

Some Further information on Silver End

1925 Silver End consisted of 2 farms, a blacksmiths, 10 cottages and an inn. Crittally, the owners of Boars Tye Farm with its 220 acres were willing to sell, and Francis Crittall paid £7500 for it in November.

1926 the Silver End Development Company was formed, with a budget of £600,000 and a five-year plan for roughly 100 houses a year. Work started on building the factory and the first houses.

Crittall's plan was to make the village self-sufficient. He had the farm to supply meat, eggs, milk and corn, so he needed somewhere to sell them, plus all the other basic household requirements.

Department Store Originally this was a 3 storey department store, containing 26 departments, and came out as far as the edge of the present car park. It was taken over by the Co-op, but was destroyed by a fire on 13 September 1952.

Former Silver End Hotel which had 16 bedrooms plus bars, a restaurant and a function room. It was used by Crittalls to accommodate clients and suppliers, as well as visitors (who included HG Wells and Ramsey Macdonald). Now a care home.

Memorial Gardens Designed by Walter Crittall in memory of his father Francis, and opened in 1952. The gates have inscriptions of the Crittall family initials. Inside the entrance to the right there a notice board with photographs. There are four, one at each entrance.

The Manors Francis Crittall's home, built in 1927. His gardener and his chauffeur lived in the two bungalows. Now retirement housing.

Japanese-inspired Pond with pagoda

Silver End is known for its Modernist housing, but of the 500 or so houses built by Crittalls, only 153 are in this style, although this is the largest concentration of such houses in the country. All houses, however, had hot and cold water, electricity, proper sanitation and a garden. This was revolutionary for working class homes as local councils in rural areas often did not even provide an internal cold water supply. The density was eight houses per acre which allowed sufficient space to grow vegetables in the rear garden and flowers at the front.

15 Temple Lane was the first house to be constructed in Silver End. The foundation stone is low down on the right of the side door.

Factory sited away from the village centre, which afforded it easy access to the factory at Witham without the need to travel through the centre of the village. All that remains is the original 1926 factory and Power House which produced electricity for the factory as well as the village.

Church In 1930 Francis Crittall provided a late C17th barn to be used as the Anglican church, inserting (of course) Crittall windows and door.

Boars Tye Road Employees could rent and eventually buy the houses but there was a strict 'pecking order'. They could only have a house deemed suitable to their position in the company. The large detached houses on the left were built for factory managers. They won first prize for the best house design of the year at the 1928 Ideal Home exhibition.

Le Chateau was the home of Francis Crittall's son Dan. It later became the '65 Club', a place for retired employees. It was also a location for the 1980s TV series 'The Nanny'. On the Heritage at Risk register due to lack of maintenance.

Craig Angus built for a senior factory manager. On the Heritage at Risk register due to lack of maintenance.

Wolverton was also built for a senior factory manager, restored by current owners in exemplary fashion.

Boars Tye Farmhouse The farm that Francis Crittall bought. Dan Crittall moved here from Le Chateau with his wife and lived here until the 1980s. It then became a residential home.

1-32 Silver Street are all listed buildings. Apart from these, and the three Modernist houses we have just seen on Boars Tye Road, no other houses are.

In 1968 Crittalls put the village was put up for sale and it was purchased in it's entirety by Braintree District Council to prevent any fragmentation. However, many of the original features of these unusual houses have been lost by general maintenance, extensions and improvements. The Council designated the original village area a Conservation area in 1983 in an attempt to hold onto the original feel of the village.

4 Cross Broadway, walk along the front of Valentine House, keeping left at the roundabout to entrance of Memorial Gardens. Look across the roundabout. The Village Hall was designed by architect C. Murray Hennell and opened by the Lord Mayor of London on 10 May 1928. It is England's largest village hall with a main hall, sports courts, a stage and two smaller halls on the ground floor and committee rooms on both floors.

5 Turn round to face the gates of the Memorial Gardens. To the right of the gates was a thatched roof tea rooms and Mrs. Dunn's open all hours shop, which is now a private residence. The park gates show, owned by Braintree District Council but now managed by Silver End Heritage Society with photographic displays.

6 Enter the gardens and look ahead to a large white building. This is the Manors, Francis Crittall's home built in 1927 designed by architect Quennell. Note the



Photos taken on the walk

blue plaque (top left). It is believed that the gardener and chauffeur lived in the bungalows.

7 Follow the garden path to the left towards the pond. Built in 1951 and designed by Walter 'Pink' Crittall with a Japanese inspired design, the pond included a pagoda. A memorial plaque is set in the wall nearby.

8 Continue towards the exit of the garden and turn left along Francis Way, towards Broadway.

5 Francis Way was the original telephone exchange. It is Modernist in style but the architect is unknown.

9 Turn right along Broadway to the crossroad with Temple Lane. Look across the road at the first house on corner with Valentine Way.

10 Continue left along Temple Lane, from the crossroad, to the T-junction with Boars Tye Road. This was the site of the original Crittall Manufacturing Company factory and Power House, now hidden behind a tall hedge to the right, and is all that remains of the larger complex that has been demolished. The Power House closest to the hedge, produced DC electricity for the houses (unusual for rural workers' houses in the 1920s) as well as for the factory. From here you can also see the Church of St. Francis, late C17th barn with Crittall windows and door, donated 1930.

11 Cross the top of Temple Lane to the left and continue along Boars Tye Road. The large detached houses on the left were designed by C. Murray Hennell for the senior managers of the factory.

12 Stop before Silver Street/Boars Tye Road/Sheepcotes Lane junction and cross the road.

Le Chateau was designed by Thomas S. Tait of Sir John Burnet & Partners, built for Crittall's son Dan, who had an interest in steam locomotion and had a miniature railway in the garden. The house was later used for the '65 Club', a place for retired employees. It was also a location for the 1980s TV series 'The Nanny'. It is now a listed building.

13 Cross over the top of Sheepcotes Lane. Craig Angus was designed by Frederick McManus who was Tait's chief designer. It is also a listed building. Looking further down Sheepcotes Lane you will see the Roman Catholic church, designed by Martin Evans, built in 1966.

14 Continue along Boars Tye Road. Wolverton was built in 1926 by Tait and McManus, beautifully restored and maintained by its present owners. Opposite is the Boars Tye farmhouse, the first the Crittall's bought. Dan Crittall moved here from Le Chateau with his wife and lived here until the 1980s. It then became a residential home.

15 Continue back along Boars Tye Road to the junction and turn right into Silver Street. 1–32 Silver Street were also designed by Tait and McManus. These are all listed buildings. Note the windows at number 4 and the original door and letter

box at 5. One of Crittall's main concerns was the welfare of his workers. All houses were to have power, light, hot and cold running water, upstairs bathrooms and large gardens for the workers to grow produce. Apart from the Modernist movement styling, it is suggested that the flat roofs were used by Crittall to display how windows could be used. All houses were to have a view either of open countryside, sports fields or allotments, use of which the 'Guv'nor' encouraged. Employees could buy, part buy/rent or rent the houses but there was a strict 'pecking order'. They could only have a house deemed suitable to their position in the company. Greenfields Housing now owns many houses in the village and have recently replaced the windows and doors. The original village was designated a conservation area in 1983. It was covered by an 'Article 4 Direction' which removes 'permitted development rights'. The conservation guidance said that the windows and doors had to be steel, although more recently, aluminium is being allowed.

16 Continue along Silver Street to the junction with the entrance to the playing fields, cross over to the left and stop at entrance to the Village Hall sports field. Here you can see evidence of the rail track that was used to bring the gravel from the area behind Temple Lane/Valentine Way to build the houses. The flat roofed houses at the lower end were built by Silver End Development Co. set up by Crittall to develop the village. These buildings are not listed.

Go right on Broadway, left on Francis Way, left down Silver Street

Congregational Church

Continue along Silver Street to Broadway. Turn right at the crossroads to end back at the shops.

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In 1925 Silver End was only a tiny hamlet of a few cottages, a farm and an inn, mainly centred around where the end of Western Road is today.

Meanwhile, Francis Crittall was busy growing his empire with the Manor Works Window Factory in Braintree and another factory in Witham. The turn of the century had given him contracts to produce metal windows for The Records Office in Chancery Lane, the kitchens of the House of Commons, The National Gallery and the stables at Marlborough House and the end of The Great War with housing shortages had grown demand for his metal windows in smaller domestic buildings.

He therefore had a growing workforce and people were coming from far and wide to work for the 'Guv'nor' so he started to make plans for building houses for his own workers. He was also making plans for a new 'Small Parts' factory where workers who were disabled from the war could do light jobs. In a time where living conditions were rather cramped for all but the wealthy, and inspired by the openness of the Garden Villages of Port Sunlight in Merseyside and Bourneville near Birmingham he began to make his plans. He wanted a place where his workers could live and socialise without ever having to leave the village. He wanted open spaces and large gardens, modern houses with indoor bathrooms and hot running water.

The idea of a Garden Village

One day while driving between his two factories in Witham and Braintree, he turned off the main road and discovered this small hamlet of cottages and acres of surrounding land, which at the time belonged to the owners of Boars Tye Farm. Meetings were had and arrangements were made and the land was purchased. Architects were consulted and the plans were underway for the Garden Village of Silver End. (The converted barn at the top of Silver Street, the Residential Care Home on Boars Tye road and the wood-yard next to this are all that is left of the farm now.)

Francis and his son Walter 'Pink' Crittall desired that their workers should live in houses with 'elementary rights of every home', amenities such as hot running water, gas and electricity, indoor bathrooms and a proper garden, not a backyard or an allotment half a mile away. He commissioned architects Murray Hennel, C.B.H. Quennell, Thomas Tait and Frederick Macmanus of Sir John Burnet and Partners. By using different architects, Francis hoped to avoid repetitiveness in the house designs. Richard Reiss was the 'village planner' and designated different zones for living, socialising and working.

'Modern' House design

Crittall's feelings of the architectural trends at the time were... "houses had been designed and the rooms were made to fit". Crittall wanted to reverse this trend and... "design in the cause of air and light and space." This was typically a Modernist strategy, allowing everyday living needs and health to be considered before the outside of the house was even thought about.

Laying the first stone

Murray Hennel's houses were the first to be built in Temple Lane and Valentine Way. The ceremonial 'foundation stone' was laid in the house on the corner of Valentine Way. Quennell also designed houses for Temple Lane and Francis Crittall's own house 'The Manors', in Francis Way, set opposite the village hall.

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It was Thomas Tait and Frederick Macmanus's modern vision for houses in Silver Street and Boars Tye Road which certainly set the cat among the pigeons within the architectural critics! The initial 3 detached houses on Boars Tye Road, Wolverton, Craig Angus and Le Chateau set the modernist style of the workers houses in Silver Street. The Modernist houses were ivory coloured with emerald green windows. Doors were either emerald green, ultramarine blue or orange.

Creating the village

The farmland around the village was purchased and developed to provide the village with food. This included a poultry farm, three piggeries, a slaughterhouse, bacon curing, a sausage factory and a bakery. The produce from all these were sold in the new department store on Broadway. Unfortunately this burnt down in 1952 and in its place today stands a parade of shops including the Co-op, the library, a charity shop and an opticians.

Opposite the department store a hotel was built. It is said to be 'a more respectable place to serve liquor than a public house.' The largest village hall in the country was built close by and housed a 400 seat theatre/cinema. It also had a dance hall, restaurant, lecture room, library, billiard rooms, club rooms, portrait gallery and an infant welfare clinic.

The 2 playing fields provided tennis courts as well as huge green spaces on which to play team sports. The Memorial Gardens were opened later in 1952 and still offer today, a place to walk, picnic, play and explore.

And so the collection of these larger developments all helped Crittall's vision for a life provided by the village. Where everyone's needs were met and no-one needed to travel to find the services they required.

The future

In 1968 the village was put up for sale and purchased in its entirety by Braintree District Council to prevent any fragmentation. However, since the Right to Buy council housing was introduced, many of the original features of these unusual houses have been lost by general maintenance, extensions and improvements. The Council have since designated the area containing the Crittall houses as a Conservation area in an attempt to hold onto the original feel of the village.

<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=julHAAQBAJ&pg=PA134&lpg=PA134&dq=crittall+factory+braintree&source=bl&ots=XH9gRIUvhn&sig=-pJE62BkUiRaAsAYv2TZL-3LwFQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjDgNqts-bYAhUED8AKHYqfDgA4ChDoAQhVMac#v=onepage&q=crittall%20factory%20braintree&f=false>

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“Readers, Friends and Fellow Workers, I wish to write you a few words on Silver End – what a delightful name for our new venture!”

Francis H. Crittall in the company magazine, January 1926.

By the early 1920s the steel windows of the Crittall Manufacturing Company were selling by the millions. The workforce continued to expand, and the question of housing the employees and their families in Braintree was becoming critical. The local council could in no way keep up with the housing demand, and Francis Crittall began to make plans to extend the clockhouse Way estate. Unfortunately, the plans ran into disputes with the council and he decided to abandon the scheme.

What then was the alternative? “that question presented itself to me in the small hours one morning when, in a silent house, I sat with my nightly whiskey and soda, calling up the future in the blue haze of my cigar” (Crittall 1934: 120–21). The answer was not “to content ourselves with a few streets tacked upon a country town” (Crittall 1934: 121), but rather to establish a completely new community in a Garden Village. Francis presented his ideas to his sons Valentine and Walter as well as to other members of the company board. He had in mind not only housing with well-sized gardens for his workers, but also playing fields, recreation areas, a village pub, a department store and schools, churches and even a hotel. His plans were greeted with enthusiasm, and in the autumn of 1925 the search for a suitable site began.

At this point the history of the project becomes slightly contradictory. Francis maintains in his autobiography that “while motoring from Witham to Braintree, I noticed a rough road on the right hand and, on an impulse, directed the car along it. shortly I reached a small cluster of rural cottages, set among trees and grouped about an inn, and I recognized it from my boyhood as a spot known as Silver End” (Crittall 1934: 122). Other sources point to his son Walter as being the one who discovered the tiny hamlet in the third week of October of 1925 (Blake 1989: 55). However, the important point is that the owners of Boar’s Tye Farm, who owned 220 acres of Silver End land, were willing to sell, and by 3 November a sale price of £7,500 had been agreed.

