

## **History of Glen Eyre House, Bassett and Glen Eyre Hall of Residence, University of Southampton**

### Introduction

The history of large houses in and around Southampton is well covered in a range of books and articles in the local press written by Southampton's best known local historian Elsie M. Sandell born in 1891 and who died in 1974. She inherited her love of Southampton from her father George W. Sandell who was born in 1853 on the Isle of Wight and died in 1945. However both she and Jessica Vale in her informative article entitled "The Country Houses of Southampton", published in 1983, make no substantial reference to Glen Eyre House. Nothing appears to have been written about the family who built the house, how it came into the hands of the University or its inception as a hall of residence for students. As a contribution to the history of the City and University this article attempts to fill that void.

Miss Sandell's father was a successful ship broker and according to the 1901 Census, when he and his family were living at Highclere, No.63, Portswood Road, also a shipping agent and merchant and Consul for Finland and Norway. The house still exists. He received an education at the School of Art opened in 1855 and housed in what was originally the Savings Bank, in Havelock Road. The bank was built in 1860, almost over the railway tunnel and close to the 1896 building of King Edward VI Grammar School. Both buildings were badly bombed but survived into the post-War period. The School of Art became entangled in the difficulties of the early days of the Hartley Institution founded in 1862 which ultimately grew into the University of Southampton. The University was established by Royal Charter in 1952.

### Origins of Glen Eyre Hall of Residence

The present large complex of buildings known as Glen Eyre Halls of Residence at Glen Eyre, Bassett takes its name from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century house called Glen Eyre House. Many years before the University of Southampton acquired the site it contained a large Victorian dwelling house set in an extensive park owned by a distinguished retired soldier, Col. Eyre John Macdonnell Stewart Crabbe, who built the house in about 1860. More of him and his family later, but it is apparent where the name Glen Eyre Hall comes from.

The Crabbes had long since left before 18 acres were sold to the then University College in 1947 for the purpose of student accommodation. Remarkably the College's plans for post-war expansion were drawn up in 1941 at a most critical time for the country and particularly Southampton as the second wave of massive bombing of the town was in July of that year.

By 1944 when a successful outcome to the War could more easily be seen a Senate committee produced a report entitled "The Needs of the University College in the Post War Period". This showed a highly developed plan for the future in terms of teaching staff, library, refectory and bookshop as well as a significant expansion of student accommodation. The College at that time applied to the County Borough Council, as the planning authority, for approval in principle of these developments. The Glen Eyre land was specifically included in these proposals. At an early stage the plan for Glen Eyre was for four halls of residence. A considerably larger scheme than was actually implemented.

## The Architects and the original students' accommodation

In the session 1946/7 the University College was granted substantial sums by the Government to buy Glen Eyre estate and other land, e.g., the former brickfield in University Road to the west of the present Students' Union and Refectory buildings. Plans were drawn up by local architects, known as Gutteridge and Gutteridge. The practice comprised Alfred Fowler Gutteridge (1856-1919), father and his son Lt. Col. Reginald Fowler Gutteridge (1882-1965). The latter had designed various University College buildings pre-War, principally the 1935 Turner Sims building, now known as the Hartley Library which was built to link two existing wings built just before the outbreak of the 1914 -1918 war.

Reginald's obituary in the RIBA Journal of 1966 specifically mentions his responsibility for Glen Eyre Hall erected in the early 1950s. It also warrants a mention in Pevsner's 'The Buildings of England Hampshire: South, 2018' where it is said that the original Halls of Residence are of a Neo-Georgian style set in a "sylvan, undulating landscape".

The elder Gutteridge designed St.Barnabas Church, Lodge Road in 1901. His son designed its replacement following war damage in 1956 and is buried there.

The original scheme shows students' Blocks A to F, as well as the Warden's Lodge, now Block W, and the Dining Hall, as a three-sided quadrangle surrounding an ornamental pond with attractive landscaping. The pond can be seen on an 1865 map when the Crabbe family were the first owners and builders of Glen Eyre House. Although the site of the pond has sadly been paved over it still remains the focal point of the quadrangle as originally intended. Near F and G Blocks, in particular, are some superb specimen trees planted by the Crabbes, including a magnificent Tulip tree. The trees date from the days when the gardens and surrounding park were of national importance.

## Glen Eyre House

The carriage road to the old house lead from Bassett Avenue via Chetwynd Road/Glen Eyre Road junction past an entrance lodge still standing in the 1950s, past W Block, to approximately where Selborne Court now stands. The house built in about 1861 was demolished in 1948. Ten years later all that remained was the imposing brick arched entrance to the front door rising up from a thicket of brambles.

The earliest O.S. Map of 1865 of the estate shows a large house in the middle of a park of 59 acres lying to the east of Bassett Avenue which was then, as now, the main road out of Southampton to the north. Glen Eyre House was one of the first of large detached Victorian villas to be built in an area of dense woods and open heathland area known as Bassett Wood, part of a much larger area, known as Stoneham Common. The land was owned by an ancient family called Fleming who owned some fifteen thousand acres in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and are referred to in more detail below.

Stoneham Common itself comprised, five thousand acres lying on the northern boundary of Southampton Common and stretched well up to modern Chandler's Ford. The land was leased to the Crabbe family by the Fleming estate for one thousand years from about 1860.

In an article by Elsie Sandell written for the Southern Evening Echo in August, 1958 she includes a plan of a projected building estate. This was published about 1850 and shows the whole of Stoneham Common east of Bassett Avenue divided into building plots. The plan was intended to attract wealthy purchasers as the particulars accompanying it state that three lessees from the Fleming Estate have erected houses "at a cost of upwards of £3,000". One of which was a house called Bassett Wood in 163 acres. The seat of the Bullars a very well-known and influential family of lawyers and doctors. However apart from these houses and Glen Eyre House itself the land remained largely undeveloped until post 1945.

On the east of Glen Eyre House and lying below it in the valley to the south east were extensive grounds with a large fish pond. At the southern end near the present junction of Glen Eyre Road and Violet Road stood Glen Eyre Farm. The site of the farm now contains several houses built in 1958/9. From the Census records it seems that it was a small dairy farm. The cows were pastured in fields where Cantell School, formerly Glen Eyre Secondary, has been erected. Large animal bones were dug up in a garden near the school in March, 2018.

The northern boundary was marked in the 1860s, as it still is, by Glen Eyre Drive curving round past the back of the Dining Hall, kitchens, etc. but in those days to the stables, greenhouses and servants' cottages. Fortunately the family name of Crabbe is preserved in Crabbe Lane, a pathway running between Glen Eyre Drive and The Parkway. Both of course modern developments.

Glen Eyre House was certainly a highly desirable Victorian 'gentleman's residence' built for an owner of considerable means. From drawings of the house in its early days of about 1860 we can see that it stood on a ridge looking south east down a narrow but deep valley towards Swaythling with a fine view across the Itchen valley to the distant countryside. Steeply descending garden terraces lead to a lake surrounded by woodland.

The gardens were on a "scale and degree of perfection not to be seen elsewhere in this locality" declared a report of a visit by members of the Royal Southampton Horticultural Society in about 1880. For a long time Mrs. Crabbe was a subscriber to the Society. The first mention nationally was in a long and enthusiastic description written in The Gardeners' Chronicle of June, 1877. The gardens were famous for spring flowers, and also for camellias in particular and "what in modern parlance is termed Pinetum". Even today the grounds are still well-wooded.

No contemporary details appear to be traceable about the architect of the house or its precise date of construction but from plans and illustrations it was a substantial building. The first reference is found in the 1861 Census when lived in by Col. Crabbe's wealthy widow, Elmina Crabbe, his second wife. She and her two sons aged nine and twenty four, were looked after by a complement of servants, consisting of a butler, governess, lady's maid, two housemaids, cook and groom. Several gardeners and the dairyman and his family in Glen Eyre Farm were recorded separately in the Census records.

The house was of two storeys with cellars and of light coloured brick with stone dressings under a shallow roof of pantiles and deeply projecting eaves. A balcony ran along the whole of the broad south east front overlooking the valley. The appearance was suggestive of a Mediterranean villa rather in the style of Osborne House on the Isle of Wight.

The 1912 Particulars of Sale drawn up by estate agents, with a London address, refer to fourteen bedrooms, four bathrooms and six reception rooms as well as a library, smoking room, billiard room and music room. Also included were stables for seven horses and a "coach house or motor house". A sign of the times. The grounds also contained two lodges, a "charming old thatched cottage" and a small farmhouse as well as accommodation for the gardeners. As well as the gardens referred to there were a kitchen garden, greenhouses, a vinery, orchards, and a stream feeding the lake. Out of the total of 59 acres 28 were assigned to pasture.

Altogether a very substantial country estate and according to the Agents "one of the most picturesque Residential Properties in the County".

### The Fleming Family and North Stoneham

The mid- 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the slow development of a large area of rough land to the north of Southampton Common belonging to the Fleming family who owned five thousand acres spreading from Swaythling in the south, north towards today's Chandler's Ford and then to Chilworth in the west. Their seat was a substantial classical mansion originally built in 1818, but rebuilt in 1913 and demolished in the 1920s, even before it was completely finished. Known as North Stoneham House it stood near the mediaeval church of St. Nicholas in Stoneham Lane

The Fleming estate has an interesting history. It was bought in 1599 by Sir Thomas Fleming born in 1544 on the Isle of Wight. He was a barrister of Lincoln's Inn who rose to be Lord Chief Justice of England (1607-1613). He is perhaps better known as presiding, with Sir John Popham of the Middle Temple, over the Gunpowder Plot trial of Guy Fawkes in 1605. It was said of Fleming that during the trial he looked very wise and said nothing.

He also founded a grammar school in Newport, Isle of Wight in 1614 known as King James Grammar School.

St, Nicholas Church houses the impressive tomb of Sir Thomas and his wife. Depicted in marble are their effigies, and in tiers below, their eight children kneeling in prayer. The Lord Chief Justice in his judicial robes and chain of office reclines on his elbow resting on a cushion as does Lady Fleming.

Although not resident in Southampton (he preferred living on his estates on the Isle of Wight) he had family connections with the town dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Several of his ancestors had been mayors. Not surprising then that the Fleming coat-of-arms can be seen on the north side of the Bargate. Before his appointment as the most senior judge in the Kingdom he had been an M.P. for Southampton, Solicitor-General and Recorder of Southampton, a lesser judicial office.

Sir Thomas bought the extensive Manor of North Stoneham in 1599 from Henry Wriothesley, third Earl of Southampton, well known as Shakespeare's patron. The first Earl was granted the Manor by Henry VIII as part of the distribution of monastic lands following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539. This broke a chain of monastic ownership arising before the Norman Conquest. The Manor had been originally owned by King Athelstan (894-939) before being granted to Hyde Abbey, Winchester, in 965.

## The Crabbe Family : Builders of Glen Eyre House.

Returning to the Crabbe family history shows that Col. Eyre Crabbe (1791-1859) was descended from a Southampton merchant, John Grove who was mayor in 1714 and again in 1726. Col. Crabbe was the builder of Glen Eyre House in about 1859 but it seems unlikely that he ever saw the house finished as he died in the same year. Probate of his Will dated 19<sup>th</sup> April shows the executors, his wife Elmina and the Vicar of Christchurch, Portswood, (now known as Highfield Church), as living in the parish.

His obituary published in the Hants Independent in March, 1859 refers to the many aspects of public life with which he was concerned. Closely involved with local politics he was also a keen supporter and benefactor of Highfield Church from its foundation in 1847 and its neighbouring primary school. He was a Justice of the Peace for both the Borough and County. But principally he was known for his "unwearying devotion" to the Royal South Hants Infirmary by chairing the Committee of Management and by generous donations so that the Hospital's "coffers have been replenished again and again".

Crabbe was a distinguished long-serving soldier who had been under the Duke of Wellington's command for several years in Spain and Portugal during the Peninsular War of 1807-1814 against Napoleon. He had commanded the 74<sup>th</sup> Highland Regiment having joined as a teenager and left on retirement in 1846 to settle in Southampton where his mother and sister lived at 28, Portland Street. The house on the south side in a terrace of c.1830, in a highly fashionable area, was destroyed by war-time bombs. In Southampton City Record Office there are letters from Crabbe to his mother just before retiring. In those letters he writes from Canada that he did not always enjoy military life and that he might have been happier as a clergyman. Perhaps he was suffering from the stress of a long, professional soldier's life served through a major European war.

His parents were Joseph William, born in 1761 formerly a colonel in the East India Company and his mother, Sarah Raggett, born in Alverstoke in 1762 but married in Devon. She died in 1852 at the age of ninety in Southampton. It is not clear when or why she and her daughter, Eliza, moved to Southampton.

Soon after arriving in Southampton Crabbe married a wealthy widow, Harriet Hollis, a Crabbe cousin, in 1846. She was his first wife and died in Highfield in 1848. Her first husband was Askew Pafford Hollis, a Vice-Admiral, born in 1766. He had married Harriet in 1826 at All Saints' Church, now vanished, just below the Bargate and died in Highfield in 1844. He had bought a one acre plot in what is now called Highfield Road overlooking The Common. It is not known when the admiral acquired the land and built on it but in the Record Office there is an application by him, dated December, 1833, requesting permission from the Corporation to erect posts and rails, presumably on The Common, "against the ditch opposite his house." In 1834 there is a request by a Mr. Blanchard "to continue Admiral Hollis' railings at Highfield." A street directory reference shows him still in possession in 1839.

The relevance of this small piece of land in the history of the Crabbes and Glen Eyre House is that Col. Crabbe bought it in 1847 probably from Hollis' executors. The exact site can be seen in Philip Brannon's book 'The Picture of Southampton, 1850' and the Rate Books record his ownership from January, 1847 to January 1856.

In 1851 he married again yet another wealthy widow, Elmina Spooner, as his second wife. She was aged thirty eight and he was sixty. Her address on the Marriage Certificate is given as Oak Villa, 3, Grosvenor Square, Southampton. The building still

stands but forlornly in the badly mutilated Regency square. She is shown at that address where she had lived with her husband Henry Spooner, who died in Southampton in 1849. The 1851 Census compiled just a few months before her marriage to the Colonel describes her as a widow living with her son, Henry Spooner, junior, born in 1837.

Her first husband, Henry Spooner was born in Birmingham in 1776. Elmina was his second wife. His first wife had died in 1829. She had no Southampton links and died without issue.

Henry had an interesting background with Hampshire connections. His father Isaac (1735-1816) was a successful Birmingham ironmaster, nail manufacturer and banker and founded the Birmingham Bank. He was an evangelical and strongly against the slave trade. Isaac's wife Barbara Gough was the sister of Henry Gough-Calthorpe, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Calthorpe (d.1798) who had extensive estates in Birmingham and Elvetham in north east Hampshire. They had ten children one of whom, was Henry. His sister Barbara (1777- 1847) married William Wilberforce, M.P., the great anti-slave trade campaigner. As William Hague writes in his biography of Wilberforce "Miss Spooner was...Barbara Ann...the third of ten children of a wealthy Birmingham businessman. She was twenty years old, regarded as 'extremely handsome'. Having known Barbara for precisely eight days, he wrote to her proposing marriage." On the evening of the same day she had accepted him and it proved a successful marriage.

Reverting to Elmina her own wealth was derived from her family's connections with the West Indies. She was the daughter of James Law Stewart who with his brother Robert owned nearly a thousand slaves on two separate estates in Jamaica. Her mother Anne Wilhelmina Brisset and her family were also slave owners in Jamaica. The family connection with Wilberforce is therefore perhaps a little ironic.

In the 1871 Census she is shown with her nine year old son Eyre Macdonnell Stewart Crabbe and a good complement of seven indoor servants. The younger Eyre was still at Glen Eyre in 1871 living with his mother and thirty four year old step brother Henry Spooner, Junior. In due course the younger Eyre became a soldier like his father and fought with distinction in the Sudan and the South African Wars (1899-1902). He was promoted to Brigadier General and served with the Grenadier Guards. He died in 1905 aged forty seven when he was back in Aldershot.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle commented on his appearance as being "burly, broad-shouldered with a full black squared beard". He also added that "he was a man worth noting". This was in the context of a certain recklessness in battle.

Mrs. Crabbe continued at Glen Eyre until her death, while on a recuperative holiday, in Italy in 1888. During her long occupation she devoted herself mainly to the outstanding gardens which were frequently opened to local charities for fund raising. She followed her late husband's benevolence to the Royal South Hants Hospital on a magnanimous scale culminating in the building of the Eyre Crabbe Wing in 1868 at a cost of £3,600 thus providing thirty six extra beds. On her death the Hants Advertiser commented that "No one was more generous to the public institutions and charitable causes of the Town than she was".

## Owners since the Crabbes

The House and estate passed to her younger son. He may not have been living there at that time as he was in the Army on active service. However, he sold in 1898 to a widow Mrs. Louisa Mitchell-Molyneux. She is not known to have any Southampton connections and the house on her death was sold to Thomas Walker in 1909. A retired Ceylonese merchant he sold in 1913 to a former business colleague, Charles Pickering Hayley, who died at Glen Eyre in 1934. Walker and Hayley were well-known, successful merchants in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka, and showed some enterprise by setting up an ice-making company.

His eldest son Alec took over the business on his father's retirement in 1913 but he also retired in 1925 and settled in Southampton near his father. His address in Bassett was the Tower House, a large house on the corner of Bassett Avenue and Winchester road. The present Tower Gardens now cover the site. Sadly he only survived his father's death by two years.

The old house seems to have been deserted for several years after Hayley's death. No history exists to show any war-time emergency use. However in 1962 on the opening of Glen Eyre Secondary School, built on a parcel of neighbouring land, Miss Elsie Sandell makes a passing reference to use by soldiers. She was the chief guest at the opening and in her speech she comments on the beautiful gardens and her close friendship with the Hayley family.

Kelly's Street Directories show that Glen Eyre Farm continued for several years post-War.

The Local Studies section of the Civic Centre Library has pre-War plans drawn up by the Southampton Improvement Trust Ltd., a company set up to develop the estate for house building. This scheme like the 1850 one came to nothing no doubt because of the outbreak of war.

## Development by the University

The next phase for the estate, if not the house, begins in 1947/48 when the University College bought it from the development company for a students' hall of residence. From the plans deposited in 1952 with Southampton Corporation the original lay out of the Blocks A to H is exactly as seen today. The Main Hall was for students, dining, kitchens and administrative purposes. The eastern wing contained a small first floor library and T.V. room with communal space on the ground floor known as the Junior Common Room which gave access to the Dining Hall. The balancing western wing comprised several flats for academic staff, the Warden's Office and the Senior Common Room with a connecting door on to a dais in the Hall.

Block W, which used to stand next to a small cottage built as a lodge for the old House, housed the Warden and his family.

These original buildings were designed by the well-established local architects, Gutteridge and Gutteridge, who had also been responsible for some pre-War buildings such as the Turner-Sims Building of 1935 which held the University College's main library. They also designed the old Students Union facing across University Road Turner Sims, now the Hartley Library. They also designed Connaught Hall, South Stoneham in 1931. All were made of a strong-coloured red brick exemplifying the term "red brick universities", not much used these days when

concrete is a more popular medium.

The Glen Eyre accommodation, built in stages between 1949 and 1955, housed 150 men, and consisted mainly of 'flats' of six single study bedrooms on each floor of six two-storey blocks. A few academics were scattered around in the same blocks but they enjoyed the addition of a sitting room as well as bedroom. Each 'flat' had a small kitchen with a gas ring.

A glimpse at student life at Glen Eyre in the 1950s and 60s

At that time Glen Eyre Hall like its counterparts at the University, both for men and women, (who in those days were strictly segregated), was run on collegiate lines. Students were expected to attend dinner in the Dining Hall at 7.0.p.m. on weekdays and 1.0.p.m. lunch on Sundays. This was not considered restrictive. Indeed payment had already been made as part of the fees due to the University and met out of the grants then available to students from public funds. Apart from which the Glen Eyre kitchens provided good quality food in adequate amounts under the supervision of the Domestic Bursar, Miss Norah Cuthbert, who was a force to be reckoned with. A dress code applied at dinner and consisted of jackets and ties, and black undergraduate gowns. Students collected their food from a serving counter and the wide sleeves of the gowns were helpful in handling hot plates and so acquired an interesting array of stains. Breakfast which was informal was also provided daily in the Dining Hall.

The whole establishment was presided over by Maj. H.C.H.Mead who had served with distinction in the Far East during World War II and had been held for some years by the Japanese as a prisoner- of -war. In his dealings with the students he was firm but genial, well-liked by his "gentlemen" as he called his students. He had a long tenure as Warden. He was appointed in 1951 as the first Warden and served until retirement in 1972. Having graduated from Cambridge after his war-time experiences he held a part-time teaching appointment in English in the University.

He and his wife frequently invited students to their home in the Warden's Lodge, Now Block W. Mrs. Mead would often walk round the grounds in the evening and engage in conversation with students also enjoying the gardens. The Meads did a lot to encourage a sense of community among the students. For example, Maj. Mead, always known as the 'Major', regularly invited students to drinks in the Senior Common Room and then to dinner with him and the other 'dons' at High Table on the dais in the Dining Hall. Near his chair was a highly polished side-table brought back from India. The top was supported by two plump wooden elephants. The elephant became a symbol for Glen Eyre. It appeared on stationery, etc. and not surprisingly on the undergraduates' Hall tie which was black, liberally sprinkled with silver elephants.

At dinner he always began the meal by saying Grace in Latin, as follows: "Tuis donis, Domine, ad tuam gloriam, recte utamur." This can be translated as "May we, O Lord, use your gifts properly to your glory."

He also produced a booklet for students entitled "On Writing Letters". The cover was decorated with an elephant with a bow-tie writing a letter with an inky quill pen on a tree stump. The object was to show undergraduates the etiquette of letter-writing .It must be remembered that e-mails did not then exist.

All the University's Halls of Residence were then single sex and visiting by women to Glen Eyre was restricted to Wednesdays and week-ends. This applied to men visiting



women's Halls. This rule was taken seriously by Miss Lightbody, the Warden of Highfield Hall, who placed herself on open days at the front door and viewed men visitors very keenly. As Nash and Sherwood say in "The University of Southampton- An Illustrated History" 2002, "She ran Highfield like a lady of the manor." However unlike Maj.Mead she did not run an elderly Rolls-Royce of which he was very proud.

In 1959 a Christmas Pantomime was performed by the students in the Dining Hall. It was written and produced by them and drew upon a wide variety of talents ranging from a very competent producer to actors, stage-hands and make-up artists. Friends in Chamberlain Hall were of great assistance with costumes. Catchingly entitled "Cinderella. A Dramatic Catastrophe in Three Spasms". It was a good-humoured satire on life and personalities in the Hall and University and was enthusiastically reviewed in the Students' Union newspaper "Wessex News" in January, 1960. Not surprisingly the programmes displayed the Hall's emblem of the elephant.

### Conclusion

The Hall of Residence site was clearly large enough to permit further development. Nash and Sherwood in The University of Southampton. An Illustrated History tell us that little student accommodation was provided from about 1970 to 1985. In the early 1990s a relatively small amount of building took place. However this was followed by much greater expansion in the late 1990s as can be seen from the erection of New Terrace.

This completes the history of the house. The University continues to grow. The Glen Eyre site was large enough to allow further residential development from the 1950s so that the student population has now grown from one hundred and fifty men to about two thousand. The appearance of the former country estate is of course vastly different today. And although the Crabbes and the Meads would probably be horrified at the sprawl of modern buildings looming over the 1950s Hall it is hoped they would appreciate the standard of facilities and the degree of comfort afforded to the students by a leading university.

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