Sugnall's History



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Early

The history of the Sugnall dates back to before the Domesday Book (1086), when it was known as Soggenhulle, or 'bird hill'. At that time Sugnall was owned by two Saxons – Frane and Fragrin – but they were quickly replaced by Joceran, a Norman, who was then part of the new ruling elite following the Battle of Hastings in 1066. We know that Joceran was a prominent landowner, with lands in surrounding vills in addition to Sugnall. Within three generations, however, most of these lands had been given away. The overlord, the Bishop of Lichfield, then took Sugnall off Joceran's family and by the 1280s he was letting it to several tenants.

The manor (by then with only a fraction of the land in Sugnall) was demised to the Charnes family. Their property passed by marriage to the Younges, who owned Charnes until the First World War.

1500-1600s

By 1500 the manor of Sugnall had passed to the Badger family who lived in Pershall — a hamlet between Sugnall and Eccleshall. They let out the manor house in Sugnall but in 1590 sold it.

The purchaser, Thomas Pershall, was from a local family that had taken their name from Pershall in about 1320. Although they held the manor of Pershall, they held very little land there and their main property was at Horseley and Bishop's Offley. They also acquired Chetwynd near Newport and several other manors by marriage, but these passed to heiresses around 1440.

The remaining Pershalls remained minor landowners until Thomas took up the law and made a fortune, in part by specializing in handling lands that had been confiscated; by 1580 he had accumulated 3,500 acres.



The Badger's land was a small part of this, but was to gain great importance under Thomas's son, John. It was a wonderful situation for a house on a hill overlooking Copmere. The old hall at Horseley was inadequate and so he built a new hall here at Sugnall. John purchased one of the very first baronetcies in 1611 and became a major figure in Staffordshire society.

There are no pictures of his house, but it is easy to imagine it being in the Jacobean style. Sir John (as he became) also flattened the top of the hill for formal gardens. The lower area, where the walled kitchen garden was to be built, was used for orchards. The chain of pools towards Copmere were dammed by Sir John.

1600s-1700s

The third baronet, another Thomas, was probably the builder of the old hall's kitchens (around 1680) which survive to this day. Sir Thomas's heir was his granddaughter, Arabella, who in 1730 married John Campbell, the son of a Scottish Earl, and who was known by the courtesy title of Lord Glenorchy

Glenorchy was a great improver of the estate, rearranging fields and planting. He decided to establish a walled kitchen garden in the dip between the old hall and the main road. In 1737 brickmakers set themselves up not far away and supplied over 250,000 bricks. He purchased plants and seeds from a London nurseryman and by the summer of 1738 he had a fully functioning kitchen garden. The walls remain completely intact after over 280 years in remarkably good condition, and two of the original doorways remain.

Another of Glenorchy's improvements was the planting of woods from the hall to Copmere, where he built a Gothic boathouse. These woods were a long thin strip, wide enough for a ride from which he could observe what was going on in his fields. This type of layout was called an ornamented farm, or ferme ornée.





Arabella died in 1754, thus ending the link between the Pershalls and Sugnall, When Glenorchy was an old man he decided to sell it. The demesne (i.e. land in hand) was only 200 acres, but this was sold to John Turton soon after 1770. The walled kitchen garden had had no glasshouses, and Turton decided not just to rebuild the hall, but also to build a vinery with backsheds.

The 1800s

Through the nineteenth century the estate passed through many hands, most of them wealthy manufacturers seeking a hunting and shooting estate. In the 1830s Richard Hodges was a keen huntsman and the hunt periodically met on the Lawns in front of the house (where the Eccleshall Show is now held). He added Sugnall House, built around 1780 as a gentleman farmer's residence, to the estate.

Hodges died in 1873, and the estate was sold to an iron master from Dudley called Walter Williams. He was in many ways typical of industrialists who sought to join the landed gentry. He took a keen interest in hunting and built a gamekeeper's cottage with adjacent kennels in order to house the hunt's dogs. In 1880 Williams was Sheriff and from 1881 an honorary major in the Staffordshire Yeomanry. By 1879 he had demolished the old hall except for the kitchen wing, intending to rebuild in Italianate style. An architect's sketch view remains at Sugnall Hall. However he proceeded no further than a set of carriage houses.

When Williams realised that his Italianate villa was beyond his means he decided to enlarge Sugnall House. Hence about 1880 he added the eastern part and the billiard room to that house, and enlarged the garden. He was residing there when he died in 1893, and an elaborate sale catalogue was prepared, offering the house 'lock, stock and barrel'.

Charles Lowe purchased the Sugnall estate from Williams's executors.

He too was an industrialist, having chemical works in Stockport and Bradford. His chief products were phenol and carbolic acid, for many years the only available effective antiseptic, and the reason for dramatically improved survival rates from surgical operations.

After Lowe died in 1897 Sugnall went to his younger son, Charles Edwin Lowe. Between father and son they gradually enlarged the estate to its present size of 1300 acres. Charles Edwin had qualified as an engineer, but devoted himself to the estate and became a keen huntsman. He ran the estate for nearly 60 years, a routine broken only by enlisting for army service during the 1914-8 war. His wife, Susan, was one of first women to have qualified as a doctor, but she too devoted herself to life at Sugnall. They had two daughters, but when the younger, Mary, died of meningitis aged 21 her grief-stricken parents had the organ and lady chapel carved for Eccleshall church.

When the redoubtable Susan died in 1959 the estate passed to her only grandchild, Anne, wife of Greville Jacques, a wartime bomber pilot and later a helicopter pilot. Mrs Jacques was a magistrate, the national vice-president of the Women's Institutes and the recipient of an MBE. Greville was chairman of Stone Rural District Council, the Rural Community Council, and Eccleshall Parish Council.

21st Century

In 1993 the estate was passed on to their elder son, David Jacques, a specialist in garden history and conservation. In 1999 the Sugnall Business Centre, former farm buildings, was opened.

Meanwhile the pools in the woods on the way down to Copmere were cleaned out, and miles of hedges were planted at the outset of the new century. Several old and new 'permissive' paths were created, so that the public can enjoy the woods and parkland between the walled kitchen garden and Copmere.



The Sugnall Estate took the kitchen garden back in hand from the start of 2006 and spent that year sorting out the paths, electricity and water, ready for planting 200 apple and pear trees in the spring of 2007. The walled garden started having weddings in 2014 and in 2015 the tea room and weddings business were let to Old School Wines of Tittensor. In addition to weddings, the garden hosts plant fairs and other events, and even held a jazz and blues festival in 2016.

That year it was decided to renovate the present hall for weekend stays, which involved a new wood-pellet boiler providing hot water and central heating for the hall and several other properties.

Nine new bathrooms had to be created, and eleven bedrooms refurbished, so that house parties of up to 28 could be catered for. The reception rooms remained in their late Victorian and Edwardian form, so the house was once more capable of hosting traditional house parties.