

LEENSIDE: THE CHURCHES AND A NINETEENTH CENTURY NOTTINGHAM SLUM

by

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Leenside is a half forgotten district of Nottingham, abutting, and occasionally penetrating, the sandstone cliff face below St Mary's Church. Formerly known as Narrow Marsh, the area was centred on the eastern end of the modern Canal Street, between Broad Marsh and London Road. In the 19th century, this district was home to some 4,500 people in impoverished and insanitary conditions. A mere handful of late 1930s houses now stand where rows of cramped, poor quality houses characterized an area which contemporaries regarded as being the most notorious in the town (Plate 1).

Leenside was an area waiting to be redeveloped

when Nottingham became an industrial town. The River Leen used to flow parallel with the base of the rock on which the old Saxon borough had been established. It was conduited in 1829, and filled in altogether in 1863.¹ There were also two streams which drained from the north into the Leen. To the east was 'The Beck,' which rose at St. Anns' Well, and to the west, 'The Rowell' which drained the Market Place.² Thus Narrow Marsh, alias Leenside, was a narrow strip of marshy land to the east of the Broad Marsh. Confusingly, Narrow Marsh was also the name of the main street. An attempt was made to re-name the street Red Lion Street between 1850-60 but the old name was resumed by 1862. Red Lion



PLATE 1: A view of Leenside in approximately 1919, from the property on High Pavement above Red Lion Street. (Formerly Narrow Marsh).

Street appeared again in c.1905 and was changed to Cliff Road in 1933-4. Leenside also extended over what is now Canal Street, created in 1880 as a 'valuable artery for traffic'³ (Figure 1).

From the early Middle Ages down to the 18th century Narrow Marsh was the area occupied by the town's malodorous leather tanneries. Because the area was separate from the rest of the town and adjacent to the River Leen, it was well suited to the tanning processes. That trade was in serious decline by the mid 18th century, and the area was redeveloped with cheap dwellings mainly for workers in the town's textile trades.⁴ This was a shift which had much to do with the changing physical structure of Nottingham in the years prior to the Enclosure Act of 1845, and of Leenside in particular.

Nottingham expanded from a population of c. 10,000 at the end of the 1740s to c. 50,000 by 1831. The physical space for this expansion was limited because the Corporation and its burgesses would not entertain the enclosure of the open fields to the north of the town and the meadows to the south. Until land in these areas became available for development after 1851, house building was restricted to a very limited geographical area.⁵ The failure to enclose had a predictable impact on Leenside: high land prices, leading to ever smaller and more compact dwellings, jerry-built at low cost. The *Nottingham Date Book* records that, as a result of the 'twist net fever' of 1825, in the town generally,

'thousands of homes were erected by greedy speculators who studied not the convenience and health of those obliged to take them, but how they might best secure 20 per cent per annum for their outlay... bricks... rose from 30s. to £3 per 1000.'⁶

The character of the area changed dramatically in the 1890s when the Great Northern Railway gained access from Sneinton to the town centre and passed through Leenside at a high level.⁷ Blue-brick viaduct arches and girder bridges crossed the obstacles of roads and the canal. Also the London Extension of the Great Central Railway leading out of the new Victoria Station cut a swath through the western edge of Leenside.

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Title deeds of the numerous properties in Leenside acquired by the Corporation as part of its slum clearance programme from 1923 onwards, contain details of the development of the numerous residential courts and yards during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This can be illustrated by the following case studies:

Dutch Alley or Taylor's Yard. The oldest extant property deed for this area dates back to 1662, when a wealthy tanner, John Sherwin, sold property between Narrow Marsh and the Leen to another tanner. It included a garden, orchard, tanyard and associated buildings, as well as a dwelling house. By 1809 the site had been redeveloped as a residential yard or court by Joseph Taylor, baker, and became known as Taylor's Alley. There were five dwellings on the west side of the Alley, three on the east side, and three on the south. Further, there was a bakehouse, coal house, and warehouse and garden, and a small shop on the ground floor fronting Narrow Marsh, used as a butchers shop which said room was 'situate under the dining room of John Wynn.' There was a passage way 4ft 6in wide and a pigsty. In 1893 the property came into the hands of Henrietta Elizabeth Duddy, a widow who lived at 52 Addison Street and became known as 'Duddy's Square.' A valuation described the property as comprising seventeen three story houses, tiled throughout, let at a weekly rental of between 2s.3d and 4s.11d. The total value was estimated to be £1,220.⁸

Crosland Street. The parcel of land which eventually became Crosland Street was owned originally in 1725 by Samuel Fellows, a wealthy silk stocking hosier. It stood to the west of the property already held by Fellows, stretched from Narrow Marsh to the Leen and had an area of about 460 square yards. It passed through several hands before it came into the possession of John Crosland, framework knitter. In 1785 Crosland built forty dwellings on the land, two of which fronted Narrow Marsh, the remainder being in the 'backside yard.' (Plate 2). On the east of this double row of houses, and interconnected with Crosland Street, was another estate of Crosland's which, in 1801, comprised twenty five properties known as Crosland Court. The court contained amongst other things, an hosiery warehouse, gardens, stables and the like. The area also had dunghill



PLATE 2: Crosland Place in 1919. Red Lion street runs past the properties at the end of the street and is visible through the archway.

places, ashes holes, necessary houses, pumps, etc.⁹

Foundry Yard or Ten Bells Yard. The documentary origins of this part of Leenside date back to 1661-2 when the property consisted of a 'messuage' on the south side of Narrow Marsh and three on the north. In 1691 Samuel Fillingham bequeathed this property to his son, Samuel, who was described as a tanner. By 1728 Samuel had become a framework knitter, and, with John White, a tanner, divided the property into 'several Dwellings or Tenements.' Towards the end of the 18th century, the property came into the hands of Thomas and Francis Foulgham, ironmongers. By 1781 the properties in Narrow Marsh were being used as warehouses and workshops and a tan yard with a frontage of 44 yards by 8 yards deep. Part backed onto the cliff face with the County Gaol above them. Two years later a horse mill and crane were installed in the workshop on the south side of Narrow Marsh. Francis Foulgham was declared bankrupt in 1798, but James, son of Thomas Foulgham, inherited from his father in 1818. James was living in Leicester, describing himself as a Gentleman, and his deceased father as an iron founder and hosier. In 1822 the site included a brass foundry as well as an iron foundry which gave the traditional name to the property. However, the foundry ceased in 1835, when the buildings were pulled down and by 1838 the Foulgham family raised a £1000 mortgage to make new buildings in Foundry Yard. By 1851, there were twenty properties in what was now called Ten Bells Yard, with ash pits and privies in the middle. These properties became a classic example of the Leenside development, for there were now two houses fronting Narrow Marsh with a passage-way between them, giving entry into the Yard.¹⁰

Glue Court - Temple Place. In 1805 there were sixteen dwellings in the Glue court, but by 1823 (Figure 2) the number had increased to twenty, and plans were in hand to erect further houses. This was typical of the high density and notorious Nottingham courts, tightly 'jerry' built on one of the narrow plots of land characteristic of Leenside. It had a three feet wide entrance, single pump and three privies, with some tenements only a little over 8 ft. square.¹¹

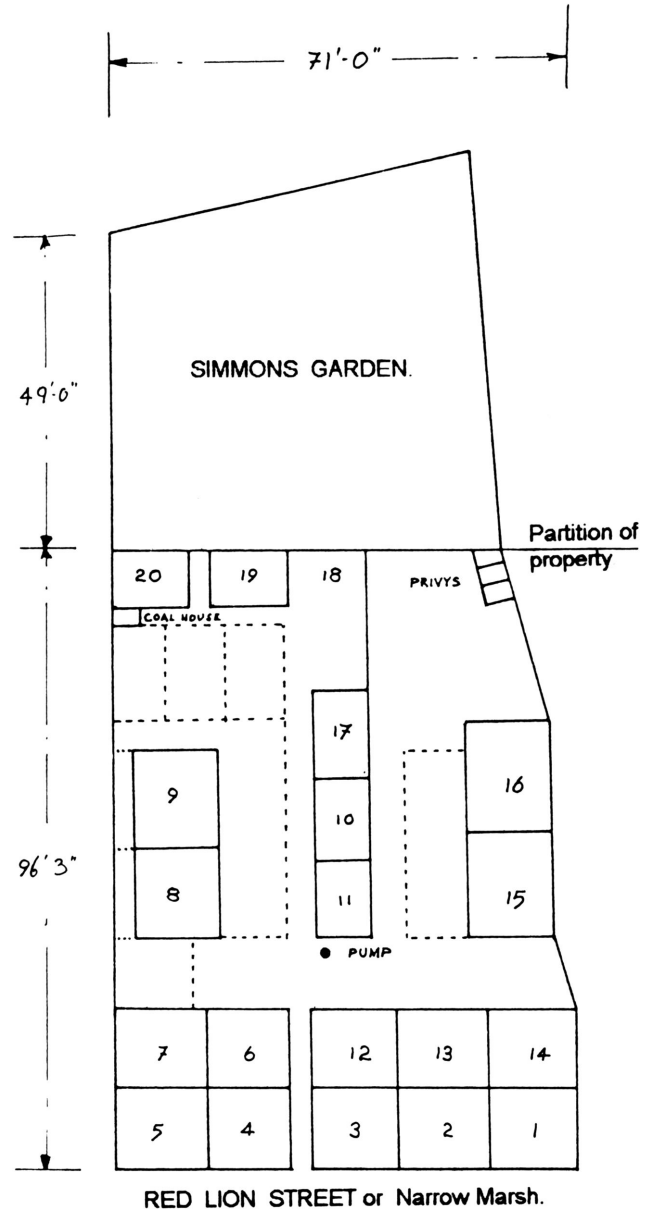


FIGURE 2: Plan of twenty houses in Glue Court, later Temple Place, 1823. (Nottinghamshire Archives, M23, 735).

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This form of development was replicated throughout the area. By 1851 the 20 acres of the original Leenside was made to accommodate 1100 dwellings, space shared with a number of industrial enterprises. The housing took up approximately 15 acres of land and was crowded with 300 people per acre. That fact alone does not account for a slum. There are parts of Nottingham today with a similar population density, but housed in properly constructed desirable dwellings, with every modern convenience. As late as 1887 there was a slaughter house in Lees Yard where its loft was converted to two dwellings.¹²

The courts and alleys were given palliative names like Peach, Pear, Currant and Plum Streets, or more topographical names such as Knotted Alley, Malt Mill Yard, Foundry Yard and Victoria Mill Yard. Some were personalised as in Lees Yard, Popham Street, Crosland Place, and Pemberton Street. Property in Leather Alley contained not only a house in 1834, but also a fellmonger's yard, woolroom, and warehouses. Adjacent to this property was a steam corn mill, a lace factory with forges, stables and other outbuildings. Larger enterprises were to be found at the western end of Leenside. For example, bleachers and dyers Lindley, Wright and Cox, Ltd, had their works in Leenside until the Great Northern Railway compulsorily purchased the site in 1889. Dodsons Yard had an adjacent mill used originally for grinding bark and dressing leather, then for grinding cement, and finally for grinding mustard and chickory (sic). There was also a smithy, converted to a cooper's shop. Near to the Broad Marsh were a number of stables and haylofts, manure yards and cart sheds used by merchants in the town centre. The best know of these were Armitages Bros., then corn and flour dealers.¹³

The proprietors of small blocks of property exercised an influence on the lives of people in Leenside, and perhaps the rest of Nottingham, disproportionate to their numbers. They were the mainstay of the churches and chapels with all the moral and social aspirations they proclaimed. In 1851 68 year old Thomas Latham was 'a house agent of houses and properties' and acted as rent collector for some proprietors. However, many collected their rents personally, and had direct contact with their tenants. A sympathetic ear, or a word of admonition, was readily

conveyed to the poor from those who were differentiated and segregated in the class structure.¹⁴

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The drinking water supply for the majority of properties in Leenside was originally from private wells sunk in the sandstone, or bore holes some 20ft deep with the supply manually pumped from the ground water of the river valley. Messrs Scott and Moffatt of London, tested the site and subsoil for the new St John's Church. In 1843 they reported that,

'The soil is uniform compact vegetable mould, below which is sand and gravel containing a great quantity of water.'¹⁵

This was manifestly unsatisfactory, and had been for some time, for contamination could be guaranteed. The Leen itself had been a source of drinking water, though the Trent Water Company, founded in 1825, piped a supply to the town. Thomas Hawkesley was the engineer. He reported that the company was able to supply some 8,000 houses in the town, at a cost of 1d. per week per house. It is not clear if Leenside received drinking water from that source. Water suppliers delivered drinking water from carts at ½d. a bucketful. In 1847 the 'noisome accumulations' of rubbish in the streets, and the filthy drains, were contributing to the unhealthy prospects of Leenside, and the spread of disease. There is no surprise that mortality rates were high: 24.9 per 1000. The Corporation took over the supply of fresh drinking water in 1880. As far as Leenside was concerned the supply was mostly from shared taps in the courts, rather than in the dwellings. Seaton recommended that night soil be properly removed, that ventilation and water supplies be attended to, and that verminous, insanitary houses be demolished.¹⁶

The disposal of sewage initially followed ancient practices - the use of ash pits (middens), dung hills, and night soil collections. But the Leen was close by, and was used thoughtlessly for the disposal of human and industrial waste. This practice was of concern to the Corporation well into the second half of the 19th century. The natural, and contrived, drainage of foul water and sewerage was into this water course. The Sanitary Committee proposed altering the course of the Leen, to link it with the Tinkers Leen and thus

improve the outfall drainage. Borough Engineer Marriott Ogle Tarbotton even proposed making the Leen into the main sewer for Nottingham, and whilst it was used for land drainage (rainwater) its culverting was finally completed to the west of Leenside, when the river was made to flow into the Canal in 1884.¹⁷

There were rudimentary attempts to enable Leensiders to bathe. Under the Leen Bridge, where the London Road passes over, and opposite Navigation Row, space and facilities were provided in 1815 for people to wash in the waters of the river. That however was short lived.¹⁸

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A demographic analysis of the population of Leenside has been carried out based upon the 1851 census using a 100% sample, and the 1841, 1871 and 1891 censuses, using 10% samples. The 1841 census

dealt only with the Leenside area as defined above. The original census district of St John the Baptist in the parish of St Mary's, Nottingham had no population outside that very tight boundary. However, the boundary was re-drawn by 1851 to be defined as: Red Lion Street, Malin Hill, Bridge Street (London Road), Tinkers Leen, Wilford Street, Canal Street, Sussex Street (Turncalf Alley). The following figures are all from that area, and are thus directly comparable. In the nature of the census returns and the author's sampling technique, the figures contained in this section are not absolute, but rather estimates within an error range of plus or minus 3%. The details below acknowledge the massive natural increase in the nation's population during this period, but no space is devoted to discussing that fact.

The total population of the area, subdivided into age groups, between 1841 and 1891 is shown on Table 1.

TABLE 1

Age Range and Population Numbers in Census Years.

Age Range	1841 (10% sample)				1851 (100% sample)			
	M	F	M %	F %	M	F	M %	F %
0- 1	-	-	-	-	66	67	1.5	1.5
1-10	450	560	10.7	13.4	509	495	11.2	10.9
11-20	550	550	13.1	13.1	468	482	10.3	10.6
21-30	320	320	7.6	7.6	376	431	8.3	9.5
31-40	360	260	8.6	6.2	285	322	6.3	7.1
41-50	170	200	4.0	4.8	246	254	5.4	5.6
51-60	120	70	2.9	1.7	143	137	3.2	3.0
61-70	50	80	1.2	1.9	86	88	1.9	1.9
71-80	10	20	0.2	0.5	30	27	0.7	0.6
81+	-	-	-	-	7	4	0.2	0.1
	4190		100		4538		100	

Age Range	1871 (10% sample)				1891 (10% sample)			
	M	F	M %	F %	M	F	M %	F %
0- 1	80	90	1.4	1.5	50	30	1.1	0.7
1-10	490	550	8.3	9.3	480	530	10.8	11.9
11-20	560	610	9.5	10.4	510	350	11.4	7.8
21-30	590	500	10.0	8.5	350	270	7.9	6.0
31-40	1060	410	18.3	7.0	430	330	9.6	7.4
41-50	300	300	5.1	5.1	310	230	6.9	5.2
51-60	230	180	3.9	3.1	130	90	2.9	2.0
61-70	130	160	2.2	2.7	130	90	2.9	2.0
71-80	40	60	0.7	1.0	30	30	0.7	0.7
81+	10	-	0.2	-	-	-	-	-
	5880		100		4460		100	

The 1891 total shows that the Leenside area was beginning to lose its physical heart. The same census reveals there were some 180 houses unoccupied, the majority being in Temple Place, Peach Street, Pear Street, Plum Street, Currant Street, Foundry Yard and Knotted Alley. Further, the 1891 census also examined the size of housing, by listing the houses with four or less rooms. There were seven dwellings with only one room, twenty-nine with two rooms, 104 with three rooms and sixty-six dwellings with four rooms. Thus, nearly one quarter of the housing stock was well below any acceptable standards.

Table 2 attempts to illustrate the places of origin of the inhabitants, based on the evidence of their birth-places as recorded in the 1851-1891 censuses.

TABLE 2.

Places of Birth of Heads of Families in Census Years

<i>Place of Birth</i>	<i>CENSUS YEAR</i>					
	<i>1851</i>		<i>1871</i>		<i>1891</i>	
	<i>Nos</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Nos</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Nos</i>	<i>%</i>
Nottingham	318	35.5	450	30.6	420	47.2
Nottinghamshire	227	25.3	340	23.1	140	15.7
Derbyshire	69	7.7	90	6.1	80	9.0
Lincolnshire	31	3.5	40	2.7	50	5.6
Leicestershire	79	8.8	130	8.8	90	10.1
Yorkshire	9	1.0	40	2.7	20	2.2
Staffordshire	6	0.7	0	-	0	-
Northamptonshire	12	1.3	20	1.4	0	-
London	6	0.7	40	2.7	10	1.1
Devon	4	0.4	20	0.1	10	1.1
Lancashire	4	0.4	40	2.7	0	-
Other	130	14.5	226	15.3	70	7.9
Totals	895	100	1470	100	890	100

It is reasonable to expect the vast majority of Leenside inhabitants to have been born within the ancient parishes of Nottingham, and the census returns confirm that. However it is notable that there was considerable migration from other parts of Nottinghamshire and from neighbouring counties, but this had slowed down by the end of the century, the

majority of residents then being born in Nottingham. There is little evidence to support the view that the changes in agriculture forced people to the towns, for Leicestershire provided more migrants than Lincolnshire. As Roger Smith put it, 'rural migrants did not wish to enter machine industries and, furthermore, their labour was not needed.'¹⁹

TABLE 3.

Major Occupations of Leenside residents in Census Years.

	<i>1841 (10% sample)</i>				<i>1851(100% sample)</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M %</i>	<i>F %</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M %</i>	<i>F %</i>
Framework Knitters	320	0	7.6	-	185	6	4.2	0.1
Allied Hosiery Industry	100	380	2.4	9.1	55	202	1.2	4.4
Lace Industry	90	360	2.1	8.6	158	407	3.5	9.0
Labourers	110	0	2.6	-	279	0	6.1	-
Other inhabitants	2830		67.5		3246		71.5	
	4190		100		4538		100	
	<i>1871 (10% sample)</i>				<i>1891 (10% sample)</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M %</i>	<i>F %</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M %</i>	<i>F %</i>
Framework Knitters	130	0	2.2	-	20	0	0.4	-
Allied Hosiery Industry	50	80	0.8	1.4	40	160	0.9	3.6
Lace Industry	180	530	3.1	9.0	120	290	2.7	6.5
Labourers	570	50	9.7	0.8	400	10	9.0	0.2
Other inhabitants	4290		73		3420		76.7	
	5880		100		4460		100	

An examination of the major occupations of Leenside residents listed in Table 3 shows that hosiery, whilst originally dominant, declined rapidly after 1841, whilst lace increased from 1851 to 1871 but declined slightly by 1891. However labourers, many in the construction industry, increased consistently. Other occupations were limited to the lower end of the service industries, and included many beer, and public, houses. Boatmen and boatmen's families are recorded; obviously not all canal workers lived on the water. This lower end of Nottingham also had occupations which were unpleasant, such as scavengers, night soil men (emptying privies) and road sweepers. Provisions could be bought in Leenside through a number of shops, but for those who could afford to pay. Nottingham market place was readily accessible. Also in the community, giving it a self contained feel, were the people who stitched and mended clothes and shod the populace, mended their pots and pans, washed and mangled linen, prescribed quack medicines, and even laid out their dead.²⁰

Many of the remainder were men and women who eked out a living doing the essential but menial jobs which urban living required, *i.e.* hawker, ice cream vendor, errand boy, hair dresser, chimney sweep, charwomen, laundresses, and the like. Nevertheless, there were also blacksmiths, colliers, clerks, butchers, maltsters, painters, decorators, bricklayers, carters, cabmen, hatters, grooms, railway employees to add a certain leaven to the lump of humanity. Tramps, unemployed men and vagrants also had representatives in the area.

The population of Leenside was predominantly English in origin, but there was a large Irish element. Leenside had 296 out of the total 1,686 Irish population of Nottingham, second only to St. Ann's Ward (1,010). They represented 4.4% of the people in Leenside and tended to congregate in certain parts of the area to form a ghetto, *i.e.* in Peach, Pear, Plum and Currant streets. The occupations of the male Irish were: labourers, agricultural labourers, framework knitters, cordwainers/shoemakers, hawkers, hucksters & dealers. Their women folk were: stitchers &

seamers, lace drawers, house servants, seamstresses, and housekeepers.²¹

Several families declared themselves to be from Germany - Bavaria and Hesse. Their occupations are given as 'musicians', *i.e.* members of small bands of itinerant barrel organists, etc.²²

The evidence does not support the claim that the obvious overcrowding of the area was the result of profligate breeding or of extended families. Sampling the 1851 census, the average number of children of the head of the household family was only 2.21. The average household was only 5.22 people. Just under half the houses of Leenside had people outside their immediate family living in them. Doubtless many made some contribution to the domestic economy, but the evidence is that the extra household numbers were made up of step children, parents and in-laws of the family head, blood relatives, servants and friends (visitors). That does not mean there were not noteworthy exceptions. There was serious, if not dangerous, overcrowding in a number of the properties, with a consequential loss of privacy, and, perhaps, human dignity. The census enumerator remarked in a marginal comment that a lodging house in Pear Street had fifteen people living in only four rooms!

Leenside gained notoriety because of the numbers of lodgers it housed (Table 4). The initial number of lodgers/boarders was youthful, but as they settled down with partners their numbers moved across onto other sections of this analysis. But their numbers were always significant, rising to nearly one sixth of the whole population by the end of the 19th century, and that dominated by men.

There is no real pattern to the lodging houses. Certainly there were recognised lodging house keepers, but there were many more houses where lodgers were accommodated in ones and twos. It might be expected that economic necessity would force people to take in lodgers, but, as Table 5 indicates, it is almost a random sample of the people of Leenside.

TABLE 4.

Number of Lodgers and Boarders in Census Years

	<i>1841 (10% sample)</i>				<i>1851 (100% sample)</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M%</i>	<i>F%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M%</i>	<i>F%</i>
Lodgers/Boarders	330	310	7.9	7.4	407	343	9.0	7.6
Others	<u>3550</u>		<u>84.7</u>		<u>3788</u>		<u>83.4</u>	
	4190		100		4538		100	

	<i>1871 (10% sample)</i>				<i>1891 (10% sample)</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M%</i>	<i>F%</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M%</i>	<i>F%</i>
Lodgers/Boarders	740	360	12.6	6.1	590	130	13.3	2.9
Others	<u>4780</u>		<u>81.3</u>		<u>3740</u>		<u>83.8</u>	
	5880		100		4460		100	

TABLE 5.

Households with three or more lodgers, 1851.

<i>Address</i>	<i>Occupation of Head</i>	<i>Number of Lodgers</i>
Bishop's Row	Lace Maker	3
Bridge St	Victualler & Maltster	6
Butlers Court	Bricklayer's Labourer	4
Byron Yard	Journeyman Blacksmith	5
Crosby Place	Seamstress (Widow)	4
Crossland Ct.	Framework Knitter (wife keeps lodging house)	7
Crossland Ct.	Labourer	7
Crossland Ct.	Glove Maker (lodgers in same trade)	3
Crossland Ct.	Agricultural Labourer	3
Crossland Ct.	Labourer	4
Crossland Ct	Washerwoman (Widow)	3
Crossland Ct	Framework Knitter	4
Crossland Ct.	Agricultural Labourer (Irish)	10
Crossland St.	Cotton Seamer (Widow)	3
Currant St.	Framework Knitter	4
Currant St.	Nurse. (Spinster)	6
Currant St.	Lace Maker	7
Currant St.	Framework Knitter	6
Dutch Alley	Silk Throwster	3
Dutch Alley	Framework Knitter (Lodgers also Framework Knitters)	7
Dutch Alley	Labourer	3
Dutch Alley	Chimney Sweep	3
Dutch Alley	Hose Stitcher (Widow)	3
Dutch Alley	Framework Knitter (Lodgers also Framework Knitters)	3
Flint Court	Wharf Labourer	4
Foundry Yard	Glover	4
Hornbuckle Yd.	Master Bricklayer	3
Hornbuckle Yd.	Master Shoemaker (+ 1 man)	3
Hornbuckle Yd.	Journeyman Silk Throwster (Lodgers also Silk Throwsters)	3
Knob Yard	Labourer	3
Leenside	Master Tailor	3

TABLE 5. (CONTINUED)

Households with three or more lodgers.

<i>Address</i>	<i>Occupation of Head</i>	<i>Number of Lodgers</i>
Lees Yard	Hawker (Irish)	6
Lees Yard	Painter	3
Lees Yard	Rag & Bone Merchant	3
Lees Yard	(sub-let entirely to lodgers)	7
Lees Yard	Hose Seamer (Widow)	3
Malt Mill Ln.	Tailoress (Widow)	3
Martins Yd.	Seamstress (Widow)	5
Narrow Marsh	Shoe Maker	4
Narrow Marsh	Framework Knitter	16
Narrow Marsh	Patent Wigmaker	3
Narrow Marsh	Staymaker (Female)	6
Narrow Marsh	Lodging House Keeper	24
Narrow Marsh	Lodging House Keeper	13
Narrow Marsh	Master Brazier (Apprentice lives in)	3
Narrow Marsh	Waterman	4
Narrow Marsh	Labourer	15
Narrow Marsh	Butcher	5
Narrow Marsh	Dealer in Old Clothes	4
Narrow Marsh	Journeyman Tailor	4
Narrow Marsh	Framework Knitter	4
Narrow Marsh	Framework Knitter	9
Narrow Marsh	Lodging House Keeper	8
Narrow Marsh	(sub-let entirely to lodgers)	4
Narrow Marsh	Lodging House Keeper	12
Narrow Marsh	Pensioner & Lodging House Keeper	19
Narrow Marsh	Lodging House Keeper (Spinster)	9
Narrow Marsh	Framework Knitter (Servant kept)	10
Narrow Marsh	Lodging House Keeper	10
Peach St.	Seamer (Widow)	6
Pear St.	Brickmaker	10
Pear St.	Labourer (Irish)	3
Pear St.	Labourer (Irish)	3
Pear St.	Framework Knitter	5
Pear St.	Farm Labourer	6
Pear St.	Charwoman (Widow)	5
Pear St.	Labourer	3
Plum St.	Journeyman Nailmaker	7
Plum St.	Dyer's Porter	5
Red Lion St.	Master Cordwainer (Apprentices live in)	4
Red Lion St.	Master Butcher	5
Red Lion St.	Master Tailor	3
Red Lion St.	Seaman & Lodging House Keeper	17
Red Lion St.	Lace Maker (Servant kept)	13

It is a reasonable inference that some of the migrants had contacts in the area, perhaps as relatives or friends. Equally, some are declared apprentices, and perhaps those from London were part of the Poor Law system of binding pauper children apprentice

well away from the metropolis. Though in a different position in the household, the few servants recorded in the census returns mostly came from outside the greater Nottingham area.

There was a very high level of population movement into, within, and out of, Leenside. Roger Smith showed mobility to be a feature of urban living and a characteristic more of the lowest orders of society than of the middle classes.²³ The census returns would require a 100% analysis to determine the full extent of mobility, but there are pointers from sampling the 1841 and 1851 censuses. These reveal that in a sample of twenty-one residents in 1841, only one can be positively identified in 1851. One had married and moved within Leenside, whilst all the rest had left, either by death or removal. Economic pressures were selective. The lace trade established itself in factories outside the ancient borough of Nottingham, in Radford and Lenton particularly; its operatives followed. But the death throes of the cottage based framework knitting industry were worked out in the courts and alleys of Nottingham, where once it had thrived (Plate 3). Professor S. D. Chapman, quoting local and visiting observers, describes the grinding poverty which characterised the stockings in their latter years.²⁴ However a 10% sample of the dwellings occupied by the framework knitters of Leenside in 1851 shows that whilst they may be poor, they were no more overcrowded than others. A few accommodated aged parents or other relatives, a few (seven) ran lodging houses as a side-line, one even having a servant.

* * *

The quality of Leenside life cannot easily be statistically assessed. There is no doubt that by the standards of many, this was not a pleasant place within which to live. Thomas Hawkesley, engineer to the Trent Water Company, reported 'a positive diminution of life resulting from confinement in an unhealthy, uncomfortable and, in some respects, demoralising situation.'²⁶ The Town's Sanitary Committee were to report of Pear, and Peach Street (the Irish ghetto area) that the privies were, 'in number and common to them all some of which are without doors, so noisome as scarcely to be approachable, and so exposed as to offend all sense of decency. Some are so ill constructed that the drainage ... runs into adjoining houses, others so broken up and filthy as to be wholly useless.'²⁶

It is small wonder that fever was endemic. How-

ever, it should be noted that the 'poor' were largely indifferent and 'did not provide a guard against contingencies.' Asian Cholera broke out in Lees Yard in 1832 - transmitted by watermen. Property was demolished in Foundry Yard to allow air to circulate more freely following an outbreak of cholera.²⁷

Physically Leenside became a most undesirable area of Nottingham. Hawkesley argued that premature mortality was costing the area over one and a third million pounds per annum as a 'waste of existence.'²⁸ By reputation, the people of Leenside were as unsavoury as the environment. One commentator wrote of 'a locality where drunkenness and depravity abounded, and where many children were running the streets in rags and dirt; growing up in ignorance and familiarised with sin.'²⁹

The Leaders of Canaan Street Primitive Methodist Church had to publicly admonish their Sunday School children for 'playing in the yard with money and insulting persons passing.'³⁰ Gravenor Henson suggested that areas like Leenside became criminal and immoral where there was unregulated freedom of action amongst the youth who were 'let loose for want of ancient restrictions upon apprentices.'³¹ It was also an area noted for political radicalism. The Rancliffe Arms in Sussex Street was a meeting place for radical reformers.⁷⁴ This public house was taken over by John Blackner, who made it 'the principal resort of all leading members, especially among the humbler classes, of that school of radical reformers of whose sentiments the *Nottingham Review* had long been the exponent.'³²

In 1840 a Roman Catholic priest told his principal at Ushaw College that within the Nottingham Catholic community there was a ferment and the possible collapse of law and order in the courts, alleys and yards of Leenside, and that he was expecting an outbreak of violence in the town. People could not earn their bread and could not better their conditions. Outdoor relief had been refused in times of trade depression, and they were greatly impoverished. The Poor Law Commissioners were told of residents of the workhouse asking to leave on Sundays to attend Church. That was stopped because they were stealing food to take to their relatives who remained in the community.³³



PLATE 3: Housing in Currant Street: five stories and a garret; in 1919 two floors have 'framework knitters' windows, though that does not mean there were frames behind all of them.

F. M. L. Thompson points out that the local public house was the only friendly and congenial place where all kinds of business might be transacted: for example, friendly society subscriptions, trades union dues, and 'houses of call' for itinerant, and journeymen, workmen in search of jobs.³⁴ However, no trades union is recorded as holding meetings in any of the public houses of Leenside.

Drunkenness and crime are commonly linked, and Leenside had continuous examples of both. There was a Police Station built on Canal Street in 1861, and an Inspector and several Constables were resident in the district.³⁵

* * *

To the churches, Leenside was a part of the Christian vineyard. Set in the geographical parish of St Mary's, the inhabitants were a world away from the *bourgeoisie*, and the *petty bourgeoisie* in particular, of the town who frequented the parish church and the non-conformist places of worship. It was to Leenside that John Wesley preached when he held a service in the house of Matthew Bagshaw in Cros(s)land Yard. It was the offshoot of Wesleyan Methodism, Primitive Methodism, which made strong inroads into Leenside (and Broad Marsh) through the work of Canaan Street Chapel. The new Chapel near Turncalf Alley (later Sussex Street) was built in 1815 at a cost of £1,400, raised by people of the 'humbler sort.' The new chapel gave its name to the local street in which it stood - Canaan Street. This chapel was extended to include an adult school for the benefit of local people. By 1828 a gallery had been added to the original building to accommodate their growing numbers. It was completely rebuilt in 1883. Membership was composed largely of newly converted Christians rather than people poached from existing denominations: Wesleyan Methodists lost few to the Ranters. Obviously from the numbers involved, Primitive Methodism had an appeal for the urban community, perhaps because of its readiness to work beyond the confines of their buildings and be in the open air. It was a feature of the 'Prims' that their open air Camp Meetings enabled hundreds, if not thousands, of people to meet on the open space south of the Nottingham Canal, known as the Meadows Cricket Ground. That was conveniently placed for people from

Leenside. In 1833 the chapel was reputed to have places for 800 hearers, and a membership of 450.³⁶ In 1851 the average Sunday morning congregation was 700, with 900 crowding in to the evening service.³⁷

The Nottingham City Mission, founded in 1837, concentrated initially on the education of the poor. The Mission began its work in 1839 in Crosland Place. Its work there was under the title 'the Town Mission Ragged School.' The missionary 'endeavoured to collect, for the purpose of instruction, the ragged and most neglected lads of the poorest of the Nottingham poor. None but the very lowest classes were admitted into the School. Those children who presented themselves in decent clothing were taken by the Missionary to other schools, and those whose appearance began to improve were induced to go to regular Sunday Schools.'³⁸

Thomas Harwood, a Methodist who had worked in various Nottinghamshire towns, was appointed, 'to convey the Gospel as extensively as possible among that class of persons (the thousands for whom no spiritual provision is made) to visit the sick and dying, and to awaken their attention to the great important concerns of eternity.'

Harwood's appointment led to a debate at the 1838 Wesleyan Conference, and in turn to a decision to extend the town mission scheme to other places: 'The establishment of the Nottingham Wesleyan Town Mission for the exclusive benefit of the poor was a noble movement, and will ever reflect honour upon its promoters.'³⁹

By contrast with the Methodists, the Church of England had little answer to the problems of urban expansion. It was caught in the web of its own antiquated parish structure, and it offered no separate provision for Leenside until the 1840s. This was partly a national problem, caused by the difficulty of raising the finance to acquire sites and build new churches, and provide income for the incumbent. By the 1840s new resources were available, and St John the Baptist Church, Leenside, was the first new church built in the town from such finance. Three new Anglican churches were already open in Nottingham though their funding was differently structured.⁴⁰ A committee was formed in 1841, whose

clerk was the Revd. W. J. Butler, Rector of St Nicholas' Church, Nottingham. The task of the committee was to plan a church to serve the working class area on the south side of the St Mary's Parish, an area 'inhabited chiefly by people of the humbler rank of life,' according to the prospectus. Serving with Butler on the committee were the vicar and churchwardens of St Mary's. Grants were available from a number of sources, although Butler complained to the Bishop of Lincoln that 'the Church Building Acts are so confused and full of references to former acts in almost everyone of them, that our Nottingham lawyers appear not to be able to give us satisfactory directions.'

The committee aimed to raise some £7,500. The land cost, since there was no green field site, and the building costs were £3,610. The £3000 needed to endow the stipend for the incumbent did not materialise.

The project was hampered by a downturn in the trade cycle. Funds to be raised by local subscription were hard to come by. Butler told the Bishop in May 1842 'we make but little progress in getting subscriptions because the town and neighbourhood are in too greatly distressed a state to allow us to call personally on those who we think likely to subscribe.'

But several other sources of funding were available to the committee; the Incorporated Church Building Society gave £500, and the Board of the Nottingham Church Building Society donated a further £500. Her Majesty's Commissioners for Building and Promoting the Building of Additional Churches in populous Parishes subscribed £800. Their donations were made on condition that there were no pew rents, and all sittings were free. Butler found his position as clerk of the Building Committee all too much, and he was ordered to rest, 'due to excessive application and anxiety of mind.'⁴¹

The architect of the new Church was George Gilbert Scott of Messrs Scott and Moffatt of London. His design was chosen as 'the best' from the eight who submitted designs. The foundation stone was laid by Earl Manvers and an address delivered by Archdeacon Wilkins. The building was completed in 1844, and consecrated in that year (Plate 4). At the

outset, St. John's was a church serving the 'poorer sort.' The 1851 Religious census suggests there were 740 people present at the morning service, and 700 in the evening. There were also 290 Sunday scholars present in the morning. Thirty years later, in 1881, the numbers were morning, 395, and evening, 358. Who all these people were is not clear and one anecdotal source claimed that St John's gained the reputation of being, 'one of the most fashionable churches in Nottingham.': '... each Sunday, the carriages of the wealthy ladies and gentlemen clattered over the cobbles to the church door and the old women stood in their cottage doors smoking their pipes and wearing woollen shawls about their shoulders.'⁴²

The first incumbent, the Rev. William Howard, was an evangelical, but he was succeeded by men influenced by, and versed in, the Oxford Movement and the Anglo-Catholic Revival. St John's was the first Nottingham Church to have a robed choir to provide a choral contribution to the Sung Eucharist. The middle-class congregation provided the finance to keep the church open. In 1892 Sydney Race described it as 'quite filled with fashionable people which is a good sign as the surroundings of the church are very poor . . . the ceremonial was dignified and English and quite different from the Romish way of St Albans.'⁴³

The Church of St John the Baptist, Leenside, proclaimed its presence, if not its gospel, for ninety seven years and was destroyed by enemy action on the night of 8th-9th May 1941. Its shell was demolished ten years later.

St John's District boundary was originally defined as Bridge Street on the east, Canal Street on the south, Sussex Street on the west and Narrow Marsh on the north. An attempt was made to include the whole of the Meadows area, but eventually the southern boundary of the parish was the Tinker's Leen.

The Ten Bells Public House stood at the top of Foundry Yard where it joined Red Lion Street. At some date before the turn of the century the disused building was taken over by St John's as a Mission Room and Parish Hall. A Church Army Officer helped staff the Mission. It continued in use for social purposes and services to well within living memory.

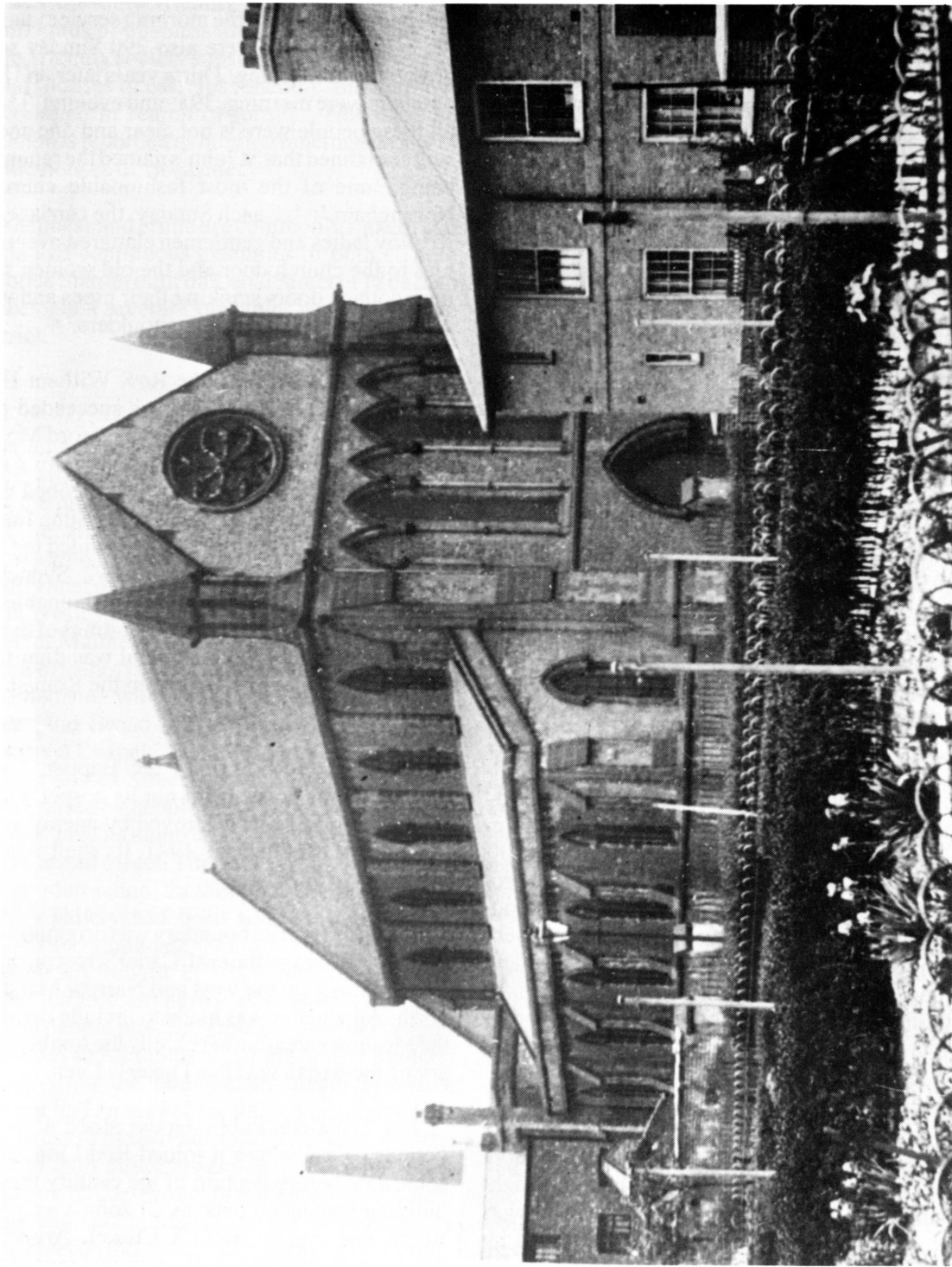


PLATE 4: St John's Church, Leenside. Some new Council houses have been built in the area, probably around 1930.

The Roman Catholic Church was not long in attempting to provide for the spiritual needs of the Irish immigrants. By 1850 there were some 2,000 immigrant Irish people living in the Hockley, Leenside and Broad Marsh areas. The Church of Our Lady and St Patrick, Leenside, had its origins in the decision to establish a Catholic mission in the area. At some point between 1856 and 1867 a disused factory adjacent to 'The Turks Head' on Leenside had been turned into a Catholic school. By 1860 sufficient funds had been collected to build the church. The school was reconstructed at the junction of Leenside and London Road to serve as a complex of church and presbytery as well as a school. The architects for this new phase of the mission were Evans & Jolly of Nottingham. It was a grandiose scheme, the first part of which was the three storied school. Bishop Roskell laid the foundation stone in April 1874, and his successor Bishop Bagshawe opened it in January 1875. The presbytery was designed to accommodate four priests and was completed in 1879 at a cost of £1,600. The Sisters of Mercy from College Street staffed the school and for a time they used the presbytery basement as a dining room where penny dinners were provided for the children. The completed church was opened in September 1883.

The Roman Catholic parish priest to serve the area of Leenside, (and other parts of Nottingham included in the parish of Our Lady and St Patrick) was The Rt. Revd. Mgr. John Harnett. Bishop Roskell sent him in 1867. Mellor's biography of him indicates that he was given charge of the mission in Leenside. The church was built at his behest and by his tireless fund raising, largely by door-to-door begging. He served the area for forty years and 'exercised a greater influence on the district than any other man.' He would lead his parishioners on parish outings, and it was a 'pleasant sight' seeing him at the head of the procession on the way to the railway station. 'The fag end of the procession [was] not distinguished in their attire.' Tireless in his assiduity, he was respectfully remembered at his death in 1909.⁹⁹ In the re-furbished Leenside area after the slum clearance, a street was named after him.⁴⁴

The Nottingham Temperance Mission established a Leenside operation in 1877. Rooted in evangelical non-conformity, it had some ninety volunteer workers, visiting lodging houses, and holding gospel and

temperance meetings. There were entertainments, Band of Hope meetings, Sunday School, drum and fife band, penny bank, mother's meetings, sewing class, reading room and lectures. These were all housed in the premises on Popham Street, where there was a Mission Hall and Coffee Tavern. Their missionary work produced 'many cases of reformation.' The Mission was transferred to its branches in Hyson Green and Carlton Road, in Nottingham, when its property was demolished, for the buildings in Popham Street were in the path of the Great Northern Railway, which demolished the Free Library, the reading room and frontage together with the various rooms and two dwelling houses.⁴⁴

Finally, by the late 19th century, the Salvation Army had a presence in Leenside. In 1891 a Captain Sarah Taylor was resident at 85-87 Narrow Marsh, and she was in charge of the Salvation Army Mission Hall. A *War Cry* of 1891 describes this appointment as a Slum Post. On 7th March 1891 the Nottingham Number 1 Corp marched through Narrow Marsh early on Sunday morning and made a 'loud noise.'⁴⁵

* * *

The first regular education of the children of Nottingham was through the Sunday School movement which was sweeping the country during the latter part of the 18th century. The first Sunday Schools in Nottingham were in the dissenting chapels, but they were followed closely by the Anglicans who were urged along by their hierarchy.⁴⁶

The first schooling directly available to the neighbourhood of Leenside was the Lancastrian school (named after the Quaker, Joseph Lancaster), in Broad Marsh, in a building designed for a cotton mill built over the River Leen. The school, using the monitorial principle (of older pupils helping the younger), was established in 1810, though after three years it was removed to Derby Road. The principle of this school was to teach the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic and also, 'the correcting of bad dispositions . . . accustoming the rising generation to habits of cleanliness, subordination and order; teaching them to fear God and to respect all men, it is manifest that the interests of religion and society must be very greatly promoted.'

As the local press reported, the Lancaster system '... is well calculated to improve their words by the habits of order and regularity which it unavoidably impresses upon the minds of children so that they submit to a cheerful and willing obedience.'⁴⁷

In 1835 a 'British School' was established on Canal Street, with 160 boys and 109 girls and three staff. It was designated a New Charity School. It stood two stories high on land donated by the Corporation, cost £1,200, and received a grant of £550 from central government. The school taught reading, writing, arithmetic, scripture, religion and moral instruction, and served 'a population in humble circumstances.' A year before, Canaan Street Chapel - in adjacent Broad Marsh - had an infants school with one staff member looking after 100 children.⁴⁸

St John's Anglican Church established a school shortly after it was opened. The Rev. William Howard was helped in this project by a grant from the Bishop of Lincoln who had received a £300 donation towards the education of the poor in Nottingham, though the source of his funds is not known. In 1887 the Great Northern Railway extension into Nottingham meant the school had to be demolished. It was re-built on another site adjacent to St John's Vicarage on Station Street.⁴⁹

The education of Roman Catholic children was closely associated with their original and eventual church buildings, already described.⁵⁰

Despite all these efforts, however, the education of children in the Leenside area was perfunctory. Even the Sunday Schools, organised through the several denominations, made little impact. However, they were able to exercise a social and religious influence on the children who attended, but their pupils tended not to come from the lowest stratum of society. Wardle suggests that the one virtue of Sunday Schools was that there was a mixing of classes within the structure such that 'this may have helped to damp down inter-class bitterness.'⁵¹ That was a forlorn hope, in view of the unruly, if not riotous, behaviour endemic in the Leenside area in later years.

In 1857 the boys tended to finish their schooling after the age of nine, whilst the girls left after the age

of eight. The majority were in school for less than one year, anyway. By the mid 1860s attitudes were changing, with educational methods and quality being debated at national level and implemented locally. Following the Forster Act of 1870, Board Schools were established in Nottingham: Leenside had such a school erected in 1889. That building still stands on what is now Canal Street. It was used as a 'School for Special Difficulty and Centre for Backward Children.' It also had a swimming pool provided.⁵²

If literacy is a measure of the success of education, then Leenside schools failed to give even that basic skill. As late as 1860 the marriage registers of St John's Church recorded that of the forty marriages that year, twenty-one women and twenty men could not write their names. Marked levels of illiteracy continued to the end of the Victorian period.⁵³

* * *

Leenside was a notorious slum area which accommodated some of the town's poorest people. It was unhealthy and an incubator of contagion. But Leenside was isolated by topography from the remainder of Nottingham: the through routes passed by the area. There was little need for any 'respectable' people to have business anywhere near the courts, yards, and alleys. The area contrasted with the 'Rookeries' which lay between Nottingham's Market Place and Parliament Street. The 'Rookeries' were smaller in area and were immediately obvious; contact between their residents and the townsfolk was inevitable. The Rookeries were redeveloped in the 1870s. So why did Leenside linger for approximately forty years?

Leenside was a major area of low cost housing. The Victoria Dwellings on Bath Street, built in 1877 as municipal housing, provided some newer accommodation for the labouring poor.⁵⁴ But the rentals were higher than houses in Leenside. The area provided cheap, even disgusting, lodging accommodation for casual labourers, and vagrants. The Town Council had debated the matter since 1859 and eventually provided a major hostel for men in Boston Street though not until 1932. That was re-built in 1995, and is now run by the Salvation Army as a hostel for homeless men.

For many industrial workers crossing the threshold of urbanisation, analysis of the census returns suggests that Leenside was a port of call prior to movement out to the emerging suburbs where work and better housing were plentiful. The Primitive Methodists advocated that route as a mark of social improvement, if not a sign of divine blessing. Thus the area became a sieve, filtering out those who were socially and industrially upwardly mobile.

The residuum became a problem which required interventionist action from the local authority. By the end of the 19th century nearly all the remaining people had little education, were separate from the churches, and had no expectations beyond low rents, living in sub-standard housing, and an impoverished lifestyle. Under 20th century legislation they were forcibly removed when the area was demolished under the 'Nottingham (Red Lion Street) Improvement Scheme, 1923.'

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