

# **Clarendon Street, Earlsdon 1861-1921**

Peter James, Earlsdon Research Group

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## INTRODUCTION

Clarendon Street is one of the original eight streets of the Earlsdon estate, with approximately 25 houses plus industrial premises. The history of the street stretches back over 170 years to the beginnings of Earlsdon.

This paper examines the early development of the street using census material available for Earlsdon between 1861 and 1921, describing the people who lived there, where they came from and their occupations.

## 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. Clarendon 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. 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.

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. These were the high-earners of the day, said to see themselves above the likes of weavers.

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.

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 <sup>vi</sup> (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 deteriorating housing and working conditions. 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. 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. For Earlsdon as a whole, in 1861, out of 146 males in fulltime employment, 100 were employed in the watch trade.

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. 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."

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 -- 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. 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. 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 17<sup>th</sup> 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.

## THE GROWTH OF CLARENDRON STREET

In 1853 one property stood on the south side of Clarendon Street. It comprised of two semi-detached houses, namely Clarendon House and Westwood House. This is where the Richardson family lived. By 1861 Joseph, a watchmaker born in Nottingham was living with his family in Clarendon House. Next door in Westwood House lived his mother Mary a retired widow of a watchmaker with her two daughters. The Richardsons were still in residence in Clarendon House 40 years later. Oliver took over the business after his father Joseph died. Another watchmaker John Hulme was living and working on the corner of Clarendon Street and Arden Street by 1861 employing 6 men and 4 boys. He was originally from Knutsford in Cheshire

and had trained in Liverpool later becoming an escapement maker. The 1851 Census shows his first address in Coventry as Spon Street. He had lived there with his wife Marie Ann (nee Matthews) who had been born in Liverpool. Marie Ann had a sister Eliza who was married to William Abbott also a watchmaker, originally from Widnes in Lancashire. The Abbotts lived close by in Arden Street almost opposite the Hulmes and the families remained neighbours for the next 30 years.

Of the five properties in Clarendon Street in 1861 three properties were occupied by watchmakers, a fourth by a watchmaker's widow. Along with the Richardsons and the Hulmes was George Jackson Smith a watch finisher from Coventry who lived with his wife Harriett and a servant and employed two boys. George Cook was the other inhabitant, a plush weaver who was living in Clarendon Street, still there in 1881 but by this time retired.

John Hulme and his wife had no children but were very much involved in the local community, focussing on education. John was vice chairman of the Earlsdon School Board serving alongside the chairman James Walker, clerk F.A. Bullock and members S.R. Masser, A.G. Pearson and W.H. Mayo. In addition to being a superintendant at the local Methodist Sunday School he was a major figure in the Earlsdon Property Protection Association, which was formed to prevent poor housing being built. Later in 1882, the education board employed Charles Corelli Johnson as the first headmaster of the school based in Cromwell Street. His father Charles Johnson spent his latter years living with his wife Marie at 44 Clarendon Street.

The census for 1871 show that households in the street now numbered ten, dropping to nine by 1881 because of one property becoming vacant. The street was still dominated by watchmakers and weavers. A governess, silk dyers and dressmakers now lived there and in 1881 they were joined by a slate layer. However by 1891 the social structure of the street had changed dramatically. Although there were still only 10 households there was now an architect, railway worker, locksmith, storekeeper, nursery gardener, baker, laundress, labourer, two servants, two retired weavers, three cycle fitters in addition to seven watchmakers and apprentices working there.

The opening of Albany Road in 1898 provided improved access to the city centre and the advent of the motor industry in 1897 offered additional employment opportunities. By 1901 although there were still only 13 properties occupied in the street the lines of business were more diverse. As well as watchmakers there were now machine fitters, clerks and a draughtsman as well as a bell factory manager located there.

The bell factory manager was Joseph Holland who lived with his wife Annie and family at No. 37 Clarendon Street. The firm of Harrington, Latham & Co. who were tubular bell manufacturers had moved to this address from smaller premises at the Butts in 1900. Joseph's son Alfred also worked for the company as an engineer. There was a foundry as well as a production and assembly unit. The bells were used in door

chimes and dinner gongs with the very largest being employed as church bells. The company eventually became known as Harrington & Holland and operated here until production moved to Whitefriars Street around 1920.

By an interesting coincidence Alfred Holland married Edith Johnson the granddaughter of Charles Johnson at St. Thomas Church in Earlsdon on 24<sup>th</sup> February 1914. They initially lived in Villiers Street but by 1917 they were living at 32 Clarendon Street with their two sons. Previously Edith Johnson had suffered as a child. She and her sister Florence had been orphaned in 1896 when she was just 11 years old and her sister Florence was 13. Their father Lindley had died in March 1895 and their mother Louisa passed away a year later in April 1896. By 1901 Florence was working for and living with relatives Francis and Ada Salmon at 3 Barras Hill Terrace. Edith was living at 44 Clarendon Street with Marie Johnson, her grandmother the widow of Charles Johnson, and was working in service at Allington Villas on Grosvenor Road. This was obviously where Edith met Alfred as they had only lived a few doors from each other in Clarendon Street.

Another person of note shown in the 1901 Census was Harry Weston who as a five year old living with his family at 50 Clarendon Street. His father was a railway engine driver who had been born in Nuneaton in 1857. When interviewed in later life Harry vividly remembered hearing tubular bells being tuned in the factory almost opposite where he grew up. To him it had been a pleasant experience, while some other neighbours had found it less so. After serving an apprenticeship in Coventry he went on to found Modern Machine Tools in the Butts in 1921 eventually moving to Maudslay Road. The company produced lathes, water pumps and various other machines. Harry became Mayor of Coventry in 1951 and was an alderman from 1955 – 1974 being awarded an MBE in 1974. He spent his later years living in Earlsdon at 6 Styvechale Avenue.

By 1911 the number of properties in Clarendon Street had leapt from 13 to 32 and the population from 54 to 130. This sharp increase may in part be attributed to the fact that between 1901 and 1911 an estimated 23,000 people migrated to the city of Coventry, a trend evident also in Earlsdon itself where cycles, motor cycles and motor cars were now being manufactured and a machine tool industry was well established. This pattern of inward migration can be seen clearly from Table 5, with residents born in for example Lincolnshire, London, Northamptonshire and Staffordshire appearing in the census. Of these, there were now seven people involved in the car trade, six making cycles and motor cycles plus nine machine tool workers living in Clarendon Street, while only one ribbon weaver and five watchmakers remained working there.

Between 1911 and 1921 the population of the street had decreased to 109 with only 25 properties being occupied, with a much more diverse range of job descriptions and no dominant trades shown in the first

post-war census. One significant change on the street involved the Harrington Bell factory which was put up for sale in 1915 and by 1920 manufacturing had moved to Whitefriars Street and their offices had relocated to Earlsdon Avenue South. The premises were soon taken over by companies involved in the cycle industry. A trade directory of 1920 indicates three companies sharing the site :- Caesar Cycle Co. Ltd. W. Jones Cycle & Motor Exporter and the Stelfen Belt Co. Ltd. Eventually as the cycle boom declined they moved out and the Clarendon Pressing & Welding Co Ltd. took their place. The chairman of the company was A. Barnett and the joint managing director was I.G. Francis, who were better known as makers of Francis Barnett motor cycles. Unsurprisingly Clarendon Pressing & Welding Co. supplied a number of parts to the Francis Barnett company. Another change involved the Gibberd family who in 1920 moved into number 23 Clarendon Street, comprising Fred and his wife and their five sons. The boys received their primary education at a small private school on the corner of Clarendon Street and Moor Street run by Miss Steane. The eldest son Frederick continued his education at King Henry VIII Grammar School before training to become an architect in Birmingham. After achieving the status of architect and town planner he went on to become arguably Earlsdon's most famous son. He was master planner of Harlow New Town and was involved in the design of Heathrow terminals 1-3, the central mosque in Regents Park and also Liverpool Catholic Cathedral. Frederick was knighted in 1967 the year that the cathedral was completed. Fred senior was a clothier and the family business continued to operate in Earlsdon and the city centre successfully until 2009.

## **CONCLUSION**

For the first decades of its existence Clarendon Street was home to watchmakers and one or two weavers. By 1891 some residents had started to benefit from the development of the cycle industry locally in Earlsdon. Subsequently, the building of Albany Road in 1898 improved travel between Earlsdon and the city centre. In consequence, by 1911 the population had grown to a peak of 126 residents with people now being employed in the motor trade and machine tool manufacture. Surprisingly, between 1911 and 1921 the population decreased somewhat at the same time as Coventry grew to accommodate workers involved in the war effort. A similar pattern of decline was seen in Providence Street over this same period but the reasons are not fully understood.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The censuses for the years between 1861 and 1921 are the foremost sources of information used for this study. They have provided data including number of people, properties, names, ages, places of birth and job titles. In addition newspaper articles, directories, maps and photographs and history from family descendants have been utilised. Unfortunately the 1861 Census does not differentiate between street names and house numbers, with addresses given simply as Earlsdon. Accordingly, sources other than the census have had to be used and certain deductions have had to be made.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **Thanks to:**

Earlsdon Research Group members especially David Porter who has helped me find information and encouraged me.

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Patricia Shorey for providing photographs and family history of both the Holland and Johnson families.

Marie Montes and Sheila Adams for research and a range of documentation.

## 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%	20.50%

Table 2: Heads of households living in Clarendon Street

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Number of Heads	5	10	9	10	13	32	25

Table 3: Total residents and average household size in Clarendon Street 1861-1921

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Households	5	10	9	10	13	32	25
People	21	52	52	52	53	126	109
Ave. household size	4	5.2	5.7	5.2	4	3.9	4.3

Table 4: Place of Birth of Heads of Households 1861-1921 in Clarendon Street

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Coventry	1	3	5	4	3	6	7
Warwickshire	2	1	2	1	2	4	4
Birmingham				1			1
Bucks							1
Cheshire	1	1	1	1			
Devon					1		
Cumbria						1	
Gloucestershire							1
Guernsey						1	1
Hampshire					1	1	
Lancashire		3		1		1	1
London				1	2	4	2
Leicestershire			1				
Lincolnshire						1	1
Northants				1	1	3	4
Nottingham	1	1				1	
Oxfordshire							1
Rutland						1	
Salop						1	
Staffordshire					2	3	
Wiltshire					1	1	
Wales						1	1
Worcestershire		1				2	
TOTALS	5	10	9	10	13	32	25

Table 5: Place of birth of all residents of Clarendon Street 1861 - 1921

	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
Coventry	13	15	39	29	28	46	55
Warwickshire	3	2	5	10	7	20	19
Birmingham			2	3	5	6	7
Berkshire						1	
Buckinghamshire						1	1
Cheshire	1		1	2		1	1
Cumbria							
Devon					1	1	
Derbyshire						1	
Gloucestershire						1	2
Guernsey						1	1
Hampshire					1	2	
Kent						1	
Lancashire	1			1		4	2
Leicestershire		2	1			1	
Lincolnshire						5	3
London			1	3	3	6	7
Norfolk			1				
Northamptonshire				2		3	4
Nottinghamshire	2	1				1	
Oxfordshire				2			1
Rutland						3	
Salop						2	
Staffordshire					4	9	3
Wiltshire					1		
Worcestershire					2	4	
Yorkshire	1	1	1			1	
Wales						1	2
Canada							1
USA					1	4	
India			1				
TOTALS	21	21	52	52	53	126	109

Table 6: Occupations of residents of Clarendon Street

1861
Watchmaking trades with apprentices 3
Weaver 1
Dressmaker 1
Housekeeper 1
Servant 1

1871
Watchmaking trade plus apprentices 32
Weaver 2
Silk dyer 1
Governess 1
Dressmaker 3
Laundress 1
Servant 1

1881
Watchmaking trade with apprentices 28
Weaver 1
Dyer 2
Dressmaker 1
Slate layer 1
Servant 1

1891
Watchmaking trade and apprentices 7
Cycle fitter 3
Weaver - retired * 2
Architect 1
Railway worker 1
Servant 2
Labourer 1
Locksmith 1
Storekeeper 1
Nursery gardener 1
Laundress 1
Baker 1

1901

Watchmaking trade and apprentices 4  
Clerk 4  
machine fitter 3  
Coach painter 2  
Bell factory manager 1  
Servant 1  
Grocery assistant 1  
Teacher 1  
Typist 1  
Draughtsman 1

1911

Machine tool workers 9  
Motor trade - cars 7  
Cycles and motor cycles 6  
Watchmaking trade & apprentices 5  
Servant 4  
Railwaymen 3  
Tubular bell makers 2  
Teachers 3  
Mining engineer 1  
Drapery 1  
Ribbon weaver 1  
Errand boy 1  
Grinder 1  
Wood turner 1  
Electrician 1  
Bricklayer 1

1921

Clerical workers 11  
Watchmaking trade and apprentices 4  
Motor car engineer 3  
Cycle & motorcycle fitter 2  
Machine tool worker 2  
Teacher 1  
Telephonist 1  
Motor car engineer 3  
Company secretary 1  
Clothier 1  
ribbon weaver 1  
Electrical engineer 2  
Caretaker 1

1921 cont.

Painter and decorator 1  
Tracer (drawing office) 1  
Railway Carman 1  
Dresser 1  
Turner 1  
Coach builder 1  
Wood turner 1  
Lorry driver 1  
Manager of textile works 1  
Servant 1

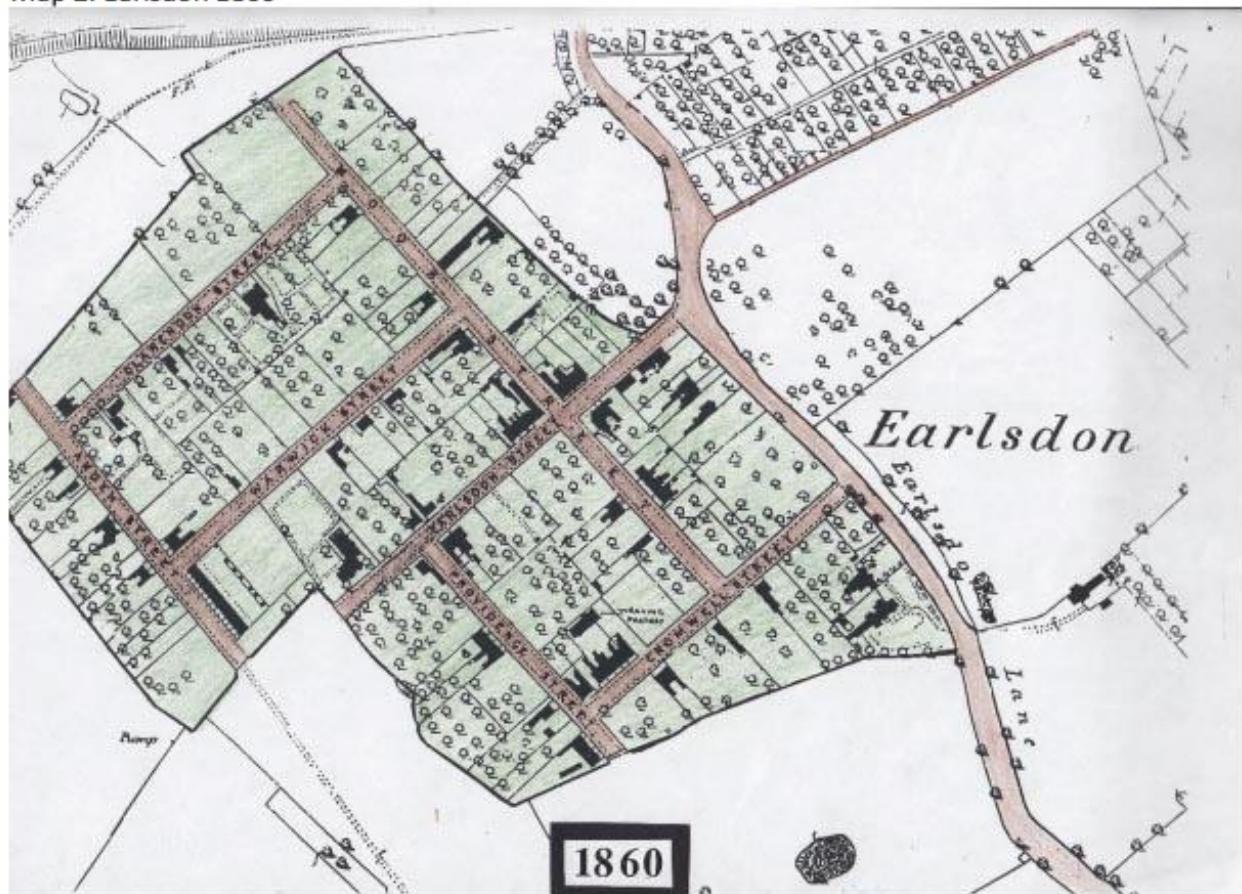
## APPENDIX 2 - MAPS

Map 1: Earlsdon 1852/53



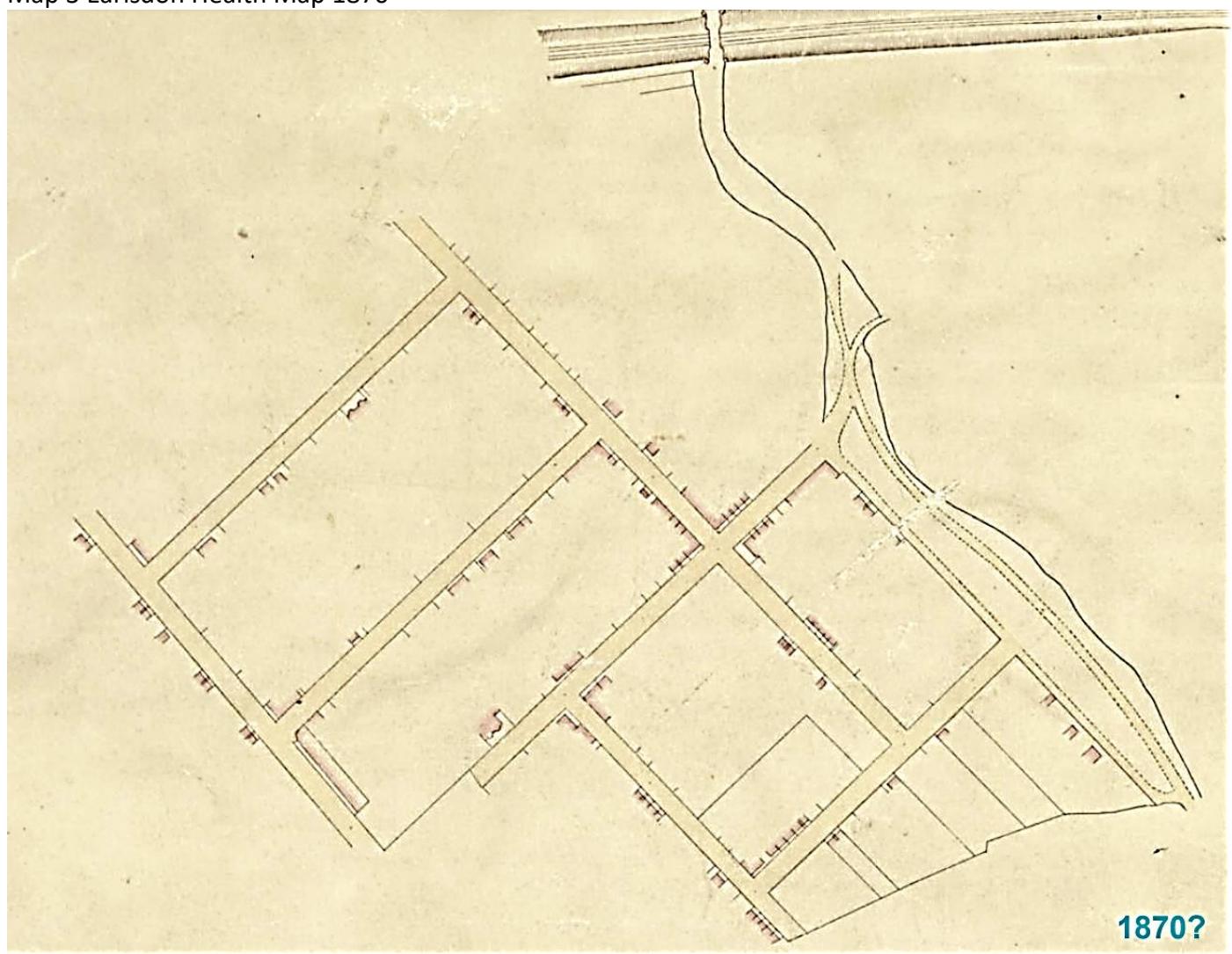
Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 2: Earlsdon 1860



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 3 Earlsdon Health Map 1870



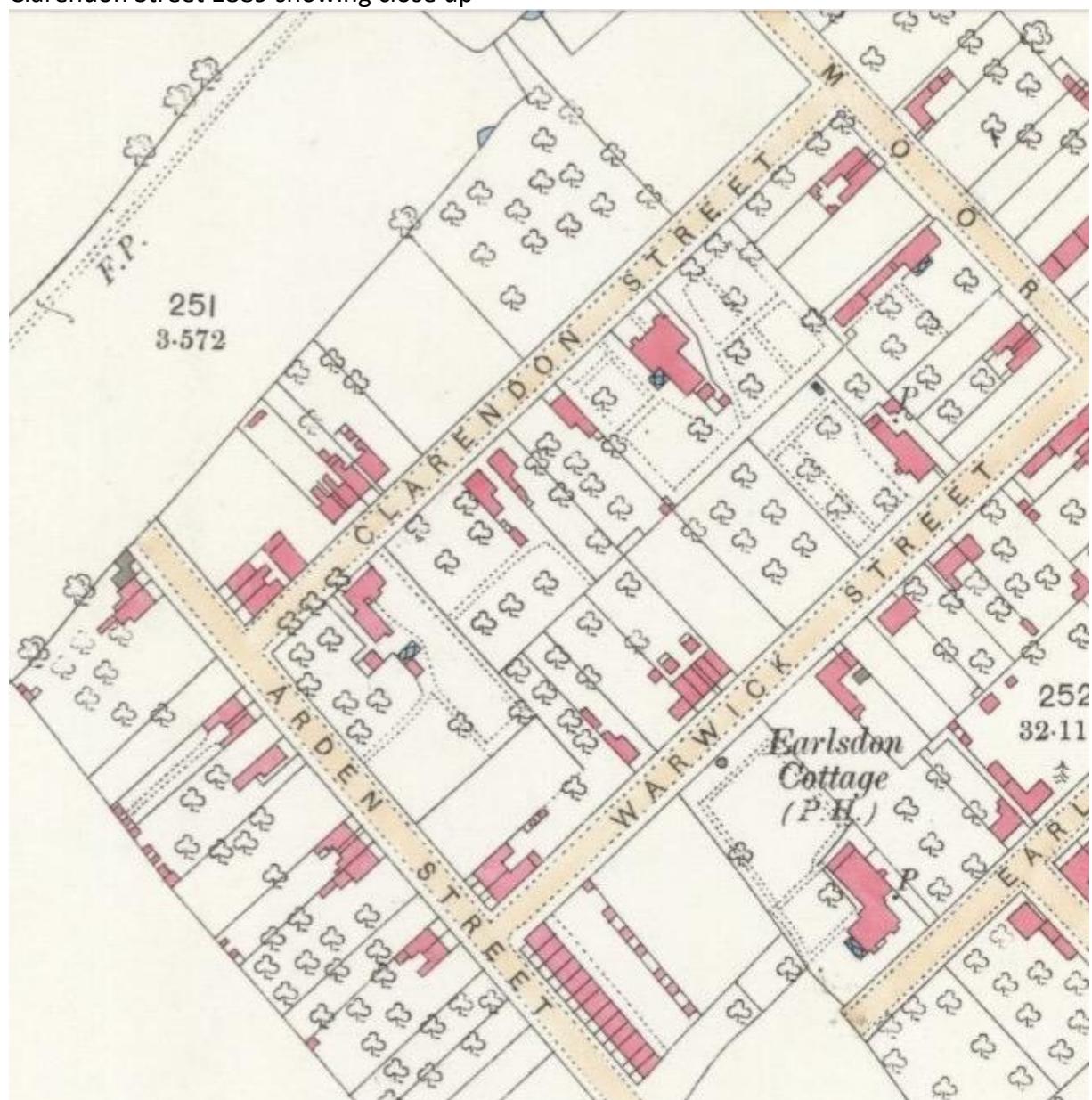
Map 4: Earlsdon 1889



Provided by Earlsdon Research Group

Map 5

Clarendon Street 1889 showing close up



## APPENDIX 3 - IMAGES

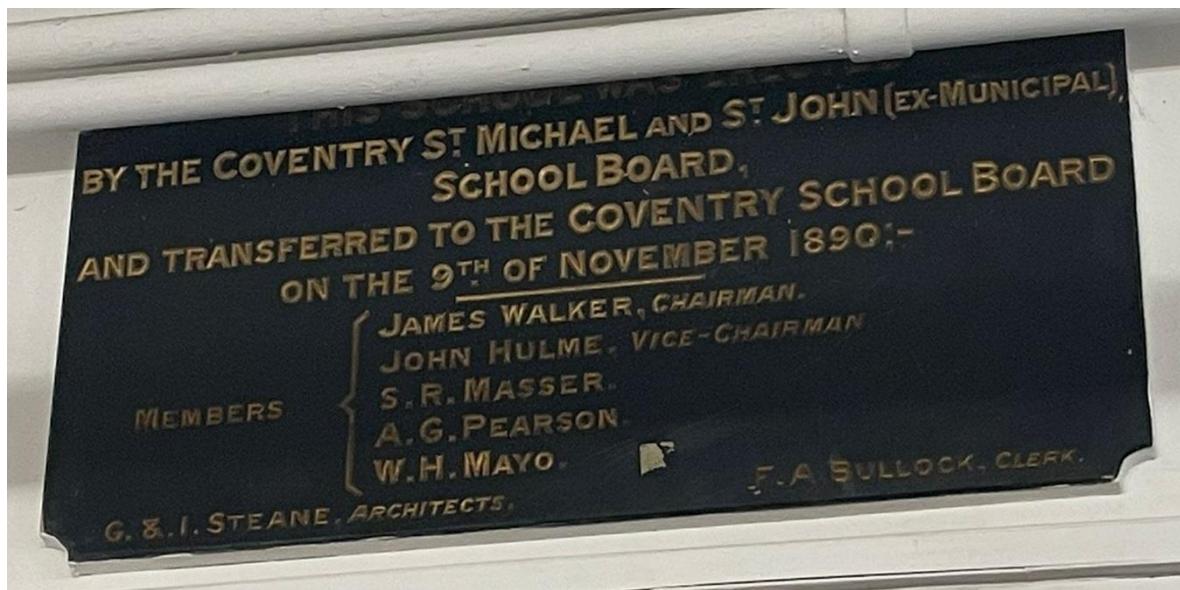


Clarendon Street c.1907, with John Hulme's house first right – lost in the Second World War – and the Harrington factory beside it

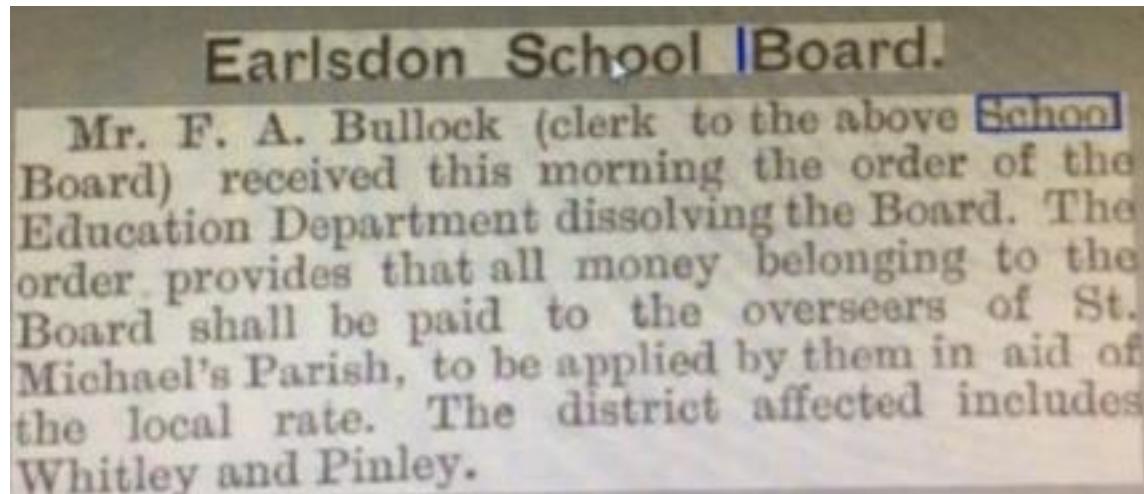


*Clarendon House and Westwood House*

First Property in Clarendon Street where the Richardson family lived, now numbers 15 and 17



John Hulme was Vice Chairman of Earlsdon School Board



Dissolution of the School Board in 1891, after the incorporation of Earlsdon into Coventry



Clarendon Pressing Works at 37 Clarendon Street, c.1931



Inside Clarendon Pressing Works





The Caesar Cycle Company, based at 37 Clarendon Street in the 1920's



DBS furniture warehouse at 37 Clarendon Street 1962 - 2007



View of 37 Clarendon Street in 2014





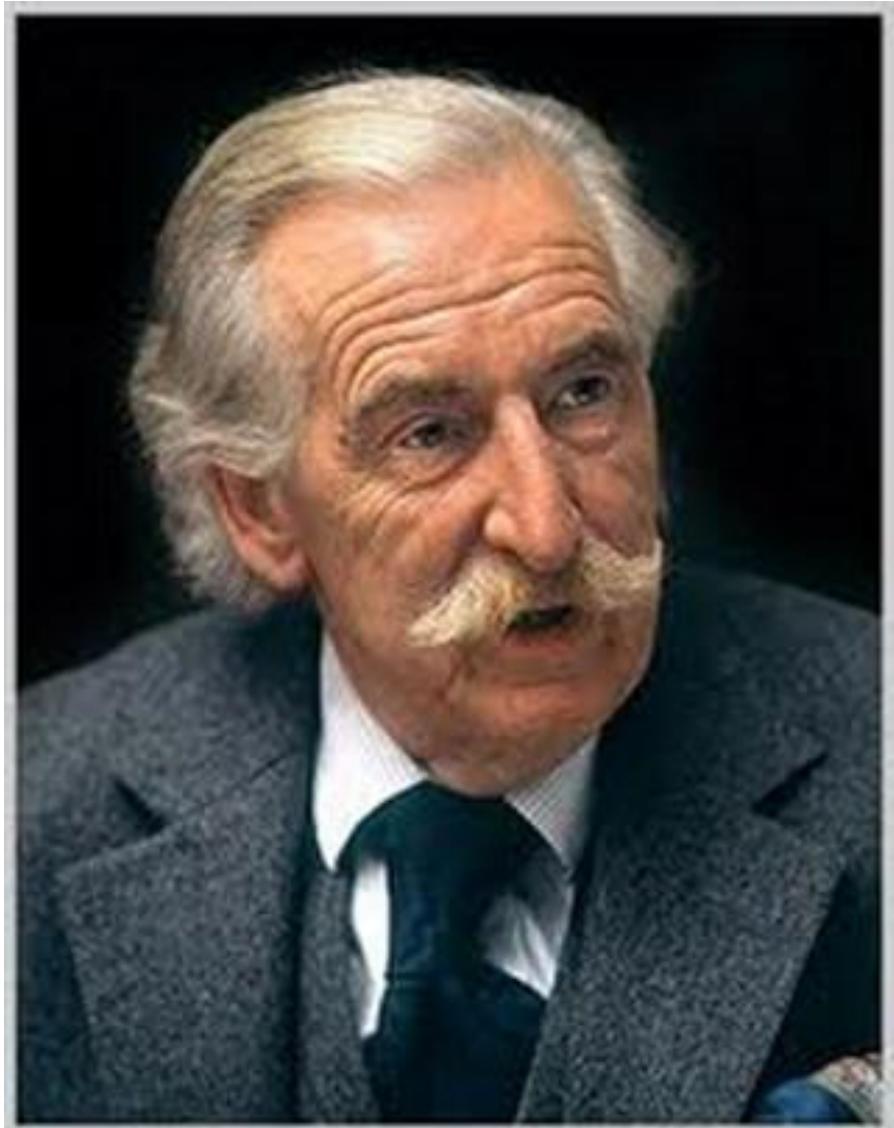
22, CLARENDON ST.  
ROSA & ANNIE SMITH,  
C1911



22, CLARENDON ST. MR ARTHUR SMITH  
MRS ROSA SMITH, ROSA & ANNIE  
C1913

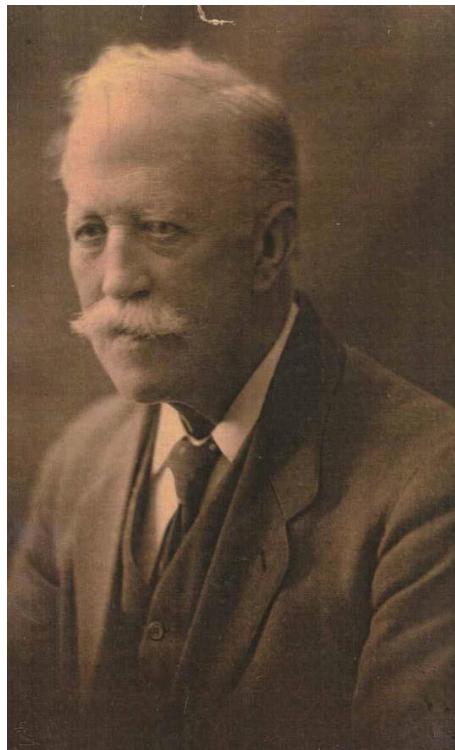


Harry Weston - Mayor of Coventry 1951, born at number 50 Clarendon Street in 1896



Sir Frederick Gibberd – Architect, who lived at 15 Clarendon Street





Joseph Holland - Manager of Harrington Bell Foundry



Joseph and wife Annie Holland, who lived at 37 Clarendon Street



Alfred & Edith Holland with son Bernard and grandchild  
Bernard was born at 32 Clarendon Street 19th December 1919



Nieces of Charles Corelli Johnson, Edith May and Florence Johnson, orphaned in 1896  
Edith married Alfred Holland on 24th February 1914



32 Clarendon Street with the red door, once home of Alfred and Edith Holland



Plaque at 26 Clarendon Street, home to Arthur Morgan of Rotherhams on Spon Street



Fairmount, number 26 Clarendon Street