

BPN Development Framework for Pleck Road, Walsall.

1. Main Site

2.

The site is bounded by Bridgeman Street, Rollingmill Street, Pleck Road, and the Walsall Canal (cut during the late 1790s), and comprises remnants of mid-19th century industrial clustering plus post-1970s manufacturing, materials processing and other unrelated businesses. The land was originally part of the 'Rough Waste' to the west of Park Lane (now Pleck Road) and the park land associated with the early moated manor (at Moat Road).

Most of the initial industrial development east of Pleck Road dates from the 1850s, when factories and streets of workers' cottages were built over Lord Bradford's land. The 1840s Tithe Map shows a croft and foundry at the corner of Bridgeman Street and the canal in the occupation of local iron founder John James. Otherwise, the Study Area is clear and comprises mainly west to east running plots of meadow, arable and pasture land severed from the larger field patterning by the 1790s canal. Plot names recorded in the Tithe Apportionment include, 'Upper Pitty Piece', 'Navigational Field', 'Slang to Canal', and 'Rough Waste Piece'.

Following the opening of the railway in 1847, building-leases were granted in the 1850s for Bridgeman Street, Pleck Road and three new roads – Rollingmill Street, Wharf Street and Weston Street. The neighbouring cemetery was opened at the southern end of Queen Street in 1857. By the 1880s the canal was completely flanked by iron and tube works, and, to the east, the huge Henry Boys' Waterloo Colliery and Brickworks which had opened by 1868.

The first series Ordnance Survey shows the following works (from north to south) on west to east running plots, each with canal access:

[Bridgeman Street]

Crescent Chain & Anchor Works

Later producers of fittings and bodies for motorcars (as Crescent Motors Ltd. between 1911 and 1913).

[canal basin – now filled in]

[empty plot – later the site of the Bridge & Roofing Works]

Walsall Tube Works

Established in 1876 by George Gill (manager of the Alma Tube Works in 1872) and the younger Jno Hildick. Following Gill's departure in 1879, the company became Hildick, Mills & Hildick, and, by 1884, was Hildick & Hildick.

Cyclops Iron Works

Edward Russell's Cyclops Iron Works, which had 22 puddling furnaces and 3 rolling-mills and was one of Walsall's largest manufacturer of bar and sheet iron and rolled sections, was on site by 1873.

Cyclops Tube Works

By 1880 George Gill (previously Alma Tube Works and Walsall Tube Works) had joined with Thomas Russell to establish the Cyclops Tube Works on that part of the Cyclops

Ironworks site flanking Wharf Street. The firm became Gill & Russell Ltd. in 1909 and finally closed in 1982. The site is now known as the Gill & Russell Business Park.

[Wharf Street]

Alma Tube Works

Edward Russell opened the large Alma Tube Works on land leased from Lord Bradford at the corner of Rollingmill and Wharf Streets in 1855. By 1860 the business had passed to John Russell & Co. of Wednesbury, and continued to occupy the works until 1929 when Stewarts & Lloyds took it over and ended production. The original 99 year lease and related plan (dated 3rd October 1855) between Earl of Bradford and Edward Russell of Walsall, iron tube manufacturer, for land for three dwellings, a factory and engine house between the canal, Wharf Street and Rollingmill Street, is in the collection of Walsall Local History Centre (ref. 35/22/17).

[Weston Street – which was later lost to the subsequent expansion of Alma Tube Works]

terrace housing

The original 99 year lease and related plan (dated 8th July 1852) between Earl of Bradford and Henry Lancaster of Walsall, ironfounder, for land for six dwellings at the corner of Pleck Road and Rollingmill Street, is in the collection of Walsall Local History Centre (ref. 35/22/14).

[Rollingmill Street].

2. Moat Site

The moat currently survives on three sides, is situated at the junction of Moat Road and Manor Road behind the Belle Vue Public House (SP 001985), and measures approximately 60 metres by 65 metres.

The manor was granted to the Ruffus family in 1159, but the earliest surviving reference to a manor house dates only to 1283. By the late-14th century, there was a moated manor house with park land and fishpond south of the present Moat Road erected on what had been cultivated land. Excavation on part of the site (1972) revealed at least two early phases of building, followed by the construction of a moat and further rebuilding. At some date between the first occupation of the site and the formation of the moat, part of the site was used for metal-working. During the late 1380s, the 'manor-house within the moat of the park' was repaired and extended: in 1388-9 the roof of the hall was repaired, a wooden belfry was made for the chapel, a small room with a privy was built next to the knights' chamber, a new drawbridge was made over the moat, and the great gates were reinforced with iron. The related chapel was apparently disused by 1417, and the house seems to have been abandoned by the later 1430s and completely disappeared by 1576.

Only the moat was subsequently considered to be of any value, and in the late 1430s a 20-year lease of rights in 'the fishery called le Mote in the park of Walsall manor' was granted to the bailiff of the foreign. In 1763 the moated site was in the tenure of a Mr. Holmes, probably Roger Holmes the town clerk, and two houses stood there, and this is shown on the 1763 Estate map. For the 1840s Tithe Map, the moat is shown as still being four-sided and accommodating 'Moat Cottage'. The site was leased out as building-land in 1865, and by 1885 the north side of the moat had been filled in and with buildings erected on part of it.

Chalybeate Water

"Near the town is a powerful chalybeate spring called Alum Well, on the site of the ancient manor- house, of which the moat still remains." ['A Topographical Dictionary of England', Samuel Lewis (editor), 1848]

The near-by Alumwell Road (running south of Wolverhampton Road) records the presence an of an alum well in the area. In 1855, the well was recorded as producing a strong Chalybeate water (a water or other liquor containing iron) and the area as having once been "a place of much resort, although lately fallen into disuse". From the 17th century, Chalybeate water was said to have health-giving properties and, in the case of Tunbridge Wells, could apparently cure "the colic, the melancholy, and the vapours; it made the lean fat, the fat lean; it killed flat worms in the belly, loosened the clammy humours of the body, and dried the over-moist brain". The presence of Chalybeate water near the moat site may have supported the emergence of an early focus on health and well-being in this part of Walsall, but unlike other parts of the country (for example, Leamington Spa), the identification of Chalybeate water did not lead to the development of a Spa town, encourage royal patronage, or generate considerable health tourism.

3. Crescent House, Pleck Road

Possibly later known as 'Crescent House', the Union Offices were used for the weekly meetings of the Guardians of the Walsall Union every Friday at 10.00am. Located south of the 1838 (and extended 1842) Walsall Union Workhouse designed by W. Watson, the "New Union Offices for the Guardians" was the work of Walsall architect Henry Edward Lavender and formed part of his Workhouse extensions of 1896. The undated plans are help by Walsall History Centre (ref. 878/143/1-6) and show a four-storey (including attic rooms and basement) building that comprised: a General Waiting Room, two Committee Rooms, an Office, plus a Vestibule leading to a marble terrazzo paved Hall and Corridor to the ground floor; a Board Room with oak screen, two further Committee Rooms, the Chairman's Office, a marble terrazzo paved Corridor, plus storage and facilities to the first floor; attic rooms and a tower to the third floor; plus a basement level "Heating Chamber".

H. E. Lavender & Co designed many important buildings in Walsall, including the Pavilion at The Arboretum. Lavender's work also included several local schools, churches, and shops, as well as numerous private villas and houses. Beyond Walsall, the practice designed the Lichfield Art School, the Town Hall and Municipal Buildings in Govan, Glasgow, and the Westminster Bank in Wolverhampton.