

Smallwood Hospital



Smallwood Hospital just after it opened

Image from The RLHS Archives

Smallwood Hospital was opened in 1895, some 30 years after the first recorded mention of a cottage hospital for 'the town and neighbourhood'. During the middle of the nineteenth century there was much concern about the state of health of the people of Redditch. The 1848 Public Health Act and the 1858 Local Government Act led to the setting up of a local Board of Health in 1859. One of the nine voted on to this auspicious body was Edwin Smallwood who became a passionate advocate for a local hospital. But the first public suggestion for a hospital came in a letter to the *Redditch Indicator* in 1865 written by William Avery.

The first cottage hospital had been set up in Cranley in Surrey following a rural accident. The victim was taken to a local cottage which subsequently became a hospital. The idea caught on and, by the time of Avery's letter, there were some 16 such hospitals and another 67 being set up. Such hospitals were for the poor as it was considered that the rich could pay for their health care. As with all matters of health, a committee was set up to look at the feasibility of a hospital for Redditch. Unfortunately, in spite of several generous donations, there were insufficient funds and this led to a lack of will. By 1891 a sites committee had been set up and arrived at no fewer than seven possible places to build the hospital, including one at Headless Cross and one on Alcester Street near the junction with Ipsley Street.

Edwin Smallwood had lived on Church Green East all his adult life and was a familiar figure on the Green. His needle making business had been very successful in the early Victorian period but, by the mid nineteenth century, had fallen away. He was nevertheless a wealthy and respected man and he well understood the need for a cottage hospital. In July 1892 Edwin died but he left clear instructions in his will for £5000 (about £350,000 in today's money) to be used for the "purpose of endowing a cottage hospital at Redditch, to be hereafter for ever called the Smallwood Hospital for the benefit of the poor of Redditch". This was not enough to build a hospital but, by November 1892, Edwin's brother, William, had offered a further £15 000. This changed everything and when William insisted on the Church Green site all other bets were off.

The site chosen housed some old cottages which had to be purchased and then demolished. Work on the building started in late 1893 and it took 18 months to build the hospital. The size of the population would suggest 6 beds on the "Cranley Principle" but in fact there were 28. It was a state of the art building with buildings on three sides of a quadrangle, large male and female wards, an internal telephone system and an effective heating system.

The hospital was opened on Saturday 15th May 1895 with Lady Windsor and the Bishop of Coventry performing the opening ceremony. There followed a banquet at the public hall on Church Road with 160 guests, although William Smallwood was too ill to attend. Without the generosity of the Smallwood brothers, it could have been another 30 years before Redditch had its first hospital.



Smallwood Hospital as it is today

Graham Smith

Image courtesy of Tony Green

Church Green Memories.....

The Library & Scientific Institute



This photograph not only shows the Institute before it was extended toward Church Green but also the Public Hall, an entertainment building that predated the Gaumont Cinema.

Image: RL-BX-0118.jpg from The Redditch Library Photographic Collection

1910, the 'open access' system for the issue of library books. Films came to Redditch in 1913 and provided an alternative form of entertainment. The Institute's buildings and assets were passed over to the Redditch Urban District Council in 1929 for the purpose of a public library.

The library building was extended and modernised in 1956. One of the things that delayed completion was the realisation that the School of Art, which occupied the top floor, would require a fire escape. There was a dispute as to who should pay for it. Eventually it was decided that Redditch Council should pay for it, and the County Council and the School of Art should pay a rent equivalent to the debt charges on the loan that the Redditch Council took out. The newly formed County of Hereford and Worcester administered the Library from 1974, and the new Library was officially opened in Market Square in January 1976. From the early 1980s the Church Road building housed the Training Restaurant of Redditch College and from 1988, after the college merger, North East Worcestershire College. It is now occupied by offices of the Redditch Standard.

An Institute Trust Deed, however, safeguarded the position of the School of Art. It was laid down that the School of Art would retain all its privileges, even if the building was handed to the Public Library Authority. By 1961 the School of Art had become a department of Redditch College, but remained in the same premises, as the college already had insufficient rooms. In 1972 it moved to the building in Peakman Street vacated by St. Steven's first school.

Angela Webster

Church Green Memories.....

The Bartleet Fountain



An early photograph by A. H. Clarke of the Barleet Fountain with a rough stone pond.

Image: A. H. Clarke in *More Redditch Remembered* by Alan Foxall & Ray Saunders

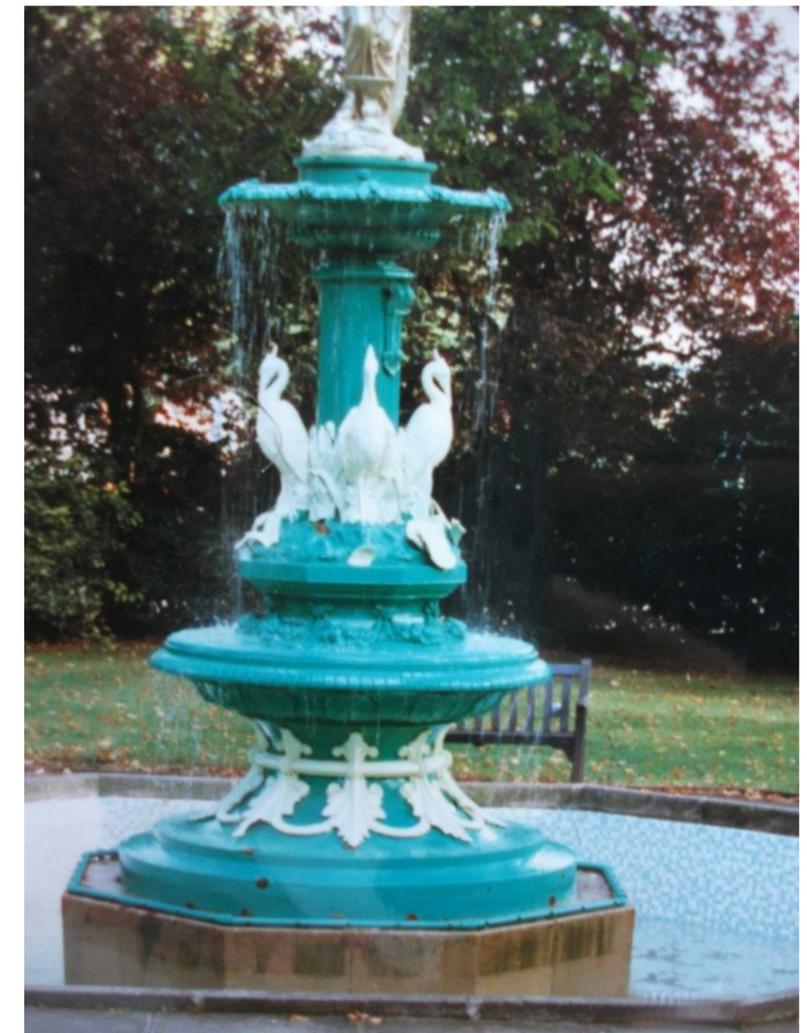
needle and fish hook manufacturer,

R.S.Bartleet. He had promised that he would donate the money for a fountain on Church Green once it was agreed to make the improvements to sewage and water. True to his word by 1883 the fountain was in place. Built of cast iron from the Coalbrookdale Company in Shropshire and costing £200 it took a design from an original sculpture by the Wills Brothers of London. William and Thomas Wills headed a firm of sculptors who were well known for their design of drinking fountains between 1857 and 1895. Mr. Bartleet himself chose the design and it fitted well with all the other changes taking place at that time on the Green with new gardens and footpaths being laid.

It was Mrs. Bartleet who unveiled the fountain on 15th May 1883 before a crowd of excited onlookers. Her speech included the remark that many donations had been made to the churches but this was the first to be gifted to the people of Redditch. The crowd cheered when it was suggested that Mr. Bartleet's example should be followed by others so Redditch could be one of the prettiest in the kingdom. I leave it to you to decide whether this has happened.

Throughout the nineteenth century Redditch suffered from a lack of a proper sewage system and a fresh water supply. The result was a high infant mortality rate and the general state of health of the populous was poor. In 1875 the Public Health Act forced Redditch to create a Board of Health and its first Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Herbert Page, set to work on his annual reports on the state of public health. His reports were blunt and to the point. The population was of "short stature, or seldom above average and countenance pallid." In spite of such reports there was a strong movement against making changes led by the newly formed Rate Payers' Association. Eventually common sense prevailed and a new sewage system for Redditch was begun in 1881. By 1882 a fresh water system was on the way.

One of the movers for fresh water was a prominent



The Barleet Fountain has been painted many colours in its history,

Image 2719.jpg from the RLHS Archives

Graham Smith

Church Green Memories.....

The Bandstand



Notice the Thatched Roof in this early picture of the Bandstand

Image: Courtesy of Redditch Library.

members of the local bands. With little in the way of home entertainment, people were much more prepared to get out to events in the town. There were church bands, regimental bands, temperance bands and, of course, there was the town band. One famous band was the Band of Hope, formed in Redditch in 1854 by Isaac Rollins. This was largely a Methodist Band and members were expected to 'sign the pledge' to forsake all alcohol. This movement in Redditch had become very popular by the 1920s. As well as performing in the bandstand the various bands would often parade on a Sunday around the Green.

By the 1940s and 1950s the local silver bands were performing regularly in the bandstand. One such band was the Alcester Silver Band which is still in existence and, in fact, performed recently as part of the programme of bandstand events held each summer. For the past five years the Borough Council has worked with local community groups (including our History Society) to organise monthly events at the bandstand. The aim has been to open up the northern part of the Green and to bring the bandstand back to life. This has largely been successful. With the support of Redditch people the bandstand as a venue for free entertainment can hopefully continue for another hundred years.

Together with the fountain, the bandstand on Church Green is often used as symbol of the history of the town. The bandstand was erected in 1898 and was the final stage of the improvements to the gardens on the Green that had started in the early 1880s. The bandstand we see today looks very different from the original one which had a thatched roof and wooden sides. The vertical supports are the main feature that remains the same.

This picture from the early 1900s shows the well developed gardens and the railings that surrounded St. Stephens Church and the gardens. The bandstand was to be the focal point of many events on the Green for well over a century.

During the early part of the twentieth century the bandstand was used as part of the celebrations for the kings' coronations. For example, a rare picture shows the bandstand decorated in union jacks for the coronation of George V in June 1911. Some reports suggest that Keir Hardy, founder of the Labour Party, spoke from the bandstand in about 1904 but I have never found proof of this (although we know he spoke elsewhere in the town).

The need for a bandstand on the Green became very apparent during the late nineteenth century. Many Redditch people played a musical instrument and were



The bandstand and fountain Ton Church Green today.

Graham Smith Image: Courtesy of Anthony Green

Church Green Memories.....

Beech House



Beech House today (2013)

Image: Graham Smith

James, and his sister, Sophronia who both lived next door at number 7 also worked at the factory. By 1871 the Warrins two sons were needle makers and the 1872 Post Office Directory shows the family business as Joseph Warrin and Son.

By 1888 the Eagle Works was still trading under the name of Joseph Warrin and Son though Joseph had died in 1879 and Eliza in 1886, and the sons, Edward and Joseph Junior, had married and moved away. It is not known what happened to the firm. The two daughters, Emily and Ellen, did not marry but remained living at Beech house for the rest of their lives. They lived a comfortable life with an income from property and they would have had servants. Emily died in 1925 and Ellen in 1931 at the age of 88, leaving over £22,000 in her will.

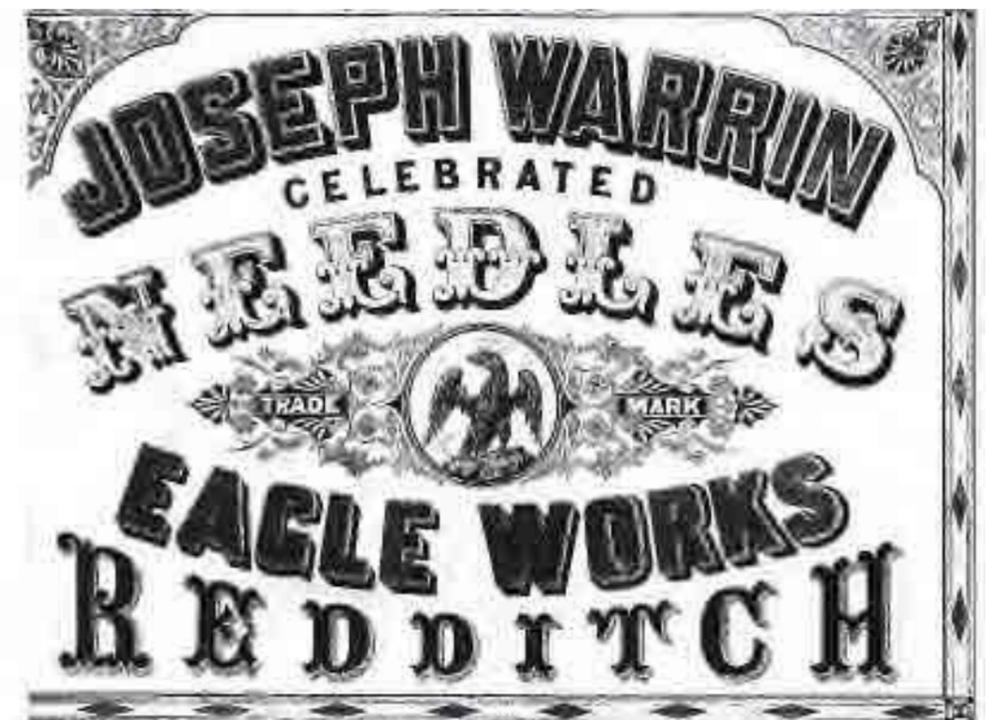
Today Beech House is the Black Tap brewery and pub. It is good to see the building being used although it has lost its grandeur. Next time you are in there spend a few moments imagining a happy Warrin family living there, perhaps enjoying a Dickensian Christmas with a roaring fire and tree looking out across the Green to the cottages beyond.

Graham Smith

Beech House is situated to the north-east end of Church Green and when it was built in the 1850s would have been the most imposing house on the Green. To its left were the townhouses built at the same time and across the Green were a row of cottages. (The Institute and hospital were several decades away). In between was the pound – a piece of wasteland used for grazing, boggy in winter and dusty in summer. There was no fountain or bandstand – nor any gardens or even roads; just some dirt tracks to traverse the Green. There was, however, a completely new St. Stephen's Church completed by 1851.

The first occupants of Number 6 Church Green East (number 7 today) were Joseph and Eliza Warrin. Joseph was born in Redditch and became a needle and fish hook manufacturer. The 1861 census shows Joseph, Eliza and their four children living at Beech House, having moved there from Fish Hill (now Prospect Hill). The Warrins were clearly a family of means as this would have been the most expensive property on the Green at this time. The family business, the Eagle Works, is thought to have been situated behind the house.

This truly was a family business for Joseph's brother,



Eagle Works was owned by the Warrins of Beech house. There are no old photographs of Beech House, Eagle Works or the Warrins that we know of.

Image: Graham Smith

Church Green Memories.....



This photograph not only Web House on the corner of Peakman Street with the iron railings that once enclosed Church Green.

Image: RLHS Archives

opportunity to another local businessman, William Webb. Webb at this time was running a successful bakers and confectioners at 33 Evesham Street. He and his wife, Sarah, saw this as an ideal opportunity to expand the business and have more space for an expanding family. (Prior to marrying William, Sarah had worked in the family drapery shop, Hollingtons, on Evesham Street).

Throughout May and June, William placed adverts in the Redditch Indicator to tell all of his plans to move to Church Green East. The date chosen for the move was Tuesday 21st June which just happened to be the day on which the whole country was celebrating Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. This must have been an exciting day for the Webb family. The excitement was tempered, however, by the sad loss of their two year old daughter just a few weeks earlier. The Webbs needed the space as they still had three children and one on the way.

They quickly set to work on setting up their new premises. But tragedy was to strike again. Barely two weeks later, William Webb committed suicide. On Friday 2nd July the maid found William's body on the floor in the bedroom with a bullet wound to the head. The details are too gory to describe here but you can find them elsewhere*. It seems William suffered from neuralgia and had been complaining of severe headache. This changed everything. Sarah and the children moved out to a house in Mount Pleasant and eventually moved to live in Surrey. William's elder brother, Thomas, had recently set up in business in Aldershot but decided to return to Redditch. Thomas had been a salesman for Abel Morrall, the needle makers, and had no experience of running a bakery business. However, he and his wife, Catherine, lived at number 20 Church Green East for the rest of their lives and did much to expand the business.

I remember Webbs in the 1980's as an old fashioned shop, long and narrow, which sold all manner of gardening equipment and seeds. Today the building stands proud as the best example of Georgian architecture in the town.

Graham Smith



Webb House

If we are to believe the date above the door, Webb House was built in 1774 although the architectural historian, Pevsner, puts the date much later. There is no doubt that there was a building here in 1774 as Norman Neasom's drawing of Church Green, based on Joseph Monk's 1776 description, shows that Mr Peakman's wire drawing mill was based here. If 1774 is correct this would make it the oldest building on the Green. At that time it was number 17 but today it is number 20 Church Green East and the offices of the Redditch Standard. It is a fine building with three storeys and a basement. The name Webb House only came into existence in the late 1980's towards the end of the family business that had been based here for 100 years.

In the 1870's the building was occupied by Benjamin Sarsons who was a maltster and corn merchant. After Sarsons' retirement in 1881, William Palmer ran the business and lived here although the property remained in the hands of Sarsons. 1887 was a critical year in the history of the building. In April Sarson's died and, in June, Palmer committed suicide at the asylum in Rubery. The beneficiary of Sarsons' will lived in Rochdale and had no interest in moving into the building so it was put up for rent. This provided an



Church Green Memories.....

The Changing Face of Redditch Market Place - 2



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South West of Market Place. The building in the centre was demolished to make way for the new Library

Image: The Vince Green Collection.

around the country so Clarke's Yard became its permanent home. The fair would operate every Friday and Saturday night under great sheets of canvas to stop any light showing. This was a popular place to meet for the young people of the town and provided some excitement at a time of deprivation and tedium.

By the 1930s there were new shops on Market Place: Woolworths, Freeman, Hardy and Willis, Currys, Boots and, on the corner with Evesham Street, James Huins, the Boot Metropole. Some of these shops have survived elsewhere while others have disappeared. Today, a new generation of shops reflects the age: a betting shop, charity shops, a Turkish restaurant and a bakery cafe. I wonder which age you would prefer?

By this time Market Place was already a busy shopping place with a dressmakers, grocers, confectioners, drapers and at number one there was an inn (today it is the Three Cooks).

Behind the Royal Hotel was Clarke's Yard, roughly where Debenhams is today. Tom Clarke bought the land in 1910 and it was used to house the community of fun fair families and all their equipment between October and April. Many of the caravans and rides were large and it was quite a sight to see the vehicles

negotiate the route down Peakman Street, across Market Place and into the narrow entrance next to the Royal and on into the site. During the Second World War there was a need for air raid shelters and the nearest to the Green was the one in Clarke's Yard. The showmen dug a deep trench, covered it with metal sheets from the dodgems and put long benches either side of the shelter. During the war the fun fair was not able to move



Graham Smith

Market Place in 2013

Image: Derek Coombes

Church Green Memories.....

St. Stephen's Church



The Chapel on the Green viewed from Fish Hill

Image: RLHS Archives

of Redditch (are) a God-fearing people. On the day of my visit the spacious chapel was filled with one of the most respectful, decently behaved congregations I have ever seen.... With scarcely an exception none of them slept during the sermon.” He was less impressed with the building calling it an “architectural abortion”. He likened the roof with its “gaudy globe” to that of a steam engine and the name stuck – it became known by some as the “engine shed”.*

In 1841 the Reverend George Fessey became the new curate and immediately saw the need to build a new, bigger church that would seat about 1600. The chapel was demolished in 1853 and work quickly began on a new church for the Green. The budget of £6,000 (£2,200 provided by the Earl of Plymouth) was just sufficient to build the structure with local stone of poor quality coming from Tardebigge. The emphasis was on size rather than quality and this was evident to all once the church was completed. The roof was poorly constructed and the spire was incomplete. It was another two years before the completed tower could be furnished with bells at a cost of £600. The old organ from the chapel was returned from St. Stephen's School where it had been stored but this was replaced by a better one in 1868. The church, however, was ready for services by July 1855 and in the same year Redditch became a separate Ecclesiastical Parish so that Reverend Fessey became the first vicar of Redditch. St Stephen's could also now be a church rather than a chapel as Redditch was now entitled to parochial status.

From then on the centre of Redditch became known as Church Green.

*John Noake's observations were published in The Rambler in 1851

There was no church on the Green until about 1806. Before this the people of Redditch worshipped at Bordesley Chapel which had been the Gatehouse Chapel to the monastery. It was built in the early thirteenth century for travellers and visitors and then rebuilt in the late 1200s. After the dissolution of the monasteries it became the parish church for Redditch, and people would have to walk down Fish Hill (now Prospect Hill) each Sunday to attend services. The church stood for over 500 years before it became so dilapidated it was judged unsafe to use for services.

A new Chapel on the Green was planned and it was to be in its own parish. An Act of Parliament was necessary to grant permission for the new chapel and this was passed in June 1805. The trustees, who included the Earl of Plymouth and the Bishop of Worcester, were charged with raising £3,000 which was done by selling pews in the chapel, although the chapel remained in debt for most of its existence. The first service was held on 5th April 1807 and the chapel was consecrated by the Bishop of Chester on 21st April 1808. It soon became clear that the building was not big enough to accommodate the hundreds of people who wished to attend Sunday morning services. The chapel was extended three times (in 1816, 1827 and 1835) but was in such debt by 1837 that it had to be rescued by seven dignitaries who each donated sums of money totalling £1,200.

In 1850, the Worcestershire writer, John Noake *, visited a Sunday service and later wrote: “*The inhabitants*



Stephen's Church South door viewed from Market Place.

Graham Smith Image: From the RLHS Archives