

WOLLATON PARK HOUSING ESTATE

THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF A GARDEN SUBURB



A detailed look at a unique housing estate in Wollaton Park, Nottingham, built between 1926 and 1929.

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£3.50



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Front cover: A Crane Composite House.
Back cover: Extract from Chapman's map of Nottinghamshire, 1774, and a map of Wollaton Park 2022 showing development since 1925.

Wollaton Park Housing Estate

At a meeting of Nottingham City Council on 1 September 1924, it was agreed to buy Wollaton Hall and Park from Lord Middleton for £200,000. In 1921, the 9th Lord Middleton had an offer of £1 million for the Park from Jesse Boot to use it as his new university campus, but Lord Middleton declined the offer. His wife wanted to keep the hall for herself as a Dover House in case her husband died before her – in fact, they both died in 1922. The 10th Lord Middleton decided to sell all the Willoughby estates to help pay expensive death duties and in 1924 Sir Lancelot Rolleston of the Midland Housing Association offered to buy the Hall and Park to build over 4,000 houses. However, Lord Middleton instead agreed to sell it to the council. He died in November 1924, and it was left to his son, the 11th Lord Middleton, to complete the sale on 18 May 1925. The Park comprised 744 acres (301ha), bounded by a brick wall built between 1698 and 1720.

The Park

The modern Wollaton Park was established in the fifteenth century, to the southeast of the village. It replaced an old park to the north of the village. Until the present Hall was built in 1588 the new Park was a mixture of arable land and pasture for deer, pigs and cattle. By the seventeenth century, it was enclosed by a stock-proof wooden fence.



The Park was established in three phases, shown on the plan above: Phase I (green) from the fifteenth century; Phase II (pink) in the eighteenth century, and Phase III (yellow) in the nineteenth century. As can be seen from the modern detail, most of the Wollaton Park Housing Estate lies in Phase II. The area coloured green is shown on Chapman's Map of 1774, the first map to show Wollaton – an extract from the map is on the back cover. The Park wall enclosed the whole of these three areas. It was said to have been seven miles long and to have taken seven men and seven apprentices seven years to build. It was, however, only ever 4 1/4 miles (6.8km) long, even when later extended, but it is 7ft (2.1m) high in some places.

In 1823, the 6th Lord Middleton had Derby Road diverted to follow its present course. The old route of the road was the northern line of the yellow land shown on the plan. The Park wall originally followed this line but was demolished when the Park was extended. A new section of wall was then built alongside the new road. The wall is still in place today but was lowered in the late 1920s when housing was built fronting Derby Road.



This picture shows the southeast corner of Wollaton Park, with the hall clearly visible one mile (1.6km) away. The picture was painted by Jan Simeonichs in 1697 and is looking due west from Hillside, Lenton. It shows the ford where Derby Road crossed the River Leen; Nottingham is to the right where the horses are heading. The Nottingham Canal, built in 1796, later passed under Derby Road near this point, following a route north parallel with the eastern boundary of Phase II of the Park, roughly where the horse-rider and two pack-horses are on the right. The land beyond the footbridge leading up to the south side of Wollaton Hall is now the site of Lime Tree Avenue, planted with lime trees in 1824.



In 1823, Lord Middleton had a new entrance lodge built here, known as Lenton Lodge (left). It was designed by the architect, Jeffrey Wyatt, later known as Sir Jeffrey Wyattville, and completed in 1824. It is now a private property and is Grade II listed. The Lodge stands about where the cottages and footbridge are in the middle of the painting shown above. The bridge over the River Leen (left) was paid for by Lord Middleton.

When Middleton Boulevard was built in 1927, the lodge was cut off from the Park and today the road towards the Hall is Wollaton Hall Drive.



Plans of housing schemes on the Nottingham Canal were on the south side of the River Trent in 1920. The photograph shows the first of the schemes, the Trent Valley Housing Scheme, which was built on the site of the canal. The photograph shows the first of the schemes, the Trent Valley Housing Scheme, which was built on the site of the canal.

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Housing design from about 1920 onwards was influenced heavily by the Arts and Crafts movement, with the result being a style of house known as the Garden City house. The movement produced a number of independent housing developments based on a common pattern of open spaces and public parks, surrounded by houses, usually 1.2m x 0.9m wide.



Although originally intended for large sites on the outskirts of London, such as the Garden City built in 1903, housing in Nottingham adopted the design idea to produce what later became known as a Garden Suburb, with its industry but with good transport links to the nearby city centre. At Nottingham Park, including the design to fit the ground and the housing design, the plan was approved and passed through to the Housing Committee of the Nottingham City Council.

In 1920, Howard was appointed City Architect in Nottingham and oversaw the completion of 6000 council houses in the city before leaving the post in 1925 to start his own business. In terms of planning, the municipal housing scheme for designers and contractors to be working for the Council of Nottingham in the county. The plan, designed around a central green in Nottingham, including the Council House (1924-25), the Housing Committee's head office, Little Boulevard (1927) and the Newton Building at Burton Street (1928), finished in 1929. By 1975, the city had built over 60,000 houses.



Phase One

The first houses built in the Nottingham estate were longhouses (shown) based on a design by Liverpool Urban Council, the Chairman of the Council's Housing Committee. The houses, known as Crane Composite Houses, consisted of a light steel frame and roof trusses, with the walls built of concrete slabs with rough render on the outside. They were erected on a raft of waterproof concrete onto which a composite flooring material was laid. They had conventional gardens at the rear with small, local primary trees. The windows were a mixture of timber or metal casement frames, and all Crane four-panel internal window doors were laid throughout the estate. Two sample houses had been built in early 1925 on The Glass Road, St Ann's, and the council approved the new design. The simple design helped to speed up the rate of building without the need for skilled or labour-intensive skills, both of which were in short supply and it helped elsewhere in the city. A small number of detached Crane houses were built, but most were semi-detached in Nottingham. Crane houses were only built at Nottingham Park.

The council planned to build 1,000 Crane houses at Nottingham, and the tender to erect the first 500 was issued in July 1925 with the contract awarded to Messrs John Smith & Sons, structural engineers from Burton who also made the steel frames. Each house was to cost £450. Building work began in March 1926 and the first crane houses were erected on 21 June 1926. In just over three months, 370 houses had been started, 260 had roofs and 60 were complete. By January 1927, 240 houses were complete, and at the phase one building work was completed in November 1927.

It had always been the intention to sell the houses on the estate, whereas if all the other sites in the city the houses were built purely for rent. The semi-detached houses were put up for sale at £450 each, with the detached houses costing £710 each. Many houses were offered a deposit of £75, with a further deposit of £75 upon the contract was signed. This was then followed by weekly payments of £4.64 (£20 for 20 weeks). To put the payments in perspective, the average weekly wage of a skilled labourer in 1927 was £3.65 for 23 sh.

All but the sales went well, but then declined as people became uncertain about investing in the new, non-traditional design. As early as July 1927 some councillors had expressed reservations about the non-standard method of construction, and by the beginning of 1927 this had turned into disinvestment on a much larger scale. This is covered later in more detail.



The photograph above, taken in 1925, shows a pair of semi-detached Crane houses on Stroughton Drive, built in 1922, as they were when they were built. Today there are only few houses that have not been altered in some way. The internal layout (plans) varied according to whether the house faced north or south to ensure that the living room always faced south.



The picture above shows Stroughton Drive soon after the Crane houses were built in 1927. The picture shows the small flats that were used as Crane houses instead of traditional cottages. Due to the steel and concrete construction of the houses, City a few of these all flats have survived the installation of new roofs and modern central heating. Other openings can be seen at the end of the road.

Part of the Garden City concept was to include large open spaces. The size of the estate did not allow for the full Garden City effect but features within the plot were retained where possible. (Detail: Spinnery, Sutton, east end of the block, of the 1915 Trillick Plan) that was retained when the site was redeveloped. It appears on the 1915 edition OS map as a quarter acre, circular space.



[Spinnery](#) (above) is another example of a space in the [Plan](#) that was retained. It contains several old English Oak trees. One local legend says that the village of Sutton Passons was wiped out in the Black Death, and that [Spinnery](#) is the site of the resulting plague pit. As yet there is no documentary evidence to support the story.

The map below shows the estate layout plan (black detail), as built in 1925-26, overlaid onto a 1915 OS Map (red detail). It shows how a copy in the [Plan](#) was retained as [Spinnery](#) (between [Concove](#) Crescent and Sutton Passons Crescent). It also shows the woodland (Great Day Wood) alongside the Nottingham Canal and the Bedford RD; and City boundary that caused so much detail.



Sutton Passons

Most of the roads on the estate are named after villages in Nottinghamshire but Sutton Passons Crescent is named after a nearby lost village. Before the Norman Conquest (1066) [Spinnery](#) was held by Aelfric and then, Anglo-Saxon times or later who held 10 acres of land. A Saxon named Uto also had 100 acres of land and it was all part of [Concove](#) (Wollaton). Sutton Passons precise location is unknown but is now believed to have been centred around the junction of Radford Bridge Road and Wollaton Road (Crane Road). It is listed in the [Commons Book](#) (1886) as belonging to Wollaton Parson.

By the 1200s, Sutton was in the ownership of the Passons family and became known as Sutton Passons to distinguish it from other Suttons in the county. Much later, the family gave land to Lenton Priory to build a church, St Mary's, and by 1316 John Passons owned the whole village. In 1336 the manor passed to Richard de Wollaton and in 1512 it was absorbed into Wollaton Park when Sir Henry Wollaton converted 100 acres of arable land into pasture. It was said then to include a house, 40 acres of land and a dovecote. A Tithe map of 1800 shows three meadows called West Dovecote Close, East Dovecote Close and Far Dovecote Close, near what is now Ringwood Crescent off Wollaton Road.

Building Outside the City

A large part of the housing estate was in Bedford district, outside the city boundary, with the house owners paying their rates (Council Tax) to Bedford Rural District Council. At a City Council meeting in January 1927, Councillor Sir Bernard Wright raised concern about building houses outside the boundary. He said that the council would lose £4,500 (£300,000 today) of rate income per year by building 300 houses outside the city and objected to the sale of the houses, saying that the loss of rent income would bring the total loss to £10,500 per year (£701,000 today). He also expressed concern that the Crane houses cost over £100 more each to build than those at Lenton Abbey, built of brick, ignoring the fact that half of the houses at Lenton only had two bedrooms and that work on the estate was delayed due to an acute shortage of bricks.

Councillor Crane said that in the short time since building work had begun, a further 240 names had been added to the housing waiting list of 3,000, and that another 1,000 people were in houses they wanted to leave. He quoted examples of the continual overcrowding in the city with one case of up to 13 people living in one small house. Alderman G. Hurlstone said that "The shadow of the storm is behind us, and if it is a problem we cannot, on financial or any other grounds, evade." Eventually, the Housing Committee decided to continue building beyond the city boundary but agreed that phase two of the site would be built in brick. Hordley's report, Review of the Progress of the Housing Schemes in Nottingham, states that the reason brick was chosen was not to save money but, "in order to obtain variety of design". The rates issue was resolved when Wollaton became part of the city in April 1928.

Phase Two

The council decided to build the second phase of the estate with only 313 brick-built houses instead of the intended 500 concrete Crane buildings. In February 1927, a contract was set to Messrs. Gomersall & Laine of Nottingham for 108 houses within the city and 175 outside the boundary. The cost was to be £141,378. By the end of December 1928, 125 brick houses were ready for occupation.



The pair of houses shown above, on Salford Parkway Crescent, is one of the brick built designs (type A6) erected during phase two of the estate. All the houses and bungalows on Salford Parkway Crescent are built of brick. These semi-detached houses were offered for sale for £575. Similar style houses were built later all across the city in large numbers, although most had plain brick frontages and flat cemented windows instead of the bay facade and bay windows used at Wollaton Park. These houses were also built at the end of cul-de-sacs or deadends (below) at Wollaton. That had no vehicle access. The 68 (20) wide pavements were bordered by hedges, reinforcing the links with the Garden City concept on which the designs were based.



The cul-de-sac layout allowed for the inclusion of more houses on the estate. In total, 23 cul-de-sacs were built along with five squares or closes that had narrow, 14ft x 20ft wide street access instead of pavements. These are Averton Square, Calver Close, Dally Square, ~~Stanhope~~ Close and ~~Langdon~~ Square.



Above: This pair of semi-detached bungalows, design type A61, with Mock Tudor gables, is one of only seven units of this design built on the estate. They were placed mostly at the end of cul-de-sacs and were not built anywhere else in the city.



Above: Another style of brick built house was the three house block. At Wollaton it has a bungalow at each end, making five houses in total. The same style was also built at Lenton Abbey and Aspley but without the bungalows.

Two styles of detached brick built bungalows were built. The one shown below has a flat facade. You can tell which are brick built by the foundations - the bay window at ground floor level and the dormer windows in the roof are later additions.



Another style of brick built detached bungalows, below, design type A62, has a projecting side wing and a timber clad gable. They are bigger than the flat facade type. Only 18 of these larger detached bungalows were built, although 25 semi-detached versions were also erected.



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In 1928 this advert offered the new brick built houses for sale from £150 to £275, or on easy terms of £10 down and 17s 6d (7p) a week for twenty years. According to the Bank of England inflation calculator, these houses would now cost £35,334, which shows how house prices have far outstripped normal inflation and wages.

It seems odd today that they made a feature of the fact that the houses had electric light, something we take for granted today. Wollaton village did not have mains electricity, gas, sewage or running water until after Lord Wollaton's estate was sold in 1925.

Buying one of these houses at Wobaton was for many people a real achievement, made possible by the re-employment system. At first sales were strong, but later when many people said that the concrete and steel Crane houses were inferior and wouldn't last, sales declined. When, in 1933, one Lambton shop keeper, Mrs Anne Love, heard that they were now building the houses in brick, she and her husband decided to take the plunge. Her story, published in 1988, is reproduced here by kind permission of the Lambton Times:

'Almost opposite Lambton Lodge, the gatehouse to Wobaton Park, is Hildale. On this street there used to stand a row of almost thirty terraced houses, No. 42 Hildale, towards the middle of the terrace, housed the shop, which back in the early 1920s I ran. There I sold the usual range of groceries, bread and cereals, cigarettes, jam and ice cream, which I made myself. In early 1928 quite a lot of new faces began to appear in the shop. These belonged to the workmen, many of them Irish, who were employed across on the other side of Derby Road on the construction of the Wobaton Park Estate. At their request I began to make sandwiches which were brought in large numbers. Every so often I would see my son and his young friend across to watch these men at work. One day I saw how the steel framework of the Crane houses was put up and how they made the concrete building blocks out of a mixture of ash and cement. A cement mixer was a luxury the men didn't seem to possess and all the mixing of materials and subsequent pouring into wooden shuttering was done by hand.

The City Council had these Crane houses built with the intention of selling them, but their original design didn't prove popular. A rumour went around that the houses wouldn't last ten years, and a lot of people must have believed it because the council had considerable difficulty selling them. As a result, I was decided to call a halt on the erection of Crane houses and finish the rest of the estate with houses built with more traditional methods. When we heard this, my husband and I decided to try and buy one of the brick bungalows. Ideally, we would have liked a house on the new boulevard that was going to be constructed but as detached properties weren't proposed for any of the land alongside the boulevard, we jumped instead for a house on **Wobaton Crescent**. Once it was finished, we sold the shop on Hildale and in May 1928 moved into our new home. That was sixty years ago, and I am still here.

According to Kelly's Directory, 1936, Joseph and Anne Love lived at 5 **Wobaton Crescent**, and despite what Mrs Love says they did eventually build eight detached bungalows on Wobaton Boulevard.



The photograph on the left from a 1935 sales brochure shows a Crane House living room with a single in the fireplace. Despite the **ABC**, **detached** look, the houses were a step above ordinary council houses in that they had bathrooms containing a full three-piece suite, a sink, toilet and a bath, which was unusual even in the 1930s as many council houses of this period had the bath in the kitchen.



The Shops

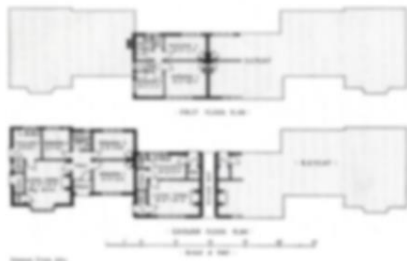
In July 1927, the Housing Committee approved a scheme for six shops to be built fronting Farnham Green. Tenders were called in September 1927 and building work began in January 1928. Built in brick, they were completed in August 1928 and cost £4,727. The shop units were design type 1009 and had a 234 sq ft (20 sq m) shop area at the front with a large store at the side. The living room, kitchen and bathroom were also on the ground floor, behind the shop area. Upstairs there were three bedrooms and a further store. The shop shown above is Farnham Green Post Office shown on a Plan published from about 1930.



Source: Lambton Times

The first occupiers of the shops in 1928 were No 1 - Sheehan & Co. Grocers, No 2 - Cyril Gurn, Stationer and Sub-Postmaster, No 3 - Nottingham Co-operative Society (butcher's shop), No 4 - Maud Stoves, Bakery, No 5 - Mrs E. G. Wyard, Draper, and No 6 - John & Alice **Wobaton**, Grocers.

In addition to the six shops in Farnham Green, four houses were built to the same design type A81 used in the cul-de-sacs. The building comprises four homes, in this case numbers 7-10 Farnham Green. In the centre is a two-storey block comprising two houses with a rounded-arch entrance to the back garden. The single-storey bungalows each side have projecting wings and bay windows - the bay windows at the rear are also additions. The internal layout is shown below. **Mrs F. Laid** was the first person to occupy one of these houses in 1928. She was still there in 1995.



Source: Lambton Times



(above) Some of the bungalows at each end of the two-storey brick houses have flat windows instead of the bay windows used on type A81.



(above) A further design, type A84, has a full-width central pergola-way to the back garden rather than the rounded-arch entrance. It also has a different window arrangement at first floor level and the units bungalows have a flat facade with a bay window. Despite their age and individual style, none of the buildings on the estate are listed by English Heritage, but the estate now forms the Sutton Passways Conservation Area, designated by Nottingham City Council on 10 August 2010.



The picture on the left shows Midleton Boulevard during construction in 1927. For a number of years, the council had been planning a new outer ring road linking Derby Road with Mansfield Road, running around the west side of the city, and Midleton Boulevard named after Lord Midleton, was a key part of the plan.



The original route for Midleton Boulevard was for it to run in a straight line due north from the junction of Lime Tree Avenue to the south, crossing the Nottingham Canal and then joining directly with another new boulevard to the north, Western Boulevard. The estate development map from 1925 on the left shows the planned route. However, it soon became clear that the 120 yard, 200 canal bridge (Radford Bridge) on Western Road at Crown Island, which was only 200 (ft) wide, needed to be replaced, and having Midleton Boulevard follow a direct line to Western Boulevard would have meant building two new bridges over the canal.

Instead, as a cost saving measure, a new 918 (274) wide bridge was built on Wobaton Road, and the two boulevards were aligned to use the new bridge. This is why Midleton Boulevard curves to the west of Crown Island and why there were two roundabouts, one each end of the new canal bridge.

The bridge opened on 21 June 1928 and Western Boulevard was opened officially on 21 November 1932. Valley Road, from Mansfield Road to Beaufort, had been built in 1922 linking together several housing sites, and Clifton Boulevard from Swirey Road to Beaman Road, Dunelm, was added in 1928. The first Clifton bridge over the River Trent opened in 1958.

Originally the junction with Lime Tree Avenue and a new road to be named Wobaton Hall Drive was planned to be a large roundabout, but it was never built. Instead, it was laid out in the form of a crescent with a circular pathway around the perimeter, although Midleton Boulevard followed a straight line through the junction. By 1932, over 30 houses had been built on Wobaton Hall Drive with St Mary's Church, garage and hall designed by T. C. Howitt, added in 1937. St. Building on Adams Hill, Curlew Drive and Wensley Gardens, began in late 1927 and the houses along Midleton Boulevard were completed by late 1932, including the shops at the Wobaton Road end.

The picture below shows Midleton Boulevard shortly after it was completed. The view is looking north from the junction of Charnock Avenue. The large clump of trees on the right beyond the houses was a small copse in the original Wobaton Park. The house on the right is one of the Dutch Tudor style houses mentioned earlier.



Good transport links to the city centre were a major part of the planning of the inner west housing estates. Trambuses ran on Midleton Boulevard on routes 33 and 45. The bus shown below, fleet number 206, is one of six Ley D14 single-decker trambuses purchased second-hand from Hastings Corporation in 1941. It is seen here on the west side of Midleton Boulevard near [Stables Drive](#) in 1941.



Acknowledgements

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Extract from Chapman's Map of Nottinghamshire, 1776



Wobaton Park and the surrounding area in 2022, showing the housing development around the Park after 1922

February 2022