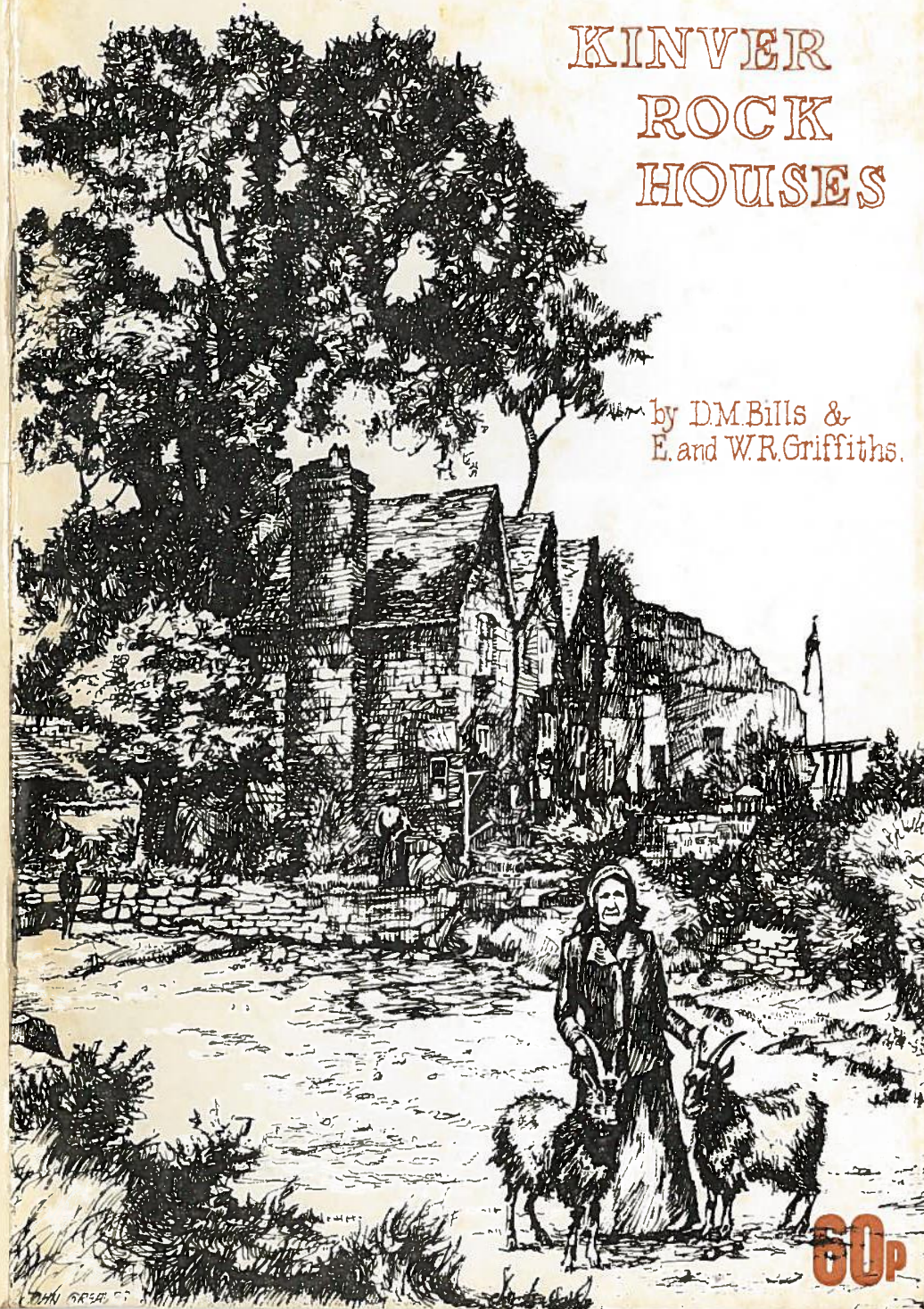


KINVER ROCK HOUSES

by D.M. Bills &
E. and W.R. Griffiths.



ISBN 0 9506253 0 2

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©

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&

E. and W. R. GRIFFITHS

Edited and Produced
by
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Published by ELDA PUBLICATIONS,
26, HIGH STREET, KINVER

Printed by Reliance Printing Works, Halesowen, West Midlands.

INTRODUCTION

KINVER has had many previous names or spellings, Cynibre, Cynefare, Chenevare, Kynfare, Kenefare, Kynvare, Kynfar and Kinfare.

In a charter of 736 AD the village is Cynibre — a great or royal hill; in 964—Cynefare—a royal road; in The Domesday Book of 1086 the name is given as Chenevare—a corruption of Keun and Vaur—a great ridge or edge.

The reference to 'royal' is not without foundation as the village was a royal manor at the time of the Conquest and the area was part of a royal forest. Stourton Castle was a royal hunting lodge. Several monarchs confirmed charters, and a copy of that of Charles I with the Great Seal of England is in the Parish Church.

The great ridge or edge is still a reality, now known as Kinver Edge, an escarpment with a steep scarp facing N.W. This Edge is composed of red weathering sandstone of Triassic age and is now a popular recreation area for the Midland conurbation.

This sandstone is easily worked, which suited the settlers who produced the first dwellings. These bear little resemblance to the present day remains, which must be valuable ancient buildings. Several dwellings or parts thereof are extant — Holy Austin Rock, Nanny's Rock, (Mega-Fox Hole) and Crow's Rock (Vale's Rock) are cut into Kinver Edge, but extensive caverns are visible at Gibraltar, facing the canal, and in Mill Lane smaller caves, which were once storage areas for a row of houses (now demolished) can be seen. This area is now a car park.

Large caves existed behind the Stag Inn (now demolished). Samson's Cave to the North of Kinver Edge is cut into the rock and embellished with stone, brick and tile.

Many of these rock houses were enlarged to make spacious rooms together with the addition of doors, windows and masonry chimney flues. Many of these added features have now disappeared as the dwellings have not been inhabited for some years. Nature soon takes over and today the once well-cut features are being eroded by the elements assisted, of course, by man and his offspring.

Much of the evidence for this book is based on the rocks as visible or recorded 1895-1978. Some of the dwellings were inhabited or used until about 1955, which provides something of a human element. Many photographs of the rock houses were used in the postcard era at the beginning of this century. The Kinver Light Railway (opened 1901) enabled the area to be used for recreation by the inhabitants of the Black Country and the rest of the Midlands, including Birmingham.

Information is also gleaned from various censuses and surveys, but the 100 year rule prevents the information being brought up to date.

Various historical works have been consulted.

PLOT: A Natural History of Staffordshire. 1686.

HEELY: Letters on the Beauties of Hagley, Envil and the Leasowes. 1777.

BENNETT: A History of Kinver. Written 1930 — 1960, but not published.
(Recently made available by Staffordshire County Library)

BRIGHT: Survey of 1831.

CENSUS: (National) 1841, 1851, 1861, and 1871.

PARISH REGISTERS: from St. Peter's Kinver.

Some of the sites recorded are on private land and their mention here does not imply free access. Holy Austin Rock and Nanny's Rock are on land owned by The National Trust to which access is free, but please respect this privilege. Many of the other Rock Houses mentioned can be seen from public roads or paths. A guide is included at the back of this book to help visitors to find the various 'Rocks'.

N.B. Where quotations have been made their original spellings have been retained.

HOLY AUSTIN ROCK

FOR generations Kinver Edge has been the weekend refuge of many thousands of people, mainly from the industrial sprawl of The Black Country. Long before motor cars, visitors arrived in horse-drawn brakes and a Sunday school outing to Kinver was the highlight of the year for countless children.

Now owned by the National Trust, the Edge has many points of interest, its two hundred acres consist of thickly wooded areas, gorse, heather, large expanses of grassland, and even sandy beaches, but its most prominent feature is the large outcrops of sandstone. Over the centuries, this sandstone has in many instances been turned into cave dwellings, the most prominent example being the Holy Austin Rock.

Holy Austin Rock is situated just below the summit of the Edge, roughly opposite where Meddins Lane and Compton Road meet. As the visitor passes from the roadside towards the Edge he is confronted with a steep flight of steps leading to the first level of the sandstone caves. The sizes of these caves gives an indication of how extensive the dwellings once were, and plate no. 1 shows how the sandstone bulges out from the side of the escarpment. This is natural, and virtually untouched except for the addition of windows and doors.

Proceed to the other side, as shown in plate no. 2, and note in the centre the straight fir tree which has over the course of time dominated most drawings, paintings and photographs, originated at this spot. Beneath this tree is another level of dwellings, to which improvements made in the 19th century give an appearance of a row of brick-built cottages, producing a hybrid of ancient and modern. The buildings were two-storey, complete with gable ends and tiled roofs; carefully cultivated gardens indicate hard laborious effort, for the top soil would have been only a few inches deep, with hard sandstone beneath.

The interior of these rock/brick houses were almost comparable in standard to the conventional brick-built houses in Kinver village. The sandstone is of a very soft nature, which made it relatively easy to excavate the natural caverns into habitable rooms, with doorways leading from one to another. Small niches in the sides of the caves were used as cupboards and store areas. Shelves were added to the walls (plate no. 3) and as in any ordinary home, plates, cups, jugs and other personal items were displayed, whilst pictures and photographs adorned the walls.

In some cases the interior walls were plastered and all appear to have been at least limewashed. The cosy appearance of the interior, as shown on plate no. 3, is enhanced by contemporary furniture of the time; brass bedsteads, tables and chairs, and so on. It can be seen also that the floor was quarried, so that it is possible that coverings of mats and rugs were used to complete the warm, homely effect.



Plate 1 (Top) The great sandstone mass of Holy Austin Rock against the Kinver skyline.



Plate 2 (Lower) Holy Austin Rock in its heyday of habitation.

Author's Collection

Photo: L. Dunn

Most of these cave-rooms had fireplaces, and we can see from the painting of an interior by Alfred Rushton, that a full-black-leaded grate was fitted inside at least one of the rock houses. With the addition of fireplaces, brick built chimneys had to be constructed around the sides of the rock, and evidence of these is clearly visible today.

Undoubtedly, the combination of fireplaces and thick sandstone made the houses very warm and dry in winter, but cool in summer, so that by and large the tenants enjoyed comfortable, cheap accommodation.

Although no longer visible, from a study of the photographs it is known that a well, providing water from a fresh spring, was in existence. The actress Nancy Price (1880 to 1970), who lived in the village, described her childhood memories of Holy Austin Rock in her book 'Into an Hour Glass', published in 1953, by Museum Press Ltd., and long out of print.

"The unique rock houses were a joy to me then and a wonder to me now. All washing was done at one of these with water which had to be drawn from a deep well."

Miss Price, who lived at Rock Mount in Dark Lane recalls; two sisters walked the two miles from Holy Austin to Rock Mount with the weekly washing.

In the National Census of 1871 we learn that an Ann Edwards, aged 27, lived at number two dwelling, and that her registered occupation was that of washerwoman.

In recent times this well dried up, for modern water pipes were laid on at the rock houses, some of which continued to be used as private dwellings well into the present century. A study of newspaper advertisements reveal that a succession of tenants had tearooms at Holy Austin Rock, and the words Rock House Cafe can faintly be seen.

The last families to reside at these dwellings were re-housed in about 1950, but the cafe continued to function until 1967. However, once the houses were empty they were visited by so many curious people that within a year extensive damage had been caused and the Parish Council were forced to seal some of the chambers.

Today's visitors can still see some of the shelves in the rock, and the plaster and whitewash on some of the walls. Holes are visible where the floor joists were placed into the walls to support the upper floors. One or two fireplaces remain, and soot marks show where the chimneys were located.

A word of warning: it is advisable to use caution when exploring the remains of these dwellings. The origins are lost in antiquity, so that documentary evidence is scarce. One of the earliest accounts of the rock caves being inhabited is to be found in a book entitled 'The Beauties of Enville' by J. Heely, published in 1777. In it he recalls a walk from Hagley to Enville via Kinver, and as he approached Holy Austin Rock he describes it thus:

I now stood upon the very edge of the awful declivity, looking with a giddy head into the deep hollow below, lingering irresolute whether I should attempt the almost perpendicular side of it, at the expense perhaps of a total dislocation or stand the fury of the storm, with the certainty of a fever drenching, the latter seemed the least evil, but a sudden crack that seemed to threaten nature with instant ruin, in a

moment determined me. — I hastened therefore down the tremendous steep, to some smoke I saw issue from a romantic rock near the foot of it, though not without very disagreeable feelings and with extreme caution very prudently making angles in my progression, left by a safe step I should explore the bottom too precipitately and in a direction that possibly might have afforded to some tittering wenches I saw below running for shelter, who were very attentive to my motions, excellent entertainment.

I found this exceedingly curious rock inhabited by a clean and decent family, who entertained me during the violence of the tempest with what had been done, how long they had lived there, and the immense trouble they had been at in excavating the rock for their purposes. The rooms are really curious warm and commodious and the garden extremely pretty lying on a shelf of the rock towards the south and full of every necessary even to luxuriance, this I was told cost them infinite labour as there was never a particle of soil upon that part till they brought it thither upon their shoulders.

The storm abating I was led up some rugged steps to the top of this grotesque mansion which I found sometimes level, abrupt or slant, and that side opposite Enville, almost perpendicular and entirely so at the bottom, about the height of a modern house. To account for this mass of rock being left so in the midst of a large waste naked and distinct from any other is I believe not in my power: however I cannot think it probable the perpendicular sides are owing to, and that time past the rock was used as stone quarry. Indeed two sides evidently shew the marks of the tool upon them, and I don't think it improbable that it once was joined to the Edge itself for I observe at the foot of that precipice another perpendicular scar with familiar marks upon it, as visible as at the rock right opposite and parallel in height we may conclude that formerly both joined the chasm being but 20 or 30 paces between both. Believe me it is a very great curiosity and well worth your observations.

This writer's observations emphasise the remoteness of the area over two hundred years ago, and shows the pride which the occupants of the dwellings had in their unusual abode. This pride appears to have existed through the centuries, for many rock house tenants have been eager to show off their homes to interested visitors.

For the next piece of documented evidence one can examine the details entered on the 'Brights Survey' 1831. This document can be described as the fore-runner of the rating and valuing surveys, and from it we learn that there were a total of six cottages and gardens registered on the plot of land known as Holy Austin.

The tenants were Thomas Childs, Benjamin Williams, Sarah Brooks, Lucretia Penzer, Benjamin Glover and John Webb, and it is interesting to find that some of these names follow through for many generations in these same homes.

The 1851 census report reveals that Thomas Childs and John Webb were agricultural labourers, and we know that they continued to live at Holy Austin until they died. Thomas Childs died on 23rd February 1851, aged 76 and John Webb died on 27th September 1870, aged 67.

Another long-established couple were Joseph and Hannah Robins, who lived most of their lives at Holy Austin, where they both died in their eighties, Joseph being 84 and Hannah aged 88.

Census returns reveal that most of the tenants were either agricultural workers or forge labourers at the Hyde Iron Works, the latter having ceased to exist in the 1880's. The workers on the land lived in the dwellings throughout their working lives and because of the healthier work generally lived to greater ages than did those who toiled in the iron works who usually died in their early fifties or sixties.

Rock dwellings were popular with the ironworkers, for as the village increased due to expansion at the Hyde works, the number of families living at Holy Austin increased. In 1851 there were twelve families sharing the rock, amongst whom were beesom makers and a mole catcher in addition to the agricultural and ironworkers.

Not surprisingly, the closure of the ironworks produced vacant homes all over the village as the workers left to try their luck elsewhere, and some rock houses were also vacated. It is at this period that we find an entry in 1871 census returns, of Joseph and Sarah Fletcher (sometimes called Belcher) and their four children, and it is through this and the Shaw family that we continue into the present century.

Most of the photographs taken in about 1900 include one or other of the Fletcher family, and Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher are believed to be the couple shown in a painting by Alfred Rushton, reproduced on plate no. 4.

The longest resident family at Holy Austin Rock is undoubtedly the Shaw family, who continually lived there for well over one hundred and fifty years, until 1935. Tracing their family tree, we find that the Webbs were the ancestors of the Shaws, and that Charlotte Webb, born 1839 to William and Sarah Webb, became Mrs. Charlotte Shaw. The descendants of Charlotte and Eli Shaw still live in Kinver today, and it is from information given by one of their grandsons that this connection between the two families has been proven.

No matter what actual evidence is presented, romantic invention still plays a part in the story of Kinver's rock houses. For example, in most of the Staffordshire Directories, there is a reference to a 'Bolt Stone', but it had not been found and its exact position is still not known. Legend tells us that its origin stems from a romantic account involving inhabitants from Holy Austin Rock and Samson's Cave, in neighbouring Enville.

The story goes that giants once lived in both caves and that a quarrel developed between them. In a fit of anger the Kinver giant hurled a huge stone at the retreating giant from Enville, and it is this which is supposed to have landed somewhere in the Comptons (see map). Its size was said to be six feet high and four yards round and, rather like an iceberg, a goodly portion was buried in the ground. It is this that became known as the 'Bolt Stone'.

Another legend tells us that an Augustine friar lived in the caves, and it is possible that the name Holy Austin Rock derived from such a personage. At all events, it was with this legend in mind that the 19c novelist S. Baring-Gould wrote his famous romance 'Bladys of The Stewponey'.



Plate 3 (Top) An example of furnishing and decor in a rock dwelling.

Author's Collection

Plate 4 (Lower) This peaceful cave dwelling scene is reproduced from a delightful painting by Alfred Rushton. The painting can be seen in the Spring Lounge at the New Rose and Crown Inn, Whitehill, Kinver.

Courtesy Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries



Plate 5 (Top) Who was the lady who posed outside her rock home for this photograph? Photo: L. Dunn

Plate 6 (Lower) Another view of Holy Austin Rock in its prime. The man standing in the doorway is almost certainly a member of the Fletcher family mentioned in the text. Birmingham Reference Library

In the story we are told of Bladys, the daughter of the landlord of the Stewponey, being given in marriage to the winner of a game of bowls. The man she loves looses, and she is taken away to Shrewsbury by Luke Francis. On the way they are robbed. Bladys is taken to the Rock Tavern, where she is told by Nan Norris that Luke is the hangman at Shrewsbury.

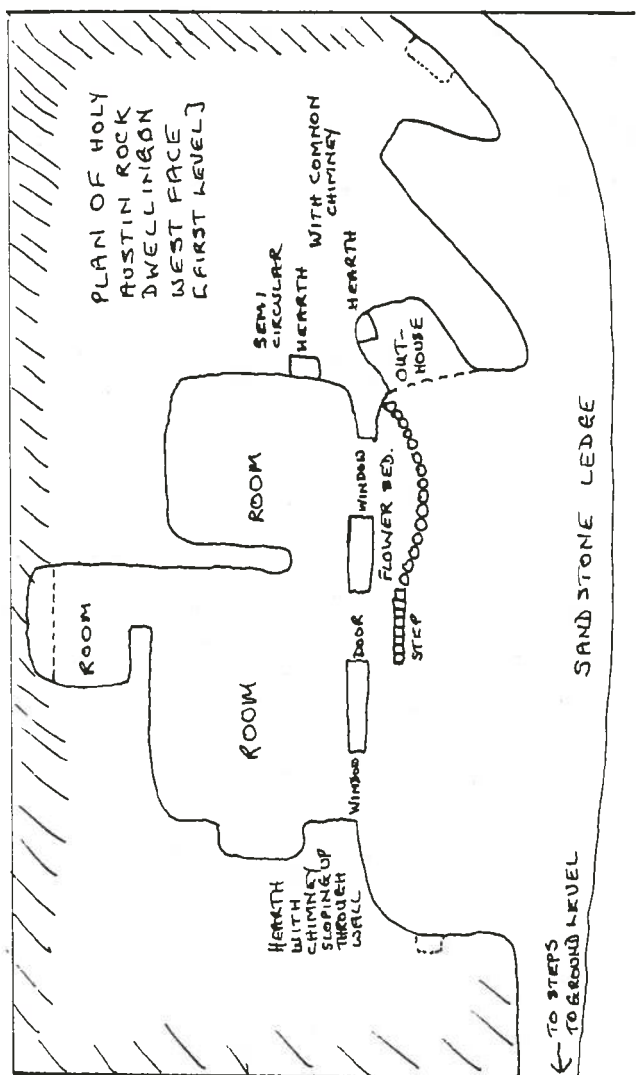
At Shrewsbury Bladys is virtually held prisoner by her mother-in-law, but escapes and returns to the Rock Tavern. Here she meets Crispin, the man she loves, but they are unable to marry and his uncle Holy Austin, takes Bladys to Holy Austin Rock for safety. Luke Francis finds Bladys in a cave; she retreats through a doorway and Luke, in his haste to follow, falls to his death. Bladys is accused of his murder, but evidence is given to prove her innocence. Nan is arrested for her connection with the high-way man, and hanged. Bladys returns to the Rock Tavern, and again she meets Crispin, but this time they are able to leave and marry.

Published in 1897 by Methuen and Co., this beautiful romantic tale inspired a company of film makers who, with the financial backing of a local industrialist, Mr. Benjamin Priest, made a film based on the novel. It was filmed in 1919 on location in Kinver village and surrounding area, using professional actors, actresses, directors and cameraman. L.C. McBean was director and Arthur Kingston, the cameraman. In the magazine 'Kine Weekly' dated 11th December 1919, Arthur Kingston was praised for his scenic camerawork. "Nothing better has been done on the British screen."

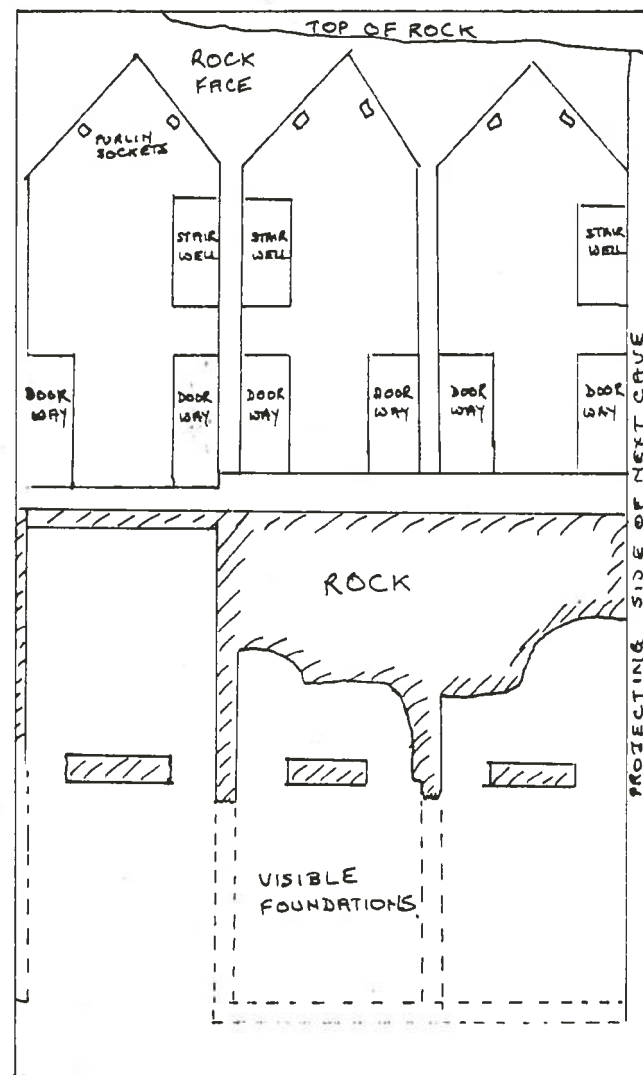
The inn featured in the film was the only place in the film not in Kinver, being the Old Bell Inn at Hurley, near Henley-on-Thames and the interiors were shot at a studio near St. Albans. The film was not widely shown commercially, and ended its days stored in an iron box under the stairs at the Grand Cinema, Old Hill. When the cinema was altered it is believed that the film was dumped along with rubble, but luckily about 90 frames survived, and a Mr. Leonard Morgan sent them to the National Film Archives, where copies were made. Scratched 'stills' are thus the only known traces of this early film. Plate 7. shows a scene taken from Kinver Edge.



Plate 7 An early film, Bladys of The Stewponey, used Holy Austin Rock as a setting for romance and high drama. Photo: Bill Pardoe



Drawn: D. M. Bills
After P. W. King



Plan of 3rd level of Holy Austin Rock

Drawn: D. M. Bills
After P. W. King

NANNY'S ROCK

AS one walks along the Edge in a South Westerly direction, we reach the second of the main outcrop of sandstone utilised as dwellings. This is Nanny's Rock, and although it is a large cavern with five compartments, it does not seem to have been converted into a house as were the dwellings at Holy Austin Rock. It has openings that look like doors and windows (Plate 8) with a chimney cut out of the rock — known as the Devil's Chimney — extending to the top.

The path that passes in front of the entrance is several feet below the actual rock and the cave is well sheltered by trees. From the top, the descent to the pathway is steep and dangerous.

Nanny's Rock has from time to time been inhabited by the more recluse type of person. For many years it was known by the name of 'Meg-o-Fox-hole', probably originating after a person who lived there some 360 years ago. In the parish register there is an entry in respect of one Margaret of the fox earth, died 8th day of June 1617.



Plate 8 Nanny's Rock. The identity of the 'nanny' remains a mystery.
Photo: L. Dunn

In 1686, Dr. Plot, the famous natural historian of the time, wrote a book called 'The Natural History of Staffordshire' in which is included a rather remarkable account of this cavern. His explanation of how the cave was formed defies belief, for he describes it as earth which had been turned to stone by subterranean heat. This is what he wrote:

If that be true which is asserted from experiment by Gabriel Plat viz: — That if you half fill a retort with brimstone, seacoale and other bituminous substances, and the remainder of the neck also halfway with pure earth and set it to distill with a temperate open fire, the earth will petrified or turned to stone, as it is also by nature where bituminous substances kinaled in the bowells of the earth send up such vapours.

Unlike Holy Austin Rock, Meg-o-Fox-Hole, has for some reason gained mention in most of the published references to Kinver. For example, in some trade directories it is referred to as a 'remarkable cavern', implying that it was uninhabited.

Its remote situation gives rise to legend and fable. Highwaymen are said to have used the cave as a hiding place, and again Baring-Gould seized on the tale to embellish his book 'Bladys of The Stewponey'. A tunnel is said to lead from the cave to Drakelow approx 1½ miles away, but no trace has been found, although through the ages most village children have explored the cave hoping to find the hidden entrance. In fiction, Baring-Gould managed not only to find the tunnel, but used it to convey one of the characters to safety.

Recalling her childhood in later years, Nancy Price talks of her visit to 'Nanny' who lived at the rock house making herbs and potions for anyone brave enough to visit her. One day, Nanny disappeared and was never seen again. Her existence must give rise to the cave's name today, but the only official evidence that anyone actually lived there is that sole entry in the parish register of Margaret-of-the fox earth.

ASTLE'S ROCK

ASTLE'S ROCK is situated on that side of Kinver Edge known as the Compa (see map) and it is only by accident that we discovered these houses whilst searching for information on the others in the village, for few local villagers had heard of them.

There were originally two cottages set into the rock in 1831, but by 1841 these had been enlarged to three. The tenants were Philip Matthews, Joseph Astle and James Marchant. They were all labourers and lived at the rock houses with their families throughout their working lives. Joseph Astle outlived the others and died aged 87.

By 1871 the number of families resident at Astle's Rock had increased to thirteen, but it is uncertain whether they were all living in rock houses or in brick built houses adjacent. Almost all of the bread winners worked at the Hyde Ironworks, but unlike the majority of employees at the works they had better jobs and were stock-takers or puddlers. When the ironworks closed these families gradually moved away, leaving the original three mentioned above.

Earlier this century, Astle's Rock was owned by a man named Fairbridge and it was he who turned the dwelling into a museum. It lasted for over twenty years attracting widespread attention (plate 9.) and since it closed the caves have not been used.

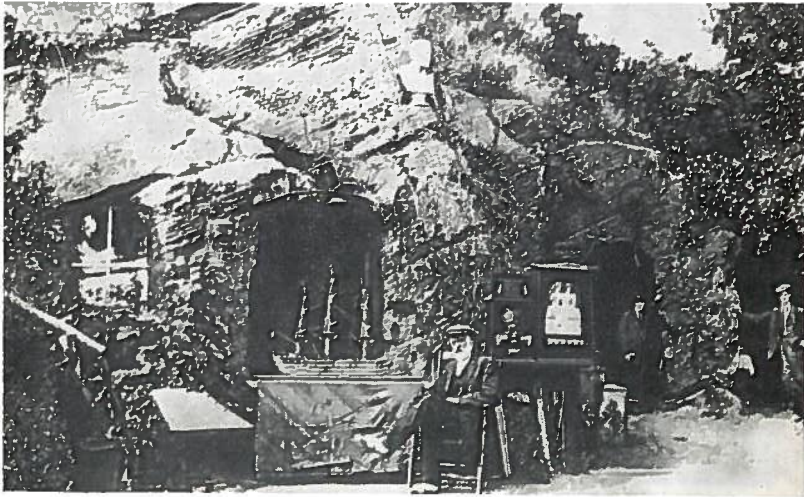


Plate 9 This enterprising display at Astle's Rock was sometimes known as 'Forest Rock House Museum.' It delighted visitors for some 20 years.

Photo: L. Dunn

VALE'S ROCK

By continuing along the top of the Edge, almost to the end, the last of the three outcrops of rock to be converted into dwellings is reached. For a long time this was known as Vale's Rock, but today it bears the name of Crow's Rock. It was turned into a house on two levels, by persons unknown, with the main living quarters at the top and out-buildings and sheds below. The top level consisted of four major compartments, three of which were mainly of rock, whilst the fourth was brick-built with only the back wall of natural rock. To the left hand side were some smaller caves, but considerable damage occurred during the severe winter of 1962, when the roof of the main structure fell in.

To the front of these caves, on the lower level, was a beautifully laid out garden, with a pathway leading to the front entrance.

Plates No. 11 and 12 clearly show that the caves were occupied, but we have been unable to trace the identity of the residents shown. However, it is known that the last tenant was Jack Leyland, who lived there until the early 1960s. Over the years he became known for the excellent besom brooms which he made.

Now uninhabited, Vale's or Crow's Rock dwellings became dangerous and had to be fenced off. It is advisable to heed the warning and view them from a safe distance.

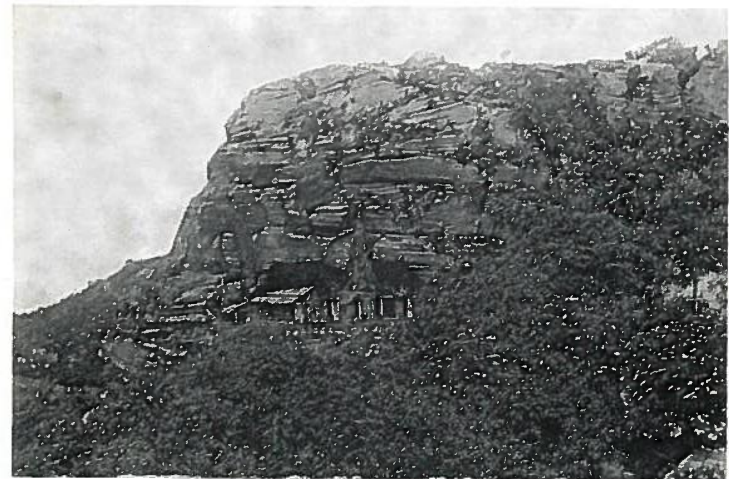


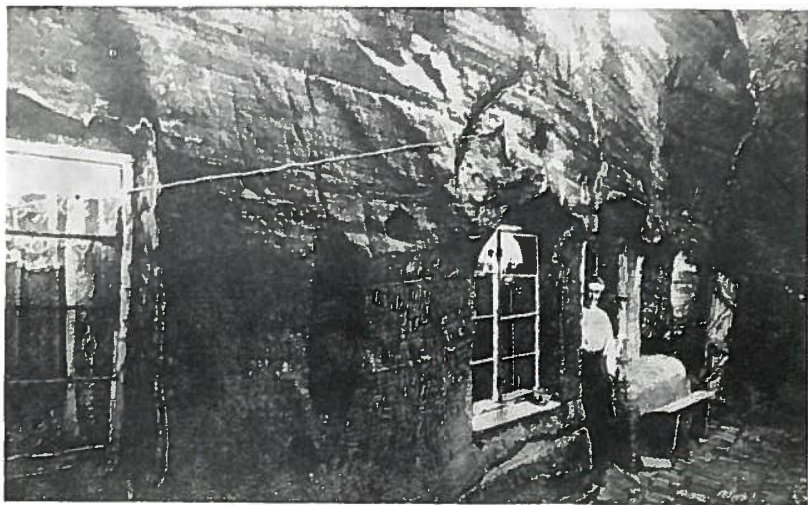
Plate 10 Vale's Rock, inhabited until the 1960s by a maker of besom brooms.

Author's Collection



Plates 11-12
Two unknown
inhabitants of Vale's
(or Crow's) Rock.

Photos: L. Dunn



GIBRALTAR ROCK

THE Staffordshire and Worcestershire Canal, which passes through Kinver, was completed in the early 1770s, and just beyond the Kinver Lock (by the Vine Inn), is the most extensive collection of inhabited caves existing hereabouts. As the canal developed as a trade route, to become the M5 of its day, the numbers of men employed in connection with the canal increased greatly, ashore and afloat.

Alongside Kinver Lock was a large warehouse complete with weigh-bridge, for at that time Kinver was an important town with an extensive ironworks and a wollen industry. The wharf was in almost continual use, so the extra labourers waiting to load the cargoes invariably had to find shelter for the night, both for themselves and their families, and the caves at Gibraltar were offered to them at 1/- per week.

According to the census forms a fairly rapid turnover of tenants occurred, with only one or two families resident for any length of time. The latter, like those at Holy Austin Rock, were either forge labourers or agricultural workers.

These caves were not so well situated as those on Kinver Edge. Dampness rising both from the canal and the River Stour which runs close by, would have made living conditions somewhat uncomfortable.

Plate no 13 gives an indication of the tiered effect of the caves, but access to them was far from easy. They were smaller and far more crowded than should have been permitted.

From the parish registers covering the seventy years from 1814-1884 there is ample evidence that disease was rife and that a considerable number of people, mostly children, died there. Between two families of the same name, a total of fourteen persons died during the period 1835-1884, and nine of them were children aged five years or less. Within a matter of thirteen days, six children died of smallpox, whilst in the rest of the parish as a whole, only four deaths were recorded.

From this evidence it is not surprising that in her book, Nancy Price tells us that her father, who owned Gibraltar, was forced by the local health board to rehouse these tenants elsewhere in the village.

By the mid-1880s the caves were no longer rented, but it is said that boatmen still continued to use them. Over the years, dampness has caused the rock to become wet and begin to crumble. Indeed, they became so unsafe that it was not safe to visit them, and today there is virtually nothing left.

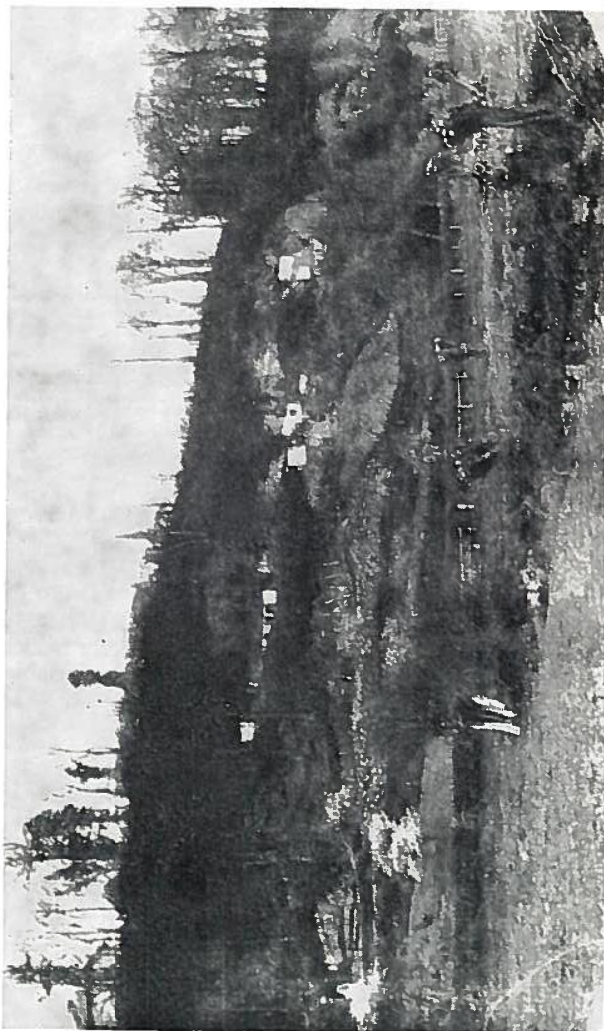


Plate 13 Gibraltar Rock, looking across the Staffs/Worcs. Canal from the vicinity of Brockley's Walk. Courtesy Mrs. Downie

SAMSON'S CAVE

Samson's Cave is the final large-scale rock cave in the area. It is in fact a small cottage with outhouses, partly built in with masonry and partly cut from a knoll. The roof was built on top of the original sandstone, possibly to prevent the sandstone from the erosive effects of severe weather.

The lower part of the front wall is of solid stone, the upper section having been built up with sandstone blocks. The windows are modern, having metal frames and shutters. Inside, is a 20th c. fireplace with a brick surround. The chimney is of thick brick leading to the middle of the roof. The ceiling is slightly rounded, plastered and painted, with a pink-whitewash. The walls have irregular-shaped alcoves which show the tool marks of the workman. The floor is covered with modern type quarries and there are three rooms, similar but smaller.

The outbuildings were built mainly of sandstone blocks and consist of kitchen complete with wash-boiler and sink, and a separate bakehouse with a 3" thick brick oven.

Like the other caves mentioned, Samson's Cave was the home of local labourers, but unlike most of them, it had a rapid turnover of tenants.

The cave is situated on private land on an ancient pathway leading to Enville. It is not open to inspection.

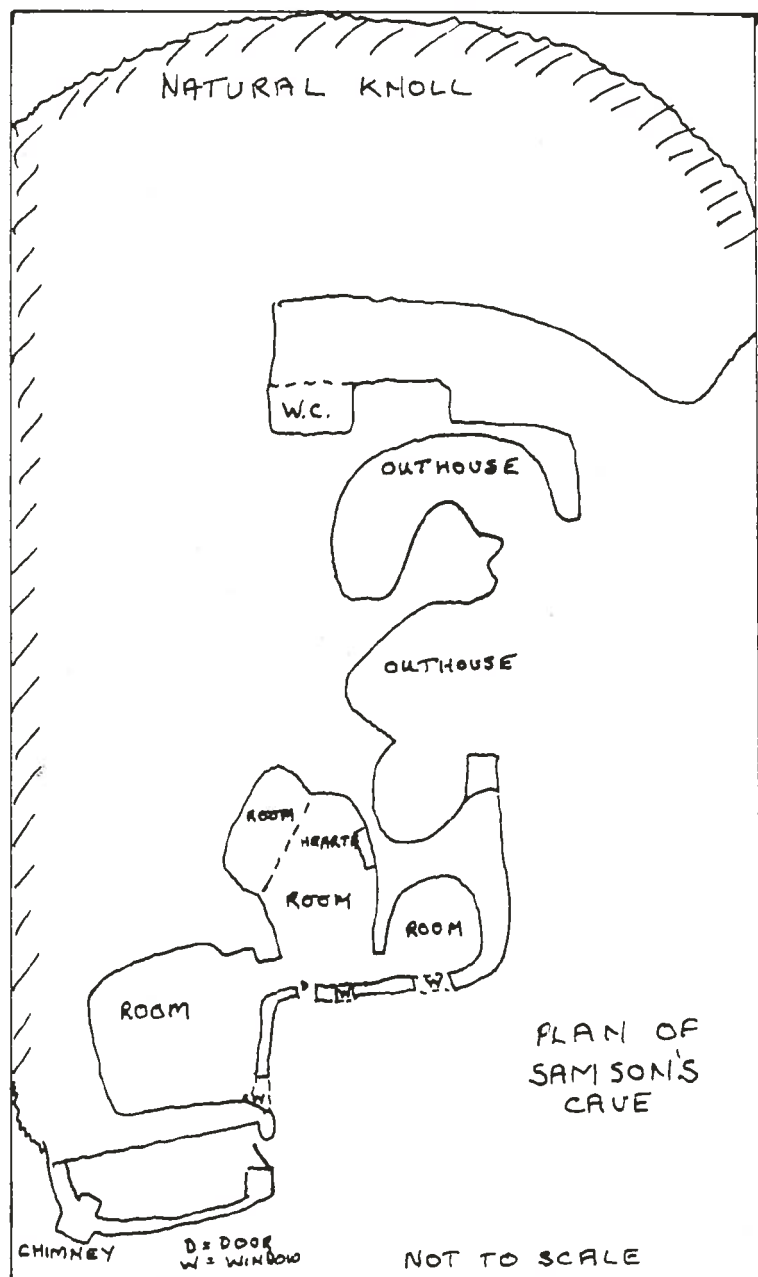


Plate 14 Plan of Samson's Cave, drawn by D. Bills, after P. W. King.

MISCELLANEOUS

MANY of the older houses in and around Kinver can boast a direct contact with sandstone rock. Some have cellars with more than one wall consisting of solid rock; others have small caves at the rear, used as garages or sheds. In themselves, such caves were too small to live in, but provided additional useful storage space to the homes that had been built on.

Three of the more notable places of this type were public houses: The Anchor Hotel, The Stag and The Rock Tavern — the latter used in Baring-Gould's novel, with highwaymen using its cave as their hideout. This dwelling was closed many years ago and for a long time its exact location was not known. Happily, this has now been determined, but again, as it is on private ground, it is not accessible to visitors.

The Anchor Hotel, however, is very much in evidence today as a popular dining-out venue. At the rear are two large caves that were used as storage space for beer and household items. Parts of them can still be seen, although much hidden from public view.

The Stag was situated at the bottom of Mill Lane close to the Stourbridge Road, and behind it was a large cave stretching back into the rock for over 30ft. In 1907 the licensee, Fred Blakeway, had a detailed plan made (page 24). It details all the compartments, many of which were doubtless used to store home brewed beer.

Because of its nearness to the river the cave began to crumble and over the years it was bricked up at intervals, until today the only evidence is a brick wall that appears to face the rock.

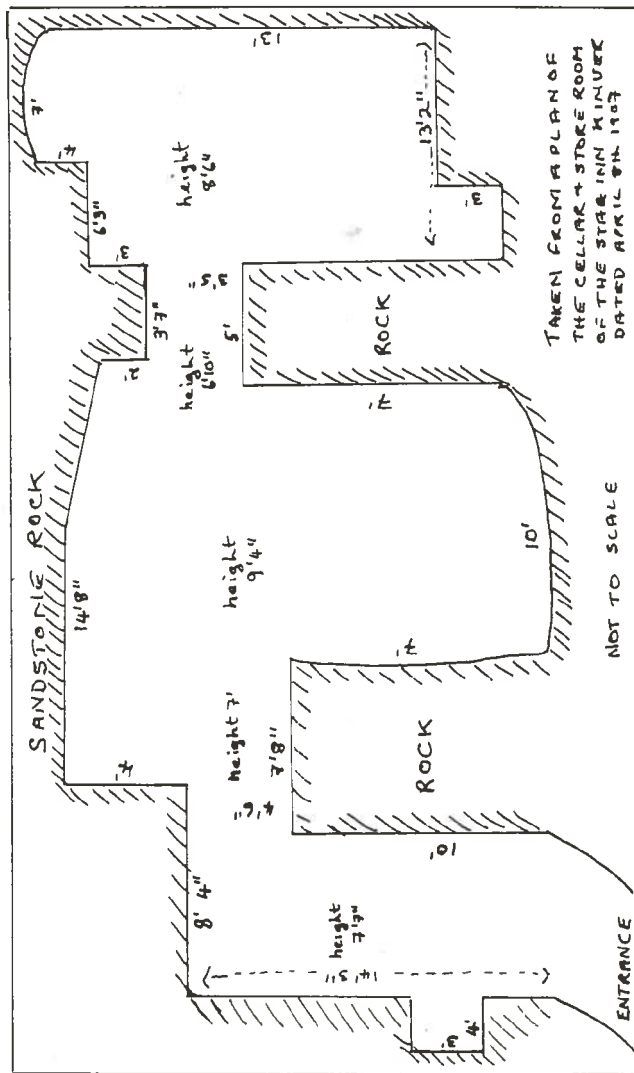


Plate 15 Plan of cellar and store-room of the now demolished Stag Inn.

Courtesy Mrs. M. A. Schirmacher

GUIDED WALKS

THIS guide is intended to be brief in order that visitors be encouraged to observe the countryside rather than read notes throughout the walk. O.S. sheet SO88 will be helpful, but a sketch map is provided on page 27. To see all the sites mentioned would constitute a very long walk, so they have been broken into groups to provide walks of a reasonable distance. It has been assumed that most visitors will arrive by car and so all the descriptions start from a convenient parking place. Good shoes are recommended.

(1)

The Rock Houses on Kinver Edge plus Samson's Cave form a convenient walk of about 4 miles (This can be shortened if required as there are several parking places in Kingsford Lane. Park in Compton Road at the bottom of Holy Austin Rock where a flight of relatively modern concrete steps lead up to the first level. Investigate the various caverns, and on the uppermost level will be seen one that resembles the elevation in plate no. 2.

With your back to this rock face, strike off slightly downhill and then gradually work your way round to the right and climb to the top of Kinver Edge (there is a seat to pause awhile to recover and contemplate the view. You should be within the camp or hillfort. Follow the summit past the 'Trig' point in a S.E. direction overlooking Kingsford Lane below on your right. After about 1200 yards along this ridge Nannys Rock is just below on your right.

Climb down and look at it. Near Nannys Rock there is a path leading due south running along the side of Kinver Edge. Follow this path for about 400 yards when it joins a much larger track. Turn right, and Crows Rock soon appears on your left. Follow the track down to Kingsford Lane and turn right and walk back towards the Kingsford Lane/Compton Road Cross Roads (Turn right if you have had enough and return to your car)

If you are still fit, cross into Rocky Wall and go to the end of White Hill. At this sharp right hand bend in the road a track leads off to the left. Follow this track to the road, cross over and at the end of the first field boundary on the right is Samson's Cave (a few yards past Samson's Cave another cavern can be seen on the left. This was the ice house for Enville Hall. Return along the track to Compton Road and turn left towards Holy Austin Rock and your car.

(2)

STAG CAVES, GIBRALTAR ROCK AND THE ANCHOR HOTEL

START at the car park in Mill Lane at the S.E. end of Kinver High Street. Small caves are visible at the back of this area. Just uphill from this car park a rock cave is still used as a private garage. Looking downhill as the road turns left over the river there is a landscaped area of grass with some nondescript walling behind. This is the rear wall of the Stag Inn (demolished 1975) The remnants of the caves can just be seen over the top of the walls (plate no. 15).

Follow the road to the Staffs. and Worcs. Canal near the Vine Inn, and turn right on to the canal towpath towards Whittington. After 200 yards the rock face and rock falls become obvious on the opposite side of the canal (plate no. 13). Continue on the towing path to the pack horse bridge and associated cottages at Whittington. Turn right and leave the towing path. After crossing the river, the Anchor Hotel appears. Climb the steep hill at the side of the Anchor Hotel and follow the road into Dark Lane. Between the Old Grammar School House and the Cross Inn, a 'Holloway' cut through the sandstone leads into Mill Lane and the starting point.

(3)

DEVILS DEN

THIS is one on its own and is best approached by parking near the Stewponey and Foley Arms Hotel and taking the towing path of the canal on the lock side of the bridge. Follow the path past the canal junction to the large sweeping bend and then the aqueduct that carries the canal over the River Stour; a sandstone outcrop soon eclipses the view of the Prestwood Estate and the Devils Den can be seen near where the canal narrows for stop planks.

If you wish to get back to your car quickly, turn around and return, but should you fancy a reasonable and pleasant walk carry on following the towing path to Prestwood Bridge. Turn left off the towpath and follow the track up to Gothersley Lane. Turn left again and walk to the main road by Stourton Post Office. Turn left and continue past Stourton Castle to the Stewponey.

ENJOY YOUR WALKING

BURIALS OF PEOPLE KNOWN TO RESIDE IN KINVER ROCK HOUSES (1814-1884)

Name	Address	Died	Aged
Ann Pool	Rock	Aug 1814	71
John Perry	Rock	Apr 1814	83
Ali Elwell	Rock	June 1815	42
William Veal	Rock	May 1816	77
Mary Inchmore	Rock	Sep 1816	Infant
Catherine Perry	Rock	Nov 1816	10
William Perry	Rock	Feb 1817	24
James Glover	Holy Austin	Jan 1818	9 months
James Bissell	Rock	Apr 1818	54
Abigail Perry	Rock	May 1818	68
Martha Reynolds	Rock Tavern	Aug 1818	74
Joseph Law	Rock	Dec 1818	28
Catherine Matthews	Rock	May 1819	78
Catherine Powney	Rock	Dec 1824	56
Jane Thomas	Rock	May 1825	
Emma Patrick	Rock	Sep 1825	43
Thomas Stone	Rock	July 1826	Infant
Elizabeth Stone	Rock	Apr 1827	
Ann Longmore	Rock	Jan 1829	38
Mary Preston	Rock	Jan 1830	45
Elizabeth Brooks	Rock	Aug 1830	74
Elizabeth Brook	Rock	Jan 1830	68
Benjamin Glover	Rock	Dec 1831	64
James Thomas	Rock	May 1832	2
Harriet Poole	Rock	Aug 1832	55
Thomas Harris	Rock	Feb 1833	85
George Elwell	Rock	Dec 1833	33
Hannah Prothrope	Rock	Mar 1834	3
Henry Glover	Holy Austin	July 1834	12
Joseph Longmore	Rock	Oct 1834	54
Ann Poole	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1835	27
John Bennett	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1835	3 Small Pox
Emma Sadler	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1835	1½ Small Pox
George More	Rock	Sep 1835	Infant Small Pox
William Sadler	Rock	Sep 1835	6 Infant Small Pox
Thomas Preston	Rock	Sep 1835	5 Infant Small Pox
Mary Sadler	Rock	Oct 1835	8 Infant Small Pox
William Sparrey	Dunsley Rock	May 1836	Infant
William Preston	Rock	Apr 1838	11 months
Benjamin Hartland	Rock	June 1838	54
Mary Preston	Dunsley Rock	Mar 1839	7 months
John Oldnall	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1839	1
Elizabeth Walker	Dunsley Rock	Dec 1839	27
Alfred Walker	Dunsley Rock	Mar 1840	3 months
William Jones	Dunsley Rock	Dec 1840	67
Elizabeth Preston	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1841	36
David Preston	Dunsley Rock	Nov 1841	Infant
Thomas Longmore	Dunsley Rock	June 1844	Infant

Benjamin Oldnall	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1845	82
William Preston	Dunsley Rock	July 1845	2
Jane Longmore	Dunsley Rock	Mar 1848	Infant
Ann Coley	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1848	11
Joseph Poole	Dunsley Rock	Oct 1848	41
Sarah Preston	Dunsley Rock	Dec 1848	54
William Coley	Dunsley Rock	July 1849	Infant
Felicia Harris	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1849	64
Mary Longmore	Dunsley Rock	Dec 1849	12
Mary Bennett	Dunsley Rock	Apr 1850	Infant
Hannah Green	Dunsley Rock	Apr 1850	74
Joseph Coley	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1851	12
Thomas Childs	Holy Austin	Feb 1851	76
Ann Glover	Holy Austin	Oct 1851	76
William Shepherd	Holy Austin	Apr 1852	Infant
Elizabeth Law	Kinver Edge	Aug 1852	2
Thomas Humphries	Dunsley Rock	Apr 1852	8 months
Elizabeth Harris	Holy Austin	Aug 1852	2 months
Thomas Mason	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1852	Infant
Mary Reynolds	Holy Austin	Feb 1853	18
Ann Coley	Dunsley	Feb 1853	Infant
John Williams	Kinver Edge	Apr 1853	Infant
Edward Bennett	Dunsley	Oct 1853	Infant
Ann Shepherd	Holy Austin	Oct 1853	Infant
Frederick Preston	Dunsley	May 1854	1
Ann Falconer	Kinver Edge	June 1854	Infant
Ann Thomas	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1854	76
Joseph Robins	Holy Austin	Mar 1855	84
Hannah Price	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1855	65
Alice Preston	Dunsley	May 1856	1
Joseph Perry	Dunsley Rock	June 1856	11
Agnes Longmore	Dunsley Rock	July 1856	Infant
Maria Morris	Dunsley Rock	Apr 1857	54
George Nott	Holy Austin	May 1857	66
Elizabeth Moore	Dunsley Rock	Nov 1857	Infant
Harriet Roberts	Kinver Edge	Sep 1859	42
James Law	Kinver Edge	Sep 1859	6
John Jennings	Holy Austin	Feb 1860	1
Sarah Child	Holy Austin	May 1860	82
Mary Murray	Dunsley Rock	Nov 1860	7
Hannah Robins	Holy Austin	Oct 1861	88
Charlette Webb	Holy Austin	May 1862	81
Abraham Thomas	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1862	84
Henry Shepherd	Holy Austin	Jan 1864	1
George Shepherd	Holy Austin	Jan 1864	3
John Oldnall D	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1864	67
Francis Preston	Dunsley	Aug 1864	58
James Brewer	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1867	Infant
John Preston	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1868	61
Edwin Jones	Dunsley Rock	Nov 1868	10 months
Mary Oldfield	Holy Austin	Apr 1869	55
Sarah Brown	Dunsley Rock	May 1870	9 days
Albert Preston	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1870	5 weeks
Jane Jones	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1870	3 months
John Webb	Holy Austin	Sep 1870	67
Francis Merrick	Dunsley Rock	Oct 1870	4 months
Jemima Jones	Dunsley Rock	Jan 1871	37
William Edwards	Holy Austin	May 1871	74
Edward Thomas	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1871	23
Ellen Bufton	Dunsley Rock	Mar 1871	1
Henry Bufton	Dunsley Rock	Aug 1871	3 months
Julia Davies	Dunsley Rock	Nov 1871	4 months
Andrew Griffiths	Dunsley Rock	Jan 1872	5 months
Alice Brown	Dunsley Rock	Jan 1872	18 small pox

Mary Ann Pitt	Dunsley Rock	Jan 1872	42 small pox
Matthew Brown	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1872	47 small pox
Emma Brown	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1872	20 small pox
Thomas Brown	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1872	14 days
Caroline Coley	Dunsley Rock	May 1872	15
Mary Ann Fletcher	Holy Austin	Oct 1872	26
Robert Morris	Dunsley Rock	Sep 1873	48
George Wood	Dunsley Rock	Oct 1873	9 weeks
Joseph Jennings	Dunsley Rock	Nov 1873	57
Sarah Evans	Holy Austin	Oct 1874	60
William Drew	Holy Austin	May 1875	5 months
William Shepherd	Holy Austin	Sep 1875	56
Thomas Mirris	Dunsley Rock	Jan 1876	33
Mary Bennett	Dunsley Rock	Jan 1876	64
William Wood	Dunsley Rock	Mar 1876	7 weeks
William Roden	Holy Austin	Mar 1876	1 month
William Green	Dunsley Rock	Nov 1876	9
Alice Preston	Dunsley Rock	June 1880	15 weeks
Alice Preston	Dunsley Rock	June 1881	34
George Wood	Dunsley Rock	Feb 1882	1 month
Georgina Preston	Dunsley Rock	June 1883	62
Richard Hughes	Holy Austin	Oct 1883	26
Francis Coley	Dunsley	Jan 1884	20 months

CONCLUSION

VISITORS who have seen the rock dwellings mentioned in this volume will appreciate that most are in an advanced state of decay. Please do not assist nature in this process! Treat them with respect and they will remain for others to see. Please do not deface the monuments and follow the COUNTRY CODE.

No doubt more information and pictures will come to light as a result of this publication. The authors will be pleased to hear from anyone who has material which might be suitable for inclusion in a reprint.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much valuable help has been given by Mrs. L. King and P. W. King who placed their research papers at our disposal. Without their help this project would not have got off the ground. Thanks are due to Mr. P. Sankey and the Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries for allowing us to photograph the picture of the interior of the Holy Austin Rock which hangs in the New Rose and Crown, Whitehill, Kinver. We also thank Mr. L. Dunn and Mrs. Downie for some of the plates and Mr. F. A. Bills for assistance in their processing. We are indebted to the Kinver Library for the use of the local history collection and to the libraries of Stourbridge and Wolverhampton for their assistance; also Rev. Prebend. D. W. Watson and Rev. R. D. Payne of St. Peter's Church Kinver. We are grateful to the Birmingham Reference Library for the use of the Benjamin Stone collection of photographs and to Mr. J. Greaves Smith for the cover design. Many others have helped in various ways. We thank them all.