

History of Hagley

It is a common assumption amongst those who know Hagley only in its commuter-dormitory guise that it has no history; yet at Wychbury, within the parish boundary, are the massive earth works of an Iron Age Hill Fort, one of the foremost ancient field monuments in Worcestershire. Upon such eminences, with their commanding views of the surrounding countryside, defensive settlements first began. From the summit of Wychbury the strongholds of Malvern, Woodbury and Dudley are clearly visible.

In Domesday Book, Hagley (Hageleia) is listed under the lands of William Fitz Ansculf, Lord of Dudley Castle. Members of the Paganel family, also Lords of Dudley Castle, succeeded him and they were followed by the Someries. The tenants at Hagley became known as de Hageleia, later de Haggelege or de Haggelye. The name Hagley would seem to mean (according to Eilert Ekwall) a wood where haws are found; or perhaps, taking account of the second syllable, an open space or glade in such a wood.

The Lyttelton family came to Hagley in 1562. They also owned the manor of Frankley, but after the destruction of their manor house by Prince Rupert in 1645, Hagley became their principal seat. Their name derived from the parish of Littleton near Evesham and their records go back to the reign of Henry III. To George, the first Baron Lyttelton, we owe the landscaping of the Park in the eighteenth century style, with its classical buildings and mock "ruined" medieval castle and the building of Hagley Hall (1754-60). Hagley became famous and was much visited by the most distinguished men and women of the age. A description of the Park as it was earlier in the 18th Century can be read in Thomson's *Seasons*. Its transformation won the enthusiastic approval of the fastidious Horace Walpole.

To the Victorian Lytteltons, the great W. E. Gladstone, the Liberal Prime Minister, was Uncle William; he was a frequent visitor to the Hall, for the fourth Lord Lyttelton was his brother-in-law.

The old village of Hagley, as shown on the Tithe Map of 1838, lay within an area roughly square, bounded by the Bromsgrove and Stourbridge roads, Hall Lane and the lower part of Hagley Hill. The Hall stabling, the farm buildings and the walled gardens adjacent formed the fourth side.

In 1821 the population of the whole parish of Hagley, which included Blakedown, was 595.

The church stood a little apart from the village, near the Hall. It was an ancient responsibility of the squire to provide a place of Worship and, not surprisingly, it was usually built near his house. The "Old Rectory" was established at the top of Hagley Hill because of the Rector's additional responsibility for services at St Kenelm's and Frankley.

There was no Post Office. Letters were brought by a postwoman who walked from Stourbridge and twice a week a carrier took parcels and passengers to Birmingham.

News of the outside world came into the village on Mondays through *Aris' Birmingham Gazette*. Opposite the Lyttelton Arms (known familiarly as "the Tap House") Miss Violetta Whittaker kept a shop, dignified by the name of "Whittaker's London Tea and Grocery Warehouse". Tea was a fashionable and expensive luxury in the early nineteenth century.

The prospect of easier and more speedy contact with the outside world came with the opening of the Oxford, Worcester and Wolverhampton Railway in 1852, but the line lay a mile to the west of the village and at first there was no station or goods yard. The OW & W had its teething troubles and its initials came to mean the "old worse and worse", but things eventually improved. In 1860 amalgamations resulted in the formation of the West Midland Railway and three years later the WMR became part of the Great Western. Soon there was a simple station with platforms built of old sleepers. By the 1870s the village of Lower Hagley was taking shape and the age of the commuting businessman was at hand. The railway became more important to them and Hagley residents began to demand a worthier station. By 1883 the railway company had promised to do something about it, but proposed building the offices above the line at road level beside the road bridge. Hagley residents however insisted upon an approach road and there was a fight between Hagley and Paddington. By the following year (as recorded on the ironwork of the footbridge) Hagley had won its new station, complete with drive, but they had had to buy the land: 570 square yards at 1/6d. per square yard, the purchase price being raised by subscription. An extra 29 perches found to be necessary was generously paid for by the GWR. With legal fees the cost of Station Drive was £45 15s 0d (£45.75).

Development during the first twenty years of the railway's existence was not rapid but during the 1870s and 1880s the new settlement of Lower Hagley was growing steadily. Landowners were beginning to realise that their land was no longer to be valued merely at agricultural rates. By the end of the nineteenth century Lower Hagley was becoming as important as the old village of (upper) Hagley and in 1911 its name was officially changed to West Hagley, lest there should linger any suggestion of *lower* status.

Of the many houses lost through development, the history of the Court, which stood opposite the old Cattle Market (now Market Way) underlines the contrast between past and present. It was for many years the home of the Grazebrook family. In 1849 when John Phillips Grazebrook came to Hagley it was still the "little old cottage by the roadside" mentioned in the Grazebrook memoirs. After his marriage to Harriet Francis in May 1855 it became too small for their steadily growing family and had to be enlarged. In 1863 the family moved temporarily to another house whilst further work was undertaken. J. P. Grazebrook was his own architect and he was also an amateur carver of wood and ivory. The massive altar of the Parish Church is one of his products and he was no doubt responsible also for much of the

interior furnishing of the Court. Wood carving was a popular Victorian hobby, even amongst the ladies.

The house stood "by the roadside", but it must be remembered that in Victorian times roads were quiet: passing traffic was an occasional diversion, rather than the incessant distraction of today. At the road junction there was a triangle of grass on which, in 1915, to commemorate the Grazebrook Diamond Wedding, a drinking fountain was erected by friends and neighbours (as the plaque records) and was almost certainly designed by their architect son, Tom Grazebrook. Alas, it was soon to become a redundant feature of the Hagley scene. When the Court was demolished in 1964 the fountain survived but in mutilated form. It now stands near the traffic roundabout, meaningless and forlorn, deprived of the stone sentinel piers and iron railings that gave it dignity and the lantern that was once its crowning feature.

Apart from the Lytteltons, there were at least three other families who were considerable landowners in Hagley. The Bates of the Birches had become increasingly important by the turn of the century, their land being mainly between the Birches and the Worcester Road. On land belonging to them, both the Mission Church - later the Parish Hall - and St. Saviour's Church were built. The Amphletts of Clent owned much of Lower Clent and the south-eastern end of Hagley and were responsible for the development of Western Road where the first house to be built was Thicknall Rise, designed by Tom Grazebrook for F. Percy Evers (1899). As early as 1871 they had tried unsuccessfully to encourage development in the area now known as Pinewoods. There was also between Hagley and West Hagley the Lea estate. The hub of this was Park Farm in Park Road which, shortly after the death of Mrs. Elizabeth Frances Green, was overwhelmed by the Lodge Crescent development in 1959.

Changes came rapidly during the 1960s with new roads, road widenings, new housing estates and the rebuilding and enlargement of old shops. They brought a general transformation to the centre of West Hagley village and old buildings were given brutal face lifts to accommodate banks and offices. The construction of the feeder road to the M5 motorway made the Hagley area more readily accessible for both residential and business purposes. As the new phases of development became evident, pleasant houses of modest proportions began to disappear, just as the large old houses had done in earlier days, making way for new roads and opening up developments such as Rooks Meadow, or simply to be replaced by something in the new "executive" style.

GEOFFREY PARKES

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