

THE COAL MINES OF THE FLOCKTON AREA NEAR HORBURY, WEST YORKSHIRE:

REPORT OF FIELD MEETING, 9TH APRIL, 1978

by Ivor Brown and John Goodchild

Introduction (I.J. Brown)

Some 35 members, friends and 3 dogs met on a fine morning at the N.C.B.'s Caphouse Colliery (Grid Ref. SE 252164) two miles west of Horbury on the A642 Wakefield to Huddersfield Road. The meeting began with a short introduction and N.C.B. officers then conducted the party around the steam engine house and the boiler house. The engine was in steam and a number of runs were made through the 140 yard shaft with the various safety 'trip' devices being demonstrated. Made by Davy Bros. of Sheffield, the engine is believed to have been installed at Caphouse in 1876, having been purchased second-hand from a woollen mill. It is a very small colliery engine with twin cylinders, each 16 inches in diameter, 3 ft stroke; it normally works on 80 p.s.i. pressure. The engine has dimple slide-valve gear and is well-maintained although its future is in some doubt. The winding drum, formerly of timber, is now of steel and is controlled by a Black's braking system. In the 11 ft diameter shaft there are twin cages running on rope guides.

Steam is raised by two Lancashire Boilers each now fitted with chain grate stokers. The steam is also used to drive a small auxiliary pumping engine which was also demonstrated.

The headframe is of timber, braced with steel, and mounted on a natural sandstone and brick surface building complex. No new timber headframes have been constructed at large mines in Britain since 1911 and the Caphouse headframe is almost certainly the last surviving headframe of this type.

The mine is a small mine by N.C.B. standards (as are most of the working mines in the immediate vicinity) employing 230 men producing about 4,000 tons of coal per week from the Beeston Seam. There are three shafts, Caphouse 140 yd deep, Hope 215 yd and Inman 97 yd and a more recent drift through which the coal is now raised by conveyor.

The Itinerary (J. Goodchild)

The Flockton and Denby Grange collieries, in the townships of Flockton, Whitley and Sitlington, worked initially the Flockton Thick (two 2 ft thick seams with a dirt parting) and the Flockton Thin (a 15 in seam, of excellent quality). Both seams had been worked since the 1770s, when each was developed on a large scale to take advantage of the cheap transport facilities offered by the Calder and Hebble Navigation which was re-opened in August 1769. By this date the clause in an earlier Navigation Act of 1758 which prohibited the downward carriage of coal had been repealed and repairs consequent upon floods had been effected. The remains of these collieries, which, in the manner of their period, were collections of working pits rather than the single grouping of pits and pithead buildings that is found today, are an unusual survival and illustrate a considerable number of facets of colliery engineering, drainage and transport from the later eighteenth century onwards. The pits were linked by two railway complexes, one dating from the 1770s and the other from the 1850s, and a remarkable number of features from both complexes can still be recognised on the ground. The itinerary (for key see Fig. 1).

- A. The tour began at Caphouse Colliery, which is still at work and which adjoins the new (c. 1830) improved line of the Wakefield and Austerlands turnpike road (Act 1759, disturnpiked 1882); a milestone stands across the road from the pit. A shaft on the site of Caphouse is shown on a mining plan of 1791 and a lease of the coal here was taken in 1778. Until 1812 the colliery was worked by the owners of nearby Flockton Colliery, and, after a period of disuse it was, in 1827, leased to the owner of the Denby Grange. It has been suggested that the shaft at Caphouse, although widened and deepened, may be the oldest working coalmine shaft in the country; it is certainly so in Yorkshire. The pit's steam-powered winding engine, which is still in regular use, is housed in an engine house with the date 1875 over the door together with the initials of Miss Emma Lister Kaye, who owned Denby Grange Colliery from 1871 until her death in October 1905. The pit headstocks are of pitchpine, unique in the Yorkshire coalfield. On the opposite side of the road can be seen the route of the Flockton waggonway, which worked c. 1775 to 1893, running between parallel stone walls, while some half a mile towards Wakefield, stone sleeper blocks occur as the topping of the wall on the western side of the main road.

- B. The Hope Pit of Denby Grange Colliery was laid out in 1827 by John Blenkinsop, Manager of the famous Middleton Colliery near Leeds, a consultant mining engineer and the inventor of the world's first practicable steam locomotive. Hope Pit first produced coal in 1829 and horse gins were in use here until the 1920s. The beam pumping engine house survives; the engine started in the morning at 8 lb pressure and finished in the afternoon with 6 lb. Beyond the colliery can be seen another old wooden headframe, now long disused. The Hope Pit, although using some antiquated surface equipment, was one of the first pits in Yorkshire to be equipped with electrical coal cutters. Coal has been worked in the area on a large scale since at least 1775.
- C. The Denby Grange Colliery railway passes under the main road in a tunnel, the southern portal of which is visible. Negotiations for the tunnel's construction were in progress at the end of 1852 and contracts for the railway's construction were let early in 1853; previously a monthly £55 to £85 had been paid in turnpike tolls. This railway was a most ambitious venture for its period, and connected the pits forming the Denby Grange Colliery with the Barnsley branch of the L.Y.R., and with the Calder and Hebble Navigation, both at Calder Grove, some four and a half miles from end to end. The railway's features included two tunnels, four inclined planes, two sets of reversing necks, various over- and under-bridges and a length of "orthodox" line. The railway cost something over £30,000 and coal was first taken to the L.Y.R. in May 1854. A rough gradient profile, with the points on the present itinerary marked (Fig. 2).
The colliery was producing over 160,000 tons of coal in 1916, almost all of which passed over the railway, and a private passenger service for colliers was operated between Hope Pit and Prince of Wales. As it was necessary to have a good start when running downhill to Prince of Wales (the lower part of the incline was fairly flat and the wire rope had of course to be dragged behind) the effects of travelling in the carriages remained in the minds of its passengers for many years!
- D. The Denby Grange railway followed approximately the line of the present New Hall Approach Road, and the remains of a cutting can be seen close to the entrance to that road at the point where the railway passed under Hardcastle Lane. A short distance beyond there is an engine pond and chimney and a ramp down which the waggons ran to achieve their initial impetus when descending the long incline to Prince of Wales. This line ultimately closed about 1942, when railway operational costs began to exceed those of road transport. Two waggons were a normal rope-load on the inclines.
- E. A much earlier transport system worked through a tunnel which runs under the line of the Denby Grange railway. This tunnel is still accessible and was visited. Between 1772 and 1775 a colliery was opened on the New Hall estate of the Countess of Bute by Richard Milnes of neighbouring Flockton and his four sons, and a wooden wagonway was built down to the River Calder at Horbury Bridge, the total costs being some £6,000. Under further leases of 1778 the colliery's royalty was extended west and south, and further leases again were taken in 1787. It was probably in connection with these later leases that the railway was extended through the tunnel. A plan of 1793 refers to the "New winning or Tunnel" colliery and shows a pillar for its support. The tunnel is some three hundred feet in length and can be entered from its southern end, where it is about 80 inches wide and some 90 in high; wooden sleepers could until recently be felt in its floor. It continued in use, always horse-worked in this section, until the collieries which it served were closed in 1893. It was noticed that the tunnel is oriented towards Flockton Village, - in fact towards pits which are shown as open on a map of 1790. To the south can be seen a twenty-arch railway viaduct, of uncertain date, leading towards Lane Eng Colliery; this colliery was working in 1803 and closed in 1893.
- F. The pumping engine whose remains can be seen alongside the Denby Grange Railway route probably dates from c. 1790. This pump was necessary as a 19 yd downthrow fault runs parallel and close to the Denby Grange railway, and water from the new workings of 1787 onwards had to be pumped from below the fault to flow away down the earlier adits or water levels. The engine apparently ceased to be used in 1812, and was converted into a cottage but the front, thick wall for supporting the beam can still be discerned. Adjoining

the pump there was a steam whimsey or winding engine but this has now gone entirely. From a position adjoining the engine numerous spoil heaps and water-level shaft heaps can be seen.

G.H. Near the incline of the Denby Grange railway a steel haulage rope can be seen on the roadside and tramplate fragments are still found in adjoining spoil heaps. Another railway, about a mile in length and a (small) part of the J. & J. Charlesworth Colliery "empire" in the West Riding of Yorkshire, crossed the route just beyond the present New Hall Prison Camp. This took coal to a roadside staith in Middlestown village. Although closed in this section by 1851 a large embankment survives close to Middlestown village. Nearby stands the medieval moated manorhouse site of New Hall. This building exhibits at least one piece of medieval sculpture. For some years the building was the home of Richard Carter, a seventeenth century businessman who made a fortune from coalmining and agriculture. With a part of this he built a church and almshouses at Flockton and endowed the school there. Beyond New Hall, at Chapel Hill, the line of shafts on the water level of c. 1772-5 which drained the Milnes Colliery can be clearly seen. The itinerary continued back towards Caphouse and the Reindeer Inn along Hayne Lane. This lane crosses the line of the Flockton waggonway by a bridge which still exists near a further prominent spoil heap.

J.K. After lunch the party travelled by car along the line of the unimproved Austerlands turnpike and ultimately along the Barnsley and Grange Moor turnpike (1759 - 1874), passing several pit sites, colliery cottages and the site of the colliery's workshops and gasworks. En route, Flockton Manor House site was seen: this was the home of the colliery's owners from the 1780s. Flockton Village itself was the site of some very special social experiments (theatre, sportground, library, etc.) in the mid-nineteenth century. According to a contemporary report on the mining community at Flockton:

"A Temperance Society comprising upwards of 200 members has combined its efforts with the Horticultural Society in diminishing the evils arising from resort to public houses ... one evening a week the school room is opened as a reading room, (the mine owner) attends for an hour, and (his) lecture may be expected to diminish the attraction of the public house and gaming table" (Report of the Commissions into the state of the population in the Mining Districts, 1845).

- L. Lane End Colliery closed in 1893; its large spoilheaps demonstrate the late date at which it worked. Surface coal-sorting replaced underground sorting about 1880 and this resulted in the appearance of the larger, modern pit tips. Here there are four shafts, and the remains of the pumping engine house can be seen. Sections of pit-top tramplate are to be found in this locality.
- M. Little London (a small hamlet) so named before large-scale colliery developments in the vicinity occurred from the earlier 1850s. Nearby can be seen the route of the Denby Grange railway running downhill from its long tunnel under Stocks Moor, as well as the quite extraordinary upper shunting neck, in its deep cutting, and the site of the Victoria Pit. Fig. 3 shows the layout at Little London as it was in 1873.
- N. Although not visible on this occasion the water level entrance and outfall in Coxley Valley can still be seen. It is stone-lined and delivers ochre water into the beck. The water level at its entrance is slightly off-line from the spoilheaps which mark the line of the water level in its upper section. The level appears to date from 1772-5.
- O. At Horbury Bridge the stone work of the Staiths of the Flockton waggonway (latterly a curious 3 ft 9 in gauge) can be clearly seen alongside the 'widening' (equivalent to a railway siding) of the new line of the Calder and Hebble Navigation built under an Act of 1834. This new cut was opened in 1838, the older staiths having been on a section of navigable cul-de-sac behind the present Bingley Arms Inn. The railway here (and to the bottom of the Emroyd incline of c. 1844) was steam-powered with a single 0-4-0 loco. from 1870 until 1893. There are three bridges at Horbury Bridge - one over the Calder and one over each of the navigation cuts at each end of it. A staith and staith house for cart-borne coal can be seen below

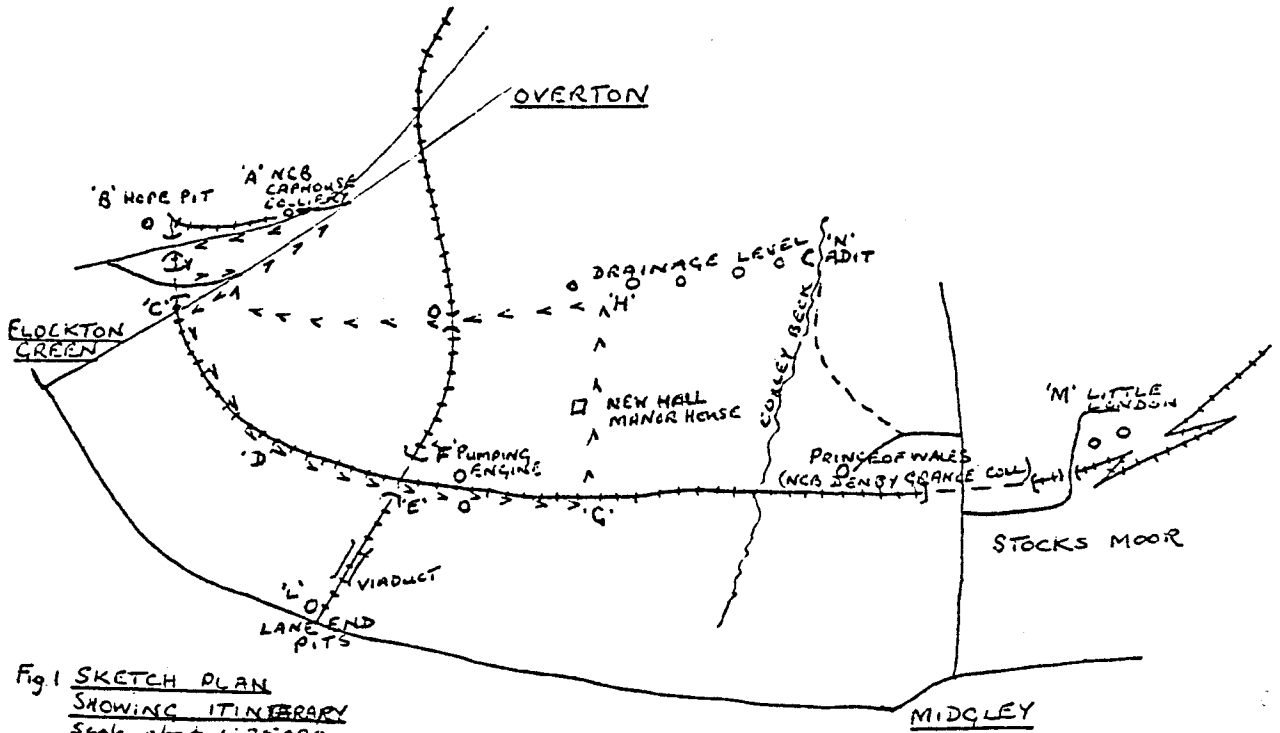


Fig 1 SKETCH PLAN
SHOWING ITINERARY
Scale about 1:25,000

KEY RAILWAYS ————
ROADS ————
WALKING ROUTE >>>
TUNNEL ————
PIT SITES. ○

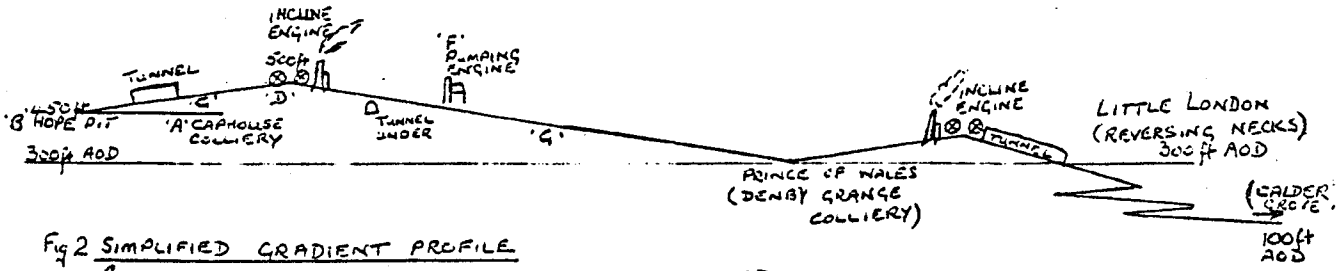


Fig 2 SIMPLIFIED GRADIENT PROFILE
COLLIERY RAILWAY: CAPHOUSE TO LITTLE LONDON

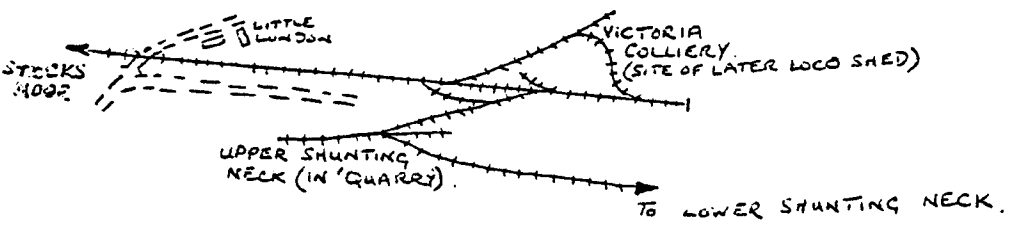


Fig 3 ENLARGEMENT OF UPPER SHUNTING NECK
AT LITTLE LONDON IN 1873.

the New Cut bridge, together with the Navigation's Horbury agent's house and the (disused) side-cut and flood-lock connecting the Old and New cuts.

The above notes are extracted from a partially-written booklet on the subject of the Flockton and Denby Grange Collieries which it is anticipated will be published by the Wakefield Heritage Group.

The meeting concluded with a visit to the old bell pit area around Bentley Grange, near Emley. This is a classical bell pit area with round mounds, six feet high, flat-topped and in rows. These consist of the waste from shallow pits sunk to the Tankersley Ironstone Seam: having collapsed the shafts have left small hollows in the mounds, each containing a bush or tree. The bell pits are clearly indicated on the 1:10,560 O.S. Map (Sheet SE21SE). A description of the mining and geology of this area is given in "The Mining and Quarrying Industries in the Huddersfield District" by D.H. Holmes, published in 1967 by the Tolson Memorial Museum, Huddersfield, price 40p.

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