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Travelling south along the A38 Bristol Road, it's quite easy to miss the area of Bournbrook, adjacent to the south gates of the University of Birmingham's Aston Webb Campus. Blink and you'll miss the signs for it, perched on the doorstep of the High Street, a forgotten quarter subsumed within the confines of suburban Selly Oak. It's an ill-defined area, with nothing to say where it begins or even where it ends. But if you're local like me, you just know innately that Bournbrook is the area from the viaduct (by Selly Oak Station) down to where the brook flows beneath the Bristol Road.

For centuries Bournbrook acted as a gateway, a shallow watery crossing between urbane Harborne (then in Warwickshire) and rural Worcestershire. It was only in 1911 that both Selly Oak and Bournbrook were incorporated by the voracious expansion of Birmingham. A century before then Bournbrook was mostly still farmland. The dilapidated farm buildings of Selly Hill Farm (then renamed as The Rookeries) were saved by George Cadbury in 1906. He had the old buildings carefully taken down, renovated and re-erected in Bournville as Selly Manor Museum.

In 1839 a local entrepreneur called James Kirby bought up a large tract of Bournbrook farmland, centred around the old Bell and Shovel Inn on the corner of Grange Road. Over the next forty years Kirby developed the area into a renowned pleasure resort known as Kirby Pools. Incorporating three fishing and boating lakes, a sports ground, a hotel and a pleasure garden, Kirby Pools attracted large numbers of well-to-do visitors from all across the Midlands. At weekends the Birmingham Tram company even ran special services from the town centre to Kirby Pools for local families.

In the latter part of the 19th century the population of Bournbrook and Selly Oak grew rapidly as the demand for workers in the local factories increased dramatically. The old farms were quickly sold off and sub-divided for the building of new roads, industrial units and housing. This period of exceptional change spelt the end for Kirby Pools. Industrial Bournbrook wasn't an attractive place to visit anymore, tourism sharply declined and Kirby sold up his land for redevelopment in the 1880s. The pools and gardens were filled in and the only surviving remnant of Kirby's resort is his hotel, the Bell and Shovel, latterly known as the Bournbrook Hotel. Today we know it as the "Goose at the Old Varsity Tavern".

Since the end of the Second World War the area has undergone its next great transformation. The factories that drove the great industrial changes have disappeared like the farms that came

before them. In their place the nearby University Campus has rapidly expanded outwards to regenerate those spaces. Where once the air literally rang to the sounds of copper pots being bashed into shape in the Birmingham Battery, now the streets are awash with Freshers getting hammered.

As the University has expanded its student population has multiplied exponentially. Most of Bournbrook's housing and shopfronts, originally built to service the needs of the Victorian workforce, has remained largely intact. Whilst the many new "Halls of Pestilence" have been built on the old factory sites to house first year undergrads, the older students go out into the community to shack up with their fellows in the terraces around Bournbrook (and beyond). From a factory village to Student Ville, the population demographics have shifted drastically in just a few short decades. Where motorbikes, copper pots and rifles were once produced in their thousands Bournbrook now coddles future generations of engineers, writers and intellectuals.

Bournbrook is such a familiar place to me, it's part of my childhood. I still live nearby and I've worked just across the road at the University for nearly ten years now. This Districts element of the Grid Project has allowed me to get to know the area better and yet look at it in a more detached, analytically way. I pass through Bournbrook every day and I'm sure I'd stopped really seeing it a long time ago. Taking out my camera gave me a chance to really look, to really see and notice this very familiar place.

Walking down the old High Street, from the viaduct to the brook, I could see the usual plethora of streets spreading outwards in a simple grid pattern. Each street is home to (mostly) uniform stretches of red brick terraced housing, side streets cut across in parallel to the High Street. It's tidy for the most part, wheelie bins seem to breed like great black lemmings.

I found myself focusing on the houses, these oh-so familiar terraces just like I'd grown up in and yet experiencing them anew. Triangular forms abound, roofs, gable ends, dormer windows, extensions and abutments, uniting to create a pleasing harmonic rhythm. Red brick colours the view, connecting Bournbrook together. The High Street echoes these architectural notes in its shops and cafés, even the decidedly modern Aldi store quietly rips off the Bournbrook Look.

The transient tides of students coming and going each year makes for an equally transient tide of re-development and renewal in the area. Skips and scaffolding are almost as common as the ever fecund wheelie bins. I don't know if the character of Bournbrook is protected by any planning laws, but it is interesting to note that the current crop of renovations seem to be at pains to protecting the red brick façades, whilst the internals are largely gutted and expanded to add even more rooms for even more students.

Farming, leisure tourism, heavy industry and now research and education. I wonder what the next Bournbrook transformation will be...

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13th April 2023