

**THE OPENING OF A NEW COAL MINE AT
HEATH END BY JOHN LANCASTER & CO
OPENED 1873 - CLOSED 1881.**



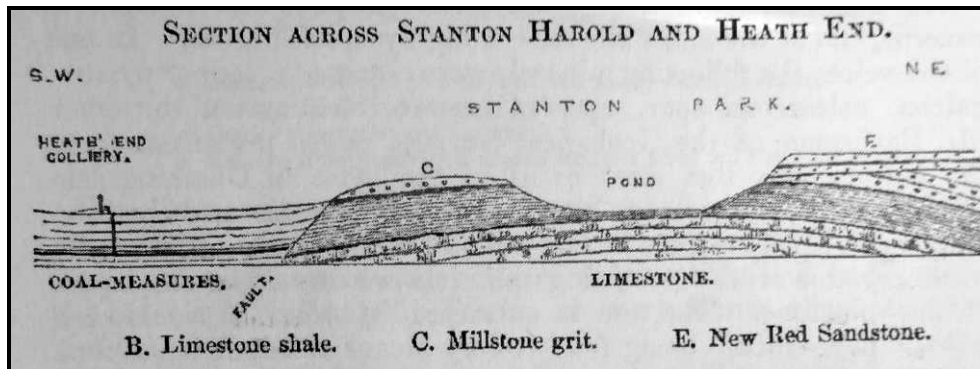
John Lancaster – Photo Credit – Kelmarsh Hall

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - 2019

PREFACE

This updated publication was originally incorporated in the publication entitled "A Social and Industrial History of Heath End and the Surrounding Area" which is still free to download and read on the author's website samuelstewart.com

There was a lengthy period of inactivity in the mining of coal in the Heath End area until workings were restarted in 1873 by John Lancaster & Co.



THE GEOLOGICAL STRATA ACROSS STAUNTON HAROLD, HEATH END AND DIMMINSDALE WHICH SHOWS THE FAULT BETWEEN THE COAL MEASURES AND THE LIMESTONE MEASURES AT DIMMINSDALE

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A SYNOPSIS OF THE LIFE OF JOHN LANCASTER

John Lancaster was born in Radcliffe near Bury on the 19th September 1815 and was one of seven sons of that place. From an early age he showed a liking for mechanics and an interest in mining engineering. When he was about 20 years of age, he and his brother bored for coal on Chat Moss. He married Euphemia Gibson in 1841 who bore him four children, Catherine, John, Robert and George Granville. In 1841 he worked on the sinking of a colliery at Patricroft where coal was cut to a depth of 1,400 ft. Although this colliery was run by his father and partner for several years, John retained responsibility for the engineering management of the site. In 1847 he became mineral agent for Lord Mostyn at Mostyn Colliery. From 1849 to 1856, he was manager of Earl Granvilles Ironworks and Collieries at Shelton, Staffs, and from 1855 to 1858 he took charge of the sinking a new colliery at Shireoaks, near Worksop, 520 yards deep, for the Duke of Newcastle.

He was a key figure in the Kirklees Hall Coal and Iron Company and with his partners built the Kirkless Hall Ironworks. Five furnaces were built from 1856 to 1860, and they were the first erected in Lancashire, with the exception of two small charcoal furnaces at Ulverston.

Between 1855 and 1868 he leased Hindley Hall, Wigan from the Leigh family and in 1861 had purchased Bilston Grange a Victorian mansion in 175 acres of land in, Dunchurch, Nr. Rugby, Warwickshire. He was appointed deputy Lieutenant of Warwickshire.

He became chairman of the Wigan Coal and Iron Company in 1870, five years after the Kirklees Hall Company amalgamated with the Earl of Crawford's coal and engineering interests. He was also a significant share-holder in the company. In 1859, he had purchased a yacht by the name of Deerhound, a three masted sail and steam vessel, and by 1864 had joined the Royal Yacht Squadron at Cowes, Isle of Wight. It was during a leisurely trip with members of the family and others in 1864, that he stopped at Cherbourg. When he sailed out of port, he got caught up in a sea battle off the coast between the confederate ship Alabama and the Union ship Kearsage which was in the latter years of the American Civil war. Lancaster's ship rescued the crew of the Alabama when it was sunk by the war steamer Kearsage. John Lancaster was also a Lieutenant in the Naval Reserve.

In 1865 the Lancashire union Railway was started with John Lancaster as president. By 1868 he had become MP for Wigan for six years and from 1870 to 1884 was chairman of the West Cumberland Iron and Steel works.

During the same period that John Lancaster was working his pit at Heath End, he invested in the Welsh coal mining industry. At the beginning of March 1878, Messrs J. Lancaster & Co took over control by lease of the Henwaun, Blaini colliery from the debt ridden Nan-ty-glo & Blaina Co., and on the 23rd of March it was reported that he held the lease for both collieries. There were 2 steam winder pits within yards of each other sunk to 178 yards and raising 500 tons per day. One of the pits was an ironstone pit.

By 1881, Lancaster he had sold his significant share holding in the Wigan Coal and Iron Company. John Lancaster died on April 21st 1884 aged 69 at his home in Hampstead.

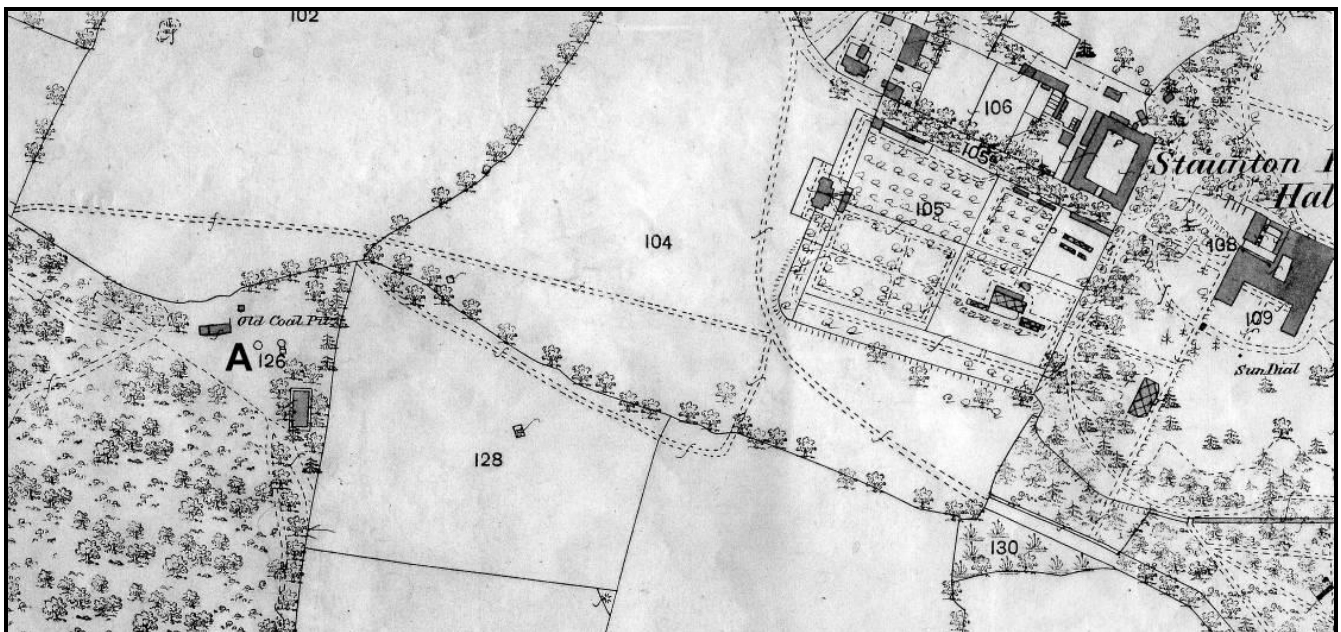
However, the company of John Lancaster & Co apparently lived on, as in July 1888,

it is recorded that the company took over the lease of the Cwmtillery and Roseheyworth collieries in Wales and in 1892 they opened a brickworks in Blaina and started manufacturing their own bricks. In 1896 they owned Arrael Pit in Aberbeeg. As late as 1938, the company is recorded as still being involved in the coal mining industry.

**PRESS ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING THE OPENING OF
JOHN LANCASTER'S COAL MINE AT HEATH END IN 1873
(CLOSED EARLY 1881)**

LEICESTER CHRONICLE – AUGUST 2ND 1873

This new foundation has been entered upon by Messrs. Lancaster and Co., who, after sinking 60 yards, have come upon coal. Earl Ferrers was immediately appraised of the happy result, and shortly afterwards, accompanied by Captain Walsh (*husband of Lady Augusta Shirley, sister of the 10th Earl*) and another gentleman, arrived at the pit mouth, and attended by Mr. Edwin, made a descent, and brought therefore a piece of the mineral. Afterwards, Captain Walsh made a similar excursion, with a like result. His Lordship was highly gratified, and as an earnest of his satisfaction, ordered an excellent dinner to be provided and given to all the workmen, on Saturday the 26th. A number of workmen and miners, headed by the Coleorton Brass Band, presented themselves at the Staunton Hall, one of the seats of the noble Earl, and, after playing out a well selected programme, led the way to the place above mentioned, where a spacious marquee was erected. After the cloth was drawn, a plentiful supply of good ale, and lighter drinks and beverage, with stacks of tobacco, were introduced for appropriation to personal use and comfort. On Mr. Edwin taking the chair, the usual loyal toasts were proposed. The next toast was "Earl Ferrers and family", at which the cheering was immense. Next followed "The Messrs. Lancaster & Co", which was received with musical honours, the workmen expressing their gratification that such gentlemen had come into the neighbourhood. Mr. Edwin and Messrs Leadbitter (Steward) and Harris (*Bailiff*) were warmly toasted, and suitably responded. The band played at intervals, and a song occasionally lent greatly to the enjoyment of the company.



**John Lancaster's Coal Mine in the north east corner of Rough Heath Wood
with the two shafts marked **A** (1881 surveyed O/S map)**



The four large remaining stones in the above photograph would probably have been the foundation stones for one of the two colliery head stocks. They have substantial bolts / fixings in them secured by lead in the holes.



The above photograph shows the area of the “Engine Pond” which is now full of silt of course; however, the perimeter can clearly be discerned still. The engine pond would have been used to supply water to the boilers of the winding and pumping engines. This is shown to the south east of the two shafts marked **A** on the preceding 1881 map. The two shafts were sunk to a depth of 68 yards (62metres) and 12 feet (3.7 meters) in diameter in the north east corner of Rough Wood. The one on the RH side having winding gear, with the LH one presumably being an air shaft. They

worked the bottom seven feet of the good quality Heath End cannel coal and sold large quantities of it to Leicester to be used in gas production. They were seriously hampered by the varying thickness of the seam and its high pyrites content which caused it to ignite through spontaneous combustion. The mine proved expensive in terms of human life and details of those who lost their lives are appended at the end of this section.

John Lancaster's son George Granville Lancaster, aged 27, who was a qualified mining engineer, was shown in the 1881 census as living in Staunton Harold with his wife Emily aged 29 who was born in Mansfield, and their daughter Isabella aged 4 months who was born in Staunton Harold. They were not listed in the 1871 census. We can only assume that George had moved to the locality to become involved in the day to day running of the colliery along with the colliery manager at that time, Jonathan Enion.

The difficulties encountered, led to attempts to locate coal to the south, including the sinking of two more shafts in 1881 under the direction of George Granville Lancaster. One was recorded as 70 yards deep in the corner of Rough Wood and the other 100 yards further south. Although this proved the existence of Heath End coal, the seam thickness had reduced somewhat and water became a constant problem. Therefore the whole development was abandoned, finally resulting in the closure of the colliery in early 1881.

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**JOHN LANCASTER & CO.,
COLLIERY PROPRIETORS,
AND
COAL MERCHANTS.**

CLEMENT PRETTY, Agent.

CENTRAL OFFICES:

22, LONDON ROAD.

BRANCH:

190a, HUMBERSTONE ROAD, LEICESTER.

Coals supplied in Bags of 112 lbs. nett, at Market Prices.

CANNEL COAL, burns bright and clean, emits great heat, and is in every respect a first-class coal.

THE BEST CANNEL is hand-loaded in lumps, and does not make any slack.

THE COBBLES are passed over screens, and both these qualities are well adapted for household purposes.

THE DERBY BRIGHTS are also a first-class coal, and suitable for very best house purposes.

DERBY COBBLES of the same description.

Truck Loads supplied to any station at nett colliery price.

Orders received for the above at the Offices, 22, London Road, Leicester, will receive prompt attention.

Scribbling Diaries and Pocket Books, at J. & T. Spencers.

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1880 advert for Lancaster's coal in Leicester by their agent Clement Pretty

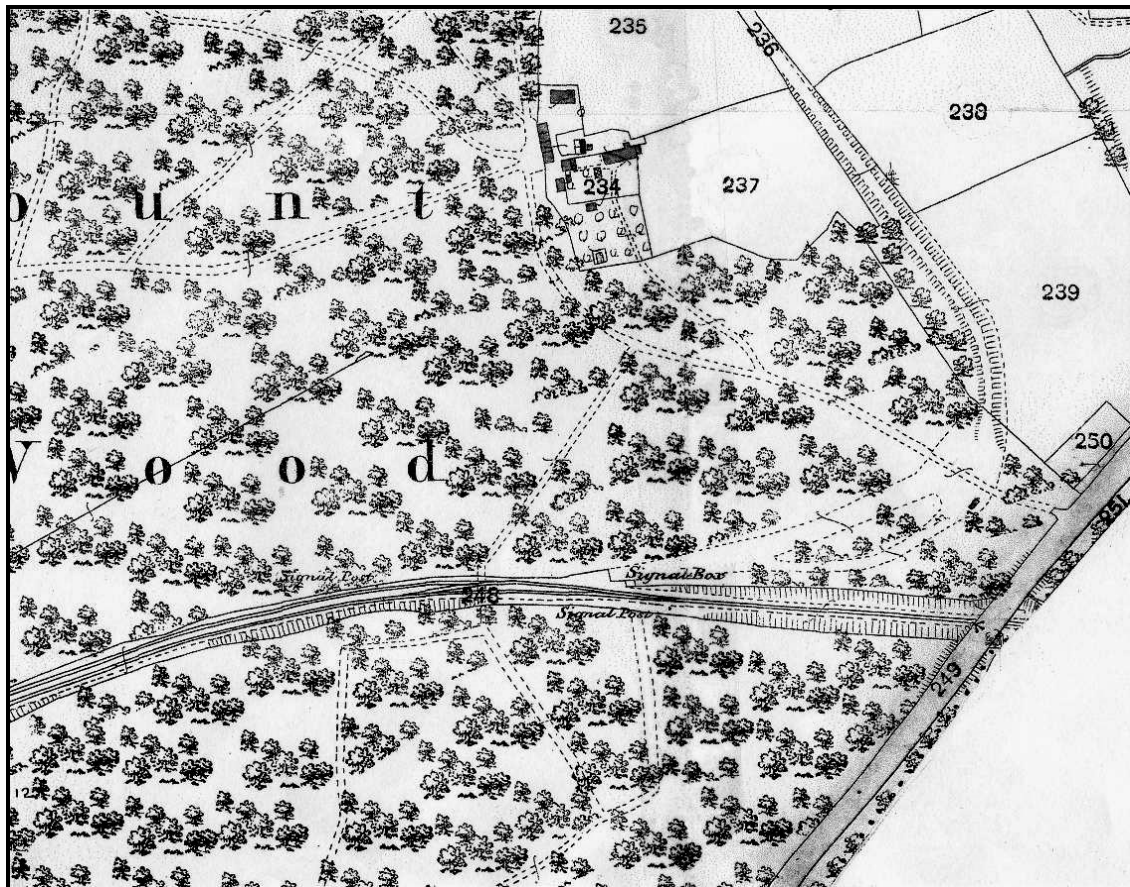
Please read the following text in conjunction with the O/S map surveyed 1881, on the next page:-

The John Lancaster colliery had its own 1¼ mile branch line (236) running in a north westerly direction from an exchange sidings on the Worthington to Ashby section of the Midland Railway (248), about 2 miles south west of Worthington Station. This part of the Midland Railway had opened on January 1st 1874, and presumably this was one of the major attractions in John Lancaster's decision to sink this colliery at Heath End. The dates show that it would only have taken in the order of 12 months to construct the line from the colliery to the main Midland Line. The author is of the view that this tramway used wooden sleepers to support the rails. The private sidings agreement was made on 9th October 1872. The main line passed under the Ashby to Breedon road (249) through a tunnel, presumably to allow Lancaster to move shaft sinking materials to his remote colliery site. In the publication "Industrial Railways and Locomotives of Leicestershire and Derbyshire" – "Industrial Railways Society 2006 A.R.Etherington & J.R.Bendall" it is recorded that part of the exchange sidings and a short length of the branch at the junction were reinstated by 1901, without formal

agreement, for the use of Earl Ferrer's tenants and not lifted until October 1955. The rail gauge was 4ft 8½ins.

John Lancaster had invested a significant amount of money in this mine, including the extra cost of building the branch railway to connect the mine with the Midland Railway at Lount Wood side, and also including the purchase of a Manning Wardle 0-6-0ST saddle tank loco named Earl Ferrers. After the colliery closed, this engine went to Bestwood Coal & Iron Works which John Lancaster opened and became the first director of.

Name	Class	Wheels Gauge	Builder Works No/Year built	Built For
"EARL FERRERS"	M Class	0-6-0ST Standard	<u>Manning Wardle & Co, Leeds</u> 561/1876	J. Lancaster & Co - Heath End Colliery. (Sold to Bestwood Coal & Iron Works)



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In the 1881 census, John Lancaster is given as living at Bilton Grange, Dunchurch, Rugby with his wife Euphemia and servants etc. This is now a school, and the Victorian mansion which forms the main school was built in 1846. He had sold his major share holding in the Wigan Coal and Iron Company in 1881 and died at his home in Hastings on the south coast in 1884, suggesting he had been experiencing failing health.

One can only assume that his son George, who by then was probably a wealthy man also, did not want to continue with a loss making venture at Heath End. The following newspaper advertisement confirms that the mine was closed in early 1881 by termination of his lease, and gives details of the sale by auction of the substantial colliery plant, machinery and railway lines, sleepers, points etc., on May 31st 1881. **This advertisement clearly demonstrates the considerable sums of money invested by Lancaster in the colliery.**

LEICESTER CHRONICLE – MAY 28TH 1881

HEATH END COLLIERY

William Graham and Son are instructed by Messrs. J. Lancaster & Co. (in consequence of the termination of their lease) to sell by auction at the above colliery, connected by a siding with the Midland Railway Company on Tuesday, May 31st, 1881 at twelve o'clock noon, in Lots.

The first-class modern Colliery Plant and Machinery, consisting of locomotive tank engine, six wheels coupled, 20 inch horizontal winding engine, beam condensing winding engine, fitted with 6ft. drum complete, 30 inch direct acting pumping engine, 12 inch horizontal engine, 5ft. drum, table engine, fitted with 6ft drum, pair of 8in. diagonal engines (geared for endless rope), Tangye's special steam pump, 8in. by 12in., complete, Garforth's steam pump, 8in. by 12in., 2 donkey engines, 1 double flue boiler, 1 single flue ditto, and 1 egg end ditto, 2 colliery head stocks, with pulleys, two 4ft. side pulleys, with pedestals, 12in. flange pump, with 54 yards of 14in. piping, air compressor, with 3 rock drilling machines, about 155 tons of bridge and T. head iron rails, 15 tons steel rails, 30 tons of bridge pit rails, 3000 square and half-round main road sleepers, 5 sets of points and crossings, about 10 tons of chairs and fish-plates, about 300 yards of 5in. cast iron pipes, quantity of steel wire rope and chains, 2 mortar mills, 20 ton Pooley's weighing machine, about 1000 yards of 2in. wrought iron steam tubing and fittings, saw bench with 2 circular saws by Clayton, about 10 tons wrought scrap and 8 tons cast iron, quantity of useful timber, 5 cwt. Brass, 2 cwt. Lead, 2 double and 2 single winches, contents of Smith's shop, including new iron, office furniture, with various other colliery requisites, together with the materials in certain buildings, and a quantity of firewood, &c., &c.

One has to ask the question, why, with all John Lancaster's wealth, experience and involvement in large engineering enterprises, would he invest considerable sums of money developing this relatively small coal mine at Heath End, and then build a railway branch line from his colliery to the Midland Railway, particularly when a good percentage of the coal in the area had been worked out. Also the working of the coal in this area proved extremely difficult due to problems with water. One can only presume that it was an initial attempt to further establish himself in the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire coal fields where he owned two other collieries.

The author has found no evidence that any further attempt was made to re-open Lancaster's mine at a later date.

RECORDED DEATHS WHICH OCCURRED AT JOHN LANCASTER'S COLLIERY

THOMAS TOON

Age: 30
Date: Sept 15th 1877
Occupation: Stallman
Colliery operated by: John Lancaster & Co
District: Ashby de la Zouch, Leics

WILLIAM MEAR

Age: 27
Date: Oct 3rd 1877
Occupation: ?
Colliery operated by: John Lancaster & Co.
District: Ashby de la Zouch, Leics
Reason for fatality: Fall of coal whilst holing. Coal broke over sprags.

JOSEPH HEWITT

Age: 24
Date: Feb 10th 1880
Occupation: ?
Colliery operated by: John Lancaster & Co.
District: Ashby de la Zouch, Leics
Reason for fatality: Fall of roof in stall

Leicester Chronicle – February 21st 1880

ACCIDENT AT HEATH END COLLIERY

At the inquest held at the Railway Inn, Gelsmoor, by Coroner Deane, on the body of Joseph Hewitt, a collier, aged 24, who was seriously injured by the fall of coal whilst working in the pit at Heath End Colliery, and who died on the 10th inst., the jury, after returning a verdict of "Accidental Death", said while they were satisfied that the deceased himself was the immediate cause of the fall, by picking the corner of the stall, they were of opinion that the evidence showed that the roof of the stall was insufficiently propped, and had not been inspected with sufficient care.

