

House Histories

The history of the houses of Strawberry Hill

Milton House



**Written by Andrew Miller and Roger White
for Strawberry Hill Residents' Association
August 2019**

House histories – Milton House, Wellesley Road

In the spring 2019 issue of the Strawberry Hill Residents' Association Bulletin an offer was made to all residents of the area. Peter Lamb of the SHRA Committee had offered a service which would involve research on the history of the houses of Strawberry Hill. This fits with another undertaking by SHRA to research and publish, via its website, a number of street histories under the name, *Streetwise*. Clearly, the two projects are linked as streets comprise collections of individual houses.

As a side project, we are aware that Strawberry Hill had many fine houses which have been demolished. Any street history must include these houses that have been lost. Milton House in Wellesley Road, is one such house. The research for this report was carried out by Roger White, a resident of Milton Court, who was intrigued to find out more about who lived in the grand house that was built on the site in the 1880s.

House history – Milton House – Wellesley Road

Milton House was probably built in 1880 in Wellesley Road next to the recently opened Strawberry Hill station. The house was one of three constructed in similar style near to the entrance to Strawberry Hill Golf Course. They bear some resemblance to German Gothic style and had an interesting arrangement of different angled roofs over three or four floors. According to the 1911 Census the house had 13 rooms. Only the historic dwarf piers of the original gates and the low wall remain (pictured).

1891-1894 – The De Fleury family

In 1891, the first (recorded) residents of the house were the De Fleury family. Emilie De Fleury was a 51-year-old widow living with her two sons, Adrian and Gaston, and her daughter, Carmen. They employed Peter Prudhomme, as butler, and Fanny Stanley, a general servant.

Emilie Mathilde De Fleury (nee Hope) was born in St Martin-in-the-Fields on 6 January 1840. She was the daughter of Adrian John Hope (1811-1863) and Emilie Melanie Mathilde Rapp (1817-1899). Adrian was a captain in the 4th Dragoons who was born on 28 November 1811 who married the 'highly accomplished and beautiful' Countess Rapp in 1836. She was at the time a minor who had to gain special permission to marry. She was the daughter of Jean Comte de Rapp (1771-1821) and Countess Albertine Charlotte Rapp (nee von Rotberg).

Jean Rapp rose from humble origins to become a division General who fought at Jena and Austerlitz in the Napoleonic Wars. He saved Napoleon's life on two occasions, and was also adjutant to the Emperor and First Consul. After the restoration of the monarchy he became the Treasurer to Louis XVIII.

On 17 October 1868, Emilie Mathilde Hope married Clifford Arthur de St Antoinnes de Fleury (1835-1881). His parents were Hippolyte Daniel de St Antoinnes De Fleury (1805-1891) and Eliza Mary Kirwan (1801-1862). They had three children all born in Paris: Adrian Jean Henri

Clifford Hyppolite (1869-1953), Gaston (1870-) and Carmen (1878-). In 1881, the widowed Emilie lived at 36 Don Road, St Helier, Jersey, with her children and a housekeeper.

By 1901, Emilie and her son, Adrian, lived at 25 Lindore Road, Battersea.

1894-1923 - The Fargus family

By 1901, the Fargus family had moved into Milton House. The head of household was Henry Robert Fargus (1850-), a Bristol-born solicitor, and his wife, Helen Mary (1855-) who had been born in India. Henry had premises at 10 Lancaster place, Strand. They had five children: Henrietta Helen Olivia Robarts (1880-), Nigel Harry Skinner (1882-), Angela F M (1885-), Frederick Brian Arthur (1888-1915) and Esme Rose Theodora (1890-). They employed five servants: a cook, parlourmaid, housemaid, young lady's maid and a kitchenmaid. They had moved to Wellesley Road from nearby 34 Waldegrave Park, where they lived at the time of the 1891 Census. They later moved to Westminster where they were living in 1919.

Henrietta Fargus

Last year was the centenary of Women's Suffrage and SHRA searched in vain for our very own Strawberry Hill suffragette. Now thanks to Roger's curiosity we can celebrate the life of Henrietta Fargus. In her mid-twenties, she became involved in the political struggle for the vote, as did many other well-educated, middle-class women. In April 1909, she was pictured haranguing the Prime Minister, Herbert Asquith, as he was walking in Whitehall (copyright Museum of London photograph). She refused to contribute to the 1911 Census, as did many fellow suffragettes, and then engaged in more militant actions. In January 1912, she was expelled from the Albert Hall for heckling the First Lord of the Admiralty. On 1 March 1912, Henrietta and Maud Joachim broke plate glass windows in shops at 74, 76 and 78 Regent Street. She was arrested and sent to Holloway Prison, appearing at Bow Street Magistrates' Court five days later, where she was bailed by her father and agreed to keep the peace for 12 months (Maud, with a previous conviction, received six months' gaol). In 1918, she married Captain Reginald Durand-Deacon MC of the Gloucester Regiment.

Jump to 1943 and Henrietta was a wealthy widow living alone at the Onslow Court Hotel, Brompton Road, where she resided for the last six years of her life. Unfortunately, during the last four years John George Haigh (1909-1949) was a fellow resident. Haigh used his charm to persuade her to visit his Crawley workshop where he was allegedly making artificial fingernails for women. He was desperate for money and according to his own account he shot her in the back of the head and stripped her of her valuables before placing Henrietta's body in a sulphuric-acid bath. She was the sixth victim of an infamous serial killer. His mistake was in choosing a relatively well-connected woman and leaving a trail of easy-to-locate evidence. He was hanged at Wandsworth Prison by executioner Albert Pierrepoint on 10 August 1949. In a 2002 ITV drama, *A is for Acid*, Martin Clunes played Haigh and Rowena Cooper played Henrietta.

She died on 18 February 1949 and in her will she left effects of £36808 13s. and 2d. She left Dame Christabel Pankhurst, the famous suffragette, £250.

(details adapted from *John George Haigh: The Acid-Bath Murderer* by Dr. Jonathan Oates, Pen & Sword True Crime, 2014).

Both the Fargus sons served in the Great War. Frederick Brian Arthur Fargus, the youngest son, was articled in his father's business and he became a solicitor in 1911. He became a Second Lieutenant in the 9th Battalion of the London Regiment in the same year and went to the front on 4 November 1914 as Senior subaltern in the Machine Gun Section. He was shot in the head by a German sniper on 1 January 1915 at Wolverghem, Flanders, while serving in the Queen's Victoria Rifles. Major Nigel Harry Skinner Fargus served in the Royal Scots, won a D.S.O. and was awarded an O.B.E.

1924-1926 – The Tomkinson family

In 1924, the Tomkinson family (Wilfred and Edith) were living at Milton House. Wilfred Tomkinson (1877-1971) was born in 1877 in Kidderminster. He was educated at Stubbington House School and joined the Royal Navy in 1891. He was on active service during the China War of 1900.

In 1907, he married Edith Bittleston and they had five children: Michael Wilfred (1908-), Elizabeth Joan (1909-), Rachel Mary (1914-), Margaret Venetia Hogan (1916-) and Joyce Mabyn Newbery (1919-). By 1910, he had attained the rank of Commander and was in charge of the Portsmouth Submarine Flotilla. In 1917, he was appointed Captain of the *Colossus* and in 1920 he was made Captain of the new battlecruiser, *H.M.S. Hood*. In 1926, he was Naval Aide-de-Camp to King George V. He was promoted to Rear-Admiral in 1927 and Vice-Admiral in 1932 responsible for commanding the Battle Cruiser Squadron. During September 1931, he was in command during the notorious Invergordon Mutiny. His understanding of the men's concerns and leniency led to him being used as a scapegoat.

1930-1944 – The Alexandra Nursing Home

In 1930, Ellen Higney, an Irish-born midwife was the sole resident with voting rights on the Electoral Roll. It seems probable that the large house had been acquired by a company who wanted to turn it into a nursing home specialising in maternity and that Ellen was appointed matron. She was born on 22 October 1901, at Rahan, Letterkenny, County Donegal. By 1926, she was a qualified midwife living at 13 Victoria Road, Twickenham. By 1938, there were six women registered to vote at Milton House: Ellen Higney, Ada Collins, Lily Emerton, Margaret Gillard, May O'Donnell and Mary Patterson. The Alexandra Nursing Home may have been both a home for delivering babies but also a care home for the elderly. In the 1939 Register, there were six elderly female residents.

The Alexandra Nursing Home was damaged by a bomb toward the end of the War when it moved to the nearby 12 Walpole Gardens.

1946-1965 – Milton House Flats

At the end of the War, Milton House was converted into six flats. In 1949-1950, the following people were living in the flats:

- Flat 1 – Kenneth and Laura T Evans
- Flat 2 – Edward J and Dorothy M Amooore
- Flat 3 – William H, Alexina H and Alice H Hawley
- Flat 4 – Sydney and Dorothy M Yates
- Flat 5 – Robert E C and Barbara L Durey
- Flat 6 – Bernard C and Gertrude Mallaband.

In 1965, the six flats were occupied by the following people:

- Flat 1 – Cyril I and Yvonne J Ashford
- Flat 2 – Leslie S F and Jean Dovaston
- Flat 3 – James K and Edith Murphy
- Flat 4 – Patricia M Fortescue
- Flat 5 – Patrick and Winifred Heard
- Flat 6 – Colin C and Christine R Coleman

Milton Court

Milton House was demolished in late 1960s and in its place Milton Court, a development of three, medium-rise apartment blocks with 31 apartments, was put on the site. In 1970, the new residents had moved into Milton Court.