

From the Archives

OCKLEY DINOSAURS

It is good news that the playground at Ockley Village Hall should soon have its new Dinosaur Slide following the recent successful campaign for a grant from Aviva. It is highly appropriate that a slide depicting a dinosaur should be chosen as there is plenty of evidence that dinosaurs once roamed around this area. About 150 million years ago, Southern England was a vast marshy swamp inhabited by dinosaurs and other reptiles. The Wealden clay in this area has been an excellent preservative for their fossilised remains.

In 1949 fossilised dinosaur bones were discovered in a clay pit at the Smokejacks brickworks of the Ockley Brick, Tile and Pottery Company (the site now owned by Wienerberger). The bones were identified by the Natural History Museum as a fibula, tibia and femur from a *Cetiosaurus Diplodocus* and estimated to be about 125 million years old. *Cetiosaurus Diplodocus* was a large amphibious dinosaur of the *Brontosaurus* kind. It could sometimes be up to 90 feet long, most of this length being taken up by its long neck and tail. The specimen found at Smokejacks was probably a smaller animal about 30-35 feet long. These reptiles were vegetarians which lived on water weeds and other vegetation and could stay submerged in water for long periods breathing through nostrils situated on the top of their heads.

Later that year, bone fragments of an *Iguanodon* were found at Smokejacks

www.nhm.ac.uk/natureplus/blogs/micropalaeo/2011/09/12/when-microfossils-meet-dinosaurs
https://blog.everythingdinosaur.co.uk/blog/_archives/2007/10/29

showing that other types of dinosaur inhabited the same area. In 2001, a well-preserved partial skeleton of an *Iguanodon* was also found there. The *Iguanodon*, another plant-eating dinosaur, walked on its hind legs and had three-toed bird-like feet. The largest were about 30 feet long from snout to tail.

However the most significant find at Smokejacks brickworks occurred in 1983 when an amateur fossil-hunter called William Walker noticed an enormous claw sticking out from the side of one of the clay pits. Excavation revealed the skeleton of a previously unknown type of dinosaur, subsequently called *Baryonyx walkeri* ('*Baryonyx*' meaning 'heavy claw', and '*walkeri*' after its finder). *Baryonyx* was a carnivorous, mainly fish-eating, dinosaur, about 30 feet long and with a long pointed jaw rather like a crocodile and large bear-like claws which helped it catch its prey. The discovery of the 'Ockley Dinosaur' (as the popular press called it at the time) attracted a lot of scientific and media interest. The skeleton of *Baryonyx* and all the other local finds are held at the Natural History Museum.

More information about dinosaurs can be found on the Natural History Museum website at www.nhm.ac.uk

Links to the Ockley *Iguanodon* and *Baryonyx* findings are:

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