

Oadby Hill Top and Meadow Court Conservation Area History and Archaeology

No archaeological remains have been found within the Conservation Area, though finds from elsewhere in the vicinity are evidence of prehistoric and Roman activity. The earliest discovery was just south of the A6 at Lyndon Drive where a Neolithic or Bronze Age flint scraper was found. There is evidence of Roman occupation at Ringers Spinney which lies to the north of Manor Road. Here Roman pottery was found in the 1960s. A Roman coin was also found off Sycamore Close just to the north of the Conservation Area.

The earliest records of land ownership refer to Earl Ralph during the reign of Edward the Confessor (1042 to 1066). In 1739 Anne Busby married Anthony Keck and a long family association began which only ended when some 93 lots totalling 6700 acres were offered for sale in June 1913.

By this time the construction of large family housing for Leicester businessmen was already taking place. The Powys Keck Estate Map shows Knighton Grange in existence accessed via a track from the London Road, south of the Knighton Grange Road. The first major housing developments began in 1902 when Kent House (One Oak), Hastings House and Rocklands were built. Manor Road (previously called Oadby Hill Top) was laid out in 1904 and a number of houses were built along all the roads up to the outbreak of the First World War.

By 1915 at least a dozen more large houses had been built on Stoughton Drive South and Manor Road, including, Digby House, Inglewood, Highgrove House, Rosenfels, Stamford House, The Gable, The Coppice, The Spinneys and Wighton. Houses are also shown on Knighton Grange Road. At the same time a piece of land down to Meadowcourt Road was sold and now included the university playing fields. By 1915 Meadowcourt Road was laid out with 8 houses constructed on the northern side and 13 on the southern.

In the early 1920s land, including on Stoughton Drive South and Manor Road was surveyed for one acre plots with houses costing not less than £1000 on Manor Road and for half acre plots for houses costing £750 elsewhere.

An Ordnance Survey map dated 1930 shows further development of large detached houses in substantial plots along Manor Road, including Howard House, Ashcroft, Aigburth, Trerose, The Beeches, Gilbert Murray house, Fields House, Bredon and Stoughton Leys. Southmeads Road is shown with two houses; though by 1938 several more houses had been built.

After the Second World War, the university began to acquire houses for student accommodation. When the Knoll was purchased by the university in 1964, the gardens of the four houses (Beaumont Hall, The Knoll, Hastings House and Southmeade) were combined to create the University Botanical Gardens. The last 40 years have seen the construction of small groups of housing such as Eynsford Close, which was built in the 1960s following the demolition of no 5 Glebe Road, and the erection of new student blocks for the university.

Today the area continues to be a popular residential area though some of the larger houses are coming under pressure for other uses or subdivision. The challenge for the future is to allow the area to adapt whilst ensuring that its sense of place is maintained.