

The story of Upperthorpe and Netherthorpe

HOW WE LIVED

At the start of the 19th century, Upperthorpe was still largely semi-rural. As Sheffield industrialised, factories appeared and the population grew rapidly. Cheap, tightly packed housing filled the area, often alongside workshops and industry. Many people worked close to home because modern transport was yet to arrive.



Martin Street at the 1902 coronation

Life in the 'courts'

Fred Pass, writing about his childhood in 'Weerz me dad?', remembered growing up in the 1940s and early 1950s in a 19th-century back-to-back house on Martin Street.

His family of four lived in one of seven houses around a shared courtyard. Their tiny home had just two rooms – a downstairs living room and bedroom – plus a coal cellar. Houses opposite had an extra attic room.

With houses sharing rear walls, neighbours surrounded each home on three sides. This made maximum use of limited land, but meant little light, fresh air or space. Housing became a key political battle.

Cramped conditions

Life revolved around shared facilities:

- **Water.** One outside cold-water tap served the whole court.
- **Sanitation.** There were no indoor bathrooms and toilets were shared.
- **Space.** Families owned few possessions, but rooms could become overcrowded when lodgers were taken in.
- **Rent.** Homes were rented, with early 20th-century weekly rents of around 3s 6d–4s.

Bathing was a weekly ritual. On Sunday evenings, a tin bath was filled in front of the fire, with family members sharing the same water.

In 1896, the Upperthorpe Public Baths opened, providing a swimming pool, 30 slipper baths and a laundry. They were badly needed: a council survey found only 116 of 10,865 nearby houses had indoor baths.



Demolition at Martin Street

A changing neighbourhood

From the 1950s, Sheffield's slum-clearance programme transformed Upperthorpe. Old courts and terraces were demolished and residents rehoused, while some surviving homes were modernised with new kitchens and bathrooms.

The old Martin Street houses have disappeared, replaced by modern tower blocks. Yet traces of the past remain – including brick remnants of former outdoor toilets in some gardens.



Outside toilets



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