



RODBOROUGH COURT



Sir Alfred and Lady Apperly

Alfred Bucknall of Clifton built Rodborough Court in 1888 for mill-owner Alfred Apperly. It was heightened and extended to the East in 1899 by Percy Morley Horder.

There were large stables and a coach house opposite and the Court gardens and model farm spread away to the south-west. The model farm was one of the most up to date in the district.

The house, which was approached by a carriage drive into a courtyard, consisted of a lounge hall, 4 reception rooms, music or ballroom, billiard room, 12 family bedrooms, 4 bathrooms, servants' accommodation, domestic offices, swimming bath and conservatory. The house was built with central heating and electric lighting.

The garden and grounds of 2.5 acres included a secluded retired lawn, tennis lawn, croquet lawn, water garden, arbors, garden house and walks. Whilst most of the garden is no longer cultivated, there remain over 90 trees in the grounds immediately surrounding the house.



Lounge Hall

The ambience of Rodborough Court, as a family home, is well illustrated by Rosemary Trollope, great granddaughter of Sir Alfred and Lady Marie Apperly (Alfred was knighted in 1907) in her book "Starting from Glasgow" (published by Sutton Publishing Ltd): -

"I can't imagine that this sedentary, passive lady provided much input when her husband, heartened by his expanding business and all the Gold Medals and international awards, decided to build himself a suitable house. He bought a sizeable house on Rodborough Hill, a couple of miles from Stroud, called The Hawthorns, and the farm next to it. He rebuilt The Hawthorns as the vast, lavish exuberant Rodborough Court and the farm became Home Farm.

Rodborough Court – which I knew intimately by hearsay from my mother's detailed descriptions but never actually saw until it had become offices – was built exactly as he wanted and contained everything he admired. The result was enough to make the editor of the present-day interior decorating glossy curl up and shrivel away. An elaborate Elizabethan staircase descended into a Gothic hall decorated with rich, three-dimensional brown and gold wallpaper. The doors were of elegant Regency proportions and the finger-please and door handles complicated and handsome brass, the very latest in 1870s design. Everywhere there were cornices and corbels and carvings and ceiling-roses, from which descended showers of lights enclosed in silk shades with sparkling beaded edges.



Drawing room

All this, of course, before the stunned eye reached the furniture.

Although it was a fashion then to over-furnish, Rodborough Court must have been in a class of its own. Rumour, current among the irreverent younger members of the family in Glasgow, had it that Grandpa bought his pictures by size, asking his dealer to send him '3 six feet by four, two a bit smaller, and a dozen for the south-west bedroom'. Certainly, the crimson silk wall-covering in the drawing-room hardly got a look in, so closely was the chaos of paintings hung there and moving about the room was quite hazardous, large as it was, considering the plethora of occasional tables, all laden with silver-framed photographs and ornaments and bibelots. The confidence behind the making of this house is, to our nervous contemporary eyes, amazing. Alfred and his ilk had no need or desire for professional advice when it came to décor. He engaged in an architect, a nephew-by-marriage, Percy Horder, to build the house, and no doubt paid him extremely well – as was his wont: He was a most popular employer at all levels – because I have seen some elegant and discreet houses built by Horder as well as this piece de resistance.

Ultimately, of course, the strong and undeviating taste of one man, however eclectic, has its own charm (vide the Burrell Museum!) and so it was with Rodborough Court, where grandchildren, with or without their parents, gathered in the summers and enjoyed it to the full.



Dining room

The Rodborough summers were full of delights. The large indoor swimming pool, where the uncles entertained children by diving for pennies, the nearby Home Farm, trips with Grandpa in the gig to the mill of Hyde Farm, and riding on Rodborough Common in the care of Daniels the coachman, or if you were too small to ride, being conveyed there in wicker panniers strapped to the broad back of a staid pony for a picnic on the hillside. For the Glasgow family all this and the country joys such as playing barefoot on the grass were a special treat."

The reference to Percy Horder building the house appears not to be quite correct. Percy Horder would have been under 18 years of age when Rodborough Court was originally designed and built. However, he was responsible for the extension, which was added later.

Rodborough Court was sold by Sir Alfred Apperly's widow to a local property developer, Edward Beavis in September 1923. The contents were sold by auction and the property was then let as flats and bed-sits. Edward Beavis' executors sold the property in September 1961 to Glevum Estates, who were responsible for the extensive housing development between Rodborough, Kingscourt and Lightpill on the land, which originally comprised the model Home Farm.



In 1964, Rodborough Court was threatened with demolition through lack of any prospective purchasers for the property. At that time, Randall & Payne and the Stroud Building Society occupied adjoining offices in 3 & 4 Rowcroft; both were expanding and Randall & Payne were considering a move to new offices leaving the Stroud Building Society room to expand at Rowcroft.

Rodborough Court was casually mentioned to Mr Alan Payne during a lunchtime conversation. He quickly became aware of the possibilities and, within a day, negotiations were in hand. The main building was saved from the demolition contractor's hammer!

The initial purchase by Randall & Payne did not include the area to the north-east, and some of the domestic offices, including the swimming pool building, along that boundary, were demolished. Some years later, the remainder of the land, including the summerhouse was purchased.

The internal layout is little changed from the original apart from alterations to the housekeeping and bathroom areas above each other on the three floors. These areas were converted to make our kitchen, ladies and gentlemen's toilets and the flat bathroom. The large music room on the first floor is partitioned to make three offices and fire screens and doors have been installed in the hallways.



The original oak panelled dining room, today, makes a fine Boardroom. Peter Van de Waals of Chalford made the Australian oak boardroom table especially for Randall & Payne in the 1930's in lieu of a fee. He subsequently made furniture for Queen Mary's Doll's House.

Rodborough Court now includes a two bed roomed flat for the resident caretaker and the remainder is fully occupied by thirty-two partners and staff. Under the ground floor is a large basement area used for the firm's archive records; cellar storage racks for wines are still visible in the basement walls.

Most of the grounds are no longer cultivated but are mainly grass and shrubbery areas. The original Victorian water garden has been uncovered and partly restored in the last year or so.

Rodborough Court is an impressive building and makes a pleasurable environment in which to work. The building is much appreciated by the many clients and others who visit Randall & Payne. The high standard of construction means that we are rarely faced with major building repairs and heating costs are quite reasonable for its size. Randall & Payne hopes to occupy the building for many years to come.



THE APPERLYS

Sir Alfred Apperly was the grandson of John Apperly who founded the cloth mill, Apperly Curtis & Co Limited, at Dudbridge Mills in 1794. The business, which manufactured finest West of England cloth, passed to John's sons in 1834 and on to Alfred in 1872. The business was incorporated in 1895 and though the company name originated from Alfred Apperly and Charles Curtis, who also worked in the firm, the company remained under the control of the Apperly family.

The firm possessed no less than 23 Highest Awards and Gold Medals, won in open competition with the manufacturers of the world at the great International Exhibitions. One of the firm's specialities was "HYDEA – English Cloth of English Wool" which was first made from the wool of a prize flock of Hampshire Down Sheep at Hyde Farm, owned by Sir Alfred Apperly.

The firm, which was badly hit by the Great War, eventually collapsed and closed in 1933.

Sir Alfred Apperly (1839 – 1913) married Maria Paice (1847 – 1931) in 1865. They had 8 children: -

Ethel Marianne (1867 – 1950)

Married James Hedderwick (1889 – 1926)

4 children

The third child, Molly, married Rev Rex Hodson who became Rector of Minchinhampton. Most of the anecdotal stories of Sir Alfred and Lady Apperly's life at Rodborough Court come from Molly, who visited Rodborough Court in 1983, and their eldest daughter, Rosemary, whose book has already been referred to.

Jessie Maria (1870 – 1953)

Married Edward Tilley (1897 - ?)

2 children

Twin boys (1876) who lived only a few hours

Rose Ellen (1871 – 1946)
Married George Gooch (1901 – 1969)
3 children

Charles Alfred (1872 – 1939)
Married Florence Lees (1871 – 1967)
2 children
As well as joining his father in Apperly Curtis & Co Limited, Charles rescued and reformed The Stroud Metal & Plating Co Ltd in 1899 which hosted the The Hampton Engineering Co Ltd formed in 1919 to manufacture the “Hampton” motor car. In 1920 Charles also became involved with The Dudbridge Iron Works Ltd but this company, along with the car manufacturing company were wound up in the mid 1920s. Charles eventually left the area and settled abroad. He died whilst living in the South of France.
Gillian, daughter of the eldest child, Alfreda, recently visited Rodborough Court and has generously provided information relating to the Apperly family tree.

Ernest Paice (1874 – 1952)
Married Edith Watt (? – 1953)
1 child
Ernest also worked in the family business until its collapse when he moved to, and settled in, Yorkshire.

Arthur Lancelot (1877 – 1916) Killed in action

The Apperly family was well travelled which resulted in the family being spread far and wide, both at home and abroad. As far as we are aware, the only member of the family still living in the local area is Joanna, daughter of Rosemary and granddaughter of Molly and Rev Rex Hodson. Gillian, granddaughter of Charles is living in Suffolk.

This booklet has been written and compiled by John Baker who gratefully acknowledges help from the partners & staff of Randall & Payne, Mrs Molly Hodson, Vernon Gibbs, Royal Institute of British Architects, Rosemary Trollope & Sutton Publishing Ltd, Mrs Gillian Linke, Mrs Geraldine Carter and Trevor Picken, author of “The Story of Hampton Cars”.