

CHARITY, LOW-COST AND SOCIAL HOUSING IN MALPAS c.1600 TO THE PRESENT

Summary of presentation at Cheshire History Day; 29th October 2011

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The town of Malpas was at the centre of the medieval Barony of Malpas, created soon after the Norman Conquest, by the first Earl of Chester. By the 16th century the major part of the Barony was divided between the Cholmondeley and Brereton families, with the Brereton share being sold to the Drake family in the late 17th century. Both families held manorial courts but by the early 19th century the administration of the town, both ecclesiastical and civil, was the responsibility of the Vestry Meeting (also known as the 'Town Meeting'), which had oversight for the work of such officials as the Overseers of the Poor and the Surveyors of the Highways. Following the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, Malpas was incorporated eventually into the Whitchurch Poor Law Union, until the demise of the Unions in 1929. Malpas Parish Council and Malpas Rural District Council were both formed following the 1894 Local Government Act. Several local government reorganisations later, Malpas is now under the administration of Cheshire West & Chester Council.

The first charitable housing recorded was a 'bedehouse' (i.e. almshouse) provided by Sir Randle Brereton, who died in 1530. In return for their accommodation the five male residents were to say daily prayers for the souls of Sir Randle and Lady Brereton. That almshouse was probably the predecessor of six almshouses endowed in 1636 by Sir Thomas Brereton, a descendant of Sir Randle. In 1721 Lord Cholmondeley had these almshouses rebuilt, as accommodation for six poor women, although later they also housed whole pauper families. The dwellings were renovated in 1955. In 2001 they underwent further alterations and were incorporated with the Wigfield Almshouses (built in 1854) to form the Malpas Almshouses Trust.

In 1884 a local clockmaker built three houses next to his shop, specifically as accommodation for lower-income working families. A report in the *Chester Chronicle* in August 1884 spoke of '*a long-felt want being met by the erection of several new cottages in the town and neighbourhood Of late years it has been the order to pull down and destroy the cottages but we are now glad to notice the reverse of the order, and new and better houses for the labouring classes erected, so that each week end the migration to other parts of those who toil in the neighbourhood will be reduced, and the facilities be greater for comfortable housing of those who come to work here.*' Also in 1884 Joseph Lewis, a prosperous manufacturer in London, who was born in Ellesmere and retired to Malpas, built the twelve Oathills Cottages. The architecture of these cottages is unusual for this part of Cheshire and has a distinctly 'Arts & Crafts' feel about it. After Joseph Lewis died in 1895, six of the Oathills Cottages were purchased by the Loyal Clutton Lodge of Oddfellows, one of the four Malpas Friendly Societies. Thereafter they became known as the 'Oddfellows Cottages'.

Both the estates and private owners provided cottage type property to rent and, possibly from as early as the seventeenth century, the Vestry Meeting also provided parish housing. Some of these parish cottages must have been sub-divided, since the 1851 Census shows that there were fourteen separate households of one to eight persons, crammed into ten or eleven such dwellings. Some of the cottages were demolished

between 1869 and 1874 but other parish cottages survived and were taken over by Malpas Parish Council in 1894. The last two remaining under Parish Council administration were finally sold to Tarvin Rural District Council in 1950.

The passing of the 1900 Housing of the Working Classes Act made it possible for a Rural District Council to take out a loan towards the cost of housing. As a result, Malpas Rural District Council built twelve 'cottages' at Sunnyside in 1906, and these are still in use. The Rural District Council had been very far-sighted in erecting such an early set of local authority or 'council' houses. Before the first World War, council house building in rural areas was very limited. Only 470 rural houses were built across the whole country which means that the twelve built at Sunnyside in 1906 represent about 1 in 40 of the national total, prior to 1914.

Until the early 1920s the two major local landowners, the Drake and Cholmondeley Estates, had been important providers of rented housing in the town. However, in common with landowners across the country, the Drakes in 1921 and the Cholmondeleys in 1924 were obliged to sell off many of their properties. This resulted in a number of smaller rented properties being taken out of the ownership of two reasonably benevolent landowners, substantially reducing the security and availability of 'cottage style' housing in Malpas.

More than thirty houses to rent were built by Malpas Rural District Council between the two world wars. In 1936 Malpas RDC was absorbed into the larger Tarvin RDC. Within five years of the end of the second world war Tarvin RDC had built thirty eight new houses, to be followed by several bungalows for elderly persons and the sheltered housing complex known as Craddock Court.

There continues to be a demand for low-cost housing in Malpas today, as in many other rural communities. This is being provided to some extent by planning requirements for a certain proportion of 'affordable' housing in any new development. It is only by ensuring a balance of affordable and more up-market housing that a balanced and vibrant community, such as Malpas, can continue to thrive.