



A BRIEF HISTORY OF SEEND

The name of Seend is possibly derived from the old English word for sand, and it is clear that the ridge of greensand on which it lies, rising up out of the heavy marshy lands to north and south, attracted a settlement at an early date. Soon after the Norman Conquest there was a village here, with a church, forming part of the royal hunting forest of Melksham. In AD 1200, the King gave the living to the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral, who still have the duty of appointing the vicar, although the tithes which used to swell the cathedral revenues have long been abolished.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Seend shared in the prosperity generated by the Wiltshire wool industry, and when the church was rebuilt and enlarged in the second half of the 15th century, it was a wealthy clothier, John Stokes, who provided the North aisle, where his memorial brass can still be seen, with the clothier's shears in the window tracery above.

John Aubrey, the writer and antiquary, stayed with another clothier family, the Somners, when he visited Seend in the 1660s. He found mineral springs here, and did his best to get Seend developed as a Spa. Nothing came of the plan, owing - he suggests - to the jealousy of the Bath doctors.

In the 18th century, when the wool trade was languishing owing to foreign competition, Seend was given a fresh lease of life by the accident that it lay on the Turnpike road which was built in 1750 to link Devizes with Trowbridge, and at that time was one of the main roads from London to Bath. Thus trade and coach-transport flowed through Seend Street until the coming of the railway in the mid-nineteenth century.

This was also the time at which the land became increasingly held by big landowners such as the Seymours (Dukes of Somerset), Awdrys, Bruges and Lockes, and the old open-field subsistence farming disappeared. The landed gentry liked the sandy ridge, because of the good air and open views, and built a number of fine houses, which still give the Street its special character.

As the Royal Forest had been gradually opened up and finally disafforested (about 1620), other settlements had grown up in Seend Cleeve, Seend Head and Sells Green, and had become incorporated into the village, together with Seend Stocks, a staging post on the Turnpike Road.

John Wesley preached in Seend on a number of occasions, and in 1775 he opened the new Methodist Chapel in Factory Row (now renamed Weavers' Cottages) which has been in continuous use ever since. In 1832, the Church school was transferred from a room in the churchyard to a new building on its present site. It has been enlarged at various times and, today, as a well-equipped Church Aided school provides education for 5 to 11 year-olds. The church, which had been a chapelry of Melksham, was given its own vicarage in 1873, and under Canon Thynne, its first vicar, developed a wide range of parochial activities, some of which it still carries out today, though others have been taken over by social services and other organisations.



High Street, Seend

The building of the Kennet and Avon canal (1810) and a branch of the Great Western Railway (1858) through Seend's northern valley meant that, after the industrial revolution, it was well placed for transport of heavy goods such as coal and stone. In the 1860s there were great hopes that the local ironstone could be profitably worked. Blast furnaces were built and linked by a tramway to the canal, and later to the railway station. But the costs of extraction and transport proved to be too high, and the furnaces were dismantled in 1889, though iron ore was still extracted from time to time and sent elsewhere for smelting, until 1947, when quarrying ceased. You can see an illustration of the smelting works on the interpretation panel near the canal bridge by the Barge Inn.

The closing of the canal in 1955 and of the local railway line in 1966 meant that the village was once more entirely dependent upon road transport. Once frequent bus services to Devizes, Trowbridge, Melksham and Bath declined in recent years, and are now supplemented by the village's own community bus the "Seend Shuttle", which serves parts of Seend - and particularly Seend Cleeve - which previous buses didn't reach. The canal is now again in constant use, but almost entirely for leisure purposes.

The village has been enlarged in recent decades by several housing developments, as well as infilling between and extending of existing houses.

Seend today is a much more diverse community than it was at the beginning of the century; those employed in agriculture or village trades are now far outnumbered by those commuting to jobs in the nearby towns in commerce, industry and local government etc. But there is still a strong feeling of community here, which became very evident in the early 70s when a large sum of money was raised, chiefly by traction engine rallies, to secure the undeveloped part of the Lye Field as a public recreation area, and to build the Irene Usher Memorial Pavilion. A very successful fete and flower show each August raises funds to maintain these facilities. The village also boasts a WI Hall and a Social Club (built by the members themselves), making it exceptionally well provided with premises for the numerous activities listed in this booklet.

A village appraisal in 1998 led to the start of even more clubs and activities, as well as providing lots of suggestions about the future of the village, and evidence that villagers find Seend special because of the countryside, the architecture and the friendly, caring and active community. Seend saw in the new millennium with a bumper firework display and a tree-planting project. Long may the community continue.