

### **The suburb of Ashbrooke**

Fawcett Street lost status as a desirable place to live, once Burdon Road transformed it into the main route to Ryhope and Stockton. From the mid-century, the middle class favoured Ashbrooke, the extensive new suburb straddling the Ryhope Road and extending west to Tunstall Road and Vale. Mowbray Park, created around Building Hill in 1854-7 and doubling in size in 1865, added to Ashbrooke's sense of detachment from the commercial centre.<sup>i</sup>

St George's Square (1855-6) was close to the park, its site now part covered by the civic centre. This exclusive precinct with gates and central garden was laid out on the Grange estate by Martin Greener. Greener also designed part of The Esplanade in 1855, the best surviving example of this style, and many more houses east and north of Building Hill, including Grange Crescent, and Cumberland and Cedars Terraces on the West Hendon estate. Thomas Oliver was another prolific planner of estates and houses around the Ryhope and Tunstall Roads at this time. On Tunstall Road, Humbledon View, by Martin Greener in 1885, and gated squares such as Holmlands Park, designed by Frank Caws in 1896, came a little later. Between the grander terraces, houses were built for those less well off who favoured the area, as with Argyll Square (1865-70), designed by Middlemiss.<sup>ii</sup>

The very wealthy lived elsewhere. The old families of the Wear coal trade were long gone: the Lambtons rebuilt Lambton House, on the coalfield, as a castle; the Liddells lived in Ravensworth Castle; Vane-Tempest, afterwards Londonderry, was far away at Wynyard Hall. William Russell, a Sunderland merchant and relatively *nouveau riche*, made a spectacular success of his lease of Wallsend colliery and within ten years, in 1796, bought Brancepeth Castle. Sunderland had no residences of such scale or stature.<sup>iii</sup>

A new generation of industrialists looked to Ashbrooke. There were exceptions: of the Doxford shipbuilding family, Theodore Doxford had John and Thomas Tillman design Grindon Hall in 1885, and Robert Doxford used Hedley & Clayton Greene as architects of Silksworth Hall in 1905. In general, though, Ashbrooke was favoured, and attracted the professional class also. A replacement for Bishopwearmouth rectory, St Michael's house, a hard red brick gothic house in Gray Road, incorporated the grand staircase of the old building. John Dobson, who extended the church, built it in 1858, releasing its valuable central site on High Street West for re-development. The glass-maker James Hartley commissioned Thomas Moore to design Ashbrooke House in 1864, in a classical style with heavy decorative plasterwork and stained glass, one of the finest houses ever built in the town. Sir James Laing made substantial additions and alterations to Thornhill House in 1867. Its estate was auctioned off, 1875-6, Thornhill Park laid out by Martin Greener for 'costly mansions occupied by the elite of the town'.<sup>iv</sup>

In 1871 Frank Caws moved the classical Cresswell House away from Thornhill in order to use the site for new streets of smaller houses. Cresswell, re-christened Rosedene, was taken to Ashbrooke Cross, an area then barely developed beyond the southernmost point of Backhouse Park. From the cross radiated out new roads, on one of which G.A. Middlemiss in 1875 designed the vast gothic Ashbrooke Tower as his retirement home.<sup>v</sup>

The most distinctive of the Ashbrooke houses, Langham Tower, was built for William Adamson, son of a shipbuilder, in 1886-91. The architect William Milburn enjoyed his first major commission, a substantial budget of £5,000, and a client who wanted his house to make a mark. Its exuberant design is full of inventive detail from a range of styles of English domestic architecture, including Gothic and Tudor, combined with the latest technical innovations. It was not a house for long, for too many servants were needed to live there comfortably, and after 1919 became Sunderland Teacher Training College.<sup>vi</sup>

The sprawling suburb acquired many amenities for its affluent residents, including shops, schools and chapels. Ashbrooke sports ground, off Tunstall Road, was laid out in 1887, with a pavilion built 1898-9, and became a major rugby and cricket venue.<sup>vii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Pevsner, 459.

<sup>ii</sup> 'Ashbrooke Conservation Area Character Appraisal' (City of Sunderland, 2005); T&WAS, SDB/A6/1/1; DT.BEL/1/84; C.L. Cummings, 'Some Account of St George's Square and the People Connected Therewith', *Antiq. Sund.*, 7 (1906), 53-80; *Sund. Herald*, 17 Sept. 1852; 22 Oct. 1852; 31 Aug. 1855; *Building News*, 18 Sept. 1857, 991; *Sund. Daily Echo*, 4 Sept. 1884; 4 Feb. 1896; Pevsner, 459-61.

<sup>iii</sup> Flinn, *British Coal Industry*, 326-7.

<sup>iv</sup> RIBA, John Tillman, FRIBA Nomination Papers, 1887; *Sund. Daily Echo*, 13 Apr. 1905; Univ. of Sund. Deeds, formerly Deed Packets 9737, 916; *Newc. Daily Jnl*, 16 Jan. 1865; *Newc. Chronicle*, 1 Jan. 1887; T. Faulkner and A. Greg, *John Dobson: Architect of the North East* (2001), 178; R. Dixon and S. Muthesius, *Victorian Architecture* (1978), 263; Meadows and Waterson, *Lost Houses*, 46, 41; Pevsner, 460-1; *Sund. Daily Echo*, 18 May 1876; 27 July 1876; *Builder*, 29 Jan. 1881, 124.

<sup>v</sup> RIBA, F. Caws, FRIBA Nomination Papers, 1893; *Sund. Post*, 20 Dec. 1887.

<sup>vi</sup> Univ. of Sund. Deeds, formerly Deed Packet 61; T. Corfe, 'Langham Tower' (Sund. Polytechnic Booklet, n.d.); 'Ashbrooke Conservation Area Character Appraisal'; Pevsner, 460.

<sup>vii</sup> E. Watts Moses, *To Ashbrooke and Beyond: The History of Sunderland Cricket and Rugby Football Club, 1808-1963* (1963), 27.