

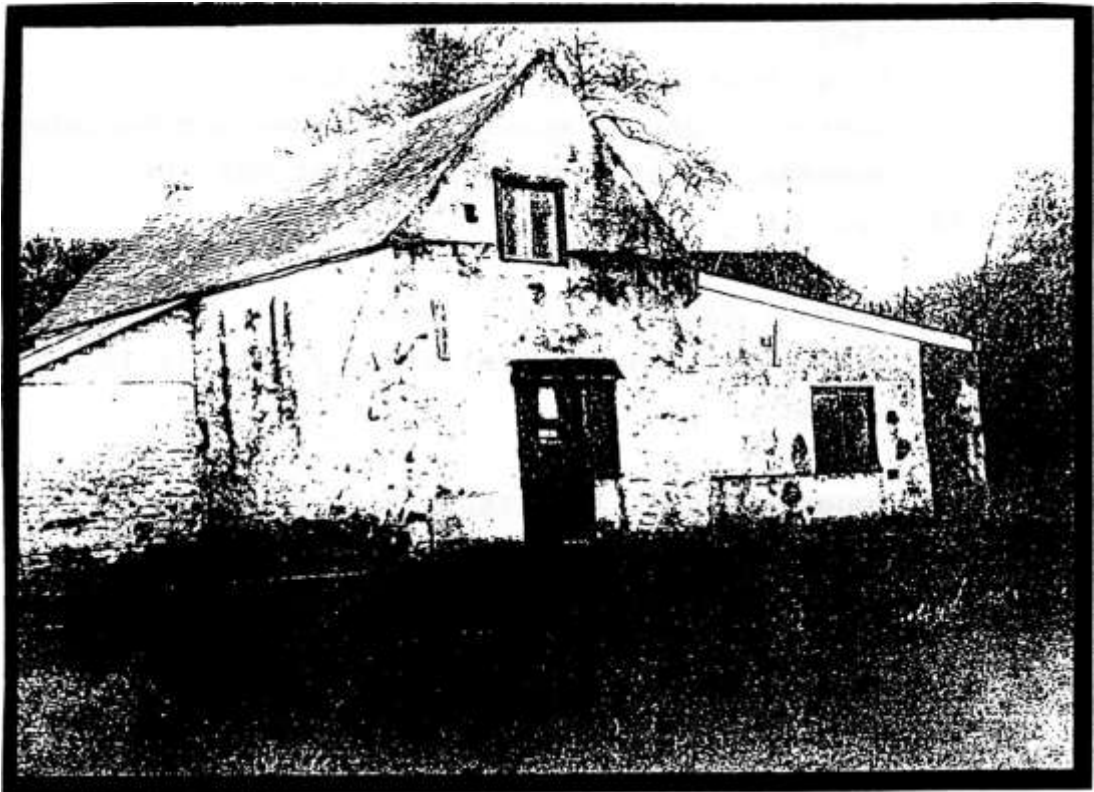
## CHARLES ADAMS AND REDDICAP HILL

*(Being a brief survey of the properties with which he was connected from 1884-1903)*

BY JANET JORDAN

If you read the reports in the issue of the 'Sutton Coldfield News' dated Friday, January 7th 1994, you will be aware of the controversy surrounding No. 59 Reddicap Hill.

No. 59, in fact, presently encompasses an area containing three rather dilapidated buildings. One is derelict; one houses a dancing school and one is a very old stone cottage<sup>(1)</sup> purported to be of Bishop Vesey origin, although this is disputed by local historians.



*(1) The Old Stone Cottage*

This area of land, situated on the right hand side, half-way up Reddicap Hill going towards Walmley, is owned by Kenmare Estates Limited, a subsidiary company of West Midlands Cooperative Society Limited. They have submitted a planning application to Birmingham City Council to convert the old stone cottage into a 'Chapel of Rest and Examination Room for funeral purposes', to supplement the Co-op's new offices in High Street, Sutton Coldfield

One or two neighbours of the cottage are not pleased to think that bodies will be stored in close proximity to their homes, although the Co-op have assured the owners of those properties that this will not affect them, the bodies being only short-stay visitors!

\* \* \* \* \*

In 1884 this cottage was Charles Adams' house, which he rented from the Warden and Society of Sutton Coldfield. It had been home to the Adams' family for generations and he had lived there from his childhood. In the Census Returns for 1861 he is listed as a blacksmith, but the Electoral Registers also class him as a grocer, so he was obviously a man of business. As such, he must have foreseen great potential for the vacant plots of land which extended up and down the hill either side of his cottage.

When the cottage and its land came up for sale by the Warden & Society of Sutton Coldfield, he agreed to take a lease of that land for 99 years and signed the actual document on 23rd May 1884. It contained the proviso that he must build, on this land, "one dwellinghouse with shop front and one or more other dwellinghouses with outbuildings, fixtures and drainage, erection of which he will expend £400 at least".

This was to prove the start of a building programme spanning several years, evidence of which comes mainly from the plans and planning applications which he submitted, now to be found at Sutton Coldfield Local Studies Library. Little is known of the actual builders that Mr. Adams employed, although the name of Mr. Langley of Park Road crops up once or twice on the plans.

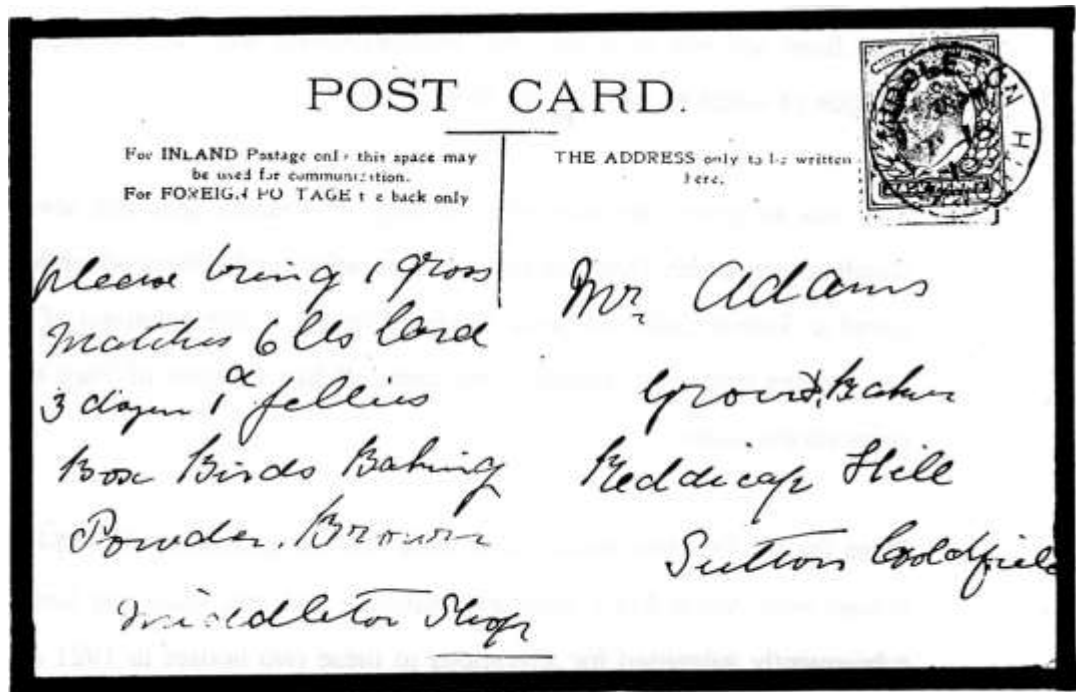
Plans for the first two houses that were built in approximately 1884 would then have been lodged with Aston Rural Sanitary Authority and are, sadly, no longer available, but plans subsequently submitted for alterations to these two houses in 1921 are available and show how they must have looked. Those details will emerge later on in this survey.

However a photo<sup>(2)</sup> in the possession of Mr. Adams' family shows the shop and house as they looked about the turn of the century.



(2) Adams' Stores

The two were semi-detached and, according to the Electoral Registers, Charles Adams opened his shop front in one of them in 1885. 'Adams Stores' had come into being, selling groceries and beer. Known as Nos. 59 and 61, these two seem to have been used in conjunction, as a shop and as living quarters. By the turn of the century, Mr. Adams had a flourishing business and his customers used to send him postcards<sup>(3)</sup> listing their orders.



(3) Postcard from 'Middleton Shop'

Having established his own position on the hill, Mr. Adams set his sights on his surroundings, but he had to take further leases of land before continuing with his building programme. When completed, the houses were then underlet to new occupiers.

Nos. 43, 45, 47 and 49 were next to be built in **1889 (Plan No. 50)**. As with all the houses in Reddicap Hill, they were built directly onto the street with no front garden. Also, as with other plans, the back room is shown to contain what appears to be a rectangular sink. A circle is drawn beside the sink, usually in the corner of the room and beside a fireplace. This would have been the site of the 'copper' boiler - a real step-up from the kettle that used to be kept constantly boiling on the stove as the only means of heating all the water necessary for the family.

In these four houses, which were terraced, the front door led straight into the living room, at the back of which was the washhouse, and stairs to the three small upstairs bedrooms began in the centre of the house. No mention is made of a kitchen, so one assumes that there was a range in the living room. The 'privies' were sited at the top of the garden. Nos. 43 and 45 have since been demolished, but Nos. 47 and 49 have been artistically renovated.

The onward march up the hill continued. Mr. Adams now turned his attention to where Nos. 51, 53, 55 and 57 would be built in **1891 (Plan112)**. Unfortunately, the plan for this cluster of four houses is not very revealing - it just shows a short terrace with privies in the back garden. In fact, all these houses have now been knocked down, although they can be seen in the photo<sup>(2)</sup>, next door to Adams' Stores.

In **1893(Plan 228)**, he hit a snag. A deep projection in the steep bank of land forming part of the boundary of the Newhall Estate, which backed onto Reddicap Hill, hindered him from erecting the next batch of four. It meant that he could only put up three houses because a fourth would have meant sharply cutting into the bank and this he was not permitted to do. Undaunted, however, he submitted plans for three houses joined together, Nos. 39 and 41 being of the 'two up two down' variety and No. 37 being somewhat larger, possessing three bedrooms upstairs, albeit rather small. As usual, the privies were 'out the back'.



*(4) Nos. 37, 39 and 41*

One year later in **1894 (Plan 281)**, two more pieces of land were ripe for development. Nos. 97 and 99 were built on one of them at the foot of the hill and situated just beside the gate leading into the Newhall Estate. They have both been demolished. Nos. 79 and 81 were built on the other piece. All four were identical 'two up two downs' with outside privies and ashes store.

Nos. 75 and 77<sup>(5)</sup> are easily identifiable with their original plans. They have hardly changed (at least from the exterior) from when they were built in **1896 (Plan 438)**. Of a distinctive style, these two have, by way of luxury, a large pantry, a cupboard under the stairs and a coals store within the house (approachable from the garden). However, the plan seems to indicate that there was a shared privy and ashes store.



*(5) Nos 75 & 77*

In **1897 (Plan 529)**, Mr. Adams extended his old stone cottage by adding a large cart shed, perhaps for a delivery cart. No doubt, feeling the benefit from the sale of the houses and customers in his shop, Mr. Adams' business prospered.

Once again, land at the top of the hill beckoned him. Here, space was restricted because the steep bank backing onto all the properties pressed in even further. However, he did manage to squeeze in a couple more houses in **1898 (Plan 689)**. From the front, Nos. 33 and 35<sup>(6)</sup> seem very large, their size being in their width. They were only one room deep but two rooms wide. An innovation for Mr. Adams, a linen closet, was incorporated into one of the two upstairs bedrooms, but still the privy and ashes store meant a trip out the back.

Nowadays, some considerable restoration has taken place in both of these houses and it takes some careful comparison with current day photos to realise that they are the original buildings. Doors and windows have been moved and windows added. The roofs have seen a radical change and there appears to be quite a large extension to the rear and side, especially of No. 33.



*(6) Nos. 33 & 35*

Attached to the plans for these two are copies of letters from the Borough Surveyor to Mr. Adams, rebuking him for allowing tenants to occupy the newly built properties before they were fit for habitation and, to rectify the position, insisting among other things that "all window frames be pointed in cement". What is interesting here is a comment from the present owner of No.35 that 'when we had the old sash windows removed we found, stuffed in the gap between the window frame and the wall, a copy of The Daily Mail from Friday, November 25th, 1938 still intact and readable ... that suggested to us that the windows we removed were fitted in 1938 and were not the originals because they didn't fit very well'.

It looks as though those window frames had always caused a bit of a problem!

Having covered much of the southern side, Mr. Adams turned his attention to the foot of the hill, on the northern side.

**Plan 809 of 1899** showing Nos. 80, 82, 84 and 86 is not very descriptive, revealing simply two sets of semi-detached dwellings but indicating slightly up-market properties which finally incorporate internal toilets and having front and back gardens.

**1899** also saw a small improvement to Nos 75 and 77 (**Plan 904**). They were 'upgraded' by the addition of external washhouses in the backgardens.

Nos. 71 and 73 were next to be built. The first set of plans was not approved (**Plan 1057**), but another comprehensive set (**Plan 1073**) was passed in **1900**. Again, the bank at the rear meant that these 'two up two downs' were wide fronted, and there was the usual outdoor privy. These houses are quite interesting from Mr. Adams' personal point of view. He actually, mentions 'Homeside'(71) and 'Woodside'(73) in his Will, leaving them specifically to his daughter although, sadly, she died before he did and they ended up in the hands of his son, Charles Bladon Adams.

One of this set of plans is very helpful. In addition to outlining the properties in question, it also helps to confirm the exact site of other properties belonging to Mr. Adams in 1900. Two much older cottages also appear, not built by him, but another photo<sup>(7)</sup>, again taken around 1900, shows them up beautifully!



*(7) Reddicap Hill (approx 1900)*



Another interesting plan (**Plan 1465 of 1903**)<sup>(8)</sup> proved to be very exciting! Yet again, we see four semi-detached houses Nos. 72, 74, 76 and 78, each comprising a hall, 'parlor' with built in cupboard, sitting room, kitchen and three bedrooms - all rooms having a fireplace. Quite a step up from the usual design! The w.c. appears just outside the back of the house, right beside the ashes and coal stores, but these are topped, somewhat unusually, by rain water cisterns, fed from rain water pipes coming from the roof One wonders what happened, for instance, during a drought or in freezing conditions?

In 1904, Mr. Adams made his Will, dividing his properties up amongst his family. No more building plans have been discovered, so one assumes that he didn't build any more. He died in 1915 at the age of 82, leaving his son, Charles Bladon Adams, to run the shop.

\* \* \* \* \*

The mystery as to what the interiors of Nos. 59 and 61 looked like when they were built was solved by the discovery of **Plan No. 3102 of 1921**.<sup>(9)</sup> A subsequent owner of 'Adams Stores', Mr. Reuben Willetts, who ran 'The White Horse' public house at Whitehouse Common, decided to make some alterations. The plan shows how the house and shopfront looked in 1921 and there is no reason to suppose they have changed much since.

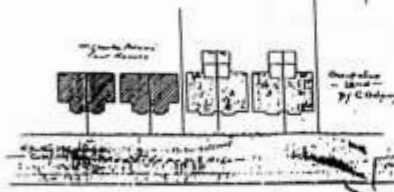
Nos. 59 had a living room at the front, while at the rear was a dairy, pantry and kitchen. No. 61 housed the shop front with a living room behind it. At one time, a beer cellar had been added to the rear outside of the shop. Mr. Willetts wanted to knock this down and bring it within the building. He therefore proposed to convert the front living room of No. 59 into a new outdoor and change the dairy into a beer cellar. Knocking down the old beer cellar perhaps gave easier access to the rear grounds of the outbuildings and storage sheds which, by 1921, had grown quite extensive..

From this survey we can see, therefore, how 100 years ago one man transformed the appearance of what was once a narrow country lane, bordered only by occasional cottages, gardens and pigstys. It must have been very picturesque, lined with trees on the one side and brand new houses on the other, with 'Adams' Stores' nestling amongst them. A grand Victorian House, 'The Mount', had also been recently erected at the top of the hill, giving a

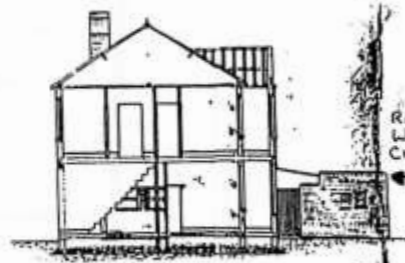
PLANS OF PROPOSED HOUSES TO BE BUILT AT REDDAP HILL FOR M<sup>r</sup>. C. ADAMS



(Nos 72, 74, 76 & 78)



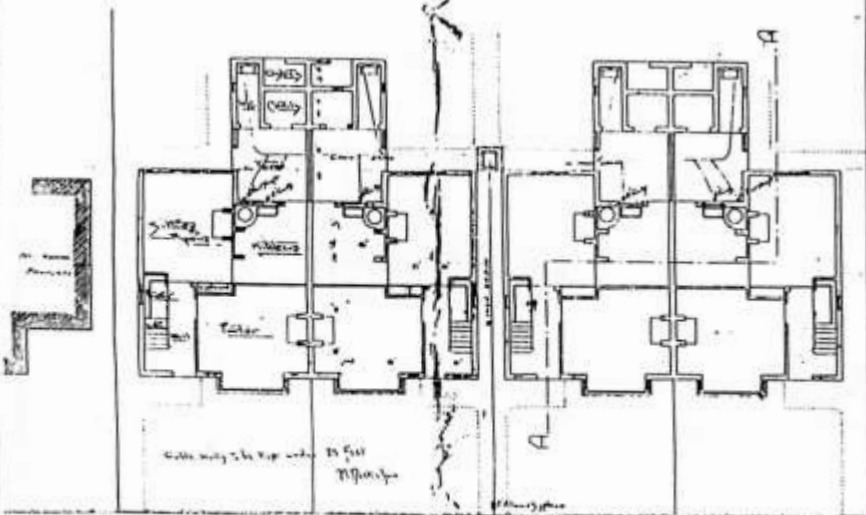
BACK PLAN  
7 feet 6 inches deep



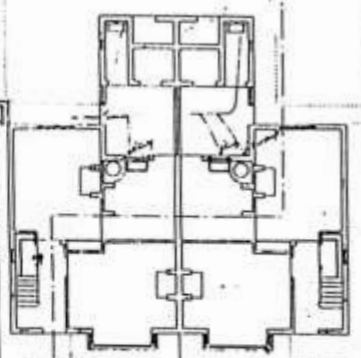
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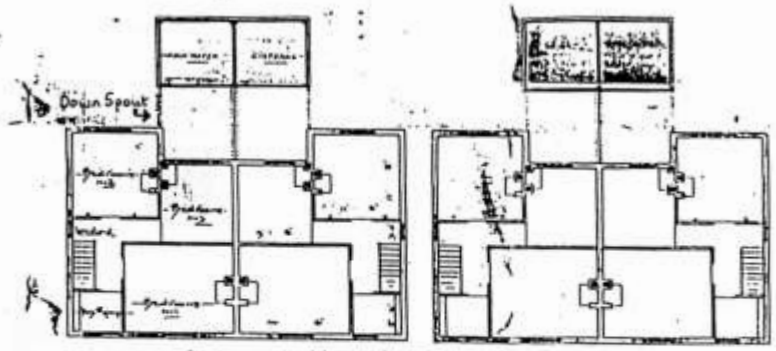
BACK ELEVATION



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR PLAN



1<sup>ST</sup> FLOOR PLANS

PLAN 1465

M. DEER'S SONS, CIVIL ENGINEERS, BRISTOL

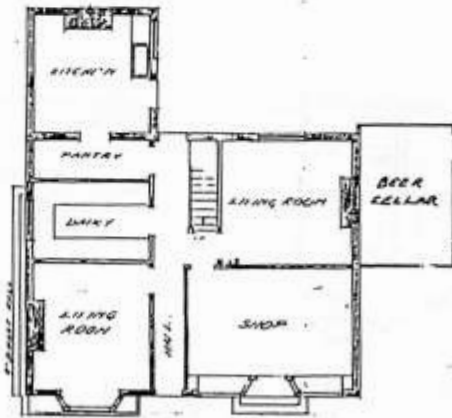
*Proposed Alterations for Outdoor Beer License,  
at The Stores, Reddicap Hill.*



PROPOSED FRONT ELEVATION.  
SCALE 4 FEET TO AN INCH.

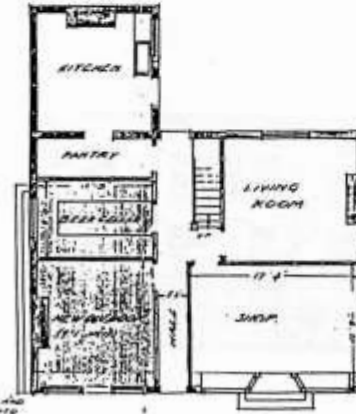


BLOCK PLAN.  
SCALE 41.66 FEET TO AN INCH.



PRESENT GROUND FLOOR PLAN.

SCALE FOR PLANS EIGHT FEET TO AN INCH



PROPOSED GROUND FLOOR PLAN.

HARRY W. WEEDON, ARCHT.  
ARCHITECT AND SURVEYOR,  
PHOENIX CHAMBERS,  
COLMORE ROW,  
BERMINHAM

TEL. No. C 3845. 28. 6. 1921

DATE	BY	CHECKED BY	TRACES BY
1921	H.W.W.	H.W.W.	H.W.W.

HOUSE + SHOP FRONT FIELDS 54/101

(9)

APRIL 1921

PLAN 3102



certain status to the area.. Children could play in the street in those days, only looking out for the occasional horse and cart.

However, even now, Reddicap Hill retains its old world charm - a fact that owes much to Mr. Adams' foresight, tenacity and wealth! Most of his houses were quite basically built, but they have stood the test of time and still present a very pleasing aspect of Sutton Coldfield.

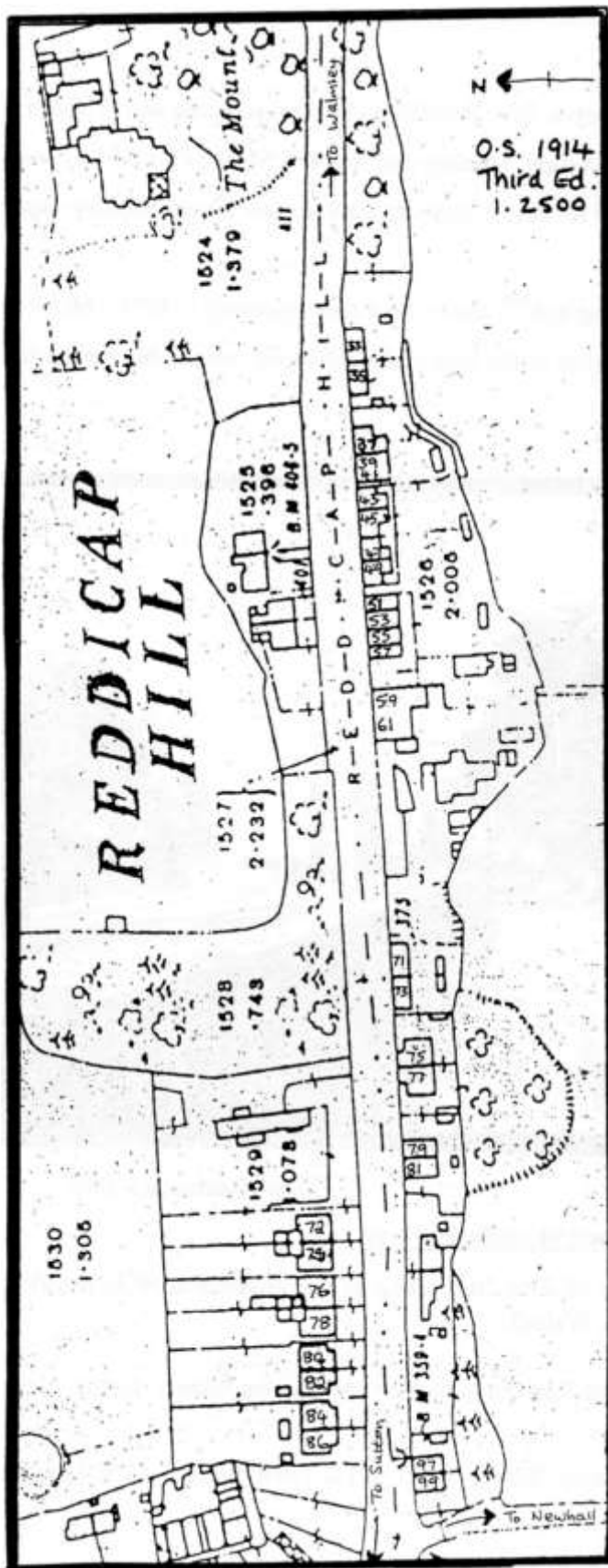
This photograph<sup>(10)</sup> shows how they appeared in 1993. Much remains the same and even the telegraph pole at the foot of the hill looks remarkably similar to that of 1900!



*(10) Reddicap Hill 1993*

**Sources not identified in text:**

- Lease of 23rd May 1884 in the possession of Kenmare Estates Limited, 10 Hatherton Road, Walsall.
- Postcards in the possession of Charles Adams' family.
- Ordnance Survey Map 1914 Third Edition 1.2500 in Sutton Coldfield Local Studies Library.



**REDDICAP HILL**

(approx.. 1914) showing all the houses built for Charles Adams between 1884 and 1903 (with today's postal numbering inserted).

**Janet Jordan**

**March 1994**