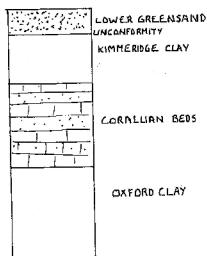


SEEND IRONSTONE

John Parkins

Seend is a hilltop village in Wiltshire, GR945611. The hill is a Lower Cretaceous outlier isolated from the main outcrop to the east by the valley of the Summerham Brook. The Victoria County History give the source of the name Seend as coming from the Old English 'Saend', meaning a sandy place, an appropriate etymology as the hill is capped by Lower Greensand.

The Lower Greensand represents the initial transgression of the Cretaceous Sea across the Wessex Basin on to uplifted and eroded Upper Jurassic beds, *see fig. 1*.



*Fig. 1:
Upper Jurassic/
Lower Cretaceous
sequence*

Deposition was in shallow water close to land. These beds were subsequently subjected to significant iron enrichment and were compressed and cemented to form an ironstone. Hard deposits formed along joints and bedding which, upon exposure, led to unequal weathering. This produced boxlike structures which gave rise to the name of 'Boxstone', *see fig. 2*. At Seend the ironstone is dark in colour in the range brown/orange/red.



Fig. 2: Seend Quarry showing boxstone

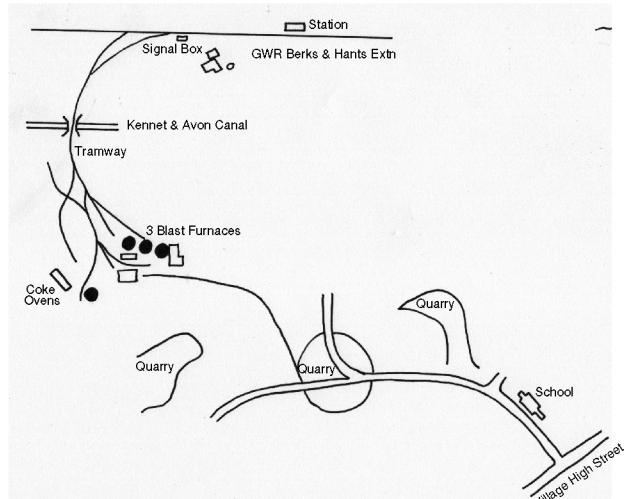
In 1968, a wider study of the village considered the economic exploitation of the ironstone. No evidence could be traced of early activity, which is interesting considering the early development of an iron industry in the Weald, founded on similar beds. Perhaps the evidence awaits recovery or unearthing from the records. The following comment from Aubrey in 1665 shows that the value of the ironstone was recognised and that some early activity is

likely. He says that the ironstone at Seend was -
"the richest ever seen. It lays in the Greensand and is paroxide of iron 50% pure."

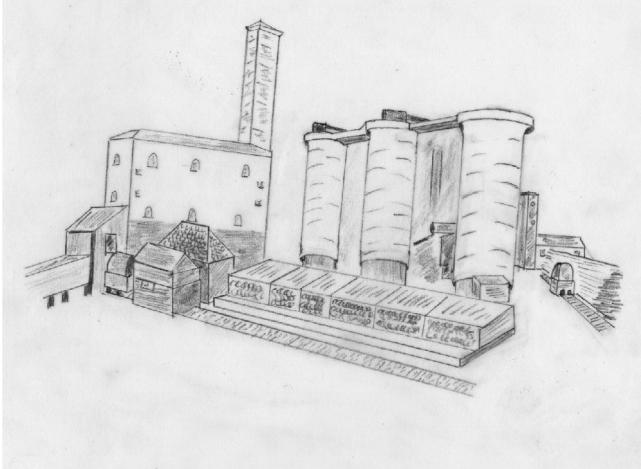
There was an indirect phase of exploitation. Rainwater percolating through the ironstone becomes iron-rich. At the junction with the Kimmeridge Clay, it creates a spring line. Aware of the goings-on some sixteen miles to the west at Bath, local residents identified a 'Chalybite Spring'. This formed the basis of a Spa and people came to take the waters. As early as 1684, Aubrey mentions Seend Spa as "Attracting much company." In 1968, Mr. Wiltshire of Egypt Farm could remember, as a boy, people coming to take the water "...for their eyes." Another senior resident, Mr. Roberts, said the springs contained particles in suspension. The springs lay "*across two or three fields*" to the east.

The short life of the formal spa was set during a period of steady decline in the local weaving industry due to mechanisation. This ushered in a long period of extreme poverty. The Eden report quotes Seend in 1729 as a typical impoverished parish of the time. Any high social life at the spa must have been very contained.

The first commercial phase, developed to exploit the ironstone began in 1855 and went in the grand Victorian tradition of the time. Three blast furnaces, coke ovens and extensive tramways were built, *see figs. 3 and 4*.



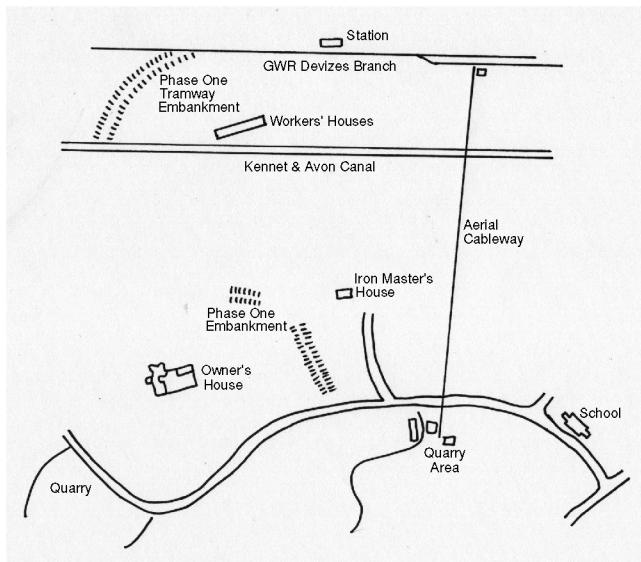
*Fig. 3: Seend Iron Works, phase one.
From the churchwardens and overseers map
of the parish 1888 surveyed 1885.*



*Fig. 4: Seend Iron Works, 1873, probably from the NE.
Coke ovens to the right of the blast furnaces.
Note wood for fuel. Blast furnaces blown up 1885.
Tramway dismantled 1909.
Impression made from a photo in Devizes Museum*

Between the years 1855 and 1861, 77000 tonnes of iron haematite were extracted and processed on site. Slag from the smelting could be found on the canal towpath. It is the story of a small company that lasted a few years and was then liquidated. By the time the 1885 Ordnance Survey was carried out, it was all over and the first phase was finished.

At the turn of the twentieth century a contemporary remembers ore being cleaned and transported to the railway by horse and cart. The second main phase began in 1921 with the construction of an overhead cable to carry the ore directly to a railway siding, see fig. 5.



*Fig. 5: Seend Iron Works, phase two.
From the Ordnance Survey 1924
Surveyed 1922*

Mr. Nash, who in 1968 was a senior resident, remembers the long iron-ore trains leaving Seend. In 1925, however, there is a newspaper report of a disastrous fire at the quarry which destroyed most of the buildings. This seems to have severely affected activities, if not ended them altogether. In 1968 it was still possible to see certain derelict mining equipment, the lower end of the phase-one tramway embankment, the site of the phase-two lower cable car station and the bed of the G.W.R. siding. Photos are available.

References

- Geddes I. *Hidden Depths* Ex Libris Press 2000
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ROCKWATCH WORDSEARCH

Wordsearch is from the Rockwatch website.

www.rockwatch.org.uk

O	S	J	H	I	N	O	A	D	S	P	F	R	X	I	A
I	T	Y	R	A	N	N	O	S	A	U	R	U	S	E	V
N	Y	O	X	S	V	B	A	L	Q	U	A	G	P	U	S
P	R	O	T	O	C	E	R	A	T	O	P	S	A	R	N
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Can you find the fossil types and dinosaur genera hidden in the wordsearch?

Tyrannosaurus
Apatosaurus
Diplodocus
Styracosaurus
Stegosaurus
Ankylosaurus
Protoceratops
Triceratops
Iguanodon
Eurypterid
Ammonoid
Trilobite