

**COAL MINING IN THE LOCALITY OF  
HEATH END - 1810 TO 1862**



**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - APRIL 2024**

## **PREFACE**

The old prolific Heath End coal field originally worked by "The Old Men" is historically important as deep shaft coal mining was taking place well before 1810, although the author has not been able to find any comprehensive research material prior to that date. Coal mining continued until 1862 at Heath End when there was a gap of 11 years before John Lancaster opened his coal mine in 1873 - 1881, which is covered in a separate publication, details of which is given under recommended complimentary reading.

With the neaby Dimminsdale and Calke lime burning kilns and the lead smelting furnaces, the area must have been a dirty and foreboding place, which was in close proximity to Staunton Harold hall of course.

## **RECOMMENDED COMPLIMENTARY READING**

**"THE OPENING OF A NEW COAL MINE AT HEATH END BY JOHN LANCASTER & CO. OPENED 1873 - CLOSED 1881"**. This is free to download and read on the author's website

## **THE AUTHOR'S WEBSITE ADDRESS**

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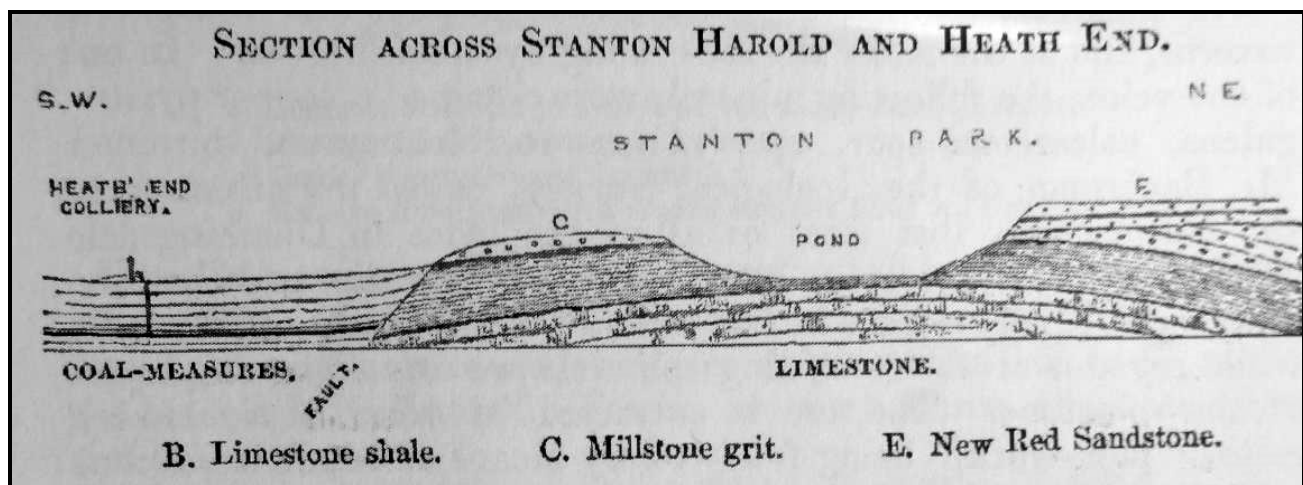
## COAL MINING IN THE LOCALITY OF HEATH END

It will be advantageous for the reader to have a basic understanding of the coal seams and boundary/branch faults in this area. The following is taken from "The geology of the Leicestershire Coal-Field and of the Country around Ashby-de-la-Zouch" by Edward Hull and is dated 1860:-

**Heath End Coals** – These constitute, as far has been hitherto determined, the lowest workable seams of the Coleorton coal-field. Their outcrop occurs at the entrance to Dimminsdale, and the seams are broken off against the boundary fault to the north-east of the Heath End pits on one side, and by a large branch fault, which ranges along the west side of Rough Heath, on the other. Please note that faults are breaks in the strata, accompanied by a vertical displacement.

The following is a section of the coal seams which were worked at Heath End Colliery. The coal seam was some 50 yards below the surface (Stanton is spelt Stanton) :-

1.	Bind (shale)	10ft
2.	Stone	4ft
3.	Bind	2ft ?
4.	Coal	4ft
5.	Stony bind	1ft
6.	Coal	9ft
		(Coal 2ft , Cannel 7ft)



In some places, the 4-foot coal rests immediately upon the thick coal, so as to form a solid seam 13 feet in thickness. The outcrop is visible (1860), but though the cannel is somewhat anthracitic so near the surface, there is reason to infer that its quality improves on the deep, and should this prove to be the case, it will form a seam of great value under the Coleorton district. At Heath End, the dip is southward, and it is terminated both to the east and west by large upcast faults. The earliest reference to coal pits at Heath End that we can find were those referred to as being worked by the old men as shown in the later Colin Owen map.

In 1788, Earl Ferrers decided to withdraw from the management of Lount Colliery and other enterprises on his estate. For an annual rent of £315, Joseph Boulbee

was able to lease from him for 21 years the "Lount Colliery", a lime works at Dimminsdale, a smelting house on Staunton Common, and 30 acres of land. Boulton was granted full access and mining rights for both lime and coal, and the right to extract clay in order to make bricks for the colliery, to use water from one of the pools to work the pump for the lime works, and to use up to 21 cords of wood per annum from the estate. He was entitled to use all the existing equipment in the colliery and the lime works on condition that he returned them in good order when the lease expired. The agreement gave Boulton a monopoly of coal mining throughout Newbold, Lount, Staunton, and Heath End plus a large part of Coleorton, and during the ensuing years, he was able to operate both Lount and Newbold collieries by employing the same companies of colliers, using Lount to do little more than satisfy the requirements of the lime works kilns. John Farey (the English geologist) recorded that a pit at Heath End / Staunton (half a mile west of Staunton Harold) had closed prior to 1810. This was likely to be one of the mines operated by Boulton, as his lease had expired in 1809.

**It was decided to include the following as evidence of the coal mining and limestone quarrying activity taking place in 1811:-**

**A Petition from Tenants of the Marquis of Hastings dated 1811**

We the undersigned tenants of the most noble the Marquis of Hastings occupying farms in Ashby Old Parks beg leave to represent to you that we sustain the most serious inconvenience for want of the road we formally used from Calling's Lane near Heath End leading through Lount Wood and communicating at the south end of the said wood with the turnpike road leading from Ashby de la Zouch to Nottingham.

The road through Lount Wood was of great consequence to us in the management of our respective farms, as the manure, lime, and coals used by us and the corn and other produce of our lands was often carried that way, and this road was of great utility and very generally used by the public to Derby and other places.

It is here that the general use of the road in question has been discontinued some time by reason of Earl Ferrers (*Robert Shirley 7<sup>th</sup> Earl Ferrers*) to whom Lount Wood belongs, having thought proper to make another road near to Staunton House for the use of his colliery and lime works, which being a convenient line for the country and kept in better repair than the other road, and carriages of every description being allowed to pass that way, the original road through Lount Wood was gradually discontinued and has of late being hardly ever used.

Lord Ferrers having recently thought it proper to prevent all persons, save and except those going to his colliery and limeworks from passing along the road near to Staunton House and having also closed the entrances into Lount Woods, and the original road through the same being nearly closed up and impeded by the growth of underwood as would naturally be the case from want of useage, we again beg to recommend this matter to your serious attention, trusting that you will adopt such prompt and efficacious measures as may restore to us the public that right of road to which use we were formerly accustomed, and of which we now consider ourselves to be unjustly deprived, and without which it will be impossible for us to cultivate our respective farm with profit or convenience.

Signed – Thomas Robinson, John Sharp, Charles Knowles, John Lagor, Frances Heathcote, William Elverson, William Hall.

Following the expiry of Boulton's lease in 1809, it was renewed by James Orme of Sutton Bonnington, Nottinghamshire for a period of 21 years at an annual rent of £350. This entitled him to the privileges previously enjoyed by Boulton. Orme was still working a colliery at Heath End in 1827 when the Ashby Canal Company agreed to pay him £39 compensation on condition that he refrained from mining a section of land immediately beneath the Cloud Hill railway.

Apparently, mining was interrupted for several years on the Staunton estate by a lengthy dispute over the ownership of the Ferrer's estates, and it was not until 1833 that new leases were taken out in respect of a colliery at Heath End.

The following two advertisements appeared in the **Leicester Mercury on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1823 and Jan 15<sup>th</sup> 1825** respectively for coal mines at Staunton Harold :-

#### **TO COLLIERS**

Wanted, two respectable and well experienced colliers, as Charter Masters, to undertake the getting of coal by the ton, at a colliery where the coal is three feet thick, good roof, and floor, the pits not more than forty yards deep and the works perfectly free from wild fire.

#### **TO COAL MASTERS**

To be let for a term of years, a very valuable and extensive colliery, now in full work, which may be entered upon immediately, together with all the implements and other machinery thereto belonging

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### **MATHEWS AND SPRINGTHORPE**

William Mathews, an Architect and surveyor from Ashby, and William Springthorpe, a miner from Staunton Harold had formed the company "Mathews and Springthorpe" and acquired a 21 year lease from Earl Ferrers in September 1833, pretty well on the same terms that Joseph Boulton had acquired it in 1788. The basic terms of the lease (with reference to coal mining) held at the Leicestershire and Rutland Record Office (25D60/107) are as follows. The lease also allowed him to work the lime and lead quarries at Dimmingsdale :-

- Two mines or seams of coal on lands comprised in an 1825 settlement in Staunton Harold with power to sink shafts for working mines; messuages and appurtenances, on closes called Home Close, Wilkin's Close & Coal Pit Close (14 acres). Rent £165 p.a.
- £25 per 1,000 tons when more than 6,000 tons p.a. produced.
- 1s 6d for every 1,000 bricks used for the colliery
- Date Sept 30th 1833

As explained above, Mathews and Springthorpe had formed a company named "Mathews & Springthorpe", however, as the following newspaper advertisement shows, this partnership apparently only lasted about a month although it is suggested in another respected publication that this lasted much longer :-

**Leicester Journal – December 26<sup>th</sup> 1834**

**NOTICE IS HEARBY GIVEN**

That the partnership lately subsisting between William Mathews and William Springthorpe, hereto before carrying on the trade or business of coal miners and coal merchants, at Staunton Harold, in the County of Leicester, under the firm of Mathews and Springthorpe, is dissolved by mutual consent, as from the 5<sup>th</sup> day of November last past.

All persons to whom the said firm is indebted, are requested forthwith to send in their accounts to the said William Mathews; all debts due or owing to or from the said partnership, are to be received and paid by the said William Mathews who alone carries on the said trade and business at Staunton Harold aforesaid. Dated the 21<sup>st</sup> day of December 1834.

(Witness)  
H. C. Whatmore

William x (His Mark) Springthorpe  
William Mathews

**Notice of Mathews and Springthorpe partnership being dissolved**

**Leicester Journal – December 7<sup>th</sup> 1838**

**CHEAP COAL**

The public are respectfully informed that there is a regular supply of coal to be had at the Heath End Colliery, at the following reduced prices:-

Main Coal - £5 per ton

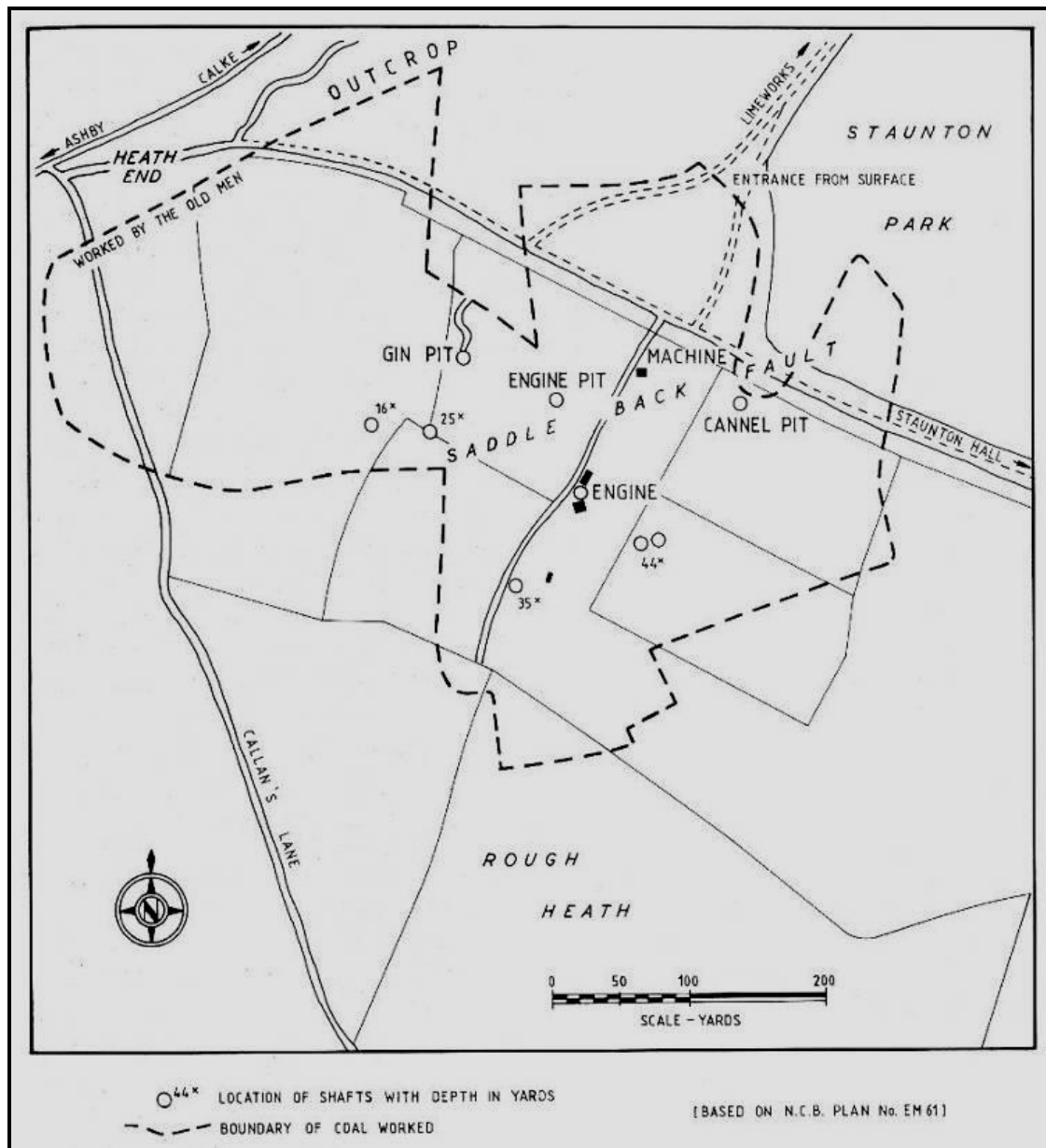
Cannel Slack (a superior quality of slack) - £4

To make a cheerful fire, it is recommended to use the cannel slack with the main coal  
N.B. There is generally a supply of cannel coal, which is sold at 8s. 4d per ton.

**Staunton Harold – November 26<sup>th</sup> 1838**

**Copy of an advertisement for coal being mined by William Mathews**

During the time of **Boulbee, Orme, Mathews** and later **Lancaster**, 16 known pits were worked in the area of Heath End, including gin and engine pits, varying in depth from 48ft to over 200ft. They worked the Heath End seam, including 7ft. of cannel coal, some of which was sent to Leicester for gas production. The evidence relating to the location of the numerous coal mines in the vicinity of Heath End, Rough Heath Wood and Staunton Harold hall is to say the least, somewhat sketchy, but Colin Owen's map below will at least demonstrate the considerable coal mining activity that took place in this area of Heath End over hundreds of years.



**Coal pits in Heath End 1853 (copyright Colin Owen - Leics & South Derby's Coalfields). This has been included to demonstrate the high level of mining activity in this area.**

When Mathew's lease expired in 1854, Earl Ferrers of Staunton Harold Hall accused Mathews of using wasteful mining practices, which had resulted in the loss of large quantities of coal and limestone through subsidence. He claimed compensation amounting to £1,870 for the loss of 17,600 tons of limestone, and a further £1,750 for the loss of 70,000 tons of coal. Eventually, the dispute was submitted to arbitration. J.T.Woodhouse of Overseal represented Ferrers and T. D. Jeffcock, a mineral agent from Sheffield represented Mathews. In 1855, following thorough inspection of the works, they ruled that Ferrers was entitled to all fixtures and materials in the lime works and to all colliery buildings, but that Mathews' executors were entitled to the engines, machinery and railway at the colliery. Furthermore, Ferrers was to pay them £150, while the cost of the case was to be shared.

The following advertisement appeared in the press in 1855 confirming that Mathews was selling off some of his mining equipment:-

**Leicester Journal – November 9<sup>th</sup> 1855**

**HEATH END COLLIERY, STAUNTON HAROLD  
TO BE SOLD BY PRIVATE CONTRACT**

An excellent condensing engine, twelve-horse power; Pump trees, Rods, Skeps, Waggon for Skeps, Buckets, Iron wheels, Iron barrel, Turn barrel, Chains, Wood uprights, Winding machine, Gin, A quantity of railway metals, Blocks, Bricks, and numerous other things connected with a colliery plant.

Particulars may be had of Miss Mathews, or Mr. Thomas Davenport, Auctioneer, Ashby de la Zouch.

The mention of a “Gin” and condensing engine in the above advertisement suggests that this was for equipment at the Gin and Engine Pits shown on the preceding Colin Owen’s map.

**DEATH AT HEATH END COLLIERY DURING THE TENURE OF  
WILLIAM MATHEW’S LEASE**

**WILLIAM BIRD & JAMES BIRD**

Age: 39 and 13  
Date: January 1<sup>st</sup> 1840  
Occupation: Miners  
Colliery operated by:  
District: Ashby de la Zouch, Leics  
Reason: Buried by collapsed scaffolding and rubbish

Conflicting newspaper reports give William and James as father and son and uncle and nephew respectively. However, we know from a gravestone in Breedon Church cemetery that William Bird was the father and James was his son. The gravestone shows that his daughter Harriet, also died on the same day. Although it cannot be proven, it is quite possible that she also died down the mine or shortly afterwards from injuries received. This was just before the 1842 child commission enquiry into children working down the mines who often used to carry candles, open fire doors and sweep the railroads etc. Certainly her death or injury would not have been publicised at this time.

**Leicester Journal – January 10<sup>th</sup> 1840**

**DEATH AT HEATH END COLLIERY, STAUNTON HAROLD - FATAL ACCIDENT**

On Friday last, an inquest was held at Staunton Harold on the bodies of William and James Bird, father and son, who were killed in a coal pit belonging to Mr. Mathews, on Wednesday, by the scaffolding giving way and a large quantity of earth falling upon them. The former was thirty nine years of age, and the latter 13. The unfortunate sufferers remained alive for some time buried in the soil: the father was



heard to utter "I cannot live", and when they were extricated life was extinct. –  
**Verdict, "Accidental Death".**

## **AN ALTERNATIVE NEWSPAPER REPORT**

### **DEATH AT HEATH END COLLIERY, STAUNTON HAROLD**

On the 3rd inst., an inquest was held at Staunton Harold, on view of the bodies of William and James Bird, who came by their deaths in the following manner: - The deceased, one of whom was in his thirty ninth year, and the other in his thirteenth, uncle and nephew (*actually father and son*), had been at work at the colliery of Staunton Harold, but latterly were obliged to desist, in consequence of a fire in one of the pits. About ten days previous to the deaths of the deceased, it was believed that the fire was sufficiently got under to enable them to resume work. On their attempting to do so, it was found that the roof had partially fallen in, when it became necessary to form a temporary scaffold to support it. This was done, but, owing to the want of sufficient props, had again fallen in. Another, and apparently a more secure scaffold was put up on which a great quantity of the rubbish had been laid for the purpose of clearing the pit. A ground bailiff of the name of Dent, with the deceased, went under the scaffold for the purpose of securing it by props, when it suddenly gave way and buried the uncle and the nephew in the ruins. Dent, who was rather out of it at the time escaped. The deceased were dug out as speedily as possible, and were found quite dead. - **Verdict "Accidental Death.**

## **THE OPENING OF A NEW COAL MINE AT HEATH END BY HALL AND WHITEHOUSE**

**Leicester Journal – August 28<sup>th</sup> 1857**

### **TO COLLIERY PROPRIETORS**

#### **TO BE LET**

The collieries at Staunton Harold (Heath End) near Ashby de la Zouch, in the County of Leicester, a most favourable opportunity presents itself for a safe and productive investment of capital in this improving district.

A seam of coal 13 feet thick has been proved at a moderate depth of 50 yards; also bands of iron stone, very rich in quality and a considerable extent may be leased.

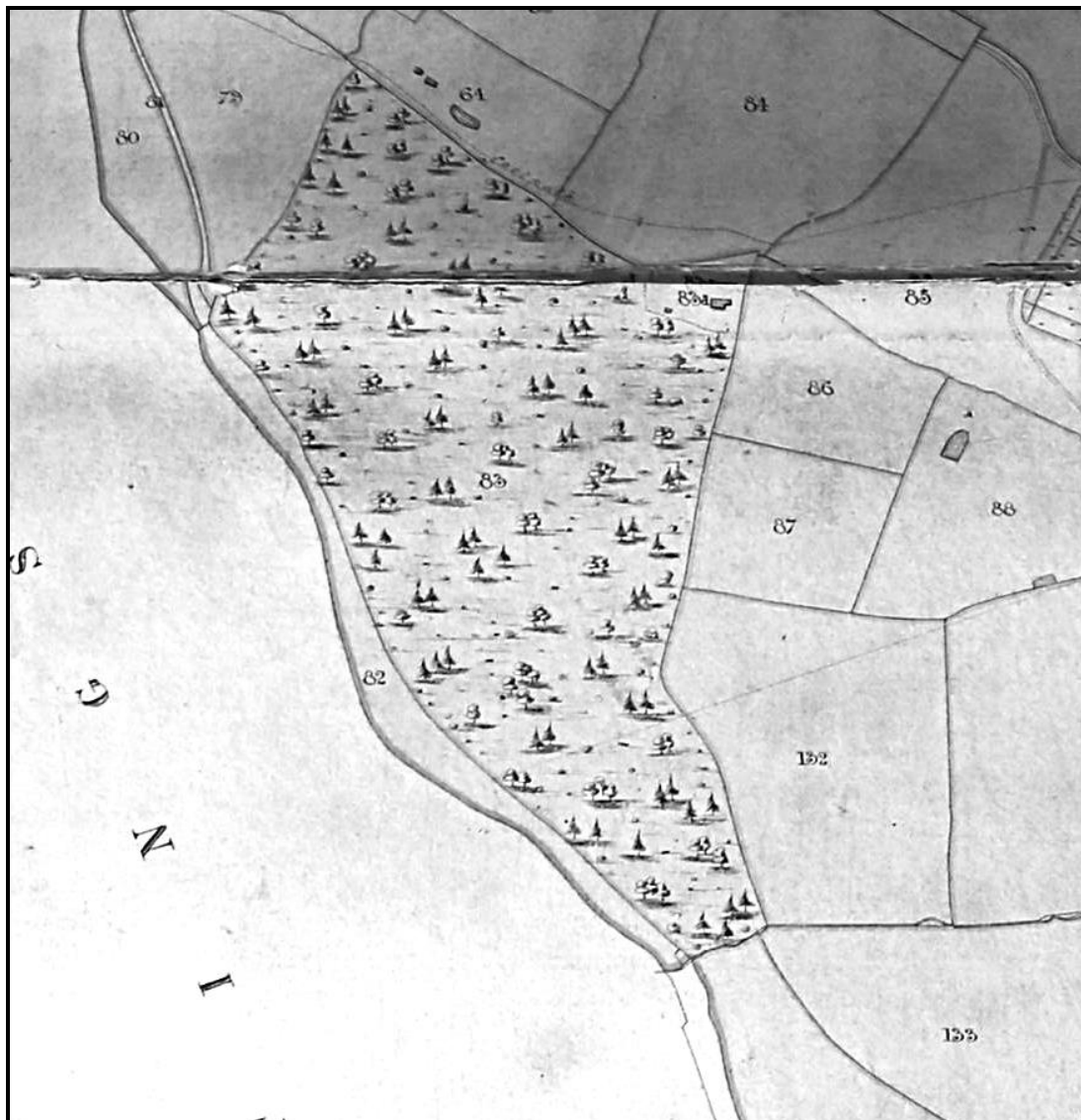
**The works are connected with the Midland Railway, at Ashby de la Zouch, by a tram road, and thence to the Ashby canal.** Immediate possession may be had

To view the works, applications may be made to William Harris, Bailiff, Staunton Harold, and for particulars relating thereto, or to them for the same, to Mr. W. S. Cope, mining engineer, Hallfield Cottage, Hanley; or Mr. Ralston, Chartley, Nr. Stafford.

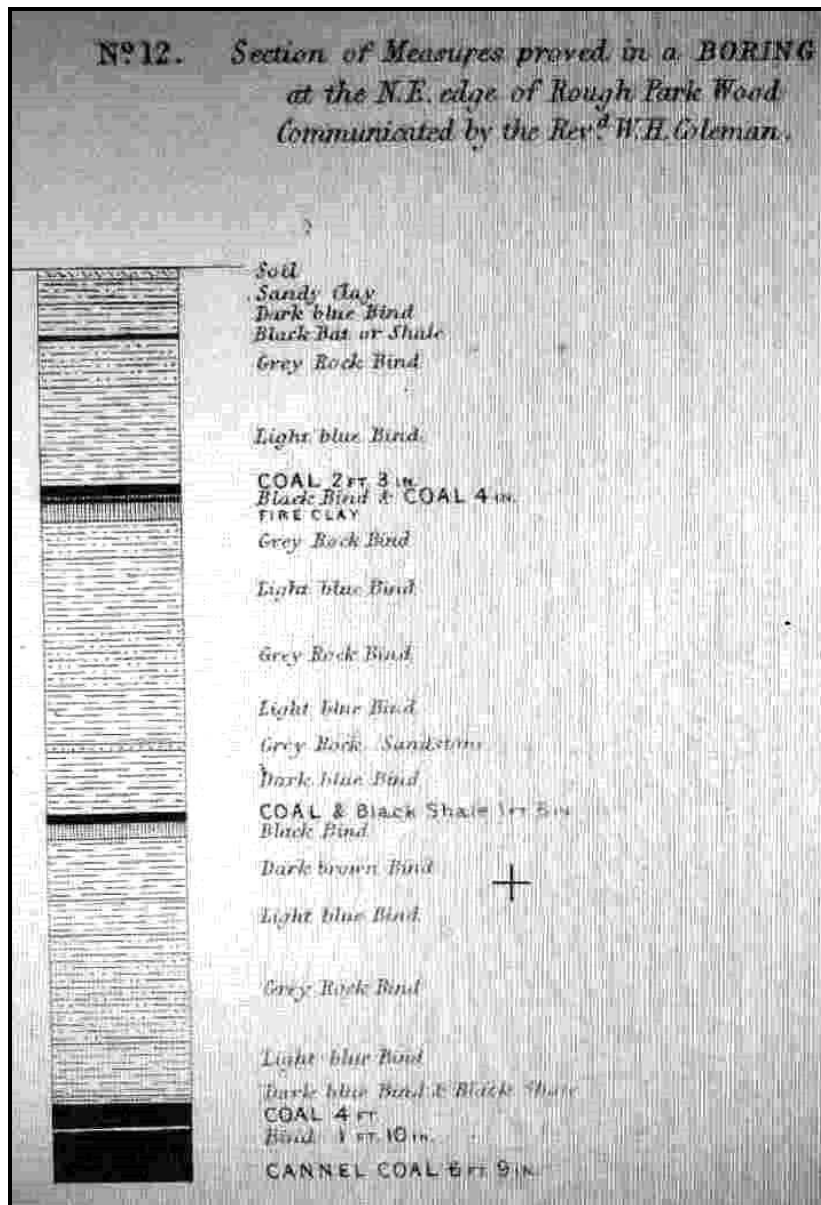
A lease dated May 28<sup>th</sup> 1856 between Mr. Ralston and Mr. Richard Hall held at Derby Record Office tells us that new tenants, Richard Hall of Pensnett near Dudley and W. Whitehouse, the manager of Corbyns Hall works, Dudley leased a colliery, which it is not unreasonable to assume that this was the colliery referred to in the above advertisement. The lease was taken for 21 years at 1s. 0d. per ton royalty charge for large coal and 6d per ton for small coal or slack.

The lessees were given the right to mine ironstone and clay for brickmaking but were to **supply Ferrers' limeworks with slack at 2s. per ton.** Three borings were made on the north east side of Rough Heath wood, two of which encountered Heath End coal. The schedule for the 1859 Staunton estate map lists plot 83a as a colliery (adjacent to the top left corner of plot 86), and this can just be discerned on the following extract of the map. Rough Wood is numbered 83.

Colin Owen tells us that Hall and Whitehouse seem to have lost interest in the venture, and the mine was closed in 1862,



**Extract from 1859 estate map showing Rough Wood to the south of Heath End. Hall and Whitehouse's colliery is shown adjacent to the north-west corner of plot 86 and is marked 83A.**



The above is evidence of a boring carried out in 1856 to a depth of 100 feet adjacent to where Hall & Whitehouse's Colliery was located, and clearly shows the good seam of cannel coal available.