

Ψ Gravel Hole extra - further information about the history of this area

Gravel and sand has been quarried around Gravel Hole Farm for centuries. The Bishops of Durham had almost autonomous rule over the north of England from 1081-1836 and an edict prevented extraction of gravel and sand at Gravel Hole without the Bishop's permission.

In 1829 the village of Norton was described as being on beds of diluvial (from a flood – in this case the melting of ice at the end of the last Ice Age) gravel, of great depth in some places, with several gravel pits around the village.

In 1857 a gravel pit existed on the site of the more recent Gravel Hole Farm buildings. By 1897 this was no longer in use and the land had been reclaimed for agricultural use. However two other quarries nearby were in use until the late 1960s. One of these is now the Gravel Hole nature reserve.

In 1899 the Stockton Stone and Concrete Works was established at Station Road, Norton, on the site of the Norton Ironworks. (The Norton Ironwork, 1855-1879, was where the original Big Ben bell was cast. Unfortunately the bell cracked whilst being tried out at Westminster and was recast at Whitechapel.) The site is beside the railway line near Calf Fallow Farm. The farm dates from the 17th Century. It now houses the Daisy Chain charity but some of the original brickwork is visible in the road-side buildings. A cobbled lane led to the concrete works from Calf Fallow Lane. Sand and gravel from the Gravel Hole quarries would have been taken to the works along the track clearly shown on the 1954 OS map.

In 1935 a fire broke out at Gravel Hole Farm quarry. The Stockton and Teesside Herald describes the fire at a plant for the manufacture of builders' materials, owned by Mr A E Hobbs of Hill House, Norton. The plant was operated by diesel engines and drums of diesel fuel caught fire causing flames 100 foot high and a series of deafening explosions. By the time the fire engines arrived the flames had taken a firm hold and, having no access to a water supply, sand and gravel from the pits was used in great quantities to put out the flames and save the farm property.

The Stockton Stone and Concrete Works made concrete stone masonry, Norton concrete flags, kerb stones and pipes. Customers included local councils and ICI Billingham. The works closed in 1967 and the site was taken over by Marshall Tiles in the 1970s until 1998. The site is currently used for land-fill.

To see a photo of the Stockton Stone and Concrete Works see www.picture.stockton.gov.uk/photos/t5729.aspx

To see a photo of the Norton Ironworks see www.picture.stockton.gov.uk/photos/t1651.aspx

Also

picture.stockton.gov.uk/photos/S807.aspx

picture.stockton.gov.uk/photos/S804.aspx

Ψ Gravel Hole extra - Websites and books for identification of flora.

Gravel Hole - Wild Flower identification

www.british-wild-flowers.co.uk for photos

“Marjorie Blamey's wild flowers by colour” – M Blamey - ISBN 0 7136 7237 4

“Collins complete British wild flowers” – Paul Sterry – ISBN 0 00 720469 8

Ψ Gravel Hole extra – for assistance with identification of fauna

Gravel Hole – Fauna identification

You can check sighting at

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/wildlife/birdidentifier/form.asp>

<http://www.uksafari.com/>