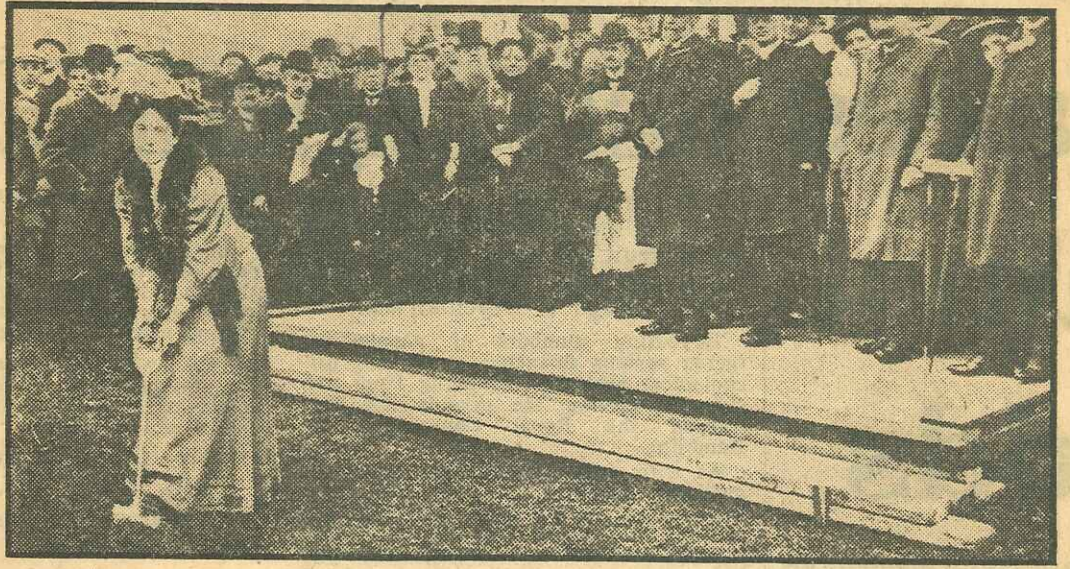


Moor Pool, the tranquil heart of the estate only two and a half miles from the centre of Birmingham. The soft waters of the pool were well known to local women who used to do their laundry and washing for the wealthy residents in neighbouring Edgbaston.



ABOVE: The first sod is cut in October, 1907, by Mrs. J. S. Nettlefold, whose husband instigated the Moor Pool Estate scheme 70 years ago. BELOW: Robert Whewell, who still lives on the estate, as he appeared dressed as a policeman in the May Day celebrations in 1910.



The haven of tranquillity

Mr. Robert Whewell is living proof of the power of Moor Pool Estate — a lovingly-tended garden suburb in the heart of Birmingham — to hold its own.

As a three-year-old he was dressed as a policeman and walked from his new home in Park Hill Road to take part in the estate's May Day festivities.

That was May 14, 1910, when the celebrations, delayed by public anxiety during the king's illness, eventually took place.

Next month, a week before his 70th birthday, Mr. Whewell will stroll from his present home to watch a similar programme of events held to mark the silver jubilee of another sovereign.

In the intervening years the crown has shifted four times and Mr. Whewell has moved house twice — without leaving Moor Pool Estate.

An observer might be forgiven for thinking that little else has changed.

That is the way they want it on the estate which was conceived at a meeting held 70 years ago next month and which was a revolutionary piece of town planning in its day — and remains a model of good design.

It lies only two and a half miles from the centre of Birmingham on 54 acres of undulating land bordered by Wentworth, Lordswood and Park Hill roads, Harborne.

The trees and hedges, selected by the curator of Birmingham Botanical

Gardens when the estate was planned, have grown; there is more traffic in the streets which were designed — with remarkable foresight — with only 16ft. of macadam so as to deter use by too many vehicles.

The women no longer wash their clothes in Moor Pool, the lake which lies within the estate and whose soft water probably gave rise to the rhyme:

*Hungry Harborne, proud and poor,
A washer woman at every door.*

Come to that, the men no longer strip off to swim in the pool after a hot day's work in Birmingham. That ended when they opened the municipal baths in Harborne in 1923 and now the Canada geese and the angling club have the place to themselves.

Otherwise the solid houses of red facing bricks and pebble dash remain much the same (only now they have mains electricity) and the nine-pin skittle alley at the centre of the estate is still in use.

There are owner-occupiers as well as tenants now, and everyone seems to take care of their homes.

It is, after all, a conservation area, selected because it is a well maintained and preserved example of the garden city movement.

In July, 1970, the conservation areas advisory committee reported: "The pattern of buildings, spaces and natural landscape features is itself

ANDREW MONCUR traces the history of a cherished garden suburb in the residential heart of Birmingham.

delightful to see and ought not to be lost to the community."

The smaller community of Moor Pool is determined not to lose the character of its estate. Mr. Whewell, who came to the estate as a 12-month-old when his father took one of the first five houses to be built, said: "It is a wonderful place to live. It has always been self-contained."

He was speaking with the conviction of a man who lived at 92 Park Hill Road, until he was aged 36; at 88 Park Hill Road until he was aged 52 and is now established in Carless Avenue (just round the corner).

Mr. Matthew Southall, company secretary of Harborne Tenants Ltd., the unquoted public company which controls the estate, is equally intent that the area should not change. He told me: "It is a little jewel in the heart of industrial Birmingham and we want it to remain so."

It must certainly have seemed a jewel to the people — mainly thrifty artisans — who first moved from the crowded back houses of central Birmingham to live on the estate

when it was formed. It was built at a density of nine houses per acre compared with the 40 per acre then permitted.

By 1910 there were 500 houses on the estate, enjoying a measure of good health that must have seemed remarkable.

The company has figures showing a death rate of five per 1,000 and an infant mortality rate of six per 1,000 at Moor Pool, compared with a death rate of 15 per 1,000 and an infant mortality rate of 120 per 1,000 in Birmingham as a whole.

The estate was born after a meeting held at Harborne Institute on June 25, 1907, to discuss an option held by a city councillor, J. S. Nettlefold, on 36 acres of land whose development had become a possibility with the planned development of a tramway from Birmingham to Harborne.

It was decided to build the estate and capital was raised with loan stock, a loan from the Public Works Loan Commissioners and from tenants themselves, who had to buy a holding in the company (which, apart from anything else, demonstrated their thrift).

The houses were built with cost-saving in mind, by building in blocks and by making use of existing gradients to reduce the expense of levelling.

They were laid out in a variety of sizes to suit all age groups, from young married couples with growing families to the elderly whose children

had left home, and with a variety of rents — ranging from 4s. 6d. to 15s. 6d. a week.

And there were clear rules for tenants. Rule 18 in the handbook states that members who on any quarter day are 13 weeks in arrears will be fined "on the first such quarter day 1s. on the second successive 2s...." and so on.

And it was well placed. Although the tramway was never built, there were bus services and trains on the Harborne branch line linking the estate with Birmingham.

The train was leisurely. In comparatively recent memory, boys from King Edward's School would come home for lunch and on hot days would leave their boaters and blazers on the train. When they returned to go back to school they would still be lying, safe and untouched, in the train.

Mr. Donald Wright, head of history and topography at Birmingham Central Library, lives on the estate and has collected anecdotes about the railway, known mockingly, as the Harborne Express.

There is the story of the bearded man who got off the train with a child's ticket from Monument Lane. When the ticket collector challenged him he explained — in his rage — that it had been valid when he boarded the train.

The branch line has ceased to function but Moor Pool Estate remains, four-square — and unruffled as the railway in its prime.