

Building Report

Weavers Cottages, 20, 21 & 22 Horsefair, Kidderminster

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Introduction

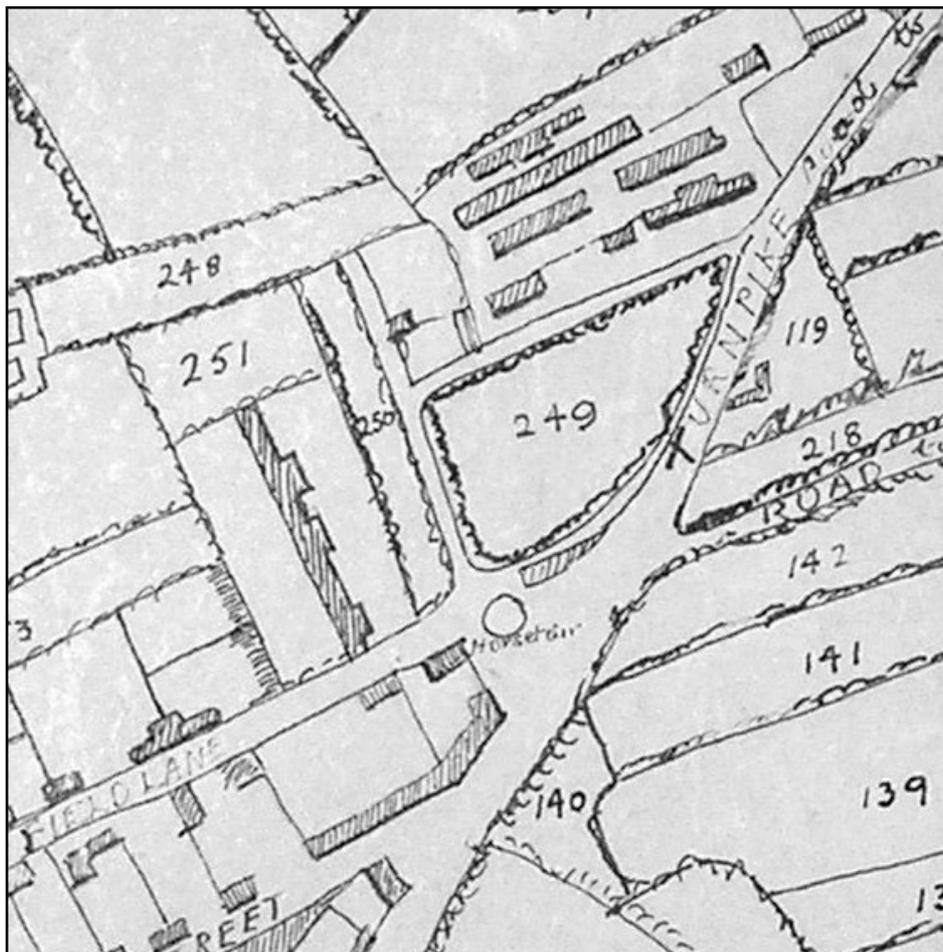
These are exceptionally interesting properties, having been listed in February 2000. They are collectively known as the “weavers cottages”, and this refers to the cloth industry which preceded the carpet industry in Kidderminster. No. 22 can be considered to be definitely of this description. We believe it to have been built by 1709. The date of construction of the other two cottages is probably c1755, which coincided with a strong revival of the cloth industry in the town. Much of the information for this report comes from a collection of deeds contained in the Worcester archive at the Hive, but the resources of Kidderminster library have been used also.



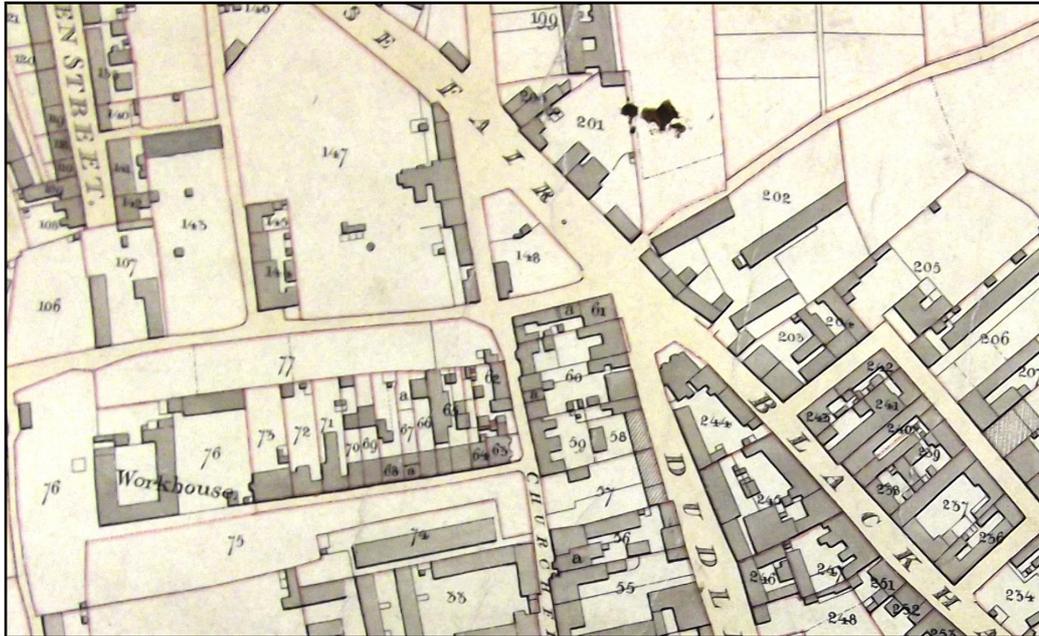
This detail taken from Doherty's 1753 plan must be treated with caution. The Hurcott Road is clearly shown (as “Hurcott”), but it is at a strange angle to the Stourbridge Road. The two distinct buildings situated by the junction must include the oldest of the weavers cottages, no.22 Horsefair. It is possible that the building facing directly into Hurcott Road is the future Cock Inn. The likelihood is that the space between the two was soon to be filled by what is now 20 and 21 Horsefair. The name “Whorwood Shipton” appears here to refer to the mouth of the Stourbridge Road on the north side of the Horsefair.

The Maps

Because the deeds offer no certainty as to which houses were built in the 18th century, we must interpret the maps as best we can. Even allowing for the inadequacy of both the 1753 and 1780 maps, we are forced to consider that for most of that century the buildings on the north west side of the Horsefair did not extend to the corner of what is now Broad Street, but consisted just of buildings opposite the Hurcott Road. In 1753 there was a gap in the middle of the buildings, but by 1780 this had been filled in. Taken with the 1835 map (see below), it seems also certain that there were no houses situated just behind this row fronting the Horsefair.



Detail from Sherriff map 1780. This seems to show a group of buildings, albeit roughly, in the Horsefair facing across the Turnpike. The land behind, numbered 249, was owned by Mr Jefferys (probably Matthew). Unfortunately the copy of the map has the details of this land partly obliterated, but we can see that the tenant's first name was Charles and must have been Charles Slead(e) or Slade. We can estimate 249 to have been about two acres in size, which must be the two acre parcel of land leased with the messuage or dwelling house shown by a deed to have been built by 1709. (See below.)



Like the earlier maps of 1753 and 1780, this detail from the Mathews 1835 map is frustrating because of its inadequacies. The most glaring is that the buildings are not always properly subdivided into their separate houses.

Because of the difficulty interpreting the deeds, we must take account of the observations of professionals who have recently inspected the cottages.

Listing Description

The cottages were listed in February 2000. This is the full listing entry:

3 houses with attic workshops, mid c18 and late c18, with later c19 and c20 alterations. Red brick, with c20 pebbledash, and Welsh slate and plain tile roof with ridge stacks and dentilled eaves. 3 storeys. Windows arranged 1:1:2, boarded at time of survey. Late c18 pair, to left (20 & 21) has to left an early c19 boarded door with hood and segmentally arched arch-headed window. To the right, a later c19 shopfront with single window under cornice and flanked by pilasters. Recessed board door to right. Above, 2 segment headed windows, and above again, 2 flat headed windows. Rear elevation, obscured by late c20 additions, has two c19 3-light casements to the second floor. Mid c18 house to right, (No 22) has early c19 doorcase and board door to left, and c19 shop window, now blocked. To right, an airbrick in a former small window. Above, a segment headed window to left, and a small flat headed window to right. Above again, 2 flat headed windows. Once corresponding blocked window to rear elevation. INTERIOR: No. 20 has original staircase and 2 c19 3-light windows, one 6-panel and 3 board doors, early c19. No 21 has altered staircase, and chamfered span beam with stops. Number 22 has principal fireplace with c19 and c20 infilling, original staircase and enclosure, exposed original structural timber, and c19 matchboard ceiling to second floor. These buildings, which combine domestic and workshop functions are rare survivals from the period associated with the domestic worsted weaving industry in Kidderminster, which preceded the development of the c19 carpet industry. The interiors retain much of their distinctive plan form, and No 22 appears to have been specifically designed for industrial use.



The weavers cottages in 2013 before the hoped-for restoration. Even in such poor condition they are very striking. The second storey windows are right up against the roof line, indicating the attic workshops within. The good size of nos. 20 and 21 show that almost certainly they started out as two separate dwellings, even though it is possible they were used as one c1800.

Views of James Edgar

In 2012 an independent architectural historian, James Edgar, made a site visit to the cottages as well as undertaking some research. He believed that no 22 is “earlier in the 18th century”. His site view showed it has “chamfered beams to ground and first have moulded stops”. These are 17th century features which survived into first decade or two of 18th century. He sums up the evidence as putting no. 22 as late 17th or early 18th. He is “happy” to conclude that it was built by 1709. He is sure that nos. 20 and 21 are somewhat later and is inclined to date them in the early 19th century. (Taken from emails exchanged with the author.)

Comment by author

The deeds held in Worcester archive must be studied carefully. They clearly refer to properties fronting the northwest side of the Horsefair, but otherwise they do not generally properly identify the particular houses. Nevertheless, the best theory from these documents is in line with the above opinions that no. 22 is substantially earlier than nos. 20 and 21. There is a house already standing in 1709, and no. 22 is the only house existing or formerly existing in the neighbourhood which fits the evidence of these deeds. However, the best theory from these deeds is that nos. 20 and 21 were almost certainly built by 1757, which is a substantially earlier date than envisaged by James Edgar and a little earlier than suggested by the listing inspector. It is likely that their construction was during the three or four years preceding the deed of June 1757.

In short, for clarity, I list my main conclusions here:

1. The house already standing in 1709 is now no 22, the largest of the 3 cottages.
2. The house built before 1753 by Samuel Hurlstone was the Cock Inn, now gone.
3. Nos 20 & 21, the other two weavers cottages, were built shortly before 1757 by Francis Clare in between the Cock and no 22.
4. The house built by 1765 by Francis Slead is what became the small fish and chip shop adjoining no 22 on its east side.

Early History of no. 22

On 5th May 1709 Francis Clare leased a messuage to Edward Jones. On 19th October Edward Jones assigned the messuage or cottage to Samuel Hurlstone labourer. Also in 1706 Samuel Hurlstone leased two acres of land from Francis Clare in the common field called Church Field near Whorwood Shipton. (This land must have been that numbered 249 in the Sherriff map above.)

Samuel's daughter, Jane, must have been born during these years. Presumably her mother died, because Samuel married Hannah Reynolds on 7th February 1726/7. Hannah died a little over four year later and was buried 19th May 1731.

Jane married Francis Slead, and their son Charles was born in 1732.

A deed of 1757 is a lease by Francis Clare again, but the son of Francis Clare who leased the property in 1709. (Worcester Archive, BA10470/94) This lease included an additional dwelling house "lately erected" by Samuel Hurlstone deceased. "Lately" is a loose term and can mean some years previously. All we know about this house is that it lay within the two acres of land. Given the clear space shown on the 1753 plan above, almost certainly this was the house which became the Cock Inn, built a few yards away from the weavers cottage (later to be no. 22 Horsefair) to the south-west facing the Horsefair.

What we see is probably a process whereby the older man built another house in order to vacate the weavers cottage in favour of the younger man. Samuel Hurlstone built his house, perhaps as early as the 1730s, to enable his son-in-law to carry out his weaving trade soon after his marriage to Jane. Certainly, in the deed of 1757, Francis Slead is described as a "weaver".

Then, perhaps, a generation later, the process happened again. This time perhaps Francis vacated the weavers cottage in favour of his son, Charles, who was described as a "weaver" in 1777 and as a "stuff weaver" in a deed of 1803 after his death. Francis had built a new house in or just before 1765. This latter house meant that the Slead family were then holding three houses on this land leased from the Clare family. One house had been there already in 1709, one was built by Samuel Hurlstone and one was built by Francis Slead. We do not know in which of the two other houses Francis chose to live. In fact we do not know where the new house of 1765 was built, but the most likely possibility is that it was a house on the site adjoining the north-east side of no. 22 now occupied by the former fish and chip shop. (See below.)

We know that in 1765 Francis Sleade had just built a new house because this is referred to by a deed dated 1792. Moreover, Francis was at that time a victualler. This suggests that Francis moved before 1765 probably into the house which would later be named as the Cock Inn. Francis died in 1773.

The Ending of the Lease

Samuel Hurlstone, Francis Slead and Charles Sleade did not enjoy the luxury of being owner occupiers. They were leaseholders, and as such had a degree of insecurity, albeit that they had long leases from the Clare family. They occupied property, which, as we have said, consisted of two acres of land with the cottage of 1709 plus the houses built by 1757 and that built c1765. Francis Slead held the property by virtue of a lease for 99 years starting in 1757 from Francis Clare, one of the great manorial landowners of Kidderminster, although in 1777 the Clare family sold most of their landed interests to Matthew Jefferys. (p72, Gilbert, 2004)

The leaseholders were doubly insecure in that they repeatedly raised money by assigning their leasehold to others. Members of the Slead family borrowed money in this way, for example, from John Brecknell, Daniel Best and Thomas Woodward. This process culminated in 1803. Samuel Slade (note the change in spelling of the surname), the eldest son of Charles, assigned the leasehold to Thomas Roberts, gardener, who paid £263 to hold the lease for the remainder of the 99 years. This was a crucial assignment which decided the future of the property for half a century.

In 1817, at a time of declining fortunes for many great landowners, John Jefferys, son of Matthew, sold the Horsefair property outright to Thomas Roberts, who was by then a victualler at the Cock Inn. This was all the property which had been subject of the deeds of 1709 and 1757, with an important qualification which sheds light on the origins of nos. 20 and 21 Horsefair. Certain houses were exempted from the 1757 lease.

Houses exempted from 1757 lease - Early history of nos. 20 & 21

We have not so far mentioned this pair of cottages situated between the Cock Inn and no. 22 Horsefair. Their likely early history is disclosed by an easily missed clause in the deeds of 1757 and 1817.

The deed of 1757, as we have noted, leased to Francis Slead the two acres of land which included the house already standing in 1709 and the house built at some point by Samuel Hurlstone. However, the deed specified that all the premises on this land were included “except and always reserved out of this present demise unto the said Francis Clare the houses and buildings now erected and built upon part of the said hereby demised piece of arable land on or near the south part thereof and near unto the common way there with full and free liberty of ingress and egress.”

The sale of 1817, however, did include these houses, and there was clearly some discussion about their identity. The relevant clause specified that included in the outright sale to Thomas Roberts was “that tenement...now void adjoining the Cock and situated between the same and the two tenements last mentioned and which said tenement is supposed to be the houses and buildings excepted out of the premises

demised by the above recited indentures.” There is no doubt that the deed is referring here to the east side of the Cock Inn. These are nos. 20 and 21, lying between the Cock Inn and two houses which are now no. 22 and the former fish and chip shop.

There is a hint with the words “now erected and built” in the 1757 deed that these houses had not long been put up. This fits with what we know about Kidderminster in those years. In the middle of the 18th century the cloth industry was booming, and in 1753 Lord Foley was planning to build a large number of weavers’ cottages by St Mary’s church. (pp62-64, Gilbert, 2004) As one of the town’s other manorial landowners, Francis Clare may have wanted to exploit the trade also. It is very likely that Clare that he built these two cottages between 1753 and 1757, inspired by Foley’s cottages going up nearby.

All Foley’s cottages were demolished in the 1960s, and it is the Horsefair’s good fortune that its three cottages have been retained.

The Cottages, the Cloth Industry and the Bombazine Trade

Number 22, dating from before 1709, is Kidderminster’s one remaining link with the 17th century and the production of the legendary “Kidderminster Stuff”, a heavy cloth made from worsted and linen, also known as “linsey-woolsey”.

The boom of 1753, when the Kidderminster clothier Joseph Williams was able to write that he and his partner John Watson were “getting money like dust”, was based upon the silk and worsted industry. (p66, Gilbert, 2004) The attics of the three cottages were undoubtedly in use for a number of years for production of cloths, but may have been affected by a depression in the 1770s.

However, the town’s cloth industry enjoyed a revival in the late 18th century when the production of bombazine was flourishing. This was a fine fabric made from silk and worsted used for clothing. The Horsefair is known to have been a centre for its production, and the industry’s light looms were no doubt busily employed in these attic workshops. The three cottages remind us that this area was once of prime importance to the prosperity of Kidderminster.

Members of the Slade family were no doubt using the attic workshops. (The surname was spelt “Slade” by 1803). Charles Slade died in 1791, aged 59, and may have continued working until his death. In 1803 his eldest son, Samuel, was a stuff weaver, and he presumably occupied number 22. A younger son, Charles, was also a stuff weaver, and another son, Francis, was a carpet weaver. By this time the carpet industry was taking over as the main industry in the town, although there were still 70 bombazine looms in the town in 1840. (p104, Gilbert, 2004)

The houses on the east side of the Cock Inn just after 1817

In 1803, when he bought what was left of the 99-year leasehold (see above section “The Ending of the Lease”), Thomas Roberts was a gardener, but by 1812 he had become an innkeeper. In that intervening period, it seems certain he occupied the building at the heart of this property and called it the Cock. In 1817 all the uncertainties of being beholden to a landowner were resolved. John Jefferys

transferred outright all the property contained in the 1757 deed, including the houses built upon it, to Thomas Roberts.

It seems that the two cottages, now numbers 20 and 21 Horsefair, may have been used as one joined property during the early nineteenth century. In 1757 the plural “houses” is used to describe the property reserved to himself by Francis Clare. In 1817 the singular term “tenement” is used.

According to the 1817 deed there were only three houses on the east side of the Cock Inn. The two further away were occupied by William A. Best and Thomas Harding. The intervening property was void. But when Thomas Roberts made his will in 1823 (he died on 28th October 1823) he had four messuages on the east side of the Cock Inn. The preferred theory to explain the addition of one house is that the “tenement” of 1817 had reverted to the original two houses. This would mean that the third house on the eastern edge of the row in 1817 (becoming the fourth house in 1823) was what is now the old fish and chip shop site, and was then occupied by Thomas Harding. This fits in with later information on Harding, or Harden as it was often spelt.

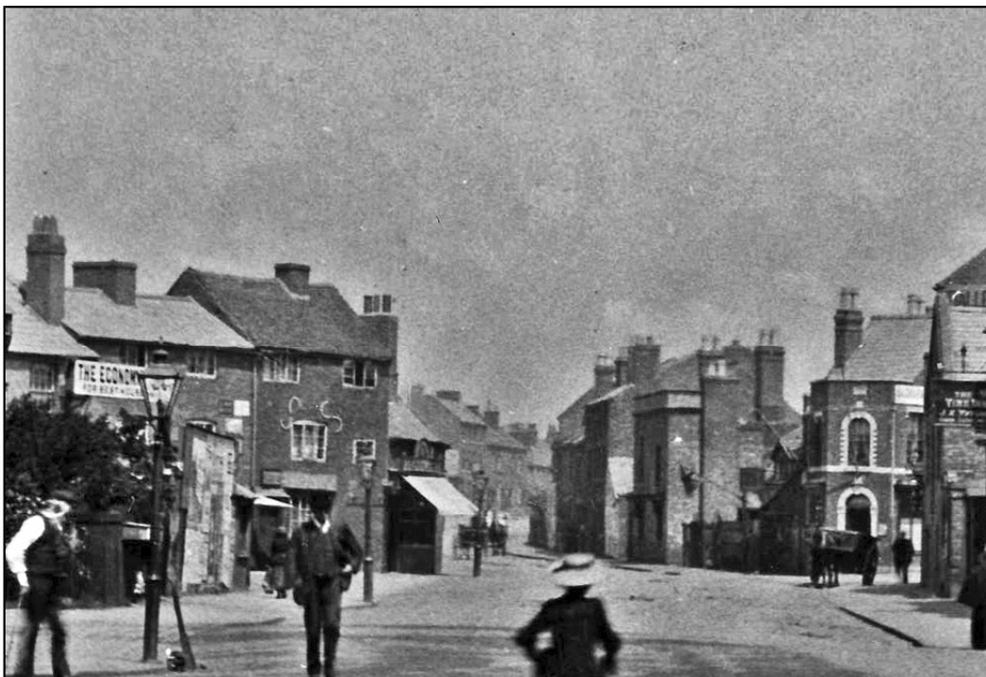
The Fish and Chip Shop site

For many years between 1832 to at least 1854, Thomas Harden is shown by the poor rate lists as occupying the last property on the east end of the row. This is confirmed by the 1851 census which has Harden, a tailor aged 62, at the Horsefair on the corner of Stourbridge Street with the three weavers cottages next before the Cock Inn.

The numbering of the properties seems to have changed since the nineteenth century. In the 1879 Littleburys and 1900 Kellys directories the Cock Inn is numbered as 18. This would give the weavers cottages the numbers 19-21 with number 22 being the last house at the end. Indeed, in 1879 number 22 Horsefair is occupied by Robert Harden, a tailor.



The old fish and chip shop in 2013, looking less than substantial.



An undated picture of the Horsefair. It shows what was to become the fish and chip shop with its awning and a large chimney. It was once a substantial property, capable of being the business premises of the Harden family for many years.

The weavers cottages and the Roberts family in mid-nineteenth century

(The modern numbering of the three cottages 20-22 is adopted in the remainder of this report.)

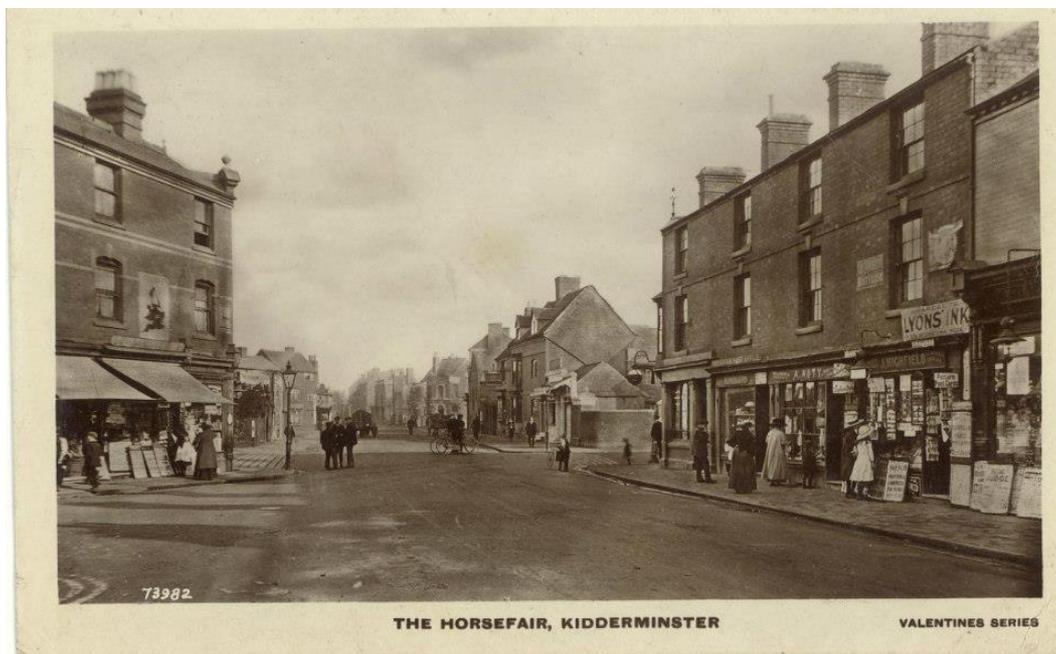
In the Thomas Roberts' will of 1823, while the Cock Inn and the houses to the west were left upon trust to go eventually to their elder son Thomas, all the property to the east of the Cock Inn was left to his wife Elizabeth for her lifetime. and then to their other son, John. As it turned out, Elizabeth would live on for a further twenty-nine years, and would survive the John.

It is clear that in the next twenty-five years or so members of the Roberts family did not always occupy the Cock Inn, and occasionally used instead the houses on its east side. For example, Elizabeth was occupying no. 22 in 1839. Thomas Jnr. was occupying no. 21 in 1841. His sister, the widow Ann Austin, occupied either no. 21 or no. 22 for most of the 1840s.

The heyday of the cloth industry was well and truly over, and there is little to suggest that weavers were active in these cottages during this period. However, more work is needed to identify the occupation of Richard Wheeler, for example, who was resident at no. 20 from 1832 to 1839, and Thomas Bagnall who was there from 1843 to 1850. We do not know what Elizabeth Hughes was doing at no. 21 between 1832 and 1837.

In the 1851 census, in the whole of the Borough of Kidderminster, there were only twelve bombazine weavers listed, and five of those were described also as paupers. Yet an intriguing possibility is raised by the presence at no. 22 of a female carpet weaver, Phoebe Hill, aged 65 and her two sons, William and Samuel, also carpet weavers. Could it be that handloom carpet weaving was taking place in the attic workshop there?

The process of manufacturing Chenille or patent Axminster carpets by handloom had been introduced by Templeton in Glasgow in 1838-9. Little is known about the industry in Kidderminster, but women were engaged in Chenille weaving in the town by the 1870s. Phoebe Hill's listing as a carpet weaver in 1851 is noteworthy. Only eight females in Kidderminster were listed as carpet weavers.



This postcard picture from c1900 displays the continuing prominence of the three cottages, particularly no. 22.

Compulsory Purchase and Later

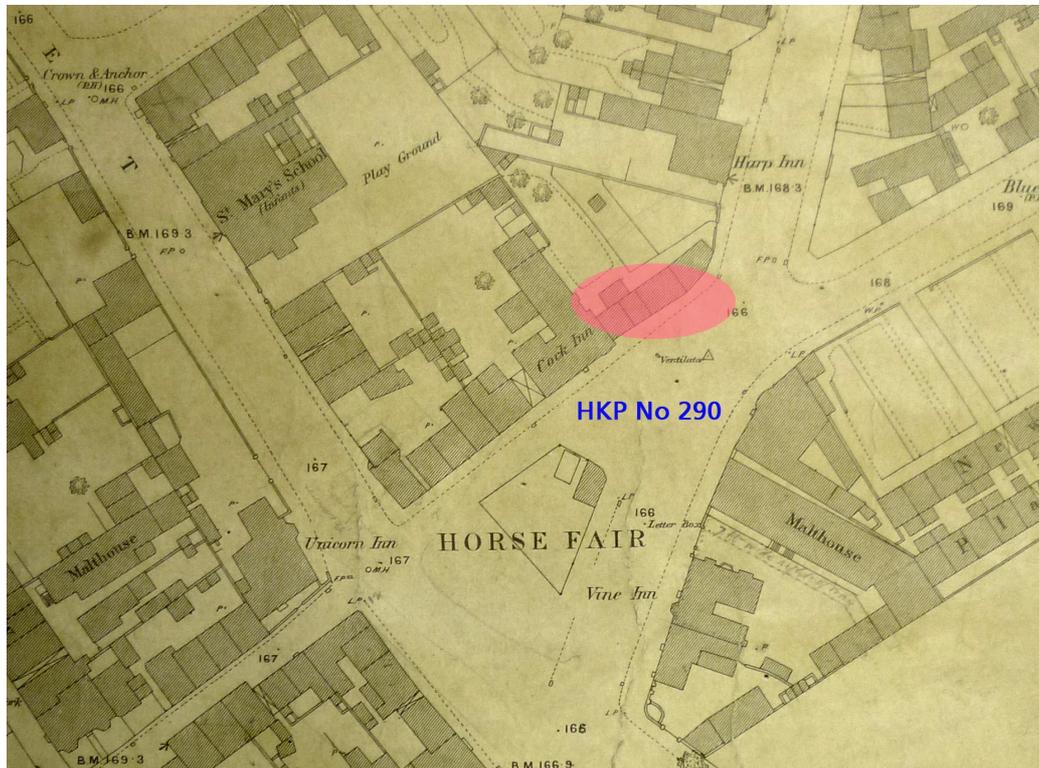
The cottages were purchased by compulsory order by Wyre Forest District Council in 1999. Listing took place in February 2000.

In 2003 WFCH made a commitment to the restoration of the cottages. The commitment to restore the cottages was made as part of an arrangement which allowed WFCH to develop 27 residential units around them. WFCH undertook an obligation to complete restoration prior to any new building taking place. (The actual transfer of the cottages to WFCH may have been delayed to 2006 – see email April 2008?)

In January 2007 a postponement was agreed allowing the new building to go ahead and restoration to proceed prior to occupation of these new dwellings.

In 2008, eight years after the listing of the cottages, it became clear that the present owner, Wyre Forest Community Housing, did not wish to restore the cottages. A second postponement was agreed, with occupation of the newly-built properties being allowed prior to restoration, by means of an agreement with WFDC under s106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This is a contractual agreement between the planning authority and the owners, and it means in this case that Wyre Forest District Council could ultimately enter the premises to carry out the restoration if WFCH did not fulfil its obligation.

To justify their delay WFCH were questioning, rather late in the day, the decision to list the buildings in the first place. It is by no means clear where their advice on this point comes from. They have suggested that the cottages were wrongly listed because English Heritage was muddled and failed to realise that the cottages were only 'associated' with the cloth industry. This was rather like arguing that the Piano Building was only associated with the carpet industry.



This detail from the 1883 OS survey still reveals the shape of Thomas Roberts' property described in his will of 1823. At that time he had the Cock Inn with three houses and the bakehouse to the west and four houses to the east. The area given to the property on the corner of Stourbridge Street, later to be the fish and chip shop, is substantial.

Bibliography

A History of Kidderminster, N. Gilbert, 2004