

LEDBURY AND ITS STREETS

Street names are around us all the time, so much so that people may take them for granted, and until recently street names have not been much studied. Every town street has a name, so that every house on it has an address. The address, the essential means of finding a house, is, of course, the reason for the street name, and has been at least since the Middle Ages. Any town or village with more than one street needed, and needs, street names. The reasons why some names were chosen are clear, or fairly clear: a High Street is the main street of a town ('high' being used in the sense of 'important'); a Bridge Street usually runs across a bridge; a North or South street is, or was, probably near the north or south edge of a town; a Hereford or a Gloucester road usually leads to the town of that name. The origin of other names, including – and perhaps particularly – the names of roads on recent housing estates, is less obvious. Finding why streets were named can tell us something about the history and development of a town like Ledbury.

The settlement which developed into Ledbury grew up in the Anglo-Saxon period at an important crossroads where the road from Hereford to Worcester (probably the modern Bridge Street, Bye Street and Church Street) crossed that from Bromyard to Gloucester (the modern Homend, High Street and Southend). At the centre of the early settlement was the church, approached from the main roads across a triangular area, perhaps used as a market, which was later infilled to create the modern Church Lane and Church Street. When Domesday Book was compiled in 1086 Ledbury was still a rural manor belonging to the bishop of Hereford. However, in the 1120s or 1130s the bishop created a new town or borough along the main roads. A new wedge-shaped market place was established in what is now High Street. Houses soon extended north along the Homend and then along Southend. Bye Street was probably developed next, and finally New Street, where houses had been built by 1186. This town plan, established in the twelfth century, was hardly altered until the building of the canal and railway in the first half of the nineteenth century and can be clearly seen in the town centre today.

Ledbury flourished in the thirteenth century when, according to some calculations, the population may have been as high as c.1410, but it was devastated by the Black Death which swept through the town in 1349. Not until 1597 did the population recover to reach c.1000. The town's late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century prosperity, based on its textile and leather industries, is reflected in the surviving buildings of the period, including Ledbury Park, the Market House, the Feathers Hotel, and the Talbot Hotel. Even at that time of relative growth, development was confined to the medieval streets, and to some alleyways leading off them. In the eighteenth century the textile and leather industries went into decline, although the population seems to have continued to grow, and until the mid nineteenth century Ledbury was a market town whose prosperity depended on local agriculture, including the trade in hops and cider which has been commemorated in modern street names.

The opening of the Gloucester to Ledbury section of the Hereford – Gloucester Canal in 1798 and of the Ledbury to Hereford section in 1845 led to some development on the western edge of the medieval town. A greater stimulus to expansion was provided by the opening of the Worcester to Hereford railway, with its station north of the Homend, in 1861 and then of the Gloucester to Ledbury railway, built partly along the line of the former canal, in 1885. The population of Ledbury parish as a whole, including the large rural area, grew from 3005 in 1801 to 4549 in 1841 and peaked at 5537 in 1861 when the railway was being constructed; that of the

Ledbury Street Names a gazetteer compiled by Angela Bishop, Gillian Murray & Beryl Rowley, edited by Janet Cooper. Logaston Press, 2007. ©University of London

built-up area grew from 2908 in 1851 to 4100 in 1861 before falling fairly steadily to 3259 in 1901. New streets were laid out, mainly west of, or downhill from, the line of the Homend, High Street and the Southend. The earliest was South Parade, off the Southend, developed in the 1820s by the Biddulph family. John Biddulph was planning another new street, a crescent, in 1840, but illness prevented him from carrying out his plans. Victoria and Albert Roads, named for the queen and her consort, were built in the 1850s. Despite the declining population between then and c. 1900, new streets including Newbury Park, Belle Orchard, Oatleys and Woodleigh Roads and part of Bank Crescent had been developed or laid out by the early twentieth century. Most of their names seem to derive from earlier house or field names. In 1851 the area around Lower Road was called New Town, indicating its recent origins. By 1886, that along the modern Bridge Street was Happy Land, perhaps a name chosen to attract new residents. Much of this nineteenth-century development was carried out by the Ledbury Benefit Building Society which was founded before 1852 and wound up in 1914.

There was little change to the street plan in the first half of the twentieth century, when the population remained nearly static at between 3259 and 3693, although existing streets were further built up. As a result of the 1919 Housing Act, council houses were built in Homend Crescent in 1921, and others followed on the Bank Crescent estate in the later 1920s and 1930s. More council houses were built in the early 1950s in Long Acre, Margaret Road and Queensway, the last two streets named for Queen Elizabeth II and her sister Princess Margaret, continuing the 'royal' theme started with Victoria and Albert roads. By 1966 other streets, including Horse Lane Orchard, Mabels Furlong, Lawnside Road, Oatleys Crescent and Terrace, the Langlands, Northmead, Audley Croft, and Plaisters End had been laid out by private developers. The major expansion of the town came in the third quarter of the twentieth century when the Deer Park and New Mills estates were built between the town and its new by-pass; the population leapt from 3911 in 1971 to 4549 in 1981 and 8839 in 2001. The Deer Park estate was named from the medieval bishops' deer park, so called as late as the nineteenth century, which in fact lay on the other side of the Southend. The developers of the New Mills estate originally proposed to continue the medieval theme by naming their development Capella Court, after Richard de Capella, bishop of Hereford 1121 – 7 and the supposed founder of Ledbury. The name finally chosen derives from the 'New Mills', a water mill recorded from 1602, which stood north-west of the new estate.

Modern street names are chosen according to a careful and painstaking procedure. On new housing estates, street names are usually put forward by developers or builders. These names are then discussed and accepted – or rejected – by the local planning committee; at Ledbury that has been the committee of the Town Council, although in the period 1974 – 1998 the planning committee for the Malvern Hills District, in which Ledbury then lay, was also involved. The criteria for acceptance are the names' relevance to the social, political and economic development of the town, and each name's appeal to the residents. Thus, for example, the importance of hops to the prosperity of the town in the nineteenth century is reflected in the Hopfields Development, where the streets are named Golding, Target and Viking after varieties of hop. Another group of streets were named Blenheim, Bramley and Lambourne after varieties of apples. Canal Walk runs close to the line of the Gloucester – Hereford canal.

Other names commemorate historical events which took place at or near the town, and the persons involved in them. Because of its strategic position, Ledbury saw several encounters between Parliamentarian and Royalist armies during the Civil War of 1642 – 1647, and the

Ledbury Street Names a gazetteer compiled by Angela Bishop, Gillian Murray & Beryl Rowley, edited by Janet Cooper. Logaston Press, 2007. ©University of London

names of the dashing commanders, Prince Rupert, nephew of Charles I; Colonel Edward Massey, Parliamentary Governor of Gloucester; and Sir Ralph Hopton, Parliamentarian son of a Royalist father, were given to streets on the New Mills estate. (Their names, with those of John Lee, Edward Massey, John Skippe, and Lady Somerset, were apparently taken from an early town guidebook.) The names of local residents who have had an impact on the town, are remembered in streets named after Stephen Ballard the Victorian civil engineer who built the railway to Hereford, the footballer Miller Craddock, and Frederick Leslie Born who had a pharmacy in the Homend for fifty years.

Yet other street names have cultural connections. Streets on the New Mills Estate commemorate poets, including the six 'Dymock Poets', and W.H. Auden and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, all of whom had close associations with Ledbury. Another road was named after the Brontës, although there is no known connection between the Yorkshire Brontë sisters and the town. Other streets were called after Herefordshire rivers, and, in a practice common in the mid twentieth century, streets in another group were named after trees. These names, and those derived from real or invented field names, were doubtless chosen to suggest that the streets so named lay in pleasant, rural, areas.

Not all the names suggested by developers have been accepted. The hop name Fuggle was rejected, presumably because the committee did not like its sound. When the naming of streets after writers or poets was under consideration Ernest Hemmingway's name was turned down on the grounds that he was an American who had no connection with Ledbury. In 1986 the town council firmly rejected the developer's suggestion of 'Paradise Place' for a new street north of the church in favour of Upper Hall Close, perpetuating the name of one of the important medieval ecclesiastical estates in Ledbury. The following year, the name of Pear Tree Court for the sheltered housing off New Street was rejected by the Committee in favour of Harling Court, after a town councillor. In 1997 members of the planning committee changed their minds over the name Poets Way for the spine road on the New Mills Estate when they realised that not all the roads leading off it would be named after poets; the road was instead called New Mills Way.

Outside the town centre, roads and lanes lead, and have for centuries led, to neighbouring towns and villages. Most of these roads had no official names until 1992, when it was reported that in the absence of street names, visitors were becoming lost. To solve this problem, the roads to Bromyard, Dymock, Gloucester, Hereford, and Ross were formally named Bromyard Dymock, Gloucester, Hereford, and Ross Roads; at the same time the town bypass was named Leadon Way.

Some street names are, at first sight, misleading. The names Winston Close, Churchill Meadow and Blenheim Drive might be assumed to commemorate Sir Winston Churchill and his ancestral home at Blenheim in Oxfordshire, but Churchill Meadow is named after a local butcher's firm, Winston Close and Blenheim Drive after apples. Newton Close is also named after an apple, not after Sir Isaac Newton. Challenger Close is one of the group of roads named after hops, and has nothing to do with the Challenger space shuttle. Saxon and Viking Ways are similarly named after hops, not after the early medieval invaders of England.

A few of the older streets, have changed their names over the centuries. The reason for some changes, like that from Bishop Street to Bye Street, is unclear. Other, more recent, changes like that from Gas Works Lane to Little Marcle Road, were clearly made to improve the 'image' of

Ledbury Street Names a gazetteer compiled by Angela Bishop, Gillian Murray & Beryl Rowley, edited by Janet Cooper. Logaston Press, 2007. ©University of London
the street. Such changes can be a cause of confusion. The name 'Church Street' was at first applied to what is now Church Lane, and it is sometimes difficult to be sure whether a late nineteenth-century reference is to the modern Church Street or to the modern Church Lane.

The words 'street' and 'street names' are generally used of town roads and their names. However, in Ledbury, as in other towns, the term 'street' has become unfashionable. Only six streets are actually called 'street': Bridge Street, Bye Street, Church Street, High Street, Market Street and New Street. All these, except Market Street (laid out in 1887), are of medieval origin and the most recently named, Bridge Street, was so called by 1850. The alternative names used, particularly in the later twentieth century, reflect changing fashions as developers strove to attract buyers. A total of 28 streets are called 'road'. They include the main roads to Bromyard, Gloucester, Hereford, and Worcester and four nineteenth-century streets; others were laid out between the 1920s and the 1999, as many as 10 in the late 1990s. The most popular term for a street in Ledbury is 'close'. The 39 closes, the earliest laid out in 1971, reflect the tendency for later twentieth-century housing developments to consist of a number of cul-de-sacs off a spine road. 'Way' is another popular term, used for 10 streets. All but Queensway (c. 1954), Biddulph Way (1972, the spine road of the Deer Park Estate), and Martins Way (1981), date from the 1990s. The ten Courts were built between 1972 and 2006; six of them are short private roads or courtyards. Eight streets, dating from between 1963 and 1999, are called 'drive', and five, dating from between 1965 and 2005, 'meadow' or 'mead', names suggesting spacious or rural developments. The four 'crescents' span the twentieth century, Bank Crescent being so named by 1903, Homend Crescent by 1922, Oatleys Crescent c. 1933, and Auden Crescent in 1998. Two out of the three avenues date from the mid twentieth century, the earliest of the three 'walks' from 1981. The two 'orchards', Belle Orchard of 1891 and Horse Lane Orchard of 1960, mark the sites of earlier orchards. Like some of the street names themselves, the words for street can be misleading. The two streets called 'View' are named for two rivers invisible from Ledbury.

Ledbury Street Names a gazetteer compiled by Angela Bishop, Gillian Murray & Beryl Rowley, edited by Janet Cooper. Logaston Press, 2007. ©University of London

A NOTE ON SOURCES

In addition to oral information received from several people in Ledbury, to all of whom the authors express their gratitude, the principal sources used in this study were:

For the history of Ledbury and for street names in general

Joe Hillaby, *Ledbury A Medieval Borough* (Ledbury and District Society Trust Ltd. in collaboration with Logaston Press, 3rd edition 2005)

Adrian Room, *The Street Names of England* (Paul Watkins, Stamford 1992)

www.originsinfo.com/StreetNames

For individual street names:

Ledbury town council minutes [dates] held in the town council offices

Malvern Hills District Council correspondence files, held in the council offices

Census enumerators' books, The National Archives; microfilm copies in the Herefordshire Record Office, Hereford

16th- and 17th-century Ledbury wills in the Herefordshire Record Office

Papers of the late Mr. Peter Garnett of Wellington Heath, Ledbury.

Ordnance Survey maps, 1:2500 Herefs. XLI. 4 (1887 and 1904 edns.); Herefs. XLI. 8 (1928 edn.); SO 7037, SO 7173 (1966 edn.)

Various editions of *Directories of Herefordshire*, including Kelly's and Jakeman and Carver

Tilley's *Ledbury Almanack*

Bruce Coplestone Crow, *Herefordshire Place-Names* (BAR British Series 214, 1989)

John Field, *English Field Names: a dictionary* (1972)

David Postle, *A Glimpse of Old Ledbury* (Amber Graphics, Ledbury, c. 1988)

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2004)

J. Webb, *Memorials of the Civil War between King Charles I and the Parliament of England*, Vol. I (1879)