

Pleasley Vale

A Journey Through Time

Edited by Matthew Beresford



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List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Aerial photograph of Pleasley Vale showing mill buildings and Pleasley Park to the north

Figure 2: Ground plan of Yew Tree Cave based on nineteenth century drawings

Figure 3: Hayman Rooke's plan of the villa site. The two villas are clearly not aligned

Figure 4: Hayman Rooke's illustration of part of the mosaic floor discovered at the villa

Figure 5: Carved stone font from St. Michael's church, Pleasley

Figure 6: Aerial photograph of Pleasley mills

Figure 7: Mill Two in the early 1900s

Figure 8: St. Chad's church at Pleasley Vale

Figure 9: The William Hollins War Memorial with lower row of cottages visible in the background

Figure 10: Lower row of cottages (left) where Bernard Sanderson's parents lived. The picture on the right was taken not long after the cottages were demolished

Pleasley Vale

Introduction

Pleasley Vale lies just to the east of the present village of Pleasley approximately three miles north of Mansfield, skirting the Derbyshire / Nottinghamshire border. It is located, as its name suggests, in a natural gorge that was cut out of the southern Magnesian Limestone region several million years ago by melting glacial ice caps. Today, a small stream runs through the Vale that feeds a couple of large, man-made ponds. This water supply was utilised in the 18th and 19th centuries, when three large mills were built within the Vale, mills that are still used as industrial units and office blocks in the present. Evidence of occupation or exploitation of the landscape can be traced all the way back to Palaeolithic times, somewhere around 100,000 years ago, and can be noted in almost every historical period since, highlighting the Vale's importance through time.



Figure 1: *Aerial photograph of Pleasley Vale showing mill buildings and Pleasley Park to the north*
(Bolsover District Council)

Pleasley Vale in Prehistory (by Matthew Beresford)

The earliest evidence of landscape use at Pleasley Vale comes from the two cave sites that exist within the limestone gorge. No human occupation has been noted, but a wide variety of Ice Age animal remains were recovered during exploration in the late 19th century. The first of the two caves, Pleasley Vale Cave, is located just to the left as you enter the Vale through the security gate behind the newly built apartments. In 1862 part of the limestone cliff face was being quarried back in preparation for a new house for William Hollins (who owned the mill complex) when the entrance to the cave was discovered. Inside the cave were the bones of reindeer, woolly rhinoceros, wolf and wild horse – animals that lived in a rather cold climate. Generally in the Magnesian Limestone region, which spreads as far north as Barlborough, to the west as far as Bolsover and to the east Creswell Crags, Ice Age human occupation can be traced back no further than 60,000 years ago, when Neanderthals were using the caves as shelter sites. However, the cave known as Mother Grundy's Parlour at Creswell Crags has revealed animal bones dating back to 120,000 years ago when the climate was much warmer, so we know animals were using the region for quite some time. Perhaps Ice Age hunters did visit Pleasley Vale, but so far no evidence for this has been found.

The second cave, Yew Tree Cave, can today be found on the trail that runs along the old railway line just to the south of the Vale up on the high ground. Located approximately halfway between the Pleasley mills end of the trail and the Pleasley garden centre end, the cave was explored by William Ransom in the 1860s where he discovered bones of roe deer, wolf and pig. The cave is now protected with a steel gate that restricts access and is often mistaken for Pleasley Vale Cave, where yew trees grow very close to the cave's location. This is highlighted in the ground plan of Yew Tree Cave (see Figure 2) where we can see quite clearly the cave entrance faces to the north – the cave located behind the new apartment buildings is south facing, so cannot be the cave depicted in the plan. Therefore Pleasley Vale Cave is behind the building, and Yew Tree Cave is in the railway cutting to the south of the vale.

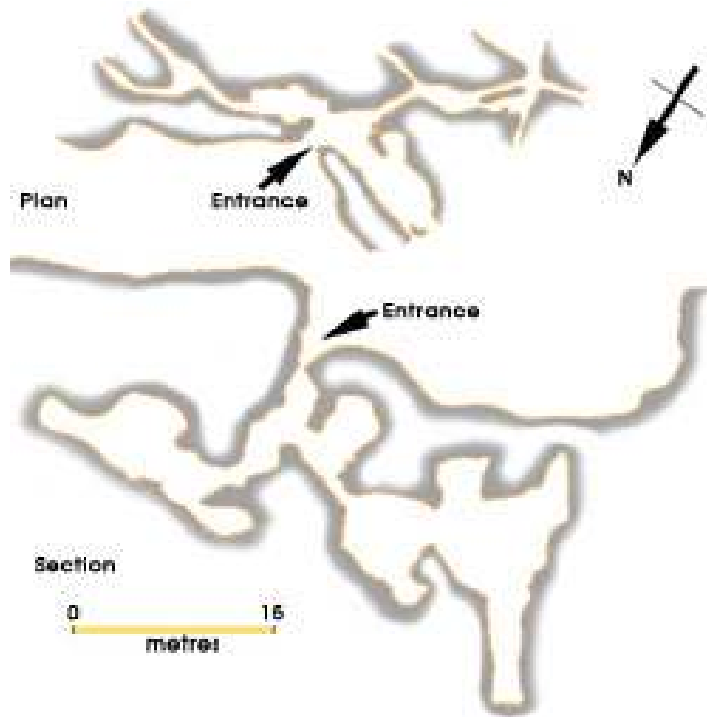


Figure 2: Ground plan of Yew Tree Cave based on nineteenth century drawings (Creswell Heritage Trust)

No later Prehistoric evidence has been found within the Vale itself, but fieldwalking in the surrounding fields has revealed Neolithic (c.4500-2500BC) flint tools and Bronze Age (c.2500-700BC) flints and metalwork, including part of a bronze bracelet and a bronze spearhead (found on separate occasions) just to the east of Pleasley Vale very close to the local water source. This may suggest they were votive offerings placed in the water as both objects were broken,

a common practice in the Bronze Age period and relating to religious beliefs. No evidence from the Iron Age (c.700BC – AD43) has so far been noted in or around Pleasley Vale, although this does not necessarily suggest that no occupation occurred (it may well be that the Roman villa just to the south of the Vale had its origins in the later Iron Age – discussed in the next section).

The Roman Period (by Matthew Beresford)

That Roman occupation has been revealed for Pleasley Vale should come as no surprise as the site borders the B6417 Rotherham Road (known locally as the Ramper) that runs from at least Pleasley (and probably south past Mansfield) all the way up to the Roman fort of Templeborough at Rotherham. That this road has its origins in the Roman period is without doubt, and is attested to by archaeological fieldwork, map work, ground surveys and stray finds since the early 1970s onwards. It may well be that the road is much earlier and could be a prehistoric trackway – plotting of known prehistoric sites on an Ordnance Survey map quickly reveals clusters of sites all the way along the road. For Pleasley, a number of Bronze Age sites lie just meters to both east and west of the road. Meeting this Roman road somewhere close to Pleasley was another major Roman road that ran from the fort of Ad Pontem (south of the River Trent) and up through Southwell (where potentially the largest Roman villa in Britain has been discovered) and north through Osmanthorpe fort at Kirklington. Here the road veers ninety degrees and travels west through Farnsfield Roman camp before passing the Roman villa site at Pleasley Vale / Mansfield Woodhouse and heading further across to Chesterfield Roman fort (Cestrefeld).

The villa site at Pleasley Vale was first discovered in 1787 by Major Hayman Rooke, a local archaeologist who lived at Mansfield Woodhouse. Rooke and his team found traces of early timber buildings that dated to around AD80 – this is quite an early date for a farmstead / wooden villa site as military occupation was still heavy in the area, largely due to the Iron Age tribes of the Brigantes (Derbyshire) and the Corieltauvi (Nottinghamshire). In fact, it is likely that the Magnesian Limestone ridge was the territorial boundary between the two tribes. The need for a military presence is testified by local forts at Derby (Strutts Park, Little Chester) and Chesterfield (Cestrefeld) both dating to no earlier than around AD70 and lasting beyond the turn of the century (Chesterfield for example had a military presence up to around AD120-130). That a civilian settlement could exist unscathed in an area deemed hostile enough for major forts seems doubtful, therefore we may be looking at an Iron Age site that was later adapted by the Romans – or was it? It could rather be that an Iron

Age leader / tribe prospered under Roman protection and adopted the Roman way of life. Either way, it seems that the wooden building made way for a villa built of stone sometime around AD180. Rooke found evidence for two large stone villas, which he described as a Villa Urbana and a Villa Rustica. It is difficult to say whether there were in fact two villas on the site, or if the initial stone villa was again later replaced with a larger building as the owner prospered even further.

Looking at Rooke's plan of the site it appears that the latter may well have been the case, as the two villas are not built parallel to each other. The Romans were very strict on layout and design – a town or fort would have strict right angles and grid systems, and Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland is built over the top of hills rather than going around them, such was the Roman way. To have two villas adjacent to each other that did not conform to this would have been very unusual, so it is more likely the larger replaced the smaller.

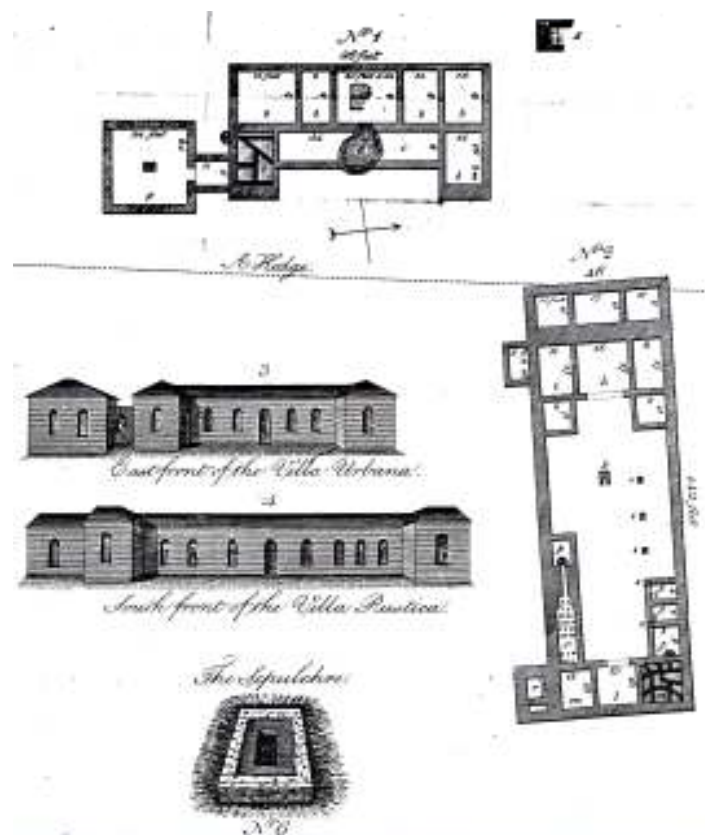


Figure 3: Hayman Rooke's plan of the villa site. The two villas are clearly not aligned

Artefacts recovered from the site include pottery (standard types such as greyware and more high status Samian ware) and metal objects including brooches and part of a cullender. Overall, it seems the site covered around four acres and consisted of two villas complete with mosaic floors and a separate sepulchral mausoleum and no doubt outlying buildings, roads and field systems, although these were all allegedly destroyed in the 1930s. Whether any archaeological remains still exist at the site due to ploughing over the years is doubtful.

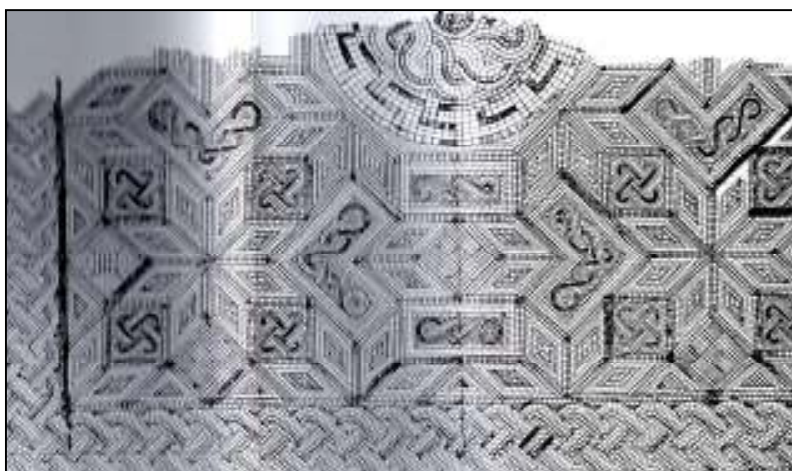


Figure 4: *Hayman Rooke's illustration of part of the mosaic floor discovered at the villa*

Further local evidence for the Roman period comes from a coin hoard found at Stuffynwood (1770), a probable Roman tile kiln at Sookholme and part of a tessellated pavement / road surface discovered in the 1970s on the high ridge at the very western end of Pleasley Vale. This may well attest to the presence of another villa site close to the Northfield one. Further afield, the site is just a couple of miles to the south of the known, large Roman occupation site of Scarcliffe Park¹.

¹ See M. Beresford *Scarcliffe Park: A Journey Through Time*, available at <http://www.mbarchaeology.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Scarcliffe%20Park.pdf>

Medieval Pleasley (by Val Gamble)

Although not mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, it is likely that a settlement of Pleasley already existed at this time. Derived from the Anglo Saxon 'Plesa', being a person's name and 'lēah' meaning wood, glade or more likely clearing in a wood, Pleasley would probably have been a very small community providing a crossing of the River Meden. Later constructions to provide water for the mill in the square at Pleasley have changed the nature of the river, but originally this would have been an ideal fording place. There is a natural bowl of flat land here by the river that cuts into the higher magnesium limestone, which surrounds it on all sides, and this would have given good access across the river.

It is believed that at the time of the Domesday Survey, Pleasley would have been part of the manor of Glapwell. Prior to the Norman Conquest of 1066, the owner of the manor of Glapwell had been a man called Leofric, but in the Domesday Book it states that this land and several other manors had been taken over by William Peverel. Serlo, the tenant, is referred to in later documents as Serlo de Glapwell.

A descendant of Serlo de Glapwell, either his son or grandson, known as Serlo de Pleasley is thought to have founded the church of St Michael's in about 1150 and also to have built a manor house close by.

The simple Norman style chancel arch with billet moulding is all that remains of the original church although some of the lower stonework of the walls is thought to be original. A founder's tomb is recessed into the south-east wall of the chancel, but when this was opened up during renovations in the 19th century it was found to be empty. Serlo de Pleasley had formed an alliance with Felley Priory and it is believed that he was buried there instead.

The church was altered during the 13th century with windows being enlarged and a tower being added at the west end in the late 14th or early 15th century. There is no written record of this work being undertaken, but the church displays the style of building from these centuries. Some stonework around several doors and windows has since been replaced in later renovations of the 19th Century.

The old, carved stone font is thought to be Norman and of a similar date to the original church. The early style of carving depicts a priest performing a baptism, holding a cloth with a cross decoration in one hand and an *aspergillum* (water sprinkler) in the other. The style of his haircut appears to be Norman or it could just represent a priest's tonsure, when the crown of the head is shaved, leaving a circle of hair around it. The figure, richly dressed in priest's vestments is seated on a throne or priest's chair, which is shown to one side. The priest is seated beneath an arch similar to the chancel arch in the church. The octagonal font is shaped from one block of stone, with flattened sides on the exterior to provide surfaces for carving. This may indicate a slightly later date as Norman fonts were generally square or tub shaped. Examples of octagonal fonts have been found as early as 1170, but this shape is more common from the 13th century onwards.

Only one side has been fully carved. A second side has another arch carved at the top, but the full panel was never completed. Undoubtedly, the font should have been carved on all sides, but something prevented this from happening. A newer font dated 1662 stands at the back of the church and this would have been installed following the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660. Many original fonts were removed from churches at the start of the Commonwealth period (1649-1660) and new ones installed at the Restoration. St Michael's old font was found in the Rectory garden in the 19th century, being used as a flower tub and has since been restored to the church. The later font stands on an earlier base, which could have held the original font.

It is perhaps surprising that such a simple, relatively small church should have such a finely carved font. The church does appear to have been upgraded during the 13th century and this may have been due to the wealthy influence of the Bek family who held Pleasley manor sometime prior to 1280 until Anthony Bek's death in 1310. Thomas, John and Anthony Bek were all very wealthy people. Thomas became Bishop of St David's in Wales and was also Lord Treasurer to King Edward 1st, Keeper of the Wardrobe, Keeper of the Great Seal of England and a Chancellor of Oxford University. Anthony Bek was a Crusader, courtier, linguist, ambassador and the Bishop of Durham.



Figure 5: Carved stone font from St. Michael's church, Pleasley (M. Gamble)

A charter, granted by the King dated 9th May 1284 gave Thomas Bek and his heirs the right to hold a market on Monday in each week, plus two fairs to be held on the feast of St Luke and the feast of St Mark. The remains of the old market cross stands at the crossroads in Pleasley. The cross would have been erected soon after the granting of the charter. All that remains are stone steps leading up to the base of the shaft.

Although Pleasley may only have been a convenient place to stay while hunting in the forest and certainly not Thomas Bek's main residence, he was granted permission in 1285 to build a stone *mansum* and crenellate it. The addition of battlements could have just been for decoration rather than for defence and this house may have replaced or improved upon an earlier residence.

On 18th February 1293 King Edward 1st visited Thomas Bek at Pleasley on his way from Welbeck to Codnor Castle. He stayed the night, so the house must have been big

enough to accommodate the King and his retinue. Also it must have been of sufficient importance and size to seek the King's permission to fortify it. Or permission may have been required as the property possibly fell within the King's forest known as Sherwood Forest. The actual site of the manor house is unclear, but it has been suggested that it was situated on a bluff across the River Meden from the church with a good vantage point both ways along the river and down to Pleasley Vale where the Pleasley deer park was situated.

The River Meden has always provided the north-west boundary of Sherwood Forest through many centuries and the crossing of the River Meden at Pleasley would have been one of the points of entry into the forest. At this point the forest was not necessarily thick with trees but contained areas of scrub and clearings to encourage grazing for the deer.

Pleasley Park itself is first mentioned in documents in 1209. By 1330 it seems to be mentioned in conjunction with neighbouring Warsop Wood and this may have formed one large deer park. By 1425 the park estate was held by John Leake of Sutton Scarsdale Hall and it is suggested that the manor house at Pleasley may have fallen into disrepair at this time with the stone later being re used in farm buildings close to the site.

Pleasley Forges (by Mick Gamble)

It is known that bar iron was purchased for Hardwick Hall from the forge at Pleasley during the time of the first Earl of Devonshire (1551-1626) but nothing else is known until the time of George Sitwell.

George Sitwell of Eckington had built his own furnace at Foxbrooke near Renishaw in 1652. Over the next twenty years Sitwell built forges at Clipstone and Cuckney; and at Pleasley Vale he built a furnace, two forges and power saws. The forges were called Nether and Upper forge. Wrought iron bars were brought to Pleasley from the midlands and later from north of Pleasley.

In the late 17th century, John Jennens, a wealthy ironmaster who originated and operated in the West Midlands area where there was a huge demand for iron, developed new sites at Kirkby in Ashfield (Furnace), Pleasley Vale (Forge), Wingerworth (Furnace) and New Mills (Forge) in Derbyshire. Smelting wasn't part of the Pleasley operation in Jennens' time because economics dictated that the sites of smelting furnaces should be close to the source of extraction. The furnaces were used for smelting ore into pig and cast iron while forges were utilised for removal of impurities from the pig iron by rolling and hammering out into wrought iron bars using water powered mills.

Both furnace and forges were fuelled by charcoal from skilfully managed coppices until the late 17th century when mature woodland became scarce & coke became more widely available and, subsequently, more economical to use. The wrought iron bars were sold to nail makers, blacksmiths, whitesmiths, locksmiths, gunsmiths and edge tool makers. The Kirkby Furnace supplied direct to Pleasley Forge from where finished iron was retailed to John Jennens' markets in the Midlands.

Pleasley Forge is marked on Chapman's map of 1774, Burdett's map of 1791 and the 1841 map of the ecclesiastical parish of Pleasley has four fields named "Forge Close" to the left of the road where it bends sharply in that direction, just before the entrance to the present mill complex, and one named "Forge Meadow" where the engineering works now stand.

As the mills developed the forges were destroyed. It is believed that the upper mill was built on the site of the upper forge and that the nether forge was further down stream in the meadow that adjoins Pleasley Park. It is possible to see where water was diverted under what is now the road.

At the site of the mill forge there is a protruding RSJ (Rolled Steel Joist) iron, which replaced the wooden beam extending over the river to where a wheel was mounted. The RSJ was a French invention around 1850.

The Mills at Pleasley Vale (by Mick Gamble)



Figure 6: *Aerial photograph of Pleasley mills* (Bolsover District Council)

Timeline:

- 1784 A partnership was formed between Henry Hollins, a brazier from Nottingham, (In 1767 Hollins was Sheriff of Nottingham.) Thomas Oldknow, a draper from Nottingham, John Paulson, draper from Mansfield, William Siddon, draper from Mansfield, and John Cowpe, an employee of Thomas Oldknow. The Company was Cowpe, Oldknow, Siddon & Co. A 42 year lease was taken out on the site of a corn mill and forge together with an extra 15 acres of land plus a stretch of the river including the dam. The lease included Upper Forge and Pleasley Old or Nether Forge. The indenture of co-partnership (1785) said the mill was at Pleasley Upper Forge, which was then owned by Thomas Burrows on land owned by Henry Thornton. When Thornton had bought the estate of Nicholas Leake in 1742 there were two forges. The total capital was £4,200. Four partners invested £700 each and the rest (£1,400) was provided by the 25 year old John Cowpe who as chief executive equipped the mill.
- 1785-95 A house was built for Cowpe. The Northfields were purchased and 10 houses for work people were built. Bridge and new road made. A smith's, joiner's shop and cotton room added to the mill. In the first years there would have been a carding machine and spinning.

The first yarn was sent to Manchester. Calico was made using twist manufactured on site. Weaving on site ceased for a number of years.

- 1788 Advertisement in The Nottingham Journal for a middle aged woman to look after 12 to 15 boys and girls.
- 1791 25 apprentices between the ages of 9 and 16 employed at the mill.
- 1792 A new house, school house, brewhouse and cowhouse were built.
- 1794 5 shillings & threepence paid to a regular Sunday School teacher.
- 1796 John Cowpe left.
- 1797-98 A second mill was built downstream from the first one.
- 1801 The population of Pleasley was 473.
- 1802 240 adult workers and 60 apprentices (girls) employed.
- 1803 A new water wheel was installed.
- 1804 A steam engine installed.
- 1816 The company was now Oldknow, Pearse & Co. It employed 81 males and 168 females.
- 1827 The site was purchased.
- 1829 The company known as Hollins, Siddon & Co.
- 1839 A gas plant was installed.
- 1840 December 25th. Fire destroyed the upper mill.

- 1841 The company known as William Hollins, Siddon & Co.
- 1844 The mill was rebuilt.
- 1846 The company became William Hollins & Co. Partners were William and Edward Hollins, Thomas, Charles and William Paget and Samuel Siddon. Controlled by the Hollins and Paget families. Pagets were related to Oldknow. Between 300 & 400 people employed. Merino wool in use.
- October - The second mill was destroyed by fire.
- 1850 A power driven combing machine was installed. (This could be operated by women).
This decade was a period of expansion for the company with other mills at Lenton, Radford and Mansfield.
- 1851 At the Great Exhibition “Hollins, William & Co, Pleasley Works near Mansfield, manufacturers. Merino, cashmere & cotton hosiery yarns, used in the Midland counties for the manufacture of hosiery, and on the continent for knittings and hosiery purposes”.
- 1859 The firm owned 26 cottages in the vale and 8 on Pleasley Hill.
- 1872 The link to the railway was completed.
- 1880s The gasworks at the mills provided gas to Pleasley Colliery, and by concession from Lady Verney (Parthenope Nightingale) to the whole of Pleasley village.
- 1881 William involved in the setting up of Mansfield & District Hospital.
- 1882 The company now William Hollins & Co Ltd. The managing director was Henry Ernest Hollins. Henry was a great organiser. William had built the modern mills and introduced merino. He had built a community and lived in it.
- 1885 An additional engine installed at the lower mill. The old joiner’s shop was demolished. The “Dorothy” engine was installed.

- 1885 Sidings added to the lower mill to the Pleasley-Tibshelf line.
- 1888 A new wash house built and a new wool room in the lower mill. From now on new machinery was installed regularly.
- 1890 May. Henry Ernest Hollins bought the Via Gellia business (to prevent competitors from expanding) for £40,000. This included mills at Cromford and Milford.
- 1891 Company Head office moved from Nottingham to Pleasley.
- 1891-92 Experimentation in mixing wool and cotton took place. This cloth was sold direct to shirt makers.
- 1893 November 23rd. The Board decided that “£2000 be risked in the cloth trade”. The cloth was called Viyella. A designer was appointed and a sales organisation was created.
- 1894 Viyella registered as a trademark. Patented in USA, Japan & S America.
- 1895 To protect stability in the market a minimum retail price set for Viyella.
- 1896 The spinning of worsted was expanded to Pleasley from Radford.
- 1898 More worsted machinery installed in No 1 Card Room, Upper Mill.
- 1898 Fairfield Mill, Huddersfield purchase. Hollins now had control of merino.
- 1899 2 Scottish weaving firms who had made cloth for Viyella were purchased.
- 1899-1902 Khaki Viyella made for officers’ uniforms in the South African wars.
- 1903 47% of company sales now in cloth.
- 1904 Viyella garments made at Radford.
Viyella began to be an international success.

- 1905-6 The upper mill, the Worsted Mill, was enlarged.
- 1907 William Hollins & Co Ltd became a public company.
- 1910 Garment factory opened in Radford
- 1913 A new combing shed built to the south of the Upper Mill.
The success of Viyella led to installation of new machinery throughout the early and mid twentieth century.
- 1914 The trading link with Germany was severed but markets increased in USA, Canada & Australia. Viyella not saleable during the war because it was expensive. Other, cheaper, wool cloths introduced. Sales in yarn increased due to more home knitting during the war.
- 1919 Garment making moved from Radford to Castle Boulevard, Nottingham.
The increased use of laundries was affecting the non-shrinking claims for Viyella. Finishing transferred to Seedhills Finishing Co in Paisley.
- 1920s Slump led to short time working.
- 1924 Head Office moved back to Nottingham.
- 1926-29 New looms, mules & ring spinning frames installed. More electrical equipment, £70,000 spent on a new power plant & railway sidings extended. Otrher new buildings – wool department: new sorting room with new scouring & carbonising plant.
- 1928 Seedhills Finishing Co was purchased.
- 1930s Slump led to closing of mills at Radford & Huddersfield.
- 1934 980 employees at Pleasley.
- 1938 Further extensions of long sheds following the line of the River Meden to the combing shed (Mill 2) were completed. Two extra floors added.

- 1939 Upsurge in demand and mills working to full capacity but a shortage of labour.
- 1941 Clothes rationing and the introduction of utility cloths meant Viyella not viable and Dayella introduced. This was eventually limited to infant & children's wear. More yarn being produced for the government. The British Small Arms company's premises in Birmingham were bombed. Part of the lower mill was cleared. Heavy carding machines and complicated spinning equipment was dismantled to make room for the BSA company. 17 pounder anti-tank guns were sent to units of the Royal Regiment.
- 1947 More than 800 employed at Pleasley. 70% were women & girls.
- 1948-54 New ring spinning frames, carding & roving machinery.
- 1952 Hollins now exporting to 45 countries. All obsolete equipment removed.
- 1961 Company renamed Viyella International. W Hollins & Co a subsidiary company.
- 1961 Houses in the Northfields were demolished.
- The next 25 years saw a series of companies emerging in the textile industry with Courtaulds & ICI Ltd as the leaders. Further developments led to a number of changes of ownership.
- 1969 The company was taken over by ICI Ltd.
- 1970 Merged with Carrington & Dewhurst to become Carrington Viyella.
- 1971 Sports & Social Club built.
- 1982 Vantona Viyella
- 1986 Company became Coats Viyella.
- 1987 The mills closed.



Figure 7: *Mill Two in the early 1900s* (Bolsover District Council)

Why Pleasley Vale?

At the time when the first partnership was created there was an expansion in spinning from the trade in Lancashire. Mechanisation meant there were new markets and profits to be made. Whilst the first partners were not experienced in mill ownership, as drapers they had a good understanding of the markets. Arkwright held patent rights over the machinery he had invented but some companies but reluctant to pay and some believe that having a mill in a relatively secluded place such as Pleasley Vale might not attract a request for patent payments. At the same time the transport links were good for their time and the River Meden was a source of power.

The Workforce - Where did the workers come from?

In 1801 the population of Pleasley was 473 and New Houghton did not develop until after the colliery opened in 1873. Mansfield Woodhouse was nearby. Travelling from Mansfield (4 miles away) would make a long working day even longer. By the standards of their day the mill owners were good employers. Gradually a community developed around the mills. Some houses were built to attract workers. It is known from an advertisement in *The Nottingham Journal* 1788 for a middle aged woman to look after 12 to 15 boys and girls that child apprentices were living in the vale. Child apprentices would be from the town workhouses. The working day started at 6am and finished at 7pm. A school house was built in 1792 and school was attended on Sunday.

An advertisement in *The Nottingham Journal*, 26th December 1801: “Wanted at Pleasley Mills, near Mansfield, an overlooker of a Spinning Room. A man with a family preferred.” The advantage for the company was that a family man would have children who would be employed as well.

In 1833 an act of parliament said that children could only be employed in textile mills if they attended two hours a day at school on six days a week. In 1843 *The Nottingham Review* reported the opening of a spacious playground for the children of the infant and junior school and “*a plentiful supply of articles for athletic amusements have been provided for the work people generally, of both sexes, and all ages*”.

A directory of 1859 recorded: “*Near the mills is a daily school, promoted and supported by W^m Hollins, Esquire, more particularly for the use of those who are employed at the works. Also a mechanics’ institute and a library of 500 books. Also, a Sunday school, well attended. The Methodists are allowed to assemble in the schoolroom on Sundays for religious services.*”

Mill children attended school in mornings one week and afternoons the next. At the back of the schoolhouse were baths charging ½d public and 1d private. The company developed a community with events and activities. Yearly outings to the seaside were

arranged. Workers had a free train ticket and families were taken to the railway station in company wagons.

The company farm supplied milk, eggs and other produce. A field was ploughed so that workers could plant potatoes in their allotted furrows. The development of a co-operative store in Pleasley Vale was encouraged by the company whose farm continued to supply it. The William Hollins & Co Cricket Club was established. Surprisingly it was not until 1885 that a canteen was provided for breakfasts and later dinners at the mills.

St Chad's Church, Pleasley Vale (by Val Gamble)

The small church in Pleasley Vale is dedicated to St Chad, the first Bishop of Lichfield or Mercia as it was known in Anglo Saxon times. The building itself, however, is much more modern, although it does have an unusual history.



Joseph Paget was a local wealthy businessman and a senior partner in the William Hollins Company who owned the mills in Pleasley Vale. In 1876, he decided that the growing number of residents and workers of Pleasley Vale needed their own place to worship rather than having to travel to Pleasley or Shirebrook. He paid for a chapel to be built on his estate of Stuffynwood in a raised position above the River Meden. This was on the Derbyshire side of the river and access was via the lower part of his carriage drive and then up a path to the church.

Figure 8: *St. Chad's church at Pleasley Vale* (Mick Gamble)

Originally built of timber and painted white, the chapel was fairly small but elegantly designed by Cox and Sons of the Strand, London. It was lit by gaslight, as gas had been installed on the Estate and throughout the mills during the previous year.

The chapel came under the jurisdiction of the Diocese of Lichfield and was attached to the parish church of Shirebrook with the recently appointed Vicar of Shirebrook, Dr Quilter of Oxford, being responsible for services at the chapel. In 1880 the Pagets started planning for their daughter's wedding, which they wished to hold at the chapel. However, St Chad's was just a chapel of ease and not a fully licensed church, so weddings should not have been held there. The Rev. Quilter objected most strongly

to the plan and upset Joseph Paget. In response, following his daughter's wedding in 1881, Paget gave instructions for the chapel to be dismantled and re-erected on the Nottinghamshire side of the river. This meant that the chapel now lay in a different diocese and was also linked with St Edmund's Church at Mansfield Woodhouse.

The church was made to look more imposing by brickwork and stone being built around the timbers, the addition of a small bell tower and a pipe organ being installed. Gothic style decoration and fittings were transferred from the original chapel, including pews designed by EW Pugin, some of which still remain in the church. The compact chancel area is decorated with paintings in the 'Arts and Crafts' style featuring plants and flowers symbolising the Christian message.

Joseph Paget paid for the church to have its own vicar and a substantial vicarage was built behind the church. This is no longer used as a vicarage as the vicar of St Edmund's is now responsible for St. Chad's Church. Although the population of the Vale has declined since the closing of the mills, the church is still well maintained and occasional services are held there.

Pleasley Vale in the Great War – The William Hollins’ Mills Memorial
(by Charlie Wheatman)

**“The Wm. Hollins’ Mills Memorial, Pleasley Vale, to those workers who fell in
The Great War 1914-19”**

(commemorative plaque on the Hollins memorial)

The following men’s names are honoured on both the Hollins’ Pleasley Vale Memorial and the Mansfield Woodhouse Memorial:

James Andrew Ashley.

Private 40182 9th Northumberland Fusiliers. He died on 22nd March 1918 and is commemorated on the Arras Memorial in France.

William Ashpool.

Private 71098 16th Sherwood Foresters. William died on 20th September 1917 aged 21 years and was the Son of Edward and Ester Ashpool of “Lynwood ,” High Street, Mablethorpe, Lincolnshire.

His death is commemorated on the Tyne Cot memorial in Belgium.

Harry Bottom

Private 42771 30th Company Machine Gun Corps. Harry died on 8th May 1918 and is commemorated on the Tyne Cot Memorial.

Lionel Herbert Flint.

Private 3496 1st/8th Sherwood Foresters. Lionel died on 14th October 1915 and was

19 years old. He was the Son of Louis Maddox Flint and Eliza Ann Flint who lived at “Kohanja,” Clipstone Road, Mansfield. Lionel’s death is commemorated on the Loos memorial, France.

William Maddox Flint.

Corporal 61775 15th/17th West Yorkshire Regiment. William died on 12th April 1918 and is buried in Le Grand Beaumart British Cemetery, France.

Were the two Flint men brothers, cousins, uncle and nephew? Note the family name of Maddox.

John George Glidewell.

Private 305709 2nd/8th Sherwood Foresters. John died on 27th April 1917 at the age of 24 years. At Easter 1916 his battalion was sent to quell the Irish uprising where it suffered numerous casualties; early in 1917 it was sent to the Western Front.

Prior to enlisting John was a Wesleyan Sunday-School teacher.



Figure 9: *The William Hollins War Memorial with lower row of cottages visible in the background (Bolsover District Council)*

Alexander and George Marchant:

Alexander Marchant.

Private 203422 1st/5th Sherwood Foresters. Alex died on 2nd April 1917 aged 30 and is buried in the Etaples Military Cemetery, France.

George Marchant

Private 12443 2nd/5th Leicestershire Regiment. George died 9 months after his brother on 6th December 1917; he is buried in the Orival Wood Cemetery, France. The brothers' father, Mr. Henry Marchant lived at 24, Pleasley Vale.

Harry Mellors.

Private 203815 16th Sherwood Foresters. Harry was born in Pleasley Vale but lived in Mansfield Woodhouse at the time of his death. He enlisted on the 22nd April 1917 having previously been employed at Messrs Hollins & Co's works at Pleasley Vale. He was wounded on 21st March 1918 and subsequently taken prisoner. Harry died of his wounds on 15th June 1918 and is buried in the Niederzwheren Cemetery in Germany.

Thomas Ignatius Joseph O'Gorman.

Private 6930 1st Lincolnshire Regiment. Thomas died on 20th October 1914, one of the very first from Mansfield Woodhouse / Hollins' Mills to die. The 1st Lincolnshires were part of the British Expeditionary Force and Thomas may have died during the Battle of Bassee, 10th October – 2nd November 1914, in which the German offensive from Arras to the coast was repulsed. He lived at 56, Blenheim Terrace, (Vale Road), Mansfield Woodhouse. Prior to the war he had been in the employment of Mansfield Post Office and then Wm. Hollins & Co. Ltd. He acted as orderly to Captain (C.E.?) Hollins, whose family owned the Mills in Pleasley Vale. Thomas is commemorated at Le Touret Memorial, France.

Alfred Peat.

Private 11962 7th Leicestershire Regiment. Alfred died on 14th July 1916 aged 35 years and was the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Peat, 17 Common Lane (Vale Road), Mansfield Woodhouse. He is buried at the Thiepval Memorial, France.

William Peat. (Possibly related to Alfred?)

Private 267215 12th/13th Northumberland Fusiliers. William died on 12th October 1918 as a Prisoner of War and is buried in the Neiderzwheren Cemetery in Germany.

Samuel Robert Robertson.

Private 15376 12th Sherwood Foresters. Samuel died on 22nd March 1918 aged 23 years. He is commemorated on the Pozieres memorial, France.

Bernard Sanderson.

Lance Corporal 46584 15th Sherwood Foresters; died on 24th March 1918. The 15th Sherwood Foresters was also known as Nottingham's Bantams because the battalion recruited men who were between 5ft and 5ft 3 inches in height.

Extract from 15th Sherwood Foresters War Diary, March 1918:

“On March 21st, the enemy launched the largest offensive of the war, on the Somme front. Known as the Kaiserschlacht, it was designed to destroy the over-stretched British Fifth Army, split the British and French Armies apart and then “roll up” the BEF from the south. The overwhelming attack caused initial chaos and loss, breaking deep into the area south of the Somme held by Fifth Army (including the ground occupied by the 35th Division in early 1917). Many Divisions were hurried to the area, to make a fighting stand.”

1st March: relieved and moved to Huddlestone Camp, Langemarck. Stayed until 9th, providing working parties.

9th March: Moved to Chauny Farm Camp, in GHQ Reserve. Spent two weeks training and refitting.

23rd March: Moved at 9am by train from Roesbrugge, arriving at Mericourt (on the Somme) at 9.30pm. then marched immediately to Maricourt, arriving 6am on 24th.

24th March: Noon. Ordered to counterattack. Moved forward and held the advancing enemy, with 15th Cheshires on the right. There was no touch with any troops on the left. The enemy went round this way, outflanking the two front Companies, who had very few survivors. At 6pm, ordered to withdraw to fresh positions on the Curlu-Maurepas road.

It was on Sunday, 24th March 1918 that Bernard Sanderson died at the age of 20. His parents, Alfred and Hannah Sanderson lived at 11, Pleasley Vale, a house, now demolished, on the bottom row adjacent to the bridge over the River Meden, only yards from where the War Memorial was later erected.

At the 11th November Armistice Service at the Pleasley Vale Memorial the Last Post has often been played by Alex Peck, whose father, John Peck was born at number 11, Pleasley Vale.



Figure 10: Lower row of cottages (left) where Bernard Sanderson's parents lived. The picture on the right was taken not long after the cottages were demolished (Bolsover District Council)

Edgar Sanderson.

Private 203355 1st/4th York and Lancaster. Edgar died on 14th August 1917 aged 24. He was married to Charlotte Sanderson and they live at 40, Park Avenue, Mansfield Woodhouse. Edgar was buried at the Adinkerke Military Cemetery in Belgium.

Oswald Sansom.

Private 28453 2nd Cheshire Regiment. Oswald died on 3rd October 1915 aged 17; the youngest known among the fallen of Mansfield Woodhouse. His parents, Charles and Emily Sansom lived at 19, Common Lane (Vale Road), Mansfield Woodhouse. Oswald is commemorated at the Loos Memorial in France.

Herbert Wharton.

Private 15555 10th Sherwood Foresters. Herbert was killed in action on Monday, 14 February 1916, aged 21 years. His parents were William and Sarah Wharton. Previous to enlisting in September 1914 he worked at the Pleasley Vale Works. His military training took him to Lulworth and Winchester but in June 1915 the 10th Battalion Sherwood Foresters went to the Front.

Extract from, *Exploring Beeston's History* by Samantha Ward:

"13th February 1916 - The Bluff, Ypres-Comines Canal - Having been in the Ypres Salient almost since their landing seven months prior, the 10th Sherwood Foresters relieved the 7th Lincolnshire Regiment in four frontline trenches in a position three miles south of Ypres (Ieper), Belgium, known as The Bluff. The first night passed quietly, until the next morning (14th) an intermittent enemy bombardment of the trenches began, continuing until 3.30pm when their position came under a "terrific bombardment". Then at 5.40 pm the first of several mines was exploded under the Sherwood Foresters, "battering (the trenches) to the ground". Shortly afterwards, German infantry attacked and despite efforts of retaliation by the British over the next

two days, the prized position of The Bluff had been lost, only to be regained a month later through some hefty investment of men and strategy. The toll of the enemy attack of the operations of the 14th - 17th February exacted 1294 British casualties. These lives were lost defending the muddy trenches that ran through and around what was effectively no more than a spoil-heap situated on the north bank of the Ypres-Comines Canal. Its forty-foot elevation served as a unique observation point in an otherwise flat landscape.”

No known grave, Herbert Wharton is commemorated at Ypres (Menin Gate) Memorial in Belgium.

Albert John White.

Sergeant 8074 6th York and Lancaster. Albert died on Monday 6th December 1915 aged 26. He was the son of John White of Pleasley Vale.

He joined the army in 1904 aged 15. When war was declared he trained recruits at Grantham and Whitby Camps where he was considered to be the best shot in his Battalion. He was sent to Gallipoli in June 1915 and received a bayonet wound to the back of his leg. He lay wounded in No man's land until the following day. When he was finally found he was sent to hospital in Alexandria and from there he went to Cyprus and to the King George's Hospital in London, where he died from his wounds. Sergeant White was buried at Mansfield Woodhouse Cemetery on Saturday 18th December 1915.

Names not on the Woodhouse memorial:

A.S. Mugglestone.

Sapper 480212 Royal Engineers. Sapper Mugglestone died on Sunday 8th July 1917 aged 22 His parents, William Henry and Ellen Mugglestone lived at 17 Portland Street, (Chesterfield Road North), Pleasley Hill, Nottinghamshire. He is buried at Achiet le Grande Cemetery in France.

Reginald Joseph Wright.

Private 36487 1st/5th battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. Reginald died on Thursday 11th October 1917 aged 19, possibly during or as a result of wounds received at the battle of Broodseinde, a phase of the third Battle of Ypres. He is buried at the Nine Elms British Cemetery at Poperinge, Belgium. His great nephew, Andy Mason who currently works at the Pleasley Vale Outdoor Activity Centre, has visited his Great Uncle's grave in Belgium. Reginald was the son of John Thomas and Eleanor Wright of Pleasley Hill, Nottinghamshire. His father's business, J.T. Wright & Sons of 1 Hill Street, Pleasley Hill is described as that of a wheelwright, joiner and general smith. Val and Mick Gamble have a photograph of the premises fronted by posed workmen, which may indeed include John and possibly his son Reg.

I would like to thank the staff at the Local Studies Libraries at Chesterfield, Mansfield and Mansfield Woodhouse for their help and advice during my research. Sources used / quoted in this piece are as follows: *Faces to Names* by Anthony Bagshaw (2008), *The Blast of War. Nottingham's Bantums* by Maurice Bacon (Sherwood, 1986), *Exploring Beeston's History* by Samantha Ward, Ancestry.com and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.