

ALVELEY CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

The Alveley Conservation Area was designated on 4th September 1978. Alveley is a considerably expanded village approximately six miles south of Bridgnorth. The Conservation Area comprises the land, buildings and lanes to the east and south of the Church, essentially reflecting the pre-20th century extent of the settlement.

History

The name Alveley appears to be of Saxon origin, from '*Alvitheley*' meaning '*a clearing in the forest ('ley') belonging to Aelfythe*'. Prior to the Norman Invasion it was held by Earl Algar. By 1086 it is recorded in the Domesday Book under Staffordshire as *Alvidelege*, and has subsequently appeared in the records and on maps in a variety of spellings. At that time the manor was held by Roger de Montgomery and worth £5.00, consisting of six acres of meadow and woodland two leagues long by half a league wide. An important and well-cultivated manor of one hide, with sufficient arable land to support nine teams, Roger de Belesme forfeited the manor to Henry II following his failed rebellion, who then passed it on to Guy le Strange in 1155. The village Church of St. Mary was built around 1120-1140, possibly on the site of an earlier Saxon church.

In spite of its rural context and economic base in agriculture, the local geology has provided the settlement with a long industrial history. The local stone quarries (located some 300 metres north of the church) produced material for the widespread export of grindstones into the early part of the 20th century. This stone was also used in the construction Worcester cathedral and the Prior's Lodge at Much Wenlock.

Lying on the northern edge of the Wyre Forest Coalfield, Alveley was until the beginning of the 19th century the location for small scale mining of coal. When an era of expansion began, coal production increased rapidly, peaking in the period 1879-1939, during which production levels of around 6,000 tons per week was achieved. The colliery finally closed in 1969, having at one time employed up to 1,250 people, many of whom lived across the river in Highley.

Landscape

The oldest part of Alveley lies some 900 metres to the west of the main Worcester to Shrewsbury road (now the A442) on a sandstone ridge running parallel to the east of the River Severn. The ridge, its highest point crowned by the Church of St. Mary, is well-drained and intersected by brooks running down into the Severn valley. A prominence visible from some distance around, there are as a consequence also distant views northwards and eastwards across the rolling countryside on both sides of the valley, and westwards over Highley towards the Clee Hills. The landscape is predominantly agricultural, with small settlements, isolated groups of farm buildings and small stands and belts of woodland scattered across it.



Hedges and tree belts of native species bound fields to the north and west, dropping steeply down the slope into the Severn valley. There are also many individual large trees, most notably the group in and around the churchyard. This extensive tree cover is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Conservation Area, and is particularly striking in distant views. When viewed from the A442, the ground falls away to form a small valley with a meandering brook in the bottom (Daddle Brook), to rise steeply up again to the settlement on the ridge; the result is the Church and trees clearly silhouetted against the skyline. From the south, this view is somewhat obscured by 20th century housing development. From the north and the west, the absence of modern development allows for uninterrupted views of the churchyard (with the church itself almost invisible amid the trees) from below the ridge, and some of the buildings of the Conservation Area located on the higher ground.



Pattern of Settlement

The Conservation Area and its tightly-drawn boundaries are focused on the ancient hub of this small village. Nevertheless, the Conservation Area can be divided into two distinct parts. To the north the medieval parish church and its graveyard are prominently sited on the crest of the ridge at a fork in the road, with a cluster of listed buildings gathered to the immediate south and east of the church. The second, southern area is formed by a ribbon of traditional dwellings running southwards along the line of the ridge. This strip of buildings is eventually submerged in the profusion of modern development to the south and east.

Due to the relatively tight concentration of dwellings within the historic area of the village until the 20th century, there has been limited subsequent opportunity for infill development that could have otherwise diluted the special architectural and historic interest of the Conservation Area. To the north and west of the Conservation Area, there has been practically no development; as a consequence these remain as open fields. It is on the north and west that the traditional relationship between village and countryside is still clearly evident and worthy of retention as the setting of the Conservation Area. However, to the east of the Conservation Area the dominant elements are the extensive 20th century housing estates running across the shallow valley and its brook up towards the A442. These dwellings are distinctly suburban in nature and layout and are in sharp contrast to the rural character of the more ancient village development.

Historic houses and cottages within the Conservation Area are informally sited parallel to Church Road in a variety of forms, some terraced, some detached and set apart, generally back from the road, some within walled, fenced or hedged gardens, but some with gable ends fronting directly onto the lane. The lack of modern pavements, kerbing and gutters throughout the northern part of the Conservation Area, together with the informal meanderings of the lanes and layout of buildings clustering about the church, combine to create a powerful reminder of the rural origins of this settlement. This is less evident to the south as the modern residential developments and their layouts impinge on the Conservation Area boundaries.



Buildings



By far the most significant building, both from an architectural and historic point of view, has to be the Grade B listed parish church of St. Mary. Although of 12th century origin this is principally a fine 15th century building in the Early English style, Decorated side aisles, with a tower rebuilt in 1666, then raised and embattled about 1779. It was restored ('ruthlessly' says Pevsner) by Sir Arthur Blomfield in 1878-9. For what was such a small settlement until the end of the 19th century (the 1881 Census indicated a population of 892), the parish church is a relatively large and grandiose structure, its sense of presence accentuated by the elevated location. Its size is no doubt due to the patronage of local landed gentry and a reflection of the extensive parish it was meant to serve. To the north, the edge of the old graveyard and its collection of tombstones and memorials is defined by a line of mature trees leading to an elaborate lych gate, then a steep bank dropping sharply away to a later burial ground, with open fields beyond.

To the east of the church is an historically significant group of buildings. No.6, The Bell Inn, is a Grade II* building from the 17th century with 19th century and later modifications, resulting in, at first sight, an relatively nondescript building. Its most notable feature, however, is a number of reset 12th century sculptured stones in the elaborate designs of the Herefordshire School, the only known examples of this striking style in Shropshire apart from at Stottesdon. Reused 12th century carvings and stonework are also evident in the adjacent privy, 18th century and listed Grade II, and boundary walls in coursed sandstone to the west of The Bell Inn, also listed Grade II. An outbuilding, probably an 18th century former malthouse in roughly coursed sandstone, separates The Bell Inn from the road frontage. It is also listed Grade II. The extensive use of blacktop for the car park and road surfaces fails to enhance the setting of these buildings and boundary walls.



To the south of the church, just outside the south porch, is the heavily weathered and lichen-clad sexagonal steps and broken shaft of the Churchyard Cross (listed Grade II). The boundary and retaining walls to the churchyard are of the rather more randomly shaped and coursed stone with rounded copings (listed Grade II). The main entrance to the churchyard is through wooden gates and a simple pedimented canopy of 19th century origin. Of particular note is the adjacent stone stile, again listed Grade II.

Beyond the gate is a small open space, informally defined by some of the more significant private dwellings in the Conservation Area. The churchyard gate is flanked to the east by Old Church House (once known as Church Cottages), now a single L-shaped house, all painted white, but clearly built in two phases at least – a 17th century timber-framed cross wing with an 18th century extension to the right. Immediately to the south is No.4 (The Chantry), a relatively complex and interesting structure dated 1706 and 1725 on prominent tablets.



Principally of redbrick with an earlier gabled wing of random stone rubble projecting forward. Later windows in non-traditional patterns appear on the front elevations. The whole is given some grandeur by a front wall of rubble sandstone with an elaborately ornate gate and railings.

Church Farm House, a 19th century building in redbrick, and the group of associated stone barns flank the other side of the church gate. These traditional farm buildings make an important contribution to the historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area in underlining the agricultural role of the settlement. The retaining walls to the farmyard in large sandstone blocks are a prominent and sizeable feature on the side of the lane. West of this point the lane drops steeply down the valley side, its descending curves and substantial trees and bushes closing the views towards the River Severn.



In contrast to these larger buildings, more modest cottages ranging in date from the 17th century to the early 19th century are scattered throughout the Conservation Area.

Behind a substantial boundary sandstone wall that gives way to a hedge as the street corner is turned, Elm Cottage defines the corner of this lane. Now heavily restored and re-windowed, this listed house in white roughcast render is dated 1672. Adjacent is Church View, another two storey listed cottage (probably 18th century) in sandstone rubble with whitewashed outbuildings/store, again with a boundary hedge.

Across the lane by the church are more vernacular listed properties including No.7, a 17th century cottage with a stone built ground floor and timber framed upper floor, and Nos.16 & 17, a modest pair of cottages defining the street corner in white roughcast and clay tiled roofs. On the gable at the corner of the street, the ornate 19th century carved bargeboards are quite a prominent feature. The informality of the boundary fencing here at this point reinforces the village character of the Conservation Area. Adjacent is No.19, once a block of 3 cottages, now a single dwelling. In sandstone rubble, this listed building is a



reminder of the workers' cottages once typical of the village, although in its conversion to one dwelling it has been subjected to the visual impact of modern fenestration.



Opposite is the Three Horseshoes Inn, reputedly the oldest pub in Shropshire in having had a licence since 1406. With a 17th (?) century core, this listed building now appears to be a largely 19th century building, somewhat disfigured by a curious render effect to the side elevation. Again, ornate bargeboards to the outbuilding are a dominant feature to the roadside, the whole being a prominent group in the streetscene. South of the pub's walled car park, and at right angles to the road, is a long stone terrace



houses fronted at the street end by the village post office. Together with the adjacent row of sandstone cottages (No.56-58), these properties are archetypal evidence of otherwise humble workers' housing constructed in an expensive building material, ie stone. Nos.54 & 55 are apparently cottages with brick facades, but the side elevations reveal sandstone blockwork. The ready availability of the dark red sandstone for all types of buildings is characteristic of this Conservation Area.



The southern end of the Conservation Area is defined by Ivy Place, an architecturally balanced row of 4 cottages in carefully dressed sandstone from the early 19th century with large keyblocks above the ground floor windows. Small foregardens are defined by hooped iron railings, with the symmetry of the composition compromised to some extent by the dark brown staining of the windows of the end property.

Building Materials

Traditional local building materials are a vital component of the Conservation Area's special character. The principal materials are sandstone or brick with clay tile roofs, although most of the traditional building materials and finishes are in evidence, often in combination on the same building.

Sandstone in a variety of finishes and dressings appears throughout the Conservation Area, from the neatly-worked ashlar finish to the cottages at Ivy Place, to the more rough coursing of Church View, and the almost random rubble visible at the malthouse and boundary walls at The Old Bell. The church is of ashlar and squared coursed stone in a variety of shades of sandstone from pale cream to deepest red, with dressings, tracery and mouldings in more finely worked stone throughout.



Stone and brick are also used together, the brick being utilised for later extensions to the original property, or to repair failing stonework. The most prominent example of brickwork is the flemish bond red brick of No.4 (The Chantry). Whitewashed roughcast render also exists, such as at No.16 and Elm Cottage. Smooth render is also in evidence, for example at The Old Bell.

Architectural Details

The traditional but varied detailing of buildings is an important element of Alveley's visual and historic interest. Not surprisingly the most elaborate detailing is to be found on the church. It has the stone traceried windows in chamfered reveals with hood moulds and a moulded sill course, chamfered plinth, ornamented buttresses and moulded eaves characteristic of the Early English style. The typically Georgian detailing of the tower, with heavily moulded string courses, pointed arched windows and embattled parapet with corner finials makes an unusual and attractive contrast.



Some features are common to most buildings. Roofs are generally gabled with plain verges, with a pitch of over 40 degrees and of moderate height and bulk; there are few

deep-plan buildings. Chimneys, whether ridge or end, plain or ornamented, are an important feature of the roofscape and all made of brick.

Openings are generally vertically proportioned, with either sash or casement windows: the latter are more prevalent. Few buildings retain their old windows. Those that do survive are of various types, generally of painted timber. Old Church House has 9/9 sash windows. Sashes and casements with a variety of glazing bar patterns are used. Most houses have 20th century replacement windows, often a close approximation of the original pattern, but usually the details make them obviously modern. Others, notably the timber casements with horizontal glazing bars of Ivy Place, are much more appropriate. Doors and windows are mostly recessed within the openings. Original doors are of several types: boarded Gothic designs, of exposed timber or painted. Some buildings have inappropriate 20th century replacement doors.



The Character of the Conservation Area

In spite of the proximity of the 20th century housing estates, Alveley still has a strong and, from certain approaches, largely unspoilt rural character. The part within the Conservation Area has the appearance of a compact hamlet rather than a village. Its character and appearance are shaped by its location on a ridged site in rolling countryside; extensive tree cover; an informal network of narrow lanes, tracks and paths, frequently lacking in pavements and kerbing; and a variety of historic buildings in various materials. It is small scale and intimate in feeling, attended throughout by the dominating presence of the church, which is visible from any point within the Conservation Area.



From the eastern approach the road climbs steeply to enter the Conservation Area suddenly from between modern houses, opposite the gable end of the Post Office and a little below The Three Horseshoes. The church can be glimpsed to the right, with trees against the skyline behind it. Ahead is a stone wall to the pub car park, as the road bends slightly out of sight to the left. Close to the bend a group of traditional stone buildings comes into view. Concrete kerbs, speed restriction signs and overhead wires unfortunately mar the rural appearance.

Southwards the slight curves in the road expose the gable ends of the various dwellings of the Conservation Area to view. The informality of the relationship of these houses to the roadside is clearly evident from this approach, and contrasts markedly with the modern houses some distance across the road opposite and to the south, where the layout opens up to underline the sense of space in the streetscene, reducing the feeling of enclosure prevalent within the rest of the Conservation Area.



The northern part of the Conservation Area has its own distinct character. The quiet narrow lane contrasts with the wider and much busier main road to the south. Views

are limited, mostly confined to within the Conservation Area itself, though there are glimpses through the gaps between buildings on the west side to the countryside beyond. To the east, because the ground falls away, the distant hillsides are clearly visible.



At the bend there is a pleasant view of the gable end of the Chantry with its backdrop of church and trees. The densely planted mature trees of the church grounds form a visual barrier to the north. The lane splits sharply to the west (where the view is closed at another bend by the front of Church View) and east and then northwards through the gap between the houses. The frequent changes of direction,

the stopping of views by buildings and trees: factors that increase the sense of enclosure at this point. The historic character and appearance of the Conservation Area is strongest in this location, as the otherwise ubiquitous modern housing development is not readily visible.



The churchyard comes into full view on the bend. Although set back the church is prominent from the lane. With its lych gate, attractive stone walls and large groups of trees, it is the dominant element of this part of the Conservation Area. The low simple bulk of the Church Farm buildings form a foil to the architectural detail of St.Mary's. The church is the most important single element of the Conservation Area's historic character. Views of it, surrounded by a mixture of old and modern memorials, shrubs and fine mature trees are among the most attractive features.



To the east of the church the lane runs northwards round to the rear of the Chantry and Old Church House and then hard up against the high churchyard wall as it drops down the slope. On the west side the stone retaining wall and raised churchyard loom above the lane. The east front of the church is a prominent feature at this point. The large number of trees within the churchyard makes a significant contribution to this location and the wider landscape. To the east side of the lane is a group of modern detached houses, which then give way via a narrow hedged lane continuing down the slope to rolling open countryside.

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