



Detailed Development History for Sutton Coldfield High Street Conservation Area

1086 to 1528 – A Medieval Market Town

In the Domesday Book of 1086 Sutton Coldfield is described as a royal manor, previously held by Edwin, Earl of Mercia.

In 1126 Henry I exchanged the manor of Sutton with Roger de Newburgh, Earl of Warwick, for land in the county of Rutland. A park and water mill are mentioned in the exchange, but no manor house. However, the site of the manor house is known to be at the location of the present Manor Drive approximately half a mile south-west of the High Street/Coleshill Street junction (Map 4, 2).

The medieval settlement of Sutton (Great Sutton) sat on the sandstone ridge to the east of Sutton Park above the crossing of the boggy Ebrook (Plantsbrook) valley. Its location in the middle of the manor and at the junction of the important route north from Birmingham to Lichfield (Mill Street, High Street) with the road from Coleshill and Warwick (Coleshill Street) contributed to its development as the local centre for a growing twelfth and thirteenth century population. This process was fostered by the Earls of Warwick who established both the parish church and the local market here.

The parish church of Holy Trinity was probably founded in the first half of the thirteenth century (first recorded in 1287) and was built on a rise just south of the junction of the Birmingham and Coleshill roads (Mill Street and Coleshill Street). The site allowed the necessary room for a good-sized graveyard and its elevated position would have given prominence to what appears originally to have been a relatively small building.

In 1300 the Crown gave the Earl of Warwick the right to hold a weekly market and annual fair in Sutton. The market charter would have formalised an existing situation, since Sutton had almost certainly become the local market centre before then, serving the surrounding settlements. Later map evidence indicates a typical funnel shaped market place just to the north of the church at the junction of the roads from Birmingham (Mill Street, High Street) and Coleshill (Coleshill Street).

Map evidence also suggests that the linear settlement had at least a partially planned layout. On the east side of High Street and Coleshill Street generous house plots were regularly laid out with large crofts at the rear, running down to the glebe lands at the valley bottom. This plot sequence seems to have extended from the site of the present Moat House on Lichfield Road (Map 4, 4) to a site identified with the present nos. 57 – 59 Coleshill Street. It may date from around the same time as the foundation of the church although there is no direct evidence for this. There is a less obvious pattern on the west side of the High Street, where the steeply rising terrain must have made the establishment of house plots more difficult, as indicated by later terracing



along the street frontage. The properties here had no long rear croft, their yards and gardens backing directly onto the fields behind. They are probably later than those on the east side of the road and perhaps represent a period of urban expansion.

Occupational surnames found in the manor in the fourteenth century demonstrate a variety of crafts and trades normally associated with urbanism. Although Sutton did not have borough status, there can be little doubt that in the later medieval period it functioned as a town. However, the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century seems to have been a period of decline for the town.

1528 to 1850 – Gentrification and Civic Pride

John Harman alias Vesey born in Sutton, (c.1462–1554) was famously responsible for the sixteenth century renaissance of Sutton Coldfield. He was made Chaplain of St. Blaise in 1495, (the free chapel belonging to the manor) and he thereafter used his fortune and influence to benefit his birthplace. He was behind the licence for a weekly market and two annual fairs given in 1519 and in 1527 founded a grammar school. In 1528 his interest persuaded the King to bestow borough status on the town. He also built the first public buildings within the town, the sites of which are still used for civic buildings today, and paved the streets.

The population of Sutton Coldfield grew throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While the local economy as a whole remained largely agricultural, a variety of craftsmen and tradesmen continued to live and work in the town. Sutton also increasingly became the habitation of gentlefolk and



building activity lasting well into the eighteenth century and a shift from vernacular to classical building forms. As this national trend reached Sutton the town's appearance began to change. New houses built for the prosperous tradesmen, professional men and country gentry who took up residence on High Street and Coleshill Street were constructed according to classical principles, while existing buildings were given increased status through the addition of a classical facade. Timber frame and local stone gave way to fashionable brick.

The present no. 20 High Street (Ivy House), newly built c.1700, is the earliest remaining example in the town of this new sophisticated type of urban building, while the present no.1 Coleshill Street and no. 36 High Street (Cull's



In the same year Sir Edmund Hartopp of Four Oaks Hall, just to the north of the town, effected an exchange of land with the Corporation under the terms of Sutton's Enclosure Act, passed in 1825. As a condition of the exchange Hartopp laid out a carriage road, Park Road, from the junction of Mill Street with The Dam to the new park entrance (Map 4, 9).

In 1826 the construction of the Town School (now Baptist Church) began at the junction of Blind Lane (Trinity Hill) and Mill Street. At the same time ten almshouses (Map 4, 10, now demolished and the site occupied by Mill Street car park) were erected on the adjacent site. In 1836 a middle school for boys was built on Church Hill on the site now occupied by the Sons of Rest. The workhouse on Mill Street was converted into the master's house. The building on Church Hill was later taken over by the Infant School.

The churchyard was enlarged in the nineteenth century. In 1832 the school property (St. Mary's Hall, Old Schoolhouse) on the south-west side of the churchyard, together with the Corporation land to the north, was taken into the burial ground, raised and levelled and walled off. The churchyard was extended slightly into the north side of Blind Lane and, in 1836, the roadway was widened on the south side. The steep gradient was reduced by cutting down into the hill. The churchyard was closed for new burial following the establishment of the Sutton pnrnaged 182 2 Awasta(Trtting)Tj-0.0003 Tc 0.0025 Tw -06.955 -1.



landscaped terraces with its front elev



erection of a fire station attached to the Town Hall which was completed in 1888.

Suburban growth kept pace with a still rising population. Victoria Road was cut south-east from the junction of Mill Street and the Parade in 1887/8 and developed with speculative housing. At the end of the nineteenth century Tudor Road was cut, along the line of a footpath running from Back Station Road (Railway Road) across Upper Clifton Road to Tudor Hill. Between 1899 and 1910, Tudor Road, Lyndon Road, Upper Clifton Road, Park Road (within the present Conservation Area) and Anchorage Road (within the present Conservation Area) were built up. There was also new housing development on Coleshill Street. Development on the High Street included extensions and additions to the Swan Hotel (now the Royal Hotel) in 1896 and 1897 and the construction of Lloyd's Bank, built 1900, and the London, City and Midland Bank, built 1901, on either side of Midland Drive.

In 1902 the Corporation purchased the former Royal Hotel for use as a Council House. In 1903 the municipal buildings on Mill Street were sold to the Sutton Coldfield Masonic Hall Company. The new Council House was opened in 1902 and the approach from the High Street named King Edward's Square. A town hall and a new fire station were erected on a site previously occupied by outbuildings. The fire station, with its hose tower and clock, was opened in 1905, the town hall, designed 'to harmonise with the existing Georgian buildings in the town' was opened in 1906. It was extended in 1936 and again in 1965, following the relocation of the fire station to Anchorage Road. The War Memorial in King Edward's Square was erected in 1922; the tennis courts and bowling green on Tudor Road were opened in 1925 and 1927 respectively.

The Town School was extended in 1888 and again in 1902 when cottages were cleared on Trinity Hill to provide a playground (now Baptist Church car park). In 1907 a new Boy's School (now occupied as the Baptist Church Hall)



On Station Street, at its southern end, the route joined a proposed inner ring road (Brassington Avenue, Victoria Road). The road schemes were given consent in 1973 and the ring road was completed in 1977. In 1972 the A38 Sutton Coldfield bypass opened relieving some of the traffic from the town centre.

Delay and uncertainty over future plans for the area and the constant pressure of traffic resulted in a general deterioration of the fabric in the historic core and the loss of a number of traditional buildings to dereliction, road improvement and redevelopment. The Jubilee Dispensary (Map 4, 15), erected in 1887, and the former grammar school property on Trinity Hill were among buildings removed for road improvements on Coleshill Street. On the High Street no. 41, no.32 and no.17 (Ennis House) were demolished, the last two in an advanced state of decay. On Mill Street a row of derelict cottages (nos.16 –32) were pulled down. The sites were all redeveloped.

The council property on Anchorage and Upper Clifton Roads began to move from residential to office use and parking around the Town Hall had become a problem. To relieve the pressure the Council demolished the cattle sale yard (Map 4, 16) on Anchorage Road, built in 1898, and no. 4 Upper Clifton Road (St. Nicholas, Ardmore House) and laid them out as car parks.

A Conservation Area centred on the High Street was first proposed in 1968. The Council was concerned to protect the historic core of the town during a period of change as the Parade was redeveloped and uncertainty over the relief road, but no decision on boundaries could be made until the new road pattern was approved. High Street, Sutton Coldfield Conservation Area was finally designated by Warwickshire County Council in November 1973 (Map ?). It included 'the best preserved sector of Old Sutton'.

In 1974 Sutton Coldfield became administratively part of Birmingham following the implementation of the 1972 Local Government Act. In recognition of this the Birmingham City Council Coat of Arms was amended in 1977 to incorporate the historic symbols of Sutton Coldfield: The Tudor rose and a bishop's mitre.

In 1984 the Council secured a Town Scheme to improve the appearance of the historic streetscape on High Street and Coleshill Street. Grant aid was made available for sympathetic repair work and the aim was to concentrate on groups rather than individual buildings. The five year scheme met with some success but was eventually discontinued through lack of interest

The late twentieth century saw significant redevelopment in the area. Station Street, purchased for the road schemes, was gradually cleared and is now mostly occupied as car parks. The properties surrounding the Three Tuns were demolished and Clifton Street stopped up. Office blocks were built at the front of the site, the remainder left clear for the relief road. The stone house at no.34 High Street was demolished and later replaced with an office building. Office blocks and residential units were developed around Midland Drive and behind Coleshill Street (nos. 1-7) and High Street (nos.2-36). Westhaven



Road, on the boundary of the Conservation Area, was adopted in 1983. The west side of Mill Street (nos. 1-32) was redeveloped with offices with only the façade of the former Post Office (no. 8), built in 1908, retained. The west side of Holy Trinity churchyard was given up for a new parish hall (the Trinity Centre) and the associated car park. There was also a general loss of the variety of uses traditionally associated with the town. Most the buildings in the historic core are now in use as office accommodation or converted to residential use. The Town Schools are occupied by the Baptist Church, the playground on Trinity Hill converted to a car park.