

SEDGLEY JOURNAL

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FLAGGING UP THE BLACK COUNTRY

Sedgley was the first Black Country village to fly a flag. This was based on Sedgley Urban District Council's civic badge incorporating the Beacon Tower, Stafford Knot and two steel pen nibs. The flag was raised on December 10th 2005 by 1st Sedgley Scouts.

The Gornals were not to be outdone. June 2011 saw Jack Rogers from Roberts Primary School win a competition to create a flag – a black cross quartered the green background. This he raised on December 1st 2012 on a new pole outside Lower Gornal library.

A second Gornal flag appeared in December 7th 2013 the work of Hannah Baker from Straits Primary School. Her art work included Ruiton windmill and the famous 'pig-on-the-wall'.

The need to design a Black Country flag led to a more widely based competition organised by the Black Country Living Museum. The winner was Gracie Sheppard from Redhill School, Stourbridge. Featuring three links of a chain and white glass cone on a fiery red and sooty black background the design was officially recognised in July 2012. The flag fluttered from London's Department for Communities & Local Government building on July 14th 2013 to coincide with Black Country Day.

BORN IN THE MANOR

It was born in Sedgley in April 1990. It? Well yes. Not a person, a business.

Poundland opened offices in Dudley Street above Concord Market. The idea of shops selling each and every item for £1 was the brainchild of Keith Smith. A casual remark to Steve, his son, was the trigger for Steve to open a store in Burton on Trent in December 1990. The public flocked through the doors to kick-start a new retail juggernaut.

The 100th store opened in Shirley in 2003 and the 450th in the UK in 2013.

The Black Country continues to play an important role with headquarters in Willenhall and a major distribution centre opened in 2005 on part of the site of the old Bilston steelworks, Ettingshall.

Steve Smith is no longer associated with Poundland, but will return to the retail business setting up Poundstore an online enterprise in early 2014.

SEDGLEY MANOR TRIVIA

Bradshaw's *Canals and Navigable Rivers of England & Wales* [1904] was the first guide to cover the network. Over eleven years Henry Rodolph de Salis, a director of Fellows, Morton & Clayton, collected every imaginable detail of the waterways.

The Coseley canal tunnel was measured as the 32nd longest at 360 yards. There were towing paths on both sides and a minimum width, including paths, of 24 feet 9 inches. Narrow boats were able to enter from both ends at the same time.

[James Fellows founded the canal carriers mentioned above in 1837. He was born in Sedgley, possibly Upper Gornal, in 1805.]

BLACK COUNTRY DAY

Dudley are promoting July 14th as Black Country Day. Also chosen as the annual anniversary of the world's first working steam engine built by Thomas Newcomen near Dudley castle in 1712.

THE WORKHOUSE – A POOR SOLUTION

Before the 1948 National Assistance Act formally abolished the Poor Law system two milestones in coping with the poor were the C17th Old Poor Law and the C19th New Poor Law.

The 1601 Poor Relief Act was the first serious attempt to organise the provision through parish based responsibilities. Success was uneven, loosely implemented and seen as voluntary. Friction between parishes left many needy in want. Some workhouses were introduced, but social changes, mobility and a rapid population increase overwhelmed the provision.

Locally workhouses were opened in Wolverhampton (1700), Bilston (c.1770), Wednesbury (1766), Rowley Regis, Dudley, Tipton (c.1755) and Sedgley (1734), together with Stourbridge, Halesowen, Old Swinford and Kingswinford. The C18th Dudley house, in Tower Street, could take one hundred inmates.

In Sedgley Manor a workhouse was built next to the parish church of All Saints as early as 1734 eventually to house sixty. Closure in 1858 was followed a contents sale in August 1859 where over 70 iron bedsteads were auctioned. The old house was replaced in the early 1860s by a police station that almost certainly contained remnants of the past. Once a fully functioning station with a court room and cells, today it is Dudley's CCTV hub.

The 1834 Poor Relief Amendment Act was a much more rigorous intervention, strengthening the previous legislation to ensure parishes joined together in Unions, built workhouses and relentlessly dealt with the poor.

The Dudley Poor Law Union was set up in 1836 and the Dudley Union Workhouse was built during 1855/56 in Upper Gornal, on the west side of Burton Road, to replace the old houses in Tipton, Rowley Regis, Sedgley and Dudley. Soon it held over 800 men, women and children. The layout was the well-established cruciform. Separate additional blocks housed the infirmary and children.

The 1881 Census returned some 20 staff. The Master was a forty seven year old widower, Joseph Rodgers who was born the same year the New Poor Law was passed. His Matron, Frances Mary Cole, was twenty seven from Worle in Somerset

The same Census recorded inmates from domestic service and industry and even a book binder, carpet weaver, engine driver, butcher and glove maker. Many came from an important local trade, nail making.

By 1900 the workhouse had an important role as a hospital and in 1926 the Rosemary Ednam Maternity Home and a Nurses Home were built. Maternity services closed in May 1988 and the hospital in December in 1993. Following demolition, private housing now dominates the site.

[Dudley's Archives Centre holds some poor law records and Dudley Union Workhouse records.]

DID YOU KNOW?

Wallpaper was taxed from 1712 to 1836. Initially charged at 1d per square yard and increased to one shilling by 1809. Tax was avoided by hand stencilling on plain paper.

A candle tax was collected from 1709 to 1831. Candles could only be made under licence and taxes paid. Many people reverted to rush lighting by dipping the plant in fat or grease. Oliver Cromwell is alleged to have scolded his wife for sewing under two lit candles. He blew one out!