

Taptonville Road

In 1850 Sheffield was entering a period of major expansion and Broomhill was a favoured location for the homes of successful manufacturers and professional classes. In the 18th c the fields now occupied by Taptonville Rd were owned by Samuel Shore esq., a local gentleman who lived in Tapton Grove, situated on Shore Lane where Tapton Hall (the Masonic Hall) now stands. A comparison of the 1851 map of the area with the present day illustrates how the pattern of the modern streets closely follows the pre-development field boundaries and lanes. Typically, the streets run through the centres of the original fields, and the field boundaries are along the back garden walls of the houses.

In 1850, Scissor manufacturer John Hobson purchased the fields that would become Taptonville Road and planned the development of the road, placing his own family home, Tapton Elms, in prime position on the highest ground at the head of the road. The gentility of the neighbourhood was assured by laying out the street with sizeable plots that were developed during the 1850s and 1860s with large, elegant houses of individual design standing in spacious gardens.

Many of the successful industrialists in Sheffield were investing in property during this period:

- No.1: was built in 1853 by Joseph Wright Bishop, one of a pair with 246 Fulwood Rd.
- Nos 2, 4 and 6 were all built in 1855 by Robert Booth (originally a tailor, then property developer).
- Nos 3, 5 and 7: were built in 1852 by William Greenwood, (property investor), who lived for a time in no.3 and then later in no. 5.
- No.8 Built in 1861 by Charles Fleming (an engraver) as his own family home
- No.10 Built in 1870 by J F Littlewood (a cooper) as his own family home
- Nos 9 to 19: Built 1852 by George Deakin (originally a silversmith, then property developer) who lived for a while in no.17.

Taptonville Crescent is a highly distinctive development with spacious individual villas arranged around a central ornamental garden. It is a unique feature in Sheffield. Each house has individual architectural style but with sufficient similarity to create a coherent whole. The 'cohesive harmony of Taptonville Road and Taptonville Crescent, including iron railings, old lamp columns, stone floorscape and grassy crescent' are recognised as some of the finest features of the Broomhill Conservation Area.

- No 16: Built in 1876 by William Graves Hall. For a short while (1893 -1895) it was the home of Albert Hobson, second son of John Hobson.
- Nos 22, 24: Built in 1860 by George Hague, builder, who had slightly earlier built nos 21 and 23. Though 22 and 24 share a single name, Mounthill House, they have always been two separate houses. No.24 was from 1917 the home of Wilfred Hobson, third son of John Hobson who built Tapton Elms (no.38).
- No 25: Built in 1861 by J Merryweather (a dental surgeon) as his own family home.
- No. 27: Built in 1858 by Matthew Hale (silver plater) as his own family home.

At the top end of Taptonville Road, the large villas of Tapton Elms and Tapton Heights, on opposite sides of the road, were built with elaborate ornamental gardens extending along each side of the road, below which stood walled kitchen gardens. On approach, this would have created a distinctive and unusual patterning with the high walls and entrances of the kitchen gardens almost directly opposite one another. The sloping land ensured that the principal rooms of the houses had fine views, over the tops of the other houses in the road to the Porter Valley in the distance.

Tapton Heights, No. 29, was built in 1863 by Alfred Ibbotson, (steel manufacturer) as his own family home. Tapton Elms, John Hobson's family house is number 38 on the right. It was started in 1851 and completed in 1852/3. The gardens of Tapton Elms dominate the vistas north and south along Taptonville road. The ornamental garden to the south of the house's principal façade has been lost under the two L-shaped disused student residence blocks now standing within this area. Further south, the half-acre walled kitchen garden of Tapton Elms has a highly decorative entrance gateway facing the street; all four boundary walls and gateways of this garden are still intact.

Tapton Elms was the home for more than 70 years of the Hobson family. They were an old Sheffield family with a long history in the scissor manufacturing industry dating back to the 17th century (George Hobson was a member of the first Jury of the Cutlers of Hallamshire in 1614). The Hobsons' business enterprises linked them to several of Sheffield's best-known companies through a series of alliances and mergers, as well as trading under their own name for many years. The family's history, which is well documented, has many interesting threads joining Sheffield's industrial, social and civic history.