

The History of Verdon Avenue.

The fourth son of Dr Edwin Roe and his wife the former Sophia Verdon of Patricroft, Manchester, was named Edwin Alliot Roe who later incorporated his mother's maiden name into his own, dropping his first name Edwin, thus becoming Alliot Verdon Roe.

He formed the aircraft construction company AV Roe in Manchester, his aircraft bearing the name AVRO which in time became world famous. During 1915-16 a site of some three hundred acres on the eastern bank of Southampton Water, at Hamble was purchased where a factory, airfield and workers houses were planned.

The factory and airfield were situated between Hamble Lane and Southampton Water, the area now covered by Petters, and the Shell Mex and BP oil installation, whilst the housing estate was planned to be half a mile or so away to the north.

In the event only twenty four of the planned three hundred and fifty houses were built, these being in Verdon Avenue, the avenue bearing AV Roe's mother's maiden name.

The houses on the south side of the avenue were of varying designs and

were intended for upper management, whilst those on the north side were for lesser types and were all the same basic design. Beech hedges were used as boundary markers, most had double gates and side ways and each front garden had either a laburnum or a cherry tree planted in it. More importantly each house had a bath with a coal fired copper attached, most unusual for working class houses in 1916.

The bath was situated in the kitchen and was covered by a hinged pine top which formed a large work surface for kitchen use and folded up to the wall when required. The last of these kitchen baths stayed in use into the 1990's at No 10!



Lighting was by gas and all houses had leaded light windows, the two main bedrooms had fireplaces and the houses were built from good quality, presumed Bursledon Brick.

In 1931 the local authority built some houses on the north side to the east of the "AVRO" row.

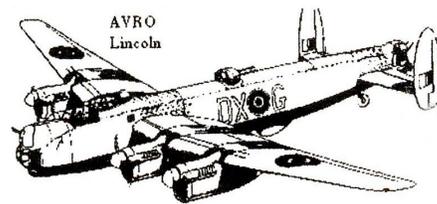
At about the same time Air Service Training Ltd (AST) purchased the land to the north of Verdon Avenue for use as an airfield, and a hangar was built at the east end of the avenue.

The AVRO factory was by this time more or less run down and the staff dispersed. The houses became the property of AST, this company and AVRO both being part of the Hawker Siddeley Group of Companies. AST's instructors staff moved in.

Some of the Verdon Avenue residents are worth a mention. For example Mr Oddie of No 39, left AV Roe, joined in a partnership with Mr Bradbury of No 37, and a Mr Cull, forming a company making fasteners, mainly for aircraft use. The company of "Oddie Bradbury and Cull" was formed in 1934 and as well as making fasteners and lock nuts made rotor blades for Cierva autogiros. They also built a Kay Gyroplane G-ACUA which first flew on 18th February 1935 at Eastleigh and made its last flight on 16th August 1947 at Perth and is now in the Museum of Transport, Glasgow. (David Kay was a Scotsman.)

Note: Of the three books from which this information came, one says the company did not move to Eastleigh until 1938 whilst the

other two state they were there in 1934 having a new factory built in 1938. They were obviously based in Eastleigh in February 1935 when their autogyro first flew. Very few British aircraft of the 30's and 40's took to the skies without Oddle fasteners being used somewhere in their construction.



Albert Bullwinkle lived at No 24. A Londoner, coming latterly from Portsmouth, via Southampton, having been bombed out from both locations. One of his favourite sayings was "The buggers got me in the Great War but in spite of having two goes in this one they've missed so far!" A jewellery shop manager by trade, on his move to Hamble he was employed as a clerk and rent collector. Due to his "Great War" wounds he walked with a limp and a rolling gate (most neighbours thought he had corns) and had a permanent drip on the end of his nose which he blamed on being gassed. After retirement he could be seen walking down the avenue to the shops to purchase his "fags" usually in the middle of the evening rush hour traffic.

He reckoned to smoke 20 Players a day and drink two bottles of Johnny Walker a week. His wife always called him "Bullie" and he lived to be over ninety.

Three families have lived in several different houses in Verdon Avenue. The Cloughtons started in No 10, returning after a spell in Exeter to No 33, then to No 38 and are now in No 30. David Wilde was born in No 26, moved to No 21 and after a short stay in Bursledon, now lives at No 12, whilst the writer has lived in No 27, No 6a, and is now in No 22.

Further local authority housing, including the old folk's bungalows were added in the late 1930's at the eastern end of the avenue. These houses were of good quality with all the "mod cons" of the period.

In June 1940 AST's flying school moved to Ansty near Coventry and Watchfield and the houses made empty by this move were occupied by employees of AST's aircraft division which had taken over the old Avro site in 1934 under the Armstrong Whitworth title.

During one air raid on Southampton during the winter of 1940-41 a German aircraft was damaged by "ack-ack" fire and several bombs jettisoned from it landed in Hamble, a couple damaging the Western end of Verdon Avenue. The crater was

still evident in the garden of No 8a in 1954 when the new tenant Mr Ernie Gerrard fell in it whilst exploring his new garden!

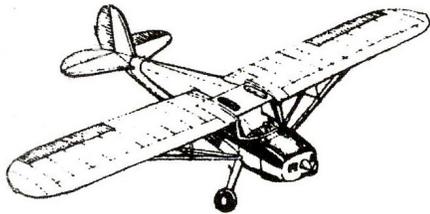
The damage was repaired by AST who replaced all the leaded lights with plain glass windows, although some of us know that the wood appears to have been still growing at the time. No 10 managed to retain its leaded lights and some of the windows in this house are still original.

During 1941 a hangar was built for aircraft repairs at the western end of the avenue on the site of a derelict barn. Up to the war years the strip of land between the houses and the light railway had been used for agriculture, but during the war, most of it was air-raid shelters or used for dispersing aircraft. The hangar has been used for a variety of purposes post war, including bus body building, boat building and later becoming a window manufacturer and installer.

When AST expanded during 1936-7 a family named Stevenson moved into No 13, "Steve" being employed as a ground engineer. He remained at Hamble when the flying school evacuated north and worked in "A" hangar on Spitfires and Seafires. On the 9th February he was fatally wounded by a canon shell during an air attack by a single German

aircraft as he worked in "A" hangar unfortunately becoming the only person to die as a result of enemy air action in Hamble. He was thirty five years old and left a widow and a four year old daughter Jill Stevenson.

In 1954 the remaining open area, up to then being used as allotments, was built on becoming "the flats", these were constructed of far better quality than many authorities built at the time.



1960 saw AST moving to Perth and the airfield was taken over by a state airline scheme and became the College of Air Training. The former AVRO houses were offered for sale to the sitting tenants, some who did not wish to buy became involved in complicated "swaps" with council tenants, the writer starting the ball rolling.

Subsequent modernisation has led to practically all the houses differing internally and during these alterations a floorboard was discovered in No 14 stamped "AV Roe and Co Ltd Manchester."

Although electricity had been installed sometime in the 1930's (probably when the first batch of local authority houses were built) and AST took over the houses, No 22 at least still retained the full gas lighting equipment (including the mantles) in the bedrooms in 1960 although the system was disconnected from the mains. In more recent years the local authority houses have been modernise and updated equipment installed and under the present governments scheme have been offered for sale to the tenants.

Although the Verdon Avenue Residents Association was not formed "officially" until 1984, its early activities, including street parties celebrating the end of hostilities, the coronation and many other events certainly put Verdon Avenue well to the fore when it came to community spirit. No doubt because most of the residents worked in one of the three major aircraft factories in Hamble there was always a common subject to talk about "over the garden fence" and although the avenue has had its fair share of tragedies, there has always been a happy friendly atmosphere, a pleasant place to live. Lets hope we can keep it that way.

Tony Sedgwick
No 22.

