

Old Industrial Tewkesbury

A Chatwin

On December 5th 1970, fourteen members of the G.S.I.A. spent a most interesting afternoon, scurrying, like so many rabbits, in and out of the warren-like back lanes and alleys of Tewkesbury.

Mrs Linnell, who is primarily an archaeologist, had kindly agreed to show us industrial buildings likely to be destroyed by future development; in the hope that some effort could be made to record the buildings before they are lost.

Through her wonderful knowledge of the town and its history, we were enabled to build up a vivid picture of the past; not for us the quiet dignity of the Abbey, usually seen by visitors, but a gradual realization of the hardship and industry of everyday life led by the past inhabitants of Tewkesbury.

We started by turning off the High Street, near the Tudor House Hotel, and going down Red Lane, soon passing on the left a few yards of the medieval town hall, built from large blocks of red sandstone.

It is a feature of the town that all public ways are paved with blue brick, sometimes steep and ridged alleyways, almost always very narrow. As long as you are standing on blue brick you can be fairly certain you are on a public right of way.

Nearing the river, before coming to Healings Borough Mill, we looked at a building on the left, which is said to have similarities with some canal buildings. The ground floor, which is paved with stone

slabs on each side and brick down the centre, is built up over an under basement (or croft) which has a shallow barrel vaulted type of roof and a narrow slipway down the centre with lower wet areas at each side.

NOTE : At the time of writing the use of this building was unknown by G.S.I.A. members and is found to have been a maltings.

On the far side of Healing Mills was the Upper Lode crossing for the ferry, and buildings existed on the key until 1940. Here also was the Admiral Bemboe tavern. Enquiry elicited the information, from one of our members, that this hero fought the French in the Caribbean, and it was generally agreed that owing to the number of pubs named after him, he must have been a great drinker!

Turning to the left up Smith's Lane, we passed a very tall narrow building, as we neared the High Street, which was the old Abbey Brewery, bringing us back into the main street and the now dilapidated building of the Barrel Inn with its typical internal alleyway alongside.

Passing again along narrow alleyways between the main street and the River, such diverse sites were pointed out to us, as a dye works, a mortuary, a slaughter house, a one time private gas works, and Nailor's Square, the name a legacy from an area used by nail makers.

In Priors Alley we stopped by the bracket crane and looked at the building, now Fawcett Bros. Ltd which had once been a shirt and collar factory. We passed the building, beside a new car park, which was the tan yard, and in St Mary's Lane admired the row of three stocking-frame cottages. The Civic Society allowed us to enter the centre cottage and we found the first floor room extremely well lighted by the wide "mill" type window. Using stocking frames was notoriously hard on the eyes and a good light must have been very necessary.

In the nearby Civic Society room we were kindly provided with cups of tea, and heard how the fund for restoring the three framework cottages is progressing. They are to be restored by Gem Town (Tewkesbury) Limited an off-shoot of the Civic Society. Money is still needed for this very worthy cause. Tewkesbury has just done a wonderful job in restoring the line of cottages in the main road by the Abbey, and it is much to the credit of those concerned, that they also realise the interest and beauty of these humbler industrial buildings.

Cast iron enthusiasts should notice the ornate "castellated" type of pavement edge in front of the stocking cottages. There is also a fine cast iron stove in the old Chapel in the next alley on the right off the main street (towards the Abbey).

Back in the main street, where carriages once entered the Royal Hop Pole Hotel through what is now the front door, we walked towards the Cross, and dived into Lilley's Alley on the right, opposite the sign of the hat. This lane brought us to Ancill's court which has the only remaining night-soil pit in the town, no longer, one hasters to add, in use.

In Barton Street we entered the side door of the launderette (which will be "Felicity" by the time you read this) and by kind permission of the owner, going down the usual alley, mounted a steep narrow wooden stairway to a building with a partially collapsed roof, which had last been in use as a tea warehouse belonging to the Tysoe family. The pulley wheel for hoisting bales of tea through the trap door is still in position and various rusty old canisters and tea boxes are evocative of the past, even through the dust of years one could almost scent darjeeling and lapsong.

Mrs Linnell thought the tall red brick building behind the Congregational Hall might possibly have been a lace factory.

On the other side of the main street, a fine many windowed building comes into site, North East Terrace, East Street, now used as a row of cottages, once rejoiced in the name of "The Patent Renewable Stocking Factory." The interior was pictured in the "Illustrated Times". (1860).

Making our way back towards our starting point, we noted the Nottingham Arms of 1470 which has been jacked up straight and made weather tight in the first stage of restoration by the indefatigable Civic Society and Gem Town Ltd. There is a long low bakehouse on the left of the alley leading to it and a fine vista of old tiled roofs on the right.

The forecourt of the new swimming pool was the site of "Walkers" the engineers who made Fair Roundabouts, and opposite a few yards further on, a large red brick crumbling building was another flour mill which had been a maltings.

What a wealth of industrial variety had been conjured up by the afternoon, even now I realise I have managed to miss out a couple of mustard factories !

Amina Chatwin from information
supplied during the walk by
Edna Linnell.