

WHAT WE WOULD HAVE SEEN....if we had been able to visit Dowlands on 26th April.

Hitchin is very fortunate to have a spread of particularly attractive Victorian and Edwardian suburbs. Wymondley Road is one such area developed gradually after c1890, initially with large detached houses. J P Collings owned Broadview (later The Chilterns) by 1894; in 1900 Francis Ransom (of the pharmaceutical business) took on The Chilterns and lived there for several years. There followed Connaught House (c1903), Wayshott (1904), Riddy Shott (1907), Lavender Croft (1910) and Dowlands (1904).

Dowlands, an unostentatious but handsome and comfortable house, was designed by Hitchin architect Walter Millard FRIBA in 1904 for George Edmundson Spurr. The house, partly rendered, is brick built, tile roofed, with distinctive twin gables and chimney stacks and characteristic Edwardian woodwork. The name was chosen by George after a farm near where he grew up at Axmouth in Devon.



Dowlands (Photo - Madeline Cave)

George Spurr was owner of the well known local drapery and outfitters business that occupied the east side of Market Place until 1971, an area now the entrance to the modernist Churchgate Arcade. Apart from being a prominent local businessman George was a Churchwarden at St Mary's, a onetime Chairman of the Hitchin Urban District Council and was active in a number of local causes. Very sadly he lost all his sons in the Great War.

After the Spurrs Dowlands was owned by the Bowmans (the Hitchin milling family) and then by Mrs Madeleine Cave, who moved in during the late 1940s, living there until recently when the house was acquired by Mr & Mrs Frost. During Mrs Cave's tenure few alterations were made. As a result many of the original features – such as fireplaces – survive. Mr and Mrs Frost are planning to bring the house back to life by restoring as many of these features as possible. For example, their aim is for the original floors and woodwork to be visible while the plumbing and heating are brought up to modern standards. This considerable work is ongoing.

We hope that we will be able to re-instate a visit to Dowlands in 2021.

HHS
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