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LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

by I.G. Fanning

Introduction

In my earlier work, *Oldham Coal* (British Mining No.68), I tried to tell the history of the Oldham coal industry as accurately as possible from the few surviving documents. This history fell naturally into two parts, with the division falling about 1850. After 1850 it was reasonably easy to ascertain the locations of the collieries — after all, some of them survived into the 1950's — but many of those worked before 1850 had vanished almost without trace. Due to editing constraints in BM68, it was not possible to include a chapter devoted to identifying the locations of these vanished enterprises. This information has now been compiled, together with the locations of later (i.e., post-1850) coalpits to form a separate paper which can be regarded as a supplement to the original work.

Inevitably, there is some overlap between this Memoirs paper and BM68, but this is not very large. Anyone who found *Oldham Coal* interesting should find this memoir equally interesting, with a lot of new information. There will also be some people who found *Oldham Coal* a little boring, perhaps because of the amount of detail involved. Hopefully, these readers will find this document more interesting because it refers to areas of the town which they may know well and which are no longer industrial sites.

When I began the project, about three years ago, I had hoped to produce something comparable to the marvellous book by Duncan Gurr (*Cotton Mills of Oldham*) but which would draw attention to the important contribution made by the coal industry to the industrial development of the town. I was unable to do so for three reasons: I knew practically nothing about the subject; I had no historical training (having earned my daily bread as a teacher of mathematics and computing); and information was very hard to find (the Lancashire Mining Museum in Salford closed whilst I was in the middle of my research). There is still a lot of information “out there” waiting to be unearthed, but it will take a lot of digging.

Primary Sources and Method of Research

In this paper I will try to locate the local coal pits in relation to modern landmarks, but there are bound to be some that I have missed, and possibly some that I have misplaced. All the pits referred to here will have been mentioned somewhere in BM68, in which more information is given. To help me in this task I have used the 1844 Ordnance Survey maps (Lancashire sheets 86, 96 and 97), which were all published on different dates in the late 1840's or early 1850's. Only photocopies of these are available now. I shall refer to them all collectively as the “1844 map”. This map is pock-marked with black dots representing coalpits and old coalpits, which of course are

not named; I have attempted to identify all the black dots which are originals and ignore those which seem to have been produced by the photocopier.

I have also used Dunn's 1829 maps of Oldham which mark some collieries and also have an accompanying reference book showing the owners and occupiers of premises shown on the plan¹ (Note: my typewritten transcript of this old document is available in the Oldham Local Studies Library, along with the original). Unfortunately, Dunn was surveying Oldham Township alone, ignoring the "out-districts", and his reference book was in fact an account book aggregating the areas of all the properties in Oldham; anything which occupied no area for him to measure was ignored. I have referred to this work as "Dunn" or as the "1829 map" and have indicated the actual sheet in square brackets, e.g, [D2]. Local Tithe Maps also proved useful and I have also consulted the few very early Poor Rate Valuation Lists which have survived.

Of course, the maps only show which collieries and pits were extant when the surveys were made; they do not show how long they had been there, or if they closed the day after the surveyors went past. Nor do they show those old pits which had already been capped and covered over, leaving no trace on the surface.

I have not related the pits I have identified to the maps described above, as I do not expect that many readers will have such documents handy. Instead I have referred pits to existing local landmarks. Where the pits are "thick on the ground", as at Werneth, I have prepared sketch maps to show their locations. Some pits can be pinpointed exactly because there were prominent landmarks nearby; others can only be approximated. However, I have no desire to frighten anyone by convincing them that there is a deep hole right under the spot where they sit watching the telly, so I have been deliberately vague in places. Anyone planning to build tower blocks etc. in the area should not rely on my locations, but should consult the detailed plans at Bratby.²

It is most unlikely that any native Oldhamer will agree with the way I have divided up the borough. The pits were so close together and the district boundaries so tenuous, and not marked on the old maps, that I have simply made use of any naturally occurring gaps between pits to separate the areas described.

Descriptions of Coalpit Districts

OLDHAM TOWN CENTRE.

Under this heading I am including all the area between the southern bypass (Oldham Way) and the top of Oldham Edge, and between Westwood and Rhodes Bank.

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In the late eighteenth century Oldham was a typical pit village. There were pits on **Fog Lane** (now King Street) which have disappeared without trace, on **Golbourne** (now Church Lane) and on the present High Street, which was then known as Coal Pit Lane. Oldham Edge was also honeycombed with coal workings, some being shallow pits or drifts working the Chamber Mines and others being deep shafts cut through the massive Blendfire Rock to the Blenfire Mine and the Black Mine below. They are now very difficult to trace, and the task is made more difficult by the fact that the shallow mines were unofficially re-opened several times in periods of coal-famine and at least one of the deep shafts was re-opened to provide water for a brewery. The top of the Edge was used as a tank training ground between the two world wars and many of the old landmarks have disappeared under the onslaught of the 41st (Oldham) Royal Tank Regiment; the benefit of this was reaped at El Alamein. After the tanks had gone the area was 'landscaped' by the Council. Thus the great purple-streaked wall of rock near Bargap Road that I always climbed on my way to Grandma's at Higginshaw has been levelled and the magnificent view from Sarah Moor over Royton and Chadderton has been obliterated by trees. Many of the Oldham Edge workings were actually in Royton and I will discuss them under that heading.

It is very easy to be misled into thinking that there were more pits than there really were, because of name changes, changes of ownership and very approximate descriptions of location. For example, there was a pit at **Red Tom Nook** and Butterworth says that Jones and Company had a ten horse-power engine at **Pleasant Spring**; these may have been one and the same place — near the junction of Horsedge Street and Lord Street.³ Similarly there was a **Nook Colliery** at Roughs Lane, marked on the 1844 map and a **Roughs Colliery** about 75 yards north of Bargap Road and 25 yards from Henshaw Street; it was 180 yards deep to the Higher Bent Mine. Roughs Lane was the old name for Bargap Road and originally led to Roughs Colliery.⁴ Was one of these the same as **Bargap Colliery** or were there three separate collieries very close together?

There was a very old and deep pit on the crown of Oldham Edge near Sarah Moor which had been capped with an arch of brickwork and then covered with earth. This eminence became a favourite spot for standing to view the surrounding countryside; the pit had been forgotten and was not marked on any contemporary maps, although a coalpit was shown on this spot on a plan of John Clegg's "Top of Edge Estate" accompanying an Enclosure Award dated 1786.⁵ In February 1875 some gentlemen standing there found a hole opening beneath their feet and, fortunately for them, the bystander they showed it to happened to be James Nield, a prominent local geologist and town councillor, who recognized it for what it was. In a letter to the Oldham Chronicle he described it as the **Waymark Pit**, which stood at the junction of the old Rochdale Road and Edge Lane Road and had not been worked for "a great number of years". Mr. Nield was an influential man who would be listened to and, as a result, that pit and others in the vicinity were properly filled up.⁶

The 1844 map also shows pits at **Coldhurst Hollow** and near to **Horsedge Barn**, also shown by Dunn [D5], of which I could find no other record, except that Barker, Evans and Company had an eight horse-power engine at Coldhurst in 1832. Dunn also shows a colliery at **Hargreaves**, owned by Edward Lees, and another at **Hill**, owned and worked by Thomas Barker. Both were very close to Henshaw Street [D5].

The oldest major colliery in the town centre area was undoubtedly **Horsedge Colliery**, possibly dating from the seventeenth century, and this title once included the Holebottom, Rhodes Bank, Nook, Nelson and other pits in the area, and possibly the Glodwick pits. In the 1841 Valuation List only Holebottom was listed, worked by Lees, Jones and Company, when it ranked as the fifth most productive pit in Oldham; Butterworth shows it as having a twenty horse—power engine. It also appears on the 1829 map [D11]. In 1845 the same colliery was listed as ‘Yorkshire Street’ and ‘Rhodes Bank’ then appeared listed as a separate colliery.⁷ **Holebottom Colliery** (Plate 1) was on Fairbottom Street, on the site later occupied by the Kings Cinema and now by the Revolution Bar, opposite the Coliseum Theatre (Many older readers will have happy memories of the Kings, and its comfortable double seats in the back row). There was also an ‘old pit’ a few yards to the north-east, approximately on the site later occupied by the Theatre Royal on Horsedge Street. **Rhodes Bank Colliery** was to the deep of Holebottom, between the

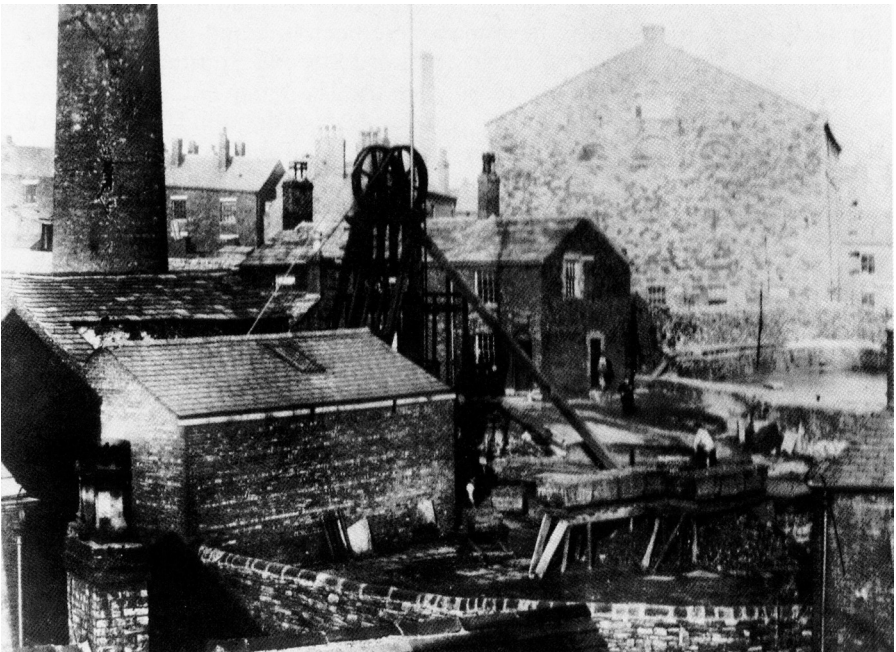


Plate 1. Holebottom colliery, Oldham, 1870. (Oldham Local Studies Library)

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old Gas Street (now Rhodes Bank) and the railway, behind the Chronicle Office. Holebottom Colliery worked the Black, Little and Higher and Lower Bent Mines and a sough drained the workings to a stream which ran into Sheepwashes Brook and then down towards Alexandra Park, and from thence to the Medlock.

There were other pits associated with these collieries: **Nelson Pit** was part of Holebottom Colliery but lay on Gas Street close to the bottom of Robson Street; there had also been a pit on the other side of Waterloo Street, under the Gas Works reservoir, which periodically emptied itself down the shaft — fortunately never in winter when it was being used as a skating rink.⁸ Both Nelson and Rhodes Bank Collieries had several shafts, nearly 400 yards deep; their headstocks can be clearly seen on the magnificent Oldham Panorama photograph of 1879.⁹ They now lie beneath the bypass, Oldham Way. There were two more old pits, probably belonging to the same colliery, a few yards to the east of the railway bridge over Waterloo Street. There are names available for all these pits — Shut, Summerhouse, Dingle, Ruffles — but I have been unable to marry them together, and some of them are almost certain to lie under the railway. **Dingle** is probably one of those near the railway bridge, because ‘Dingle’ was a small clough running from Greenhill to join Sheepwashes Brook near Rhodes Bank. **Shut Pit** was probably in Shut Clough, behind Alexandra Park.

Following roughly along the line of Oldham Way, there was a pit on **Clegg Street** almost opposite the end of Cromwell Street, which was 20 yards deep to the Lower Bent Mine. This may well have been the pit on Union Fields which trapped and drowned an unwary 13-year-old kite-flyer in July 1826.¹⁰ Then there was the **Priory Colliery** at the junction of Wellington Street and Longley Street; if you drive along Oldham Way from Mumps and take the slip road for Ashton, your nearside wheels will pass over this shaft as you leave the main carriageway. Its associated shaft is a few yards away, probably under the top part of the slip road on the other side, just as you leave the roundabout heading for Mumps.

Bent Grange Colliery was approximately on the site now occupied by the Grange Arts Centre and there was another pit nearby, but closer to Rochdale Road, alongside the present Alderson Street. Bent Grange in 1841 was called ‘Marfield’, owned by John and Ashton Clegg and worked by Thomas and Robert Butterworth. In 1845 it was listed as ‘Bent Grange’, still owned by the Cleggs and operated by Thomas Butterworth only, working the Neddy Mine at 84 yards. It was only a small concern, with a rateable value of less than £70, but it made a big name for itself later. Highfield Colliery was sunk near Bent Grange, but closer to Chadderton Road, in 1848, and there were several other pits in the same area, which are now untraceable.

I think it must be accepted that there were many more pits on and around the Edge whose locations have been lost. At least two old shafts, of which there

had been no previous record, had to be filled up or capped when foundations were being built for the Civic Centre on West Street. Also, several shafts had to be filled up when the St. Mary's Estate was being redeveloped, but the actual locations are not now known, except perhaps to the contractors.¹¹

Robin Hill Colliery was at the bottom of Dunbar Street, off Rochdale Road, behind the Community Centre of the same name, and close to Tilbury Street. In 1841 the proprietors were Barker, Evans and Company, working the Royley Mine at 146 yards, but it was later owned by the Oldham, Middleton and Rochdale Coal Company Ltd.

Banktop Colliery, near the Bank Top Tavern between King Street and St. Patrick's Church, was the site of William Jones' first pit, dating from about 1770. Dunn shows a colliery in the King Street area in 1829, owned by the executors of Edward Stringfellow Radcliffe and worked by John Radley [D13]. It does not feature on the 1844 map, and the Bank Top Colliery listed in later Oldham Rate Books relates to Bank Top Colliery in Clarksfield Ward.

In 1845 Joseph Jones and Company had a small colliery on Potters Lane, which was almost certainly the forerunner of the **Lower Moor Colliery**, which was at Higher Moor (Oldham folk being a bit perverse), on the north-east side of Edge Lane Road. Its site now lies between Higginshaw Road and Wimpole Street. It was re-opened as a new pit in March 1861 and continued to get coal from the Royley Mine until about 1880, when its last owner was Hiram Robinson.

By 1850 the only collieries surviving in the town centre area were Holebottom, Rhodes Bank, Robin Hill, Bent Grange and Highfield. Highfield had been abandoned by 1852, Bent Grange by 1869, Robin Hill, Holebottom and Rhodes Bank by 1883 (though Rhodes Bank survived for a few more years as a pumping station).

WERNETH, HOLLINWOOD AND LIMESIDE.

A scrap of paper in a box of coal leases in the Lancashire Record Office, Preston gives a list of coal and cannel got in Werneth Bank and Chamber for the four weeks ending 21 March 1812.¹² The figures quoted are almost worthless, as no units are given; are they quarters, tons, horse-loads or baskets? (I believe that they are 'quarters', but that is only a hunch.) They do, however, give us some idea of the *relative* productivity of the pits listed. I will quote here only the totals for the four weeks. The productivity of the pits was quite erratic, with the best week totalling 955 and the worst only 322.

<i>Collier Hill</i>	1115	<i>High Scott Meadow</i>	160
<i>Blackridings</i>	91	<i>Low Scott Meadow</i>	191
<i>Copy Nook</i>	131	<i>High Pit Hardfield</i>	218
<i>Bowlingreen</i>	278	<i>Low Pit Hardfield</i>	184

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<i>Old Engen</i>	129	<i>New Bayley Pit</i>	81
<i>By Pitt Old Engen</i>	63	<i>Pea Croft</i>	175
<i>Abraham Meadow</i>	156	<i>High Pit Cannel</i>	87
<i>Shooting Butts</i>	158	<i>Low Pit Cannel</i>	60

Some of these pits were nearly exhausted and closed in 1812 when the leases ran out; they had mostly been worked by Lees, Jones and Company but there were also Booths, Duncufts, Barrows, Marslands and Ogdens amongst the partnerships. A few of the pits were reopened a few years later by Radley, Clegg and Company and worked until about 1840. The Radley pits were reputed to be the worst in Oldham as far as working conditions were concerned. Only Copy Nook, Bowlinggreen and the two Cannel Pits appear in the 1841 Valuation List, which is the earliest one available.

Collier Hill Pit was where you would expect it to be, at Collier Hill beside Chamber Road; it lay near the tram road which ran from Copsterhill Colliery, past Chamber Lane and Chamber Dam Collieries, to the canal wharf at Hardman Fold, at the bottom of Albert Street. It appears to have been a single-shaft colliery of the type that was outlawed in 1862. About 1815, a boy, who was about 11 years of age, was killed at this pit. He was the driver of the ginhorse (the gin being a horse-drawn winding engine) at 5s. a week, and in trying to grab a waggon with the bankhook his feet slipped, and he was dragged into the pit's mouth, and fell 100 yards down the shaft.¹³

Blackridings Colliery lay on the eastern side of Block Lane (previously called Black Lane), extending towards the end of Milne Street; Dunn shows it as owned and worked by Widow Travis. It was working the Black Mine at 50 yards and the Lower Bent Mine at 115 yards until it closed in 1843. There was another shaft somewhat closer to the junction of Block Lane and Oxford Street, on Blockfields. This was a medium-sized pit owned by the Reverend Joshua Horton, described as "Blockfields" in 1841 and as "Werneth" in 1845; it was worked by Simon Holding and later by William Haigh. There were also two shafts on the opposite side of Block Lane near the area now occupied by the ruins of the Chadderton Mill, amongst others - now possibly under the railway. One of them was the New Bayley (or Bailey) Pit, which I will deal with along with the Chadderton pits.

Copy Nook, sometimes referred to as "No.2 Fancy Pit, Coppice Nook", was in the angle formed by the two turnpikes, Manchester Road and Featherstall Road and close to Alfred Street. Apart from occasional accident reports there is little information about it. Fancy Pit was being worked by Joseph Jones (Junior) and Company in 1841, with a rateable value of £416, which shows that it was almost as big as the Jones' colliery on Broadway Lane. By 1845 its rateable value was down to £86 and that was the last mention I could find of it, though there is a gap in the records for 'Oldham Below Town' between 1845 and 1854. In fact, there were two pits in the triangle bounded by the two turnpike roads mentioned and Alfred Street, which worked the

Black and the Bent Mines; the other one was the **Bowlinggreen Pit**, nearly opposite the bottom of Windsor Road, or “No.1 Coalpit, Coppice Nook” as it was listed in 1841. The last mention of this pit was in 1845, when its rateable value was £288 - so it was then comparable in size with Rhodes Bank and Holebottom. When the pits were abandoned, in the late 1840’s, they were

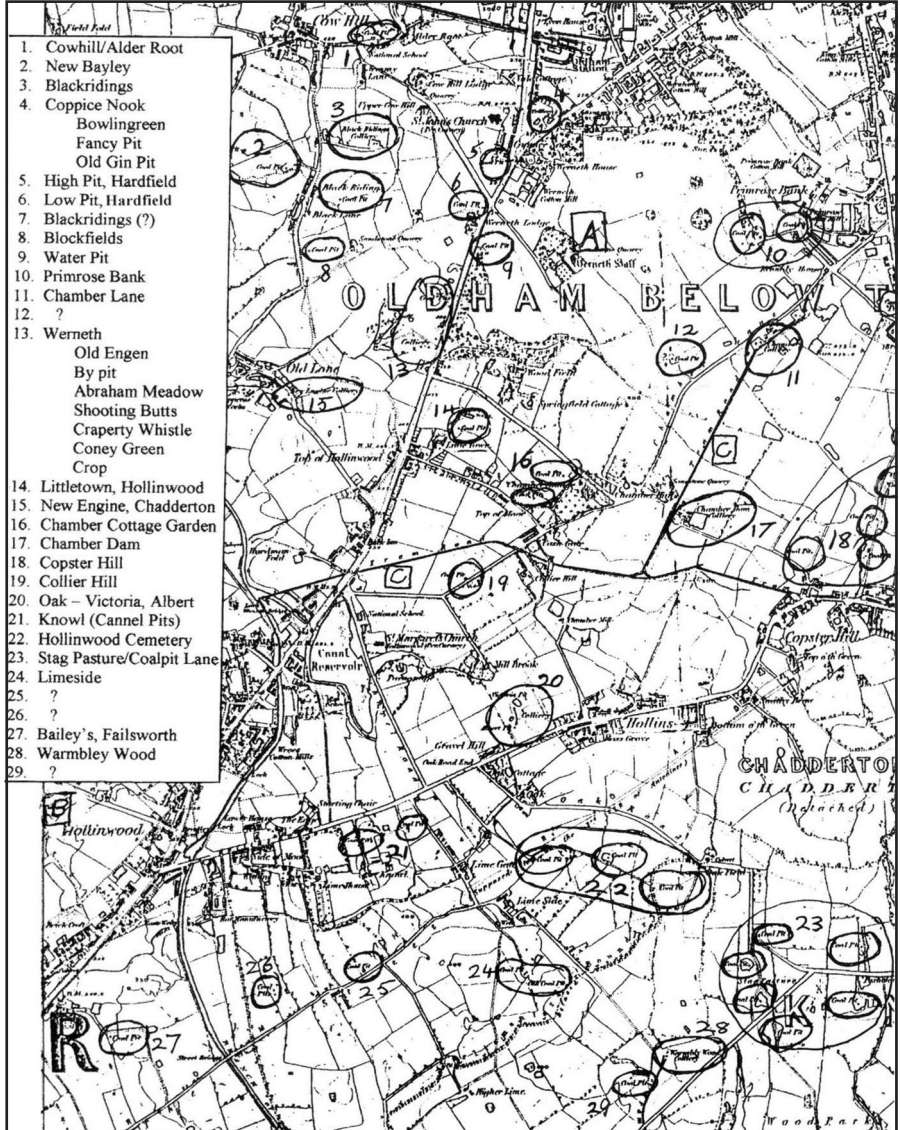


Figure 1. Location of coalpits in the Werneth area (reproduced from Ordnance Survey first edition map of 1844).

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filled up on a timber scaffold built across the shaft at the Black Mine landing, leaving a cavity down to the Bent Mine at a depth of about 150 yards. Some years later, probably in the 1860's, the scaffold in one of them failed and the filling dropped down to open up a large hole which swallowed up some houses in Alfred Street. The residents were given warning by neighbours and were able to make their way to safety without anyone falling down the hole. Fortunately everyone got out of bed on the right side that morning.¹⁴ (Incidentally, this area around the junction of Featherstall Road, Oxford Street and Manchester Road, was known as "Higher Coohill" in the 18th century.)

There was another pit at Coppice Nook, known as the **Old Gin Pit**, about which I have been able to find very little. It was possibly a drift mine driven into the side of the Werneth Bank either near Alfred Street or Coppice Street, using a gin outside the pit for hauling. There was also a pit beside Manchester Road, between Edward Street and Featherstall Road.

Old Engen with its **By-Pit** and **Stablefield Pit** with its **By-Pit** must have been very close together, for both pairs were situated behind the old Co-operative building on Werneth Brow, and there certainly wasn't a lot of room there. This old Co-op is now a Mosque. The two pits shared a winding engine with Shooting Butts Pit, so the engineman could not see all three pits from his position, especially in bad weather, and had to watch out for a piece of rag knotted round the chain to know when to stop. Not surprisingly, this led to a number of winding accidents. The original engine was a hand-gear engine situated between Stablefield and its by-pit but it was later replaced by a steam engine. I believe the pumping engine at the by-pit to be the first colliery steam engine in Oldham, having been erected before 1790. This contradicts Butterworth's claim that the first such engine was erected in 1792 at Broadway Lane, so I make the suggestion with some hesitation. Whatever its provenance, the "Old Engen" was bought by the Ashton Canal Company and re-erected in 1812 on the canal at Waterhouses to pump water up the locks.¹⁵ The engine may have been disposed of then because the pit was being abandoned, or because it was being replaced by a more modern engine which could both pump and wind; this is, however, mere speculation. (The massive beam of this engine was still lying beside the canal about 1960; it has now probably been landscaped over, because it is most unlikely that lifting gear capable of shifting it could have been taken there.)

Dunn shows **Hardfield** to be a large field stretching from Cowhill to the junction of Oxford Street, Manchester Road and Featherstall Road and spreading on both sides of the present Edward Street; it was owned by Edward Lees in 1829 [D7]. High Pit, Hardfield may therefore be the pit now lying under Oxford Street at its junction with Bath Street and Low Pit, Hardfield may be the pit near the bottom end of the Hartford Mill, near Jammy Lane, which was 31 yards deep to the Black Mine. Butterworth credits E. Lees and Son with operating two steam engines, totalling 26 horse power, but the location is simply given as 'Werneth'.

Abraham Meadow Pit, which derived its name from Abraham Fletcher who kept the old inn nearby, was alongside Manchester Road about forty yards on the Hollinwood side of Suffolk Street, opposite Werneth Terrace (which has now disappeared). It was the principal pit in the neighbourhood in its day, for in addition to extensive cart sales at the pit-bank there was a tramway from the pit to the Hollinwood canal, coal being then sent by boat to Manchester and Stockport. The route of the tramway was across the area between Suffolk Street and Spencer Street, later occupied by the Oak Mills, across Old Lane by a wooden bridge, to a point very close to the present Corpus Christi Church. The waggons were drawn by horses from Abraham Meadow to this point, and then sent down a jigbrow to the tippler at Cut End. Cut End was close to the place where the railway crosses Block Lane at Washbrook, the spot now being occupied by a funeral parlour. When Abraham Meadow was being filled in, about 1845, a local character (called "Bonegrinder") tried to retrieve the bricks lining the top part of the shaft, for recycling, but had to beat a hasty retreat when the shaft began to cave in leaving a hole over twenty feet wide. Even before that it had caused serious subsidence which had led to the abandonment of the nearby inn; fortunately at that time there were no other houses within sixty yards.¹⁶

Shooting Butts Pit was probably sunk late in the eighteenth century. It lay in the middle of Norfolk Street, just above its junction with Warwick Street. It got its name because it was in a tree-lined clough which had been used for Sunday archery practice in the days when that was a legal requirement for all able-bodied men. This clough, called Coney Green Clough, extended from in front of Woodfield House down to the lowest part of Suffolk Street, near to where the Gem Cinema used to be; it has now disappeared, having been crossed by the new turnpike (A62) and subsequently filled up. There was another pit in front of Woodfield House, working the Blenfire Mine, which for that reason was always known as the Coney Green Mine in Hollinwood and Werneth. I have been unable to reconcile its name with any in the above list. Shooting Butts was closed when the lease ran out in 1812, along with other pits in Werneth, and was one of those re-opened some years afterwards by Radley, Clegg and Company. There was a third pit in the same clough which was at one time, early in the 19th century, known as **Crapperty Whistle Pit**, because the banksman was a Glodwick man called Crapperty. It also worked the Blenfire Mine. This was a very wet pit and was possibly the last pit in Oldham where the drawers used the belt and chain to draw iron-shod tubs without the benefit of wheels and rails. It must have had a name of its own before Mr. Crapperty; the name I have got 'left over' is **Pea Croft**.

Shooting Butts Pit caused a stir in January 1885 when it collapsed, taking the full width of Norfolk Street down with it to a depth of 230 yards, and seriously jeopardising some of the houses on the new Freehold Estate. The Surveyor's Department had been laying sewers and paving the street because it was the main thoroughfare for lorries to the United Mill. They uncovered the slabs covering the shaft, but then covered them up again and

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carried on with their work of laying a foundation of rubble. During the next night the collapse occurred, taking the Surveyor's hut and wheelbarrow with it and leaving a chasm fifteen yards long by eight yards wide. Fortunately none of the residents went down with it as they had been forewarned by indescribable noises underground and had taken themselves and their valuables to a safe distance. The Surveyor's men were out in force by 1.30 a.m. to fence off the hole and put some planks across it. They also removed all the household effects from three houses on one side of the street and two on the other.¹⁷ The gaping cavity was later filled up by Chamber Colliery Company workmen, who also completed the paving and sewerage work and billed the Corporation for it.¹⁸ Apparently the shaft had been covered over with Oldham Edge flags about nine inches thick, overlapping by a foot on the brickwork of the shaft, and then covered with earth. The brickwork in the shaft only extended down through the drift to the first rock layer, so that in due course, when some of the rock broke away, the brick cylinder and the flags went down with it.¹⁹

Previous to 1812 there were two pits working near Werneth Hall, which went by the name of "Back o'th Ho' Pits"; they were located somewhere east of the junction of Werneth Hall Road and Frederick Street. Black Mine was being worked at these pits and the coal was wound with a two-horse gin wheel. They were probably one of the "matched pairs" in the list, perhaps at **Scott Meadow**, but I have been unable to link them definitely with their names. (Dunn lists a **Scott Field**, owned by Hopwood, Heron and Heywood, near Primrose Bank.) One of these pits was the scene of a remarkable escape. A young man from Newton Heath, called James Newton, fell down the pit (100 yards deep) on his horse; the horse was killed but James escaped with a broken thigh.²⁰

There was another pair of pits beside Manchester Street, standing back from the road near the Punch Bowl public house and Worthington Street. The colliers, of course, took refreshment in the Punch Bowl whose landlady was called Sally Kay. Consequently these pits were always referred to locally as the "**Sally Kay Pits**" though they also probably had a name of their own, perhaps from the above-mentioned list. There were also two pits alongside Manchester Street near the Werneth Institute. One of these, about fifty yards from the Institute, was possibly the Fancy Pit described earlier.

There were other pits in Werneth and Chamber which are not in the above list, probably because they were owned by different partnerships. The pits on the Chamber Estate, which became known as **Chamber Lane** and **Chamber Dam Collieries**, were probably the oldest in the area; there were pits on the Estate before 1700. Chamber No.1, No.2, No.3 and No.4, working the Coney Green (or Blenfire) Mine, Little Mine and Black Mine and operated by Joseph Jones (Junior) and Company appear in the Oldham Valuation List for 1845. Chamber No.3 and No.4, on Chamber Road opposite Werneth Cricket Club, survived until 1928, being then worked by the Hopwood Colliery Company Ltd.

There was a pit at the Manchester Road end of Chester Street, called the **Crop Pit**; it was probably so named because it was connected underground to the "**Engen**" **Pit** lower down Werneth Brow. This pit gave a scare about 1870 when the shaft collapsed, although it had apparently been filled up and not simply capped. It did considerable damage to the house of a Mr. John Stansfield. Another used to be behind Werneth Park wall, opposite to Rutland Street; after the recent road widening it now probably lies under the south-bound carriageway of the A62. Another pit lay near the junction of Gregge Street, now Grange Avenue, with Manchester Road. Yet another pit, known as **Littletown Pit**, lay a little further south and further back from the road in the village of Littletown (which was the highest point in Hollinwood). This is now approximately the Lacrosse Avenue/Werneth Crescent area. Dunn records this pit as being owned by Hopwood, Heron and Others (i.e. the Chamber Estate) and worked by Lees, Jones and Company. According to a Chronicle correspondent in 1885, these last three pits were abandoned and fenced off, but still not filled or capped at that time. (On 28 April 1877, the Borough of Oldham issued a "Dangerous Places Order", addressed to John Lees of Clarksfield, Joseph Lees of Clarksfield and James Arthur Lees of Alkington Hall, giving them 3 days to build a wall round a disused coal pit shaft in a field of Gregge Street, under threat of legal action. This wall had to be of bricks and mortar, 14 inches thick to a height of 4 feet and then at least 9 inches thick for a further 3 feet.)²¹

Hartford Colliery just about qualifies to be included in Werneth. It lay alongside Featherstall Road just beyond Werneth Station and was eventually built over by the cotton warehouse at Werneth Goods Station, opposite Arkwright Street, Westwood. It was originally sunk 50 yards to the Top Bent Mine and then later sunk deeper to the Royley Mine, at 286 yards, which was four feet nine inches thick there. On the way down to the Royley, the shaft passed through the Stone, Lower Bent, Two Mines and Lower Two Mines, and the Neddy and Lower Neddy Mines but it seems to have only worked the Bent and Royley, and possibly the Two Mines. Stretching Werneth a bit also allows me to include a pit marked by Dunn at **Midfeathers**, alongside Featherstall Road between Middleton Road and Elevenways, owned by the executors of William Clegg [D5].

The **New Engine Pit** was sunk in 1803 when the pits higher up (Abraham Meadow, Shooting Butts etc.) were nearing exhaustion. It was approximately on the site now occupied by Corpus Christi Church, Hollinwood, so it could utilize the jig-brow down to the canal. (The church is sandwiched between Pit Street and the end of Engine Street.) New Engine appears in Chadderton Valuation Lists from 1844 until 1855, operated successively by Joseph Jones, William Jones, Joseph Jones (Junior) and then another William Jones, but its rateable value during that period never rose above £200, so it was not a big concern.²² It seemed to produce a large proportion of small coal, for the steepest part of Old Lane, from its junction with Derby Street, was always known as "Slack Brow" and the Colliers' Arms in Old Lane was (and I think

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still is) known as “The Slack”. The colliery had two shafts, the deeper one being 186 yards deep. It worked the Black Mine at 69 yards, the Oldham Great Mine at 129 yards and the Lower Bent Mine at 146 yards. The site was rated for “Engine house and power” and for a sawmill; there was also a Copperas Works beside it, with an evaporation shed.

The **Cupola Pit** was located between Suffolk Street and Spencer Street; it does not appear on any maps that I have seen but there was a field marked as ‘Cupola Pit Field’ on the site later occupied by the Oak Mills. A “cupola” was a cap or cover built over a shaft, often with a sliding hatch to regulate the flow of air, so it is possible that Cupola Pit was an old pit being used as a ventilating shaft for the pits further up the bank e.g. Abraham Meadow.

The two **Cannel Pits** I believe to have been at Oak Colliery, Hollinwood, because the 1841 Poor Rate Valuation List includes two cannel pits on Park Road, which was at the lower edge of the Oak site, opposite Oak Road. These pits were recorded in 1841 as being worked by Joseph Jones (Junior) and Company. The 1844 Ordnance Survey map shows two pits on the site, but labels them as Victoria and Albert which were supposedly not sunk till 1848, so I believe that those pits were deeper sinkings of much older shafts. The Tithe Schedule for Chadderton, dated 1841, shows plot 1062: **Bradley Field Colliery** and vacant land. Owner: Miss Mary Andrew; Occupier: Lees, Jones & Co.; Area: 5 acres 2 roods 32 poles; Rateable Value, three shillings and tuppence (16p). This caused me some confusion and a lot of wasted time, until I remembered that Copsterhill and an area south of it were in Chadderton (detached) at that time. Bradley Field was then found to coincide with the parcel allotted to Jonah Andrew in the Enclosure award of 1804, the area of which was then given as 5 acres 1 rood 35 perches. (poles and perches were the same thing, sometimes called ‘rods’). Dunn shows ‘Bradley’s Field’ on the same site, owned by Mary Andrew and occupied by James Ogden [D8]. This identification is strengthened by the **1825 Turnpike Act**, which reads:

“A certain piece of road at Hollinwood leading from and out of the turnpike road from Manchester to Oldham at or nearly opposite to a certain public house called the Buck and passing near to the Chapel yard to the old road leading from Bradley Bent in Oldham towards certain collieries called Park Collieries should be made turnpike.”²³

This is undoubtedly Chapel Road. There seems to be no logical reason why that piece of road should be classified as a turnpike, other than that it connected the main Manchester — Oldham turnpike to a very productive colliery (Oak), and also gave that colliery access to the canal wharf. The Victoria Pit at **Oak Colliery**, near the junction of Heron Street and Hollins Road survived until 13 July 1956. A correspondent to the *Oldham Weekly Chronicle*²⁴ suggested that Park Colliery was at the junction of Hollins Road with Ashton Road, but the Park Colliery mentioned in the 1825 Act was definitely stated, in the preamble to the Act, as being in Ashton-under-Lyne i.e. the Park Col-

liery at Park Bridge. **Park Colliery**, Oldham, (close to where the Park Cake bakeries are now) was not sunk until much later in the century and never actually produced any coal.

South of Oak and lying just a few yards off Hollins Road were the two pits of **Knowl Colliery**, Engine Pit and Crop Pit; one was between Knowl Street and Argus Street and the other between Oldham Street and Mellor Street, Hollinwood. These were probably two of the oldest pits in Hollinwood, listed in the Police Rates list for 1840/41 but not mentioned anywhere after that, so they were probably very close to being worked out at that time.²⁵

There was a colliery with three shafts in the area now occupied by Hollinwood Cemetery. Little information is available about it, except that it is marked on Dunn's 1829 map [D10]. It was managed at one time by John Evans, who also managed **Warmbley Wood Colliery** further over into Limeside, near where Limehurst and Holy Family Primary Schools are now. Warmbley Wood had its own tram road leading to the top end of Crime Lake in Woodpark Clough, so it could ship its coal directly into canal boats. Whether this coal was sent into Manchester and Stockport, or came back to the gasworks or mills in Hollinwood, I have been unable to determine. Lees, Barker and Company were using two steam engines at Limeside in 1832, totalling 22 horse power, which may have been sited at these collieries.

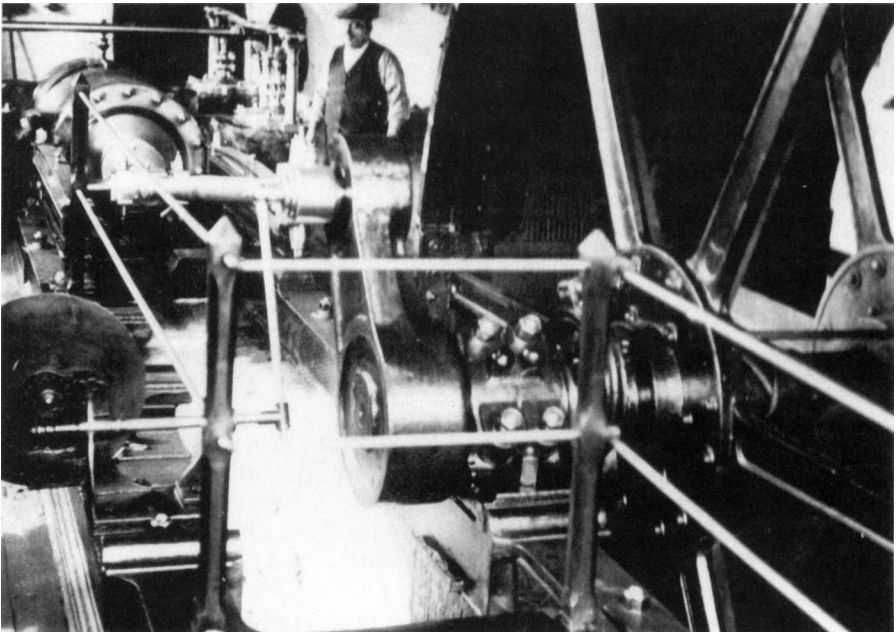


Plate 2. The horizontal winding engine at Bower colliery, Hollinwood, showing engineer George W. Hall. (Oldham Local Studies Library)

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

The 1844 Ordnance Survey map shows another six coalpits or old coalpits north east of Warmbley Wood clustered around Coal Pit Lane in the area known as Stag Pasture; at least two of these are now covered by Werneth Golf Course. One of these was 80 yards deep to the Foxholes Mine, and another was 100 yards deep to the Cannel Mine. This map also shows four pits in the area between the cemetery and Oak Road, which is now covered by the Limeside housing estate. Two were behind the houses at the top end of Ninth Avenue, opposite the bowling green, and two were between Second Avenue and Third Avenue, close to where the little roundabout is now. Dunn shows this area as “Kennel Pit Field”, occupied by Isaac Ogden, and it lies close to the line of the road named “Canal Pits Lane” listed by Moses.²⁶ Three more are marked north west of the Roman Road but close to it, two of them north east of the canal and one south west of it, in Failsworth. One of these may be the ‘colliery’ listed by Dunn amongst the Limeside properties but without a map reference; it was owned by Jonathan Mellor and worked by the Newton Heath Coal Company. About the other pits I could find absolutely nothing, other than their locations on the maps.

The **Bower Colliery** (Plate 2) dates from 1863; there is a mention of a coal pit at Birchen Bower in 1812 but I could find no other information about it, other than an accident report. Some of Wolfenden’s unspecific reports, of the type “Man dies in coalpit at Hollinwood”, could well have been relating to the old Bower. It was probably this old shaft that was sunk deeper by the Marlands, who previously worked Cross Colliery at Hurst, Ashton-under-Lyne. The Bower Pit, always known thus locally, survived until 1922. (My grandfather was a fireman there, and my father also went underground there when he was fourteen.)

Finally, right at the bottom of Hollinwood, bordering on Failsworth, was **Bailey’s Pit**. This was at the junction of Mersey Road North and Wesley Street. It was working an unnamed seam 2 foot 9 inches thick, at a depth of 195 yards, and did not survive long enough to be included in any of the surviving rating lists. There was also another colliery in Failsworth, **Hope Colliery**, at Wrigley Head, but I could find little about it. Its coal could be more easily got from Bower, and so it probably didn’t survive for long.

There were several very old, shallow “**Water Pits**”pits in the Werneth area which had been winning coal before any records had been kept. They were kept open to drain the top water which would otherwise have run down into the deeper mines, from where it would have to be pumped out at considerable expense to the colliery proprietors. Hence they served the same purpose, for the tunnels which connected them, as manholes do for a main sewer. One was in an open space near the Old Lang Syne beerhouse, if anyone knows where that used to be; another was at the top of Werneth Brow; a third was in the park, opposite Rutland Street, already mentioned, and a fourth lay somewhere off Norfolk Street. They were all linked by tunnels, which then ran to one of the old pits behind the Co-op and from there to Crapperty

Whistle. Finally their collected water was turned, somewhere near the lowest part of Suffolk Street, into the brook which ran naturally down Coney Green Clough. This stream ran past Washbrook and became the Bower Brook which eventually ran into the Moston Brook at Failsworth; its water was fought over by the prospective proprietors of the Rochdale and the Ashton Canal Companies in 1793.²⁷ It is now mostly culverted, but when I was a boy it showed itself briefly on the plot of land between Stanley Road and Coalshaw

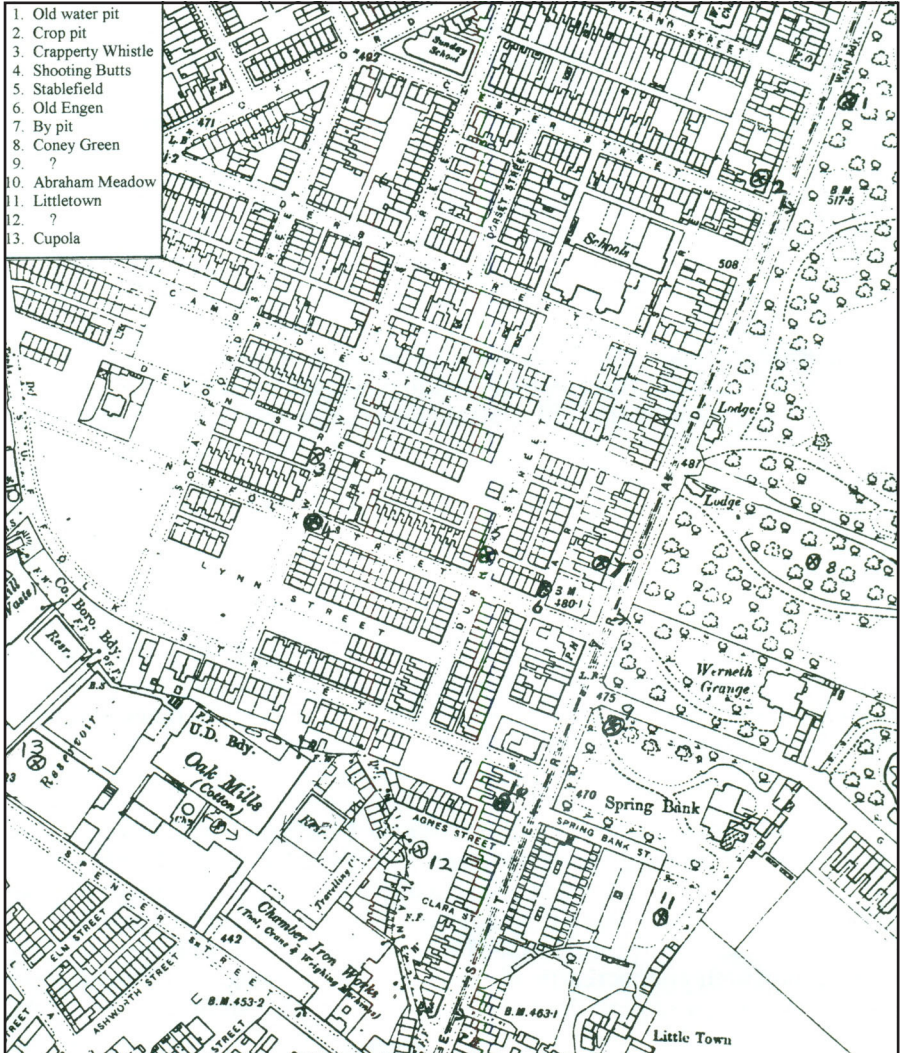


Figure 2. Location of coalpits in the Werneth Brow area (reproduced from Ordnance Survey first edition map of 1844)

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

Green Park before diving underneath the railway. It reappeared on the other side to run alongside the embankment between the railway and the Glebe Mills before disappearing underground again before Drury Lane. It is probably this stream that caused the flooding on canal street, Chadderton, in August 2003.

CHADDERTON.

New Engine and Bower were in Chadderton but have already been mentioned under Werneth and Hollinwood. The pits on the east side of Block Lane, close to Blackridings Colliery, were probably in Chadderton but I have included them in Werneth because of the 1812 list. They could just possibly be the pits referred to at Cowhill in early reports.

There were coal mines in Chadderton before the end of the 17th century. The old pits at Cowhill are now very hard to identify, having been obliterated by the big “newcomers” like Denton Lane, Stockfield etc. Stockfield Colliery was in that part of Cowhill now known as Crossley Estate. Cowhill Wakes used to be held on the remnants of its slag heaps, in the second week of August. There was also a pit on the Alder Root side of Cowhill, opposite the end of Jammy Lane, now occupied by streets evocative of holidays in Switzerland, but I cannot put a name to it.

Denton Lane Colliery was sunk in 1845, 160 yards deep, to the Bent Mines; it passed through the Black Mine at 95 yards. About 50 yards from the surface water was found to be oozing out of the side of the shaft and falling to the pit bottom. To catch this Water a series of circular gutters were placed round the shaft at ten-yard intervals, connected by vertical spouts which conducted the water from one gutter to the next until it reached the sump-hole at the bottom of the shaft, from whence it was pumped back to the surface. The top-most gutter, and no others, was later found to be encrusted with a deposit from the water.²⁸ In spite of this the pit horses drank the water and were reported to be very healthy. (Living in the dark as they did, the horses were probably anaemic from lack of sunlight, and the iron-rich water was probably just what the doctor (would have) ordered.) The colliery was first rated in February 1846, with a value of £7.60; before that only a house and land, owned by William Jones, had been listed at Denton Lane. The pit had obviously just been opened and its value crept slowly upwards over the next few years. It occupied the land on the north west side of the junction of Denton Lane and Fields New Road, which I remember as being open land — playing space — but is now occupied by streets with names like Shoreham, Arundel, Lewes etc. Denton Lane sent its coal in road waggons to the Hollinwood canal wharf at Hardmans until 1862, in which year the Chamber Colliery Company purchased a railway locomotive for shunting their coal to the railway. The colliery produced no coal after 1897.

In June 1847 Denton Lane was joined in the rating lists by **New Bailey Colliery** and **Incline Colliery**, all three being valued at £49.82. In September 1848 these pits first became ‘big time’, then having a total rateable value of

more than £1800. New Bailey Pit was between Block Lane and Fields New Road in the area now occupied by the ruins of the Chadderton Mill (or possibly now covered by the Hollinwood-Werneth railway). It was sunk 120 yards to the Lower Bent Mine. There was another pit close to the New Bailey, which I cannot name; it lay in the area now occupied by Jane Street/Bernice Avenue. Incline Pit was replaced by **Railway Pit** in the 1848 valuations, so they were apparently one and the same, probably the one known locally as **Stock Lane Pit** because it was near Stock Lane and alongside the Werneth Incline railway, on the south side of the tracks and roughly half-way between Walsh Street and Broadway. This pit could also be described as being at Cowhill, and was later probably part of Stockfield Colliery.

Hunt Clough Colliery was the oldest sizeable colliery in Chadderton, the early references to coal mining on Foxdenton Estate probably relating to it. It occupied the area between Burnley Street and Broadway, now covered by Ash Walk and Poplar Walk and Chadderton F.C.'s ground. It was working the Black Mine at 34 yards. There was a tram road from Hunt Clough down to Chadderton Roughs, where it met a short spur of the Rochdale canal in the area known as Ferney Fields. This tram road ran through what is now Chadderton Cemetery and crossed Middleton Road near to Nordens Road; the present Ferney Field Road lies roughly along its track. In 1844, Hunt Clough was being worked by Joseph Jones and Company, and with a rateable value of £570 was by far the most productive pit in the Oldham area. Yet through 1846 and 1847 its value was only £47.50 so it would appear to be coming to the end of its useful life. It was redeveloped during 1874 - 76 by having two new shafts, constructed to a very high standard, sunk to the Royley Mine at 310 yards. This investment, possibly more than £40,000 per shaft, was not as productive as the Chamber Colliery Company had hoped, for all the Chadderton pits, except Stockfield, had been abandoned by 1897 because of water problems. Stockfield continued winning coal until 1914.

Billy Barns, who was leader of the orchestra at the Theatre Royal, Manchester, prior to March 1845, and lived on Royton Road near its junction with Featherstall Road, used to walk to his work every day. He would walk through Chadderton, past the Hunt Clough Coal Pits, then along the Waggon road to the branch of the Rochdale canal, then along the towpath, and thence through Moston to Manchester.²⁹

Hunt Lane Colliery was very active and productive up to about 1842, sending a lot of coal to Manchester by road and via the Hunt Clough tram road and canal (it was cheaper by road), and also supplying the vitriol works in Slacks Valley.³⁰ In spite of its name it was not on Hunt Lane but lay very close to the Shaw and Rochdale Turnpike (now Middleton Road), approximately in the area now occupied by Ward Street and Crompton Street, near Chadderton Town Hall. It was operated by Joseph Jones and Company on a small piece of land of 2 roods 25 perches owned by Robert Radcliffe Esq.

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

The 1844 map shows Ferney Fields south of Chadderton Roughts, but with no pits marked on it; local folklore claims that the area got this name because of the large number of fossil ferns that could be found lying about there. If this is true then the fossils must have come from a much earlier pit, possibly the one at **Springs Brook** between the Roughts and Ferney Fields. Springs Brook Colliery was 160 yards deep to the Lower Bent Mine; it had earlier worked the Black Mine at 85 yards. Ferney Field produced no coal after 1897. There were coal mines at Chadderton Roughts as early as 1743 when Robert Radcliffe bought them from George Wagstaffe of Darley in Derbyshire but **Ferney Field Colliery** was not developed until much later.

In 1845 there were coalpits at **Scowcroft**, near the Rochdale Canal, worked by Joseph Jones (Junior) but, in spite of the plural, they were very small beer rated only at £30. There was also a pit at **Little Green**, now Middleton but which was then in Chadderton, worked by Wild and Andrew on land owned by Thomas Taylor. Though it had a tram road and power its rateable value was only £26.25, so it may have at one time been a major concern but was clearly on its way out. It was not listed after 1848.

There were other pits in Chadderton close to the Royton boundary. Evans, Barker and Company were working **Birchenlee Colliery** in 1852. After several changes of ownership it passed into the hands of the Oldham, Middleton and Rochdale Coal Company Ltd. in 1866 and they worked it until it closed in 1884. It had at least two pits, **Lee Pit** and **Bridge Pit** (Plate 3), situated at the north western end of Birchen Lee Wood, between Streetbridge Road and the River Irk, near the Horton Arms. **Woodside Colliery** was being worked by Booth, Marland and Booth in 1862. It was about 250 yards SSW of Racefield Hamlet, 80 yards deep to the Royley Mine. From 1874 it was listed as being worked by the Oldham, Middleton and Rochdale Coal Company and the last mention of it was in the 1883 List of Mines, when it was being managed by Walter Evans.

It was in Chadderton, at Hardman Fold, that the Joneses, two Williams and two Josephs, developed the offices and workshops that later became the headquarters of the Chamber Colliery Company, usually known as “Colliery Office, Hollinwood”. This development had started by 1844, the earliest date for which records could be found, but the Joneses had property there, beside the new canal, before 1800. It was also the terminus of the tram-road from Copsterhill, which was built before 1828 [D7]. The development of offices, stables and workshops continued throughout the rest of the century. “Hardman’s” provided a base for some very important names in the local coal industry: Isaiah Booth, George Henry Hollingworth, W.W. Millington, Owen Hughes and Eric Potts to name but a few, who from there controlled all the important collieries in the area. At one time it had more clout in Chadderton than did the Town Hall. One of the original buildings, on Wharf Street, is still standing and is in use as an engineering workshop.

COPSTERHILL, PRIMROSE BANK AND ASHTON ROAD

Some of the earliest collieries in Oldham were in this area, working the Black Mine which was exhausted by 1840. The 1844 map shows two pits at **Primrose Bank**, one being close to the junction of Primrose Bank and Lee Street and the other a few yards west of it towards St. Thomas' Circle. Neither pit appears in the Oldham poor rate valuation for 1841 so they must have been abandoned before that date; they were probably shallow pits working the Oldham Great Mine, which cropped nearby, as well as the Black. These may well have been the "back o' th'Ho' pits" behind Werneth Hall, already mentioned under 'Werneth'.

There were four pits spaced evenly along the line of the present Copsterhill Road between Hollins Road and Ashton Road and another one about 150 yards west of the bottom end of Copsterhill Road. All these pits lay close to the tram-road which ran from Copsterhill to the canal wharf at Hollinwood. Dunn shows this tram-road as turning through almost 90 degrees at Copsterhill and then continuing up the hill almost as far as Ashton Road; it was owned by Lees, Jones and Company [D8]. Manchester Directories for the period show that Lees, Jones, Duncuft and Company, of **Copsterhill Colliery**, had premises at 16 Ducie Street, Ancoats — close to the Ashton canal. Butterworth's 1832 list of steam engines shows that Lees, Jones and Company were then operating 5 steam engines at Copsterhill Colliery, with a total of 132 horse-power. Yet there are no Copsterhill pits listed in the valuation lists for 1841 or 1845; they were obviously very early pits which had been exhausted by then, probably working the Black Mine.

There was another pit in the acute angle between Lee Street and Ashton Road, one on the opposite side of Ashton Road and another between Goddard Street and Broadway Street, opposite the bottom of Carthage Street (50 yards deep to the Black Mine). This may have been the **Stockfield Colliery**, Oldham, not to be confused with the Stockfield Colliery, Chadderton. The Chamber Colliery Company owned them both later on in the century. There was yet another pit on Boston Street, next to the present Boston Square, which was discovered when new houses were being built there; it was filled up with pit spoil, under the supervision of an experienced collier, and then covered with a concrete raft.

Another unknown shaft was discovered close by, at the junction of Panmure Street and Estate Street, and was treated in the same way. Nothing has been built on either of these sites. Any or all of these pits, to which I can put no name, may be the two **Broadway Lane Collieries** operated by Joseph Jones (Junior) and Company. In 1841 one of these had a rateable value of £468, which made it the most valuable pit in the Oldham area at that time; the other was much smaller, rated at £115. Yet between them, in 1832, they only had one 6 horse-power steam engine though the Broadway Lane Colliery was, according to Butterworth, the site of the first colliery steam engine in Oldham.³¹

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

It is always difficult to tell which collieries had more than one shaft, or whether a cluster of black dots on the map represented a number of independent single-shaft collieries.

Honeywell Lane Colliery poses a little problem: it was owned by Lees and Hibbert in 1841, working the Black Mine, but is shown on the 1844 map as **Cross Colliery**. It was behind the Colliers' Arms at Cross, near the junction of Honeywell Lane and Ashton Road. Dunn shows a "coal pit meadow" and a colliery close to Honeywell Lane on its southern side, in the Emma Street area, being owned and worked by James Bailey [D8]. It also worked the Lower Bent Mine at 223 yards, but this was probably not till much later. There was another pit about 300 yards from Honeywell Lane in the area east of Cardwell Street. (On old maps Honeywell Lane is marked as "Roman Road".) The colliery was abandoned on 14 July 1892 but on 7 January 1900 Oldham Corporation served the Chamber Colliery Company with a Dangerous Places Order relating to a piece of land covered by water in front of Honeywell Lane School. They were ordered to surround it with a close-boarded fence at least 6 foot 9 inches high. This stretch of water, the site of Honeywell Lane Colliery, covered two, and possibly three, deep shafts which may, or may not, have been adequately filled or capped.

SHAW and CROMPTON

A surviving fragment of a Shaw "Registers Book" lists four coalpit owners in Crompton in 1804, and then lists twelve Crompton coalpits in 1811, but without relating the two lists or giving any indication of the size of the pits. "The four pit owners were Thomas Henthorn, Henry and John Wilde, John Robertson, and Robert Taylor. The locations of the twelve coalpits were given as **Crowknowl, Doghill, Crompton Fold, Holebottom, Laneside and Scar**. Obviously some of these places must have had more than one pit, the most likely being Crompton Fold, Holebottom and Crowknowl.

Poor Rate Valuation Books for Crompton have survived for 1820, 1828 and 1837 and they tend to give just a little more information, without indicating whether the ratepayer is the owner or merely the occupier of the property."

In 1820, Thomas Henthorn had a coalpit at **Crossleys** and James Henthorn had one at **Shore Edge**. James Fielding had a pit at **Crompton Fold** and a second pit there was owned and operated by James Hilton. John and James Mills had two pits at **Crowknowl** and James Wilde had two at **Holebottom**. Abram Fielding was being rated for a coalpit at an unspecified location.

The 1828 and 1837 Valuation Lists name an owner and an occupier, sometimes of course the same person, and also state the number of colliers employed and the pit's rateable value. These both give an indication of the size of the pit, but the number of colliers does not give a true value for the number of people employed there. Each collier would employ his own haulers and

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thrutchers, they often being his own children, and there would also, presumably, be some surface workers on the pitbank.

	Owner	Occupier	Location	Colliers	R.V.(£)
1828	Mr. Milne	James Milne	Crowknowl	5	25
	Thomas Shaw		Doghill		4.27
	Alice Cocker	John Hamer	Laneside		-
			(6 h.p. engine)		
	James Milne	James Milne	Brushes	8	40
	John Hilton and Company		Brook	2	10
	Harry Thomas	Harry Thomas	Low Crompton		-
	Milne Taylor and Company		Stockfield	9	45
1837	Joseph and Thomas Milne		Crow Knowl	3	22.5
	Scholes	John Scholes	Top of Dog Hill	3	15
	James Milne	Wm. Knott & Co.	Brun	2	2
	Mr. Buckley	Milne Taylor & Co.	Holebottom	12	90
	Thomas and Joseph Milne		Brushes	8	60
	Abram Buckley	John Buckley	Heys	7	52.50
	Harry Thomas	Harry Thomas	Low Crompton		
	Milne Taylor and Company		Stockfield	10	75
	John Buckley	John Buckley	Marfield	4	30

There are also “coalpit fields”, “coalpit Banks” and “coalpit waste” listed at Burnedge, Narrowgate, Cuts, Crow Knoll and Shaw Lane. One of the earliest records of coal mining in Crompton concerns Crow Knoll. A lease dated 2 May 1766 was for five acres of land “of the measure used thereabouts” demised to John and James Butterworth, who were Woollen Clothiers of Crompton, obviously looking for a good investment or a career change. It gave them the rights to all mines and veins of coal and stone with liberty to sink and mine and convey away the coal and stone at their will and pleasure. The 999-year lease carried a rent of one pound and six shillings of lawful money of Great Britain, payable annually on Candlemass Day (2 February), three-fifths of it to Abel Crompton and the other two-fifths to James Wilde. Crow Knoll is also mentioned in a letter dated 13 July 1843, to Joseph Jones from an unknown correspondent, who remarks that “some coal is being got from a breast-eye at Crow Knowl, the coal (“lumps and loose”) going to Job Lees at Soho, “at 5 the load”.

Joseph Jones was at that time the owner of the Spadescroft Estate, Crompton, and the letter referred to above was in response to a query of his regarding the Holebottom Colliery. Jones was interested in the Bankhouse Estate which adjoined his property and Holebottom. It had been previously been offered for sale by auction in 1817, when it was described as abounding in stone and coal, with an open eye or pit already working, with the water loose and drained. It had then been sold to Joseph Newton, who sold it to Messrs. Travis and Milne in 1830. It was apparently up for sale again in 1843. “The high road from Shaw Chapel to Delph passes in front of the principal buildings and nearly through the middle of the premises.”³⁴

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

There were two pits at Holebottom, (marked as “Holebottom Collieries” on the 1844 map) one producing 30 quarters per Week and the other 20 quarters per week, both working the Mountain Mine. The coal was from 22 to 24

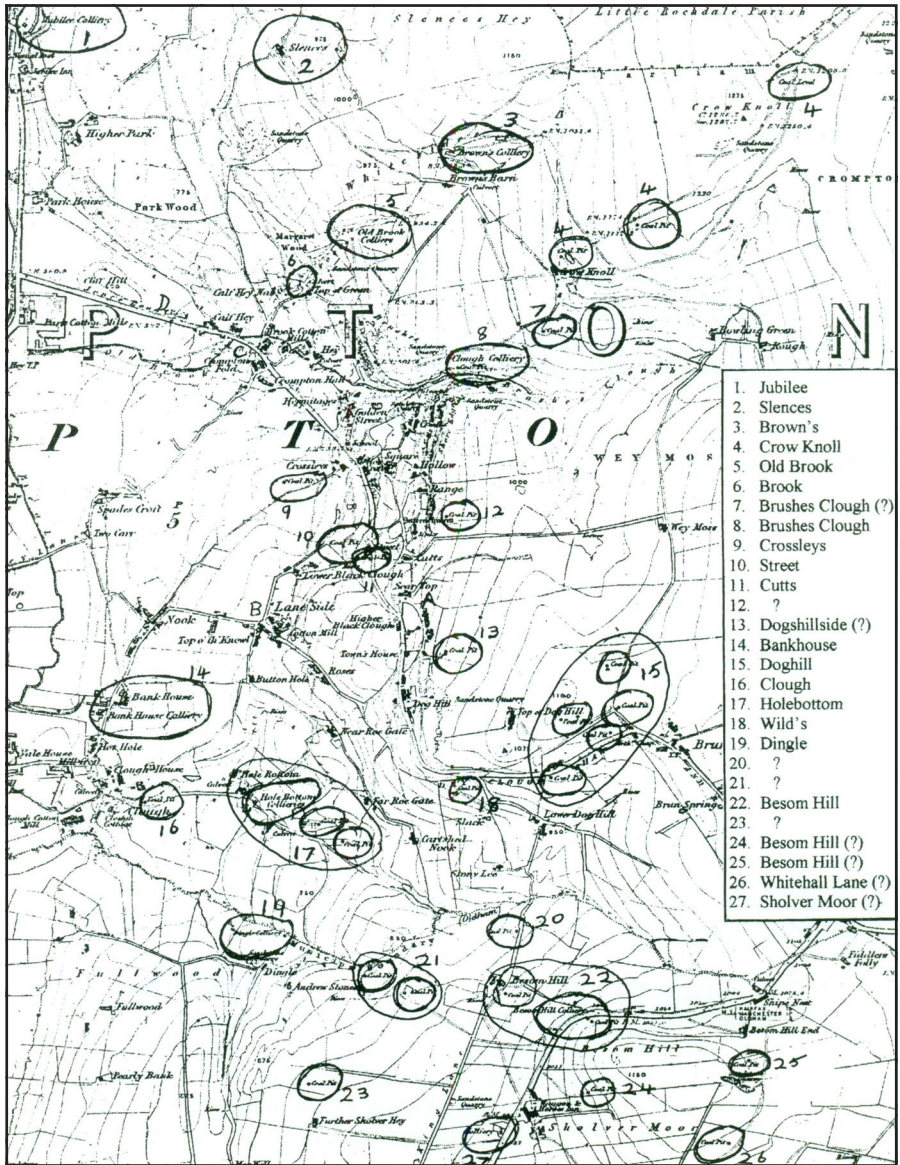


Figure 3. Location of coalpits in the Crompton area
(reproduced from Ordnance Survey first edition map of 1844)

inches thick, and the coal on the southern side was of a better quality than that on the northern side. The shafts were 80 yards deep and 12 hours pumping was needed in every 24, using barrels with an average diameter of 10 inches. The letter mentioned above also states that Robert Buckley of Besom Hill sank a pit ("some years back") at, or near to, Crompton Hall, on land belonging to Farrar of Shaw. It was 60 yards deep and there was some water to pump. Buckley got 3/- per score of loads for his coal. This was probably one of the pits at **Crompton Fold**.

The mining rights to coal, cannel and bass under Holebottom and Dingle had been leased by James Taylor of Ogden, Yeoman, to Joseph Houghton of Ashton-under-Lyne, James Taylor (collier of Butterworth) and Benjamin Taylor of Ogden on 3 April 1771. The rent to be paid was to be ninepence per month for every twenty common horse loads got. They were also empowered to use any shaft they had sunk to bring up coal from any neighbouring estates to which they had acquired the coal rights, or they could charge threepence per twenty horse loads for any coal wound up their shafts by anyone working the neighbouring estates.

The Tithe Schedules for Crompton, dated 1848, and the associated map, also give some information about other local collieries:³⁵

Burnedge Colliery, once owned by Widow Taylor and worked by Widow Kershaw, was located to the south-east of Fenton's Farm and later maps show it as **Fenton's Colliery**. It had two shafts. This pit was using a 24 horse-power steam engine in 1832. The site is now a sheep pasture, sandwiched between Fenton's Farm and The Colliers' Return. A few hundred yards away, down Pit Lane was the **Dean Pit**, just about in Rochdale; its site can still be identified easily because someone has tipped a couple of old fridges on top of the shaft;

Stockfield Colliery, worked by Milne, Taylor and Company, was on the other side of Rochdale Road, between that road and Greenhill, so it was close to where the houses and the green fields meet, opposite Stockfield Farm.

Park Colliery on Jones Road (now Buckstones Road), with the toll-gate in front of it; the Park Inn now marks the spot, approximately;

Brook Colliery, **Old Brook Colliery**, and **Brown's Colliery**; all three being roughly on a line half a mile long running north-east from Calf Hey;

Crow Knowl is shown on two sites, neither being marked as a colliery but both shown as a cluster of buildings; there were, in fact, two shafts and a level or drift, which survived into the twentieth century;

Clough Colliery at Brushes;

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

Sarah and Robert Taylor are recorded as working Holebottom Colliery, owned by John Taylor (Junior) of Ogden;

DennisBarrettisrecordedasworkingacoalpitin anenclosuresouthofHolebottom, probably **Dingle Colliery**, owned by the Misses Buckley of Saddleworth. There was a waggon-road or tramway from Dingle Colliery to Shaw centre, but I have no information as to when it was laid down or when it was abandoned.

The 1851 Ordnance Survey 6-inch map (surveyed 1844-48) shows so many pits and collieries in Crompton, east of Milnrow Road, that justice can only be done with a sketch map. Besides the pits shown on this plan, the 1851 map shows several other pits that I have been unable to find much information about. These include:

Foxhill: between Samuel Lane and Marlfield Road, almost opposite the end of the modern Foxhill, High Crompton. The old Foxhill was a double row of cottages north of the current Foxhill and on the south side of, and parallel to, Rochdale Road. This pit was working the Royley Mine.

A pit between **Greenhill** and **Burnedge**, working the Royley Mine, which had a tramway running to Rochdale Road, which it joined at right-angles opposite to Fenton's Colliery. The tramroad was exactly one-sixth of a mile long and was dead straight, so it may have been operated by the endless chain system, which was popular hereabouts. Hence I think this may have been the Chain Pit, which I have otherwise been unable to identify.

Low Crompton Pit: this was on the eastern side of Low Crompton Road, about half-way between Thornham Road, High Crompton, and the hamlet of Low Crompton.

Cowlshaw Pit: this was a few yards south of the junction of Manchester Road and Cowlshaw Lane, and was working the Mountain Mine.

Street Pit, near to Cutts.

Some of these pits were part of **Dean Colliery**, which was acquired by the Oldham, Rochdale and Middleton Coal Company in 1862. This colliery over-lapped into Royton and Thornham (see the following notes on Royton).

There was also a pit called "**Whitehead's**" which I have completely failed to locate; it may have been on or near to Whitehead Street, High Crompton, but that is mere speculation. There was also reputed to be a pit at **Cartshed Nook**. This may be the pit, known as **Wild's**, which was about 550 yards east of Holebottom and just north of Cartshed Nook. And then there are **Stile Hole**, **Midge Hole**, **Old Nanny** - pits which I have seen listed under **Bankhouse**

Colliery but which I cannot place; these may well be in Sholver or Royton, or even in Rochdale. **Jubilee Colliery** was marked on the 1844 map and was working the Mountain Mine before 1854, because it was then listed in the annual Inspectors' Report as being operated by Evans, Barker and Company,

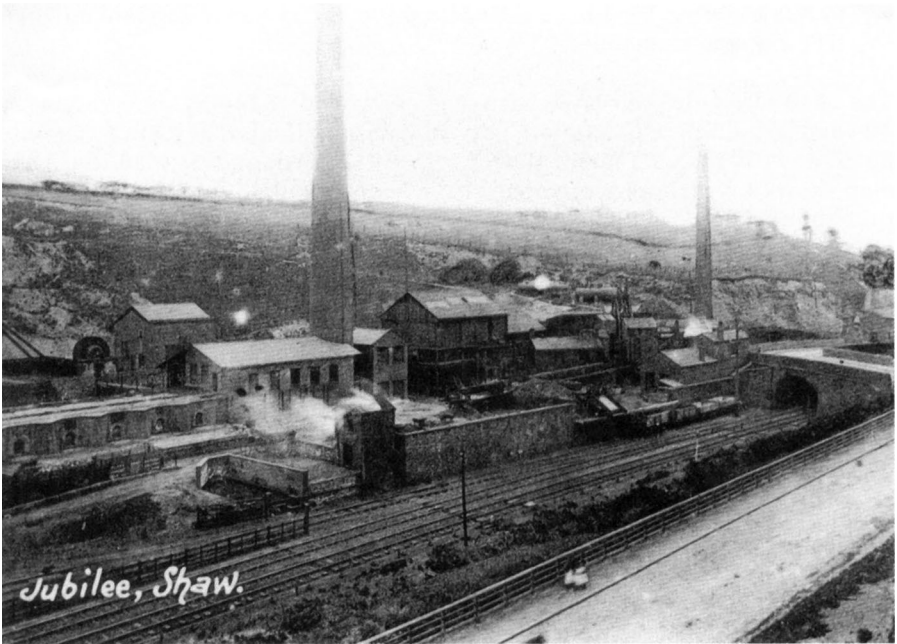


Plate 3. Jubilee Mine, Crompton, 1910, where Platt Brothers produced coke for their foundries at Derker and Werneth. (Oldham Local Studies Library)

of Edge Lane and Dryclough Collieries, Royton. Its depth to the Mountain Mine was 105 yards. It does not appear on the 1848 Tithe map of Crompton; though 'Jubilee' is marked, there is no indication of a colliery there, although it obviously dates from before 1850. It was later owned by the Oldham, Rochdale and Middleton Coal Company Ltd. and then by Platt Brothers. It was connected underground by a tunnel to Butterworth Hall Colliery in Milnrow, and to Park Colliery on Buckstones Road. It worked the Mountain Mine and processed much of it into coke on the site, until it closed in 1932.

Bankhouse Colliery is also shown on the 1844 map, but I have no information about it prior to 1850. It lay beside Grains Road between Hot Hole and Nook and after 1850 probably included Holebottom, Dingle and Clough. It was connected underground to Park Colliery and **Sholver Colliery** near Cop Road. Towards the end of their productive life, Bankhouse and Sholver were operated as one colliery and were eventually abandoned on 1 June 1903.

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

ROYTON.

It is likely that Royton was the home of the first commercial collieries in this area, shipping most of its coal down to Manchester via an old railway running from Dryclough through Chadderton to central Manchester. These early collieries were at **Dryclough** and **Edge Lane**, which were separate collieries at first but seem to have become one early in the nineteenth century. It is important to remember that Edge Lane was an area, not a 'lane' in the modern sense; hence the existence of Edge Lane Road and Edge Lane Street at Royton. Dryclough Mount was at the bottom of 'Little' Turf Lane; it was the eminence on which the church of Ss. Aidan and Oswald now stands, but Dryclough Colliery was at Edge Lane. Edge Lane Colliery probably straddled Edge Lane Road up the Royton side of Oldham Edge. There is very little information available about them: Dryclough Colliery is marked on the 1844 Ordnance Survey Map but not Edge Lane; Edge Lane Colliery is listed in the few surviving poor rate lists, but Dryclough Colliery is not. Edge Lane Colliery in 1832 was owned by Edward Evans and Company and occupied by Edward Evans (Senior). In that year it paid £15.42 in rates, but as neither the rateable value nor the poundage was recorded it tells us nothing except that Edge Lane Colliery was the largest in Royton at the time.³⁶ It also had a wider reputation. In 1851 Joseph Jones sought Edward Evans' valuation of Bank House Estate, Crompton, which he was considering purchasing. The valuation came, dated 6 December 1851, on very sophisticated notepaper with the pre-printed heading "Edge Lane and Dryclough Colliery Office, Oldham".³⁷

The 1844 map shows a number of collieries in Royton which can with some difficulty be reconciled with the rating assessments which have survived for 1832 - 36. Abraham Lees had a coal pit at Top of Edge, near Sarah Moor, as also did James Dearden; these seemed to be very small operations but Butterworth shows Abraham Lees and Company to be operating a 16 horse power engine on Oldham Edge in 1832. Abram Clegg had coal pits at Higginshaw, known as "Clegg's Pits", but they seemed to be little more than holes in the ground, rated at five shillings (25 pence), reducing to four shillings by 1836. These may well have been the pits marked on the map on the western side of Higginshaw Lane, in the Mortimer Street area, between the car-wash and the Boundary Hotel.

Milne and Travis had a colliery at **Higginshaw** which seems to be the one marked opposite to Rudding Street in 1844, which was working the Royley Mine at a depth of 193 yards. This is now covered by the large triangular "Seddon-Atkinson" sign alongside Higginshaw Lane. This colliery was on the edge of Royton Moss and so may be the **Moss Colliery** which inundated Royton Park Colliery in 1901. There were also two pits close together at **Lower Fold**, off Blackshaw Lane near Heyside, on the land now occupied by Royton and Crompton School. They worked the Higher Two Mines under Royton Moss. There was also a pit between Windsor Street and the railway station at Royton Junction which was probably part of the Moss Colliery.

Travis and Company had a small pit at Turf Lane End, which was the Heyside end of Turf Lane; it was a small operation, worth only a four-shilling rate in 1836 and not being heard of again.

There were quite a few collieries marked on the 1844 map which seem to have completely avoided any assessment for rates, from which I infer that they were no longer working at the time of the earliest surviving rating list (June 1832). These were the **Booth Hill Colliery**, close to the foot of Booth Hill Lane, and **Hardy Field Colliery**, which was near Edge Lane Road but lower down the hill from Grimbies, about 600 yards east of the A627. Booth Hill worked the Blenfire Mine at 19 yards, the Oldham Great Mine at 47 yards and the Little Mine at 55 yards. Hardy Field Worked the Blenfire at 32 yards, the Oldham Great at 60 yards, Black Mine at 95 yards and Lower Bent at 153 yards.

Dunn shows a “coalpit waste” and “coalpit hill”, belonging to Barker, Evans and Company in the area between Godson Street and Rochdale Road, now covered by Aster Street and Lily Street, but calls it “Highbarn”. The 1844 survey calls this area Lower Moor and shows Highbarn much further up the hill towards Sarah Moor. Dunn also shows a colliery near Coldhurst Hall, beside what is now Crompton Street [D5]. This was probably the pit at “Grimbies, Oldham Edge” being worked by Barker, Evans and Company in 1837. (The original name was “Grimby’s gate”.) Sometime after 1888 this shaft was used to supply water for the Messrs. Jowett, Waterhouse and Company Ltd’s brewery. (In 1824 an old pit on Oldham Edge was used to dispose of the bodies of 102 dogs, killed during a rabies scare; it would not be the same pit, but was likely to be the same water. Beer brewed in Oldham was always famous for having a lot of ‘body’.)

Surprisingly there are no indications of pits or old pits in the Royley area; though there was a serious subsidence in the Denbydale Way area when the houses there were quite new, the builders claimed that it was simply an old well. The only pits to the west of the A627 and still in Royton were the **Waterloo Coal Pits** which worked the Royley Mine at 85 yards and were 100 yards deep to the bottom. They were situated at Holden Fold, almost in Chadderton. North of Royton centre, the great depth of sand around Tandle Hills precluded the sinking of coal shafts to the west of Rochdale Road, though there was a borehole sunk to the south of Tandle Hills at the western end of Oozewood Road.

Royton Colliery, was sunk in the Royton Park area during the years 1874 - 6 by the Oldham, Middleton and Rochdale Coal Company and the colliery was first recorded as Royton New Pit in 1877; it was 227 yards deep and worked the Royley Mine. It was abandoned after inundation in 1901, which signalled the end of coalmining in Royton.

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

Finally there were a few pits which are now in Royton but before 1850 were in Rochdale; these were **Hanging Chadder**, **Hathershaw Moor**, Plumpton (or **Hollows Pit**). Hanging Chadder was close to Hanging Chadder Road, at Thornham; it was 80 yards deep to the Royley Mine. Hathershaw Moor was on the north west side of Thornham Lane, near Summit. You will pass it on a summer evening if you have a pint in the Summit Inn and then stroll up to the Tandle Hill Tavern for another. It was 100 yards deep to the Royley Mine. Hollows Pit was a few yards closer to Rochdale to the west of the A627; it also worked the Royley, at 64 yards. These were all owned by James Stott Milne and several others until about 1862. Hanging Chadder, Hathershaw Moor, Hollows, Foxhill, Dean, and Low Crompton pits were all part of Dean Colliery after 1862, owned by the Oldham, Rochdale and Middleton Coal Company Ltd. after an auction sale ordered by the Court of Chancery.

GLODWICK and LEES

The Glodwick collieries were also amongst the oldest in the area. Collinge's, the well-known cotton spinners, were operating the Glodwick Collieries before 1827, when John Wild was the manager there. They were also working the Foot Mine and the Mountain Mine, which was about fifteen yards below it, at a small pit near Waterhead. Later, but before 1840, they sank to the Black Mine at Glodwick and then the Bent Mines, which were known there as the Two Foot and the Peacock, and were about twelve yards apart. Winding was done with a whimsey, or gin, which was driven by John Wild's son, George, until 1840.³⁸ He then went underground, at the age of 13. We shall hear more about George Wild, for he became manager at Bardsley Colliery in 1863, aged 36, having been involved in collieries since infancy.

The Oldham Poor Rate Valuation for 1841 shows that Collinge and Lancashire were operating a medium-sized colliery at Glodwick and that Law, Collinge and Company owned a gasworks on Glodwick Road, at Rails Gate. William Wrigley was working two collieries at **Lowside**, on land owned by Miss Frances Mary Richardson Currer. No.1 Colliery was the third largest in Oldham, judging from its rateable value, but No.2 Colliery was a very small affair, possibly a drift mine. There was another colliery at Lowside operated by Edward Brideoak, of roughly the same size as Collinge's. The rate books do not, of course, indicate how many pits or shafts each colliery was using.

By 1845, Collinge and Lancashire's colliery was now being worked by Collinge's alone and was listed as being at Rails Gate. Its rateable value was now only £8.80, so it was not winning much coal at that time. William Wrigley's two collieries were now rated as one, with the address given as "**Lowerfield and Abbeyhills**". It was then the highest valued colliery in Oldham, being worth £4 more than Rhodes Bank. Dunn names Lowside Colliery as "**Wabbow Hills Colliery**", owned by Miss Currer and worked by William Wrigley [D6]. Wrigley was using two steam engines, totalling 29 horse power, at "**Fenny Hill and Loeside**" in 1832.

The 1844 Ordnance Survey map shows twenty coalpits and two collieries in the Lees/Glodwick area. Glodwick Colliery is marked a few yards north of Barley Clough, which is difficult to locate now but was probably close to Nether Hey Street. It was 184 yards deep to the Black Mine. It was here in about 1839 that Mr. John Wild invented and fitted a device to prevent over-winding, which worked satisfactorily for over 20 years.³⁹ The other colliery is marked at Banktop, Lees. It was 85 yards deep to the Royley Mine, and was being worked in 1841 by Lees, Jones and Booth. There were three pits along the line of New Earth Street, between Lees Road and Roxbury, and another one at Roxbury. Some or all of these would belong to the New Earth Colliery, operated by James Lees and owned by Hibbert and Whitehead. This colliery was quite small in 1841 but had doubled in size by 1845. There were six pits within 200 yards of the junction of Roundthorn Road and Manor Road at Lowside; these would belong to William Wrigley and Edward Brideoak of Lowside Colliery, mentioned earlier. A pit marked at Sugar Meadow, close to the eastern side of Glodwick Road and north of the church, was known as Saccharine Lane Pit. (The nearest street on the modern street plan is Pitt Street East). It was 187 yards deep to the Top Neddy Mine and was later sunk to the Royley Mine at 337 yards. There was a pit at **Glodwick Brook**, now the southern corner of Alexandra Park; another at **Lees/Brookside** was being operated by Lees, Jones and Booth in 1841. There were two pits near **Welly Hole**, one north and one south of it, and further north a pit at **Hanging Bank**, beside Constantine Street and near the south east corner of Greenacres Cemetery; this was 30 yards deep to the Royley Mine.

One of the pits belonging to Lowside Colliery made headlines for itself later. In January 1885 (in the same week that Shooting Butts collapsed at Werneth) a pit close to Abbey Hills Road fell in. Unlike Shooting Butts, it was not due to the failure of a stone capping but to the sinking of a core of rubbish which had been used as filling. The colliery had been worked by the Lowside Colliery Company, at the Top of Lower, (probably around the Buckfast Avenue area) up to two or three years before, and had been abandoned in a hurry due to inundation. At least one steam engine and other working machinery were left in the bottom of the pit. There were two shafts connected with the pit, only about eight or ten yards distant from each other and they were filled in with tip or other rubbish. On the morning of 11 January it was found that the filling in one of the shafts had sunk down, leaving the pit gaping open to a depth of over 13 yards. By the time the filling had finished sinking, the depth was close to 60 yards. The brickwork in the shaft seemed all right, the rubbish with which it was filled having simply sunk in the shaft down to the depth stated.

There was a pit between Higher Clarksfield and Kolverlow, on the north east side of Lees Road, owned by James Lees in 1829. This is probably the one for which John and James Lees bought a Watt and Boulton pumping engine in 1799; if so, it was 130 yards deep.⁴⁰ **Spaw Colliery**, south of Gibraltar, was being worked by James and Joseph Lees in 1829; Dunn also marks an engine-

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

house there [D6]. At the same time, James and Joseph Lees were also operating a pit at **Roundthorn**, also with an engine house. Butterworth says that Lees, Jones and Company were operating a 16 horse power engine at Roundthorn in 1832. **Elysian Colliery** was in open fields between Roundthorn and Fenny Hill, being worked by Thomas Beckett in 1829. It is now hemmed in by Abbeyhills Road and Warren Lane. There was also a pit at **Waymark**, near Roundthorn, which was working before 1839. A pit marked on the 1844 map between Swineclough and Nether Hey is labelled **Swineclough Colliery** by Dunn, the proprietors being Abraham Lees and Company, who were using a 10 horse power engine [D6].

Around 1900 Rothwell Buckley, of Shaw, was working a drift mine at Milking Green, Lees, about which I have no more information.

There were other pits I can offer no information about, at Lower Clarksfield and Salem. All these pits had been worked before 1850 for they all feature on the 1844 Ordnance Survey map. There were probably many other pits in Glodwick, Clarksfield and Lees which were no longer visible on the surface when the survey was undertaken.

DERKER

Dirtcar Colliery was approximately where Derker Infant School is now, near the junction of Westminster and Stoneleigh Street, with another shaft in Afghan Street; this was 88 yards deep to the Royley Mine. In 1829 its proprietors were Lees, Jones and Booth.

There was a pit near the north side of Bower Street, opposite Hope Street, which was 26 yards deep to the Top Neddy Mine; this may have been the pit listed in 1841 on the "new road to Shaw", a small pit worked by Samuel Lees and Company.

Stampstone Colliery was on the west side of the junction of Stampstone Street and Gould Street. It was 110 yards deep to the Royley Mine. There was an associated shaft nearby, known as Little Pit. The colliery existed before 1850 but was not rated separately, because it was part of Greenacres Colliery. It was not recorded by Dunn and was eventually built over by Platts.

Ainsworth and Company were the proprietors in 1841 of a colliery at Hopkin Fold, quite a large undertaking, being similar in size to Holebottom Colliery. Hopkin Fold was near the top of Acre Lane but there were no pits marked there on the 1844 map, so this was probably Pitbank Colliery, which was nearly 300 yards north of Hopkin Fold. It was working the Royley Mine at 102 yards. However, according to Butterworth, Lees, Jones and Company were operating a 16 horse power engine at Pit Bank in 1832.

Whetstone Colliery was just north west of Stoneleigh Park, near the railway; it was working the Royley Mine. Dunn's 1829 map shows a tramroad in the area, running down in the direction of Royton [D4 and D5]. Unfortunately, to Dunn Royton was unknown territory, a blank space on the map of the "here be dragons" variety. **Broadbent Moss Colliery** appears in Oldham Poor Rate books, but there are no pits marked on Broadbent Moss either in 1829 or 1844. Whetstone Colliery is on both maps and is the closest pit to the Moss. Whetstone was sunk to the Royley Mine and it was whilst working the Royley that Royton Colliery was inundated in 1901, by breaking through into Moss Colliery old workings.⁴¹ Hence I believe Whetstone and Broadbent Moss Collieries to be one and the same.

There are several other isolated pits marked on the 1844 map, two south of Whetstone Hill and one north west of it, within a quarter of a mile of each other; these were close to the junction of Shakespeare Road and Whetstone Hill Road. Local tradition says that one is under the spot where the 12 bus stands, outside Sacred Heart Church, and another is under the back gardens of the houses on the opposite side of Shakespeare Road, but I have no documentary proof of that. (The legend is that the capping stones were uncovered when householders were digging deep holes in their back gardens to accommodate the Anderson shelters they had been allocated by the Home Office in 1940). Another one was a few yards north of Whetstone Colliery, and probably belonged to it - perhaps an air shaft. There was also another medium-sized colliery at **Sandhole**, listed in the 1841 Valuation List amongst properties at Derker, worked by Lees, Jones and Booth, which I cannot find on any maps.

MOORSIDE, SHOLVER, WATERHEAD and GREENACRES MOOR

Paulden Wood Colliery, 50 yards deep to the Mountain Mine, was to the south east of Waterworks Road, before it turns north. There were also two pits close to it, one at the top of New Royd Road (60 yards deep to the Lower Mountain Mine) and the other in the Lowbrook Lane area, south of the reservoir (52 yards deep, also working the Lower Mountain Mine). None of these appear in the rate books either for 1841 or 1845, but there are two collieries, one small and one medium-sized, listed at **Watersheddings** and owned by James Clegg. As the 1844 map shows no pits at Watersheddings, but the 1842 Commissioner's Report mentions Paulden Wood as being worked by James Clegg, I think it is the concept of Watersheddings which has moved. (When I think of the 'Sheddings I think of walking down Watersheddings Road to watch Frank Stirrup and Rocky Turner, inter alia, but my street map of Oldham now shows it on the other side of Ripponden Road, in the area I would have called Broadbent.)

A 12-year-old boy working for Mr. Clegg at Paulden Wood in 1841 reported that the main road was a yard high and the workings only 20 to 23 inches so that the drawers and thrutchers had to creep on hands and knees. The drawer

LOCATING OLDHAM COALPITS

still used a belt and chain, though there were rails laid throughout all the workings. Sometimes it was necessary to have two thrutchers, for the tubs weighed 2.25 hundredweight and there was a rise of one yard in six.⁴² Dunn also credits James Clegg with working a pit at **Bottoms**, north of Strinesdale reservoir.

Butterworth's 1832 list of steam engines shows Stopherd and Company as operating a 4 horse-power engine at a colliery at **White Croft**, which is alongside Broadbent Road, but I have found no mention of this anywhere else. White Croft is almost on top of an outcrop of Royley Coal, so Stopherds may have been working a drift and using the small engine for hauling up the brow. Manchester Directories of the same period show Stopherd and Waring as the proprietors of a pit at **Millbottom**, Waterhead, of which I have found no other trace; however, Dunn shows them as working a colliery on land owned by James Rothwell on the north side of Huddersfield Road between the Carrion Crow and Waterhead. This may well have been classed as Millbottom at the time.

Barrowshaw Colliery lay to the north west of Ripponden Road, below Further Barrowshaw and close to Cornhill Street, in the area now known as Barrowshaw Farm. It was 130 yards deep to the Mountain Mine. It first appears in the Valuation List for 1845, owned by Abram Clegg but occupied by Joseph Bagnall, with a rateable value of only £26. This value seems to indicate that the colliery was newly opened, or perhaps still sinking, because it got rather big later. It is not marked on the 1844 map. It was abandoned after inundation, which killed two men and a boy, in 1875.

Hodge Clough Colliery also lay near Ripponden Road, about 150 yards north west of that road just below its junction with Wilkes Street. Butterworth names the proprietors as Ashton and Booth, operating a 4 horse-power engine there, but the 1841 Valuation Lists shows it to be worked by Lees and Hallows; it was not very valuable but seems to have had at least three shafts, 40 yards deep to the Mountain Mine. Dunn shows 'Hodgeclough' Colliery on the **east** side of Ripponden Road, approximately where Highfield Terrace is now, and puts **Sentry Pit** a few yards north of the village of Hodge Clough [D2]. Manchester Directories show that there were **two** independent collieries at Hodge Clough, one operated by Messrs. Lees and Hallows and the other by George W. Booth and William Ashton. (The Borough of Oldham issued a "Dangerous Places Order" in 1895 relating to a dangerous and disused coal pit shaft near the Highfield Inn, Ripponden Road, addressed to the Agent of the Radcliffe Estate, demanding that he should repair and protect the shaft within 7 days. He wrote back and asked the Corporation if they would like to use the shaft as a tip.)⁴³

Haven Pit was near Haven House on the south west side of Haven Lane; it was a medium-sized colliery, slightly larger than Hodge Clough, worked by Booth and Clegg. It worked the Foot Mine.

Count Hill Colliery was north of Count Hill, about halfway between Count Hill and Turf Pit Lane; it was 60 yards deep to the Mountain Mine. South East of it was an “old” coalpit, also 60 yards to the Mountain Mine. Another pit lay south of Lower Counthill and was also working the Mountain Mine, at 106 yards. I have been told that the black scar left by one of these pit was still visible from the art room window at Counthill School in 1950. None of these pits

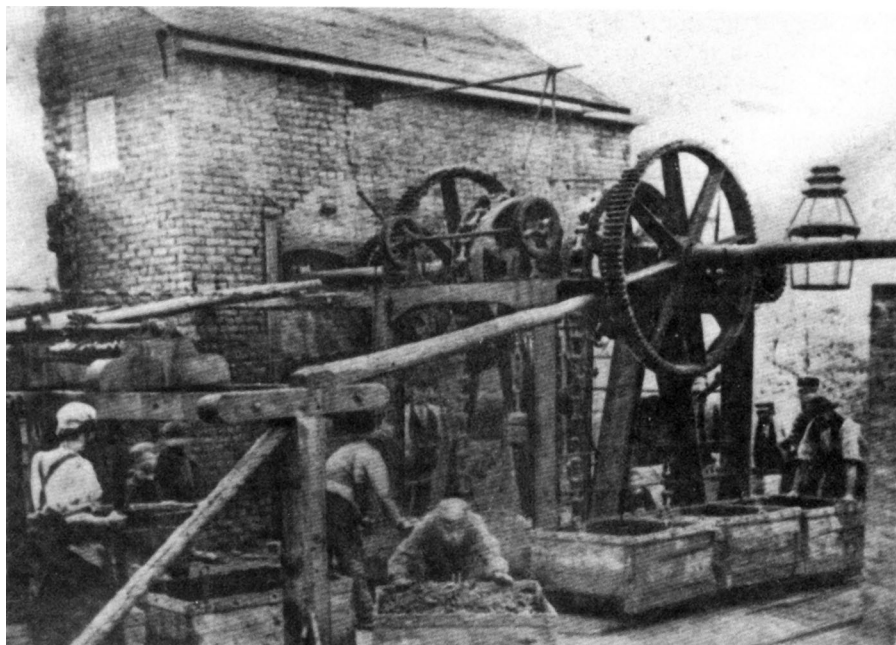


Plate 4. Bardsley Bridge Chain Pit, 1868. (Oldham Local Studies Library)

feature in the 1841 and 1845 Valuation Lists, so I assume that they were worked out by that time, yet there was still an open, unfenced shaft beside Higher Count Hill Lane in July 1874.

Knowl or **Sunfield** Colliery was on the north side of Turf Pit Lane between the playing field and Sunfield Avenue, and there was another pit about 150 yards north of it which was 45 yards deep to the Mountain Mine. Knowl was sometimes known separately as Upper and Lower Sunfield Collieries, 38 and 39 yards respectively to the Upper Foot Mine, but neither of them was rated in 1841 or 1845. There was another pit nearby, beyond the top of Whitehall Lane towards Besom Hill, which was on an outcrop of the Foot Mine.

Little End Colliery in Strines Dale was on Turf Pit Lane, approximately where Turf Pit Lane now becomes Roebuck Lane, Samuel Lees being the proprietor in 1829. It was working the Mountain Mine at 44 yards. About 150 yards further down the Medlock valley was another pit, 30 yards deep to the Foot

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Mine. It was otherwise known as Forsets Roof. Little End was re-opened in April 1860 by Adam Crompton. Amongst his co-workers were Henry and Thomas Crompton and Abraham Crompton, Junior. Abraham was paid one shilling per day, whilst the other three got four and sixpence. The venture was wound up in November 1860, by which time it had paid out £191:17s:9½d in wages and realised £60:4s:3d in coal sales. Mr. Mellodew, the local mill-owner, was either a shareholder or a philanthropist who paid £200 to the concern to cover Adam's outlay. Possibly Mr. Mellodew was their main customer for coal, to be used in his local mills.

Northgate Colliery was a few yards south of Sholver Hey; it was 45 yards deep to the Mountain Mine, and there were coke ovens on the site. It does not feature in the 1841 and 1845 Valuation Lists, and in 1853 only the coke ovens are rated, owned by Job Lees. However, in 1845, Job Lees is listed as the proprietor of **Moorside Colliery** on Sholver Lane, which was comparable in value to Holebottom in the Town Centre. Moorside was between Northgate Colliery and the Ripponden Road/Sholver Lane junction, about 45 yards from the Bull's Head. This pit was working the Mountain Mine at 45 yards.

Sholver Pit was on the south side of Cop Road, about 300 yards towards Heyside from Sholver village, which was operated by James Buckley; there was another shaft about 150 yards north of it. They were probably the upcast and downcast of the same colliery, which was working the Mountain Mine at 105 yards. Sholver Pit was actually in Crompton and became part of Bankhouse Colliery. (This is the pit listed as "Cop Road and Fullwood", worked by Henry Bentley, in 1845.)

Sholver Moor was on the eastern side of Ripponden Road on the slopes of Besom Hill, being worked by George Hallas in 1845 and appearing in the valuation list merely as "Sholver".

There were two pits on the south side of Sholver Lane; the first was **Sholver Lane Colliery** and the second, almost in Sholver village, was **Sholver Fold Colliery**. The proprietor in 1845 was Abram Lees.

Dunn shows a "coalpit field" at **Besom Hill**, between Halifax Road and Besom Hill Farm, near the right-hand bend near the old quarry. It was owned by the Vicar of Mottram and occupied by James Bottomley. There was another on the opposite side of the road just beyond Besom Hill, worked by James Wilde and owned by the executors of John Taylor. There were so many pits around the slopes of Besom Hill that it is difficult to identify them individually from written records.

In 1841 Lees, Jones and Booth were working a medium sized colliery at **Hill** (South Side), on Greenacres Moor, which was 60 yards deep to the Royley Mine. This was close to Dunkerley Street, between Greenwood Street and Huddersfield Road. It disappeared from the Valuation Lists after 1845, by

which time its rateable value had sunk to £5. Another pit was opened close to this in 1885, at **New Breaks** beside Huddersfield Road (opposite Sharples Hall Street) but did not survive long enough to appear in the 1886 List of Mines.

BARDSLEY

The major collieries at Bardsley were **Copperas House Colliery** and the two **Bardsley Collieries**, both owned by Jonah Harrop. Copperas House Colliery was near the south side of Coal Pit Lane close to its junction with Oldham Road (A627) and north of Holy Trinity Church; it was later called **Woodpark Colliery**. There were two pits, Rise Pit and Deep Pit about 100 yards apart on a line parallel to the A627, Rise Pit being to the north of Deep



**Plate 5. Coll's Old pit, Delph, 1910. An example of a drift mine or 'breast heigh'.
(Oldham Local Studies Library)**

Pit. They were sunk 176 yards and 375 yards respectively to the Black Mine. There were two other shafts to the south west, in Woodpark Clough, probably being used for ventilation, and another one opposite Half Way House; some of these shafts were at one time operated by horse-gins. Copperas House had a traditional local cart trade, and also sent coal in deep-sided waggons down the tram-road to the wharf at Crime Bank, for loading into canal boats there. The Copperas works was on the other side of the A627 in the area now occupied by Weatherly Close et al.

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Bardsley Colliery was south of Holy Trinity Church between Knott Lane and the A627. In fact, there appear to have been two independent Bardsley Collieries, both worked by Jonah Harrop, the owner of Bardsley Estate. The larger of the two had two pits, Victoria and Diamond, a few yards further south of the Knott Lane/Oldham Road junction, on a north-south line 100 yards apart and less than 70 yards from the A627. Diamond Pit was 453 yards deep to the Two-Foot Mine and 470 yards to the Peacock (Upper and Lower Bent Mines). The area being mined was approximately 720 yards N/S by 540 yards E/W, most of it lying to the west of the A627. It was noted as being a very fiery mine. In addition to the usual local cart trade the pits sent coal in the pit waggons down a jig-brow to a canal wharf at Valley Dale, where there was also a dry dock to build and repair the boats.

The other Bardsley Colliery, sometimes known as the **Bardsley Coal and Cannel Company**, consisted of the Bardsley Bridge Chain Pit and the Old Cannel Pit; it was also owned and worked by Jonah Harrop. As its name implies, the **Bridge Pit** was close to the road bridge over the River Medlock, and sent its coal down a steep jig-brow to a wharf near to the canal bridge. This pit used a steam engine to drive an endless chain down the shaft, running on toothed wheels like a bicycle chain, to prevent slipping under load. To keep the two sides of the chain in the right position they were stayed at intervals by cross bars, running in conductors down the shaft, and the tubs were clipped to these bars whilst the chain was in constant motion. This sounds like a very dangerous operation, and it needed much care from the “hooker-on” and the men in charge. To help in the hooking there was a moving stage which was slid to within a short distance of the chain and then removed when the tub was hooked on; similarly when a tub came to the surface a stage was slid under it before the tub was unhooked. The men travelled in the tubs or simply clung on to the chain; obviously this system removed the danger of breaking ropes, but there were still fatalities caused by men falling down the shaft.⁴⁴

There were two pits within 75 yards of Marland Fold, one north and one south, and each about 150 yards from the A627; another was 75 yards further north, and there was a pit east of that and close to Deanshut, about 600 yards from the A627. As yet I have been unable to put names to the first two; they were possibly just air shafts. The latter two are the **Hill Pits** at Fitton Hill, worked by the Rocher Colliery Company until 1888.

Keb Lane had a pit on its south side in the area later covered by Oldham Rugby Union Club’s ground; this shaft was rediscovered when the land was being surveyed for housing in 1975. It was over 20 yards deep and was immediately under the goalposts.⁴⁵ There were four other shafts north of Keb Lane, within 150 yards of the lane and within 400 yards of the A627. Again I have been unable to name them; they were probably merely air-shafts for the large collieries nearby.

BRITISH MINING No.73

Besides these there were the Park Bridge pits which, though not in Oldham, certainly won some of their coal from beneath the borough but I have chosen to ignore them because their locations have been adequately documented by the staff at Park Bridge Visitor centre.

N.B. There were three "Hill Pits" in Oldham, at Hill on Henshaw Street, near the Edge, Hill at Greenacres Moor (near Hill Stores) and the Hill Pits near Deanshut.

SADDLEWORTH

Shaw and Hayes were working the Yard Mine and the Victoria fireclay seam, via a drift, at the Lancashire and Yorkshire Colliery at Thornlee, Grotton, in 1874; they also had a fireclay works there. The colliery had a succession of proprietors: the Lancashire Firebrick Company, Ltd.; the Premier Blue Brick and Fireclay Company; and the Pioneer Blue Brick and Fireclay Company. It never employed more than 10 men and was eventually abandoned in 1906 or 1907, when the company was only making bricks.

I could find no evidence of any other significant coal workings in Saddleworth. Oldham Corporation found some coal at Readycon Dean in 1880, but the coal was never worked. The nearest coalpits to the Saddleworth boundary were at Roebuck Low, Paulden Wood, Hey, Milking Green and Knowls Lane.

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