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**THE 19th CENTURY WRAY WOOD MOOR COLLIERY & MINING DISPUTE**

by Philip J. Hudson.

The main topic of this further instalment of the history of coal mining in the Lower Lune Valley area, near Lancaster, is the dispute over the Wray Wood Moor Mine in Roeburndale.<sup>1</sup> This mine, which was part of Smear Hall Colliery, consists of a series of pits on the south western edge of the colliery field. On Wray Moor can be found a series of up and down shaft heads and, smaller ventilation shafts, many of which are linked by an access road. There is also some evidence of water power being used, possibly just for ventilation and water pumping. Some sites had cinder ovens, and one site had a steam engine installed. There were also some associated buildings.

These Wray Wood Moor coal shafts, and some others which adjoin them, are shown on the abandonment plan of 1888.<sup>2</sup> What this plan does not show, however, are several pitheads and filled shafts which were worked in the early part of the 19th century and were therefore long out of use.<sup>3</sup>

Most of Wray Wood Moor has at some time been mined by either the owners of Outhwaite, The Hornby Castle Estates, or some other lessees. Field work in the area has located the extensive surface remains of these various mining activities, but the problem now is to begin to interpret them in order to make some sense of the working dates and the way the mines were worked, and to try and marry any interpretations to the available primary documentary sources. This work is continuing, but the only sure way of finding out how extensive the workings were and just what was constructed underground would be by opening a shaft and exploring. This, however, is not an option which the writer has in mind, being long past the age of such activities! Fortunately, a series of documents in connection with the dispute has survived. These documents give some clues as to the types and extent of the mine workings and are discussed below.

The mining of the minor seams of coal in the Lune Valley probably peaked in the early 19th century. This created a situation where there was a local demand for the coal, but supplies from the thin seams were short. Most of the seams presented problems, as none appear to have been more than 18-20 inches thick, with lensing, and were found in thick rock strata at varying depths, in some cases exacerbated by faulting, making them difficult to mine. As the same seams were often worked by several different groups of miners at the same time, disputes were inevitable.

In 1824 there was a dispute over some of the coal seams on Wray Wood Moor between John Marsden, owner of the Hornby Castle Estates, who was supported by his steward George Wright and George Smith the agent, and the Edmondsons of Outhwaite, owners of some of the coal pits, and their partners.<sup>4</sup>

This paper deals with what is known about this dispute, using extracts from the Hornby Castle Muniments, some items recorded by Colonel W.H. Chippindall, who worked on the Hornby Records earlier this century, and the Diary of George Smith.<sup>5,6</sup>

The set of Hornby Castle documents, B.HY.,13, which date from the 1820s is very informative on this dispute over the coal mining rights and working methods on a site near Outhwaite, on Wray Wood Moor.<sup>7</sup> These documents are substantiated by George Smith's Diary entries for this period. This site and the coal-pits are illustrated in Map Four of a paper on the Hornby Castle Estate coal-mining sites which was published in *British Mining* No.50.<sup>8</sup>

In the Wray Moor Colliery dispute, the main points in contention were access, rights to coal and works in certain areas of the moor pits, damage done to the pits owned by or leased from Hornby Castle, and the robbing of roof-supporting coal pillars in the previously worked seams.

Below is an outline of the correspondence content, together with some analysis of the way in which the dispute progressed. Francis Pearson and Mr Wilson were Edmondson's Solicitors, Mr Sharp was the solicitor acting for the Hornby Castle Estates, and George Wright was Mr John Marsden's steward.<sup>9</sup>

There had been some disputes about these Wray Moor and other coal-pits earlier in the 1820s, but these appear to have been minor in comparison to this one in the mid-1820s.

George Smith made an entry in his diary on Friday January 21st 1820, "*I copied some evidence for Mr Sharp respecting the dispute of Warf (sic, Wray) Wood it was enclosed to him and I gave it to Watkins this evening..*"

Nothing further was written by Smith or recorded in the Hornby Castle Muniments with respect to the disputed Wray Wood Moor area until it was mentioned again in April 1824, when I suspect that things came to a head.

It would appear that Edmondsons, their partners and the colliers working for Hornby Castle Estates were all working pits in the Wray Wood Moor area at this time. Marsden and Wright suspected that someone was working underground coal seams to which they had no right. To verify these suspicions, Wright arranged for the underground coal workings to be measured precisely (dialled) at night, rather than in normal working times. An entry in Smith's Diary confirms this as follows: April 24th Saturday 1824: "*..John Hodgson his son, William Carr, Henry Knowles and Thomas Charnley this night Dialled the works in the shaft on Wray Wood Moor nearest to Bowskills Barn..*". Another entry on the next day April 25th states, "*The men finished Dialling this morning about 4 o'clock...*" and again on April 27th: "*The same men that dialled on Saturday night and Sunday morning Dialled last night*

*and this morning the works in the shaft on Wray Wood Moor opposite Howsons House.”<sup>10</sup>*

The Edmondsons and their partners discovered these clandestine activities, and complained, protesting their innocence and claiming, it would seem, some recompense for their being cheated.

On April 27th, Smith also records: “*William Edmondson senior of Outhwaite called on Mr Wright today and said that recompense must be made for the coals got.*”

The first letter in bundle B.HY., 13 shows that Wright’s response was to gather more evidence with which to face them. This letter dated April 30th 1824, contains John Thompson’s statement at Hornby Castle with regard to damage to Mr Marsden’s coal workings, other coal workings, and coal in other pits on Wray Wood Moor.<sup>11</sup>

Supporting comments were recorded in Smith’s Diary and by early May 1824 the matter had become one of physical confrontation, leading to threats of further legal action.

Smith's Diary, May 4th: “*John Hodgson and William Charnley called and said that Edmondsons sons refused to let our men go down to look at the workings. They would neither allow our men to pull down the wall in the bottom nor take any tools down with them.*”

The response to this action is seen in letters numbered 2 and 3.

The first of these is dated May 5th 1824 and is Mr Sharp's letter to George Wright of Hornby Castle about the dispute over coal on Wray Moor, and what action to take – that is, serving legal notices on the partners who are working the pit.

This action was carried out by George Smith and others the following day and, on May 6th Smith records in his diary:

*“Copied notices to serve upon the Edmondson & Co about coal. I set off about 4 o’clock this morning. Called upon John Hodgson of Wray, we went by way of Bowskills to Wray Wood Moor where Mr W Edmondson was. This was about a half after five, soon after William Edmondson Junior came and I then served a notice paper on each of them. They would not take them but let them fall to the ground. I received a copy of the notice to them both cost ???, then I went down the pit and soon after William Edmondson Junior took up his notice paper saying I may as well take this paper, I said that Mr Marsden was willing to settle the matter quickly and that it would be the best way to do so, I said why would they not let us go down, William Edmondson*

*said that if you (meaning) Mr Marsdens men had come openly in the daytime instead of at night, they might have gone down. William Edmondson also said that William Green and Isabella his wife and William Davies were not partners in the Colliery, he also said it was not likely to go down the wall in the bottom as it would let their works in. I said that was no excuse at all as we only wanted to make 2 or 3 holes through it, not get down to the dip, to see what coals had been got.*

*Hodgson and I then went to the other pit and served a notice paper on Anthony Bateson the Banksman. I also read a copy to him whilst we were with him.<sup>12</sup>*

*Henry and Thomas Edmondson came to the other pit to their brother William, we went back and I served a notice paper each on Thomas and Henry.*

*Hodgson and I then set off and went to Outhwaite and I served a notice paper on Ellin Edmondson. I also read a copy to her, she said that she was told they were not in Mr Marsdens coal and that if our men pulled down the wall in the bottom they would let the works in. I answered her as I answered W. Edmondson and told her that Mr Marsden was desirous of settling the business quickly.*

*Afterwards we espied Mr Edmondson junior getting over the garden wall, I called to him, went up and served a notice paper on him.*

*I also read a copy thereof to him. He said that he would like to have the business settled, that he had tried to do so as much as he could. We then returned to Wray when Hodgson left me and afterwards served a notice paper on John Edmondson in his Shop.*

*Mr Wright sent two notices to Mr Sharp one to be served on John Bush, the other for a copy."*

By this date the legal action was well underway and further steps were planned as letter No.3, dated May 7th 1824, is from George Wright to Mr Sharp, instructing him to take further legal action to stop Edmondsons and others from getting the coal.

It is perhaps understandable that the Edmondsons began to "dig in their heels" at this point, bearing in mind that the men of Outhwaite owned their own lands and were independent of Hornby's Lordship. The response by Edmondsons seems reasonable, as the actions of Marsden and Wright, interpreted on the evidence to date, seems a bit high handed and even furtive at times.

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Previously disputes of this kind had usually been settled face to face, with some amicable agreement eventually being reached to the satisfaction of all parties concerned, but this does not appear to be the case in this instance.

To complicate matters further, it appears that the Edmondsons owned some of the coal seams that Marsden and Wright were working, and the latter paid the Edmondsons a rent for these.

Smith's diary has one entry dated August 7th 1823 (page 149), which seems to confirm the payment of a colliery rent by the Hornby Castle Estates: "*I paid William Edmondson of Outhwaite Highway Rates for Roeburndale tithes and for the colliery.*"

What had transpired so far seems to be a recipe for the dispute to escalate and then drag on. Marsden and Wright again took legal advice on the matter and decided to proceed further by issuing court injunctions.

The entries in Smith's Diary explain this further. There was also more legal correspondence. The next six letters in B.HY.,13, numbers 4 to 9, give more insight into this and further developments in the dispute, as follows:

Letter No.4, dated May 8th 1824, is Mr Sharp's letter to George Wright regarding Edmondsons and the coal pits, with an inclosure detailing a Mr Bush's account of the partners who got the coal.

Letter No.5, dated May 11th 1824, is a copy of Wright's letter to Mr Sharp, giving him instructions about examining the coal pits to estimate the damage for Mr Marsden.

Letter No.6, dated May 13th 1824, is Mr Sharp's letter to Wright, explaining his correspondence with Francis Pearson, solicitor of Kirkby Lonsdale, who had been instructed by the Edmondsons to get an agreement signed regarding Wray Moor Colliery. Copies of the two letters were attached.

Letter No.7, dated May 14th 1824, is Sharp's letter to George Wright, enclosing a draft memorandum of an agreement for Wray Moor Colliery, from Edmondsons' solicitors, to which Mr Sharp made many objections.

Letter No.8, dated May 15th 1824, is Sharp's letter to Wright, suggesting that a bill should be filed against those working the colliery.

Letter No.9, dated May 16th 1824, is a copy of G. Wright's letter to Mr Sharp, suggesting that the latter drew up a new form of agreement and suggesting that a new shaft might be sunk on Wray Moor to ascertain the damage.

It seems certain that this legal activity was not having much effect on the Edmondsons who may at this stage either be the guilty parties or were totally

ignoring the legal processes. Their actions from this point on might be interpreted as entrenched, possibly making the most of the uncertain situation. The next few letters in the B.HY., 13 series show that there was, by this time, much more concern as to the gravity of what was taking place in the colliery, leading to a much stronger response from Marsden and Wright.

Letter No.10, dated June 1st 1824, is George Wright's letter to Sharp, saying that the Edmondsons were robbing the pillars in the coal pit, letting in the roof and causing a great deal of damage to the workings.

Letter No.11, dated June 2nd 1824, is Sharp's letter to Wright saying that the vice-chancellor had granted an injunction against Edmondsons regarding the colliery dispute.

Letter No.12, dated June 5th 1824, is a note from Sharp to Wright, saying he should receive the vice-chancellor's writ of injunction the next day.

This legal instrument must have been eagerly awaited and plans had been made to put it into immediate effect. On Wednesday June 9th 1824, Smith records in his diary:

*“Received a parcel this morning per post from Mr Sharp containing a writ of injunction against Edmondson and others getting Mr Marsden's coal, with copies for me to serve. In the afternoon I and Thomas Crossfield examined the copies with the original and afterwards in the evening went to serve them. I served Ellen Edmondson at her house, William Edmondson senior at his own house, A.C.Edmondson at his own house, Anthony Bateson at his own house, Henry Edmondson in the road below Black Sike Foot and John Edmondson and Mr Edmondson both at Mr Grimes Innkeeper in Wray.”*

Smith carried on his account as follows:

*“June 10th. Thomas Crossfield and I went this forenoon and served a copy of the injunction upon Thomas Edmondson on Goodber, I then went to Green Smithy and served a copy upon William Green.”*

This last action may have temporarily stopped activity on the sites, for, if anything further happened in the next few months, Smith did not record it in his diary. The Hornby Estate records are just as silent. It is possible that documents could be lost, but, if this is so, it is strange that Smith makes no comments at all in connection with this topic. However, there was a renewal of information on the case in November, as follows:

Letter No.13, dated November 4th 1824, is from Sharp to Wright, stating he had been served with a notice from the courts to take the answers of the Edmondsons and others on November 8th at Mrs Wilcock's in Lower Bentham.

A further letter, the last one in this series, No.14, dated November 13th 1824, is from Sharp to Wright, who saw no objection to meeting the partners as a Mr Wilson, acting for Edmondsons had suggested.

Whether or not this meeting took place was not recorded, but Smiths' Diary has this entry on Tuesday November 16th 1824: "*A meeting of Mr Wright, Mr Sharp and the proprietors of Wray Wood Moor Colliery at the Castle Inn, Hornby.*"

A possible outcome of this meeting is that some compromise was drawn up by the parties, as they appear to agree to bring in an independent expert to measure the workings and to assess the underground situation. Smith's Diary gives the details on December 20th 1825: "*Cuthbert Batty of Burton in Lonsdale dialled part of the works in dispute Marsden v Edmondson yesterday and finished the remainder today.*" On December 21st he continues: "*Cuthbert Batty dialled upon the ground adjoining Wray Wood Moor. I was present and afterwards measured the ground. There were also John Hodgson, Thomas Charnley and Henry Knowles.*" The Edmondsons were not mentioned as being present and did not appear to agree with Batty's results, so the dispute dragged on, with Mr Sharp, Marsden's solicitor, examining witnesses and preparing the case further, as Smith records on January 12th 1826: "*Mr Sharp came up this morning to the Castle and examined the following persons in the dispute with Edmondsons about coal. Robert Sharples, James Sharples, William Tomlinson, George Wilcock, John Thompson and Edward Wilcock.*"

Just what information was given by these witnesses and to what use it was put is not in the records, but this action did not end the matter. There was still further disagreement and antagonism, as Smith's diary entries in early 1826 illustrate.

Wednesday January 18th 1826: "*John Hodgson, collier, called and said that the Edmondson were dialling in the Scuttle Hill Meadow today there were Thomas and A.C Edmondson and Leonard Hodgson dialling, Hodgson said he had been down in our gate under Scuttle Hill Meadow, that the wall which he (Hodgson) had made across the gate on Monday last had been taken down and put up again since 12 o'clock yesterday to the hour he went down today (11 o'clock a.m.).*"

Smith recorded a further development in his diary on January 26th 1826: "*Mr Buttle and I measured the remaining part of the land adjoining Wray Wood Moor in dispute Marsden and Edmondson.<sup>13</sup> We also measured the dialling part done by C. Batty and H. Knowles who dialled the surface of Scuttle Hill Meadow today along with John Hodgson and Thomas Charnley.*"

What happened next, or what was the outcome of this case of Marsden v Edmondsons, is not known. There was no further information available in the documents examined so far. These only indicated that the dispute was



lengthy, lasting from April 1824 to after January 1826, but did not conclude the action or prove the case for the plaintiffs or the defendants. There were no further references to this case in Smith's diary, but the answers are possibly in the unseen documents in the Hornby Castle Muniments or in some unexamined legal record.

Part of the answer could perhaps be found in an advertisement in the *Lancaster Gazette* dated July 28th 1827, however, when Edmondsons tried to sell the Outhwaite Estate, along with the coal mines and the rights to mine for coal.

*“Sale of Outhwaite Farm, freehold and tithe free, several houses and buildings, lands adjoining on moor in possession of William Edmondson and others’ and contains valuable beds of coal. Several shafts are opened in convenient parts of the estate and large sums of money have lately been expended in making levels and sinking new shafts for obtaining coal to a large extent’ John Parker of above beck will show, further particulars Robinsons, solicitors Lancaster or Pearsons, Kirkby Lonsdale.”*

When the property came up for auction sale in August, Smith made the following entry in his diary: August 20th 1827 (p.259), “*Outhwaite Estate offered for sale at Castle Inn, but not sold, bid to £3670, S. Garnett auctioneer.*” Why the estate remained unsold was not stated, but there could be some connection with the coal disputes. It is possible to argue that if, by this date, the court cases were still unresolved and were common knowledge, this must have had some influence on the judgement and decision of any prospective purchaser.

This case and the associated documents are of importance to the industrial archaeologist and social and economic historian alike. The evidence connected to the dispute contains valuable reference and information on the coal-mines, the working methods, place-names, the location of the pit sites, as well as names and addresses of people who were engaged in coal mining and other economic activities at this time.

Letter number 10 is particularly useful as it gives unwitting testimony to some of the mining methods employed in the Wray Wood Moor mines, i.e., that of underground galleries with pillar and stall working, leaving pillars of coal (so it must be assumed that the coal seam was quite a thick one on this site) to assist the working and to shore up the roof. The main point made in this letter was that the Edmondsons were robbing these coal pillars and thus letting the roof collapse behind them to the detriment of the workings.

The whole case was perhaps important as an indicator of the changing social and economic situation in early 19th century North West Lancashire. The influence of the Lord of the Manor and his men was being resisted by the

emerging, independent landowning families, perhaps an indication that the old traditional system of manorial control was slowly being eroded away.

### REFERENCES

1. Located from SD 624658 to SD 619652. Marsden died, Wright inherited, but the will was contested by a close relative, Admiral Tatham. This became the subject of the famous Tatham versus Wright court case.
2. See Smeer Hall Colliery abandonment plan, *British Mining* No.50, p.133.
3. Hudson P.J. "The Hornby Castle Estate Coal Mining Sites" *British Mining*, No.50 (1994), pp.111-143. See page 121, Map Four, and page 125, Map Six.
4. Hudson P.J. "The Wray Moor Colliery Dispute" *Contrebis*, Vol 19 (1994), p25-35.
5. Hornby Castle Muniments, B.HY.,13, unpublished notes.
6. George Smith's Diary, unpublished.
7. Hornby Castle Muniments, Bundle HY 13, also recorded by a Colonel W.H. Chippindall (No.8 of his index and copy notes), unpublished.
8. Hudson P.J. "The Hornby Castle Estate Coal Mining Sites" *British Mining*, No.50 (1994) pp.111-143.
9. George Wright had run the estate an behalf of old Mr Marsden for many years. When
10. Smith's Diary, page 172.
11. The writer has been unable to get access to these documents in order to transcribe them and study them in detail.
12. The term Banksman, meaning "*a person who is in charge of a mine*" was in use in 1438 when one Thomas Buk was appointed to this position by the Bishop of Durham, before he was promoted to surveyor (viewer) at a salary of 40 shillings per year. Griffin A.R. *The British Coal Mining Industry* (Hartington: Moorland, 1977) p.25.
13. Mr Buttle was Thomas Buttle, Land Surveyor. He did some work for the Hornby Estate and also produced several surveys and maps of farms and estates in the area in the 19th century, in co-operation with John Binns and others. He was also responsible for the layout of the Tunstal Enclosure Award fields in 1825.

Paper submitted - April 27th 1995: P.J. Hudson,  
4 Cork Road,  
Bowerham,  
LANCASTER  
Lancashire  
LA1 4AJ