



AMBLECOTE HISTORY

Number 9

The Newsletter of Amblecote History Society

November 2004

VITAL AMBLECOTE HISTORY IN MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS



recent visit to Amblecote by a lady who formerly lived at Amblecote Hall between the 1920's and 40's, and who contacted Society Chairman, Father Paul Tongue with regard to Church records, has resulted in the emergence of several precious documents relating to our area.

The first is a photocopy of part of the mid 17th Century estate map held at Enville Hall (members will remember Borough Archaeologist John Hemingway's reference to this in June), and the second a series of photographs of Amblecote Hall taken between 60 and 80 years ago.

The map, part of which is reproduced here, provides an incredible amount of fascinating information and opportunities for further research. Good quality A4 copies are available at meetings for 50p should anyone wish to observe it more closely.

The photographs were displayed at the September meeting and one particularly pleasing panoramic view is reproduced here showing the Hall, possibly from the old pre-open cast Vicarage Road.

The Society intends to devote the April 2005 meeting to discussions about Amblecote Hall, when the map, pictures and other information will be presented - and further observations invited. Mike Perkins for example, recently came across a reference to the death of William Raybould of

An extra event has been added to the Amblecote History Society Calendar on **Wednesday 15th of December commencing 7.30pm.**

Originally December had been avoided because of its proximity to Christmas. However a number of requests have been made for our own festive 'social', and the event will simply be that; with no fixed programme, but just providing a chance to meet and chat about matters historical and Amblecote.

Nibbles and wine will be provided but if anyone has a special talent in the mince pie department all donations will be gratefully accepted!



'Hamble-cote Hall', who was buried at St. Mary's Church Kingswinford on the 10th of November 1726. Can we, through collaborative effort, begin to unravel the history of this vital - and now utterly lost - Amblecote building.

WHICH WAY UP IS THE MAP?



The Secretary has received a number of enquiries about the orientation of the 17th century map. This has West at its top, with what is now Vicarage Road running down the middle and High Street Amblecote forming the top of a 'T' with this. The distinct triangle (see left) in the approximate centre is the old Amblecote Hall/Farm area which in pre-open-cast days was just above the railway bridge.



Below: Amblecote Hall photographed in the 1920s, possible looking north from Vicarage Road above the railway.



Above: Amblecote Hall and surrounding area as shown on the estate map of 1688.



CORBETT PERAMULATIONS



Walking The Borders of the Hill House Estate - And More

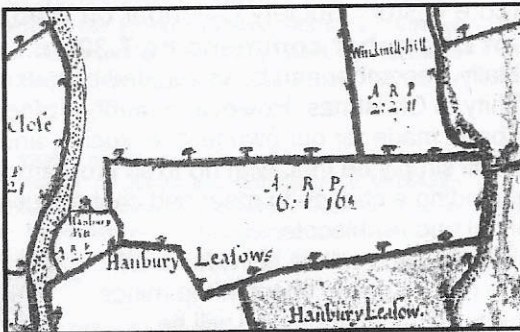


Some fifty members and guests turned out on the evening of August 25th to perambulate the perimeter of Corbett Hospital. Father Paul Tongue began by showing a copy of the 1688 map (see Page 1) covering the whole of the Corbett (more properly Hill House) estate and more, which promised to greatly enhance our historical understanding as the evening's tour progressed.

The party set out from the Church Hall car park on an anticlockwise tour of the site starting 'bottom left hand corner' by the Royal Oak pub.

As with our previous walk around the gas works site the idea of the Corbett tour was to both encourage memories of the area and spot items of historical interest. Mike Perkins began (with a memory that is, not as an item of historical interest) by recalling the Vicarage Road edge of the hospital before its 1960's expansion.

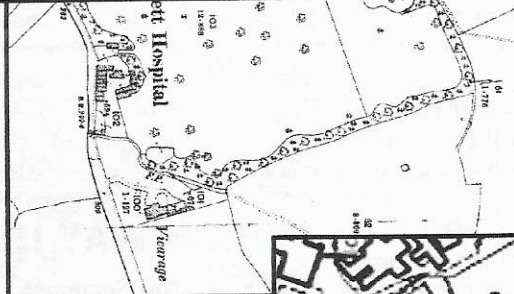
There was, he noted, a wall that ran as far as top entrance to the modern rear car park, with a lodge at the High Street end. In the grounds behind the wall were a number of huge horse chestnut trees only one of which one remains, standing behind the lower out-patients car park (of which more later). Walking up Vicarage Road the party paused adjacent to the new Ambulatory Centre where Mike recalled gates that led into an area of stables, before proceeding in careful single file along the narrow pavement to 'The Gully' below the shop. Visible at ground level on the left, projecting from beneath a modern concrete fence are a long row of curved blue bricks, remnants of cottages that once stood here. Recollection was also made of a wooden hut that latterly served as a grocery shop but had previously been the Amblecote Scout HQ.



The Gully in 1688

The party turned left into the The Gully and followed its winding path with a magnificent Victorian brick wall on the right. This was the boundary of the old vicarage, built in 1855 and demolished in about 1959, which stood on the high ground now occupied by Queen's Crescent. At this point Father Paul, using the 1688 map, was able to match the exact course of The Gully against the path shown on the old document. Clearly, despite centuries of building and re-building, its course as a right of way had remained exactly as that laid down by "The rolling English drunkard" of yore! John Hemingway's talk of a few weeks earlier was recalled when he had pointed out the same area was known as 'Hanbury Pitt', a Saxon reference, possibly, to a 'high fort' of ancient origin. Could it be that the high ground on which Queens Crescent now stands is in origin an Ancient British construction?

The old vicarage wall ends with its original corner pillar, after which The Gully takes a left turn and descent, following the Hill Estate boundary on the left and allowing glimpses through the modern fencing to the meadow beyond. Helen Cook (whom we were very pleased to see after illness), whose knowledge of, and concern for, the meadow is well known, was able to indicate a number of important features. She pointed out a range of specimen trees including a rare cut-leaf beech tree, although noted sadly that an even better example had been lost during the recent building work. Interestingly, from this angle the meadow presents a spectacular aspect bringing the hill of 'The Hill' into panoramic view, illustrating how the area got its name as well as the original topography of Amblecote's pre-industrial high ground. Helen noted that in spring the meadow is full of indigenous bluebells, indicative of ancient woodland. Using the 1688 map it was possible to determine the approximate position of Amblecote Hall and it became obvious that the existing paths are nothing less than a series of lanes that once centred upon it. John Hemingway's talk was again recalled, when he remarked that the Hall area was probably the ancient (very ancient) centre of Amblecote, a fact born out by the map. Thus the modern pathways that are, in fact, fragments of ancient tracks. One striking feature was the way in which the railway would have cut through some of these making them redundant as modern roads, whilst those where bridges were built (such as Vicarage Road) remained in use. Mention was made of the 'Murder Bridge' and the fact that one path previously utilised this before the bridge was removed during the 1970's open cast operations, thus causing the lane to it to disappear. It was quite something to realise that we were standing 'within one field' of Amblecote Hall and that a millennia or more of history had disappeared within less than a lifetime. Meanwhile it was noted that Dennis Hall, now thankfully preserved, was clearly visible on the opposite side of the Coalbournbrook, making the point that old Hill House and the Hall were once 'big houses' designed to impress the neighbours as much as be lived in!

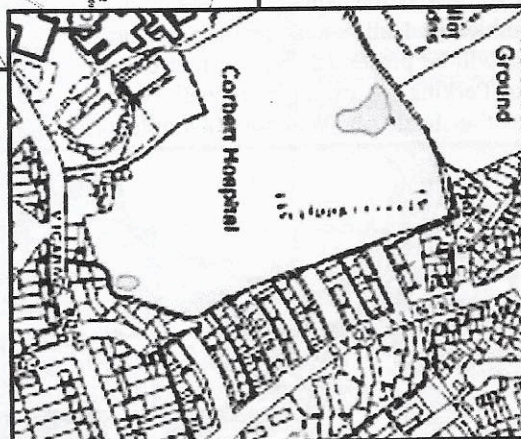


The Gully in 1903

Turning left again at the 'top right' corner of the Corbett estate Mike Perkins again recalled the area during its less urban past. A hawthorn hedge had backed onto Amblecote Hall Farm and there was a sharp drop into a ditch which, during winter, "became quite a torrent". He remembers many amateur bridges built at this point to enable locals to use a short cut via the Murder Bridge.

All along the northern Gully we were pleased to see occasional remains of the original hospital wall and fencing. Mostly overgrown and sometimes bizarrely entwined with branches, nevertheless a low wall of cinder blocks topped by iron railings could be glimpsed through the undergrowth.

Partway down, the path opens out onto Amblecote's playing fields once, of course, agricultural land. Along with the meadow these fields form a green corridor stretching from Vicarage Road to Collis Street; something it is vital to preserve. Again recollections of the old fields were observed, with the point made that the path once ran alongside a now disappeared (probably ancient) hedge. The open land gave yet another view of the Corbett meadow, this time enabling us to see the natural sandstone collapse along its eastern slope.



The Gully in 2004. The path along the edge of the Corbett Estate still follows a track that is recognisable over 300 years ago; and is certainly much older, possibly skirting an ancient earthwork?

There were more specimen trees, including a wonderful willow and some magnificent pines. Re-entering the path proper a sea of healthy looking allotments on the right gave some hope for the survival of civilisation, and it was recalled that in fairly recent times an adjustment of the adjacent school grounds had extended these. It was also noted that the pathway had been 'squeezed in' to allow fencing for the allotments and school to stand on the slightly higher ground of the original path. It was remarked that the path would thus once have been much wider, allowing carts and in latter days tractors to reach the farmland above. Indeed the arrangement of the pathway, a flattened lane along a contour line along the edge of an estate with a ditch to one side suggested (albeit to amateur historians) something of typically Saxon origin where ditches and banks were used to define borders - one of the English landscapes most important forms of historical

survival.

Speaking of heights, views were also obtained of the surrounding countryside illustrating how high this part of Amblecote generally is in comparison to surrounding districts. From one point views of the churches of Wordsley and Brierley Hill, as well as a glimpse of the Stour Valley, demonstrated the paths elevated position; essentially running along the contour of the northern side of the promontory on which ancient Amblecote was once located. Once again recalling John Hemingway's talk and applying some entirely amateur historical observations, it was conjectured that whilst Vicarage Road may well have been a prehistoric 'ridgeway' track leading to ancient Amblecote, The Gully may well represent a later Saxon ditch border between two estates, later adapted into a farm lane.

It was quite something to think that a thousand years ago Anglo-Saxon farmers would have used this same route to walk from the manor house at Amblecote to the main road.

At the bottom of the gully the path opens out into a driveway servicing the north west entrance to the hospital. On the left is the now redundant hospital swimming pool and below that Hill House, the magnificent Edwardian pile built by John Corbett to house the hospital's resident surgeon. Now housing hospital services its long-term future, like much of the site, is unknown.

Again referring to the 1688 map it was fascinating to see that the lane emerged onto the main road at exactly the same point, and that opposite was marked a significant building. Opposite us still stood a significant building – Sankey House – though sadly due for imminent demolition. Obviously Sankey House is not the building of 1688 but the juxtaposition of this building and that on the map begs the question whether it was built over the remains of a much older construction? Several members noted the eccentric nature of the wall of Sankey House and its outbuildings, demonstrating several periods of construction, whilst Father Paul remembered mention of the demolition of old barns on the property. It is not difficult to imagine that in pre-industrial times the lane and the main road would have formed a much more significant T-junction, and that an important farm or dwelling might have been located there.

The party then walked along high street with the Corbett wall to our left. Members expressed their ongoing concerns about this structure which, as a defining architectural signature within the Amblecote landscape, is considered vital for preservation. Close up viewing enabled those present to appreciate the wonderful mixture of brickwork, considerably patched and extended over the years. It was naturally assumed that the wall pre-dates the hospital and was originally that of Hill House, although no one knew for sure. Does anyone have any definitive knowledge of this?

By the time the old hospital gates and lodge had been reached, dusk was falling but not so much that these important structures could not be appreciated. The building and the ornate gates and their surrounding wall structure are absolutely essential to the history of Amblecote and Stourbridge.



The Gully in 2004. The old Victorian Vicarage wall on the left set on exposed sandstone, and the modern concrete hospital wall to the right. However both are very new in comparison to the actual track way they define.

They are locally listed by Dudley MBC and as such already possess a measure of protection.

Entering the gates the walkers made their only foray onto hospital grounds. In fact, mention was made of previous attempt by the Health Authority to restrict public right of way between the gates and the lower car park entrance, something that was successfully resisted.

Indeed, the idea was floated that the area formed by the lower car park and the drive from there to the gate represents an important Amblecote open space. Within it, the facility of the car park itself, used out of out-patient hours - unofficially but nonetheless importantly - as an 'overflow' for events at the church and church hall (weddings at the church would be almost impossible without this extra parking). Whilst the massive horse chestnut tree at the car park's far end is one of the most impressive in all of Amblecote. Add to this the tree-lined avenue from the hospital drive to the lodge and the entire area forms a 'corridor' of greenery, public utility and right of way that it would be both inconvenient and tragic to lose.

Continuing on the theme of trees it was pointed out that a mature tree had been very recently felled at the top of the hospital's main drive. Given that all significant trees on the sites have TPO (Tree Preservation Orders) it was decided to investigate the reason for this loss.

Enquiries made by Helen Cook and Councillors Martin and Banks have revealed that the felling of a large wych elm at the top of the Corbett Hospital main drive was within the parameters of the Tree Preservation Order placed upon it. James Atkins a Tree Conservation Officer at Dudley MBC kindly made enquiries on our behalf and discovered that the tree had developed a dangerous split which, due to its proximity to nearby buildings, necessitated its removal.

MORE ON SANKEY HOUSE

Members will be aware of the sad and deteriorating state of Sankey House on Amblecote High Street, the demolition of which cannot be far away. Borough Archaeologist John Hemingway has written to the Society with further information about the site on which the house stands which obviously once of considerable importance. It could be that demolition will reveal further information and, as John indicates, he is keeping a 'watching brief'.

"I have been doing a spot of research on Sankey House. The earliest reference I have found is in a deed of 7th May 1588 when a 'little croft' at Holloway End is tenanted by Richard Hocekis(Hodgkis). This was sublet with other lands by William Beare from John Grey of Enville. As the only 'little croft' in the area is the site of Sankey House it is more than probable that this is the first sign of occupation of the site that we have. Incidentally a 'croft' is a piece of land associated with a building. A later document, dated January 27th 1680 stated that Lord Grey paid £80 to the then occupiers, Gray and Ruth Jeavon, as a mortgage. Mr Jeavon appears to have been an Amblecote clothier. The district in this document was said to be Holloway End again. The fields attached to the property if we look at the 1688 map which you have used for your recent walk, (This must be another copy of the one I have seen at Enville), were called Broomy Leasow.

The land was divided into three plots with the Jeavon's occupying the house and garden and Thomas Rogers and Thomas Moody renting the fields. It is this latter surname that can be picked up in the 1769 map when

field names called Moody's Close's were recorded on the site of the Broomy Leasow's. By 1691 Rogers and Moody had gone and the property was occupied by John Glasebrook, Elinor Briscoe and Edward Wilmott. The property was let to Edward Holton on the 22nd May 1744 at a yearly rent of £14 and he still occupied it four years later. By 1773 it was in the possession of Richard Willetts who held the 'house, barn & garden'. The barn lay to the north of the house and is shown on the 1769 map. Willetts was a farmer, as in an Assessment of 1784 he held a stable and a foyldary as well as a further 30 acres 3 roods and 13 perches of land close to the Coalbourne Brook. No other documents to the house site have as of yet been discovered.

It is often difficult to appreciate how old buildings really are by just looking at them. They often need a careful survey, with the plaster taken of the interior walls before one can hazard a guess. But this is my opinion for what it is worth! To start with the 1688 drawings should not be taken as photographic-type images as they are stylised representations. However the footprint of the structure shown in the 1769 map looks as if it is situated on the same site as the present building. In which case there is a possibility that at least some of the 18th century walls may still survive. There is a big 'if' here but it is well worth exploring. I have added it to our Sites and Monuments Records and its unique number is SMR12279. My colleague has also communicated with the Development Control Officer who is responsible for it. Although it might not be possible to stop its demolition we at least may be able to deliberate on its age!"

*John Hemingway
Borough Archaeologist*



A TOUCH of GLASS

The International Festival of Glass which took place over the August Bank Holiday weekend was a stunning success, with Amblecote History Society playing a small but significant role.

Organised by the Ruskin Glass Centre in Wollaston Road (Society members will recall our visit there last summer) the festival engaged an incredible diversity of participants ranging from major local sponsors such as Plowden and Thompson to artists from around the globe. The event combined history and modernity, tradition and the avant garde; with lectures on glassmaking, displays and classes in glassmaking itself and the British Glass Biennale - an exhibition of contemporary glass with a £5,000 prize (won by Hannah Kippax). All the principle local glass venues took part with events at the Bonded Warehouse, Ruskin Centre, Plowden & Thompson, Redhouse Cone (all linked by canal transport), as well as the Broadfield House Museum and Royal Brierley Experience.

As the Society's contribution to the Festival, Jason Ellis, author of *Glassmakers of Stourbridge and Dudley*, made a presentation on the *History of the Coalbournhill Glasshouse*, the historic name of what is now the Ruskin Centre and Glasshouse College, formerly the works of Webb Corbett; and of course the very site upon which Jason was delivering his talk.

Jason covered the entire history of the glasshouse from 1691 to the present day. In particular he unravelled the dynasties of the Hills (of Dennis Hall) and the Webb's whose labyrinthine family connections encompassed, at one time or another, much of our area's commercial and manufacturing activities.

He also noted the physical nature of the works, complimented this with a series of fascinating illustrations. Of particular note was the way in which buildings has 'wandered' across the site, with maps, drawings and photographs demonstrating that over the centuries its cones, workshops, dwellings and other buildings have been constructed, extended, amalgamated, demolished and rebuilt in a never ending 'dance' across the landscape. It was as if the glasshouse itself was continually reshaping itself, emulating the many and varied products that flowed from it. Nevertheless certain key survivals remain and Jason was able to identify several architectural details including the High Street gates and features of Harlestone House that have remained unchanged over the centuries.

Also on display during the festival was an exhibition entitled *The Gaffers Hands*. Co-ordinated by Society member Brian Mason the display in the Glasshouse Café consisted of cast glass hands (and some faces!) of some of the 'old masters' of the local industry, accompanied by photographs and their own personal tales of life in the glasshouse. The exhibit was complimented by an exhibition at Broadfield House called, *Heroes of the Wheel* featuring glass engravers both historical and contemporary.

Meanwhile, in true festival spirit (!) the events were complimented by various entertainments including music and drink; with special glass filling delights from Enville Ales and Halfpenny Green Vineyards. A stunning pyrotechnic display by specialist theatre company Walk the Plank concluded the weekend, which encompassed a spectacular music and pyrotechnic display accompanying live glassmaking.

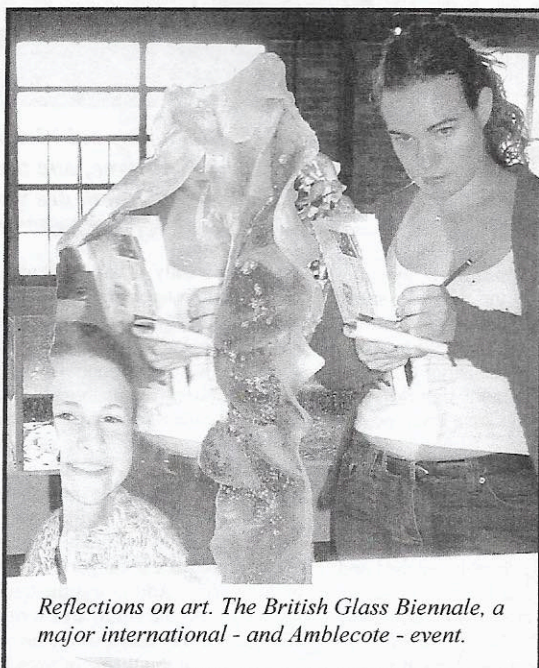
The International Festival of Glass marks a turning point in the his-

tory of Stourbridge Glass. For over a decade now the industry has been viewed as in decline, with closure after closure of glassworks and dependent industries. Only Plowden and Thompson remain as anything like a traditional works; surviving through an ingenious ability to adapt to changed circumstances. Yet, whilst the factories laid off workers and lost world markets British studio glass has, largely unnoticed by those whose focus was on the traditional industry, gained a great strength; fuelled in no small measure by the efforts of Stourbridge glass designers and the teaching focus the area still provides.


The Victorian and Edwardian industry in its heyday directly sponsored the encouragement of art alongside industry as the area's old college buildings (with the sad exception of demolished Wordsley) still testify. With the old industry now gone it is the new art of glass, supported by the surviving traditions that are poised to breathe life into a great revival of Stourbridge glass. The International Festival of Glass provided a glimpse through the looking glass into this very positive future and - importantly for Amblecote History Society - allowed a wonderful chance to celebrate the history and traditions of a craft that is so vital to the heritage to our area.

Special congratulations to Jenine Christley for making IFG 2004 work so well. The next IFG is planned for 2006. The

Society must ensure we are fully engaged with it.



Reflections on art. The British Glass Biennale, a major international - and Amblecote - event.

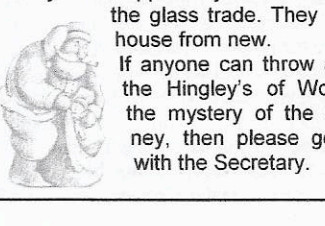
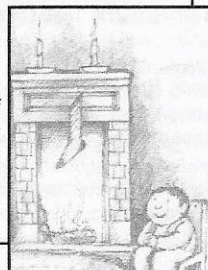


The Sixth Chimney Mystery

Julia Taylor of Woodcroft (36A) High Street Amblecote has a number of questions for Society members concerning this house, into which she and her family have moved. Woodcroft is the large considerably elevated house on the Stourbridge side of the Fish standing opposite Harlestone House. During extensive renovation work it has emerged that whilst there are 6 chimneys on the north side of the house only 5 of these can be traced to fireplaces...why? Furthermore, whilst redesigning the garden and drive the Taylors have discovered a vast collection of refractory bricks and many solid lumps of coloured and plain glass. Are the two connected? Did someone produce 'home made' glass in the house? Or is there a simpler explanation for both the chimney and the glass remains?

Julia has been told that the house was previously lived in by brother and sister Donald and May Hingley. Donald was a bank manager and May kept house, although the family were apparently also associated with the glass trade. They lived in the house from new.

If anyone can throw any light of the Hingley's of Woodcroft, or the mystery of the sixth chimney, then please get in touch with the Secretary.

AMBLECOTE MEMORIALS of the GREAT WAR

Fifty members and guests gathered at Amblecote Church Hall on Wednesday October 20th to hear a talk by the Society's Secretary, Nick Baker entitled *Amblecote, Memorials of the Great War*.

Nick outlined the reasons why the Great War of 1914-18 was commemorated in a way that no war has been before or since. The massive expansion of British forces that occurred during the war with almost nine million men under arms by 1918, and almost 900,000 casualties, affected almost everyone in the country with death visited upon every location and strata of society. In addition, with almost half British casualties having no known grave, the aftermath of the war saw a great psychological need to remember those who had died principally through the recording of names.

Nick divided his talk into several sections each dealing with a different memorial or memorial type. From the outset he acknowledged that although Amblecote had its own distinct memorials there was considerable overlap with those of Stourbridge, not least because the Memorial Athletics Ground, part of the Stourbridge memorial effort, lies within the borders of Amblecote.

The Amblecote Lych Gate

The first mention of an Amblecote memorial was made by the then incumbent, Father H M Crabbe, in early 1919. As a battlefield chaplain he returned from the war insistent on "something really big", suggesting a new chancel for the church or a church hall. Ideas snowballed as the UDC endorsed the concept and a public meeting added several more grand suggestions including UDC offices, a library and a playing field. A War Memorial Committee was formed, chaired by J H Mees. However, it soon became obvious that none of the schemes were financially viable and at the suggestion of Father Crabbe the idea of a Lych Gate with the names of the fallen inscribed on bronze panels was finally agreed. Although located at the Parish Church the memorial was nevertheless a civic one, the idea being fully supported by Amblecote's chapel community. An initial fund raising effort brought in £250 towards an estimated cost of £375. However, the rest proved remarkably difficult to find and only after local builders John Guest offered to build the gate for £375 with the balance to be paid 'as and when' could the project commence. The gate was erected in October 1921 and much pride was taken in the fact that it had been made entirely within the bounds of Amblecote Parish. A dedication ceremony on November 6th attracted a large crowd, possibly a thousand strong. Unfortunately the lack of funds meant that the names of the 61 Amblecote dead were painted on wooden panels rather than the hoped for cast bronze. Indeed, Nick noted that despite some considerable searching he has been unable to discover when the current bronze panels were actually erected - though this may have been as late as 1950 when the names from WW2 were added.

The Institute Memorial

The second Amblecote memorial discussed was that of the Amblecote Institute at the bottom of Collis Street. Still lovingly preserved by the Institute the memorial was erected in 1922 on the wall of the billiard hall. It consists of a bronze and enamel plaque on a carved oak surround and lists four members of the Institute together with details of their regiments and dates of death. Three of the names cross reference with those on the Lych gate whilst one, James Lander, does not.

Private and Organisational Memorials

Nick went on to mention a number of private memorials within Amblecote. These were commonly erected during the immediate post-war period, especially when it became official policy not to repatriate bodies. Holy Trinity church contains a crucifix dedicated to the memory of 12 church members who died and a bronze plaque listing their names has recently been refurbished. Nick also showed slides of several gravestone memorials to Great War dead, with names and other details added to family memorials. Finally he noted a small number of official war graves in Amblecote churchyard of men who died at home or in UK hospitals of wounds or the late effects of gas.

The Stourbridge War Memorial Scheme

Nick then went on to describe the Stourbridge War Memorial scheme which, although organised by Stourbridge Borough Council, eventually came to encompass a much wider area and involved both the residents and landscape of Amblecote. He explored in some detail a public meeting in March 1919 at which 'battle lines' were drawn between town councillors and a large group of semi-organised ex-servicemen, the latter determined to have a social club as a memorial and nothing else. Over several acrimonious months wars of words were waged between

the ex-serviceman and the 'establishment' until anarchy threatened to prevail. Adding to the difficulties was the news that Lady Grey of Enville Hall intended to sell the Stourbridge Athletics Ground (located in Amblecote), home of much Stourbridge sport including Cricket and Football. The Stourbridge War Memorial Committee proposed purchasing the ground as part of their scheme only to be 'voted down' at a public meeting. Good sense came in the form of a privately sponsored conference organised at the Stourbridge Old Edwardian Club which suggested a three part memorial. This comprised a local cenotaph in the town itself, a memorial to the overseas dead in Stourbridge Cemetery and the purchase of the Athletics Ground where an ex-servicemen's social club would be built, all to be paid for by public subscription.

The War Memorial Club

The club was built on land adjacent to the athletics ground using a hut donated by Thomas Webb the glassmakers of Dennis. Nick outlined the history of the hut which began life in Collis Street as a social club for Webb's and, after they decided to move this into Dennis Hall, became a bone of considerable contention between the UDC and the company as the latter attempted to use the hut "for purposes other". There appeared to be relief all round when Webb's offered to present the hut to a good cause. The Social Club was opened in January 1922. Two years later a fine bowling green was added, paid for by Major Harcourt Webb and Alderman H E Palfrey, both prominent local politicians and businessmen.

The Trust Controversy

In 1925 Palfrey was at the centre of a controversy involving both the club and the Athletics Ground when, in move that usurped both the spirit and legality of the original Trust document, the Trustees of the ground (essentially the War Memorial Committee) attempted to negotiate a 35 year exclusive lease with the Cricket Club. Palfrey 'blew the whistle' and led a brave and at times lonely campaign to ensure the ground remained for the use of all, and that the tenure of the War Memorial Club remained inviolate. In 1926, after a judgement in the High Court, the ground was sold to Stourbridge Borough and a transparent 35 year lease negotiated involving all the sports clubs. Following this considerable expansion took place at the ground. The Football Club built two new stands which remain in use to this day, whilst the Cricket Club, through the generosity of local philanthropist Ernest Stevens, erected a new pavilion.

The Memorial Arch and Entrances

In 1928 Stourbridge Borough Council paid for a memorial entrance archway complete with wrought iron gates by Hill and Smith of Brierley Hill. This was officially opened by Ernest Stevens who two months later donated the money for a cinder wall along the perimeter of the ground which still defines this length of Amblecote High Street. Stevens also later paid for a new lower entrance complete with decorative gates, blue-brick path and turnstile block. This although (and perhaps because of) being now disused, represents in Nick's opinion one of the most important architectural survivals in Stourbridge and it is vital it should be preserved. Finally Stevens also paid for a second turnstile block at the top of the ground.

The Present

Nick then moved on to the present, reviewing how the various memorials had fared over time. The civic ones he noted, as official war memorials with name panels, have survived reasonably well and given the continuing interest in annual remembrance were likely to remain well cared for. So too the various private memorials. Unfortunately the Athletics Ground has suffered considerable since the absorption of the old Borough sporting facilities into 'Dudley', whilst the War Memorial Club has been sold into private hands and currently (as recently reported in the local press) has no-one that will actually admit to ownership. Both have deteriorated, and although the sports ground is still used by Stourbridge CC, FC and from this season Dudley Town FC, most of the structures put in place by the war memorial effort and its aftermath are in a relatively poor state. The War Memorial Club meanwhile represents a local tragedy, with the club house empty and decaying and the once fine, and until recently well used, bowling green turning to waste.

Action

In discussions that followed the meeting the idea was floated that the Society should take action to at least prevent further deterioration of the Athletics Ground memorial structures and possibly even lobby for their restoration. It was suggested that local listed status could be sought for the bottom entrance and a campaign mounted to restore the War Memorial Arch.

CORBETT PLAN REVEALED

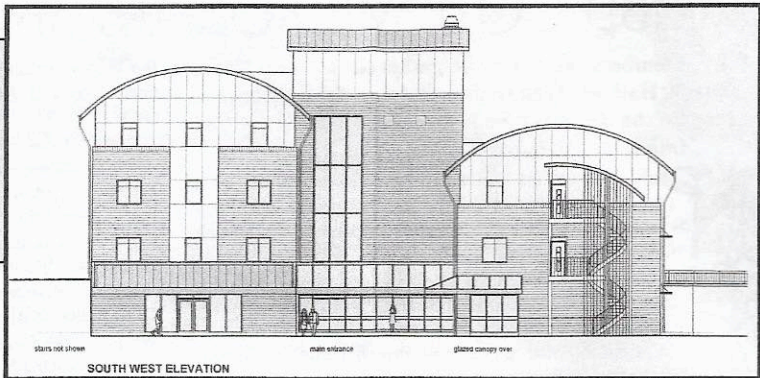
Plans for the changes to the Corbett Hospital site have been made public and several Society members have visited the Planning Department of Dudley MBC to view them. Indeed, Planning Officer Peter Reed who spent some time discussing the proposals with Nick Baker and Helen Cook, kindly loaned a duplicate set of documents to the Society which were viewed at the meeting of the 20th of October.

Scrutiny of the plans reveals a situation that, given development is generally regarded as inevitable, is reasonably acceptable from a heritage perspective.

The areas of principle heritage concern; the meadow and 'high street corridor' including the wall, lodge, gates and Hill House, are in fact not part of the planning area and will remain unaffected by it.

Along Vicarage Road a new Primary Care building will replace the old Out-Patients and A&E, more or less occupying the same footprint, although being square on, but set back from, the road and extending further into the bottom car park. The large Horse Chestnut tree about which much concern has been expressed is to remain, and although the new building will block views of it somewhat from Vicarage road, which is a shame, at least the tree survives.

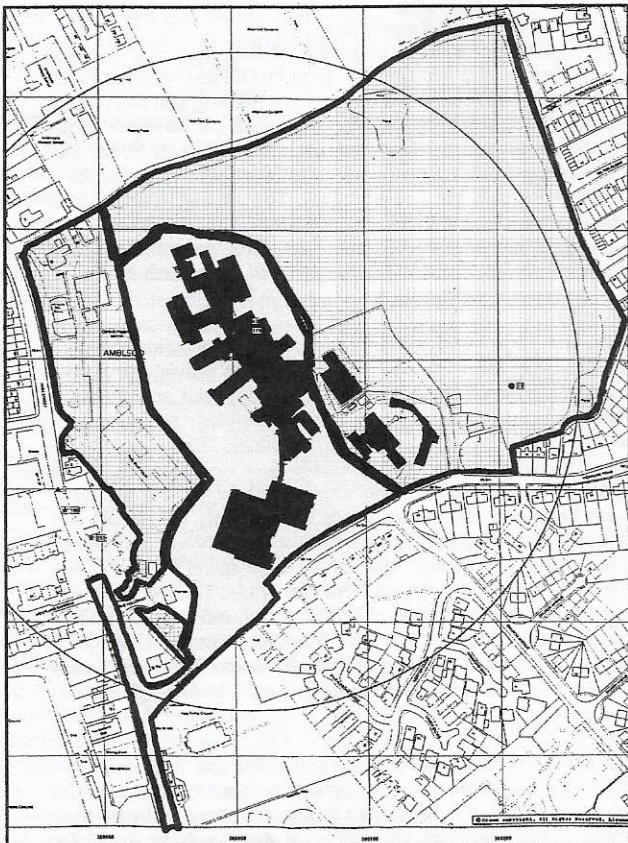
Car parking in the area of the lower car park,



Front entrance to the new build. This will replace the current 1950's block building that faces the existing lower car park.



Plan showing the relationship of the old and new vehicle entrance off lower Vicarage Road. Extensive car parking and the large Horse Chestnut will be retained.



The central development area will not encroach on the meadow or principle areas of heritage concern (hatched).

which is used as a vital 'overflow' for many local activities, not least History Society meetings, will remain (although of course access to it may be affected; which would be another issue for another time).

Car access to the site will also change with the squaring up of the access road to Vicarage Road so that it will directly face the Church Hall car park entrance.

The old hospital buildings themselves on the top of the hill are designated for demolition and replacement with private housing with outline permission for around 200 dwellings on the current built-over footprint. Again, detailed comment on this must wait further plans.

Finally there are plans to improve access to Vicarage Road by creating a left turn lane from High Street by cutting back the pavement frontage of the Royal Oak pub, this being linked to the residential development.

In conclusion, although there are one or two detailed issues (not least the 18th century Vicarage garden wall which will back directly onto the new parking area), from a heritage perspective things could have been much worse. Fears that a massive residential estate would entirely cover the Corbett site right down to Vicarage Road, and that the High Street wall would be demolished, are groundless. And although most of us would undoubtedly wish that the estate could remain undeveloped, and may question the morality of the National Health Service in selling off John Corbett's gift, at least what will happen appears, so far, to be fairly sympathetic to the historical environment.

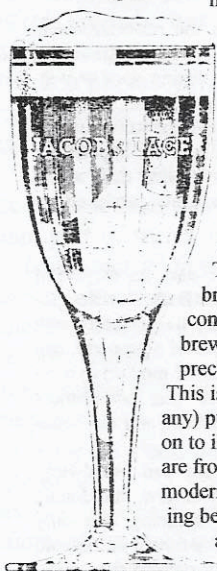
In response to viewing the plans the Secretary sent a letter to the Planning Department requesting that historical aspects of the site be respected and that any archaeology revealed be treated properly.

GEOFF HILL MBE

Amblecote businessman Geoff Hill has been awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. Geoff is a tireless worker for charity, his company automatically donating a percentage of profits to deserving causes via his charitable trust. Members will remember Geoff donated £100.00 to the Society shortly after its formal inauguration earlier this year. Congratulations Geoff!



A HISTORY OF AMBLECOTE PUBS



In excess of seventy members and guests gathered at the Church Hall to hear Kieron McMahon present a fascinating and wonderfully illustrated talk on the History of Amblecote Pubs.

The History of Beer

He began by pointing out the all-important link between the public house and beer; something that on first consideration seems fairly obvious, but actually has its roots in the deep past. Beer was first brewed in Ancient Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq) and features in the 3rd millennium BC *Epic Of Gilgamesh*, the world's oldest work of literature. Developing this ancient link further Kieron explored the mythological and sociological importance of beer, noting that communal consumption for both pleasure and sustenance was and remains a vital element in many cultures.

In England the early development of buildings where beer was brewed and drunk soon led to the concept of the 'local', a quasi-public shelter where, as village life became the norm, shared feelings of ownership and place came to be associated with the consumption of beer. The dissolution of the monasteries, where brewing was a major medieval industry, also contributed to the development of small local brew-houses which in turn became pub-precursors.

This is not to say, of course, that many (if indeed any) pubs have 'ancient' origins. As Kieron went on to illustrate, most of the pubs we have today are from distinctly determinate points in fairly modern history, existing and indeed only surviving because of specific circumstances that ebb and flow with the course of events.

Amblecote's Oldest Licence

Almost all the older pubs in Britain today are descended from the days of horse drawn travel, most notably the coaching inns which expanded rapidly after the various turnpike acts of the 18th century allowed for more rapid road transport. Amblecote never appears to have possessed any such inn, Kieron pointing out that the proximity of Stourbridge and the Talbot (dating to 1685) meant that travellers were either too close to starting or ending their journeys to require accommodation or change of horse in Amblecote. However, the improvements to roads did affect Amblecote, forming the first phase of a massive expansion of industrial infrastructure that brought with it the opportunity for new inns to service travellers and workers alike. The oldest identifiable pub in Amblecote belongs to this era, with Kieron's research indicating the Royal Oak (or at least its predecessor) on the corner of High Street and Vicarage Road as existing in 1718. Later on this name was changed to the Green Dragon, before reverting once again to the Royal Oak. To illustrate the history of this pub Kieron showed a wonderful collection of old photographs of the former building whilst outlining the various changes of ownership between breweries local and not so local. Interestingly he also threw light on an oft repeated local history 'fact' that the pub was used as a training school during the mid 19th century. In actual fact he can find no interruption to the license during this time, suggesting that the school and pub shared the same building. Of special interest were some internal photographs of the pub, showing a well worn somewhat Spartan appearance with glimpses of an old inglenook fireplace that seemed to pre-date the exterior, alongside some spectacularly dangerous looking pre-war electrical wiring! As Kieron remarked, such a pub (carefully re-wired), would be a prize brewery possession today. Unfortunately the old Royal Oak was demolished in the 1960's, and replaced with its unremarkable modern counterpart.

Victorian Speculations

Another pub, the Rising Sun (which existed from at least 1795), once stood only a few doors away, and Kieron used this establishment to illustrate the big

brewery attitude to pubs, driven by government legislation, that prevailed in the 1880s.

An Act of Parliament in 1888 attempted to restrict new licences but 'protected' any pubs built before 1869. As a result many old and decrepit houses suddenly became of vital corporate interest and, with the big brewers raising huge funds by public flotation, began changing hands at inflated prices. The Rising Sun was one such, although it eventually closed as a pub in 1926 and its foundations now lie buried under the Royal Oak's car park.

Pubs at the Stour Bridge

Having thus introduced much beer lore and licensing history through the stories these two old Amblecote pubs; one surviving in name and the other long gone, Kieron then undertook a selective 'pub crawl' of Amblecote beginning at the Worcestershire / Staffordshire border by the Stour bridge. Here he noted that the juxtaposition of road, canal and rail links together with factories and warehouses resulted in a plethora of pubs springing up during the 18th and 19th centuries. One, the Moorings Tavern, previously the Barrel and before that the Navigation, still survives; whilst records show a Bridge Inn, a Fosters Arms (now the Chinese take-away) and, confusingly, another Navigation. He noted that in 1910 the landlord of the Fosters Arms was fined for serving after time; 10pm in those days. However, far more stringent restrictions were introduced during the Great War when drinking was blamed for a lack of industry amongst war workers. Even round buying, known as 'treating' was banned.

Memories of the 'Jag'

Moving back up the high Street, Kieron showed a marvellous picture of the old Jaguar, formerly known as the Holly Bush (although in fact before that as the Jaguar), famous in recent times as the 'hospitality suite' of Hewitts motors. Sadly this fine looking old pub was closed and demolished and its remains are now buried under Magnet's car park.

Beer is Best

To set the scene for the next pub Kieron talked about the controversy that raged in Britain throughout the 18th and 19th centuries over the evils of gin versus the benefits (or at least lesser evils) of beer. Gin had been introduced from Holland in the reign of William of Orange (1689-1702), during which English soldiers coined the phrase 'Dutch Courage' for its ability to aid ferocity in battle. So addicted did the English populace become to gin that fears were expressed for the very survival of the nation and in 1830s steps were taken to remedy the problem. This was legislation brought in by the Duke of Wellington, hero of Waterloo, who although always controversial as a politician certainly knew how to tackle difficult problems in a direct and often popular (at least to the working classes) manner. The Beer House Act of 1830 was once such action, by which anyone possessed of property could purchase a two guinea licence to retail beer. Breweries encouraged householders (by paying the licence fee) to 'open up', gin sales fell away and the modern 'public house' was born. In Amblecote the Robin Hood in Collis Street opened in 1836, a classic beer house that eventually became the pub we know today.

Hunt the Pub

Kieron then devoted some time to his favourite game of 'hunt the pub', whereby using a combination of old trade directories and street observations he tracks down old pubs in modern guises. Using examples from around the midlands he showed how tell-tale signs such as unusual bay windows or out of place archways can often reveal a long lost public house. Turning to Amblecote he revealed several former licensed premises that are still with us but serving other purposes. The firework shop at the bottom of Brettell Lane was once the Swan. The nearby carpet shop was the Acorn. Two houses further up the road were once the Cross Keys, whilst former pubs in King William Street (now completely 'dry') may also be located.

More to Come

Kieron concluded by noting that he had only touched upon some Amblecote pubs such as the Starving Rascal (formerly the Dudley Arms), Fish (now the Ruby Cantonese) and Maverick (formerly the White Horse), and others he had not mentioned at all such as the Little Pig and Old Dial, yet all had fascinating histories and, provided the Society was willing, he would be more than pleased to return at a future date to continue his 'crawl' through our area's public house heritage.





FUSING PAST & PRESENT

PAUL FLOYD - KILN FORMED GLASS

In this edition of Amblecote History we take a look at another craftsman who occupies a workshop within the Ruskin Centre on Wollaston Road, where new and traditional Amblecote crafts are thriving.



Paul Floyd came to the Stourbridge Glass Quarter from South Wales where he had completed courses in surface design and glass working at Carmarthen and Swansea. In August 2003 he moved into a workshop within the Ruskin Centre, taking advantage of the excellent business start-up facilities offered through its innovative director Aonghus Gordon.

Paul undertakes a variety of hot and cold architectural glass work, combining a wide variety of design and manufacturing techniques which he 'mixes and matches' according to the requirements of a particular commission. These may range from repairs to traditional leaded windows to the production of abstract glass wall tiles to compliment contemporary living spaces.

The Flat Bed Kiln

Paul's principal hot glass tool is a modern flat bed kiln. Essentially, the kiln enables one glass to melt or fuse into another; a technique that, by the use of careful temperature control, produces effects ranging from the complete mixing of two or more glasses to the adherence of one piece of glass to another. Although the outcome is without doubt decorative, use of the kiln is a complex technical operation that involves a detailed knowledge of both material and process. The blending of glass is by no means new, much medieval stained work was produced by painting powdered glass onto a plain background and heating. However, modern control mechanisms enable cycles of heating and cooling that may be used to produce almost an almost infinite range of structure and texture. The result is a wide array of design outcomes of which the old glass-masters could only have dreamt.



The Flat Bed Kiln.
Combining modern technology with traditional craft skill.

In most cases a secondary material such as cut or ground glass is placed on a clear backing sheet. Firing then takes place according to the requirements of the individual piece during which the secondary material will fuse with, or even into, the background. Several firings may be used to 'build' a piece though, of course, the accumulated effects must be carefully calculated in advance. Once again technical skills as well as design concepts are essential, with a detailed knowledge of the various glasses' chemical and physical characteristics as essential to a successful outcome as any amount of good ideas! Another extended technique called 'slumping' involves a secondary firing over a mould which reshapes a flat piece into a three dimensional one. The overall effect of kiln fusing, flat or three dimensional, is to extend the expression of architectural glass way beyond that of the traditional

leaded window. Even the medieval church glass craftsmen knew that were 'painting with light', and did a very fine job of it, but were constrained by material and technology to the use of tiny panes held in place by masses of unstable lead. By fusing glass onto a backing sheet Paul is able to achieve effects of light, texture and colour so as to allow the final product a multiplicity of previously unthinkable practical and decorative uses.

Cold Comforts

On the cold side Paul is principally engaged in the restoration and manufacture of stained glass window inclusions. This ranges from matching a piece of broken or lost glass into an existing door or window, to the complete glazing of either new or restored frames. Although 'cold', this work does occasionally involve the kiln which is particularly useful in stressing modern glass to mimic the appearance of vintage material. So accurately can this be controlled that, where absolute restoration is called for, the colours and textures produced are indistinguishable from the original

New Ideas for Old Buildings

However, Paul not only offers restoration but the chance for owners of period properties to reconsider their design options from a contemporary perspective. Broken, lost or dated glass may be replaced with modern glass that, whilst reflecting the original style of a property, can introduce aspects of modern expression and colour that compliment both an owner's taste and the building's ambience.

Furthermore, Paul can 'sandwich' glass panels, old or new, into double glazed units - meaning that only those purists who regard being cold as an obligatory part of the period property experience need suffer accordingly.

Fusing Concepts

Paul Floyd ably represents a new wave of modern craftsmen who are leading the renaissance of glass manufacture in Stourbridge and Amblecote. Bridging the gap between the 'art for arts sake' products of the studios and the down to earth provision of architectural detail for 'building', Paul's work enables any structure from a newly fitted kitchen to a feudal

FIRST VICARAGE FOUND

Father Paul Tongue has managed to track down the location of The Mount, first residence of Amblecote's first vicar in 1842. Interest was raised in this matter during the summer when the Society held a local history event at the refurbished Dennis Hall. This house too served as the vicarage, but only after the vicar had previously lived at The Mount in Stourbridge. This house, it turns out, was located in Red Hill, Stourbridge and a remnant may still be seen in the shape of an impressive masonry gate post in yellow brick that stands adjacent to modern flats at the Church Street end of Red Hill, just above the Church Street car park.

