

People – John Shepherd

John Shepherd was born in Sheffield in 1789 and died in 1872. His father was also called John Shepherd and was a dealer in household furniture and hardware, with a large shop in the main Sheffield market area at Bullstakes (now called Haymarket). Son John went into the family business and expanded it to offer a wide range of goods from a number of different outlets. In Trades Directories dating from the 1830's and 1840's he is listed as an iron, timber etc merchant, offering furniture, upholstery, cabinet making, timber, mahogany, feathers and ironmongery, with shops and workshops situated in Haymarket, Saville St, Dixon Lane and Wicker. At the time of the 1841 census he lived at Mushroom Hall, which stood on Mushroom Lane in Crookesmoor.

John was married to Sarah, born in Ecclesfield in 1801, and according to baptismal records they had six children: Malin, born in 1825; Thomas born 1827; Sarah Margaret born 1830; Ellen born 1832; Frances born 1841 and Benjamin born 1844. Thomas does not appear in any census records so it is possible that he did not survive long.

The Shepherd hardware etc business must have been highly profitable during the first half of the 19th century when Sheffield was expanding rapidly. There are no historical records to suggest that John Shepherd needed to borrow the money (more than £4000 - a huge fortune at the time) that he used to purchase the Ashdell estate and build on it. Earlier, in 1826, John Shepherd had purchased Tupton Hill Farm for a sum of £2150 but he later sold this on to Joshua Spooner of Hallamgate Farm. Clearly he had been wealthy for some time before purchasing the Ashdell estate when in his early fifties.

The houses that John Shepherd built – Ashdell and Ashdell Cottage – are two of the most distinctive in the Broomhill Conservation Area and stand in interesting contrast to each other in terms of scale, grandeur and style. Ashdell is built broadly in a 'classical revival' style popular for grand houses of the period. Ashdell Cottage is in a 'domestic vernacular' style. John Shepherd and his family lived in Ashdell for more than 20 years before moving across the road in 1864 to the more modest Ashdell Cottage. John sold Ashdell for the sum of £5928 to William Hugill Walker, of Walker, Eaton and Co (Wicker Iron and Steel Works).

When John Shepherd died in 1872 his executors were his clerk and his assistant. There are no records of any bequests to relatives, which is odd considering his numerous children and grandchildren. Some clues can be found in the subsequent family history as documented in official records.

Initially it appears that John's eldest son Malin followed his father into the family business; he is listed as a merchant in the 1851 census when he was 24 years old and still living with his parents at Ashdell. Malin made a trip to New York in 1849 on 'The Senator', whose passenger list also describes him as an iron merchant. In the 1861 census Malin was still listed as a merchant and married; he and his wife Clara were living in Stafford Rd in Norfolk Park and had three young children, one of whom was staying with his grandparents on the day of the census. Over the next ten years there was a significant change of circumstances as by 1871 Malin and family had

moved to Harrogate, where his occupation is given as 'land, property, mortgages'. Possibly John Shepherd had already settled proceeds from selling parts of the Ashdell estate on his children before his death in 1872? In the 1881 census there had been another change of location and Malin and family had moved to Cheltenham, where Malin's occupation is given as gardener.

Ellen Shepherd was married in 1859 to Frederick W Primrose. Frederick Primrose was the son of William Primrose of Primrose & Co. lead and glass merchants and manufacturers. The Primrose family firm went back at least two generations and was initially situated at Westbar Green, then later at Corporation St. In the 1851 census William Primrose and his wife Harriet lived in Upperthorpe and were listed as having three children: Eliza born 1829; Frederick born 1832 and Harriet born 1836. William Primrose died in 1859, the year that Frederick and Ellen Shepherd were married.

In 1861 Ellen and Frederick lived close to Ashdell at no. 8 Ash Mount (now 20 Ashgate Rd) and this continued to be their home for some years. Frederick acquired part-ownership of the Ash Mount terrace (and the plot of land opposite where he built Summerfield) from John Shepherd in 1869. Note that at this time, if John Shepherd had settled this property on Ellen it would have automatically become her husband's property, as married women could not own property in their own right before 1870. Frederick continued to run the Primrose family lead and glass business until about 1880, when he and Ellen moved to Southampton. The business was taken over by Joseph Mellowes, who had joined the company in 1871.

Benjamin Shepherd is listed in the 1861 census as a scholar, aged 16, attending Agricultural College in Cirencester (this college later became the Royal Agricultural College). At the time of the 1871 census he is married to wife Mary and living in Cherry Tree Road with the occupation of iron merchant, so he appears to have continued the family business following the departure of Malin for Harrogate. Benjamin must have prospered in the business as by 1881 he is living in Ranmoor Park Rd. His census entry describes him as an iron and timber merchant employing six men. He and his wife had no children.

Thus by the end of the 19th century it seems that John Shepherd has no direct descendants still living in Sheffield, nor is he remembered as a notable figure in the civic history of the City, though he has left a deep imprint on the development of Broomhill and no doubt supplied much of the iron, timber, furniture, upholstery and feathers that filled the houses of Sheffield's Victorian citizens.