

Back in Time - 12 - Rowsley Manor – Westminster Road

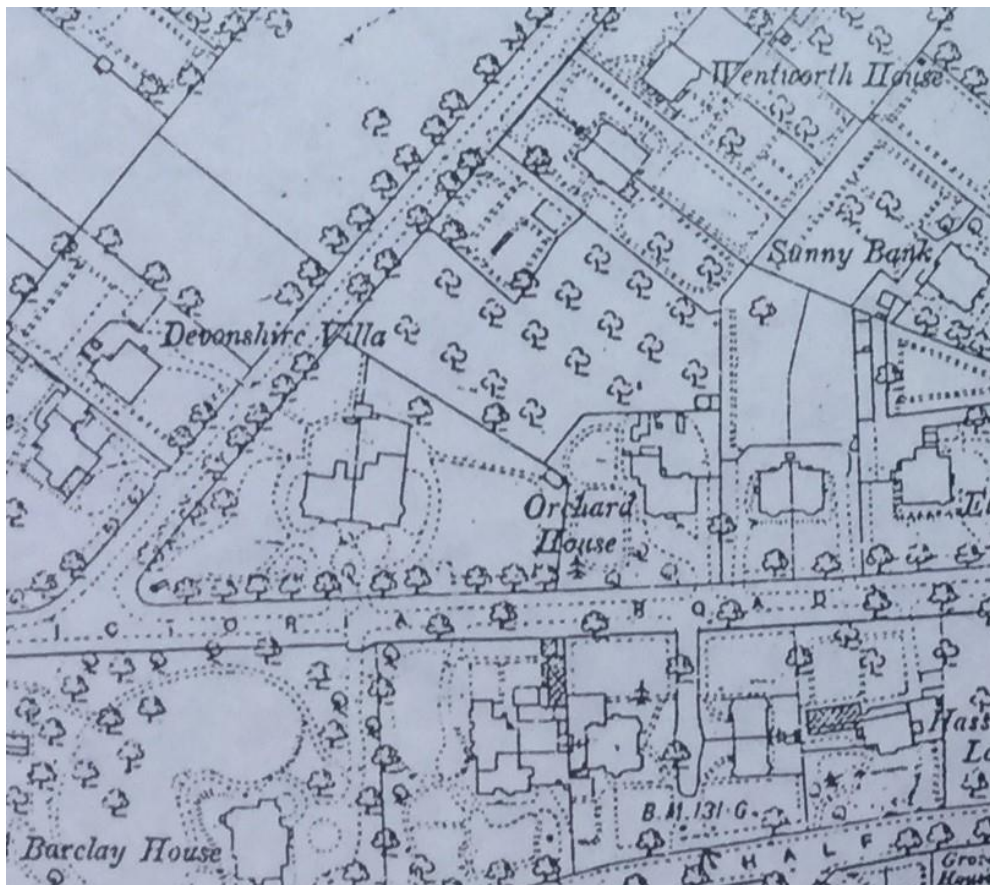
by John Rabbitt and Clare Ward

Clare Ward has very kindly contributed to our 'Back in Time' series a magnificent document which traces the history of Rowsley Manor; this document can be read on page 3.

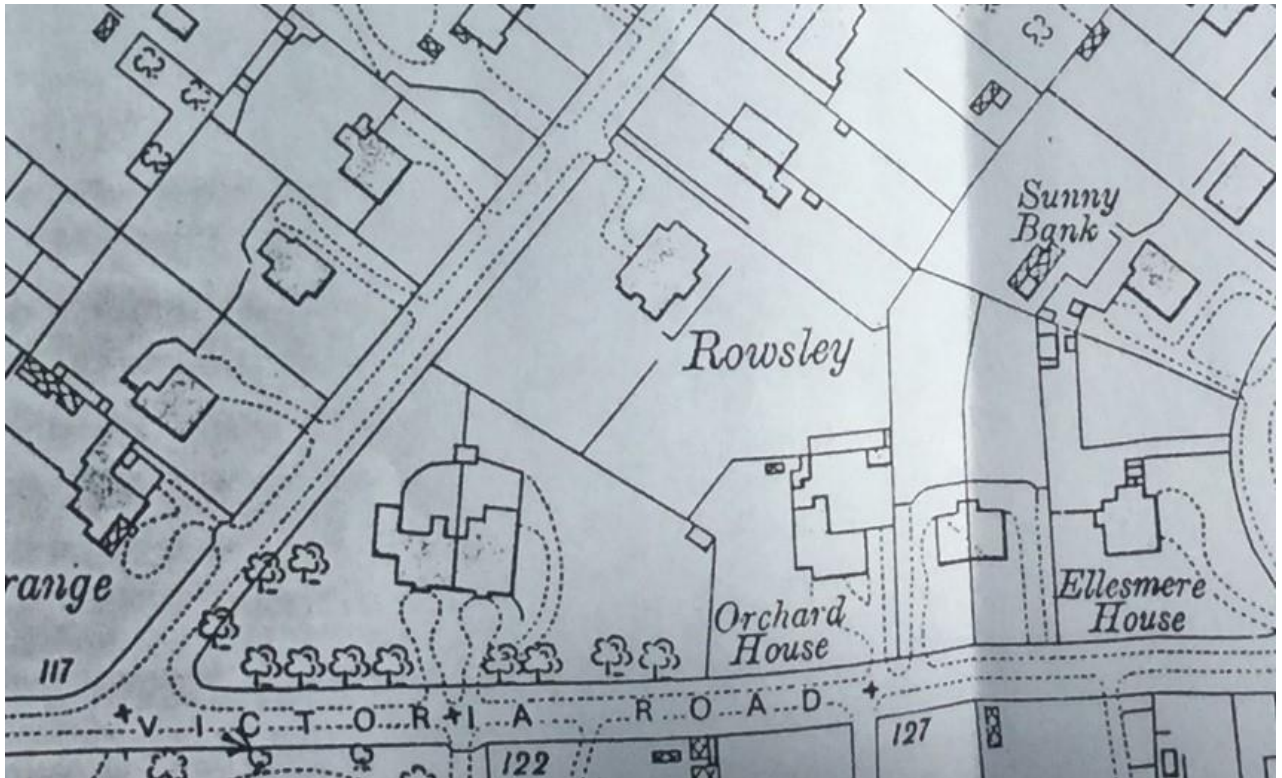
Rowsley Manor, on Westminster Road, is one of the most impressive properties in Ellesmere Park. I have included some sections of old maps so you can see how the site developed before the house was built.

One of the maps (Rowsley Plot 1880) shows a significant planting of trees on the site that became Rowsley Manor. The map also shows some sort of enclosure in the north west corner of the plot. With the property "Orchard House" adjacent to the site it could well be that the plot was used as an orchard in the early days of Ellesmere Park.

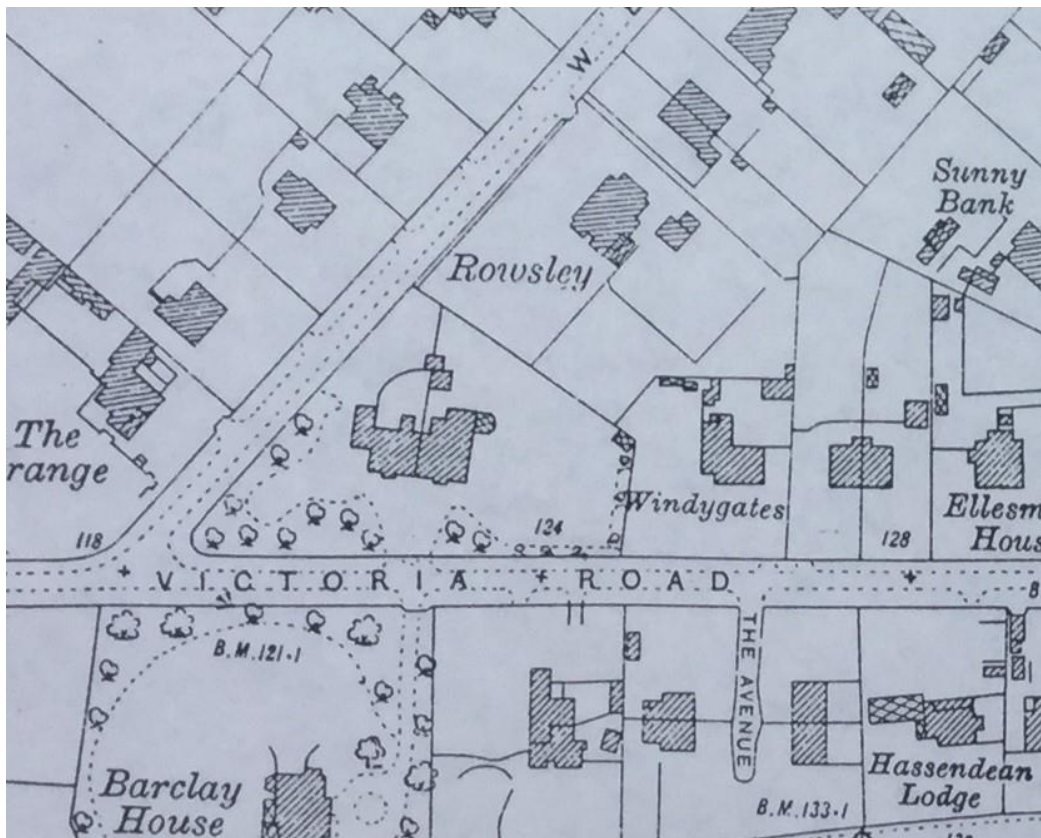
Other undeveloped plots shown on the maps of Ellesmere Park at that time simply show plain rectangles. It makes you think the surveyors recorded a significant plantation of trees of some description on that particular plot. I believe the triangular piece of land at the back of the plot was leased to a lady who had horses grazing on there for a few years around 1950s.



Rowsley Manor Plot on Westminster Road - 1880



Rowsley Manor Westminster Road - 1906



Rowsley Manor Westminster Road - 1927

Rowsley Manor



Rowsley Manor was built in 1903 by local architect Mathew Owen as a residence for rich cotton merchant Thomas Halliwell. The architect's brief from the wealthy businessman was that "everything had to be in finest detail and no savings should be met."

The name of this luxury home was inspired by the maiden name of Mathew Owen's wife, Elizabeth Rowsley.

Based in Manchester's Mosely Street, Halliwell's company, Dawson Halliwell and Co, was extremely successful and famed for its "Excelda" handkerchiefs. The wealthy businessman had previously lived just down the road at 'Dunclana', a villa in Monton and commissioned Rowsley Manor as a residence befitting a man of property and influence. Indeed, the new house reflected Halliwell's status in Manchester's business community at that time, standing as it did next door to the home of Lord and Lady Sieff, co-founders of Marks and Spencer.

Rowsley Manor was finally completed on June 22 1903 and its leafy gardens provided the ideal 'rural' retreat for a man of commerce who needed to remain close to Salford and Manchester, at that time the world centre of the cotton industry.

In addition to providing a prestigious house, Rowsley Manor provided an ideal family home for Halliwell who had five children with his wife Agnes. The couple enjoyed their home's grandeur, hanging a large portrait of themselves in a commanding position on the landing, overlooking the stained glass window that still forms one of the house's most distinctive features today. During its heyday, the house's stunning staircase was characterised by two bronze figures positioned either side of the stairs holding candles to light the hallway and draw attention to this impressive architectural statement.

Halliwell retired from business in 1916, and the firm went on to become Stanley Dawson & Co, still trading as recently as 1970. Following his death in 1917, his widow continued to live alone in the house until her death, aged 74, in 1940. After Agnes died her son Arthur, came to the house to clear their parents' belongings. The house was commandeered by the Army during World War II and used as offices.

After the war, in 1946, the remaining contents of Rowsley Manor were sold in a 'garage sale' type house clearance.

The house was then sold to the Gentlewomen's Housing Association; an organisation founded on the combined wealth of a group of widows, and it then became a residential home. It remained a residential home for the next 50 years, providing comfortable and peaceful surroundings for elderly women until, in 1997, the Association decided it was no longer viable and it was once again left vacant.

Over the next six years, while the building remained vacant, it was left to fall into a state of disrepair and was broken into and vandalised, making the general decay even worse. Eventually, the building was secured to keep out thieves and vandals, but by this time it was derelict.

The gradual decay of the building had been a fear of the many women who had lived at Rowsley Manor during its years as a residential home and had been reluctant to leave. Amongst these ladies was Joyce Moody, who had lived at the home for over ten years. It was Joyce who, with her long term vision, suggested to her daughter Clare that Rowsley Manor would provide the ideal location for both spacious new offices for her successful business and a comfortable home.

Clare was delighted by the idea and ready to take on the challenge of preserving Rowsley Manor's heritage by restoring the house to its turn-of-the-century grandeur and she purchased the property in December 1999. Under Clare's guardianship, the refurbishment was completed in just 18 months – an ambitious timescale under any circumstances, but on this project, nothing short of a miracle. Not only was the building in a terrible state, but the refurbishment suffered several serious delays including the discovery of dry rot in most of the rooms, the need to remove asbestos and the replacement of all the drains because roots were found growing in them.

Despite the challenges, all the rooms have been refurbished in keeping with the period. Some have also been christened anew to reflect Rowsley's proud history. The late King Edward VII, who was on the throne when the house was built, would particularly approve of the Alexandra Suite, The Daisy Brooke and The Keppel Suite - named after his wife and various lovers. The Keppel Suite is of course named after Alice Keppel, who enjoyed favours as the King's mistress long before her even more famous descendant, Camilla Parker Bowles!

Clare's attention to detail has even led her to contact some of the people associated with Rowsley Manor's past and its original occupants. Andrew Owen, great-grandson of Mathew Owen the original architect, was delighted to present Clare with a "housewarming present"; the first large brass sandstone front-door key made for the house in 1901. And more recently, 82-year-old Joy Halliwell, granddaughter of Thomas and Agnes, visited Clare at Rowsley Manor to share some of her recollections of her grandparents' home. It was the first time that Joy had set foot in the house since she was 10 years old but she could still clearly remember some of the house's original features and the sound of the bell on the ice-cream man's bicycle outside the house.

Joy also approved of the love and attention that Clare has invested in Rowsley Manor over the past 15 years, bringing it back to a regal splendour that she and her clients enjoy now as much as any of its previous occupants did over the past hundred years!

Joyce, Clare's mother, would be overjoyed and proud of her daughter at seeing the metamorphosis which has taken place at her former home not to mention the most important day of her life.

In June 2010, Clare met Keith and shortly afterwards fate took a hand when his own home was flooded. Keith moved in to Rowsley while his house was refurbished and just two years on they got married and had their reception in the grounds of Rowsley Manor. A great legacy to Clare's mother. Clare and Keith moved from Rowsley Manor in 2020.

---- End of Article ----