Welcome to Sawmills

We invite you to read on and find out more about the history of this area.



Ordnance Survey 1930

The village is named after the sawmills used for cutting marble that were near the canal and river. The marble cut at the site originated from Hopton Wood Quarry, probably brought to the sawmill by horse drawn wagon. The stone was used for facing fine houses around Britain after travelling down the canals to the River Trent.

Ambergate and Sawmills were formerly part of the parish of Heage. A mission was set up in 1887 and a church built in 1890-1891.

It was intended that this should be a chapel of ease to Heage, however Ambergate parish and Sawmills became a separate ecclesiastical parish, and the mission church of Sawmills St Mary was started in 1903.


St Mary's Mission Church, Sawmills

The village grew mainly because it was next to Cromford Canal and the Cromford to Langley Mill Turnpike Road. There was an aqueduct built for the canal to cross the river and road, but when the railway was built the problem of crossing the canal was solved by the building of an iron trough 150 feet long that was floated into place overnight so as to not impede canal traffic. The railway was driven through the bank beneath the trough and the stone bridge built over the railway line. The aqueduct carrying the canal over the road was demolished in 1968 to widen the A610.


Bull Bridge aqueduct carrying the canal, demolished in 1968 © picturethepast.org.uk

The only remains of the sawmill are four old cottages. Now two houses near the four arch bridge into the old brickworks. The rest were demolished to make way for the Belper to Pye Bridge railway line in 1875.

There was also a brickyard at what is now known as Riversdale. This was owned by Edwin Glossop, probably starting in 1917. Butterley Brick Co. bought the works in 1947, and it finally closed in 1970, becoming a tip. Bricks from this works were used to build the houses in Riversdale and also used in the building of the new Roman Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool.

There were two brickyards in Sawmills. One was where Lockwoods Haulage is now although it was linked to the brickyard that was at Buckland Hollow. It was known as the Ambergate Brick and Tile Company, probably starting around 1876. It became Bull Bridge Brick Company in 1889. After the 1920s it was owned by Midland Refractories, producing bricks and refractory products. It closed in 1981.


Ambergate Brick and Tile Company tile, probably made around 1880 © D Hirst





Edwin Glossop's brickworks © D Hirst

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