

RICHARD CHARLES SUTTON 1834-1915

This account by Ken Brand of R C Sutton's life and work was originally published in two parts in Newsletters 154 and 155 (April and September 2014.) With new information having become available since then, some corrections have been made and Editor's endnotes added before its inclusion in the archive in 2019.

Richard Charles Sutton was born in Nottingham in 1834. His father Richard was proprietor of *The Nottingham Review*, a radical newspaper founded in 1808 by his grandfather Charles, whose outspoken views in 1816 on the conduct of the Government brought him a year's imprisonment in Northampton jail. Young Richard was one of a family of ten children who spent at least part of their childhood at Radford Grove, originally created as a pleasure garden by William Elliott in 1790 but purchased later when in a neglected state by grandfather Charles. He was educated at Ockbrook School in Derbyshire; then, on deciding to study architecture, he went to London and entered the office of Samuel Sanders Teulon (1812-73). Teulon was one of the main proponents of the early Gothic revival; near Nottingham he built Bestwood Lodge between 1862-5 for the tenth Duke of St Albans, adding Emmanuel Church in 1868-9.

At the completion of his professional training Richard returned to Nottingham in 1857 and started what was to become a family line of architects and surveyors active over a century. In 1858 his office was in St Peter's Church Walk, but he soon moved his practice to Bromley House, Angel Row, where he remained for the rest of his career. In the 1861 census he is listed as living at Gill Street, Sherwood, Nottingham, with wife Henrietta, daughter Ada (born 1859) and son Ernest R (born 1860). He probably built what was for long the family home, Carisbrooke House, 2 Southey Street, in 1864-5, prior to which he lived in Peveril Street (1860) and Hampden Street (1862). From early in his career he retained an interest in Sutton Brothers of 1 Bridlesmith Gate, the family firm of booksellers and printers, then still publishers of *The Nottingham Review*.

Sutton carried out a number of small architectural jobs for some of the county magistrates soon after opening his office, the most important of which was the creation in 1859 of the new Grand Jury Room on the first floor of the Shire Hall, High Pavement, Nottingham. This was the first vertical expansion of James Gandon's building of 1770. This commission led him in 1860 to the distasteful yet important work of supervising the erection of the various structures associated with a public hanging, there being no county surveyor at this time. The magistrates, still well aware of the fateful aftermath of the hanging of William Saville in 1844 (when 17 people died), gave him a free hand to control the expected crowds around the Shire Hall. So well did he perform these onerous tasks that he was commissioned to repeat these duties in 1864.

As with many architects of the mid-nineteenth century, tracking down Sutton's early work is difficult. In Nottingham all building work had to be officially approved from

September 1874; before that date any list has to be compiled from a collection of known and chance references. With Sutton's career some help comes from the details of architectural competitions listed in *The Builder*. Not all architects were convinced that the limited chance of success was worth all the investment of time and money. However, the competitions were quite common, and Richard Charles Sutton, certainly early in his career, entered and was successful in a number of them.

In 1858, in association with Henry John Paull of Manchester, he won first prize for a Memorial Chapel at Epworth; with the same partner he secured first place in competition for the Nottingham Parliament Street Schools in 1859. In the same year, acting alone, he was placed first with his designs for the Derby Street Baptist Chapel, Nottingham. The following year he was the architect of a chapel at Ripley. With H J Paull again he was unplaced in the competition for new markets at Longton in 1861. In the same year, this time with a different associate, Edward Andre of Liverpool, he was placed second of twelve entries in the Nottingham Grammar School competition, winning £25. Andre also collaborated with Sutton on his prize-winning plans for St Saviour's, Arkwright Street, Nottingham in 1863. A year earlier Sutton had been a founder member of the Nottingham Architectural Association.

In 1865 Sutton received first prize for the Congregational Church at Pembroke Dock. Thereafter he was unplaced with his plans for Nottingham Mechanics' Institute in 1867; St Matthew's Church Hall in 1868; and the County Gaol, Brecon, in 1869. Perhaps dismayed by this lack of success, or just busy, he appears to have avoided competitions until 1896 when, working with his son Ernest, the pair were placed second for their proposals for the Nottingham Higher Grade School (Mundella) and for the new Nottingham Workhouse at Bagthorpe. Success in any competition did not mean that the erection of the building soon followed. Often there was a delay; sometimes the winning entry was discarded. Complete abandonment was not unknown.



Figure 2: Castle Gate Congregational Chapel

The Congregational Chapel, Castle Gate, Nottingham (1863), is probably the building usually associated with Sutton, but the award-winning St Saviour's, Arkwright Street, noted earlier, and the Unitarian Church on Peas Hill Road (demolished in 1932), were his other churches of the same date. Among later churches were the Congregational Institute, Forest Road (1867-8); the New Connexion Chapel and Schools, Parliament Street and George Street (1874); St Philip's,



Figure 1: St Saviour's Church

Pennyfoot Street (1876-9, demolished in 1963); and St George's, Kirkewhite Street West (1887-91). (*Endnote 1*) He also carried out extensions, as at St Peter's, Radford (1870-72), and repairs, for example out of town at St Mary's, Attenborough (1868-9). A most unusual commission was The Walter Fountain, Greyfriar Gate (1865-6), a memorial to John Walter, sometime proprietor of *The Times* and MP for Nottingham. It was commissioned by his son, who later also became an MP for the town. It was removed, as a traffic hazard, in 1950.



Figure 3: Mills & Gibb Factory

Sutton designed a number of warehouses and factories for some of Nottingham's leading companies of the 1870s and 1890s. These commissions included those for I and R Morley, Pilcher Gate (1872); Perry and Son, Stanford Street (1874); John Player, off Alfreton Road (1881, at a time when when Player lacked confidence in the appeal of cigarettes and had a lace and tobacco factory erected); Sylvester and Bridgett, Willoughby Street (1881); Mills and Gibb, 47 Stoney Street (1883); Jardine and Co, Cremorne Street (1883); and S Widdowson, Stoney Street (1887). Sutton was often responsible for later extensions to these premises.

A variety of commercial premises came from Sutton's office. Besides a few small works for young Jesse Boot and rather more for the rising provision merchant Joseph Burton, he designed a chemist's shop for E C Patchitt (1877) at Canning Circus, which after a period as a branch of Boots was converted some years ago into Ben Bowers Restaurant; it is now (2014) the unimaginatively named Late Lounge Bar. In 1878 for Dr Claude Taylor he produced the saleshop on the corner of Derby Road and North Circus Street, adjoining the Albert Hall. It must have been sturdily constructed as it survived the fire that destroyed the first Albert Hall in 1906. (*Endnote 2*)

Away from Nottingham, one of Sutton's earliest buildings must be the Wesleyan School, 12 Kirkhill, Bingham (1859). In 1865 he designed Moneta House, Ricardo Street in Stoke-on-Trent. An important early commission was Ilkeston Town Hall, erected 1867-8. (*Endnote 3*) At some time he added extensions to Southwell Workhouse. Lodges, chapels, gates and railings were designed by Sutton for the Queen's Road cemetery at Walthamstow in 1872. This was followed by St Peter's Church, Mill End, Rickmansworth



Figure 4: Ilkeston Town Hall

in 1875, Beauvale School, Greasley, in 1878 and the United Methodist Free Church at Kimberley in 1890. Sutton carried out several tasks for Visiting Justices and the County authorities. Typical small scale public works were Newark Police Station (1873) and a Police Station in Chilwell Road, Beeston (1888.) In 1873 he prepared plans for Gonalston Bridge, and two years later he was instructed to examine the roadway over Bulwell Bridge.

Like most Victorian provincial architects, Sutton undertook the full range of domestic assignments. He produced a variety of cottages, dwelling houses, villas, singly and in pairs, and villa residences. The grand houses had stables with carriage houses; some had a conservatory, some a greenhouse. The more utilitarian outbuildings included a brewhouse, a bakehouse, cowsheds and a slaughterhouse. Miscellaneous buildings from Sutton's impressive list include an entrance lodge for the Nottingham High School (1878); major alterations to the old Mechanics' building (1877); and the then 'New' Masonic Hall (1880). He had at least one venture into town planning, for in March 1876 he prepared plans and sections for Bilberry Street and Bullace Road, St. Ann's.

Sutton's eldest son Ernest (1861-1946) was articled to his father in 1876 and became an 'Improver' in 1879. He became an assistant in the offices of Alfred Waterhouse and then (1883-4) Sir Arthur Blomfield, moving on to Carpenter & Ingelow (1884-95). He started his own practice c. 1895, based like his father in Bromley House. Unlike his father he became a FRIBA in January 1905, being nominated by local architects A N Bromley, B E Bailly, and A W Brewwill, together with his former employer B Ingelow. Ernest also worked in partnership with his father from 1895 to 1906 for, as noted, R C and E R Sutton were placed second in the controversial competition for the prestigious Bagthorpe Hospital and Workhouse (the result of which was announced in November 1896) and also second in the Mundella School competition. Ernest was now living at Ivy Lodge, 2 Grove Avenue, just around the corner from his father.

Richard Sutton did little independently after the opening of his son's office; although he is listed as Architect and Surveyor in local directories until 1910, he retired in 1906. Thereafter he lived in retirement at Southey Street until his death on 18 October 1915. In 1913 he wrote a short article on *Radford Grove or Folly*, his childhood home, for the *Transactions of the Thoroton Society (TTS Vol 17, 1913, pp 56-58)*. As he was no longer an active member of the Nottingham and Derby Architectural Society he was not granted the privilege of an obituary in their Annual Report for 1916. The brief mention stated: 'Mr RICHARD CHARLES SUTTON, who died on Oct 18th, 1915 was a Member from 1872 until 1884.' His son had been a full member since 1897, President in 1912-13 and first President of the Nottingham and Derby Society in 1913-14. His grandson had been an associate member since 1905. Perhaps Richard ended his membership when he started taking an interest in local politics.

In 1904 Ernest, still in Bromley House, went into partnership with Frederick William Charles Gregory as Architects and Surveyors; the association lasted about ten years. By 1920 Ernest had moved to Albion Chambers, 32 King Street, where he was joined by his son after war service. Albion Chambers, on the corner of King Street and Parliament Street, was in fact the first major assignment of Ernest Sutton and was completed in 1899. Ernest's son Cecil Alfred Sutton was articled to his father 1905-6 and then became an assistant to the new partnership his father made with Gregory. He became an ARIBA in March 1911, being proposed by his father, and the local notables Robert Evans and Albert N Bromley. Not long after rejoining his father, Cecil Alfred was promoted and the practice of E R Sutton and Son was established. This family firm lasted until c. 1930 when Ernest retired and it was reformed as Sutton and Burnett. After further amalgamations it became Sutton, Pearce and Dick. Cecil retired in 1964 and died in February 1965, aged 79. Sutton, Pearce and Dick survived until the 1970s. An intriguing unfulfilled design from E R Sutton and Son was for a new Council House, published in the local press before Cecil Howitt's proposals were known.

At the 1881 census, Richard Charles Sutton, a widower aged 46, has his children, all unmarried, living with him at Southey Street: Eleanor (16 years); Charles R A (18); Henrietta (19); Ernest R (20); and Ada (22). By the time of the next census in 1891, he has remarried; his second wife Jane was born in 1850 in Islington. Ada is still at home and the Suttons have two servants. They are listed as living in 1 Hardy Street. This apparent change of address is an enumerator's whim, as Carisbrooke House is on the corner Hardy Street and Southey Street. In the 1901 census return just Richard and Jane remain.

Richard Charles Sutton was a member of the Town Council for Sherwood Ward 1887-1901. For two periods during the winter of 1888 and in the summer of 1893 he was possibly chairman (or deputy) of the General Works and Highways Committee, and as such signed approval of building applications. He was a prominent Freemason for over 50 years, being at times Worshipful Master, Provincial Superintendent of Works, Provincial Grand Treasurer and Provincial Grand Warden. After his death in 1915 probate was granted to his widow Jane for his estate of £2,674. Richard Charles Sutton lacked the flair and imagination of some of his local contemporaries, producing buildings that were sturdy and reliable and well suited for their purposes. Nevertheless, many had a certain chunky elegance countered on occasions with touches of eclectic delicacy.

Editor's notes

1. The Castle Gate Congregational Chapel, 'blowsy Lombardic Romanesque' (Elain Harwood), became the headquarters of the Congregational Federation in 1981, when a new floor was inserted to create administrative space; the stepped gallery and organ

were retained for worship. Late in 2018 a planning application was lodged with the City Council for conversion of the building into a 'market-style deli restaurant and bar.' Planning permission was granted following the Civic Society's submission, supported by the Conservation Officer; that revised drawings be produced showing the retention of two rows of original pews in the chapel's gallery.



Figure 5: Paton Congregational College

The 'Congregational Institute' on Forest Road West, built as the Paton Congregational College, now houses the Nottingham Society for the Deaf. Also on Forest Road West, Sutton's Primitive Methodist church of 1874 now houses the Nottingham Christadelphian Ecclesia. These Forest Road buildings are not far from Carisbrooke House, the home he built for himself in Southey Street. Just visible over a boundary wall to extensive grounds, the house is now divided into flats. The Character Appraisal for the Forest Grove Conservation Area within which the house lies refers first to the 'impressive square Venetian tower' projecting from the front corner; then offers the following description: 'The

property is built in red brick but also has ornate polychromatic brickwork around window openings and blue brick diaper work in the walls. The rich decoration is carried through to the slate roof and the cast-iron crestings along the ridge.' According to Elaine Harwood, Sutton also designed most of the houses (built 1875-9) in Waterloo Crescent, running between Southey Street and Mount Hooton Road.



Figure 6: Christadelphian Ecclesia

The Methodist New Connexion Chapel and Schools on the corner of Parliament Street and George Street, later the Central Methodist Mission, still stand. The glazed extension on the Parliament frontage enables the Mission to offer refreshment to the public. The ground floor also has meeting rooms, and apartments have been created on the upper floors.

St George's Kirkewhite Street, ('St George's in the Meadows'), has a chancel by Bodley, added to Sutton's nave in 1897, and, according to Elaine Harwood, significant furniture, fittings and glass by later artists.

2. Elaine Harwood notes that it was R C Sutton who in 1882 rebuilt Jesse Boot's original store in Goose Gate (marked by a Civic Society plaque.) Patchitt's shop at 126-8 Derby Road bears a prominent date stone (1877), which became the name of another restaurant sited at the premises. The saleshop on the corner of North Circus Street is one of several

on the ground floor of a brick and terracotta building bearing the name of Mia House, which is listed Grade 2, albeit under the name of Colston House. The corner doorway and display windows to each frontage (North Circus Street and Derby Road) are to the design of (Ernest) Sutton and Gregory (1909.)



Of 1887 and in a different style (timbered gables over oriels) is the building next to the People's Hall (Morley House) in Heathcoat Street, 'a creche, shop, café for the women's hall' (Elain Harwood.)

3. Clare Hartwell describes Ilkeston Town Hall as in the Italianate style, like a 'medium-sized polychromatic brick palazzo.' Heanor's former Town Hall, now that town's Register Office, is also by Sutton and is of similar style and date.

Figure 7: 126-128 Derby Road

Sources

Elain Harwood: Pevsner Architectural Guides: Nottingham (2008)

Clare Hartwell: The Buildings of England: Derbyshire (2016 edition)

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