

LOCHBUIE AND THE RIDGE

The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire

by

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The Historical Analysis & Research Team is part of the central Conservation Group of English Heritage, based at Savile Row in London.

Lochbuie and The Ridge at The Park, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire.

Lochbuie and The Ridge are two houses set in generous plots in a residential area of Mansfield which forms The Park Conservation Area. Lochbuie is still in private ownership; The Ridge is used as a children's home, and is the subject of a proposal to demolish and redevelop the site. The East Midlands team have been asked to respond with written representations at a public inquiry, and the inspector has asked HA&RT to provide some historical information to support its rejection of the application.

Introduction

The Ridge was designed in 1896 and built in 1899 for Robert Frank Vallance FRIBA, a Mansfield architect, to his own design. He is first listed in the 1900 electoral register at that address, and died there in 1908. His only daughter, Mary, continued to live there until c.1918. The property passed out of private ownership in March 1950 when it was bought by Nottinghamshire County Council, and converted to a children's home, opening in November 1951. Lochbuie, a similarly large house with stables, was also designed by Robert Vallance and his partner, Louis Westwick, in 1907 for a Mr R.H. Wiggins, and built soon afterwards.

The architect

Robert Frank Vallance (1856-1908) was born in Mansfield, the son of George Vallance, of Cavendish House in that town. Between 1874-7, young Robert was articled to Albert Nelson Bromley (1850-1934) and his partner Mr Bakewell, of Nottingham. Subsequently, from 1877-9, he was an assistant to Messrs Goddard & Son (Henry Goddard, 1813-1899, and Francis Henry Goddard) of Lincoln. At the age of twenty-four Robert commenced practice in 1879 in Mansfield, and was in partnership with Louis Alfred Westwick from 1898. Their offices were at White Hart Chambers. Vallance was subsequently appointed Borough Surveyor for Mansfield, and Surveyor to Warsop Urban District Council. He was a member of the Royal Institute of Public Health, and the Association of Municipal and County Engineers, and was appointed a governor and honorary architect of the Mansfield and Mansfield Woodhouse hospitals. He was made a Fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1891, and became President of the Society of Architects in 1907. Vallance died at his house, The Ridge, on 18 April 1908 and was buried in Mansfield cemetery.

During his career of almost thirty years, Vallance built up a varied practice which ranged from public and commercial work to private commissions. He designed asylums, hospitals, workhouses, banks, hotels, board schools, warehouses, factories, public baths, power stations, commercial premises and private residences. He was also an expert in legal matters relating to urban building and planning such as arbitrations, valuations, water supply and sewage disposal, and his services were much in demand in these matters.

Vallance designed the Victoria Hospital (1897-8), which was connected to the workhouse at Mansfield, for sixty-eight female patients, and an adjoining block for maternity wards and staff accommodation. Other buildings by Vallance included: a warehouse in Sadler's Court, the Diamond Jubilee ward of the Mansfield Woodhouse District Hospital (1897); Samuel Smith's bank in Market Street; printing

works in Toothill Road; houses in Portland Street, Pleasley Hill, West Hill Drive and the Park; the laying out of Quarry Lane and Cromwell Street for the Corporation; the vicarage at Layton Avenue; Boards Schools at Pleasley Hill, Rosemary Lane (1899-1900), with a distinctive cupola on the roof, and at Littleworth for the Mansfield School Board; the Victoria Hall in Leeming Street with a capacity for 850 people; schools for the Bolsover School Board; extensions to the Mansfield Accident Hospital; a hotel at Edwinstowe (1896); and cemetery chapels at Shirebrook.

The Park

The houses in the Park and Park Avenue were built between 1891 and 1912, on land belonging to the Manor of Mansfield for prominent local people. Of these residences, The Ridge and Lochbuie, situated on the brow of a hill, are the best examples. Lochbuie comprises two storeys with an attic storey in the large decorated Tudor gable on the cross-wing. It has a recessed central porch with Mansfield stone columns, the capitals carved with simple classical motifs, and above it carved stone volutes, brackets and swags, with a charming naturalistic face of a young girl in the centre of the composition. To the right of the entrance is a curious canted bay that projects through the roof line, and to the right of that, black-and-white close studding on the first floor, with a canted bay with stone mullions on the ground floor. The tall red brick chimneys have Shavian decorative brick corbelling. The Ridge has a double height entrance hall with two turreted bay windows linked at first floor level by a wooden verandah. The adjacent coach house/stable block has steeply pitched, red tiled roofs.

Standing in extensive grounds with mature trees, these houses stand out in the conservation area, which otherwise comprises smaller semi-detached houses of the 1870s and 1880s built of Mansfield stone, Midland Imperial red brick, and slate roofs, and mock-Tudor houses of the 1920s, much 'improved' in recent years. But Lochbuie and The Ridge were the forerunners of these: large detached houses with coach houses, in an eclectic English vernacular style revived by George Devey in the 1860s (for example, in the estate buildings at Hemsted Park, Benenden, Kent for the Earl of Cranbrook). The style in the Mansfield houses is less confidently handled, perhaps, than by Devey or Richard Norman Shaw, but nevertheless instantly recognisable as the style popular at the turn of the century and later. The houses are reminiscent, too, of the work of Nottingham architect Watson Fothergill (1841-1928), whose style was 'an idiosyncratic combination of polychrome Gothic and half-timbering.'¹ Fothergill's offices in George Street, Nottingham (1894-5), and the Queens Chambers, Long Row, Nottingham (1897), were both clearly an inspiration to Vallance, with their eclectic mix of octagonal castellated tower, half-timbered gables with carved barge boards, brick banding and oriel windows characterising the architecture. Unfortunately, The Ridge has an ugly and unsympathetic 1970s extension, which could be removed. Lochbuie may have original features inside. Plans have survived for both buildings and could be used to aid restoration.

¹ Pevsner 1979 *Nottinghamshire*, 36

Conclusion

Robert Frank Vallance was not of the stature of the Nottingham architects Watson Fothergill or T.C. Hine, nor were his domestic buildings of the special interest of the Arts and Crafts houses designed by Parker and Unwin in the early 1900s in Mansfield, or those by local architects Brewill & Bailey. Nevertheless, The Ridge and Lochbuie have definite architectural quality. This can be seen in the eclectic mix of features (double-canted bays, steeply pitched roofs and projecting porches to give a picturesque massing), and the mix of materials such as red roof tiles, hung tiles, red brick, half-timbering, and stone window dressings.

Vallance's contribution to the institutional buildings in the Mansfield area was considerable, and other surviving examples of his work there are yet to be fully identified. It was the town where he lived all his life, to which he was clearly deeply attached, and on behalf of which he carried out much public service. For this historical reason, as well as the considerable intrinsic architectural quality of The Ridge and Lochbuie, every effort should be made by the local authority to retain these key buildings in The Park Conservation Area in Mansfield.

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31 January 2002

Sources

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The Building News, 24 April, 1908 p.593 Vallance's obituary.



MANSFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL
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THE PARK

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Map to show the location of The Ridge and Lochbuie within The Park Conservation Area, Mansfield.



Front and rear elevations of Lochbuie



Detail showing the volutes, carved swags and girl's head above the porch of Lochbuie



Front and side elevations of The Ridge

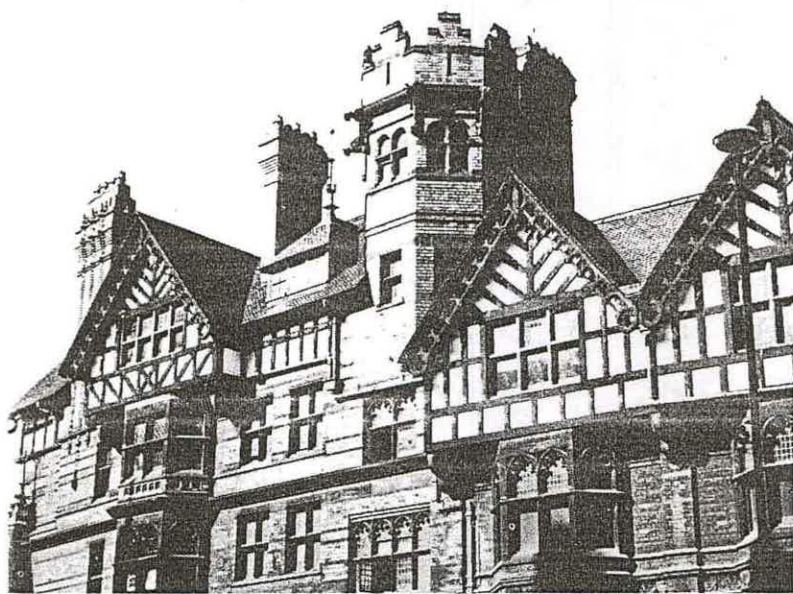


Two houses in The Park Conservation Area



THE LATE MR. R. FRANK VALLANCE.

Portrait of Mr Robert Frank Vallance, published in *The Building News* 24 April, 1908



View of the upper storeys of Queen's Chambers, Long Row, Nottingham, by Watson Fothergill, 1897 (from Pevsner).