



AMBLECOTE HISTORY

OCTOBER 2003

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of Amblecote History Society, which will discuss general items of interest, will take place on Wednesday 12th of November at 7.30pm at Amblecote Church Hall. For details contact Father Paul Tongue on 01384 394057 or Nick Baker on 01384 894446.

MEETING SETS AGENDA

Around 30 people met at Amblecote Church Hall on Wednesday 10th of September to discuss the future development of Amblecote History Society. The meeting was a great success, providing an outline for future action and placing the Society on a more formal footing.

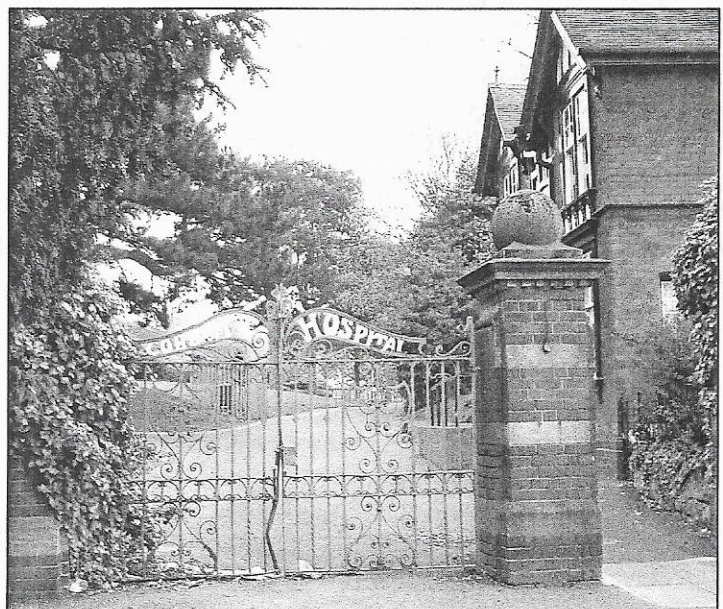
Even so a committee was still successfully avoided (!) in favour of regular general meetings at around six weekly intervals where everyone can have a say and make a contribution. However, it was recognised that 'anarchic collectivism' could only be

taken so far and the meeting agreed to a yearly membership to the Society at a cost of £3.00 in order to provide funds for mailings, with a recognition that some speaker events may require an admission charge to cover expenses. Meanwhile the contribution of Holy Trinity Church, in the form of Cannon Paul Tongue and members of the congregation in providing facilities and refreshments at the Church Hall was acknowledged. Indeed, so far, all meetings and visits have proved cost neutral, with both the church and Glasshouse College generously providing free facilities, and speakers happy to appear for no expenses or fees.

Administration of the membership fee will be effected at a future meeting, but the aim is to keep costs down through a mixture of prudence and good will. Meanwhile, if anyone can think of a way of raising sponsorship please speak up!

AWARENESS IS THE KEY and 'THE LIST'

A number of historical issues were discussed at the September meeting including the preservation of Amblecote's heritage landscape and the presentation and elucidation its history through recording and study. However, as a matter of immediate importance, the need was recognised for those with an interest in Amblecote's past to become and remain *aware* of important architectural and other



*Corbett Hospital Gates and Lodge,
a 'Must Keep' Amblecote survival.*

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AWARENESS IS THE KEY

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physical objects within the area that either may be at risk or could be better sighted.

It was therefore decided to compile a list (rapidly christened *The List!*) of items of importance to the history and hence future of the area. The List will not only comprise buildings but also objects of interest including architectural ephemera such as street furniture, boundary walls and artefacts as well as trees and natural landscape features. By compiling such a list Amblecote History Society will have at its fingertips a means of quickly identifying items under threat from unsympathetic development or removal, and be able to muster whatever level of protest or persuasion may be necessary to ensure their survival within a local context.

One vital point about compiling this list is that members of the Society are in a unique position to, firstly, understand the significance of what might otherwise seem unimportant and, secondly, and very importantly, monitor changes on a day to day basis. The point was well made that many buildings and fea-

tures in the Stourbridge area have disappeared entirely where with some imagination features from them could have been retained and re-used (whatever happened to the decorative front to Wordsley College of Art for example, or the superb iron bollards from Enville Street?). Vigilance and the ability to ask questions or make suggestions in an organised manner enable a means of challenging potentially harmful change, and a list will provide an excellent starting point for any campaign to save Amblecote's physical heritage. Of course, the list also provides a basis for the study and appreciation of Amblecote history by raising awareness of the location and diversity of its (still) many historical survivals.

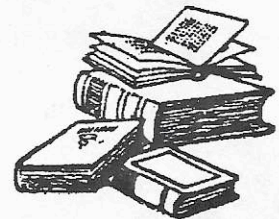
Thus inspired, Father Paul Tongue began to compile "The List" immediately after the meeting, which is reproduced in this edition of the newsletter. Please note that this is by no means considered complete and further suggestions are welcome either by contacting Father Paul or Nick Baker, or by coming along to the next meeting. It may be, that as the concept of the list develops, the Society can add its own grading of importance and/or risk to the items on it, together with suggestions for action where necessary.

LIBRARY LOSS – DEVELOPERS GAIN?

Dudley Council have announced that Amblecote Library, situated in School Drive, is to be closed, thus bringing to an end a long tradition of library facilities on this site. The old Amblecote Primary School demolished in the 1950's (?) once served as a library. Although demolition of the modern temporary building represents no great architectural injury to the landscape the loss of such a long-standing public facility most certainly does!

However, of wider historical concern is the fact that the land on which the library building current stands is to be disposed of for development – presumably housing? This in itself is not especially dangerous (although the loss of parking for the Amblecote Holy Trinity Scout and Guide Centre, as well as the British Legion may well be), but, and a big but, the freeing up of this land would give access to the old Wollaston Light Railway terminus sheds which, if demolished, would present an area of valuable building land that might otherwise not be viable for housing. By coincidence one of these sheds, formerly housing the Box-A-Circuit gym (now closed) is, according to the *Stourbridge Chronicle*, owned by local businessman Jim Driscoll and is in the hands of an agent. Putting two and two together in this case makes a sizable building plot with access.

Preservation of the sheds should be a concern of Amblecote History Society, and members are asked to 'stay aware' of any precipitate moves to remove them.



POST OFFICE CLOSURE

Another proposed closure in Amblecote, equally depressing, is that of the Post Office in Brettle Lane. According to *The Stourbridge Chronicle* the building has existed as a Post Office since 1905, although local directories show that a 'Letter Receiver' existed long before that, presumably at the same address.

The 1881 census describes a Maria Levi (born 1813) as 'Postmistress and General Dealer', in Brettle Lane, whilst for many years (from at least 1890 until 1914) Amblecote directories show a 'Miss Levi' as variously 'Letter Receiver and Draper' and 'Sub-Postmistress and Draper'.

Whatever the case, the closure of Amblecote's Post Office would be both an historical as well as a con-

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STOURBRIDGE LION 175TH



recent article in *The Black Country Bugle* reminded us that 2004 is the 175th anniversary of the arrival of the *Stourbridge Lion* in America, where it became the first locomotive to run on rails in the USA.

The *Lion* was manufactured by James Foster and John Rastric at Bradeley's Iron Works which lay largely in Amblecote. Apparently plans are afoot in Honesdale, Pennsylvania to run a replica *Lion*, constructed for the centenary in 1929, which has not been operational for over 70 years.

The achievements of Foster, Rastric, and James Foster in general, certainly deserve to be recognised. It must be remembered that Foster and Rastrick built the *Stourbridge Lion* only six years after the first commercial steam locomotive ran between Stockton and Darlington, and before the opening of the 'turning point' Manchester to Liverpool railway in 1830. Indeed the famous Rainhill Trials (at which John Rastrick was a judge), a competition to decide on which locomotive type to use on the Manchester to Liverpool, took place five months *after* the *Stourbridge Lion* ran in the USA. It was to be another twenty-two year before the railway itself reached Stourbridge...

It would be nice to think that some form of memorial to the *Lion* could be placed in Amblecote – perhaps the new development on the old gasworks site opposite the old Bradley's works could provide an opportunity (and sponsorship money)?

CORBETT HOSPITAL CONCERN

With the closure of Corbett Hospital looming ever-nearer concern was expressed at the September meeting on a number of levels about the survival of important artefacts and future use of the sight for development. Fortunately a number of Society members are also active Friends of Corbett Hospital, and have their finger on the pulse of the situation. Indeed, thanks to the Friends, agreement has been reached to retain the portrait of John Corbett, the hospital's original benefactor, within the new Ambulatory Care Centre now being built off Vicarage Road. Incredibly (or maybe not) the Heath Authority had first proposed that the portrait should go to Russell's Hall, or even to a Birmingham gallery! Still under discussion is a name of the new centre, it being by no means certain that the Health Authority wishes to include the name Corbett. There was a general agreement that as far as Amblecote History Society was concerned John Corbett should indeed remain commemorated on the site he donated to the people of Stourbridge in 1897.

It was noted that a number of other features of the hospital and its grounds are also of heritage interest, including a commemorative panel within the building, the gates, the wall, Hill House and the Lodge in High Street, as well as the trees, lake and landscape features within the grounds. All of these should go on *The List*, and awareness of their possible retention maintained.

ROAD NAMES

Whilst on the subject of the Corbett site development mention was made of the influence the Society may be able to bring with regard to the naming of any roads that might be built. The Amblecote Bank and Lakeside estates stand testimony to the imposition of locally meaningless street names, combining, amongst other things, districts in London with places in the Lake District, whilst the history of Amblecote remains wholly ignored. Again, vigilance on the part of the Society remains the key with an organised willingness to lobby for more meaningful names at the appropriate time.

Amblecote History. October 2003.

POST OFFICE CLOSURE

(Continued from page 2)

temporary loss. The closure is being resisted, with a petition launched by Councillor for Amblecote, Pat Martin, and anyone wishing to express concern should contact Paul Maisey, Post Office National Consultation Team, PO Box 641, St. Albans, AL1 5XN.

Meanwhile anyone with a more comprehensive history of Amblecote Post Office, or memories of it in more recent times, please come along to an Amblecote History Society meeting on November 12th.



WHERE IS AMBLECOTE?

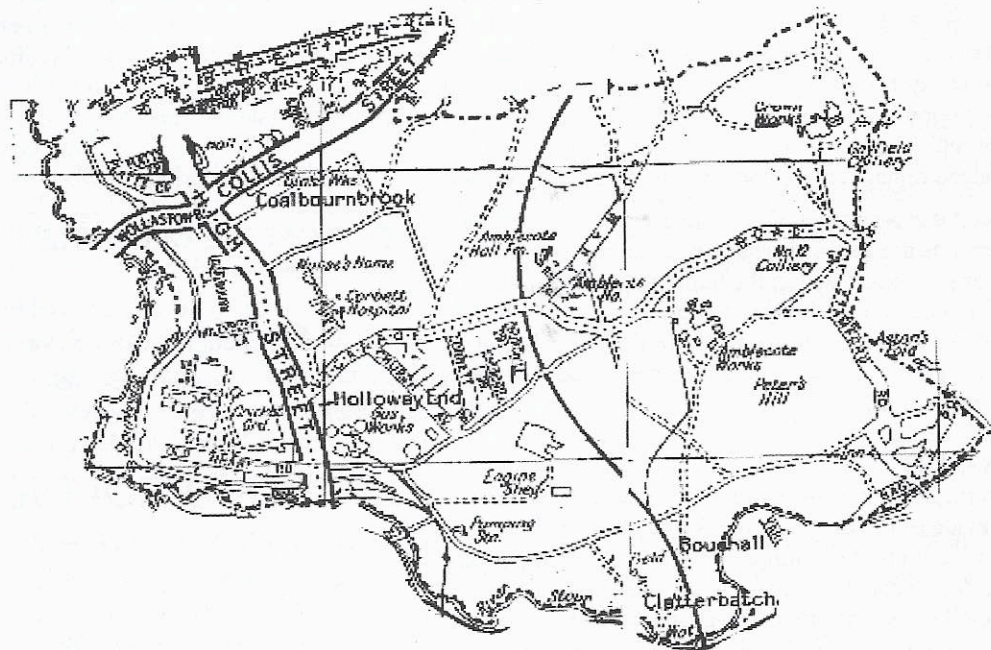
Defining anywhere within the Black Country can be a difficult task (“If I was yo mate, I wudn’t start from ‘ere”). Nevertheless the question was posed at the last meeting of the Amblecote History Society of exactly what we mean by Amblecote and it was agreed to produce a map.

The result was three maps (!), showing the old Urban District as at stood in 1966, the current Parish boundary, and the current (though soon to be changed) electoral ward boundary. The urban in-fill of the past quarter century is obvious on the Parish map and ward maps. Note too that the modern Parish has expanded slightly to include areas of urbanisation in the north and west, whilst the division from Brierley Hill across Withymore Village is necessarily a little ‘fuzzy’. Meanwhile the ward map shows that the current political boundary, which encompassing parts of Brierley Hill, is actually much larger than the old UDC.

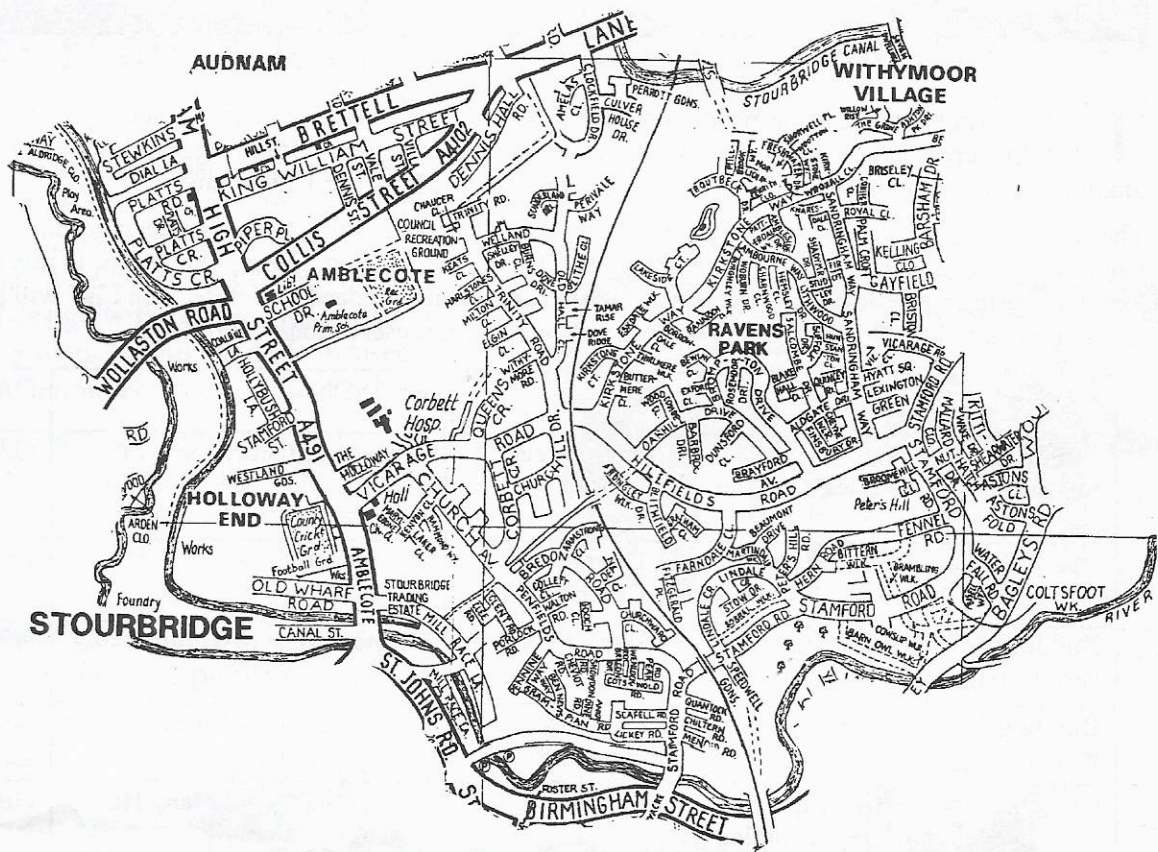
Sadly, and somewhat illogically, in its next incarnation the ward is destined to cede areas north of the Stour to Lye and Wollascope, thus distorting the ancient natural river boundary which once divided Amblecote from Stourbridge and Staffordshire from Worcestershire.

However, no matter how the boundary of Amblecote is drawn, the fact remains that anyone with an interest in the area, whether Parish, old UDC or ward, and whether resident inside or outside any of these, is more than welcome to come along and celebrate Amblecote’s history with Amblecote History Society.

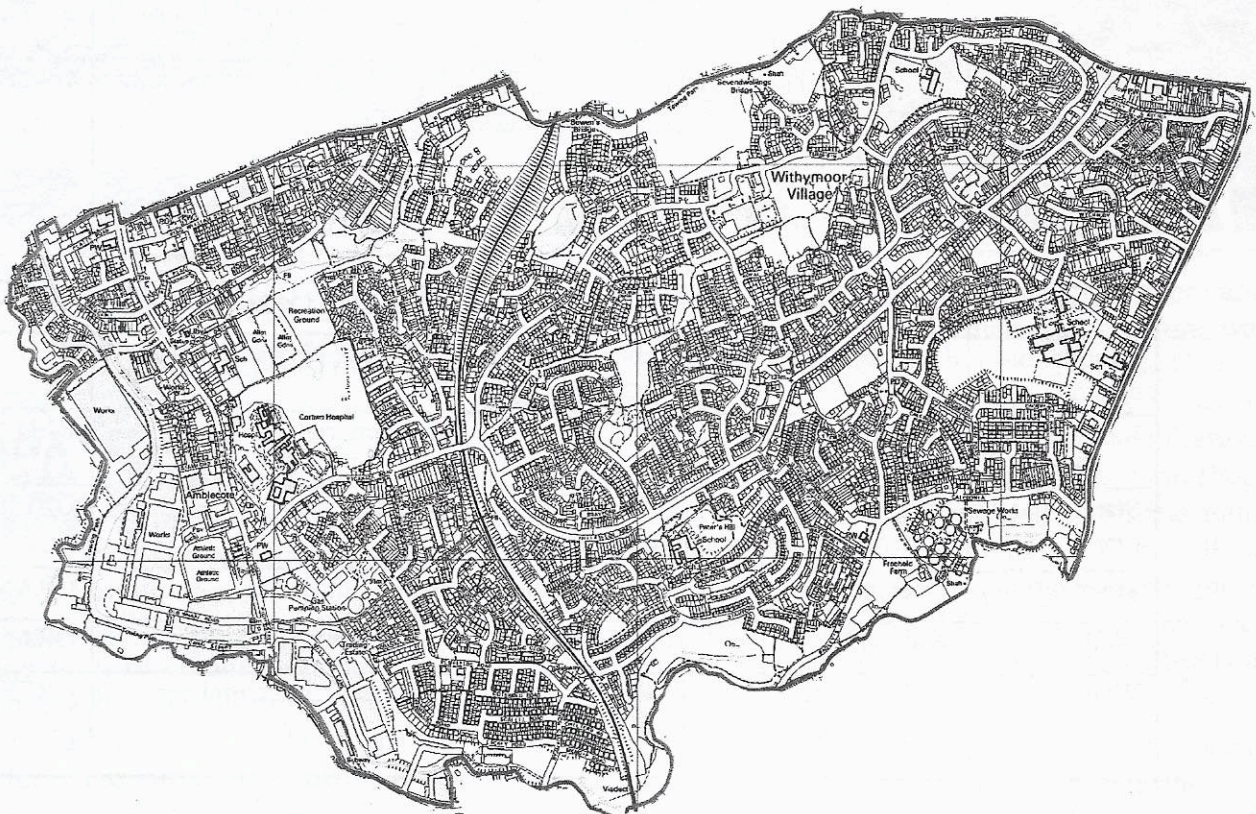
URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL 1898 - 1966



PRESENT DAY PARISH



ELECTORAL WARD



THE AMBLECOTE LIST

The following items have been submitted for inclusion on a Amblecote History Society List. Please note that this represents only the start of this venture and anyone with further suggestions are invited to come along to the next meeting on November 12th, or contact Nick Baker or Father Paul.

The reason for inclusion has naturally been truncated in this newsletter. As the list develops this can be expanded to include further history and details. The Danger Rating (Red, Green, Orange) is, in this first list, based on current opinion and is open for discussion at meetings. Indeed, in future 'The List' will provide a means of assessing both an items importance and its present preservation/action status.

TYPE	ITEM	LOCATION	REASON	DANGER
Building Industrial	Tram Sheds, Wollaston Light Railway	High Street	Transport History Survival.	ORANGE
Building Pub	Pub, Starving Rascal	Brettell Lane / Collis Street	Unique building.	GREEN
Building Residential	House, Platts House	Platts Drive	Former Home of Thomas Webb. Glass History Survival.	GREEN
Building Residential	Dennis Hall	Cameo Drive	Vital to Glass and Iron History	GREEN
Church	Holy Trinity, Church Building	High Street	Unique Building. Many Historical Inclusions.	GREEN
Church Inclusion	Holy Trinity, Railings & West Gateway	High Street/ Vicarage Road	Important early 19 th century local ironwork.	GREEN
Church Inclusion	Holy Trinity, War Memorial Lych	Vicarage Road	Local War Memorial.	GREEN
Gateway	Gateway and Gates, War Memorial Athletic Ground.	High Street	Local War Memorial. Decorative ironwork.	GREEN
Gateway	Gateway, Gates and Turnstiles	High Street	Decorative ironwork. War Memorial. Cultural Survival.	GREEN
Gateway	Gateway and Gates	High Street	Stourbridge Hospital History.	ORANGE
Hospital Inclusion	Hospital, Historical Items	Corbett Estate	Stourbridge Hospital History.	RED
Railings	War Memorial Club	High Street	War Memorial	RED
Street Furniture	Mile Post & Boundary Markers	Audnam and Wollaston	UDC Survival	GREEN
Trees	Trees, Mature	Corbett Estate	Vital to Landscape.	ORANGE
Wall	Wall on West Side	High Street	Vital to Street Landscape.	ORANGE
Wall	Wall Around Old Vicarage Site	Queen's Crescent	Important architectural survival	GREEN

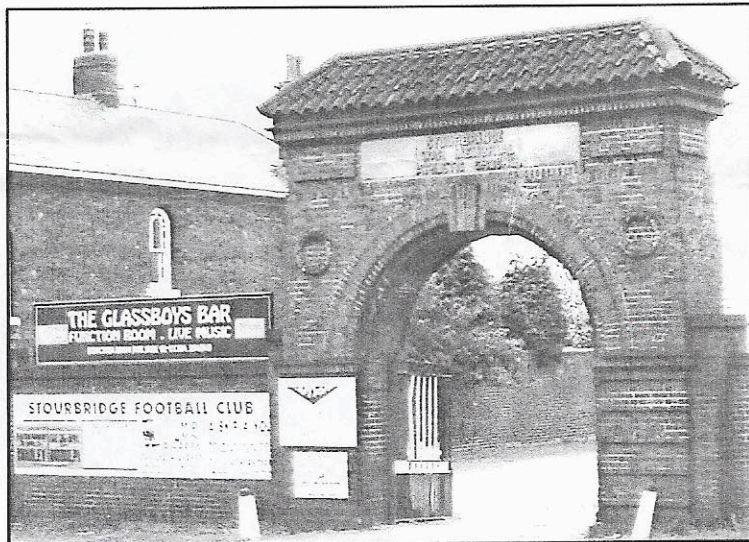
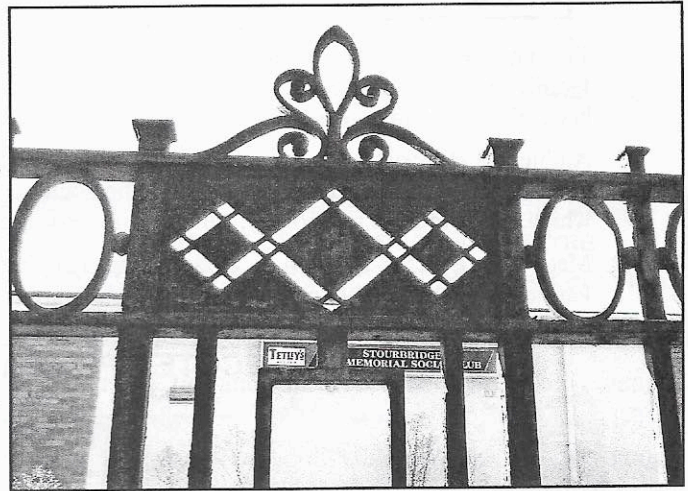
ON 'THE LIST'

War Memorial Architecture in Amblecote

The War Memorial Club (now closed) perimeter ironwork (*right*), is often overlooked and 'disassociated' from the Athletic Ground. Whereas in fact the railings are contiguous in design with both the main gate of the sports ground (*below*) and the disused gates of the old bottom entrance (*below right*).

All these artefacts thus form an integrated complex of street architecture and, vitally, of items erected by the people of Stourbridge as a memorial after the First World War.

With the War Memorial Club now closed and the bottom gates in disuse the recognition and preservation of these items is immensely important.



DENNIS HALL COMMEMORATIVE



discussion took place at the September meeting regarding Dennis Hall, with general approval expressed at the renovations and the sympathetic manner in which these are being carried out. Nevertheless, it was thought appropriate to explore the possibility of some form of commemorative object being included within this in order to ensure the history of the hall, as both a big house and a glass manufactory, are properly remembered. Whilst the most obvious form of commemorative item – a

plaque – is a possibility, the idea of a more ambitious piece of artwork, such as a sculpture, was discussed. Andy Cope of the Glasshouse College in Wollaston Road, which the Society visited in July, reminded the meeting of the multifarious talent located there, with a wealth of workshops ranging from cut glass studios to a brass foundry. Andy kindly agreed to liaise with the Glasshouse on the idea of a commemorative piece, whilst Nick Baker will, as a first step, approach the developers to seek their opinion of the concept.

At the time of publication no reply had yet been received (20th Sept to 20th Oct), and a further 'try' will be made.

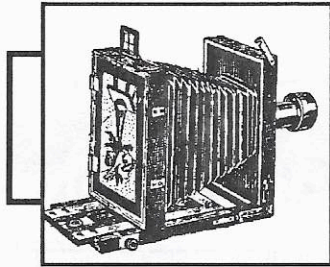


PHOTO-CALL

With thanks to John Easthope

The importance of photographs to local history cannot be underestimated, and not just 'old' ones. The fact that many families have now possessed a camera of one form or another for many, many years means that details of the past have been recorded, sometimes deliberately and sometimes inadvertently as background, on thousands of pictures.

Amblecote History Society member John Easthope recorded this scene of Amblecote's past, part of a collection which will be reproduced in future newsletters. The Society would like to encourage others to come forward with photographs which, using today's technology, can be easily and instantly scanned for printing.

Meanwhile a pictorial record of modern (and changing) Amblecote is also vitally important, a point well made by Mike Perkins at the September meeting, whose photographic skills will also be called upon as the Society develops(...!).

AMBLECOTE OPEN CAST WORKING AROUND 1970

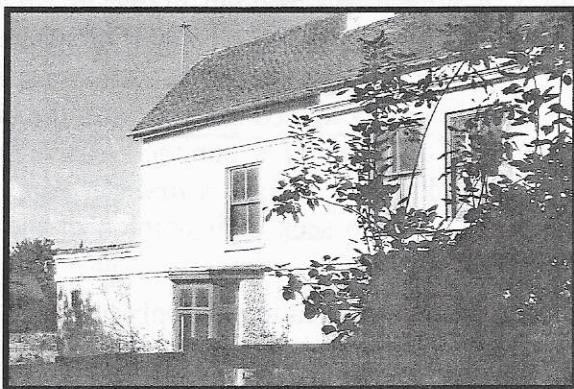


Left. The workings seen from the old road looking towards Brettell Lane.

Below. Detail showing giant earthmoving machines. Note the distinct layers of coal and clay.



Below: Horizon detail showing Harris & Pearson's works on Brettell Lane. The distinctive office buildings survive and are preserved, whilst the brick kilns, the chimneys of which can be seen on the right, have all but disappeared.



SANKEY HOUSE TO GO

Amblecote History Society has been informed that Sankey House, situated on the west side of High Street between the Coalbourne Lane and Stamford Street, is to be demolished. The house is a much changed Victorian building that unfortunately would prove uneconomic to restore.

Formerly used as a private residence and a dance school, the Society would be very pleased to hear from anyone with a history or memories of the house. Please come along to the next meeting or contact Father Paul or Nick Baker.