



## THORNTON HOUGH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

---

### PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

Prepared for Wirral Council by Donald Insall Associates Ltd, 2007 - Wirral Council 2009

## CONTENTS

### PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

#### PREFACE

- Background to the Study
- Scope and Structure of the Study
- Existing Designations, Legal Framework for Conservation Areas and the Powers of the Local Authority

#### **1.0 LOCATION**

- 1.1 Geographic Location
- 1.2 Topography and Geology
- 1.3 General Usage (e.g. residential)
- 1.4 Conservation Area Boundary

#### **2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 2.1 Early History and Origins
- 2.2 Joseph Hirst
- 2.3 William Hesketh Lever
- 2.4 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Changes
- 2.5 Archaeology

#### **3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS**

- 3.1 Setting and Relationship with the Surrounding Area
- 3.2 Character and Relationship of Spaces
- 3.3 Views and Vistas within the Area
- 3.4 Green Spaces and Planting

#### **4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

- 4.1 Grain, Scale, Repetition and Diversity
- 4.2 Principal Buildings and Features
- 4.3 Boundaries and Surfaces

#### **5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS**

- 5.1 Prominent Styles
- 5.2 Known Architects and Designers
- 5.3 Materials
- 5.4 Typical Features and Details

#### **6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS**

- 6.1 Overview
- 6.2 Recent Development
- 6.3 Unsympathetic Extensions
- 6.4 Unsympathetic Alterations

6.5 Loss and Development Pressures

6.6 Public Realm

**7.0 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER**

## PREFACE

### **Background to the Study**

This report has been prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd on behalf of Wirral Council. Its purpose is to clarify the designation of the Conservation Area, which will protect and enhance the character of the historic core of the village of Thornton Hough.

### **Scope and Structure of the Study**

The scope of this Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan is based on the guidelines published by English Heritage ('Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals' and 'Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas', both dated February 2006) and represents a factual and objective analysis. In accordance with the guidelines, the following framework has been used as the basis for this analysis:-

- Location and population
- Origins and development of the settlement
- Prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan form or building type
- Archaeological significance
- Architectural and historic qualities of buildings
- Contribution made by key unlisted buildings
- Character and relationship of spaces
- Prevalent and traditional building materials
- Local details
- Contribution made by green spaces, trees, hedges, etc
- Setting of the Conservation Area and its relationship with the surrounding landscape
- Extent of loss, intrusion or damage
- Existence of any neutral areas

The document has been structured to encompass these areas of study and concludes with recommendations for the Conservation Area boundary and other matters such as provision of Article 4 Directions.

### **Existing Designations, Legal Framework for Conservation Areas and the Powers of the Local Authority**

Since the 1967 Civic Amenities Act local authorities have been empowered to designate as Conservation Areas those areas within their districts which were considered 'special'. The subsequent Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 consolidated those powers and defined Conservation Areas as:-

*"areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".*

Such areas are diverse. They may be large or small; residential or commercial; civic or industrial; old or relatively modern. They may represent social ideals or civic pride. They may be specifically designed or speculatively produced; modest or grand. They may contain Listed Buildings of architectural or historic interest or may simply have local historic association. However, common to all will be an identifiable environmental quality which should be protected from unsympathetic redevelopment or alteration.

Wirral Council has declared 25 Conservation Areas throughout the Borough reflecting the variety of building styles and environments exhibited within its borders.

The content of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is clarified by national Planning Policy Guidance (PPG15): Planning and the Historic Environment and is supported by more recent Regional Planning Guidance for the North West (RPG13), which identifies as a key objective the need to ensure active management of the regions environmental and cultural assets.

The principles of these documents are further supported by Wirral Council's local Heritage Conservation policies contained within its Unitary Development Plan.

This legislation and policy framework enables the authority to exercise greater control over development within Conservation Areas and, where appropriate, this may be supplemented by the use of 'Article 4 Directions' to remove permitted development rights. In this way, minor changes, such as window replacement or loft conversions, which may be cumulatively detrimental, can be controlled.

National policy stipulates that local authorities have a duty to review, from time to time, their regions to ensure that places of special architectural or historic interest are being protected. The boundaries of existing Conservation Areas may be revised, new areas may be designated and those areas which have been eroded to the extent that their special character has been lost may be de-designated.

Whilst the Council recognises that, for Conservation Areas to remain 'live' and responsive to a changing society, changes must and will occur, it nevertheless undertakes to ensure that all changes make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of its Conservation Areas and do not result in any serious loss of character or features.

Planning legislation supports the authority in this by increasing its control over development. It does this in the following ways:

- Buildings and structures may not be demolished without formal consent from the Council (Conservation Area Consent).
- Trees are protected and all work to them requires consent from the Council.

- New development is expected to reflect the quality of design and construction of the surrounding area and should make a positive contribution to the area's character.
- Local planning authorities may, if necessary, exercise even greater control by removing the basic permitted development rights of householders.
- Under section 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Council has a legal obligation to ensure that "special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance" of the area when formulating decisions on planning applications.

The first step to protecting the inherent qualities of a Conservation Area is having a thorough understanding of its character and Planning Policy Guidance PPG15 advises that "the definition of an area's special interest should derive from an assessment of the elements that contribute to (and detract from) it".

This should then underpin local policies for the areas protection. Such a definition requires a thorough appraisal of the area to assess the contribution of each element (e.g. buildings, boundaries, trees, surfaces, etc.) to the areas overall character. PPG15 notes that "the more clearly the special architectural or historic interest that justifies designation is defined and recorded; the sounder will be the basis for local plan policies and development control decisions".

Whilst an appraisal aims to identify the essential elements which give an area its character, it is not intended as a detailed evaluation of each building and feature. Therefore any buildings, features and details may still have importance even though not specifically referred to in the document and any omissions do not indicate lack of merit or interest.

## PART 1 – CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

### **1.0 LOCATION**

#### **1.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION**

- 1.1.1 Thornton Hough is located towards the centre of the Wirral Peninsula between the large settlements of Bromborough and Heswall. It is within a largely undeveloped, agricultural band of land which runs from the outskirts of Birkenhead to the north-west of Chester.

#### **1.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY**

- 1.2.1 In general the land gently slopes, with the highest point being around the school, to the north-east of the conservation area.
- 1.2.2 The geology of the historic township of Thornton Hough is thought to consist of bunter sandstone in the west, pebble beds in the east, including under the village centre. All of the sandstone and most of the pebble beds are overlain by boulder clay.

#### **1.3 GENERAL USAGE**

- 1.3.1 The majority of the buildings in Thornton Hough are residential. In addition to the houses, however, there are 2 churches, a public house, Women's Institute building, primary school, smithy, small shops, agricultural buildings, offices and community buildings such as the village hall.

#### **1.4 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY AND STATUTORY DESIGNATIONS**

- 1.4.1 Thornton Hough was designated as a Conservation Area in April 1979. The current boundary follows an irregular line to include the houses on Grange Drive to the north, Hilltop Farm and the North Lodge on Thornton Common Road, Thornton House to the east, most of the houses along Raby Road, The Folds and the recreation ground, before returning up Smithy Hill.
- 1.4.2 There are around 22 listed buildings in the village. Many of these are groups of houses forming a terrace. St George's Church is grade II\* listed, denoting its exceptional level of architectural interest.

## **2.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **2.1 EARLY HISTORY AND ORIGINS OF SURROUNDING AREA**

- 2.1.1 At the time of the Domesday survey, the land around Thornton Hough (or Torintone as it was then referred to as) was in the possession of Robert de Rodelent. By the time of the reign of King Edward II, the land was owned by a Roger de Thornton, whose daughter married Richard de la Hough, thus giving the current name of the village. Thornton Hough remained in the same family for 12 generations before being passed to the Whitmores and Savages and then onto the Mostyns. At the time of Edward M. Lloyd Mostyn's ownership, William Mortimer commented on Thornton Hough in his book 'The Hundred of Wirral' published in 1847:

*'Most of the land is of very indifferent quality, which indeed may be said of the whole parish... The village is built on a slight elevation, the only street of which is cut through the solid sandstone, presenting a very unpleasant appearance, and although it possesses a few tolerably good houses, the greater proportion are of a very inferior description.'*

### **2.2 JOSEPH HIRST**

- 2.2.1 It was wealthy woollen mill owner, Joseph Hirst of Wilshaw, near Huddersfield in Yorkshire, who undertook the first major phase of improvements in the village. Hirst purchased farmland from James Houghton, a merchant, for £600 in January 1866 and started construction work on a church, vicarage and school. He lived in Springfield House (later to become part of Thornton House), but also appears to have instigated the building of a terrace of houses (Wilshaw Terrace) and a shop, creating a very small model village.

### **2.3 WILLIAM HESKETH LEVER**

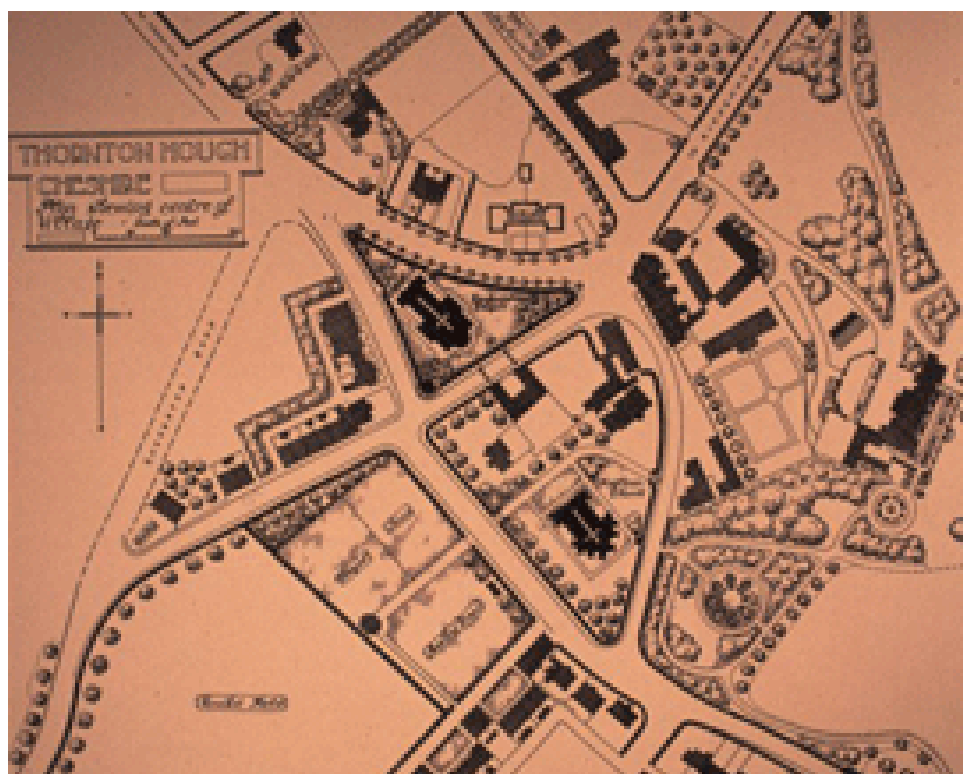
- 2.3.1 William Hesketh Lever constructed the Port Sunlight works on the east of the Wirral Peninsula in 1888 for the manufacture of soap. As the area at that time was relatively sparsely populated, he chose to build an adjoining model village to accommodate workers and their families and meet most of the needs of their everyday lives, such as schooling and hospitals. The project was ambitious on a scale not seen before: over a period of a couple of decades, hundreds of houses were built, but instead of the tightly packed streets of terraced housing seen in other areas of workers' housing, Lever's buildings were planned amongst vast areas of gardens, landscaping, recreational facilities such as bowling greens and allotments to encourage the growing of fruit and vegetables. The houses themselves were picturesquely laid out and blocks were individually designed and reflected a number of vernacular influences.



- 2.3.2 Also in 1888, William Hesketh Lever rented the early Victorian Thornton Manor, situated a short distance from Thornton Hough village. In 1891, he bought it outright, after making a number of alterations (he was later to remodel the house almost entirely).
- 2.3.3 Lever was then to purchase the village of Thornton Hough and subsequently took it upon himself to make improvements in line with his work at Port Sunlight. Housing was built to accommodate his estate workers and managerial staff together with a school, congregational church, a further shop and social club. In 1895, he rebuilt and considerably enlarged Thornton House for his brother, James Darcy Lever.



*Engraving of Thornton House from The Building News in 1896, presumably shortly after its completion*



### 2.4 20<sup>TH</sup> AND 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY CHANGES

- 2.4.1 The Lever Estate continued to expand Thornton Hough during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, building more individual or pairs of houses on the periphery of the village and expanding community facilities.
- 2.4.2 A large area of housing was constructed in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in close proximity to the Neston side of the village. This is visually separated from the conservation area by woodland to the south of the recreation ground.

### 2.5 ARCHAEOLOGY

- 2.4.1 The Merseyside Archaeological Service Historic Environment Record holds accounts of sites of interest for the region. Within this record, there is little of archaeological interest known to have been found around the conservation area. It should be noted, however, that lack of finds generally indicates a lack of investigation, as opposed to a lack of archaeological / historical interest.

### **3.0 LANDSCAPE AND VISTAS**

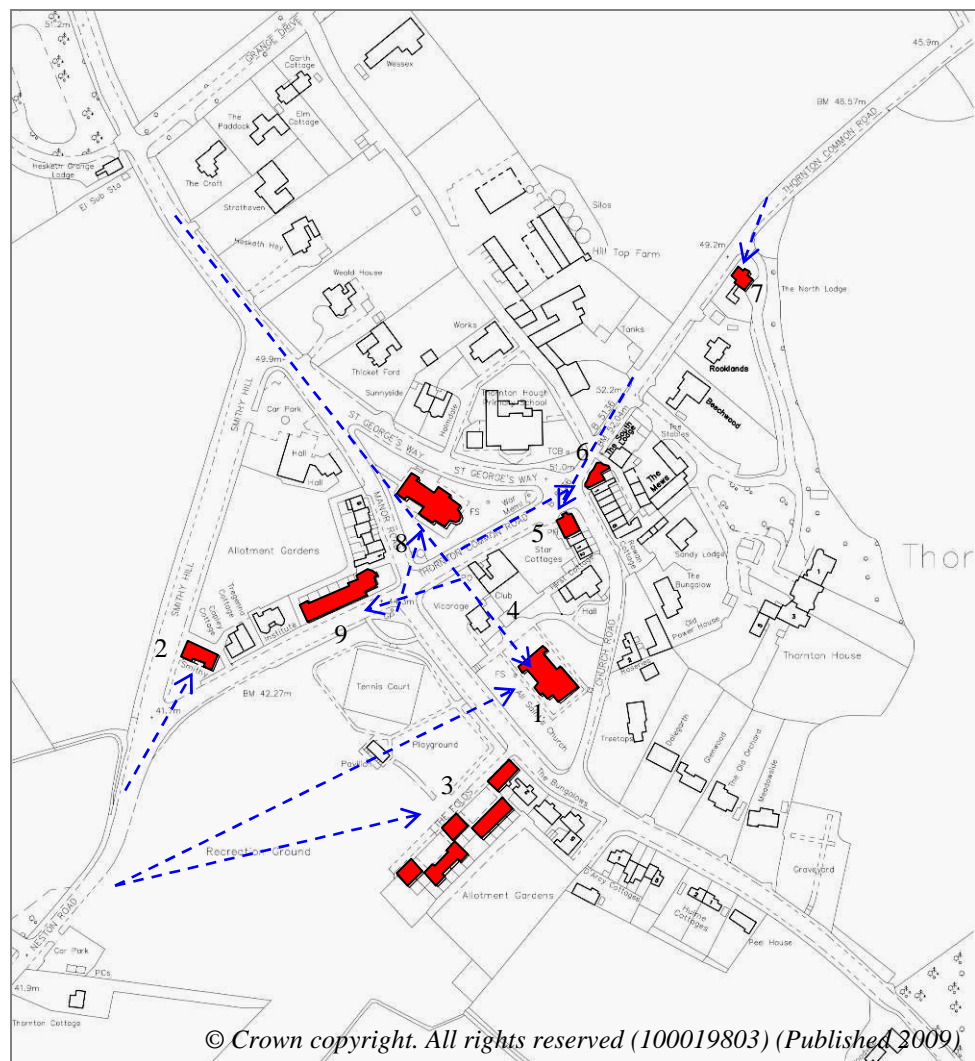
#### **3.1 SETTING AND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SURROUNDING AREA**

- 3.1.1 The area around Thornton Hough is one of the most rural parts of the Wirral, within a band of largely undeveloped land stretching along the centre of the Peninsula to the outskirts of Birkenhead and Chester. Thornton Hough stands at the junction of roads that link the larger settlements of Neston and Bromborough / Eastham and the smaller villages of Brimstage and Raby.

#### **3.2 CHARACTER AND RELATIONSHIP OF SPACES**

- 3.2.1 The character of Thornton Hough is a complex mix of elements of a model village together with buildings from a more typical historic settlement that has grown up over a period of centuries. Despite the many of the buildings more recently becoming privately owned, the character of an estate village, with the associated consistency of detail (e.g. fairly unified boundary treatments) and good levels of maintenance still prevails.
- 3.2.2 Buildings within Thornton Hough are generally focused around key elements such as the green or either of the two churches. The increased density of buildings near the crossing point of the principal roads through the village provides a natural focus. Church Road, at its junction with Thornton Common Road, displays the contrast of the grit of Wilshaw's stone buildings of Pennine character and Lever's softer brick Arts and Crafts style.

## 3.3 VIEWS AND VISTAS WITHIN THE AREA



*Map showing key views and vistas within the conservation area*



*View across the recreation ground to All Saints Church*

3.3.1 Views and vistas towards or between key buildings are vital to the character of the Thornton Hough Conservation Area. Views are enhanced by its natural topography and are set up from the incidental twists and the angles of historic streets. They are further improved by eye-catching features such as turrets, towers and spires. Views from the west across the recreation ground are more panoramic, whilst those from the north and east are funnelled by the tighter pattern of development.

3.3.2 Key views include:

- 1) View across the green / recreation ground towards All Saints Church
- 2) View up Neston Road towards the Smithy
- 3) View across the green / recreation ground towards The Folds
- 4) Vista down Manor Road, past St George's Church terminating on All Saints Church
- 5) View towards The Stores
- 6) View down Thornton Common Road featuring The Store and the Seven Stars Public House
- 7) View down Thornton Common Road featuring the North Lodge as a gateway to the village
- 8) View from the recreation ground toward St George's Church with the shelter in the foreground
- 9) View of 1-7 Neston Road and 1-6 Manor road from the east

### 3.4 GREEN SPACES AND PLANTING

3.4.1 There are 4 distinct types of green space and planting within Thornton Hough Village:

3.4.2 **Shared Green Spaces** - The recreation ground is the principal shared green space in the village and is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it enhances views towards surrounding buildings and their setting. Secondly it has always had an important social role, for the recreational use of residents who often only have small gardens. Although largely consisting of grass, there are a few attractive trees and small areas of planting.



3.4.3 **Agricultural land and features / Allotments** - Despite Thornton Hough's agricultural setting, little in the way of land associated with farming is included within the conservation area boundary. However, of importance to the historical development of the village are the two areas of allotments off Smithy Hill and behind The Bungalows and The Folds. These areas of land were allocated to encourage residents to eat healthily and live thriftily by growing their own fruit and vegetables.





*Allotments behind the Bungalows and The Folds*

- 3.4.4 **The Churchyards** are critical to the landscape character of the village as their grounds are situated centrally in prominent positions. Both are raised above pavement level on retaining sandstone walls. The churchyards have a number of attractive trees and in particular the topiary yews to the south-west entrance of All Saints church frame views of the tower. The ranked gravestones of All Saints contrast with the more open character of St George's.



*All Saints Churchyard*



*St Georges Churchyard*

- 3.4.5 **Domestic planting and landscaping** gives the village much of its lush green appearance. Domestic gardens are often behind dense hedging, which is most attractive when it allows a view of the building beyond. Large shrubs and trees are generally found in gardens and very few gardens have significant areas of detrimental hard landscaping. Where gardens are large there are generally significant mature trees. The tree-lined driveway to Thornton House is particularly important as it provides a dense green edge to the village.



*Garden on the corner of Manor Road and Neston Road.*



## **4.0 TOWNSCAPE AND PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS**

### **4.1 GRAIN, SCALE, REPETITION AND DIVERSITY**

4.1.1 Despite the relatively recent construction of most of its buildings, Thornton Hough has the irregular grain of a historic village that has grown up over a period of centuries. This would have been the intention of the designers and also the layout would have grown from the village's earlier origins and the historic street / field patterns. Where the terraces of houses have even plot widths, their regularity is not immediately apparent due to the change in building line and external appearance / detailing of the houses. With the exception of the largest of houses, most were built with very little or no rear gardens, with residents expected to use the allotments for growing vegetables and the recreation ground for exercise. Rear yards were only provided for utilitarian purposes e.g. drying clothes etc.

4.1.2 The historic buildings within the village vary in height from single storey bungalows to two storeys with a third within the roof space. The two churches have a greater height, giving them visual prominence.

### **4.2 PRINCIPAL BUILDINGS AND FEATURES**

4.2.1 There are a number of buildings within the conservation area which have a higher status either historically, socially or architecturally or are of particular importance as being landmarks. Most of these buildings are listed grade II or II\*, however, there are a small number of unlisted buildings which are important to the character or historical development of the village and designed by architects that Lever employed at Port Sunlight:

- Primary school – formerly Lever School – 1904 by Jonathon Simpson. Important for its social role in the village and value as a landmark.
- Sunnyside and Holmdale – semi-detached pair by William and Segar Owen, 1892. Contributes to visual character of the village, designed by locally important architects and appears to be in good, largely unaltered condition.
- Thicketford – by William and Segar Owen, 1892. The building became the home of Lord Leverhulme's sister and is also important for having been designed by locally important architects and appearing to be in good, largely unaltered condition.
- Weald House – of social significance to the village as it was built as the Manse for the congregational minister in 1904 by locally important architects Grayson and Ould. The building also appears to be in good, largely unaltered condition.
- Hesketh Hey - the building also appears to be in good, largely unaltered condition and contributes to the previously mentioned group of buildings.



*(top left) Primary School; (top right) Sunnyside and Holmdale; (bottom left) Thicketford; (bottom centre) Weald House; (bottom right) Hesketh Hay*

### 4.3 BOUNDARIES AND SURFACES

- 4.3.1 The principal adopted roads have a modern tarmaced surface. Pavements exist to most roads and are generally paved with modern artificial block paviours in a pink colour. However, the stone kerbs, presumably dating to around the 1890s, still generally remain. There are occasional instances of red terracotta diamond patterned engineering paviours (early 20<sup>th</sup> century?) used for paths to houses and for pavements.
- 4.3.2 Many houses front directly onto the road, but elsewhere sandstone walls or picket fences appear to have traditionally separated front gardens or the grounds of a building from a public pavement. In many cases the sandstone walls are now attractively weathered with lichen growth. The wall alongside St Georges Church is picturesquely planted with colourful shrubs such as heather.





*Boundaries and surfaces within the conservation area*



## 5.0 ARCHITECTURE, MATERIALS AND DETAILS

### 5.1 PROMINENT STYLES

5.1.1 Buildings and structures within Thornton Hough can be categorised into the following general architectural styles or building types:

- Agricultural buildings – constructed from locally sourced materials and often extended or altered in an ‘ad-hoc’ manner. Forms are simple and rectilinear and the buildings have relatively low pitched roofs. Openings are generally small and the buildings generally have a ‘robust’ character. Buildings typically have a rectilinear floor plan and simple roof arrangement.



*Agricultural building in the conservation area*

- Early 19<sup>th</sup> century – buildings constructed of locally sourced material. Buildings are generally of simple rectilinear forms, although may have outriggers and later extensions. Positioning of openings has some order although not in the manner of the contemporary urban houses. Buildings typically have a rectilinear floor plan and simple roof arrangement.



*Early 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings*

- Gothic – buildings with features such as pointed arched openings, steeply pitched roofs, tall chimneys, turrets and various decorative elements such as ridge tiles, finials and carved stonework figures. Buildings typically have an irregular floor plan and complex roof arrangement.



*Gothic building in the conservation area*

- Vernacular Revival– Buildings with details derived from a number of traditional building types. Influences include Gothic, Jacobean, Elizabethan and Medieval building periods. In contrast to the traditional agricultural buildings or those built in the 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, roofs are more steeply pitched and elevations are relatively detailed. Plan forms are generally more complex. Gables are used regularly as features in the design of buildings, and like openings, are shaped to reflect the style of the building. Chimneys are typically more prominent on buildings of these styles.



*Buildings of a Vernacular Revival style on Thornton Common Road*

### 5.2 KNOWN ARCHITECTS AND DESIGNERS

5.2.1 The following text briefly covers all architects known to have worked in the village:

5.2.2 Kirk and Sons of Huddersfield:

- All Saints Church (1867)
- Vicarage (1866-8)
- School and School Master's House (1866-8)
- Wilshaw Terrace (1870)

Less is known about Kirk and Sons than other architects working in the village. One of their principal buildings is the Municipal Buildings of Dewsbury, West Yorkshire (built as Dewsbury Infirmary in 1881. Like their buildings in Thornton Hough, it is constructed in a gothic revival style.

5.2.3 Grayson & Ould:

- Village Club and Post Office (formerly Liberal Club) (1904)
- Weald House (formerly the manse) (1904)
- 1 The Folds (1892)
- 3 The Folds (1892)
- 13 and 15 The Folds (1892)
- 17-23 (odd) The Folds (1892)
- 2-5 The Bungalows, Raby Road (1890s)
- Thornton House (1895 rebuild)
- North Lodge to Thornton House (1895)
- South Lodge to Thornton House (1895)
- Stables to Thornton House (1895)

Edward Augustus Lyle Ould (1852-1909) trained under John Douglas before setting up his own practice for a short time in Chester. In 1886 he teamed up with George Enoch Grayson (c. 1834-1912), who had already found success in Liverpool. The practice of Grayson and Ould designed churches, commercial and domestic buildings. However, they are perhaps best known for designing many of the houses in Port Sunlight, together with its primary school. More locally they designed Hesketh Grange and its two lodges (1894), together with extensive work to Thornton Manor (1896). Hill Bark in Hoylake, Wirral (1891), was also designed by the pair, as well as 3/5 (1889) and 36 (1890s) Castle Street, Liverpool. Further afield, they worked on the restoration of Hall i' th' Wood in Bolton in 1900, also for Lord Leverhulme and a few Cambridge Colleges.

5.2.4 Jonathon Simpson:

- Primary School (formerly Lever School) (1904)

Jonathon Simpson (1850-1937) also worked on Thornton Manor with Grayson and Ould, but generally seems to be less prolific. Although, he did

not seem to design many buildings, he was a close friend of Lever, having met him at school. Lever used Simpson to work on a number of buildings that were clearly important to him, such as Hall i' th' Wood in Bolton in 1900, which he worked on with Grayson and Ould. Simpson designed a few groups of houses in Port Sunlight, including 30-38 Primrose Hill (1899) and 31-35 Corniche Road (1897). He was also responsible for the design of the Congregational Church in Astley Bridge, Belton (1891).

### 5.2.5 James Lomax-Simpson:

- St George Congregational Church (now URC) (1906-7)
- Stone shelter (1906-7)
- Smithy (1905 rebuild)
- D'Arcy Cottages (1906)
- Additions to Thornton House (1906)

James Lomax-Simpson (1882-1976) was the son of Jonathon Simpson and the godson of Lever. He studied at Liverpool University, before being articled to Grayson and Ould, whom he was clearly influenced by. He set up his own practice in Liverpool in 1905 and in 1910, he was appointed to take charge of the architectural department at Lever Brothers. His work for Lever's include: many houses, the Residents Club (1913) and part of Lever House (1913-4) in Port Sunlight, alterations to Thornton Manor (1913) and Unilever House in the City of London (1930-2).

### 5.2.6 William and Segar Owen:

- Sunnyside / Holmdale (1892)
- Thicket Ford (1892)
- 1-6 Manor Road
- 5-11 (odd) The Folds (1892)

William Owen (1846-1910) practiced primarily in Warrington, where he became a friend of Lever's. The following buildings are attributed to William Owen: extension to All Saint's, Thelwall, Warrington (1890), Parr Hall, Warrington (1895) and the NatWest banks in Wigan (1898) and Southport (1892). He also worked on numerous houses in Port Sunlight. He was joined in practice by his sons Segar (1874-c.1931) and Geoffrey (1887-1965) and the firm was subsequently known as William and Segar Owen. The following Port Sunlight buildings were attributed to this firm: Hulme Hall (1901), Christ Church (1904), Lady Lever Art Gallery (1914-22) and Lever House (1895).

### 5.2.7 Douglas and Fordham:

- 1-7 Neston Road (1893)

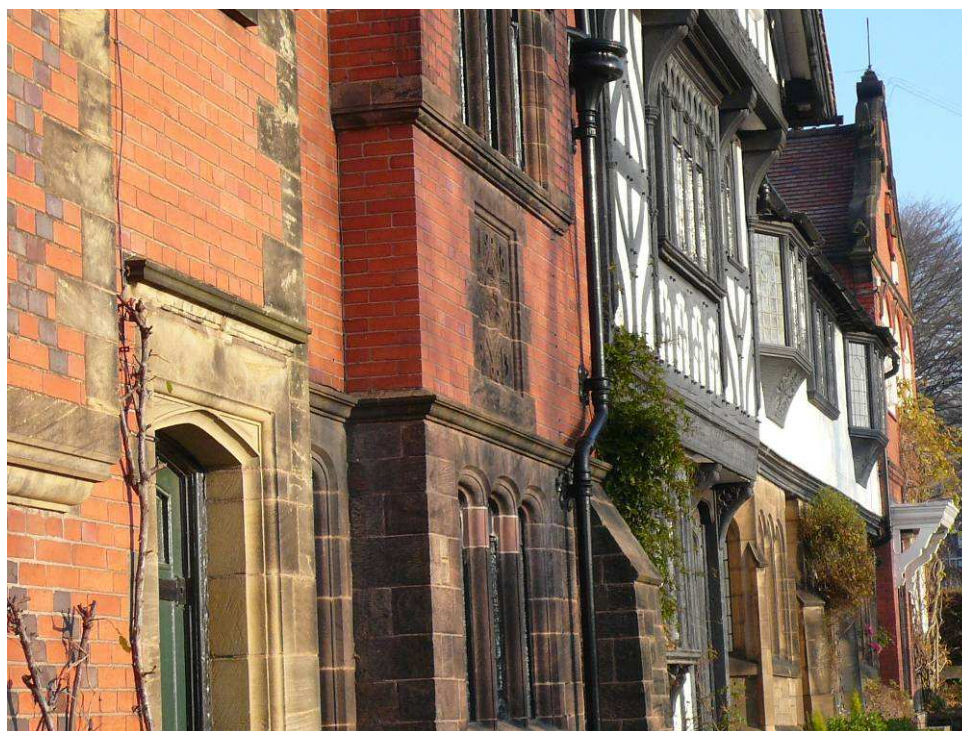
John Douglas of Chester (1830-1911) is the best known of all the architects who worked at Thornton Hough. From around 1884-1897 he worked with Daniel Peter Fordham (c. 1846-1897), who was thought to have been the partner of the firm that dealt primarily with Lever. In 1897 he joined up with



another architect to form the practice Douglas and Minshull. John Douglas, working either together with his partners, or on his own, was a prolific architect, particularly in the north-west. They designed many buildings in Port Sunlight, but were employed to a considerably greater extent by the Duke of Westminster at the Eaton Estate and throughout neighbouring Chester. Douglas also designed and restored many churches. He was particularly famed for his love of detailing, traditional materials and careful craftsmanship, and his work clearly influenced many other architects (including those working for Lever) of his time.

### 5.3 MATERIALS

- 5.3.1 Buildings within Thornton Hough have a rich variety of materials. Red sandstone, buff sandstone, red brick, polychromatic brick, timber framing, render and pebbledash are all seen in on the elevations to the village's architecturally prominent buildings. Roofing materials vary also; plain clay tiled roofs are seen with approximate equal regularity to slated roofs. Where slate is used for roofs, the slates are often thick stone slates laid to diminishing courses (slate size varies from very large at the bottom to small at the top).



*The richness and variety of materials of Thornton Hough illustrated in a single terrace: Buff sandstone, red sandstone, red brick, polychromatic brick, timber framing and pargetted render are all seen here.*



## 5.4 TYPICAL FEATURES AND DETAILS

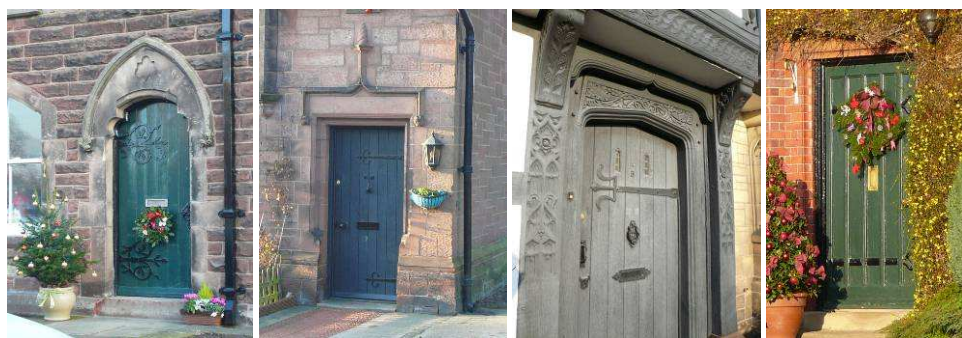
5.4.1 **Windows** within the Thornton Hough Conservation Area that enhance its character are principally one of a few types:

- Leaded windows – seen on the majority of buildings built in the first decades of the Leverhulme period. Leaded lights are set within timber or stone subframes, often with intricate carving. Where opening lights are provided, there are of a slim metal construction.
- Painted timber vertically sliding sashes – seen on the earlier buildings, before the Leverhulme period. Some are arch headed.
- Painted timber, multi-paned casements. Generally seen on buildings built from around 1900 onwards. Occasionally bulls-eye panes of glass are used as a decorative feature.



*Windows in the conservation area*

5.4.2 **Doors and porches** within the conservation area are an important part of the elevational compositions of buildings. Doors themselves are generally of a simple boarded timber construction without glazing. Decoration is in the metalwork (e.g. hinges) or to door surrounds. Many doors are arch headed and often have carved stonework / timberwork to the surrounds. Doors are occasionally recessed behind the face of the building or a bracketed canopy provided to give shelter.



*Doors within the conservation area*



*Porches within the conservation area*

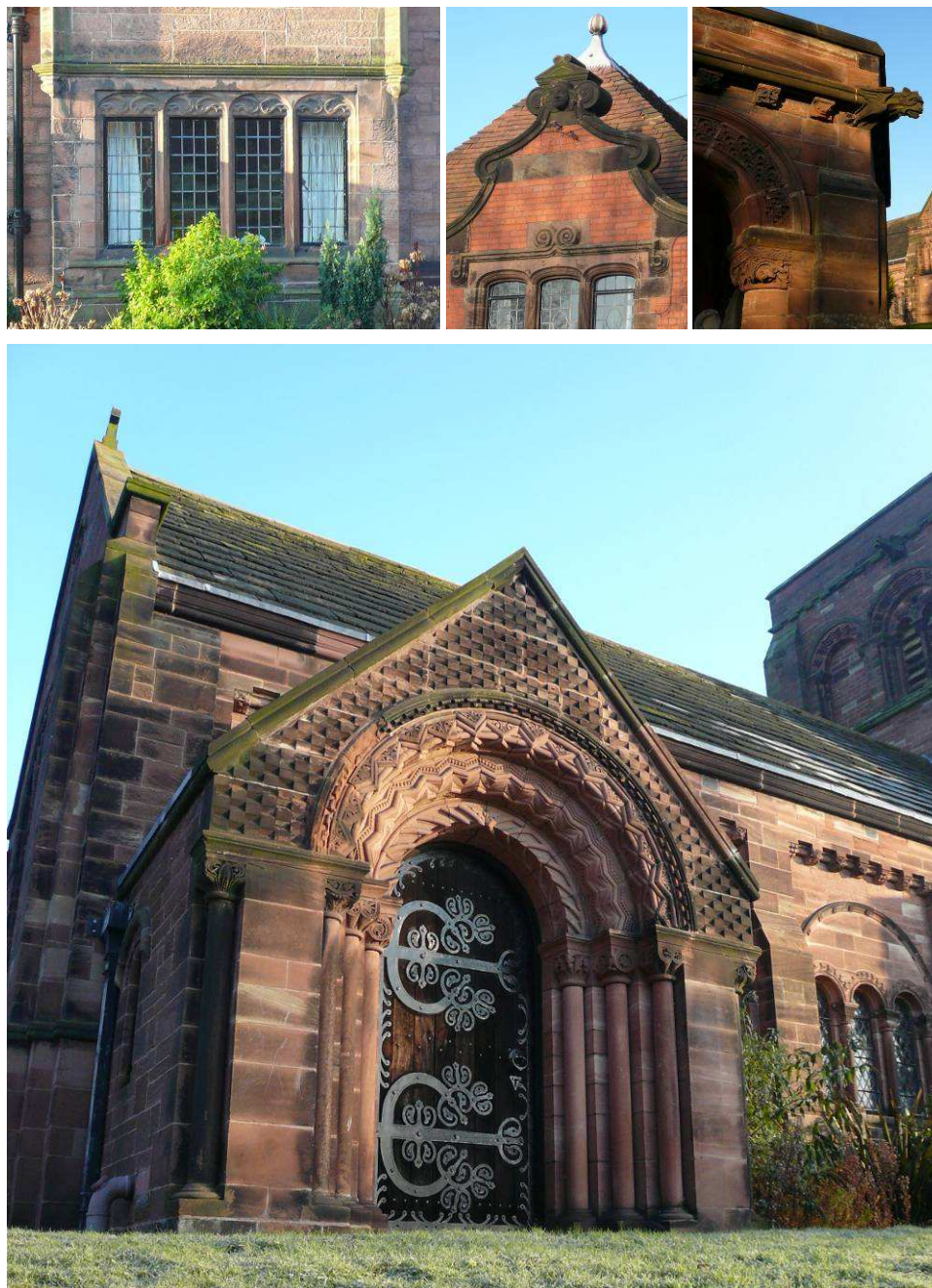
- 5.4.3 **Carved timberwork** is a particularly strong detail within the conservation area and there are many outstanding examples of traditional craftsmanship. Carved timberwork is predominantly seen on buildings built around 1890 to 1910. Very high quality carving to timberwork is seen particularly to window surrounds, bargeboards, door surrounds and brackets.



*Carved timberwork*

- 5.4.4 Carved stonework is also of an outstanding quality within the conservation area and is again mostly seen on buildings built between around 1890 and 1910. Very high quality carved stonework is seen particularly to window surrounds, door surrounds and parapets. The quality of the stonework to St George's Church is exceptional.





*Carved stonework. The bottom image shows the exceptional decorative stonework to St George's Church.*

- 5.4.5 Pargetting is usual, but seen in a number of instances within the conservation area on buildings built around 1890 to 1910. It used to ornament gables, eaves and other areas of external plasterwork.



- 5.4.6 **Chimneys** play a part in the visual composition of most buildings within the conservation area and in particular are used to punctuate groups. Chimneys vary considerably in design: circular, octagonal, square and canted plan forms are seen. Occasionally, chimneys are highly decorative with carved stone or moulded bricks used to form elaborate shapes, such as the barley twist popularised by John Douglas. Often the chimney stack projects out of an end gable and is used as a ‘bookend’ to a terraced composition. Terracotta or buff clay pots are seen on top of some stacks.



*Chimneys within the conservation area.*

- 5.4.7 **Roof details** are used to further decorate the already complex roof forms within the conservation area. A wide variety of forms and shapes are used – hips, parapets, pyramids, turrets etc, with often the most prominent features used at corners. The apex or gables of roofs are often topped with a weather vane or metal finial. The buildings built for Hirst have dog-toothed ridge tiles.

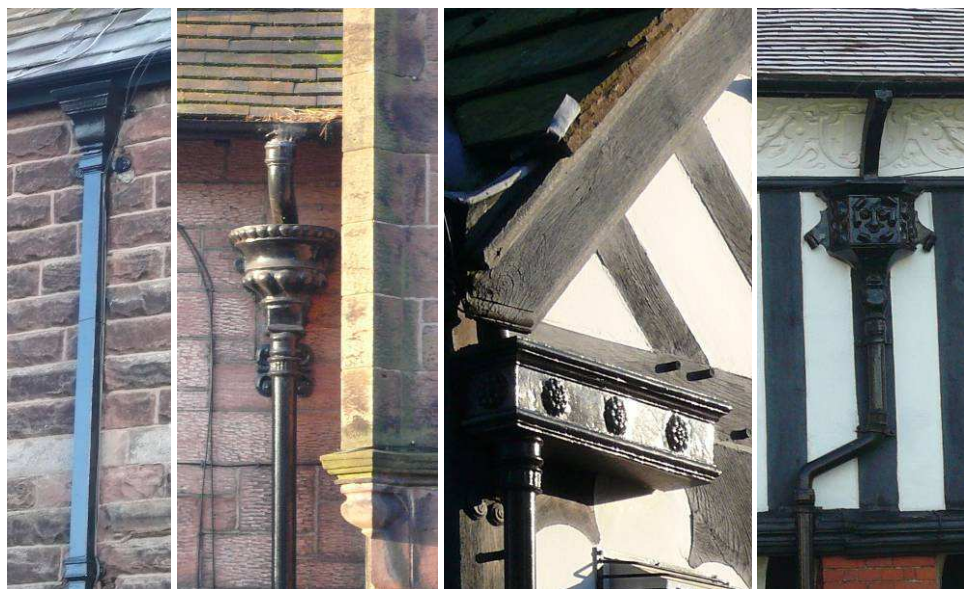






*Roof details in the conservation area*

- 5.4.8 **Rainwater goods** add further ornament to the buildings in Thornton Hough and continue the use of high quality craftsmanship. Of particular interest are the decorative cast iron hopper heads. Most other rainwater goods, such as guttering or downpipes are simpler, but of a high quality.



*Rainwater goods within the conservation area*

- 5.4.9 **Gateposts** are relatively simple with moderately decorative carved tops above a simple rectilinear post.



*Gate posts within the conservation area*

- 5.4.10 **Public realm features** within the village are predominantly more modern, but generally continue the aesthetic of high quality craftsmanship and traditional material. Cast iron is used for most lamp posts and fingerpost signage. The millennium lych gate leading to the recreation ground adds to the character of the village.



*Public realm features in Thornton Hough.*

## **6.0 NEGATIVE FACTORS**

### **6.1 OVERVIEW**

6.1.1 A study of this nature cannot attempt to highlight every part of the built environment that has a detrimental impact on the character or setting of the conservation area; instead this report summarises the most apparent of examples and key problems within the conservation area as a way of encouraging an understanding and awareness of these issues.

6.1.2 Appended to this document is a plan showing the contribution of buildings to the character of the conservation area. The plan was produced as a tool to gain an understanding of the significance of different parts of the village and to inform as to the appropriateness of the boundary. This plan categorizes each building, or group of buildings into the following groupings:

- A: (Red) – Buildings that are critical to the character of the area: typically these may be landmark buildings and / or historic buildings with most of their original character retained
- B: (Yellow) – Buildings that contribute positively to the character of the conservation area: historic buildings may have some alterations but original character is still prominent
- C: (Green) – Neutral - Either modern buildings of little interest or buildings where character has been lost beyond economic redemption.
- D: (Blue) – Buildings that detract from the significance or character of the area.



### 6.2 RECENT DEVELOPMENT

- 6.2.1 There have been very few buildings built within the conservation area since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A relatively small number of agricultural structures have been erected next to older structures on Hill Top Farm and the community centre has been significantly extended. The very few houses erected since the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century are generally set back from the road and are no visually prominent.



*(left) large extension / new building adjacent to older community centre building; (right) small later porch, although constructed of sympathetic materials, is detrimental to the simplicity of the form of the original structure.*

### 6.3 UNSYMPATHETIC EXTENSIONS

- 6.3.1 There are very few recent extensions within the conservation area that have a significant impact. The most unsympathetic of extensions are those that confuse the original form of the building and lessen the overall perception of quality. Good extensions either use the materials and detailing of the original building or are of a modern design and construction that is of a high quality but adequately contrasting to the original. Many of the key buildings within the village are of such a high standard of design that an extension to anything but the most hidden of elevations would almost certainly have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the building and conservation area as a whole.

### 6.4 UNSYMPATHETIC ALTERATIONS

- 6.4.1 There have been some changes to the buildings within the conservation area. These changes are often detrimental to the architectural character of the building and adversely affect the architectural character of the individual building or perceived quality of the area as a whole. These changes potentially include:
- Replacing original windows or other joinery, with modern designs and materials such as UPVC



- Replacement of leaded windows with plain float glass with / without stuck-on leading.
- Poor quality repairs, particularly where using a change of material
- The installation of rooflights into prominent roofslopes
- Loss of / changes to original boundary features.
- Poor quality fixtures onto a building – e.g. surface mounted wiring, signage etc
- Obtrusive aerials and satellite dishes
- Alteration to chimneys



*(top left) replacement UPVC windows on the side elevation of the listed Seven Stars public house; (top right) solar panels on the prominent front facing roof slope of Weald House; (bottom left) a modern poor quality fence and wall on Manor Road; (bottom right) large, prominent aerials.*



*Photograph taken at the opening ceremony of St Georges Congregational Church in May 1907. In the background is the Seven Stars Public House and Wilshaw Terrace before later alterations.*



*Similar view taken in late 2007 – differences include the loss of the dormer windows on the terrace and the removal of the parapet detail to the public house and the changes to its colour scheme.*



*Subtle loss of detail – the old photograph shows now lost top courses to the chimney and decorative bracing to the second floor gable.*

### **6.5 LOSS AND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES**

- 6.5.1 Thornton Hough village is remarkably intact when compared to its form in the early 1900s. No significant buildings appear to have been lost since that period, only perhaps minor outbuildings and structures such as boundary walls.
- 6.5.2 At present there seems to be little development pressure in Thornton Hough, despite its attractive setting and relatively close proximity to major urban centres. The area lies within the Green Belt. Under Wirral's Unitary Development Plan it is stated that Planning permission will not be granted for residential development within the greenbelt with the exception of the limited infilling in existing villages, including limited affordable housing subject to local community needs. Furthermore, Thornton Hough is outside Wirral's priority regeneration areas in which, according to the Interim



Housing Policy of October 2005, house building should be focused. However, it is likely that the Leverhulme Estate's long term ownership of the area has meant that the construction of buildings that are not in the interests of the village as a whole has been avoided.

### 6.6 PUBLIC REALM

- 6.6.1 The surface treatment of pavements and roads is of a fair standard in comparison to many other areas in the borough, but cannot be considered generally appropriate for a conservation area. The block paved surface to most pavements is neither a historically accurate choice of material, nor does it blend into the background in the manner that a neat but weathered, well maintained asphalt surface would. Where positioned up against the red Cheshire sandstone walling, the clearly artificial texture and colour detracts from the quality and character of the older structures.
- 6.6.2 Similar issues occur with the roads. There are problems with speeding of cars and cutting through the village by large lorries. To try to curtail traffic nuisance, large signs and road markings are used along the through road (Thornton Common Road / Neston Road). However, these signs and road markings are visually obtrusive and detract from the character of the area and appearance of the surrounding listed buildings.
- 6.6.3 The quality of street name signage and lampposts is often also poor, with standard quality fittings used, without consideration as to the character or significance of the area.



*(left) block paving and poor quality modern signage; (right) inappropriate highways road markings which detract from the character of the conservation area*

## **7.0 SUMMARY OF SPECIAL CHARACTER**

7.1 The following is a list of features that are part of Thornton Hough Conservation Area's special character:

- Historic village dating back to before the Domesday Survey.
- 'Model' village with two distinct primary phases of construction.
- Grouping of church, former school and Wilshaw Terrace by wealthy woollen mill owner Joseph Hurst
- Association with philanthropist William Hesketh Lever.
- Pioneering concept of workers housing, considered to benefit workers' health and well-being.
- Picturesque layout of buildings, carefully planned to create views and vistas between key elements.
- High quality landscaping including mature trees and sandstone walling.
- Most buildings are of an exceptionally high level of architectural design, with gothic and vernacular revival styles dominating.
- The materials seen within the village are of a very high quality - red sandstone, buff sandstone, red brick, polychromatic brick, timber framing, render and pebbledash are seen on walling with stone slates, Welsh slates and plain clay tiles all used traditionally on roofs.
- The level of detail and craftsmanship is exceptionally high – the village is particularly noted for its carved stone and timberwork.
- A number of locally important late 19<sup>th</sup> / early 20<sup>th</sup> century architects worked in the village including Jonathon Simpson, William and Segar Owen, Grayson and Ould, Douglas and Fordham and James Lomax-Simpson.
- Recent change and development has had little effect on the character of the village.
- A particularly high standard of repair and maintenance prevails in the village.
- A small number of agricultural buildings help indicate the form and nature of the village prior to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. These are simple forms with red sandstone / brick walls and slated roofs.