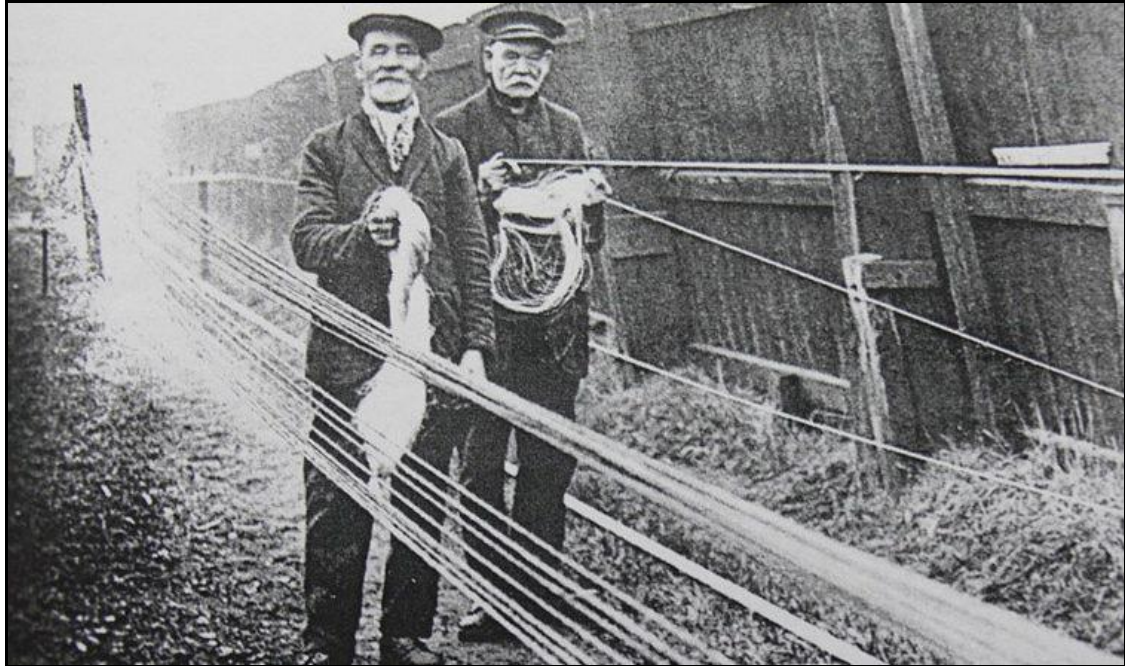


THE COLEORTON "ROPE WALK"



BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JANUARY 2022

FRONT COVER PHOTOGRAPH

Location or date of this photograph is unknown but is probably a good representation of what the Rope Walk would have been like at Coleorton.

PREFACE

The purpose of this short publication is basically to record the existence of the "Rope Walk" at Coleorton. It is hoped that further information will be forthcoming which can then be added at a later date.

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Numerous other social and industrial history publications are available on the author's website which are free to download and read
<https://samuelstewart940.wixsite.com/mysite>

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THE COLEORTON ROPE WALK

In the early 1990s, Leicestershire County Council in collaboration with North West Leicestershire District Council issued a "North West Leicestershire Coal Mining Trail" leaflet. As part of the trail it featured "The Rope Walk" at Coleorton with the following narrative :-

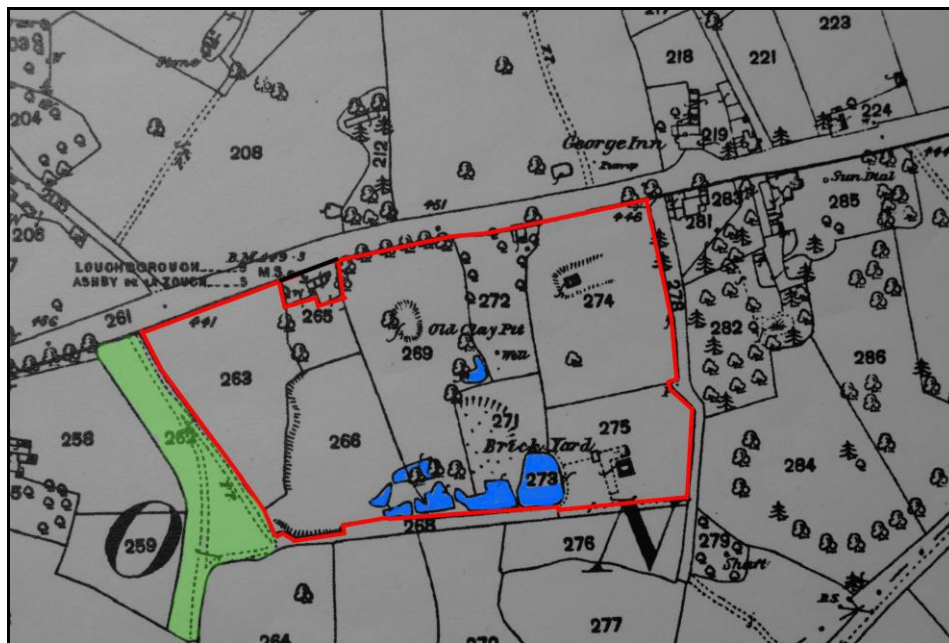
This is a good example of long lost industries being maintained by place names. Rope was made here by hand until well into the 19th century for use both in the mines and in agriculture. The individual strands from which rope was made, were pegged out at one end of the "walk" and the rope twisted by hand as the rope maker walked the length of the ropewalk.

As the actual field was identified on the trail map, it is not unreasonable to assume that they had some firm evidence relating to this.

In the publication "Vanished Industries" by H. Butler Johnson (early 1900s) he wrote:-

Another vanished industry, this time a pleasant healthy one, is to be found in the name of a field, the "Rope Walk", in the parish of Coleorton. Beyond the mere fact of the name, we have, so far, failed to ascertain anything concerning its history.

This is an extract from the 1881/2 surveyed, 1885 published O/S map showing coloured green the field identified in the above described L.C.C. mining trail leaflet. The area outlined in red shows the extent of the Coleorton Brickworks. Its location can be related to the "George Inn" identified on the map.



The dotted lines indicated as a footpaths are interesting. Was that the Rope Walk track?

Anyone with an interest in Industrial History will be aware of Ropewalks located in areas of ship building such as Liverpool, Chatham Docks etc where the

manufacturing of ropes can still be observed in the museums there. However, there is little available evidence of inland based Rope Walks, particularly in coal mining areas, where there would have been a large demand for rope in the 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, that the author has been able to find to date.

The following two examples that have been found are interesting, in that they prove other Rope Walks existed in the midland coal mining areas.

On the respected Bob Bradley (healeyhero.co.uk) mining website the following is recorded :-

The Ropewalk in Nottingham was a stretch of land about 100 yards long by 60 yards wide used for the manufacture of ropes and one was established in Lenton. William Coates began a firm in 1840 when the arduous method of manufacturing ropes began by a mass of loose fibres being wrapped around a workers waist and after it had been run out it would be tallowed ready for coiling. The workers would walk continually up and down the "Rope Walk" and the rope would be twisted in a way that that it would not unwind afterwards. Incredibly, a small pit in Yorkshire would still be using a wound hemp rope about 5 inches wide x 1 inch thick for winding in 1943 (possibly after 150 years). The width was achieved by plaiting several single ropes together.

Leicester Daily Post - Monday 09 December 1872

ROPE and TWINE MANUFACTURERS

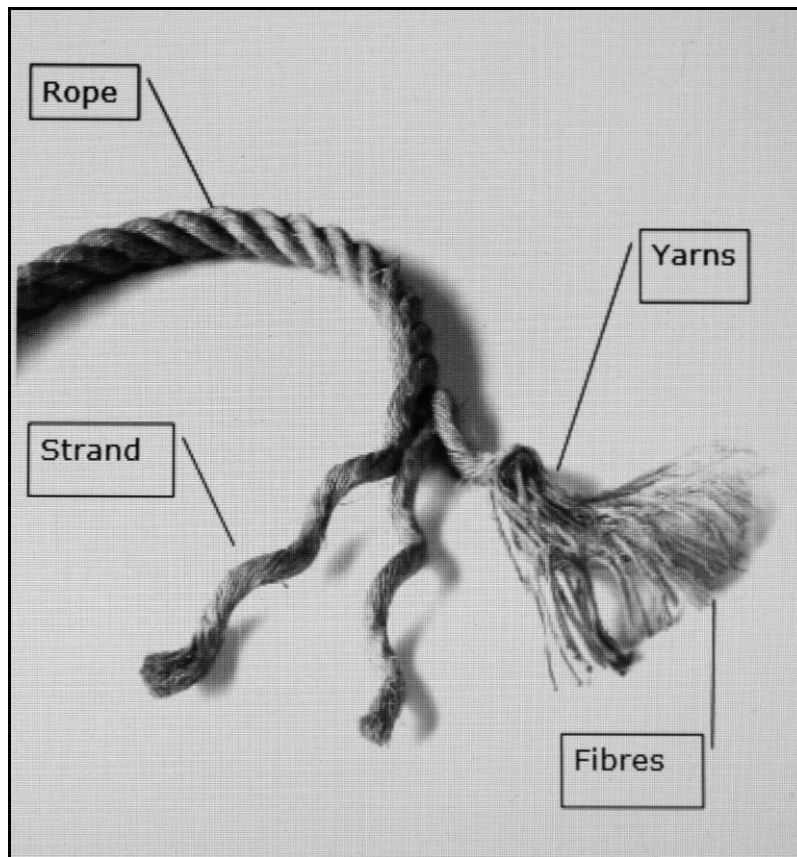
To be LET, at Nuneaton, with Immediate possession, a very superior ROPE WALK, 100 yards long, with good bedding at one end of it. The whole of the Plant can be taken to at valuation. There is a good residence attached, consisting of a parlour, kitchen, front shop, and two sleeping rooms. Rent moderate—Aptly to Mr. Isaac Hogg, George and Dragon Inn, Wash-lane, Nuneaton. N.B.—**There is no other Rope Walk within five miles, of Nuneaton.**

The last sentence confirms that there were other Rope Walk in existence.

*The author strongly recommends that the reader refers to the following website relating to - **THOMAS HART'S ROPE-WORKS BLACKBURN: An Industrial Link with the Eighteenth Century.***

<https://www.cottontown.org/Other%20Industry/Pages/Rope-Making.aspx>

BASIC ROPE MAKING TECHNOLOGY



Spinning the yarn

A large bundle of naturally short fibres, preferably hemp, were wrapped around the waist of the rope maker. A yarn / cord was fed out by him from the bundle, the end of which was attached to a spinning wheel turned by another operator to impart a twist into the yarn. This, in simple terms can be compared to the spinning of wool process.

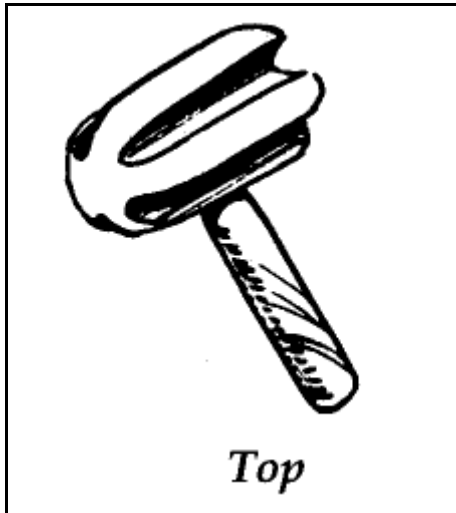
Some hemp was grown in Lincolnshire and some was imported from Russia or Italy and although it was the strongest of the various fibres suitable for rope making (others were Coire, Sisal, Manila) the finished ropes had to be dipped or painted with something to make them waterproof though, such as tallow, which would be readily available.

Depending on the length of rope required the rope maker would have to walk up and down the ropewalk.

Following the spinning of the yarn / cord, six or more yarns / cords were then twisted together to make a strand. Strands were then twisted together to form the rope. A cone shaped item called a top was placed between the strands during twisting into a rope to keep the twist tight and even (see photograph on next page). The finished rope would have been about two thirds the length of the strands used due to the twisting. There needed to be a specific direction of rotation observed when winding the yarns, strands and rope in order to prevent the finished ropes from unwinding.



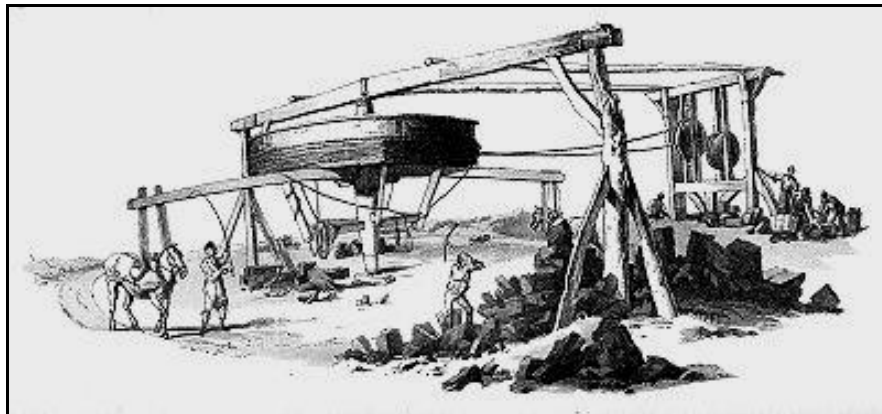
Winding the yarns into strands



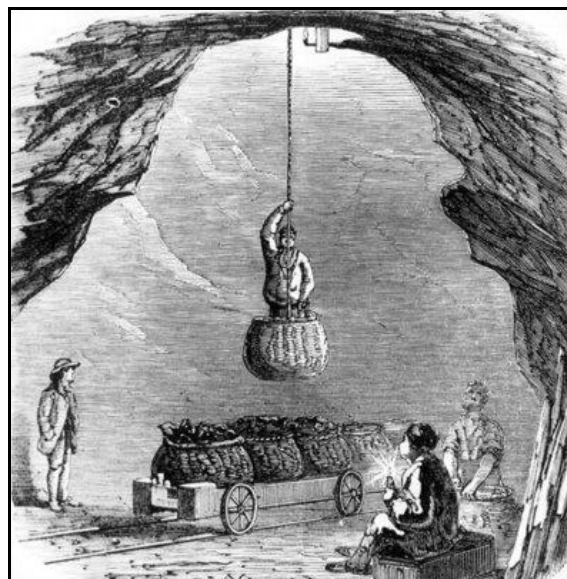
SOME ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE USE OF ROPES IN EARLY COAL MINING



Illustration of coal being pulled along in Corves (hazel twig baskets) on sleds or sledges by a woman and child



Whim or Whimsy Gin (Horse powered winding wheel)



Miners and coal being raised and lowered in corves