

The Highland Street / Morley Road Wall
("Lady Morley" Exonerated)
by Stephen Pomeroy 30 August 2019

Background

Highland Street was laid out running south from Highland Road.

One of the earliest datable buildings in the street was on the east side, a Wesleyan Chapel built in 1866 between numbers 15 and 17, Methodist Records.

On the 1877 Ordnance Survey map the whole of the street is built up with houses in both side and the chapel on the east. The land to the south was still undeveloped fields with a few gravel and claypits for the housing built or being built in the vicinity.

When the Wesleyans built and moved to larger premises in Highland Road in 1889 the chapel was sold to the Church of England and used by them until 1900.

In November 1900 Charles Brown, builder from Rose Cottage, Highland Road had plan 13398 approved to build 4 houses in the street by the Roads & Works Committee. These were built as numbers 15a, 17a, 21a, 23a out of sequence with the rest of the street.

The 'continuation' of Highland Street, was later built becoming Morley Road, shown in directories from 1908.

Finally in 1974 a store between 5 & 7 Highland Street was converted into a house, becoming 5a. So there are explanations for the strange numbering on the east side of Highland Street.

Morley Road has some housing missing, 7-17 and 14-16 with garages on those sites.

The unusual feature is that the two roads were for many years separated by a wall. There is a local story that Lady Morley had the wall built at the end of Highland Street, see later for more details.

The corporation / council minutes have revealed the facts behind the wall and its longevity whilst the Evening News supply the folklore from people living in the streets and a few facts.

'Known' Details

The details from 1906 to 1999 are detailed first as they were the information until recent discoveries.

In the printed Council Minutes for 24 Sep 1906 plans 16477 by H Clark for 2 houses and 16478 for 18 houses in Highland Street were approved by the Roads & Works Committee.

These match with 2 houses and 9 houses on the east side and 9 houses on the west side of what was built as Morley Road. Most of which in the 1911 rates are owed either by E White or Bailey & Whites and rented out.

In the printed Council Minutes for 13 July 1920 at a full council a petition from residents in Highland Street and Highland Road urging removal of wall, was presented Councillor A.B Wright. Resolved that the petition be referred to the Road & Works Committee.

In the printed Council Minutes for 21 Nov 1921 at a full council meeting there was an enquiry from the Health & Housing Committee inquiring what has been done by the Roads & Works Committee with respect to the removal of the wall between Highland Street and Morley Road. Resolved to reply - nothing has been done.

Evening News 18 Dec 1962 article by James Bayes. A Morley Road resident was told by a 78 year old retired Marine that Lady Morley owned a farm or small estate and it was her who caused the wall to be raised.

Evening News 10 Dec 1975 article by Charles Green. Discussions are taking place to remove the wall. These have, stalled as the Assistant City Secretary said the council could not just demolish it with knowing who owned it. It is said that it was built by Lady Morley to stop working class residents of Highland Street walking past her house. A resident of Morley Road stated that Lady Morley built the houses for her employees and then had the wall built.

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Evening News 1 Apr 1976 reported that Council workmen started work demolishing the wall across Highland Street and Morley Road.

Evening News 17 Apr 1999 article by Ron Brown. In Dec 1975 the Transportation committee supported a £2,300 scheme to remove the wall. The wall was built by Lady Morley whose workers lived in Morley Road.

No Morley has been found living in Morley Road or owning land in the area, although there was a Councillor William Morley who sat on the Roads & Works Committee.

New findings

That was how things stood until an e-mail arrived from David Otton on 22nd July 2019 querying whether the WEA Local History Group might be able to help him as he also could not find Lady Morley. I supplied him the known details and agreed that there seemed to be no Lady Morley.

A few days later David had the key breakthrough on the British Newspaper Archive online which included a letter to the editor of the Evening News published on 26 June 1906. This has not shown up in earlier catalogues which are not as detailed as the online index.

Evening News 26 June 1906 letter to the editor

“On the morning of the 15th May a 10 foot wall was erected on the south end of Highland Street, Eastney, which completely stopped our approach and view to the sea front. I wrote to the Borough Engineer concerning it; the matter was brought before the committee on the 21st May, and on the 30th May a party of gentlemen came into Highland Road, opposite Highland Street, but did not enter the street. I hear this was the committee. I must inform you that this wall is from 125 to 140 yards from where this supposed committee stood and with a descent to the wall of near four feet. Is it possible that the effect of this wall could be properly inspected from this distance? Now Sir, on the lower right hand side of this street next to the wall, a man and his family have lived for 24 years getting their living by tailoring. This wall, being only 3ft 6in from the window, and one foot above it, completely stops them from working in that room now. It is asserted that if there had been a better class of houses in Highland Street, the wall would not have been erected and a cul-de-sac avoided. Hoping something will be done to remedy the evil and give, us the light of Heaven and the sea breeze once again.”

from ‘A LOVER OF JUSTICE’

This not only gives the date the wall was built, 15th May 1906, before the planning application for the houses later built in Morley Road, but the dates of committees that can be looked for. The fact that the houses were built after the wall, as well as the lack of evidence for Lady Morley seems to suggest the folklore could be wrong. Although the assertion about class of houses seem to suggest a problem may have existed.

Examining the council records for 1906 reveals some interesting information.

17 May 1906 The Borough Engineer submitted a letter to the Streets Sub-Committee from George Burridge on behalf of the residents in Highland Street protesting against a wall across the southern end of this street. The Borough Engineer reported that the wall is being erected for Messrs Bailey & Whites Ltd. The committee ordered that the Borough Engineer confer with the Town Clerk. (CCM6a/8 Page 402).

So straight away Lady Morley is not involved.

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Later minutes show:

21 May 1906 Letter received by Roads & Works Committee from George Burrige {He lived at 17 Highland Street} and others complaining that a wall is being erected across the lower end of the street blocking the thoroughfare. Referred to the Streets Committee. (CCM6/19 Page 343)

5 Jun 1906 Road & Works Committee, Streets Committee report that the Town Clerk's opinion to be taken on the legality of the erection of the wall (CCM6/19 Page 353)

After this there is no more mention of the wall and nothing is done.

Returning to the 1920s when there was another attempt to remove the wall, mentioned above, the detailed minutes of the sub committees show:

In the printed Council Minutes 13 July 1920 Full committee meeting of council, Councillor A.B Wright presented a petition from residents in Highland Street and Highland Road urging removal of wall, referred to Road & Works Committee.

From Jul 1920-Oct 1921 there is no mention of this petition in the Road & Works Committee Minutes although other letters and petitions are presented. (CCM6/27)

6 Oct 1921 Health & Housing Committee the question was raised as to the wall in Morley Road as to whether the same could be removed. It was mentioned that The Roads & Works Committee had some time had the matter under consideration. Resolved that the Road & Works Committee be asked what action they have taken in this matter (CCM20/13 Page 167)

24 Oct 1921 Resolution of the Health & Housing Committee to Roads & Works Committee the question of the removal of the wall between Morley Road and Highland Street - no order made (CCM6/27 Page 148)

In the printed Council Minutes 21 Nov 1921 Full committee meeting of council enquiry from Health & Housing Committee inquiring what has been done by the Roads & Works Committee with respect to the removal of the wall between Highland Street and Morley Road. Resolved to reply - nothing has been done.

1 Dec 1921 Health & Housing Committee report of the Road & Works Committee on 21 Nov 1921 states they can do nothing as they were not aware of any authority to remove the wall being submitted to the committee. CCM20/13 Page 219)

David Otton in another newspaper Hampshire Telegraph 29 February 1908 found that Henry Clark having failed to sell the 20 houses in Morley Road and another 20 in Glasgow Road could not pay the interest on his mortgage and was appearing at bankruptcy court. The outcome is not stated.

This may explain why the houses are in the rates books as owned by Bailey & Whites as Henry presumably could not pay them what he owed for the land and materials so they took the houses back in compensation in which case he would not be declared bankrupt. Bailey and Whites Ltd in addition to supplying land and materials to local builders would sometimes supply mortgages, providing a 'complete service' to local builders.

In the 1899 local company Bailey & Whites Ltd was set up converting two existing companies Bailey & Son, Timber & Slate Merchants; and Whites Joinery into an estate and development company; buying land selling small plots to local builders, letting them have materials all on account to be paid off when the houses sold with interest. (528A/1/1/1-3)

The shareholder's register (528A/2/1/1) for Bailey & Whites Ltd does not have any entry for any of the Morley family.

The directors minutes books (528A/1/1/1-3) for Bailey & Whites Ltd have no reference to Highland

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Street, Morley Road or a wall - these are 'high' level meetings with transfers of shares, land, loans to builders and dividends, sadly not the day to day business of the company.

There is, however, mention as to disputes for continuation of streets where the compensation to the existing owner was felt inadequate for passing over, drainage, making up of road etc. That in the minutes being between Bailey & Whites Ltd and Messrs Bailey, White & White! In this case Highland Street was an adopted street not under control of the developer so passage should not have been stopped.

As mentioned earlier somewhat ironically of the 'better class' of houses in Morley Road some were affected by subsidence as reported in the council minutes of 21 Nov 1978; numbers 14-16 & 7-15 Morley Road are affected by major subsidence and are not suitable for improvements as part of the General Improvement Area and are to be demolished after CPO is raised.

They were replaced by garages in 1982/83.

Summary

The wall was built on 15th May 1906 for Bailey & Whites

The houses in Morley Road were built after 24th September 1906.

So there are three mysteries now in place of who was Lady Morley.

- 1 Why did Bailey & Whites need to build a wall? None of the other roads they laid out or extended have a wall.
- 2 Why were they allowed to retain it when any other unplanned work even a shed could be ordered to be taken down?
- 3 Why did the council in the 1920s and 1970s not know who owned the wall? When they knew in 1906.