

A
NUTSHELL
HISTORY
OF



SEDGLEY

GEOLOGY

The solid geology of Sedgley consists of impure limestones, shales, calcereous marls, clays, sandstones, coal-seams and nodular beds of clay ironstone. The oldest rocks of the parish are the bluish Wenlock limestones and shales, which were deposited during the Silurian Period.

FOSSILS

Fossils are the remains of living things which have been preserved in rocks. Geologists are interested in them because they provide evidence of the condition of the earth and of the life upon it through the ages.

The rocks of Sedgley Beacon Sill are very rich in fossils, and exquisite specimens of fossil shells, corals, fish and ferns can be found there.

Why not form a collection of your own? Listed below are the names which geologists give to some of the fossils found upon the Beacon Slopes:

HELTOLITES	Sun Coral
TRILOBITES	A remarkable Crustacean, commonly called the 'Dudley Locust'
ATRYPA	
ORTHIS	
BHACHIOPODS	Try to find out what these are like
GASTROPODS	
FAVOSITES	

If you ask at the library for a book on fossils you will be able to add name labels to your own discoveries.

HISTORY

Early

Underhill suggests that the district would have been ideal for the settlements of pre-historic folk, and later for the early Britons, who were men of the woods, and spent most of their time in hunting wild animals or collecting great stores of berries and edible leaves. Their houses would have been similar to the wigwams of the American Red Indians.

Roman coins have been found at Hurst Hill, and it is recorded that a lane at Lower Gornal was once named, "The Roman Way".

Pre-Norman, 633 -1066

The Manor of Sedgley once formed part of the Kingdom of Mercia under successive monarchs. Ethelbald reigned for 40 years (716 - 755) but the most celebrated King of the Mercians was Offa, who became an ally of the Emperor Charlemagne,

Many kings reigned after Offa up to the time of the Norman Conquest, and the Manor was passed from hand to hand according to the pleasure of each ruler.

Earl Leofic, whose wife Lady Godiva is still remembered for her naked horseback ride, was once Lord of Sedgley Manor. The last Saxon Earl to hold this post was Leofic's son, Earl Algar.

Lords of the Manor

William Fitz Ansculf, a soldier-of-fortune, from Picquiny, near the French town of Armiens, was the first Norman to hold the Manor, as from the year 1066.

Feulke Paganel, the next Lord, was said to be the son of Ansculf's daughter, Beatrice, and he was succeeded by his own son, Ralph. The land passed through the hands of Gervaise Paganel, Ralph's heir, to his sister Hawyse, who married John de Somery.

The manor remained in the possession of the de Somery family until 1321, when it passed into the hands of the Suttons through the marriage of Margaret, heir to a later John de Somery.

The last of the Sutton line was the third Edward Sutton, who so 'wasted his estate' and 'clogged it with debts' that in order to restore his finances he was obliged to marry off his grand-daughter and heiress, Frances, to Humble Ward, the only son of William Ward, a wealthy (and crafty) London goldsmith.

In 1600, Thomas Parkes, a man who had amassed a fortune in the nail-making industry, purchased Sedgley Manor. It remained with the Parkes family until 1672 when, again through marriage, the estates reverted once more to the Ward family.

In 1860, the titles of Viscount Ednam and Earl of Dudley were revived and have remained in the Ward family ever since.

The Beacon Tower

The Beacon Tower was rebuilt in 1846 by Lord Wrottesly, for astronomical purposes in which he took an interest. The beacon hill is about 777 feet above sea-level. It was at one time the highest cultivated land in England. Although it cannot claim that distinction now, yet it is still the highest tableland in the country. Shaw speaks of a tower being there previous to 1798. It has been suggested that the Beacon Hill was used by the Britons as a look-out post, and served also as a signalling station for the quarterly religious rites which took place at Bar Beacon and Sutton Coldfield, both places being centres of Druid worship.

Gornal

At Gornal, it is said that the natives worshipped the sun and hence the name from Gor-on-al, meaning the sun. It has also been suggested to have derived its name from "quern", an ancient British hand-mill. For generations, a gorn, a small round tub with a handle, was used to carry the wort in brewing. Perhaps the words GORN and ALL explain much.

Ruiton

Ruiton is said to be derived from Rewardine, meaning the farm or homestead on this hill slope. In legal papers dealing with the old mill, it is mentioned as Rewardine, short Ruyton.

The Ellowes

The Ellowes, or Ellers, is a corruption of Ellenvale, the ancient name for the beautiful valley overlooked by the Hall, which was built by the famous ironmaster, John Turton Fereday.

Sedgley Parish Church

According to the Domesday Book, Sedgley had not only been formed into a parish before the Norman Conquest, it had a parish church as well.

In 1275 the Prior of Dudley held the church at Seggesle, it being a gift from the Somerys, then lords of the Manor.

The old church became dilapidated and not large enough to accommodate the congregation, so the present church was commenced on 1st September 1826. It took two years and ten months to build.

The Rev. C. Girdlestone was Vicar at the time of the restoration. Built after the Gothic style, it has three roofs covering nave and side aisles. The nave is supported by richly clustered stone columns, and lit by clerestery windows. The ceiling is finely groined. The tracing of the east and west windows is worked in Gornal stone. There are a number of stained-glass windows. That on the east aide, containing the apostles, is very fine. The old church seated 404 people, the present one about 1,300.

The Bells

At the reformation there were only four bells. Now there are eight. They form a very musical peal, and have a sweet and delightful tone.

Saint Chad

Saint Chad became Bishop of Lichfield in 669. He was distinguished for his humility and self-sacrifice in the interest of the poor and sick. At one time the relics of St. Chad were preserved in a house which stood on the site of Woodsetton Lodge. They are at present enshrined above the high altar of St. Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham.

LOCAL DERIVATIONS

Sedgley

Many local people believe that the earliest mention of Sedgley occurs in the Domesday Book. This is not so. In a charter of Ethelred, A.D.985, (Codex Diplomaticus, III, 213) it is spelt SEGGES LEAGE. The same charter mentions HEAUTUNE (Wolverhampton) BILSATENA (Bilston) and TRESEL (Trysull). The word 'Secga' appears to have been an Anglo-Saxon personal name, and it is almost certain that Sedgley means 'Secga's Lea', a lea being a pasture or untilled land.

High Arcal

Ercol was the Anglo-Saxon name for Hercules, which would be pronounced ARCOL. There is a High Arcal in Salop, anciently ERCALEWE - Ercol's 'low' or 'burial place'.

Gospel End

The word 'end' in Middle-English denoted a 'place' or 'locality', frequently on a thoroughfare. The terms 'Gospel Oak' and 'Gospel End' are common on the boundaries of parishes.

They derive from the days when, before maps were used, it was the custom of the Minister, accompanied by his parishioners, to 'beat the bounds' of their parish and, at certain notable landmarks, to read from the Bible.

The Straits

This is again from Middle-English but has root in the old French word 'estreit'. It means 'narrow passage' as in the Straits of Gibraltar.

The Domesday Book

Compiled by William the Conqueror in 1086 as a great national land register, it contains a record of the Manor of Sedgley. A photostat copy of the actual entry, together with a version in modern English, is on view at this exhibition.

"William Fits Ansculf holds Segleslei of the King. Algar, Earl of Mercia, held it!"

An acre of land was sold at that time for one shilling, which was the cost of four sheep.

MANUFACTURE OF IRON

Coal came into use about the year 1200. Iron-stone was mined and smelted by means of charcoal with limestone as a flux as early as Anglo-Saxon times. During the latter part of the Tudor period and throughout the 17th century, nailmaking and coal-mining were the main industries of the parish, although farming too occupied a prominent place. Later, Sedgley became famous for the manufacture of steel pens, the first of their kind being made here in 1806 by J. Fellowes. Pens are no longer made in Sedgley.

It was not until 1619 that iron smelting by means of coal in any quantities took place. The disappearing oak forests, from which charcoal had been made, rendered it a matter of urgency to find a substitute fuel.

In 1619 Dud Dudley was sent by his father to manage his furnaces at Pensnett. In his history, he tells of erecting a furnace at Hasco Bridge, using a huge bellows to create the blast. Rioters cut his bellows and ruined the furnace. Shortly afterwards, the Civil War broke out.

On the other side of Beacon Hill at Bradley, John Wilkinson built his first iron furnace in 1757. He had found a means of boring cannon out of solid iron. This invention was applied to the making of cylinders for steam engines. With the help of Bolton and Watts, together with a Scotsman named Murdoch, they made a steam engine to produce sufficient blast to smelt iron. By this means iron smelting by coal became a qualified success.

Wilkinson also invented the iron canal boat, which was the wonder of the time, and became the forerunner of the modern steel ship.

In 1686, Sedgley was famous for its blacksmiths, who wrought in plough, cart and fire irons, horse locks and shoes, bolts, hinges and general ironwork. The craft of wrought ironwork is still carried on today at Russell's Forge and Engineering Works, Lower Gornal.

MODERN INDUSTRY

There are several foundries and light engineering works in the district, and their products range from complex machine tools to elegant work in wrought iron. Sedgley is specially noted for furnace refractories and the manufacture of bricks, arising out of the fact that rich deposits of fireclay are found in the locality. In Gornal there are silica sand and stone quarries. High-grade coal is still mined at Baggeridge Colliery.

The plastics industry has also taken root at Lower Gornal, where fibre-mouldings are made. Other suitable industrial development is being planned to add to the means of local prosperity.

THE LAST DAYS OF SEDGLEY AS AN INDEPENDENT AUTHORITY

From 1st April 1966, the Urban District of Sedgley will cease to exist as such. On that day, the recommendations of the Local Government Commission for England for a pattern of County Boroughs in the Black Country, will take effect. Sedgley Urban District, with the exception of the Goldthorn Park Area, will become part of the new County Borough of Dudley, together with the Urban District of Brierley Hill, Amblecote, Coseley and Tipton. Gospel End Village will be merged with Seisdon Rural District Council.

COMPILED BY THE REGIONAL LIBRARIAN, SEDGLEY

SOURCES:

1. Ministry of Housing and Local Government. West Midlands Special Review Area. Report of objections.
2. Hackwood, F.W. Sedgley Researches.
3. Hackwood, F.W. Staffordshire Curiosities and Antiquities.
4. Underhill, E.A. (this book is available for consultation in the library only) The Story of the Ancient Manor of Sedgley.
5. Underhill, E.A. Patchwork.
6. Roper, J.S., M.A. Sedgley Probate Inventories, 1614-1787.
7. Sedgley Urban District Council Official Guide.
8. Thomas, H.R. (ed.) Sedgley Parish Register, 1&58-1684.
9. West Midland Group on Post-War Reconstruction and Planning. Conurbation.