



**A Tribute to Ron Baker:
Tailor, Businessman and Artist**

1918-2018



Baptism - and primary school education

Ron was christened at St Chad's Church Coseley - and as a young child attended St Chad's Church of England Infants' School.



Early memories - Birmingham New Road, 1927

Ron remembered watching the Prince of Wales opening Birmingham New Road in 1927 from the clay pit banks that later became Silver Jubilee Park, when he was eight years of age.



**Secondary Education – Mount Pleasant Junior School,
Coseley**

Ron attended Secondary School at Mount Pleasant, Coseley (which later became the home of Dudley Archives), where he excelled in art, and won a design competition for fireplace tiles.



Architectural training - ambitions thwarted

Having excelled in art and design at school, Ron set his ambitions on training as an architect – alas, the fees charged for becoming articled to an architectural practice were prohibitive.



Apprenticeship as a tailor

Ron instead decided to train as a tailor, and started an apprenticeship at the age of 14 in 1932, at Dudley's Town Mills in New Mill Street, Dudley.

Picture: Rear of Town Mills 1958 shortly before demolition.

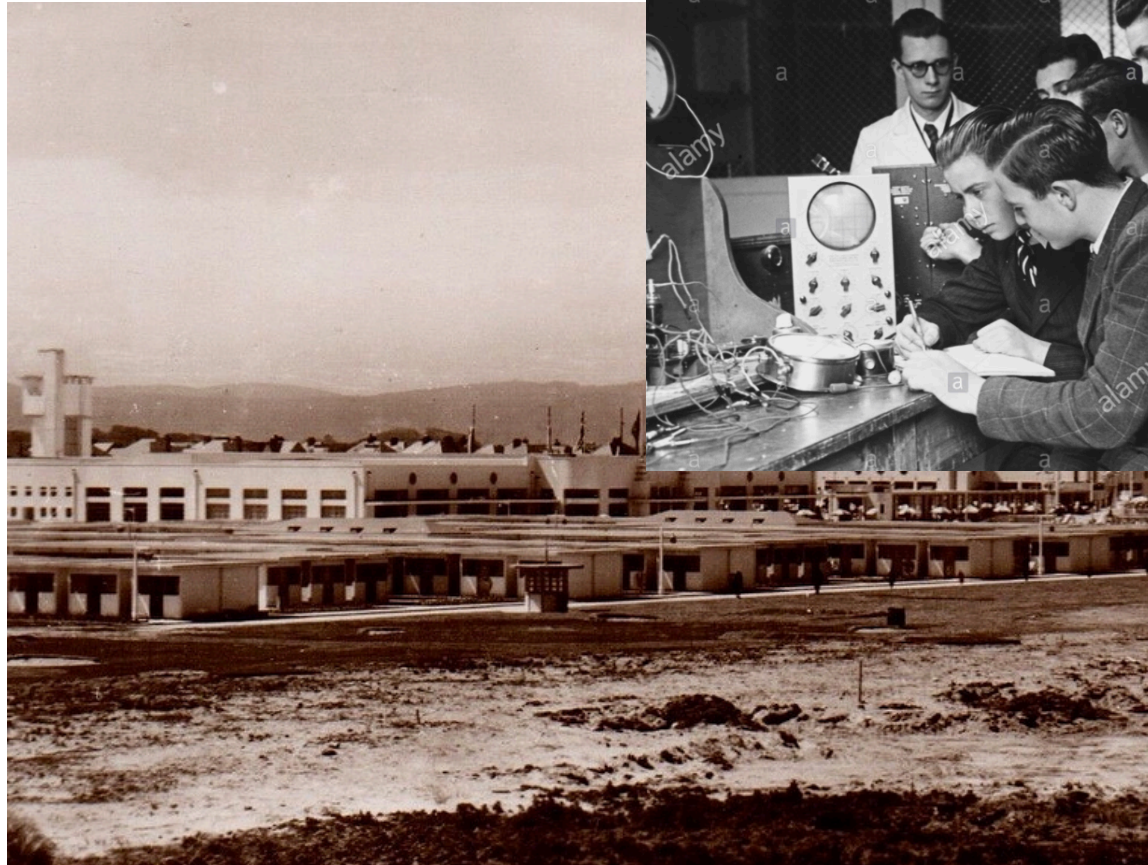


Views of New Mill Street Dudley as it is today.



New Mill Street, Dudley.

The Town Mills were demolished in 1961. Ron attended night school and college while working as a pattern cutter there and obtained a **First Class City and Guilds Diplomas in Clothing Design and Manufacture**. Among other contracts, Town Mills made uniforms for the British Army.



Thomas Cook's holiday camp in Prestatyn was used for Royal Signals training in the war.

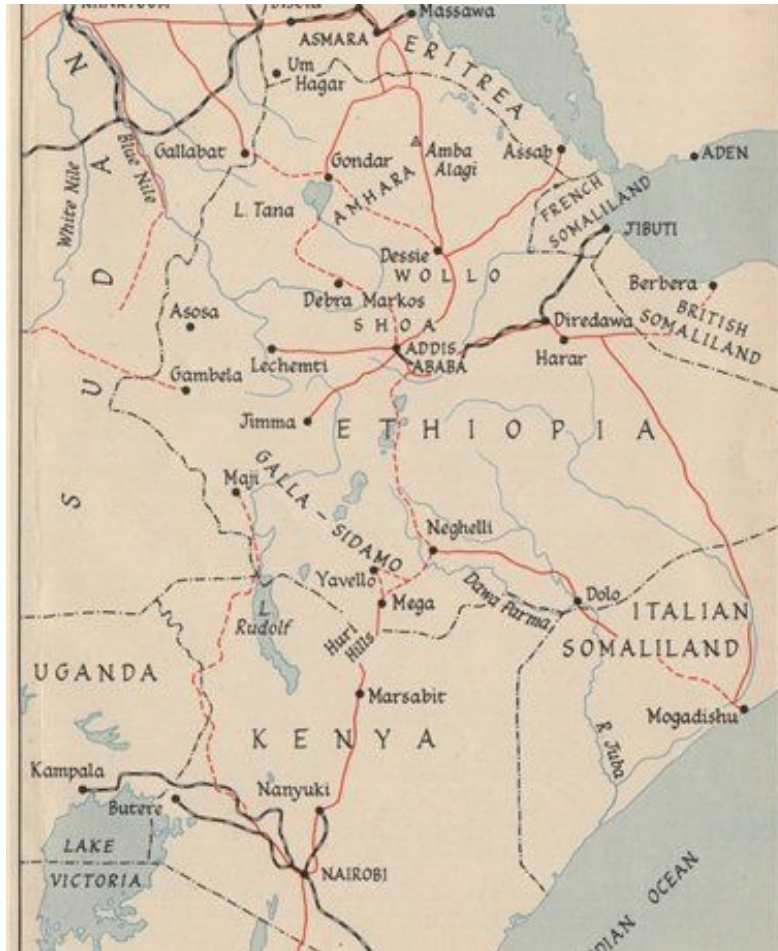
World War 2 – Royal Signals

On the outbreak of World War 2, Ron enlisted in the Royal Corps of Signals and trained for six months as a **wireless operator** - at Thomas Cook's holiday camp in Prestatyn (later Pontin's holiday camp).



Convoy attacked by the Scharnhorst

Ron was shipped out to **East Africa** on board a boat from Liverpool. While in mid-Atlantic his convoy was attacked by the German battleship the **Scharnhorst**. Luckily he survived – the voyage took 8 weeks, travelling via the Cape of Good Hope.



From Mombasa to the Great Rift Valley

On landing in Mombasa, Kenya, Ron travelled by rail to the Great Rift Valley. The East African Campaign was fought during World War II by Allied forces, mainly from the British Empire, against Axis forces, primarily from Italy and Italian East Africa, between June 1940 and November 1941.



12th Africa Division – East Africa Signals

Ron was assigned to the 12th African Division. Their task was to oust the Italians from territory in Abyssinia they had invaded in 1936. The campaign ended successfully with the return of Emperor Haile Selassie to Addis Ababa in 1941. Ron saw the Emperor on one occasion, noting that he was a lot smaller than his reputation would suggest!



Malaria and Blackwater Fever

After the East African campaign against the Italians was won, Ron contracted first malaria, then Blackwater Fever. So while the rest of his unit of East African Signals left for Burma, Ron was reclassified as a draughtsman, becoming Command Headquarters' official draughtsman in Nairobi.



Art club in Nairobi

While based in Nairobi, Ron organised an art club for other military personnel; he also designed stage scenery and posters for the armed forces drama group.



Imperial War Museum

Ron's drawings executed for Command Headquarters during wartime covered battle locations; airgraph (telegram) frame designs; and badges of military units - he also drew the nature and villages he saw while on leave. He bequeathed this collection to the Imperial War Museum.



Travels in East Africa.

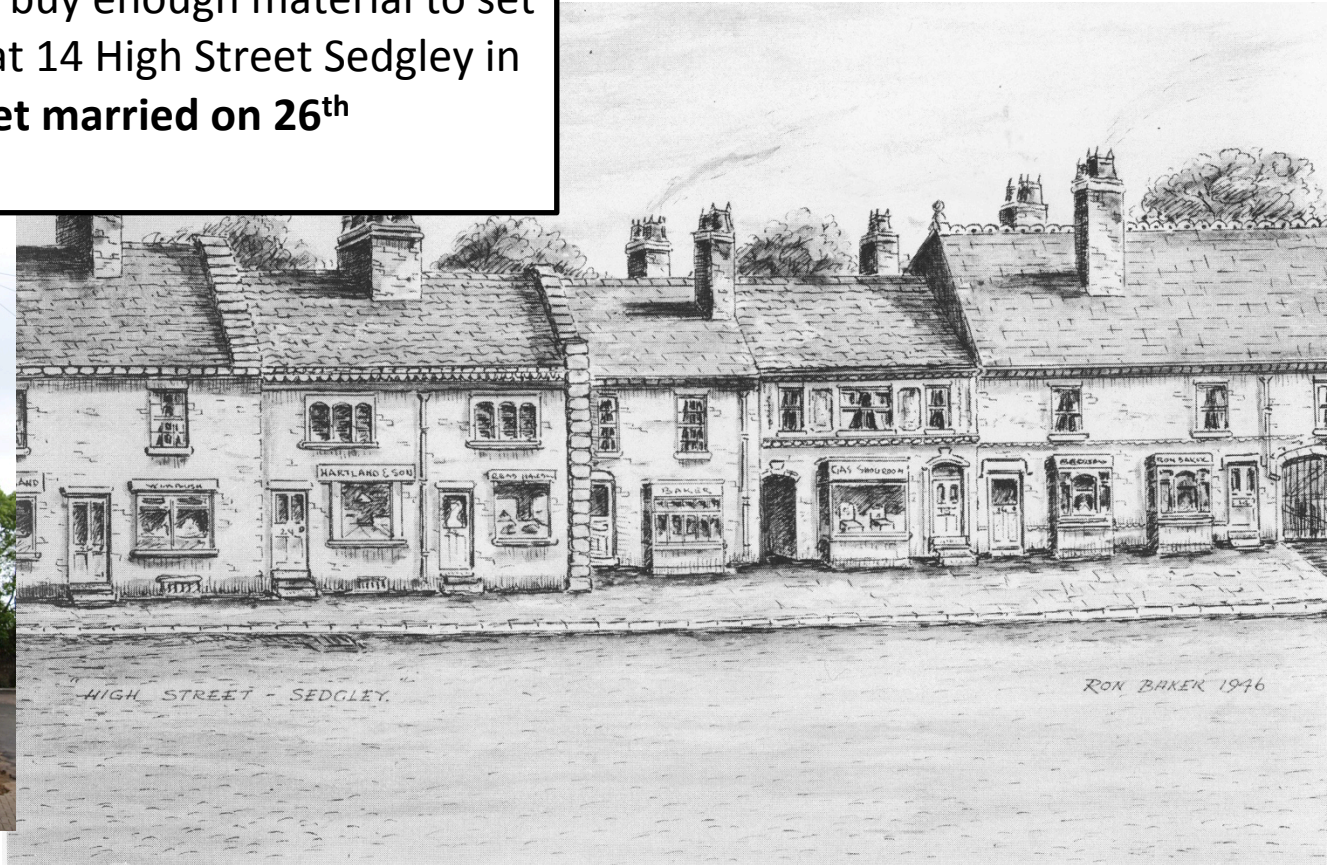
While on leave Ron visited the Rift Valley, Uganda, as well as Kampala, Jinja, and the Mountains of the Moon; he also saw tribes of pygmies and the Great Congo Forest. He played golf, went fishing, game hunting, bird watching, and climbing in his spare time.



Returning home.

By VE Day 1945 Ron had spent five and a half years overseas. He caught a ship north through the Red Sea, eventually making his way to Port Said, then joined a troopship travelling from India, arriving in Southampton in September 1945.

Once home, and while on 20 days' leave, Ron met **Violet Raybould** from Upper Gornal. He was demobbed from the regular army in January 1946 and transferred to 2 Reserve. As a soldier he had acquired clothing coupons, that allowed him to buy enough material to set up Quality Clothes at 14 High Street Sedgley in 1946. **Ron and Violet married on 26th December 1947.**



Ron sets up business in High Street Sedgley



A photo from Trevor Genge's 'Sedgley and District – Britain in Old Photographs'.

Ron Baker's Shop in High Street, Sedgley, 1952.



Summer Lane Upper Gornal

The business expands.

A shop in **Summer Lane Upper Gornal** was acquired, and a shop in **Castle Street Dudley** - with a **workshop in Brierley Hill**. His friend joined him in a partnership which lasted 30 years.



Rivoli – Cotwall End Road

In the latter part of his life, Ron lived in Cotwall End Road, Sedgley. Eventually he moved to Whitchurch on the Shropshire/Cheshire border to live with his son Tony and his family.



Shortly before his death, Ron signed a copy of his first book for Martin Jones of Sedgley Archives Group, who travelled to Whitchurch to congratulate him on his 100th birthday.

Publishing 'A Pictorial History of Sedgley' (1970).

Ron worked tirelessly in his spare time, drawing the buildings in the village. In the early 1970s he published 'A Pictorial History of Sedgley' containing 38 plates, in a limited edition of 200 copies, selling at £2.10s.



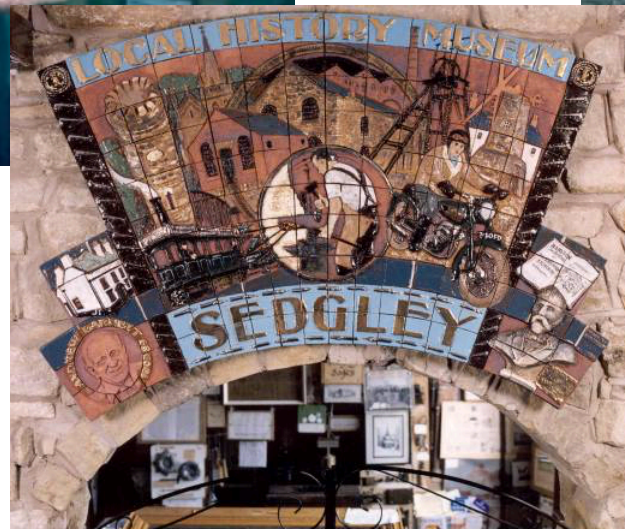
Trevor Genge, former headteacher of Lanesfield Primary School, who published 5 volumes of historic photos of Sedgley and District.



Andrew Barnett, former headteacher of Redhall Junior School, who published 'Barnett's History of Sedgley'.

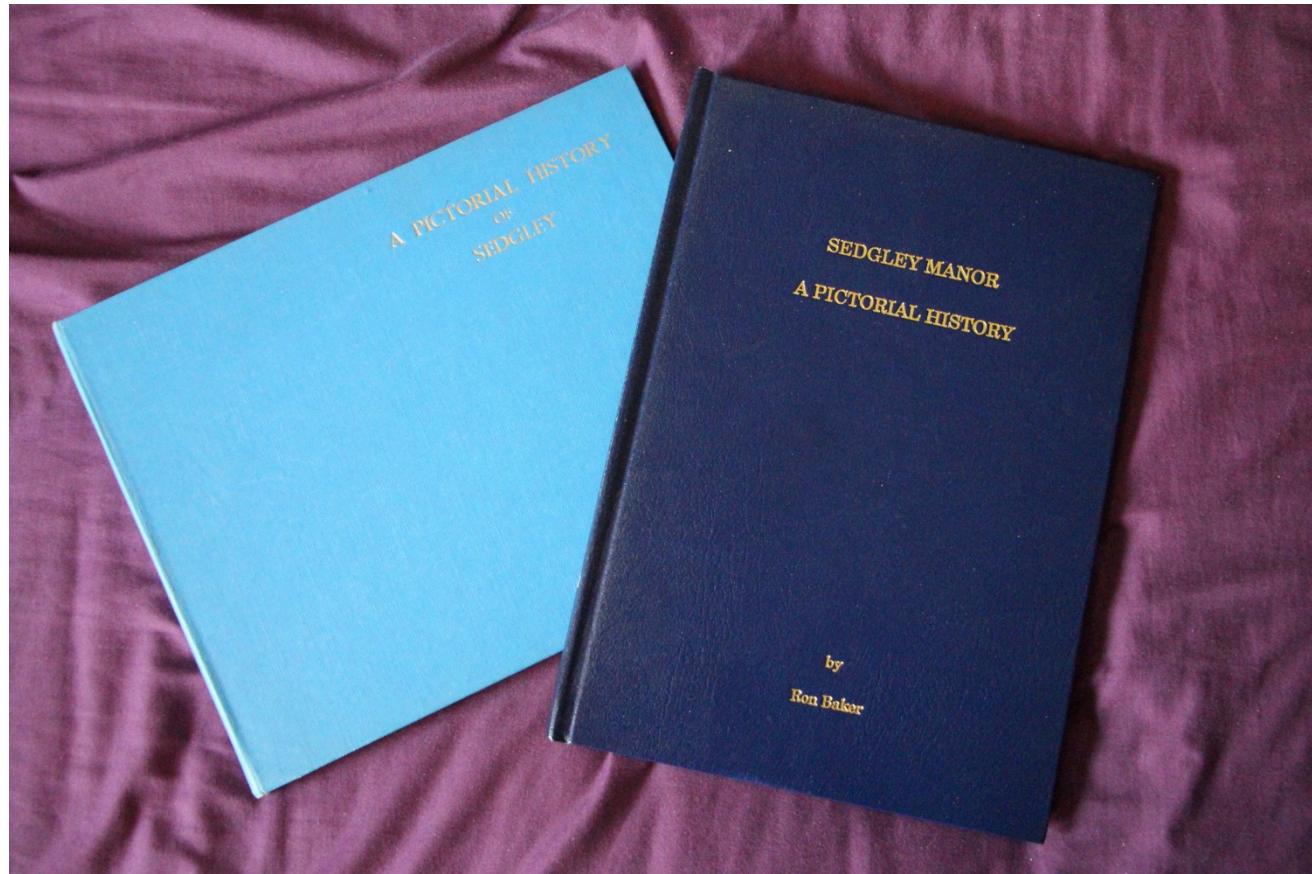
Sedgley Local History Society

In 1984 Ron founded **Sedgley Local History Society** along with two local headteachers – **Trevor Genge and Andrew Barnett** - Ron became the Treasurer. The Society continues today, meeting monthly in St Andrew's Church Hall, Bilston Street. It has a membership of 60.



Sedgley's Museum

Sedgley's local museum was set up in an old nail works in Brick Street Sedgley, now Cottage Blinds in 1988. The museum lasted 16 years, closing in 2004 when Cottage Blinds required more space. A ceramic mural depicting the history of Sedgley still hangs in the premises. Ron was a trustee of the museum.



Second compilation: Sedgley Manor – A Pictorial History – Published 1991.

In 1991 Ron published a second volume of drawings, this time with a dark blue cover, this time containing a history of the Ancient Manor of Sedgley and **90 drawings** of buildings in the Manor.



Shortly before Ron died, he celebrated his 100th birthday with his family in Whitchurch.



Ron Baker, 10th November 1918 - 17th December 2018

Thank you for your magnificent, totally unique artistic legacy to the people of Sedgley.