



A History of Cheddleton Parish

Cheddleton village is situated on the A520 and is about three miles from Leek to the north and twenty one from Stafford to the south. By the A522, it is about seven miles from Cheadle to the south east and by the A52 it is about eight miles from Hanley, the main shopping centre of Stoke-on-Trent. Small country lanes link it to nearby villages such as Ipstones, Kingsley, Endon, Stanley and Bagnall. The Caldon Canal which was restored and reopened in 1974 after being disused for about twenty years goes through the village and is now used extensively by private narrow boats as it passes through the beautiful Churnet Valley.

Cheddleton is a large and rather irregularly shaped village, beside the canal and the River Churnet. Anciently, it was a collection of four small villages which were Cheddleton proper, Basford, which was the part of the parish north of the River Churnet, Rownall, which was to the west of the Westwood Brook and also included much of what is now called Cellarhead, and Consall which was a self-contained village situated further downstream on the River Churnet.

Cheddleton and Basford have virtually merged over the last hundred years or so and the name Basford is now usually only applied to a small outlying community which used to be known as Basford Green. Rownall is a name usually applied now to a vague area to the west and marked chiefly by the names of a few farms.

The other major centre of population associated with Cheddleton is a comparative newcomer in the village of Wetley Rocks. Wetley Rocks grew up straddling the boundaries of Cheddleton, Rownall and Consall and consisted of a public house and a farm together with a few outlying cottages and farms in the 1780s. It is about two miles to the south of Cheddleton. The quarries were reopened in the late eighteenth century to provide stone for the booming pottery towns and a village grew up in the wake of this, containing seven public houses in the 1840s. A Gothic-style mansion called Wetley Abbey was built for the potter George Miles Mason in 1824 and his son, the famous artist, George Heming Mason, was brought up there. A parish church dedicated to St. John the Baptist was built in 1834 and the village also has a Methodist Chapel built in 1927. It has a new primary school opened in the later years of the twentieth century. There is also a post office and a petrol station, which has a small supermarket attached. The Powys Arms, which was built in the late eighteenth century, is the one remaining public house in the village. The impressive ridge of rocks, which give the village its name runs alongside the main A520 on the east side. At Cellarhead, on the southern edge of the parish is the Moorside High School which was opened in 1937.

Farming dominated the local area's economy through most of its history and, although there has been a considerable drop in the number of working farms in recent decades, there are still a large number of successful farms in the area.

Between Wetley Rocks and Cheddleton are three old mansions, Westwood Manor which was built in 1878 to replace an earlier Hall built in 1796 called Westwood House has, for many years, been the Cicely Houghton School. Heath House, which was built in the 1770s, is a private residence, as is Ashcombe Hall, which is situated in extensive

parkland, which was formerly a deer park. Ashcombe Hall was completed in 1808 to replace an Elizabethan predecessor. Basford Hall, which was rebuilt in the 1820s, was completed in 1830 and is also a private residence close to Basford Green and overlooking the Coombs Brook.

The population of Cheddleton is difficult to assess. The official figures for the 2001 Census do not follow the boundaries of the various constituent villages and considerable numbers of houses have been built since the Census was taken. It is impossible to give more than approximate figures of 4,500 for Cheddleton and 1,500 for Wetley Rocks and the Southlow area covering much of Cellerhead.

For many years Cheddleton was dominated by the St. Edward's psychiatric hospital, which was opened in 1899 and finally closed in 2001. Much of the building has been retained and a large housing estate built in the grounds. The old hospital water tower, which is the highest building in the area, now serves as an impressive private dwelling.

From 1838 to 1979, the paper mills, known since the early 1890s as "Brittains" was a dominant feature in the lives of Cheddleton people. Much of the land on which this large establishment stood is now an Industrial estate, close to the River Churnet and is known as the Churnetside Business Park.

Over the centuries, many attempts were made to exploit the small Shaffalong Coalfield within the parish, but none seem to have been successful. There are references to "old shafts" in the sixteenth century and to coal mining in the eighteenth century. Around 1810 people were again mining in the Shaffalong area but the mines closed in 1849. Between 1904 and 1908, the final attempt was made to establish a mine but constant flooding caused the final abandonment of the project.

The church at Cheddleton is dedicated to St. Edward the Confessor. The earliest church here was built in the last decade of the twelfth century. Much of the existing building dates from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with the tower and porch being completed in the late sixteenth century. Major restorations were undertaken in the 1770s and particularly in the 1860s. The church is noteworthy for the nine stained-glass windows by Morris and Co.

A Methodist Chapel was opened in 1967 and dedicated to St. Andrew. This replaced earlier chapels which represented a long Methodist presence in the village.

There has been a school in the village since 1722; the latest one having been built in 1968, and is a first school with the older children going to school in Leek. The 1905 Infants' school is now used as a Community Centre and the 1855 National School is now the Craft Centre, which houses Tea Rooms, Craft Workshops, Craft Shop, and the Parish Council Chamber.

Three public houses remain in the village, the Black Lion in the old village centre, opposite the church, the Red Lion on the A520 and the Boat Inn beside the Caldron Canal, close to the Railway Station at Basford Bridge. There is also a post office near the Red Lion, a chemist's shop, a dental surgery and a veterinary surgery, several shops including a small supermarket and newsagent, a hairdresser's and a takeaway food shop. There are four play areas in Cheddleton Parish, Bridge Eye and the Cheddleton Playing Field in

Cheddleton village, the Wetley Rocks Playing Field in the village of Wetley Rocks and the Toll Bar Playing Field at Southlowe.

There are numerous groups meeting regularly, some in Cheddleton, some in Wetley Rocks and some in both. There is a local Historical Society, Women's Institute, Senior Citizens, Twinning Association, mother and baby groups, a Play Group, after school group at the school, Mothers' Union, Scouts, Guides, Cubs, Beavers, Brownies, Rainbows, Friendship Group, Crusaders and Venture Scouts now called Explorers who meet at Consall Scout Camp. There is also a large Day Nursery on the old Hospital site. There are two Cricket Clubs – one in Ashcombe Park and one, called Staffordshire Moorlands which plays on the old Hospital Ground, sharing this with Leek Rugby Club. There are also a number of Football Clubs and a Cheddleton and Leek Chess Club.

Castro's Restaurant, which is situated on the A520 by the side of the Caldon Canal, specialises in Mexican Cuisine and the public houses also provide excellent food.

There are several superb Bed and Breakfast establishments in and around Cheddleton to cater for visitors to the area as well as the Glencote Caravan site in Station Road.

The highest point in Cheddleton is near Ferny Hill where a height of 284 metres above sea level is reached. In Wetley Rocks, a point on Southlow is 257 metres above sea level.

Near Ferny Hill to the east of the village is Rod Wood reserve, consisting of flower meadows with magnificent views over Leek, North Staffordshire and the Peak District. Nearby is the Coombes Valley Nature Reserve, which consists of 260 acres of ancient woodland partly owned by the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust and partly by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

On the other side of the village at Denford is Deep Hayes Country Park, which covers 143 acres and has a visitor centre and toilets and is a mixture of woods, meadows and pools. The site was originally a compensation reservoir, built in 1848 by the Potteries Waterworks Company to supply water to the pottery towns. Nearby was once a hive of industry, with the large Wall Grange brick works and other smaller industrial sites. The reservoir was abandoned in 1979 and soon afterwards the Country Park was established.

The Churnet Valley Railway operates steam engines through Cheddleton from Leekbrook to Froghall, along the deep and picturesque valley of the River Churnet. The railway was once part of the North Staffordshire Railway, which was opened in 1849 and originally ran from North Rode to Uttoxeter through Leek. The line closed completely in 1965, but after many years of hard work, opened again for passengers in 1996. The Railway regularly holds fun day events both in the day and at night along the refurbished line. The line is open on Saturdays and Sundays from March to October. The station is open most days from 10:30am to 6:00pm. For special events, prior booking is essential.

The Caldon Canal passes through Cheddleton on its way from its junction with the Trent & Mersey Canal at Etruria, to its current terminus at Froghall. Built by the Trent & Mersey Canal Company between 1776 and 1778, the main cargo carried on the canal was limestone from the quarries at Cauldon Low. In 1847 the canal was taken over by the North Staffordshire Railway Company, and the ownership subsequently transferred to the

London, Midland and Scottish Railway, and then eventually to the British Waterways Board following the nationalisation of the canal network in 1948.

By 1951 any traffic on the Caldon Canal had virtually ceased and by 1961 the canal was threatened with closure. Following campaigning by what became the Caldon Canal Society, and with support from Stafford County Council, Stoke-on-Trent City Council, and British Waterways Board, the canal was reopened in September 1974 in a ceremony which took place in Cheddleton. Since then it has become a firm favourite with many pleasure boaters who explore the Churnet Valley through Cheddleton and beyond.

The Caldon Canal Society, having changed its name to the Caldon & Uttoxeter Canals Trust, is today campaigning on issues affecting the canal in the parish of Cheddleton, as well as looking further afield at the future restoration of the Uttoxeter Canal and the extension of the canal into Leek.

The Cheddleton Flint Mill is, in reality, two mills on either side of the River Churnet. The southern mill was the ancient manorial corn mill and is first mentioned in the thirteenth century. The north mill was built as a flint mill after 1782. The south mill was also later converted to flint grinding around 1820. The flint was ground here and then transported to Stoke-on-Trent by the canal, where it was used in the pottery industry. The mills are run by a Trust and are open to the public. There is a small museum with cottage, kilns and a steam engine. It is open at weekends from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. plus some weekdays in the summer.

Every year, there is a large Carnival on the second Saturday in August, held on the Ashcombe Park Cricket Club car park. The first Carnival was in 1944 and there has been one every year since. The Committee also organises other events in the village throughout the rest of the year, notably a Bonfire Night fireworks display – held, again, in the car park, and the 'Duck Race,' held annually at The Boat Inn and raced along the canal. One of the other events arranged by the Committee is the Christmas Pudding Race which takes place every year on the final Saturday in November. It is a very popular event and attracts hundreds of visiting runners from surrounding running clubs, especially Staffordshire Moorlands Athletics Club runners. The proceeds which have amounted to many tens of thousands of pounds over the years go to Cancer Research UK.

Lee Pearson who was born and bred in the village is a paralympic horse riding champion, who has won nine paralympic gold medals, was awarded an O.B.E. and in 2009 was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) In 2004 he was voted the B.B.C's Midlands Sporting Personality of the Year. Lee was born with Arthrogryphosis, which left him severely disabled, but, with the help of over fifteen operations, he can now walk with the help of splints and crutches.

In 1989 Cheddleton Parish Council initiated a twinning arrangement between the villages of Cheddleton and Wetley Rocks and the Bavarian town of Mitterteich in the east of Germany. There is a very active twinning association, which has formed a close bond with the people of that town. In even years, the people of Mitterteich visit Cheddleton, usually in August, and Cheddleton sends a party to visit Mitterteich each odd year. Any resident of the Parish is welcome to join in the programme of ongoing social events and to both host visitors from Bavaria and to visit Mitterteich with their family.