

Martens Grove and Oakwood

The history of the origin of near neighbours Martens Grove and Oakwood are closely linked.

Before receiving the name Oakwood the house that later proudly bore the name, was only a part of Martens Grove Estate. The Tithe Award Map of 1839 gives us a clear indication of the lands that were later to form the estates of Martins Grove and Oakwood. It is interesting to note that the Tithe Award, Rate Books and early Census Returns, all refer to the property as Martins Grove. The present spelling Martens Grove only appears towards the end of the 19th century.

The main enclosure, Martins Grove Wood, was of approx. 47 acres. Its boundaries were May Place Road in the north and London Road in the south and Pinnacle Hill in the west to Woodside Road in the east. Partly enclosed by Martins Grove Wood was an arable enclosure 'The Gores' of 17 acres, giving a total area of about 64 acres. In 1839 all this land was owned by a Mr Pew. The only houses on the land were 3 cottages, 2 in the South West corner on London Road and another cottage on the northern edge of The Gores.

Oakwood

It is not until 1848 that we get the first reference to the possible building of a large residence on the land. With the following extract from a Schedule of Freehold Properties for sale by auction, Lot 78 refers to the contents as follows.

"Martins Grove Wood beautifully situated on the north side of Turnpike Road (London Road) descending the hill from Bexleyheath to Crayford. Abounding with game, and overlooking the River Cray with most delightful views. Particularly eligible for the erection of a Country Residence, of 44 acres 1 rood 23 perches."

Lot 78 was purchased by Mr John Shaw an architect, the son of John Shaw Senior also an architect, born in Bexley 1776- 1830. John Shaw Jun., 1803-1879 had achieved a measure of fame for his designs of country houses in the 'Picturesque Style' - the style he was to adopt for Martens Grove, and Oakwood. To add to the land acquired by the

purchase of Lot 78, John Shaw added 'The Gores' and a further plot off Old Road, to give him a total holding of approx. 75 acres. Our first reference to large houses on the Martens Grove Estate is found in 2 entries in the Poor Rate Returns for Crayford in 1850. Two houses are recorded at Martins Grove. Both entries show a Mansion, Buildings and Land. The first entry shows Mr J. Shaw as the owner and occupier, and the second gives Mr G. Lock as the owner and occupier. Mr G. Lock was a builder and a partner in the firm of builders Lock and Nesham. It is most likely that both houses, with their many similar features, were designed by Mr Shaw and built by Mr Lock. The house occupied by Mr Lock was designed to facilitate the movement of his invalid wife.

Our first reference to the name Oakwood is in the Poor Rate Returns for 1853. It shows Mr G. Lock as the owner and occupier of a Mansion, buildings and land at Oakwood, 7 acres 0 roads 23 perches in area. Mr G. Lock died in 1854 and the estate was in the hands of his executors until 1860, when it was taken on a short lease by Mr Robert Lloyd the then owner of Martens Grove. He resided at Oakwood during the period of extensive alterations to Martens Grove, moving out on their completion in 1862.

In the same year Mr. Lloyd purchased Oakwood and leased it to Mr. W. Dodgson, a Stock Broker who was to become a great benefactor to both the Church and Parish of Crayford. He made the first serious attempt to establish the fine gardens and woodlands that were to become a feature of Oakwood. His interest in trees extended to the churchyard of St. Paulinus, where he planted many fine yews and evergreen oaks, some of which stand today.

The fine Lytchgate is another example of his generosity. His wage supported him in his good works and he took an active interest in the welfare of the Parish. Unfortunately Dodgson's wife died at the early age of 47 years and in March 1875 was buried in the new extension of the churchyard, which her husband had done so much to beautify. Following the death of his wife, Mr Dodgson left Oakwood and moved to Sevenoaks. He died in 1895 aged 84 years and was brought to Crayford and buried in the churchyard with his wife.

With the removal of Mr Dodgson in 1875, Mr Lloyd sold Oakwood to Mr C Ionsides but his stay only lasted until 1881, when the Oakwood Estate was purchased by Mr Stephen White, a Lloyds Underwriter. Mr

Stephen White resided at Oakwood until his death in 1906, during those 25 years he carried on the work stated by Mr Dodgson, laying out new gardens, and maintaining the large area of woodland, parts of which we can still walk through and enjoy today. There were extensive Vineries, an orangery, and Conservatories for the growing of peaches, pineapples and other exotic fruits. The Terrace and formal gardens all received high praise. All required large staff for their upkeep. In this respect it is interesting to note the entry for Oakwood from the 1891 Census, that shows 12 members of the White family and 11 servants in residence, a large staff for such a house, and these were no doubt supplemented with a number of local dailies.

The house was enlarged in the 1890's at a cost of £2000, following the original design but with one concession - the rooms had higher pitched ceilings, giving them a lighter and more pleasant feel. Mr White was a member of Kent County Council and from the inception of the Parish Councils Act in 1894, a councillor and Chairman of Crayford Parish Council for a number of years. Mr White died in 1906 aged 70 years; his funeral service was at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, Crayford, with the interment at Kensal Green Cemetery. Mrs White survived her husband by only 2 months and died on the 28 February 1907. The death of Mr White signalled the break-up of the Estate. On the 16 October 1906 the Dartford auctioneers Dann and Lucas conducted a sale by auction at Oakwood of the Conservatory and Hothouse plants and all the Nursery Stock. With the death of Mr White's son Victor, killed in action in France in 1917, the family's interest in Oakwood ended.

The estate was purchased by Mr C. Harris no doubt with the hope of future development. The one factor that ruled out any major development of the house or land was drainage. The owner had failed to connect the house to the main sewerage system, happy to rely on the old cesspits. These were in poor condition and had contaminated the land drainage from the site. In 1927 Mr Harris applied to Crayford Urban District Council for permission to convert the house into 3 separate dwellings. This was approved, but does not appear to have taken place. The following year the stable and loft were converted into a dwelling.

In 1931 Kent Education Committee, with C.U.D.C. wished to purchase part of the estate on which to build a new school, to cater for the rapidly increasing population brought about by the major housing

developments in Barnehurst. Again it was the lack of mains drainage that called a halt to the negotiations. Agreement was reached with Mr Harris in 1932 that the estate would be connected to the new sewer being laid in the extension of Woodside Road to Mayplace Road East and the improved land drains into Inglewood Road.

Work on the new school started in 1933 and Mayplace County Primary School was opened on the 6 December 1933. The ceremony was performed by Lord Northbourne, Chairman of the Elementary Education Sub-Committee. On the night of the 17 September 1940 the school was virtually destroyed by incendiary bombs during an air raid.

With the completion of the Woodside Road extension in 1933 part of Oakwood Estate (late Vickers Sports Ground) was acquired by Mr J Franklin, builder of Mayplace Road, for the erection of houses and bungalows. His advert read:

Freehold Houses and Bungalows surrounded

By sports grounds,

£5 secures

£525 Houses and Bungalows

£645 and £675 Houses

No Road, legal or surveyors fees, no extra charges.

Oakwood received considerable damage from air raids and by 1944 was in a ruinous state. The owners in reply to a Council enquiry said they were willing to sell the 4½ acres of land comprising the house for £5000. The intention of the council was to demolish the house and build houses and flats on the land but permission was refused by the Minister of Health. In 1945 it was agreed to purchase the estate and use the land on which the house stood to build a new school to replace the old school destroyed in an air raid.