

Plan for the Noel Park project
A research report by Nita Hilton for the Crouch End & District U3A Local History Group
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The Artizans, Labourers & General Dwellings Company (Artizans Company) was established in 1867 by William Austin. Austin was an illiterate who had begun his working life on a farm as a scarecrow paid 1 penny per day, and had worked his way up to become a drainage contractor. The company was established as a for-profit joint stock company, with the objective of building new houses for the working classes "in consequence of the destruction of houses by railroads and other improvements". The return for investors was 5%. The company aimed to incorporate the designs of rural planned suburbs with the ethos of high-quality homes for the lower classes.

Whilst earlier philanthropic housing companies such as the Peabody Trust focused on multi-storey blocks of flats in the inner cities, the Artizans Company aimed to build low-rise housing in open countryside alongside existing railway lines to allow workers to live in the countryside and commute into the city. The company attracted the attention of Lord Shaftesbury, a philanthropic Christian politician, who served as president until 1875.

One of the proposed estates was planned to be built near Wood Green north of London. Despite its distance from London at the time, the area was well served by railways. The Palace Gates Line, opened in 1878 to serve nearby Alexandra Palace, had an intermediate station at Green Lanes, immediately adjacent to the site in question. This provided direct service to the City and the Port of London. In addition, the Great Northern Railway's station at Wood Green (now Alexandra Palace station) was within walking distance.

The company decided that the quality of transport links compensated for the distance from any significant centre of population, and in June 1881 a site of 100 acres was purchased by the company for £56,345 (approximately £5.13 million today). However the slow take-up of available

homes on the estate was largely to the Great Eastern Railway's initial refusal to offer third-class rail fares from the nearby stations. But after the intervention of Lord Shaftesbury, the Great Eastern agreed to provide cheap railway tickets to the city and the docks, a critical element in the life of many of the workers on the estate.

In July the Company proposed to the Great Eastern Railway that they could rent some of the land at Green Lanes in exchange for the use of a siding to which all the estate's building materials could be delivered. In addition to an estate workshop, a clubhouse for a hundred workers was also built there.

A leading architect of the period, Rowland Plumbe, was appointed Consulting Architect to the Artizans Company, with a brief to prepare a design for the estate. Plumbe had primarily been a designer of hospitals, such as the London Hospital, and Poplar Hospital; he had also been President of the Architectural Association in 1871-72 and a Council Member of the Royal Institute of British Architects since 1876.

Plumbe designed the estate with five sizes of house, an arrangement that suited both the Victorian notion of social hierarchical classification and the varying incomes of the inhabitants. Each house was a single family home, and built to one of the five basic designs, and each street was given a distinct style of design and ornamentation. Varying mixes of red and yellow bricks, and variations in window design and ornamental motifs, were used to give each street a distinct identity. All were designed with front and back gardens. Corner houses were given distinctive designs and turrets. The width of the houses ranged from 13 feet to 16 feet and the front porches were designed facing away from their immediate neighbours. The smallest houses had scullery kitchens, a parlour on the ground floor and two bedrooms above.

In 1883 the name Noel Park was chosen for the estate in honour of Ernest Noel MP, the chairman of the Artisan's Company since 1880, who was a member of the Temperance Society, which explains why there were no public houses on the estate.

Notes

My original plan for the project was to interview occupants of the 5 different types of house. But due to my ill health and the bad weather I missed several meetings of the Local History Group and was unable to get out and do the house histories. However I have arranged with a number of occupants to complete their interviews.

I have consulted a number of sources for this project, viz:

Welch, Caroline *Noel Park, A Social and Architectural History* Haringey Council Bruce Castle Museum, 2006

Wikipedia

W.J.Meade Estate Agents, Wood Green, whose current sales list includes a number of houses on the estate, e.g:

- 1) a 3-bedroom house in Hewitt Avenue - for £595,000
- 2) a 2-bedroom house in Morley Avenue - for £535,000
- 3) a 2-bedroom house in Farrant Avenue - for £547,000.

The houses

1. 10 Darwin Road - 1947 to 1968

This is a 2 bedroom house, with a kitchen with bath and the loo behind on the ground floor; and a living room and 2 bedrooms upstairs.

The occupant is a retired researcher & administrator. She went to the local primary and secondary school on the estate, then trained as a shorthand typist and married in St Marks church on the estate.

Family history - her grandfather worked on the building of the estate and in consequence was entitled to rent one of the houses there (in Farrant Road in his case).

The family used the Shropshire Hall community centre in Gladstone Road and had a very happy childhood playing in the local park.

She thought the conservation area - implemented in the 1980s - was a good idea because it would control changes made to the external appearance of the houses that some of the residents had bought.

2. 98 Gladstone Avenue - 1978 to present

This is a 3 bedroom house with bathroom; because the occupant is a retired builder he has a discounted rent of £15 to £20 per week. His children went to the estate school.

Before him the council tenant - who paid £10 per week rent - had a bicycle repair shop in the ground floor front room.

He was unaware there were five categories of house on the estate.

3. 169 Hewitt Avenue - 2008 to present

The occupant was originally a council tenant in a high rise flat on the Haringey ladder until 2008 when she moved to the estate, where she pays £150 rent per week.

She is now in a modernised house with a bathroom and a bedroom on the first floor and a kitchen and 2 living rooms on the ground floor one of which is used as a bedroom.

She is happy on the estate, has good neighbours and her mother also lives on the estate.

4. 237 Gladstone Avenue - 1999 to 2006

She trained as a theatre designer. Before coming to Noel Park she was originally living on a Peabody estate in the Borough. She paid £230,000 for the house on Noel Park estate. It has 3 bedrooms and a bathroom and was part of the 1970s modernisation of the estate.

Her children went to Shropshire Hall on the Sure Start scheme. They enjoyed the Park and the communal Fetes organised by the estate association.