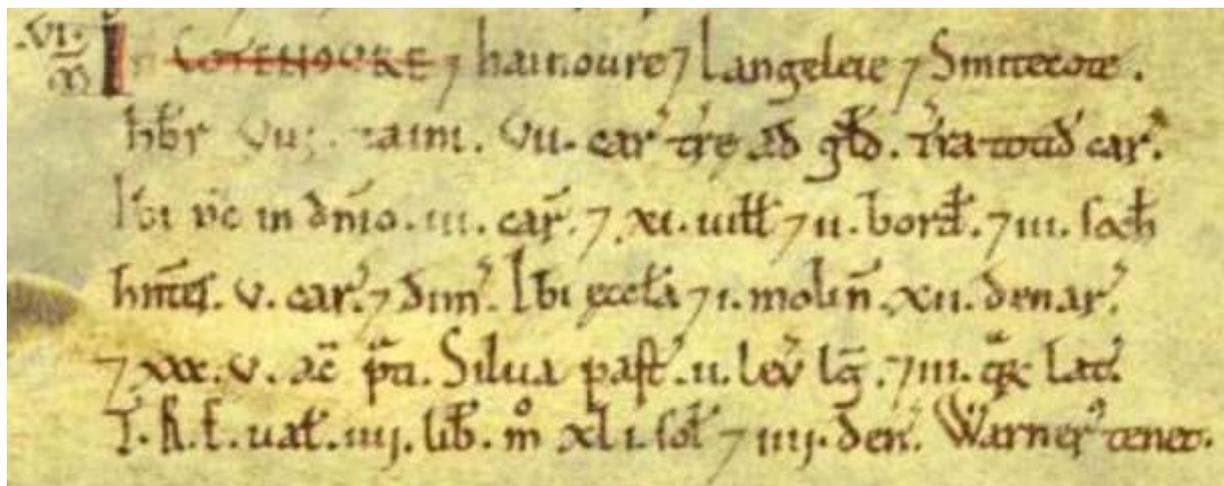


A Local History of Ironville & Codnor Park

1 In the Beginning

Before Ironville or Codnor Park there was a place called Smithycote. Smithycote was a settlement in the Codnor Park area, mentioned in the Domesday Book. The names of the Anglo Saxon residents and other information is also detailed. Now "long lost" probably "disappearing" when Codnor Castle was constructed and the surrounding parkland developed. Codnor Park including what is now known as The Forge was set up by the de Grey family who were granted the area by William the Conqueror. For their part in the Norman Conquest of England



Close to the village is one of only two medieval castles retaining its original medieval architecture in the whole of the county of Derbyshire, (the only other being Peveril Castle in the Peak District). Codnor Castle has a very rich history and the castle site dates back to the 12th century. The castle was the home and power base for one of medieval England's most powerful families for 300 years - the De Grey family, also known as the Baron's Grey of Codnor. This medieval fortress was once grand enough to play host to royal visits including that of King Edward II in 1342. The Castle is open to the Public every second Sunday of the month throughout the year.

The de Greys were loyal to the King whoever he was (they fought for Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth and ingratiated themselves to the victor Henry VII, and so their castle survived when others such as Duffield Castle were destroyed in 1267 after the 2nd Barons War. The de-Ferrer's who were granted Duffield Frith and much of southern Derbyshire backed the rebellion against the King because they wanted to limit the power of the King and re-instate Magna Carta into English Law. As a result, there lands were forfeit to Henry III's brother Edmund Crouchback and Duffield Castle whose wall rivalled those of the Tower of London were pulled down and remain a pile of rubble to this day.

When Channel 4's Time Team visited the Codnor Castle they quite literally struck gold. Excavations at Codnor Castle unearthed a gold coin which presenter Tony Robinson said was one of the most valuable single items ever found on Time Team. Their discoveries revealed far more than anyone ever expected. In the bottom of Codnor Castle's moat they found a Gold Noble coin which dates back to the time of Henry V and the Battle of Agincourt. Their excavations also uncovered the remains of a massive round tower and one of the first drawbridges ever discovered in the programme's 15 year history.

Long before the Codnor Park Iron Works had been constructed, coal and iron stone had been mined in the area for hundreds of years. Records go back to the De Grey family having coal mines in the area in the fifteenth century. In 1599 Thomas Shorter married Elizabeth Bradway, in Heanor Parish Church. Thomas's address was given as living "at Codnor Park by the Furnace." Before Ironville Parish Church was constructed Codnor Park was an 'extra parochial liberty' referring to the fact that the area did not at that time come under any parish. Couples in those days had to travel as far as Heanor, Eastwood or Alfreton to get married

2 The village in the 19th Century

Ironville is possibly one of Derbyshire's best examples of a mid-nineteenth century model village. The village itself was mainly created between 1834 and 1860 by the Butterley Company to house its iron workers. The model village won much national acclaim, with its large gardens, a rural setting well away from the ironworks and the overall spacious layout compared with other industrial villages. The physical and spiritual welfare of the employees of the Company was reflected not only in the provision of a church and a school by the Company, but also with the provision of a complete range of public services for the village. These included its own gas and water works, a Mechanics' Institute containing an artisans' library and swimming bath. At the historically renowned Codnor Park Iron Works (demolished in the 1970's and now landscaped and planted with native trees), cannonballs were made for Waterloo, armour plate was made for the very first iron-hulled warships such as The Black Prince (circa 1861). They also supplied special 'Butterley Bulb' iron deck beams for several iron-hulled warships such as HMS Warrior (1860) on display at Portsmouth Historic Dockyard. Ironwork was also supplied for Isambard Kingdom Brunel's 'SS Great Britain' now on display in Bristol Docks. During World War II the works also produced sterns for 57 "Loch" class frigates, and 51 large bridges, each with a 150-foot span, which were used for crossing the Rhine and Italian rivers. In addition, the company manufactured tracks for Churchill and Cromwell tanks as well as many other important products for the war effort.

The first houses in Codnor Park actually built by the Butterley Company in 1802 were for workers at the newly built Lime Works. The row of houses was originally called Measham Row (later Lime Kiln Row) and probably reflects where these workers came from. They would all have walked there or hitched a ride on barges passing along the canal system. This would also apply to all the workers who came to live there in the period 1834 to 1860. Many walked from Wales just to be employed there, not being able to afford train fares etc. Just imagine - a house and a job! They must have thought they were dreaming or heading for the land of plenty!

Just imagine what it was like to live in Ironville 100 years ago. A flourishing community:



The ironworks at Codnor Park formed part of the famous Butterley Company. During the 19th century the Company became a thriving success. In 1862 there were seven furnaces at Butterley and Codnor Park which produced one-fifth of the total output of iron in Derbyshire. Later in the 19th century the production of ironstone declined locally, but the Company still remained a major force in the iron industry. It was heavily involved in the expansion of the railways, by the manufacture of track and wagons at its foundry and engineering works, and the Butterley Company was famously used for the huge arched roof of St Pancras Station in London, one of the wonders of Victorian engineering. Throughout its history the Company was heavily involved with the production of bridges, heavy structural steelwork, mining equipment and machinery, presses, castings and overhead cranes.

The development of Codnor Park and Ironville is due to the formation of the Butterley Company and the opening of the Cromford Canal. The advantages of the Codnor Park site for both smelting and refining of iron are obvious with iron ore and coal virtually on the site of the ironworks, lime from Crich via the canal and of course, cheap bulk transport to the South and North West via the canal system.

The village in the nineteenth century boasted its very own brewery, a pottery and a brick works. In the twentieth century there was for a time, an oil well producing 400 gallons of oil per day, (1921).

Near to the castle are two well-known local landmarks - the Jessop Memorial & Hall. The monument was built in 1854 by public subscription by Butterley workers as a monument to William Jessop II, son of the founder, who developed the company after the death of his father in 1814. The monument and grounds once upon a time proved to be a popular attraction for Galas, Sunday school outings and picnics. Whit Monday Band of Hope Fetes were also held there, with local Bands marching through the villages before finally ending up at the monument. The Monument Hall in later years was used as a Rola-Rena.

The parishioners of Codnor Park and Ironville can claim to possess one of the most substantial and beautiful monuments to World War I in the county. The unveiling and dedication ceremony was held on 16th November 1923. The War memorial was restored in 2016 and in 2018 the memorial has been added to the List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest. The memorial is now listed at Grade II.

The village is set within excellent countryside surroundings with many wonderful signposted walks and benefits from being only ten minutes from the local town centres of Alfreton and Ripley.

Codnor Park Reservoir, built originally to top up the canal is a popular spot for walking and fishing, with good access for disabled anglers, also a haven for a variety of birdlife.

Less than two miles to the west of the reservoir is Swanwick Junction, part of the Midland Railway Trust which commemorates one of the major railway companies of its time. It has a superb collection of steam and diesel locomotives which may be seen powering trains on the line or on display in the museum. The Golden Valley Light Railway (GVL) and Butterley Park Miniature Railway are based there too.

3 The Butterley Company – very early history

The Butterley Company was an English manufacturing firm founded as Benjamin Outram and Company in 1790.



In 1793, William Jessop, with the assistance of Benjamin Outram, constructed the Cromford Canal to connect Pinxton and Cromford with the Erewash Canal. In digging Butterley Tunnel for the Cromford Canal, coal and iron were discovered. Fortuitously, Butterley Hall fell vacant and in 1790 Benjamin Outram, with the financial assistance of Francis Beresford, bought it and its estate.

The following year they were joined by William Jessop and John Wright, the grandson of Ichabod Wright, a wealthy Nottingham banker who was betrothed to Beresford's daughter and who owned the Butterley Park estate.



Butterley Blast Furnace C. 1844.

In 1793 the French Revolutionary Wars broke out and by 1796 the blast furnace was producing nearly a thousand tons of pig iron a year. By the second decade of the next century the company had expanded with another works at Codnor Park, both works then having two blast furnaces, and output had risen to around 4,500 tons per year.

Benjamin Outram died in 1805 and the name changed to the Butterley Company, with one of Jessop's sons, also William, taking over.

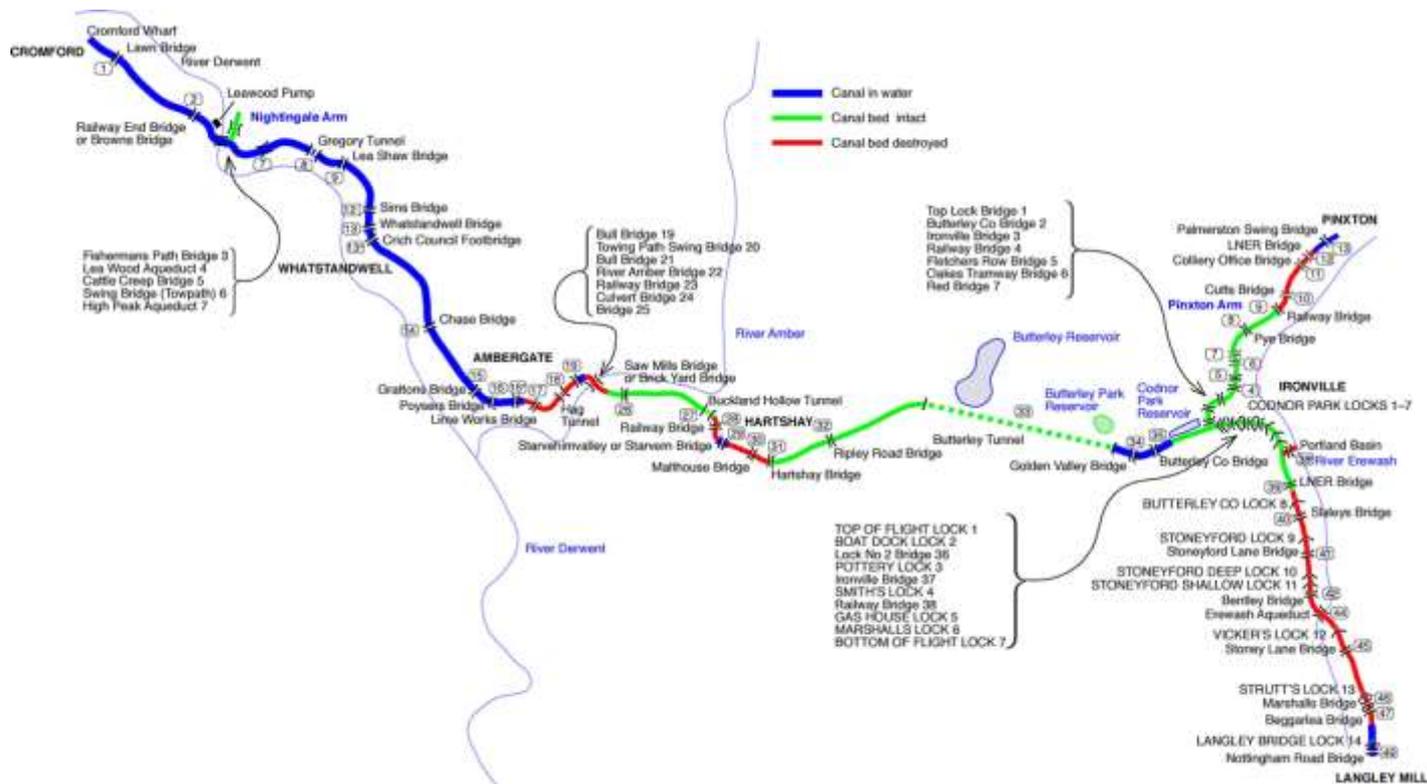
4 Cromford Canal

The Cromford Canal ran 14.5 miles from Cromford to the Erewash Canal with a branch to Pinxton. The Canal was of course originally built by William Jessop with the assistance of Benjamin Outram. When William Jessop originally surveyed the route of the Cromford Canal he acknowledged that " . . . there are few instances that have come within my knowledge, which comprehend such a variety of important advantages." He was referring to the abundance of minerals – particularly in the area around Codnor Park.

From Cromford it ran south following the east side of the valley of the Derwent to Ambergate, where it turns eastwards along the Amber valley. It turns sharply to cross the valley, crossing the river and the Ambergate to Nottingham road, by means of an aqueduct at Bullbridge, before turning towards Ripley. From there the Butterley Tunnel took it through to the Erewash Valley.

From the tunnel it continued to Ironville, the junction for the branch to Pinxton, and then descended through fourteen locks to meet the Erewash Canal at Langley Mill. The Pinxton Branch became important as a route for Nottinghamshire coal, via the Erewash, to the River Trent and Leicester and was a terminus of the Mansfield and Pinxton Railway

In addition to purely canal traffic, there was a lively freight interchange with the Cromford and High Peak Railway, which traversed the plateau of the Peak District from Whaley Bridge in the North West, and which descended to the canal at High Peak Junction by means of an inclined plane.



5 The coming of the railway

Originally the canal was served by horse drawn railways or tramways as they were also known that bought minerals from the mines to the canal wharfs. The relationship between these railways and the canals was very much a symbiotic one, being allowed as part and parcel of the original Act of Parliament for the Construction of the Canal itself.

The arrival of steam locomotive railways changed everything for the land owners, colliery owners; iron works owners and canal users alike. This is described by rail and canal historians today as the 'period of transition', from the early horse drawn railways and their symbiotic relationship with canals, to steam railways and (in many instances) the direct competition to canals.

The Erewash Valley Railway was opened to the Codnor Park works, on 6th September 1847. Later this line was extended to the north about 1879 – the Erewash Line from Colwick to Pinxton was being made in 1872, and was opened in 1874. In 1900, the Midland Line Codnor Park to Manchester was made available for G.N. Traffic, and in the same year American built engines were first used on the Erewash Valley Line.

6 A Film was made to show Puddling at Codnor Park Circa 1965

(shortly before the Forge was closed down)

The film demonstrates the 'puddling' method of making wrought iron from pig iron by the Butterley Company Ltd at their Codnor Park works.

Below are some clips taken from the film to show the process:



7 The Forge at its height circa 1937

The Forge and Rolling Mills at Codnor Park Works produced the famous Butterley iron - noted for its toughness and resistance to shock and to corrosion



8 Recent History

In 1965, the forge stopped production, and all was made redundant. It was the end of an era - but wrought iron was no longer needed in the quantity it was before. The great metallurgists had improved on steel and of course, it was cheaper and easier to make. There was only the wagon works still producing, but their orders were getting slimmer and slimmer. The welding section did improve however, by getting their tender approved for making motorway signs, and most of the signs on the start of the M5 were Butterley made, so at least they were in business a little while longer.

Following its closure, the old forge became a wilderness, an "old and reliable works and workforce gone forever". It wasn't long before the wagon works folded, in 1975. Some workers were transferred to Butterley and others were made redundant. It wasn't long before the Clugston Company moved in, demolishing the mills and the buildings. Following on from demolition the site was extensively open cast mined for the coal lying just below the surface.

Not only have all the industrial buildings been demolished and railway lines removed with the mainline being reduced from four roads to three, but Ironville railway station has also been demolished.

The surface coal has been removed from the site and mineshafts all filled in.

At the bottom of the photograph to the left of the railway is the village sewage farm, which has also been demolished.

However, the sewerage farm is now fields used for grazing horses, and The Forge is now a nature reserve.

Slowly the area is returning to something like it was 200 years ago before the advent of the industrial revolution.

Once the opencast was completed, the site was extensively landscaped and put up for sale by the Harworth Insurance Co. Ltd. The land was subsequently purchased by The Forest Project TFP Ltd on 28th March 2014. The initial stated aim of The Forest Project TPL Ltd. was “ . . . to restore our native landscape, returning natural value to an increased urbanised and developed countryside.” They commenced tree planting operations via a commercial company Chris Wait & Associates, shortly after purchase. However, Chris Wait & Associates were “laid off” not long after they had started. The site was subsequently very much abandoned by The Forest Project TPL Ltd. until it was once again put up for sale by auction on December 13th 2017. This resulted in the purchase of the site by FoBP Ltd. A small nature conservation charity. Their vision for The Forge is “that it is to be a place where its native flora and fauna will flourish, growing both in number and diversity, and provide a breathing place in the middle of our increasingly urbanised country and most importantly to remain a nature reserve in perpetuity.”

The new owners held a start-up meeting in January 2018 which surpassed all expectations when 120 people came to the meeting to see who the new owners were and what they hope to do with The Forge. The meeting supplied a huge volume of valuable feedback and resulted in the forming of a community group call Friends of The Forge (Codnor Park). To help in the management and maintenance of the site. The group has a website www.theforgecodnorpark.info