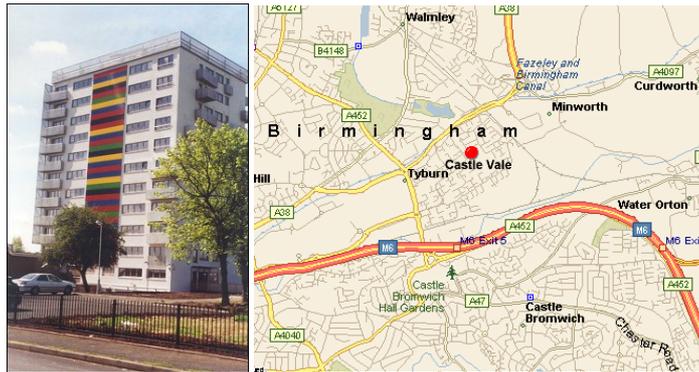


A HISTORY OF



CASTLE VALE

By Geoff Bateson

INTRODUCTION

Castle Vale is a modern housing area on the north-eastern edge of Birmingham. It is unique in many ways and has gone through distinct sets of changes. The things that most people noticed on their first visit to the area, when it was first built as a housing estate, was the flat and open landscape and the very distinct boundaries which seemed to almost cut Castle Vale off from the rest of the city to make a little island of people. These features have recently been changed, and will continue to change into the future, but each change is dictated by past developments. To understand what an area is like now, it is important to understand its history. The history of the Castle Vale area can be traced backwards, layer by layer and then built up again as a sequential record of those things that made the area what it was at each stage of its development.

This booklet follows the changing fortunes of the small area of land known as Castle Vale from its beginnings as a swampy forest, through the feudal times of battling barons, through the growing industrialisation of Birmingham to the First World War, on through its life as an airfield, finally to the construction of the modern housing estate and the very recent improvements to that area. From time to time little excursions will be taken into the wider history of the region but only in order to set the very local events within their wider setting and make them even more interesting than they already are.

Geoff Bateson

June 2005

FOREST TRACKS, MARCHING ROMANS AND INVADING SAXONS

We first need to go back many millions of years to the large spans of time during which the grand-scale geological and climatic changes were bringing into shape the scenery across which later historical events were to take place. During the Ice Ages the movement of glaciers gouged out valleys and pushed mounds of rocks and soil into place. As the ice melted the melt-waters filled the valleys, finding their own routes and creating the present river courses.

These hills, valleys and fording places determined the routes taken by travellers, explorers or conquerors and influenced the sites suitable for habitation and settlement – the events of recorded history.

Not much is recorded about life in this small area of Britain before the arrival of the Romans. We do know, however, that the Midlands' densely wooded areas were inhabited not only by wolves, bears and other fierce creatures but also by Ancient Britons who made their own trackways through the forest. When the Romans later passed through these areas their road constructions could easily follow existing trackway routes from ford to ford and from settlement to settlement.

In the area that is now known as Castle Vale there already existed an Ancient British trackway through the swampy forest, crossing the River Tame at a fording point. The Britons had protected this important crossing by means of a hill fort – a simple wooden stockade on top of a mound overlooking the ford. This mound was in recent days popularly known by the nickname "Pimple Hill" and was mostly removed during the construction of the M6 feeder road near to one edge of Castle Vale estate. When the Romans sought to establish a way through the area it is not surprising therefore that they chose to make use of the line of this trackway. The route became an established one used by later travellers. It became one of the coaching routes and is still one of the main roads through the area – Chester Road. Two of the boundaries of the present Castle Vale, the river down one side and the roadway across the top, can thus be traced back to ancient times. A third boundary was also formed at around the same time, following an old trackway along the higher edge of the valley, parallel to the present Kingsbury Road. This was used by Saxons moving westward from their base near Lichfield to fight on the Welsh borders.

After the Romans other explorers were to use these same land and water routes to cross the area. In the sixth century two successive waves of invading Saxons came into the region, one from the south following the Severn and the Avon, the other from the north following the courses of the Trent and the Tame. It was from a combination of these languages of these two groups that the area's historic, but almost forgotten, name of Berwood derives.

Settling in this densely wooded river valley the first group of Saxons called it Bearu (this simply being the word for "the woods" in their language). The next group some centuries later took this word, the meaning of which has by then been forgotten, and added their own word for "the woods" Wudu. The area thus became known as BearuWudu – which over time became Berwood.

The name Berwood therefore literally means 'woody woods' and at least conveys the impression of a dense forest in this low swampy valley. Given these damp, dark and dangerous conditions it is not surprising that it would remain an outlying, almost insignificant, part of the estate of the important family who owned it rather than be a select spot on which they might choose to build a manor house for the main branch of the family. You would even be forgiven for supposing that nothing more would be heard of this piece of land for another thousand years – but you would be wrong.

THE BATTLE OF HASTING AND GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Given the very low population of the Midlands as a whole at the time of the Middle Ages and considering that this particular swampy bit of forest was not the best of places to live it is hardly surprising that little mention is made of any residents of the area, although one record does show that in 1301 a William de Berwood lived as a tenant with his wife Edith. The Manor of Berwood covered what is now Castle Vale and also included some land at Minworth, Curdworth and the land now covered by Pype Hayes Park. At the time of the Battle of Hastings in 1066 this manor was one of the forty-two manors belonging to Turchill de Warwick, Earl of Mercia. On King Harold's march southwards to meet the invading Normans at Hastings he called on noblemen along the route to send men to help him. After the battle those nobles who had supported the defeated Harold had their lands confiscated. Others, like Turchill, who had not supported Harold were allowed to keep some of all of their lands. Turchill kept most of his land but had to give up the title of Warwick. He chose as his new family name that of Arden. The early recorded history of Castle Vale is therefore the early history of the manor of Berwood as it was affected by the changing fortunes of the Arden family.

The Ardens' fortunes were obviously good ones during the next two hundred years because they are recorded as being important gentry "matching with the Bagots of Blithfield, the Holtes of Aston and other good families". This was a time when the church had a heavy influence in state affairs and many noble lords operated by trying to influence important church members. Political and religious beliefs were intertwined. One way of gaining political influence with the church whilst at the same time doing good deeds that might count in your favour in any afterlife was to donate large tracts of land to the church. Several members of the Arden family donated land, including the whole of the manor of Berwood, to an abbey recently established by the Early of Leicester. In return a shrine and a hermitage were established in the forest alongside the trackway and the river. Other similar gifts of large tracts of land by the Ardens in 1244 brought two priests to the manor. Their job was to look after the shrine, to pray for the soul of Sir William Arden and his descendants and to assist travellers through this dark, isolated area.

Not everyone was convinced that, at a time of rising population and developing trade, giving away all of your land to religious organisations was really in the family's best interest (especially if those

organisations were managed by the more powerful landlords). In 1360 Sir John Arden tried to regain some of the lands given by his predecessors to the Abbey at Leicester. He went to court but, just at a crucial stage in the case, the Abbey used its influence to have the judge replaced with one of its own choosing. Not surprisingly, the judgement then went against Sir John and the land stayed with the Abbey.

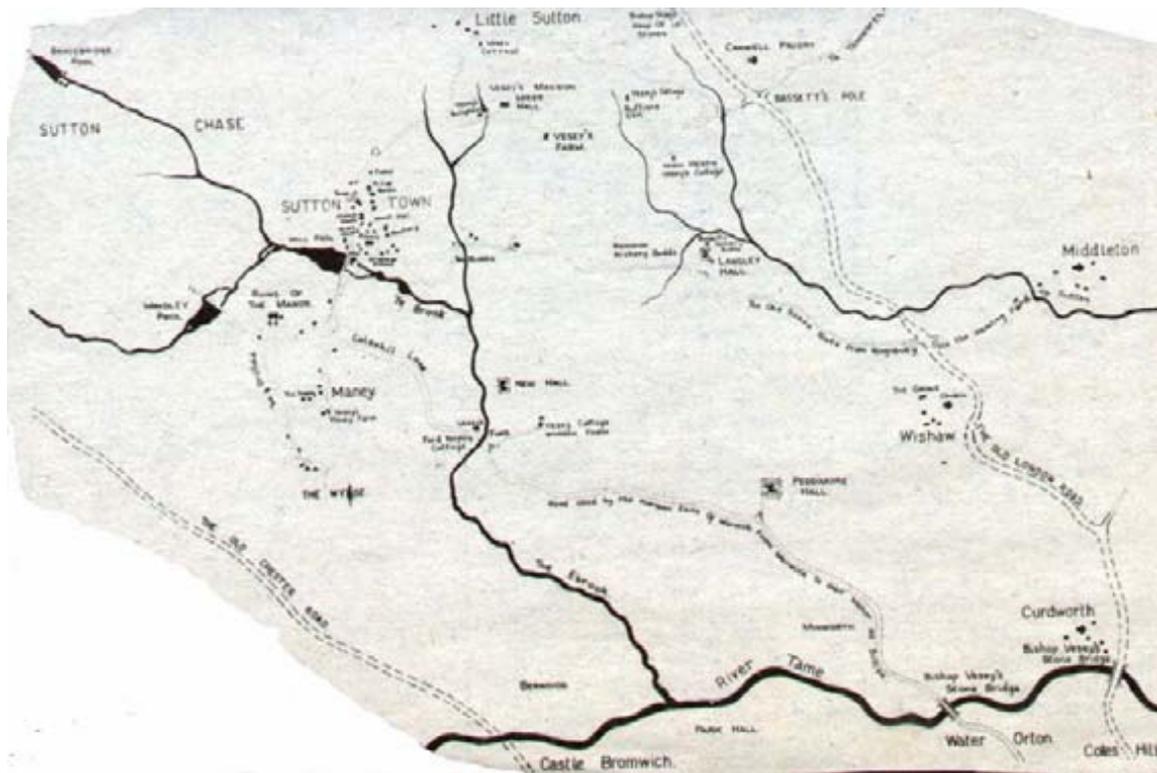
As trade increased and other families became rich, there was also a degree of in-fighting amongst the landed families themselves. Some of the oldest families in the region, the Berminghams, Bromwiches and Eardingtons were on the wane. Others, such as the Strettons, who were trading families in Birmingham, were getting newly rich. At the same time some of the established families were still extending their influence. The Ardens took control of Saltley from the Clodshale family, other areas went to the Holte family whilst the Bagots were consolidating land in Staffordshire. Lawsuits are recorded in which these few important families contested ownership of pieces of land and a certain amount of alliance making and breaking, sometimes through marriages, was taking place.

How influential a family were the Ardens who owned Berwood? In addition to controlling considerable amounts of land, of which Berwood was just one small fraction, they were active on the national political scene – as were their neighbours the Bagots and their relatives the Buckinghamhs. They were people in the public eye. One served in Calais, another was Sheriff of the County and was part of Henry VIth's parliament in 1451. This latter person, Robert Arden, got involved in plots against the King. After trying to illegally raise an army in Yorkshire his plots were discovered and he was executed for treason.

The family consolidated their positions of influence by marrying both nationally and locally. One marriage allied the Ardens with the Bracebridges of Kingsbury Park. This marriage, of John Arden to Alice Bracebridge, was not consented to by John's parents. To get round this he arranged to be "kidnapped" by his future parents-in-law and held at Kingsbury until the wedding had been performed.

Meanwhile, on the Ardens' land in Berwood, the religious community was undergoing some changes. In the early fourteenth century it had been a thriving farming community with a moderately sized population and improved agricultural methods. At its peak the main farm buildings were listed as "a hall, a

bakehouse, an oven, a granary, large and small barns, a cowhouse etc". By 1380 however, less money was being put into the Abbey. The newly-rich merchants were instead putting their wealth into more local Charities and Guilds to improve Birmingham or were investing directly in commercial ventures. In the face of steady cutbacks by the Abbey, fewer priests worked out from there, the farm went into decline and the hall, Berwood Hall, became more and more in need of repair. This decline of the once thriving farming community continued over the next two centuries and it had all but disappeared by the time Henry VIII decided to try to break the power of the church once and for all.



Berwood Manor in relation to surrounding areas in the time of the Arden family

BUT WHAT HAPPENED TO THE TREES?

When the power of the monasteries was broken and their land sold off by the Crown, the land at Berwood was bought back into the Arden family for £272.50 and was used as a source of timber and for low-level tenant farming. Without the support of the religious organisation the hall buildings had by now almost totally collapsed. The hall was still in this shell-like state two generations later when the Berwood lands were confiscated by the Crown and handed over from the Arden family to a man named Edward Darcy. The reason for this confiscation shed some light on social relationships of the day. Edward Arden had crossed the Earl of Leicester by refusing to wear the Earl's livery. He had also made some very suggestive remarks about the Earl's behaviour with various high-ranking ladies. The Earl of Leicester had Edward arrested on some minor charges, and brought forward a priest named Hall who was paid to give false evidence which was so serious that Edward was eventually found guilty of treason and was hanged at Smithfield in 1585.

But the Ardens were not, as we have seen, a family that would give up easily. Edward Arden's son immediately began to study law and started a series of court cases to get the Berwood lands back. He eventually managed to get the courts to award him half of the lands. The other half was to remain with the present owner Edward Darcy. When Edward Darcy learned that he was due to lose the half of his land that is now Castle Vale and Pype Hayes, he had all of the trees cut down and dragged over onto the part of the land at Minworth and Curdworth that he was going to keep. So centuries of forest growth were chopped down and removed to leave a flat, tree-less and rather boggy piece of land.

We have seen how three boundaries of the present Castle Vale had been in existence since ancient times – the River Tame along one side, the Chester Road trackway along a second side and the old trackway on the higher edge of the valley along the third site. This division of the land between the Ardens and Edward Darcy established the fourth boundary. This boundary still exists today having been reinforced by later constructions. In the nineteenth century a road was built by Gypsies who came to the area to help with crop picking and who were given road construction as an occupation whilst they were waiting for the crops to be ready. The diversion of a stream and the construction of a railway loop line all followed the same direction. In similar ways all four boundaries were to become more and more established, defining the area and separating it from its neighbours.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BAGOTS AND THE CIVIL WAR

The direct influence of the Arden family on this particular square mile of land had lasted for over five hundred years but in 1643 the last male of this main branch of the Ardens died leaving four daughters. The youngest of these four married Sir Charles Adderley, predecessor of the Norton family who were influential in the area. The third daughter, Dorothy, married Sir Hervey Bagot – Sheriff of Staffordshire and a staunch Royalist. Dorothy took the Berwood estate, with its farmhouse built around the structures of the original Berwood Hall, to the marriage as her dowry.

Hervey Arden-Bagot had the better half of the land – that on the higher land away from the river – enclosed to form Pype Hayes (“Hayes” means an enclosed piece of land). The lower, swampy, less valuable part of the estate was let to a succession of tenant farmers on small pieces of land. One such family of tenant farmers were the Davisons.

Both the Bagots at Pype Hayes and their tenants the Davisons had large families. In the case of the Bagot family, the sons became an MP living in London; a Colonel in the royalist army acting as Governor of Lichfield during its siege. In each case they were given accommodation, food and income from these activities. The Davisons in contrast all lived off the same small parcel of land scraping together a relatively restricted amount of accommodation, food and resources. Whilst the Bagot children were enjoying success, eight members of the Davison family died in 19 years. The same was true of the other tenant families e.g. that of Samson Bridgwood whose children died with sad regularity and whose wife died aged 47.

Enclosing some of the land to form Pype Hayes estate removed this land from the stock available for farming. Farmers displaced by the enclosure would have had to find similar patches of land elsewhere, move in with relatives or join the as yet small number of people finding industrial employment in Birmingham.

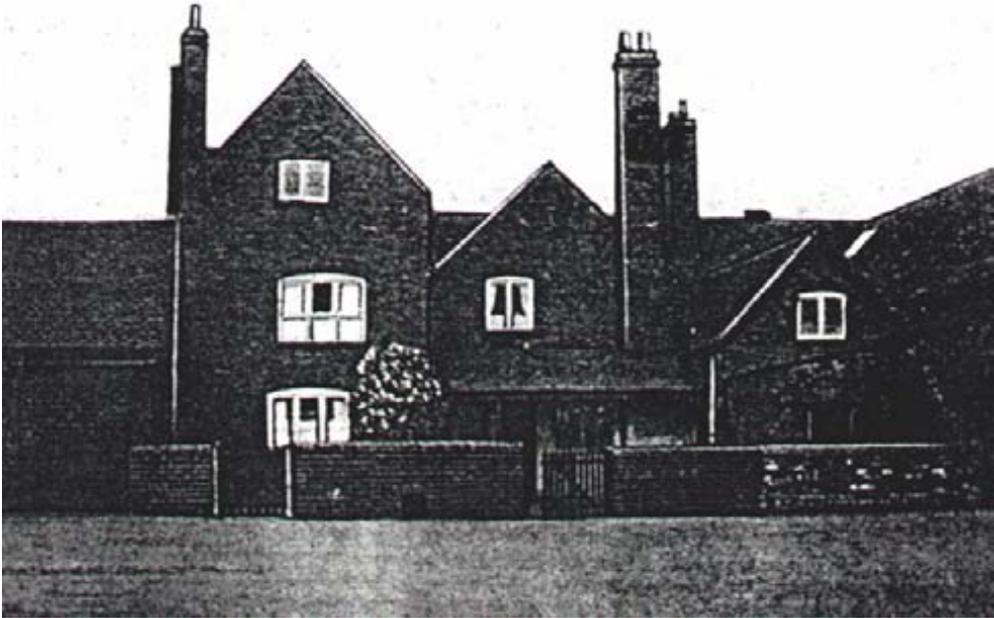
Birmingham at this time consisted of a number of village centres with outlying streams supporting a number of smiths. Because of the distance from deep navigable rivers, the manufactured products of the area were usually transported by pack-horse. The cost of such transport meant that, at the time, the only

financially feasible products were large numbers of a wide variety of light metal objects such as spurs bits, nails etc. Journeymen smiths worked from their homes and the responsibility for trying to sell at ever increasing distances was taken on by the merchants already established in town. By the end of the sixteenth century there were twenty merchant houses in Birmingham, which was still only a few streets around Deritend. As these merchants accumulated wealth and influence they bought landed estates of which they enclosed parts, creating more landless labourers to find employment in the town. The trades established in Birmingham gave greater scope for innovation and development - with manufacture being boosted not only by the supply of small parts for ships, houses and tools but also by the supply of swords, and later muskets, during the almost perpetual wars on the continent and during the Civil War in England. Small workshops in Birmingham provided 15,000 swords for the Earl of Essex during the Civil War. Birmingham fortunes were being made on the basis of explorations and warfare.

During the Parliamentary/Royalist civil war opposing armies passed alongside the Berwood estate. A story is told of the two rival armies chasing each other. Coming to the Tyburn crossroads, a commanding officer asked a local young lad which way the other army had gone. Unfortunately the lad was mute, but the officer took his inability to answer as defiance and cut off his head. The body was then thrown over the hedge into Pype Hayes grounds and the head was kicked along the lane later to be thrown into an oak tree in Walmley. Two centuries later when this oak was cut down the skull of the unfortunate mute rolled out. Countless times since then the headless ghost of a young boy has been reportedly seen in the area around the Tyburn House Inn (and not just after closing time)!

In 1690 the same area saw an even more spectacular event. British troops in Ireland were sent reinforcements and provisions. One thousand baggage wagons loaded high with these provisions passed by the Berwood estate in one day! If a thousand buses were to go past Castle Vale in one long procession today it would create a stir amongst residents, imagining what a spectacle these thousand baggage wagons was in those days.

Later the Duke of Cumberland's army used the same road on its way to Scotland to meet the Young Pretender. The Berwood estate, because of its location next to a main communication route, would be kept well supplied with news of developments and politics in other parts of the country.



Berwood Hall as it was in 1926



Pype Hayes Hall

THE GROWTH OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

Throughout the 1700's there was an increase in industrial and commercial expansion. The overseas trade in raw and finished materials was established, linking British manufacturers to distant markets. Ports grew in importance because of the trade with various colonies, and manufacturing towns looked for more efficient and cheaper means of transport to these ports. This was first done using "cuts", links made to join up navigable rivers, and later using purpose-built canals.

Money for the earliest canals was provided by both merchants and landowners. As these canals proved so obviously profitable people no longer had to be persuaded to put money into canals and the cash poured in. During this 'canal mania' many new canals were built but with a number of side effects. As the number of canals increased they encroached more and more on land belonging to the wealthy gentry families who were not much in favour of the new commercialism. In addition, more canals built meant more canals in competition with each other. Both these features were part of the history of the building of the Birmingham to Fazeley Canal whose route went across the middle of Berwood land, separating the Pype Hayes portion off from the rest and reinforcing one more boundary of what is now Castle Vale.

Birmingham was not an ideal site for canal construction but iron and coal were needed from the Black Country for Birmingham's factories in ever larger amounts and at an ever cheaper price. It was estimated, in 1767, that building a canal would enable 72,800 tons of coal to be brought annually into the city at a cheaper cost. Several thousand pounds would be saved each year which would be available "for the support of the poor". Other plans were drawn up, including schemes in which extra money could be saved by having the barges unloaded at no cost by using the workhouse poor. It was calculated that enough money would be saved by industrialist to enable "cleaning of the streets and lighting the principal part of the town with lamps". Some of the promoters of the canal, however, had other plans for any profit – preferring to reinvest it for their own benefit rather than put it to public good. These disagreements grew into contentions. A second canal was proposed, in competition with the first with an extension on to Fazeley to link up with the Coventry Canal and the Oxford Canal. Petitions and counter petitions for these canals were presented to Parliament. Influence at Parliament was important since anyone wanting to build a canal had first to get a private Act passed for each proposed canal. There is no evidence that the Arden-Bagots had become directly involved in industrial or commercial concerns but they had

consistently, over several generations, represented their own interests (and those of other landowners) in Parliament. Hervey Bagot's first son was the MP for Staffordshire; his grandson became MP for Staffordshire in seven successive parliaments; his great grandson also became MP for Staffordshire and his great great grandson, Sir Walter Wagstaffe Bagot LLD, was firstly MP for Newcastle-under-Lyme, then for Staffordshire and finally for Oxford University. It was to this long line of Bagots in Parliament (which was to continue until 1852) that generations of landowning interests would look for support.

The extension of the canal from Birmingham to Fazeley was opposed by the Earl of Dartmouth and his relative Heneage Legge on the grounds that building the canal across their land would "cause Gentlemen's Estates and Pleasure-grounds to be cut to pieces and annoyed". The canal was eventually built, running from Legge's land at Aston to Bagot's estate at Berwood. This construction did not remove much land from the Berwood estate but did bring in considerable compensation for the disturbance caused to the Bagots (although one suspects that it was in reality the tenant farmers who had the most disturbance).

As industry developed, other forms of transport were being worked on. Railways were regarded as public services in the same way that canals had been. This meant that it was relatively easy to invest money in them although, like canals, each proposed railway had to be approved by Parliament (again with opposition of landowners who envisaged their landscaped parklands being but to shreds for the benefit of commercial interest). In 1836 three railways were authorised to serve Derby. One of these, the Birmingham and Derby Junction Railway was promoted by a group of Birmingham businessmen. Its route followed the Tame Valley out of Birmingham necessitating the purchase of land owned by Heaneage Legge (Earl Howe), Charles Bowyer Adderley (Lord Norton) and the Reverend Bagot (owner of the Berwood land). The construction of this railway along the river reinforced the eastern boundary of the area that was to be Castle Vale. Much later a different transport system, the M6 motorway, was to follow the same route, adding to the boundary. A branch railway line was built on further land bought from the Bagot estate at Berwood and this was to reinforce the boundary created by the earlier Arden/Darcy dispute.

It seems that throughout this period of expansion there were a number of recurring themes. One of these was the recompense of traditional landowning families for 'disturbance' to add to any income from direct sale of their land to canal and railway companies. Another outcome was the constant re-emphasis of the same boundaries, leading to an ever-increasing definition of the area that was later to become Castle Vale.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS OF AN EXPANDING BIRMINGHAM

As industry grew out along the canal routes and as increasing numbers of people came into the city to find work, there was a need to change the systems necessary for the organisation of Birmingham. The demands at national level for changes in Parliament away from the traditional landowning interests were paralleled by similar calls for changes locally to meet the new industrial problems. Whilst towns were small, industrial concerns may have needed to provide housing in order to attract workers but as soon as this was no longer necessary there was no hesitation in passing the responsibility for house-building on to small-scale builders who built on plots of land leased out by landowners. Housing was a low-return investment and the values of the free market when applied to housing had its consequences in jerrybuilding, overcrowding and classic slums. The special feature of house-building in Birmingham at this time was the large number of courts of brick back-to-back houses. Over two thousand such homes were in existence in the 1830's.

Later in the century, expanding markets in the empire fuelled the growth of the city's industry creating a need for more and more housing to accommodate the growing workforce. At the same time some of the worst back-to-backs were being demolished. The working families, displaced from the central areas which were being redeveloped as commercial shopping areas, had to look for housing in the newer tunnel-backs of the next parish. Housing developments followed industry as it moved out along the canal into the Tame Valley and out towards Berwood. These newer rings of housing built towards the latter part of the nineteenth century were to become the problem housing of the twentieth century which were to affect housing policy and be one factor in the development of Castle Vale.

This was a boom time and a time of improvements in many aspects of social life. Education for all, a good water supply and healthy sanitation were all products of this era. Gas and Electric companies were purchased by the city and in 1890 the first council houses were built. At the same time each improvement brought with it its own set of problems to be dealt with. Take sewage as an example. Up to 1860 most houses had sufficient land nearby to absorb the household's sewage but with the increasing densities and numbers of population sewage disposal became a problem. The problem was not a technical one since the method used was simple – 'night soil' was collected in carts and dumped on water logged land beyond the city boundaries for irrigation by the rain. This was done on a site at

Salford Bridge near to Gravelly Hill, which was adequate whilst the amounts were small. As the amount of sewage to be disposed of grew even larger, however, Gravelly Hill residents took out court injunctions to prevent sewage being piled on to land near their houses and further injunctions to prevent overspill sewage polluting the River Tame and interfering with the fishing.

As the population continued to grow, the point was reached where both of these injunctions were being broken and the corporation was being threatened with writs for damages. The problem was increasingly seen as a political one – how could those various authorities with drainage into the River Tame act as one united Drainage Board and together be able to pump sewage further and further out. One proposal was even to build a sewer from the Midlands to the East Coast. In 1876 the Sewage Committee of Birmingham Council invited representatives of neighbouring councils to a conference chaired by Joseph Chamberlain. By 1877 a new united board (the Birmingham Tame and Rea Drainage Board) had been set up and loaned £164,000 by the Government to pay for new works and to use as compensation for any lands purchased.

The irrigation method of spreading sewage out over the surface of the land was obviously one that needed ever increasing amounts of land as the amount of sewage to be treated increased. Land was bought up in large amounts all along the route from Salford Bridge out towards Minworth. In 1881 William Walter Bagot sold 344 acres of the Berwood Farm land to the Drainage Board and in 1888 a further 358 acres were similarly sold. Amongst other land purchased by the Board was a tract of land from the Wakefield Trustees (descendants of Edward Darcy who had created the Berwood/Minworth boundary). Some of this land was on the northern side of the Fazeley canal and it was on this site that reservoirs and a pumping station were built on Plants Brook. The purchase of Bagot land by the Drainage Board was to be a key factor in the creation of the flat piece of land that was later to become Castle Vale.

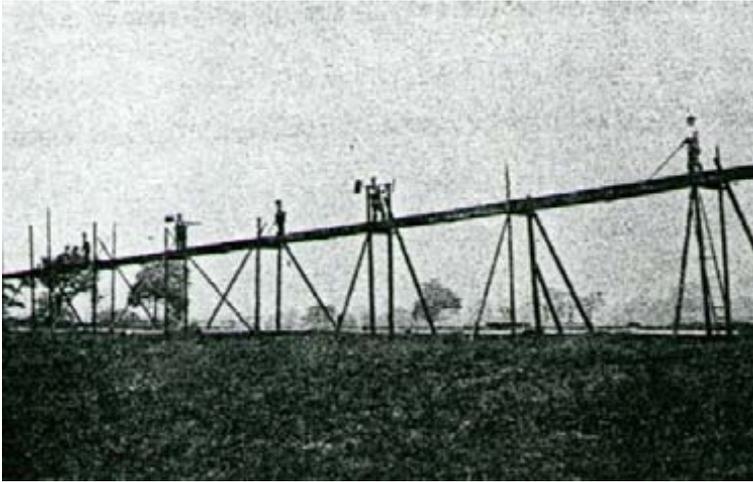
The land at Berwood was already flat and devoid of trees but before it could be effectively used for sewage treatment the existing field hedges had to be removed. These ancient field boundaries are shown on maps with the field names marked in as Round Moor, Long Close, Rough Coppice, Orchard Meadow and Brook Piece (the field across which Plants Brook trickled). Residents of Castle Vale will

recognise these as being the few names of roads on the estate that were not named after aeroplanes, airfields or people involved in the estate's construction.

Plants Brook, running across the middle of the piece of land, was diverted to the Minworth perimeter. The result of these changes was a flat large sewage farm run under high cultivation to yield large crops. One archive photograph of the time shows a cabbage so large that it is being taken home on a hand-cart. This farm was reported as being the best sewage farm in Europe and had many visitors from abroad. The method could not continue indefinitely however. This method of treating sewage needed ever more and more land as the population of the city grew, but there was a limit to the amount of land that could be bought. Pressure was on to find a new method. In 1898 the filtration method was introduced by Professor Dewar and Mr Hawksley the consultant engineer. The sewage could be treated by passing it through filters which needed only a fraction of the land needed by the former method. Construction of the compact filter beds continued into the period of the First World War. Loss of men to the war meant that the vital construction work was continued by women, by German prisoners of war and by conscientious objectors.

This changeover of method to one requiring less land released 2,727 acres. This land could be sold off by the Board for farming, as industrial sites or other such uses as the case of 744 acres leased to W.J. Edkins "for shooting only".

Industry hadn't reached this far out yet, certainly not in the quantity that would warrant anyone thinking about housing on the land. In any case an ex-sewage farm that was still liable to flooding may not have been considered an ideal site for housing.



From 1877 to 1901 the sewage sludge was lifted by dredger bucket into an overhead wooden trough. The sludge was manually pushed along the trough and shovelled onto plots of land separated by banks of earth. There it was left to dry out and break down.



Steamploughs at work on the sewage farm. These ploughed the soil and, with a cutting wire, stretched between two tractors, were also used to harvest cereal crops.

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY – THE COMING OF MODERN INDUSTRY

A small amount of actual sewage farming was retained at Home Farm – the farm near to the Tyburn House crossroads whose solid stone gateposts remained in place until the widening of the Tyburn roundabout eighty years later. The 1905 Ordinance Survey map clearly shows this farm with its orchard along the Chester Road. This orchard had 650 trees all in straight lines on its eleven acres. On a good summer's evening the branches were so heavy with fruit that they could be heard snapping. Farming a herd of dairy cows here was so successful that in 1906 an electric milking machine was installed enabling fourteen cows to be milked at a time. This was a novel innovation at that time.

The same map shows Pype Hayes Hall, complete with its ornamental goldfish pool. The hall at this time was still occupied by the last of the Bagots to reside there. The Tyburn House public house is marked on the same map. It was rebuilt into its present form in the 1930's – before then it was in an earlier style dating from a rebuilding in the early nineteenth century. A pub existed at this important crossroads even before that. It was after a dance at the Tyburn House that Mary Ashford was killed in 1817, leading to a famous court case.

The rest of the land no longer required by the Drainage Board was leased off or sold. The principal early sale of Board land was one of 381 acres to the Dunlop Rubber Company for a new factory. John Boyd Dunlop had invented the pneumatic tyre in 1888. It proved so successful that by the turn of the century Dunlop had manufacturing or retail concerns in Australia, Canada, France, Germany and South Africa. In 1900 he opened a second factory in England but by 1916 this was already over-expanded and the site at Berwood was bought from the Drainage Board.

Small manufacturing concerns appeared in the area, often based on existing buildings. By the canal had been an old ale-house – a “pull-up” for boatmen. It had stables at the rear for the horses. Later it was used by the railway builders and took the name “Railway Inn”. Later still it became a boarding house – mainly for “Irish labourers who slept in layers”. After this it became a woodyard; a house overrun by rats and mice, and finally was sold to a company who pulled down the old buildings and built a Glue Factory (or Residue Refinery as it was officially called).

On the other side of the canal was a pumping station at Plants Brook reservoirs. The introduction of the Elan Valley water supply in 1904 reduced this to a standby station. The building itself – a classic piece of nineteenth century industrial architecture with walls two feet thick – was taken over as offices by International Metal. This firm manufactured ingots in furnaces which operated continuously. The waste, including amounts of aluminium, was dumped in the reservoirs. In recent days a company planned to drain the reservoirs to reclaim any metal waste, but through the activities of conservationists and the City Council, the area was retained as an urban wildlife area.

Other early factories in the Berwood area were the Guanogen Fertiliser Company (to reclaim the sewage) and the Toro Soap Works. These, together with the Glue Factory and the Sewage Farm, would not do much to enhance the value or image of the area!

The central rectangle of land – which is now Castle Vale – remained empty except for Home Farm and the semi derelict Berwood Hall Farm (built around the core structures of the medieval Berwood Hall).

In 1909, 250 acres of this land was leased to the Housing Reform and Open Spaces Association. In 1913 a further 33 acres was used by Birmingham Corporation Parks Department as a recreation ground. These playing fields were marked out with football pitches. Up to sixty matches could be played at one time! This was to provide weekend recreation for the factory workers who were now being housed as far out as Erdington and Salford Bridge in relatively settled communities around reasonably stable industries.



Area in 1914

CASTLE BROMWICH AIRFIELD

Early in the twentieth century the military and commercial uses of vehicles were being investigated as much as their potential for public transport. This was especially true of the aeroplane.

In 1915, during the First World War, an airfield was established on the Berwood Playing Fields by the War Department. This was initially used for training airmen, including ones from Canada and France, and later for testing newly built aeroplanes. The airfield itself initially had a very small staff – a commanding officer, his assistant and two mechanics. There were only three or four aircraft and opportunities for flying were limited to about forty minutes each day because of the fog, high winds and industrial haze. Another regular hazard of this particular airfield was overshooting and ending up in the sewage works!

The first active squadron at Castle Bromwich Airfields was No. 10 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. Pilots were trained to staff the increasing number of squadrons in France. The machines flown for training were Maurice Farman's. Initially the pilots were accommodated in tents and their mess was a large marquee. Later they were billeted in Erdington and even at the jockeys' quarters at the nearby racecourse. As numbers increased the old hall farmhouse was used as an officers' mess, new rooms were built and a line of huts were erected as billets for the men. German Prisoners of war were housed in a corrugated iron shed on the airfield and were used to construct roads etc. The aircraft themselves were kept in huge corrugated buildings next to Castle Bromwich station. These buildings were later to house the British Industries Fair, an early forerunner of the National Exhibition Centre.

As with all early flying groups, characters abounded at Castle Bromwich. There was an Indian Prince who wore a turban and a monocle; Flight Commander Captain Henderson who used to wear his kilt when he flew, and many others.

At the announcement of the signing of the Armistice to end World War One, the officers in the mess at the airfield celebrated by getting very drunk, taking all the furniture outside to make a huge bonfire and letting off a lot of signal flares which had coloured flares floating down on tiny parachutes.

After the war the Home Farm premises were let to Dunlops. The airfield continued in use as an airfield – but this time a private one for the Midland Aero Club and for fliers from the University. It also had regular visits from Jones and Cobhams' flying circus and from private flying contractors such as the two Americans who had 'skywriting' contracts to do advertisements for local industrial concerns – as well as being used as a refuelling stop in the Kings Cup Air Races. Planes in these days were flimsy constructions of wood, canvas and wire but their fragility didn't deter some of these early pilots from zooming down to almost land on the roof of passing trains, having to hop over the bridges as they did so.

Even though peace was established in 1918, it was not until 1922 (and then only after some pressure) that the Air Ministry allowed the Drainage Board to retake control of the bulk of the land. Sewage farming had now ended although the Board had some contracts for the supply of dried sludge. At the same time the buildings erected by the Government were acquired for only £12,500. These immediately became profitable since the Board was able to let them out. The large corrugated hangars were let to the British Industries Fair – a concern staged for a fortnight each year by a group of local business men keen to promote the range of Birmingham's manufactured products. The B.I.F. was promoted nationally and received visits from members of the Royal Family. At these times train load after train load of people would pour out from Birmingham to Castle Bromwich station. Apart from these busy times and the Sunday Flying and football, however, the area was still a relatively empty, peaceful one.

The area opposite the orchard (which was to become the site of British Leyland Cars and later, Jaguar) was fields of wheat and barley. At harvest times these crops were cut by zig-zagging traction engines. The pastoral scene was completed by a pub called "The Farmers Boy".

Another acquisition made by the Drainage Board, when it took over possession of the airfield, was the line of huts across the field. This cost the Board £5,500 but the intention was to resell the huts to Birmingham Corporation to help overcome some of the city's shortage of housing.

These huts were the only housing in the area except for some housing erected by the Drainage Board. They were officially addressed as "The Bungalows" but they were called "The Huts" by everyone. These homes were constructed on stilts of increasing height as they approached the river. Flooding of the area

was a frequent event. In most cases these simply made the airfield swampy and unusable but in one particularly bad flood the water was high enough to reach into the rooms of the huts and “meat floated out of the oven in the roasting tin” as one resident graphically put it.

The huts were quite modern for 1920. They had a living room, three bedrooms, an inside toilet and electric lighting. Most of the tenants were Dunlop employees who previous to this had needed to travel to work by narrow boat along the canal from Salford Bridge. The social facilities in this small community comprised a wooden church hut, a small store, a social hall and a fire station which was, in reality, a small hut with a bell and a hand-operated water pump.

The reoccupation of the land by the Drainage Board enabled the Parks Department to again take up tenancy of the playing fields at Park Lane (now reduced to 13 acres). This was used continuously for football, and the stabling of horses, until the end of the 1980's when the land was designated as a site for part of industrial development at Minworth.

One condition of handing back the land to the Board was that the Civil Aviation Branch of the Air Ministry would be allowed to have free use of the northern part of the airfield. This agreement remained in force until it expired in 1925, when the future use of the land has to be decided. Meetings were held with several organisations including the Ministry of Health, but eventually the land (and some buildings) were sold to the Air Ministry for £60,000. A further section of land was to be bought by them in 1940 enabling a sizeable airfield to be brought into use in World War Two.

Between the wars, public interest in flying was sustained by events such as the Birmingham Air Pageants. One hundred thousand people turned up to watch the first of these in July 1927. Aeroplanes looped the loop and did mock bomb attacks on tanks and a model village. The airliner “Argosy” took people for joy rides over the city and the weekend was concluded by a mass fly away when all the planes took off simultaneously and flew away in different direction.

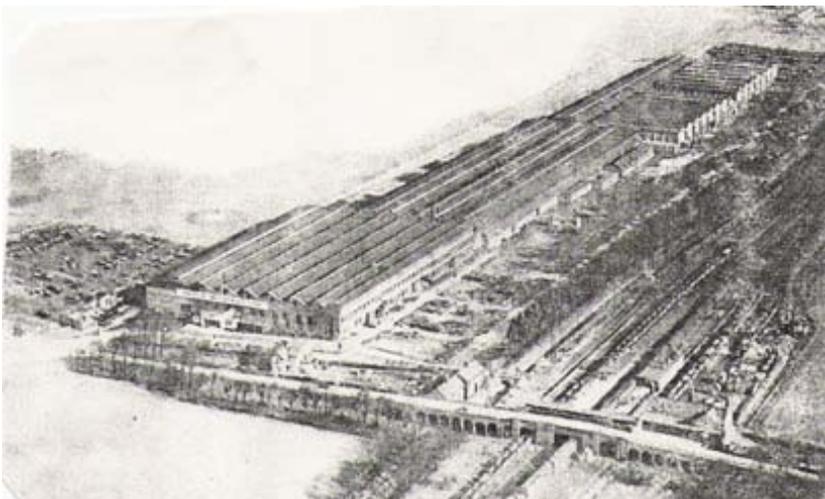
As well as being a base for 605 Squadron, Castle Bromwich was seeking to establish itself as a commercial airfield for the City of Birmingham. The proximity of the British Industries Fair site at Castle

Bromwich was part of this, as was the establishment of combined services with the Great Western Railway, whereby passengers from Birmingham to Plymouth would travel from Snow Hill station in the city centre to Castle Bromwich and fly on from there to Plymouth – all for a single fare of £3.

The airfield was pushed forward as a possible site for a proposed municipal airport for Birmingham. In 1933, however, Elmdon was selected as the airport site in preference to Castle Bromwich. The airfield at Castle Bromwich remained a base for 605 Squadron – a link that was to continue into World War Two.



Entrance to British Industries Fair



Aerial view of buildings of British Industries Fair

SECOND WORLD WAR – BUT WHERE ARE THE PLANES?

Castle Vale was a name that was still in the future. Berwood, the ancient name of the area, had all but been forgotten after 1500 years of continuous use. The area was known, throughout World War II, by the name given to the airfield, Castle Bromwich - a name which was to be used even at the planning stage of what would, two decades later, be initially known as the Castle Bromwich Airfield Estate.

As the Second World War loomed in the late 1930's, attention turned to those factories that could be switched to war production. During the interwar period a number of factories had been built near to the airfield, many of which were already making vehicle parts and could easily be changed to production of aeroplanes. Vickers had established a factory on the site opposite the airfield. In 1935 the Government decided on the rapid expansion of the military aircraft industry and financed extra factories to build airframes and engines. These 'shadow factories' were run by existing motor concerns – the Vickers factory became one such site. The part of the aerial war that is, rightly or wrongly, most often associated with Castle Bromwich airfield, is the production and testing of spitfires which were then used in the Battle of Britain.

The fall of France had given the German air forces extra bases nearer England. There were now 2,500 enemy planes within an hour's striking distance of Britain. A full-scale invasion of England was being prepared but it would initially be necessary to eliminate any air opposition by destroying the Royal Air Force. It was against these waves of enemy planes sent over to attack RAF bases, airfields and aircraft that the spitfires and other aeroplanes took off.

Losses of British fighter planes during these heavy air battles were running at a rate of eight hundred per month. At one stage a meagre 288 reserve planes were left – enough to last only eleven days at that rate of loss. Production of new aircraft became of vital importance. Aircraft factories around London had been badly damaged and output so affected that some aircraft were being fitted with one gun instead of eight.

At the Vickers Castle Bromwich factory, the production of Spitfires went into full swing. 11,000 Spitfires were built - clusters of workers around each plane, lifting the sections into place and riveting them

together. The finished machines were pulled across the Chester Road on the end of ropes for their test flights from the airfield.

The Chief Test Pilot at the airfield at this time was the renowned Alex Henshaw who provided some spectacular air displays as he put the new Spitfires through their paces. A total of 37,000 test flights were carried out on new planes which were then ferried to the RAF Battle of Britain stations, often by women pilots of the Air Transport Auxiliary. Tales are told of Henshaw swooping so low over nearby houses that washing was blown off the lines!

When the pressure for replacement planes was at its peak, three hundred Spitfires were being built and tested here each month. The newly-made planes had to be tested in all weathers. The area is to this day a notoriously foggy one, so it is hardly surprising that under these conditions 127 forced landings had to be made. Of course, there were accidents and tragedies. Two pilots were killed testing the planes and other planes had to be written off after crashes, including one training plane which crashed straight through the roof of the construction factory and landed on the partly assembled Spitfires.

As well as the natural camouflage of the fog, the factories had artificial camouflage and, for the duration of the war, the extra protection of smoke-screen machines which could be brought out to chug smoke over the whole area.

There is a story told of two airmen on duty at Castle Bromwich Airfield one foggy night. In the dark they heard one of the Spitfires coming in to land and switched on the large runway illumination lamps. Imagine their surprise when they saw not a Spitfire but a lost German bomber. By the time the startled airmen had got ready to open fire; the bomber pilot had got his bearings and had taken off again.

After World War Two the old corrugated iron hangars which had housed the British Industries Fair were used as stores by various firms. The parts within these stores were occasionally illicitly 'traded' for other goods. When the stores were cleared at a time when the old buildings were to be demolished, some of the items that had been in store longest were almost completely stripped down or were totally missing.

At the other end of the airfield, the large redbrick hangars constructed during the war were put to use as a store for shell cases, gas masks and tyres. These hangars continued to be used for storage up to the 1990s and gained some notoriety during the 1980's as store depot for part of the Common Market grain mountain. By the end of 1992 the site of the red-brick airfield hangars was being cleared to make way for an industrial site. The first occupant of this site was Betterware Limited, whose new premises were officially opened by the then Prime Minister, John Major.

The area that is now Castle Vale estate still carries strong memories as an airfield for many people. Some remember it as a wartime airbase with its Spitfires. It is remembered by many other people for the several Battle of Britain air shows that were staged there during the 1950's. The link to aeroplanes and airfields is retained in the road names of the area and in the names of the now-demolished tower blocks.



View of part of the airfield and surrounding area in 1955



View of the airfield in 1955

POST WAR HOUSING PROBLEMS

Even without the extra problems that wartime created, cities had continuous problems to be dealt with and the greatest problem of all was housing.

As early as 1930 changes in the system of Government subsidies had led to an emphasis on slum clearance. Throughout the 1930's 8000 back-to-back houses were demolished in Birmingham. Even so 30,000 still remained. The residents of these cleared areas had to be re-housed somewhere. As previously, the cleared areas were often used for commercial or industrial expansion which meant the people being re-housed at ever increasing distances from the city centre. The boundaries of the city were pushed steadily outwards. In 1931 the boundary had reached as far as the Castle Bromwich Airfield and a new housing estate at Pype Hayes was being built. The design of this estate, as with others between the wars, shows that more thought was being given to planning and layout than in the courts and streets of the inner city. Minimum building standards and public health regulations were all designed to produce better quality living conditions. Whatever was built still had to be provided within the constraints of what could be afforded by the city and what could be produced by builders who had their own profit to make. The results of any cost-cutting would not be noticeable then but would later come to light as serious building defects were discovered.

Amongst the new tenants of Pype Hayes estate were the residents of the airfield huts. As well as housing, other changes were taking place as industrial concerns, including the American company Cincinatti, bought land along the Kingsbury Road. As the city spread outwards in this way some groups of people began to argue for protection of the Green Belt, for the size of Birmingham to be limited and for any future housing to be built in 'overspill' or 'satellite' new towns.

At the end of the Second World War one third of the city's housing was declared unfit. Immediate post-war redevelopment efforts were, however, put into rebuilding the city centre and industrial areas. Housing replacement was done very slowly. One effect of this was that there was more time to think about effective planning. Ideas were developed about 'residential neighbourhood units', 'planned communities' and so on.

Another, more immediate, effect of this lack of housing replacement was that by 1948 there were 65,000 names on the housing waiting list. The "Housing Question", in terms of reducing the size of the waiting list, became a politically sensitive issue. One device for doing this was to alter the points system, making it more difficult to get onto the list in the first place. Even with such minor adjustments to procedures and a reliance on private landlords to fill the gaps, it was obvious that the housing problem wasn't going to go away easily.

In 1949 a Housing Conference was held in the city. It concluded that a different approach to housebuilding was needed. Figures of a projected "overspill" of 60,000 people by 1971, the shortage of land for building and the inefficiency of dealing with large numbers of small building firms led to a situation, throughout the 1950's, where larger firms were being asked to take on larger contracts.

By the 1960's a small number of building firms were being approached to see what they could build quickly, in large numbers and within the money available. Since these firms operated with only two or three basic designs, the result was the building of large numbers of houses which were all very similar. Any variety from one area to the next would therefore be more dependent on layout rather than house design. Planning and architecture departments of the City Council became much more prominent in their power and influence.

THE ESTATE IS PLANNED

In the early 1960's designs were drawn up for the "Castle Bromwich Airfield Estate". The name Castle Vale was to come later, the result of a newspaper competition to choose a suitable name. In some ways it is a pity that the history of the area was not better known at the time and the historical name of Berwood was not retained in some form.

Even at this planning stage controversy arose about the estate – the first new large-scale redevelopment within the city. Two opposing groups, based around different committees and departments within the City Council debated the relative merits of a plan for 15,000 people based on small mixed neighbourhoods against a plan for 22,000 people based on spines of high-rise flats along the length of the estate. The second plan was the one eventually adopted.

At this time the construction industry got higher government subsidy for prefabricated, system-built high-rise dwellings. Various systems were on offer. Concrete Limited had developed a system but needed a major contractor to do the marketing. Bryants were well placed to take on this role within Birmingham and were in the forefront of receiving Local Housing Authority housing contracts.

Within the competition to win these large, lucrative contracts, the offering of favours was to reach such proportions that investigations were ordered with many prominent people becoming implicated in the accusations of corruption.

Early in the life of the newly-built flats some faults came to light and arguments arose as to whether the cost of putting these right should fall to the city or to the original construction company.

Despite these political wranglings, planning arguments and pared-to-the-bone construction costs, Castle Vale became a reality – a planned unit of 5,000 dwellings with 34 tower blocks mostly in two spines down the length of the estate.

Many of the residents who moved in as early tenants and occupiers liked their new homes and the estate as a whole – many still do. Others found realistic fault with life there and saw this as being due to the attitudes of a minority of residents. Others saw the same problems and related them back to faults in design and construction or to the lack of money for repairs. The vast majority were, however, feeling very positive towards the estate. When residents moved away from the area, it was notable how many said that they missed the atmosphere and company of Castle Vale, and many wanted to move back again. Whatever one's point of view, Castle Vale was an area of the city that evoked strong feelings and memories within people.

1970's THE ESTATE GROWS IN MATURITY

As Castle Vale settled down some of the original temporary buildings were replaced by more permanent ones. For example, the wooden hut that served as St Cuthbert's Church was replaced by a modern new building as a joint Anglican/Methodist church, joining St Gerard's Church Centre as a place of worship. Other church groups, such as Seventh Day Adventists, made use of existing community centres.

The schools on the estate established themselves and grew in size as a 'bulge' in the birthrate worked its way through. Chivenor, Topcliffe, St Gerards and Pegasus Primary schools all grew in size, as did the new Castle Vale Nursery school. Castle Vale Secondary School peaked at an intake of 11 new classes a year, a total of more than 1800 pupils and more than 100 staff.

The population of the estate reached its peak in the late 1970's. A falling birthrate, smaller families and a growing number of single person households meant that the numbers fell year on year after this. With the lively mass of people came a growing list of thriving community activities: youth clubs; community centre; adult education classes; sports training; mother and toddler groups; playgroups; slimming clubs; keep fit groups; open community-learning mornings; school plays and fetes; an annual carnival; annual fun run; women's groups; health groups; tenant's groups; community association; cubs; scouts; brownies; Air Training Corps; Church groups and fellowships; library-based groups; holiday playschemes; careers advice sessions; trade union group meetings; dancing classes; boxing club; pub darts; fishing and football teams; badminton group; swimming baths (newly opened by the Queen); playcentre and a stables and new football area to replace the Park Lane playing fields when these were built on; citizen's advice sessions; motorcycle training school – and more!. There was no shortage of things to do.

Out of this network of local activities sprang other, shorter-lived events: visits by members of professional orchestras to give concerts in the secondary school hall, visiting theatre groups putting on pantomimes at the Astral Centre (whose walls were also being decorated with murals by pupils from the school and by a local artist), a group that came together to tackle editors of local newspapers concerning the quality of their reporting of event at Castle Vale, publications of writings by residents, a broadcast of the radio

programme 'Any Questions' from the secondary school, plays at the nearby Cincinnati factory theatre so on.

During the 1980's opportunities at Castle Vale became underpinned by a professional support network as providers of playgroup and nursery provision formed an Under 5's Liaison group; with monthly meetings of professional workers on the estate; with schools regularly meeting as a consortium; and through the close cooperation of social services, probation, police, careers service, school and youth workers in the area. Crime rates were lower than many other areas. Turnover of residents was small. People wanted to be there and wanted to stay there.

The estate now had a sense of social maturity about it but was also beginning to reach a stage where cracks were, literally, beginning to show in the physical infrastructure. The 1960s bright new concrete was looking grey and faded. Faults were appearing. Some flats began to regularly flood through cracks in their flat roof. Heavy blocks of cladding fell from the outside of some tower blocks. Scaffolding, safety netting and cordoned off areas became regular features. Red-suited 'spidermen' dangled their way down the sides of tower blocks testing for loose panels. A decline started to set in. There were increases in population turnover, increasing frustration as day-to-day repairs took longer to get done and cutbacks in support services. Empty units began to appear in the shopping precinct. This was paralleled by an increasing uncertainty in employment with threatened redundancies, closures and takeovers.

There was, by the early 1990s, a sense that the estate was ready for a renewed burst and a new approach to reinvigorate it, if it was not to slip into absolute decline.



Aerial view of part of Castle Vale in the 1970's



Flats being checked by 'spidermen' workers.....



...after a block of external cladding fell off the outside of one tower block



On a warm day in summer the estate could appear bright and cheerful



.....and on foggy november mornings the same estate could appear bleak and barren

CASTLE VALE HOUSING ACTION TRUST

In 1993 Castle Vale residents voted in favour of the estate becoming one of the country's first Housing Action Trusts (HAT). Ninety two percent of the votes were in favour and so, on April 1st 1994, control of 3,500 properties at Castle Vale was transferred from Birmingham City Council to the Housing Action Trust.

The Housing Action Trust represented a programme of change that was in the forefront of national thinking about the need for public/private partnership approaches to whole area regeneration.

Castle Vale Housing Action Trust was a Government body which was established to improve housing and general living conditions in Castle Vale. It was designed to be a short-life body which would be dissolved in 2005 once its business was complete. The aim was no less than the complete and lasting regeneration of Castle Vale and the reversal of nearly 30 years of physical, social and economic decline. The Trust aimed to stimulate employment, involve and empower local people and community groups, address health and social needs, improve the environment as well as to provide new homes and a major retail shopping centre. This regeneration of Castle Vale was planned to cost around £300million.

Castle Vale, at this stage, had a population of nearly 11,000, covered 2.5 square kilometres (1.5 square miles); and consisted of 3746 homes.

The physical problems of Castle Vale were legacies of design, layout and construction. We have seen that many of the homes were built with new, untried building methods and subsequently suffered from widespread and severe problem of damp and condensation. Most properties were difficult to heat adequately. To tackle some of the problems, the radical approach included demolishing 2178 homes (including 27 of the 34 tower blocks). To replace these, 1458 new homes were being built and 1381 being refurbished.

Alongside this rebuilding of homes there was the attraction of new employment opportunities with companies moving into the Park Lane area and onto the site of the old aircraft hangers. This Enterprise Park of 44 new business units would sit easily alongside other neighbouring retail developments such as

The Fort and Star City, as old industrial sites were converted for service industry use. All of this would be accompanied by programmes of local, customised training to give residents the skills for the new jobs.

In all areas of the Housing Action Trust's work it recognised that it alone couldn't solve all the problems and it adopted a multi-agency approach in practically all of its initiatives. Research in 1993 showed that Castle Vale had some of the worst health statistics in Birmingham, as well as higher levels of drugs and substance misuse than the city's average. In response a number of key initiatives were developed including designing out crime (through traffic calming; video controlled access; defensible spaces; a victim support scheme established in 1998), A Healthy Living Centre (The Sanctuary) was built in 1999 to house 12 voluntary organisations all under one roof, and a Community Mental Health project was established. A Credit Union was set up to ensure residents of Castle Vale would have access to savings accounts and affordable loans.

In addition to these rebuilding, training and community development changes – the estate also enhanced its 'green' environment, through developing woodland, massive bulb-planting, public art, environmental groups, semi-mature trees being planted on the estate's main roads and planned projects to redevelop the allotment site and improve the conservation area as well as the development of a central park area. The community were heavily involved in decision-making about these developments.

The issue of what would happen once the HAT finished its work in 2005 had been addressed from the outset. A number of 'successor' organisations have been set up by the HAT to carry on with some of the key areas of the HAT's work and service the needs of the community well beyond the HAT's life. So far, successor organisations include Castle Vale Community Housing Association (a community based housing association set up to manage homes developed by the HAT's housing association partners), Merlin Venture Ltd, (whose first focus is on employment and training, largely to encourage local job creation), Castle Vale Community Fund, (a local registered charity which as an independent fund supports good causes on Castle Vale and will carry on doing so once the HAT has wound down in 2005).

Such recent developments have been forward looking but where possible have also built on the past. As an airfield Castle Vale had a Sentinel Spitfire aeroplane to 'guard' the entrance. This was transferred to

a museum some years ago but the ongoing redevelopment of Castle Vale kept a link back to this bit of its history through the instalment of the 'Sentinel' sculpture (The Spitfire Project) – a major gateway feature and a premiere public art piece in Birmingham.



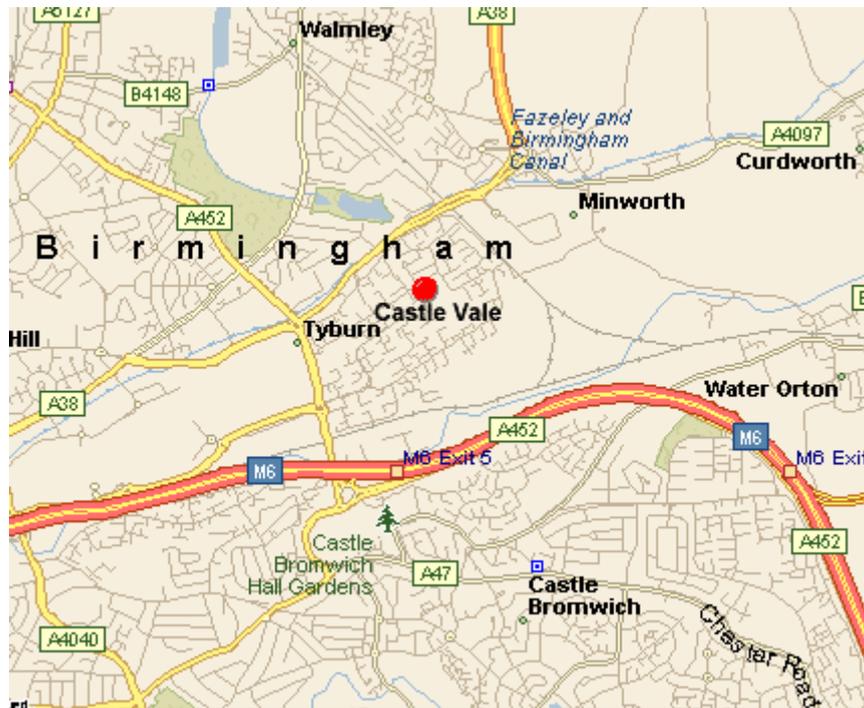
The Spitfire 'Sentinel' sculpture at the estate's main entrance.



Redeveloped block of flats



New build replacement houses



Castle Vale with its boundaries resulting from events reaching back more than a thousand years



New build redevelopments resulting from the Housing Action Trust activity



Aerial view of Castle Vale 2004

CONCLUSION

The history of Castle Vale can be looked back on and seen to be long, varied and interesting – and surprising in parts.

From a long, slowly evolving stage as an ancient forest and swampland it began (during the first millennium up to 1000AD) to have the regular band of travellers, the odd hermit settler, and the occasional wave of invaders.

The next millennium, from 1000-2000AD, saw the area transformed several times. It changed from a piece of land whose fate was determined by shifting loyalties to King and Church; to an agricultural area trying to come to terms with the problems of a growing set of industries; to a piece of land alternating between recreational and military use; and finally to a housing area designed to meet the complex needs of a city changing from its old manufacturing base to a modern service-based cosmopolitan centre.

Who knows what changes the area will see in the next millennium and what name this same piece of land will be known by in the year 3000AD. Let's hope that someone continues to record the changes along the way.

Postscript:

An earlier version of this history of Castle Vale was written by me in 1995 and copies placed in local libraries, schools and community venues.

This history has been referred to in the following books:

- One Thousand Years Of Birmingham (1999) Carl Chinn
- Castle Bromwich, Castle Vale and Shard End (2000) Peter Drake and Marian Baxter

The history has been updated in this version which is being published electronically by being incorporated into Birmingham City Council's website (at www.birmingham.gov.uk) as a source of information and enjoyment for anyone with an interest in the development of this area of Birmingham.

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