

Cotteridge

Cotteridge, Birmingham on the web

High House

April 2010 | Author: [Cotteridge](#)

High House was a large gentleman's residence that was built in the mid eighteenth century. Later, outbuildings were constructed to the north of High House which catered for the maintenance and repair of the wagons and coaches in use at the time. The largest of these outbuildings occupied a greater area than the main house, but was very long and not very wide and ran east to west parallel to what is now the railway line. I will refer to this building later as The Coach House.

The whole area is now a business park, and bears little resemblance to the area I knew very well as a child in the early fifties. As a rough approximation, High House would have stood just to the south of what is now Sovereign Road, and the coach-house would have been between Sovereign Road and Castle Road. These approximations lie between Melchett Road and the railway line. Prior to 1955, the whole area was fields and woodland.

In 1817, access to High House was via a gated driveway complete with Lodge. The entrance was situated about ten yards south of what is now the railway line. The drive ran through woods in an 'S' shape to a large hard standing by the House. There was a secondary access point for foot passengers from what is now Pershore Road. This entrance lay halfway down the hill leading from Cotteridge to Kings Norton and also ran through woodland. As one walked along the driveway from the Lodge, after twenty five yards, there was a smaller driveway leading to the outbuildings.

At this time, High House was at the centre of what was known as High House Farm. The farm was extensive and was bounded to the south by land owned by the Earl of Plymouth and an estate owned by Mr Mynor. The northern and eastern boundary abutted Cotteridge Farm, then owned by Mr Spurrier.

There was of course, no railway line and no shops. The farm filled the area between what is now Lifford Lane and Pershore Road almost into Stirchley. The farm consisted of eight large fields and I make no apology for listing the names of all the fields. As can be seen, echoes of these fields exist today as road and place names...

- Long Meadow
- Tanners Meadow
- Crofts Lands
- House Close
- Tanners Close
- Cotteridge Close
- Garden Close
- Hill Close

The term 'Close' refers to fields fenced on three sides only.

On 6th November 1817, the owner of the farm, Mr James Pool, sold the farm via the auctioneers J&C Robbins. The sale was held at the Woolpack Inn, Moor Street, Birmingham. I believe the purchaser was Mr Pumphrey. On 17th January 1850, Mr Pumphrey sold the farm via the auctioneers Cheshire and Son. The farm was described as easily worked soil especially suitable for the cultivation of turnips and barley. I can find no record of the buyer.

In 1882, the railway line had severed the farm, the track being at its current location. The overall size of the farm remained the same, movement between the two parts of the farm was via a farmers bridge over the track just north of High House. The original road bridge carried what is now Pershore Road (as it does today).

By 1904, virtually all of the farm to the north of the railway line had gone. St Agnes' Church, the Methodist Chapel and two Sunday Schools now occupied the land. Further developments of the railway line had widened its course and a second line running north had joined the original at a junction just north of High House. The farmer's bridge had disappeared. The Lodge and gates had gone, being replaced by a signal box. The driveways remained the same but all of the outbuildings except the

coach-house had vanished. The Pershore Road Bridge had been altered to accommodate the widened track.

By 1916, all the farm to the north had gone. On what once was farmland, suitable for the cultivation of turnips and barley, stood a tramway depot, private houses next to the Methodist Chapel (now shops), and allotments.

By 1937, the allotments had been lost to a fire station and a much enlarged tramway depot. It was virtually the same in 1937 as it was thirteen years later when my parents along with a five year old boy moved into the coach-house as tenants.

At this time, my Father was working, as a toolmaker, at what was known as Kings Norton Factory Centre. My Mother and I were living at my paternal grandmother's house in Leicester. It was post war, and there was a dire shortage of private houses, most of the building carried out was to help rebuild the infrastructure of the country. We, along with thousands of others, had lived in rented rooms and relatives houses for all my short life. The wartime camaraderie had evaporated, and tenants were, for the most part, not treated well.

We received a message from my Father to the effect that he had found us a house close to where he worked. We travelled to Birmingham, met my Father and he took us to the coach-house. The flat we were to occupy was on the top floor and in poor order. Nobody else lived in the building.

I well remember the three of us in the small back room. My mother was in floods of tears. My father looked rather crestfallen. I was over the moon: what a great place to live! All those fields and woods and a railway running past.

We moved in, and to their credit, my parents made it quite cosy. We lived there for five years and I loved it. The Flat (as we now called the coach-house) was a big building. It measured 120ft long by 20ft wide and as tall as a three storey house. There were however only two storeys: the working area which was a series of workshops and stables occupying the ground floor, for the height of two storeys, and the living area above the western half of the building for about 60ft.

Access to the flat was along the driveway leading to High House. Taking the left hand drive at the junction, it was about fifty yards to the flat. Passing through a large wooden gate the coach-house extended into the distance on your right hand side, a large field being on your left hand side.

As you walked along the front of the building the first thing on your right, was a recessed area containing two stables and an entrance to what I assume was a large tack-room. As you walked further along, you became aware of a huge set of double sliding wooden doors suspended on two iron rails. These doors opened onto a covered 'garage'. This was where the better coaches would have been kept.

A little further along was a covered courtyard with a flight of stairs to the living area on the right hand side and a solitary toilet under the stairs.

After the courtyard, the roofline of the building dropped by about ten feet and the remainder of the building consisted of a blacksmiths workshop complete with furnace, a large square workshop where new rims were fitted to wooden wheels and a carpenter's workshop.

At the far end of the building was a large Victorian hothouse in poor repair. Against orders, I entered this hothouse many times, and can still picture the exotic plants now left to look after themselves. I can only imagine that these were once used to decorate High House in its heyday.

At the very end of the building was a crater full of rubble: the result no doubt of a stray bomb meant for the adjacent factories.

The living area was long. Up the stairs from the covered yard, through the front door, along a narrow hall to the first room...the kitchen. Ahead of you was a big black range. In the far left hand corner was a sink and a solitary cold water tap. Between the two, a cooker fuelled by bottled gas. The door to the next room was in the far right hand corner.

This was our living room. The fireplace shared a chimney with the range. In the far left hand corner was the door to the bedroom, in which we all slept.

The only toilet was under the stairs by the covered yard. Quite a walk if you needed it in the night.

The only windows were facing north and very small. They were the iron framed, roman arched type common in factories all over the Midlands. The only other source of light were skylights on the south facing side of the roof.

I remember these dripped a lot.

Life at the Flat, for a small boy, was wonderful. The artefacts I discovered from the

buildings previous life led to all sorts of adventures. I found horseshoes, leather harnesses, old tools, wooden wheels, numerous old steel wheel rims and a host of other steel bits and pieces, the purpose of which I still do not understand. The prized possession was a rusty revolver.

I kept my treasure in the blacksmiths forge. The front of the furnace had a small access door to a large ashbox. I cleared the remnants of the last fire, and this became my stash.

Other oddments found were several iron farm gates, and dozens of pigtail fencing spikes as used in the war for the rapid erection of barbed wire fencing.

By standing an iron farm gate on end allowed me access to the top of the wall separating our field from the railway line. Sitting on the wall watching the busy flow of locomotives moving from Birmingham to Kings Norton sidings was a major recreation. I would wave at the drivers, and they would always wave back.

At the eastern boundary of the field was another wall running from the railway wall to the bomb damaged building. I tried to scale this wall, but it was too tall for the farm gate method. I had to wait about two years until I had grown taller. I eventually climbed a cherry tree adjacent to the wall and looked over.

It was small boy's heaven. Old aeroplanes for as far as I could see. British, American and German. All had their wings removed, but were intact otherwise. They were in huge piles four or five deep and ready to be explored.

I had a problem. I could jump from the top of the wall, but could not return.

To overcome this, I built a den at the base of the cherry tree, and over a period of weeks, wore away the crumbling mortar to make a hole just big enough for me to climb through. I took the precaution of not making it big enough for a man to climb through, should I be chased away.

The aeroplanes were part of a materials reclamation programme and were under MOD control. A company called BKL Alloys (whom I think still exist) were responsible for the metal extraction.

I couldn't care less at the time. They were there for one purpose only: to play with.

After much exploration, my favourites came down to two: a complete Hurricane fuselage and a complete German bomber fuselage. I spent many many hours in them, bombing both Berlin and London!!

A nasty incident however, curbed my enthusiasm. I slid the cockpit canopy of the Hurricane to the closed position whilst I was sitting in it. The canopy closed with a click and I was trapped. Nobody knew where I was as I dare not tell anybody what I was up to.

I do not remember the details of my final release, but I can still hear the click as the mechanism released the canopy. I was trapped for several hours.

As a family, we would visit High House during the summer. The House was now a social club. The steward was an old man called Amos, assisted by a younger man Roy.

I cannot remember much about the House. There was a bowling green on the southern grounds which was well used. A very large room ran across the rear of the House containing three full sized snooker tables, end to end, and a spectators seating on three sides. I didn't like going there as you were not allowed to talk.

The most impressive thing was old Amos. He carried a catapult and a supply of steel balls. Rats were a problem, but Amos could kill a rat at thirty yards.

The summers came and went, and I never tired of the field or surrounding areas. Suddenly, things took a dark turn. Slough Estates had bought the land belonging to High House and they wanted us out.

I do not understand the legalities of the situation and therefore speak as I remember. What I do understand is that my hatred of Slough Estates (or SEGRO as they now like to call themselves) remains with me.

The first hint that something had changed is that we now paid the rent to Slough Estates and not to Amos. The price, of course, increased.

I returned from school one day and found that High House had been reduced to rubble.

A few weeks later, I returned to find that all the outbuildings attached to our flat had suffered the same fate as High House. All that remained standing was our living area. My collections of artefacts were buried under tons of rubble. I cried.

Slough Estates then served notice on my father that our flat was to be demolished and

we had thirty days to find alternative premises. This notice had no legal authority as subsequent events proved. The thirty days passed and we were still in residence. Slough Estates then began a truly Rachmanesque campaign to remove us. The electricity supply was severed and removed. Lighting was provided by oil lamps and candles. Heating was difficult.

When this failed, a large and deep trench was dug across the access drive to the Flat to prevent movement of vehicles. This was, after a period of some months, filled in.

Their final move was to sever and remove the water supply to the house. We had no running water and no sanitation.

The Fire Service were sympathetic to our plight, and provided water containers and a supply of water: if we could collect it. I remember as a boy of ten, pushing a push-chair across the railway bridge with a container to be filled up at the fire station many times a day.

This situation continued for about a year and attracted the attention of the local press. Slough Estates had no comment. The water and electricity were never restored. Eventually, my parents had the deposit for a new house and we moved out.

On the day of our move, as the removal van was loading, three large bulldozers appeared in the field and sat revving their engines. I was in the cab of the removal van and remember looking in the door mirror as we moved up the driveway for the last time. The bulldozers had already reached the house. By the time we had reached Kings Norton, the Flat would be rubble.

Footnote

I have written what I believe to be true, but have viewed it through the eyes of the child I was. If anybody could throw some light on the true purpose of the coach-house, or what it was like in its heyday, I would be most interested.

5 Responses to "High House"



• Susan:

[January 26, 2012 at 10:03 pm](#)

I was interested to see the narrative re High House.

My husband's great great grandfather Richard Prosser lived there from about 1847 until his death in 1854 and subsequently his widow Mrs H S Prosser although the family had left by the time of the 1861 Census.

If anyone has any additional information or a photo of High House I would be delighted to hear from them.



• The Author:

[January 27, 2012 at 11:54 pm](#)

Susan

At last... another link in the chain.

As you probably have figured out, Richard Prosser was more than likely the man who purchased High House Farm from Mr Pumphrey.

The dates do not correspond exactly, but as you are aware... they never do!

If you come across any further info, please post it to this page, and I will do likewise.

I would like to know who were the original owners of High House and when was it built.

If it any help... I believe at at the time it was built, that area may have been in the county of Worcestershire. If this is the case, Worcester archives may be of help.

Also: the then Earl of Plymouth's property portfolio may give us a clue (see text).

Happy hunting and thank you very much.

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