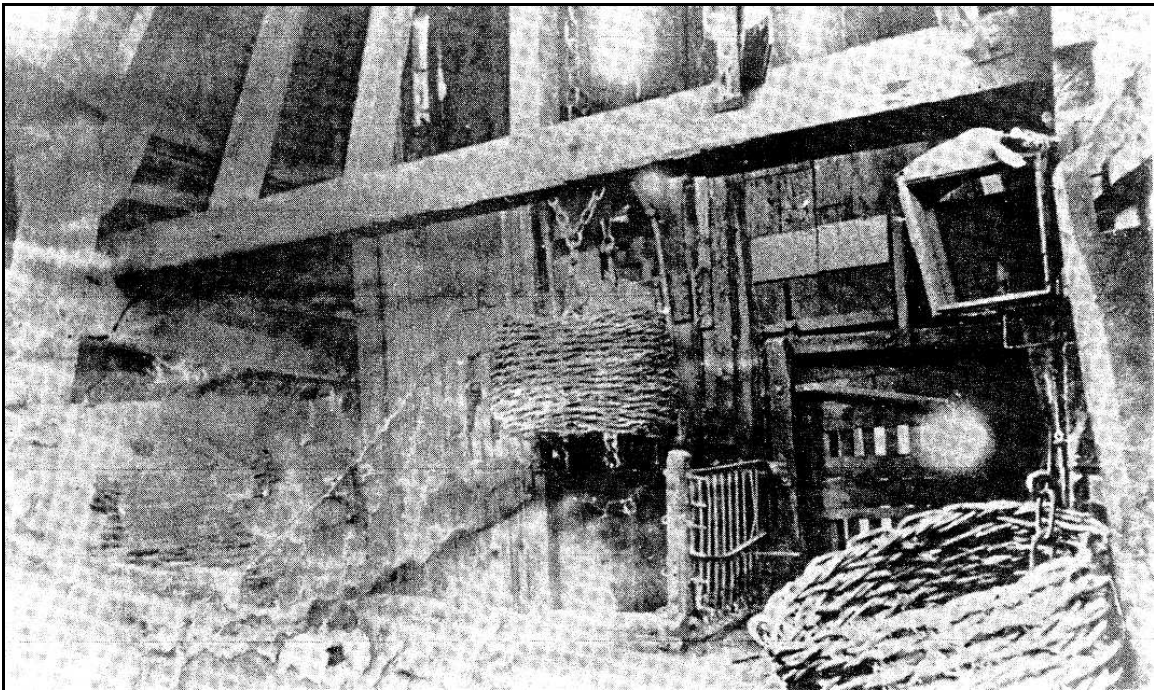


*THE 1842 GENERAL STRIKE AND ITS
EFFECT ON COAL MINERS IN NW
LEICESTERSHIRE*



**A corve wicker coal basket being raised to the pit head
from the bottom of the pit. Thought to be Heather Colliery c. 1860.**

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JANUARY 2021

PREFACE

On the 4th May, 1842, Thomas Duncombe presented to Parliament a Chartist petition signed by 3,250,000 people. As well as demanding the six points of the Charter the document also complained about the "cruel wars against liberty"; and an "unconstitutional police force"; the 1834 Poor Law; factory conditions and church taxes on Nonconformists. It also included an attack on Queen Victoria, contrasting her income of "£164 17s. 10d. a day" with that of "the producing millions". The Chartists were furious when the House of Commons rejected the petition by 287 votes to 47.

The People's Charter called for six reforms to make the political system more democratic:-

1. A vote for every man twenty-one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for a crime.
2. The secret ballot to protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.
3. No property qualification for Members of Parliament to allow the constituencies to return the man of their choice.
4. Payment of Members, enabling tradesmen, working men, or other persons of modest means to leave or interrupt their livelihood to attend to the interests of the nation.
5. Equal constituencies, securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors, instead of allowing less populous constituencies to have as much or more weight than larger ones.
6. Annual Parliamentary elections, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation, since no purse could buy a constituency under a system of universal manhood suffrage in every twelve months.

This decision by Parliament was quickly followed by a series of strikes in the industrial districts of the country which **started in the Staffordshire Midland Coalfield**. Workers spread news of the Staffordshire strikes to their fellow laborers across the region, aided by the radical Chartist newspaper the Northern Star, and unrest soon developed in the textile industry in Lancashire and Yorkshire. In some cases, striking workers stopped production by removed boiler plugs from newly installed steam engines in factories. As a result, these industrial disputes became known as "**The Plug Plot Riots**". Strikers were met by troops of Hussars, Lancers and Infantry, the inevitable result being that people were killed on both sides.

There were reports in the press that in the Staffordshire Potteries, factories and even private homes of the factory owners were being burned.

The turnouts were mainly focused in the industrial areas of Lancashire, Staffordshire, Cheshire and Yorkshire but spread to the coal mines in the midlands and north east and as far south as Cornwall.

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CONTENTS

PAGE 4 – EXAMPLES OF COAL MINING CONDITIONS IN NW LEICESTERSHIRE IN 1842

PAGE 9 – THE RESULTS OF THE STAFFORDSHIRE MINERS INFILTRATION OF THE NW LEICESTERSHIRE COALFIELD

PAGE 18 – WILLIAM STENSON

GLOSSARY OF MORE UNUSUAL TERMS USED

THE YEOMANRY CAVALRY – Initially formed in 1761 as a voluntary cavalry and created from local small farmers and land owners who were known as Yeomen. At first they had to provide their own horse, swords and uniform. Officers were drawn from the nobility or landed gentry. In the first half of the 19th century they were used to quell riots and civil disturbances.

CORVE BASKET - A reinforced woven hazel wicker basket for loading the coals into by the miners at the coal face. These held from 6 to 8 cwt. of coal. When full they were mechanically wound up to the surface as shown in the following illustrations.

TURN OUT – A strike

TURN OUTS – Strikers

BIND - A term used in various areas to refer to shale, mudstone, clay or sandstone overlying the seam of coal.

LIP POWDER - Explosive powder used to blow up the bind.

BANK / PIT BANK - Area surrounding the top of the shaft.

AGENT - The senior colliery manager. Where the mine owner provided the capital and sank the shafts, the agent organised the development of the colliery, determined mining methods, advised the owner on the mine's commercial management and labour policy, and in later years was generally a trained mining engineer.

BUTTY - The "Butty system" was a contracting system used in coal mines. A Butty or Charter Master employed several men in a gang (hewers), to work at the coal face and to whom the men were responsible. Their wages were also paid by the Butty.

A LONG TON – Referred to by the miners when the manager had adjusted the number of hundred weights to the ton from for example 21 to 24, the result being that the men earned less wages for the coal dug.

HOLERS – Shot firers who set explosives to bring down the coal at the face.

SODS – Small lumps of coal.

TRAPPER - A child employed (before 1842) to open and close doors in roadways along which the coal tubs were transported in order to control ventilation in the mine. They could spend nine hours in pitch darkness.

HIGGLER – Also referred to as a Hawker or Peddler. In this context they would have travelled around with a horse and cart selling coal to local residents.

OTHER COMPLIMENTARY, FREE TO DOWN LOAD PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR ON THE WEBSITE

- The Development of Coal Mining in the Local Area
- A Record of Fatalities in Local Coal Mines 1782-1957
- A History of Coleorton No. 3. Colliery (Bug & Wink) 1875 – 1933
- A History of Coal Mining and Brick & Sanitary Pipe Making, in the Vicinity of Newbold
- A History of Early 19th Century Coal Mining in the Manor of Peggs Green
- Coal Mining in the Smoile

EXAMPLES OF COAL MINING CONDITIONS IN NW LEICESTERSHIRE IN 1842

As certain parts of the following article on the 1842 disturbances in NW Leicestershire coal mines relate to the Whitwick and Snibston collieries, the author felt that the following extract from the "1842 Child Employment Commission report" would provide the reader with an insight into the working conditions in coal mines at that time with the use of child labour still.

THE CHILD EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION 1842

A "Children's Employment Commission" was established in 1842, and the following extract is taken from a report by James Mitchell, Esq., on the employment of children and young persons in the mines of the Warwickshire and Leicestershire coal-fields, and on the state, condition and treatment of such children and young persons. The following text and illustration are taken from the report:-

The following questions were put to **Michael Parker (No.77)** of Snibston Colliery:-

What occupation do you follow? - Ground bailiff to the Snibston Collieries.

At what age do children commence going down the pits? - Some at seven and all ages afterwards.

How are boys under 10 employed? - Opening doors, sweeping railroads, driving ponies and asses, according to a boys activities.

When do they begin to fill skips? - About 18.

Why do they not go to this work sooner? - Our coal is all in large pieces, and they are not equal to the work.

Are other boys employed at other employment? - Some work at what is called putting the coal, that is pushing and drawing the coal from the face of the work to the crane at the horse-way. Two boys are able to draw a train, or the one draws and the other pushes. A large basket is put on the train and the basket is filled. It will hold about seven cwt.

When do they take the pick in hand to dig the coal? - About 20, but some much sooner if very active. Our coal is very hard and some young people are not capable of doing it.

Do the baskets (corves) when once loaded go all the way to the shaft, and afterwards are they lifted up without being emptied? - When the trains arrive at the horse way, the baskets are lifted up by a crane and put on the great horse-wagon and then are conveyed to the foot of the shaft ???

Do the boys enjoy good health? - Exceedingly good.

To what age can a man hold out to work? - Some work well at 60 years, but some are knocked up at 50 and 45. 50 may be the average.

What is the cause of a man being knocked up as early as 50? - The severe labour, and on some constitutions the bad air takes considerable effect.

Are the mines much exposed to bad air? - Only at chance times. The wind is carried through the mines.

What are the hours of work? - The holers (shot firers?) go down at two in the morning,

and return about two or three in the afternoon. The others begin to go down about half-an-hour before six and are ready by six to go to work. They finish at six and take half-an-hour to come up.

How many go down together and come up together? - About four men, and if all boys, five or six. They go in the basket. We have had no accidents in our pits going up and down.

To what do you attribute freedom from accidents? - To have good tackling and taking care. There is a man whose duty is to see the boys safe in the skips coming up and that there are no more in numbers than four men, or more than five or six boys. They are particular to have a steady man at the engine.

What precautions do you take against fire-damp or choke damp? - Strong ventilation.

What time do the men take their meals? - The engine stops about half-an-hour at one o'clock, then the people all rest.

What are the wages of the fillers? - 3s. a day, no beer and the company allows 10 cwt. or 12 cwt. of coals in the month and the men have free cottages and gardens or a very small rent of 1s. a month.

Are they often out of employment? - Some time in the summer when there is a small demand for coals.

Are the people tractable, and is there a good feeling between masters and men? All quite friendly.

Do the people attend public worship? - Most of them do.

Do the children go to school? - They in general go to day-schools, and all go to Sunday-Schools. Mostly all learn to read and many to write.

Have they a Field-Club? - Yes. They pay 8d. a-month and receive medical attendance and 7s. a-week when sick. The boys pay 4d. a month, and receive 3s. 6d. a-week when sick. If the fund falls short the company makes it good. There are few accidents from the falls of stone or coal from the roof. We have not had any such for years past.

The following questions were put to **William Stenson** (No.80):-

You are an engineer and have the management of the Whitwick colliery? - Yes.

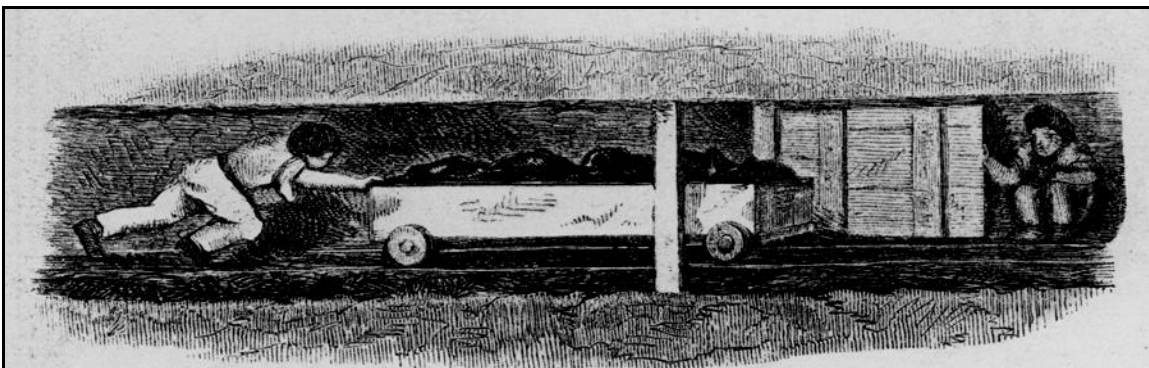
Having read the evidence of Michael Parker respecting the Snibston colliery, will you be so good as to state if the same will apply to your colliery? - To a considerable degree the same. We have 110 boys under 10. We support a day-school, to which the children under 10 go, and we have a Sunday-School also. Men who act together as butties (similar to agents who employ several men to whom the men are responsible) get great wages, as much as 28s. a week. We do not put the boys to push or draw the trains. We employ horses and asses. We do not use iron chains but flat ropes, which we consider much safer. **Ropes will tell a tale before breaking.** Our people begin work about seven, and leave about seven at night. In other respects, the description of Mr. Parker will apply to us.

**A FURTHER EXTRACT FROM THE
"CHILDS EMPLOYMENT COMMISSION REPORT" OF 1842**

No. 255. *William Pickard*, General Steward to Sir John Lister Lister Kaye's Collieries. Examined at Denby Grange, May 21, 1841:—

No. 255.

I have been a bottom-steward 44 years. We used trappers till lately, and they used to go
30 and begin as early as 6 years old. Now the doors are allowed to fall to themselves. The
men will let the children go as soon as ever they are big enough to addle any wages. They come
at 8 or 9 to hurry; but we have had trappers that begun earlier to hurry. The thinnest bed
we are working is only 10 inches. We cut the gates 26 inches; but they don't stand quite
that at the banks. The youngest children go there. The corf and coal together will weigh
35 28 stone. They will have 250 yards to hurry, on an average; they hurry 16 a-day. They
always fill or riddle. It is a rare thing for the children to go two together; they go singly.
The biggest part of the gates are dry. There is some places where the water is over their
shoes; but very few. It is mostly very dry considering. I don't like to see the poor little
children dabble in water, if it can be avoided. They go down generally at 6, or a quarter
40 after. We reckon to give over pulling at 5 out; they generally give over at 3. The hurriers
will stop to eat their bread at 12; but the bigger ones of 12 or 14 years old will be kept to
work in the hole shovelling muck, or picking it away. When I was a hurrier, they had good
reason to be tired with a belt and chain, and without rails. I do not think now that children's
work is hard work. They have generally play enough after their work is done. If a child
45 does not begin to be a hurrier at 9, he never will do in thin coals; they must be brought up
to it. We could do with them at 9; but it would be better to have them at 8. It would be
possible to cut the gates higher; but it would be a great expense. It is not only the expense
of cutting away, but there is that also of taking the stuff away. We are now paying 6d. a yard
extra for straight work in the thin bed, where we cut 16 inches of muck, &c. It would be a
50 capital thing to make the men more regular in their hours of work; but if we were to take a
man and hang him every now and then, it would not make them regular. Nine hours for
drawing coals would be plenty of time. I have known pits in the neighbourhood drawing
coals at 9 at night. The education of the children is very much neglected. The parents
don't value it, and think nothing about. The proprietors of coal-pits don't notice schooling
55 much, except the Stansfelds'. They are the best I ever knew; they are always doing some-
thing for education to the children; and Mrs. Milnes has always done a great deal too; and
Mr. Briggs also is a very good one for that. I don't know how we are to do without girls;
we cannot do without. It would be a good thing to stop girls from going after they are 12 or
13 years old. I have known a married woman hurrying for a man who worked stark naked,
60 and not any kin to her. I fear colliers could not do without the wages of girls; and they
are far better hurriers, and more attentive to their job.

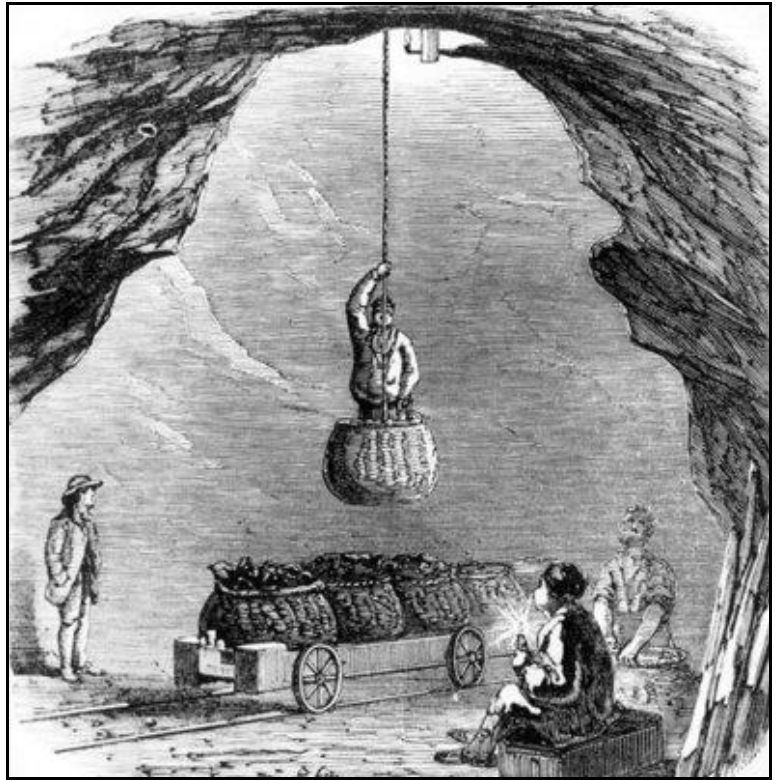
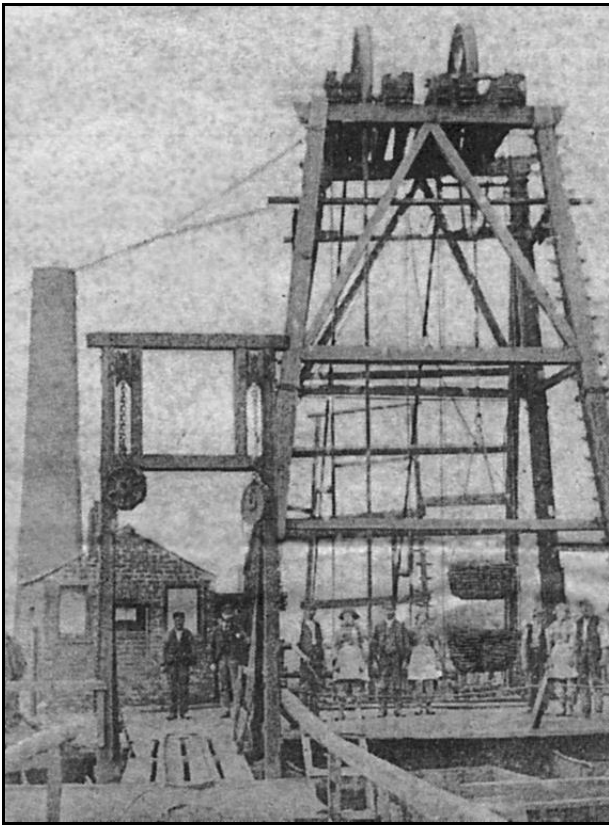


CHILD-LABOUR IN COAL-MINES OF THE 'FORTIES: A LITTLE "TRAPPER" (ON RIGHT) OPENING AN AIR-DOOR FOR A TRUCK TO PASS THROUGH.

"The trappers sit with a string attached to the door, and pull it open the moment they hear the corves (coal-trucks) at hand, and the moment one has passed they let the door fall to. . . . They are in the pit the whole time it is worked, frequently above twelve hours a day. They sit, moreover, in the dark."

All the illustrations on this page and the extracts accompanying them are reproduced from woodcuts and an article in "The Cyclopædia of Useful Arts" (1840-5).

ILLUSTRATIONS OF CORVES (WOVEN HAZEL WICKER BASKETS) BEING USED IN COAL MINES AS WAS THE CASE AT THE TIME OF THE GENERAL STRIKE



Top LH - Corves being raised to the pit head
Top RH - Collier being raised in a corve basket
Bottom - Trolley wagon on rails with corve baskets full of coal – Previous to this development, wooden or iron sledges were used to transport the corves to the shaft as shown in the following illustration



**Illustration of coal being pulled along in Corves on sledges
by a woman and child**

THE RESULTS OF THE STAFFORDSHIRE MINERS' INFILTRATION OF THE NW LEICS COALFIELD

This publication relates mainly to the situation which arose in respect to the Coal miners in NW Leicestershire. It has been transcribed from various newspapers of the day in a manner which the reader will hopefully find easier to understand in contrast to the flowery repetitive classic Victorian journalism used in the actual newspaper reports, which often only serves to confuse those with little background knowledge of the subject matter.

On August 1st 1842, a meeting was organised by the Staffordshire coal miners at West Bromwich, reportedly attended by 15,000 men at which resolutions were passed and were known as the "Staffordshire Miner's Resolutions". These were as follows:-

- 1st – *That the workmen at the several collieries remain at home until the whole of the masters promise to comply with the requisitions of the meeting are met.*
- 2nd – *That no man shall work for less than four shillings per day, two quarts of drink, and fire-coal every four weeks as before, for nine hours labour per day. One hour out of the nine to be allowed for dinner.*
- 3rd – *That the men consider half days, quarter days, and "bildasses" (days in which a man only works three or four hours, and is allowed nothing for it) as oppressive, and must be wholly done away with. No man or boy to go down into the pit without he works a whole day (accidents excepted, and also fair and wake time) but according to the hours (eight clear) he works per day a quarter or half day, shall be calculated by.*
- 4th – *Wages to be paid in current coin, and the meeting will discountenance the truck system whether direct or indirect. Magistrates to be called upon to assist them in carrying out this resolution*
- 5th – *This resolution merely stated, that the meeting pledged itself to carry out the whole of the foregoing rules by all constitutional means.*

It did not take long for leaflets outlining these resolutions to find their way into the hands of the coal miners at Whitwick, Snibston, Bagworth, Ibstock, Coleorton, Pegg's Green, Lount, Newbold, Heath End etc., and reports of delegations from Staffordshire infiltrating the local mining communities were rife, particularly at Whitwick and Snibston.

An urgent message was sent to Leicester requesting the attendance of the Yeomanry Cavalry at Whitwick, and also of the County Police, in consequence of an anticipated rising amongst the colliers employed in that neighbourhood. By 12 a.m. on Monday August 15th, three troops of yeomanry under the respective command of Lord Hill, Captain Storer, and another officer, plus a body of police under the orders of Mr. Goodyer, the chief constable of the county, arrived at Whitwick, and took up their quarters at Mr. Potter's Railway Hotel, where Lord Howe, Sir N. Griesley, T. Pares, I. Hodgson, and T. Mowbray, Esq., Magistrates of the county, were sitting.

In consequence of information received from various quarters, it was deemed advisable to send one troop to Coleorton, one to Hugglescote, and the other to remain at Whitwick,

whilst the police were sent to Lount and Pegg's Green. At each of these places, large meetings of colliers were held but no demonstration of violence was reported.

Mr. Goodyer, with his reported usual good tact, wished to prevent a riot taking place, instead of putting it down. With that view, the meeting recommended also sending delegates from the Magistrates in order to be able to report back to the remaining magistrates, the cause of the colliers complaints.

In the course of the afternoon, information was forwarded to Mr. Goodyer, which lead him to believe that the colliers engaged in the Whitwick and Snibston pits were not only about to turn out themselves, but also to force all the pitmen in the neighbourhood to join them – and that in consequence of such proceedings a disturbance of the peace was likely to ensue. It was stated that it being payday, the men were only waiting to receive their money, and then would turn-out and that they had been stirred up to take this step by certain delegates from the Staffordshire pits, who had distributed inflammatory circulars among them, and urged them not to do another days work until their just demands were acceded to.

Mr. Goodyer immediately despatched Superintendent Burditt and a man to Whitwick to observe first hand what was really taking place, what the demeanor of the men was, and whether anything serious was likely to ensue. The information received by Mr. Goodyer the next morning (Sunday) was such as to confirm his earlier apprehensions, and he therefore communicated with both the Borough and county Magistrates on the necessity that existed for taking steps to be prepared against any outbreak.

The Leicester Troup of the Yeomanry Cavalry received orders to assemble early the following morning, and, with an additional troop from the county, to proceed to Whitwick. This was accordingly done, and Mr. Goodyer with a strong body of his men followed to Long-lane. Earl Howe and Lord Curzon had arrived with their troops, and the Magistrates - Sir Nigel Gresley, and Messrs. Mowbray's, T. Pares, and Isaac Hodgson were also assembled at Mr. Potter's Railway Inn, Coalville.

The number of turnouts varied greatly – some reporting as many as 500 men from Whitwick alone, others not more than 250. It was said that the men scarcely knew why they had turned out, and that they would not have done so but for the Staffordshire delegates who had infiltrated them. Mr. Vaughan (agent at Snibston Colliery) stated that the men had for a long time past been receiving the same rate of wages as now, and that, if left to themselves, they would be quiet enough and return immediately to their employment. ***This statement, it will be seen, was somewhat at variance with what the men stated.***

News now reached them that a meeting had been held that morning in the neighbourhood of Pegg's Green, and that certain resolutions had been agreed upon, and that the meeting dispersed and went in parties to the different pits in the vicinity to induce the men to join them.

The resolutions agreed by the local men were different to those of the Staffordshire miners, as they had a different set of grievances. The following concentrates mainly on the Whitwick and Snibston collieries, although the author gained the impression from the various newspaper reports studied that their

grievances also applied to the other local pits in similar ways, based around the coal masters changing the rules without consultation with the workforce resulting in getting reduced wages for working harder. The men saw this as producing more profit for the colliery proprietors who argued their actions were in response to the greater competition they faced in the market place. If the colliers didn't like it, they were told they could leave their employment. Unfortunately it was not as easy as that as the coal masters well knew and could therefore hold the men to ransom, which is what happened here.

Following a consultation amongst the magistrates, it was determined that the Cavalry should remain behind at Whitwick, and that Mr. Goodyer with his men should proceed towards Pegg's Green to learn whether the turn-outs there were forcing others to join them, and generally to keep an eye on their activities. Mr. Hodgson and Mr. Pares (Magistrates) also rode on to Pegg's Green, and there they had a conversation with some of the turn-outs whom they found remaining behind. Their representative stated that he felt the turn-outs were only asking for what was just and reasonable, and that his men had not been forced to join the main body. Work was partially stopped at Pegg's Green colliery but one of the partner's of the colliery stated that there had been no compulsion towards the men and they had stopped work of their own accord and had now proceeded towards Griffydam to hold another meeting.

The remaining men said to both Messrs. Hodgson and Pares that they solely wished to have the rules of employment with their employers strictly observed by the Magistrates, which had not been the case in the past. They informed the two Magistrates that in place of paying two prices for the different grades of coals got according to past agreement and custom, a third price had now been introduced by their employers. In consequence of the manner in which the employers had been encroaching step by step, the workmen could obtain but a miserable pittance in wages. They said (in answer to remarks by Messrs. Hodgson and Pares) that they did not intend to proceed to a single act of violence. Apparently, they listened with the greatest respect to both these gentlemen and Mr. Goodyer, when warned by him that his police force would be compelled to put down any violence. They advised the men not to cause suffering to themselves by being led by strangers, but the men denied any such attempt had been made. They said it was true that Staffordshire men had been amongst them, and the same men had left papers with them, but they were not inflammatory and six Staffordshire men were in the act of begging for food. It was true that they had had a meeting that morning, but nothing was said at which they would have minded the magistrates hearing – indeed, there was to be another meeting at four in the afternoon, and they should be glad to see the magistrates, the chief constable, and the press reporters attending.

Proceeding nearly a mile further, Mr. Goodyer came upon a meeting in a field, at which some two hundred men and women were present, listening to the resolutions which had been adopted at the meeting in the morning. When the speaker had finished, he stated that the resolutions were open to inspection of any person who wished to look at them. At this, Mr. Goodyer, who had instructed his men to keep out of sight, so as not to cause any unnecessary irritation through a display of force, requested to be allowed to look at the paper, after explaining who he was. The resolutions were at once handed to him in the most respectful manner, and the meeting did not allow any crowding round Mr. Goodyer while he was speaking to them. Others gathered round the newspaper reporters who went among them, and they were similarly furnished freely with

information. Mr. Goodyer reported that their behaviour was such as did them great credit.

The following were the resolutions agreed, and shown to Mr. Goodyer and the reporters in the form of a memorial:-

To the agents of the Whitwick and Snibston Collieries:-

“Gentleman, - we feel it our duty to acquaint you with our present resolutions, since our labour is the object of our worldly interests, and the support of your capital. We therefore hope you will sanction our propositions, which are just and reasonable in all things. Our first proposition is – that you will bear the loss of the bad coal, by giving the same price for that as the other, viz. 1s. 9d. per ton, allowing one-third for cobbles, of which the price is 11d. per ton, but not to have three distinct prices at all. – Our second proposition is – that we may be allowed to see our coals added up, and the number of tons, with cwts., put on the slate, under the columns of each stall, in the Bank Machine, before going to the office. – Our third proposition is – that we may be allowed to have each machine on the bank properly adjusted to 21 cwt. for the ton ; and the gross weight taken, and the neat left, of either coals or cobbles – our fourth proposition is – that Summers be restored to his work again. We do not want any increase of wages – we only want the coals to come up together, and be sorted on the bank, with the perquisites of lip powder, as usual”

Appended Signatures

Note:-

Lip Powder is used to blow up the bind (A term used in various areas to refer to shale, mudstone, clay or sandstone overlying the seam).

Summers was the man with whom the dispute originated in a confrontation with William Stenson at Whitwick which is explained later in the meeting with the Magistrates.

The men plainly stated what they considered to be acts of injustice on the part of their employers, but they did not launch out into bitter invectives against them. The men explained that at the time of their employment, they were paid two prices, described as two thirds and one third – viz., 1s. 9d. per 21 cwt. ton for large coals, and 11d. per 21 cwt. ton for cobbles. The coal mine masters had now decided that the coal would be sorted on the bank, and all pieces not quite so large as a brick were called “sods”, and were only paid 6d., for a 21 cwt. ton, while at the same time these so called “sods” were being sold at the bank head as “small coals”. The coal masters had also decided once again without any formal agreement with the colliers that a ton would now become 24 cwt. “long-ton” They were also being deducted for what was judged as bad coals although of course, the miners had no option but to send up what was available to get. For example, if nine tons of coal had been sent up from the pit, then based on the old two price agreement, it would have been paid for by the employer at 13s. 3d. However, the reporter was shown tickets using the three price system (three tons of coal at 1s 9d.: three tons of cobbles at 11d., and three tons of “sods” at 6d. making a total of 9s. 6d, meaning a loss in wages of 3s. 9d.

One of their demands was that every man should be able to know at the end of every day how much work he had done, and how they were being paid, and there surely was nothing unreasonable in wanting that. The men also used to have a rake and pan to enable them to fill their corve baskets with, but those had been taken away, and they now had to fill them with their hands, which of course took so much more time. Another complaint was, that if a corve basket (which should hold seven hundredweight)

happened to come up to the bank but a few pounds deficient in weight, they were not deducted the amount of that deficiency, but were not allowed any payment at all for the corve. The colliers of course had no way of checking the weight prior to it being wound up the shaft by the corve machine.

Due to the increased weight they had to give at the bank, because the employer had decided there should now be 24 cwt. to the ton and the introduction of a third price for "sods", and non-payment for what was judged to be bad coals, or a light corve, a man sometimes did not get more than 11s 6d. for a fortnight's wages, and were only paid once a fortnight.

They men wanted to have the weighing machine at the bank to be properly adjusted, so that they might know its weights were correct, and that the weight of the ton should be fixed at 21 cwt. Previously, they said, every man was allowed to go into the machine-room, and inspect the tally, but now they were not allowed, and if they did go in there, they were turned off (sacked) for so doing.

On further questioning regarding their wages, the informant candidly acknowledged that the 11s. 6d. was exclusive of house rent – their house being found for them, together with a bit of garden, and they had no complaint to make as to the houses, which were very comfortable, but he said "that all are not like myself, with only a small household to provide for – I have known many of my companions to be absolutely pining for want of more food". He further said, and with tears in his eyes, that he had known some of the men to be at work a whole day without any solid food.

The local newspaper reports confirmed that in contrast to what was happening in the rest of the country, not a single instance of the local miners committing a breach of the peace was heard of. Such was the extremely peaceable demeanour of the men.

Before Mr. Goodyer left them, he advised them to send a deputation up to the Magistrates at Mr. Potter's, Railway Inn, at Coalville and lay their case fully before them, with a view to the settlement of the dispute. A meeting was arranged for five o'clock with a delegation of four men as advised by Mr. Goodyer.

INTERVIEWS WITH THE MAGISTRATES

The Magistrates sitting were Sir Nigel Gresley, Messrs. Hodgson, Pares, and T. Mowbray Esq. ; Sir George Beaumont, though not a Magistrate, was also present, as was Mr. Dewes, a solicitor from Ashby.

According to a newspaper report, Messrs. Stevenson and Vaughan (agents for Whitwick and Snibston mines respectively) made a statement to the Magistrates prior to the meeting, but the reporter was not made aware that this was taking place until the interview was concluded. However its purport will be left to the reader having read the following.

The delegation on behalf of the colliers began by saying that they and their fellow workmen had only met to obtain their rights and did not set out to break the peace. On the previous Thursday, one of Mr. Stenson's men "Summers" went to him and complained of being stopped for bad coal, **and was discharged at a moments notice for so speaking, although he had been engaged for twelve months.** The men made

representation to Mr. Stenson about the matter, but he said he had never paid for bad coal and would not. They told him that he had not before deducted for the so called bad coal, to which he replied, that even if that were the case, he would only pay 6d. for the small coal, thus making three prices.

Mr. Hodgson - Then your complaint is that you are now paid 6d. a ton for “sods” for the first time without previous notice. The **delegation** said that was the case.

Mr. Pares asked whether, when only two prices were paid, any third sort of coal was put on one side as unfit for sale, and not paid for?

Mr. Stenson, jun., said the man who had been speaking had only worked in his colliery for a few weeks – he had been in Staffordshire, and therefore could not know what his (Mr. Stenson’s) rules were.

Mr. Pares reminded Mr. Stenson that this was not an answer to his question. Besides, his father (Mr. Stenson Snr.) had just before told the magistrates that his rules had not at all varied, so the man’s absence from the colliery could not signify.

Mr. Stenson, jun., then began to enter into an explanation of what the men had said to him on Thursday last about their determination not to work unless he complied with their demands, but the magistrates again told him that was not the question under consideration.

Some conversation took place between **Mr. Stenson** and the **delegate** with whom he had spoken just before, as to when “sods” were first paid for as such, and at 6d. per ton. **Mr. Stenson** certainly appeared to be labouring under some error upon that point, for he first said that he had not previously paid them for “sods”, but that he only paid them for coals and cobbles as sent up (after being screened or sorted, it was understood), and afterwards that he had paid them for “sods” at 6d. per ton. The **delegate** said they only wanted to be paid what they had agreed for at coal and cobble price. In answer to **Mr. Stenson’s** remark that he had agreed to pay for the small coal, but at “sods” price, and that the men had consented to that arrangement, the **delegates** said this was not the case – there was not a man who had said a word about the “sods”. These “sods” **Mr. Stenson** spoke of as very small or refuse kind of coal, but the men said the majority of them were as large as half a house brick, and were sold at a good price on the bank as “small coal”.

Mr. Dewes to delegates – When you were hired did you sign any document? The **delegates** said they did, and **Mr. Stenson**, on the **Magistrates** requiring to see one, said “he had not one with him, but it was something after this form” – I X.X. of....., do hereby agree to work at No.X pit, and to consent to the rules of the pit, and to give one month’s notice before we leave”. The **delegates** in reply said that they had not seen any of these rules.

Mr. Stenson stated that the men went down the pit in bodies of five or six at a time and were told the rules then. **The delegates** declared that this was not always done.

Mr. Stenson said that when five or six men came and agreed to go to work, they were sent generally to different pits, and then the rules might not be particularly noticed.

Mr. Stenson was asked to acknowledge that the rules were not always read to the men, but in answer he stated "*that they knew what they were*".

Mr. Pares said it would appear from that, the men went on to work blindly.

Mr. Stenson then recapitulated the substance of the rules, but in too rapid a manner to be intelligible to those not previously acquainted with coal mining operations.

Mr. Hodgson here remarked that some bills had been given to the men, in which there was not a word said about "sods" – these were probably some of the same period as those referred to before, and he understood that there was no complaint made about these prices, and that the only complaint was, that the men were not allowed to see the machine which weighed their coals.

The delegates said that was the only complaint, providing that two prices were paid as before, and that if the agents would but say the men could have access to the machine, they would go to work that very night.

The conversation then reverted to the three prices to be now paid for coals, and the **Magistrates** said that the due notice of the change about to be made ought to have been given to the colliers, and then they might have decided for themselves whether it was worth their while to work for such prices. Would the **delegates** be satisfied if the agents consented to the colliers seeing the weight outside the bank? The **delegates** said no because they thought there were differences in the modes of weighing. However, they would be satisfied if the weight was adjusted to 21 cwt. to the ton, and not the 24 cwt. to the ton long-weight.

Mr. Stenson said the owners would consent to give the men a ticket of what they had done, but not that they should have the liberty to adjust the machine. The man at the bank should give them a ticket whenever they came up from work and wanted to see what they had done. The **delegation** said they would be satisfied with that assurance, if they were to be sure the machine was adjusted to 21 cwt. to the ton.

Mr. Stenson said that the long-ton weight had to be 24 cwt to the ton now in consequence of the great competition that now existed. They allowed 24 cwt. to the ton for the boats, and 21½ cwt. plus to the higgles, but the land sales were a trifling percentage. He could assure the magistrates that justice was done to both the men and to the employers.

The Magistrates said to the **delegates** that if the owners sold the coals at 24 cwt. to the ton, they were perfectly right in paying them at that rate. **Mr. Vaughan** here stated that in the summer time, in order to keep the colliers employed, a great quantity of coal was stacked, by which the owners lost 3 or 4 cwt. per ton by this. **The delegates** said they were not aware that was the case.

The **delegates** principal spokesman went on to say that they only wanted their rights and to be protected against oppression, but the **Magistrates** said they could not enter upon that topic, and if the men did not chose to work for the terms offered, they need not. The **delegates** then said that if **Mr. Stenson** chose to lay his prices before the men, and they thought proper to work for them, they might do so, but they wished to have two prices only.

In answer to some other remarks, **Mr. Stenson** said he did all he could to make his men send up good coals, but at times they were in the habit of sending up rubbish. He did not want to treat them harshly, but he also did not want to be treated in this way. One of the **delegates** said nobody would deny that, but for one thing, that last Saturday night **Mr. Stenson** said he would only pay for certain kinds of coal.

One of the delegates complained that if the corves were not filled up exactly to seven cwt, they were not paid anything for it. Mr. Vaughan replied that this was one of the regulations which had to be introduced due to the slovenly manner in which the work is done. Very frequently a corve is filled up with about half cobbles. The delegate went on to say that due to an accident on the way up to the bank a corve could become upset, and if it was then not the full weight when it reached the top, it was tipped over on the bank and not accounted for.

Mr. Pares told the speaker that if the men did not like the new regulations, they should give a month's notice that they would not work any longer, and that would be a lawful way of leaving employment, but the present action was not. The **delegate** said that might be Mr. Pares law, but it was not his. **Mr. Pares** replied that it was not his law, but "the" law.

The delegation then entered upon the question of the pan and rake having been taken away from the men, and their being obliged to fill the corve baskets with their hands.

Mr. Pares said there could be no doubt but these things were looked upon by the men as grievances, but, as he had said before, they could give a month's notice and leave. He had no doubt the matter might be remedied between the two parties, if gone about in a proper manner. A **delegate** remarked that **Mr. Stenson** had himself broken the law by turning off (sacking) a man at a minute's notice. **Mr. Hodgson** told the speaker that, if that that were the case, the injured party had a remedy open to him by taking **Mr. Stenson** before a Bench of Magistrates.

It appeared that the **delegates** who had thus far spoken belonged to **Whitwick Colliery (Mr. Stenson's)**, and the two who came from **Snibston (Mr. Vaughan's)** were told to make their statements. They were in substance the same as the foregoing, with respect to the alteration of the two thirds coals and one third cobbles prices.

Mr. Vaughan stated that the owners had been obliged to make the changes in order to meet the reduction in the market price, and on account of the superior quality they were now obliged to sell. The **delegation** said they had not been given any notice of this change and Mr. Vaughan had been dropping the price little by little.

The Magistrate asked, why, if that were the case, they had not left **Mr. Vaughan's** service? **Mr. Vaughan** said he had told them, that if they could not go on working at the new prices, they might leave. The **delegates** said they had worked all along for **Mr. Vaughan** – they had their cottage and garden and their family – and it was not a pleasant or easy thing to leave. **Mr. Vaughan** said the men would have no difficulty in disposing of their garden stuff if they had wanted to leave, but the **delegates** said that they would not be able to for everyone were as badly off as themselves, even in the spring they had to beg for food. **Mr. Vaughan** said he had given his men notice to leave sometime back, if they did not approve of the new regulations, but they would not.

The **delegates** did not deny this was the case, but said they could not have got work elsewhere. They were proceeding with some other remarks, when the **Magistrates** stopped them and said they had a much better opinion of the **delegates** case before they came into the room than they had now.

After some further conversation, the **Magistrates** said they would advise both **Mr. Stenson** and **Mr. Vaughan** to draw up the laws of their collieries afresh, and to let the men be made properly acquainted with them, and then have their choice of working or not, as they chose. The **delegates** said that if it had been done before, they would not have complained, and **Mr. Vaughan** said that what he complained of was, that having given the men notice two months ago, they would not leave, and now acted in this manner.

Mr. Pares then said, that after listening carefully to all that had been said on both sides, he was decidedly of the opinion that the colliers had taken a wrong step in acting as they had done, but he fully believed that they had thus acted under a misapprehension of the matter. He would again advise the employers to draw up their rules more strictly than had hitherto been the case, and to make every man acquainted with them.

The **delegates** said that all they wanted was according to the laws of the realm, and that due notice should be given before any alteration was made.

Mr. Hodgson told the **delegates** that they were anxious to do justice to all parties, and therefore had heard both sides of the arguments at length. **Mr. Pares** again said he fully believed the turn-outs had thus acted, not with any malicious intent, but from the wrong idea of their position and what was necessary before leaving their employment. Everything that was past should now be forgotten, and they should go back to their work as if nothing had happened. Let them never again put themselves in the position with respect to the law as they had done that day. If they did, the **Magistrates** would be forced to put the law into force against them. That, they had no wish to do so, and if the masters did their men any wrong, the **Magistrates** would do the latter every justice – they would send either **Mr. Stenson** or **Mr. Vaughan** to prison if they violated their contract and wronged their servants.

The interviews were brought to a close, the Magistrates again advising the **delegates** to return to their work on the morrow as if nothing had happened.

The Cavalry returned to Leicester in the course of the afternoon, and at ten o'clock, when Mr. Goodyer and his men left, the greatest order prevailed. It is but an act of justice to state, that it was doubtless to the firmness and kindness blended together of Messrs. Pares and Hodgson and Mr. Goodyer, that the peaceable manner in which the day passed off is to be attributed. It is equally an act of justice to the turn-outs to say, that while candidly stating what they felt to be grievances, their demeanour was quiet and respectful, and it is to be hoped that the events of the day will have taught both masters and men a useful lesson, that of kind consideration on one side, and a determination on the other side to avail themselves only of those means of redress which the law has provided for them. We feel persuaded that the county Magistrates, as a body, are disposed to protect the poor servant equally with the wealthy employer.

The meeting ended a little after seven o'clock and a further meeting of the men was called in order that the result of the interview with the Magistrates could be explained to them. This meeting was adjourned till half-past nine the next morning (Tuesday) which was numerously attended, but no terms were agreed upon.

In the evening a second meeting was held when one of the speakers commenced reading from the "Northern Star", but was interrupted by the men saying that they did not want to hear anything except about their wages and masters. Another meeting was held about eight o'clock, when Mr. Pepper and other Chartists addressed the meeting.

In the course of the day, reports had circulated that that the Ibstock and Lount Collieries had been turned out, which proved to be correct. Still no progress had been made at the meetings to bring the two parties together. The chief constable and a body of his men were still in attendance, but not the slightest disturbance was observed.

On Wednesday, yet another meeting took place when intelligence was received that the Bagworth Colliers had turned out. This was unexpected, as the Bagworth men were apparently satisfied with their conditions in the early part of the week, and did not intend to join in the turn-outs at all. Mr. Whetstone representing the owners Messrs Brewin and Whetstone went down and met the men, and it was through his intervention that concessions were made and the Bagworth men returned to work.

On Thursday morning, reports were received at a late hour, that the men had consulted together and there was little prospect of them all returning to work, with one portion of the men threatening that if the others went down the pit they would cut the ropes and stop them again. However, things remained peaceable and the intervention of the police was not necessary.

THE LOCAL MEN RETURNED TO WORK BEFORE THE END OF AUGUST. THE MINE OWNERS, BY PROVIDING HOUSING OR CHEAP RENT AND FREE COAL HAD CLEARLY PUT THEM IN A POSITION THAT THEY HAD NO ALTERNATIVE. EITHER THEY WENT BACK TO WORK OR THEY AND THEIR FAMILIES WOULD BE HOMELESS AND STARVE. THIS WAS MADE WORSE BY THE FACT THAT THE MAGISTRATES SUPPORTED THE COAL MINE OWNERS. THE STAFFORDSHIRE MINERS STAYED OUT FOR A SHORT WHILE LONGER BUT THEY EVENTUALLY CAPITULATED AND THE 1842 GENERAL STRIKE PETERED OUT.

HAVING READ THE FOLLOWING HISTORY ON WILLIAM STENSON, THE READER WILL NEED TO MAKE UP THEIR OWN MIND AS TO WHETHER HE WAS A GOOD FRIEND TO THE COAL MINERS, BUT THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT HE WAS AN EXTREMELY TALENTED AND MUCH RESPECTED GENTLEMAN.

WILLIAM STENSON

(Mining Engineer, Colliery Developer, Manager and Owner)

b. 1771 – d. Nov 27TH 1861.

A “Native of Coleorton” and subsequently known as “The Father of Coalville Town”.



WILLIAM STENSON - ENGINEER

A Lithographic portrait from a drawing by H. Denham

July 5th 1841

(Copyright Leicester County Council Museums)



William Stenson's and his wife Hannah Varnham's vault in the old Hugglescote Baptist cemetery (photograph taken August 2014 by the author)

INSCRIPTION ON VAULT

THIS MONUMENT

IS ERECTED TO PERPETUATE THE MEMORY OF

**WILLIAM STENSON OF COALVILLE THE ESTEEMED FOUNDER OF
THE WHITWICK COLLIERY. HE DIED IN PEACE NOVEMBER 27TH 1861**

AGED 90 YEARS

BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD. ALSO

HANNAH, WIFE OF WILLIAM STENSON OF COALVILLE CENT.

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE NOVEMBER 12TH 1843

IN THE 66TH YEAR OF HER AGE

IN HER CAPPAICE ? (CAPACITY ?) SHE WAS PLAIN, FRANK AND OBLIGING

AND A WILLING WIFE. A MOST TENDER AND AFFECTIONATE MOTHER

AND EVER KIND AND BENEVOLENT TO THE POOR

TO WHOM HER MEMORY WILL LONG BE DEAR

I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVETH



**Oil painting of William Stenson held at “Leicester New Walk Museum and Art Gallery”. Gifted by Mr. J Stenson Turner in 1960.
(copyright Leicestershire County Council museums)**

William Stenson was clearly a mining engineer of some talent and repute. Only limited and fragmented information about his life is available, but in all of the research material to hand, including genealogy information from his descendants, **he is accepted as being born in Coleorton**. William was a non-conformist, and he was buried in the old Baptist cemetery at Hugglescote near Coalville, having died at his home in Coalville on Nov 27th 1861.

The following information regarding William Stenson’s marriage and children has been put together from various descendants’ genealogy information on the internet, **but the facts cannot be guaranteed by the author of this publication of course**.

William Stenson was born in Coleorton c.1771, and he married Hannah Varnham in Coleorton on July 25th 1796. She was born on Feb 22nd 1777 in Coleorton, and died on Nov 12th 1843 in Heather, Leicestershire. Her parents were Thomas Varnham and Rebecca Varnham (nee. Bonser).

William and Hannah are recording on a descendants genealogy websites as having had the following children:-

Rebecca Stenson - b.1797 Coleorton, d. March 1873 Coalville, Leicestershire.

Ann Stenson - b.1798

John Stenson - b. circa.1799

William Joseph Stenson - b.1800 in Thringstone, Leicestershire d.1851 Birmingham

Charlotte Stenson - b.1801

Hannah Stenson - b.1803 Shipley, Derbyshire, d. May 3rd 1870 Coalville, Leics.

Thomas Alexander Stenson - b.1804, Derbyshire, d.1867 Coleford, Gloucestershire.

William (Towndrow ?) Stenson - b.1807, Shipley, Derbyshire, d. Feb 9th 1870, Coalville, Leics

Selina Stenson - b.circa 1808 Riddington, Derbys d. circa.1889 Ashby-De-La-Zouch, Leics.

John Forester Stenson - b.1811 d.1863.

Caroline Stenson - b. circa.1813 Coleford, Gloucestershire, d. Oct 12th 1862 Donnington-Le-Heath, Leicestershire

Colin Owen's respected book suggests that William Stenson trained as an engineer in the North East coalfields, but no proof of this has been found by the author. There is however, good reason to think that in the early 1800's, he was working for David Mushet who had moved from Scotland to become manager of the Alfreton Ironworks in 1805 in Derbyshire. By 1808 Mushet was involved in the design and supervision of a major rebuilding of the "Whitecliffe Ironworks" near Coleford, Gloucestershire, having been approached by Thomas Halford, a wealthy investor from London to carry out this work. These thoughts are based on the fact that in 1809, William Stenson was working as a "mine bailiff" at Bixslade near Coleford, Gloucestershire and employed by Thomas Halford and David Mushet. This implies that Stenson was working for Mushet in Alfreton and was invited to work in their coal mining venture there. In a letter dated Sept 23rd 1809 from Thomas Halford to Mushet, he states...."*would not Derbyshire people proceed with more activity at Bixslade than our foresters*"? In 1814, Stenson was resident in Coleford, where he leased "Mill Cottage" from George Dew, and there is a record of a schedule of deeds for this property made out to William Stenson by the solicitors in 1821. **William's daughter Caroline was born in Coleford in 1815.**

In 1816, a William Stenson of Coleford, Gloucestershire was granted a patent for an "Improved Engine", this is listed in "A Descriptive History of The Steam Engine" by Robert Stuart.

In Volume 19 of Parliamentary papers, House of Commons & Command, it records that William Stenson and Samuel Hewlett were awarded a license on Nov 25th 1817 to erect and continue two steam engines to be called "Old Mill Engines" at the "No coal and Church way coal veins" for a period of 31 Years from Michaelmas 1817.

In 1818, Stenson became a "coal master", when a colliery was opened in Bixslade in partnership with Arnold and William Willis Bailey of Coleorton. Willis Bailey was a mining surveyor of some repute in Coleorton and the locality, and is mentioned several times in the authors other publications. Bailey probably knew Stenson, having both spent their childhood in Coleorton, and in the partnership articles he described Stenson as a good friend.

There is evidence that William Stenson was active in the Heanor, Derbyshire area prior to 1820, even though he was apparently still resident, or kept his house in Coleford. The Derby Mercury of Oct 4th 1820 gives details of a "festival" at the opening of a new coal mine in Shipley, Derbyshire owned by E. M Mundy Esq. - "*A noble steam engine of 120 horse power, constructed under the direction of Mr. Stenson, now wields its ponderous limbs on the spot in mighty aid of manly labour.*" *At the party (where they got through 400 gallons of ale), "Mr. Stenson the Engineer, was chaired."* In 1823, he was requested by the Rev. Whinfield to sink another mine in the Heanor, Derbyshire area with a view to taking out previously waterlogged coal, but following disputes about boundaries etc., he subsequently gave up his interests.

In the early 1820's, William was active in the local area, and carried out trial borings into previously unexplored coal reserves at Long Lane, which was a track from Whitwick. William Stenson established what was to eventually become Whitwick Colliery c.1826, and in 1827 the "Leicester Chronicle" reported that two shafts had reached a depth of 26 yards. In 1824, it was initially known as "Long Lane Colliery" but then became Stenson & Co., and was operated / owned by James Whetstone and William Stenson.

William Stenson was in his late 50s in April 1827, when he entered into partnership with James Whetstone of Dudley, Staffordshire and Samuel Smith-Harris, a coal merchant of Leicester, as colliery owners to form "Stenson & Co". A contribution of £2,700 of initial capital was made in the ratio of three ninths for William Stenson, four for James Whetstone and two for Samuel Smith-Harris. James Whetstone then sold two of his shares to his nephew Joseph Whetstone, who was a yarn spinner in Leicester. Stenson agreed to live close to, and manage the colliery for a salary of £200 per annum, plus a percentage of between 10% and 15% of the profits depending on the output.

It is worth mentioning at this point that no actual proof has been found that William Stenson was related to the business people and land owners in Whitwick named Stinson, although much has been written to suggest that was the case.

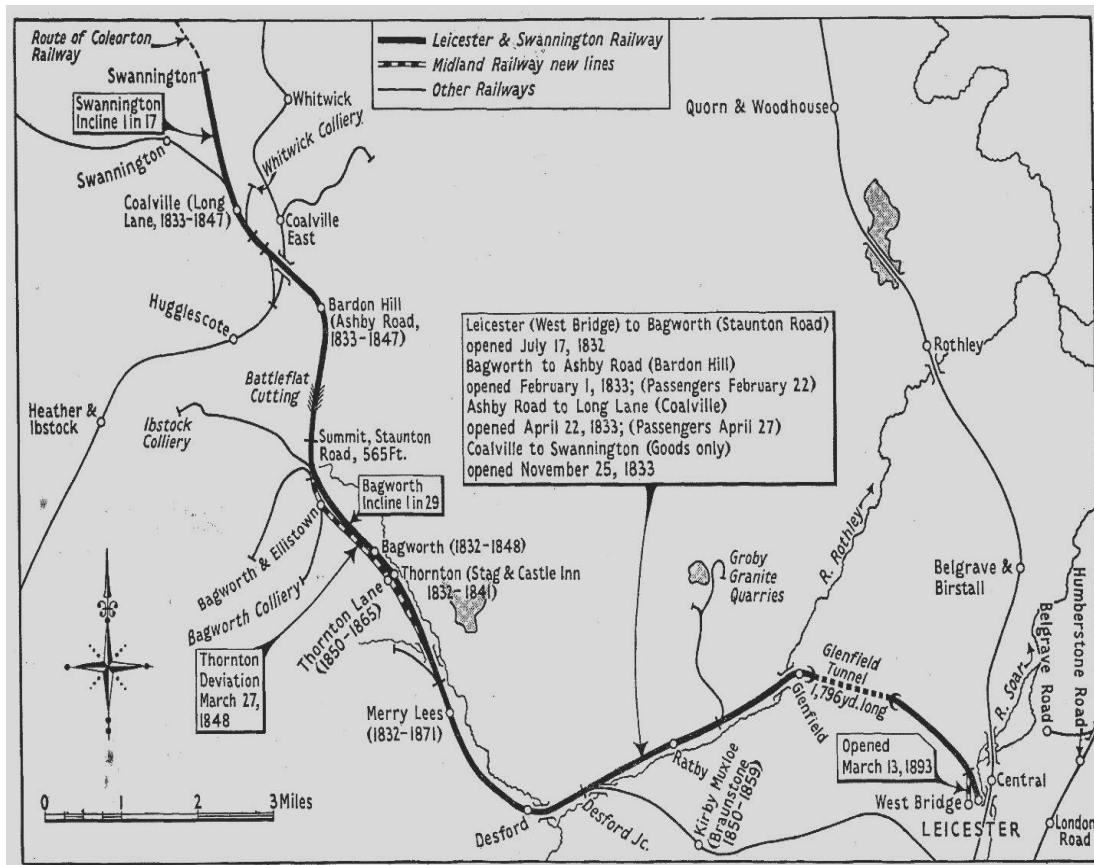
The land on which the colliery was first sunk, was owned by a wealthy hosier from Coleorton named William Sherwin, who had become the sole surviving trustee of the will of John Bonnet of Whitwick who had died in 1823. The deeds to this land showed that in 1808 a Samuel Towndrow of Leicester had interest in these lands, and a further indenture, dated 1816, shews Edward Towndrow as a party to a transaction concerning the land. William Stenson had a son with the middle name Towndrow, which presumably indicates that William Stenson had some involvement in the purchase or lease of this land on which the colliery was sunk. In January 1833, he did in fact purchase the Bonnet lands for £1,590, through a mortgage funded by William Sherwin, for which he charged Stenson £1,100 to do so. The mineral rights, however, still remained in the ownership of William Sherwin as he was trustee of the Bonnet will.

Further leases were purchased in the 1830's. In 1832, 15 acres (including mineral rights) near to the "Red House" and adjoining Long Lane were leased from Thomas Stinson of Whitwick for 31 years at an annual rent of £100 per acre, plus £4 per acre for any surface land used or damaged by the mining. In 1832, 30 acres were leased near the "Red House" from William Sherwin of Coleorton for 40 years at a rate of £160 per acre for all coal not exceeding 180 yards in depth, and a further £20 for coal below this level. Early in the following year, Sherwin agreed to sell the partners 30 acres of coal under Whitwick Waste for £1,590, while a further 160 acres were leased from Messrs Peake and Chapman. **Stenson apparently became stretched financially and was forced to sell shares in order to meet his share of the required company capital, and eventually Joseph Whetstone became the single most powerful partner in the colliery company.**

By April 1828, the "Minge" seam, 3ft 6ins thick, had been reached at Whitwick, some 100 yards below ground, and later that month, a waggon laden with Whitwick coal was drawn about Leicester, preceded by a band. In May 1834, the main coal seam was reached at a depth of 780 feet, and great celebrations were held at the "Railway Hotel" on Long Lane. This heralded the official opening of Whitwick Colliery, and it was reported that 50 gentlemen dined, and 200 colliers ate roast beef and plum pudding, with due allowance of ale. The celebrations were further enlivened by music and cannons! In support of the above success, an agreement was made with Samuel Bonnet of Whitwick in 1835 where he agreed to sell Whitwick Colliery Company 140 acres of coal below the former open fields of Whitwick for £1,350. This purchase basically completed the first phase of the company's development, for which they had secured possession of nearly 700 acres of land.

Soon after founding the Whitwick Colliery Co, and during a visit to the North East of England, Stenson saw the new Stockton and Darlington Railway. He immediately realised the potential in the Whitwick area for this revolutionary mode of transport to take coal to Leicester. He therefore contacted George Stephenson with his proposal, who invested £2,500 in the enterprise, and Stephenson's son Robert, was appointed the railway's engineer. Robert Stephenson and Thomas Miles subsequently surveyed the route of the railway, and presented their findings to the railway promoters at the Bell Hotel, Leicester on June 24th 1829. Following this, the "Swannington and Leicester Railway Company" was founded.

The railway eventually reached Long Lane by 1833, and enabled Whitwick coal to be sold at a profit in Leicester. On the 22nd of April 1833, the first coal train to run from Whitwick Colliery, arrived safely at Leicester. See the following map for further details of the railway. The building of the "Leicester and Swannington Railway" was followed by the construction of the "**Coleorton Railway**", which joined it at the incline in Swannington. The "**Coleorton Railway**" features in a later article.



Route of the "Leicester to Swannington Railway"

Platforms for Railway Stations were not provided in those days, and nearby Inns were often used for railway business. At Long Lane, the "Railway Hotel" served this purpose. A local businessman and historian Edgar Hawthorn recorded in the 1950's, that a room to the left of the front entrance was used for the issuing of tickets, whilst a bell fixed behind the front door gave warning of an approaching train to intending passengers. This arrangement lasted till 1848 when the "L&S Railway" was sold to "The Midland Railway", and a new station named "Coalville" was built.

It was thought that Coalville was named after William Stenson's house named "Coalville House" (described later) but the following evidence certainly discounts that theory:-

Examples of records found of the name Coalville first being used are:-

- An advertisement in the Leicester Chronicle dated March 4th 1836 – "*All trains from Coalville or Long Lane would now convey passengers throughout the summer*".
- In the Leicester Chronicle dated the 4th and 19th February 1836 a wedding between John Stenson and Elizabeth, daughter of James Stephenson at Coalville is reported, and also an advertisement for the sale of a bakery near to the "Red House" in Coalville.
- In the Leicester Chronicle dated 16th November 1833 – *Owing to the traffic which has been produced by the Railway and New Collieries on Whitwick Waste, land which twenty years ago would not have fetched £20 per acre, is now selling in lots at £400 to £500 per acre, for building upon. The high chimneys, and numerous erections upon the spot, give the neighbourhood quite an improved appearance. We hear it is intended to call this new colony "COALVILLE" – an appropriate name.* The area referred to, is undoubtedly the Collier's Cottages referred to in "Coalville Place" described below.

Even though William Stenson was having difficulty in meeting his existing financial responsibilities, he continued to operate independently of his colliery partners in the development of land in the fledgling town of Coalville. In 1839, William Sherwin's son, William Jnr., conveyed him twenty seven perches of land, which was to become the site of "Club Row", "Stone Row" and Mammoth Street in Coalville Place. This area was situated between Whitwick Colliery and Snibston No.1 Colliery, and all these streets were recorded in the 1851 Census of the Coalville Ecclesiastical district. Stenson profited by selling off individual plots of the land to developers who built on the plots, and then let the houses to tenants, who were mostly miners working at Whitwick Colliery Co. James Cort, an ironmonger of Leicester, and John Field, a shopkeeper of Whitwick, were typical of the trader and merchant class who brought plots from Stenson.

In 1841, following the poor financial situation of Thomas Cooper of Thornton, who had large land holdings in Hugglescote Parish, he was forced by his creditors to sell a large parcel of land fronting Long Lane which totaled over eight acres. Stenson obtained a further mortgage of £500 towards the purchase price of £600. The mortgage on this occasion was provided by his old associate in Coleford, Thomas Halford of Leicester. This mortgage was not paid off till August 1860, presumably from the settlement obtained on his retirement from Whitwick Colliery Co. This land, which then formed part of the main street of Coalville during the 1860s, was later sold as prime building plots as directed in Stenson's will.

In 1852, it was reported to the trustees of "Wyggeston Hospital", a charitable institution which owned land in the Swannington area, that about 575 acres of the Main Coal had been leased to William Stenson, which again confirms his willingness to go it alone.

William Stenson was clearly a man of some standing in the coal mining industry, and appeared to have been well off financially, although the aforementioned does not always bear that out. In 1860, Stenson, now in his ninetieth year, and house bound and infirm, retired from the colliery company partnership, and was paid a sum of £6,750 for his share in the estate and interest of land in Stenson & Co., and Whitwick Colliery Company. In addition, he was to receive one ton of coal per week delivered to his house. William Stenson was a member of the "North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers" (NEIMME), although the date of his actual election is not recorded. He appears in their lists until c.1860. when he retired from Whitwick Colliery.

Following William Stenson's development of Whitwick Colliery, George Stephenson saw the potential for mining in the area, and Snibston No.1 and No.2 mines were sunk, which is another story.

William Stenson is rightly credited with initiating the birth of the nearby mining and industrial town of Coalville, which developed around these local mines, and which he lived to see. He was later to become known as "The Father of Coalville Town". The "Trade Directory of Leicestershire & Rutland" 1846 by F.White, states that "*Colliery-owners such as Whetstone and Stenson (Whitwick) and the Stephensons (Snibstone) contributed towards the erection and upkeep of Methodist chapels and schools*", presumably in the well founded belief that Methodist teaching propounded the virtues of honesty, conscientiousness and sobriety.

William Stenson built his own home on land next to where the Council Offices on London Road now stand. This reportedly had a stone plaque on the front with the name "Coalville House" carved in it. Unfortunately, the house was demolished in the 1950's. In 1999, the plaque shown below was unveiled on London Road, Coalville at the site of "Coalville House" in William Stenson's memory, by his family.



The Plaque states :-

Site of Coalville House

1770-1861 (born / died)

Here Lived

William Stenson

Mining Engineer

Founder of Whitwick Colliery

And

Father Of Coalville Town

Erected in Loving Memory

By His family

July 1999

According to "The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers records", his son, William Stenson Jnr., was elected to the NEIMME on Aug 5th 1853. Both father and son appear together in the NEIMME listings until c.1860, when William Snr. retired, and his son took over as manager at Whitwick Colliery. William Stenson Jnr., died in Coalville in 1870. He clearly inherited his father's engineering talents, as it was recorded in the July 24th 1857 edition of "The London Gazette", that William Stenson Jnr., of Whitwick Colliery, mining engineer, was granted a patent (No. 1182) on May 27th 1854 for "Improvements in Steam Engine Valves".

The Loughborough Monitor of the day described William Stenson as follows on his retirement.....*"A master warmly respected by his numerous workmen; and although strict and apparently occasionally harsh in his demeanor, he was at all times a sincere friend of the working man"*.

William Stenson died sixteen months following his retirement. On Nov 27th 1861, he died at his house in Coalville, the town which he had been so instrumental in founding.

As a final tribute to this great man, the Loughborough Monitor published the following obituary:-

The whole country knows that Mr. Stenson was the originator of Whitwick Colliery many years ago, what he made it, and how celebrated he left it; and thousands have, through him been provided with daily bread, and thousands more to this moment continue to enjoy a warm fireside.

No man can question but what he was the founder of Coalville, or that Whitwick, directly or indirectly, through him has grown into importance and profited greatly.

At length, full of years, he was called away, and this great man, in common with all others had to obey the summons. On Wednesday week a solemn paraphernalia stood before his door, the house which once knew him, knew him no more, and the mournful cavalcade, consisting of the hearse containing the body, eight morning coaches containing his family, his grandchildren, Joseph Whetstone of Leicester, one of his respected partners, with a few friends and long procession of coal miners, and the tradesmen of Coalville, slowly and sadly wended their way to Hugglescote, where he was interred in the vault that had received his wife 18 years ago. The deceased for several years had been a rigid adherent to the doctrines of Calvin, and was instrumental in rearing a chapel at Coalville, in which the gospel continues to be preached. It provides so much satisfaction to find that the aged deceased was respected for the firmness and consistent views he professed, combined with a sense of his own utter unworthiness and unabated trust in the Saviour who sustained him in his dying hours.

Rev. Mr. Foreman, in the evening preached the funeral Surmon, the Baptists kindly lent the use of their Chapel, in order to accommodate the very numerous congregation. The preacher ably discharged his last office for him. To say the deceased had no faults or failing would be a mistake; both sides were fully expatiated on; not a word of exaggeration or suppression relating to his character was supplied or omitted, and the congregation were satisfied with the impartiality of the oration.

In concluding our observation we can only hope that many men may still be raised up to serve their day and generation as well and as faithfully as Mr. Stenson has done.