



*A brief History of the Earls of Dartmouth's
association with West Bromwich*



William Legge, 1st Earl of Dartmouth
(1672-1750) Lord Privy Seal
Artist Godfrey Kneller

Dartmouth Park, Dartmouth Golf Club, Dartmouth Square, Dartmouth Street, Dartmouth High School – who were the Dartmouth's who left such a legacy to West Bromwich. The following brief history includes extracts from a piece written for the Old Ordnance Survey Map of Sandwell Hall 1902 by John Stokes, Senior Countryside Officer for Sandwell.

Much of the land in Sandwell Valley has been part of the same estate for almost 1000 years. It was originally given to the monks of Sandwell Priory in 1180. After the Priory was dissolved it passed to various people and was turned into a country house which was named after the Priory.

When William Legge, the first Earl of Dartmouth, bought Priory House and the estate surrounding it, he asked a local builder, William Smith, to look at the possibility of extending it. Smith's advice was to knock it down and start again. This was done, starting in 1705 and finishing in 1712. As Sandwell Hall was taking shape in Priory Wood, Sandwell Park Farm was being built a quarter of a mile away to the west, to provide the food needed by the new house.

The Hall which finally emerged from the ruins of the Priory was on a much grander scale, fit for an important cabinet minister's country dwelling, which it was, Lord Dartmouth being Lord Privy Seal to Queen Anne. He was also one of her closest confidants and personal friends - a letter to Lord Dartmouth from Queen Anne is signed 'Your very affectionate friend'.

The Dartmouth family were also close friends of almost everybody with whom they had dealings, being well known throughout the district as benefactors of great generosity. They funded local schools and took an active part in the life of the local community whenever they were at Sandwell Hall. They were liked by their tenants whom they treated fairly and also by the local townspeople. In 1876 'Billy My Lord' as the Earl of the time was affectionately known to the locals, donated the land which was to become Dartmouth Park to the people of West Bromwich.



'Hutt in the Pleasure Grounds of the Earl of Dartmouth, at Sandwell ...

Sketch'd on the spot' by

John Phillip, 1807.

This image is from the Phillip album, a collection of watercolours and sketches by John Phillip (c.1778-1815).

Phillip may have been Matthew Boulton's son but the evidence is inconclusive. He was born in Falmouth, Cornwall and came to Soho in 1793. Boulton paid for William Hollins to teach him architectural drawing in 1795. During his time at Soho he produced designs for silver, plate, medals and tokens.

Conservation and cleaning had to be undertaken on the album before it could be scanned and this was carried out as part of the Digital Handsworth Project.

This image of Sandwell Hall is taken from a publication circa 1800-1830 entitled: Picturesque Views and Descriptions of Cities, Towns, Castles, Mansions and other Objects of Interesting Features in Shropshire and Staffordshire.



Unfortunately, the green farmland of Sandwell Valley hid the same fuel which had spelt the downfall of most of the surrounding countryside. In the 19th century, the search for new reserves for coal led to the sinking of the Sandwell Park Colliery's Diamond Jubilee Pit at the North End of the Valley. A colliery tramway was constructed to carry the coal from the pithead to the canal and railways at nearby Smethwick. This cut through the Valley, dividing the fields, parkland and kitchen garden. Meanwhile, the dark satanic mills and foundries of the Black Country's own industrial revolution were spreading their blight over the once green acres of Sandwell Valley.

Following the death of his wife and the increasing industrialisation of the area, the 4th Earl left the estate and moved to one of his other estates, Patshull, near Wolverhampton.

