

# Herefordshire

## HENRY BROOKES, SHOEMAKER AND GEOLOGIST OF LEDBURY

### Introduction

Henry Brookes (sometimes spelt Brooks) was a well known local geologist, born at Eastnor and living in the Ledbury area 1816 – 1884. It was unusual at this time that a working man, a shoemaker, should have a keen interest in geology. The prosperity and invention of the Industrial Age threw up intelligent people with enquiring minds but also with the leisure time and the means to employ themselves in the exploration and research of the world around them. Clubs sprang up in the country at this time attracting those with an interest in geology, botany, entomology, zoology and general scientific discovery.

In the area around Ledbury three clubs were formed around the middle of the nineteenth century: the Worcester Naturalists' Club, the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club and the Malvern (Naturalists') Field Club. Darwin published his theories of evolution at this time which must have stimulated the interest in geology. Just a few years older than Henry Brookes, Darwin actually lived in Malvern for a while. The members of these clubs were largely clergymen, doctors and those of independent means. Henry Brookes was not of the social status required to become a member of such elite clubs, but he was recognized by them and was useful to them, even donating valuable fossils to the Malvern Club. Eventually by the 1880s Henry was actually listed as a Corresponding Member of the Malvern Field Club and even granted the title of "Mr", a courtesy denied him in earlier reports of the Clubs where he was referred to as Henry Brookes or even just Brookes.

### **Joint expedition and visit to Henry Brookes' home by the Malvern Field Club, the Worcester Naturalists' Club and the Woolhope Field Club, 1859**

Such clubs produced excellent records of their proceedings including expeditions, and the Worcester, Malvern and Woolhope Clubs all published their proceedings. The accounts of their expeditions bring to mind the exploits of Dickens' Pickwick Club. Before photography was readily available their words paint a most descriptive picture of events. They were also often humorous. Drawings and diagrams were sometimes included. The excursions were quite

elaborate affairs, starting with a hearty breakfast at a local coaching inn or great house and in one case even the local asylum! Around 3 o'clock they reconvened for dinner and discussion. The *Malvern Advertiser* of 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1859 gave the following account of a joint excursion to Ledbury by the Field Clubs, which included a visit to Henry Brookes' home to view his fossil finds on display:

On 29 June 1859 under a clear sky and the brightest auspices ... the members of the Malvern, Worcestershire, and Woolhope Clubs arrived at the Feathers, soon after 11 o'clock, in considerable numbers with many elegantly dressed ladies, who accompanied the Naturalists throughout the day's excursion ... at 12 o'clock the inhabitants of Ledbury were rather astonished at seeing at least 100 gentlemen and ladies, some bearing hammers and satchels and others carrying insect nets or botanical cases, pass through the Homend, en route for the Tunnel. [This was the newly dug railway tunnel at Ledbury under Dog Wood Hill] [On the way] many of the party took the opportunity of visiting the humble dwelling of Henry Brooks, the shoemaker geologist who discovered the rare fossil fish, the *Auchenaspis Salteri*, in the passage rocks of the tunnel. Brooks has adorned the walls of his cottage with many typical fossils suspended by a string also with books and maps presented to him by those who are pleased to encourage the cultivation of a taste for Natural History in working men, several of whom were present at this meeting. [A copy of the full report is on the website].

The Worcester Naturalists' Club also record the visit:

A visit was made to the humble dwelling of Henry Brooks, a working man of Ledbury, who, interlacing labour and geological acumen, has collected together a considerable number of local fossils, which, with characteristic ingenuity, he has hung all over the walls of his apartment, so that they can be seen at a glance with great facility. Brooks had recently presented some very valuable fossils to the Malvern Club, and on this occasion the President presented him with a contribution the club had made for him, as an encouragement to persevere in the useful course he had entered upon. [A copy of the full report is on the website].

## **Early Years of Henry Brookes**

Henry Brookes was baptised at Eastnor parish church on 29 December 1816. He was the son of Ann and John Brookes, a carpenter living at the Pound. It seems quite likely that as John Brookes was a carpenter he was working on the building of Eastnor Castle which was begun in March 1812 and completed in 1824. A note on the plans of the castle indicates 250 men

were employed on the site of the construction of the house day and night for the first six years and 600 tons of estate timber was used in the first 18 months of building. A 'Pound Plantation', is listed on the tithe map of 1840, identified as no. 111, a small strip North West and close to the construction site of the Castle. Could this have been an area for the temporary accommodation of the building workers? More than one baptismal record shows the address of Pound.

It is interesting to note that the children currently attending Eastnor School still find fossils in the parkland. Maybe this environment provided early inspiration for Henry Brookes. No evidence has been found of where he was educated or when he or his family moved to Ledbury. Eastnor School was built as soon as the Castle was finished. *Eastnor and Its Malvern Hills*, published in 1923, recounts how the school was presided over by a series of 'Dames' and that one such hung a large coloured picture in her classroom showing the varying sizes of creatures, from an insect to a huge whale.

## **Henry Brookes and his Family**

Henry married and raised a family of 8 daughters and two sons. Despite his shoemaking trade, his expertise in geology and a fossil collecting business, the indications are that his was very much a working family, the younger children obtaining work as soon as they were in their mid teens. Henry was a shoemaker with his workshop in Ledbury and a fellmonger (an ancient and skilled craft of cleaning and working hides in preparation for the tanner). In 1859 he was listed in Slater's *Directory* as a boot and shoe maker and by 1876 he was listed in Lascelles *Directory* as both a shoemaker and fossil collector.

The first record of Henry living in Ledbury is in the 1841 census, when he was lodging with the family of Benjamin Bennett in Homend Street. Benjamin was a publican or beer retailer at The Packhorse Inn (later The White Horse Inn). The 1840 Tithe Map and apportionment shows that the house and garden was among a row on land measuring 29 perches, owned by John Fleetwood. The house is still standing in the Homend marked with a plaque relating to the White Horse Inn. The 1841 census shows Benjamin with his wife, Mary, and 5 children. In 1842 Henry married Benjamin's second daughter, Ann. She is shown in the 1841 census as 15 years old and a dressmaker. At that time Henry's occupation is recorded as a shoemaker and his age 20 years (the ages were only required to be accurate to

the nearest 5 years or so, but Henry was in fact at least 25 years old as his baptism record is dated 1816). The marriage entry records Ann as a minor (under 21); her mother was one of the two witnesses.

In 1851 Henry and Ann are recorded as the household next but one to Benjamin Bennett's. The houses are still standing, and a photograph of them is attached to the item on Henry Brookes on the EPE website. Henry's family clearly helped with his trade and in 1861 the census return shows his wife Ann and his second daughter, Jane (15 years old), working as shoe binders.

The census information records no live-in servants, but the oldest daughter, Mary Ann (now 18 years old) has no occupation shown on any census return, so she was possibly fully occupied in keeping house and looking after her siblings. In 1861 she had 3 younger sisters and one brother at home, as well as her grandmother Bennett. One of her younger sisters, Jessie, probably died before 1861 (no death record found). In the 1871 census the oldest two daughters are not recorded in the household. Anne (aged 46) and her 19 year old daughter Harriett are dressmakers and Charles, at 16 years, is an agricultural labourer. There are a further 3 younger daughters at school and a baby, Edith, 10 months old.

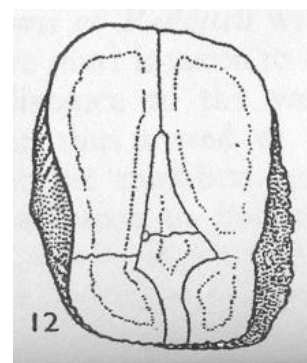
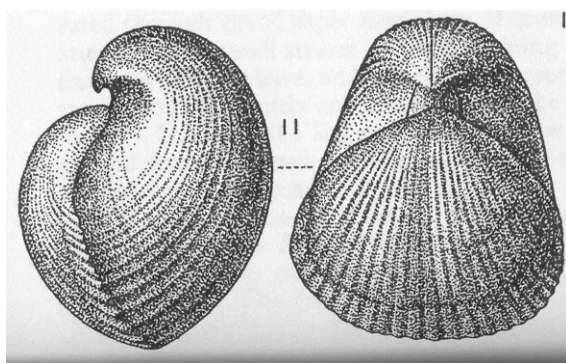
The 1881 census shows a major change in the family. Henry's wife, Ann, died on 9 November 1874 aged 50 after 32 years of marriage and bearing ten children. Her last baby, William T., born within the last year of her life, is now 8 years old. He is living with Mary Ann his oldest sister, now 38, and another sister, Hannah (18), a seamstress, at an address in Back Homend Cottages, Ledbury, presumably a more lowly address than Homend Street. Charles in 1881 is now 26, and has moved on from agricultural labouring to become a railway engine fireman. He is living in Skipton in Yorkshire married to Mary, a local Skipton girl, 3 years his junior with a one year old daughter, Annie. Henry is recorded in the Skipton census too, now 66, with his two youngest daughters, Emma, working at 14 years old, and Edith 10 years old and attending school. Henry may have just been visiting Skipton, although his appearance as a corresponding member of the Malvern Club may indicate that he was actually living in Skipton. Emma's occupation as a cotton spooler suggests a permanent move to Skipton as that work is more likely in Yorkshire than Herefordshire.

Henry survived his wife by 10 years and died in 1884 in Bye Street, Ledbury. The 1910 Land Valuation shows more than one family of Brookes living in Bye Street who could

have been relatives. Henry was buried with his wife in New Street cemetery Ledbury on 20 April 1884. William Parr's 'Notes on Ledbury' in the *Hereford Times* on 17 May 1884 recorded: 'I must mention, also, the name of Mr Henry Brookes, who died at Ledbury 16th April last, aged 64 years (actually about 68 years). Deceased was a well-known authority upon the geology of this neighbourhood. He was a shoemaker and was for many years associated with the ringers of the Ledbury church bells'. This tribute is indicative of the high esteem in which he was held.

## Local Geology

The excavation of the railway tunnel at Ledbury in the late 1850s (in preparation for the railway line from Worcester to Hereford which opened in 1861) provided the opportunity for examining the geology of the layers below Dog Hill, in particular the passage-beds between the Old Red and the Upper Silurian formations where the cuttings and tunnel exposed the strata, described as 'intervening beds of marl and grey shales appeared in a singularly disturbed manner, tilting up very strangely and presenting various tints.' The Aymestry Limestone, containing the *Pentamerus* bed at 236 feet contained dwarfed specimens of the fish species *Pentamerus Knightii*, brought out of the tunnel about 1859 by Henry Brookes. He shared exploratory walks with Mr George Piper F.G.S. who was later to become the President of both the Malvern and Woolhope Clubs. [An extract of the President's address by George Piper is and various extracts from the transactions of the Worcester and Malvern Clubs on related expeditions and findings are attached].



Illustrations of *Kirkidium Knighti* (syn. *Pentamerus Knightii*) from *British Palaeozoic Fossils*, plate 21. This specimen was found at Mocktree Hill, near Leintwardine, Herefordshire by J. Sowerby

George Piper was a solicitor living at The Courthouse, The Southend, Ledbury. The Natural History Museum in London has some documentation of G. Piper's collection of fossils from the Ledbury station section of the railway. The document at DF105/51 dated 29 October 1898 records these as: 'Piper collection of duplicate fossils consisting of about 2,300 specimens obtained from the Silurian and Haveronian nodes, in the neighbourhood of Ledbury.' The history of the collections contained in the natural history departments of the British Museum, 1904, states that specimens were presented by Piper to the BM in 1887 and 1889 (described in the BM 'Catalogue of Fossil Fishes, Part II') and the remainder was purchased from his executor in 1898. Among the collection were unique specimens of *Cephalaspidian* fishes, especially *Cephalaspis murchisoni*, *Auchenaspis egertoni* and *Didymaspis grindrodi*. It is interesting to note that in the Malvern Field Club account of the visit to Henry Brookes' home in 1859 it records amongst the numerous fossil fishes on display the same fishes: *Cephalaspis* and *Auchenaspis*. Could it be that the Piper Collection contains some of Henry Brookes' finds, possibly acquired after his death in 1884?

Worcester City Museum has one fossil donated by an H C Brookes. It is *ptychodus cretaceous* (the crown of a small tooth from a bottom feeding ray) found in Wiltshire. There are no further records of this donation so it is not conclusively from Henry Brookes. This Museum also has an old wooden box containing early records of the Malvern Field Club and original correspondence, including a letter in George Piper's hand, but none from Henry Brookes.

Malvern College was given the Malvern Field Club's museum collection in 1868. There is an interesting account of this transfer at the end of by Meriel C Hoggetts' booklet *Malvern Naturalists' Field Club - The Early History*. The College's Science Building still contains the Collection which is partly on display and also stored in 22 boxes on the top floor and a chest (on the ground floor). This collection was catalogued and displayed in the 1980s by Rosemary Roden of Worcester City Museum.

## Sources

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