DERBY'S GRADE II LISTED BUILDINGS, NO. 52

Melbourne House, 96, Osmaston Road.

by Maxwell Craven

Whilst we were driving home from the London Road on 12th January last and I was pondering on which listed grade II Derby building to write about in this issue, we came to the Osmaston Road roundabout only to find a traffic superfluity and the Osmaston Road blocked south-bound. We soon discovered that one of my favourite Victorian houses, Melbourne House, on the corner of Melbourne Street, had suffered a fairly serious fire.

Melbourne House, service wing looking south, 25th Jan. 2024, photo courtesy of Ashley Waterhouse.

This was clearly because, since 2011, when it was first offered for sale by the NHS trust, it had lain empty. However, on 26th May 2022 it had been sold at auction for £654,000 (well in excess of estimate) with planning permission for conversion into residential use to what the local paper called a 'mystery buyer.' This 'mystery buyer' had, however, unlike the NHS Trust, allowed security to lapse (or had considerably down-graded it) so that squatters had got in. Finding the weather cold, they had lit a fire in one of the rooms in the west wing, but the chimney was badly blocked through long disuse, and the fire lit accumulated detritus, but the fire could not vent through the chimney but instead spread to the rafters of the roof, which caught burned and seriously damaged most of the house's roof, rendering it now open to water ingress and all the horrors that will bring.

The house its architecturally fairly spectacular, is by a notable architect and is connected with two former mayors of Derby and a notable railway engineer.

It was built in 1863 for Alderman Robert Pegg, JP (1801-1867) a large-scale paint and varnish manufacturer at the Morledge Mills, where the 'bus station used to stand. He was Mayor of Derby in 1855-56, and had been born in Melbourne in modest circumstances. Yet most unusually, his ancestry can be traced back to Tudor and 17th century landed gentry, the Pegges of Shirley, Osmaston-by-Ashbourne, Yeldersley Hall and Beauchief (now in Yorkshire), his

earliest ancestor having been John Pegge of Shirley, who died in 1540 and whose posterity is recorded in the heralds' visitations of 1584, 1611, and 1662. Members included Catherine Pegge (c. 1635-1678), Charles II's first mistress and mother of Charles FitzCharles, 1st Earl of Plymouth, and Revd. Dr. Samuel Pegge FSA the distinguished antiquary, whose collections are in the British Library.

Left: *Portrait by an unknown artis, thought to represent Catherine Pegge. Two portraits of her were painted by Sir Peter Lely, but the whereabouts of neither is currently known.*
[*National Portrait Gallery*]

Melbourne House, showing the SE angle, 23rd March, 2016. [*M. Craven*]

John Pegge, fourth son of George Pegge of Osmaston-by-Ashbourne, went to live at Melbourne, being buried there in 1737, having married a Melbourne lady on whose inheritance he was able to build a modest business. The family became Baptists and stalwarts of

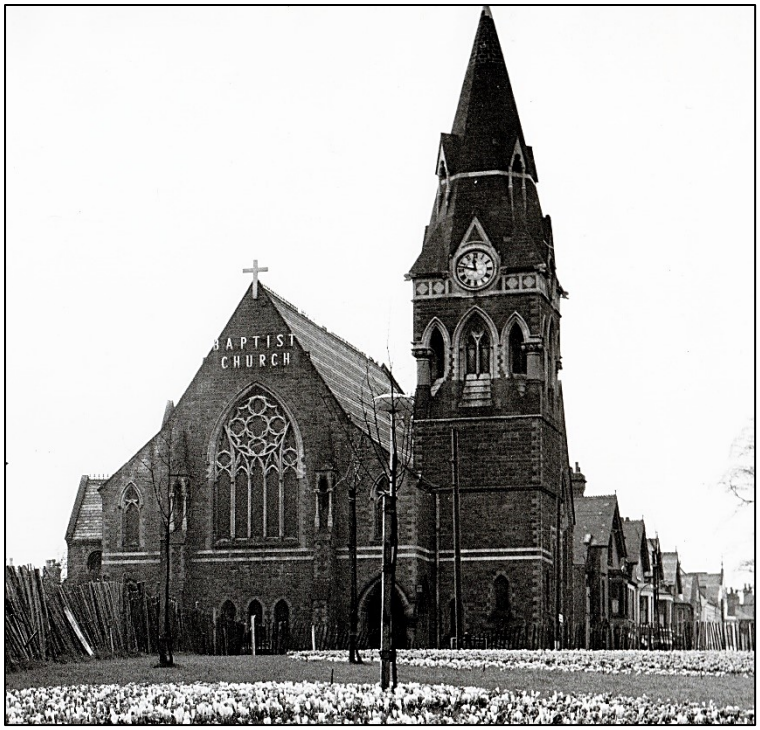
Melbourne's handsome 18th century chapel. His grandson John was a wheelwright and his great grandson was a turner and cabinet maker, who married an aunt of Ticknall-born Derby architect George Henry Sheffield; Robert was their fourth son. Interestingly, but not surprisingly – small town life then and now being metaphorically incestuous – Robert was a brother-in-law of Thomas Cook, the pioneer of holiday travel, also a Melburnian, his mother's sister Ann Perkins having been the common-law wife of Robert's brother John and mother to his daughter..

Quite how Robert, as the younger son of a family of only modest means, came to start up his colour manufacturing business is not clear, but he had started up by 1821 when he married Hinckley girl Sarah Ann Scott, and they went on to have three sons, of whom only one, George, born in 1825, survived infancy.

Undeterred, Robert bought a plot of land in Litchurch in the late 1850s from the Corporation, an engaged Thomas Chambers Hine (1813-1899), Nottingham's leading mid-Victorian architect, to design a magnificent Baptist Chapel, pitching Charnwood Street to Normanton Road beside it and Leopold Street just beyond. He then engaged his relative G. H. Sheffield to sell the plots to members of the local middle class and Sheffield was thus superbly placed to be commissioned to design most of the houses – which he duly did. He did not have things all his own way, though, for Hine designed The Retreat, just round the corner from the new chapel in 1864.

Pegg's developments in Charnwood Street: left, The retreat, by T. C. Hine and right, No. 45 by G. H. Sheffield, both photographed 12th May 2017.

Meanwhile, the *Derby Mercury* for 23rd May 1860 reported on the building of the Baptist Chapel, whilst *The Builder* for 2nd March 1863 recorded its completion; although a peculiarly muscular design, it is a matter of regret that the Baptists knocked it down in 1968 and substituted a triangular façaded steel and concrete replacement which hardly embellishes the setting. Hine, its architect, had come hot-foot from designing and overseeing the build of the



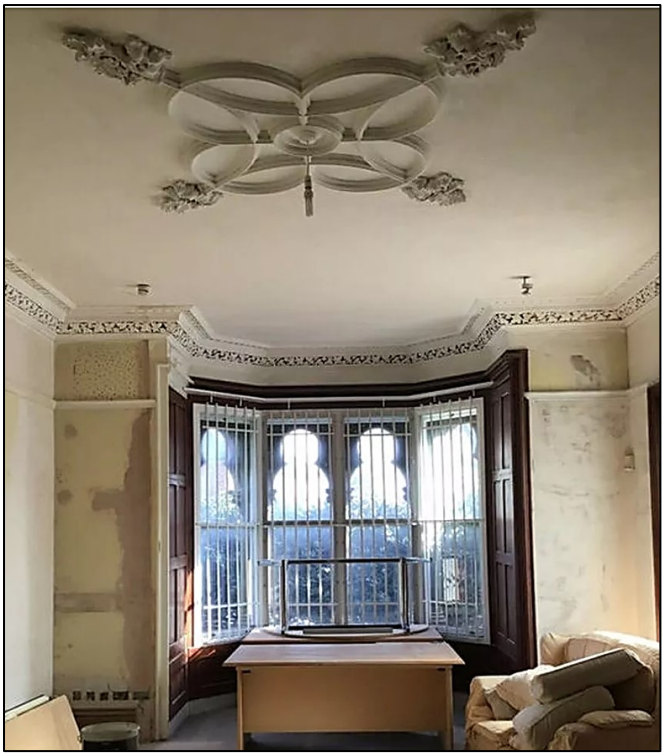
Presbyterian Chapel in Victoria Street, completed in 1859, and with the chapel complete, it required only a few month's work to complete the house, too.

Osmaston Road Baptist Chapel, seen from the end of Bourne Streeet, with Charnwood Street to the right, spring 1964.
[*M. Craven*]

Melbourne House was named after the good Alderman's birthplace, and the grounds stretched back to Normanton Road. Of red brick with blue brick detailing embellished further by Keuper sandstone dressings and of two storeys, Melbourne House boasted a round turret with a witch's hat roof on the NE angle with the first floor window arcaded under trefoil heads supported on polished granite colonnettes, a feature repeated on both floors of the full height canted bay on the SE angle. A certain amount of iron brattishing also survives. There were two gables on the north side as well as a ground floor corner window under a pair of Gothic arches supported on the angle by a granite column – a typical Hine feature, also to be seen in some of the grand villas he designed for the Park estate in Nottingham.

North west side of Melbourne House, with the service wing to the right.
[*SDL*]

The south side featured the two-storey entrance tower under a quatrefoil balustrade, set back from Osmaston Road, and a long range with mullioned windows beyond, separated by a gabled projection, with all the windows of the formal part of the house given trefoil heads. What makes it stand out lies in the fine detailing: the chamfered brick chimney breast sides in front of the entrance, for instance, have carved stone stops top and bottom, the gables all boast stone framed quatrefoils at their apices (another Hine conceit) and there is a blue brick patterned plat band between the storeys. The chimneys, however, have been reduced in the case of the main stack.



Left*: First floor room, street front 2021* [*SDL*]

Right: *Part of the Chellaston alabaster staircase balustrade, January 202*4. [*Ashley Waterhouse*]

Galleried lower pitch of the main staircase: trefoil arches on Chellaston alabaster colonnettes. [*Ashley Waterhouse*]

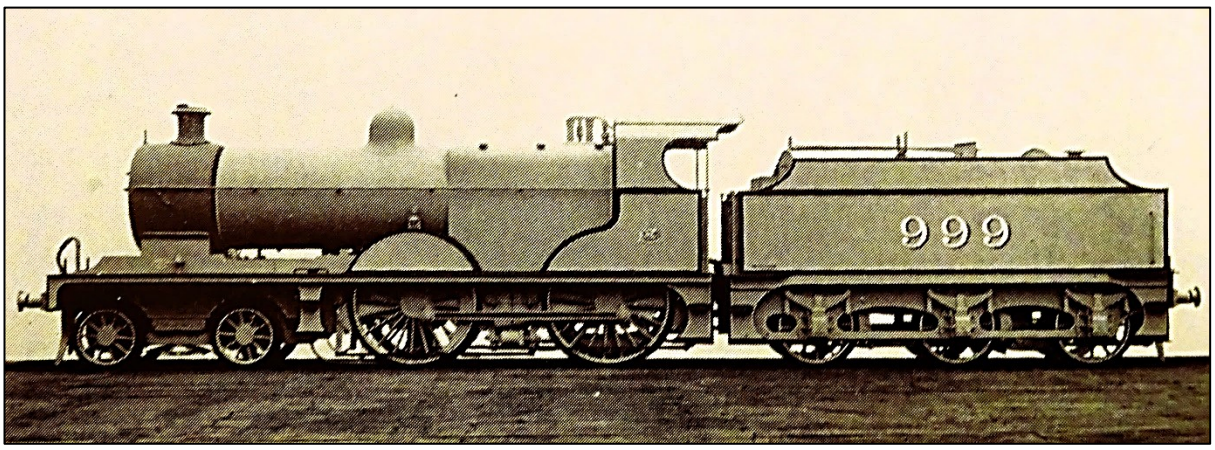
Inside are well-proportioned rooms, restrained but well executed Jacobethan plasterwork, especially to ceilings and cornices, and a lavish use of Chellaston alabaster for the main chimneypieces and the balustrade of the galleried main staircase.

Hine also found time to design three villas on the east side of Osmaston Road just south of Wilderslowe (now being restored after years of neglect), Lonsdale Hall (LGII) and Elmhurst, with its glorious Moorish interiors (dem.) both in Lonsdale Place, before retiring to Nottingham; nor had he finished working for the Pegg family, either, for on the good Alderman's death in June 1867, he designed a vast granite monument for him in Uttoxeter New Road cemetery, now listed grade II and recorded by *The Builder* 27th February 1869.

With Robert Pegg dead, followed by his widow in 1872, the surviving son, George, moved with his wife and daughter into the countryside and began to redevelop the house. In 1873, he pitched Melbourne Street through the grounds on the south side to connect with Normanton Road, and sold off the plots, upon which were built terraces of fairly meanly proportioned artisans' cottages with a pub on the SW angle with Normanton Road, appropriately named the *Melbourne Arms*.

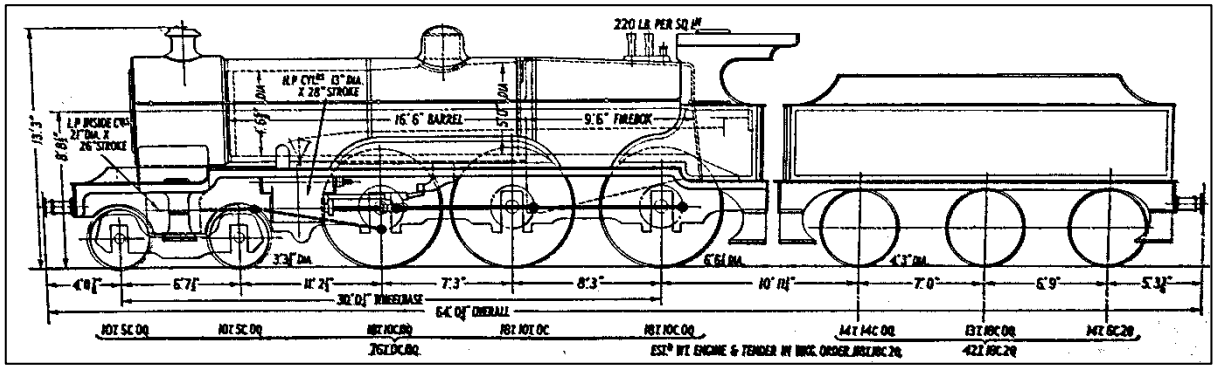
The house was let to Mrs. Mary Farrand who was replaced in 1884 by Thomas Carter Wigg, a surgeon, who in 1892, was followed by another medical man, Dr. F. F. Moore, this time a physician. In 1894 however, the freehold was purchased by lacemaking magnate Alderman Thomas Fletcher (Mayor of Derby in 1899) who allowed his son William to live there until 1902 when it was again let, this time to engineer Richard Mountford Deeley (1855-1944).

Deeley was a member of a younger branch of a Northamptonshire landed family, but his father was chief accountant of the Midland Railway. He was apprenticed to Samuel Waite Johnson, long the chief locomotive engineer of the MR, from 1875 and succeeded him in 1903. He had influenced the design, especially, of the boilers of Johnson's later locomotives, and pioneered compounding, producing the famous Midland Compound 4-4-0 locomotive No. 1000 (now preserved) and proving to his board that a superheated simple 4-4-0 performed better than an un-superheated compound, producing his '999' class to prove it and consequently driving forward a policy of superheating on the MR.



Deeley's prototype 999 class superheated 4-4-0, 1907 [*MR Trust*]

He then, in 1907, designed a much larger locomotive: a superheated 4-6-0 compound, but which the board rejected, being influenced by their chairman Sir Ernest Paget, Bt., whose son, Cecil (later Sir Cecil, Bt. of King's Newton Hall) was Deeley's deputy and had ideas of his own and who actually designed and built, at his father's expense, a prototype 2-6-2 compound engine with 8 cylinders (of very dubious efficacy), over-riding Deeley's authority. This, in 1909, led to Deely's 'retirement' and his departure from Melbourne House. It had been a sorry chapter in Midland Railway history, too.



R. M. Deeley designs for the rejected express 4-6-0 designs [*late Brian Radford*]

In 1909, therefore, Thomas Fletcher resumed residence at Melbourne House, but after the Great War, his son divided the house, letting the SW wing to Miss E. H., Sharpe, who rented out rooms on short term lets. By 1936, the Fletchers had left and Miss Sharpe had the whole house for her 'boarders' and this situation continued until early in the war, when customers became scarce and she left, too, being replaced by Arthur J. Sturges who was in residence until 1954, when the Fletchers sold the house to the newly formed NHS.

The NHS used the house for a variety of purposes, latterly letting to the University of Nottingham School of Nursing. Yet, despite all these vicissitudes, the house remained in sound, largely unaltered condition, until sale in 2022. In view of the new owner paying £100,000 over the odds for the place at auction, one might wonder what the attraction of a complex listed house with less than half an acre could be: was there, the back of the bidders' minds, the thought that, aided by a little neglect, the house could be de-listed and demolished to make space for a substantial block of flats?

If so, there is the double hurdle of being statutory listed and in the Hartington Street Conservation Area. Let us hope that the powers that be become resolute in their desire to see this fine house – only superficially damaged, despite the roof – restored and put to good use. Let's hope, too, that the owner had a sound insurance policy on it.

In the hall, a surviving Chellaston alabaster chimneypiece, January 2024 [*Ashley Waterhouse*]