



A settlement at what is now Broseley, was first recorded in Domesday Book in 1086. From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was an early centre for iron working, coal extraction and ceramic production and became a crowded and wealthy centre as one of Britain's earliest industrial settlements. The fabric of the town reflects the key industries of the Gorge: distinctive brickwork, plain and elaborately patterned tiles and boundary walls made from reused industrial materials. From the grand houses of wealthy industrialists to the meagre dwellings of their employees, Broseley provides a coherent example of the upheaval wrought to society through industrial change. While Coalbrookdale claims to be the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, Broseley was significant in getting the bridge funded. Its importance as a commercial and social heartland for the Shropshire coalfield brought many of the finest minds of the time to the region and ultimately led to the innovative design of a marvel that stands to this day: the internationally acclaimed cast-iron bridge across the River Severn.

### Coal

From the late 1600s and into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the town featured the largest network of mines and collieries in England and it has been recognised as the "*original town of the Shropshire coalfield*". The main evidence for it today is a pattern of roads and paths along the tracks of old routes to wharves on the river bank from which coal was exported to other parts of the country. At that time, the south bank of the Severn Gorge at Jackfield, then part of Broseley, served as a major inland port. The river was the motorway of its day.

### Iron



Barnets Leasow Mine Mound

Ironstone mining and iron manufacturing flourished into the first half of the 1800s. Today, beautiful green landscapes hide a secret past. For example, Barnets Leasow Mound and Stocking Mound were two of the many sources of ironstone for local furnaces. The former mine was closed by 1873 and is recommended by English Heritage in the Monuments Protection Programme for scheduling as *“the best preserved example of a typical late 18<sup>th</sup> century - early 19<sup>th</sup> century Shropshire iron mine.”*

These mounds result from material being brought up from the mineshaft to weather and allow the iron ore rocks – the Pennystones – to be separated manually, usually by women and girls. This left a layer of residual materials which were then covered by further layers and the mound built up. Today these mounds appear wooded as a result of moves to beautify such industrial remains in Victorian times.

There were 17 mines and eight ironworks within Broseley and the town was home to several key figures in the industrialization of Britain. Most prominent was **John ‘Iron-Mad’ Wilkinson** whose house still stands in Church Street.



*“The Lawns,”* home of John Wilkinson and later, John Rose.



Wilkinson founded the Willey furnace at Dean Corner and became the first commercial customer for a Boulton & Watt steam engine, enabling a significant increase in productivity and availability of iron. Wilkinson pioneered novel methods, particularly for the manufacture of cannon and pressure cylinders. He also built the world's first iron boat in Broseley in 1787 and a three-mile iron railway to transport iron products to the river.

It was **Thomas Farnolls Pritchard** who approached Wilkinson with the design for a cast-iron bridge. Wilkinson then became one of several shareholders from Broseley who formed the consortium appointing **Abraham Darby III** to build the bridge that later gave its name to the Gorge. With **John Onions**, "the father of the Shropshire iron trade," the master foundryman in the town, he was influential in replacing the wooden Coalport Bridge with one in iron which is the oldest cast-iron bridge still carrying vehicles today.



Coalport Bridge, built by John Onions

Among other major figures, **John Guest**, born into a long-established collier family and a further shareholder in the iron bridge, created an ironworks that was a starting point for one of Britain's foremost engineering companies: GKN, formerly known as Guest, Keen and Nettlefold.

## Clay

Equally extensive industries developed from clay mining which can be traced back to 1590.

The renowned Caughley chinaware was manufactured at the edge of Broseley. A young apprentice in the Salopian China Manufactory at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was one **John Rose**, who later transferred the manufacturing to Coalport, now the Ironbridge Gorge China Museum. There is little trace of the works today nor is there any from the many brick and roofing tile manufacturing companies in the town. The name of Broseley was an international trademark of quality throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century for such products.

Broseley was home to the world's largest glazed and encaustic tile production centre, with millions of locally manufactured products featuring in prominent buildings internationally. Maw and Co was originally based in Broseley, but later moved to Jackfield and their factory is now the Maws Craft Centre. The Tile Museum, housed in the old factory of Craven Dunnill, is one of two Ironbridge Gorge Museums in Broseley. Specialist tiles are still manufactured on that site.

Perhaps the most intriguing product from clay was the widespread manufacture of tobacco smoking pipes originally in over 50 companies in Broseley, the last of which survived until 1957. Their factory is now the Ironbridge Gorge Pipe Museum, a perfect time capsule, virtually unchanged from a century ago in which manufacturing can still be demonstrated on its original equipment.



The Broseley Pipe Museum

The jargon of “having a Broseley” was used widely for smoking clay pipes, including the spectacularly long ‘churchwarden’ designs. The buildings are all Grade II listed by English Heritage. In front of the museum is the site of an early Quaker Meeting House in which the Darby family worshipped and beside which **Abraham Darby I** was buried. This clearly demonstrates that Broseley was an important centre in everyday matters in the early period of industrialization in the Severn Gorge.

### Development of the town



The Jitties Trail



Broseley's industrial history predates that of Coalbrookdale and several hundred years of industrial production has left its mark on the original agricultural hamlet, creating buildings and sites of importance to Britain's cultural heritage.

One aspect of this is beautifully preserved in Broseley's intricate network of streets including the unusual '**Jitties**', settled by workers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This is an intricate network of narrow paths and mining tracks between cottages and houses on what was poor quality common land, originally occupied by immigrant miners and squatters who lived in difficult conditions at the fringes of society. Among the items of archaeological interest are rare 'saggar walls' forming boundary fences which are unique within the Ironbridge Gorge.



A saggar wall in Gough's Jitty

These are examples of early recycling of earthenware containers used to stack pipes in kilns and protect them from being discoloured and damaged during firing. Also associated with the Jitties is a small village green with its traditional maypole, a further demonstration of Broseley's role as a social hub for the Gorge.

Stark contrast to the Jitties is provided by the groups of buildings constructed by successful citizens in the atmospheric older streets between the Pipe Museum and the High Street. In all, the area includes 22 buildings Grade II listed by English Heritage. Among the buildings in this area of High Street is the home of **George Pritchard**, banker and philanthropist and his son, also **George**, who became High Sheriff of Shropshire. Angel House, a former Inn, provides further interest with a cast iron window frame and etched glass windows. An old butcher's shop on King Street is faced with a mix of tiles produced by Maw and Co.

The area around Queen Street was the centre of Broseley Wood comprising 17th century timber framed houses, a malthouse and substantial 18th century properties which were occupied by mine owners and other entrepreneurs.



2 Queen Street

Important architectural legacies from the industrial success of Broseley are most clearly demonstrated in Church Street. Among the eight Grade II listed buildings are 'The Lawns,' home at various times to **John Wilkinson** and **John Rose**, 'White Hall,' home to **John Onions**, 'Raddle Hall,' home of the eminent historian **John Randall**, and the Manor house of 'Broseley Hall.' The distinctive blue brick of Broseley is magnificently demonstrated on the Victorian Old School, opened in 1855. Both 'The Lawns' and 'Broseley Hall' bear features by **Thomas Farnolls Pritchard**, designer of the iron bridge.

Broseley boasts a vibrant high street, with the traditional butcher, baker, grocer, ironmonger as well as many more shops. These were all built on land which linked the community around Church Street to that of Broseley Wood. It includes the Victoria Hall, constructed as a meeting place for Plymouth Brethren in 1867. At one time a memorial fountain to **George Pritchard** stood at the southern end of the Memorial Gardens.

The town has a fine range of restaurants, cafes and bars. There's a thriving community of artists. The Birchmeadow Centre features local, national and international musicians and plays from visiting groups or the BROADS (Broseley Amateur Dramatic Society). The Haycop is a nature reserve close to the town centre, while the beautiful Shropshire countryside in which the town is set offers abundant opportunities for walking and cycling.





Penn's Meadow, Broseley

The Memorial Gardens and High Street are awash with colour during the summer months of "Broseley in Bloom." They are also the centrepiece for two "not-to-miss events," both of which attract thousands:

... the newly revived annual Broseley Festival, a celebration with entertainment, music, food and drink, fun and much more for all the family early in the Summer, and

... the highly acclaimed Christmas Lights celebrations in the town.



The first revived Broseley Festival, June 2015



Broseley Christmas Lights, December 2013

Special mention is due to the beautiful “All Saints’ Church” described as “the finest early Victorian church in Shropshire.”



All Saints’ Church, Broseley.



This is located at what was the original centre of Broseley. It contains many memorials recognising significant citizens such as **John Onions** and is dedicated to **George Pritchard**. A unique feature of this church is a spectacular stained glass window by one of Britain's foremost Victorian artists, **Charles Eamer Kempe**, dedicated to one of the town's foremost brick and tile manufacturers, **William Exley**. Unfortunately, this is virtually hidden as a result in a change in placement of the church organ in the last century. It is hoped to reveal this in all its glory as a centerpiece of an ambitious project to establish a Heritage Centre in the Church in which the many aspects of the industrial and social history of the town can be celebrated and shared. Funding has now reached the stage where professional help is going to be involved in finalizing an application for National Lottery funding. Interest in the local heritage of the town has grown markedly over recent years. Broseley has the benefit today of an extremely active Local History Society and their website is a valuable source of more detailed information.