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## **BUILDINGS OF NORTH CO DOWN**

[Extracts from Buildings of North Co Down by C E B Brett, published by the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society in 2002.]

### **Tudor House and Tudor Hall, Holywood**



'Tudor Houses', a prominent feature in the picturesque entrance to Holywood from the North East. They consist of two separate buildings, each containing two mansions which have been built in the Tudor style of architecture from which they derive their name. The cost of their erection was upward of £6,000. The proprietor of these is the enterprising merchant of Belfast, Henry Murney of High Street" (Kelly, 1850). (Murney is also described as "the snuff and tobacco king" ). On the staircase landing of Tudor House, there is a stained glass window inscribed 'Tudor House. HM. 1848'. He and his family have expansive memorials inside the old Priory Church.

Merrick says that these houses were built in 1849 - "Located on an escarpment overlooking very spacious and wooded grounds that swept right down to the road, they enjoyed a superb vista of the Lough. It is a matter of considerable regret that so much of the woodland and the little gate-lodge with the castellated entrance gates to the demesne were lost when the private housing estate was built in 1970. Tudor House is a fine example of the fully-fledged neo-Elizabethan style of architecture and the roofline which is alive with chimneys and gables looks most impressive as it rears above the surrounding trees". The listers are markedly less enthusiastic: they award Nos 17/19 Bangor Road (I think, Nos 4 and 6, Tudor Park, but it is hard to be sure: the numbering seems to have changed, perhaps more than once) a grudging B1, with the brusque

comment "2-storey block of 2 houses with Tudor influence in style - mid-19th century"; and a similar description and classification to Nos 21/23 Bangor Road (I think Nos 3 and 5, Tudor Park, next door) - though in my view the latter are much inferior.

Although I have learned from bitter experience to beware of attributions unsupported by documentary evidence, I felt at first sure that Tudor House, and Tudor Hall, with their inimitable chimney-stack details, gables, and cylindrical pinnacles on every gable and gablet, were by the irrepressible John Millar; they resemble so closely his documented villas at Old Quay Road, Marino (107), and are so unlike the work of anyone else. Having now seen the interiors, I am not so sure: the Tudoresque halls and staircases could be his, but the very florid ceiling roses and cornices throughout the ground floor rooms do not at all look like Millar's work.

This is a splendid great thumping pair of tall, mock-Elizabethan, stucco semi-detached houses, two-storey-and-attic, the former with ornate bargeboards, quoins, dripstones and all the Tudorbethan trimmings. No 6 well painted in pale brown; its other half, rather more seedy at present, but still fine despite the rather obtrusive conservatory added in the 1930s. Externally, Tudor House, facing north and west, getting the morning sun, would appear to be the grander of the two; but maps disclose that the two houses are divided, not along the centre-line of the block, but in such a way that Tudor House is the narrower of the two - Tudor Hall, facing north and east, so getting the evening sun, is considerably the larger and grander of the pair. Each house is extraordinarily high, long, and thin, consisting of little more than one room and a corridor on each side of the spine wall. Of the two, Tudor House has been much less altered over the years than Tudor Hall: its marble mantelpieces and above all its remarkable staircase, with fancy ironwork banisters in a style foreshadowing Art nouveau, are all intact. Although said to have been originally semi-detached, there used to be a connecting arch and doorway between the two houses, on the

first floor, so that at some date, this must have been used as a single enormous dwelling; but the opening, it seems, was blocked up after a severe fire in 1907 in which two members of the Murney family perished.

The other pair (Nos 3 and 5, Tudor Park) are three-storey, with very tall pointed gables, of multi-coloured patchy stucco, with plain rectangular chimney-stacks, quite lacking in the bravado and panache of Millar's work. I think that these are certainly by some lesser mortal; unless, perhaps, Mr Murney's money ran out before Millar could complete the second block. Both buildings were the subject of extensive, expensive, and co-ordinated repairs between 1989 and 1992.

Tudor House was valued at £52, occupied until 1925 by Annette Gardiner, and from 1926 until the 1950s by William Dunn, grandfather and father of the present owner; the latter, in my young days, the last Chairman of Holywood Borough Council. It is said that the house was requisitioned to provide billets for troops during the second World War, and various initials carved into the woodwork appear to bear witness to this. Its other half was valued at £53, and occupied by Thomas Orr, later bought by John Irvine, then by the present owner. The two, lesser, neighbouring houses were valued at £45 each. It is a pity that the grounds were invaded in 1970 by so many red-brick villas and bungalows, though their design (by Robert McKinstry) is quite inoffensive

Photographs: A C W Merrick.

Situation: 4, 6 Tudor Park, Bangor Road, Holywood; td, Holywood; District Council, North Down; Grid ref J 402 793.

References: Listed B1 (23/20/18a and b). VAL 12B/17/10F, G in PRONI; Kelly, 'Holywood', 1850, p.61; Merrick, 'Buildings of Holywood,', 1986, p.57; files in MBR; information from owners.

<http://freespace.virgin.net/mp.hearth/DownCo.html>

This was where Martin Jaffe was living at the time of his marriage.... Sylvia Jaffe