

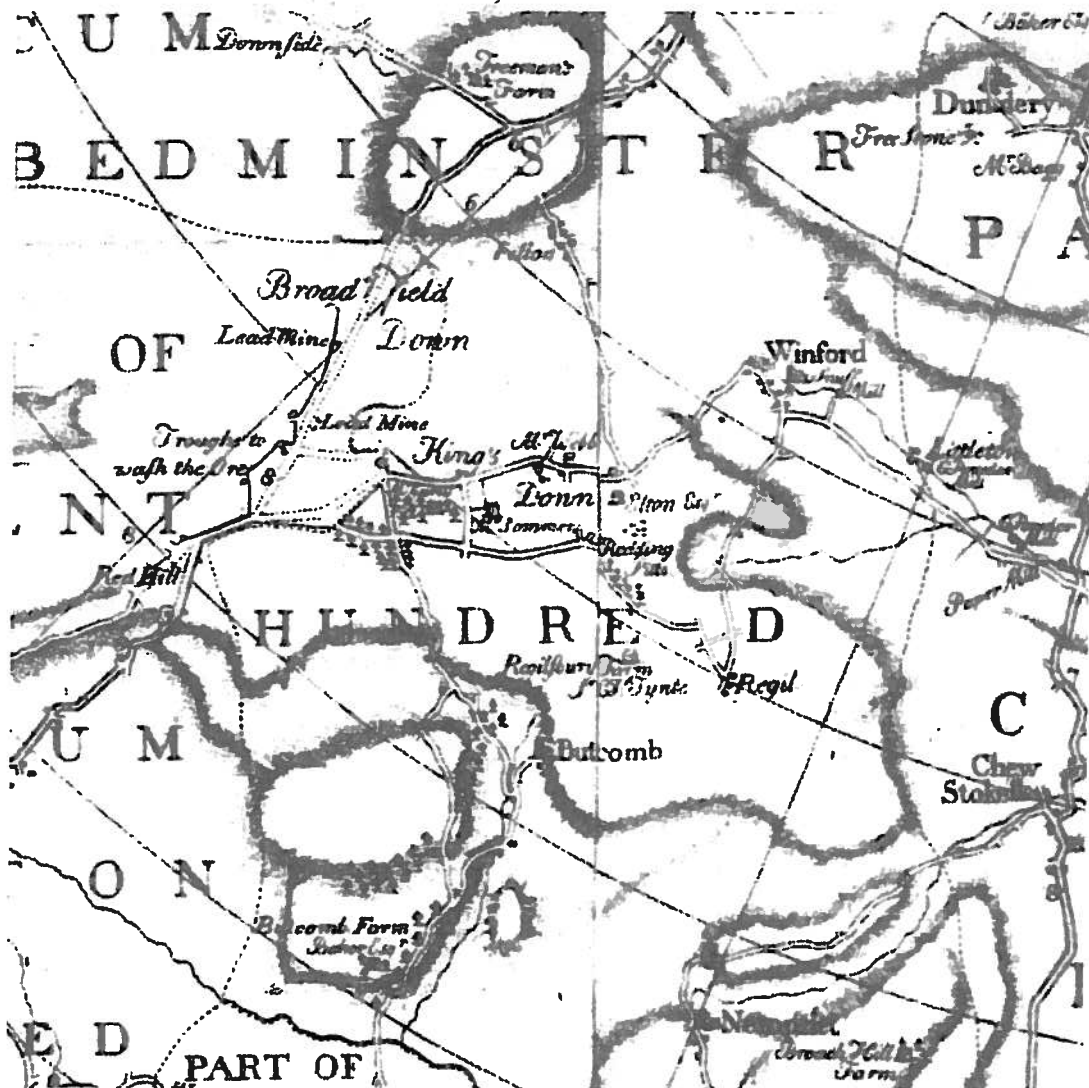
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APPENDIX 13

CHAPTER 7

Broadfield Down

Most of the parishes on Broadfield Down have a history of mining. To the north and east, lead was mined in Flax Bourton, Backwell and Redhill, and iron was obtained from the western and south slopes at Yatton, Congresbury and Wrington. An isolated outcrop of iron was also uncovered at Barrow Gurney. Mining on the down goes back to the 16th century or earlier, when calamine, copper and lead were the principal ores in demand. By 1740, the deposits at Broadfield Down may have held more promise than those on Mendip, as Strachey states; 'Broadwell Down afford good plenty of lead, whereas the Mendip Hills have heretofore been much famous than they are at present.'

Benjamin Donn's Bristol map (1769) showing the area around Broadfield Down



Besides lead and calamine, this area was worked for iron ore and ochre. The soil on the southwestern slope of the Down and at Red Hill, is a very rich red, and there is an entry in the churchwardens' account book for Yatton which hints that this, or some other locally acquired colour, may have been put to some use. In 1454 the churchwardens made payment, 'For feschyng (fetching) of a stone from Chelvey to grinde colers herewith.'

BARROW GURNEY AND FLAX BOURTON

In the 1860s, Barrow Gurney was known to have numerous veins of haematite, and in 1872 a mine was established on J.H. Blagrove's property by the pervasive mining agent, E.L. Owen. [*The main iron mines are in Slade Wood, on the hill near Barrow Court, where there were about six pits*]. About a mile and a half from this, there was an iron foundry at Kincot mill. In the 1880s, the foundry was managed by William Gregory, and he specialised in making farm equipment such as troughs and pumps. Iron ore was brought to the foundry from Winford, and William Gregory's daughter, Polly, used to do the hauling. The foundry ceased working during the First World War, when William's sons joined the forces.

BACKWELL

In the mid 17th century, part of Broadfield Down belonged to the manor of Backwell. Mining on the down must have been conducted on a relatively informal basis as there were no specific laws or rules governing the mines, such as those for the Forest of Mendip. Towards the close of the 17th century, the Lord of the Manor, Colonel Anthony Hastings, was having financial problems, and he was obliged to mortgage much of the manor's estate. On his death, his wife Caroletta remarried, but this failed to save the ailing estate, and it was sold shortly after her death, in 1698, to the Marquis of Bath. In 1709, the Marquis instigated the Down's first set of mining rules and customs. These applied to that part of Broadfield Down which came within Backwell Manor, and were principally concerned with lead and calamine workings. However, in article 13 of the new laws, mention was given to iron dug on the waste ground of the manor. Since at that time the manor may have extended over part of Winford, the waste ground could have referred to the eastern edge of the down, where large reserves of haematite were uncovered at a later date. The Marquis was demanding a three fourth share of all iron dug, and this probably acted as a deterrent to any prospecting miners. In later years he leased out the coal and ironstone beds at West Town, and was asking a more reasonable royalty of 6d per ton of iron.

One day in 1808, Sophia Weaver, aged about six, wandered into the fields at Downside to gather blackberries. Being long overdue, a diligent search was made for her, and the following day two men descended an old lead mine [*Sophia's Shaft*] having been drawn there by the barking of a dog. The girl was found unharmed in one of the galleries leading off the shaft, which was said to be over 100 feet deep. It is remarkable that Sophia did not plunge to her death or receive serious injuries from falling debris. She remained in the pit for 14 hours. This is only one example of numerous open shafts which were a constant threat to the unwary.

CONGRESBURY AND YATTON

The iron industry at Yatton goes back to Romano-British times. Excavations conducted at Ham Farm in 1965 indicated that there was an industrial complex there which included an iron smelter. The nearest source of ore to this point would have been Cadbury Hill on the edge of Broadfield Down.

According to one report, ochre was dug at Congresbury during the years leading up to 1824. This could refer to the red ochre which stains much of the soil in the south western corner of Broadfield Down, or, to the occasional outcrop of yellow ochre which occurs in the woods on the south side of the down at Congresbury and Wrington. The manor of Congresbury at this time was held by Bristol Corporation, and it had been in their possession since 1583, when Alderman John Carr entrusted it for the use of the Orphans' Hospital in Bristol. In 1853, the trustees issued a notice asking for tenders for the iron ore veins in 'Cleeve wood', Congresbury (Ball Wood and Corporation Wood), and a lease was drawn up with William Thomas and Richard Bryant. The lease was to last for 21 years, with a royalty of 2s 3d for every 2,700 lb of ore raised, but as fate would have it the mining was destined to last but a few years.

Thomas and Bryant traded under the name of the Cleeve Mining Co. William Thomas lived at Honey Hall, Congresbury, and probably provided the mining expertise for the company, whilst Richard Bryant was from Bristol, where he kept a shop in Old Market Street. Bryant was a man of varied interests and mining was only one of his many occupations. His other interests began with a carpentry and undertaking business, which blossomed into a horticultural and general building firm doing a bit of undertaking on the side, and ended up as a manufacturer of hot water heating systems. Bryant and Thomas originally went into partnership with D.W. Davies to develop a mine at Cleeve, but Davies withdrew his interest in 1854. Three years later Thomas had a dispute with Bryant which came uncomfortably close to a court case, and in 1858 the company was dissolved.

This unfortunate mining venture, which was far from harmonious, ended with Thomas leaving the parish on the tide of chance and change and moving to the mines at West Harptree. Bryant carried on his multifarious business in Old Market Street and engaged some men to work an iron mine on Durdham Down. An interesting feature of the whole affair is, that in the terms of the lease, Thomas and Bryant were obliged to keep a counting house in the woods near the mines.

There was one other company of note that exploited the iron deposits on the western slope of Broadfield Down. This was the Yatton Iron Co. run by Richard Trevithick (1821-1875) who lived for many years at Rose Villa in the village. Trevithick was born at Calstock in Cornwall, and though he bears the same name as his famous fellow countryman who invented the high pressure steam engine, the two were unrelated. On coming of age, Richard Trevithick found employment with the Cornish mining company owned by the Vivian family, and in 1846 he was transferred to Somerset as Captain of the Elborough mine. He disappears from the Mendip scene for a short period, but by 1851 he reappears on Broadfield Down, having left the Cornish-owned company and started a business of his own at Yatton. At first it seems as though he intended to establish a mining company, for in 1852 he bid unsuccessfully for the Ashton Hill iron mines. Instead, his business developed as a trading agency for iron ore. He bought ore from mine proprietors on Mendip and arranged for it to be transported northwards to the foundries and smelters. Besides this, he also worked some iron mines at Yatton, which are possibly those in King's Wood. In 1856 he raised 5,000 tons of ore from the Yatton mines, but in the following year the landowners sold King's Wood and thereafter his output was much lower. Between 1858 and 1862 he only shipped about 3,000 tons of ore from Yatton station, mostly to Bristol, but some found its way to the Midlands.

Captain Trevithick was probably typical of many iron ore merchants of his time. Buying and selling ore required an alert mind and a good knowledge of the current state of the market. It is curious that he used Yatton as his base, and he also acted as secretary and purser of the Exmouth Mine, Bridford, in the 1870s, and was a director of West Wheal Trevaunance, St Agnes for a short time. He had a large family, which included seven daughters, one son and an adopted nephew, and he was often seen in Yatton village driving a cartload of his children to school. Like many a Cornishman he was a Methodist, and his successful career came to a close in February 1875, with his burial in Yatton churchyard. His widow and family expatriated themselves from the mining days of Yatton by moving to Eastville in Bristol. One of the daughters apparently gleaned something from her father's knowledge and experience, for in 1880, a Miss Trevithick is reported to be wrangling with the Winford Iron Ore Redding Co. over the price they were asking for redding. The King's Wood iron mines were continued by J.B. Smith.

Broadfield Down

| BURIALS in the Parish of <u>Yatton</u> in the County of <u>Gloucestershire</u> in the year One thousand eight hundred and <u>Seventy five</u> | | | | |
|---|--------|----------------------------|------|-------------------------------------|
| Name. | Abode. | When buried. | Age. | By whom the Ceremony was performed. |
| No. 81 Charles Thomas | Yatton | Jan 7 31 | 73 | J. W. Hardman Helena W. P. H. |
| No. 82 Elizabeth Dehan | Yatton | Feb 6 4 th | 68 | J. W. Hardman Curate & Clerk |
| No. 83 Harriet Lowrey | Yatton | Feb 7 6 th | 68 | J. W. Hardman Curate & Clerk |
| No. 84 Emma Louisa Dorwood | Yatton | Feb 10 10 | 3 | J. W. Hardman Curate |
| No. 85 Richard Trevithick | Yatton | Feb 17 20 th | 63 | J. W. Hardman Curate |
| No. 86 Emily Parsons | Yatton | March 9 th | 23 | J. W. Hardman Curate & Clerk |
| No. 87 Adah Gregory | Yatton | March 9 th | 83 | J. W. Hardman Curate & Clerk |
| No. 88 John Hebbler | Yatton | March 14 th | 16 | J. W. Hardman Curate |

Entry in the Yatton Parish Register for Richard Trevithick Yatton (No. 85). Photograph Roger Starr 2011. [The area where Richard Trevithick was buried, in Yatton Churchyard, was re-used so the grave stone can no longer be found]

The next development at Congresbury serves as an example of an 'exciting discovery' ending in disappointment. This occurred in 1870, when a workman by the name of Chamberlain was hired to make a roadway on the Congresbury estate of J.E. Jones of Court Farm, Wrington. The new roadway was in Urchinwood, and the track connected Woodlands to Woolmers. Whilst digging there, Chamberlain discovered 'some portions of ochre', of which at the time little notice was taken. 'However, it has been found that it exists in large quantities and is now being worked with apparent success. On Tuesday there was conveyed some 15 tons to Yatton per rail, the value at the pit's mouth being £3 per ton; and in all probability constant employment will be given to many, which is much needed in the neighbourhood.' This bold statement turned out to be its last for judging from the present state of the pit the work did not progress any further. Two years later, J.F. King found some 'excellent quality ochre near Hillside Villa whilst planting fir trees.'

In 1881, a renowned Cornish mining magnate by the name of Edwin Carter became interested in the iron mines in this district. In his lifetime Carter was involved with over 30 mines in Cornwall and Devon, and amongst these was the Indian Queens mine referred to in an earlier chapter. During his brief stay in Congresbury, Carter lived with his wife and daughter at Brinsea, and it seems most likely that he was responsible for the large vertical shaft on Cadbury Hill [*Cadbury Camp Mineshaft*]. In March 1978, a hole began to appear which daily grew larger in dimensions, much to the consternation of the local inhabitants. The shaft has all the hallmarks of the Cornish approach to mining, with its large collared entrance and vertical range of at least 150 feet. This trial for iron seems to have overlooked the fact that in north Somerset iron ore was only found as pockets trapped within the superficial fissures and interfaces of the bedrock. Arthur Viney, a Yatton miner, may have been more successful when he and his colleagues dug for ore on the same hill during the early years of the 20th century. However, neither Carter nor Viney prolonged their stay, and Carter departed from Somerset wiser as well as lighter in pocket.

WRINGTON

In early times Wrington was one of the more important mining parishes on Broadfield Down, but little remains to commemorate this. There used to be sets of washing troughs for lead ore at Redhill but these were demolished long ago to make way for a piggery. There are also two fields known as the Buddles, one at Harvey's Farm and the other at Lye Hole, but here again the original buddle pits have disappeared. Many of the mines have been filled in and levelled to make way for the airport and the farmer's plough, but a few relics of earlier grooves and spoil heaps can be seen at Redhill, Littler Plantation and in Prestow Wood. Wrington is one of the few parishes in north Somerset to have any surface igneous rock, but, in common with its neighbouring parishes, it was the Carboniferous Limestone and Dolomitic Conglomerate which bore the minerals.

It has been claimed by archaeologists that at Worship's Farm, near the Wrington-Butcombe boundary, there are some ochre pits which date from the 12th to 14th centuries. Not far from this, at Row of Ashes Farm, the remains of a Romano-British iron bloomery were excavated and reported on in 1973. Besides these two finds, there is little else to suggest that Wrington supported much of an iron or ochre industry until the arrival of some Cornish miners in the early part of the 19th century.

In 1841, there were seven iron miners living at Wrington, and they were employed by Captain Thomas Robarts. Robarts lived at Oatlands Cottage on Wrington Hill, and combined his enthusiasm for his job with a sense of adventure. In 1847, he sent a report to Mr R. Vivian in Cornwall which read;

'I have been a resident in this part for the last eight years, and have traversed this mineral country from the Bristol river to Wells, which is about 30 miles north and south, and from Bath to Bridgwater river, which is about 40 miles, east and west, and have, in doing so, examined very carefully the geological and mineralogical position of those localities, and find they are composed of mineral or mountain limestone, old red sandstone, new red sandstone, lias, penant, magnesian limestone, quartz, fluor-spar, silex and jasper; there are hundreds of lodes and veins in this range, which carry metallic and mineral ores, such as lead, iron, copper, manganese, calamine, barytes, pyrites, redde, antimony, coal, yellow ochre, and white lead ores I think Somerset will make a great mining district, some day. I have an account of a little mine that paid in 1822, £808 15s 10d for dues; and take the average, they were no more than 15 fathoms deep, and they rose hundred of pounds' worth, 8 or 10 fathoms deep'

Mining Journal 1847

Whilst at Wrington, Robarts supervised the Oatlands Iron Mine, which was situated just above the Water Catch on Simshill. In June 1844, the owner of Oatlands, Mrs Aveline, paid £130 14s in dues for iron to the Rector of Wrington, and the following month she also passed on a royalty for manganese. Robarts and his miners had packed their picks and shovels and moved on by the time of the next census in 1851, and they made no further contribution in making Somerset 'a great mining district'.

Broadfield Down

The boom in the iron trade during 1873 did not affect the parish of Wrington directly, but the Weston Mercury reported in June of that year: 'There was difficulty in hiring casual labourers for haymaking in the villages around the Mendips, particularly in Wrington. Many regular workers had refused the offers made for an acre of mowing, and claimed that they can earn more money at some of the local mines. Employment at the mines was easy to get, and the wages ranged from 17s to 22s weekly for nine hours work per day.'

Besides the ochre pits at Worship's Farm, it has been suggested that one of the grooves in Prestow Wood is also an old ochre working. A similar site occurs near the summit of Simshill Wood, but there is no evidence which shows that any of these pits were worked exclusively for ochre.