

ART. II.—*The Medieval Mines of Alston.* By JOSEPH WALTON.

ALSTON MOOR, contiguous to Northumberland, Durham and Westmorland, is one of the least known corners of our Society's district. In post Conquest times it suddenly became an object of great interest to the king's officials owing to the discovery there of a silver mine.\* The most detailed notice of this is given by Robert de Monte who under the year 1133, after noting the foundation of the see of Carlisle, an eclipse of the sun and Henry I's journey to Normandy adds "At this time veins of silver ore were discovered at Carlisle and the miners who dug for it in the bowels of the earth paid five hundred pounds yearly to King Henry (Chron. s.a.). A shorter note is given in the *Eulogium Historiarum* by a monk of Malmesbury (Rolls Series 9, iii, p. 64).

It is clear however that the mines had been discovered before this date—it was possibly through noting the information along with the foundation of Carlisle cathedral which took place in this year that the error arose—for the Pipe Roll of 31 Henry I [1130-31] records that "the burgesses of Carlisle render account of 100s. of the old farm of the Silver Mine and William and Hildret ought to render account of £40 for the farm of the silver mine for this year past." (V.C.H. Cumb., i, 338).

At this time the county of Cumberland had not been formed, but Carlisle, brought back into English influence by William Rufus and recently greatly strengthened by Henry I, was the local centre of royal government of the area headed by the sheriff of Carlisle, to whom the care of

\* The early notices term it a silver mine but there can be no doubt that it contained a very large admixture of lead.

the mine of Alston belonged. The legal position of the mine was curious, for complete jurisdiction over it was retained by the kings of England though it was within the bounds of the manor of Alston which as part of the Liberty of Tyndale was long held by the king of Scotland (see these *Trans.* N.S. xxxi, 8-20) whilst ecclesiastically thought part of the county of Cumberland it lay in the diocese of Durham, and is now in the diocese of Newcastle on Tyne (*ibid.*).

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that more than once the miners got involved in local disputes and disorders. John of Hexham in his *History of the church of Hexham* notes under the year 1152 "Henry archbishop of York went to the church of Hexham and spent a considerable portion of the summer in its territory. He made a complaint at Carlisle to King David that his forest had been ravaged by the king's men who were employed in working the silver mines." (Surtees Soc., vol. 44, p. 166). The forest ravaged was in the archbishop's regality of Hexham, and this is only the first example of trouble caused by the very extensive right to fuel which the mines evidently enjoyed from the first (see below).

From the early years of Henry II (1154-89) the Pipe Rolls\* provide invaluable items on the history of the mine at this time. In the first of these—4 Henry II (1158)—it appears that "the mine of Carlisle" was held by William son of Erembald at a rent of 100 silver marks, and he also held it for 1159 at the rent of £100. For the next four years however he gives way to William son of Holdegar who in 9 Henry II pays an additional £20 "of the mine in Yorkshire" perhaps a newly discovered vein

\* The early Cumberland Pipe Rolls were first printed in 1847 by J. Hodgson Hinde along with those of Westmorland, Northumberland and Durham, an English translation of those up to 16 John (1214) is given in Victoria County Hist., Cumberland, i, 338-418, and the Pipe Rolls of Cumberland and Westmorland for 1222-60 were edited and published (1905) for our Society by F. H. M. Parker as Extra Series Vol. xii).

just over the county boundary. The following year the mine was held by "William the moneyer" who is probably distinct from the two Williams just mentioned and had outbid them, for he paid no less than £200 rent.

The next year (11 Henry II) "the mine of Carlisle" first appears as a separate heading in the Cumberland Pipe Rolls and was then held by William son of Erembald at £266. 13s. 4d. but the following year he was outbid in his turn, £333. 6s. 8d. being paid "for two mines" by William son of Holdegar (1166). There seems no doubt that this spirited competition had forced up the rent of the mine to an uneconomic level. William son of Holdegar and William the Moneyer wisely disappeared from the scene, leaving the mine to be farmed by William son of Erembald at a yearly rent of 500 marks (£333. 6s. 8d.). From the first William son of Erembald was unable to pay his way. The Roll of 1167 shows him owing £14. 13s. which had risen to £396. 13s. 4d. in 16 Hen. II (1170). This was somewhat reduced in the following year but after that William's finances seem to have collapsed almost completely little or nothing being paid off so that eight years later his debt had swollen to the enormous sum of £2006. 13s. 4d. (equivalent to perhaps twenty times that amount in modern money). This figure increased a little in the next two years, so it is scarcely surprising that it was decided to put the mine of Carlisle "under new management."

The roll of 27 Henry II (1181) shows £200 due for the rent of the mine in the past year, a quarter (£50) from William son of Erembald, a quarter from "Richard and Humphrey brothers" and half from "Richard of Edmondshala et Adam nephew (*nepos*) of Roulin." The following roll shows that William had paid none of his share and now owed £2106. 13s. 4d. Next year shows Henry "Estrensis" associated with Adam nephew of Roulin and owing £108. 6s. 8d. But the newcomers almost

from the first fell into debt. In the last years of Henry II's reign and the early ones of Richard I a small part of the sums due to the royal treasury were recovered from pledges and from Roger de Stutevill and Robert de Vaux, sheriffs of Northumberland and Cumberland who had taken them. One Walter de Carleol, Richard—here described as “de Logis”—and Humphrey his brother occur as “keepers” (*custodes*) of the mine in 30 and 31 Henry II. In the next two years the mine was farmed jointly by Richard brother of Humphrey and Alan the moneyer each of whom rendered £50. In the roll for 3 Richard I it is noted that “Alan the moneyer renders account of £10 of the farm of the aforesaid mine for this year which remained in the King's hand when he gave to Hugh bishop of Durham the county of Northumberland with appurtenances.” In 10 Richard I Alan paid £160 out of £200 due for the farm of the year for the four years past. He seems to have been succeeded in early years of John by William de Stutevill and then by Robert de Curtenai each of whom farmed the mine for £50 yearly. But the roll of 13 John (1211) shows some reorganisation was effected, though its exact nature will not be clear until the relevant legal records of the time have been examined. Under the heading “ameracements of the autumnal justices” is the note “the same sheriff renders account of 10 marks for the farm of the mine.”

In the reign of Henry III there is no sign of any more important local individuals farming the mine at what would seem to have been inflated rents and this annual rent of 10 marks from the sheriff becomes the stock entry.\*

That some agreement had been reached whereby the local miners of Alston ran their mine in return for a nominal rent and a proportion of its output in kind is not

\* Parker, *op. cit.*, p. viii. Incidentally the debt of William son of Erembald had now reached the astronomical figure of £2154.

unlikely in the light of later evidence but examination of the unpublished legal records will probably be necessary to clear up this point.

During this time on several occasions payment was made in kind. Thus in 13 Hen. II (1167) William son of Erembald was allowed £10. 3s. "for lead for the king's houses at Windsor by the King's writ," and in the following year £24. 15s. "for 55 cartloads of lead delivered to the sheriff of Northumberland to be carried to Caen." In 23 Hen. II (1177) £40 was allowed "for lead for the use of Domus Dei at Grantmonte," two years later £66. 13s. 4d. "for 100 cartloads of lead delivered to brother Simon to the work of the church of Clarevall" (i.e. Clairvaux the famous Cistercian abbey founded by St. Bernard) and the year after (1181) further gifts to Clairvaux.

In the early years of Henry III local disorders seem to have grievously interfered with the mining and led to vigorous action by the government to safeguard a valuable source of revenue.

In 1219 Robert de Vieuxpont complained that Hugh de Balliol lord of Teesdale had prevented the miners from going to the mine as they had been accustomed, to the damage of the king, and Hugh was ordered to cease from interference.\* In 1222 the Pipe Roll for the year remitted half a year's rent of the mine since no one had been working there (Parker, *op. cit.* 3-4) and in 1222 and

\* The opening clauses of the entry are worthy of note:—*Monstravit consilio domini Regis Robertus de Veteri Ponte quod omnes predecessores domini Regis Anglie mineriam quandam semper habuerint in Tindal spectantem ad castrum domini Regis Karleol' de qua constabularius ejusdem castri domini Regis debet respondere: Hugo de Ballol minatores in ea operantes in dampnum Regis impedit non permittens quod iter suum faciant sicut facere consueverunt (Fine Roll 3 Hen. III, m 4d.)* The miners were to be allowed to work "sicut temporibus predecessorum domini Regis operari consueverunt." *Tindal*—this probably refers to modern upper south Tynedale. Garrigall is the nearest village and local tradition asserts that the earliest mines were in this area near the source of the South Tyne. It is very likely that the original "mine of Carlisle" was here.

1223 the miners were given letters of protection until the young king came of age.\* The latter is directed to "minatores domini regis de comitatu Eboraci et Northumberlande pertinentes ad bailliam minerie de comitatu Cumberlande)." The following year (1224) the sheriff of Cumberland was ordered to accept security from Ivo de Vieuxpont for standing his trial before the king when commanded "concerning a trespass made in the persons of the miners of our lord the king, whom he took in his mine of Alston, illtreated and imprisoned and compelled to give ransom for which they gave their hostages and concerning damages and injuries inflicted on them" (Rot. Lit. Claus. ii 8a). This seems to be the first reference to the "mine of Alston" (*Mineria sua de Aldenestone*) the original name being the "mine of Carlisle." Complaint was made against John de Balliol in 1229. In the next year his bailiff was ordered to allow the Cumberland miners to have free passage through all his master's land, forest as well as other lands, to buy victuals. But the king allowed that as long as John de Balliol was in his service beyond the seas the pleas between the king and him were to be respite and during the same time the miners not being able to work freely should be excused five marks of the farm (Memoranda L.T.R. 14 Hen. III, m. 3 and m. 6. d.). The land that Balliol had closed was probably the forest and other parts of Harwood a part of Teesdale near the mine and abutting on the forest of Alston.

In 1234 and again in 1237 royal mandates ordered that the miners of Alston should have all their past privileges and be allowed to dig and mine unmolested (Cal. Pat. Rolls, pp. 65, 174). In 1235 a royal mandate "to all the king's miners of the county of Cumberland" ordered them to come to work in his mine of Alston, and granted to those who came the liberties and free customs which his miners of those parts have been accustomed to have

\* Cal. Pat. Rolls, pp. 339. 366.

in the time of his predecessors. This was accompanied by another mandate which ordered the sheriff to "cause all the said miners to come to work in the mine as they used to do in the time of the king's predecessors and also to cause merchants of his bailiwick to come there with victuals for the maintenance of the miners as they used to do" (*ibid.*, 132). If we may judge from the silence of the Chancery enrolments in the following decades these persistent royal attempts to re-establish the mine inspired a substantial era of peace in its history.

In 1278-9 interesting presentments were made before the itinerant justices in special session at Alston. It was stated that the king should receive each ninth "disc" dug up by the miners and each disc to contain as much ore as a man could lift from the ground. As to the remaining eight discs the king should also have the fifteenth penny of all the ore sold but he was to find at his expense a certain man called a "drivere" who knew how to separate the silver from lead. The jury said that the value of the mine depended on the nature of the ore but there was enough ore of one kind and another to last until the end of time (Cal. of Doc. Scot, ii, 41 from Assize Roll of 6-20 Edw. I). When in 1282 Edward I granted the manor of Alston to Nicholas de Vieuxpont he excepted from the grant "the mine, the miners and the liberty thereof" (Cal. Fine Rolls, i, 165).

In 1290 an interesting dispute arose regarding the miners' rights to take fuel which may be summarised as follows:—Patrius del Gile and twenty-six other miners at Alston were impleaded by Henry of Whiteby and his wife Joan, because they forcibly cut down their trees at Alston and took them away to the value of £40, etc. The former say that they hold the mine of Alston at farm from the king, and that the liberty of the mine allows the miners thereof to take wood whosoever it is where they find it suitable for the silver vein, and that they may take

this wood at will for burning and smelting at the mine and for building, burning and enclosing, and may give it to employees for their pay and also that the rich members can give as much as they like from that wood to the poor for their support. And they say that because the wood in question was convenient for a certain vein which they had found, they cut it down for burning and smelting there and for building and enclosing and for giving to the poor and the employees. And they also claim that lords of the woods in which wood for the mine has been begun to be taken cannot sell or give away any of it but only take their reasonable needs (*estoveria*). This they claim to have been their liberty from before the memory of man. Henry and Joan admitted that the miners could take wood from the more convenient woods for burning and smelting at the king's mine but they say that the miners took away £40 of wood beyond what was necessary or sufficient for this, which was of no use to the mine or profit to the king and they ask for an enquiry hereon.\*

In 1292 the miners were summoned to show by what warrant they claimed that itinerant justices in Cumberland should come to Arneshow in Alston to hold pleas of the crown there without the licence of the king. Investigation failed to sustain the miners' claim that from the time justices began to itinerate in those parts they and their predecessors always had this liberty (*Plac. de Quo War. Rec. Com.*, 117).

In 1356 officialdom was paying great attention to Alston miners owing to an infringement of their rights. By Letters Close of May 16 of this year Alan del Strothe, bailiff of Queen Philippa of her liberty of Tyndale, was ordered not to distrain the miners of Carlisle to come before him out of Cumberland to pay any contributions or other charges by reason of the king's mine of Aldeneston, contrary to their liberties as by the certificate of the

\* Michaelmas term, 1290—for the original text see E. Coke, *Institutes of the Laws of England* [1642] p. 578 or Nicolson and Burn, ii, 440.

treasurer and barons of the exchequer it is found that the sheriff of Cumberland was charged with ten marks in the 12th year of King Henry for the ferm of the mines of Carlisle and so yearly in the time of that king, of Edward I, the late and present kings until the 28th year of the present reign (25 Jan., 1354-5) and that Edward I in the 10th year of his reign (30 Nov., 1281-2) recovered by judgment of his court of king's bench against Robert de Veteripont the manor of Aldenestone, as of the said county, and at the instance of Alexander son of Alexander then king of Scotland, that king granted the said manor to Nicholas, Robert's son and heir, to hold of the king of Scotland, saving to the king Edward and his heirs the said mine and miners which that king retained for himself and he granted that the said manor should thenceforth be of the said king's liberty of Tyndale, so that the miners should answer to King Edward for that mine as they had been accustomed to do. And now the present king has learned from the miners that they are distrained by the said bailiff to come before him in the said liberty out of their county to make divers contributions and other charges with the men of that liberty whereupon they have besought the king to provide a remedy.\* This interesting missive confirms the privileged position of the miners against the lord of the manor of Alston.

It was followed up by further Letters Close of 26 Oct., 1356 to Alan, which ordered him to cease to demand "from the miners of Aldeneston who work in the king's mines or those who dwell within the limits and bounds of that mine and maintain and find the men to work therein, . . . £20 or for any portion of the subsidy lately granted to the said queen" (Philippa). It goes on to recite the pedigree of the right in the terms of the previous letter and narrates that this demand with others was "to the

\* Cal. Close Rolls, 16 May, 1356, 1354-60, p. 262, given in full in Rymer's *Foedera* 3 pt. i, p. 330).

prejudice of the king the annulling of his ferm and the impoverishment of his miners and the business being brought before the king and his council and reasons being heard," it was decided that the miners "to wit all working in the mine and all others dwelling within the bounds appointed for getting ore and maintaining and finding men to work therein, should be discharged of the said subsidy and all other charges, but that the miners should not have any benefit or immunity for their lands and goods outside the said bounds and others who are not miners although dwelling within those bounds should not have that immunity. To ensure that Alan cannot excuse himself on the grounds of ignorance the king has enjoined William of Presfen before the king and council in the presence of certain miners to warn him not to inter-meddle with the miners with their liberty."\*

Six days previously the king had issued as Letters Patent an exemplification of an inquisition made under the king's commission "before Thomas de Seton and John de Mowbray as to the liberties, customs and immunities of his miners of Aldeneston in Cumberland by a jury at Penreth on Thursday next after St. Lawrence's day (Aug. 10) previous." The jury's findings throw a most valuable light on the rights of the miners.

They found that the miners when they lived together in sheilings (*shelis*) and worked together were used to elect one of themselves as Coroner and another as Bailiff called Kynges Sergeant, the coroner having power to hear and decide all pleas both civil and criminal arising among them and their servants, and the Kynges Sergeant having power to put his judgments into execution, but that the present miners are now so dispersed at their work here and there in "ones and twos" that they should no longer exercise the above privileges. But that from time beyond memory while they worked in a body they

\* *Ibid.*, 281-2.

enjoyed the aforesaid liberties and immunities paying yearly to the King's Exchequer at Carlisle ten marks (Cal. of Docs. relating to Scotland (1108-1509), ed. J. Bain). In view of the adverse report on the miners' privileges and the interest which official circles must now have felt in the matter of the Alston mines, it is not surprising that soon after we have evidence that the interesting mining community which as we have seen had for so long managed the mines were superseded. By letters patent of 12 Mar., 1359 it was announced that "on the petition of Tilman of Cologne shewing that he has taken the mines of silver, copper and lead in Aldeston More from the freemen of Aldeston More at farm for certain payments to the king and them for the same, and had hired and will hire labourers for the mines, the king has taken him and the labourers while working in the mines into his special protection." (Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1358-61 p. 183 = Rymer op. cit. iii, pt. i, p. 422). But this outside speculator—for that is evidently what he was—seems to have held the mine for only a very short time, perhaps finding it as difficult to make profit from it as his twelfth century predecessors. He evidently gave way to the Stapletons who succeeded the Vieuxponts as lords of the manor of Alston. For Letters Patent of 13 Nov., 1414 inform us that "William de Stapleton and his tenants at will in this manor and their predecessors from time beyond all memory had annually paid at the king's exchequer at Carlisle ten marks for the mines of Aldeneston which in the exchequer run by the name of the mine of Carlisle, though for fifty years and more before that time the mine itself had ceased and been profitless to them to their great and manifest injury; the king therefore granted them the aforesaid mines, with all the commodities, profits, emoluments, liberties and franchises and immunities, whatsoever thereunto belonging to be holden for ever by the annual payment of the said ancient sum of ten marks.

The Stapletons were grantees of the mine *before* they acquired the manor. Several concessions were made soon after to seek to revive the industry but there can be no doubt that by this time the lead mine had lost its former great importance. The Crown therefore lost interest and its records cease to mirror, albeit dimly, its history in the same way they had hitherto done.

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