

COAL AT ALDERWASLEY: A NOTE ON 'THE IRONWORKS AT ALDERWASLEY AND MORLEY PARK'

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In his study of the ironworks at Alderwasley¹ Mr Riden states 'a number of imponderables remain concerning the history of what may have been the last charcoal furnace in England or the first coke furnace in the East Midlands or both.'² I offer here some points which may have a bearing on the debate.

Mr Riden emphasises the importance of the availability of timber for charcoal and the 'unsuitability of Alderwasley as an ironsmelting site off the coalfield'.³ There is, however, clear evidence of the presence of coal in the township. Alderwasley lies west of the coalfield on the Middle Grit Group of the Millstone Grit Series. This Middle Grit Group includes bands of coal.⁴ The Geological Survey map (scale 1:10,560) locates 8 exposures of coal within Alderwasley, and shows 2 bands of coal within the grits, twenty six and thirty four inches thick.⁵ Bulmer's directory, from which Mr Riden quotes, contains the statement 'A coal seam extends into the parish'.⁶

Alderwasley cannot be described as being 'located some distance from the nearest coal...'⁷

The significant question is whether this coal has ever been extracted. To answer this I put forward three pieces of historical evidence.

- 1 'Complaint of Edward Lowe Esq. of the depredations committed by the Parliament Party at Alderwasley. The house of Edward Lowe Esq. of Alderwasley was plundered by the Parliament Party as under-1642, October 29
... and at the same time they took pewter and brass out of a coal pitt worth £30'⁸

Edward Lowe does not give a specific location for the coalpit in which he had hidden his silver to preserve it from his parliamentary enemies, but the heading over all the depredations is 'at Alderwasley'.

- 2 The will of William Peat of Alderwasley, written 1771 and proved 1780:-
'... I give Devise and Bequeath all and every my Coal Pits or Coal Mines and Delphs of Coal and all other coal in within or upon all every or any of my aforesaid Closes Lands Hereditaments and premisses with all every and singular the Tools materials and utensils for the getting of Coal or otherwise equally to and amongst all such of my child or children as shall be living at the time of my Decease their several and respective heirs Executors administrators and Assigns for ever share and share alike To enjoy the same as Tenants in Common and not as Joint Tenants Together with full power and Lawful authority not only for them to Enter to get and raise the said coal from time to time in within or upon all or any of my aforesaid Closes Lands and Premisses in the usual manner or in any other manner or by any other ways or means by sinking of pits or otherwise and to sell and dispose of the same as they in their Discretion shall from time to time think meet and proper to and for their own several and respective use and benefit absolutely But also to make all proper necessary and convenient Road or Roads for the

purposes aforesaid and of fetching and carrying away the same with horses carts or otherwise as they at any time and from time to time shall ajudge or judge most proper and convenient to and for their severall and respective use and benefit without the hindrance Interruption or Disturbance from any person or persons whatsoever from time to time doing or comitting as little Damage to ground soil and herbage thereof as maybe And I do hereby order and direct that the vestry or Rubbish arising or drawn from the pits or getting of coal in or upon all or any of the aforesaid premisses (Tyburn Flatt and Spencer's Field Excepted) to be cleansed and carryed away (at an equal Expense of them getting such Coal as aforesaid) and laid upon a peice of Ground where I Sank the first Coal pit which was in a close called the Highfield and the vestry or Rubbish arising or drawn from the pits or getting of coal in or upon those aforesaid closes called Tyburn Flatt and Spencers Field to a Corner of the further close thereof next to Marsh Pool.'⁹

This paragraph from the will of William Peat refers to his 'aforesaid closes, lands' *etc* which are named in the bequests in the earlier part of his will. These include 9 named closes fields or flats, and these, with but one exception, are stated to be in Alderwasley. Tyburn Flatt and Spencer's Field can be located on the Tithes Apportionment map of 1841.¹⁰ They lie athwart the longest coal outcrop shown on the geology map already referred to. (Grid ref. 43/317536)

3 A note on William Peat, the writer of this will, by W.N. Ince. (Mr. Ince was the Wirksworth notary who compiled pedigrees of many local families from the deeds in his possession. This note is added to the Peat family tree.)

'This William and his children are extracted from a draft grant from his children to F.Hurt Esq. of coal at Alderwasley in consideration of 10 gnas. each dated 1790.'¹¹

The children of William Peat inherited his lands and coal pits in 1780. The exact nature of this grant of 1790 is not known.

There is then, clear evidence of coal production in Alderwasley before and after Francis Hurt built his forge and furnace. This raises at least 2 questions.

If the furnace, coal or coke fired, and the forge were established at the same time, can the forge still be described as 'curiously timed and badly located'?

The statement '...it would have been clear to the more perceptive ironmasters that the future lay with new works on the coalfields, rather than those, such as Alderwasley, located some distance from the nearest coal and ironstone.'¹² implies that the founder of the works at Alderwasley was not among the more perceptive ironmasters. Is Francis Hurt perhaps misjudged?

REFERENCES

- 1 Philip Riden, 'The ironworks at Alderwasley and Morley Park', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal* CV111 (1988) 77-107
- 2 Riden, *op.cit.*, 82
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 D.A. Wray, *The Pennines and Adjacent Areas* (British Regional Geology) Geological Survey and Museum (London 1948)
- 5 Ordnance Survey. Geological Survey Sheet SK 35 SW 1:10,5600.(1969)
- 6 T.Bulmer & Co., *History, Topography and Directory of Derbyshire* (Derby, 1895) 607
- 7 Riden, *op.cit.*, 78
- 8 British Library, Additional Manuscripts 6666 f.201
- 9 Lichfield Joint Record Office, Will of William Peat, 12 April, 1780.
- 10 Derby Local Studies Library, Township of Alderwasley in the Parish of Wirksworth Tithes Apportionment, 1841.
- 11 Derby Local Studies Library, Pedigrees of Wirksworth Families, W.N. Ince (mss.)
- 12 Riden, *op.cit.*, 78