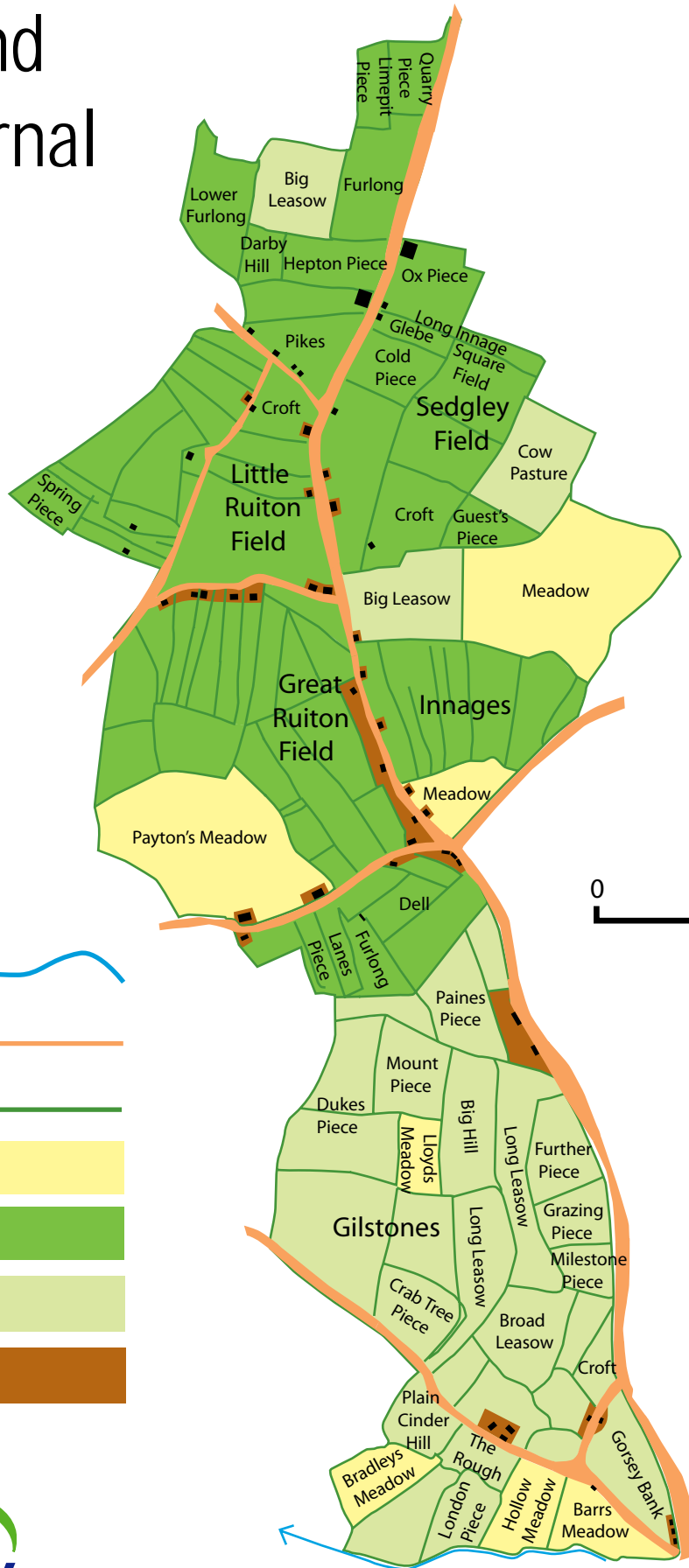







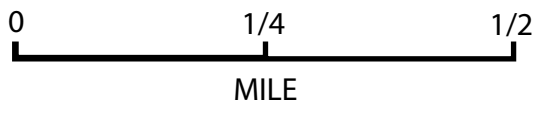


"Township" of Ruiton and Upper Gornal 1750



- Brook 
- Roads 
- Field Boundaries 
- Meadow 
- Arable 
- Pasture 
- Garden 



Produced by John Hemingway/Jennifer Foster, 2006.
 Historic Environment Team, Directorate of the Urban Environment, Dudley MBC, 3 St James's Road,
 Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 1HZ.

Upper Gornal Township

Upper Gornal is in the parish of Sedgley and within the county of Stafford. The name Upper Gornal is post-medieval in origin. What the earlier name was is unknown, as it seems to incorporate lands that would otherwise have been in the townships of Woodsetton and Gornal.

The geology of the township in the south of the area is the Carboniferous coal measures, to the north Devonian sandstone. The boundaries of the township are: the upper reaches of the Holbeach Brook in the south, the middle of Ruiton Field in the west, Catholic Lane in the north and the middle of Sedgley Field in the east.

An early settlement name in this Township was Sheepcotewall. This is a name of three elements; sheep – the animal, (This part of the name implies sheep grazed the land around), *cote* – possibly a cottage of a shepherd and wall (*wielle*) - a spring/stream. The stream in question is a tributary of Wall Brook that flows east through Woodsetton. The original settlement would appear to have been close to the Jews Lane-Eves Lane- Kent Street crossroads.

Another settlement was Ruiton. Ruiton was originally spelt *Ruewardine*. This place-name is of two elements. The *Reu* is a Welsh word - that means the slope. (This indicates an early origin for the name) and *Wardine* is an Early English (Anglo-Saxon) term for a building in or very close to a wood. Both fit very neatly to the settlement site which is on a hill overlooking the ancient woodland of Pensnett Chase. Ruiton originated as an important place in its own right and its open fields comprised substantial pieces of arable land in the two townships of Upper and Lower Gornal. It is possible that Ruiton was the original name for these two townships, but that the importance of Gornal eclipsed it.

One of the earliest references to Upper Gornal is in 1533 when the name of the township was spelt *Upper Guernal*. This document relates to land in the ownership of Baron Dudley. By 1581 it is spelt *Over Gwarnall*. Some of the earliest references to *Over Gornall* are in the 1614 Parish Survey. The only customary tenant in this township was Nashes Tenement held by Roger Turner of Cotwallend. There are four cottages and their holdings referred to; one occupied by Thomas Hartell, another by William Gybbyns, another by John Downing and another by Thomas Granger. The small number seems to imply that the development of the community started after this date.

By 1600 there were a number of names in the Township; particularly the Underhill's who were destined to make some impact in the area. For instance *John Underell* was then recorded as an agricultural labourer. By 1699 the Township was starting to develop the normal home industry of the area – nail making. Thomas Underhill was stated as being a husbandman and nailer in that year. Husbandry is another name for farming, which is what most people were engaged in.

Sand was an important material quarried out of the Ruiton area. The place-name Gornal refers to its use in making querns or hand-mills and the stone blocks can still be seen around the area to build boundary walls and structures. Samuel Fereday is described as a stone cutter and stone mason of *Upper Gournall* in 1760. He was in fact a quarry master working the local stone quarries, but another use was of the fine sand. From the late 17th century windmills were often built and used for crushing the material which was then sold for scouring and strewing. This started the Ruiton people travelling to deliver the material. With the improvement of communications in the second half of the 19th century families in Ruiton started to deal in salt. It was picked up at the railway station in Birmingham and distributed all over the Midlands. They

delivered it from carts and were on the road for most of the summer.

Non conformism was very strong with the quarrymen of Ruiton and after George Whitfield the Methodist, preached to them they decided to build a chapel. The Independent Chapel was erected in 1778 and the first pastor was Rev. John Underhill. In 1782 a Sunday School was established there. (This is reputed to be the second oldest in England.) A Wesleyan Chapel with a Schoolroom underneath was built in 1834 in Kent Street. This led to the established church being involved. Rev. Girdlestone in a publication in 1837 proposed that an established church be built in Upper Gornal. A subscription was raised and St Peters church was erected in 1844. In the same year Upper Gornal became its own ecclesiastical parish. In 1883 a school had been built in Clarence Street.

By the 19th century Upper Gornal was becoming highly developed, but it still retained knowledge of its recent rise in population. A local comment made at the time '*that Gornal was made out of the odds and ends that were left after the creation*', emphasises this. The local industries were: quarrying, coal, fireclay and ironstone mining, nail making and brick making (and some working with fireclay). This employment was practiced by the majority of the population. In 1859 the 'Dudley' Workhouse was opened in what is now called Burton Road for residents of the surrounding parishes. It developed into Burton Road Hospital. In the 20th century much of the earlier industry began to die and housing took the place of the works and fields which once occupied the area.

John Hemingway, 17th February 2005.

Notes: The base material for the composition of this map is the parish map of 1826, with other material gathered from local histories and documentary research.

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