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### Carlton Crescent: Southampton's most spectacular Regency development

Rightly described by Pevsner and Lloyd as "the most spectacular piece of Regency development in Southampton", Carlton Crescent has happily kept most of its original architectural integrity and appeal, strong enough to withstand the intrusion of a post-war office block replacing a group of houses destroyed by bombing in World War II (figure 1).

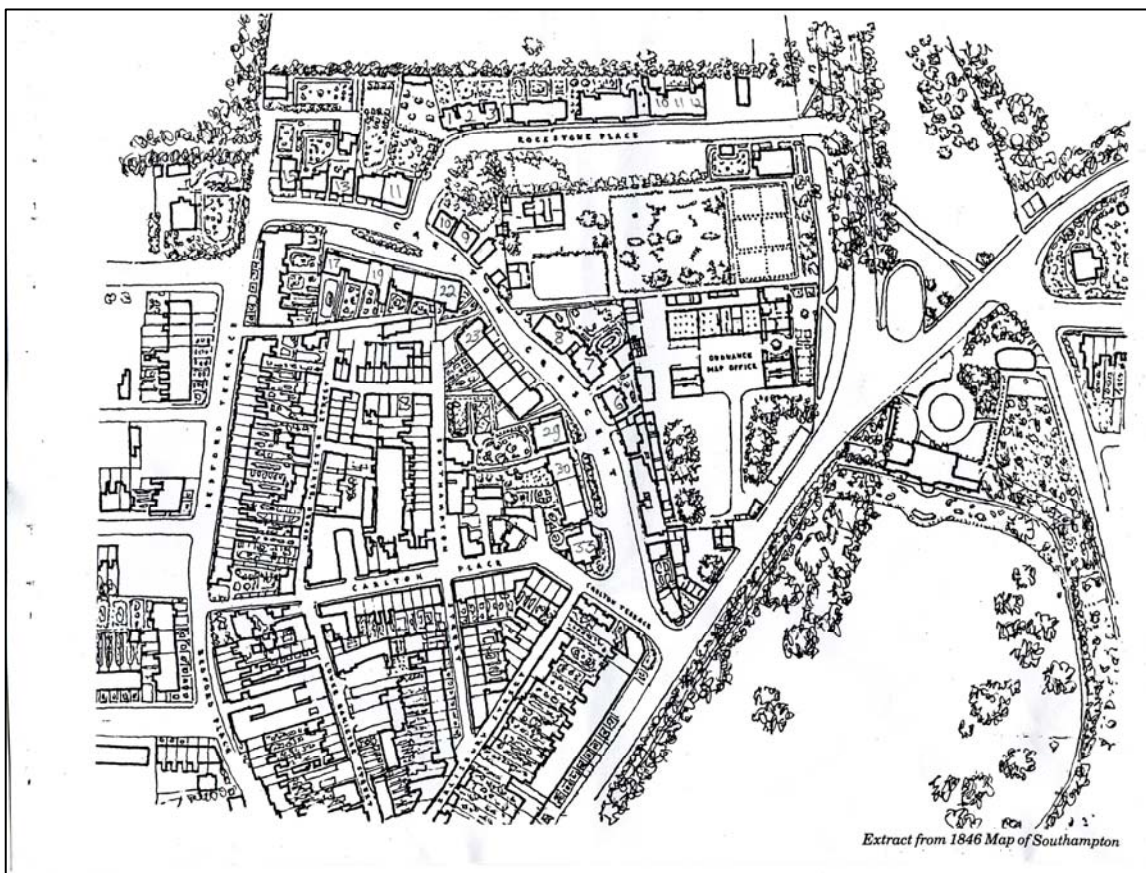


Figure 1 Carlton Crescent and surrounding area – drawn by R J Coles from the 1846 Ordnance Survey map, with some current street numbers added. This map shows how the layout of Carlton Crescent had to be related to the site boundaries of the Royal Military Asylum/Ordnance Survey Office

The whole crescent presents an attractively unified aspect but it was, in fact, built up piecemeal over a period of 10-15 years from 1825, as the most noteworthy feature of the “genteel upper part of the town” at a time when Southampton was rapidly expanding, both as a fashionable residential resort and commercial centre.

A century later, changing social conditions led to conversions from residential to institutional, business and office use, a process hastened in 1940 by destruction of city centre premises. Carlton Crescent has now become an area of “prestige offices” at the heart of Southampton’s legal, financial and professional activities.

These developments are exemplified in the history of Clarence House, later styled Avondale House, the three storey and basement “town house” dating from 1833, renovated, adapted and extended in the 1990s, which still dominates the southern side of the upward sweep of Carlton Crescent from London Road to Bedford Place.

It was one of the last houses built in Carlton Crescent and one of the largest, although – unlike most of those on the opposite side of the road – it did not have a coach house.

Clarence House was built in 1833 for James Hawkins Thring, a successful High Street wine merchant, who also invested in a similar house in nearby Cumberland Place.

Clarence House remained empty for nearly two years, until it was leased from 1835 by Mrs Eliza Purvis, widow of Admiral John Purvis. She subsequently bought it and spent the rest of her life there .... in some style, for the 1851 census recorded her, then 81, with a living-in staff of seven – butler, footman and five female servants.

On her death in 1858, the house passed to her daughter Eliza, wife of Captain Richard Beaumont Burnaby. Twenty years later, she bequeathed the property jointly to her three sons – Alexander Dickson Burnaby, Richard Briones Burnaby and Eustace Beaumont Burnaby – and her daughter Eularia Elizabeth Burnaby.

The menfolk all pursued army careers, respectively attaining the ranks of Major, Colonel and Major General. The last of them having died in 1916, the surviving Miss Burnaby found it necessary to sell the old family home early in 1918 – to the well known Southampton public figure and estate agent, William Burrough Hill.

The price of £1,050 probably represented about half what the house had cost to build 85 years previously.

Burrough Hill briefly used it as auction rooms and stores, before selling it in 1920 to Brown Bros Ltd, a London-based firm of motor car and cycle factors, who used it as offices. The purchase price of £3,000 then reflected post-war inflation as well as revival in the property market.

In 1933 the building was acquired by the Southampton builders Brazier & Son Ltd, in connection with the building of a new depot for Brown Bros in Marsh Lane.

Braziers renamed it Avondale House, taking the name of the Victorian villa in Portswood Road which had become a Brazier family home in 1896 and played an important role in the firm's development, as the base for its stores and works and as offices from 1940, after being bombed out from Above Bar, until 1967, when the seven-generation family business moved to new premises at Millbrook.

Avondale House was let as offices, eg to Swan National Car Rentals (1956-92) and the Southern Regional Examinations Board (1974-89). Renovated, extended and internally adapted in the 1990s, the building was sold to new owners and now accommodates a bar-restaurant.

Incidentally, Avondale House, with its impressive corner frontage and portico entrance, was glimpsed, even if not recognised, by millions on television, for it was used in 1989 as the setting for parts of the BBC1 four-part thriller "Chains".

Pevsner and Lloyd (*Buildings of England: Hampshire and the Isle of Wight*, page 560) describe Carlton Crescent as "composed in the main of broad three-bay three-storey stuccoed detached houses, mostly sufficiently close to each other for the street, except in a few places, to appear as a piece of unified townscape...."

The authors go on to write: "The houses generally give an effect of austere elegance and economy of detail, in a manner that might, perhaps, be more appropriate to a medium such as granite than stucco. Did the anonymous

designers of these and similar houses come from somewhere like Plymouth or Aberdeen?"

The answer must be in the negative. Research in old rate books, directories, deeds and other documents preserved in Southampton City Archives has yielded enough facts to establish when and by whom Carlton Crescent was conceived, laid out and built up, identifying the prime movers in its creation, along with that of Rockstone Place, its more modest complement.

*Edward and Samuel Toomer*

They were the businessman Edward Toomer (1764-1852) and his architect son Samuel Toomer (1801-42).

Edward Toomer, born at Newbury, came from a Berkshire family of some substance. His marriage at Abingdon in 1790 to Hannah Fletcher was blessed with two sons and eight daughters. Their father was evidently enterprising and ambitious, wanting to provide well for his family.

He sought a wider sphere of activity, moving by 1800 to Southampton, where he prospered in his ironmongery business, with his shop in a prime position at 130 High Street, opposite Holy Rood church.

Within a few years he was able to diversify into banking, in partnership with Cornelius Trim. From 1812, Trim and Toomer's Bank several times made loans to the Corporation, with which Edward Toomer was later more directly involved. In 1835 he became a member of the newly reformed Borough Council, elected as a Conservative councillor for All Saints ward: six years later he was made an alderman, serving until his death in 1852.

Between 1801 and 1851 the population of Southampton rose from under 8,000 to over 34,000 – small in comparison to today but representing an unusually rapid rate of growth, particularly in the years 1820-40, when a buoyant "service economy" uplifted the town ahead of the advent of railway and docks.

Numerically, its main expansion was eastwards, in the St Mary's area, where many streets of small houses were quickly erected, but the prevailing "spirit of improvement and extension" was most noticeably applied northwards, along and beside Above Bar and London Road.

The houses built there in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were mostly of a character then described as "genteel ... respectable ... suited for persons in the middle and upper classes of life."

Such residences were, of necessity, complemented by "houses on an inferior scale", such as those in and to the east of Bedford Place/Terrace, rapidly built in the 1820s.

It was on land adjoining this area that in the same decade Southampton was given its most impressive and fashionable Regency-style development, in Carlton Crescent.

Edward Toomer must have had thoughts of such a project before 1819, when he leased one and three quarter acres of land immediately north of what was then the Royal Military Asylum – occupying the former "horse barracks", to be taken over by the Ordnance Survey in 1841.

In 1823 Toomer bought this land, for £315, from the assignees of John Antram, a local “butcher, dealer and chapman” who had become bankrupt in 1816 – as a result of mortgaging in 1809 the lands he had earlier inherited from his uncle of the same name and occupation.

These included the grazing fields, formerly part of old Bannisters Farm, still known by their medieval names of Great and Little Mongers.

Also in 1823 Toomer bought another two acres of Antram’s land, part of Great Mongers. The price of £858 covered acquisition of the “farm house, ox-stalls and other outbuildings” – which Toomer was soon to demolish.

The Little Mongers plot represented the eastern half of the future Rockstone Place; the “parcel of Great Mongers” comprised the north-eastern part of Carlton Crescent – the houses now numbered 1-8.

The land opposite had already been sold to the Southampton auctioneer James Linden, who split it into building plots. He must have worked in conjunction with Toomer because some of them fronted the crescent to be laid out on the latter’s land, while in 1825 Toomer bought from Linden two house plots to the south of the future Clarence House.

Meanwhile, in 1819, Antram’s assignees had sold a 3 acre “parcel of a field called Little Mongers” for £475 to John Curtis, a prosperous grocer. He soon had two houses built on its Bedford Terrace/Place frontage – Bedford Cottage and Wilton Lodge, which happily survive – but did not further develop his land, for in November 1824 he sold the whole property to Edward Toomer.

This provided the sites for the western section of Rockstone Place and both sides of the north-western part of Carlton Crescent (today’s numbers 9-22), thus completing the land assembly for the Toomer project.

Now much admired for its elegance and symmetry, Carlton Crescent displays considerable subtlety of layout, with a variety of buildings (almost all three storeys and basement) well proportioned and arranged, combining elements of individual design and overall unity of scale and harmony. They embrace both terraced groupings and detached houses linked by single storey pavement walls that originally included entrances to their coach houses.

Although built over a period of some 15 years, Carlton Crescent must initially have been conceived as a whole, most probably by Samuel Toomer.

In the 1820s he was listed as both architect and ironmonger – helping his father at 130 High Street, like his brother Joseph who continued that business – but in the 1830s Southampton directories noted him only as an architect or architect and surveyor. These were then more or less self-taught professions, usually acquired by some form of apprenticeship. Samuel Toomer may have served a period of pupilage with one of the several architects established in Southampton to serve the expanding town.

Either side of 1840, before his untimely death, Samuel Toomer lived successively at Bedford Cottage and Wilton Cottage (later styled Lodge). The 1841 census recorded him at Bedford Cottage; the only other person in that house on census night was 35 years old Susan James, presumably his housekeeper.

Samuel Toomer died suddenly, unmarried and intestate, on a date variously given as December 14/15/19 in contemporary 1842 newspapers. The *Hampshire Advertiser* simply recorded his death at Wilton Lodge. The *Hampshire Independent* described him in its Southampton columns as “architect of that town.” Neither paper accorded him an obituary notice which might have indicated some other houses for which Toomer may have been responsible, beyond those in the Carlton Crescent/Rockstone Place/Bedford Place area.

He is, however, known to have been the architect for Portland Baptist Chapel, opened in 1840. On 24 January 1843 Edward Toomer announced that he had made arrangements for the business lately carried on by his son to be continued by Charles M Doswell – the eldest son of the distinguished surveyor and civil engineer John Doswell Doswell.

Of the attractive yellow brick pair gracing Bedford Place, Bedford Cottage (1820) now has its frontage obscured by shop fronts but Wilton Lodge (1823) remains unspoilt: its classical Doric portico and assertively large semi-circular bay windows give the impression of a young architect’s extravaganza.

In 1831 Toomer must have taken great pleasure in enhancing the grouping by adding the delicately proportioned stucco features of Carlton Lodge around the corner in Carlton Crescent – “arguably the best small house in Southampton” according to the late John Arlott (perceptive in matters of architecture as well as cricket and wine), who rated the distinctive trio “as elegant a piece of architecture as one might find anywhere in Hampshire” (article in *Hampshire: the county magazine*, February 1973).

One can now only speculate as to other Toomer-designed houses in and around Bedford Place and elsewhere in Southampton but his direct responsibility for Rockstone Place is well documented and while some of the houses in Carlton Crescent may have derived from pattern books rather than his individual designs for clients, Samuel Toomer must be accorded major credit for sensitively implementing his father’s successful property speculation.

First mention of its progress was made in the *Hampshire Chronicle* of November 21, 1825, reviewing that year’s extensive “improvements” – “Carlton Crescent has this season made its appearance and contains 8 handsomely built residences; being detached, these will, when finished, form by far the handsomest line of houses in Southampton.”

It first featured in the rating list of October 1826, which recorded the house occupied by R D Pritchard Esq. By the following January four houses were taken, including the largest, styled Rockstone House (no. 8), which boasted a double coach house and stables, while its sizeable garden was complemented by a separate “pleasure ground” on the opposite side of the road (figure 2).

This property was owned by a well-to-do clergyman, Rev John Methuen, who lived there himself for some years before leasing it to Sir Henry Onslow.

Nearby, John Clerk Esq occupied “the sixth house on the newly formed line of houses called Carlton Crescent” – “a capital messuage with coach house and stables” built for him by Henry Buchan at a total cost of £2,900.



Closely involved with the Toomers were John and Benjamin Oakley, cabinet makers turned building contractors, who erected many of the houses in Carlton Crescent and Rockstone Place.



Figure 2 Rockstone House, 8 Carlton Crescent, now styled Ambassador House – once the home of the exiled Argentine dictator General Rosas, later a girls' school, private nursing home and then offices from the early 1900s (photograph by Wendy Stott)

In 1830 Edward Toomer sold to them for £1,300 the plots on which they built Carlton Lodge and the adjoining terrace of six houses now numbered 17-22, nicely set back from the road behind a “plantation” – which later provided useful off-street parking space.

The Oakleys sold one of their newly built houses (no. 19) for £1,400 to John Owen; he and his wife ran it as a high class “lodging house”. It continued as such while the Crescent became less fashionable, changing hands in 1897 for £1,200 and again in 1918 for only £675. In 1954 it was acquired as offices by the architect Bernard H Dale.

As building had progressed in Carlton Crescent, its ten houses occupied by mid-1829 rose to 17 in 1831 and 22 the next year, with another 8 newly built and awaiting takers.

Much of the building being speculative, houses often stood empty for some time before finding purchasers; alternatively, they were let on short tenancies or run as furnished apartments.

Rate book entries of the later 1830s show that of the 30 houses, 12 were owner-occupied. These were mostly the larger ones, catering for the “carriage

classes", including Admirals Sir John Gifford and Charles Tinling and Captains Charles DuCane and James Anderson. Of the other 18 houses, half were leased out and the others were lodging houses.

The Crescent was completed in the early 1840s by the building of Rockstone Terrace, a group of six houses, on Mr Methuen's former "pleasure ground."

### *Rockstone Place*

Meanwhile, Edward Toomer had in 1831 secured from the Corporation a right of way over the strip of common land adjoining the Avenue, to give a connection to it for the new road that was to be called Rockstone Place. His son Samuel organised its layout to create a Regency-style development pleasantly secluded off the grander Carlton Crescent and rated "genteel" rather than "fashionable."

It gives the appearance of an almost straight continuous terrace but actually comprises four groups of three houses each, successively completed in 1833-35-38-41. Later two storey extensions at the sides of numbers 7 and 9 were sensitively effected in 1881 and likewise a similar addition to no. 3 in 1886.

The area left vacant on the north-east side of Rockstone Place was subsequently filled by two late Victorian red brick houses erected in 1895, following the building of St Edmund's Roman Catholic church and presbytery.

Opposite them, back in 1840, Samuel Toomer had turned aside from the Regency style to produce one of his last projects, a substantial square yellow brick house of three storeys and basement, abutting the Avenue.

Styled Avenue House, this was seemingly spec-built. First appearing in the rate book in January 1841, as then vacant, it was leased that March by Thomas Leader Harman, the enterprising young proprietor of the local Liberal weekly, the *Hampshire Independent*. His manifold activities and involvements are the subject of a comprehensive and deeply researched article by Richard Preston published in *The Journal of the Southampton Local History Forum*, no. 16, Winter 2010.

After Harman left Avenue House in September 1842 it remained unlet until the summer of 1845, when it was taken by Mrs Eleanor Ward, an 80-year-old widow, and her unmarried daughter, both described by the 1851 census taker as "funded"; their income enabled them to keep five resident servants. From 1858 they were followed by tenants with more modest households, until in 1865 the house was taken over – initially rented, later purchased – by the Ordnance Survey. An English Heritage plaque records its occupation by the Director General, Lt-Gen Sir Henry James.

Following the removal of the Ordnance Survey to Maybush in 1969, what is now styled "The Director General's House" was later renovated and adapted, with extension, to serve from 1986 as prestige offices.

There was insufficient depth in the Toomer plot to allow suitably sized Regency-style houses to be built along the south side of Rockstone Place. This area was therefore laid out as a garden amenity for residents. To preserve it from possible future in-filling with smaller dwellings, in 1878 the three surviving Toomer sisters offered the land to the Borough Council, which accepted it by formal conveyance the following January, "to be kept as an open space for ever."



Neglected during the war, from the 1940s it served as a car park (the Rockstone Place houses did not have garages) until pressure from amenity societies prompted the Council to reinstate it in 1991 – as recorded on the plaque now identifying “Rockstone Place Park (Little Mongers)”.

Opposite it, no. 5 carries a pre-war stone tablet stating “In this house lived the Hero of Khartoum, General Charles George Gordon (Chinese Gordon) B. 1883 D. 1885.”

His home during the brief intervals between his service overseas was where his parents had lived from 1857 with their eldest daughter Mary Augusta – for whom her brother bought the house in 1874. Following her death in 1893 the house passed to her widowed sister Helen, who died in 1919, after which it was sold for use as offices.

In 1968 it was purchased by LSU College – appropriately to accommodate its History department. The block numbered 10-12, rebuilt after bomb damage, was occupied by the Art department. Altogether, 8 of the original 12 houses in Rockstone Place were acquired by the Sisters of La Sainte Union before and after the war, to complement the schools and College they developed on the site of Archers Lodge, bought in 1880.

Most are now back in residential or office use, following the absorption of the College in 1997 into the University of Southampton, which in 2007 sold its site and buildings for housing redevelopment ... not affecting Rockstone Place, whose “listed” buildings preserve their integrity dating from the 1830s.

### *The Changing Scene*

The most notorious resident of Carlton Crescent was the exiled Argentine dictator, General Juan Manuel de Rosas, who rented Rockstone House from 1852 until moving in 1865 to Burgess Street Farm, where he remained until his death in 1877.

Rockstone House was afterwards used as a girls boarding school and a private nursing home, then from the early 1900s as Ordnance Survey and other offices.

In 1994 the City Council affixed a plaque to what was now styled Ambassador House. This did not relate to General Rosas but stated “This house was the birthplace of EMILY DAVIES, born 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1830, died 13<sup>th</sup> July 1921. Campaigner for Women’s Education and Suffragette, Founder of Girton College, Cambridge.”

She certainly merits commemoration, albeit her Southampton connection comprised only a few months as a babe in arms. Her father, Rev John Davies (1795-1861) was an Anglican clergyman, vicar of St Pancras, Chichester, where, with his wife Mary, he started a boys boarding school in his vicarage. In 1828 he moved this school to Southampton, presumably relying on his income from it, since he does not seem to have held any benefice in this town.

Mr Davies was first listed in July 1828 as occupying a house in Carlton Crescent; he vacated it before the end of 1830, moving back to Chichester. In 1840 he secured the living of Gateshead, which he held for the rest of his life.

After his death, his daughter Emily moved to London, prominently identifying herself with the progressive women's movements of the time.

My research into the sequence of entries in the rate books established that the house where she was born was not in fact no. 8 but the one now numbered 6 – as detailed in an article in *Hampshire: the county magazine*, August 1994. This eventually led to the removal of the City Council plaque from No. 8 and its replacement in 2004 by an English Heritage plaque, correctly placed on no. 6, succinctly stating “EMILY DAVIES, 1830-1921, Campaigner for Women's Education, was born here.”

Across the road, a plaque erected over the doorway of no. 21 during the Southampton meeting of the British Association in 1925 records that “In this house from 1861 to 1881 lived Colonel A R Clarke, CB, FRS, who determined the figure of the earth.”



Figure 3 Carlton Crescent in the 1970s. On the right is the post-war office block Alleyn House in its original form, before its glass and panel frontage was improved by yellow brick cladding. At the left are some of the detached houses built in 1825-27 (photograph by Wendy Stott)

Alexander Ross Clarke (1828-1914) had passed out top of his year at Woolwich and joined the Royal Engineers; a posting to the Ordnance Survey gave full scope for his mathematical talents. He organised publication of masses of survey data, including an international project to calculate the exact dimensions of the earth, and wrote a standard book on geodesy. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1862 and honoured by other learned societies.

The Crescent was still favoured by retired army and naval officers but less in evidence were the “carriage folk” of earlier decades, in whose households servants had usually out-numbered family. Lady De Vere seems to have been the last titled resident around 1890. Towards the end of the century, the Crescent

was increasingly occupied by professional people and those who had prospered in business, rather than “persons of independent means.”

From 1900, five or more medical men were established there, including Dr J F Bullar, founder of the Eye Hospital, who lived at no. 7 for over twenty years. Several houses were occupied by “professors” of music and dancing or ladies running small private schools, as well as by St Anne’s Convent School. No. 9 was the family home of George S Hallum from 1894 to 1947, continuing until 1980 as the premises of the building firm he started.

Between the wars, the medical presence in Carlton Crescent dwindled away but at least half a dozen houses still provided board residence or apartments. Others were used as staff hostels of Plummer-Roddiss and Tyrell & Green and by the Church Army, Girls Friendly Society and “Darnells Hostel for Educated Women Workers.”

The longest-lasting private residence was probably Carlton Lodge, which Miss Archer inherited from her father in 1895; she remained there, with her companion Miss Axtell, for nearly half a century, maintaining the rituals of genteel living – without benefit of electricity, which she refused to admit to the house.

More houses were taken over by a variety of institutions, as diverse as friendly societies, Liberal Association, Temperance Institute, Theosophical Society, British Legion, Borough Engineer’s and other social clubs.

The heating and ventilating engineers Adams & Adams had their offices at 4 Carlton Crescent in the 1920s. The distinguished architect Herbert Collins bought no. 32 for his offices in 1935 and other architects also established themselves in the Crescent.

Wartime destruction of city centre premises led more businesses and organisations to move into offices in Carlton Crescent (figure 3). The change-over to office use continued in post-war years, starkly highlighted by the appearance of an intrusive new block on the site of bomb-destroyed Rockstone Terrace. The original harsh outline of Alleyn House was later softened by a yellow brick cladding. Much more sympathetic to its Regency location was the 1961 extension to St Anne’s Convent School, for which architects Sheppard, Robson & Partners received a Civic Trust award (figure 4).

Doctors Burnett and others kept their surgery at no. 5 for over thirty years into the 1970s and the Constitutional and Conservative Club occupied no. 20 for nearly fifty years but almost all the other buildings in Carlton Crescent became offices – accommodating solicitors, accountants, technical and financial advisers and consultants, property managers and developers, surveyors, insurance brokers *etc.*

For this specialised concentration of occupiers, Carlton Crescent provides a prestige address in an attractively located centre of professional activities. An



Figure 4 St Anne's Convent School buildings on the corner with Rockstone Place. Its 1961 extension nicely harmonises with its Regency-style neighbours (photograph by Wendy Stott)

outstanding feature of the Southampton townscape has thus been given a new lease of life, likely to continue for many decades. Generally well maintained and sensitively modernised with full respect for their exterior, the “listed” buildings of Carlton Crescent are now more highly esteemed than at any time in their long history.

Edward and Samuel Toomer would be pleased to see how they have endured... (figure 5).

### *Postscript*

This article is a revised and extended version of the one originally published in *Hampshire: the county magazine*, May 1994, pp 51-54, which was itself an expansion of the shorter accounts of Carlton Crescent/Rockstone Place/Avenue House previously contributed to the booklet *Southampton's historic buildings* published by the City of Southampton Society in 1981. Edited by the late R J Coles, former City Planning Officer, who provided expert architectural drawings and maps, this booklet brought together research contributions from members of a University/WEA class which he conducted.



Figure 5 Rockstone Place – a view towards The Avenue from the garden area laid out in 1991 on land given to the Council in 1878 “to be kept as an open space for ever”

Other relevant articles in *Hampshire* magazine are

Early days of Avenue House (July 1979)

Archers Lodge (November 1979)

75 years of La Sainte Union College (March 1980)

Exiled Argentine dictator, General Rosas (July 1982)

Emily Davies (August 1994)

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