

Family Studies, 2

Some information on the history of the property now called the Old Post Office, Boughton, Norfolk and previously known as The Post Office.



Richard Clarke

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Initially written in April/ May 2009 I had gathered the following information from papers attached to the deeds and photocopied for me by the solicitors dealing with the sale of the property following the death of my sister (owner) Doris Clarke in November 2008. Even though I was brought up in the house from 1948 to 1967 I had not previously seen these papers. I have no specific legal training so my interpretations may be flawed. Added to this analysis are my recollections of the property and some knowledge of its housing history.

The building style of the house, the end property of a row of three, is clearly neo gothic with features such as; steeply pitched gables, bargeboards, decorative slates, open porch and lancet windows. The detached building to the west was originally the Wesleyan Chapel and Sunday school and related outbuildings, these with a date- stone (still visible) of 1872. As some features are common between chapel and cottages I am sure they are contemporary and this is confirmed by the date stone in the front gable of the middle cottage.

The terrace of three has a continuous run of single storey outbuildings running parallel to the rear of the cottages and detached from them, the three single-storey rear kitchen extensions all being 20th century. Almost certainly the areas between cottage rear doors and outbuildings would have originally been a communal yard with access for the middle cottage around the side of either end cottage. The outbuilding for the Old Post Office had, until the 1970s, a built in copper in the south west corner with a flue and chimney, but otherwise was a general storage shed with one door. This was unusual as outbuildings usually were sub divided by single brick walls between 'shed', washhouse, 'coals' and earth closet. Immediately behind the outbuilding was an annex which in my time was the coal shed but which must have once housed the original earth closet. This is now part of the property 'Wesley House' (previously the Methodist chapel) for which all the garden previously owned by the Post Office was bought in 1994.

The walling of the outbuilding is coursed flint rubble in a thick lime mortar with an apex slate roof supported on trusses.

The cottages would have been built as estate cottages for the farm of Richard Harwin who also endowed the chapel. They were built in a classic style and would have been rented to selected employees. A neighbouring row of six cottages between the terrace of three and what was Manor Farm (originally built and owned by Richard Harwin) are of much plainer style and would almost certainly be of 1890s when the Agricultural Depression resulted in a much more utilitarian style of estate cottage generally being built (although this interpretation of the six cottages is challenged by the research of a current resident). Boughton was then a mixed village, not exclusively an estate village but not really an 'open' village.

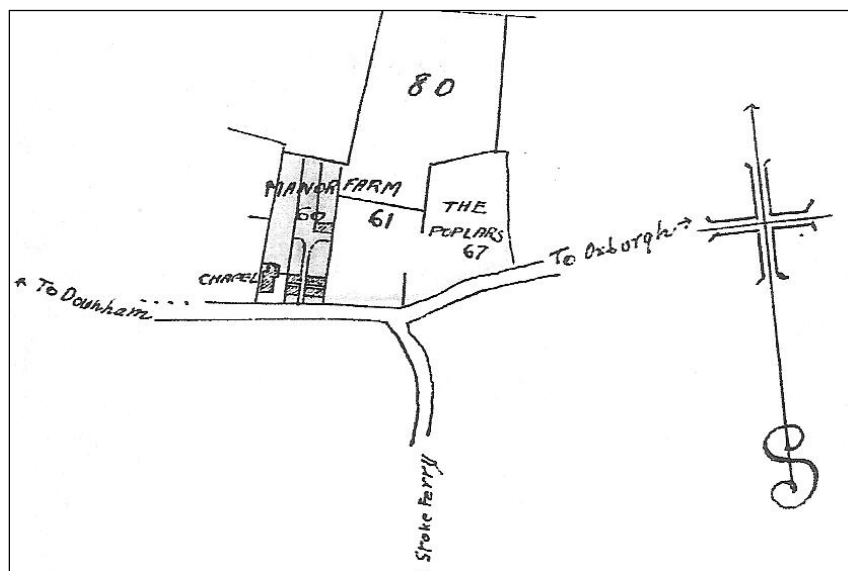


Fig. 1 Hand-drawn map attached to an 'Abstract' dated 1920. The short terrace of three 1870s estate cottages is sandwiched between the chapel and the longer terrace of smaller cottages. 'The Poplars' defines land around the Victorian rectory notable for the avenue of Lombardy poplar trees lining the drive, considerable landmarks in the undulating landscape.

The earliest documentary evidence related to the Old Post Office is dated 22/09/1920 and entitled 'Abstract of the Title of Mr. Roger George Robinson to Freehold hereditaments situate at Boughton in the County of Norfolk'. Being an 'abstract' the document listed previous transactions. The estate

cottages had been owned by Richard Harwin until his death in, or around, 1913, at which time his executors sold Manor Farm and the estate buildings to Leonard Mason a farmer living in Fincham, a village four miles north. It is very hard to unravel exactly what happened across the summer and autumn of 1913, parcels of property being immediately sold on and seemingly in September the nine cottages 'The Poplars' (?) and Manor Farm were sold on to John Hall (for whom my father was later to work). An attached plan shows the nine cottages in two blocks and their blocks of rear gardens, in area 1.474 acres (see Fig. 1).

After lengthy, and hard to understand, financial arrangements between 1914 and 1918 page five first mentions Roger George Robinson as having bought the properties freehold from H.J. Smith of Denver (10 miles away and on the edge of the Fens). Robinson paid £7500 for the properties and land and borrowed £4500 from Robert Kerkham of Terrington at 5%p.a.. It seems Robinson conveyed to Kerkham the properties shown on Fig. 1. 'The Poplars' appears to have been The Rectory which had, in my recollection, tall Lombardy poplar trees, a local landmark, forming an avenue beside the drive. The properties together generated a yearly rent of £225.

An indenture dated 20/10/1920 shows that Ada Louise Rix bought the cottage from R.G. Robinson for £300 which he then used to part pay his mortgage to Kerkham. A.L. Rix was the wife of Arthur Rix, labourer and were my mother's maternal grand-parents. Fig. 2 reproduces the plan attached to the indenture. It shows a 12 feet wide private roadway and garden for the Old Post Office behind the chapel. Special mention is made of a drain running (then) behind the Sunday school to a open ditch. It seems that one Elvina Howard already owned the middle cottage.

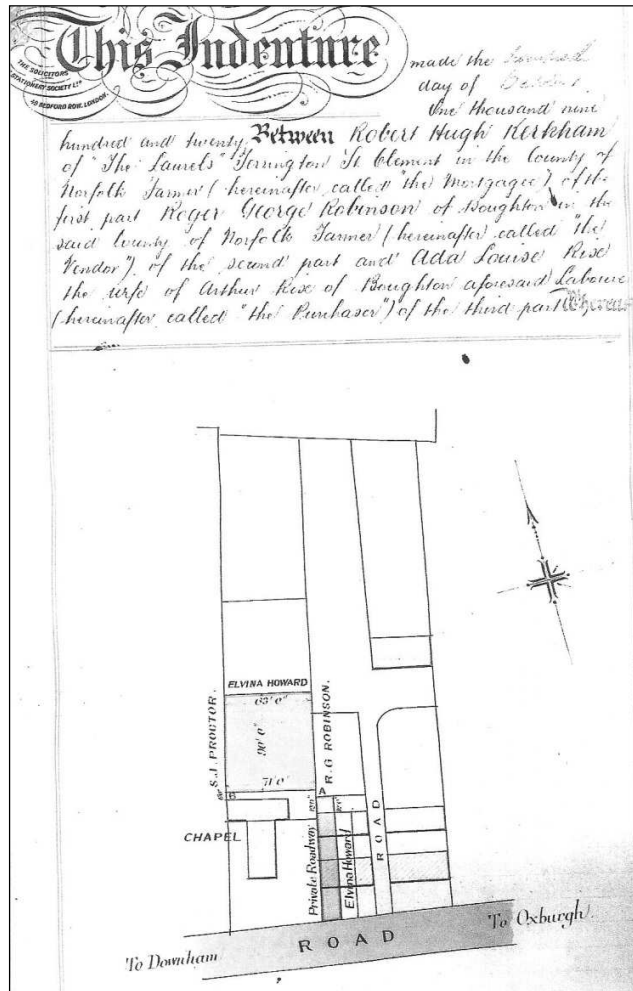


Fig. 2 Map attached to 1920 Indenture. The vertical shaded blocks define, from south to north, the front garden, the house, the open rear yard, the detached outbuilding and the privy. The garden was accessed by a path that ran beside the outbuilding and privy.

There is an Abstract of Title of Mrs. A.L. Rix to the cottage and dated 1944 and a Conveyance dated 30/06/1944 between A.L. Rix and Annie Clarke (our mother) whereby the latter bought it for £300. Interestingly A. Clarke's address was already, "Post Office" (see Doris Clarke, a life).

A deed dated 9/11/1950 concerned the maintenance of an underground sewer built along a line shown on its plan to the ditch bordering the garden, and which partly crossed the next garden (see Fig. 3). Interestingly Ada Louise Rix seems to have owned that garden which went with the next door

cottage to the Post Office, where Elvina Howard had previously lived. Annie was to pay Ada £5p.a..

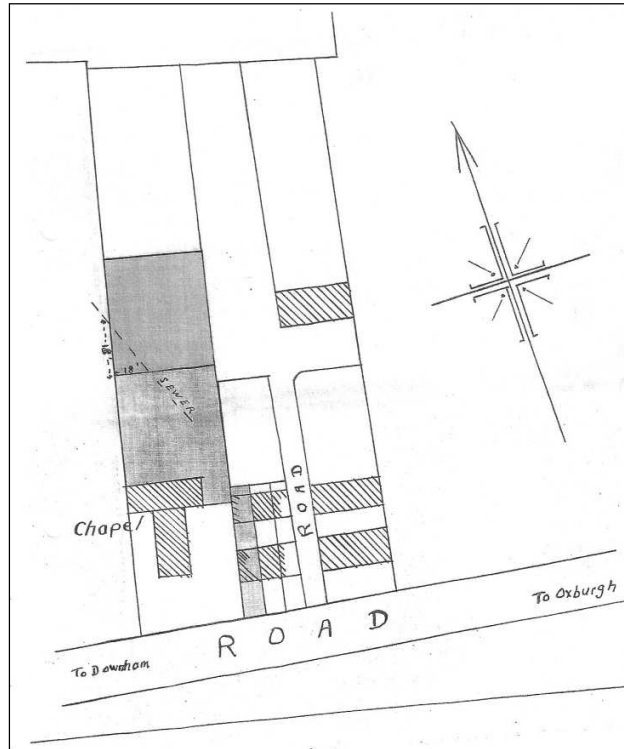


Fig. 3 Plan dated 1950. Incidentally the house drain ran to an open ditch.

Annie died in January 1978, intestate. Sidney Walter died in November 1987 and the property devolved to their daughter Doris who lived in the house for most of her life.

When Doris agreed to sell off the garden in 1994/95 for some reason the legal side required establishing the link back to Annie's ownership. The legal documents contained clauses about the previous drainage pipes and cesspit and the new owner of the chapel's intention to build a sewage disposal plant. A mains sewer now passes across the front of the house, this being not built by the local authority until the late 1990s.

Originally the house had a stone sink under the window in what is now the middle room and what prior to 1949 would have been the scullery. Beside this in the alcove would have been a wooden, shelved airing cupboard so located as it was beside the cooking and heating range which would have

preceded the later coal fire. On the other side of the room was a walk in pantry. The doorway leading to the present kitchen would have originally been the back door of the house.

Between this door and the brick outhouse may have been some form of less well built annex(s).

The issue of the cooking/ heating range may be uncertain as in most late 19th century cottages with just two ground-floor rooms the range would have been in the front room with the rear room as the scullery. I do not know if the range had been removed before the Clarke's era.

The three bedrooms show that the estate cottage was built to modern standards for its time. Enlightened employers, realising the desirability for separate sleeping accommodation for the sexes, were committed to the extra expense of building three bedroom cottages. Furthermore the 'gothic' roofline, lancet windows, stained glass, decorative red brick string lines in walls of 'whites', stone lintels etc. made this a 'classy' estate cottage of its day.

The outbuilding, end of a continuous run of three, incorporated a copper, side window and had a two seat earth closet annexed behind with separate entrance.

The garden in my time had; gravel paths, a wood pile (to supplement coal as winter fuel), chicken run, pig sty and small summer house at the north-west corner and a further small pig sty behind the Sunday School, this made from the corrugated casing of an old air raid shelter (not originally on the site). There were old pear and apple trees, flower beds and a large vegetable area. It would be fair to say that from the 1940s onwards Sidney Walter Clarke spent much of his life there.

After Doris' death in 2008 the Old Post Office was sold and the new owner set about the comprehensive repairs needed throughout the interior.