

SUMMARY

Cromford today is considered to be a village, but such was the importance and scale of the industrial development of the settlement, that by 1840 it was identified as a “township” and, with its terraces lining the streets, it maintains a certain urban character.

The historic character is predominantly that of an estate village, where common materials and details were employed by a single landowner, who managed all aspects of life. However, there are exceptions to this, which are documented in this appraisal.

The development of the village was rapid and extensive between 1771, when Richard Arkwright first arrived in Cromford, and 1840, when most of the development stopped. It provided an early model of an industrial community. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that the village was developed further, although this later development has had little impact on the historic core, which survives remarkably well preserved. It was largely its remoteness that has led to the high degree of preservation of the original mills and mill village.

Although it is largely associated with Richard Arkwright, Cromford had an earlier phase of development, in part associated with lead mining, and this appraisal looks holistically at all the physical evidence for its appearance today.

The dramatic relationship between the built structures and their landscaped setting is one of the most marked characteristics of Cromford. The arrival of Arkwright in Cromford coincided with a national appreciation of the picturesque qualities of the landscape and Matlock Bath had already become renowned for its dramatic scenery and natural beauty. By the end of the 18th century, watercolour artists were painting the scenes within the Matlock Gorge and including within these Arkwright’s industrial mill buildings.

In many cases, the houses of highest status were placed carefully and deliberately to make the most of the views, and situated on heavily engineered sites, rather than in the most practical location. In addition to this kind of engineering, over the last two centuries there has been considerable removal of material to excavate sections of the limestone rock-face, create level routes for the local road network and to import hardcore and soil to create level platforms for the mills and market place.

The distinctive characteristics of Cromford can be summarised as follows:

- a working community which depends on quarrying and associated industries and as such has a ‘gritty’ nature which has, so far put a halt on over-prettification
- association with Sir Richard Arkwright, one of the most significant figures of the Industrial Revolution
- an industrial core of mill buildings threading through the valleys, accompanied by complex systems of water management & control
- significance of Bonsall Brook & River Derwent as power sources for mills
- a linear ribbon development of planned industrial housing
- terraces forming long, almost continuously enclosed, street frontages, often accompanied by raised pavements
- dramatic topography & geology of two gorges, riverside and lush wooded setting
- use of locally quarried, deep pink gritstone for the historic buildings
- large quantity of traditional paving materials employing both local gritstone & limestone
- yew trees planted to punctuate the street & within parkland
- the prevalent use of gritstone for boundary walls
- a manufactured, engineered & designed landscape
- formal open spaces created to front several buildings at Church Walk, The Market Place, the parkland lawn to Willersley Castle, the canal wharf, the millyard, the Promenade, the lawns & parkland to Rock House, the War Memorial Garden
- informal open spaces (millponds, water meadows, Allen’s Hill)
- large numbers of historic ancillary structures and spaces; privies, pigcotes, cowhouses & allotments
- predominance in views of Willersley Castle, the principal landmark