

Shropshire Council

BROSELEY CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

The Broseley Conservation Area was designated on 8th June 1988. The Conservation Area boundary was amended on 23rd July 2003.

LOCATION

Broseley is an historic small town approximately one and a half miles south of Ironbridge, six miles north west of Bridgnorth and four miles north east of Much Wenlock.

On its northern edge the Broseley Conservation Area adjoins the Severn Gorge Conservation Area designated in April 1980. This boundary also denotes the extent of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site to the north. The Broseley Conservation Area then extends southwards to include the ancient parish of Benthall including The Mines and the Benthall valley, parts of Broseley Wood, King Street, Cape Street and Duke Street. The Conservation Area then continues to the south east, to include the High Street and the lanes and streets leading off it. It then continues further south to include a part of Bridgnorth Road, as far as the old school complex, the whole of Church Street, including Broseley Hall, All Saints Church and the Lady Forester Hospital, and part of Avenue Road, with the Forester Arms on its south eastern boundary.

HISTORY



Broseley originates in a Saxon clearance within the Royal Forests which covered the Ironbridge Gorge. The name is said to derive from the Old English for “Town-guardians wood/clearing” or perhaps, “Burgweard’s wood/clearing”¹. It was recorded in the Domesday Book and seems to have been largely an agricultural village. Evidence suggests that the medieval settlement of Broseley was centred on the area close to the church. However, no church was recorded in the Domesday Book and the existing All Saints church, which is in the Perpendicular style, was extensively rebuilt in 1845 by E. H. Eginton.

The town is of special historic interest, not least because of its strong association to

¹ Nottingham University Key to English Place Names

the development of the Industrial Revolution. Broseley was originally an agricultural village, but by the early 15th century coal was being mined in the area. Mining developed rapidly in the 16th century, mainly because the substantial reserves of coal began to be exploited by the Lord of the Manor, James Clifford. He encouraged the immigration of miners to the area. They were permitted to build cottages on the hitherto unenclosed commons of the village.² Coal continued to form the main base of Broseley's prosperity in the 17th and 18th centuries along with the manufacture of iron and earthenware. The extent of mining pre-1844 is uncertain as very few records or maps survive. Later Ordnance Survey maps, however, suggest a small-scale mining boom, with the extraction of coal, ironstone and clay from shafts rather than the earlier adits, bell pits or open quarries. Many traces of the area's industrial past survive as complete buildings or remains and significant archaeological traces of mining activity can still be seen, especially in The Mines area. Lime quarrying and brick making have also taken place from the town's earliest times. None of these industries survive today with the Maws tile works, the brickworks and potteries having all closed. However, the archaeological remains of many of these industries including lime, china and brick kilns still survive.

Broseley's boom time started in the first quarter of the 17th century and the settlement grew rapidly as immigrant miners built cottages on irregular plots on the unenclosed common lands and wastes to the north. This can be seen especially in the Broseley Wood area which became a squatter settlement. This uncontrolled, unplanned development continued throughout the 17th century, resulting in the intricate and haphazard maze of streets, lanes and narrow paths (known as jitties), which is one of Broseley's most distinctive characteristics. King Street, Queen Street and Duke Street and other connecting streets developed out of the small strips of land left between the growing numbers of dwellings.



By 1700 Broseley had become one of Shropshire's largest and most important industrial towns. During the 18th century its population of about 2000 more than doubled. Coal mining remained the most important industry, but the local reserves of ironstone were also mined, supplying iron ore to furnaces both locally and further afield. The high quality local clay was also exploited for the manufacture of pottery and of clay tobacco pipes; Broseley pipes were nationally and internationally famous



for 300 years. Southorn's Pipeworks survives in King Street, and the site of another pipe works is in Legges Hill. The local brick and tile industry expanded to meet the rapidly increasing construction demands of commerce and housing in the area. Eighteenth century buildings in these local materials can still be seen throughout the town.

² Research Paper No. 15 Benthall and Broseley Wood by Catherine Clark & Judith Alfrey – Nuffield Survey



Wealth from industry was reflected in the building of substantial houses such as The Lawns, White Hall and Broseley Hall in Church Street. Broseley continued to develop rapidly, although the settlement became more concentrated rather than expanding outwards as existing houses were subdivided and the sites between them were infilled. By the end of the 18th century some of the larger industrial employers were

building housing for their workers. This established the complex irregular pattern of development with a mixture of large houses, commercial buildings and small cottages, detached, in groups and rows, or terraces, mixed together quite haphazardly, which is characteristic of a large part of Broseley. During the 18th century the commercial centre of the town shifted from the area close to the church northwards to the High Street.



Around 1800 the easily worked reserves of coal ran out, and with that much of the prosperity of Broseley ended. Ironstone continued to be mined until the 1870s. Some of it was used locally, but by the 1830s iron production in the parish virtually ceased. The production of clay pipes, pottery, bricks and tiles became the most important local industries. From about 1840, with the introduction of new machinery and processes, the brick and tile business boomed, helped by the opening of the railway in 1862.



Despite this Broseley went into gradual decline. From the 1840's the population began to decrease. Modest houses continued to be built, but few large buildings were erected. The town altered little; at the beginning of the 20th century the street pattern was little different from that at the end of the 18th. After the First World War some of the worst slums were cleared and a small amount of new housing was built. Since the 1960s major housing development has increased

the population to above its early 19th century level and in 1991 the population was approximately 5,000. Nevertheless the historic core of Broseley remains very largely intact, with many of its old buildings surviving.

LANDSCAPE

Broseley's geographical position and landscape setting have a marked effect on the character of the Conservation Area. The town lies above the Severn Gorge, along the Benthall Valley which runs down into it. At the northern end of the Conservation Area Bridge Road climbs through the densely wooded side of the Gorge. The dense woodland of native trees is a major feature of this part of the Conservation Area.



The steep valley side in Broseley Wood helped to shape the intricate, haphazard character of the area. Narrow tracks and jitties wind up the hillside between randomly scattered buildings. Views constantly alter with the changing levels, and buildings are thrown into prominence from varying viewpoints. The woodland of the Gorge forms the backdrop from many points, but there are also significant views out into the countryside to the east.

The Benthall Valley broadens out along Bridge Road and south of Barratt's Hill. This part of the Conservation Area has a strong rural and agricultural character, with pasture, hedgerows and trees, farmhouses and scattered buildings contained within the valley. The buildings of King Street are prominent on the ridge above the valley to the east. From the western end of Barratt's Hill, from Speeds Lane in the valley bottom and from Bridge Road on the valley side the buildings of Cape Street and King Street are prominent against the skyline, with gardens, orchards and fields running down the valley side. Views of the valley from Cape and King Streets, glimpsed between the buildings, are typical of Broseley's mix of urban and rural character.

The land rises steeply up Barratt's Hill to the High Street before falling gradually away again to the south and east. The town centre at first appears to be densely built up, but there are glimpses from many points out into the surrounding countryside, between buildings and alongside roads. There are open fields behind some of the buildings on the eastern side of High Street. Along the north eastern side of Church Street development is less concentrated, and the churchyard of All Saints provides an important green space with views to the countryside beyond. The large mature trees and shrubs surrounding the Lady Forester Hospital are a vital contribution to the character of the south-eastern end of the Conservation Area.



PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT



The Broseley Conservation Area consists of at least three distinct settlement areas; one in the old parish of Benthall, another around Broseley Wood towards the Severn Gorge and the town of Broseley itself. All have developed individually through the ages and all have their own distinct identities. The density, pattern, scale and type of settlement varies greatly within the Conservation Area. This variety is a significant part of Broseley's character. Around the church large

buildings, mostly detached, are widely spaced, with many set back from the road, and backing onto open fields to the north. This pattern changes in the more northerly part of Church Street where buildings are more tightly concentrated, with many fronting the street and grouped in rows or occasionally in terraces. This pattern becomes more dense still along much of High Street. The open areas of The Green and the junction with Barber Street provide counter points to the tightly confined street. To the west of High Street there is an intricate network of lanes and narrow roads, with modest older houses and cottages interspersed with new development.

To the north, Barber Street, Duke Street and Fox Lane have irregular, more scattered groupings of small houses and cottages, and mid-20th century development fills much of the area between High Street and Queen Street. Queen Street, Cape Street and its northern continuation as King Street are narrower than High Street and development here is less concentrated. There is the same irregular mix of large and small buildings, but the rows and blocks comprise fewer buildings and are more widely separated.



Chapel Lane and Barratt's Hill also lead out into the surrounding countryside. Buildings along both roads are set apart, and there are fine views across the largely undeveloped Benthall Valley. This part of the Conservation Area traditionally has a strong rural character. However, infill development is in danger of diluting the hitherto open and spacious

character of this part of the Conservation Area. Although The Old Vicarage, Benthall House and Hilltop Farm are substantial Georgian houses the majority of houses in this area tend to be less grandiose. A new infill development of terraced houses exists on Barratt's Hill at its junction with Cape Street.





At its northern end the valley is more heavily developed. Legges Hill and other lanes and tracks link King Street, Speeds Lane and Bridge Road. An intricate network of narrow, steep lanes and the paths known as jitties extends from here northwards into The Mines and especially Broseley Wood. Broseley Wood developed as an outlying settlement of Broseley, and has a very different character to the central part of the town. Development is entirely random, with a maze of 18th and 19th century

cottages in small groups on many different levels on the steep slope down to Bridge Road. Its origin as an area of workers' housing is reflected in its small houses and cottages, detached, in pairs or small rows, many developed haphazardly by extending or rebuilding. This random effect has been increased by unplanned early 20th century development. To the east is an open area of countryside immediately adjoining the boundary of the Severn Gorge Conservation Area.

The Mines was once extensively developed but now is little more than a random scattering of houses in a wooded area to the west of Bridge Road. The Conservation Area boundary includes an open area to the west which contains visible evidence of mining activity. North of Spout Lane The Bailiffs House (The Croft), one of the most important surviving 17th century buildings in the Conservation Area, is surrounded by the dense woodland of the Severn Gorge which provides the backdrop to the whole of the northern part of the Broseley Conservation Area.



BUILDINGS



Much of Broseley's character is provided by its great variety of buildings of many types, sizes and periods. They reflect the changing pattern of life in the town and its history. The surviving historic public buildings are Victorian or Edwardian, notably the former school (Library and Health Centre) and Lady Forester Hospital. The Old Baptist Church in Chapel Lane and the Victoria Hall are among a considerable number of 18th and 19th century chapels and meeting halls which illustrate the

strength of Nonconformism in the town. These chapels are mostly modest buildings, but the parish church of All Saints, rebuilt in 1843-5, is one of the grandest buildings in Broseley.

Some buildings survive from Broseley's industrial and commercial past. The most significant is Southorn's Pipeworks in King Street. This range of 19th century brick buildings, the last surviving clay pipeworks in the country, is of national historic importance. Some houses have commercial premises attached, such as the former warehouse adjacent to 21 King Street. The same property also has one of the most unusual shops in the town, entirely faced outside and in with a bizarre mixture of local tiles. A considerable number of original 19th and early 20th century shop fronts make a valuable contribution to the character and appearance of High Street, and there are others elsewhere, including King Street.



Broseley has a wide range of houses and cottages of many sizes and types. Large detached Georgian houses of considerable architectural quality set in spacious gardens and grounds, such as Broseley Hall and The Lawns, are concentrated around the original centre of the town focused on the parish church. The 17th century Raddle Hall, in the same part of the town, is an example of the later subdivision of substantial houses into smaller dwellings.

Slightly less ambitious but nevertheless good quality 18th and early 19th century houses were built as the town expanded north from the original centre. These include Nos. 1 and 29 and Broseley Social Club in High Street, Hurstlea in Queen Street and Orchard House and Holly House in King Street. These are individual buildings, either detached or linked to adjoining properties. Others such as 53-54 and 79-81 High Street are in pairs or short terraces.



character of the town.

Particularly characteristic of Broseley is the way in which these larger buildings in the fashionable architectural styles of their day are intermingled with humbler houses and cottages in a quite random way; Broseley is not and never was a planned or rigidly socially stratified town. In many parts of the town large 2 or 3 storey houses stand next to small, low cottages. The result is a great variety of sizes, heights and scales of building which contributes greatly to the intricate, irregular

Among the smaller cottages and houses there are a number of distinct types. One of the most common, which originated in the early 18th century, is the small one or two unit brick, one and a half storey cottage built singly, in pairs or short rows. Some survive largely intact, but many others have been substantially altered and enlarged in recent years. A later development is the "industrial cottage", workers' housing consisting of small brick 2 storey houses with uniform details built in short terraces. Long uniform terraces are, though, something of a rarity in Broseley: haphazard rows of adjoining buildings are much more common.



Boundary and retaining walls and railings are both complementary to the buildings and form important features in their own right. They contribute greatly to the enclosure and continuity of frontages along many of the streets and roads. Some are low, defining areas such as The Green, but in other places such as Harris's Green high boundary walls tightly confine narrow roads, adding to the urban effect.

In some parts of the town 20th century development has unfortunately damaged its character. The flat-roofed shops in Delphside, flats adjacent to the Victoria Hall and Spar Supermarket are examples of buildings which are unsympathetic to their historic setting. Fortunately such damaging intrusions are limited within the Conservation Area.



BUILDING MATERIALS



Broseley is predominantly a brick and tile town. By the 16th century bricks and tiles were being produced in the parish and production increased as population and industry expanded. Raddle Hall in Church Street, built in 1663, is one of the few survivors of a number of large houses built in brick in the 17th century. Three of the finest houses in the town, Broseley Hall, White Hall and The Lawns, were built in the first half of the 18th century in local red brick. From the early 18th century onwards

most buildings, from the humblest cottages and boundary walls to large houses, commercial and industrial buildings, and public buildings such as schools and chapels were brick built.

The local tradition of brick building is highly developed and distinctive. Red brick predominates. Older houses, such as Raddle Hall and Broseley Hall are built of hand made, relatively soft bricks. Irregular firing produced an attractive variation in shade within a single building. During the 19th century red bricks remained widespread, but mass production produced greater consistency of shape and colour. Smoother, harder, more highly fired bricks were also made and used. A variety of other colours were produced, and examples of these can be seen around the town; the strong blue brick used for the former school (now the library) in 1855 is a particularly striking example. Some later 19th century buildings have a mixture of different coloured bricks for decorative effect.



Clay roof tiles also vary in colour, from browns and reds to the durable blue tiles produced at Jackfield, used with a variety of ridge tiles, some with decorative cresting. Some buildings, such as the former school or Nos. 26-29 Church Street, have bands of decorative scalloped tiles alternating with plain tiles. The dominance of the local tile industry was almost total: the Welsh slate roofs which became widespread throughout England in the 19th century are scarcely to be seen in Broseley.

Within the Conservation Area concrete tiles have been used in recent years on some new buildings and to re-roof a few old ones, but clay tiles still predominate.

The decorative tiles also made in the parish can be seen used in the gables of the Jubilee Hall and, more spectacularly, covering the entire frontage of the shop adjoining 21 King Street. By-products of the local clay industries were not wasted; in some parts of Broseley Wood there are boundaries and retaining walls along the jitties built of the saggars used to hold pottery and clay pipes during firing.



Iron, another important local product, is also part of the character



of Broseley. 3 Church Street, known locally as the "Iron-Topped House", has iron rafters and a decorated iron-framed door hood. Angel House in High Street has an elaborate cast iron window, and iron windows can be seen in a variety of other buildings. The churchyard has excellent iron railings, gates and gate piers, and other sets of good quality iron railings can be seen around the town, notably in High Street and King Street.

Some Broseley buildings are at least partly timber-framed. Timber framing was a strong vernacular tradition in this part of Shropshire, where timber was abundant, until the late 17th century. In some buildings such as 2 Queen Street or The Mines Cottage the framing can be clearly seen, but in many cases it is completely hidden beneath later rebuilding, usually in brick.

Stone is another local building material used before brick became predominant. 49 Bridge Road of roughly coursed sandstone rubble and The Bailiff House, Spout Lane, of coursed sandstone are 17th century buildings. There are also a number of stone rubble cottages which have been substantially rebuilt in brick at a later date. These timber or stone buildings, though few in number, are an important relic of Broseley's earlier history, before its greatest period of industrial development and expansion in the 18th century.



Many buildings throughout the Conservation Area have their basic construction concealed beneath paint or render. This is largely a recent, non-traditional practice which has often accompanied modernisation, extension or alteration of buildings. In most cases the original construction was intended to be left exposed.

ARCHITECTURAL DETAILS



Much of the distinctive detailing of many old buildings which make a major contribution to Broseley's character is due to the local brick tradition. Even the simplest 18th century cottages often have decorative touches such as projecting brick bands between storeys and cornices below the eaves. Cornices range from simple corbelled-out courses, dentils or diagonally-set "dog tooth" to elaborately moulded cornices such as those of Nos. 73-76 High Street. Moulded 'specials' are

also used to add decorative emphasis to prominent gables.

Most buildings have vertically proportioned openings, and many have brick segmental arches, often of contrasting colours. Others, such as the Lion Hotel in High Street or Nos. 26-29 Church Street have straight headed openings with specially moulded brick 'Tudor' style hood moulds projecting over them. Brickwork is also combined with stone or painted rendered dressings such as quoins, cornices and lintels, either plain or with



moulded decoration and key blocks.



Painted timber joinery is also a major element of the original character of Broseley's buildings. It ranges from the highly sophisticated work of buildings such as Broseley Hall, White Hall and The Lawns to the simple plank doors and casements of small cottages. Many of the finer houses in Church Street, High Street, King Street, Barratt's Hill and elsewhere have panelled doors and timber doorcases with varying degrees of ornamentation. There are also numerous original 19th century timber shop fronts around the town, generally with pilasters, fascias and moulded cornices. Original sash windows, generally with numerous glazing bars are widespread among 18th, 19th and early

20th century buildings. Many other buildings, particularly the smaller cottages, retain their original side-hung timber casements. Distinctive local features include iron opening lights and 2-light casements with horizontal glazing bars.

THE CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

Broseley is a historic town of very strong and varied character. Much of that character is the result of the rapid growth of the town which accompanied industrial development exploiting the area's natural resources in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Evidence of this industrial past can be seen in the Conservation Area in the form of both extant buildings and archaeological remains. The epoch of prosperity that resulted from the industrial success of Broseley began to decline towards the end of the 19th century. The period of stagnation that followed continued well into the 20th century ensuring that both the distinctive patterns of settlement and a great many of the 18th and 19th century buildings have survived and continue to shape the character and appearance of the town today.

Some aspects of Broseley's character are common to the town as a whole. Brick and clay tiles, the local building materials whose manufacture contributed considerably to the prosperity of Broseley, are predominant throughout the Conservation Area and have a very marked effect on its character and appearance. Much of the distinctive detailing of buildings is also due to the use of these local materials.

Broseley is not in any sense a planned town, and the random, haphazard way in which the various parts of the town developed is very much a part of its character. There are no carefully laid out straight streets: main streets and side roads, lanes, tracks and jitties are all irregular, and mostly narrow and winding.

Although the vast majority of old buildings are 18th and 19th century, they are of varied character. There are some substantial buildings of considerable architectural quality, but these are largely concentrated close to Broseley's original centre. In the commercial centre of the town along High Street larger houses are mixed with commercial premises (some of



these shops were themselves originally houses) and smaller cottages in a quite random way. This mixture of commercial and residential use in the heart of the town is a very important aspect of Broseley's character. It contributes greatly to Broseley's strong feeling of still being a working rather than a dormitory town. A similar mix of residential with commercial or industrial use can be found, though to a considerably lesser extent, in parts of Barber Street, King Street and Queen Street.



The heart of the town, in the immediate vicinity of High Street, has a strongly urban feeling, but the areas adjoining it are somewhat different, more village-like in character, with less concentrated development. East and west of the High Street there are more modest houses and cottages. From King Street and other points there are glimpses out into open countryside. Some parts of the Conservation Area, notably the Benthall Valley, have a strong rural character with a

scattering of small cottages and substantial farmhouses which is very different to the character of either the original centre around the church or the commercial centre.

Broseley Wood and The Mines are areas with a strong individual character of their own which again differs considerably from other parts of the Conservation Area. Their origins as squatter settlements are clearly evident in the entirely haphazard layout of small dwellings along the narrow tracks and jitties which grew up piecemeal as development continued. This combined with the topography of the steeply sloping valley side and the wooded backdrop makes these areas very distinctive within the Conservation Area itself.



Broseley cannot therefore easily be characterised as a single place. It is rather made up of a variety of small and distinctive areas, sharing some common qualities but each with a strong individual character of its own.

The historic importance of Broseley, both as an industrial town and for the survival of its historic pattern of settlement and buildings, was a major factor in the designation of the Conservation Area. The diverse but traditional styles and architectural detailing of its housing are probably the principal elements that epitomises the character of the Conservation Area. However, the high demand for new housing, especially in the peripheral areas away from the commercial hub, has resulted in an eruption of infill and back plot developments. The unavailability of the distinctive Broseley brick, due to the long ago demise of the Broseley brick manufacturing industry, has resulted in an increased use of alternative and often unsympathetic modern brick types. The use of non traditional materials and inappropriate detailing is in danger of eroding the character of Broseley Conservation Area.

BROSELEY CONSERVATION AREA PLAN

