

SHREWSBURY SUBERBS – BELLE VUE AND COLEHAM

BY PAM BONNER

In an area immediately South East of the town centre on the opposite bank of the river is the large and diverse suburb of Belle Vue and its sub-suburb of Coleham/Longden Coleham. It is approached by crossing either the English Bridge or the Greyfriars footbridge – so called because of its proximity to the site of the Franciscan Monks dwelling.

Longden Coleham was a medieval suburb which became an artisan suburb in the Middle Ages. However, very little is known about the development of the area before 1790, but in the subsequent 30 years it became the most heavily industrialised part of Shrewsbury.

The two suburbs seemed to grow in the following three ways:

1. The need to provide houses for workers employed in riverside industries. The expansion of domestic dwellings encouraged the growth of public houses in the area which then led to the development of more houses. It is worth noting that, in an attempt to address the consumption of alcohol, a temperance cocoa house was established in Coleham in 1878;
2. The development of Shrewsbury as a major railway junction, locomotive maintenance and wagon building centre from around the middle of the 1800's; and
3. The promotion of upper and middle class villa developments throughout the area from the 1840's onwards. This suggested gentrification with substantial houses, some of which were complete with ornamental gardens.

However, there was no structured plan to the development of the area – it was based purely on the land that became available at any given time.

The Riverside Industries

The area now occupied by Carline Crescent, upstream from the confluence of the River Severn and Rea Brook, served from 1768 to 1774 as the yard where stones were shaped for the English Bridge.

The land further up the road where the Barnabas Centre now stands was sold by John Carline in 1789 to Powis and Hodges who built a woollen mill. This was powered by a steam engine and water wheel and was equipped with carding engines, spinning jennies and fulling stocks – which were used for cleansing the cloth in woollen cloth making.

The Mill was then leased in 1803 by a Mancunian – Charles Hulbert – who with partners intended to weave calicoes from yarn spun at Llangollen and then send them to Morda for printing, but the government leased three floors of the largest building for a military store (Napoleonic War??). Unfortunately Hulbert lacked capital and lost his skilled workers to mills in Lancashire and Cheshire. It passed to Thomas Carline.

Whilst Thomas Carline owned the mill and associated buildings the area saw an influx of Irish migrants as a result of the famine in the late 1840's. They settled in an area of the mill development known as Factory Yard – the 1851 census recorded eight lodging houses run by Irish people and all accommodating railway navvies.

As the railway expanded and Shrewsbury developed as an important railway town, there was a new surge in terraced cottages for the workers. This area of growth centred around Scott Street, Rea Street and Rocke Street – an area that later became known as 'Back of the Sheds'.

Other industries in the area included:

1. A lead works in Burrs Field off Kingsland Road - the area now used as a carpark during Shrewsbury Flower Show. This was originally owned by Charles Bage who built a single storey shed to accommodate looms for weaving linen cloth, but the business did not prosper. It was then purchased by Thomas Burr in 1829. He was a London plumber who moved to Shrewsbury around 1812 and made lead pipes in Beeches Lane. His sons developed the site and by 1847 the complex included two steam engines, a rolling mill, a melting furnace and casting bed, a hydraulic pipe-making machine and ovens for producing both white and red lead.

A 150 foot high shot "tower" (for guns) was constructed in 1853. The works caused pollution across the centre of Shrewsbury. It closed in 1894 and was soon demolished, the shot tower collapsing on 3rd May 1894;

2. An iron foundry in Coleham established in approximately 1796 by William Hazeldine which supplied the ironwork for the Pontcysyllte Aqueduct – Thomas Telford's 'Stream in the Sky';
3. A brewery established in 1807 by Thomas Troucer which, in 1828, brewed 120 barrels daily from eight vats. Brewing ceased in 1955 and, after being used for packing eggs and storing greengrocery, the buildings were converted into apartments in the 1990's;
4. A clay tobacco pipe works from about 1830 until 1894 in Pipe Passage/Fairford Place, Longden Coleham;
5. A brush factory which moved in to the area of Hulberts Mill in 1891. The factory had been started by William Hudson in 1818 and was originally located in Mardol. All kinds of brushes and brooms were manufactured there, together with mats for hotels, grand houses and general domestic use. The factory changed hands and by 1925 had moved to Abbey Foregate;
6. A gravel pit in Havelock Road ; and
7. A brick works along Aston Terrace, off Belle Vue Road, producing bricks for use in local developments.

As previously mentioned, the growth of the residential buildings in the area was clustered around the Public Houses and there are four of particular note -

The Boars Head, The Belle Vue Tavern, The Crown and The Masonic Arms.

1. The Boars Head. This is a timber framed building dating from the mid 17th century. In the 1850's this was recorded as having a malthouse, brewhouse and a skittle alley.
2. The Belle Vue Tavern – formerly called The Plough. This pub is built partly in the Arts and Crafts style.
3. The Crown in Coleham. This pub dates from the late 17th or early 18th century.
4. The Masonic Arms on Belle Vue Road built by Daniel Climie, a Scots Civil Engineer involved with the Shrewsbury and Hereford railway. He built the stations on the line to Crewe and boosted his income by operating the local brickworks off Alton Terrace that employed 17 men.

Climie built an estate with the same colour coding that he applied to the railway, using blue brick for first class stations and red brick for second class. The pivot of his development was the polychrome brick Masonic Arms. Polychrome brickwork emerged in the 1860's as a feature of gothic revival architecture wherein bricks of different colours were used in a patterned combination to highlight architectural features.

Flanking the pub on Belle Vue Road are four lofty blue brick houses known as 'Honiton Terrace' named after Daniel Climie's wife's birthplace. The family lived in the end house that butted on to the Masonic Arms.

At right angles to the pub are a row of red brick cottages – Trinity Place – the plebeian portion of Climie's estate.

At the top end of Trinity Street, away from Belle Vue Road, are more prestigious houses. Among the inhabitants was a stone carver from London – George Valducci – who moved into the area in 1861 to set up business at the general cemetery.

Daniel Climie's developments contributed to the gentrification of the area during the mid1800's and I have picked out a few houses that I personally found interesting:

- A pair of lofty three-storey dwellings, in Belle Vue Gardens, each with a tower with a louvered upper storey, mansard roofs, polychrome slating and first floor balconies.

The garden of No. 28 is adorned by the stone tracery of a church window in the decorated style, doubtless removed from one of Shropshire's larger medieval churches during restoration in the 19th century.

The pair of houses were probably built for the printer and antiquarian Henry Adnitt who was living there in 1881 and he may have been responsible for the window appearing in the garden.

- Houses in the Hermitages. The name of this development may derive from the settlement of a medieval ascetic in the area – i.e. a person characterised by severe self-discipline and abstention from all forms of indulgence, typically for religious reasons. Although its modern use comes from the house called the Hermitage on Belle Vue Road. In the early 19th century the house or its predecessor was used as a lunatic asylum by James Johnson, son-in-law of a Mr. Proud of Bilston, a celebrated carer of the mentally disturbed.

The streets named after the Hermitage (north, south and west) lie on the opposite side of the main road on a six acre site that in 1832 consisted of 52 allotments. By the summer of 1896 roads were laid out and sewers, gas and water pipes installed. Building work then took place between 1897 and 1900.

- Havelock Road (called Berwick Road in 1871). Most of the houses on the eastern side were built by 1850 and I have focused on three developments:
 1. Berwick Place – a row of three-storey houses built in a classical style with a veranda. A plaque alongside the front door of No. 7 says ‘F Bourlay, Dancing Master’.
 2. A pair of early 19th century villas flanked by Edwardian wings – and
 3. Six two-storey houses with herringbone lintels and classical doorcases.
- Severnside House and Kynnersley House . Both built by the architect and builder Samuel Poutney Smith who by 1851 was living at Severn Cottage, Coleham. He sold Severn Cottage in 1852, probably because he had built Severnside House, the three-storey mansard roofed dwelling on the opposite side of the road. In 1861 he appears to have been building the adjacent terrace, in which a wagon arch gave access to his yard and brickworks.

By 1871 Smith had built two remarkable pairs of semi-detached houses, one of which was Kynnersley, in a French Renaissance style with mansard roofs, polychrome slatework and re-used ancient internal panelling. They were let to clergy, army officers and widows and spinsters living on investments. From around 1916 the Royal Army Pay Corps then occupied the houses which remained in military use during the following decades.

I have discovered that Belle Vue and Coleham is an area consisting of a rich variety of architectural styles and is full of nooks and crannies waiting to be explored. Because of its eclectic mix of houses, ranging from the very fine to the more humble terraces, it makes a very socially mixed area and a lovely place to live.

(During her talk Pam also distributed some 25 photographs, taken of the areas mentioned, to members of the Group.)