

## PLACE-NAMES

Many of the place-names in the Birley Stone area show that when it was settled by the Anglo-Saxons it was heavily wooded and had to be cleared for settlement. Birley itself means woodland clearing near the byre; stubbing in Stubbing House Lane means a clearing in which the tree stumps still remained; hurst in Upper Hurst Farm means a wooded hill; and Stanley in Stanley Hill means a stoney woodland clearing. Prior Royd, now the name of a wood, was originally a clearing (royd) belonging to the priory (Ecclesfield Priory).



A Grenoside quarry in 1906

Some of the local place-names contain elements of Danish Viking origin. Greno in Grenoside, for example, is made up of the Anglo-Saxon element *graefen* and the Old Norse *haugr* and *graefen-haugr* (*gren-o*) means a quarried hill. The name carr in Andrew Carr Farm is from the Old Norse *kjarr* meaning marsh. Andrew is simply the name of an early tenant of the land.

Lastly it would be unwise to leave this historic landscape without considering how Whalejaw or Jawbone Hill got its name. Some accounts suggest that actual whales' jawbones once stood at the top of the hill near Birley Stone, but there is no firm evidence for this assertion. Just as likely is that it got its name because the bend in the lane (see the map) forms the perfectly symmetrical shape that would have been formed by erecting whale jawbones as an arch.

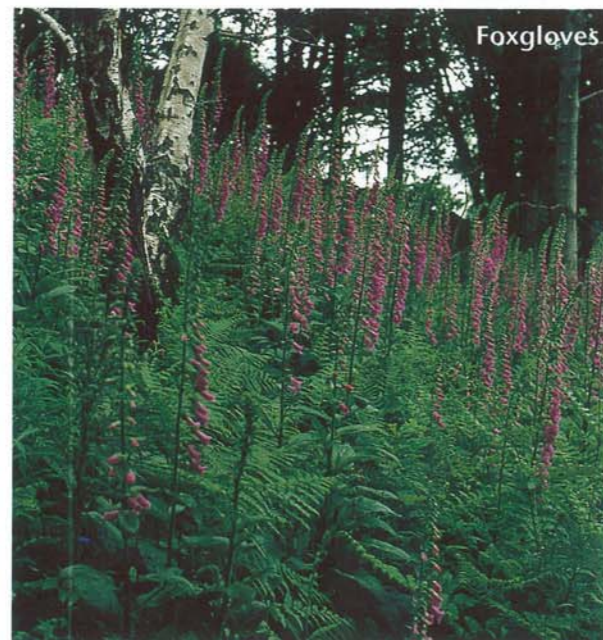
## NATURAL HISTORY

Old photographs show that the Birley Edge on either side of Whalejaw Hill near the Birley Stone was once much bleaker than it is today. To the south of the Birley Stone in particular, in the direction of Back Edge there is now much open woodland dominated by birch but with occasional oak, ash, sycamore, beech, hawthorn, crab apple and holly. But even here, and more obviously to the north of Whalejaw Hill on the footpath in the direction of Hunter House and Prior Royd, the landscape is dominated by heathland vegetation that reflects the dry and acid conditions on the steep edge underlain by sandstones. There are sheets of bracken, small clumps of bilberry and heather, and stands of broom and gorse, the latter rarely out of flower, giving rise to the old proverb 'when gorse is out of blossom, kissing is out of fashion'!

Among flowering plants in the ground flora look out for, in the appropriate season, bluebell, foxglove, hawkweed, vetch, rosebay willowherb, sorrel and wood sage.



Speckled Wood



Foxgloves

## Yellowhammer



The area also has a rich and varied bird life. In winter there are mixed parties of tits, flocks of redwings and fieldfares and small groups of linnets, siskins and redpolls. In late spring and early summer it is the songbirds that attract the attention: the resident blackbird, hedge sparrow and yellowhammer and the migrant chiffchaff, willow warbler and tree pipit. Tawny owl and green woodpecker also nest in the area. And if you are very lucky, and have a pair of binoculars, you may even see the occasional buzzard circling high above Wharncliffe Forest.

Among the butterflies that may be seen, the most notable is the speckled wood, a fairly recent arrival that has spread north from the south of England. Mammals are much less obviously seen, but if you are around early in the morning or late in the evening you may have the honour of seeing a fox trotting across the fields below the edge.

## The Countryside And Rights Of Way Act 2000

You are welcome to walk across Birley Edge and Back Edge, which is land that has been designated as Access Land under the Countryside And Rights Of Way Act 2000. This is a special landscape that has been recognised by the Countryside Agency for its recreational value.

### What can I do at Birley Edge?

Activities that can be freely undertaken at Birley Edge and other areas of Access Land include walking, sightseeing, bird watching, running and picnicking. You may not camp, light fires or barbecues, ride a bicycle or a horse or drive a motor vehicle (except mobility scooters or buggies).

Dogs must be kept on a short lead on Access Land at all times in the vicinity of livestock, and at all times between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 31<sup>st</sup> July due to ground nesting birds. However, these rules regarding dogs do not apply if you are walking along an existing Public Right Of Way, where dogs must be kept under close control.

### How should I prepare for my visit to Birley Edge?

If you plan to walk any distance you should wear walking boots and take a suitable map and be prepared for the possibility of bad weather. The paths along the top of Birley and Back Edge are fairly level, but are not surfaced, and are very narrow in places. For information on short and accessible walks around the Sheffield area, please refer to the publication Easy Going Trails that is published by Sheffield City Council and is available from local tourist information centres and some bookshops.

### Are there any restrictions on my use of Access Land?

Landowners and occupiers have the discretion to suspend or restrict the new access rights for up to 28 days each year for any reason. Details of such restrictions will be clearly posted on site.

Longer term restrictions on access may also apply: for details please telephone the Open Access Helpline on 0845 100 3298 or visit the website [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk)

## How do I find out where other Access Land is situated?

There are several other areas of Access Land around Sheffield. For the most up to date information on Access Land nationwide please visit the website [www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk](http://www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk) The new Ordnance Survey Explorer maps also show where Access Land exists throughout the country. You should also look out for the new access symbol located at most entrances to Access Land.



*This leaflet has been devised and written by Mel and Joan Jones with the map and three illustrations by Bob Warburton. The help of Norman Bradley, David Diver, Adrian Ollerearnshaw, George Robinson and Frank Rodgers is also acknowledged.*

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# THE BIRLEY STONE

## HERITAGE SITE AND VANTAGE POINT



### MEDIEVAL MARKER

Lying at 816 feet (249 metres) above the Don valley, the Birley Stone marks an important medieval boundary. It was first recorded – as *Burleistan* – in a boundary agreement in 1161 between Richard de Louvetot, lord of the manor of Hallamshire, and the monks of the Abbey of St Wandrille in Normandy. This abbey had been granted land in the ancient parish of Ecclesfield and monks from the abbey had founded Ecclesfield Priory by 1273. In the boundary agreement, the monks were to have the freedom to pasture their flocks of sheep and cattle from January to August in a great wood that covered the valley side as far as the *Don* (the River Don) from *Wereldsend* (Wardsend) to *Uhtinabrigg* (Oughtibridge). The monks were also permitted to pasture their swine on the fallen acorns in the same wood in the autumn. The remnants of this great wood remain as Wilson Spring Wood and Beeley Wood.



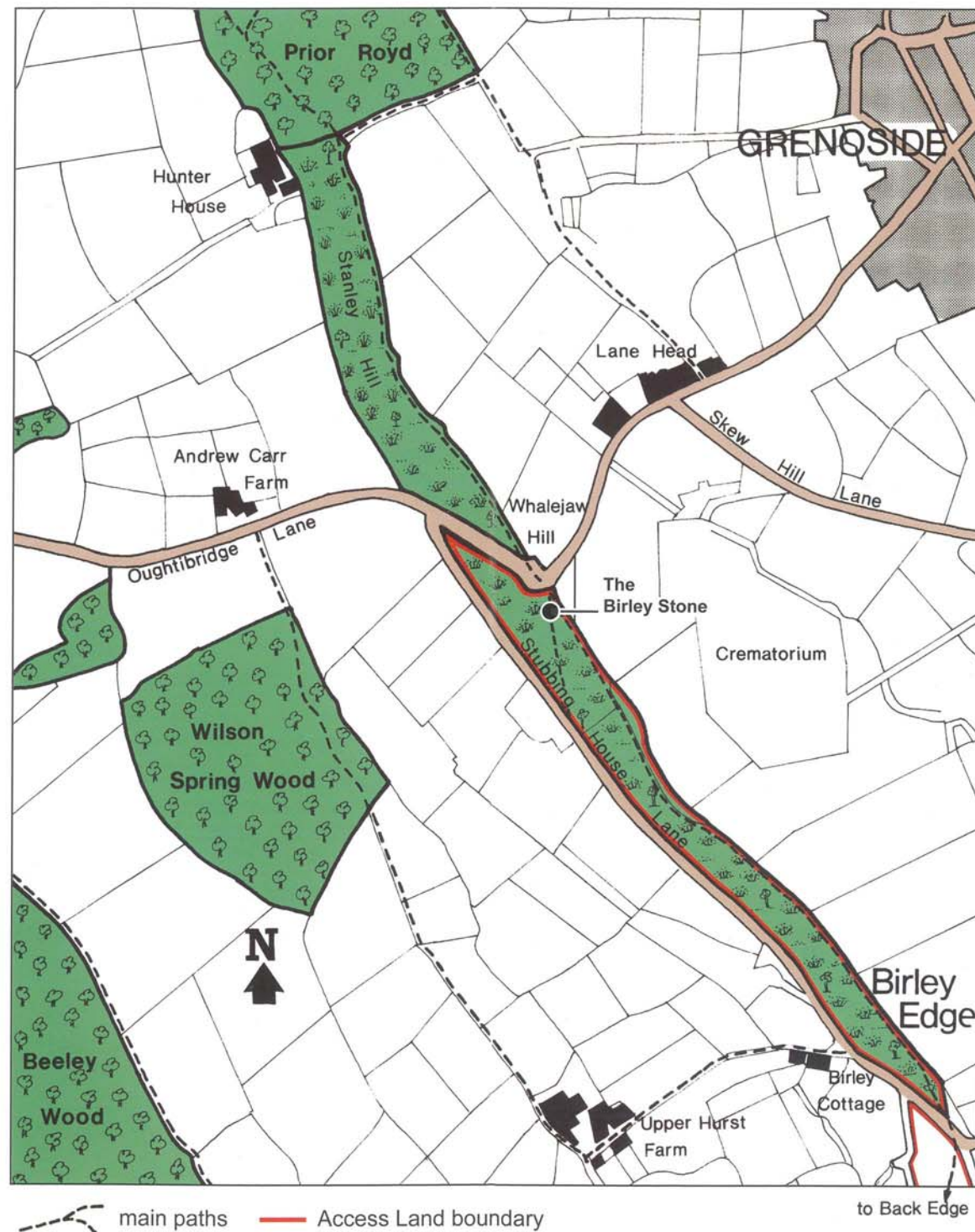
The base of the stone may be the original medieval one, but the shaft is later. Indeed, the original stone may not have been a straight stone shaft, but a stone cross to mark the way from Ecclesfield to Bradfield via Oughtibridge and Worrall. In this case it probably already stood in its present position when the 1161 boundary agreement was drawn up. The stone later became a boundary marker between the Grenofirth and Southey quarters of Ecclesfield parish.

### THE IMPACT OF GEOLOGY ON THE LANDSCAPE

Birley Stone and the surrounding area is part of the Pennine 'stone country'. Solid rock can be seen outcropping at the side of the road opposite the Birley Stone. On a short walk to the south along the footpath towards Back Edge outcrops of rock abound and soon the path is diverted by mounds of soil and rock waste from disused quarries. And everywhere are dry stone walls dividing one field from another. This is because the long slope from Birley Edge down to the River Don is underlain by thin seams of coal inter-bedded with shales and massive beds of coal measure sandstones – Greenmor Rock, Grenoside Sandstone and Penistone Flags.



What is hidden from the observer is the impact of geology underground. The many centuries-old rural landscape that spreads out before the visitor is in fact riddled with a honeycomb of mine workings, entered in their working days not by shafts but in the form of drift mines, known locally as day holes. These were brick-lined entrances straight into the hillside. And the main mineral mined for two centuries was not coal but ganister. This is a fine-grained sandstone that occurs beneath the thin coal seams of the Lower Coal Measures. It was ground into a powder which was mixed to form a clay for making bricks. But not just ordinary bricks, these were bricks to line the interior of steel furnaces – refractory bricks.

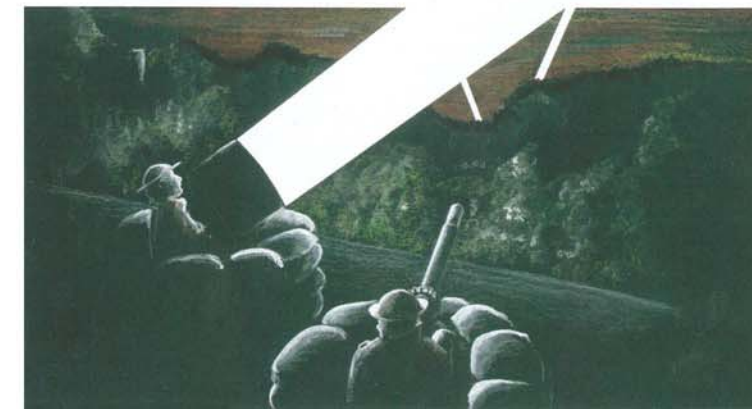


### THE WAR YEARS

The Second World War also made its temporary mark on the landscape around the Birley Stone. The area to the east of the Birley Stone, now occupied largely by the crematorium was an ammunition depot with the ammunition hidden underground in grass covered bunkers. Here were stored the bombs used in raids on Hitler's Germany and taken on a regular basis by convoys of lorries to the airfields in Lincolnshire. All that is left to remind us of this important part of the war effort are a number of marker stones showing the boundary of the site. There is, immediately behind the Birley Stone, on the edge of the copse, a boundary stone with the initials W D (War Department) on the far side.



There was also a small army unit billeted at Lane Head House to the north-east of the Birley Stone. The lieutenant and his platoon were stationed there to operate the searchlight and adjacent Lewis gun positioned in two sandbagged pits in the corner of a pasture field opposite the Birley Stone. The family at Lane Head House (the Robinsons) would retreat to the subterranean dairy during an air raid but Mr Robinson was sometimes called out to repair the Lewis gun when the mechanism jammed! The Robinson children had grandstand views of the Sheffield Blitz in 1940.



### THE FESTIVAL STONE

Beside the Birley Stone stands the Festival Stone, so-called because it was erected, by Wortley Rural District Council (Grenoside until 1974 was not part of the City of Sheffield) to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951. This is topped by what has variously been called a 'topograph' or a 'toposcope', that is a display showing the direction and distance from the stone of natural and built landmarks.



It cannot be stressed enough that the Birley Stone is not only an important heritage site but also a wonderful vantage point. To the south and south-west there are clear views over Sheffield including such easily identified landmarks as Hillsborough Stadium, the University Arts Tower, the whole of the city centre with the town hall and the two cathedrals, and beyond to the Gleadless valley and Norton Water Tower and Herdings flats. Turning to the west and north-west is the rolling hill country between Worrall and Bolsterstone, an area of outstanding beauty in which the small stone-walled fields, winding lanes, hamlets and isolated farms and valley woodlands form a perfect complement to the natural landscape. Beyond that rises the exposed and relatively treeless plateau between Ewden Beck and the Little Don. Looking northwards are the varied coloured patterns of the stands of deciduous and coniferous trees in Wharnccliffe Forest.