

# 9 Fosterville

Exploring Abergavenny

FOSTERVILLE CRESCENT



## EXPLORING ABERGAVENNY

For several years the Abergavenny and District Civic Society has been studying the streets, spaces and buildings of Abergavenny and Mardy outside the town centre. This process is known as 'characterisation', defined by the Welsh Government as 'capturing the local distinctiveness by identifying how places have been shaped over time.'

This record of what makes each part of the town distinctive, and often rather special, increases our awareness of the qualities that need to be considered and respected when new development is proposed. We hope that the planning authority will share our impressions and take account of our views. We also hope that our studies will increase residents' understanding and appreciation of their town, encouraging them to take an active interest in how change is managed in the future, or to conduct more research into aspects of the town's development.

The survey started in partnership with the Civic Trust for Wales as a pilot project to test whether community groups could carry out urban characterisation. The outcome was the Trust's *Exploring your town* manual and toolkit (2013). A County Council conservation area appraisal adopted in 2016 has also been taken into account, and this also covers the town's commercial centre<sup>1</sup>.

We have divided the town into thirty-six character areas. This report presents the history and character of one of those areas.

Now we would like *your* contribution:

- *Have we made any mistakes?*
- *Can you add to the history of the area?*

- *Do you agree with our impressions of the area?*
- *What have we missed that should have been recorded?*

All the reports are available at <https://abercivsoc.com> and comments may be sent to [abercivsoc@gmail.com](mailto:abercivsoc@gmail.com) or recorded when the reports are exhibited.

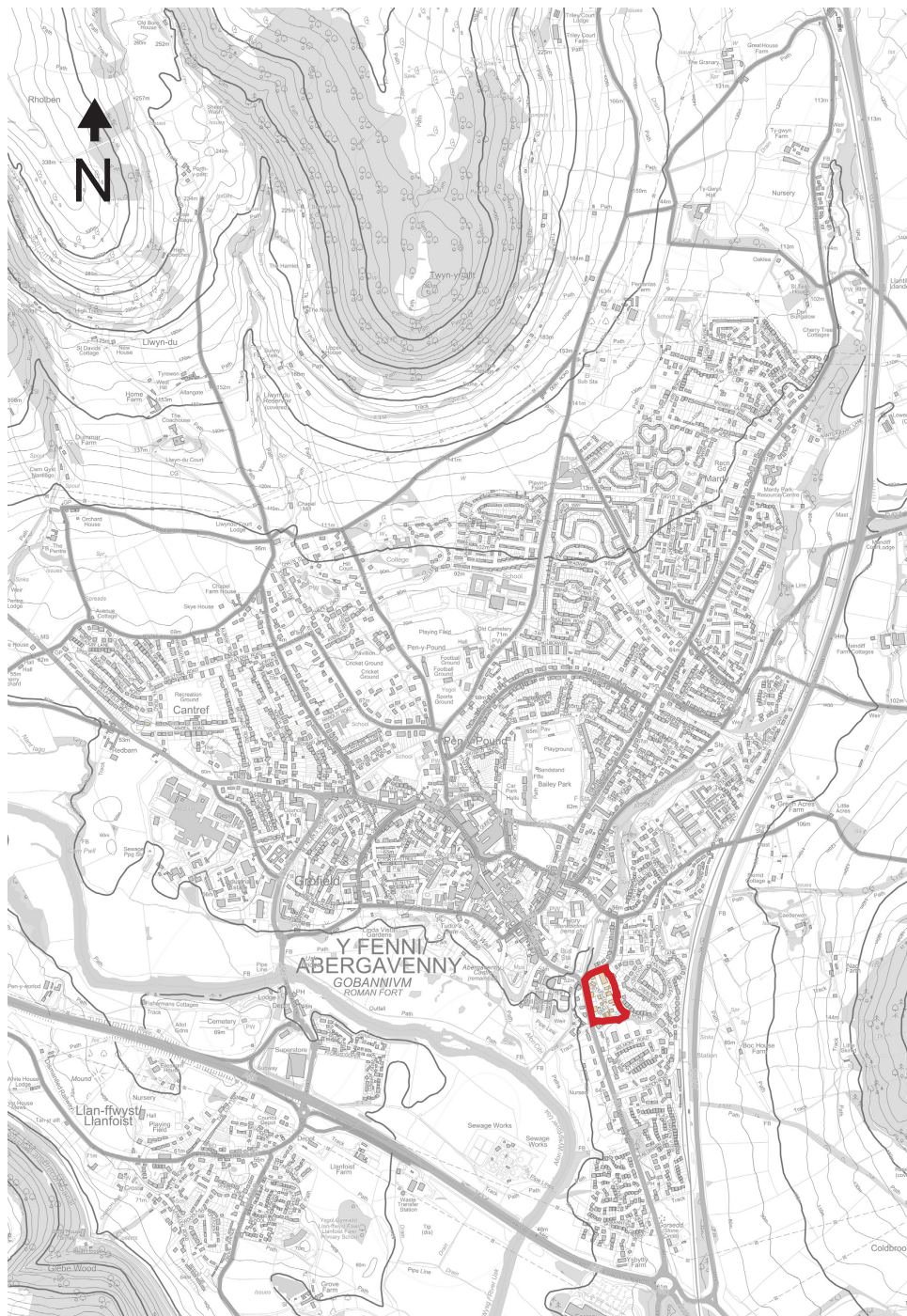
### Acknowledgements and copyright information

The Society is especially grateful for the survey contributions of Clive Bransom, Dick Cole, Tony Konieczny, Nigel Patterson, Anna Petts, Duncan Rogers and Jay Shipley. Dick Cole has carried out much of the research and final report writing, and accepts responsibility for any errors. None of the team had prior experience of heritage studies; all have learned much from the project.

We also thank Anna Leron and Dr Matthew Griffiths of the Civic Trust for Wales for their early support. Matthew Griffiths, now of the Open University, has also helped to present the project for the education and participation of residents, including the design of these character area reports.

This publication © 2017 Abergavenny and District Civic Society. Mapping based on Ordnance Survey data © Crown copyright and database 2017 Ordnance Survey (Digimap Licence via the Open University). For educational use only. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Aerial image (figure 1) © Google 2016.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/abergavenny-conservation-area-appraisal>



## FOSTERVILLE

THIS DISTINCTIVE SMALL planned suburb on Monmouth Road close to the town centre merits a character area in its own right, though there are more houses with a similar character on the main road nearby.

Elsewhere we have described the Mill Street area on the opposite side of Monmouth Road as a minor gem; Fosterville is a major gem, its exuberant architectural variety probably unnoticed by most of the town's residents and visitors. It is unfortunate that houses and garages added in the post-war period, perfectly satisfactory though they would have been in other situations, did not blend better with the character of the area.

While the condition of the houses appears generally good with the Foster houses usually retaining or respecting original features, the condition of the pavements, some stone walls, the groups of garages, and the on-street parking



detract a little from the quality of the area. However, it would be unfortunate if the damage to pavements was dealt with by felling the offending trees. The area also deserves something better than the present modern galvanised lighting columns.

Historical Background

Surprisingly in view of its central location, this area was a field until the 1890s. The 1901 Ordnance Survey map (probably surveyed a few years earlier) shows nothing of Fosterville Crescent apart from the first three houses at the Holywell end of the terrace (which is dated 1901 *in situ*). The semi-detached pair fronting Holywell Road and two pairs fronting Monmouth Road were also complete.

According to a family history compiled by Margaret Giles, Edwin Foster, builder, later architect and surveyor, probably the leading partner of Foster Brothers (based in Radstock Yard, Regent Street) purchased the four-acre field in 1888. Edwin lived at nearby Bella Vista, no 59 Monmouth Road, by 1901. In 1904/07 Edwin sold the land to his son Thomas, by which time nos 9/10 (Wilcot and Henley) and no 11 (Asthal House) had been built, the last as Thomas's home (but the listing description dates no 11 as 1909/10). The history states that the land for the terrace was also later sold to Thomas and suggests that this and the remaining houses (including those fronting Monmouth Road) were built when other work was short by 1910. This clearly conflicts with map evidence referred to above. All properties were let until about 1975. The Giles history and listed building records attribute all the properties to Edwin Foster as architect. Newman (*Buildings of Wales*) wonders whether these are the crescent of nine villas in Monmouth Road for which E.A. Johnson invited tenders in 1886, but it seems more likely that the Foster project superseded that proposal.

No houses were added between the wars, and by 1970 the area was much as it is today. No 14 had been built on the largest plot in the area, in the corner of the Crescent, with no 15 below it, and nos 16 and 17 had recently replaced the kitchen garden and orchard that Giles says occupied the space opposite nos 11-13.

Setting, Streets and Spaces

Fosterville Crescent, which is actually a loop off Monmouth Road taking the form of three sides of a hexagon, rises quite steeply to about 8m above the main road. This gives the commanding houses on the top section good views of the town and the Bloreng and Usk valley, especially from upper floors.

Key to map

|                                    |                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Conservation area boundary         |    |
| Listed Building                    |    |
| Building of special local interest |    |
| Building of local interest         |    |
| Metal railings                     |    |
| Local landmark building            |    |
| Good sense of place                |    |
| Terminated street view             |    |
| Deflected street view              |    |
| Vista, long view                   |    |
| Visual pinch point                 |    |
| Building rhythm                    |   |
| Important walling                  |  |
| Important trees or shrubs          |  |
| Important hedges                   |  |
| Footpath                           |  |
| Improvement opportunity            |  |

Figure 2: character analysis





Figure 3: Crescent grandeur

Mature trees, especially copper beech, some within, and damaging, pavements on the northern section of the Crescent, and trees, shrubs and hedges in gardens add considerably to the character of the area, as do sandstone boundary walls, usually capped with yellow brick, and gateways with good pillars, some topped with pinecones (nos 18/19) or balls. Timber fencing to modern mos 16/17 is neat but less sympathetic. Gardens are not particularly large for the size of houses.

Asthal House, the most striking, closes the view into northern end of the Crescent from Monmouth Road. Only Asthal House among the older houses has a driveway, and there were no rear accesses. Most older houses were approached by steps. Because of this, and the proximity of the town centre, the Crescent experiences considerable on-street parking.

The tangential terrace, which shares the Crescent address, has a very narrow road access and no footway.



Figure 4: The Terrace

### Building Character

The mixture of large and smaller houses by a single builder/architect, and therefore also social diversity, is unusual in a small development of the early 20th century. The detached and semi-detached homes are large, displaying a remarkable variety of ornate details; many original doors, windows and iron gates survive. There is also a variety of building materials, including dark brown sandstone, yellow and red brick, caramel terracotta, slate and tile roofs. The variety cannot be done justice in this summary description. Many of the houses have side and rear elevations of a quality similar to their fronts.

Five Crescent houses are listed: nos 9/10 are red brick with caramel terracotta dressings with inscribed house names, Venetian windows above two-storey bays, and slate roofs; central no 11 (Asthal House) is stone with cream terracotta dressings and a tiled roof topped by an iron-railed belvedere; and nos 18/19 are yellow Ebbw Vale brick with terracotta dressings and tiled roofs with decorative bargeboards, plus deep iron-railed first floor balconies.



Figure 5: A leafy Edwardian street

Unlisted nos 12/13 are similar to nos 9/10 but in yellow brick with carved bargeboards. The terrace (nos 1-8) is stone with yellow brick dressings and slate roofs (tiled bay roofs except one); the end houses have front gables and two-storey bays with red terracotta inlays. Nos 8 and 10 Monmouth Road are sandstone with yellow brick dressings and slate roofs, iron balconies to a first floor window, unusual triangular bay windows, side entrances and gable woodwork resembling roof trusses. Less altered no 10 is a dental surgery. Nos 12 and 14 are similar but screened by trees. No 1 Holywell Road is paired with no 20 and has battlemented ground floor bays and similar gable woodwork to nos 8 and 10 Monmouth Road.

A garage or workshop with an arched corrugated roof sits beside no 13 in the Crescent and utilitarian garages have been provided on both sides of the southern arm of the Crescent.

The architectural integrity of Fosterville is lessened by the contrasting style of houses added to the Crescent since the Second World War. No 14 is the most successful, quite plain and L-shaped in a reddish brick with a steeply pitched



Figure 6: Contrasting styles - the 1890s and 1960s

tiled roof; no 15 is a bungalow with an attic room, uses a paler brick and is tiled; nos 16 and 17 use a reddish brick with tiled roofs (asymmetric at no 17) and rendered and timbered panels, typical of the 1960s.

### Heritage Assets

The area is within the Conservation Area and has four listed buildings. Superficially all the other Foster houses are of similar quality and interest, especially for their group value. The street trees, quite small on a 1929 aerial photograph, are unusual in Abergavenny.