

THE LOST SUBURB OF ST EBBE'S

WESTGATE
OXFORD



The Westgate Oxford development is situated in the Parish of St Ebbe's. During the 1800s and 1900s many thousands of people lived and worked in the predominantly residential area, which lay near the site of the castle in the south-eastern part of Oxford, and extended to the northern bank of the Thames. For 150 years 'The Friars' (as it was known) was characterised by narrow terraced streets of brick and stone houses, interspersed with small shops and many pubs, that had been constructed in a piecemeal fashion between c 1820-1860s.



After the clearance of the extensive Greyfriars' religious house in the 1500s the area became meadow and pasture land crossed by a number streams. During the later part of the 18th century Mr Bricknell, who had a tan yard near the site of Little Gate, owned much of the land. Some of the area was cultivated as market gardens with orchards (Paradise and Pensons Gardens), and the odd surviving building from the friary (including Friars Wharf) and a few large residential houses occupied what must have been a green and pleasant edge to the city.



In 1819 the gas works (which grew to dominate the area until its demolition in the 1960s) appeared, and the following year the meadows started to be sold for speculative housing development. Increasing amounts of goods were transported on the railways from the 1840s and unused wharves and waterways were infilled.

Over a period of 40 years Friars Street, Orchard Street, Wood Street - then Bull Street, New Street, Abbey Place, Cambridge Terrace, Bridge Street, Pike Street, Perch Street, Trout Street, Commercial Road, Blackfriars Road, and Waterloo Buildings were among the many streets that appeared. A large laundry (later Bennets), St Ebbe's School, the rectory (still in Paradise Square), a Methodist chapel, a childrens' play area, and a public swimming baths within a flowing section of the Thames were also constructed.

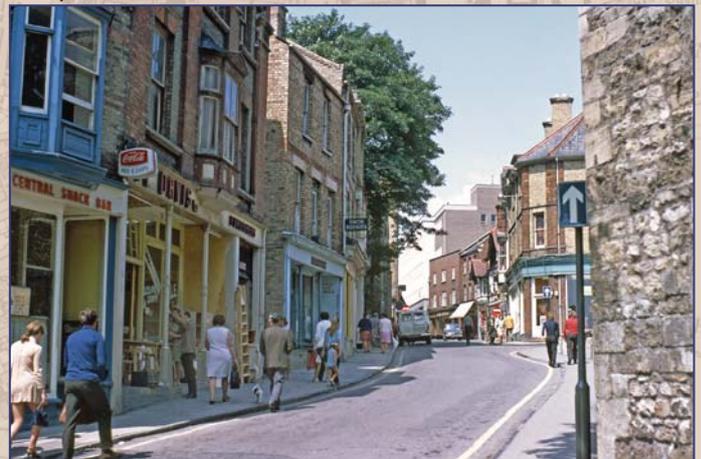


The parish attracted a mixture of low-income tenants as well as the slightly better off and contained houses suited to

many on the borderline of middle and working class. However, with no controls on the area's development, poor drainage (the streams were open sewers) and dirty water supply (garden wells drew upon contaminated ground-water) all contributed to severe health problems, including serious outbreaks of cholera during the mid 1800s. Proper drainage was put in place during the 1870s and clean water was supplied over time - residents health improved but issues remained into the 1930s.



Although many who lived in St Ebbe's were very proud of their homes, by the early to mid 1900s the area was considered to be run down in the eyes of the authorities, and was targeted for clearance and redevelopment in plans dating as early as 1938. The Second World War intervened, but in the post-war period new plans for redevelopment were suggested, until eventually the community of some 700 households were moved out and the area finally demolished in the 1970s.



We would love to hear from you if you lived in St Ebbe's and would like to send us your stories or photos. Please bring them in to the Pop-Up Museum or e-mail Becky at westgate@oxfordarchaeology.com

