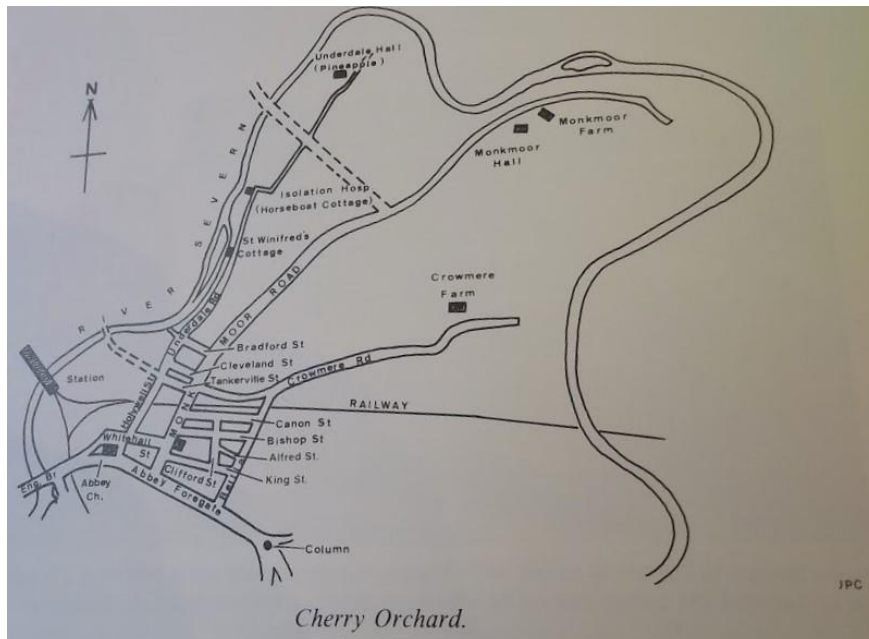


Monkmoor and the Racecourse

Presentation to U3A Local History Group 3 on 4 February 2022

The Monkmoor area



I am taking you back to early 2020 when I did a presentation on Cherry Orchard with the promise of a part 2 covering Monkmoor and The Racecourse, so finally here it is. If you remember, I took you on a virtual walking tour which took us from Whitehall through Cherry Orchard ending at Underdale Hall, now the site of the golf driving range and that's where I left you! I am now going to continue the tour through Monkmoor and the area which was once the Racecourse and back along Monkmoor Road to Whitehall where we started.

The Monkmoor area is surprisingly varied. It consists of river paths, country lanes, a busy main road and a number of interesting old houses. Two notable features are the old airfield and the racecourse.

Origins of Monkmoor

In 1086 a man called Helgot was Lord of the Manor of Uffington and in the Domesday Book there were 14 households consisting of 3 villagers, 2 small holders, 3 slaves, 4 female slaves and 2 Frenchmen. Helgot also owned an area of moorland and a wood just across the river from Uffington. In 1087 he decided to give this land away to Shrewsbury Abbey, hence the name, Monkmoor.

3 variations of the names recorded in earlier times are Le Monkemor in 1303, Monkismore in 1365 and Monkemore in 1463.

Monkmoor Farm is mentioned as early as 1545 and up to the 1800s much of the area was made up of enclosed fields and farmland. There was a well-used road across the moor giving access from Abbey Foregate across the river. Documents belonging to the Abbey mention a road leading to Haughmond and Uffington in the 13th Century.

The river in Monkmoor



So, from Underdale Hall we are going to walk along to the road bridge over Telford Way and down the steps to walk along the river. In the picture you can just see the village of Uffington across the river.

At the top of the steps is an information board explaining that this was the path taken by the war poet, Wilfred Owen and his family when they walked to Uffington Church on a Sunday. It tells the story that Wilfred had commented here that the buttercups had blessed his young brother's boots with gold. This memory later inspired the line in his famous poem "Spring Offensive" where he says "...the buttercups had blessed with gold their slow boots" only this time he was not in Shrewsbury but on the Western Front.

Monkmoor Lane



After following the river path for while we then take a right turn walking away from the river and into Monkmoor Lane. In this area was Monkmoor Farm, the home in the early 19th Century of Isaac Taylor, who combined farming with a stage coach business at the Lion Hotel. The picture above, were taken on a gorgeous sunny Winter's day in lockdown January 2021.

Monkmoor Hall



If you had taken this walk along Monkmoor Lane in earlier times you would have passed Monkmoor Hall but today what you see is the entrance to the sewage works! Monkmoor Hall was a mansion with 13 bedrooms built about 1840. In the 1850s and 60s it was the home of William Butler Lloyd (1825-1874), a banker who was also mayor of Shrewsbury in the 1850s. His mother was Harriet Lloyd who was the youngest daughter of Samuel Butler who owned Whitehall. Their son, George Butler Lloyd was MP for Shrewsbury in 1913. The mansion had various occupants until 1909 when it was opened as a sanatorium for scarlet fever patients. It was demolished in 1961.

The Airfield and RAF Monkmoor



The pictures above show Glenburn Gardens. RAF Monkmoor was based in this area during World Wars 1 and 2. These houses in Glenburn Gardens, further along on the right of Monkmoor Lane, were once the officers' mess and barracks. They were offered for sale in 1922. By 1927 some had been adapted for houses forming Glenburn Gardens. Numbers 9 and 10 are single storey buildings which appear to be barrack blocks.

The Isolation Hospital



Still on the same site, this building was the women's hostel. It was then adapted as an isolation hospital, opened in 1923. After the 2nd WW it was used as a hospital for children and then for geriatric patients from 1947 until it closed in 1961. The building remained until 1991.

The photograph is from Shropshire Archives, date unknown.

An aerial view of Monkmoor Hospital





Part of Monkmoor Hospital was built in 1918 as a women's hostel connected with the airfield. At this time, Monkmoor Hall was the town's isolation hospital, along with a smallpox unit in Underdale Road. The hostel was converted, in 1921, by the Shrewsbury and Atcham Joint Hospital Board and turned into the area's isolation hospital, giving accommodation of about fifty beds. It became a children's hospital in the 1950s, and later, a geriatric unit. The hospital closed in 1991 and was demolished in 1994. The gentlemen are being entertained by Matron Ellis.

Continuing along Monkmoor Lane, we have reached the area which is now Conway Drive, the site of the Monkmoor Airfield. The runway was in the area now crossed by Woodcote Way. The hangers were on the opposite side, now the Monkmoor Industrial Estate. It opened in 1918 and was used as an Observers School and for aerial reconnaissance.



During WW2 the hangers were occupied by the RAF salvage unit carrying out repairs on crashed aircraft. One of the hangers later became an indoor sports area and there were also pleasure flights from here.

After the 2nd World War, the hangers were adapted for commercial use including Rolls

Royce and Hathaway Tools. The front part which you may recognise is now a carpet shop with other commercial units behind.



Ancient fields and farmland



We have now crossed the roundabout into Monkmoor Road with the police station

on our left. This is the North end of Monkmoor Road and the area around it would once have been woods, fields and farmland. There are indications here of its ancient past. Monkmoor's connection with the Abbey can be traced in some of its street names. Land in the area of Abbott's Road was personally owned by the Abbot of Shrewsbury. The area around Connynger Crescent is named after the Connynger or warren for rabbits farmed there for the Monk's table.

Judith Butts Lane



Walking towards town along Monkmoor Road, many of you will know Judith Butts Lane on the right. The name has had a number of variations – Judas Butts, Judeth's Butts and on Hitchcock's 1832 map of Shrewsbury, Judah's Butts. The earliest reference to the name is from 1508 when it was a pasture called Judas Butts. The name Butts in a place name often refers to archery but may also simply mean a strip of land abutting another and in this case is likely to mean land owned by a man called Judas. No-one really knows how Judas became Judith! The Judith Butts housing estate was built about 1932.

St Peter's Church



The next notable building we come to on the right is St Peter's Church. Monkmoor was part of the parish of Holy Cross. In the 1930s there was a plan to make Monkmoor a separate parish with a church on this site. However, following the Depression and with the advent of the 2nd World War this never happened. Instead, the small church of St Peter was built as an annexe to the Abbey Church.

The Racecourse



We are now taking a diversion left off Monkmoor Road, into Racecourse Crescent, the area that was once Shrewsbury's Racecourse. Horse racing had been taking place in Shrewsbury since 1718, first at Kingsland and then at Bicton Heath. In 1832 a new racecourse was created on this site on land owned by the Earl of Tankerville. The Earl leased the 56 acres of land to a Richard Taylor who eventually bought it for £10,000.

The racecourse set out for the Royal Agricultural Show in 1845



The races were managed from 1843 by John Frail, the Conservative Party agent. It grew as an important national horseracing venue with 10,000 attending the meeting in May 1845. It gained a reputation for being fixed and was rife with pickpockets! The Rev Charles Wightman alleged that racing brought to Shrewsbury "some of the greatest blackguards in existence". By 1887 the company had gone bankrupt and the land offered for sale. In 1888 Alfred Atfield, a corn merchant bought the land for £12,000.

However, the Racecourse was also used for sport such as cricket, football and archery. Other events including the Royal Agricultural Show – see this picture of the show in 1845. It became successful and in 1884 many people arrived by train to the drop station in Underdale Road and a temporary platform was even built behind Crowmoor Road. Others would arrive by ferry. The ground was still used and in particular for the West Midlands Show in 1888 and 1895.

Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee Celebration at the Racecourse 1887



The Pavillion 1914. Originally the entrance to the Racecourse



Staff at the Royal Show 1914



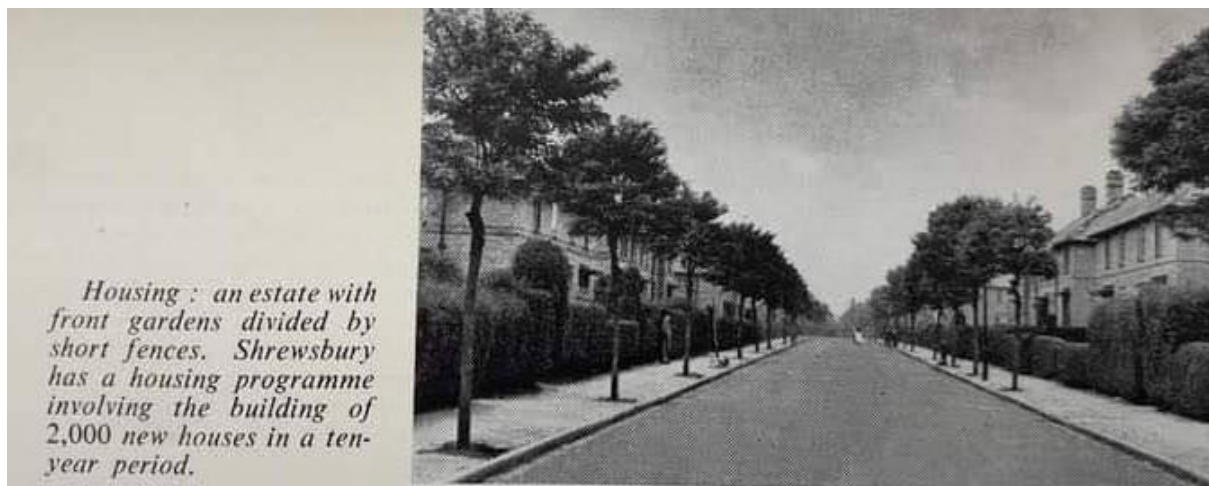
George V arriving at the Royal Show 1914



The need for social housing

There had been pressure on the Council to provide housing in the suburbs of Shrewsbury from the early 1900s when slums in the town were deemed unfit for habitation and “calculated to breed dirty habits if not to slacken morals”. After the first WW the need grew to build homes fit for returning heroes. Several estates were built in the years following the war.

This included the 56 acre site of the Racecourse. The Council announced plans to build 204 council houses and building began in 1926.



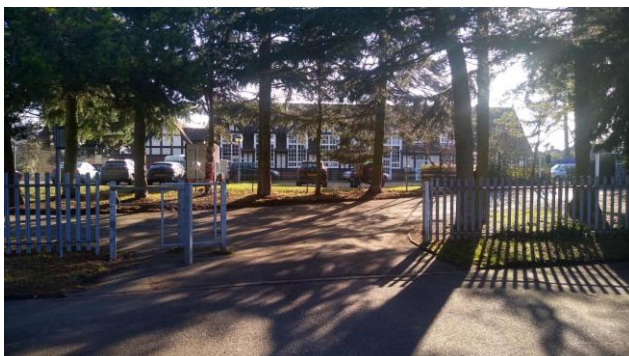
Modern day Racecourse Avenue



By 1937 they had built 300 houses and you can see these today. You will recognise the road names, Racecourse Crescent, Lane and Avenue. The only part left undeveloped was what we now know as Monkmoor Recreation Ground.



The Chase



This was originally Monkmoor School on Racecourse Crescent. The buildings have now been converted to housing.

Monkmoor School



Monkmoor School was built in 1929 at a cost of £30,000. It was designed to be an “open air school” for girls and particular care was taken with the heating and ventilation so that children could always work in warm fresh air.

The first open air school was opened in London in 1907



Open air schools or schools of the woods were designed to prevent and combat the widespread rise of tuberculosis that occurred in the period leading up to the Second World War. The schools were built to provide open-air therapy so that fresh air, good ventilation and exposure to the outside would improve the children's health. The schools were mostly in areas away from city centres, sometimes in rural locations, to provide a space free from pollution and overcrowding. The creation and design of the schools paralleled that of the tuberculosis sanatoriums, in that hygiene and exposure to fresh air were paramount.

The Southern end of Monkmoor Road

We now return to Monkmoor Road.

A man riding his bike along Monkmoor Road around 1903.



As we walk along Monkmoor Road back towards town, you will see The Ice House, just before the Abbey pub on the right. This is one of the earliest houses in the area. It was originally a dairy farmstead surrounded by fields and countryside. How

different from how it looks now! As you see, it now has mock tudor timber framing which makes it difficult for historians to date but what a fabulous picture, especially the way this group of people are standing nonchalantly in the garden. Who are they and does the dog belong to them or is he just passing by?

Ashley House



Ashley House, on the corner of Bradford Street and Monkmoor Road is now the Abbey pub. It was built about 1860 as a private house and looked out over the Racecourse. Later, in the 1930s it became a hotel.

Castlecote



This was one of the earliest houses in Monkmoor road, number 77 and called Castlecote built in 1903. It is now a guest house.

Numbers 69-73 under construction before 1910. Number 69 was to become the home of the famous war poet, Wilfred Owen.



Wilfred Owen's house today.



In my Cherry Orchard presentation, I showed you a picture of the house where Wilfred Owen lived with his family in Canon Street. They later moved to this house on Monkmoor Road. There was very little development in Monkmoor road when the Owen family moved here to this newly built house in 1910. For much of that time

Wilfred was away fighting in the First WW. He died in action in 1918. Wilfred's father, Thomas named the house Mahim after a coastal district of Bombay where Thomas had worked when he was young. It was given Grade 2 listed status and a blue plaque with the inscription "Wilfred Owen lived here 1910-1918". This was not until 2014 as part of the commemorations of WWI.

One of the other houses built at the same time as Wilfred Owen's.



The Christadelphian Hall



The Christadelphian Hall on the corner of Monkmoor Road and Tankerville Street was designed by local architect, A E Lloyd Oswell who designed several buildings in Shrewsbury including the Fire Office Building in High Street overlooking the Square, noted for its elaborate carved stonework.

The parish of the Abbey was called Holy Cross and this building opened in 1884 as a

mission room for the Holy Cross Parish. It was later used for clothing production for the Shrewsbury based company, Sillhouette during WW2 and is now the Christadelphina Hall.

Ashbourne House 1893



Next we come to this lovely old house tucked away on the opposite side of Monkmoor Road which you would miss if you weren't on foot. Built for a Miss Bulmer by Shrewsbury architect, Alfred Deakin in 1893. Divided into 2 houses in the 1950s.

Prynce's Villas



Numbers 13-15 Monkmoor Road towards the town end were named after Richard Prynce, a London lawyer who was the first owner of Whitehall. Described as a mix of

timber framing and classical elements built around 1886.

1-3 Monkmoor Gardens 1903



Note Whitehall in the background of the picture on the right. I love the picture of the 2 children – straight out of an Edwardian novel!
1-3 Monkmoor Gardens today.



A little further along on the left of Monkmoor Road you come to Whitehall Mansion. This picture is looking at it from Whitehall Terrace which is where our Cherry Orchard walk began.



Sources

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