

WEST YORKSHIRE VICTORIAN SOCIETY – 10 MAY 2014

INDUSTRIAL VILLAGES SOUTH OF HUDDERSFIELD

Introduction

Today's visit is to three villages, Armitage Bridge, Wilshaw and Meltham Mills, which developed from late Georgian to mid-Victorian times around the fast-growing textile mills of the Huddersfield district. They differ widely in their line of business, their industrial scale and in the extent to which they developed a 'model village' around the factory. But their histories also have common features, and indeed inter-connections, which should emerge in the course of the day.

The Brookes and Armitage Bridge

John Brooke & Sons Ltd lays claim to being the country's longest-established family business, tracing its origins to a fulling mill at New Mill in the upper Holme Valley, established in 1541 on former monastic land. The 19th century Armitage Bridge mill complex, where today's visit starts, is still owned and managed by the family, in the shape of Mark Brooke, 16 generations on, though manufacturing on the site ceased in 1987.

By the mid-18th century the Brookes were active both as millers and clothiers, and had rented a mill further downstream at Honley. From there it was only a short further move to Armitage Bridge, where the site was purchased possibly as early as 1798 and the mill complex steadily developed from 1816 onwards. The business therefore "provides the most perfect link with the fulling mills of the 16th century", yet became an early exemplar of the fully integrated mill, with all processes on one site, perhaps second only in scale to Bean Ings Mills in Leeds.¹ The firm's initial lines of business included military uniforms and formal menswear, from which they diversified in the course of the 19th century.

Buildings surviving on the site today, and now in a variety of business, cultural and residential uses (including film studios, just used for *Jamaica Inn*!) include:

- The 4-storey pedimented warehouse building of 1816/17 (listed grade II).
- Number One mill of similar date, for fulling, scribbling and carding.
- The hand-spinning and hand-weaving shops of 1816-25 (as was often the case, concentration onto a single site was not driven by mechanisation but preceded it).
- The power spinning mill of 1828/9, adjoining the first mill.
- Mid-19th century power weaving sheds, some now converted to the North Light Gallery, which houses contemporary art and a permanent exhibition of the business history.
- The elegant four-stage clock tower and more distant chimney (both grade II).

These were by no means all of the buildings in place by about 1930, after a century of continuous evolution of the site, but some have since been demolished.

A run of accounting records from 1825 has enabled more than one historian to analyse the financial strength that lay behind the growth of the business, which was employing 1000 people by the early 1830s.² Drawing on centuries of accumulated wealth, in 1825 William Brooke (1763-1846) and three

sons had £100,000 invested in the business (which, as a share of GDP, would equate to £300m today!). This generated a handsome income for the partners but most was left in the firm to finance the development of the business and the site. J M Keynes once observed that, for the 19th century capitalist, “The duty of saving became nine-tenths of virtue and the growth of the cake the object of true religion.” By this standard, Herbert Heaton comments, “The Brooke family was in general tenths virtuous, and its accounts show the zeal with which abstinence could be practised when necessary.”

But the Brookes also had ‘true religion’ in a more literal sense. Large families were common – William Brooke had 9 children, his son Thomas (1798-1859) 13 – and several sons went into the church, or rather churches. ‘Squire’ Edward Brooke (1799-1871) became an itinerant Methodist preacher and founded the first Wesleyan Chapel in Honley. In the next generation two Brookes became Anglican priests, Joshua Ingham Brooke (1836-1906) at Thornhill (later he became archdeacon of Halifax) and his brother Charles Edward (1847-1911) at St John the Divine, Kennington, where he largely funded the church built to G E Street’s design (1874) and hailed by Betjeman as the most magnificent in south London. (Street also provided a new nave at Thornhill in 1877-9.)

It is no surprise, then, that **St Paul’s, Armitage Bridge** (grade II), which we visit today, was almost entirely a family venture, with £5964 of the £6350 cost coming from the business or family members. The church was designed by R D Chantrell in Decorated style and consecrated in 1848; Pevsner found the tower “ambitious” and the whole “quite lavishly done”, most evidently now in the external carving. Walter Parratt, later organist at St George’s Chapel, Windsor and Master of the King’s Musick, became organist here aged 11. Sadly the church was gutted by an arson attack in February 1987, leaving only the outer walls and tower intact; visible survivals of the C19 church today are the chancel arch and piscina. The rebuilt church, with a strong focus on community use, was designed by Dick Shepley of BCCH, Leeds and rededicated in 1990. Its present features include:

- Sculptures of St Paul in cast concrete by Ian Judd of Dean Clough, Halifax.
- The baldacchino painted by Steve Simpson of Wakefield, who took his inspiration for ‘Angels’ from the style of medieval icons.
- The altar, lectern, etc by Edward Wilcock, then of Wakefield and now in York.
- Stainless steelwork by Keswick Metalcraft.

The architect himself designed the motifs which are repeated throughout the building in the floor, lighting, kneelers, and altar cloths. Above the church is the parsonage, in Elizabethan style, again by Chantrell, who also designed a school for the village.

He had previously designed the restrained classical **Armitage Bridge House** (1828; grade II) for John Brooke. Subsequently enlarged and now converted to 10 apartments, with a modern estate occupying much of the formerly landscaped grounds, its austerity of design well reflects the prudent business values described above – though it had an unusual ‘starfish’ ceiling which Chantrell copies from his master, Sir John Soane. (The lodge, former coach house, gatepiers etc are also listed grade II.)

The Brookes also built an attractive L-shaped row of **workers' cottages** on two sides of the site, five of which survive today as "some of the most exclusive and attractive properties to let in the Huddersfield area", according to the lettings agent, and others as small business accommodation.

Armitage Bridge is clearly an 'industrial village', in the sense that a large industrial complex has adjacent to it a substantial settlement. The chapelry of Armitage Bridge, constituted in 1848 with the church, had a population of 2455 housed in 561 dwellings. The Brookes' contribution to this was modest. There can be no doubt that they espoused a generalised paternalism which took members of the family into many areas of 19th century public service, including education and recreation, local government service, the magistracy and county office. But this was not focussed on the development of housing and social facilities within Armitage Bridge; in fact the Brookes were not builders of 'model villages' like our other two examples today.

Joseph Hirst and Wilshaw

Wilshaw, our next stop, is genuinely a 'model village', essentially the creation of one man, Joseph Hirst (1805-74). Hirst was one of 14 children of Thomas Hirst, who had married Mary Brook, daughter of William Brook of Thick Hollins (see below). Hirst senior was a 'higgler', or middleman in the domestic woollen industry, based at the farm of Lower Greave, now subsumed into Wilshaw. His son Joseph started out in the same trade but soon came to rent a spinning mill. He was, Cyril Pearce comments, "a good example of the merchant clothier turned factory owner"³, and in that respect echoes the much longer trajectory of the Brooke family. But they have little else in common. Hirst's remained a much smaller industrial enterprise, but in the isolated moorland setting of Wilshaw he came to create a much more complete set of community facilities.

The business grew quite rapidly through the 1830s and 1840s. In 1832 Hirst moved a short distance to larger premises at Wilshaw Farm, which he converted as a mill for both spinning and weaving. This was owned, as was much of the surrounding land, by his uncle Jonas Brook, but when Brook died in 1836 Hirst bought the premises. (Uncle Jonas had also given him a quarry as a wedding present when he married Eleanor Ramsey in 1831, and here he had built **Wilshaw Villa** (grade II) as a family home.) Further premises were rented at two Meltham locations in 1842 and 1853, and in 1849 the Wilshaw Farm site was redeveloped to provide a warehouse, weaving room, counting house, dyeworks, gasworks, stables and both manager's and workers' housing; little now remains of this complex except for the former manager's house. The Great Exhibition of 1851 saw the firm exhibiting "Buckskin, Orleans, crape and fancy doeskin and hair-line for trousers", and receiving a prize medal for "great excellence of manufacture".

Hirst's village-building came later. The housing at Wilshaw Farm was perhaps a necessary response to the isolated location of the enterprise, but a decade later Hirst became a full-blown industrial paternalist. The turning point was the death in childbirth in 1858 of Joseph & Eleanor's only child Mary. For the rest of their lives, the couple embarked on a series of projects which aimed both to memorialise their daughter and to benefit their employees. Unlike the industrial premises, these buildings all survive today.

Most striking is **St Mary's Church** (1863, grade II), an unusual building both functionally and stylistically. From the outside it seems symmetrical in plan, but this is because the church, Sunday school and vicarage are housed within the one building. The Bishop of Ripon threatened not to consecrate this unorthodox arrangement (a few years before, he had refused to sanction adjoining Anglican and non-conformist chapels at Huddersfield's Edgerton Cemetery), but reputedly gave way after Hirst threatened to offer the church to the Methodists instead! Stylistically, it is described in its listing as a "church of highly eclectic design, having some German Romanesque forms, the elaborate central tower roof of French gothic type, and the windows typical of the Italian Renaissance." Inside are portraits of the founders; a Clayton & Bell East window in memory of the daughter; and finely carved woodwork. Painted texts over the chancel arch and windows were striking features until the church was redecorated in the 1930s. The churchyard includes an elaborate Hirst mausoleum and a boiler house, contemporary with the church and also listed grade II.

The architect of the church, as of all Hirst's Wilshaw projects, was John Kirk of Huddersfield. The other buildings are:

- Housing at **Lower Greave** (1863-74) for senior employees, remodelled from vernacular buildings in Kirk's preferred Italianate style.
- **St Mary's Court** (c.1871), a group of 12 houses for workers and their families, arranged around three sides of a courtyard, with gardens forming the fourth side, on the site of Upper Greave, the third and last-acquired of three original settlements on the site. These are more austere than the Italianate housing at Lower Greave but far from mean, and bear comparison with the much more extensive 'model housing' at Saltaire, Akroydon and elsewhere. Unfortunate modifications and additions preceded conservation area declaration.
- The neo-Elizabethan **St Mary's School** (c.1870, grade II), again incorporating a dwelling, for the headteacher, and now the village hall.
- Six attractive Italianate **almshouses** (c.1871, grade II) behind the church. These were very much the initiative of Eleanor rather than Joseph Hirst, and provided housing for 12-18 people. Preference went first to retired Hirst employees or their widows, then to other residents of the chapelry, and finally to those of the wider area.

Beyond the almshouses the **mill manager's house** survives from the original mill complex.

Joseph Hirst's building projects embody a complex mix of motives. Like the Brookes of Armitage Bridge and the Brooks of Meltham, he was in a small way at the forefront of the industrial revolution, but also recognised and sought to ameliorate the threats to the social fabric from unrestrained *laissez-faire*. In this there was an element of enlightened self-interest but, as Pearce puts it in his analysis of both Hirst and the Brooks, "the harsh reality of the cash nexus was mediated by a remarkable synthesis of a feudal and aristocratic concept of '*noblesse oblige*' (Disraeli's 'baronial principle') and a kind of localised and individualistic welfare capitalism."⁴

However this may make Hirst sound too backward-looking a figure. Towards the end of his life he declared himself a supporter of profit-sharing, the co-operative movement and male household

suffrage. His 'model village' activity was also uniquely impelled, after the death of his only child, by the desire to memorialise her, and perhaps his own life's work, in the village of Wilshaw. He was also responsible in part for developing another model village at Thornton Hough in the Wirral (though more extensive building there was undertaken by Lord Leverhulme of nearby Port Sunlight); here he and Eleanor had a second home on land she had brought to the marriage, and John Kirk designed a church, school, housing and village shop for Hirst in Gothic style and Cheshire sandstone. His two villages would be his only legacy, for the business closed after Eleanor's death in 1881.

The Brooks and Meltham Mills

The Brookes of Armitage Bridge were major industrialists whose social legacy was modest. Joseph Hirst had a much broader social programme but on a scale commensurate with his quite minor industrial enterprise. With the Brooks of Meltham, the story culminates with a family who built up a major business and an extensive urban development programme to match.

Unlike the small villages of Armitage Bridge and Wilshaw, Meltham was a significant settlement long before the industrial era. William Brook (1733/4-1806) and his wife Martha moved there from the Bradford area (Manningham or Bingley) in 1774, leasing the manor house at **Thick Hollins** from the Armytage family, lords of the manor. The house, formerly three-gabled and in Jacobean style (the gateposts survive), was rebuilt in the C19 and is now Meltham Golf Club, our lunch stop. The nearby 17th century barn house, originally a tannery, is worth noting in passing.

Brook's first industrial venture, in about 1780, was to establish a scribbling mill, which may also have undertaken fulling. The intervening spinning and weaving processes were carried out domestically, but by 1785 Brook had added a small woollen mill of his own and he was also a wool merchant and banker, founding the business of William Brook & Sons. The new mill was water-powered but equipped with a small steam engine to pump water from below the wheel back into the dam for increased power.

William and Martha had 13 children, including six sons surviving childhood. After his death, and led by Jonas (1775-1836), they converted the manufacturing business from woollen to cotton, establishing Jonas Brook & Bros, cotton spinners, on its Meltham Mills site. There were three multi-storeyed mills by 1833, with over 600 employees, and another three by 1850, with a wide range of ancillary buildings and a workers' dining hall. Specialising in cotton sewing thread, this was another fully integrated complex, undertaking everything from spinning and dyeing through making and winding the cotton reels and printing the labels, to manufacturing cardboard boxes. The firm grew to become one of the industrial giants of 19th century Yorkshire, eventually merging with J & P Coats of Paisley in 1896, by which time there were around 2000 employees. In the process the Brook family, especially Jonas's brothers James and Charles, and James's sons Charles and William Leigh Brook, came to dominate 19th century Meltham, providing housing, churches, schools and recreational facilities for their growing workforce. A great deal of this legacy remains visible today.

The Brooks' impulse to build was first expressed in churches and associated schools. As an established settlement, Meltham already had a chapelry at **St Bartholomew's** (grade II), with its own interesting history. First consecrated in 1651, it is a rare example of a new church established during

the Commonwealth. Only details remain of that first building, which was remodelled in Georgian style by Joseph Jagger in 1785/6, when William Brook was a chapelwarden. James Pigott Pritchett added a matching tower in 1835, endowed by the Brooks, and John Kirk replaced the Georgian apse with a neo-Norman chancel in 1876. The church contains monuments to William & Martha Brook, to Jonas and his wife Hannah and to other family members, and will be reached at the end of our Meltham walking tour.

But St Bartholomew's was a mile distant from the rapidly developing Meltham Mills site, and the Brooks' own building programme commenced in 1838 with the endowment by James Brook (1773-1845), the eldest brother, of a combined church and school, with houses for the incumbent and schoolmaster, opposite the mill site; the 'neat and commodious Gothic edifice'⁵ was designed by James Pritchett. However this building was soon found inadequate to the growing community's needs, and in 1844 Pritchett drew up plans for a much larger church. Work was in progress in 1845 when James Brook died, and the substantial Gothic church was dedicated as **St James'** (grade II) in that year. Extensively remodelled in the 1980s to provide a church hall, it is replete with windows and monuments dedicated to the Brooks, many of whom are buried in the graveyard. Adjacent to it is the earlier building, modified in 1844 and perhaps again in 1856, which became **St James' School** and is now in industrial use. An eight-bedroomed vicarage, again by Pritchett (or his son Charles) and now in residential use, also followed in 1856.

After the death of Jonas in 1836, and the retirement of James to Boston Spa in 1840, the youngest brother, Charles (1792-1869), briefly became the driving force in the business, also establishing his own silk mill at nearby Bent Ley. He married Anne Brooke, from the Honley/Armitage Bridge family, and the untimely death of their son Charles John Brook (1829/30-57) was memorialised by another Brook endowment at **Christ Church, Helme** (1858/9, grade II), less than a mile away; his brother (another James) became the vicar there. Much smaller than St James', it is in a rather rustic Decorated style, with a red tile roof and shingle spire; the architect is unrecorded. The neighbouring vicarage and school were also commissioned by Charles John's widow and children.

But it was yet another Charles Brook ('the younger', 1814-72) who would become "the guiding and at times visionary light", as Cyril Pearce puts it, in the major 'model village' projects of the 1850s and 1860s. He was the second son of James, and stepped up to the leading role in the business after his older brother William Leigh and his wife died of cholera on a business trip to Germany in 1855. Our walk from St James' to St Bartholomew's will take us past many of his projects. The itinerary includes:

- The **Mills** themselves, though now only in the shape of the red-brick 1930s building, complete with the firm's distinctive goat's-head crest. The cotton business at Meltham closed in 1939 and the site passed to another Huddersfield industrial giant, David Brown tractors; it is now in a variety of light industrial uses. From 1869 to 1934 it had its own railway station, on the Meltham branch from Huddersfield, for the convenience of Brook Bros employees.
- **Spring Place** and **Manor Buildings**, terraced workers' housing close to the mill site. (The earliest housing, on the mill site itself, has been demolished.) Nearby too is the former

Meltham Mills Co-op Society building of 1862, now the village shop; the Co-op had been founded in 1827 and enjoyed the Brooks' support.

- The **People's Pleasure Grounds**, designed for Charles Brook junior by the well-known Yorkshire-born landscape architect Joshua Major.
- **Bank Buildings** (listed II) of c.1860. In a Gothic style with Tudor details, and by an unknown architect, these comprise 34 over- and under-dwellings, complete with allotments and hanging grounds for washing. The four-storey facade to the landscaped Pleasure Grounds has a monumental aspect, and Cyril Pearce comments that: "There seem to be ideas at work here of blending building with landscape gardening that go beyond Saltaire's urban grid", anticipating the late 19th century innovations at Port Sunlight, New Earswick and elsewhere.⁶
- A glimpse of the former **Convalescent Home** of 1868-71, a flamboyant Gothic building by John Kirk and Edward Birchall of Leeds, who was linked to the Brook family through his brother John Dearman Birchall's marriage to William Leigh Brook's daughter Clara. This was built in 11 acres of landscaped grounds at a cost to Charles Brook junior of £40,000 (over £3m today). In the 20th century it became a special school and is now private dwellings.
- Further developments at **Calmlands** and **Wetlands**, developed from 1872 until the 1920s century to provide extensive and generously-spaced terraced housing, with rugged Gothic detailing in the earlier phases.
- The Elizabethan **Carlile Institute** of 1890, endowed by J W Carlile (1823-1909) to provide community facilities and adult education for Meltham; Carlile was managing director of the business after Charles Brook's time, though Brooks remained dominant on the board. Today it is the subject of a community-led revival project centred on an asset transfer from Kirklees Council.
- The adjacent neo-Gothic **Town Hall**, erected in 1898, on the formation of Meltham UDC, at the sole cost of Edward Brook (1825-1904), son of the founding father Jonas (and who, like his uncle Charles, had married a Brooke).
- The **memorial school** of 1868 opposite St Bartholomew's, designed by John Kirk, built on a site provided by Charles Brook junior and now the church hall.

The Brooks were immensely successful entrepreneurs who built up great wealth. Despite their extensive philanthropy in and around Meltham, they were perhaps less imbued with the 'true religion' of abstinence than their near-namesakes at Armitage Bridge. At a quite early stage in their ascent they employed uniformed liverymen for their coach and horses, and as well as workers' housing they invested in increasingly opulent homes of their own as the 19th century advanced. After William Brook's death in 1806, the original family seat at Thick Hollins appears to have reverted to the Green Armytage family who owned it, but from the 1840s to 1860s it was again being leased by Brooks and then by Carlile. Other important Brook residences included:

- **Healey House** (listed II*), a classical house of c.1800, leased by Charles Brook (the elder), perhaps after his marriage to Anne Brooke in 1821; she remained until her death in 1885 and thereafter it remained in the Brooke family. Remodelled by Charles Brook around 1850, it was provided with its own station on the branch line. Today it is well-concealed from

public gaze but we should glimpse its charming neo-Tudor lodge (dated 1803) en route from Armitage Bridge to Wilshaw.

- **Meltham Hall** (listed II), built in 1841 for William Leigh Brook and celebrated by George Sheeran as “vigorously Greek in style” with giant pilasters as its central motif.⁷ After William Leigh’s death in 1855 it became home to his brother Charles the younger during his most active years developing the town’s facilities. There he brought up the five children of William Leigh’s two marriages; his own late marriage to his cousin Elizabeth Hirst was childless. The Hall’s symmetry has been spoiled by a late C19 extension and, after a period of municipal use, it is now private apartments; its extensive landscaped grounds, giving onto St James’ churchyard and the Mills site, are now Meltham’s public park, the Robert Ashton Memorial Park.
- **Helme Hall.** Close to Helme church (see above), this large house was built in 1887 for Edward Hildred Carlile (1852-1942), later Sir Hildred, a Brook and Coats director and nephew of J W Carlile. Planned to 19th century ideas of comfort, comments Sheeran, it is yet “in a style so close to Pennine vernacular that a hundred years of weathering have only blurred the distinction further”.⁸ Today it is a care home with a modern extension.

Moreover, as the Brooks’ success continued they followed many other newly-rich industrialists in purchasing country house estates elsewhere. Charles Brook junior bought Enderby Hall near Leicester in 1865 as a retirement home and a base for hunting, commissioning John Kirk to extend it in Italianate manner and endowing the enlargement by Edward Birchall of the C14 St John the Baptist; his stepdaughter Charlotte duly married Cecil Drummond, nephew of the neighbouring Duke of Rutland, in 1871. Later in the century his cousin Edward, who had followed him at Meltham Hall, bought substantial Scottish estates at Hoddon Castle and Kinmount Lodge, Dumfriesshire.

Conclusion

Despite wide differences between the Brooke, Hirst and Brook stories, they also had much in common – and were linked by ties of family and marriage. Contrary to a stereotype of thrusting pioneers of the industrial revolution, Whig in politics and non-conformist in religion, all three families were Conservatives and Anglicans. As Cyril Pearce wrote of the Brooks and Hirsts,

Their commitments here seem to have reflected a deep-rooted set of values. Both families were descended from the rural industrial elite of farmer clothiers, merchants and landowners and as such they shared a notion of the divinely ordained nature of the social order and it was from this that their paternalism flowed.⁹

This complex of values was expressed in rather different ways in their varied approaches to business investment, personal lifestyle and social projects; though they had in common the church-building impulse. Each left a legacy in the built environment which helps us to appreciate what they stood for.

David Griffiths

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¹ Crump & Ghorbal (1935), p.46; Jenkins (1975), p.64.

² Heaton (1972), pp.90-92; Crump & Ghorbal, pp.116-20.

³ Pearce (1986), p.92.

⁴ Pearce (1986), p.90.

⁵ Hughes (1866), p.198.

⁶ Pearce (1986), p.101.

⁷ Sheeran (1993), p.26.

⁸ Sheeran (1993), pp.47-8.

⁹ Pearce (1986), p.91.