

MEMBERS MEETING —6 February 2007

The Domestic Architecture of Chesterfield — a talk by Godfrey Holmes illustrated with slides.

Godfrey began by saying that if we looked out of the window and saw a complete stranger photographing our house we would be nervous because our homes express our identity, our territory and ownership. Godfrey has lived in Chesterfield for 27 years and because of his interest in housing he decided to make a photographic record of how the town was housed. Chesterfield is in a unique position being in the centre of England.

The boom time for house building was in the period 1837-1977 and during this time there were many surges. Much social housing occurred in the 1920's, 30's, 40's and 60's when it dried up. Then there were surges in private building in the 1980's, 90's and 2000. Now there is a new phenomenon, "buy to let", where flats etc are bought by private individuals to let as a speculative investment. Chesterfield's housing pattern is typical of the country as a whole. 62% of the houses are privately owned, 25% belong to the corporation or housing associations, 10% are privately rented and the remaining percentage are hostels, prisons etc.

We are lucky to have been born in the present era when most people have had a maximum of 3 homes. One in their 20's, one in their 30's — 40's and one in their 50's plus. This is because they generally had only one or two careers. This will not happen in the future as people move around more because of their job or because of the price of property.

In the past families were broad like beech trees and because of the numbers of individuals they needed more space. Now we can liken families to a beanstalk and homes may now consist of a grandmother, daughter and great grand daughter all living in the same house.

Our housing needs are changing. Houses are now built with rooms in the roof. The town is changing. Gone are the days of coal, iron, engineering, industry and quarrying. Now society depends on work in building societies, shops and offices and therefore different houses are being built.

The first slide showed Godfrey in front of Chatsworth House. This house is of course part of grand estate but houses built in the town are called estates", e.g. Highfield Hall, Park Hall, Ringwood, Hunloke and Birdholme Estate.

Godfrey's mission to record the different housing of the area began when he visited Hollingwood. Here he noticed some uncommon wooden bungalows. These were not recorded but he found out that they were built in the 1940's for the Royal Air Corps. This decided him to research the houses we live in — our palaces.

A picture of a house at Brookside illustrates the N. European Dutch "Mansard Roof". This design was built to shed snow from the roof and to include rooms in the roof. It was at least 40 years ahead of its time.

Early housing was often in the form of a terrace. Traditionally these were built as back to

back houses with an alleyway behind, each house having its own privy toilet. They were built of ashlar stone; stone with random rubble and mortar; or brick. Sadly a lot of these Victorian terraces have been bulldozed in north Nottinghamshire but here people find them solid and many have been renovated within.

People who were moved from the old Arkwright village terraces to the newly built Arkwright town complained that they miss the social qualities of the terraces.

Most terraced houses were built to the same design i.e. you stepped straight from the road into the parlour. This room was often only used on Sundays. The house would have a kitchen/scullery and two bedrooms. Two front doors would be next to each other or room, door, room etc. Doorsteps were always well polished. There was no provision for cars in terraces as they were built before cars were invented and front gardens were small or non-existent.

Terraced houses were often built by employers to house their employees e.g. Midland Terrace at Hasland was built for foremen, platelayers and shunters on the railway. The names of the terraced streets reflected the times in which they were built. Higher Albert Street was built in 1850 and named after Queen Victoria's consort Prince Albert. Baden Powell Avenue was built in the 1920's. Sadly most of the terraces in the town centre were lost in the slum clearances but a good example remains at South Place near Yeomans where donkeys and horses were once kept.

On Newbold Road there is a fine example of Italian architecture. Here the terraced houses have balustrades and boast names like "Waverley".

In the days of horses and carriages mews housing was built for the stable lads and carriage drivers as well as for the horses and carriages. Today modern houses are being built with a garage for the car and accommodation above. Examples of this type of mews housing can be found on the site of the old Branson's garage at Ashgate.

In the 1920's semi-detached houses replaced terraced houses. These were built one left and one right handed. In Middlecroft they were laid out in the "Nottingham principle", i.e. circles of houses within circles. In the 1930's builders like Kirks and Arthur Heath built houses with big gardens and each house had a distinctive brick panel.

The great industrialists of the times, the owners, mayors and families like Wilcockson, Shorts, Yeomans, Shentalls and Broomheads all lived in the town centre but in the 1920/30's they began to live in huge semis in the suburbs. Many of the old large houses in the town e.g. those on Clarence Road are now used as offices by solicitors, accountants, dentists etc.

Several large semis on Boythorpe Road were bulldozed in the re-development for Royal Mail but an enterprising builder restored the remaining houses. These have large rooms. A group of semis were built at Haddon Close with unique flat roofs.

The houses on the Loundsley Green estate were built specifically to accommodate Post Office staff re-located from London and Harrogate.

Detached houses were built for the more affluent residents of the town. A fine example on Gladstone Road is "Lindenhurst" which was once the home of the Mayor. It has three storeys and very high ceilings. A modern detached house in Somersall "Faversham" was built in 1927. It had a flat roof and was designed in the style of a Gaumont cinema. It was reputed that Josef Locke, the Irish tenor, visited when Peter Mullan was the owner. Detached houses in Hawksley Avenue were uniquely joined together by their garages, this type of housing is known as "link housing".

Rye Flatt, once the home of one of the Robinson families and the site of a nursery garden, has been replaced by a small number of executive homes.

The sites of the old engineering companies, like Markhams, have now been re-developed into residential sites.

Chesterfield didn't follow the trend of the 1960's when towns built tower block flats. The highest domestic blocks were at Barrow Hill and one, two and three bedroom flats were built near the Netto roundabout. Flats with four storeys were also built at Stonegravel.

Social housing used to be in the form of almshouses built for the elderly. In Hasland almshouses built in the 1920's have recently been demolished and replaced with modern bungalows. The Terminus Hotel, which used to be the terminus for trains and trolleybuses has been demolished and replaced by Stephenson Court, this site now consists of purpose built flats for elderly people.

Methods of building and building materials have changed over the years. Many homes are now manufactured in factories and assembled on site. In 1947 when there was a shortage of homes an experiment was carried out with pre-fabricated houses. Nationwide some 450,000 homes were built at a cost of £1500 each. These were meant to be temporary homes but are still in existence today with a waiting list for occupancy.

In the future old buildings will be redeveloped to provide accommodation instead of being demolished. The old cardboard packaging factory on Chester Street has been transformed into flats. This development was years ahead of its time. Developments like these are a template for the future imaginative use in the domestic architecture of Chesterfield.

A vote of thanks on behalf of members was given by Yvonne Mason.