

Arden Street, Earlsdon 1861 to 1921

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CONTENTS

Introduction	page 2
The Growth of Coventry	page 2
The Growth of Arden Street	page 5
Conclusion	page 18
Notes on Methodology	page 19
Acknowledgements	page 19
References	page 19
Appendices	
Appendix 1 - Tables	page 24
Appendix 2 - Maps	page 32
Appendix 3 - Images	page 41



INTRODUCTION

Arden Street is one of the original eight streets of the Earlsdon estate, with approximately 70 houses of varying ages and styles, flanked by part of a much newer complex of flats called Williamson Court constructed in the early 2000s which backs on to Arden Street. The street has a history going back over 170 years, stretching back to the very beginning of Earlsdon.

This paper examines the early development of Arden Street. It looks at the origins of the street and, using the earliest and the most recent personal census material available for Earlsdon between 1861 and 1921, describes who lived there, where they came from and what they did.

THE GROWTH OF COVENTRY

Like any city, Coventry's history has passed through different phases, from being an important medieval centre, through industrialisation, to the development of a modern city. Its period as a major industrial centre has also depended on a variety of crafts and businesses. By the end of the 18th century, silk and ribbon weaving were the basis of the city's economy. During the nineteenth century, it became a centre of watch and clock manufacturing. In the later decades of that century there was growth in cycle manufacturing, later replaced by engineering and motor industries during the 20th century.

Present-day Earlsdon is one of the more diverse and affluent suburbs of Coventry. Its core area was laid out in the 1850s. It was one of a number of areas that were developed on the outskirts of the city, allowing better-off working people, especially watchmakers, to move their families and businesses away from poor conditions inside the city. Arden Street was part of that core area.

As noted above, silk and ribbon-weaving were the basis of Coventry's economy at the start of the nineteenth century. Around 1820, 10,000 people were employed in the industry rising to a peak of 25,000 around 1857, at which time the total population of the city was approximately 40,000.ⁱ The industry faced a decline in the 1860s, following a national treaty with France which allowed the importation of foreign ribbons and other products, duty-free. However, in Coventry, watch and clock making were well-placed to take over as

main employers. The city was already one of the three major centres of the trade in the United Kingdom, the others being Clerkenwell in London and Prescot in Lancashire. In 1860 there were 90 watch and clock manufacturers in the city, employing 2,100 people.ⁱⁱ

Coventry's early industries were home-based, rather than factory-based: many watch and clock makers worked in their own homes around the Spon End and Chapelfields areas of south-west Coventry.ⁱⁱⁱ These were the high-earners of the day, said to see themselves above the likes of weavers.^{iv}

Unfortunately, their industry was eventually hampered by a certain reluctance to innovate as well as by the impact of trade policies in the second half of the nineteenth century – such as happened when the United States placed a tariff on imported English watches – thus increasing their cost and leading to a decline in watchmaking in England. However, the skilled pool of workers was vital in assisting the growth of cycle manufacturing and machine tools, which became major industries. It also later helped the growth of car manufacturing, following the establishment of the first car manufacturer in the country at the Motor Mill, Sandy Lane, Radford in 1896.^v

Against this background, Earlsdon was one of a number of small communities originally established outside the urban area of Coventry, which is notable in that new building had tended to take place either within the city or beyond the "Lammas" and "Michaelmas" lands, where Freeman had the grazing rights^{vi} (a situation similar to the modern-day Green Belt).

A local farmer and butcher, John Moore, had built a farmhouse (called "Six Fields") in 1830 off what is now Moor Street. The 31 acre estate was sold to the Coventry Freehold Land Society in 1852. Many of the better-off working people wanted to move their families and businesses out of the city and away from the over-crowded housing and associated public health hazards. Membership of a Freehold Land Society offered such people an opportunity to move into their own house, perhaps with a workshop attached. This was one of six such sites developed by the Coventry Freehold Land Society during the middle years of the nineteenth century.

The Society laid out eight streets – Earlsdon Street, Moor Street, Cromwell Street, Arden Street, Warwick Street, Clarendon Street, Providence Street and Earlsdon Terrace, alongside

Earlsdon Lane (see Appendix Map 1). The resultant estate comprised 250 self-build plots, each being supplied with water, as well as drainage for waste and rainwater but not for sewage. The Society hoped to sell the plots to members, who would then take out a mortgage and commission a builder to design and erect a house.

John Flinn, a watch manufacturer originally from Prescot and a member of the Society, built the first house, Earlsdon House, in what is now Earlsdon Street. Attached to it was a workshop where 14 men and 5 boys were employed in watchmaking.^{vii} For Earlsdon as a whole, in 1861, out of 146 males in fulltime employment, 100 were employed in the watch trade^{viii}.

The initial development of Earlsdon was slow and uneven, reflecting the cycles of the city's economic fortunes during the second half of the nineteenth century. Some of the plots remained unsold for years, whilst others were sold but not developed. There were 10 houses in 1854, 107 in 1861, 114 in 1871 and 187 in 1884. Map 3 shows that less than half of the potential area had been developed by the 1880s. Indeed, a walk through the initial core area of Earlsdon will show that there are only short stretches of similar houses in any street – an indication of this gradual growth. Census figures also show that Earlsdon experienced considerable population change in its early years: about 60% of households listed in the 1861 Census had left by 1871; about 70% of households listed in the 1871 Census had left by 1881; and about 50% of households listed in the 1881 Census had left by 1891.^{ix} Nonetheless, despite this pattern of piecemeal change, Earlsdon continued to establish itself during this period, with Frederick Smith describing the new community as "a kind of garden suburb, established mainly by Coventry watchmakers, but it was up-to-date and had a School Board of its own and a small sewage farm."^x

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this pattern of incremental change gave way to a period of dramatic growth, thanks in large part to the incorporation of Earlsdon within the municipal boundary of Coventry in 1890, and towards the end of 1898 the opening of Albany Road which provided direct and convenient access to the city, at the very time when the population of the city was beginning to increase significantly – see Appendix Table 1^{xi} – thanks in large part to the advent of the new cycle and motor manufacturing industries. In the period to the start of the First World War, these new developments saw the laying out of nearly forty streets and the building of over 2,000 houses on estates surrounding the

original, mid-Victorian Earlsdon. ^{xii} Owing to the city's industrial contribution to the war effort, by 1918 the growth in the city's population had reached a peak of approximately 142,000. ^{xiii} Although there was a good deal of economic dislocation after the war as companies readjusted from wartime to peacetime production, giving rise to unemployment and even a slump by 1920, the fact remains that by the time of the 1921 Census Earlsdon was no longer a small, semi-rural settlement outside the city but instead a well-developed, integrated suburb of Coventry. As the Coventry Graphic on 17th August 1912 put it:

Everybody here knows what Earlsdon is like – a thriving, active, progressive suburb with its fine schools (another one is being built), golf links, well-equipped clubs, wide roads, up to date shops, motor works, picturedromes and tram service There is no finer site within easy reach of the centre of the City. ^{xiv}

THE GROWTH OF ARDEN STREET

As with other streets on the Earlsdon estate, the development of Arden Street and the details of those who lived there can shed light on the social and economic trends which affected the inhabitants and those living in the wider area.

One family which serves as an example in this regard is the Abbott family, who the census returns show as living in Arden Street between 1861 and 1901. The chief member of the family for the purposes of this survey was William Abbott, who in the 1851 Census is shown at the age of 16 living near Prescot working as a watchmaker's apprentice. By 1856, like many others whose involvement in the watchmaking profession began in this part of Lancashire, William had moved to Coventry where he married a fellow Lancastrian from Liverpool by the name of Eliza Matthews, who the 1851 Census shows as living in Spon Street, one of the watchmaking districts of Coventry. The following census reveals that in 1861 William and Eliza were living in Arden Street with three infant daughters, a servant and a boarder, and by 1871, the couple had added a further daughter and two sons to their family. By 1881, all six of the couple's children were still living at home, with two of the daughters employed as office workers and a third as a dressmaker, whereas the eldest son Thomas at the age of 16 had chosen to follow his father into the watchmaking trade. While

the eldest daughter Mary Ellen had apparently left home by the time of the 1891 Census, it is interesting to find that with the exception of the youngest daughter all members of the household – both sons and daughters – are shown as being engaged in the watch trade, with even William’s wife Eliza involved in this line of work.

From here on, the Abbott household underwent a series of significant changes, not the least being the deaths of Eliza in early 1898 and William in 1900, who on a more positive note lived long enough to see his eldest daughter marry Thomas Hewitt, another watchmaker from Prescot, just the year before. The 1901 Census records further changes affecting the Abbotts, with brother and sister Thomas and Ellen having moved to Lord Street, where although Ellen worked from home as a watch polisher Thomas was no longer a watchmaker but rather a cycle machinist; as with many of his peers, Thomas had obviously chosen to abandon watchmaking as the industry had been in decline for some years and had seemingly opted instead to benefit from the opportunities in the fast-growing cycle trade. In similar vein, at the family home of 49 Arden Street William’s younger son John is also shown in the 1901 Census as having given up watchmaking to become a cycle wheel maker, living in the company of the two other unmarried sisters. While we can be certain that John continued to live at his late father’s house for some further time, as this is the address which appears in the record of his marriage on 26th June 1902, no Abbotts appear in the census records for 1911 and 1921 and so the involvement of the family in the history of Arden Street appears to have come to an end in the early years of the new century.

Although not unique in terms of the length of their residence on the street – census records also show the family of Joseph Bull living here for forty years between 1871 and 1911, for example – nonetheless the presence of the Abbott family over so many years is striking. Indeed, in her seminal study of its early years, the eminent local historian Mary Montes argues that the early inhabitants of the Earlsdon estate faced considerable social difficulties living in a location at some remove from Coventry but also remote from other parts of the country where many of them had been born. ^{xv} She argues cogently that the disparate nature of the population resulted in a lack of social cohesion and an unwillingness of new residents to settle in the new estate for longer periods of time, in which regard she points to the lack of kinship among them the new arrivals as a particular issue. Interestingly, she also states that among the one hundred or so families on the estate in 1861 there were only four

shared bonds of kinship, among them the Fletchers and the Tranters – who took up residence in what is now Berkeley Road South – as well as the Hulmes and the Abbotts.

Since an examination of these kinship links lay outside the scope of Mary Montes' original paper, given the importance of the Abbotts to the history of Arden Street perhaps we can add some detail by explaining that the head of the household where Eliza Matthews – it will be remembered that she was to marry William Abbott in 1856 – was living in Spon Street in 1851 was the noted watchmaker John Hulme, whose wife was Mary Ann Hulme (née Matthews) of Liverpool, for which reason of course Eliza is shown on the census return as John Hulme's sister-in-law. This kinship bond must have been a factor in the two families moving to the new Earlsdon estate and living so close together, with the Hulmes living almost opposite the Abbotts on Clarendon Street as shown in the 1861 Census. In fact, as regards the timing of the move to Earlsdon, it is interesting to note that in the 1881 Census the Abbotts children are all shown as having been born in Earlsdon, and since the eldest daughter Mary Ellen was recorded as being 23 at that time we can safely conclude that the Abbotts must have taken up residence on Arden Street between the occasion of their marriage in 1856 and the year of birth of their first-born, which can have been no later than 1858. Whatever the precise date, it is certain that the bond between the two families remained close throughout the rest of their time on the street – as one instance of this, when Mary Ellen married the watchmaker Thomas Hewitt on 6th August 1899 as mentioned earlier, their marriage certificate records John Hulme as the first witness.

It might seem that these personal, domestic details are of little more importance than family reminiscences, but the argument made here is that the bonds among this group of émigrés from Prescot and Liverpool – all of them associated with the watch trade – must have helped them become settled in and subsequently contribute to the social fabric and economy of the nascent district lying beyond the outskirts of Coventry.¹ Just to add one more plank in this argument, it might be added that the above-mentioned boarder recorded as living with the Abbotts in the 1861 Census was a coachman called Goodman Matthews,

¹ It might be pointed out that John Hulme was no Lancastrian himself, having been born in Knutsford, Cheshire. However, he might be claimed as an adopted son of Liverpool as it was here that he trained as a watchmaker and also married in 1838.

who it is clear was in fact Eliza Abbott's father and so by extension of course the father-in-law of John Hulme.

Given that the Abbotts family lived here for nearly 50 years, it is unsurprising that during their residence Arden Street changed considerably. Turning to Tables 2 and 3 in Appendix 1, it is clear that the growth in the number of households was slow if not almost static for the first half of the period under investigation here. As an illustration of this, it is interesting to compare the contrasting fortunes of Arden Street with Moor Street over this period: ^{xvi}²

Arden Street

	1861	1871	1881	1891
Households	21	15	26	27
People	103	82	140	134

Moor Street

	1861	1871	1881	1891
Households	13	22	24	33
People	59	118	137	155

1. Resident numbers in Arden Street and Moor Street, 1861 to 1891

While Moor Street shows a considerable increase in numbers of both households and total residents, in the case of Arden Street the figures over this period clearly fluctuate. What is even more striking is that, although the 1871 Census details only 15 households on the street there were in fact 26 houses here at the time, 11 of which were recorded as unoccupied, whereas in the remaining seven streets on the estate the census shows only three other empty houses. While Mary Montes ^{xvii} reports that there was a slump in the watchmaking trade during the late 1860s and early 1870s, and that the estate's overall population fell from 492 to 472 individuals between 1861 and 1871, nevertheless the number of residents in some other streets actually rose at this time, and so the decline in Arden Street is particularly noteworthy.

Furthermore, it is clear also from the data in the tables above that over the whole of this thirty-year period Arden Street did not experience the rate of growth which was typical of

² All subsequent data relating to Moor Street used for the purpose of comparison can be assumed to have been drawn from the sister paper listed below in the bibliography; for reasons of economy, therefore, no further references to that paper will appear from here onwards.

the rest of the estate. As another example of this, while the 1881 Census shows that Arden Street recorded a greater number of households than any of the other streets at that time, by 1891 Moor Street had overtaken Arden Street in this regard.

To attempt to explain this relatively low rate of growth over the long term, it might be helpful to examine the maps shown in Appendix 2. In the first place, it is clear that in comparison to the other streets in Earlsdon, Arden Street was relatively inaccessible given that both ends of the street were closed with no direct access to other streets. Indeed, until approximately 1897 there was no access to Earlsdon Street while at the other end of the street until as late as 1935 there was only a field gate leading to a number of allotments until Hartington Crescent was constructed. So if it can be claimed that Earlsdon was remote from Coventry, Arden Street was arguably the most remote part of Earlsdon.

A second and perhaps much more important issue which might help explain the street's relatively slow growth could be the fact that Arden Street is located on the highest part of the estate. Anyone who is familiar with the streets which make up the original estate will know this from experience, but there is also evidence of this as confirmed by the figures accompanying the so-called crow's feet symbols shown on the 1913 map in Appendix 2. These symbols are accompanied by numbers indicating altitude above sea level from which it is clear that the highest point on the estate – some 346.9 feet above sea level – is at the corner of Arden Street and the top end of Clarendon Street. This might have had a direct bearing upon the residents of Arden Street because the water supply to the estate was provided from an artesian well in Spon Street which needed to be pumped uphill.^{xviii} By virtue of its height and also its distance from the pumping station, Arden Street would have been the first street to lose its supply when the pressure was low, which contemporary reports show was a common occurrence.

As one of example of this, in his annual report for 1890 the Medical Officer for Coventry City Council stated that "the residents in Earlsdon and other high-lying districts cannot obtain water from the taps for some 12 to 14 hours daily" and urged that the Council needed to move more quickly with its scheme to increase the water supply to the city's newly-incorporated districts such as Earlsdon.^{xix} Given its elevation, therefore, it is perhaps no coincidence perhaps that a photograph from around 1890 which survives of a handcart delivering water supplies to Earlsdon was taken in Arden Street, as shown in Appendix 3.

Although the exact significance of the geographical factors outlined above is to some degree a matter of speculation, what is certain is that in the years following 1891 Arden Street started to enjoy significant levels of growth. Comparing again figures drawn from the census returns for Arden Street and Moor Street helps demonstrate the scale of these changes over this period:

Arden Street

	1891	1901	1911	1921
Households	27	51	71	78
People	134	227	335	352

Moor Street

	1891	1901	1911	1921
Households	33	40	66	66
People	155	179	286	271

2. Resident numbers in Arden Street and Moor Street, 1891 to 1921

As is self-evident from the tables above, while the rate of increase in the number of households flattened out towards 1921 in Moor Street with even a small drop in the number of residents – a pattern which was similar to many other streets on the estate – the figures for Arden Street on the other hand show a sustained, higher level of growth such that by 1901 the number of residents on the street had outstripped the figure for Moor Street, which is particularly striking given that Moor Street is almost double the length of Arden Street. Furthermore, by 1921 it had the greatest number of households among the eight original streets with the number of residents still continuing to grow. In tandem with this, it is interesting to note from Table 2 in Appendix 1 that the proportion of heads of households who had appeared in the preceding census grew steadily from only 10% in 1901 to 35% in 1921, which increase is suggestive of more residents choosing to remain on the street.

Of course, it is the case that Coventry as a whole and Earlsdon in particular experienced a remarkable phase of population growth as the nineteenth century drew to a close and the twentieth century began, with significant implications for the residents on Arden Street. Much of this growth can be attributed to the arrival of the cycle and associated motor industries, which afforded new opportunities for employment, while more locally the

opening of Albany Road in 1898 allowed easy access to the centre of Coventry. In addition, the incorporation of Earlsdon as a suburb of Coventry allowed the very real problems with water supplies as described above to be tackled, particularly after the commissioning of the Whitley water pumping station in 1895-96^{xx} feeding a new reservoir in Coundon.³ Furthermore, the joining up in 1897 of the south-eastern end of Arden Street with the newly-extended Earlsdon Street^{xxi} as well as the increased employment possibilities offered by companies nearby engaged in the motor trade and toolmaking must have all combined to make Arden Street a more attractive place to live.

Returning to the issue of the houses themselves on the street, some of the earliest buildings are of considerable interest, in part for the simple reason that one large block of Arden Street's houses no longer exists, namely the thirteen small cottages which were built in the early 1850s by local watch manufacturer John Flinn at the south-eastern end of the street to accommodate his workers – the location of the row of cottages in question can most clearly be seen on Map 5 in Appendix 2 as well as in Images 1 and 5 in Appendix 3.^{xxii}

Flinn's pioneering efforts in many ways acted as a springboard for the watchmaking trade in Earlsdon, and indeed some of his employees and apprentices who lived in what became known as Flinn's Cottages must have gone on to work in the industry on their own account – two such examples mentioned in the Curtis and Beamish directory of 1874 are Joseph Bull, who was still engaged in the watch trade in 1911 having moved across the road to 43 Arden Street, and also Benjamin Amos Hall, who again is recorded in 1911 living as a watch engraver at 19 Cromwell Street (now 77 Berkeley Road South).

For Arden Street itself also, the construction of Flinn's cottages was a significant event as revealed by the 1861 Census. To explain, uniquely among all the Earlsdon residents included in the census at that time we know who lived in the cottages since each dwelling was identified with a house number on what was recorded as Arden Row, as a result of which we learn that of the 103 residents who we take to be living on Arden Street at the

³ In fact, in spite of this new development, along with other parts of Coventry difficulties with water supplies continued for quite some years as the authorities attempted to respond to the city's ongoing population increase. In 1908, the authorities in Birmingham agreed to supply water to Coventry but the continued growth of the city meant that this new extra capacity was soon outstripped and had to be increased further within a decade.^{xxiii}

time as many as 68 were living in the cottages. Another finding which the level of the detail in the 1861 census reveals is the presence of Mrs Sarah Cotton and her son Mark Cotton – both of whom were bakers – living at number 1 Arden Row, which house stood at the corner of Warwick Street and Arden Street.⁴ This makes for an interesting coincidence because at the bottom end of Warwick Street on the corner with Moor Street there was another baker called Samuel Ward, who in 1860 is known to have started his business in the premises which are generally taken to be Earlsdon's first shop.^{xxiv} However, looking at the cottages as pictured in Image 5 it is clear that number 1 Arden Row on the far left of the picture was built as a shop with its door opening on to the corner and its windows rather larger than those in the rest of the row. Indeed, given that these cottages were built some years before Samuel Ward built his store it is interesting to speculate whether Earlsdon's first shop might actually have been number 1 Arden Row instead. What is certain from later trade directories and census returns is that this corner location was used by a long line of shopkeepers including John Tranter (1874 – 1881), William Caldicott (1891 – 1901) and Henry Oswin (1903 – 1909). The last recorded shopkeeper was Augusta Guest (1911 – 1921), from which we might conclude that easier access to a greater range of shops on Earlsdon Street had drawn custom away from the shop on the corner of Arden Street, causing its final closure.

However, while it has been argued here that the building of John Flinn's cottages was key to the early development of Arden Street and Earlsdon itself, it might also be remembered that according to the 1871 Census Arden Street experienced a significant drop in the number of households living here. In fact, of the 11 unoccupied houses mentioned earlier in this paper six were in the row of cottages – including the shop at number 1 – and given that these were built for Flinn's employees, it might be the case that this decline in the street's fortunes could be attributed to certain financial difficulties the Flinns were experiencing at this time. To give some background to this, Flinn's oldest son John Flinn Junior had followed his father into the watch trade and in 1861 at the age of 34 was shown as a watch jeweller employing two men and two boys at his house in Crow Lane, Coventry. However, just three years later in August 1864 according to a notice in the *Coventry Standard*, John Flinn Junior

⁴ As explained earlier in this paper, in 1861 there was no access to Earlsdon Street and so the cottages were originally numbered consecutively from number 1 at the corner with Warwick Street up to number 13 at the end of the row, nearest the south-east end of Arden Street.

– shown now as living in Earlsdon – had been declared bankrupt.^{xxv} What direct bearing this development had on John Flinn Senior remains a matter of speculation, but it may be no coincidence that in April 1865 a notice in the *Coventry Herald*^{xxvi} announced the sale of the 13 cottages, one of which is described as having a “a retail shop, capital baker’s and an oven” and more tellingly another which was noted as being in the occupancy of Flinn Junior, as well as the sale of a large paddock with a frontage on to Warwick Street, all of which might suggest an issue with the family’s financial circumstances. As further evidence of this, in early 1868 another advertisement appeared in the *Coventry Standard* announcing that Earlsdon House together with the surrounding gardens and outbuildings were available for let.^{xxvii} This opportunity clearly came to the attention of another watch manufacturer by the name of Joseph White who was then based in Chapelfields, and by the time of the 1871 Census, Earlsdon House and its grounds as well as the thirteen cottages on Arden Street had passed into his ownership, with seven men and nine boys in his employ.

It would seem eminently plausible therefore that the depopulation of Arden Street at this time can be attributed to a period of dislocation caused by this changeover of ownership from John Flinn to Joseph White, occasioned perhaps by changes in the circumstances of the Flinn family. This analysis is consistent with the finding that according to the 1874 Curtis and Beamish directory the number of houses in occupation in Arden Street as a whole stood at 24, an increase of nine households in just three years compared to the situation recorded in the 1871 Census. As for the cottages themselves, it will be remembered that in 1871 six were unoccupied and yet three years later this directory shows that all of the cottages were in occupation again with 10 of them housing new tenants – all engaged in the watch trade bar the new shopkeeper at number 1 – suggesting that the change of regime at Earlsdon House was complete.⁵

Another property of interest on Arden Street is Stoneleigh House at number 37, which has an intriguing past.⁶ The history of the house has been the subject of interest in the past,

⁵ As further evidence of the scale of these changes, a comparison of the 1861 and 1871 Census returns for Flinn’s cottages shows just one household in residence throughout this period, namely that of Joshua Bold and family.

⁶ By coincidence, the 1901 Census shows that this house was in the occupation of John Tranter who had previously run the corner shop mentioned above, although by this time he had abandoned his earlier occupation and chosen to become a platelayer instead.

with local historian Mary Montes reporting in the *Earlsdon Echo* that in 1924 Stoneleigh House had become a sub-police station as part of the Coventry Police Force.^{xxviii} However, the presence of the police at this address actually dates back somewhat earlier, as the minutes of the Coventry Watch Committee – which was responsible for the local police force – make clear.

By way of background, from as early as 1900 in fact these records make clear that there had already been a police presence in Earlsdon, with a police officer living in a house rented for the purpose by the Coventry Police Force. The 1901 Census, for example, shows Constable James Wright living at 43 Cromwell Street (now 101 Berkeley Road South) in what the Watch Committee minutes show to be the Earlsdon sub-station at the time, which in 1906 was reassigned to 68 Moor Street with Constable Austin Essam in residence. However, with the introduction of new legislation which required each police force to provide places of detention for children from 1910 onwards, a sub-committee was charged with finding suitable accommodation sufficient to accommodate six boys and six girls in Coventry. To this end, the sub-committee members inspected two premises in Earlsdon, namely 52 Earlsdon Street and 37 Arden Street, but as the former was significantly more expensive it was decided to purchase the latter outright for the sum of £360, with a further £245 allocated for the building to be extended for the children's quarters. In September 1910, the Moor Street tenancy was terminated and PC Essam and his family moved to his new accommodation on Arden Street, as confirmed by the 1911 Census.^{xxix}

The new arrangements for accommodating children on the site were – for whatever reason – not destined to last long, as after 1918 alternative provision in Birmingham was used instead for children who had been detained.^{xxx} Nevertheless, a few years later following PC Essam's retirement, the 1921 Census shows that Sergeant Phipps and family had been assigned to the Arden Street sub-police station, which continued to be used by the police force – albeit not for residential purposes – until 1964 when after more than half a century of use it was closed and replaced by a new police station on Fletchamstead Highway.^{xxxi} 7

⁷ The premises at 37 Arden Street took on increased significance after the Second World War. During the bombing raids, the original police station alongside the Council House on St Mary's Street had all but been destroyed and as its replacement on Little Park Street would not come into service until 1960 it was decided in 1949 that Arden Street should be upgraded to become the headquarters of Coventry Police's C Division, which

Looking at the population of the street as a whole over the sixty decades under investigation here, while in all parts of Earlsdon it is clear that considerable numbers of people moved to the district from other parts of the country, this was particularly the case for the residents of Arden Street. As shown in Table 4, in 1861 only 52% of heads of household were born in Coventry, Birmingham or Warwickshire whereas by way of comparison the figures for Moor Street and Providence Street stood at 80% and 85% respectively.^{xxxii} While not surprising perhaps given the importance of the watchmaking trade in the street, it is notable that nearly a quarter of these heads of household were born in Lancashire, which was itself an important region for the trade. Likewise, as shown in the census returns for 1911 and 1921, the proportions of Arden Street heads of household born in Coventry and the surrounding areas remained lower than those for Moor Street and Providence Street, again standing at just over half of the total. Turning to the figures in Table 5, approximately two-thirds of all residents were born locally during the earlier and the later decades of the sixty-year period under review here, in both cases the figures for Arden Street lower than those for Moor Street and Providence Street. The fact that in 1921 nearly a third of the residents of Arden Street were born outside Coventry, Birmingham and Warwickshire points to the pull exercised by the opportunities for work in the city's rapidly developing industries and might also suggest that housing on Arden Street was somewhat cheaper and therefore attractive to this influx of newcomers.

Other findings emerge from an analysis of the age distribution of Arden Street residents, which again serve to show how the development of the street differed from that of many of the other streets in Earlsdon. Looking firstly at figures for the heads of household in Table 6, the average age fluctuates around 40 years old for the first five decades, before showing a noticeable increase to 46 years of age in 1921. Comparing this with the situation in Moor Street and Providence Street, the average for Arden Street remained appreciably lower for much of this period, with the sole exception of 1921 when the average ages for Moor Street and Providence Street were 48 and 43 respectively. Turning to the statistics for the age distribution of all the residents in the street shown in Table 7, as with other streets on the estate the average age of the Arden Street residents grew steadily from 20 in 1861 to 28 in

in addition to Earlsdon was responsible for an area including parts of Chapelfields, Stivichall, Cheylesmore, Gibbet Hill, Tile Hill and Eastern Green.

1921, and yet in comparative terms the residents were consistently younger than their counterparts elsewhere as can be seen below:

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Arden Street	20	19	20	23	23	24	28
Providence Street	22	27	23	25	26	29	30
Moor Street	29	24	23	26	27	28	31

3. Residents' average age in Arden Street, Providence Street and Moor Street, 1861 to 1921

Again in comparison with the situation in Providence Street and Moor Street, the proportion of residents aged 13 years or younger was higher in Arden Street in all seven censuses conducted over this period never once falling below a quarter of all of the residents recorded on the street, which helps to explain the age distribution in the table above.

Concerning the occupations of those living on Arden Street, the details of employment recorded in Table 8 reflect changes taking place in the rest of Earlsdon and Coventry at this time, albeit at a rather different pace. One immediate trend discernible from the data is the importance and continued growth in the number of those working in the watchmaking trade from 1861 up until 1901, when it still accounted for more than half of the occupations declared by residents on the street. For the sake of comparison, in contrast to 1881 when the totals of Moor Street residents engaged in the watchmaking trade outstripped those for Arden Street, the statistics for 1891 and in particular 1901 show that Arden Street had overtaken Moor Street to become once more the street with the highest participation in this trade on the Earlsdon estate.

What is noteworthy about this finding is firstly that the watch-making trade had been in decline from the late 1880s ^{xxxiii} onwards owing to – amongst other factors – increased competition from overseas, and secondly that data from other streets shows a marked shift much earlier towards alternative fields of employment such as the new cycle manufacturing industry and the burgeoning building trade. For example, over the final decade of the nineteenth century the number of residents in Moor Street engaged in the watch trade fell by half, while those employed in retail, construction and the bicycle trade all rose appreciably, and yet in contrast the 1901 Census for Arden Street shows only three

inhabitants engaged in cycle manufacture and just two in construction with 34 still active in watch manufacture.

By 1911, however, the employment pattern on Arden Street had changed radically. Amongst many other changes, the number of those employed in watchmaking had collapsed to approximately only a quarter of the total ten years earlier – bringing it well below the figure for Moor Street, in fact – while the new motor manufacturing industries were by now the largest source of employment for residents on both streets, with 20 employees on Moor Street but as many as 35 employees on Arden Street. By the same token, the number of residents working in construction had leapt to 14, while the railway, toolmaking and the cycle trade were now also important sources of employment.

On the basis of the above, the pattern of transition from watchmaking to cycle and then motor vehicle manufacture as well as toolmaking started much later in the case of Arden Street residents compared with other streets on the estate and was also telescoped into a much shorter timeframe. Once this process of change had started, however, it continued apace such that by 1921, 54 residents were employed in the motor trade, more than double the number for Moor Street, with retail work a significant form of employment in conjunction with railway work and motorcycle manufacture.

A further change in the pattern of work concerns where residents were employed, as for the first time the 1921 Census included details of employers and their locations. At the beginning of our period in 1861, it is safe to assume that all residents with an occupation were working at home or very nearby in the case of those employed by John Flinn. In contrast, while by the end of the period in scope there were larger enterprises in Earlsdon such as Coventry Gauge and Small Tool and the Coventry Acme Motor Company, in 1921 the great majority of those in employment on Arden Street found work outside Earlsdon. For example, 13 of those in the motor industry were employed at the new Canley Standard factory, which had only opened in 1916, while a further 13 worked in the city centre at the Rover Meteor Works near Queen Victoria Road. Similarly, as regards toolmakers, while three residents were employed in Earlsdon by Coventry Gauge and Small Tool, Alfred Herbert Ltd located on The Butts beyond Earlsdon employed 13 Arden Street inhabitants.

As one final point, in 1921 it is notable that many companies were struggling to recover from the effects of the war and to readjust to peacetime conditions, and yet the returns for Arden Street reveal that only ten of the 152 residents for whom an occupation was recorded were identified as being out of work at the time, a proportion rather lower than was experienced elsewhere on the estate.

CONCLUSION

From the earliest years of the estate, the number of watchmakers living on Arden Street was significant for the development of Earlsdon, in large part owing to John Flinn's decision to construct thirteen cottages to support his new watch manufacturing operation. Against the background of the dislocation seemingly associated with the subsequent departure of Flinn from Earlsdon House in 1868 and his replacement by Joseph White, the residents of Arden Street remained heavily involved in the watchmaking trade until the end of the nineteenth century in spite of the industry's decline towards the end of this period. However, somewhat later than other streets on the estate, Arden Street underwent a number of significant changes at an accelerated pace from the start of the twentieth century onwards. With the linking of Arden Street and Earlsdon Street – the result of Joseph White's endeavours, it might be added – at about the same time as the construction of Albany Road in 1898, together with the development of other industries such as toolmaking and in particular motor manufacture, there was a notable shift away from watchmaking among the residents of Arden Street in favour of these new fields of employment. At the same time, new residents from other parts of the country took up residence in the street – perhaps attracted by the prospect of housing more affordable than nearby – with the result that by 1921 Arden Street was the most populous of the original eight streets with a relatively young population, numbering in excess of 350 individuals.

NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

The principal source of information has been the censuses from 1861 and 1921. These generally provide information on the following: numbers of people in dwellings, household composition, names, relationships, age, occupation, place of birth and employment status. The censuses provide consistent information, enabling the analysis of trends over time. This has been supplemented by information from probate records, newspaper entries, directories and maps. With the exception of Flinn's Cottages, a specific problem was that the 1861 Census treated Earlsdon as one area and did not give street names and house numbers. Using local history sources, maps and the 1871 Census, a deduction has been made as to which section of the 1861 Census lists the households living in Arden Street.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- Earlsdon Research Group members, especially the late Niall McChesney who produced the first paper in this series concerning Berkeley Road South
- Coventry Archives for offering access to local history sources and original documents
- Mary Montes for her pioneering research and the extensive range of authoritative publications she produced
- David Fry for providing insights into and images of Earlsdon over and above those available through his books about Coventry
- Volunteers at the West Midlands Police Museum on Hertford Street for their insights into the local history of policing

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Tables

Table 1: Population of Coventry 1891 to 1921

Table 2: Heads of Household living in Arden Street in Preceding Census

Table 3: Total People and Households 1861 to 1921

Table 4: Place of Birth of Heads of Household 1861 to 1921

Table 5: Place of Birth of Heads of All Residents 1861 to 1921

Table 6: Age Distribution of Heads of Household 1861 to 1921

Table 7: Age Distribution of All Residents 1861 to 1921

Table 8: Occupations Listed in Censuses for Working People 1861 to 1921

Appendix 2 - Maps

Map 1: Earlsdon 1852/53

Map 2: Earlsdon 1860

Map 3: Earlsdon circa 1870

Map 4: Earlsdon 1889

Map 5: Arden Street close-up 1889

Map 6: Arden Street 1904

Map 7: Coventry 1911

Map 8: Earlsdon 1913

Map 9: Earlsdon 2022

Appendix 3 - Images

Image 1: Looking north-west, circa 1907

Image 2: As above, August 2023

Image 3: Looking north-west further up the street, circa 1912

Image 4: As above, August 2023

Image 5: Looking south-east, circa 1907

Image 6: As above, taken August 1923

Image 7: Plan drawn in 1918 indicating the internal layout of the Flinn Cottages

Image 8: Water cart next to Flinn's cottages towards the end of the nineteenth century

Image 9: As above, August 2023

Image 10: Numbers 8, 10 and 12 Arden Street after the 1940 bombing

Image 11: Looking north-west towards the end of Arden Street, with Clarendon Street to the right, circa 1907

Image 12: As above, August 2023

Image 13: Looking south-east from the end of Arden Street, August 2023

Image 14: The opening of Arden Street police station on 26th April 1949

Image 15: Ordnance Survey crows foot symbol on the corner of Arden Street and Clarendon Street

APPENDIX 1 – TABLES

Table 1: Population of Coventry 1901 to 1921

	1901	1911	1921	Increase 1901-1911	Increase 1911-1921
Population	69,978	106,349	128,157	52.0%	20.5%

Table 2: Heads of Household Living in Arden Street Also Listed in Preceding Census

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Number of Heads	21	15	26	27	51	71	78
Preceding census	N/A	4	3	5	5	16	27
Percentage	N/A	27%	12%	19%	10%	23%	35%

Table 3: Total Residents and Average Household size 1861 to 1921 (Arden Street)

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Households	21	15	26	27	51	71	78
People	103	82	140	134	227	335	352
Ave H'hold size	4.9	5.5	5.4	5	4.5	4.7	4.5

Table 4: Place of Birth of Heads of Household 1861 to 1921 (Arden Street)

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Coventry	11	9	12	11	16	16	24
Adj Coventry*		1				2	2
Birmingham			1	3	2	8	6
Warwickshire**		1	2	5	19	13	9
Bedfordshire			1				
Berkshire					1		
Buckinghamshire				1	1	2	1
Cambridgeshire							
Channel Islands							
Cheshire						1	1
Cornwall							1
Derbyshire						1	
Devon				1			1
Dorset							1
Essex						1	
Gloucestershire							1
Hampshire			1		1	1	
Herefordshire							1
Hertfordshire						2	
Huntingdonshire							1
Kent						1	

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Lancashire	5	3	1	2		1	1
Leicestershire	2					2	1
London		1	5	2	2		1
Norfolk			1				
Northamptonshire				1	2		2
Nottinghamshire			1			1	
Oxfordshire	1					2	3
Shropshire				1	1		2
Somerset							2
Staffordshire	1		1		3	8	9
Suffolk							
Surrey	1						
Sussex							1
Worcestershire					2	3	4
Yorkshire					1	3	2
Scotland						2	1
Wales						1	
Total	21	15	26	27	51	71	78

* Adj Coventry refers to parishes then outside, but later absorbed into, Coventry

** Warwickshire refers to the county without Coventry and Birmingham

Table 5: Place of Birth of All Residents 1861 to 1921 (Arden Street)

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Coventry	67	61	89	78	106	154	179
Adj Coventry*		2	4		4	5	6
Birmingham	3	3	2	12	18	20	23
Warwickshire**		9	13	20	45	43	32
Bedfordshire			1				
Berkshire					1	1	1
Buckinghamshire				1	2	2	1
Cambridgeshire						1	
Cheshire				3	2	6	1
Cornwall						1	1
Derbyshire	1		1		4	6	1
Devon				1			2
Dorset					2	1	2
Durham							1

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Essex						2	
Gloucestershire						4	2
Hampshire			1		2	3	1
Herefordshire				1		3	2
Hertfordshire							3
Huntingdonshire							2
Kent						5	2
Lancashire	14	4	6	4	6	6	7
Leicestershire	2	1		2		8	3
Lincolnshire					1		1
London	8	1	14	3	4	3	5
Norfolk	1		1				5
Northamptonshire	1	1		4	5	3	7
Nottinghamshire	1		1			2	2
Oxfordshire	1		1	1	3	3	5
Shropshire				3	1		3
Somerset							3
Staffordshire	1		5		15	24	19
Suffolk			1				1
Surrey	1					1	2
Sussex						2	5
Worcestershire					3	8	8
Yorkshire					3	10	7
Ireland	1						
Scotland						6	5
Wales	1					1	1
Canada						1	1
India				1			
Total	103	82	140	134	227	335	352

* Adj Coventry refers to parishes then outside, but later absorbed into, Coventry

** Warwickshire refers to the county without Coventry and Birmingham

Table 6: Age Distribution of Heads of Households 1861 to 1921 (Arden Street)

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
< 21	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
21-30	6	5	7	9	13	15	7
31-40	5	5	13	3	20	28	23
41-50	6	3	4	11	9	18	22
51-60	2	1	0	4	8	7	14
61-70	2	1	2	0	1	2	10
> 70	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Total	21	15	26	27	51	71	78
Average	40	38	38	39	39	40	46

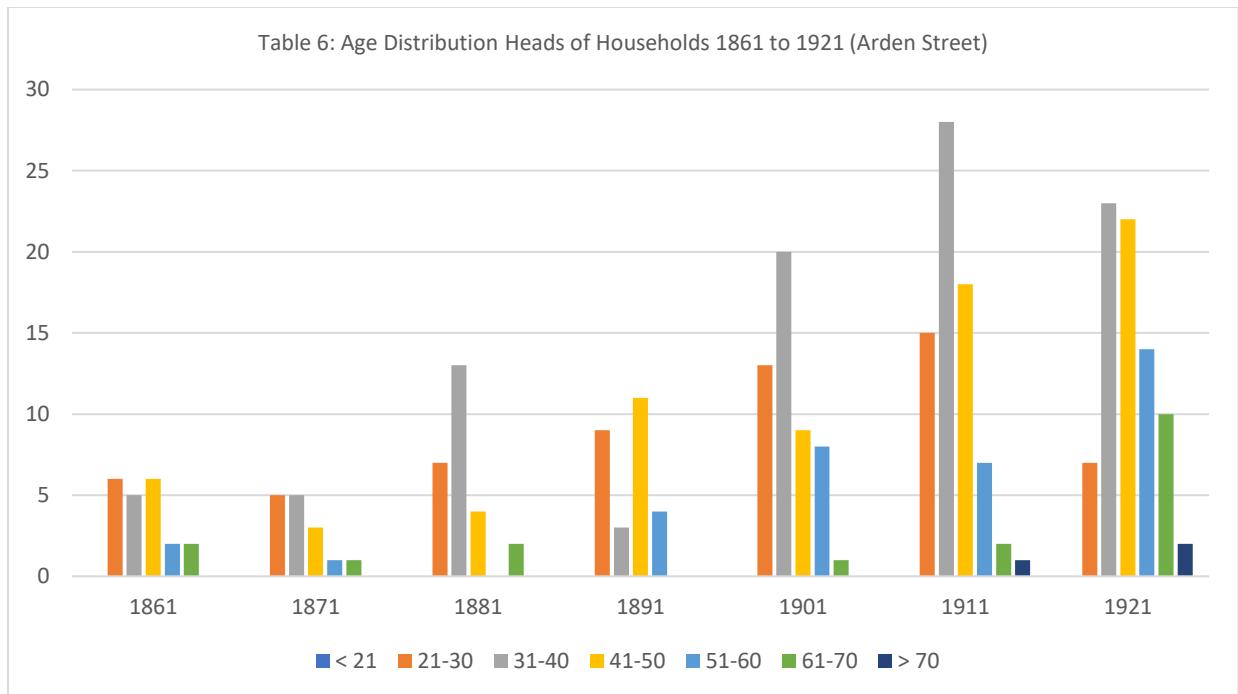


Table 7: Age Distribution of All Residents 1861 to 1921 (Arden Street)

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
< 13	48	38	58	44	78	118	91
13-20	10	13	27	23	30	41	71
21-30	16	11	15	31	47	63	46
31-40	12	11	26	9	41	58	51
41-50	11	4	7	16	14	32	48
51-60	3	2	4	8	11	14	24
61-70	3	3	3	2	6	5	15
> 70	0	0	0	1	0	4	6
Total	103	82	140	134	227	335	352
Average	20	19	20	23	23	24	28

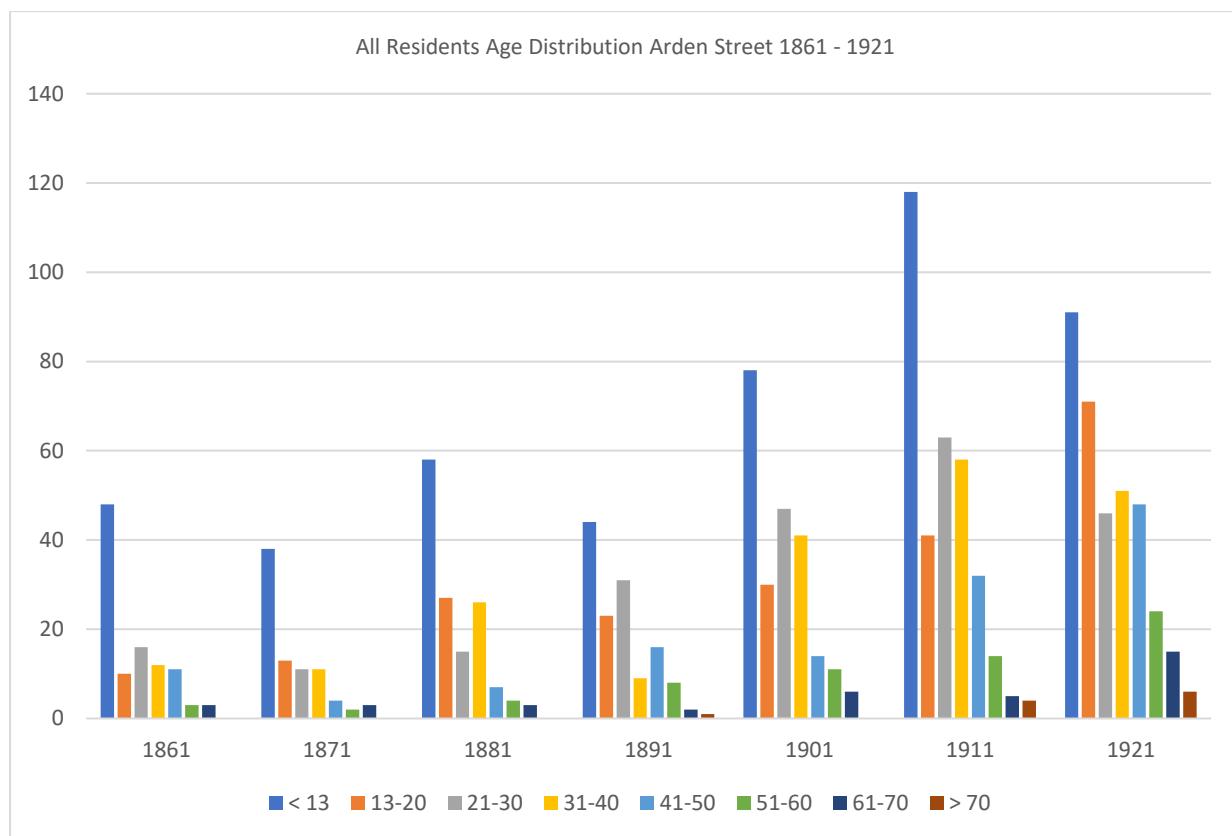


Table 8: Occupations Listed in Censuses for Working People 1861 to 1921 (Arden Street)

1861	
Watch trade 21	
Servant 4	
Baker 2	
Coachman 1	
Errand boy 1	
Laundress 1	
Shoemaker 1	
Silk winder 1	
Superannuated excise officer 1	
Tailor 1	
Whitesmith 1	
1871	
Watch trade 17	
Labourer 4	
Annuitant 1	
Dressmaker 1	
Gardener 1	
Silk winder 1	
Warper 1	

1881	Watch trade 21 Servant 4 Baker 2 Coachman 1 Errand boy 1 Laundress 1 Shoemaker 1 Silk winder 1 Superannuated excise officer 1 Tailor 1 Whitesmith 1
1891	Watch trade worker 30 Labourer 2 Laundress 2 Office girl 2 Servant 2 Bicycle fitter 1 Carpenter joiner 1 Dressmaker 1 Errand boy 1 Machinist 1 Nurse 1 Railway clerk 1 Sewing machine manufacturer 1 Shopkeeper 1 Silk winder 1 Trimming stamper 1
1901	Watch trade 34 Railway 4 Bicycle trade 3 Bricklayer/Carpenter 2 Dressmaker 2 Iron working 2 Labourer 2 Laundress 2 Clerk 1 Drayman 1 Fish and egg dealer 1 Florist and gardener 1 Gardener 1 Grocer 1 Machinist 1

1911	<p>Motor trade 35</p> <p>Bricklayer/Carpenter/Plasterer/Plumber 14</p> <p>Railway 10</p> <p>Toolmaking 10</p> <p>Cycle trade 9</p> <p>Watch manufacturing trade 7 [1 retired]</p> <p>Blouse designer/Costumier/Dressmaker/</p> <p>Machinist/Tailoring 4</p> <p>Butcher/Provision dealer 4</p> <p>Capstan hand 4</p> <p>Gardener 3</p> <p>Labourer 3</p> <p>Private means/Pensioner 3</p> <p>Silk making 3</p> <p>Laundress 2</p> <p>Milk seller 2</p> <p>Paper stainer/printer 2</p> <p>Tinsmith 2</p> <p>Accountant clerk 1</p> <p>Blacksmith 1</p> <p>Fancy stationery 1</p> <p>Groom 1</p> <p>Insurance agent 1</p> <p>Moulder ironwork 1</p> <p>Patternmaker 1</p> <p>Police constable 1</p> <p>Portable buildings & rustic work 1</p> <p>Registration clerk, Board of Trade 1</p> <p>Road foreman 1</p> <p>Servant 1</p> <p>Stationary engineman 1</p> <p>Storekeeper (Ironmongers) 1</p> <p>Waggoner 1</p>
1921	<p>Motor trade 54</p> <p>Shopworker 15</p> <p>Cycle trade 9</p> <p>Labourer 8</p> <p>Railway 8</p> <p>Watches 8 [including 1 repairer]</p> <p>Toolmaking 8</p> <p>Clerk 6</p> <p>Bricklayer/Builder/Painter/Plumber 5</p> <p>Turner 4</p> <p>Boarding housekeeper/assistant 2</p> <p>Bookkeeper 2</p> <p>Colour mixer & paper stainer/printer 2</p>

Gardener 2
Police officer/sergeant 2
Silk sorter/winder 2
Advertising trainee – ex-servicemen's scheme 1
Artificial silk worker 1
Bookbinder 1
Brazier 1
Commercial traveller 1
Engineer 1
Insurance agent 1
Laundress 1
Office girl 1
School teacher 1
Tailoress 1
Textile weaver 1

APPENDIX 2 – MAPS

Map 1: Earlsdon 1852/53



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

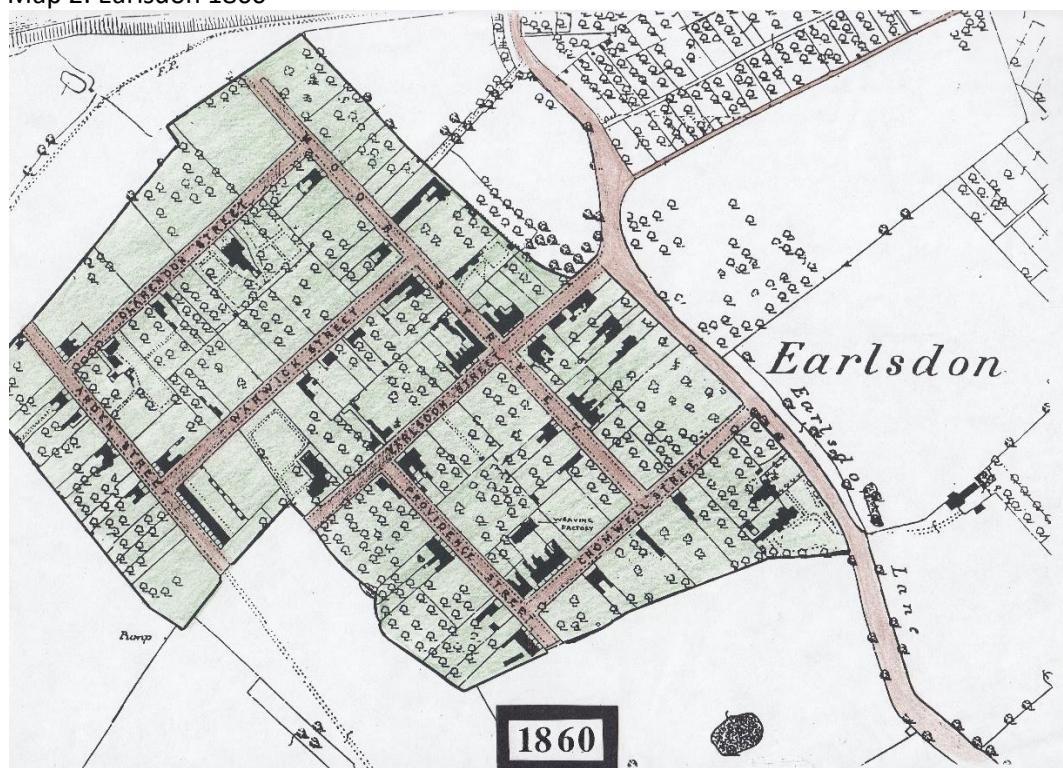
Arden Street, Earlsdon 1861 to 1921

David Porter with Niall McChesney, Earlsdon Research Group

November 2023



Map 2: Earlsdon 1860



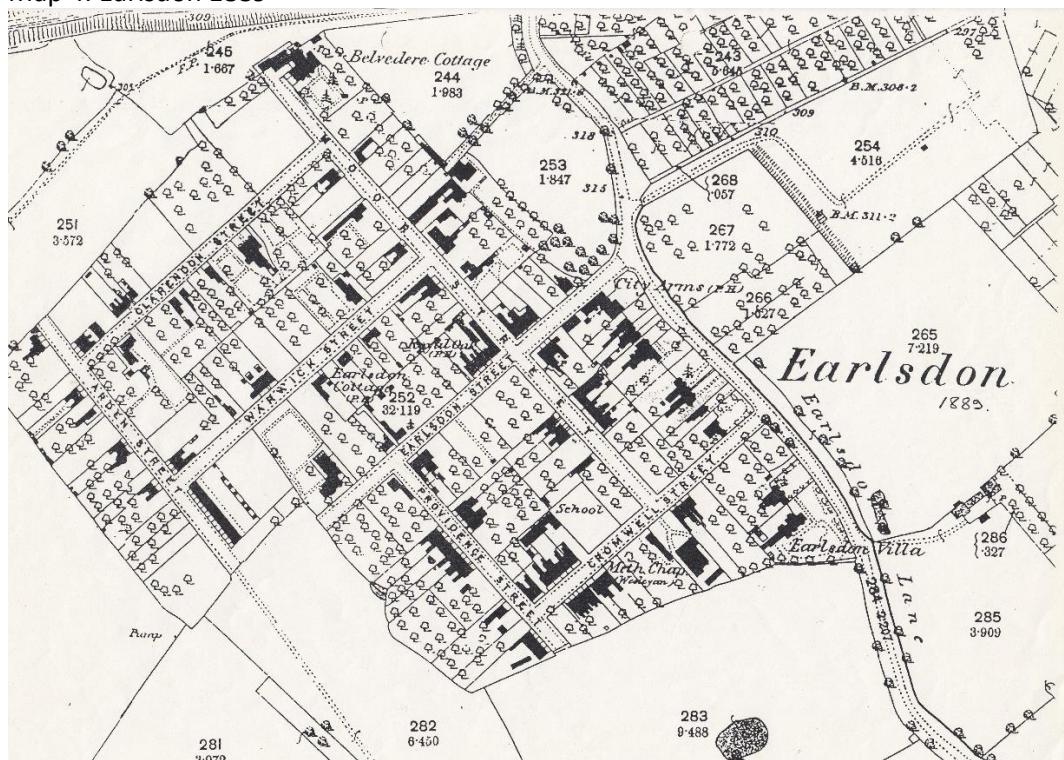
Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 3: Earlsdon with Arden Street to the far left, possibly from 1870



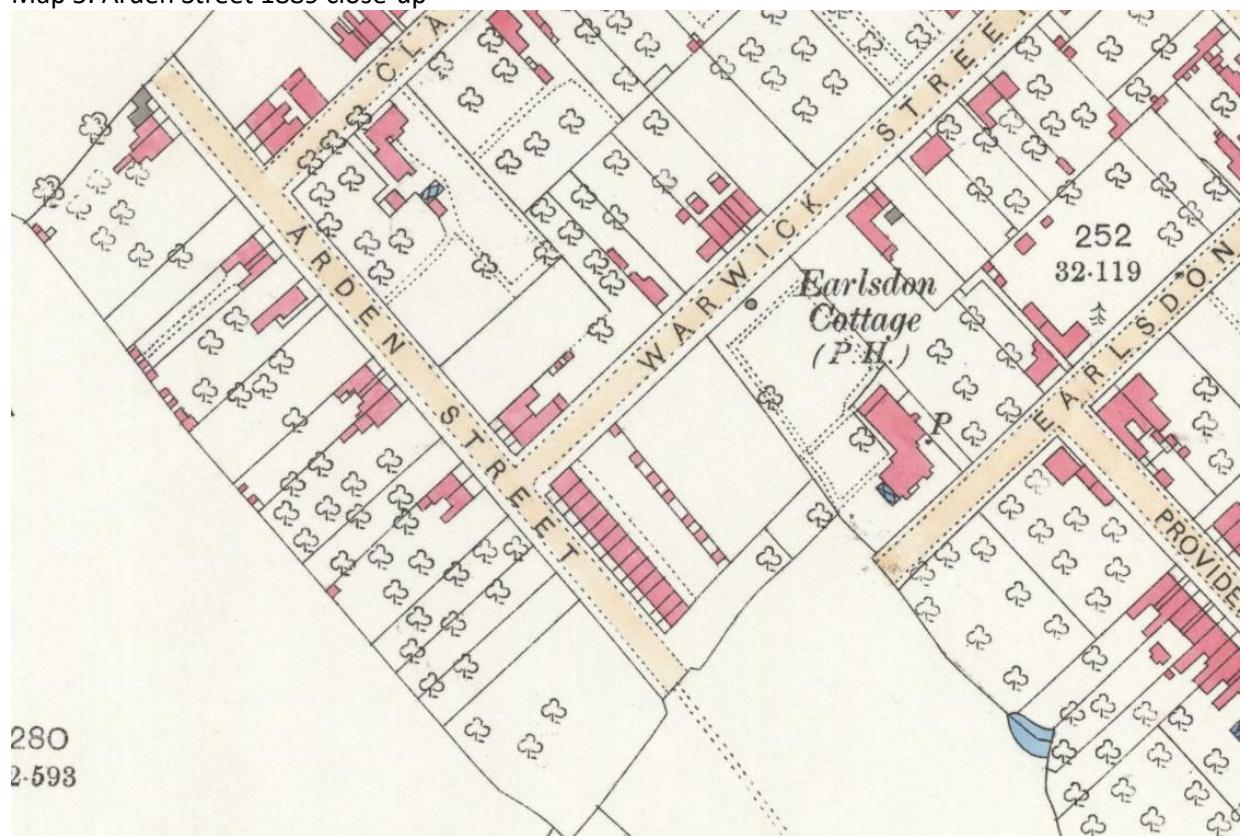
Provided by David Fry

Map 4: Earlsdon 1889



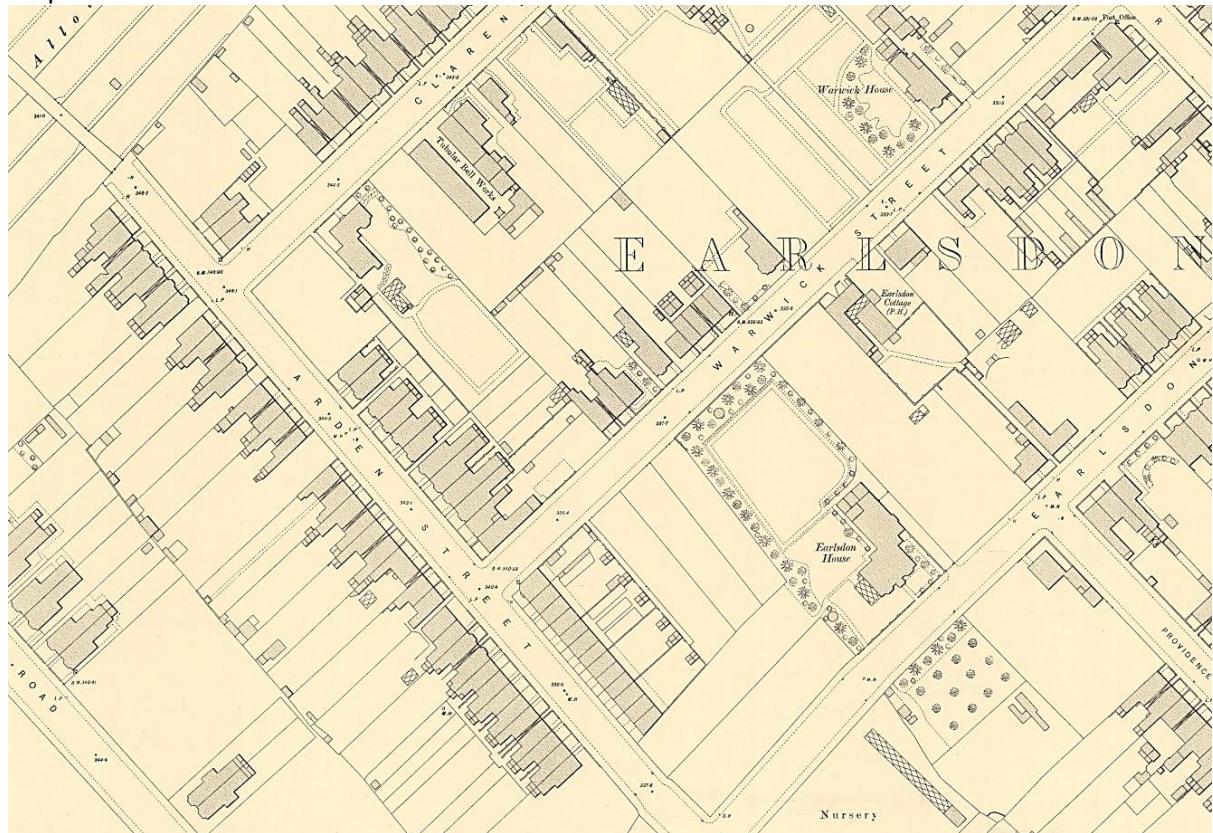
Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 5: Arden Street 1889 close-up



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 6: Arden Street 1904



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 7: Coventry 1911



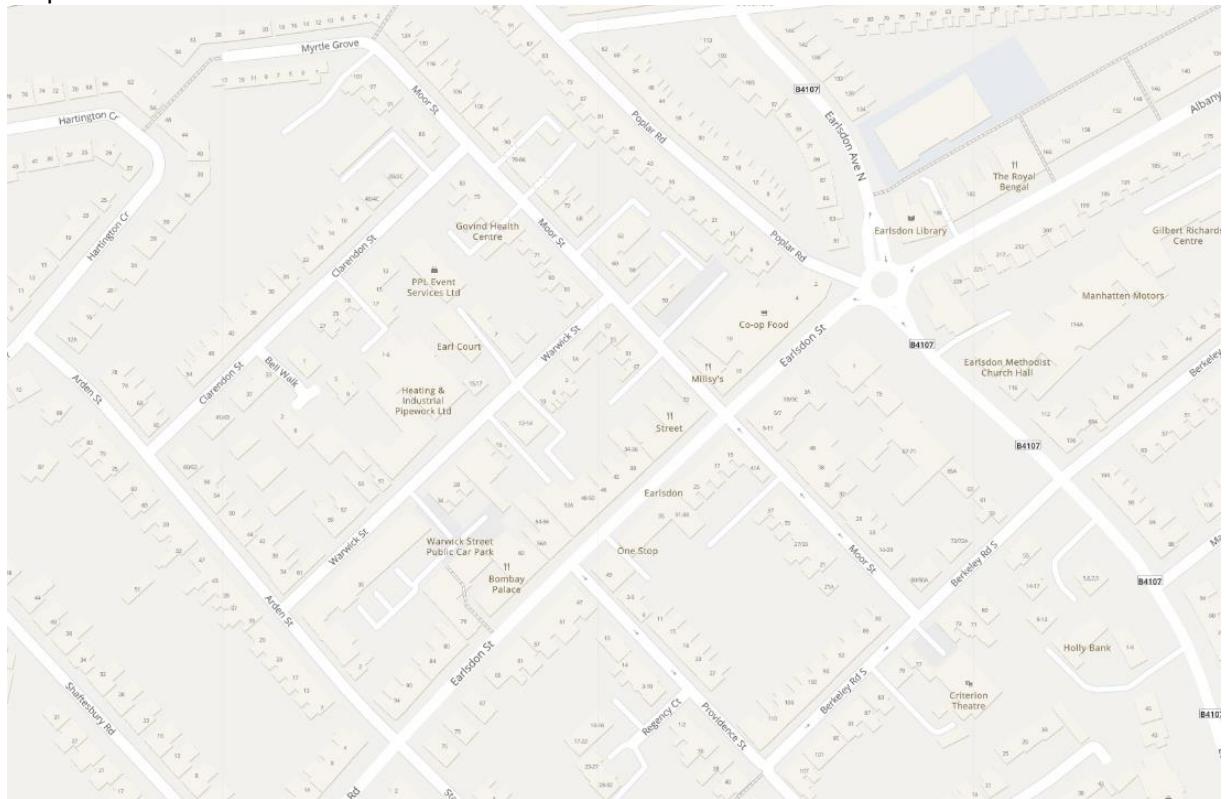
Reproduced from Dormer Harris, Mary (1911) Story of Coventry. London: J M Dent & Co

Map 8: Earlsdon 1913



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 9: Earlsdon 2022



Extract from www.mapquest.com

Published by earlsdonresearchgroup.org



APPENDIX 3 – IMAGES

Image 1



Arden Street looking north-west with John Flinn's thirteen cottages to the immediate right and Warwick Street just beyond them again to the right, circa 1907, provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Arden Street, Earlsdon 1861 to 1921

David Porter, Earlsdon Research Group

November 2023



Image 2



Arden Street looking north-west, August 2023

Image 3



Arden Street looking north-west circa 1912, provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Image 4



Arden Street looking north-west, August 2023

Image 5



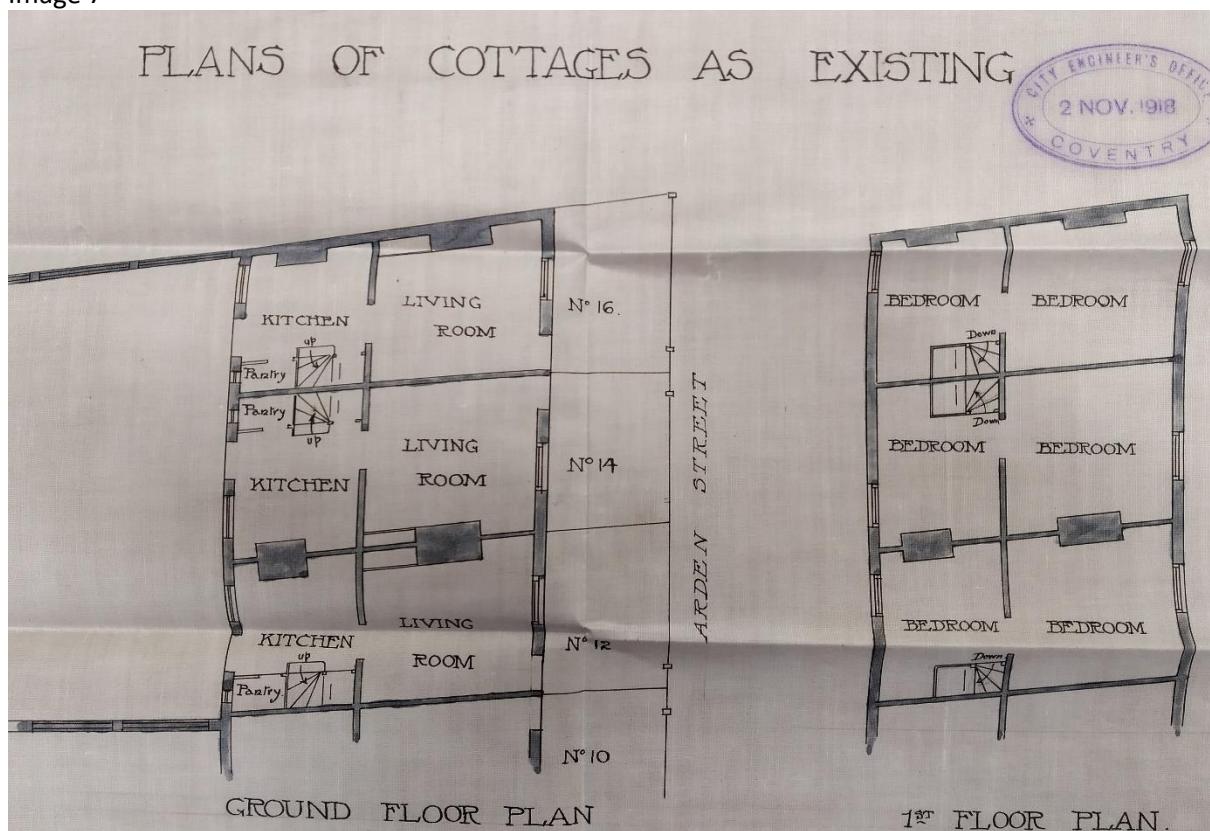
Looking south-east towards the end of Arden Street across Earlsdon Street and along Stanley Road, which had opened just ten years beforehand. On the corner with Warwick Street can be seen the door to the shop at what was initially 1 Arden Street – by this time renumbered as 32 – which might have been the location of Earlsdon's first shop. The three cottages which would be destroyed during the Second World War as shown below in Image 10 can be seen at the far end of the street on the left-hand side. Taken circa 1907, this photograph was provided by Earlsdon Research Group.

Image 6



Looking south-east towards the end of Arden Street, taken August 1923 and showing the Williamson Court flats complex to the left, constructed in around 2007.

Image 7



A plan drawn in 1918 indicating the internal layout of the Flinn Cottages, downstairs and upstairs, reproduced with permission from Coventry Archives & Research Centre ref CCD/3/BYE/8685

Image 8



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group and annotated by founder member Bill Dunn, a photograph of a water cart next to Flinn's cottages towards the end of the nineteenth century, with Warwick Street to the right.

Image 9



Taken from the approximate location of the water cart shown in the previous image, August 2023

Image 10



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group, a photograph of what was left of numbers 8, 10 and 12 Arden Street after the 1940 bombing, these being some of the Flinn cottages nearest Earlsdon Street. The remaining ten cottages to the left continued in occupation until 1971, when they were demolished by order of Coventry Council.

Image 11



Looking north-west towards the end of Arden Street, with Clarendon Street to the right just before the house with the attic window. Until Hartington Crescent was built in 1935, this end of the street remained a cul-de-sac with extensive allotments in the fields beyond. Taken circa 1907, this photograph was provided by Earlsdon Research Group.

Image 12



Looking north-west towards the end of Arden Street, August 2023

Image 13



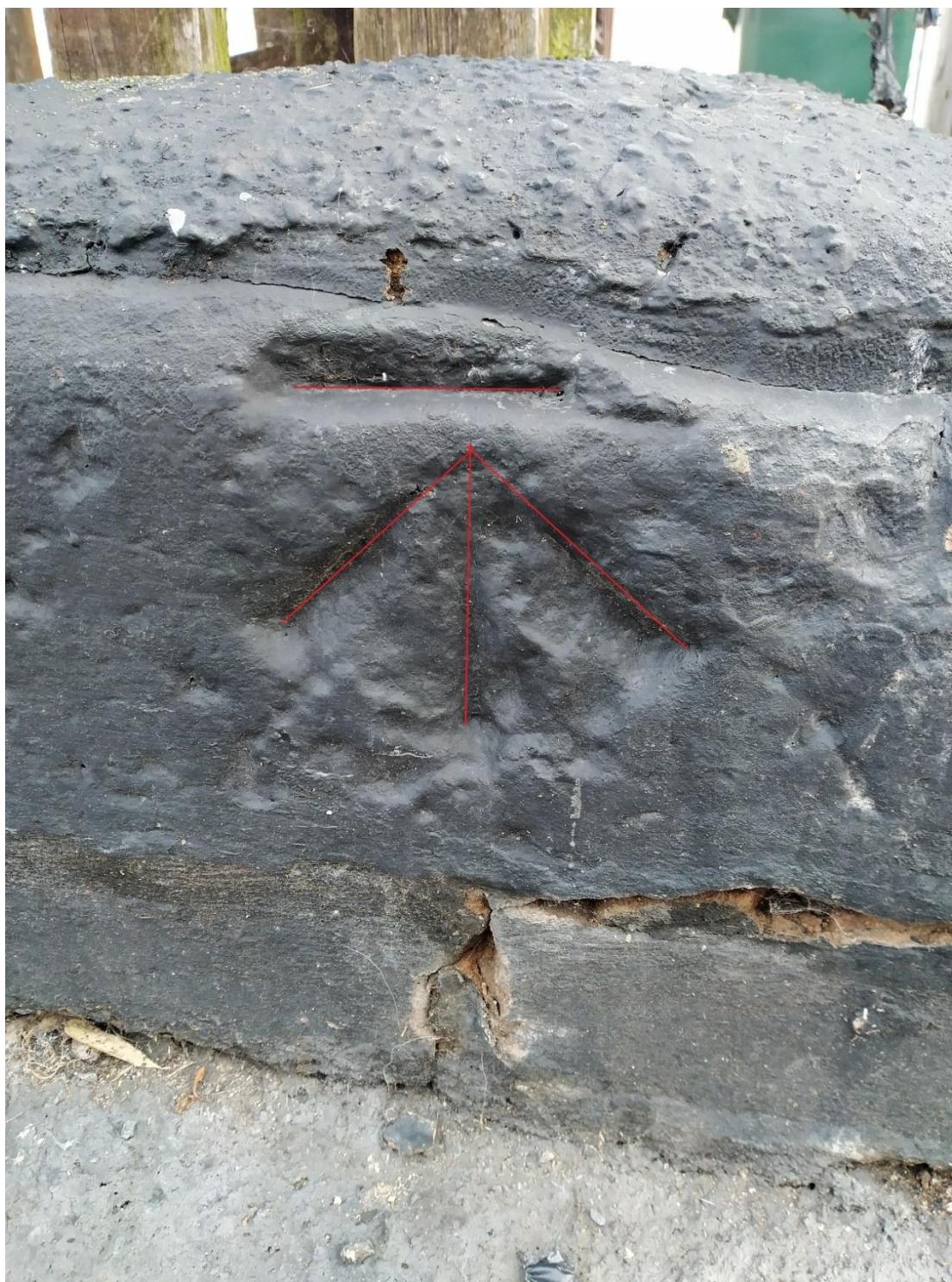
The re-opening of Arden Street Police Station at number 37 on 25 April 1949 with Alderman Mrs A. E. Corrie, Chair of Coventry Watch Committee, Mayor-elect Alderman V. A. Hammond and Chief Constable Pendleton; image provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Image 14



Looking south-east from the end of Arden Street, August 2023

Image 15



An Ordnance Survey crows foot symbol (picked out in red) on the garden wall facing Arden Street on the corner of number 60 Clarendon Street, marking the highest point surveyed on the Earlsdon Estate, September 2023

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