



CONSERVATION AREA HISTORIES:

# MELBOURNE

DISTRICT OF SOUTH DERBYSHIRE



*High Street, Melbourne, c1900. Courtesy of Philip Heath.*

Melbourne is named after the mill stream (Old English “myln burna”) that flows south to north down the centre of the parish **(9, 9)**. Known today as Carr Brook, it runs into the River Trent which forms Melbourne’s northern boundary.

Domesday Book mentions a mill in Melbourne, and at least four ancient water mill sites are known along the brook’s course through the parish. The only remaining one is Melbourne Mill **(44)**, which may be the successor of the Domesday mill. The present building dates from about 1632, and was altered and refitted in 1832. It closed in 1968 and was converted to a house in 1973. The upper part of the brook, above Melbourne Pool and known as Scots Brook, was dammed in 1959-64 to create the Staunton Harold Reservoir. Despite the name, most of the reservoir lies within the parish of Melbourne.

Melbourne Pool **(45)**, the best-known part of Melbourne, was originally constructed to serve the mill. The date of its creation is apparently unrecorded although tradition states that there was a quarry there, from which stone for Melbourne Castle was obtained. The Pool was greatly enhanced and improved in 1842-7 by cleaning, remodelling and landscaping, under the supervision of former Prime Minister Lord Melbourne (1779-1848), who used Melbourne Hall frequently during the 1840s. Two islands **(46, 47)** were formed in 1845 on the advice of William Pontey, an eminent landscape gardener who also did the initial designs for the semicircular weir **(50)** and laid out some of the planting in the “Intake” **(48)**. The picturesque frontage of Pool Cottage, the former miller’s house, was built in 1839 and is an essential part of the overall composition **(49)**.

Archaeological evidence suggests that King's Newton, in Melbourne parish, may be an older focus of settlement than the present day town of Melbourne. Its position on the historic local road network seems more strategic than Melbourne's, being at the floodplain edge and commanding access to an old crossing point of the Trent at Weston Cliff. There is clear evidence of settlement shrinkage at King's Newton and an important Anglo-Saxon cremation cemetery was discovered there in 1867. King's Newton was also central to the medieval open fields of the parish, while Melbourne was situated on the edge of the arable land, sunk into the northern edge of an extensive tract of woodland pasture.

Firm evidence is lacking, but it seems plausible that present-day Melbourne may have begun its life as a complex of buildings associated with the government of the royal manor, separate from the villagers' houses further north, and conveniently placed for hunting in the woods. There was a royal hunting park in the south east corner of the parish, probably created c1200 by King John, who stayed at the manor house in Melbourne on several occasions. Parts of the ditch and bank that once marked the park boundary still survive, and are shown in more complete form on the early 25" Ordnance Survey plans. The park was "disparked" at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century upon being sold off by Queen Elizabeth I.



*A print of Melbourne Castle, made in 1733 from an original drawing of c1580.  
Courtesy of Melbourne Civic Society.*

The manor house was transformed into a castle **(26)** between 1311 and 1322 by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster and his steward Robert de Holand. Situated on the east side of Castle Square, it was renowned as “a magnificent piece of building”, but was only ever half-finished as the Earl and Robert de Holand took place in an unsuccessful rebellion against King Edward II. The Earl was executed and Robert de Holand was murdered a few years later. After the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, the captive Duke of Bourbon was kept at Melbourne Castle for nineteen years. In 1583, towards the end of its life, the Castle was inspected to see whether it was suitable to accommodate another important prisoner, this time being Mary, Queen of Scots. The rooms were found to be great and spacious but few in number, and the building was “left imperfect at every corner” because it had never been finished. Moreover, the ground around was marshy and unpleasant, there was no convenient fair or market and the stabling was inadequate, so the proposal was abandoned.

Melbourne Parish Church (**40**), just a short distance south of the Castle site, may be another Royal work. It is one of England's finest Norman parish churches, dated on stylistic grounds to a period c1125-35, and seems likely to have been built by order of King Henry I. When Henry I founded a new Bishopric at Carlisle in 1133, the church and rectory of Melbourne were given to the Bishopric as a permanent endowment. The work of building the church, which apparently was never fully completed, was probably continued under the Bishop of Carlisle. The Bishops occasionally resided at Melbourne and their house there later became Melbourne Hall.

The features of the church leave no doubt that its builder was an important person. In plan it is a miniature cathedral with three towers, outstanding Romanesque sculpture and (formerly) a triple-apsed east end. The western gallery and two-storied chancel show that it was designed for worship literally on two levels, one above the other. By the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Melbourne also had a second church (St. Michael's) which seems to have been the principal devotional focus for the



*This is the only known photograph of the interior of the parish church prior to its restoration in 1859-60. Courtesy of Philip Heath.*

parishioners and was where most of them were buried (**29**). Although it was destroyed at the Reformation, its site continued to be used as the parish burial ground until 1860. This explains why the old burial ground is separate from the parish church. The parish church was formerly dedicated to St. Mary, but after the Reformation it took the dedication to St. Michael that had previously belonged to the other church. Today the church is dedicated to both St. Michael and St. Mary. It was restored by G. G. Scott in 1859-60, but still shows much evidence of substantial earlier repairs of the 1630s including the roofs of the nave and aisles, and the aisle windows.

Royalty and Bishops feature highly in the history of medieval Melbourne. The buildings symbolising their authority were close to one another and must have made an impressive group. Whether or not it existed before, a settlement to accompany them must have come into existence by 1230, when the Bishop of Carlisle obtained the grant of a weekly market and yearly fair in Melbourne. Melbourne's original market place was the "Castle Green", now Castle Square (**25**). The earliest village houses were no doubt concentrated in the vicinity of the Church, the Green and on Potter Street, which was the only densely built street in Melbourne as late as 1790.

The Reformation in the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, followed by James I's sale of the Manor of Melbourne in 1604, brought about the transfer of the old Church and Crown estates to local people. The manor was purchased by Henry Hastings, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Huntingdon, of nearby Ashby de la Zouch and Donington Park, who demolished the Castle between about 1604 and 1630. A rubble wall and a small area excavated in 1967, showing excellent quality ashlar, are all that is now to be seen. Meanwhile, the former chantry lands fell into the hands of important local families such as the Bewleys and Hardings, thus increasing their prominence in the parish.

In 1592, Sir Francis Needham of London took a lease of the rectory from the Bishop of Carlisle, who had long ceased to use the derelict old rectory house (42), and had let the estate for many years. In 1596, the house was partially rebuilt and Sir Francis made his home there. In 1598 he purchased the old royal park and built up an estate from which the large Melbourne Hall Estate gradually developed. Today the estate is much reduced by sales, but the former park remains at the heart of it to this day. In 1629 Sir Francis sold his estate to Sir John Coke, who took a new lease of the rectory from the Bishop of Carlisle at the same time and rebuilt part of the house in 1630-31. His direct descendant Lord Ralph Kerr still lives there today. The rectory estate leased from the Bishop was eventually converted to freehold by Act of Parliament in 1704.

By about 1630 Melbourne had settled into a period of relative stability and slow change which lasted about a century and a half. The most significant development during this period was the setting out of the Hall gardens (43) by the Right Hon. Thomas Coke in 1704-7, followed by the remodelling of the house into its present Georgian form, mostly in 1726-7 and 1742-5. The Hall gardens are one of the most important early 18<sup>th</sup> century survivals in the country, with notable lead statuary by John Nost and a wrought iron arbour of 1706-8 by the well-known ironsmith Robert Bakewell. The layout of the Hall itself still echoes the mediaeval plan, despite the fact that most of the fabric is 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century. The mediaeval great barn (41) still survives in the former farmyard, of aisled construction and dated by dendrochronology to the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century.



*Left: A Victorian photograph of the gardens at Melbourne Hall, illustrating the emphasis on vistas, fountains and lead statuary. Courtesy of Philip Heath.*

*Right: A Victorian photograph of the “Birdcage” in the gardens at Melbourne Hall, made by famous ironsmith Robert Bakewell in 1706-8. The figure in the doorway is thought to be Lord Palmerston. Courtesy of Lord Ralph Kerr.*

Despite the growing importance of the Melbourne Hall estate, Melbourne never became a “closed” village under the domination of a single major landowner. In 1808 just under half of the parish’s 3,464 acres belonged to Melbourne Hall estate, which owned 1,686 acres. The estate continued to grow, however, throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Hastings family by contrast, despite being Lords of the Manor, owned only 924 acres in 1808; a third of this was sold by them in 1811 and 1813 in an attempt (ultimately unsuccessful) to escape from financial trouble. Sir Henry Harpur Bart. of Calke bought property in Melbourne in the late 1780s, and immediately exchanged it for land near Calke Abbey, where 138 acres of Melbourne parish were subsequently taken into Calke Park. The remaining 716 acres

of the parish did not belong to great estates, and the Hastings estate sales of 1811 and 1813 released more land to the lesser freeholders.

Melbourne was thus able to freely open its doors to industry, with its accompaniment of immigration and population increase. The population of Melbourne nearly doubled in the 19th century, rising from 1,861 inhabitants in 1801 to 3,580 in 1901. James Pilkington, writing in 1789, noted that a considerable number of Melbourne people were already supported by manufacturing industries:

**“Many hands are employed in combing and spinning jersey. But those who work upon the stocking frame are still more numerous, there being no less than eighty of these machines within the parish. The stone quarries near the town also afford employment to about thirty persons. The chief part of their business is the manufacture of scythe stones”.**

In 1772, the parish curate stated that there were about 220 houses in the parish, but said it was not easy to specify the exact number “as New Houses are built every Year”. It was during this period that new streets were laid out in Melbourne for the first time, to serve plots sold off piecemeal for building purposes. “New Yard” (14, now Thomas Cook Close) was laid out in 1777, Blanch Croft in 1783 (10) and Quick Close in 1796 (13). The first of these three contiguous streets was built on an orchard and the other two took their names from the fields they were built on. In each case the carriageway was only twelve feet wide. They were followed in 1826-32 by an adjacent estate of small speculative houses on Rawdon Street (now deleted), Moira Street and Hastings Street (now part of Selina Street), collectively known as “New York” (12).

The inadequacy of the “New York” houses, coupled with the narrowness of the earlier streets and the irregular nature of the buildings built on them, made the area a target for slum clearance measures between the late 1950s and early 1970s. Today, most of it is redeveloped with housing of a very bland and uninteresting nature. Among the houses demolished was the humble cottage on Quick Close where Thomas Cook the travel agent was born in 1808. Fortunately the “slum clearance” movement had lost its momentum by the time Blanch Croft was reached, meaning that it is now Melbourne’s sole survivor of a street created in the early days of the Industrial Revolution. Elsewhere in Melbourne, a complex of interesting houses and small factories at the Lilypool was the other principal casualty of the clearance programme (6). The Lilypool name has since been transferred to a modern housing estate the other side of the street, built in 1979 (7). These houses stand in a former fishpool, commonly but incorrectly confused with the now-vanished Lilypool.

The parish registers show a very noticeable spate of framework knitters’ marriages in the 1780s, coincident with the period of growth just described. It is no surprise, then, that the best remaining examples of framework knitters cottages are still to be found on Blanch Croft (e.g. nos. 7, 11, 19 and 43-57). The change of emphasis from worsted hosiery to lace and silk gloves, requiring larger and heavier frames, caused the local textile industry to become factory-based during the mid 19th century. Bulmer’s Derbyshire Directory of 1895 noted that “The town is not large, but the handsome



*Blanch Croft c.1975 (SDDC collection).*

mills and well-built houses indicate general prosperity”. Melbourne’s 19th century factories produced hosiery and thread, silk shawls and handkerchiefs, gloves, mittens, taffeta, lace and (from the 1860s) boots and shoes. The most important textile factory was the Haines family’s “Castle Mills” on Castle Square, established in 1812 and demolished in 1989 **(27)**. It had closed a few years earlier. “Victoria Mill” on Derby Road, built in 1861 and burnt down in 1890, was another particularly impressive but short-lived factory, built by John Hemsley **(1)**.



*A hallmark product of Victorian Melbourne: a silk glove produced by Thomas Haines & Co. Courtesy of Peter Newbury.*

Meanwhile, the mediaeval core of Melbourne also changed dramatically during the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Many buildings on the street frontages date from this period. Their typical late Georgian details include sash windows, often of eight over eight panes, with wedge-shaped stone lintels which were characteristic of Melbourne buildings until their sudden fall from favour c1860. Fronts are usually of brick, often in Flemish bond, with corbelled brick eaves and roofs of tile or slate. Until c1830, rubble stonework was commonly used for side and rear walls. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Melbourne stone quarries were worked by John Chambers, who suitably advertised his trade in the new stone house he built for himself at 15, Potter Street, with a fine ashlar façade **(22)**.

In 1789 the main road through the town was diverted from its old route along Castle Street and by Melbourne Pool to a new route along Derby Road and High Street. This was done, despite popular protest, to give greater privacy to Melbourne Hall and its estate, but there were important side-effects: the diversion was an added stimulus to the growth that was already taking place at the west end of the town, but it caused the old centre at Castle Square to stagnate. When the Melbourne market was re-established in the 1830s it used the present Market Place as its pitch, because it had become the natural trading centre of the town and the focus of its

shops (19). The road diversion partly explains why Melbourne is a bi-focal settlement, with one focus at the Hall and church and another at the Market Place. Hence the comment in J. B. Firth's "Highways and Byways in Derbyshire" (1908):

**"Melbourne is a curious medley, of which part is as distressingly commonplace as any newly-built country town. This we may ignore. The other half, including the church, the Hall and the great pool, is altogether charming..."**

In the early 19th century several ancient farmsteads could still be found in the urbanising streets of Melbourne, despite the re-organisation of agriculture upon the enclosure of the parish in 1787-91. But as the century progressed they became fewer while the satellite farms around the town became larger. Nevertheless, some old farmsteads still remain in Melbourne, particularly near the parish church where, in fossilised form, they continue to contribute much to the character of the conservation area.

A courtyard of farm buildings west of the church formerly belonged entirely to the Dower House, but was partly sold and bisected by the present "Dark Entry" in 1813 (37). The farm buildings to the north of Close House (38), at Chantry House (36) and at Melbourne Hall (41) were all the Home Farm buildings of the Melbourne Hall estate before 1840. They were inconveniently arranged across a split site, and were replaced by a new Home Farm complex in Melbourne Park, built between 1834 and 1840.

The Cruck Cottage on High Street (16) ceased to be a farm in 1823, but the houses on the east and west sides of the yard reflect the grouping of the former outbuildings. The two storey houses on the west side are actually early barn conversions. No. 7, Penn Lane (Rose Cottage) is another remnant of an old farmstead, converted from an outbuilding in 1868 when the old farmhouse was pulled down. Castle Farm (26, now Castle House), with its timber framed barn, remained in quasi-agricultural use until a couple of years ago and was the closest thing Melbourne still had to a working farm.

Melbourne's growing prosperity and confidence in the 19th century in turn produced a sense of civic pride, reflected in the numerous public buildings. An Athenaeum was built in 1853 to house an infants' school, mechanics institute and savings bank under one roof (21). Other buildings in the list include the Market Place Monument of 1889 (19), the Liberal Club of 1889 (2, now with a dull frontage of 1970) and the Board School (17, now the Leisure Centre) of 1896-7. The National School, affiliated to the Church of England, was rebuilt on a shoestring budget in 1821-2, with attractive cast iron windows (33). The Thomas Cook Memorial Cottages (15), established by Cook himself and built in 1890-91, should also be mentioned. From 1853 Melbourne had its own Gas Light and Coke Company (8), and from 1892 mains water was available in lieu of the increasingly polluted wells.

The working classes of Melbourne were predominantly Nonconformist in religion and liberal in politics. Nonconformity in Melbourne has old and deep roots and the chapels are important features of the street scene. A Quaker meeting house (31, demolished in the 1980s) was established in

1703 by the will of William Cook, a wealthy carrier who must have been responsible for the late 17<sup>th</sup> century brickwork still to be seen at Close House, which he owned and occupied (39). The Baptist chapel was built in 1749-50, and remains of it can still be discerned among the present building, largely rebuilt in seven weeks in 1832 (3). The Independent Chapel and schoolroom (18, now the United Reformed Church) was built on High Street in 1871-2, replacing earlier premises on Penn Lane (34) which were converted into a house in 1874. The Methodist Church was originally built in 1800, but was rebuilt in 1826 (23) and was converted to schoolrooms after new premises were built next door in 1869. The former New Jerusalem Church on Derby Road was built in 1863 (11), replacing an earlier chapel attached to the private house of William Haines on Penn Lane and opened in 1826 (32). The Victorian church buildings are enhanced by the use of rock-faced local gritstone, also used at the cemetery chapels of 1860 on Packhorse Road.

With the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Melbourne's development slowed down and the population stagnated. There was some inter-war housing development, e.g. the council houses of 1922 on Station Road (5) and a few more notable additions to the street scene, e.g. the Roman Catholic church of 1907 (24) built by the Kerrs of Melbourne Hall, and the Co-op building of 1915 in the Market Place (20). But the population did not begin to expand rapidly again until the building of the Woodlands Estate off Packhorse Road in the 1970s. Since then there has been a great deal of infill development in the town centre on sites not previously developed, notably including Jubilee Close on the site of the old Nixon-Knowles timberyard (4) the Lilypool (7), Chantry Close (30), Castle Mews (28) and Bishops Court (35).

### **Philip Heath.**



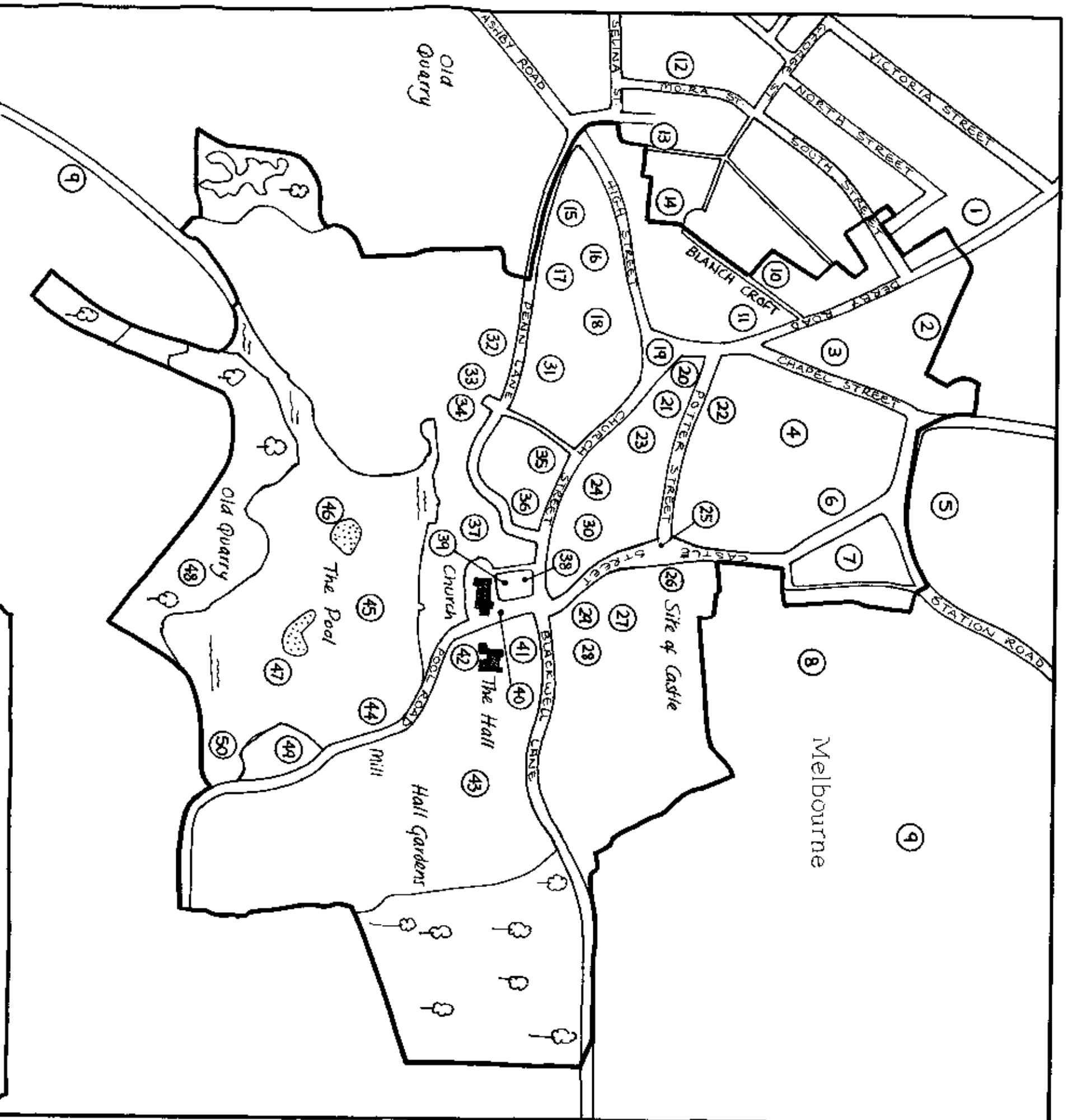
*Market gardening was a principal industry of Melbourne from the mid 19th century to the mid 20th. These men are hoeing on the market garden of Hatton Bros. & Snape.  
Courtesy of Mrs. Winifred Taylor*

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CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY

HISTORIC ROAD LAYOUT OF  
**MELBOURNE**  
 CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATED 12/02/1969  
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