

SHAWFIELD HOUSE

It is now generally agreed that the need for people to travel to work must be reduced and that mixed-use buildings should be encouraged. Shawfield House, just off the King's Road, is a building that for many years was a good example of such a building. It is a credit to the Royal Borough's planning department that, in spite of its having recently been largely re-built, its distinct, if rather odd-looking, front façade has been retained. This facade expresses its original multiple functions – shop, factory and dwelling. Unfortunately, the mixed use ceased some years ago and, as with so much current development in Chelsea, this large property is now a single dwelling.

Shawfield House was the headquarters of Humphrey Taylor & Co., distillers, until the firm moved to new premises in New Oxford Street in 1909. Kelly's Directory describes Humphrey Taylor & Co. as being 'rectifiers and brandy distillers,

manufacturers of liqueurs, cordials and the only genuine apricot and peach brandy'. They were especially famous for an apricot brandy called Pricotta which is still mentioned in old cocktail recipes, though it is no longer obtainable.

The firm was distilling in Chelsea from as early as 1770. The first Humphrey Taylor grew all the herbs that went into his cordials in his garden, which was visited by people of fashion who came to admire the garden and sample the cordials. It was thus one of the many businesses in the King's Road that were involved with horticulture and gardening for which Chelsea was famous throughout the eighteenth century. Six generations of Taylors carried on distilling on this site. Edward Taylor, born in Chelsea in 1829, was so successful and respected in the trade that in 1887 he became a shareholder of the Glenmorangie distillery and it is said that he shipped stills from London to Scotland.

With the increase in residential development along the King's Road in the nineteenth century, the Taylor family were not slow to carry out some speculative development on their own land. Their shop was originally situated on the King's Road, with the distillery at the rear and

the garden beyond, but in about 1835 they formed a new street, to be known as Shawfield Street, down the middle of the garden, re-locating their manufactory to the western side together with a garden of reduced size and then built a terrace of houses on the eastern side of the street.

The façade of the present building was erected in about 1870. As can be seen from the photographs, the central feature is an archway with big double doors that led through to the distillery buildings, which were arranged around a yard. To the right of the archway and nearest to the King's Road, is a shop selling the products of the manufactory, with probably an office or staff accommodation over. To the left is the owner's house with its own front door.

When Humphrey Taylor moved out of Shawfield House it was taken over by Buckley & Beach, gas engineers and pewterers and the multi-use aspect of the building continued as Mr. Arthur Beach was also living there. In 1971, the building became part of the King's Road fashion scene when Adel Rootstein opened a showroom there from which they sold fashion mannequins and this business continued until the redevelopment into a single house.

David Le Lay



Shawfield House in 1975



Shawfield House later