Belgrave Then & Now
A Short History

Produced by the
Belgrave Heritage Group
with support from
Heritage Lottery Fund Young Roots Funding
A Short History of Belgrave

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Students from TEC Belgrave
(formerly Belgrave High School)
with funding from

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This book is dedicated to the people of Belgrave, past, present and future.
Belgrave is situated to the south of Tamworth, in the county of Staffordshire and is nestled between Wilnecote to the south, Glascote Heath to the East and Two Gates to the West.

At one time these areas were all separate villages well away from the conurbation that is Tamworth. As the population grew, following the Baby Boom, these small villages gradually expanded to form one large area. In the case of Belgrave and its neighbouring areas this expansion was mainly due to the planned expansion by the Town Council. Belgrave is made up of a series of horseshoe shaped roads and is bounded by the new A5 on one side and the railway line on the other.

*Map above courtesy of Wikipedia*
Looking at a map of modern day Belgrave it’s difficult to believe that it hasn’t always looked like this, especially if you have been born and brought up in the area. Back in the 1930s the area looked very different. Today there are around 2,000 houses in Belgrave but back then there were about 80 houses with only three roads; Wilnecote Lane, Belgrave Road and Fenn Street.

We do tend to take where we are for granted and not really think about how it might have changed. That’s why we wanted to do this project.

We knew that most of the houses in Belgrave were built in the 1970s, nearly all of them in fact. This made us think what was here before? Were there houses that were knocked down? If so why? Who lived here and what did they do? Where did they work? Were there schools here before ours?

These questions prompted us to make a bid from Heritage Lottery so that we could get a professional heritage interpreter to work with us to help us find some of the answers. We would like to thank HLF for having faith in this project.
Belgrave Then & Now

The Team

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We worked on this project for over twelve months, visiting libraries, searching the internet and contacting anyone who we thought could give us some help and advice. It hasn’t been an easy task as there is very little written about the area. With that in mind we feel that what we have produced will be of interest and value to the future of Belgrave.
This 1923 map shows the full extent of Belgrave with only three roads and about eighty houses. There was a mine shaft very close to the village [1] and where Morrison’s is now was a pipes and pottery works [2] which used local clay. To service all of this industry there was a complex system of railway lines as can be seen on the left of the map [3]. The area marked as [4] was an open cast mine which was a different method of extracting coal as it lay very close to the surface and did not require a deep shaft to be dug. There was a lot of open cast mining in the area. In Polesworth the river was diverted twice so that rich veins of coal could be extracted. Bird’s Bush is an old name and is more or less where the school of that name is now [5].
This map shows the three roads Wilnecote Lane, Belgrave Road & Fenn Street. It also shows the club and the row of houses that were built in the 1940 (on the right of the map). These three roads are still here today and follow the same plan as they did before the development. The row of shops that are on Wilnecote Road are still there but have changed usage.
Belgrave Then & Now

Belgrave pre 1970

Carol’s Story

There were only three roads in Belgrave when I was a child; Belgrave Road, Fenn Street and Wilnecote Lane, and I can only remember there being one car, it was black. Mind you most cars were black then. Apart from the few houses there were several farms. Where the Fire Station is now used to be a farm and we used to go scrumping at Field Farm (scrumping was taking a few windfall apples from the farmer’s orchard). I met my husband when he was working on one of the farms he was driving a tractor.

Lakin’s Farm was mainly cows and Summerfield’s Farm sold chickens. We used to ride round on our bikes and buy a chicken, it was a lot different to how we buy them now. The Rag and Bone Man also had chickens. If you gave him any old rags you would get a chicken! Mr. Naylor had pigs in his garden and I clearly remember going down to feed them.

We used to play all over the fields but of course there used to be a lot of mining on the area and I remember seeing a sign saying “Mineshaft” by St Gabriel’s School, I suppose it was very dangerous but it didn’t seem to worry us at the time. Doulton’s, the clay works, used to dump all their broken pottery on the mine’s grounds.

Where the shops are now is where they have always been and that area there is more or less where ‘old’ Belgrave used to be.

What is now a furniture shop used to be the Post Office and the Working
Belgrave Then & Now

Belgrave pre 1970

Men’s Club has always been there. Opposite the club was a yard with several small workshops. One of them used to mend shoes. I think there’s a bungalow there now.

Just past the chip shop there was a Church that ran a Sunday School. Mrs Whittington was the teacher there. The Church is long since gone.

In the 70s when they started to build the new estate they basically built over all the places we used to play.

*The map below shows the original layout of Belgrave before any newer houses were built. As you can see, it was very small.*
“Back then Belgrave was mainly fields, in fact it was nearly all fields. I used to live in Belgrave Road. Our house was quite big and had an attic and a cellar, I used to think it was a bit creepy. It was home for seven of us children who were all looked after by my Mother because my father had been killed in Polesworth Mine when I was only seven years old. My Mother was pregnant at the time so my brother never knew his father. It was a hard life and a struggle for Mum to feed and clothe us. If it hadn’t been for The Salvation Army giving us clothing and food parcels I don’t know what we would have done. Mum only got 10/- (10 shillings = 50p) a week to look after us all.

We did all the cooking in a single pot of an open fire, no cookers then. So we had a lot of stews and bread and butter, not the wide choice of food youngsters have today. It was cosy to have an open fire and we used to sit in front of it making rag rugs for the floor which were brick covered. However, the rest of the house was very cold in the winter. We had no bathroom of course and on bath night we used to take the old tin bath off the outside wall, heat water in the copper and have a bath in front of the fire. Eventually the house was condemned and we were moved into one of the new houses. At school there
were six of us who were good enough to go to Grammar School. Only two of use turned up for the exam. We both passed but my Mum couldn’t afford to pay for my uniform so I didn’t get to go. I left school when I was 14. I walked out of school at 4 o’clock and by 6 o’clock I was on a train to Coventry to be in service for a family who lived in the country. Mum didn’t want us to work in a factory so we had no choice. At 14 I had to look after a young baby and help with all the household chores. We had two free nights each week and a weekend off every month. I was so homesick that eventually I came back home and got a job in the slipper factory.

I then got a job working on the bread round for the Co-op, it was all done with horses and carts then and we had to tack the horse and look after him afterwards. Our horse was called Harry and I was terrified of him. One day he slipped on the thick ice and all the bread came tumbling off the cart onto the road. If there was any money short at the end of the week we had to make it up out of our wages. I was only paid £3 4/- (£3.20p) a week for working over twelve hours every day.

During the war I worked at the brick works where Morrison’s is now. I used to make cylindrical pots on a potters wheel. It was very dirty work and we didn’t get much pay. Before the war the works was owned by Doulton’s who made all sorts of pottery from pipes to teapots. Belgrave has changed such a lot since I was a child. We had some very good times and also some very hard times and I don’t think the youngsters of today would like to go through what I went through.”
Belgrave Then & Now

The Doulton Factory

Although not strictly in Belgrave the area that is now Morrison’s used to be Doulton’s Pottery works. Royal Doulton, as it became known as later was based in London but had factories in Stoke on Trent and Tamworth and made some very fine pottery which is highly valued today.

Tamworth.

The Terra Cotta Works at Tamworth were established in 1847, by the present owners, Messrs. Gibbs and Canning, and are now very extensive and important, and produce a large variety of goods of the highest class and character. The principal productions are terracotta for architectural, horticultural, and other useful and ornamental purposes.
George Skey´s Wilnecote Works

George Skey started his enterprise in 1860 and ended up making pretty much anything from clay from the site, from gas ovens to ginger beer bottles. It rapidly expanded and became one of the most important pottery works in the country. Wilnecote works was a huge place and functioned from 1860 till 1936 when it was taken over by Doulton. The buildings were finally demolished in 1981. As recalled by Dora Brown, during the war the factory was requisitioned by the Ministry of Defence to support the war effort.
Coronation Day 1953

These rare photographs show Belgrave celebrating the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.
Tamworth has a long history of coal mining and the likelihood is that Belgrave exists because of the coal seams in the area. Beauchamp Colliery was a major employer in Belgrave and along with a salary came the social benefits such as the cricket team and other events.
Belgrave Then & Now

Belgrave post 1970

Tamworth town expansion

Residential development

Belgrave
Belgrave Area - Definition.

Belgrave area is approximately one mile long by half mile wide and has a total area of 209.3 acres.

Ultimately the area will be very clearly defined as the area of land contained by the main Birmingham to York railway line to the West, the line of the proposed A5 diversion to the North and East and the line of the proposed A453 Trunk Road Diversion, together with the boundary of the Belgrave Industrial area, to the South.

By their very nature these area boundaries will tend to form physical barriers against movement into and out of the area and will give rise to specific crossing points providing access for pedestrians and vehicles.
Belgrave post 1970

Sam’s Story

“I moved into Belgrave in 1961 and remember seeing them filling in the mineshafts, lorry after lorry came to do that. When they were building the estate there were lots of blue bricks used by the mine works for walls. Engineering bricks they’re called. I used them as the base for my garage, they’re still there now.

We were told that Marlborough Way was going to be a dual carriageway and that there would be neighbourhood centres and plenty of open spaces. I don’t think we got everything we were promised.”
Jo’s Story

“My family moved into the estate from Birmingham in 1970 into the house I was born in. I do remember there being lots of little parks in the area where we could play. There was ‘Nine Foot Park’ in Nine Foot Lane and what we called Curley Whurly Park because of the slide. They’ve all gone now and the sites have been planted with bushes to cover them up. They were got rid of because of vandalism and youngsters drinking there. It’s a shame really.”
Belgrave Social Club

The club was formed in the early 1900s in Fenn Street, it eventually moved to its present site in Wilnecote Lane and had the intriguing title of ‘Belgrave Miners Welfare & Village Hall Institute, eventually becoming Belgrave Sports & Social Club.
Tamworth Baptist Church began its life in the centre of the town in 1821. When plans were being drawn up to develop the Belgrave area it was decided to relocate there and in 1967 a site on the new estate was reserved. It wasn’t until 1972 that building work began and now the Church has had a presence in Tamworth for over 190 years. The fire station, in contrast is one of the newest buildings in Belgrave.
Hanbury’s Farm was built on land that was previously a farm of the same name. It was the first primary school to be built on the new Belgrave estate. When it first opened it had over 500 children on role. It was so big that some children had to take their meals at the nearby Church as the school hall was not big enough. It was known for being very good at sport and was a feared and formidable opponent in many inter-school competitions.

When Bird’s Bush and St. Gabriel’s were built many children moved to the school nearest to them and numbers eventually dropped to their current level of around 180 children.
Belgrave Then & Now

School Focus

Staff photograph taken in 1989
(Headteacher Mr. Baker centre front)

BELOW: A farewell message from the outgoing, and first Headteacher of Hanbury’s Farm Primary School.

25 July. This is my last day as head. Best wishes to the school for the future.

P.W. Barker
Belgrave High School

The school was originally founded with just one building called “The White Block” in 1978, and in 1981 added the “New Block” for its additional pupils. The school canteen was originally placed in the White Block but was later moved to a more central location within the school. The area that was occupied by the old canteen is now used for teaching. Since then, the school canteen has been extended, with a new purpose-built extension added beside the existing kitchen area.
The school’s current headteacher is Simon Turney. Since joining the school, several improvements have been made, including a purpose-built examination building, security fencing, high-tech CCTV, new swimming pool changing rooms, and strict discipline. The school has recently become an academy and changed its name to TEC Belgrave.

When Simon first came to the school one of the things he noticed was how much litter there was. One of his first challenges was to clean the school up so that the students would respect it more. He then empowered the staff to do their best for the students. This book and film has been made because of the interest shown by the staff in the History department and their desire to engage in ‘real’ historical research.