

DORDON HERITAGE TRAIL



Introduction

Welcome to Dordon, an historic parish, where people have lived and worked since at least the Bronze Age, and probably started mining for coal in Roman times! There have been at least two Mediaeval manors, and an Elizabethan Hall as well. The present parish is made up of two ancient villages – the hamlet of Hall End to the east, and Dordon to the west. This leaflet lays out a suggested heritage trail around the village. You can start at any point – look at the pictures, and try to imagine how the parish has changed over the centuries!

1. ROMAN WAY AND LIBRARY

Roman Way is situated in the old hamlet of Hall End. The hamlet stretched from the west side of Long Street to the eastern border of Dordon. Roman Way got its name from the fact that Roman artefacts were found during building work. There is a legend of a ghost of a Roman Centurion haunting the school site! Before the present library was built there was a small library in the Men's Institute in Browns Lane. In 1950 it was reported as holding 2,500 books. Both the library and school were built to accommodate the increasing population moving into the Kitwood Estate in the 1950s. In front of the library please note the ornamental terracotta tiles from Northfield House (later the Merrie Miner/ Cuckoos Rest Pub). The library stands on the croft attached to Northfield House.

2. THE POLICE HOUSE

Until the 1970s Dordon had its own policeman. Before 1936, when the Police House was built at a cost of £646, he lived on the Watling Street. According to local newspapers policemen have patrolled Dordon since at least the 1860's.

3. KITWOODS BARN AND BOYS' CLUB (SITE OF)

The site of Kitwoods Barn is where the present playground stands. The barn complex is shown on a map of 1834. Originally this area was in the Parish of Polesworth. A large barn is clearly marked on the 1850 tithe map and was probably owned by Sir George Chetwynd of Grendon Hall who owned most of Dordon. Morris and Shaw later owned the site. The Deeming family farmed here until the new Kitwood estate was built in the 1950s. In 1958 the Boys Club moved from Birch Coppice Colliery to Kitwood and continued here until 1966 when the building fell into disrepair.

4. OLD COTTAGE BARN'S CLOSE

Before the present houses were built in the 1950's, an old farm worker's cottage stood on this site. The name Barns Close refers to Kitwoods Barn and the fact that the land was enclosed or fenced in. The cottage had no electricity or running water!

5. HALL END HALL (SITE OF)

If you look over the fields from Barns Close to where the trees end and meet the track, this is roughly the site of Hall End Hall. The Hall was probably built between 1584 and 1636 when George Corbyn was squire of Hall End. This Hall, along with Holt Hall (now Hall End Farm), passed to his daughter Margaret who married a

John Lygon. The hall was built in an L shape from local cream sandstone. In the 1700s a north east wing was added, made of red brick. For a most of its life the hall was occupied by the Lakin family - however Mr Charles H Morris lived there for a short time according to the 1901 census. By 1911 Col. George Herbert Fowler, engineer to the colliery, lived there. Col. Fowler died in France in 1915 and there is a window to him in St Leonard's church. In 1947 the hall was taken over by the National Coal Board; it was demolished in 1967.

6. HOLT HALL (NOW HALL END FARM)

This farmhouse is a Grade II listed building. The oldest parts date back to the late 17th or early 18th Century. An earlier manor house stood on or near this site, and recent archaeological excavations have found pottery dating back to the 11th and 12th centuries, suggesting that at this date there was a small settlement here. Like Hall End Hall the house was tenanted for a time by the Lakin family. Morris and Shaw used the farm to provide hay for the pit ponies until 1923.

7. DORDON BOYS CLUB

In 1934 Morris and Shaw began a club for boys aged 12 to 20; it was situated at the colliery. In 1939 land was acquired west of the Shortwoods to build a new clubhouse. On Thursday 29th June 1939 the Duke of Gloucester (wearing the white boiler suit in the photograph), who was president of the National Association of Boys' Clubs, laid the foundation stone. Due to the outbreak of war that year, the building was never erected - so the club remained at Birch Coppice Colliery.

8. VILLAGE HALL

In 1923 Messers Morris and Shaw gave this land for a Village Hall to be constructed. The Miners Welfare Association gave a grant for the construction. The hall was opened on 30th October 1924. Mr Frederick Arthur Morris said he hoped the building would be used "not only for recreation, but for the improving of their minds and learning more of the outside world". The hall is built on the site of the Birch Coppice Brick and Tile Works.

9. MEN'S INSTITUTE (DORDON MENS CLUB)

The "Stute" has always been a men only club. It was opened in 1908 by Morris and Shaw who owned Birch Coppice Colliery and Brick and Tile works and were the main employers in the village. Before the Institute was gram men used to meet in the Church Hall to listen to gramophone records or play games. During this

period heavy drinking was a problem amongst miners and Morris and Shaw tried to encourage healthier pursuits! It was hoped that "leisure time may be spent in healthy recreation under the best of conditions" (Tamworth Herald 18th January 1908). During the 1940s and 1950s the building held the village library of 2,500 books. The building was designed by Mr H. V. Star and was surrounded by grounds for outdoor sports.

10. VIEW LOOKING DOWN NEW STREET

On the right is the site of New Street School. The first shop on the left-hand side of the street was Room's Bakery. Before this it was the site of a blacksmith's shop.

11. NEW STREET SCHOOL

The school was built in 1900 at a cost of £450 and held 240 Infants. Before then young children were educated in the Church hall, but by 1898 it was felt to be too small and unsuitable. Older children went to the Board School (Polesworth School). The last children to be educated at New Street were in 1972, before the extension to the Roman Way site was completed.

12. THE SHORTWOODS

The Shortwoods appears on an 1834 Map, covered in trees. The houses here were built in the 1930s. On the corner where Linden Lodge now stands, is the site of the original doctors' surgery. It was a wooden building and still in use until 2001. Behind Linden Lodge was a brickyard pool which was very deep. Sadly in October 1966 a 3-year-old boy was accidentally drowned here, so it was filled in soon after. Over the years the burial records for Dordon have a surprising number of accidental drownings owing to the number of pit and brickyard pools in the area. Half way up the Shortwoods (where the road bends and is narrower) is the site where a German bomb exploded on the night of 4th/5th June 1941. Eight people were killed. Four were members of the Egan family (father, mother, and two children, aged 5 and 6). Three were members of the Geary family (mother Florence and her two sons, Albert Henry and Kenneth). Also killed that night was John Thomas Chetwynd who was an Air Raid Warden doing his rounds. Albert Geary survived the attack as he was in the outside toilet at the time! The Egans were evacuees from Coventry, escaping the bombing there. Both Gearys and Egans were Roman Catholic and were buried in Atherstone. John Thomas Chetwynd's grave can be found in Dordon Churchyard.

13. VIEW OF BROWN'S LANE

This photo was taken between 1908 when the Men's Institute was built and 1923 when the Village Hall was built. The building marked with a cross is New street School.

14. THE SITE OF THE SECOND GATE INN

On the corner of Browns Lane and Long Street stood the Gate Inn. This was the second pub to bear this name, as the first stood on the opposite side of Long Street and dated back to at least the 1850s. The Inn was built on the site of an old barn and stables where post mortems were sometimes carried out.

15. VIEW OF COPPICE LANE (LONG STREET)

As you look down what is now Long Street, the houses on the right are on the boundary of the Hamlet of Hall End, whereas the houses on the left are in the hamlet of Dordon. The first house after the modern flats (no. 125) was the home of George Watson who, before telephones were widely available, used to put a card in the front window for the doctor to read if anyone in the village needed a house call. The slightly taller building, which for a time was known as Joy's Boutique, is the site of the first post office in the village. The first Post Mistress was Sarah Black who also ran a grocer's shop with her daughter Beatrice. Sarah's grave can be seen in Dordon Churchyard near the steps by the hall.

16. VIEW LOOKING UP LONG STREET

Before the present flats were built in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there stood a row of cottages which were built in the 1880s. This is when Dordon expanded with the brickworks and collieries needing more labour. However the Gate Inn pub is mentioned in White's Directory in 1850, when the landlady was Mary Lowe. In 1873 the Inn, along with an adjacent cottage, was bought by Mr. Eadie, a brewer from Burton, for £755. This suggests that it was a substantial property. It included a bowling alley and function rooms. The Gate Inn was used throughout the nineteenth century for holding local inquests.

17. THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The church was built in 1908. In 1920 it closed due to lack of funds - then reopened in 1922 due to the efforts of 11 parishioners. In 1937 the Sunday School extension was built. 5,000 bricks were donated by Morris and Shaw. In recent years the church had to close again due to lack of funds - but reopened when part of the building became a dance school.

18. ROYAL PICTURE PALACE (SITE OF)

On the 28th January 1922 plans were put to the council to build a new cinema made of concrete lined with asbestos. The plans were accepted, and the cinema was built by Messers Fieldhouse and Young of Nuneaton. The Royal Cinema opened in June 1922. By February 1923 it was up for sale for £4000. Mr. Brown, who lived in Browns Lane, bought the cinema. The photograph shows the first children's matinee. The cinema closed in 1959 as audiences had declined. The building was then used for a variety of purposes including a shoe warehouse and soft toy factory. Finally the building was demolished and four houses built on the site.

19. THE ELBOW (SITE OF)

The picture shows the cottages known as the Elbow built in the early 1880s when the mines and brickworks were expanding. The wooden hut used to be a chip shop at one time owned by Albert and Margery Skudder. At one time there was also another wooden hut which housed a butcher's shop owned by Tommy Murden.

20. ST LEONARD'S CHURCH

In November 1861 Lady Charlotte Augusta Chetwynd wife of Sir George Chetwynd (Third Baronet of Grendon Hall and landowner of most of Dordon) was thrown from her horse on this spot and died shortly afterwards from head injuries. In memory of his wife, Sir George gave the land for a chapel of ease to be built here. The small church was designed by G.E. Street who is famous for designing the Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand. St. Leonard's was opened on 14th April 1868. In 1901 the south aisle was built to accommodate the growing population. It was designed by William Bidlake in an Arts and Crafts style. The east window was donated by the Chetwynd family in memory of Charlotte Augusta and the West Window was paid for by public subscription in memory of George Herbert Fowler who was killed in France in 1915.

21. WAR MEMORIAL

The war memorial was erected in October 1920 and was paid for by public subscription. Harry Hatwell and Samuel Chetwynd, who died as a result of injuries in WWI, are buried to the south of the church - as is Sydney Neville Baker who died on active service in the RAF on 2nd August 1940; he had just celebrated his 21st birthday.

22. PATIENCE AMELIA RADFORD

The first person to be buried in Dordon churchyard. She was born in Bermondsey in 1811 and married her cousin John Radford from Baddesley (who is buried with her). For many years John was a blacksmith on Dordon Common near Hollies Wood. Patience was buried on 12th August 1881.

23. ALICE BAMBER

Alice was born in 1815 in Lancashire and at the age of 12 became a servant to the Royles family. When the family moved to Dordon Hall Alice came with them. In 1897 the magazine 'Tit Bits' awarded Alice a silver medal and a £5 note for being the longest serving servant in Warwickshire. Alice died in her 90th year; the Royles paid for her headstone.

24. SARAH BLACK

Born in Congerstone Leicestershire in 1856, Sarah was the first postmistress for Hall End. She was a successful business woman owning a shop and two cottages.

25. MARGERY FLORENCE ATWOOD MORRIS

Born 15th October 1883 and baptised at Polesworth on October 16th 1883, Margery was the first child of Frederick Arthur Morris, Colliery Proprietor, and Cunitia Atwood Morris. At the time the family were living at Hall End Hall. Sadly, Margery only lived for 3 weeks and was buried on 8th November.

26. CHURCH HALL

The church hall was built on the site of Sir George Chetwynd's Stables, which were used presumably for his work ponies. The foundation stone was laid by the Marchioness of Hastings (wife of Sir George Chetwynd 4th Baronet - the son of Lady Charlotte Augusta) on October 25th, 1884. A Sunday School had already been established in a room in the old Gate Inn on Long Street. The Sunday School opened here in January 1885. Until the New Street school was built in 1900, infants in the parish came to school here. The hall has been used for many things including a men's institute, before the "Stute" was opened in 1908. In 1906 the hall was extended. From 1937-39 the hall was used by the Ministry of Labour as a Labour exchange. During WWII troops including Home Guard were billeted there.

27. VIEW OF CHURCH ROAD IN 1908

This photograph shows the Methodist Church on the left-hand side with the old chapel just visible. Built in 1870, the chapel was demolished to build the new Sunday School hall in 1963.

28. METHODIST CHURCH (SITE OF)

Methodists began worshipping in Chapel House Dunn's Lane in 1854. In 1870 A United Methodist Free Church had been built on land leased from Mr Ross, the local brick and tile maker, who also donated the bricks. In 1882 there was an explosion at the brickworks situated at the back of the church demolishing its back wall. This gave the opportunity to rebuild the church as the congregation was growing. The new church held 200 people. The cost of the new church was £625 with £50 still owing in 1910! The vestry was built in the 1920s linking the two buildings, then in 1963 the new Sunday school was built on the site of the original church.

29. CHURCH ROAD COTTAGES

This small terrace of cottages is all that is left of the original houses built on the North side of Church road. This is Hannah Craddock outside her shop at 85 Church Road. Hannah came from Gloucestershire and survived 3 husbands!

30. THE BARRACKS

The Barracks were built opposite the Blue Brick and Tile Works (now the park and surgery) for single male workers employed in the brickworks and the collieries. Later families lived there including the Hatwell family at no. 195. Harry Hatwell came home from the Great War in 1916 as he was too ill to fight. He died in 1918, but sadly is buried in an unmarked grave. Next to the barracks was Ken Gubbins' butchers shop - note the large doors for the animals and carts to pass through.

31. DORDON WORKING MENS CLUB

This is how the club looked in 1974. The main building was opened in 1910 with an extension with a larger function room in 1927. The club finally closed in 2018 and is now a dance school and fitness centre.

32. CLEMATIS COTTAGE

Home of the Wallbank family for many years, including Sydney Wallbank who was killed on the Somme in 1916.

33. 208 LONG STREET

This is how the house looked in the 1930s when the Jeffcot family lived there.

34. WHITEHOUSE (SITE OF)

This large farmhouse was referred to as "Sky Hall" on the 1850 tithe map. It was sometimes used to house the priest in charge of St Leonard's before a vicarage was built in 1913. At one time the Hill family lived there. Three of their sons are mentioned on the war memorial. To the north of the house was a colliery, with at least three shafts being worked by Mr Shaw in the 1850s and 1860s.

35. NORTHFIELDS HOUSE (SITE OF)

Northfields House was built between 1902 and 1908. It was a substantial farmhouse with a croft attached to the west of the property. The house has had several occupants. In 1909 Jonathan Chetwynd lived here. The house was owned by the Lawton family from 1914 until 1920, when the Parkinson family moved in. Frederick Parkinson was a chemist. His unmarried daughter Mabel was a Sunday School teacher still remembered by older residents. In 1956 Mabel moved to Browns Lane and the house became the "Merrie Miner", opening in 1958. Later the pub changed its name to the "Cuckoo's Rest". Tiles from Northfields house can be seen in front of the library. The building was demolished in 2019.



Recreation Ground

School Dordon

Birch Coppice

Hall End Business Park

Roman Way and Library



The Police House



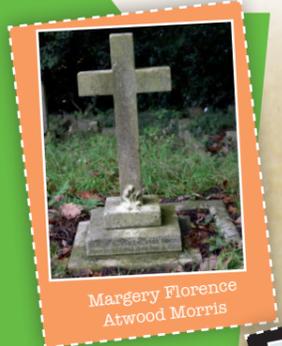
The Site of the Second Gate Inn



View of Coppice Lane (Long Street)



Sarah Black



Margery Florence Atwood Morris



Northfields House (site of)

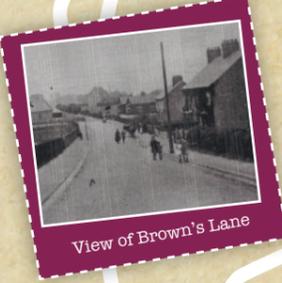
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Kitwoods Barn and Boys' Club (Site of)



Old Cottage Barn's Close



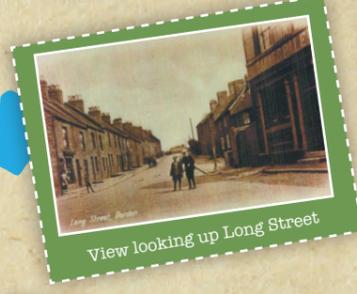
View of Brown's Lane

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View looking up Long Street



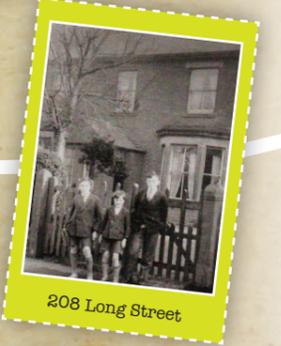
Alice Bamber



Church Hall



Whitehouse (site of)



208 Long Street



Hall End Hall (site of)



Holt Hall (now Hall End Farm)



The Shortwoods

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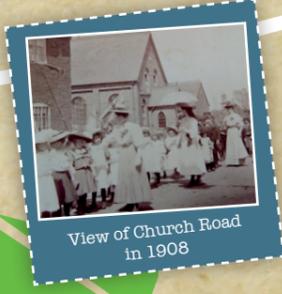
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The Congregational Church



Patience Amelia Radford



View of Church Road in 1908



Clematis Cottage

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New Street School



View looking down New Street

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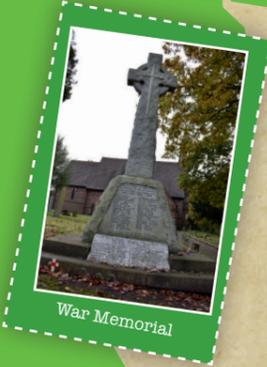
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Royal Picture Palace (site of)



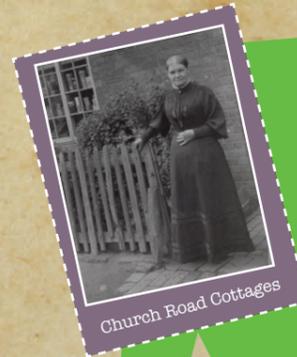
War Memorial



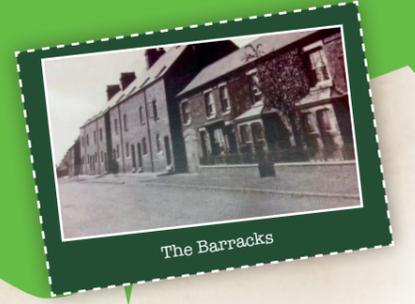
Methodist Church (site of)



Dordon Working Mens Club

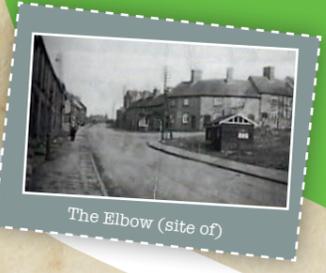


Church Road Cottages



The Barracks

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The Elbow (site of)



St Leonard's Church