

by John Goodchild

Walton Colliery - or to use its proper title, Sharlston West Colliery - was sunk at the end of the nineteenth century in an area in which coal had been worked already for several centuries. The present colliery lies close to the boundary between the townships of Walton and Crofton, but just inside the former, and original documents in the author's collection refer to a "Colemyne" in Walton in 1635, while in 1691 the owner of the Walton Hall estate "hath sett up a colliery" and was selling coal to the neighbouring villages at below cost price; in 1717 as a Papist he registered details of his estate including "one Coal mine within the Mannor of Walton". References to field names indicating coalmining activities occur in deeds of 1698 and 1727.

Early coalmining at Walton was never upon a major scale, owing to the lack of the cheap transport facilities which only waterways could then provide, coupled with the thinness and comparatively poor quality of the upper seams. Even when the Barnsley Canal was publicly opened through Walton in 1799 these latter factors militated against a revival of coalmining. It was not until both economic feasibility and technical ability provided an opportunity to sink to the deeper seams, from the 1860s, that deep modern collieries were attempted at Walton and its immediate vicinity, making use now of both the newly-developed railway system and the older canal.

Coal was found on the Walton Hall estate in 1868, and a report on it printed in the following year. A nine-inch bore had been put down to nearly 800 feet, using the steam apparatus of Mather and Platt of the Salford Iron Works, and it was that firm which promoted a company - The Walton Coal Co. Ltd. - to work this coal. A lease was signed in 1872 and some £30 000 was stated contemporaneously to have been spent, but the coal proved of insufficient thickness to be worth working on the extensive scale necessary for adequate financial returns. The firm went into liquidation in 1877, the coal having then not been worked for some time. It was followed by The Hare Park Coal Co. Ltd., probably working under an assignment of the earlier lease agreed in 1880, but that firm too was in liquidation in 1884. Not only were there geological difficulties to be contended with, but the British coal industry was during this period (in fact from 1874) in a period of depression. Nearby, E.J. Waterhouse's Chevet Coal Co. was in operation by 1872, when a fatal accident occurred, but here again the coal was insufficiently thick and the colliery was closed by 1876, some £52 000 having been spent and the shaft's tubbing by that time having given way.

In neighbouring Crofton, the antiquity of the coal industry is illustrated by one of the old open (strip) fields being known as the Coal Pit Field. Here coal had been owned and worked by the Priors of Nostell, and their coalmine at Birkwood was in operation through to the 1660s: Richard de Wombwell, Prior 1372 - 1385, had constructed a water-drainage channel for his Priory's coalpits and they were commented on in the reign of Henry VIII by the Royal antiquary, John Leland. Coalmining rights in Crofton were regarded as valuable and other pits were at work in Crofton itself during the immediate post-Reformation period, although they apparently ceased to be worked towards the end of the 17th century, as the local landowner was advised in 1690 to set a colliery going on his estate. A temporary revival occurred early in the eighteenth century and in 1743 a local field was known as the Wind Gin Close; a much more major development occurred from 1777 and a steam pumping engine had been erected by 1780. This colliery probably closed about 1804, and although various projects were considered for the development of mines in Crofton in the early and mid-19th century, in the event no developments occurred until the 1880s.

In 1881 H.S.L. Wilson, the owner of the Crofton Hall estate, leased coal under Crofton to the New Sharlston Collieries Co. Ltd. Sharlston Colliery, this company's other pit, lies some two miles NNE of the Walton Colliery site: its history is detailed in the present writer's pamphlet 'Coalmining at Sharlston, an historical essay', Wakefield, 1976. The New Company had bought the colliery in the mid-1870s and worked the Crofton coal under the lease of 1881. Wilson received his minimum rent of £50 in May 1881 and the major coal rents came in from a year later. By 1900 he had received over £25 000 in such rents and was thus enabled to live in some affluence during

STEAM ENGINES AT WALTON COLLIERY

<u>Description</u>	<u>Manufacturer</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Power</u>	<u>Pressure</u>
No. 1 Winding Engine	J. Fowler (Leeds)	1880	1000	80 p.s.i.
No. 2 " "	Roley & Co. (Lincoln)	1924	2000	150 p.s.i.
Turbine	Bellis & Morcom	1924	1875 KVA (high (low	175 p.s.i. 16 p.s.i.
Turbine	" " "	1926	2500 KVA	170 p.s.i.
Compressor	" " "	1923	750 hp (steam (air	180 p.s.i. 80 p.s.i.
Fan Drive	" " "	1924	550 hp	160 p.s.i.
Auxiliary Generator plus 3 steam pumps (one Tangye feed & two Weir ram) & 1 steam hammer	" " "	1924	50 hp	160 p.s.i.

BOILERS

<u>Description</u>	<u>Manufacturer</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Evaporation Rate</u>	<u>Pressure</u>
Lancashire 1)	Thompson (Liverpool)	1923	1200 g.p.m.	160 p.s.i.
" 2)	" "	1923	"	"
" 3)	" "	1923	"	"
" 4)	" "	1924	"	"
" 5)	" "	1945	"	"
" 6)	" "	1939	"	"
" 7)	" "	1939	"	"
" 8)	" "	1940	"	"
" 9)	" "	1942	"	"
" 10)	" "	1944	"	"
" 11)	" "	1947	"	"
" 12)	" "	1947	"	"

the period of national agricultural depression (his other income was in large part from farm and cottage rents) and even to rebuild his mansion and to invest in other shares. Wilson had, in fact, purchased New Sharlston Collieries shares to the nominal value of £1000 in 1880 - an investment which he retained.

A colliery to work the coals leased by the New Sharlston Co. was envisaged by that concern at Walton, where excellent rail (Midland as well as L&YR) and canal transport facilities were immediately at hand, and by means of which long distance underground carriage costs could be avoided. The Barnsley Canal had recently been enlarged and modernised and railway sidings could be negotiated with the mainline companies. One of the earlier Walton pits had had a siding, the remains of which can be seen alongside the West Riding and Grimsby line near Hare Park Junction. The new shafts were put down on glebe land acquired from the Rector of Crofton and the incipient colliery is shown on the second edition of the six inch O.S. sheet, surveyed in 1890, along with the safely-at-a-distance explosives store, for which a licence was obtained in March 1890. The company was now in an improving financial position only one dividend (of 2½%) had been paid between its registration in October 1873 and the early 1880s on the capital of something over £300 000, but in 1890 a profit of £33 498 was made. The output of coal in that year was the largest in the history of the concern. The chairman of the Company at this time was T.Y. Strachan - who incidentally was Liberal candidate for Wakefield at that time and stood, unsuccessfully, for that borough constituency at the election of 1892.

The actual sinking of the new colliery at Walton appears to have been something in the nature of a local non-event. The records of the local authorities of the time (Walton township and the Wakefield Union Rural

Sanitary Authority) do not refer to it, the local newspapers and almanacs do not allude to it and the local newspapers' abstracts of the company's annual reports only allude to the new sinkings in passing and general terms. Work on sinking was underway by February 1890, and a row of cottages was built in the same year; the N.C.B. give the sinking date as 1890, but almost certainly work must have been continued into the following year. A new locomotive was bought for the pit in 1890. Unfortunately, that useful indicator of the commencement of coal working, the establishment of special mining rules, is not available specifically in regard to Sharlston West Colliery as it worked under the Sharlston Colliery rules.

By 1901 there were 610 employees at Walton, where the Haigh Moor seam was worked, and in 1903 730, when the coal was being used for coke-making, gas-making and household purposes. By 1911, at the height of prosperity of the coal industry, there were 958 employees, and in 1930 there were about 1200, when the colliery was described as being "among the best and most completely equipped in the country". Today, some 740 men produce about 230 000 tons of coal each year from the Lidgett seam at about 450 yards from the surface.

References

Wakefield Metropolitan District Council Archives, in particular Goodchild Loan MSS, Waterston MSS, Simpson MSS, Wilson MSS, Sharlston Colliery MSS.

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