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BOURNEHILLS COLLIERY, ROWLEY REGIS, STAFFORDSHIRE.

by Nigel A. Chapman

SYNOPSIS

During the course of the 19th century, the South Staffordshire Coalfield was transformed from a rural landscape into an industrial one, with mines and furnaces appearing on the once green fields. Drawn by the vast wealth of raw materials, manufacturing industry of all kinds was attracted to build its factories on this once green and pleasant land. To meet the demands of this expansion, villages developed into townships in a disorganised sprawl that littered the landscape.

1801 TO 1833

One area that developed along these lines was the Withymoor estate owned, in 1801, by George Stokes of Oldswinford, Worcestershire. He was an ironmaster, but appears to have followed his trade in the Kingswinford area rather than at Withymoor. Probably at this date the mineral wealth below the ground was little used, apart from for a local market. This began to change with the cutting of the Dudley No.2 Canal in the period 1793 to 1801. This opened a direct route from Dudley down the valley through Netherton to Oldhill and Halesowen, crossing an area of coal seams which were little touched at the time.

George Stokes purchased a meadow at Windmill End from Joseph Hill in 1809, with powers to work the seams of coal, clay and ironstone from adjoining shafts and to repair eight cottages owned by Timothy Hill, should they be damaged by mining. Here we have the first evidence of coal mining under the estate. George Stokes had for a number of years banked with Hill, Bate and Robins of Stourbridge and by 1811 owed them £20,000. He requested a ceiling of £36,000 be put on his accounts and offered the Withymoor estate as security. He seems very quickly to have over-reached himself, however, being declared bankrupt on May 16th 1812. It is tempting to suggest that the development of coal mining on the estate proved too much for his finances.

Messrs Hill, Bate and Robins attempted to sell the estate in 1817, but failed and so they purchased it themselves for £5500. They divided the lands into four, with each partner taking a fourth. This division lasted until 1819 when the two Hills, father and son, sold out to Bate and Robins. In this document there is mention of powers to work the mines, to search, sink etc.

1833 TO 1868

On July 2nd 1833, the estate was sold to James Griffin of Withymoor, who since 1790 had operated the Withymoor Forge with water-driven hammers producing scythes and tools. The nearby bridge over the Dudley canal is still known as Griffin's Bridge. He wanted to develop into the making side of the



Location map of Withymoor. SO954881

iron trade to supply his '*ironbashing*' works and is believed to have constructed the two Withymoor blast furnaces on the estate. To supply the furnaces with coke and ironstone, he began the intensive exploration of the Thick Coal lying at about 100 metres below the ground.

A further part of the estates of George Stokes, the Bournehills estate of 10 acres, was divided between his four daughters, so that at his death the estate

was actually split into six portions, the married daughters receiving two portions each. One daughter, Maria, began to buy the others' shares until, by 1823, she held 5/6ths of the estate. Eventually on Christmas Eve 1838, the 5/6ths were sold to Francis Downing of Dudley, Gentleman, and William Foley of Netherton, Coal Master. They quickly set about the business of mining the Thick Coal below the land, creating a basin on the Dudley No.2 canal to move the output, probably towards Birmingham. They erected a steam winding-engine at their Bournehills Colliery, laid a tramway to the canal, operated a weighing machine and, until 1843, traded as Downing and Foley Coal Masters. However, they never formally had any partnership documents and when, in October 1843, Francis Downing wanted to give up coal mining, William Foley had to take over the debts of the partnership. These amounted to over £2000 and proved to be difficult to meet.

Foley went to three Birmingham merchants, Charles Shaw, William Chance and William Mabson, who were the Birmingham Banking Co. to help him over the existing debts. He borrowed £1890, to which they added £5 per cent interest per annum to the debt. Foley, based on the previous profits of the colliery, hoped to pay back the bankers over the next few years. This was not to be and the three merchants, after gaining possession, sold the estate to James Griffin on August 1st 1854. From this date the Withymoor and Bournehills estates were united and followed the same path. James Griffin appears to have profited most from the estates, being mentioned at first as Ironmaster of Withymoor, then moving to Athol House, Edgbaston and styling himself Gentleman. Finally, a move to 18 Clarendon Square, Leamington, leaves the impression that he had '*made it*'. He died on February 9th 1856, leaving his wife and two executors to settle his affairs.

One of the executors' first leases for 21 years was concluded with William Henry Dawes, an Ironmaster of West Bromwich, who, from May 8th 1856, leased the two blast furnaces at Withymoor. W.H. Dawes went on to run one of the largest iron works in the country at Bromford, West Bromwich, and, with his brother George, operated the Elsecarr furnaces at Barnsley for a number of years. During 1864 they founded the first ironworks at Trent on the Lincolnshire ironstone field.

1868 TO 1876

On March 17th 1858, the executors sold the estates to Edwin Nock, Maltster, Thomas Wood, Coal Master, and Joseph Nock, Maltster, of Oldbury, for £4500. They were owners of 14 acres, 2 roods and 24 poles and the mines and veins of coal and ironstone under the lands. They were not to work near the blast furnaces or to damage them by mining. Nock, Wood and Nock carried on the extraction of coal under the estates and worked the three pairs of shafts, at the Windmill End, Bournehills and Withymoor Collieries, already existing on the lands. Mining continued over the next few years with Nock, Wood and Nock being mentioned in the Mine Inspectorate reports, mostly for fatal accidents to colliers in the mines. In the period 1858 to 1869 ten colliers

lost their lives in the Thick Coal mines under the estate. This was not unusual in the Black Country, however. Indeed, the toll was considered normal by the standards of the coalfield for the Thick Coal mines.

For reasons unknown, Nock, Wood and Nock decided to sell the estate during 1869 and a sale of the mines was attempted on June 15th of that year when the estate was advertised in the local papers. Nothing seems to have developed from this event, however, and the mines stood until sold for £4500 on June 12th 1874 to Joseph Pearson of Compton Tettenhall, Staffs, and David Shakespeare of Kingswinford, Coal Masters, who managed to operate them until October 16th 1876 when they were sold by auction at the Dudley Arms in Dudley to settle arrears of rent.

John Foster Clay, a Worsted Spinner of Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire, bought the mines for £2000 during December 1876. Fairly soon afterwards, he seems to have mortgaged the mines for £1200 to William Pearson of Pearson's Colliery at nearby Oldhill. It may be that the friendship with Pearson was the reason for Clay getting involved in Black Country mining. Pearson was then empowered to operate the mines and extract the coal and probably did so. After the number of years that mining had been pursued under a small estate, the coal was now being worked for the third or fourth time. The working of the Bournehills Colliery had already ceased and the winding engine had been removed, with only a dwelling house, offices and stores remaining on the site. The other two pairs of pits still retained their steam winders and were available for use.

BOURNEHILLS AND WITHYMOOR COLLIERY COMPANY

During 1879 John Foster Clay repaid his debt to William Pearson and took over working the mines until March 1890. Then, with a group of wool and cotton manufacturers of Halifax, he formed the Bournehills and Withymoor Collieries and Fireclay Company with a capital of £15,000. They continued operations over the next few years until the estates must have been almost devoid of coal. To continue mining, they then took leases of some of the Earl of Dudley's old workings nearby and extracted the ribs and pillars left from previous working. The first lease was of 3 acres, 2 roods 17 poles from January 1st 1893 over two years at a royalty of £250 per acre. They were to raise the coal extracted from their own shafts, leaving support for the Great Western Railway and station at Windmill End. By the end of the lease in December 1894, £901 11s 3d had been paid to the Earl. The lease must have been profitable to the company as it took out a further one of 4 acres, 1 rood 22 poles in June 1895. This covered the period to June 1897 and provided royalties to the value of £2632 10s to the Earl.

With these leases, the story of the coal mines under the Bournehills and Withymoor estates comes to an end. Apart from the canal, very little remains today of these activities of the last century. The furnace site has gone under housing, along with the Windmill End colliery, while the Withymoor Colliery

is under an area of open space. The Bournehills Colliery has been lost under a transport depot. Only the brick wall blocking the canal basin can be seen. Ironically the only building left is the Withymoore Forge of 1790, which as the works of J.T. Parkes it still used for metalbashing. The wheel seems to have come full circle.

REFERENCES.

Most of the documents consulted for this article are held in the Reference Department of the Smethwick Library, High Street, Smethwick, Warley. My thanks to the Archivist, Clare Hetherington, for permission to study and use the documents.

Mines Inspectorate Reports 1858 to 1869. Dudley Libraries, Archives and Local History Service, Mount Pleasant St, Coseley, have information relating to the estates mentioned in the article.

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