

EXTRACT FROM BRITISH HISTORY ONLINE:  
HISTORY OF THE COUNTY OF STAFFORD: VOLUME 7 ORIGINALLY  
PUBLISHED BY VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORY, LONDON 1996

Rockhall in 1770. (fn. 59) On the east side of the Roaches a scattered settlement of coal miners grew up in the 19th century around Shaw House. (fn. 60) Roaches House (originally Argyle Cottage) south-east of Hen Cloud was built in 1876. (fn. 61)

A settlement on the township's south-western boundary where the Leek-Macclesfield road crossed the Churnet was known as Bridge End in 1641. It included Coneygray House, recorded in 1697 and named after a medieval rabbit warren. (fn. 62) The hamlet developed in the earlier 19th century after the opening of a dyeworks by 1824. (fn. 63) A row of seven houses dated 1850 stands to the east where the road to Meerbrook village crossed the Churnet. The former Highfield Hall north of Bridge End was built in the early 19th century. (fn. 64) Rock House, on the west side of the main road by the river crossing, was built in the earlier 1860s for Charles Ball, a Leek accountant. (fn. 65)

Before the later 18th century the road from Leek to Buxton ran via Abbey Green, Middle Hulme, and Upper Hulme. It crossed the Churnet by Broad bridge, so called in 1587 and rebuilt in the early 19th century. (fn. 66) It is now called Broad's bridge. From Upper Hulme the road ran north-west to a gap between Hen Cloud and the Roaches and on to Flash, in Quarnford, in Alstonefield. (fn. 67) The present Leek-Buxton road, which forms part of Leekfrith's eastern boundary, was laid out in 1765 and 1766 as a turnpike road. It was disturnpiked in 1875. (fn. 68) The Leek-Macclesfield road runs through the south-west corner of the township. Part of the medieval Earl's Way, the road was turnpiked in 1762, and in 1824 a tollhouse was set up at the north end of the Leekfrith stretch of the road at Poolend. (fn. 69) The road ran in front of Highfield Hall, but it was realigned to the west in the late 1820s. (fn. 70) It was disturnpiked in 1878, and the Poolend tollhouse was demolished in 1879. (fn. 71) There was formerly another route from Leek to Macclesfield, which branched from the Meerbrook road at Fould Farm and ran along the top of Gun, crossing into Cheshire at Danebridge, in Heaton. Recorded c. 1230, the road was still in use in the earlier 18th century. (fn. 72) In 1731 Robert Brough was murdered on Gun by his servant Joseph Naden as he travelled home along the road. After being sentenced at Stafford, Naden was hanged on Gun and his corpse gibbeted there. (fn. 73) The gibbet post was still standing in 1875. (fn. 74) A packhorse way ran east-west across Gun and passed through Meerbrook village and Middle Hulme. (fn. 75)

Leekfrith was included in an association for the prosecution of felons formed in 1802 and also covering the townships of Leek and Lowe and Tittesworth. (fn. 76) A separate association for Leekfrith was established in 1819 but evidently lapsed. The association was revived in 1833, and it still functioned in 1873. (fn. 77) The rural part of Leekfrith was connected to a mains water supply in the earlier 1970s. (fn. 78)

In the mid 19th century Meerbrook wake was celebrated at the end of September or the beginning of October. (fn. 79) Before the change in the calendar in 1752 it was probably held on the Sunday nearest 21 September, the feast of St. Matthew, the patron saint of Meerbrook church. By 1866 a wake was held in July at Abbey Green, and it was still held in 1919. (fn. 80) A village hall was built west of Meerbrook village in 1908 and rebuilt in 1988. (fn. 81) A Women's Institute was formed at Meerbrook in 1924. (fn. 82)

The Roaches and Hen Cloud impressed Robert Plot when he visited the area c. 1680. (fn. 83) He also noted Lud's Church, a ravine northwest of the Roaches, which has been suggested as the setting for the climax of the 14th-century poem, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. (fn. 84) About 1862 the landowner, Philip Brocklehurst of Swythamley, in Heaton, placed a ship's figurehead in the form of a woman at the entrance of the ravine. (fn. 85) It was apparently intended to commemorate the supposed martyrdom of the daughter of a Lollard preacher, and it was still there in 1914. (fn. 86)

The Roaches were added to the Swythamley estate at the time of the inclosure of the area in 1811, and in the late 1890s Philip Brocklehurst acquired Hen Cloud. He encouraged visitors to the area by cutting footpaths and building bridges across streams. He also incorporated the Rockhall cave dwelling into a Gothic-style shooting lodge. The lodge became a tourist attraction, and in 1872 Princess Mary of Cambridge and her husband Francis, duke of Teck, were entertained there. (fn. 87) It later became a private dwelling, and it remained as such until 1989. It was then acquired by the Peak Park joint planning board, which had bought 975 a. of the Roaches in 1980, following the break-up of the Swythamley estate in 1977. In 1993 the lodge was made into a refuge by the British Mountaineering Club. (fn. 88) The area remains popular with walkers and rock climbers. A colony of wallabies there originated in the late 1930s, when some escaped from a private zoo kept by Col. H. C. Brocklehurst at Roaches House. (fn. 89)

Richard Caldwell (d. 1584), the physician, was born apparently at Upper Hulme. (fn. 90) The sculptor Richard Hassall (1831-68) was born at Pheasants Clough, a farmhouse on the west side of the Roaches. (fn. 91)

## MANOR AND OTHER ESTATES.