Father Hudson’s Complex
Coleshill
Warwickshire

August 2012
Mercian Heritage Series No.595
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An Outline Heritage Statement
Father Hudson’s Complex
Coventry Road
Coleshill
Warwickshire
NGR: Centred on SP 202 884

An Outline Heritage Statement

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Fig.1: Location of the Father Hudson’s Complex
Father Hudson’s Complex
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Summary

Development of the Father Hudson’s Society Complex to the south of the centre of Coleshill began in 1905 when work began on St. Edward’s, a large boy’s home for Catholic children. The site expanded and developed until the 1940’s and eventually included its own hospital, nurses’ home, cottage homes, offices, a church and several chapels and three convents for the nuns who worked on the site. Changes in patterns of social care meant that most of the residential buildings had become redundant by the 1980’s and the hospital and school closed at the end of the 20th century. Many buildings are now empty and there are proposals to redevelop part of the site, which is in a Conservation Area. Apart from the Grade II listed church to the south and the former offices to the north, none of the buildings are considered to be of architectural significance. The present proposals include more demolition than a Development Brief adopted by the local authority in 2005 but the basic principles remain. For a variety of reasons it is not felt that the proposals will have a detrimental impact on the character of this slightly unusual Conservation Area.

1. Introduction

Father Hudson was a Catholic priest dedicated to the care of the physical, moral and religious welfare of poor, abandoned or orphaned Catholic children and went to Coleshill as its parish priest at the end of the 19th century.

Early in the 20th century he raised funds to build a new residential home for boys on the edge of the town, which eventually became the focus of a large complex which included a hospital, smaller children’s homes, a nurses home and several convents for the resident nuns.

Already old fashioned when it was established, compared to the smaller ‘cottage homes’ developed by the Dr Barnado’s Society and local workhouses, it was becoming obsolete by the 1960’s and finally residential care ceased altogether in the mid-1980’s. Subsequently, both the hospital and the primary school closed. As a result a large number of sizeable institutional buildings became effectively redundant.

New uses were found for some, both others proved more difficult to adapt and have remained empty. These are now slowly decaying. When the Coleshill (Coventry Road) Conservation Area was adapted in 1995, the specific problems facing the site were recognised and a separate Development Brief was adopted by the local authority in 1997 and subsequently revised in 2005.

This suggested redeveloping a large area of the complex by demolishing several buildings and creating a mixed residential and office development. This would free up assets for the Society to fund its new and expanding role of care in the community and for new purpose-built facilities on the complex for the elderly and young adults with disabilities.
Despite several schemes being put forward to achieve this, the difficulty in adapting some of the buildings due to be retained – particularly St. Edward’s Boys’ Home – has proven to be a major obstacle and the site remains largely empty and prey to trespassers and casual vandalism.

There are now proposals to develop the site and to demolish St. Edwards, as well as St. Gerard’s Hospital – the conversion of which into offices at the end of the 20th century has proven to be less than perfect.

Clearly the additional scale of demolition since the agreed 2005 framework will have an additional impact on the character of the Conservation Area. In 2010 the then government replaced the existing Planning Policy Guidance Nos. 15 and 16 (PPG15 and PPG16) with a combined Planning Policy Statement No. 5 (PPS5).

This reiterated the fact that it is the responsibility of owners to understand the value of each ‘heritage asset’ and to produce sufficient relevant information to inform the planning making process. Two years later, PPS5 was in turn replaced by a few paragraphs in the government’s National Planning Policy Framework.

This Consultancy was commissioned by the owners of the property to undertake a heritage statement of the development area under the relevant Guidance of the NPPF. The general level of the analysis of the buildings is that of Level 2 of the English Heritage Guidance. A Level 2 survey is a ‘descriptive record...Both the exterior and interior will be viewed, described and photographed. The record will present conclusions regarding the building’s development and use but will not discuss in detail the evidence on which these conclusion are based...’.

1.1 Report Format

The report format is quite simple. After this brief introduction there is a short section of the requirements of NPPF and local guidance related to the site. That is followed by an outline history of the site (Section 3). Each of the building elements is then identified and then described and discussed in turn (Sections 4 & 5). Buildings in the complex but outside the development area are dealt with in Section 6 and the landscape setting is considered in Section 7.

Section 8 is an assessment of the heritage impact and discusses the proposals in light of the assessment of the buildings and how the proposed development relates to the guidance set out in the NPPF, the existing Conservation Area Appraisal, and the 2005 Development Brief. Section 9 is a short conclusion and Section 10 a list of the references used for this report.

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2. Planning Guidance

Redevelopment proposals, particular within Conservation Areas, have to be assessed on many different criteria, including both national and local guidance. The relevant guidance for this site will be discussed in greater detail in Section 8.

2.1 National Guidance

Government Guidance regarding listed buildings and conservation areas have changed twice in two years. In March 2010 the long-lasting Planning Policy Guidance Nos.15 and 16 (PPG15 and PPG16) – relating respectively to archaeology and buildings – were amalgamated into a new set of Guidance - Planning Policy Statement No.5 (PPS5). This introduced a new term in planning legislation – the ‘heritage asset’. This was identified in the guidance as:

‘A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape positively identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions. Heritage assets are the valued components of the historic environment’.

Parts of PPS5, much condensed, were incorporated and regurgitated into a new précis of planning guidance published in March 2012 – the National Planning Policy Framework – which replaced all other separate Planning Policy Guidance and Planning Policy Statements.

Because of the condensed and generalised nature of the new document there has been considerable confusion as to the guidance within it, but in essence, excepting the overarching concept of presumption in favour of ‘sustainable development’, the heritage aspects have changed little.

Much of the existing advice outlined in the earlier Guidance is still deemed to be of relevance and this is summarised best in a guidance note to planning inspectors issued by the Planning Inspectorate, which states that ‘The Framework largely carries forward existing planning policies and protections in a significantly more streamlined and accessible form’. The main relevant paragraph in the NPPF (largely based on policies HE6-HE8 of PPS5) states that local planning authorities should require applicants:

‘...to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposals on their significance. As a minimum the relevant historic environment record should have been consulted and the heritage assets assessed using appropriate expertise where necessary’.

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2 Department for Communities & Local Government, 2010, Planning Policy Statement No.5: Planning for the Historic Environment

3 op. cit., 13, Annex 2


5 The Planning Inspectorate, 2012, Advice Produced by the Planning Inspectorate for use by Inspectors

6 Ibid.
2.2 Local Guidance

2.2.1 The Coleshill (Coventry Road) Conservation Area

The local authority’s own Guidance for conservation area’s in general and the Coventry Road Conservation Area in particular broadly follow national Guidance, but in this case also include reference to the site’s 2005 Development Brief. The Coleshill (Coventry Road) Conservation Area was established in 1995 to protect the southern approaches to the town from unsympathetic development. It is a linear area along the road, but it obviously included the Father Hudson’s Society complex on the east side of it – and, indeed, in terms of area, the complex forms more than half of the designated area.

The latest national guidance regarding Conservation Area’s states that ‘An appraisal of an area undertaken prior to designation will lead to an understanding and articulation of its character which can be used to develop a robust policy framework for planning decisions’.7 Fortunately, such an appraisal was undertaken before the designation of the Coleshill (Coventry Road) Conservation Area and forms a useful planning tool.

The Appraisal correctly states in its first paragraph that ‘it is...the character of an area rather than individual buildings which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. That character is derived from a range of interrelated factors in particular the geography, history and townscape character of the particular place’.

The Appraisal recognised the unique nature of the Father Hudson’s complex and the potential planning difficulties it represented, but did not have the advantage of a detailed analysis of its history, buildings or development. As a result there are some anomalies and contradictions in the Appraisal and some assessments that need to be challenged; these are dealt with in Section 8 of this report.

2.2.2 The Father Hudson’s Development Brief

When the conservation area was created, the local authority acknowledged the exceptional position of the Father Hudson’s Homes in the recent history and built heritage of this part of Coleshill and that the difficulties and opportunities that the changing role of the Society would impact on the site. The Area Appraisal states that the designation of the Conservation Area ‘is not intended to frustrate the wishes or obligations of the Father Hudson’s Society. The Borough Council recognises that the way the site of the Father Hudson’s Homes complex is used must change’ 8

The Council recommended a specific Development Brief for the site be produced and this was undertaken in conjunction with the Father Hudson Society in 1997. Further changes to the site – including the closure of St. Gerard’s Hospital and the primary school – led to the need for an updated version of a Development Brief; this was produced by the Society in cooperation with the Borough Council and was ratified in 2005. The Brief acknowledges that the site has been identified by the council as a key development area for new housing.

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7 English Heritage, 2011, *Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management*, Para. 1.6
8 Para 51
3. Outline History

3.1 Coleshill

The small town of Coleshill is about 18 miles to the north-west of Warwick, 12 miles to the east of Birmingham, and just over 100 miles north-west of London. It is a linear settlement on an area of highland between the confluence of the small rivers Cole and Blythe; shortly downstream the enlarged Cole, in turn, joins the River Tame, which flows northwards through Tamworth to join the River Trent near Alrewas.

The River Cole rises in the hills around Portway and flows north and then north-eastwards. Around Stechford the maturing river turns abruptly the east and meanders towards Coleshill. Its name is thought to be pre-Saxon, possibly Welsh and meaning ‘hazel’; it is mentioned as ‘Colle’ in the Yardley charter of AD972.  

The derivation of the name of the village is straightforward – a hill by the River Cole. In the later-Saxon period, Coleshill was held by the Crown and after the Norman Conquest it was held by William I; by 1086 Coleshelle was a fairly sizeable village of 3 hides, with 30 villans, 13 bordars, 16 ploughs, a large area of woodland, a mill and a priest – the latter suggesting that there was a church.

The township was originally the centre of the Hundred of Coleshill, but this was later renamed the Hundred of Hemlingford – taking its name from a ford across the Tame to the south of the parish church of Kingsbury. Nevertheless the court of the Hundred is known to have continued to meet at Coleshill in the medieval period and still did so in the mid-17th century.

The medieval town was granted both a market and a fair by King John in 1207, at which time the lord of the manor was Osbert de Clinton. Coleshill sent representatives to a parliament of 1275 and before 1290 it had obtained borough status and seems to have been a reasonably important market town for this part of the county.

In his unfinished and rather eccentric Itinerary, written in the 1530’s and 40’s, John Leland mentions ‘Colleshull towne a praty thrwgh-faire in Werwikeshire, lyeinge by norther and southe up[on] an hill, hathe but one longe strete, and a paroche churche, at the southe end of it’.

Coleshill is shown as a fairly large road-side settlement spread out along the important London to Lichfield route on John Ogilby’s ground-breaking road atlas of 1675 – the Britannia.

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10 Williams, A, & Martin, G H, 2002, Domesday Book: A Complete Translation. 655
11 VCH, 1947, Victoria County History of Warwickshire Vol. IV, 103, 1
12 Toulmin Smith, L, 1964, The Itinerary of John Leland, II, 106
13 Ogilby, J, 1675, Britannia, I, pl.22
By the early-19th century Coleshill was still a small market town, with a population of just under 2,000 people within the parish; as well as a weekly market, it had four annual fairs, the largest of which was the horse fair held on Shrove Monday. In 1835 it was said that ‘The houses are in general well built, and several of them are handsome and of modern date’; the patron of the vicarage was Lord Digby. By 1881 the town’s population was 2,356 rising, by the early-20th century, to just under 3,000.

By the mid-20th century the population was expanding and there were over 6,000 people in the Coleshill district by the start of the 1960’s. Despite this population expansion, and the rapid growth and spread of the conurbation of Birmingham to the west - and especially the development of the nearby Castle Vale area in the late-1960’s and early-1970’s - the town has managed to retain much of the character of a small road-side market town and a good many of its historic 17th and especially 18th century buildings. The town is still separated from the urban sprawl by the meadows along the valley of the Cole which also, unfortunately, provided a good route for parts of both the M6 and M42 motorways.

Fig.3: The southern part of Coleshill on the 1833 Ordnance Survey map.

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15 *ibid.*
3.2 The Father Hudson’s Complex

For several centuries after Henry VIII severed England’s link with the Church of Rome in the early-16th century, Roman Catholics were both feared and discriminated against through several draconian laws. It was only by an Act of 1829 that the Corporation Act of 1661 and the Test Act of 1673 were finally repealed and most of the legal discrimination was removed – though unofficial discrimination continued for many decades. As the author of a history of the Father Hudson Society has claimed, the direct result of such discrimination was a somewhat defensive stance and a denominational approach to most forms of education and welfare – especially when dealing with children.

A Catholic mission had been set up in Coleshill in 1850 but it only in the 1880’s was a church was built on land to the west of the Coventry Road to the south of the main part of the town. In 1884 a boy’s home was established in a former tannery in the town, called St. Paul’s; it took Roman Catholic boys from workhouse schools in and around Birmingham who were looked after by nuns of the Order of the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul the Apostle.

George Vincent Hudson (1873-1936) was born in Worcestershire and studied for the priesthood at Oscott; he was ordained on the 1st November 1898 and a week later was sent to Coleshill to be its Roman Catholic parish priest. He was deeply involved in the welfare of poor Catholic children, being concerned for their health and, perhaps as importantly, their faith. Often, in the Poor Law workhouses where such paupers often ended up, they would be raised as Protestants; in the 1860’s there was a campaign on behalf of Catholics in workhouses, one result of which was for the right of Catholic children to be sent to, and funded in, Catholic boarding-schools and orphanages certified by the Poor Law Board.

As a result, he was instrumental in establishing a much larger boy’s home on a new site in Coleshill, opposite the Catholic church, as well as being heavily involved in the Diocesan Rescue Society. The new Home was opened on the 6th November 1906 and cost £8,665; the architect was Henry Sandy from Stafford, who designed several Roman Catholic churches and other buildings, and the complex housed up to 120 boys. Large and austere, with its huge dormitories it was already old-fashioned when it was built, despite being described over 30 years later in the Catholic Herald as ‘a magnificent new Home for boys’.

 Shortly afterwards, with many of the boys suffering from diseases – often spread unnecessarily because of the design of the Home – it was decided to build a hospital on the site to serve not only those boys but all poor Catholic children in the Birmingham Diocese; St. Gerard’s Hospital, also designed by Sandy, opened in 1913. After the First World War, when it was used as a VAD hospital, a new operating theatre and a chapel were added and it became a TB and orthopaedic hospital. A nurses home was built along the side of the Coventry Road, named St. Mary’s.

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16 10 Geo. IV c.7, An Act for the Relief of His Majesty’s Roman Catholic Subjects
17 Pinches, S M, 1998, Father Hudson and His Society: A History 1898-1998, 7; much of the historical detail in this report is derived from this very useful account.
18 op. cit., 10-11
19 op. cit., 5
21 ibid.
22 Catholic Herald, June 1939
23 Pinches, op. cit., 15
Fig.4: A picture map, dated November 1926, showing the aspirations for the site.

Fig.5: A letterhead of 1927.

Fig.6: A view of St. Gerard’s Hospital, taken from a 1938 souvenir programme.

(All these illustrations are taken from Pinches, *op. cit.*).
In October 1914 an elementary school was built to the south of the St. Edward’s Boys Home as the complex extended. An extension to the Home had been built in 1910 as Our Lady’s Home for Babes, for three to five year olds. Somewhat belatedly, in the early-1920’s, the Society established two Cottage Homes (St. George and St. James) for 100 younger children - built on a slightly more human scale than the main Home but still large and austere.

Other buildings of the 1920’s included a new office complex at the north-western corner of the site, open air wards on the east side, and a range of sports facilities – most of which have long gone. There were even greater ambitions for the development of the site, shown on a proposed ‘picture map’ drawn up by the architect George B Cox of Birmingham in 1926. By this time the site was known simply as the Father Hudson’s Homes.

There was to be a second pair of cottage homes to the south of and opposite the existing ones – for babies – and these would have been on opposite side of a large formal garden area with the Coventry Road at one end and a convent at the other. South of that would be a nurses’ hostel. To the north of the Boys’ Home it was planned to build a senior school with a large central block and two low but long rear wings. There was also to be a second open air ward near the main hospital. On the opposite side of Coventry Road, near to the parish church, there was a doctor’s house and a farm.

The scheme never happened. However, the St. Joan’s Cottage Homes, on the south-western edge of the site, were built at the start of the 1930’s with houses built on a smaller scale for girls and a training facility – the St. Philomena School of Social, Domestic and Commercial Science, was also built for training the girls in care.24

After Father Hudson’s death in 1936 a large chapel was built in his memory towards the southern end of the site, between the boys and girls cottage homes. Although intended as a memorial church it effectively replaced the old parish church on the opposite side of the Coventry Road; that was finally demolished as recently as 1987.

Another chapel was attached to St. Edward’s Boys Home and further buildings were added after the Second World War, including three small but separate convents for the nuns serving in the homes or the hospital. However, whilst the site had became a very large Catholic complex, its main raison d’être – the residential care of poor Catholic children and orphans – was already becoming diluted by more liberal attitudes in society and in child care and a more understanding ecumenicalism.

Fostering became more common and the number of children nationally in care dropped dramatically, so much so that the Cottage Homes closed in 1980 and St. Edward’s in the following year. After a major review, the Birmingham Diocesan Rescue Society became a limited company and changed its name to the Father Hudson’s Society. As a sign of these changes, in 1984 the Society appointed its first Director who was not in the priesthood.

The Society’s aims changed to include the care of children and their mothers but also of families in need, the elderly, the disabled and others in need – such as addicts and the homeless. Within the complex itself, several of the larger buildings had become redundant. The convents were no longer needed as there were less and less nuns on site – the last leaving

24 Pinches, op. cit., 18
in 2002. St. Edward’s and the Cottage Homes were no longer needed either; the former became disused and the latter adapted to new uses. Despite its reputation and the fact it had been open to all for a considerably length of time, St. Gerard’s Hospital was finally closed in 1998.

However, the old primary school, closed in 1997, was converted into a Day Centre for young adults with disabilities and St. Gerard’s into offices for the Society. Other buildings were leased by other associated organisations. Two significant new facilities were added to the campus – the St. Joseph’s Care Home, replacing an older unit on the site, purpose-built units for the elderly and opened in 2002, and the St. Catherine’s bungalows, homes for young adults with disabilities.

Evidently the Society at the start of the 21st century is a very different one that had existed at the start of the 20th, though many of the underlying charitable aims remain the same. However, it is no longer associated with residential care of children and not strictly devoted to those of the Roman Catholic faith – indeed, one of its value statements is that it ‘should offer a high quality of service to people, regardless of race, colour, religion, language, culture, social conditions, disability, gender or age’.25

Unfortunately, whilst the Society attempts to expand its important charitable works in a new era of co-operation and hope, less savoury aspects of the past have emerged to tarnish its reputation. In many institutions – especially virtually closed residential ones - there will be individuals who do not adhere to the ideals of the institution or even to the law of the land.

By their very nature, childrens’ homes and orphanages are often not very happy places for many of those living in them, for all sorts of reasons, and many such institutions have had a poor reputation – whether or not it was deserved. The austere architecture and sheer size of the larger Victorian homes tends to reinforce these feelings.

At the end of the 20th century a former Assistant Administrator of the Society, in post in the 1950’s and 60’s, was found guilty of several counts of sexual abuse with children in St. Edward’s; he died in prison and was denounced by the papal authorities who removed him from the priesthood. Subsequently, more revelations of mistreatment within St. Edwards and in other parts of the complex have emerged and more allegations made, particularly in internet forums; another former priest associated with the home has recently been jailed, though no one else has yet been prosecuted. Nevertheless, this has clearly affected the general public’s perception of the Society – even though it is now far removed from that era in terms of its role, its organisation, and its personnel.

For many people, the disused and decaying residential buildings on the site, and in particular St. Edward’s itself, have become an unwanted symbol of an unfortunate past. They are now within a Conservation Area, though when this was created the changing nature of the Father Hudson Society complex was recognised and a Development Brief was drawn up between the Society and North Warwickshire Council in 1997 and revised in 2005 which allowed for a degree of redevelopment of the site. Since then, several development proposals have been considered which would have retained several of the key buildings on the site, including St. Edward’s, but up until the present time no viable scheme has been put forward.

25 Quoted in Pinches, op. cit., 2
4. The Building Identification

The complex increased significantly in area since the beginning of the 20th century, eventually being over 22 acres in extent. With various closures of facilities in the late-20th century, parts of the site have been sold off, mainly to the diocese and other organisations known to, and in keeping with the basic tenets of, the Father Hudson Society.

The area directly or indirectly associated with Father Hudson’s main Coleshill complex is thus larger than the specific boundaries of the study area, and includes several buildings that are key elements in its historical and architectural development.

Although outside the boundaries of the study area, they are of such significance to it that they cannot be excluded from the report and are, therefore, included – albeit in less detail – in their own section.

Most of the buildings or groups of buildings within the complex have their own individual names, usually that of a saint. For convenience, these names are retained in the report but the buildings within the boundaries of the development area are also prefixed alphabetically in a system that is hopefully logical.

As it was the earliest building on the site, the sequence begins at St. Edward’s Boys Home (Building A), and is then continued in a broad northern sweep zig-zagging around the site. For convenience, the Coventry Road is deemed to run due north-south and all other cardinal points are based on that assumption. Thus the main elevations of St. Edwards (Building A) and St. Mary’s (Building C) are deemed to face west, towards the road.

![Fig.7: Plan showing the buildings within the proposed development area.](image-url)
5. The Buildings

5.1 Building A: St. Edward’s Home for Boys

The St. Edward’s Home for Boys, designed by Henry Sandy of Stafford, was the first building on the site and took a little over a year to build, opening in November 1906. The dedication of the Home is presumably to St. Edward the Confessor, King of England until 1066 and a man with a reputation for religious devotion and, in particular, for his generosity to the poor and the sick.

The complex is large and has been extended on several occasions. It can be broken down into several component parts which will be described in turn.
5.1.1 Description

5.1.1.1 Building A1: The Original Building of 1906

St. Edward’s is a large mainly two-storey building with several slightly later additions to the rear. The original portion was a large symmetrical ‘H-shaped’ plan formed by a central range flanked by cross-wings north and south.

To the rear, or east, end of the northern wing there seem to have been some attached service buildings and a small chapel, later much altered when the facilities were upgraded and extended.

5.1.1.1.01 The Exterior

The Entrance, or West, Front

The principal elevation faces west, towards the road, from which it is shielded by mature tree growth on the street frontage, a lawned embankment, and further, self-seeded, trees closer to the façade itself. This elevation contains the main entrance into the building.

The attenuated façade is symmetrical and consists of the main central range recessed behind the projecting western ends of the cross-wings. It is faced in a ‘heritage’ type of brick with both stone and cast concrete detailing and has a low plinth.

Most of the window openings have flat-arched heads of rubbed bricks, those on the ground floor having, in addition, attenuated keystones. The windows are mostly sashes, with plate-glass lower sections and 2x2 upper sashes.

The entrance is contained within a two-bay section that projects slightly forward from the rest of the central section, with rusticated common brick quoins. The entrance is of tripartite form with a central doorway under a semi-circular head flanked by windows; it is protected by a bold canopy following the profile of the three openings.

Beneath each of the windows is a recessed stone apron, the left-hand one containing the foundation stone, laid on October 17th 1905 by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Birmingham, the Right Rev. Edward Ilsley.

At first-floor level above the doorway there are two windows; this section is topped by a semi-circular pediment enriched with cast concrete or terracotta decoration with the diocesan coat of arms above the sans serif lettering indicating that this is the ‘St. Edwards Home for Boys’.
Pl.1: St. Edward’s Boys’ Home from the south-west.

Pl.2: The south wing of St. Edward’s.
The sections between the entrance and the flanking wings are mirror images of each other. Each consists of three pairs of bay with paired windows on each level – apart from on the ground floor where the central windows are set in canted bays – flat roofed with parapets, and key stones only in the main front windows.

In the angles between the central sections and the projecting wings are slightly projecting sections with canted corners associated with the stair halls within. These have paired windows on the ground floor and a larger one, beneath a segmental brick head with triple keystone and matching parapet, lighting the stair landings.

The gable ends of the wings are of identical design. They have rusticated brick quoins topped by a thin capitals with egg-and-dart decoration; they are topped by bold triangular pediments.

There are four windows on the ground floor and a tripartite arrangement above, with a tall central window with semicircular arched head flanked by narrower ones with flat-arched heads.

The lintels of these windows are combined to form a thin band course and the lintels of the windows are also extended to either side, ‘supported’ on the outwards ends by the capitals of the quoins and, on their inward ends, forming the springing of the head of the central window – which has a head of alternating brick and masonry. All of these upper windows have triple keystones.

The return elevations of the projecting wings facing the lawned court in front of the entrance are also mirror images. Each has the canted section of the stair extensions in the re-entrant angles next to the central section.

The rest of the elevation has two pairs of windows at both ground and first-floor level; the pair nearest to the central section have taller first-floor windows and the brickwork is carried up slightly above the eaves and topped by a semi-circular pediment.

The Side Elevations

The original side elevation are those of the cross-wings and these were original virtually identical. Each was almost symmetrical with a pattern articulated by a series of three semicircular pediments above paired bays raised slightly above the eaves line and flanked by plain brick pilasters.

There are six pairs of bays in all, but the place of what could have been an easternmost pair of bays to complete a fully symmetrical elevation was, on both wings, taken up instead by a slight projections associated with stairs within.

On the north side the projection is two bays wide with a small ground-floor window on the west return; beneath ground level is the access into the basement. On the south side the elevation of the projection is less symmetrical, with a canopied doorway set to one side of a window on the ground floor and a tall double sash window above lighting the top of the stairs within.

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The Rear Elevations

The original rear elevations have been considerably altered by later extensions and other changes. The visible evidence suggests that the south wing originally ended with moulded brick verges beneath the end gables, probably with a large central window at the first-floor level.

The north wing seems to have been slightly longer – with a wider end section – but evidence of the original design is now difficult to assess as it is abutted by the later Our Lady’s Home for Babes (Building A2).

The rear elevation of the recessed central section between the rear wings appears to have had a tall gable in the centre, above the main rear doorway - opposite the main entrance on the main façade. Whilst that gable was enriched with simply moulded brick verges, it was not coped.

To either side there were sections with three ground-floor windows topped by pairs of windows at first-floor level. The central pairs of windows were raised up above the level of the eaves and topped by a similar, but slightly lower, design of brick gable as that in the centre.

At either end of the central section there seem to have been primary projections in the re-entrant angle between it and the rear projections of the wings, but these have been much altered.

5.1.1.1.02 The Roof

The roof structure is a relatively straight-forward design. The plain-gabled and plain-tiled roof of the central section runs into the roofs of the cross-wings but has its own cross-gabled roof over the central section.

That ends behind the central pediment on the entrance front and in the gable with the brick eaves decoration to the rear. At this point there is a distinctive octagonal timber louver on the ridge, topped by a weather-vane, which is distinctly Baroque in character.

The wings of the roof end in triangular pediments on the main façade; the southern wing has a rear gable with brick eaves detailing and the northern one may once had something similar, but the changes made to this end of the building have removed much of the evidence. Both wings also have octagonal ridge louvers, set in line with the front wall of the main central section.

Structurally the roof consists of a series of composite trusses with timber principals and collars and wrought-iron rod bracing. The trusses support tiers of timber purlins which, in turn, support the common rafters.
Pl.3: Part of the rear elevation of St. Edward’s.

Pl.4: The ground-floor refectory in the north wing.
5.1.1.1.03 The Interior

The Ground Floor

Despite its sheer size, the internal layout of the original home was very simple in plan and quite utilitarian in its decoration. Most of the walls are of painted brick, with different bricks used for some of the dados.

The main entrance led into a weather lobby, the inner partition of which was a glazed screen with vaguely Art Nouveau decorated glass with a pair of part-glazed doors beneath a rather incongruous Adamesque ‘bat’s wing’ semi-circular fanlight incorporated into the design.

Running along the rear of the central section was the main corridor, lit by the windows in the rear elevation. There are arch-headed openings where it met the entrance hall – and, originally, the rear doorway – the latter opening remodelled to be the entrance into a new chapel.

At either end of the central section, at the junction with the cross-wings, were stone or concrete stair cases, with half landings formed by concrete on wrought-iron joists. These project in the re-entrant angles between the central section and the wings on the principal façade. There is another staircase at the end of the northern rear wing.

In between the central entrance hall and the stairs there are three rooms. Those next to the corridor are accessed directly off it and had small angled fireplaces. The others are accessed off the corridor instead. The central ones have the bay windows, the others, pairs of windows.

There have been changes to the wings, making assessment a little difficult. However, it is clear that most of the western end of the northern wing was one large room, lit by eight windows on the north side. It is assumed to be the dining room, and the rooms to the east were probably associated with the original kitchens and the services. The ground floor of the south wing has three main rooms, two of full width on the western half and a third with the main access corridor to the north of it. At the former eastern end of the wing is a primary stair case, latterly boarded up.

The First Floor

Attempts have been made in the recent past to partition the first floor to make it more user-friendly and adaptable. Originally it appears to have consisted of three huge dormitories – one in each of the wings and one occupying virtually all of the central section – except for the stair landings at either end. These rooms were well lit but very tall, being ceiled at the collar height of the roof trusses.

There was some WC accommodation next to the stairs at the northern end of the central section and at the stairs at the eastern end of the south wing. Further WC accommodation is of uncertain date, and there were presumably once bathrooms and other service rooms as well, probably mostly at the much altered eastern end of the north wing, which seems to have been linked to other structures.
Pl.5: One of the staircases within St. Edward’s.

Pl.6: One of the original dormitories, looking up to the roof structure.
5.1.1.2 Building A2: The North Rear Wing, or Our Lady’s Home for Babes

The large two-storey extension to the northern rear wing of the original section of the Boys’ Home (Building A1) was added in 1910 as the Our Lady’s Home for Babes (see above, Section 3.2.2). It is built of good quality red brick laid mainly to a Flemish bond.

5.1.1.2.01 The Exterior

The South Elevation

The principal elevation faces south and has a degree of symmetry based on a central bay – but with a primary elongation of the elevation towards the right; the symmetry is confined to the elevation to the left of a brick pilaster which marks the boundary between it and the right-hand section.

In that symmetrical section is eight bays in all. The centrepiece, defined by brick pilasters rising up above the eaves, has two bays (at first-floor level) above the large brick-built ground-floor canted bay – the windows of the bay having much lower sills than the other ground-floor windows. These ground-floor windows have cross-mullioned casements.

The two first-floor windows and each of the three windows in the bay have segmental arched brick heads and large-paned sashes. In between the two first-floor windows is a projecting broad pilaster with a recess beneath an arched head supporting a statue.

To either side of the centre are three-bay sections, the bays articulated by plain brick pilasters. The centre bay of each of these sections is taller and topped by a coped cross-dormer gable; the first-floor window in each is taller than those to either side. The ground-floor windows are broader, but all have segmental arched heads and large paned sashes.

Beyond this symmetry the right-hand, or eastern end, has an additional bay with a first-floor window above an external doorway; next to the doorway is an additional small ground-floor window.

The North Elevation

At the western, or right-hand, end of the north elevation is a full two-storey projecting wing under a hipped roof that appears to be primary to this extension – which has no windows on its west and north walls but a pair of windows at first-floor level on the east elevation.

At the opposite end of the elevation is a much smaller two-storey extension, set one bay in from the eastern gable end of the range. In between these projections the elevation is of six bays at first-floor level, and the decoration is similar to that on the south elevation. The section towards the western end next to the projecting wing is obscured at ground-floor level by the former chapel.
Pl.7: Our Lady’s Home for Babes (Building A2) from the south.

Pl.8: The main sitting room within Our Lady’s Home for Babes.
The East Gable

The east gable end is of two bays, though the height of the windows on each floor level is quite different. At ground-floor level the right-hand, or northern, window is the taller, whilst at first-floor level, it is the left-hand window instead. At that level this is explained by the fact that it lights the stairs within. The ground-floor windows have segmental arched heads whilst the first-floor ones have timber lintels beneath the eaves.

5.1.1.2.02 The Roof

The main roof structure is hipped at the eastern end and has a rather uncomfortable junction with the earlier rear wing of the original Boy’s Home at the west end – the ridge of the latter being slightly higher than the extension.

The extension at the western end of the rear elevation has a hipped roof, and there is a lower hip over the central section of the main south elevation. The roofs have overhanging eaves and are of simple composite truss construction and covered with plain tile.

There is a tapering octagonal turret or louver on the ridge of the roof with a timber slatted superstructure beneath a ribbed dome and a tall finial. This is positioned centrally above the canted bay on the south side.

5.1.1.2.03 The Interior

The Ground Floor

The central-heated interior is sparsely decorated, despite being built as the babies unit. The largest space is centred on the southern bay window and is a full width room with a high ceiling. There was a fireplace in the wall opposite the bay, but decoration is limited to skirting board and dado rail.

Other rooms in the main part of the building and the northern projection are equally plain and seem to have been sitting rooms, service rooms, WCs, and a small bathroom and there is another stair at the end of eastern end of the wing.

The First Floor

The first floor consists of a series of bedrooms along the south side of the range linked by a corridor along the north side; the stair landing is at the south-eastern corner of the range and there are WCs at the south-western corner.

The only rooms with any pretence of comfort are the two bedrooms in the northern projection, accessed by a corridor, which have windows in their eastern walls and fireplaces in the angled stacks next to them.
5.1.1.3 Building A3: The Original, or North-East, Chapel

Tucked away in the complex north-eastern ranges of the Home is a former Chapel, hemmed in by buildings on three sides. To the south is the main section of Our Lady’s Home for Babes (Building A2) and to the west the flank of its northern wing. To the north is part of the Service Range (Building A4).

This appears to have been the original chapel serving the Boy’s Home but its date is unclear; it was presumably built after Our Lady’s Home for Babes – unless it was originally freestanding.

5.1.1.3.01 The Exterior

The former Chapel is a brick-built single-storey structure of three bays. There are three windows on its eastern side. The central window is taller than those to either side and is a cross-mullioned window beneath a semi-circular fanlight set within a projecting gable rising higher than the eaves of the wall. The windows to either side are simple casements with segmental arched heads.

The only other part of the building that is external is the very top of the coped north gable wall, which rises a few inches above the roof of the adjacent Service Range. The coping is of stone and the gable is topped by a cross.

5.1.1.3.02 The Roof

The roof has a coped north gable and is covered in plain tile. Structurally it is of three bays and it has heavily over-painted arch-braced collar trusses exposed internally, rising from stone wall corbels.

5.1.1.3.03 The Interior

The interior is a single space open to a ceiling at the collar height of the roof structure, accessed from the north wing of the Babies’ Home. It is fairly plain and lit by the aforementioned windows in the east elevation, the ones to either end with full-height shallow reveals in which there are now radiators. The walls are, incongruously, now wall-papered and there are few traces of its former function.
Pl.9: The interior of the former North-East Chapel (Building A3).

Pl.10: The interior of the Chapel of St. John Bosco (Building A6).
5.1.1.4 Building A4: The Service Range

The Service Range is a small range of tall single storey buildings attached to the northern end of both the Babies Home (Building A2) and North-East Chapel (Building A3), and butted against by the later Kitchen Block (Building A5). They are partly overgrown and partly derelict, making internal inspection impossible.

Part of the range is a gabled structure aligned west-east; the east gable has two tall windows and a small doorway at the right-hand end of the elevation. There are three windows on the north side wall, which fronts onto a covered passage in between the range and the adjacent Power House. The roof is plain gabled and covered with tile.

At right-angles to this section is another portion which butts against the north gable of the North-East Chapel (Building A3) and in between that and the Kitchen wing (Building A5) is a flat roofed section. Internally this appears to have been the main laundry of the Home, though this could only be seen through a hole in the flat-roofed section.

5.1.1.5 Building A5: The Kitchen Range

The Kitchen Range is a fairly large but plain two-storey and flat-roofed range built after the Second World War in the angle between the north rear wing of the original Boys’ Home (Building A1) and the western walls of the northern wing of the Babies’ Home (Building A2) and the Service Range (Building A4).

5.1.1.5.01 The Exterior

The building is brick walled but possibly concrete framed and fairly utilitarian. The west elevation is of four wide bays articulated by brick piers; in each bay there are full-width windows at both ground and first-floor levels – apart from a door and window at ground-floor level in the southern, or right-hand, bay.

The upper floor of the east wall is visible and is of three bays, two of which with full-width windows. The north gable end has irregular fenestration reflecting the internal arrangements, including the provision of four WCs at first-floor level.

5.1.1.5.02 The Roof

The building has a flat roof but there is a false plain-tiled ‘hip’ on the north end, complete with overhanging eaves.

5.1.1.5.03 The Interior

Most of the ground floor is a single large kitchen, with service rooms along the eastern side. Most of the first-floor is also a large single space, possibly a dining room, with a narrower space along the east side and WCs in the north-eastern corner.
5.1.1.6 Building A6: The Chapel of St. John Bosco

The Chapel of St. John Bosco was added in the former rear courtyard of the original Boys’ Home in the late-1930’s or early-1940’s and is a fairly large single storey building with a stubby Greek cross footprint reflecting its internal arrangements. It is dedicated appropriately to St. John Bosco, founder of the Salesians of Don Bosco; he was a Piedmontese peasant who found his vocation in looking after poor children in the 19th century and was canonised in 1934.26

5.1.1.6.01 The Exterior

The building is brick walled and mainly symmetrical, but most of the brickwork is rendered; the brick piers articulating the design are left exposed and there is a corbelled eaves arcade of bare brick as well. The external walls are difficult to see clearly because of the undergrowth in the adjacent courtyards.

The ends of the north and south arms of the cross have three windows a piece, and there are single windows in the sides of the west and east arms – though the northern opening in the east arm is a doorway leading into what was presumably an attached vestry. The windows have square heads and leaded lights, much of the glass being coloured.

5.1.1.6.02 The Roof

The Chapel has a cruciform roof structure that matches its footprint. The roof structure is based on light-weight steel trusses and it is covered with plain tile. The main roof is aligned west-east; at the western end it runs into the roof over the main section of the Boys’ Home (Building A1) and at the opposite end ends in a coped gable.

The main roof covers the west and east arms of the cross. The north and south arms are covered by slightly lower roofs, built at right-angles to the main roof, which terminate in hips.

5.1.1.6.03 The Interior

The Chapel is accessed through the former central rear doorway in the main range of the Boys’ Home. This has a neo-classical timber surround with a semicircular head to the opening. It contains a pair of partly glazed doors and there is a substantial inner doorway surround as well.

The main part of the chapel is a single open space, articulated by the design of the ceiling structure. The main west-east axis is ceiled by a single tunnel-vaulted lath-and-plaster section articulated by moulded plaster ribs – forming a ‘nave’ of three bays and a single bay sanctuary in the eastern arm.

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At the foot of the vault is a broad band of moulded plasterwork which runs into the end arms of the cross and also covers the inward side of the bridging beams separating the central section of the ‘transepts’ in the north and south arms of the cross. Those beams have additional moulded on their outward sides and soffits. The interior was not lavishly decorated and since it has ceased to be a chapel the decoration has become even plainer.

5.1.1.7 Building A7: The Covered Walk

A flat-roofed covered walk links the eastern end of the northern rear wing of the Boys’ Home and the Hall Range (Building A8) built against the gable end of its southern wing. This is heavily overgrown and difficult to look at in detail but seems to be contemporary with the Central Chapel (Building A6).

To either side of the surviving west wall of the demolished WC Block (Building A9) there are three ‘bays’ of rendered brick with bare brick arcading; the fenestration within the individual bays is similar but not identical. These sections are topped with the same type of brick corbelled arched eaves matching those of the Central Chapel. The western wall of these sections was inaccessible but probably match.

5.1.1.8 Building A8: The Hall Range

5.1.1.8.01 The Exterior

Attached to the eastern gable end of the south wing of the original Boy’s Home (Building A1) is a large single storey Hall Range, built of light red machine-made bricks laid to a mainly Flemish bond.

The South Elevation

The exterior of the south elevation respects the main divisions within between the auditorium to the west and the stage area to the east. The former is expressed as a five bay elevation articulated by thin brick piers. In each bay is a tall window under a rubbed brick flat-arched head. The original glazing has been replaced by late-20th century uPVC.

The eastern section is of two bays, with triple windows in each bay, set high in the wall with individual flat-arched rubbed brick heads just beneath the eaves and diminutive brick aprons beneath the combined sills. The original sashes survive. Beneath the right-hand, or eastern, windows is a small doorway.

The North Elevation

The north elevation is more irregular than the south elevation. Just two windows light the auditorium and there also doorways into that section and into the stage area. At the right-hand, or western, end the wall is abutted by the Covered Walk (Building A7) and later modern extensions.
Pl.11: The Hall Range (Building A8) from the south-east.

Pl.12: The interior of the Hall Range, looking east towards the stage.
The East Gable

The east gable is devoid of openings but at the base is a tall ‘dado’ of glazed brick; both of the corners have been rebuilt. These pieces of structural evidence suggests that there was a single storey continuation eastwards of this range when it was built which has since been demolished.

5.1.1.8.02 The Roof

The roof is mainly plain gabled and abuts the gable end of the adjacent range at the west end and ends in a half-hip at the east end. It has overhanging eaves and is covered with plain tile. There is a louver on the ridge at the junction between the auditorium and the stage area; this has lost its domed cap.

5.1.1.9 Building A9: The Missing Ablutions Block

There was evidently a very large ablutions block butting against the Covered Walk on the west and the Hall Range. The concrete and partly paved floor of this structure survives, as does a series of windows set high in the remnants of its western wall.

5.1.2 Discussion

The 1906 Boy’s Home is substantially intact, despite the additions made to it and the changes undertaken internally. It is large, austere, and architecturally indifferent. Despite the laudable intentions of Father Hudson in rescuing Catholic children in need, the Home was already old-fashioned when it was built and within a few years was something of an anachronism.

Large scale institutions such as this originated in the 18th century, represented, for example, by Foundlings’ Hospitals such as that in Coram’s Field, London and its outreach in Shrewsbury – long since converted to be part of a public school. Such institutions, whether orphanages or associated with poverty or illness, continued to dominate the ‘care’ of poor children when and if they were separated from their families housed within the workhouse system well into the later-19th century.

However, smaller scale childrens’ homes had been pioneered in the 1870’s by the Dr Barnado’s Society, and even the more forward thinking workhouses had already developed small units of this type for pauper children in the later-19th century.

In fact, in 1878-9 the Birmingham Union had built one of the very first such sites at Marston Green, very close to Coleshill; this had fourteen homes, each for around just 30 boys and girls, plus a school, infirmary, and swimming bath. Catholic boys had been taken from there to the first St. Paul’s Home at the end of the 19th century.
In 1890 Elham Union in Kent opened an even smaller cottage home site several miles from their workhouse, the children being sent to the local elementary school rather than a workhouse one.\textsuperscript{27}

This was the first of several such cottage homes for pauper children which was paralleled by a scheme pioneered in Sheffield of renting houses for such children in various parts of the town and trying to integrate them into the localities involved; this became known as the ‘Sheffield’ or ‘scattered home’ system.\textsuperscript{28}

This would ultimately develop into the form of residential children home, either adapted or purpose built, that survived in large numbers until the end of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century – and many still remain.

The architecture of the new Boys’ Home at Coleshill was also old fashioned, being a rather tired version of the so-called ‘Queen Anne Revival’ of the later-19\textsuperscript{th} century, ill-suited to such a large building that was clearly not domestic in character.

If anything, the interior is – and probably always was – bleaker than the exterior, with very little decoration of note and only large three dormitories on the first floor of the original section. There have been changes to the interior as well, and in the past thirty years of disuse and neglect it has continued to deteriorate.

None of the extensions to the original section are of any great architectural or historical significance. The most impressive is the new chapel of St. John Bosco, added around 1940 but still of no great architectural quality.

Overall, the building is clearly not worthy of being placed on the statutory list but would be worth placing on any non-statutory local list because of its historical importance to the whole Father Hudson’s Home complex.

It also makes a contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, but only because the Conservation Area is effectively based on the complex and this is the oldest and largest building within it. In consequence, it was one of the buildings flagged up in the 2005 Development Brief as being worthy of retention and adaptive reuse.

However, in the past 30 years there have been many proposals to convert the buildings and all have foundered because of the difficulties involved in such adaptive reuse – whether it be residential or office.

Some problems are practical – there are, for example, too few external doorways and logical circulation and stairs to make a residential conversion viable, and any conversion would result in the complete gutting and re-ordering of the interiors.

\textsuperscript{27} Morrison, \textit{op. cit.}, 151

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{ibid.}
Other issues are as, or more, important barriers to conversion, if less tangible. Excluding practical economic arguments applicable to any such developments, these include the difficulties of marketing a building of this type and its tarnished history.

As a Boys’ Home of the traditional Victorian type – despite its actual date - it shares the uncomfortable if not always deserved bad reputation of other orphanages and Dickensian institutions of the 19th century.

 Sadly, in this case, for an unknown number of its former inhabitants that reputation was all too real. Instead of a building that should be a memorial to the good works of the founder of the Boy’s Home it is, to many, a symbol of the way those ideals were betrayed by certain individuals.

 The building is, to many, thus a symbol of despair rather than of hope and it is difficult to see how this reputation could be overcome sufficiently in the foreseeable future to enable the adaptive reuse of the premises to be commercially viable.
5.2 Building B: The Generator House

5.2.1 Description

5.2.1.01 The Exterior

The Generator House was built in the 1920’s between the original Boys’ Home (Building A) and St. Mary’s (Building C). It is a single-storey brick-built building, utilitarian in function but given an element of architectural embellishment.

The six bay side elevations are articulated by brick pilasters and the original openings are topped by rubbed brick flat arched heads with keystones. Both side elevations have been altered, with some windows blocked and at least one large doorway inserted on the north side.

The gable ends are less altered. Both are of two bays with tall windows topped by a roundel in the gable above a ‘tie’ of a course of soldier bricks. At the angles there are curious ‘trumpet’ corbels under the overhanging eaves boxing, made up of flat-laid plain tiles in thick mortar courses.

5.2.1.02 The Roof

The roof is plain gabled and plain tiled, but has deep boxed timber eaves and barge boards. The trusses support two tiers of purlins but the structure could not be examined.

5.2.1.03 The Interior

The interior was not examined but is full of equipment and the basic internal arrangements have been modernised over time.

5.2.2 Discussion

This is a purely utilitarian and necessary building, probably of the early 1920’s, and of little or no historical or architectural significance. It makes no positive contribution to the character of the conservation area. Its demolition and relocation was agreed to as part of the 2005 Development Brief.
Pl.13: The Generator or Power House (Building B) from the north-west.

Pl.14: St. Edward’s Convent (Building C) from the north-east.
5.3 Building C: St. Edward’s Convent

St. Edward’s Convent was one of the last buildings to have been built on the site prior to the radical reorganisation of the Society in the later-20th century, being built shortly after the Second World War for the nuns working in the main Boy’s Home.

5.3.1 Description

5.3.1.01 The Exterior

The building is a substantially built brick structure of two storeys consisting of a main section aligned north-south and a west wing built at right-angles to it. The brickwork has a darker coloured plain brick flush plinth and a soldier course at the level of the first-floor windows sills. The main brickwork is of mottled brown colour, but red bricks are used in the jambs and heads of most of the window openings.

The main front is not, in fact, the entrance front. It faces east and is an asymmetric composition based on the slightly projecting stair bay which is a little to the right (or north) of centre. This has a low concrete framed ground floor window (presently boarded up) beneath a very tall stair window with concrete architrave on consoles. The window glazing, like the others in the building, is a multi-paned ‘Crittal-type’ steel frame.

To the left (or south) of the stair projection the elevation is of four bays, with windows on both level – those on the ground-floor being taller than the ones above. The ground-floor windows have flat arched brick heads whilst those above have their heads beneath the overhanging eaves.

To the right of the stair projection the elevation is of three bays. At ground floor level is a series of very large French windows set between rounded concrete-faced piers supporting a slightly projecting flat veranda roof. The window surrounds are also of smooth concrete. The windows are presently boarded up. Above are three more first-floor windows identical to those in the northern four bays.

The gable ends are fairly plain, with centrally positioned windows on each floor level. The rear elevation is interrupted by the rear wing. To the right (or south) of this the elevation is of five bays but accommodates, at the northern end close to the wing, the main entrance into the building. This is a composition of a doorway beneath a fanlight to the left with a trio and smaller windows to the right, all beneath a projecting flat canopy.

North of the wing there are two bays at first-floor level but no openings on the ground floor because of the location of a flat roof structure in the angle between the main section and the wing.

The west wing is of four bays at first-floor level. On the south side there are, however, four windows below the upper three. On the north side there is a single-storey lean-to built up against the elevation and the flat roofed section adjacent, and this has three windows in its north side. The west gable end of the wing has asymmetric fenestration and incorporates an external fire escape.
5.3.1.02 The Roof

The roofs of the main section and the rear wing are of the virtually identical proportions and are both hipped and plain tiled, with boxed overhanging eaves; the roof of the west wing is slightly lower and narrower.

5.3.1.03 The Interior

The building is of two floors but there are also capacious attics in the roof space. The internal floors are supported on massive RSJs and the upper floors are partly of terrazzo. The internal arrangements are quite logical.

The main entrance in the west wall leads into an entrance hall with the stairs on the east side, rising to the first floor by way of a half-landing in the eastern projection. At ground floor level an axial corridor from the foot of the stairs runs southwards and provides access to the former cells – four on the east side and three on the west. Instead of a fourth cell on the west side, the space next to the entrance hall is taken up by WCs.

The section of the main portion to the north of the stair hall at this level is a large sitting room lit by the three massive windows in the east wall. This is plainly decorated and has, on the wall opposite the windows, a simple stone (or concrete) chimneypiece.

At this level, most of the rear wing is taken up by a large full-width and well-lit room - presumably the former refectory - and the original kitchen is in the flat-roofed block in the re-entrant angle to the north of it. There is also a lean-to corridor against the main body of the wing leading to the kitchen.

At first-floor level the plan to the south of the stair landing virtually repeats the layout on the floor below, with four cells on each side of the corridor. The axial corridor is continued northwards past the stair landing to serve more cells – three on the east side and two to the west – the position of a third occupied by the start of a passageway into the west wing and a linen cupboard. The axial corridor in the west wing is offset to the north of centre. To the south of it are three more cells, whilst to the north are the bathrooms and WCs.

Internally, the only feature of note is the staircase, which is a rather attractive period piece with ramped timber handrails combined with steel balusters and terrazzo steps. Otherwise the interior is pleasant and well lit but austere.

5.3.2 Discussion

This purpose-built post-war convent is quite an attractive building of its time, though with the main windows on the east side presently boarded up it looks oddly like a moderne inter-war fire station. Given its relatively recent date and lack of any advanced or innovative design it is not a building of any real historical or architectural significance and it makes no real positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area. Its demolition was accepted in the 2005 Development Brief.
5.4 Building D: St. Mary’s Nurses Homes

The two-storey St. Mary’s Nurses Homes lies to the north of the original St. Edward’s Boys Home (Building A) and also fronts the main road with some formal gardens and lawns in the narrow space between. It was not shown on the 1926 ‘picture map’ of the site and was presumably built around 1930 – though not necessarily in one single phase. The architect was possibly George Cox.

5.4.1 Description

Because of the mature trees on the road side of the building, and a similarity of proportion and detailing, the complex appears superficially to be a long and symmetrical composition of one phase.

However, the complex can be divided into three quite distinct, if linked, elements – each, in turn, sub-divided into a frontage block and a rear wing. These separate elements are best described individually.

5.4.1.1 Building D1: The South Section, Frontage Block

5.4.1.1.01 The Exterior

The Front, or West, Elevation

The front elevation is a symmetrical composition of seven bays, the broader central three bays set back very slightly from those to either side. The central section has a ground floor ‘arcade’ of three tall brick arches springing from a band course of brick above tile.
Pl.15: The southern end of the west elevation of St. Mary’s (Building D1).

Pl.16: The central part of the west elevation of St. Mary’s (Building D3).
In the central bay is a neo-classical doorcase with triangular broken pediment. To either side are large tripartite windows with semi-circular heads. At first-floor level there are actually four evenly spaced sashes, their heads beneath the overhanging boxed eaves.

To either side the two bay sections have sashed windows on both floor levels. The first-floor windows are identical to those in the central section. The ground floor windows have cambered flat-arched heads of brick with keystones.

The North Gable Return

Only the western section of the northern return is external, and has a windows on the ground floor. This section butts against the front wall of the Central Section (Building D2).

The South Gable

The south gable is fairly plain, but does have a large canted bay with a flat roof on the ground floor, and a central sash window above it at first-floor level.

The Rear Elevation

The rear elevation is butted against by the rear wing. To the south the rear wall is of three bays, with windows on both floors with similar but not identical detailing as on the front elevation – the keystoned heads of the ground floor windows have plain flat arched heads instead of cambered ones.

This part of the elevation forms one side of the courtyard in front of the main side entrance into the building. The other end of the elevation is of four bays, with similar detailing; the southern-most bay lacks a window on the ground floor.

5.4.1.1.02 The Roof

The roof is covered in plain tile with hipped ends. The overhanging eaves are boxed and ignore the slight recessing of the central section on the front elevation. The roof structure was inaccessible. There are stacks towards either end of the ridge, and three dormer gables on the west slope.

5.4.1.1.03 The Interior

The Ground Floor

The interior has a very logical layout and very limited and utilitarian decoration. At ground floor there is a large central room occupying the middle section, lit by the large tripartite windows flanking the main western entrance.
In the rear wall is a doorway with double doors, under a segmental headed borrowed light window, opposite the main entrance and a pair of larger borrowed light windows opposite those in the front wall. The room has a timber skirting board and dado rail as well as a plain plastered cornice.

The corridor to the east of the main room links rooms at either end of the building. These are both full width and had fireplaces on the cross-walls. They are lit by two windows in the side walls; the southern room also has the bay window in the south gable and the northern one the window in the northern return. A doorway from that room links this area with the Central Section (Building D2).

**The First Floor**

The first floor is reached by the main stairs in the rear wing and consists of eight rooms on either side of a central axially corridor. One of these spaces forms the link to the stair landing with a small closet next to it; the rest were presumably bedrooms, each lit by a single window. There is also a window lighting the southern end of the corridor.

**5.4.1.2 Building D2: The South Section, Rear Wing**

**5.4.1.2.01 The Exterior**

The Rear Wing is ‘T-shaped’ – the stem being a link block at right-angles to the Frontage Block and the main part of the Rear Wing. The link block has a section ‘cut out’ of it at the north-western corner to allow light to reach a first floor window in the Frontage Block.

The south elevation of the link has within it the southern entrance to the building, which was clearly the main entrance. This has a central door case matching that in the middle of the west elevation of the Frontage Block.

To the right of the doorway are narrow sashed windows at ground and first-floor levels. To the left of the doorway is a taller and higher set window, above a shallow recess, lighting the stairs within.

To the right of the approach to the doorway the west wall of the main part of the rear wing matches the rear wall of the Frontage Block to the left, the two forming part of a balanced composition.

The south gable end of the main part of the rear wing echoes that of the Frontage Block, but is not quite identical. The rear elevation is of four bays with one bay projecting very slightly from the others. The north gable matches the south, and there are two bays on the west wall of the main part of the wing to the north of the link block.

Finally, the north wall of the link block itself has a canted west end but the remaining section is a symmetrical composition with two wide windows in the centre flanked by narrow ones to either side.
5.4.1.2.02 The Roof

The roof structure is quite logical, with a roof over the link block running between the roofs over the Frontage Block and the main part of the Rear Wing – the latter having hipped ends and the roof covered with plain tile.

5.4.1.2.03 The Interior

The only space of note in the interior of the rear wing is the entrance hall and main stair in the link block. The timber stair has a quarter landing and a fairly substantial balustrade with stick balusters and square newels. The rest of the link block section is mainly taken over by WCs and bathrooms.

The main part of the rear wing has a series of six fairly small rooms on each level accessed by a corridor along the west side; the end rooms are full width and the decoration is very austere.

5.4.1.3 Building D3: The Central Section, Frontage Block

5.4.1.3.01 The Exterior

The Front, or West, Elevation

The front elevation is of four bays articulated by brick pilasters. The central two bays project slightly and also rise slightly higher than the eaves, being topped by a brick parapet. This has tall windows on the ground floor and slightly lower ones above, all with sashes.

The windows have brick flat arches, the ground floor ones with keystones. In between the first-floor windows is a stone cartouche. The detailing of the windows in the bays to either side is the same.

The Rear Elevation

The rear elevation is now partly obscured by the single storey rear wing, which seems to be later. However, the first-floor section is visible and is of four bays with substantial terminal brick pilasters.

The first-floor windows are in pairs on either side of a narrow decorative feature of three diamonds of brick set between vertical piers of narrow tiles. There are also two narrow windows in the gable returns from this elevation.

5.4.3.1.02 The Roof

The roof is a single broad hipped structure covered in plain tile. There are stacks at either end of the ridge.
Pl.17: Part of the rear elevation of the northern part of St. Mary’s (Building D6).

Pl.18: Part of the interior of St. Mary’s.
5.4.3.1.03 The Interior

The ground floor consists of one large central room, lit by the two windows in the middle of the front elevation. This is flanked by pairs of rooms to either side originally separated by a corridor – though this arrangement has been altered. The decoration is very plain.

At first-floor level there are rooms on either side of a central corridor with cranked ends as it approached the corridors of the adjacent sections. There are no features or fixtures of architectural or historical interest.

5.4.4 Building D4: The Central Section, Rear Wing

The Rear Wing is a single storey structure which seems to be mainly a later addition to the building and of little or no architectural value.

5.4.1.5 Building D5: The Northern Section, Frontage Block

5.4.1.5.01 The Exterior

The Front, or West, Elevation

The front elevation is of seven bays, the central three bays on the ground floor being recessed behind an arcade of brick arches. Above the arches the first-floor windows are sashes, the central one enriched with a timber architrave. The recessed section has a classical central door case with attenuated keystone, flanked by tripartite windows beneath segmental brick arched head. The paired bays to each side have sashed windows at ground and first floor levels.

The South Gable Return

Only the western section of the southern return is external, and has a windows on the ground floor. This section butts against the front wall of the Central Section (Building D2).

The North Gable

The north gable is fairly plain, but does have a large canted bay with a flat roof on the ground floor, and a central sash window above it at first-floor level.

The Rear Elevation

The central section of the rear elevation is abutted by the Rear Wing. To the right (or north) the elevation is of three bays, with the ground floor sashes windows having rubbed brick cambered flat arches. To the left, there are also three bays, with one being slightly narrower than the others.
5.4.1.5.02 The Roof

The roof is a large hipped structure covered in plain tile. There are three dormers on the west side and one at either end of the east slope. There are also two chimneys, set just to the west of the ridge.

5.4.1.5.03 The Interior

The interior is fairly plainly decorated, but there is some plasterwork in the larger ground-floor rooms and some good timber doorcases. In the central section is an entrance hall from the doorway to a corridor along the rear wall. To either side there are rooms lit by one of the tripartite windows in the front wall.

At either end of the range are larger rooms, the biggest being that at the northern end, lit by the bay window in the gable. The first-floor level has an axial corridor with small bedrooms on either side and, above, is a large attic used for storage.

5.4.1.6 Building D6: The Northern Section, Rear Wing

5.4.1.6.01 The Exterior

The two storey brick-built Rear Wing is a stubby ‘T-shape’ in plan. The main rear elevation is of four bays, the middle two projecting slightly. There are windows at ground and first-floor levels; the ground floor windows have rubbed brick heads, the central one with a cambered flat arch and keystone, the others with plain flat arches. The gable ends are blank.

The south side of the link block is similar in style to the south side of the link block of the South Section (Building D1). It has a central door case, probably the most used entrance into the building. To the right of the doorway are narrow sashed windows at ground and first-floor levels. To the left of the doorway is a taller and higher set window, above a shallow recess, lighting the stairs within.

The north elevation of the link block is far more utilitarian, with a series of broad and narrow windows lighting rooms and WCs within.

5.4.1.6.02 The Roof

The roof structure is quite logical, with a roof over the link block running between the roofs over the Frontage Block and the main part of the Rear Wing – the latter having hipped ends and the roof covered with plain tile.

5.4.1.6.03 The Interior

The interior has a rather fine staircase but little else of note.
5.4.2 Discussion

This complex was built around 1930 as a nurses’ hostel. There were clearly distinctions between the different parts of it and it is possible that the Central Section was some type of administrative and communal area whilst the North and South sections were hostels for different classes of nurses – perhaps experienced ones in one and trainees in the other.

The building, probably designed by George Cox, is pleasant enough and makes a fairly neutral contribution to the streetscape, especially as it is largely hidden by mature trees and shrubs. However, it is not architecturally or historically significant.

As with other purpose-built buildings on the complex it does not lend itself well to adaptive reuse for residential purposes; there are too few external doorways and potential communal circulation areas, and too many small corridor linked rooms which would mean that the interior would have to be gutted in order to create logical and useable internal circulation patterns.

The 2005 Development Brief seems to be ambivalent about the future of the site. In the text there is a suggestion that the buildings could be converted, but in the key development map at the end of that report they are down for demolition and redevelopment.
5.5 Building E: Old St. Josephs

Despite its name, Old St, Joseph’s is one of the more modern buildings on the site and seems to have been built shortly after the Second World War as a care home for the elderly. It was replaced by a much better designed facility, the present St. Joseph’s, in 2002.

5.5.1 Description

The building is a low, brick-built, flat-roofed single storey structure. It is mainly of two sections – a west-east portion with very shallow projections at either end of its north elevation, and a very slightly lower long, low, wing running northwards at right-angles to it.

The south elevation of the ‘cross-wing’ has a low flush ‘plinth’ of a soldier course of brick and is topped by a low parapet. The central section projects slightly and contains a set of five windows with shared concrete sills and lintels. Towards either end of the elevation there are double doorways.

The longer northern section has large windows with some doorways but much of it is inaccessible because of the overgrowth. In the re-entrant angle between the west wall of the long range and the north wall of the cross-wing is a curving section with full-height French windows associated with a well-lit day-room within.

5.5.2 Discussion

This building is a mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century structure of little or no architectural importance than makes no positive contribution to the Conservation Area – being both just single storey and flat roofed. It is marked for demolition in the 2005 Development Brief.

Pl.19: Part of Old St. Joseph’s (Building E).
5.6 Building F: St. Philominas Convent

St. Philominas Convent was built after the Second World War and is a little to the east of Old St. Joseph’s (Building E). It was built as a convent for the nuns serving St. Gerard’s Hospital.

The name saint is an unusual choice, for already by the time the convent was built, the credibility of St. Philomena (sic.) – supposedly a virgin martyr whose bones had been found in the catacombs of Rome in 1802 – was being questioned; never officially added to the Roman Martyrology, in 1961 the Roman Catholic church officially ruled that her feast day be discontinued and her shrine, in Mugnano, be dismantled.29

5.6.1 Description

St. Philaminas Convent is a two storey ‘T-shaped’ building with capacious attics to the east of Old St. Joseph’s (Building E). The main eastern elevation is a symmetrical composition, defined as right bays by the window pattern of the first floor.

It has a tall plain brick plinth and soldier courses at first-floor level and beneath the plain concrete cornice. The two central windows are wider than the others (with a portrait of St. Philominas in between) and all have tripartite steel-framed windows with concrete sills.

The ground floor has a central doorway with a shallow porch of a concrete roof supported on brick piers. To either side there are groups of boarded up windows above a shared concrete lintel, with smaller single windows at either end set higher in the wall.

None of the other elevations have any architectural pretension. The roof over the main section appears to be flat, but with sloping hipped edges covered in pantiles. The roof of the ‘stem’ of the ‘T’ is lower and mainly flat. The interior was not examined but has communal and service rooms of the ground floor and cells and related facilities on the first floor and in the attics.

5.6.2 Discussion

This is a large but fairly non-descript mid-20th century building of little or no architectural or historical significance. It is suggested that its size and design actually detract from the character of the Conservation Area and it is down for demolition and redevelopment in the 2005 Development Brief.

Pl.20: St. Philomenas Convent (Building F) from the south-east.

Pl.21: Part of the Temporary Buildings (Building G).
5.7 Building G: The Temporary Buildings

5.7.1 Description

Close to the southern side of the main hospital of St. Gerard’s are two temporary timber-framed structures in a parlous state. The larger of the two is a long single storey range on a tall brick plinth, with external decoration of mock timber-framing; it has a simple gable roof.

Separate to this range to the east is another range of similar date but clearly re-clad in more recent times. This has a gabled roof with a rear extension under a catslide continuation of its western slope.

5.7.2 Discussion

These buildings could date to the First World War and were evidently of a temporary nature associated with additional accommodation at nearby St. Gerard’s Hospital – but have survived. However, both are now in a very parlous structural state. They are of very limited historical and architectural significance and detract from the character of the Conservation Area.
5.8 Building H: St. Gerard’s Hospital

St. Gerard’s Hospital was built as a hospital originally serving the recently established Boys’ Home and all poor Catholic children in the Birmingham Diocese, after it became clear that many of the children in the home were also in poor health due to their backgrounds. Designed by Henry Sandy, it opened in 1913.\(^3\)

The Hospital was used in the First World War as a VAD hospital for wounded soldiers; after the war it specialised in TB and orthopaedic services and eventually became established as the Warwickshire Orthopaedic Hospital, finally closing in 1998.

5.8.1 Description

The hospital was designed on pavilion lines, a type which had become developed in the mid-19\(^{th}\) century and in which the main components – the wards, sanitary blocks and nurses stations – were far more separate than they had been before and when the benefits of good ventilation had become realised.

The original layout of St. Gerard’s was of three parallel ranges, aligned west-east, linked by a covered corridor that continued through each range. The ranges were a Central Block and two Ward Wings.

![Fig.10: Basic layout and identification of St. Gerard’s (Building H).](image)

\(^3\) Pinches, op. cit., 15
5.8.1.1 Building H1: The Central Block

5.8.1.1.01 The Exterior

The main entrance front is to the east, facing the gardens, and like the rest of the complex, of roughcast brickwork; it is, architecturally, a rather odd combination of neo-vernacular and neo-Baroque.

The centrepiece is of three bays; in the centre is an arch-headed recess with a rubbed brick keystone and curved rubbed brick back with stone bands mid-way up and at the springing of the arch. Within the recess is the statue of the saint on a tall stone plinth.

To either side there are openings with the same detailing in their semi-circular heads, but these do not match each other. To the right is a doorway under a multi-paned fanlight. To the right is a window – with a multi-paned upper sash and plate-glass lower sash. The overall composition, despite the neo-Baroque detailing, is thus unbalanced.

To either side of the centrepiece are tall projecting canted bays. In each cant there is a tall but narrow window with a flattish segmental head of rubbed red brick and weathered sills of the same material. Each has a sash window under an upper fixed light; the upper sashes are multi-paned, the lower ones of plate glass.

Curiously juxtaposed with the bays are projecting cross-dormered gables with faux timber framing and plain bargeboards above them, supported on bold curviving brackets. The bays are linked by a low rendered wall with brick coping and central gateway forming a narrow forecourt to the building. The side walls of the block are either plain, abutted by other structures, or altered.

To the rear, or west, of the main part of the central block are two narrow wings flanking a covered courtyard. The northern wing has a substantial rendered stack projecting on the its north side and a second on the west gable end.

5.8.1.1.02 The Roof

The roof is a tall hipped structure aligned north-south with a surprisingly short ridge. Midway up the eastern slope are two large and symmetrical disposed rendered brick stacks with brick cappings. The northern rear wing has a glazed vented ‘clerestorey’ and the roof over the rear courtyard has steel arched trusses and part glazed sheeting.

5.8.1.1.03 The Interior

The interior has been radically modernised and there are only a few fixtures and fittings of note, mostly confined to door cases and architraves. The original layout survives. Running through the block from north to south is the main corridor of the hospital.
Pl.22: St. Gerard’s from the north-east.

Pl.23: One of the sanitary annexes of St. Gerard’s.
There are two main day rooms or offices to the east of this, each ending in one of the bays on
the east elevation, and each originally heated. In between these rooms is the narrow entrance
hall – with weather lobby - and a third room. To the west of the corridor there were also
three rooms but these have been partly subdivided to create washrooms and WCs.

5.8.1.2 Buildings H2 and H3: The Link Corridors

The corridors linking the central block with the wards were originally of the same design. Each is a narrow building of five bays, built of rendered brickwork with a plain pitched and
tile-covered gabled roof; originally these each had central opposing doorways in the middle
bay flanked by windows.

The doorways have semicircular heads of rubbed red brick and the tall windows segmental
arched heads of the same material. Above the doors are fanlights. The windows towards the
outward ends of the corridors have higher sills than those nearer to the central block.

The northern link corridor (H2) has been little altered, but additions have been made against
the west side of the southern link corridor – between the adjacent walls of the Central Block
and the South Ward.

5.8.1.3 Buildings H4 and H5: The Ward Wings

5.8.1.3.01 The Exterior

The two Ward Wings were virtually identical when built but have been altered in different
ways. Each has a slightly taller central section with wards to the west and east – the former
being the longer of the two.

The wards are full-width ‘Nightingale’ wards – taking the name from Florence Nightingale,
an early advocate, but not instigator, of the pavilion design. In such wards there are also
opposing windows in the side walls to encourage cross-ventilation.

Each of the western wards has five windows in their side wall facing into formerly open area
between the wings. These are tall, and have rubbed brick segmental arched heads and
weathered sills.

At their western ends are projecting stacks in rectangular projections. Attached to the western
ends of their outward-facing side elevations are short corridors leading into the original
sanitary annexes.

The shorter eastern wards are also broad, full-width and well lit and accessed by the axial
corridors in the central blocks. These have curious canted bays at their eastern ends; these
echo the bays of the central block – but have projecting chimney stacks in the outer cants,
breaking the line of the faux timber-framed trussed gables.
As with the western wards, there are corridors and sanitary annexes towards their gabled ends in the outward elevations. These annexes appear to be primary and have narrow but tall windows.

5.8.1.3.02 The Roofs

The complex but logical roof structure matches the footprint of the original building. The roofs over the central blocks are slightly taller than those over the wards to either side and although hipped are virtually of ‘tower roof’ proportions, the short apex being topped by a tapering cupola or vent.

The roofs over the slightly narrower wards have hipped ends, but at their eastern ends are plain gabled sections running into the terminal hips. On the east side these end in the _faux_ timber framed gable ends and on the west side they end in the plainer barge-boarded gables.

The four sanitary blocks have hipped roofs and the corridors into them have lower plain gabled roofs between these and the roof of the adjacent ward. The main link corridors have simple plain gabled roofs as well. All of the roofs are covered in red plain tile and have overhanging eaves.

5.8.1.3.03 The Interior

The central section of each ward wing is divided into quarters by the main corridor access and an axial central corridor at right-angles to it. Originally there was a single room in each quarter, though there has been a degree of minor sub-division since the hospital opened. In each range one room has a large angled fireplace. Curiously, instead of being mirror imaged, in each block this is the north-western room.

The two ‘Nightingale’ wards in each wing are both broad and full-width well-lit spaces, accessed by the axial corridors within the central blocks and served by attached sanitary annexes. The western wards are slightly longer than the eastern ones.

5.8.1.4 Building H6: The Chapel

5.8.1.4.01 The Exterior

The present Chapel, dedicated to St. Philomina, was added to the northern end of the hospital shortly after the First World War and is aligned on the line of the main corridor running through it. It is built of rendered brickwork with bare brick and tile detailing, and in some aspects is reminiscent of chapels in Italian hill-top towns.

It is a single storey structure of five bays, the bays articulated externally by deep but narrow buttresses with unusual bare brick capitals under the exaggerated overhanging eaves. There are tall square-headed windows in each bay, except in the northernmost bays. On the west side this bay contains, instead, the doorway into an attached and contemporary vestry.
Pl.24: The northern end of St. Philomena’s chapel (Building H6).

Pl.25: The interior of St. Philomena’s Chapel.
projecting from the main building. Above each of the side windows is a large dormer gable window.

At the northern end of the Chapel, its liturgical east, is a narrow projecting apse with canted sides in the form of a demi-octagon. This has no openings low down but, at the top there is an open arcade beneath the hipped end of the roof of polychrome brick above a moulded stone base.

The lower part of the arcades up to the springing of the arches is of blue brick. In each of the three main cants there are paired openings with semi-circular arched heads of red brick and a dividing column of stone, vaguely Romanesque in form. Above the line of the moulded springing for the arches the brickwork is roughcast up to a simple and overhanging cornice.

The vestry attached to the west side is rectangular in plain and of roughcast brick. It has a doorway in the west gable and a window in the south wall – both with rubbed brick flat arched heads - but no other openings other than the entrance from the chapel.

5.8.1.4.02 The Roof

The main roof is plain tiled and hipped, but overhanging eaves and exposed rafter feet. At the northern end the hip is canted to match the profile of the demi-octagonal apse beneath, and there is a cross on the ridge at the junction between this section and the main central part of the roof. The roof over the vestry in plain gabled and tiled.

5.8.1.4.03 The Interior

The interior of the Chapel is accessed through a doorway on the line of the main corridor, with a short lobby area in between. The Chapel is one single space with a semi-circular apse or sanctuary at the north end.

The interior has a simple plastered tunnel vault, pierced by the reveals of the dormer windows; these are designed so as not to break the curving line of the vaulting. The walls of the chapel are panelled up to the height of the springing of the sanctuary arch. The side windows are slightly taller than that so they read as windows with fanlights above them.

There are statues to either side of the sanctuary in the north wall with gilded recesses, but the main internal interest is in the carved stations of the cross, apparently carved by Belgium refugees during the First World War. The pews seem to be modern, but could date to the inter-war years.

5.8.1.5 Building H7: The Southern Extension

The Southern Extension lies at the southern end of the original complex at the opposite end of the main corridor to the Chapel and was probably built at around the same time. It is a rectangular block of rendered brickwork beneath a hipped tiled roof with overhanging eaves.
Its entrance is in the southern gable, which has a tall central doorway beneath a parapet, its jambs enriched with brickwork. To either side there are windows, though of different sizes – a large one to the right (or east) and a much smaller one to the left – even though the rooms they light are of the same size.

The side walls have a shallow central projection in which there is a tall window under a flat-arched rubbed brick. The present windows are modern uPVC replacements.

5.8.1.6 Building H8: The Operating Theatre Block

Built to the west of the rear courtyard of the central block are the former operating theatres. In their present form this single storey extension is relatively modern and is devoid of any historical or architectural interest or significance.

5.8.2 Discussion

Despite all the later additions and changes, the core of St. Gerard’s is a relatively intact pavilion hospital of the early-20th century designed for children. The first childrens’ hospital in England was founded at Great Ormond Street in 1852 by Dr Charles West, who had studied such hospitals on the continent, and there were 38 such hospitals by 1888.31 The design was similar to general pavilion hospitals, for as one writer has pointed out, these were ‘basically general hospitals with an age limit’.32

Its design was more in keeping with the small cottage hospitals being built from the late-19th century onwards serving smaller towns and rural communities but based on the larger urban hospital forms.

This is emphasised by the curious neo-vernacular detailing, reminiscent in some ways of the style popularised by architects in the 1870’s and 1880’s such as Richard Norman Shaw – though considerably watered down and less well handled. That is oddly juxtaposed with hints of the Baroque, presumably used to imply a degree of formality and, indeed, perhaps hinting at the Catholic underpinning of the facility.

The pavilion design was well established by the time the hospital was built, so there is nothing pioneering about its layout – of a central block linked to double ward wings by covered corridors.

What seems to be unusual about the original interior layout and decoration is the absence of anything specifically child friendly. Some childrens’ hospitals of the late-19th and early-20th century have been listed because of their internal decoration – with popular themes generally taken from nursery rhymes, for example, often executed in tile or murals. The interior of St. Gerard’s seems to have been quite austere in comparison.

32 op. cit., 113
In fact, little survives of the original decoration anyway because of the many changes made to it – and especially the most recent alterations made at the end of the 20th century that were required to convert the buildings into offices. That use has proved to be difficult to maintain because of the nature of the buildings and the overall layout.

Although the complex has a degree of local historical significance as a hospital, it is not a good piece of architecture and it has also been altered and extended in such a way that much of the original character has been lost. As such it is now only a neutral contributor to the character of the Conservation Area.

5.9 Building I: The New Hospital Extension

The New Hospital Extension is a later-20th century extension to the north-east of the main part of St. Gerard’s and linked to it by a covered corridor. It calls for little comment, as it is of no architectural or historical significance and detracts from the character of the Conservation Area.

Pl.26: Part of the modern Hospital Extension of St. Gerard’s (Building I).
5.10 Building J: The Old Wards

The Old Wards complex to the east of the main hospital complex was built shortly after the rest of the hospital as open air ward. It was clearly influenced by the ‘fresh air’ movement then current in hospital design, pioneered by medical people like Dr. Robert Jones and influential ‘lay’ experts such as Dame Agnes Hunt of Shropshire; the best known example of their work is the still functioning and still influential orthopaedic hospital at Oswestry, now known as the Robert Jones & Agnes Hunt Hospital.

5.10.1 Description

The Old Wards complex is all single storey and consists of a main ward section with a service wing built at right-angles to it, thus creating a ‘T’ shaped footprint with attenuated ‘cross bar’.

5.10.1.1 The Ward Block

5.10.1.1.01 The Exterior

The main range is a steel or iron framed structure under a steel-framed gabled roof, though the gable ends appear to be of rendered brickwork. The steel or iron columns of the framing have curious neo-classical capitals with acanthus leaf, rather out of keeping with the otherwise plain design of the building.

Each side elevations consist of a series of double doorways with pairs of strap-hung partly glazed outward opening timber doors; above the paired doors are rectangular paired opening fanlights up to the eaves.

On the south elevation there is a central bay with a narrower doorway flanked by low-silled windows. On this elevation the roof slope is continued as a ‘cat-slide’ roof over a covered veranda; at either end the gable walling is continued to protect the ends of the veranda, and in this brickwork there are two round-headed openings – one a doorway and the other a window.

On the north side there are sets of double doorways to either side of the service wing forming the ‘stem’ of the ‘T’ shape, and glazed flat-roof lobbies in the re-entrant angle between the two sections.

The gable ends appear to be of rendered brick, but this could be screen-walling within the steel or iron framing. The west gable has a pair of French windows but the east gable has a massive seven bay window of three tiers.
Pl.27: The southern elevation of the Old Wards (Building J).

Pl.28: The Old Wards from the north-west.
5.10.1.02 The Roof

The roof is hipped and covered with machine-made pantiles; it is assumed to consist of steel trusses, as such half-trusses support the continuation of the roof slope on the south side over the veranda.

5.10.1.03 The Interior

The interior consists of two full-width wards separated by a central ward station or separate ward; this is flanked by two cross-walls and has direct access into the service wing to the north.

The interior is ceiled at eaves height. It is obviously well-lit because of the glazed double doors, their fanlights and the windows in the gable ends of the building. In addition, there are roof lights in the north slope to provide additional natural light for the central section. There are no surviving fixtures or fittings of note, and the interior was always evidently quite sparse.

5.10.1.2 The Service Wing

The Service Wing contained the sanitary facilities for the wards and the nursing stations – as well as, presumably, additional private areas for patients. It is built at right-angles to the north wall of the ward block.

5.10.1.2.01 The Exterior

The wing is built of rendered brick above a bare brick plinth. Each side wall is of five bays. Four of the bays have tall sashed windows whilst the fifth, at the south end close to the lobbies, is a smaller window with a much higher sill.

The north gable elevation was the main official entrance into the complex and consists of a recessed doorway beneath a semicircular arched head flanked by sash windows slightly smaller than those in the side walls.

5.10.1.2.02 The Roof

The roof is hipped and covered with machine-made pantiles. The roof structure was not accessible. On the west side is a substantial brick chimney stack.

5.10.1.2.03 The Interior

The interior was not accessible but consists of sanitary facilities and nurses’ rooms. There are no fixtures or fittings of note.
5.10.2 Discussion

This range is of some interest as a surviving example of an early-20th century open air ward but is otherwise very plain. The patients would have spent much of their time outside the main wards – their beds being wheeled through the double doors onto the veranda on open side and an uncovered hard-standing on the other.

Even if the beds were kept within the building, the idea was that the doorways were generally left open. Obviously, this would rely on the weather. The central section between the two wards may have been the nurses’ station with possible communal facilities for the patients as well.

The necessary sanitary facilities and other nursing offices were within the service wing, which had the main official entrance into the building in its gable end. Normal access was no doubt through the lobbies to either side of it where wing and ward met.

The building is tucked away from the main buildings of the site and does not contribute significantly to the character of the conservation area. Given the design and condition of this range of buildings and their relatively low heritage value it is difficult to see how they could be suited to viable adaptive re-use.

Pl.29: Part of the interior of the Old Wards.
6. Father Hudson Buildings Outside the Present Development Site

6.1 The Central Offices

6.1.1 Description

The Central Offices block is situated at the northern end of the complex by what is presently the main access into it. It was built in the 1920’s as the offices of the Society and there is a tradition that part of it was one of the short-listed, but losing, designs for the Hall of Memory in Birmingham. In 2000 the Father Hudson Society re-located their offices to St. Gerard’s Hospital and the Central Offices were taken over by the Diocesan Schools Commission.

It is a neo-classical design, built of dark mottled brick with a slightly better red brick used for the flat arched heads – with keystones – of the window openings. It is a two storey composition of two distinct parts – the cruciform main section and the more vernacular east wing. The cruciform section has a two-storey hub, square in plan but with canted corners. From the flat sides of this run the single-storey arms of the cross.

Apart from on the entrance side in the north-western angle of the building, the canted sections have rusticated brick ground floors with a sash window beneath a flat stone band course. The entrance has a flat-roofed projection, presumably part of the original design. The double doors are hung in a painted stone architrave set within a recess with a semi-circular brick head and topped by an iron balcony.

Above this the first-floor band course each of the angled facets is flanked by brick pilasters topped with moulded brick acanthus-leaf capitals beneath a brick entablature. At this level there are tall windows with semi-circular arched heads on all four cants.

The other sides of the central section, above the gabled roofs of the arms of the cross, are of three bays articulated by more brick pilasters of the same design as those in the canted corners, but these elevations have no openings.

Each of the four arms of the cross are of the same proportions but not identical. Some have two windows in an elevation, others just one, and the eastern arm – which joins onto the office section – has a narrow window flanked by roundels in the north wall instead.

The roof of the main hub is flat topped with sloping sides matching the footprint. The roofs over the arms of the cross have hipped ends. All are covered in plain tile. The main internal feature of this section is double height space within the hub, with a balcony around it at first-floor level.

The rest of the building is the office section to the east, which is a pleasant enough single storey structure but one of little architectural interest. It is built of the same type of brick as the rest and covered in a hipped roof. The interior has been modernised.
Pl.30: The former Central Offices.

Pl.31: Don Bosco House, formerly St. George’s, one of the Cottage Homes.
6.1.2 Discussion

This is one of the two most architecturally significant buildings on the complex, the other being the church at the opposite end of it to the south. It is a building of interesting design, and with a possibly interesting origin, though probably not quite worthy of statutory listing.

It is worthy of inclusion on any non-statutory local list because of its relationship to the Father Hudson’s Homes site and its prominent position on the street side means that it makes a positive contribution the character of the Conservation Area.

6.2 The Former School

The Infants’ School opened in 1915 and is a typical example of the period, though with the subtle adaptations for a Catholic faith school. It has suffered from some unsympathetic additions and is not considered to be of any great architectural or historical significance, and makes only a neutral contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

6.3 The Cottage Homes

6.3.1 Description

The two Cottage Homes were set up in the early-1920’s on a site to the south of the original Boys’ Home and were designed to provide a more family-type environment for the younger children taken in by the institution.

The two ‘cottages’ on the Coleshill complex opened in 1923 and each took 100 boys between the ages of 5 and 11 in ‘families’ of 25. Each family had its own entrance, day rooms and dormitories but there was a common kitchen and refectory. Despite being smaller in size than the main Home, the ‘cottages’ were still fairly large and formal in their design and layout. However, they do have a degree of architectural quality.

By the end of the 20th century the buildings had found new uses. The western cottage, St. George’s, became offices and is now called Don Bosco House. The eastern cottage, St. James’s is still used for children and is the Teddy and Daisy Nursery. Neither building has been altered significantly, externally, since they were built.

The blocks are virtually identical. Each is built of brick and of two storeys with attics and is of ‘H-shaped’ footprint, with a long central section flanked by stubby cross-wings. On the south side, each central section is of nine bays, the central three stepped forward slightly beneath a shaped brick and stone pediment. The fenestration is different on the northern sides, with differing sizes of windows and the doorways into the separate units within.

All of the windows have flat-arched brick heads with keystones. The roofs are hipped and plain tiled and there are tall but narrow dormer gables lighting the attics. The main interesting features are the cast-iron balconies on both sides of each building running along the sides of middle sections and linking the wings.
The Cottages, although still quite large, were probably far better environments for the younger children than the main Boys’ Home, and it brought the facilities, perhaps belatedly, in line with current welfare thinking.

6.3.2 Discussion

Despite their conversion to new uses, the two buildings are, externally at least, relatively unaltered and have a degree of architectural quality – though not sufficient to warrant statutory listing. Historically they are a very late and very large example of a more humane form of housing for poor children.

The two main buildings and the surviving outbuildings to the north still retain much of their original character and, as a group, probably make a neutral or perhaps even positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

6.4 Church of The Sacred Heart & St. Theresa

6.4.1 Description

St. Theresa’s Church to the south of the site was built as a memorial to Father Hudson and as a chapel for the Society he founded. It was designed by J B Cox of Birmingham and the foundation stone was laid in October 1938; it was opened in September 1942 – making it one of the very few churches to be completed in England during the Second World War. It has replaced the earlier parish church and is now the property of the diocese.

Architecturally it follows in the inter-war tradition of the Catholic churches in Britain, as a modernist brick-faced take on vaguely Byzantine and Romanesque design. It is cruciform in plan, the narthex flanked by an apsidal baptistery and a stair tower.

The nave is of five bays and flanked by low aisles; the chancel is square ended and there are short transepts and a tall crossing tower. Most of the window openings are narrow and tall and have semi-circular heads, as do the bell openings in the tower. The main enrichment of the exterior is in the west doorway which is flanked by Corinthian columns and topped by a tympanum; high in gable above is a large round window.

6.4.2 Discussion

The church is a good example of its type and date and has been listed Grade II – a fairly rare distinction for a building not completed until 1942; it may be the fact that it was finished in the war helped in getting the building listed.
Pl.32: The Church of The Sacred Heart & St. Theresa

Pl.33: The Presbytery and Parish Centre, formerly St. Joan’s.
At the same time, it is generally recognised that in the mid-20th century that Catholic churches tended to be more architecturally advanced than those of other denominations, partly because there was a demand for new churches and thus more opportunities for younger architects who took advantage of the new materials and techniques available.  

It is probably the most architecturally significant building in the complex and, together with the only other building of any intrinsic architectural quality, the former Central Offices to the north, bookends the main street frontage of the complex. It clearly makes a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

### 6.5 The Presbytery & Parish Centre

Next to the church, the present Presbytery and Parish Centre is housed within part of the St. Joan’s Cottage home for girls built in the 1930’s. It is a simple brick built with a pantiled hipped roof that has seen a degree of external upgrading and internal re-fitting. It is considered to be a neutral element in the Conservation Area.

### 6.6 St. Joseph’s and Catherine’s

St. Joseph’s and St. Catherine’s are modern purpose built units dealing respectively with the elderly and young adults with disabilities. Both are long, rather rambling and well-lit single-storey buildings designed for purpose with little or no architectural pretension.

### 7. The Grounds

Apart from some areas adjacent to the disused and derelict buildings, the grounds have been well maintained. They are mainly set to lawn and are studded with mature and self-seeded immature trees and shrubs, although there are also some flower beds and roses.

What little design there is to the gardens is generally based on the layout of the buildings and dictated by the slight slope of the prevailing ground levels – which has resulted in some terracing on the eastern side.

Some of the paths are of early or mid-20th century date and some of these relate to features which have been removed – such as the sports pitches and swimming baths. There is a pond by a statue to the east of St. Gerard’s set within some surviving gardens beds laid out early in the 20th century.

In the Conservation Area assessment these gardens are attributed to a Miss Evelyn Powell, but there is otherwise little or no information available about this lady who was, therefore, not a recognised garden designer of note – and, indeed, the gardens do not have much of a ‘designed’ feel, being fairly informal.

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See e.g. Martin, C, 2009, *A Glimpse of Heaven*
Whilst the mature trees obviously form part of the character of the Conservation Area, many of these appear to be in poor condition and many have been planted too close together, particularly on the street side. The self-seeders have got out of control in many cases and are growing into mature trees too close together and too close to the buildings.

The views into the complex from the fields to the east are undistinguished and there is – and never really has been - a real sense of ‘place’ from this direction. This side of the complex has changed considerably since the designation of the Conservation Area.

The southern aspect is now largely dominated by the long, low modern brick buildings of St. Joseph’s and St. Catherine’s, car-parking associated with these facilities, derelict car-parking, the derelict convents, and the modern extensions of St. Gerard’s. These elements are partly obscured by slightly overgrown hedgerows and other informal planting.

Overall, whilst some aspects of the grounds are considered to be positive contributors to the character of the Conservation Area, other aspects are mainly neutral or, in some cases such as the large areas of car-parking, detract from it.

Pl.34: Part of the informal gardens near St.Gerard’s.
8. The Heritage Impact Assessment

8.1 The Planning Background

The Father Hudson’s Society complex is a large area containing a number of mainly large 20th century institutional buildings – mostly empty and redundant - set in a now somewhat overgrown partly planned setting. Apart from the church – which is just outside the present redevelopment boundary – none of the buildings are listed. However, the site is within the Coleshill (Coventry Road) Conservation Area and, indeed, makes up the largest part of it.

Conservation Areas protect areas of architectural or historic interest and, being mainly concerned with the built environment, are usually distinct from Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The earliest Conservation Areas came about as a result of the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, but the current legislation dates from the 1990 Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act.

The original Coleshill Conservation Area was set up to protect the linear core of the older part of the town in 1969. Development pressures on the town and its immediate vicinity have continued to increase because the area’s proximity to two major conurbations – Birmingham and Coventry, its transport links (particularly the motorways), and the still attractive countryside around it.

In order to protect the southern approaches to the town from unsympathetic development, a further Conservation Area based on the Coventry Road was set up in 1995. Although a linear area along the road, it obviously included the Father Hudson’s Society complex on the east side of it and because of the extent of the complex it now forms more than half of the area of the new Conservation Area.

When the Area was created, the local authority recognised the unique position of the Father Hudson’s Homes in the recent history and built heritage of this part of Coleshill and that the difficulties and opportunities that the changing role of the Society would impact on the site. The Area Appraisal states that the designation of the Conservation Area ‘is not intended to frustrate the wishes or obligations of the Father Hudson’s Society. The Borough Council recognises that the way the site of the Father Hudson’s Homes complex is used must change’.34

The Council recommended a specific Development Brief for the site be produced and this was undertaken in conjunction with the Father Hudson Society in 1997. Further changes to the site – including the closure of St. Gerard’s Hospital and the primary school – led to the need for an updated version of a Development Brief; this was produced by the Society in cooperation with the Borough Council and was ratified in 2005.

Despite several schemes designed to meet the recommendations of the Development Brief it has proven difficult to get a scheme that is both economically viable and capable of retaining the St. Edward’s Boy’s Home. This remains empty and derelict, as do many of the other buildings on the site; in addition, the conversion of St. Gerard’s Hospital into offices has proved unsuccessful.

34 Para 51
After much discussion and debate a new set of development proposals have been drawn up in order to allow the Society to realise some of its assets in order to fund its core charitable works.

Whilst broadly in keeping with those in the 2005 Development Brief, these proposals now include the demolition of most of the buildings within the redevelopment area, including St. Edward’s Boys Home, St. Mary’s and St. Gerard’s Hospital. The new development will be a mix of office and residential, still retaining the headquarters of the Society on its Coleshill complex.

This redevelopment will clearly have an impact on the character of the Conservation Area which needs to be assessed, and any planning decisions that need to be made will be based, through the advice within the new National Planning Policy Framework, on the Conservation Area Appraisal and the specific Development Brief for the site.

8.2 The Conservation Area Appraisal

In England, apart from the very concise paragraphs included in the new National Planning Policy Framework, the key document for advice related to Conservation Areas was published by English Heritage in 2011 - Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management.

The latest guidance regarding Conservation Area’s states that ‘An appraisal of an area undertaken prior to designation will lead to an understanding and articulation of its character which can be used to develop a robust policy framework for planning decisions’. Fortunately, such an appraisal was undertaken before the designation of the Coleshill (Coventry Road) Conservation Area and forms a useful planning tool.

In general the Appraisal is concise and well-written but it did not have the advantage of a detailed assessment of the historical background and development of the Father Hudson’s complex, or assessments of its standing buildings. As a result there are some inconsistencies and inaccuracies, particularly related to the Father Hudson’s site, which could be prejudicial when it is being used to assess some planning applications.

Certain aspects are relatively insignificant – such as a contradiction regarding the foundation of the Father Hudson’s complex. In paragraph 7 it states work on the complex began in 1884 and continued into the 1920’s; in paragraph 24 it states instead that work began in 1910 and finished in 1942. In fact, the first building opened in 1906 and the last major additions, apart from the modern wards of St. Gerard’s, were added after the Second World War.

Other parts of the appraisal are apparently contradictory. In paragraph 19 it is claimed that the ‘density of buildings to the east side of the Coventry Road is high with the complex of large buildings that makes up Father Hudson’s Homes’, whilst in paragraph 9 it is stated that the ‘complex incorporates a number of important open spaces’, and the grounds and gardens are referred to in later sections as well. In fact the site is clearly not densely developed.

35 English Heritage, 2011, Understanding Place: Conservation Area Designation, Appraisal and Management, Para. 1.6
A more important misleading statement relates to the buildings on the site and their age and significance. In paragraph 36 it is stated that ‘the buildings of Father Hudson’s Homes are important and good examples of Edwardian architecture’.

Technically, within the proposed redevelopment area, only the original St. Edward’s Boys Home is Edwardian and – even allowing this architectural term to be extended chronologically that far - the only other pre-First World War structure is St. Gerard’s Hospital. Most of the buildings of the Homes complex were built between the 1920’s and 1940’s so cannot in any way be considered to be ‘Edwardian’.

The assessment that the buildings are both ‘important and good’ is also debateable. Apart from the church, none of the buildings, including the St. Edward’s Boys Home itself – described in the same paragraph as being ‘of particular note’ – have been considered to be worthy of being placed on the statutory list.

None meet the various general criteria for listing set out in the relevant guidance, nor in the most recent and more specific guidance related directly to childrens’ homes and hospitals set out in the English Heritage’s designation advice on health and welfare buildings.36 For this type of building of this date, buildings have to be innovative, distinctive or of definite architectural quality.

It is difficult to agree that they are good examples of their era, whether that be ‘Edwardian’ or of the 1920’s and 1940’s. As outlined above, the original St. Edward’s Boys Home is not a particularly good or innovative example of early-20th century architecture and the philosophy of care and its design was already out of date when it was opened in 1906; the age of the large, austere, institutional orphanages and childrens’ homes had passed.

Residential care had devolved to the smaller ‘cottage homes’ and the even less formal ‘scattered homes’ of the Sheffield system – a process that had begun in the 1870’s and had become almost universal by the 1890’s even in the Poor Law Union workhouses. Ironically, one of the earliest of the workhouse schemes was the one at Marston Green so close to Coleshill.

Apart from the church and the former Central Offices, both outside the proposed redevelopment area, it is difficult to agree that any of the other buildings on the site are either important or good examples of their type.

At best the others are pleasant enough rather than being of any particular architectural or historical significance. Ironically, the most interesting surviving building is the Old Wards, a fairly rare surviving example of an early-20th century open air ward.

The Appraisal correctly states in its first paragraph that ‘it is...the character of an area rather than individual buildings which should be the prime consideration in identifying conservation areas. That character is derived from a range of interrelated factors in particular the geography, history and townscape character of the particular place’.  

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8.3 The Development Brief

The revised Development Brief accepted by the local authority in 2005 recommended a large swathe of the area be redeveloped and recognised the difficulties of adaptive reuse of all the buildings on the site and accepted the need for the demolition of several structures and the redevelopment of part of the site for housing; that, in turn, met some of the requirements of the North Warwickshire Core Policy (HSG1) for housing which set out a target of 150 houses on the site of which 60 (40%) would be ‘affordable housing’.

It was, at this time, still considered possible to retain and convert St. Edward’s Boys’ Home, and the St. Gerard’s Hospital had already been converted into the Society’s offices. The general scale and character of the present redevelopment proposals are similar to those outlined in the 2005 Brief, except for the demolition of St. Edward’s and St. Gerard’s; the buildings scheduled for demolition are shown in plan D at the rear of the Brief:

Fig.12: Extract from the proposed demolition schedule in the 2005 revised Brief.

The main consideration should be how the present proposal differs from it – which is clearly in the proposed demolition of St. Edward’s and St. Gerard’s; the ambivalence regarding St. Mary’s in the Brief also needs to be addressed because that building is also due to be demolished as part of these proposals.
In general, the demolition of St. Gerard’s is considered to have a relatively limited impact on the area, as it is set quite far away on the north-eastern extremity and has been extended in several directions. It has also been physically altered and, although a reasonably intact example of a small pavilion hospital, it was not a building of any great architectural or historical significance.

This Brief is still current and the site is still considered by the local authority as an important development site; section 2.39 of the local authority’s Draft Core Strategy published in June 2012 states ‘A site off Coventry Road owned by the Father Hudson’s Society is one of the key development sites in Coleshill and the Borough Council has been working with the land owner and the Homes and Community Agency to deliver a housing scheme, supporting housing or a mix of residential uses on the site’.

8.4 Impact Assessment

Given that the Father Hudson’s complex is the largest element of the Conservation Area, any changes made to it will inevitably have an impact on the character of the Conservation Area. The specific issues related to the site were sensibly noted in the original Conservation Area Appraisal which also suggested the need for a more detailed Development Brief and anticipated the issues facing the Society as its role developed and many of its residential buildings became redundant.

By adopting the revised Brief the local authority clearly acknowledged the specific planning issues regarding the site and accepted that the degree of demolitions and new build proposed would, if suitably designed and laid out, would not be unacceptably detrimental to the character of the Conservation Area.

This seems to have been because it was considered that the main reason for the creation of the Conservation Area was to protect the southern approach into the town. The Appraisal states (in para. 9 and the next, wrongly numbered para.7) that the area ‘is characterised by C19th ribbon development’ and that the area ‘is attractive with mature trees and interesting buildings abutting the road’. The emphasis on the character is thus on the linear street and the buildings along it rather than the wider complex beyond.

It is considered that the buildings away from the street front within the Father Hudson’s complex are either fairly neutral or negative in terms of their contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

In addition, the preservation of large complex type sites has always been problematic. Guidance to try and preserve the layouts of characters of these sites are often too general and difficult to adhere to once the original specific function of the site is no longer there.

Recent wholesale demolitions of such sites include, for example, the redevelopment of the once highly influential PMRAF hospital at Halton, Buckinghamshire and the Okehampton Workhouse complex in Devon – both unique in their own way, both with buildings deemed in an independent heritage assessment of being worthy of retention or even listing, but both considered impossible to retain.
The Father Hudson’s complex has also lost its original purpose and has an over-supply of residential but institutional buildings designed original for children, nurses and nuns – none of which are now needed. Evidently the Development Brief has accepted this fact and allows for their removal and the redevelopment of their sites.

The street frontage buildings are slightly different. The better quality of buildings that ‘book-end’ the north and south ends of the street front – the Central Offices to the north and the church to the south – are to be retained and are not within the proposed redevelopment area. In addition, the former school and the Cottage homes are also excluded from it.

That leaves just the original St. Edward’s Boys’ Home and the St. Mary’s nurses’ hostel. The latter building is probably of circa 1930 and a reasonably attractive, if not architecturally significant, neo-Georgian design. It makes a minor contribution to the character of the Conservation Area but its internal layout would make adaptive reuse quite difficult.

Ironically, it is felt that the St. Edward’s Boys Home is not a positive contributor to the character of the Conservation Area, despite being the oldest component of the Father Hudson’s complex.

It is of limited architectural value and in its scale quite different to anything else within the Conservation Area, being large and austere. As outlined above it was already old fashioned when built and the architect is not of national significance.

Its historical importance is in its role as the first building on the Father Hudson’s site, which led to development of the rest of the complex and ensured the establishment of what is now the Father Hudson’s Society as part of the fabric of Coleshill.

However, its more recent history is also a significant factor in its contribution to the Conservation Area and is far less attractive. Many residential institutions have bad reputations, deserved or otherwise, and the buildings are often seen as physical representations of their unfortunate pasts – especially when the architecture itself is austere and unwelcoming.

The criminal actions of a few individuals in positions of trust against defenceless children taken into the care of the Father Hudson’s Homes – completely at odds with its original aims and ideals - have seriously damaged the reputation of the Society and will inevitably have had an impact on what is now a very different organisation which is trying to reach out to the unfortunates in and on the fringes of society.

Inevitably, this more recent history of St. Edward’s Boys’ Home in particular has a very serious impact on the way it is perceived in the community and the wider world. The building is, for many people, a symbol of abuse and painful memories – and as such, a blot on the good name of both the modern Father Hudson’s Society and the town of Coleshill. As such it can only be seen in this context as being a negative factor within the Conservation Area.
Pl.35: General view northwards along Coventry Road, with the site on the right.

Pl.36: Typical degraded part of the present grounds of the Father Hudson’s complex.
The existing service road parallel to the Coventry Road at the front of the existing buildings, together with the basic landscaping and tree cover, is to be retained and will preserve much of the character of the general vista along the Coventry Road.

The removal of the large institutional buildings facing the road will inevitably leave a gap that will need to be filled by new buildings in the redevelopment. It is strongly suggested that these be in a style robust and substantial enough to fill the gap – perhaps of at least three storeys to match the height of the buildings to be removed and of large footprint.

9. Conclusions

The present redevelopment proposals for much of the Father Hudson’s Society’s Coleshill complex are broadly similar to those adopted by the local authority in 2005, apart from the demolition of St. Edward’s Boys’ Home and St. Gerard’s Hospital – and confirming the demolition of St. Mary’s Nurses Hostel.

The basic layout of the new development is much the same apart from the need for the new build along the Coventry Road and is designed to retain and where possible enhance the character of the Conservation Area.

It is felt that with suitably designed buildings along the Coventry Road frontage and the retention of some of the key mature trees and the basic existing character of the landscaping, the key views along the line of the Conservation Area will be retained – the main difference being the removal of the St. Edward’s Boys’ Home which is a building of indifferent architectural quality with an unfortunate recent history.

The street frontage will still retain key elements of the Father Hudson’s complex, notably the church and the former Central Offices, and the retention of much of the existing landscaping and tree cover will effectively mask many of the changes beyond, limiting the visual impact on the main axis of the Conservation Area and the southern approach into the town.

There is ample opportunity to retain some of the pleasant, if not historically significant and much altered, landscaping within the complex in the redevelopment and the views into and out of it will not be too radically altered as a result.

None of the buildings to be demolished are of great architectural value though most of are sufficient interest to warrant a degree of ‘preservation by record’ – perhaps to an English Heritage level 2/3 survey mainly based on a photographic record, existing plans and amplified building analysis.

Finally, it seems clear that such a redevelopment is the only real way in which the modern Father Hudson’s Society can retain its historic links with Coleshill now that the original purposes for which it was founded – residential child care – is no longer needed. As this complex was developed in the 20th century by the Society for its charitable works, this has to be a significant factor in its continued development.
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