# Dr Gareth Carr – Victorian workers’ housing – The development of the bye-law terraced house

Professor Richard Day: Good evening everybody, my name’s Richard Day, I’m pro-vice-chancellor for research here at Wrexham Glyndwr University. It’s my really great pleasure to welcome you to the university, especially as we have a number of people who have not even been in the building before so it’s really great to see new faces. So I’ve worked here for some years; I’m not going to say how many years, but probably a similar number to Gareth, and what that’s meant is from time to time I’ve had the privilege of chatting to him about his research and two things came across to me, one is the level of enthusiasm that he has for this subject, the other is just how important it is, in terms of social development. And there are things he is going to say which are I think you’ll find quite surprising in terms of housing stock and housing development, so I’m not going to steal any of his thunder but to pass over to Gareth and let’s hear about Victorian workers’ housing.

Dr Gareth Carr: That’s lovely, thank you Richard. First of all, thank you for taking some time out and coming to look at some slides this evening. I think that these types of houses, terraced houses, small brick terraced houses typically, there’s a lot of historical context attached to these buildings and of course we can walk past them every day and really not appreciate where these types of buildings have come from, so that’s the first message I’d like to communicate is the historical significance of these houses in that they raised hundreds of thousands of people out of poverty in the second half of the 19th century and the second point I’d like to try and communicate really is the, there is an argument that the Welsh did build most of Liverpool, and hopefully we’ll come onto that in the slides that follow.

So I’m not sure if anyone has tried to buy one of these recently, but sort of locally, I think you’d be lucky to get anything around the £100k mark, and in the suburbs of major cities or large towns throughout the land we might get something approaching £200k perhaps, anywhere near the London suburbs and we’re approaching a million. But the sad irony with this of course is that these houses weren’t intended to be so lucrative in many ways, and hopefully we’ll explore some of the themes associated with that in due course, because these houses were developed through a series of local and national legislation because things were so bad. And these images come from the courts and cellar dwellings of Liverpool, notorious for their desperate poverty, and this is of course the environment that preceded anything like a bye-law terraced house that we are totally familiar with nowadays. These images, I can look at these for ages because ethereal people emerge out the darkness, sometimes you don’t seem them the first time you look at it, but if you start looking in windows or doorways, you know, these people begin to appear. And of course, these are early 20th Century images, which is a period when poverty still existed on a huge scale in Britain’s towns and cities, so these are particularly desperate places to be, no regulation, or if there is regulation, very little of it. Landlords practically have free reign to build what they like, to put as many people into those houses that they can. If you didn’t pay your rent, you were chucked out. They were sort of dens of crime, vice in some places and the lack of drainage, lack of good drinking water meant a lot of epidemic disease sort of was rife in these sorts of environment.

So in terms of these sorts of environments, they were still with us in the 60s and 70s and there’s an argument to say that some of these desperate conditions are still with us today. So in terms of the historical context of these sorts of environments, and I think things are improving in the modern world, but maybe not fast enough, and not necessarily everywhere, are things improving.

And if you know where to look, some of these properties still exist. This is the back of London Rd in Liverpool as you sort of come out of Liverpool towards the East. And these are quite important structures now, historically, and I think the local authority are on the case and recognise these for what they are, they’re the last vestiges of the desperate plight for so many hundreds of thousands of the urban Victorian poor. So I have been in the roof space of one of these actually, even now it’s a dark and depressing place. And when you look at the evolution of this over time, a lot of this property, the grey is the built element, of course and the white are the streetscapes. It’s not surprising that the Welsh Baptists were about, the Welsh Wesleyan Methodists were about in Great Crosshall St. The established Church, the Roman Catholic Faith, this is where these faithful people felt they needed to be to try and make the best of a desperate and difficult situation. So when you look at the densities of these places, when you look at these sort of medicine bottle shapes here, these are the courts, and the narrowing at the top is the entrance to these courts, and they would typically look like that, so no light, hardly any light, hardly any air, no water supply, no drainage, no security. You can imagine these sorts of environments being affected by crime and everything else associated with that in such a desperate area, but there is research suggests though that the poorest tended to look after each other; if you needed anybody to give you their last penny, you could rely on your fellow poor people to do that. It’s only when the levels in that society, sort of further up those levels, people more or less kept the poor at a distance, and that’s quite ironic really, in terms of if the authority’s not looking after these people we should look after ourselves, and that’s a well-established fact.

So the 1841 census in Liverpool suggests that one fifth of the population were living in these conditions and again, another aspect of these photographs is that the locals know the photographer’s about so they all come out to have a look, but these are, you can stare at these images for hours and still see things you might’ve missed the first time. But of course, that’s not just Liverpool these things are happening, to a smaller scale, Wrexham suffered a similar problems, when we think about some of the local environments that are not too dissimilar from the large metropolises of Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, these environments are, again, ramshackle, I suppose, uncontrolled, unregulated, it’s a free for all for Landlords and landlords typically wouldn’t necessarily have any sympathy, you know, rent is what they do it for and if you couldn’t pay your rent you were chucked out. Not much charity about in that respect. And not just one person per room of course, we’re talking 7 8 a dozen people in a room maybe. If anyone’s seen the film Angela’s Ashes, then that gives you an idea of what some of these environments might have been like. So really desperate circumstances with uncontrolled development, not just light, lack of light and ventilation, but fire spread, structural failure, you know, it’s wrong on every level by modern day standards.

So these sorts of environments are breeding ground for disease, and the early public health act, 1848, gave powers for an inspectorate to arrive in towns like Wrexham, and this is the report on Wrexham in general public health terms, by George Clark, and I’ve included a bit of narrative in the next few slides and apologise for having to read it but the words paint so many pictures really.

 “…The small back streets, courts, and alleys are in a most wretched condition in regard to cleanliness. Here the eye sees filth of every description, manure of all sorts heaped up for months from pigstyes, etc.: gutters and drains full of putrid matter, which in some instances runs under the cottages, and is not to be removed by any existing means of purification.”

“…I believe cottage property to have been, on the whole, property of a most valuable description to its owners, and at the time I found the poor paying rents of £3, £5 and £7 per annum for tenements that no surveyor would have ventured to value, unless they had been required for a railway…”

In other words, the only value of that property is to demolish it to build a railway. It gets better…

“In the course of the inspection I received numerous complaints of the scarcity of pure water. ..the population of the Pentrefelyn district fetch water from Bryn-y-ffynon, a remarkably clear and copious spring…On the west side of York Street, next the churchyard, the wells are tainted, and the people go elsewhere for drinking water. There are in the town 148 private pumps and 4 public wells or pumps.

This is interesting…

“The town is lighted by gas, manufactured by a private company, and supplied under a contract, with gas inspectors appointed by the township. There are 60 public lamps, lighted for eight months in the year, omitting five nights at and about each full moon.”

There’s a terrible feeling that we’re going back towards that ourselves in the modern world.

“Thefts are very numerous; and altogether I consider the town, as regards crime and immorality, among the worst in North Wales.”

“Superintendent Griffiths also states, with reference to crime:-

“Drunkenness among the lower classes, male and female, is very frequent, and difficult to check, owing to the bad state of the lodging houses.

“prostitution is also complained of; scarcely a lodging-house in the town refuses to harbour for this purpose.”

“…there are about 1,400 yards of drains of all kinds. Of these, however, only 170 yards are reported as efficient or at all approaching to efficiency, so that only about 1/35th part of the town may be said to be sewered.”

“In forming the drains to which reference has been made, the brook has been regarded as the proper receptacle for the filth of the town, and into it they discharge their contents.”

More on that in a moment.

“The sewage of one portion of the town has hitherto been discharged into the low boggy spot, close to the town, known as Eagle’s Meadow. Here it has been customary to pen it back, and either to sell it or put it upon the land, causing a most serious nuisance to this quarter of the town.”

“The house drainage is what might be expected in a place without street sewers…In many cases there is not even a gutter; in others the gutter flows along a covered entry into the open street. Some-times there is a trench cut beneath the floor, and covered with the loose flags or bricks of the dwelling-room.”

“The privies, where there are any, have cesspools, which are usually open, and without drains, so that when full, as they frequently are from rain, the diluted and most offensive filth overflows into the yards and courts, and not unfrequently into the houses. Wrexham is full of instances of such places.”

“These cesspools and the cottage pigstyes are among the chief evils of Wrexham. Not only are the privy cesspools in them very numerous, but the people are in the habit of forming very large pits on their premises, and storing manure collected in the streets and elsewhere. Into these places they put straw, with a view to it becoming rotten, and from the sale of the whole they derive a considerable revenue, selling the stuff at 3s to 4s 6d a ton…Of course this sum is gained by individuals, at a great loss to the community, from the consequences of the pauperism, sickness, and premature death directly attributable to such filthy practices.”

So George Clark wasn’t particularly happy about Wrexham. When you look at the modern day plan and the location of the courts, that preceding modern Wrexham, we’ve got a whole series of the sorts of courts that we’ve looked at in terms of the images of these environments dotted around town. And the Brook St there the brook is actually open on that plan, but you can see the dense accommodation, unregulated, unplanned close to that water course, which of course is a recipe for disaster.

So this is just North East of town, it might be Holt St, more very dense insanitary accommodation there. This is Eagles Meadow and some courts down towards mount St. So you can see these concentrations for this very dense unregulated accommodated is asking for trouble, it’s just evolved into that, there’s been no plan, it’s been constructed, inhabited, and utilised in that respect.

So when you look at all these dangerous places to live in the early part of the 19th century, we see all these courts in Wrexham, which have obviously gone forever, actually. What I want to draw your attention to is this court up here, which is difficult to read on the OS map, we’ll come back to that.

So these are the deaths between Sept 1845 and Oct 1849. 145 deaths from epidemic disease because of the prevalence of these environments, and it’s no surprise that when you start looking at the larger numbers, that’s the lowest part of town which is where the water will gravitate to and we didn’t understand the science of cholera at that stage. So we now know that cholera is a water borne disease, and it’s no coincidence that more people have died in the part of town where the brook is running through.

That sets the science in terms of what the early 19th century environment looked like, smelled like, and perhaps tasted like, I think with some of that terminology. The solution was in both Liverpool’s context and in Wrexham’s context if that makes sense, was an evolution of legislation and what we’re going to look at now is how improvements were made in the Liverpool context. Lots of cities towns, London, Birmingham had their own bye-laws, some bye-laws were quite standard sort of taken off the shelf and implemented. But Liverpool in many respects was ahead of the game, they preceded some of the public health acts because the authorities in the informal sense, in Liverpool, were one of the earliest governing hierarchy to be able to implement change in this context.

This is a typical Georgian town house in Duke St in Liverpool, and when the wealthy decided to dispose of their properties and move out to the countryside, typically because they were in close proximity to the disease ridden courts and cellars that existed in that environment, they sold up and went and of course landlords purchased these buildings. And to gain even more income, accommodated hundreds of people in these buildings, and not only that, they filled in what small yard there was at the back of these townhouses with extra accommodation. So they absolutely crammed these people in, purely for profit because it’s not regulated, and they can do it. And what’s interesting, any new development there took on the shape of those yard in-fill type developments, so it became the norm in the 1820s 1830s to actually build such dense accommodation from scratch. But of course, the local, the great and the good locally to try and change things to improve conditions, started to introduce some sort of regulation to be able to try and control these environments a bit better. And the Liverpool building Act of 1842 insisted that these courts have to be a minimum of 15ft wide, so what does that do? It increases the light, it increases the fresh air, so by moving the facades of buildings further apart from each other, that’s an improvement at least, no huge at this point, but an improvement nonetheless.

The Liverpool Sanitary Act introduced a number of further requirements, so from this point, those narrow entrances were banned, the entrance to the court had to be the same width as the rest of the court, that minimum of 15ft, you can only have 8 houses in any one court, as you can see, with that full width entrance. And if you wanted to add any more houses to that, you had to add another foot either side. So these are very rudimentary dimensional regulations which are starting to spread these very dense buildings further apart from each other, and pedestrian ways have to be 30 ft wide, so if it’s a thoroughfare, there’s a much wider distance between one building and the building opposite.

Then the Liverpool Sanitary Amendment Act, 1864, required that these courts now had to be open at both ends, what we see here is that court is open at the front here and that there is steps down to the highway to the side, so that’s not a barrier or anything, so this is open and that is open. Now is that starting to look familiar, in terms of the theme of our terraced houses.

It became economically much more viable for builders to actually build in streets now not in courts, because they do their maths on it, in terms of rent and income, floor and area, and rather than trying to get 8 houses then 12 houses, 14 houses further and further apart. It became much more economic to just build them in rows. And in the Liverpool context, that’s how the street, the terraced street, emerged from that preceding very dense environment. What’s happened is the court has bee origami-like unfolded into a street and that’s where the terraced street comes from. And the Liverpool authorities are really quite clever because if they’d implemented this right away, the landlords would’ve gone to Manchester or somewhere else to build, by introducing this legislation over 20 years, a bit at a time, it gradually improved things but still kept the landlords interested because you still need landlords. So they were very careful to introduce this legislation of what we would today call a business case I suppose.

And this terms is real interesting, before these shapes emerged in plan, there was a minimum requirement to have a 3ft wide ventilation space at the back, so you’d have the back of your terraced house, then a 3ft minimum gap, and then the wall, the boundary. I think that the 3ft wide space is the origin of the term ‘back yard’, can’t demonstrate that, but I’m pretty certain in my own mind, that the back yard terms comes from a requirement of it being a minimum of 3ft wide. So there’s lots of stuff in here, and the other requirement as well, at the rear of the property, unlike the court that used communal privies and standpipes and everything, there’s a minimum requirement of 150squareft at the back of the property, so you’ve got your own back yard. More on that in a moment. And that’s the point I just made, the privies became attached to the house, so you’d have your own toilet, rather than having to share those sorts of facilitates with the rest of your neighbours.

So not long after that, the Wrexham was incorporated into 1857, so we’re now into the second half of the 19th century, and Wrexham introduced their own bye laws and these are the 1861 bye-laws and of course now, you have to start to submit plans which is the same for today’s builders. At the point, the authorities want to see what you want to do before they give you approval to do it. So this is again a breakdown of how these houses took shape, because under the Wrexham bye-laws, and it’s typical bye-laws similar to others in other parts of the UK, “…it shall **not be lawful** newly **to erect any house**, or to rebuild any house pulled down…**without a sufficient water closet or privy, and an ashpit** furnished with proper doors and coverings.” So we have the house and we have an ash pit and a privy, “Every person who shall erect a new domestic building **shall provide in front of such building an open space**, which shall be free from any erection thereon…except any portico, porch, step, or other like projection …shall **throughout the whole line of frontage…extend to a distance of twenty-four feet at the least**…”, you can’t build anything in front of your house closer than 24 ft. So we’ve got that 24ft requirement, “Every person who shall erect a new domestic building shall provide **in the rear of such building an open space exclusively belonging to such building**, and **of an aggregate extent of not less than one hundred and fifty square feet**, and free from any erection thereon…except a water-closet , earth-closet or privy, and an ashpit…such open space **to extend, laterally, throughout the entire width of such building**…the distance across such open space…to the boundary…**to be not less…than ten feet.**”

So that 150ft it has to be exclusive to each house, it can only incorporate an ash pit and a privy, and it has to extent laterally through the entire width of the house and be a minimum of 10ft deep. Of course 10ft by 15ft is 150 square ft which is a minimum requirement anyway so you see the standardisation of these minimum requirements now just generating like builders do today now almost, some of them. The minimum, this is only a minimum requirement. So that 15ft wide house becomes almost a standard terraced house at the lower level of the market.

Then we’ve got other requirements then in terms of the height; if your house was quite tall, if it’s 15ft then the boundary has to be 15ft away. If it’s 25ft and this is typically half the height to the roof, your boundary has to be 20 ft away. And if it’s 35ft to halfway up the room, it has to be 25ft a minimum distance at the boundary as well. So, what you can see is all these regulations off dimensional requirements is starting to engineer a standard product and that’s why you can go and look at terraced houses all over the UK, and they look similar, simply because the bye-laws are similar. But what this is doing of course is when we look at height, height is restrictive in terms of light and air, and modern day planners, the first thing they will look at is your proposal in relation to the neighbours, because a lot of this still applies in terms of planning legislation.

So what we’ve done then with all dimensions and all these requirements is created an environment where builders understand what the minimum standard is and boy to they build millions of them. When you think about it, inside the house there was a requirement that windows have to be at least 10% of the floor area of the room, so that ensures that a standard box/sash sliding window is universal because if you’re talking a 15ft wide house, which is ft deep, that will generate a standard size floor room plan, which then generates a standard size window so we’ve actually crated a standardised approach to these buildings. Not only 10% of the floor area has the be window, half of that has to be openable, so again it’s the light and the ventilation. So you get the sliding sash window is the perfect answer to that legislative requirement.

When it comes to layout, if we lay out a street with the same hand, that phrase hand is engineering term for that way round or that way round, so left hand right hand. If we have the same hand, in other words, if there’s a right hand house in series like that, we create a space where the light and ventilation is still quite claustrophobic, there’s not much circulation round there. But if you layout your streets to be left right left right, you’ve immediately created a much bigger open space for light and ventilation. And that’s a good indicator of early terraced houses and later terraced houses; if they’re all the same hand, then chances are it might be 1860s, 1850s, if they are left right left right, it’s probably 1860 1870s 1880s, you can see the differences in that because there is much more space for that light and air to circulate.

So we end up with an engineered product really that complies with the bye-laws and we get a two up two down, we might get a three up two down, and what is really interesting about some of the terminology here is that this picture, the association of the word ‘kitchen’ with cooking is a relatively modern one, ‘kitchen’ through to the average Victorian tenant would’ve been living room in modern terminology, and my mother would always say, and we only had one kitchen in our house, my mother would always say ‘I’m out the back kitchen’, we didn’t have a front kitchen you know so kitchen would’ve been good enough. But even into the 1960 and 70s and 80s, that term back kitchen was still in use but the origin of that is probably 1840 1850, and my mother she’s a bit old fashioned, she did used to keep going in her own sort of way, but that’s interesting with that word kitchen.

So we’ve got these sort of standard two up two down, three up three down, but if you could put a bay window on it you could charge extra rent, and my supervisor at university wrote a lovely paper called ‘a view with a room’, which I thought was really quite clever. Because again it’s about light and it’s about air, again you’ve made the window much bigger. Which makes that front room much lighter, sort of more ventilated and a nicer space to be in so that will add a shilling on your rent. These are business people after all and they are using their skill to accommodate the market. And of course that’s social mobility in the Victorian period, that’s probably another lecture that so I won’t spend too much time talking about it now but, this is a time when the rental market accommodated pretty much everybody if they had a job. Now, we’re in a situation where I suggest that modern house builders are not particularly interested in the social housing part of the market, that’s left to typically public, semi-public private bodies, charities, third sector maybe, and local authorities to manage that as best they can. These days, in the Victorian period, certainly in the 1870s 1880s you could afford your rent if you had a job, more or less, that’s a sweeping statement, but the market accommodated the various levels right down to the very poorest because that’s what these houses are for, they are to raise these people out of poverty.

The problem is on the left and the solution is on the right, and that’s where the terraced house comes from, it’s an engineered dimensionally directed regulated product.

Now that we’ve established that this is the momentum of change really in the 19th century, the significance of North Wales to Liverpool, these builders that moved from North Wales to Liverpool timed it perfectly to get onto the economy that was opening up in such as significant part of the world. People understand that Wales has made a huge contribution to Liverpool and here are just a few quotes: **“The urban development of Victorian Liverpool was different [from other ‘Victorian towns’] and unique in the sense that it was undertaken in the main by Welsh migrants and their families”**

200 years from very early on.

**“As North Wales was a rich source of building materials, enterprise and labour, the linkage between Liverpool and the North Wales region consolidated into one business and a single enterprise.”**

Thomas Roberts has written a few papers on this and he’s right. It was almost a monopoly, quite often orchestrated from the vestry of the Calvinistic Methodist chapel, particularly Calvinistic Methodist because they were the biggest movement in Liverpool at the time and it was a labour exchange as well as a place of faith, and the welsh community more or less kept it in house in that respect, and…

**“An influx of Welsh builders invaded Messrs. Earles' fields [in the Edge Hill district] about 1863, and in a few years the whole surface north of the railway was covered with houses,”**

James Alison Picton is a good read, her was a contemporary, I think 1870 something he published a topographical and historical volume tot hat and if you want to get into the streets and to read the environment they are really two interesting volumes to read.

And Olwen Morris-Jones has done some stats of where these builders came from, and what is interesting about this is the 35% there is typically second generation but 49% came from Anglesey and Caernarvonshire . And the reason for that of course is it’s much easier to get to Liverpool by boat than it is by train over land at that period. So lots of people moving from an agricultural environment typically to Liverpool who weren’t afraid of hard work and graft. When you think about people who had been born and brought up in farms and in agriculture, heavy lifting, long hours, hard work, then they were perfectly suited to the building industry, all before power tools of course. I see Victorian builders with big hands and I’ve got small hands but that’s no surprise that Anglesey and Caernarvonshire contributed so much to Liverpool over the years. And this is a great book, this is the Welsh Builder on Merseyside: Annals and lives, and this was written, published in 1946 and that was very timely because this chap just collected stories of Welsh builders at a time when many of the late Victorian Welsh builders were still in the memories of the people who he interviewed and it’s great, it’s not particularly academic, it’s just a collection of character biographies and these are some of the people that he mentions.

They’re all Welsh builders that are mentioned in that book. And the mark of some of these welsh builders was very subtle, I’m sure somebody would’ve seen this before, but if you look at Goodson Park football, Everton’s of course, if you look at the first letter of all of the streets up here, you’ve got Owen and William Owen and one of the daughters was Elisa ad one of the sons was E Alfred, why not? The contractor who built those streets. But of them all, this is the greatest builder ever to have arrived in Liverpool, this is Richard Owens, I call him a builder because he was a joiner, he was taught joinery by his father on his farm at Four Crosses on the Lleyn Peninsula and he left that part of Lleyn to make his fortune in Liverpool probably early in the 1850s so some of those Welsh houses he would’ve carpentered roofs on, but not long after a few years, I’ve not nailed down how many years it was but maybe four or five years, he then came off the tools to an extent and started working in an estate agents and studied at night and qualified as an architect in terms of the qualifications of the day, and he did make his fortune. He arrived as a 19 year old carpenter joiner and his probate tells us that he was almost a millionaire when he died, because again, just like any other builders from North Wales, they timed it just right.

So he is responsible for the design of over 150 chapels in wales, mostly in wales, 9 institutional buildings, 12 banks and post office, 39 schools and Sunday schools, including east street school in Llangollen, anybody familiar with that. 53 warehouse and manufactories, 5 office buildings, 10 arbitrations and 2 draft bill consultancies, so he was consulted at the highest levels in terms of boundary changes as an expert in the growth expansion of Liverpool, and of course being an arbitrator, clearly recognised as knowing his stuff, but most of all tens of thousands of houses and what’s interesting I think, we come onto a few sort of other facts in a moment, his obituary suggests that he laid out more land in Liverpool than anybody else, and that I suppose was one of my research questions I suppose, did he, or didn’t he? And I was more than pleasantly surprised.

I’ve had the privilege of reading through his archive, that’s 17 and a half thousand letters and what I couldn’t do, was leave you without the flavour of his personality.

**“I beg to call your attention...to a plan which I have submitted for two houses and a shippon in Rose Lane, Mossley Hill. I am given to understand that the plan complies with the bye-laws in every respect, but that a question has been raised as to fencing an area in the cross-street, a question in my opinion that you have no right to interfere with and as I am anxious to proceed with this work I shall be glad if you will come to a final decision on the point and pass the plan so that I may proceed with the work. Your attention will oblige.”**

But it gets better.

**“Dear Sir. You have too many committees and too many Clerks of the Works at your place. The work I saw last Wednesday was done exceedingly well and I have no reason to think but that all the rest is done the same.”**

**“Sir. Your paper ‘the Goleuad’ came to my hand this day by accident and I find that advertisement for tender to new chapel Llanfaircareinion put in a very comical manner, just as you are in the habit of doing. Penmachno chapel before was done just as strange. You must have a lot of blundering idiots as composers. In this case Llanfaircareinion is put down as Llanfairfechan and my name instead of being Richard Owens is Richard Davies and this is not the first time you made this mistake. The very same advertisement was sent to the Oswestry Advertiser and it appeared quite correct, but yours is a most misleading affair that ever appeared in print. I should fancy that there are so much controversial questions flying about your office in trying to keep the cash in order that it quite put business matters in obscurity.”**

So he’s really not happy, but you get a flavour. I did find one letter, it said yes it’s my fault and I’ll put it right. So when he made a mistake, he’d sort it out. But this is his housing contribution to Liverpool throughout the 30 years of his career, it is huge, just this one architect supervising housing schemes. And it totals a massive 325 acres of land set out by a carpenters son from the Lleyn. Amazing achievement. What’s interesting as well on this plan is if you look at this bit here, that grid of streets, that’s early 19th century and it was set out to be a new Liverpool., just like the new town in Edinburgh. But it didn’t happen. The streets were set out and because of the proximity to the docks, it was immediately filled with slums, or you know, semi immediately filled up and it was too late by then, they couldn’t get the Georgian mansions in town because the docks had more or less taken over it. We’ll come onto the welsh streets in a moment, time is cracking on so we’ll have a quick flick through of some of these slides but the welsh streets, that’s been in the news quite a lot in the last decade, Kensington, that is only one of two almost complete Victorian estates in the UK, so that’s really significant, that’s a protected area now. And not only when you look at where the welsh are in Liverpool, here’s not actually just extending Liverpool, he’s extending the welsh community as well, certainly in Everton and in south Liverpool in Toxteth.

And this is Stonewall street, it was under construction when general stonewall Jackson was killed in the American civil war so clearly the landowners had sympathy with the south. And what I find interesting about this as well is as well as scrubbing the doorsteps, tenant would scrub the window sills as well, because scrubbing the door steps was a requirement, as a tenant you were required to do that and that’s why people today still scrub the flagstones outside their house because it was a bye-law requirement for so long.

In terms of the process, when people migrated not wanted to live in such a densely populated town anymore, then new streets were just built on the land and they sold up within the boundary streets were fitted, and when you look at a typical project of Richard Owens’, it’s no surprise that you’ve got J and R Williams, Hughes and Williams, Peter Davies, Thomas Jones and Moses Evans all building houses there. Not a surprise at all, and that just aggregated and therefore you can still see the medieval plan in the streets, these are all demolished now but you could see how these are sort of parcelled up and sold up as individual plots if you like. And what’s interesting about going through the archive is that everything is in sequence, so for the first time in a 150 years, we can create the order in which these streets were built. That estate was clearly started off at the North, and ventured further South and what amazes me is how little paperwork Victorian builders needed to build houses. Now it’s like most projects are like building another runway at Manchester airport the paperwork that you need. But these builders know what they are doing, they can be relied upon because of that cohesion within the welsh community in that respect.

And we build a corner shop first, and we build a pub second, and we build the houses in between because we’ve got about 18 months’ worth of hungry and thirsty builders, and from wales, which is even better because they’re going to be even hungrier and thirstier perhaps. So they weren’t daft, they were very commercially aware and as a good Calvinistic Methodist, Richard Owens was pretty broadminded was he build as many pubs as he did chapels. So what’s interesting about the Victorian economy if you like though in these terraced houses was that there was room for everybody. You can probably modern volume house builders on the digits on one hand, they’ve cornered the market, that sort of top level housing market. But in the Victorian period, we look at these streets now and we see them as whole, but they weren’t constructed as that. They were sold off by length of frontage, so if you were a start-up and you wanted to start building houses as a business at the lowest level, you could by one length of frontage and build one house. If you were a medium enterprise in modern day terms you could be a Jones and Daughters or a Davis, and if you were a regular building company, you buy as much as you think you could afford for profit. And that is quite often evidence by the join, and it’s the same street, the same type of houses, but the materials are different, so in an example like this, this could be by Jones and Daughters, this co0uld be by Mr Davis, but we don’t read the street like that, so next time you walk along a terraced street from one end to the other, just have a look at the material detail because that demarcates the different companies that actually built them.

So these are Richard Owens’ large estates in Toxteth, huge significant development, they are 1900 houses in one estate, and some images of those estates, you can see that these are quite posh because they’ve got bay windows, these are some of the welsh streets, Voylar street, these were almost demolished but we managed to save them through public enquiry, and we see certainly towards the top of this image how that looks from a birds eye view, and we’re lucky that these houses survived because they’re now completely refurbished and they’re still being refurbished, I think they’re due to be finished sometime this year. These are the welsh streets, and what they’ve done, after the local authority wanted to demolish them all, they’ve kept the frontages, and put a brand new house on the back of the houses. So you’re getting the best in terms of technology and modern interiors, combined with a very well established welsh connected elevation frontage to all these streets. And I don’t usually creep up to people’s houses and take photographs through their front windows, but this was an empty property at the time before the tenant’s had moved in and I think this picture captures both requirements of modern society – connection of the past and a significant welsh connection, in the context of Liverpool, and an efficient, warm high spec house to live within. And these are great these are, I was consulted on this to an extent. It’s great, this is a milestone for me, it’s great to see Richard Owens on the mural along with other greats like Hilda Ogden, Arthur Askey, and George Melay. They are all associated with the welsh streets in Toxteth, perhaps they were born there, lived there, died there, all locals to that part of Liverpool and it’s great to see a carpenter’s lad from Caernarvonshire there as well.

And there’s a great blue plaque, that’s my favourite blue plaque in the country, ‘Nan Rene is the best nan on the earth, best roast dinners, best egg on toast, supergran lives here’, that’s what blue plaques should be about.

So coming to Wrexham then, we now know what a terraced house looks like in 1872, we can see where these estates are, and it’s all speculative of course, it’s a private enterprise for rent and for profit. So you can see that these are radial around the town though, they’re not now, similar to Liverpool expanding on its front, Wrexham, these are new houses to spec, out in the fields at this stage, so we see them, the blocks, as they get towards the close of the 19th century, and sort of into the Edwardian period. It’s interesting, we think of red brick Victorian houses but chances are, red brick houses are actually Edwardian not Victorian because that material was a late 19th century, early 20th century material, before then the terraced houses were built with more like common brick, which wasn’t the dense red brick. And then towards the first world war, we have things like patches of render turning up, so you can differentiate between a few decades worth of these houses around the town, so when we look 1972, 1898, 1898 again with some of the other peripheral development of terraced houses, we can see that just like some biological organisms under the microscope, it expands in particular ways you wouldn’t find terraced houses to those specifications in this part of town because of course that’s the evolutionary process in two dimensions. It is like an organism.

And just around some of these places, the quality of the workmanship is just fantastic you know, we look at how these things are put together without power tools, all with controlled brute force, big four arms and hands I suspect, big shoulders, certainly the joiners and the bricklayers. We are blessed with houses like this in Wrexham, the workmanship in Wrexham is fantastic, that’s such a simple detail, that’s the same brick just turned upside down every other brick, so in terms of the quality of the detailing the craftsmanship is fantastic. This is my favourite street really, Trevor St, and we get polychromatic designs coming in, and nice sort of catalogue picked dentil courses and things.

They were built to rent predominantly and as we suggested, rental prices were affordable if you were in work, if you weren’t in work you might have had a problem but the rental market went right down to the very bottom in that respect and that’s an important point actually, the builder would build the street or part of the street and then generate income from that rental income. So they mostly speculative, but what I’d advise you to do, next time you’re in any urban environment like this in the UK, is forget about the UPVC front doors and windows and screens, just have a look at the brickwork, it is a tapestry of colour, texture, and I’m sure that there is something in there for somebody to produce in terms of a piece of artwork, whether it’s a fabric, whether it ends up being a tea towel, I don’t know, the brickwork of Wrexham,. It’s such a rich environment, being the centre of brick world of course, in terms of Ruabon and places.

So that’s the terraced house, and we know that these are extortionate prices, purely upmarket value, a million miles from their intended purpose, but to finish, I’d just like to bring you back to something that we looked at earlier on, opposite crown buildings up here on this little entranceway there and the destitute courts that existed behind it because when you walk around town, sometimes there are anomalies and you see openings and doorways that shouldn’t be there. And I found this one, and I’ve located it on the OS map, and through that doorway, a century and a half ago, was desperate poverty and disease. Thank you very much.