

GENTLEMEN BARMASTERS: A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY MINING DYNASTY

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Abstract: When the office of under- or deputy-barmaster was first instituted in the Wirksworth Wapentake in the seventeenth century, its holders in Brassington liberty were drawn from yeomen/minor gentry families. They included two from families who had been mine owners or smelters and had married into the leading family in the village. There is evidence that this family, too, was involved in the lead trade.

The innkeeper at Wirksworth who entertained the Barmote court in the 1650s had three scales of charges - 1/-, 10d and 8d for "gentlemens dinners", "the barmasters table" and the "24 table" respectively (DRO D258/28/2a). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the men in the middle of this rudimentary social arrangement, the deputy- or under-barmasters were drawn from the more prosperous members of the innkeeper's third class, that is from those families who combined mining with tenant farming. However, if one of the Wirksworth liberties, Brassington, was typical, the first holders of the office of under-barmaster, created in the seventeenth century because of the increase in mining activity, came from minor members of his first class, the yeomen/minor gentry. The lucrative office of chief barmaster for the Wirksworth wapentake had always been held by a gentleman, and in the seventeenth century was held by the Duchy of Lancaster's farmer, or lessee of the mineral duties. It may have been that because his was a gentlemanly occupation he looked to men of his own class for his deputies. It may also have been necessary because before the eighteenth century the limited education required to keep the mining accounts was only accessible at that level. The evidence of seventeenth century wills and inventories is that only the few gentry and larger yeoman farmers were able to sign their names.

The seventeenth century Brassington liberty included the "towne fields" of Tissington, Allsop-in-le-Dale, Eaton, Mapleton, Thorpe, Bentley, Kniveton and Bradbourne, as well as Brassington. Its boundaries extended to Hartington on the west, as far south as the Dove, to Kniveton in the east and north to the Wirksworth liberty. At the time of the survey (Slack, 1988) which gives this information, the under-barmaster was William Blackwell, alias Blakewell or, more commonly Blackwall. Blackwall was the third husband of Mary, daughter of Thomas Westerne, of Brassington, who had died in 1621, and whose family controlled the Brassington mines during much of the century.

The Westernes, from the evidence of their wills (LJRO Probate B/C/11) and from manorial documents, had risen one notch in the social hierarchy during the early years of the century, from yeomen to minor gentry. Thomas Westerne had married into the Newton gentry family of Okerthorpe. His daughters married gentlemen and his son Robert married Anne Buxton, whose family owned one of the manors at Brassington. The elder Westerne's will is written on parchment and instructs that his body be buried in the chancel of Brassington church. He had held several hundred acres of land and a number of cottages in Brassington and Carsington, and had run an inn on the street in Brassington now known as Town Street, which was

then the main London to Manchester highway. He was also the bailiff for the earl of Kent, owner of the Brassington manor formerly owned by Kent's father-in-law, Gilbert Talbot, seventh earl of Shrewsbury. The earls of Shrewsbury, in particular Gilbert's father, George, the sixth earl, had been the dominant force in the Derbyshire lead industry and it may be that it was from his connection with the Talbots that Westerne and his family acquired their interest in the Brassington mines. There is no direct evidence that Thomas Westerne himself had mining interests but the fact that his eldest son and two of his sons-in-law had, suggests it.

It is apparent that both innkeeping and carrying out the duties of barmaster in the local liberties were activities thought suitable for "gentlemen" in the seventeenth century. Westerne is described as "gentleman" in his will and Blackwall is consistently described as "gentleman" in his many appearances in the manor court records, including those where he is fined for "breaking the Assize of Ale" (DRO 166M/M1). He, like his father-in-law, was an innkeeper, and like Westerne and every other innkeeper in Brassington, was regularly fined for this offence. It meant, ostensibly, either that he was selling bad ale or that he was selling his ale at more than the permitted price. The frequency of the fine, however, may indicate that it was in fact a disguised local tax. The scale of Westerne's duties as bailiff for Kent's manors of Brassington, Monyash and Brushfield are apparent from an account of 1619 (SCA Microfilm A128), where Westerne enumerates the sums paid by him on the earl's account and claims £187 for "necessary payments and expences" incurred during the year. Westerne's inn, which was the house now known as the Tudor House, and which has Westerne's and his wife's initials carved over what is now a window but was formerly a door, was by far the largest house in the village at the time of his death, judging from his and other wills. It was built in 1615, probably on the site of Westerne's existing inn and possibly incorporating timber-framed walls from the earlier building - there are timber-framed internal walls. The house had seven named rooms and an unspecified number of cellars and Westerne's household goods were appraised for his probate inventory at a very much higher figure than any previous valuation at Brassington. It was not exceeded until the second half of the century, when mining and farming had brought considerable prosperity to a number of the village's yeoman farmers.

Thomas Westerne's connection with the mining industry is inferred from the activities of his eldest son, William, and of his sons-in-law. There are two conflicting documentary pointers to William Westerne's role in the industry. In 1627,

during one of the many disputes which the miners had with John Gell of Hopton over their reluctance to pay tithes, royal commissioners summoned twenty-two witnesses to meet in Brassington "att the house of William Westerne gent" (DRO D258/42/15). There were four defendants and the mines included some at Bakewell, Tideswell and Hope. The choice of Westerne's inn is a strong indicator that he held an official position in the industry. However, the evidence of Westerne's inventory is that he was a smelter and ore-buyer. He died unmarried and presumably young in 1635. There is no will and his inventory is a brief list as would be expected of a bachelor living in his widowed mother's house. There are two items which provide direct evidence that Westerne was in the smelting side of the industry. He had, respectively, thirty-two loads six dishes of lead ore and nineteen pieces of smelted lead in his possession at the time of his death. An item reading "all his bookes and a prospective glasse" may also relate to the lead trade. Books were virtually unmentioned in Brassington wills until the late seventeenth century and were still rare then. Westerne's "bookes" are likely not to have been printed books but the books of his trade, account books. His "prospective (or perspective) glasse", either a telescope or magnifying glass, was unique in the village. If a telescope Westerne may have used it in supervising the local mines. A magnifying glass may indicate scientific interest. A further item is merely suggestive. Westerne was one of the few men in the village to leave a "hackney saddle". His riding may have been among the mines of the Brassington liberty or between them and a smelter.

Surviving in the Gell papers in the Derbyshire Record Office are the lot and cope accounts for Brassington for July, August and September 1639 (DRO D258/58/24). The barmaster was Henry Trevis. He was William Westerne's brother-in-law. Trevis was a member of a yeoman/gentleman family from Lancashire. Members of a Trevis family at Leigh had mines and shares of mines in Derbyshire, and Henry Trevis was probably related. It was presumably his mining connections which qualified him to take the barmaster's job at Brassington. He had married Thomas Westerne's daughter Helen at Ashton-under-Lyne in 1622, by licence, and was described then as being of the parish of Manchester (information from Mr J. Travis). He may have come to live in Brassington when, in 1634, he had inherited a copyhold farm on the death of a Westerne' tenant (DRO 166M/M1). According to the 1650 survey the under-barmasters were either appointed by the Wirksworth barmaster or elected by the miners themselves. There is at least one other case at Brassington of the office remaining in one family and it seems likely that both the miners and the Wirksworth barmaster were inclined to appoint a relative or associate of a prominent member of the trade. Henry Trevis was on hand to take the job.

The office of barmaster was not a salaried one. However, miners and ore-buyers were obliged by the rules of the industry to use the barmaster's services in the production and sale of the ore and the income to be derived from a productive liberty was clearly enough in the seventeenth century to attract men of the yeoman/gentleman class. Trevis and the other under-barmasters were paid for measuring the ore. The rate was given by Stokes in the nineteenth century as 3d per load (Stokes, 1964), a figure which had lasted since the turn of the eighteenth century and which may have been paid in the seventeenth, though Dr Kiernan quotes a contemporary source as saying that the barmaster's "gratuitie" was one dish per eight loads

measured, "but some more and sometymes lesse as there affacons bee to the Berghmaister" (Kiernan, 1989). Barmasters were also paid for their services in "arresting", or suspending operations at mines in dispute, and in attending the barmote court which adjudicated the disputes. They were paid for "viewing", or checking the validity of mine ownership at a rate which in the eighteenth century was 4d per pair of "possessiones" or stowes (windlasses), the visible evidence of ownership (DLHL Duesbury Papers).

Including "caved" ore, dug from old spoil heaps, Trevis measured over fifty-three loads at Brassington in July 1639, over twenty-one in August and over twenty-five in September, a quarterly total of a hundred loads six dishes, implying an annual total of over four hundred loads. Lot and cope accounts for the Wapentake for the years 1644-1646 (DRO D258/58/18j), which do not give the production figures, suggest that those for 1639 were slightly high for Trevis's period of office. Cope was paid by the ore-buyers for both "grove" (mined) ore and caved ore. Trevis collected cope of £8-12-6d in 1644, £4-4-6d in 1665 and £7-10-0d in 1646. Later accounts, giving the amount of ore as well as the cope, indicate that the cope was 6d per load. Trevis had therefore measured annual totals of three hundred and forty-five loads, one hundred and seventy-seven loads and three hundred loads respectively in these years. His annual income for carrying out this task seems likely to have been £3-£5. In July 1639 he measured ore on thirty-eight occasions, which implies a busy industry and one which would involve regular disputes, accidents, viewings and the other activities on which his mining income depended. His will gives an indication of his standard of living.

The will was drawn up in 1647 and deposited at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, itself an indication of social standing. Bequests included houses and land to his eldest son Henry and £30 each to two younger sons and £10 to a daughter. Henry was also left his father's bay mare and some silverware, plus a bible "and a Book which is part of Perkins workes" - William Perkins (1558-1602), a Calvinist writer whose books were still widely read in the seventeenth century. The copy of the will at Lichfield has an inventory which reveals a style of living which was comfortable, rather than grand. The rooms mentioned are "house" or living room, kitchen, chambers over house and kitchen, and a parlour. The parlour was at that date still a bedroom, and probably had another over it. There were five featherbeds, a large number of brass, copper, pewter and iron utensils and some silverware. The beds were amply supplied with bolsters, blankets, sheets and coverlets, and there were eighteen table napkins and sixteen "quishions" (cushions). There was a hand-mill and a pair of mill stones, all left to Henry, which suggest that Trevis may have been in the licensed trade, like others in the family - the mill would have ground malt for brewing. There were a total of only ten cattle (four cows, four heifers and two calves) and one pig, indicating that his main business was with the mining industry. The total value of the inventory goods was put at £90-7-6d. There were only seven Brassington inventories valued at a higher figure than this during the first half of the century.

The continuing influence of the Trevis family in the industry at Brassington was sufficient to enable Henry Trevis junior to enlist the support of the miners in a struggle to avoid paying tithes (DLHL Gale bequest bundle 3). This struggle lasted several years, starting in 1667, when the

"impropriator", Phillip Laycock of Nottingham, took Trevis to court in an effort, eventually successful, to enforce the handing over of the tenths of hay, corn and ore. In spite of Trevis losing his case after he had been found to have bribed witnesses, it was still reported in 1670 that "the myners by the pswasion of Henry Trevis doe denye to paie any tyth oare". This Henry left the village after buying an estate called Shirland Lodge in 1682, and his eldest son, another Henry, was the Chief Barmaster for the Wirksworth Wapentake in the early 1700s (DLHL Ince, T. Pedigrees).

William Blackwall, who succeeded Trevis at the latter's death in 1647, was probably descended from an early sixteenth century family of that name who had been successful smelters. One of the family, Richard Blackwall, had also leased the lot and cope of the mines at Griffie, near Brassington, from the monks of Dale Abbey, who held them before the dissolution of the monasteries. There is a note with this lease to the effect that Blackwall had lent the abbey 40/- for a year (DRO D258/53/1r). The activities of this man, and other members of the family, are quoted by Dr Kiernan. William Blackwall married Thomas Westerne's daughter Mary after the death of her second husband, William Greatrax, in 1645. Greatrax himself had been a yeoman/gentleman. He was a tenant of the Gells of Hopton and had claimed the tithes jointly with Sir John Gell in a case in 1636 (LJRO Brassington tithes B/C/5, 1636, 1637). As further evidence of the social rank of the family, Mary Westerne's son by her first husband, John Hall, was described as a gentleman in a number of appearances in land transactions in the manor court book.

The lead trade was considerably more buoyant after the Civil War and William Blackwall measured twice as much ore as his brother-in-law. The totals for the three years for which the figures are complete, 1655, 1659 and 1660 were nine hundred and nine loads, eight hundred and six loads and nine hundred and twenty-three loads respectively (DRO D258/28/20). Measuring this would bring twice as much income as in Trevis's day if paid at 3d per load, much more if consisting of one dish in every eight loads. Lot ore was sold at £1-11s per load in 1660. Blackwall's nine hundred and twenty-three loads would yield him a "gratuitie" of twelve loads or £18-12s. The accounts for the 1650s refer to the miners, very rarely to the mines. One of the few mines named by Blackwall was the Great Rake, in 1653. This is the earliest reference to a mine which continued to be worked until the twentieth century. These accounts also include the names of the ore-buyers. Among the main ones were Godfrey Bunting, Robert Dey, William Flint and the Civil War soldier Major Molanus, often listed by Blackwall simply as "Maior". Flint is one of the suppliers in an unattributed smelting account for 1655 (DRO D258/24/3v). The smelter was probably John Gell and the others were probably buying for Gell, too. There were a number of small-scale buyers, among them, in 1655, Ralph Brunt of Brassington. In that year Brunt had bought Thomas Westerne's old inn from his son Robert. The inn was a copyhold property and the transaction had to be ratified in the manor court, where objections to the transfer could be made. Objections duly came from Blackwall's wife Mary and her sister, the widow Ellen (Helen) Trevis. Brunt got his inn but only "savage the right of the said Ellen and Mary", meaning, presumably, that the sisters received part of the purchase price. Brunt is included in the 1655 smelting account as owing the smelter £8. His operations seem to have been precarious at all times. He mortgaged

his inn twice (DRO 166M/M1) and eventually lost it (DRO D161 B/6/52). The main ore buyer from 1657 was John Hitchinson.

Blackwall presumably derived a good income from a vigorous lead trade. His property sales, however, may indicate a decline in the income from his other activities, innkeeping and farming. There were a number of changes of fortune in Brassington in the late seventeenth century, including an apparent collapse in the Westerne family's. Before his death in January 1679, Robert Westerne, Blackwall's brother-in-law, had been listed among the lowest taxpayers in the village (DRO D258/29/13), after a lifetime of being among the highest. This change does not seem to have been caused by a late transfer of assets to an heir, as no other member of the family is taxed. The male line ended with his son Robert's death two months later.

There is evidence of a general change in the economics of the village in the wills and inventories, which are quite different in the eighteenth century from those of the seventeenth. In the earlier century there are a number of very comfortable yeomen, as well as such gentry as the Westernes and Buxtons. The eighteenth century wills, in contrast, are much more modest, including those left by members of families which had been prosperous in the previous century. Blackwall and his relatives may have been experiencing a downturn which was affecting their class generally in the village, partly caused, paradoxically, by the prosperity of the lead mining industry. There had been a switch from arable farming to cattle-rearing and a decline in the wool trade. While there were national reasons for the latter, the motive for the move from arable to cattle had been the loss of labour caused by the villagers' preference for mining (DLHL Gale bequest bundle 3). Cattle rearing needed fewer men than arable. The yeomen were also satisfying a demand by leasing grazing to the miners, who with their modest prosperity usually had a cow or two, or a few sheep. The eighteenth century wills reveal a community predominantly composed of small farmers and miners, rather than the more polarised society of the seventeenth century. Most of the yeomen/gentry families had moved away.

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DRO Derbyshire Record Office
LJRC Lichfield Joint Record Office
PRO Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London
SCA Sheffield City Archives

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