

# offbeat Helper

drawings by Elvin Ibbotson



# Drawing Belper

Belper is a Derbyshire market town with a rich history. The name is thought to derive from 'Beaurepair' or 'beautiful retreat'. From Norman times it formed part of Duffield Frith with a manor house and a deer park while its oldest building, St John's Chapel, dates from around 1250. The earliest industry was nailmaking, carried out in small workshops, and the football team is still known as 'The Nailers', but in the eighteenth century Jedediah Strutt built his first cotton mills along with housing for mill workers. Together with Arkwright's mills at Matlock Bath and Cromford, Strutt's mills were an important part of the Industrial Revolution and the rebuilt North Mill, with its pioneering iron and brick multi-storey structure and water powered machinery is a landmark building in Britain's architectural heritage.

Some of the buildings I chose to draw will be familiar; some less so; but I have tried to choose somewhat less-seen buildings or viewpoints, and to show not just the historic and obviously 'architectural' but also the recent and the ordinary.



The drawings are available as from my website as A4-size prints or as postcards. Scan the QR code or go to...  
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Looking along Bridge Street  
towards the East Mill





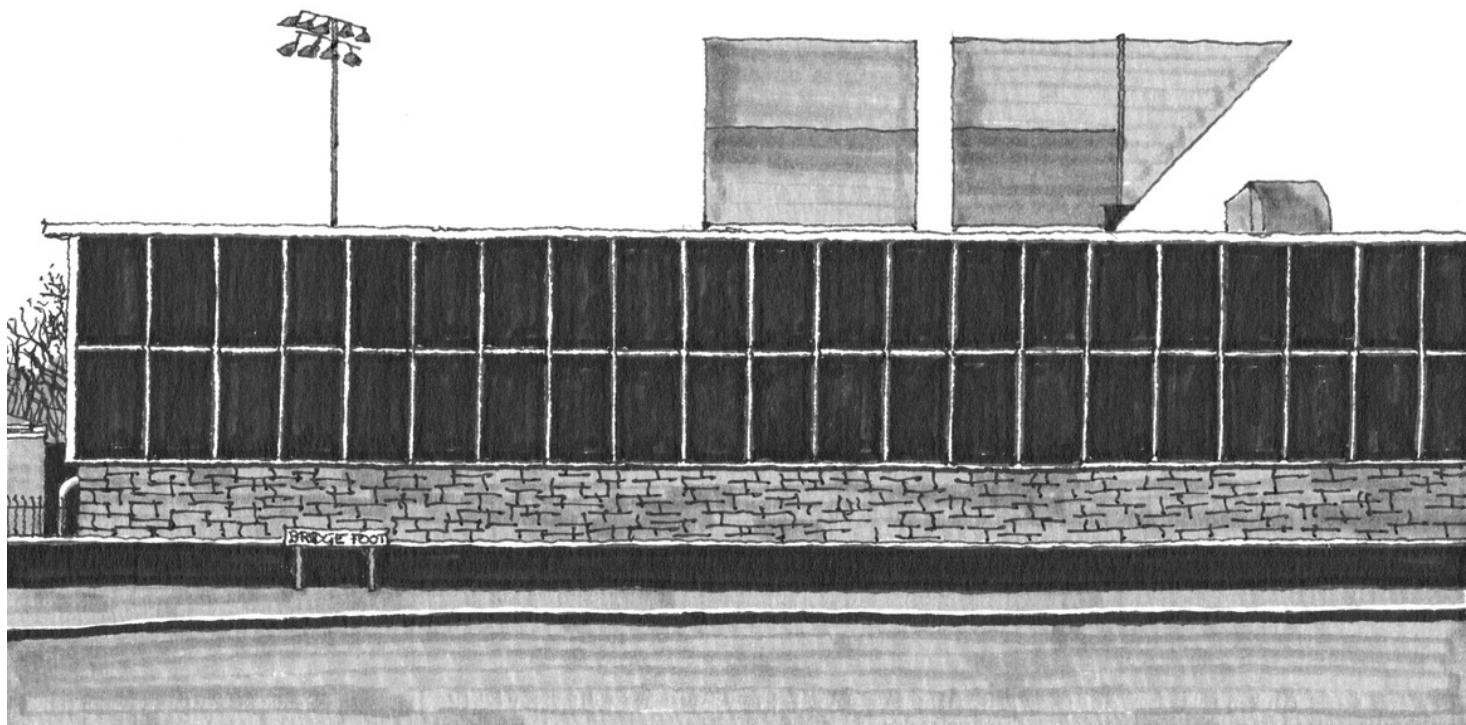
The **East Mill** was built in 1913, the last of a series of factories built by the Strutts in Belper. It abuts the only other remaining mill, the North Mill, an important example of early industrial architecture rebuilt in 1803 after a fire destroyed the original building.



Belper's mills were water powered, the river Derwent being held back by a weir. Water turbines still provide electricity. Across the river from the mills, the Strutts converted a row of cottages into a hospital and now they are cottages once again.

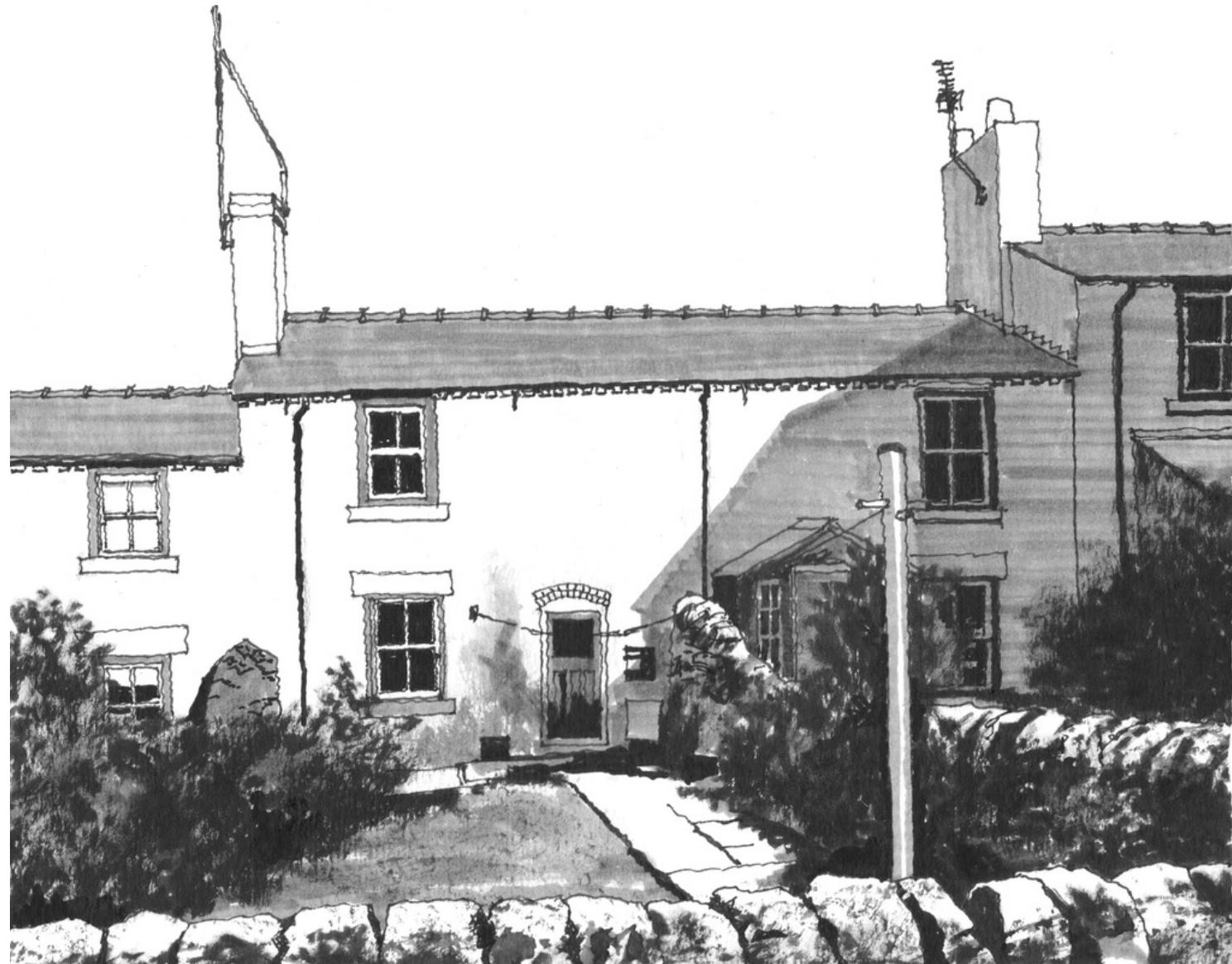


The old Courtaulds factory where the West Mill once stood





**Short Row** is a street of houses built by Jedediah Strutt to provide homes for mill workers. There were several rows of two-storey cottages here, and the Strutts built many more houses around Belper, with a wide variety of sizes and layouts. They also built a school and provided a hospital. Built in the 1780s, these south-facing row houses are still pleasant, practical and affordable homes.





the Strutts built houses for mill workers in several locations around Belper, the best known being Long Row. They experimented with house types, sometimes following established patterns but sometimes trying new ideas which may well have fed back into developments by other builders.

The Scotches, off Belper Lane, has strong similarities to Strutts houses, while a row of cottages nearby is more piecemeal.



Cottages on Belper Lane





The Strutts lived on the hill looking south over the river and made a path down through the gardens and straight to the bridge and the mills. The coach drive ran from Belper Lane where the gate lodge still stands surrounded by more recent housing.



Lodge Drive



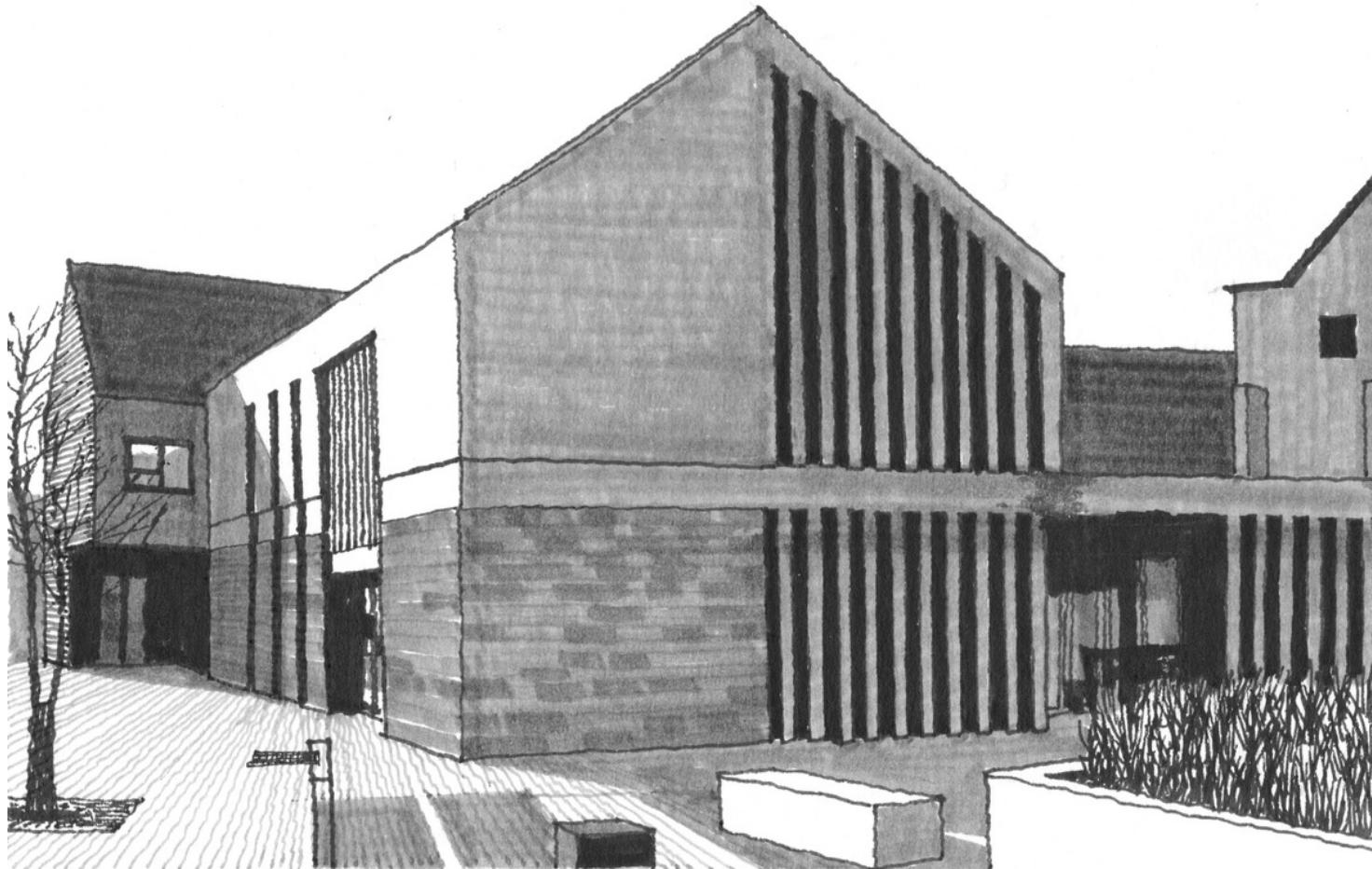
The Belper Poor Law Union Workhouse opened in 1840. It gave the destitute accommodation, food, employment and skills training in a fine building designed by the leading Victorian architect, Sir George Gibert Scott. You wouldn't have wanted to end up in a workhouse, but they might not have been quite as bad as they've been painted.

An infirmary was added some fifty years later and it became **Babington Hospital** in the twentieth century. There are plans to replace it with a new building on Derwent Street close by the Ada Belfield Centre care home on the site of the old Thorntons factory.





The Ada Belfield Centre





Just as many of the old buildings we find attractive today were built to be cheap and functional, some more recent buildings can have unintended qualities, like the sculptural ventilation ducts on the roof of the old Courtalds hosiery factory. Other buildings were designed to look good, like Babington Hospital. There are a few contemporary buildings dotted around Belper that delight the eye and make the town a pleasanter place. Buildings like the Ada Belfield Centre, a care home sharing its entrance with the new Belper Library in the converted Thorntons factory, or the new smaller homes being built by Wheeldon Homes on the south edge of town.



**28a Market Place** is a timber-clad private house tucked away behind the market place and above the Coppice car park.



The Strutt family gave Derby its arboretum in 1840 and opened the River Gardens next to the Derwent in 1906 having already allowed the Belper Boating Association to use the river north of the weir. The mill race which fed water to power the first mills is now a water garden



A recent addition to Belper is the **Park Life Cafe** in the River Gardens, east of the Derwent. Built as a modern interpretation of the original building, the 'Swiss Tea Rooms', which opened in 1906, funded by George Herbert Strutt.





