

A NOTICE OF MARESFIELD FORGE IN 1608.

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BY W. V. CRAKE, B.A.
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WHILE staying in Ayrshire recently, I came across records¹ of the connexion between the smelting industry of Scotland and that of Sussex in the time of James I. of England (VI. of Scotland). This goes far to prove the high importance of the Sussex iron industry in Tudor and Jacobean times. In Sussex the dense woodlands and the readily accessible ore produced the iron industry, ending in the blowing out of the last furnace in 1830 as the result of the competition of the Northern iron fields, using mineral coal. In Scotland the charcoal was becoming scarce, and the immense difficulty in smelting ores may be gauged by the following proclamation forbidding the wasting of wood and timber in the Northern kingdom :—

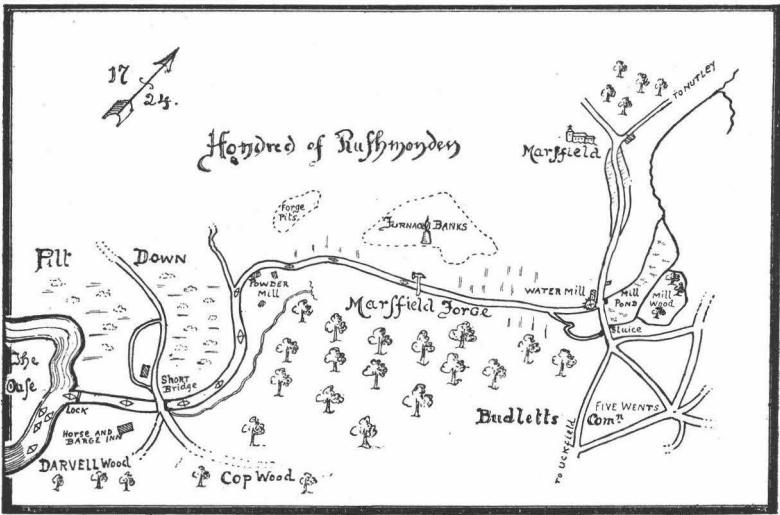
“ Act² anent the making of yrne [iron] with wode. Forsamekle (forasmuch) as it has pleased God to discover certain veins of rich metal within this Kingdom, as also certain wodis [woods] in the heylandis : whilkis [which] wodis by reason of the savageness of the inhabitants there about, were either unknown or at the least unprofitable and unused : and now the estates presently convened, being informed that some persons, upon advantage of the general obedience in those parts, would erect yrne [iron] milnis [mills] in the same parts ; to the utter wasting and consuming of the said woods, whilkis [which] might be reserved for many better uses, and upon more choice and profitable metals, for the honour, benefit and estimation of the Kingdom. Therefore the estates, presently convened, (states and ordains and therewith) commands, charges and inhibits, all and sundry his Majesty's leiges and subjects that none of them presume nor take upon hand, to work and make any

¹ *Early Records relating to Mining in Scotland*, by R. W. Cochran-Patrick, F.S.A. Scot., 1878.

² *Scots Acts*, Vol. iv. p. 408b, 27 Jan. 1609.

iron with wood or tymmer [timber] under the pain of confiscation of the whole yrne, that shall be made with the sayed tymmer: to his Majestes use; and ordains publication to be made hereof, by open preclamation at all places needful quhairthrow [whereby] none pretend ignorance of the same."

The wood famine³ reached such a pitch that the art of smelting seems to have been dead, and certain Flemings were introduced into Scotland to conduct smelting operations.



COPY OF A MAP OF THE MARESFIELD FORGE IN 1724.

Made by C. Dawson, F.S.A.

Amongst these loosely thrown together records I found an account of the bringing to England, in the year 1608, of 100 tons of silver ore, 20 tons of which were sent to be smelted and refined at Maresfield, near Uckfield in Sussex.

³ Dr. Johnson, in his journey to Scotland and the Western Islands in 1773, wrote speaking of Fort Augustus, "The country is totally denuded of its wood, but the stumps both of oaks and firs which are still found show that it has been once a forest of large timber." In the South (he writes of Montrose), "The country is still naked." And "From the bank of the Tweed to St. Andrews I have never seen a single tree which I did not believe to have grown up far within the present century . . . the whole country is extended in uniform nakedness: a tree might be a show in Scotland as a horse in Venice."

To go into details: In the early years of James I. of England (VI. of Scotland) the report was current that gold and silver had been discovered, and that the King was losing his 10 per cent. dues, which were smuggled into private pockets. The finding of the first silver reported was in 1606, by Sandy Maund, who hit upon a heavy piece of red metal in the lead mines, Linlithgow, "traced with many small strings like unto hairs or threads when he broke it with his mattock." This created a great excitement, and a Commission sat on the subject, called by the King's Secret Council; the stone is described as coming from "God's Blessing" mine, and as from "out of God's treasure houses."

Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote on 10th August, 1608, as follows to Cecil, Lord Salisbury, congratulating the King on the promise of riches to the Exchequer⁴:—

MY VERY GOOD LORD,

I account myself beholden to your Lordship for your news out of Scotland, that of the mine being of special importance—you will smile to yourself that I rather shew affection towards the mine. But your Lordship knoweth that if the King have money enough other matters will be easily compassed.

(Signed)

Yr. l. most assured frende,

R. CANT. Lambeth.

In 1607-8 the Royal Mint was in the Tower of London, and Sir Richard Martin, Alderman of the city of London, was Mint Master. The reports and letters I refer to exist at the British Museum and Record Office, connected with the Sir Julius Cæsar⁵ papers dealing with the affairs of the Royal Mint. The official who represented the Privy Council as Warden of the Mint and the King was Lord Knyvett, known in history as the man who searched the vaults of the Houses of

⁴ *S.P. Dom. James I.*, Vol. xxxv. No. 47.

⁵ Sir Richard Martin, Alderman of London, Master of the Mint, was father of the first wife of Sir Julius Cæsar, Judge of the Court of Requests and Chancellor of the Exchequer of James I.

Parliament and found the gunpowder, and to whom Guy Fawkes confessed. The correspondence which follows shows Mr. Edmund Doubleday, a Scotch goldsmith, under the control of Mr. Russell, an English Mint official. The ore was brought by ship to Newhaven, then up the Ouse by barge, then by carts to Maresfield.

[LETTER FROM MR. DOUBLEDAY TO LORD SALISBURY.]⁶

11th December, 1608.

RIGHT HONORABLE.....

Since your Lordshipp and other of his Majesty's council of state gave direction for transportation of twentye tonne of his Ma^{ts} silver ure of Scotland into Sussex to be moulton at an iron furnace there according to a project propounded by Mr. Russell, I have in his company attended there for the affecting of the same service before the arrival of which ure we endeavored with those workmen which we took downe with us, to make preparation of many things which were to be used in the process of the work there, and Mr. Anthony Knyvett⁷ lay at Newhaven to provide boates and carriages for the conveying of the said ure to the furnace which after a long stay by means of contrary winds was performed. Since which time the said ure hath been burnt for the spending away of the sulphur, arsenicke and other substances which were over neere and unfriendly companions to the sayde ure. Upon Tuesday last the sixte day of this instante December (after diverse false charges of Coale and iron, cinder had been put into the furnace) the first charge of the saide ure was put into the saide iron furnace and an orderly course helde therein of proportion, both for ure and additame..... and there was good hope all that night, of a speedye and perfect working of the furnace: But the next daye being Weddensdaye about one of the cloke, in the afternoone, the furnace beganne to clogg and put both us and the furnace maister and all the workmen into great doute that the furnace woulde blowe out. Whereupon after much care and long debating of the cause of the alteration of the state of the bodye of the said furnace and of the disease, we concluded that it was a surfeyte which would kill the projecte unlesse there were a present remedy provided which we resolved, was then to be donne by evacuation of the melted substance, out of the body of the furnace and by drawing of the same to a more sparing dyett (I meane in giving it smaller charges of the myne) which was accordingly performed. Since which tyme, although the same

⁶ *S.P. Dom. James I.*, Vol. xxxviii. No. 23.

⁷ Sir Anthony Knyvett here mentioned was nephew of Lord Knyvett above referred to.

furnace hath had many dangerous fittes ; yet we were in some hope of recovery of the life of the project. Although it were with much more expense of money and tyme then was spoken of before your Lordshippe. But now so it is, right honorable, that after diverse assayes made of the metalline body coming oute of the furnace by melting of the sayde ure, I see the silver of so small valewe, that can be extracted from the same metalline body, that I am unwilling to have any more of the silver ure to be moulton in this iron furnace, for fear of an unrecoverable consumption of the same silver which Mr. Russell is unwilling to yelde unto (without speciall direction from your Lo^{ps}. [Lordship] and others of his Ma^{ties}. Counsell) being in hope that the silver is sonke into the chinks of the earth of the furnace, and although I will not denye but that some small quantity of silver there remayne ; yet I am in great doute that it is not neere the valewe of that which is wanting ; the one halfe of the said ure (at the leaste) being alreddie melted downe ; but seeing that projecte is his (and as he sayeth) referred indefinitely to his ordering, I will be contented to advise and forbear to his ordering, to commande untill I shall have more perfitte skill. Thus craving pardon for my bouldnes I humbly take leave and comitte your Ho. [honour] to the proteccion of the Almighty. Resting still,

Your Hon^{rs}. most humbly to bee commaunded,

E. D. DOUBLEDAY.

Marisfield in Sussex this day morning
the xj.th of (De)cember, 1608.

That Mr. Doubleday must have been at one time in the medical profession may be assumed by expressions used by him in reference to the furnace as of a body capable of disease, evacuation, sparing dyette, dangerous fits, a surfytte that would kill, and recovery of life. It is probable that science was in the hands of the Universities in those days, and a learned doctor would be a student of chemistry, so that the employment of a medical student as mining expert and goldsmith was natural in a sparsely populated country like Scotland.

The Mr. Russell referred to writes the following letter, which seems to follow Doubleday's letter. It is presumable that the trial was of some use to the Royal Mint, as a furnace master is sent for out of Sussex to conduct further operations.

[LETTER FROM MR. RUSSELL TO LORD SALISBURY, 1608.]⁸

Being instructed by my former errors I found both the means of preparation of the two ures, and the true furnace to work them in, to make perfect lead, and by consequent a true separation of the silver out of the ure. Meanwhile, I humbly crave your honour to signify to the right honourable the Lord Knyvett, that it is your honour's pleasure that the Master which your honour sent for out of Sussex may have competent consideration for his pains, being here this five weeks I have no longer use of him, and he will be much hindered in his private business.

THOMAS RUSSELL.

[*This, though not dated, is presumably from the Tower of London.*]

In studying this report and comparing it with the reports of various trials of ore from Scotland, it appears to be a portion of a series. The 100 tons of ore were sent to the Tower and submitted to different furnace masters, and the results docketed. But for us in Sussex it is only of importance to show how much was thought of our smelting industry, that 20 tons of silver ore should be sent all the way to a remote village of Sussex to be tested for the purpose of enriching the Exchequer of King James, and incidentally the people of Scotland.

I trust that these notes may lead to further research in the histories of the iron furnaces of Sussex.

⁸ *S.P. Dom. James I.*, Vol. xxxviii. No. 24.
