

## On the Early History of Wirksworth and its Lead Mining.

BY WILLIAM WEBB, M.D.

**W**IRKSWORTH is a town of considerable antiquity. It derives its name from two Anglo-Saxon words\* *weorc*, work, and *weorthig*, land or estate, which mean a work or labour estate, and it is stated on the authority of Camden to have received this name by reason of the neighbouring lead works. The use of the word *tor*, rock, a word believed to be of Phœnician origin, has led some authorities to believe that the Phœnicians and ancient merchants of Gaul traded in Derbyshire, as they are known to have done in counties adjacent to the coast. It may be said very safely that the work of lead mining has been pursued in Derbyshire from time immemorial. Lead miners are constantly in their workings coming upon old *grooves*, or works, which they call the "old man," meaning thereby that the works were wrought in a large majority of instances in the distant ages of the past ; but when or by whom history tells not.

At the Norman survey, *Werchesworde* (Wirksworth) had a priest, a church, and sixteen villanes, and nine bordars, having seven ploughs. Historians tell us that the manor was the property of the King; although the neighbouring hamlets of *Bradebune* (Bradburne) and *Branzinctun* (Brassington), were possessed by

\* Derbyshire Archæological Society's Journal, vol. ii., page 70.

Henry de Ferrers, and *Belidene* (Ballidon) by Ralph Fitzhubert. This may have been the origin of the title, "The King's Field." It formed at this period a part of the Wapentake of Hammenstan. In the reign of King John, Wirksworth passed from the Crown to William de Ferrers, Earl of Derby. It subsequently became a part of the Duchy of Lancaster, and has continued so to the present time.

Long before the Norman Conquest, lead mining must have been carried on in the district of Wirksworth, for in the year 1777\* there was found on Cromford Moor, a foot from the surface of the ground, a pig of lead bearing an inscription as follows: †

No. 1.



It weighed 126lbs., and was believed to have been cast about A.D. 130. A second pig of lead was discovered in 1783, at Matlock, which was presented to the British Museum by the late Adam Wolley, Esq., as was the one found at Cromford, probably by the Nightingale family. The second pig was lettered as below:—

No. 2.



This pig weighed 84lbs. A third pig of lead was found on Matlock Moor in 1787, having upon it the following inscription:—

TI. CL. TR. LVT. BR. EX. ARG.

\* Gough's "Camden," vol. v., p. 369.

† Lettering after Lysons—Magn. Brit., vol. v., p. ccvi.

These inscriptions will be better interpreted by some of the archæologists present at this meeting. I will simply remark that Pegge makes out the first to mean—"The sixth legion inscribes this in memory of the Emperor Hadrian;" and the second—"The property of Lucius Aruconus Verecundus, lead merchant of London." Now it is not at all likely that the sixth legion would use a pig of lead as a memorial to an Emperor, and therefore the explanation given by Lysons\* as to the meaning of the letters "LVT" in these inscriptions forms a more ready solution of the difficulty. He believes these letters to refer to "Lutudarum," the Roman station next to Derwentio, and which is believed to have been the site of the town of Chesterfield.† The inscription on pig of lead No. 1 would therefore mean "the pig was cast from works belonging to the Emperor Cæsar Hadrian Augustus, from the metallic district of Lutudarum;" on pig No. 2, "Lucius Aruconus Verecondus, from the metallic district of Lutudarum;" and on pig No. 3, "A Tribute to Tiberius Claudius from the Mines in the British Lutudarum." Be this explanation accurate or not, the lettering on these pigs of lead found in the latter part of the last century, and just 100 years ago, in different parts of the Wapentake of Wirksworth, affords conclusive evidence of the great antiquity of lead mining in this part of Derbyshire, and of the absolute certainty that it was pursued here during the Roman occupation of Great Britain, and probably before the Christian era; indeed, Derbyshire is said by some authorities to be referred to by Pliny when he wrote, "In Britain, on the surface of the ground, lead is dug up in such plenty, that a law was passed to stint them to a set quantity."‡

That the lead mines were energetically worked during the Saxon period we are assured by the following circumstances:—

1. From the fact that a mine near to Castleton is called Odin, after one of their gods. 2. Eadburga, Abbess of Repton (to

\* Magn. Brit., vol. v., p. ccvii.

† Mr. Watkins, in another paper of this volume of the Transactions, argues for the identity of Lutudarum with Wirksworth.

‡ Camden.

which monastic institution the lead mines of Wirksworth appear to have belonged at this time), sent from Wirksworth, A.D. 714, a leaden coffin in which to bury St. Guthlac, Prior of Croyland Abbey, and formerly a monk at Repton.

3. Kenewara, also Abbess of Repton, gave the estate at Wirksworth, A.D. 835, to Humbert, the Alderman, on the condition that he gave lead to the value of three hundred shillings, to Archbishop Colenoth, for the use of Christ's Church, Canterbury.

4. From the name *Bergmote* (A. S.) being applied to the Court for the trial of mineral disputes.

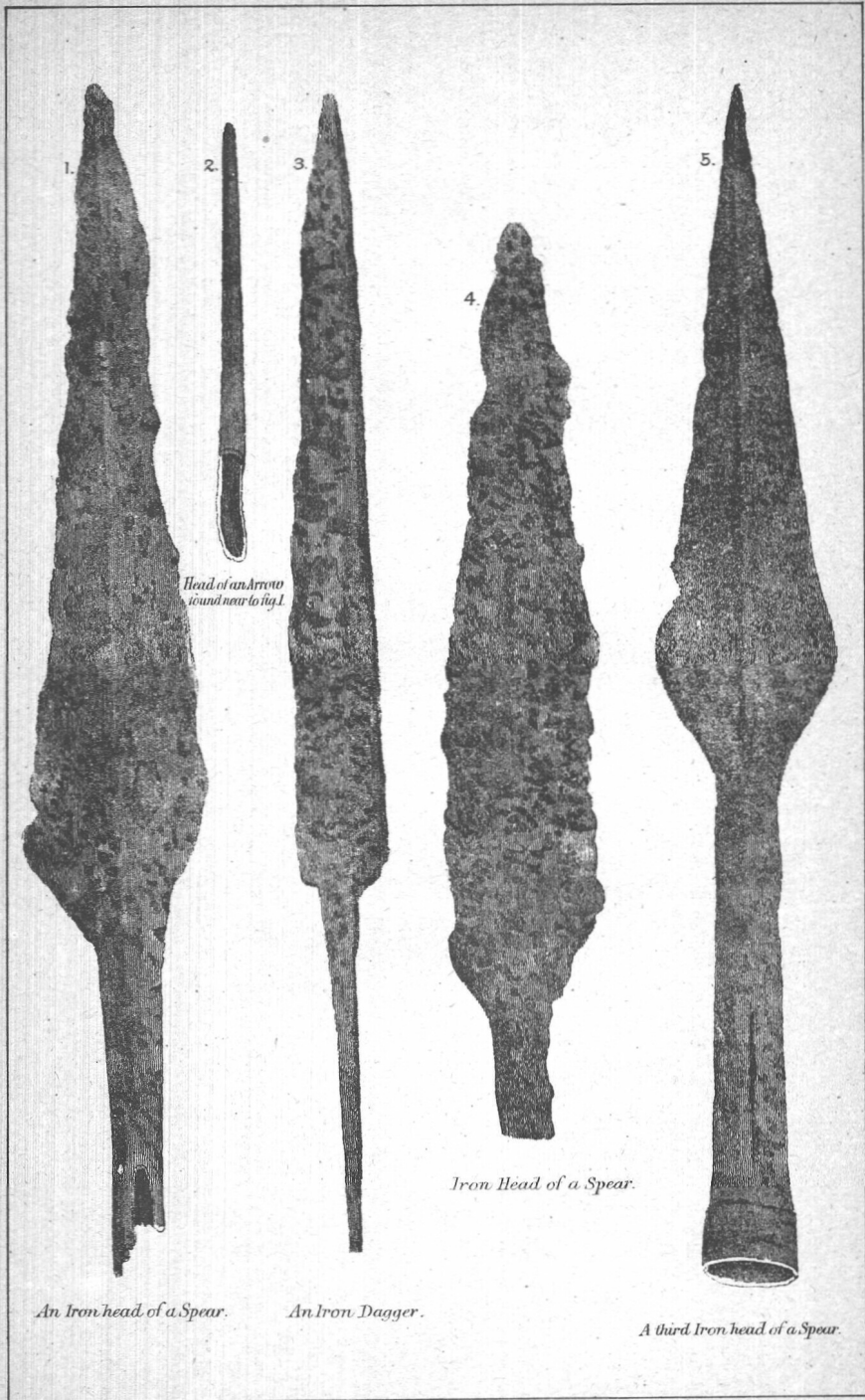
That the mines were worked after the Norman Conquest is proved by a survey, still, I believe, in the possession of the Duchy of Lancaster, of Peveril Castle, made in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, who greatly encouraged mining operations by inviting skilled workmen from abroad; and this survey describes the castle as being covered with lead. As it was built in the reign of the Conqueror, it is more than probable that the lead used in its construction was obtained from Derbyshire mines; in fact, Domesday Book mentions the working of three lead mines at Wirksworth, one at Crich, one at Ashford, one at Bakewell, and one at Metesford, a manor in the neighbourhood of Matlock.

Perhaps you will not consider it out of place if I refer to important discoveries, although not connected in any way with lead mining, during the cutting of the road called *Via Gellia* through the estate of the Gells, of Hopton. This road was made in 1791-2.

There were found :—(Plate III.) 1. An iron head of a spear. 2. The head of an arrow. 3. An iron dagger. 4, 5. Two iron spear heads (Plate IV.) 6. A marble spear-shaped instrument supposed to have been used for examination of the victims sacrificed by the Druids. All these six ancient implements or weapons were found between Hopton Moor and Ible, but the most remarkable discovery of all during the making of this road was (7). An urn found in a large barrow at Abbot's Low, near Hopton. The inscription upon the stone which covered this urn\*

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\* "Archæologia," vol. xii., p. 2.



1.

2.

3.

5.

4.

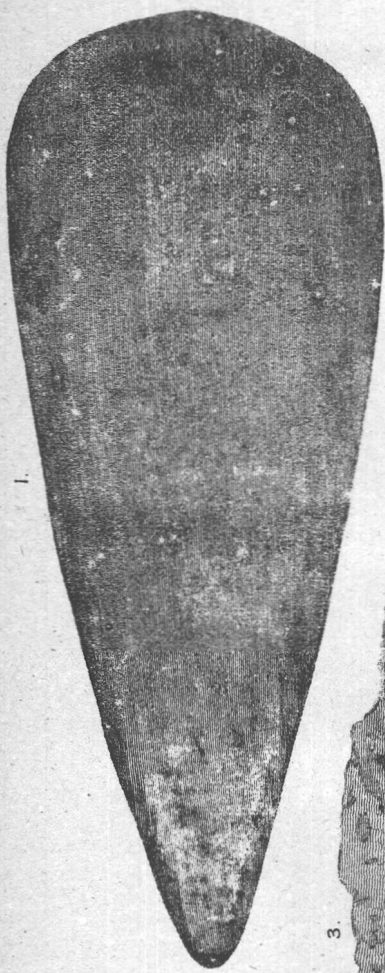
*Head of an Arrow  
found near to it.*

*An Iron head of a Spear.*

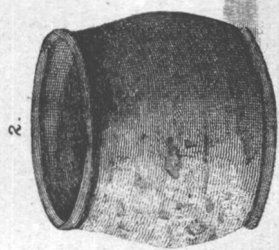
*An Iron Dagger.*

*Iron Head of a Spear.*

*A third Iron head of a Spear.*



*Marble instrument found near Wirksworth supposed to have been used in human sacrifices.*



*Stone Urn found at Abbott's Low, Hopton.*



*Stone Covering of Fig. 2.*

was supposed at first to indicate the following, viz. :—*Gellius Præfectus Cohortis Tertie Legionis Quintæ Britannicæ* ; but as the fifth Legion was never in Britain, Horsley\* considers that the sixth Legion is implied thus :—*Legio Sexta Victrix*, the word “Legio” signifying the sixth Legion and the V, *Victrix* or *Victrices*. “It is also remarkable,” writes Mr. Hayman Rooke, “that the Præfect’s name should be Gellius, and that the urn which contained the ashes should be deposited in a barrow on Mr. Gell’s estate.” Mr. Rooke’s original drawings of this, as well as of many other Derbyshire antiquities, are now in the possession of Mr. E. Cooling, jun., a member of this Society. The urn was full of burnt bones and ashes, and was covered by the stone before mentioned.

Let us now proceed to consider some of the mineral laws and customs of the Wapentake of Wirksworth—in every part of which any subject of the Crown may “dig and delve” in search of lead ore without asking leave of or giving any payment to the owner of the land upon which he works—churchyards, highways, orchards, gardens, &c., being excepted. Manlove, a former steward of the Barmote, thus explains it in doggerel rhyme :—

By custom old in Wirksworth Wapentake,  
 If any of this nation find a rake,  
 Or sign, or leading to the same, may set  
 In any ground, and there lead ore may get.  
 They may make crosses, holes, and set their stowes,  
 Sink shafts, build lodges, cottages and coes,  
 But churches, houses, gardens, all are free  
 From this strange custom of the minery. †

The Barmote Court (originally spelled Berghmoot), which is held twice a year in this Moot Hall, is presided over by a steward, and there are also other officers, viz., a Barmaster (or Berghmaster), Deputy Barmasters, and jurymen. The Barmaster is the officer who looks after the Lord’s dues, who gives possession to new ventures in the mineral field, and who, assisted by his deputies in the different parts of the Wapentake, sees that all the ore

\* “*Britannia Romana*,” p. 200.

† “*Liberties and Customs of the Lead Mines*,” by E. Manlove, 1653.

is measured in dishes which correspond with the dish you now see, and which is always kept chained in this hall. This dish (Plate V.) has upon it the following inscription :—

This dishe was made the iijj day of Octobr, the iijj yere of the reigne of Kyng Henry the VIII. before George Erle of Shrowesbury steward of ye Kyng's most honourable household, and also steward of all the honour of Tutbery by the assent and consent as well of all the Mynours, as of all the Brenners, within and adjoyning the lordship of Wyrkysworth percell of the said honour. This dishe to remayne in the Moote Hall at Wyrkysworth, hanging by a cheyne, so as the Merchantes or Mynours may have resorte to the same at all tymes to make the tru mesur aft. the same.

The word Bergmote means an assembly upon a hill (from A.S. Berg—gemote), just as the word *Witenagemote* means an assembly of the Witan or wise men ; and Bergmaster means a master or superintendent of the mines.

The dues to the Crown have been let on lease certainly since the reign of Edward IV., and probably for a longer period. The Arkwright family have been the lessees for four generations.

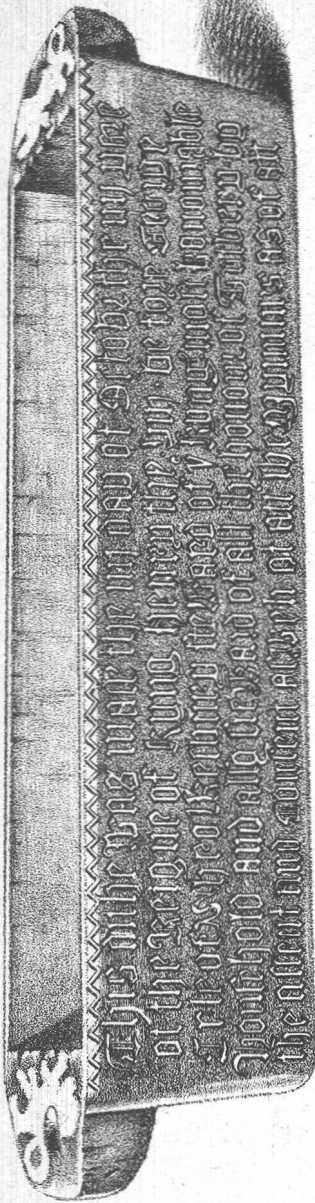
The working miners and the mineral proprietors in the Wapentake pay dues, which are known by the terms *lot* and *cope*. *Lot* signifies every thirteenth dish of ore, and *cope* 4d. or 6d. (according to the locality) for every lode, or nine dishes of ore ; moreover, all mines in the parish of Wirksworth pay to the vicar every fortieth dish as tithes. This was in former days as much as one in ten ; but as litigation was of frequent occurrence, this was commuted in 1778 to one in forty by agreement made between the Rev. Richard Tillard, vicar of Wirksworth, of the one part, and the miners and maintainers of the other part. When a miner has searched and found ore in any land, he gives a dish to the Lord to free the mine ; but to get title and possession he applies to the barmaster, who, with at least two of the jury, marks out two meers of ground, each containing twenty-nine yards.

The Barmaster (Bergmaster) was formerly the coroner of the mines, and he it was who investigated all cases of sudden death which occurred in them—

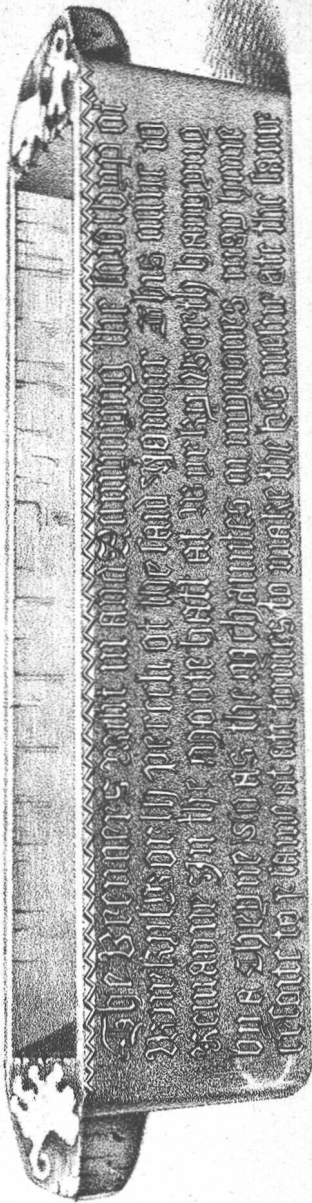
If by perchance a miner damped be  
Or on the mine be slain by chance medley,  
The Berghmaster or else his Deputie  
Must view the corps before it buried be,  
And take inquest by jury who shall try  
By what mischance the miner there did die.\*

\* Manlove.





This dish was made the day that I was set  
at the request of King Henry the fifth by the  
request of the King's Council of the Honourable  
Council. And all the day of all the Honour of  
the Great and Noble Archbishop of Canterbury  
at the request of the King's Council.



The miners' dish in which the King's Council  
was made by the request of the King's Council  
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THE MINERS' DISH, KEPT IN THE MOOT-HALL, WIRKSWORTH.

The following curious record of a verdict in 1761 may not be uninteresting:—

March 26, 1761.\*

We whose names are under written being this day summoned by Mr. Edward Ashton, Barmaster for the Liberty of Brassington to a groove called by the name of the Throstle next to Brassington Pasture to enquire into the cause of death of T. W., now lying before us: accordingly we have been down the shaft to the foot thereof, and down one Sump or Turn to the foot thereof, and on a gate northwardly about sixteen yards to the Forefield, where the deceased had been at work: and by the information we have from William Briddon who was working near him, it appears to us that a large stone fell upon him out of the roof, and it is our opinion that stone was his death.

Then follow the signatures of Thomas Slack and eleven other jurymen. This part of his office has, since the new Mineral Act, been relegated to the coroner of the district.

Before this period some offences connected with the mines were punished with great severity. The stealing of lead ore was one of these, and upon clear proof of this crime having been committed, the offender on the first and second convictions was fined according to the gravity of the offence; but if he were convicted a third time, then (it will scarcely be believed now to have been possible) he must submit to have his hand transfixed by a knife and fixed in this way to the stowes or supports for the windlass at the top of the mine, and to keep it there till either he tore his hand away or death ended his sufferings, and moreover, according to the old rhyme, his sufferings lasted for life.

And shall forswear the franchise of the mine,  
And always lose his freedom from that time.

In conclusion, the lead ore was in former days smelted in holes on the tops of hills which had generally a westerly aspect. These were termed *boles*. Wood and lead ore were placed in these holes and ignited during a westerly wind. Hence the name of Bole Hill, near Wirksworth, and in other districts of the Peak.

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\* Hardy's "Compleat Miner," 1762.