

BRITISH MINING No.64

COAL MINES AROUND ACCRINGTON AND BLACKBURN

by

Jack Nadin



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A
MONOGRAPH
OF THE
NORTHERN MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY
DECEMBER 1999

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Editor's note

Many of the newspaper reports used in this publication were written in the long-winded style beloved of the Victorians. Where possible, I have cut out repetitions and rewritten parts of the reports in a more accessible style. No facts or names have been cut out, however, and, should anyone wish to read the originals, the name and date of the newspaper are given in every case.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the willing help given by the staff at Accrington and Darwen reference libraries. I am also grateful to: Harry Tootle of Oswaldtwistle for information and loan of photographs; Gordon Hartley of Burnley for loan of a number of newspaper cuttings relating to mining in the Blackburn area, uncovered during his research, and for the loan of a number of photographs; Alan Davies and staff at the *Lancashire Mining Museum* for their time and for permitting me to use their library; Ann Stokes of Darwen for a great deal of information on the Huddlesden Collicries and, in particular, their founders, Joseph Place and Sons; Trevor Longworth, Middle Scotland Farm, Huddlesden, for a potted tour of industrial Huddlesden and district during which he pointed out various coal mining remains, and for the loan of photos; and Hazel Martell and Mike Gill of the Northern Mine Research Society for sorting the wheat from the chaff and publishing this book. Last, but not least, I must thank my wife Rita for her patience during my many hours of absence doing field studies in search of old mines and for the supply of refreshment while I have been endlessly stuck in front of the computer.

INTRODUCTION

The author's first book, British Mining No.58, *The Coal-Mines of East Lancashire*, dealt with coal mining in that part of the North-East Lancashire Coalfield between Colne and Padiham. This companion volume covers the townships of Church, Accrington, Oswaldtwistle, Baxenden, Blackburn and Lower and Over Darwen, which are to the west.

Readers should note that, particularly in the Darwen area, there were scores of shallow pits, shafts and drifts working during the early to mid 1800s. They appear on the 1844 OS Map, but identification of an individual pit is almost impossible. In many cases the sites were incorporated into the town as it developed, or became sunken hollows on bleak moorland. The more important sites have been recorded, along with a number of minor ones, and I apologise for any omissions.

The history of coal mining in this area goes back to at least the 15th century as, in 1409, the mines of coal and stone in the forests of Blackburnshire were recorded as being worth 14s 4d per annum. Three centuries later, during the reign of Queen Anne (1702-1714), a number of the inhabitants of Darwen were described as coalers and coal-getters. In 1729, Peter Walkden, a Nonconformist minister from Chipping, recorded in his diary for December 17th: *Son John went to Eccleshill coal-pit for two loads of coal.* This was a distance of some 30 miles and carriage was by sacks hung over the sides of horses and pack-mules. The *Manchester Mercury*, on July 22nd 1766, recorded that the manor of Over Darwen was to be sold on August 28th, adding that: *Under most of the estate there is coal, and the purchaser will be entitled to the Common Right of about 300 acres, under which there is also coal.*

THE MINING COMPANIES

GEORGE HARGREAVES & COMPANY

This company, which ran many of the Accrington, Baxenden and Rossendale collieries, was founded to work the copyhold mines in the manor of Accrington along with the Forest of Rossendale. Greater detail can be found in R.S. Crossley's *Accrington Captains of Industry*, published in 1933.

One of the first leases, dated April 1805, is an agreement between the Duke of Buccleugh, as Lord of the Manor, and Henry Hargreaves of Newchurch in Rossendale. Henry died in 1829, and his son, George, succeeded him. At this time there was practically no coal coming into the Accrington district. A further lease, taken in 1825, had a clause binding the lessees to "use their best endeavours to get and raise coal and cannel sufficient to supply the consumption of the county." In accordance with this, George Hargreaves and his partners, Richard Ashworth and Johnathan Hall, sank new drift mines and shafts along the hillside. Ashworth died around 1860 and Hall some years later, so the partnership was dissolved in 1867 and from then on was known as George Hargreaves and Co.

George Hargreaves asked John Hargreaves, who ran the Broad Oak printworks, to enter into partnership with him and seek a new lease from the Lord of the Manor. The printworks was an extensive employer and, perhaps more importantly, a large user of coal. A new lease was obtained, and Henry Hargreaves Bolton, a nephew of George Hargreaves, was appointed to the management. From this time forward the firm was closely connected with the Bolton Family.

In 1874, H.H. Bolton, Peter Wright Pickup, Thomas Brooks, a colliery and quarry owner of Rawtenstall, and the Burnley firm of the Exors of John Hargreaves formed the Dunkenhagh Colliery Company Ltd. In November 1929, George Hargreaves (Collieries) Ltd. amalgamated with the Altham Colliery Company and Hargreaves Collieries (Burnley) in running the collieries and Altham Coke Works at Clayton-le-Moors. The firm then dominated the East Lancashire Coalfield until nationalisation on January 1st 1947.¹

The following article gives some interesting historical information on local mining families:-

Accrington Observer, January 4th 1947:- *For several generations, in some cases going back nearly 150 years, the collieries in this area have been in the hands of a few families, who have retained their interest right down to the end of 1946. Although the firms have been converted into limited companies, the actual ownership has not changed because all the shares were retained by the families previously owning the pits, the descendants or legal representatives of the original owner. In Burnley, the Thursbys, direct descendants of Colonel John Hargreaves, and the Brooks of Towneley*

Blackburn Times, June 7th 1856:- *On Saturday last, Edward Whitaker, aged 24 years and of Great Harwood, met with a violent death whilst working at the shaft bottom in one of Mr Lomax's mines. A large coal slipped out of the basket that was being wound up, and fell upon his head with great force, inflicting such injuries that death resulted within a few hours. The occurrence was quite accidental.*

CLOSE NOOK RISHTON

Nothing remains of this pit which was located north of Rishton, near Close Nook Farm and beyond the dismantled railway. It was worked by the Dunkenhalgh Colliery Company in 1879.

CLOSES

SD710228

A number of small pits, off the Roman Road and above Higher Waterside, were worked during the early 1840s. At the top of Harwood's Lane, in Hoddlesden, a track leads down towards Waterside Works. At the first gate, a footpath on the left passes a water-filled sandstone quarry and Closes Colliery is marked by an area of disturbed ground a few yards further on. From here the ruined Closes Farm from which the colliery took its name can be seen. A number of other shafts were sunk over to the right. The pit is marked on the 1848 OS Map, and had an engine house, reservoir and boiler, suggesting steam power was used for raising the coals.

COB WALL PIT

SD695290

This is probably the old colliery marked on the 1844 OS Map. The shaft was 80 yards to a 24 inch thick coal, possibly the Upper Mountain Seam. The site was roughly at the corner of the Northrop works, off Phillips Road, Blackburn. Nothing else is known.

CONEY

SD683214

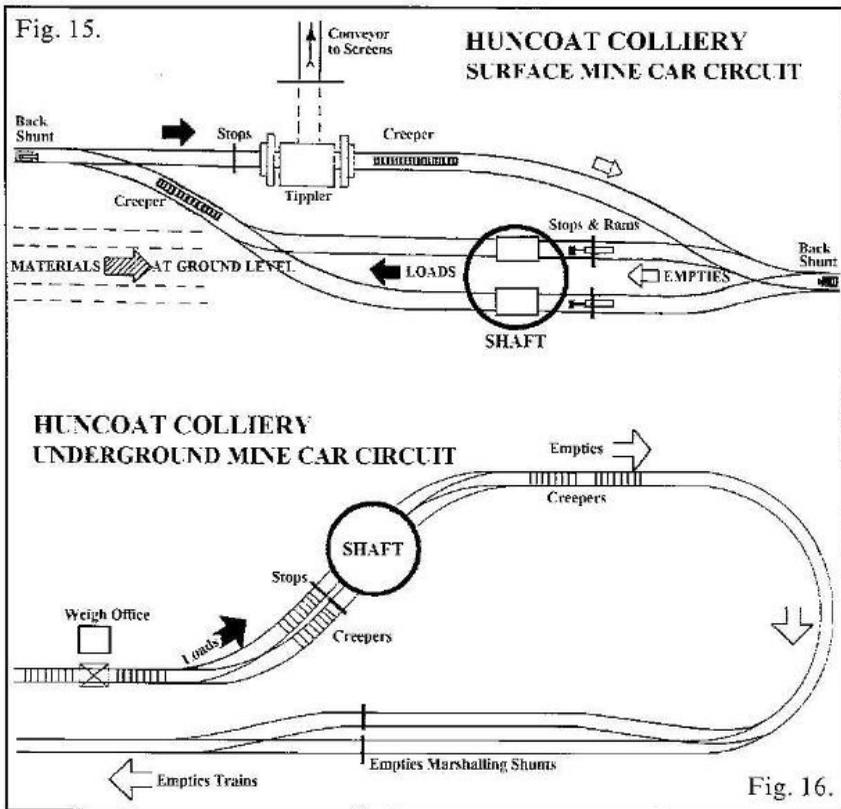
William Pierce opened these drift working into the Dogshaw Seam in the late 1840s or early 1850s. According to the *Collieries of Lancashire*, however, by 1879 the Coney Coal and Fireclay Co. Ltd was working the pit for fireclay, along with the Lower Yard Seam. Offices and other buildings were located at Wood Street, Darwen, where a tramway ran up to the drift entrance. John Taylor, a paper maker, may also have had an interest in this colliery, which was abandoned in 1881.

COPY CLOUGH

SD742293

The site is best approached via Church Hall and Peel Bank towards the canal. Cross the swing bridge and go down the middle lane. Copy Clough Colliery is then on the left. A triangular concrete marker indicates the position of the shaft, while the rubble close by was the engine house.

The shaft, sunk by Haworth, Barnes and Co. around 1838, was 228 feet deep to the Lower Mountain Mine. Coal winding stopped in 1873, though the pit was retained for ventilating Enfield Pit and Dunkenhalgh Colliery.



evening a few weeks ago, about to go through the terrible ordeal. We set off for the pit head across the railway lines, and were soon turning the lamp room into a temporary dressing chamber. We were each given a safety lamp and taken to the fan room. Here we saw a giant engine, the fly-wheel of which reminded one almost of the big wheel at Blackpool. It is continually going all day and night, and it is only still for about 12 hours on Sunday. We were allowed to go in and it was as much as we could do to stop ourselves from being blown down an immense well. From there we went to see the winding engine, then we went through the boiler house, and came out by the cages for our descent. I was in the second instalment to go down and I shall never forget it as long as I live. We had to go down about 900 feet, and seemed to set off as though the earth was sinking under us. Our hearts were in our mouths (at least mine was). The sensation was most peculiar, for from about half way we seemed to reverse the order of things, and appeared to be going up again. But soon we saw our pals waiting for us and we scrambled out and joined them. Shortly after the third and last load arrived, we began the important part of our visit. We had assembled in a

large open space, and there was a small army of men whitewashing the walls and ceiling, and it was brilliantly lit up with electric lights. However, when we came to a small door in the wall, we were bundled in about six at a time and, at the other side, we found ourselves in a brick tunnel. Then our lamps were necessary, for it was the only illumination we had. We all set off up the tunnel, and the dust flew into our eyes terribly. In the tunnel, which was 1,000 yards long, we were able to walk comfortably, but after that the road got uneven, and the roof rather lower and many times I nearly scalped myself. We came to a full stop at a little station and, when we had rested for a short while, our guides decided to take us to 'No.4'. Off we started again, before long turning off to the right and through another door and there we came to a halt with a dead wall in front of us. Here, we were told, we were somewhere below Altham Church. Some of the chaps were looking round for coal, but so far we had not got into the workings. We then traced our steps a short distance, and took a turning to the left, coming across a lot of small trucks loaded with coal. A few minutes later and we had achieved our object, for before us was a solid wall of shining coal, and at the base a small aperture just large enough for the body to crawl through. Then we had to lower our dignity and slide gingerly through, and soon we were digging away with some most formidable 'toothpicks'. I did not stick it long, for it was rather warm work, and it is no joke lying on your back with pieces of coal filling your eyes and mouth, not to mention your ears. Then, as time was getting on, we started on our return journey. We came to a pumping station and here the lamps that had gone out were relighted by means of an electrical apparatus. On the way back we each had a pocketful of coal as a memento of our visit, and all wondered how we were going to get clean again. Altogether we had been down about two and a half hours, and we set off home in a merry mood. The experience had been a very happy one and each member was in raptures at having done something which thousands would never have the opportunity to do. Personally, being a Southerner, where coal mines are a thing read of, but never seen, I was in a very excited state. I sent one of my black diamonds home, only to hear it had arrived in crumbs.

Accrington Gazette, December 16th 1922:- Mr James Whittaker, for 30 years the underground manager at Messrs George Hargreaves Collieries at Huncoat and Calder, was given a gold watch from the miners at a meeting of the Accrington Branch of the Lancashire and Cheshire Miners' Federation held at the Railway Hotel on Thursday evening. Cr Smith of Huncoat made the presentation, remarking that they were pleased to find Mr Whittaker recovering from his recent illness. Mr Whittaker had, said Mr Smith, always met the men halfway whenever they had approached him, and his energies on behalf of the workpeople, especially in connection with the doctors' fund organised jointly by the firm and the Accrington Miners' and Colliery Accident and Burial Society for the treatment of miners, were greatly appreciated. Concluding, Mr Smith expressed the hope that Mr and Mrs Whittaker would live long to enjoy the fruits of their labours. Mr J. Baron

VICTORIA PIT

SD763262

Also known as Friar Hill Pit, this mine at Baxenden worked the coal under Bedlam, Friar Hill and Accrington Moor. George Hargreaves and Co. sank the shaft circa 1855, probably as an extension to the Railway Pit workings in the valley below. It was around 330 feet deep to the Lower Mountain Mine. The Upper Mountain Mine was worked for a while in connection with Miller Fold and Dewhurst Collieries. Victoria Pit had passed to Hargreaves Ashworth Co. in 1869, and was abandoned in 1894. A ginney, running through the fields, linked it to Baxenden Colliery.

The site of the pit can be found by going down the lane to Green Haworth golf course, bearing left at the junction beyond the club house to Victoria Cottages on the left. In conversation with the present occupier of Victoria Cottages, it emerged that the person who filled or capped the shaft at Victoria Pit was given the cottages as a reward for his efforts. To the left of the cottages is the reed-filled reservoir of the pit, and, at the far end of the garden, are some large stone engine beds. The cottages were originally two dwellings and, in the 1870s, Henry Coupe, 52, banksman, lived in one with his wife, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth Bennett, with her sons, James, 19, coal miner, Henry, 13, and Edwin, 11, drawers in the mine, lived in the other.

Accrington Times, June 29th 1867:- Mr J. Dean, deputy coroner, held an inquest on Thursday into the death of John Mills, 17, drawer at Friar Hill Colliery, New Accrington. Mr Bolton, manager for Messrs Hargreaves, Ashworth and Co., was present. The first witness was Mr John Mills, of Wood Nook, Accrington, father of the deceased, who said his son left home for work last Monday morning and he was brought home dead that same morning. Henry Butterworth, collier, of Green Howarth, Oswaldtwistle, said he worked at the same pit as Mills and, at about 7.15 a.m. on Monday, he, Mills and several others were waiting to go down the shaft. Mills was

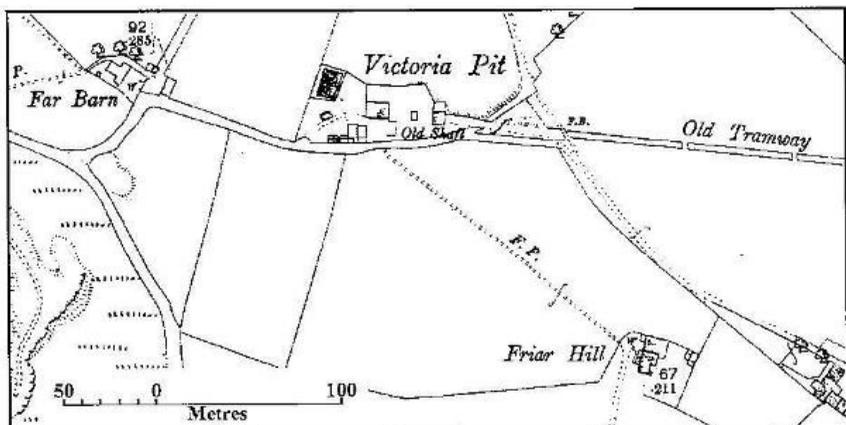


Fig.27 Victoria Pit.

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