

A Moseley Architect - Baron Collingwoode Seymour Underhill (1892-1964)

Collingwoode Underhill was born on 29th October 1892 in Edgbaston, the youngest of the three children of Collingwoode and Clara Underhill. The family moved to Park Road, Moseley in 1899, and Coll was educated locally at a private school, leaving at the age of sixteen in 1909 to be articled to Lloyd F. Ward, A.R.I.B.A. of 55 Newhall Street 'to learn the profession or business of an architect and surveyor' for the term of three years. During this period he attended lectures at the Birmingham School of Architecture. Having served his articles, he entered the employment of George A Cox of 33 Newhall Street.

In February 1915 Coll left Mr Cox in order to take up a commission in the South Midland (Warwickshire) Royal Garrison Artillery. He qualified as an instructor of signalling and spent his entire war service in the U.K. On demobilisation in February 1919, he rejoined Mr Cox, and in January 1920 entered into a partnership agreement with him, the partnership being called 'Cox and Underhill'. However, Mr Cox died in May of that year, and Coll took sole charge of the practice.

Coll was elected member of the R.I.B.A., Licentiate in 1925 and Fellow in 1929. The practice was called 'Baron C.S. Underhill, F.R.I.B.A.' During the inter-war period he had five articled pupils:- Scammell, Cox, Onions, Davies and Cornfield. In 1937 he moved his offices from 33 to 9 Newhall Street. His most noteworthy work at this time was in the field of domestic architecture; he designed a number of medium-sized houses, mostly in the traditional style derived from the Arts and Craft Movement, in the Birmingham – Solihull – Stratford-on-Avon area, and a few as far afield as Llandudno and Falmouth

In 1928 Coll married Gladys Barton and designed the house in Moseley which was to be their home for the greater part of their lives. In 1923 Coll became a freemason, joining Athol Lodge No. 74, of which he was Worshipful Master in 1939. He was appointed Past Provincial Grand Superintendent of Works in 1947.



The house Collingwoode Underhill designed in Moseley, where he and his family lived.

The outbreak of war in 1939 brought the practice to a halt, and during the next six years Coll did little architectural work as such, although he was always in demand for inspections and reports in connection with war damage claims. He was also employed by the War Department to survey requisitioned and other property and produce 'state and condition schedules'. This work covered a wide area, from Birmingham in the north to Worcester in the south. For much of this time Coll was living in Harvington near Evesham with his wife and son.

On his return to Birmingham towards the end of the war, progress in rebuilding the practice was slow because of restrictions and shortages of materials in the building trade. Work in the immediate post-war period covered alterations and conversions in the Evesham – Pershore area, as well as reconstruction jobs in Birmingham. The latter included buildings at the Bordesley Green factories of Thornley and Knight, the paint and varnish firm, whose architect he had been since 1920. Two major projects were the Grestone Avenue Schools in Handsworth Wood, undertaken on behalf of the City of Birmingham Education Committee. In spite of a serious illness in 1954, Coll continued to work until his death in 1964.