

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE LONDON LEAD COMPANIES IN WIRKSWORTH: A

BRIEF SUMMARY

By Robert Gould

Summary: This final article on capital formation and mine ownership in the Wirksworth lead industry examines the role of the two companies who were most active in the area, the London (Quaker) Lead Company and the London New Lead Company. Both companies made a contribution to the local industry, and unlike so many other ventures in the district, physical proof of their efforts still remains.

THE QUAKER COMPANY

The London Lead Company, otherwise known as the "Governor and Company for smelting down lead with pit and sea coal" which of course had extensive mining interests in Flintshire and the Alston Moor area, came to Derbyshire in the 1720s, having sent representatives to report on the prospects of the mines there. These representatives, who appeared to find the Derbyshire roads and weather somewhat trying, reported favourably and in 1720 the company wrote to Thomas Bagshawe, barmaster, thanking him for the reception given to its agent not doubting that he had satisfied Bagshawe "of the laudableness of their desires in setting down in these parts to spend their money" (D.C.L., Wolley Mss 6681/306). In 1742 the company had completed the purchase of Mill Close Mine, for £1050 from a partnership including John Wall, Alex Barker and Messrs. Thornhill and Twigge, (S.C.L., Raistrick Colln.), and in 1766 they had also purchased shares in mines in Winster through their agent George Tissington. They acquired a half share in the Yatestoop and Cowley Sough, the project being completed in 1764, having cost £30,000 and taken 41 years to drive (Raistrick 1950, p. 183). The company was also responsible for the building of a reverberatory furnace at Bowers Hill, near Chesterfield, as well as installing a steam engine at Mill Close. Documents show that men employed in erecting these furnaces had to enter into a bond " ... not to build or by any means or methods direct the building or erecting of any like furnaces for the space or term of 20 years ... save for ... the company" (S.C.L. Raistrick colln.).

Turning to the company's activities in the Wirksworth area, it is often difficult to distinguish its activities from those of the London New Lead Company mentioned later, as in both cases the company is often referred to as the London Lead Company, or simply as the London Company. However, it is quite certain that the company had sunk the Doghole mine on Middleton Moor in the 1770s, as it addresses a series of searching questions to its local agent regarding the engine shaft (the gin circle can still be seen, as well as the remains of coes). How deep ought it to go? At what distance does the scriin wherein we got so much ore in the year 1765 lie from the engine shaft? Table 1 shows the very high production which the company managed to achieve in 1765, raising a total of 291 loads in a six month period at a profit of £207 (Raistrick colln.). The company also worked the Sparr Rake mines,

TABLE 1

ACCOUNTS FOR WIGLEY DOGHOLE MINE - 1765 and 1766
(From the Raistrick Collection, Sheffield City Library)

Year	Date	Ore raised		Price sold per load	Cash			Profit		
		Loads	Dishes		£	s	d	£	s	d
1765	Apr.	26	0	32/6d	42	5	0	21	2	7
	May	54	6	"	88	16	8	50	17	2
	Aug.	53	7	"	87	9	7	39	16	9
	Oct.	51	3	"	83	10	1	36	6	0
	Nov.	48	0	"	78	0	0	34	11	0
1766	Mar.	<u>57</u>	<u>4</u>	"	90	9	6	<u>24</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>8</u>
		291	4					£207	4	2
		<u>=</u>	<u>=</u>				<u>=</u>	<u>=</u>	<u>=</u>	<u>=</u>

and the partnership of Joseph Whitfield (the company's Derbyshire manager), Richard Buxton and Henry Buxton agreed that "money arising from this mine towards supporting the customs be lodged in Joseph Whitfield's hands until the treasurers for the funds have settled their accounts" (S.C.L. Bagshawe colln.). The amount of ore raised from these workings between 15th February and 11th July, 1769 was 582 loads; and between 1st July, 1769 and 18th December, 1773, 2,872 loads had been raised.

Evidence of the company's involvement in mines within the township of Wirksworth itself is scanty. Kirkham (1963) suggested in a footnote that it was the Quaker Company that was involved in the Rantor dispute of 1771 but this was not so, the company involved was the London New Lead Company, Mayo and partners. However, it is possible that the company had an interest in the Yokecliffe Rake mines, as on January 4th, 1797 Richard Buxton approached Barmaster Alsop to have titles in twenty three possession confirmed, saying that he "and partners" had taken several meers there but they were now out of possession for "many years" as some of the partners "were now dead or had left the country". Raistrick records that the company's Derbyshire mines showed a slight loss in 1775 and that it had surrendered all its leases in the county by 1792 (Raistrick, 1950, p. 186). It seems possible that in view of this and of Buxton's partnership with the company in nearby Middleton that they may have had an interest in Yokecliffe Rake but this cannot be confirmed until all the relevant Barmasters' books become available.

The conclusion one can draw is that the Quaker company's activity in the area was brief but significant and for a period profitable, but that it was prepared to withdraw as soon as things became difficult. Its contribution lacked the persistence of the London New Lead Company of Mayo and partners, though it was almost certainly its business expertise that led it to withdraw before the position became impossible.

THE ACTIVITIES OF THE LONDON NEW LEAD COMPANY

There is no evidence to suggest that the company was in any way connected with the Quaker or London Lead Company, but it played an important role in the late eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, being known primarily for its activities at the Goodluch mine in Wirksworth, and for its dispute with the Rantnor partners in 1771.

In 1771 the company petitioned the Duchy of Lancaster over the Rantor dispute saying that "your orators or the greater part of them are traders in London and strangers to the county of Derby, but who were desirous of becoming adventurers in the Wapentake of Wirksworth" (S.C.L. Bagshawe colln. 741). Table 2 gives details of the partnership (S.C.L. Bagshawe colln. 741) and this raises one or two interesting points. Firstly the

TABLE 2

MEMBERS OF LONDON NEW LEAD COMPANY

Name	Address	Occupation
John Mayo	Upminster	Gentleman
Wright Burdett	Westminster	Gentleman
Edward Taylor	Middlesex	Baker
William Sparrow	Strand	Weirworker
William Stratford	Middlesex	Grocer
James Jackson	Hatton Gardens	Merchant
Richard Watson	Middlesex	Inn Holder
Samuel Collis	Marylebone	Carpenter
Thomas Tubb	Middlesex	Wood Sawyer
William Kirkland	Flintshire	Miner
William Cawood	Middlesex	Victualler
Edward Timperley	Youlegrave (Derbyshire)	Gentleman
John Hall	Middlesex	Carpenter
George Elliott	Battersea	Silkman
Thomas Elliott	Southwark	Grocer
David Merrin	Bedford	Peruke Maker

shareholders, by and large, were from the London area, and almost all were of the same social standing; that it they were local businessmen who required money to finance their probably social aspirations. Secondly, after the South Sea Bubble disaster an act was passed which made companies without a charter illegal, and consequently as a charter was highly expensive to obtain jointstock enterprises were discouraged. However, the Derbyshire lead mining industry was not covered by this Act; consequently the fact remains that these London New Lead Company partners would probably not have enough capital to finance a properly chartered company, and therefore a stake in a mining venture of this type would appear to be a good method of making money without a vast outlay of capital to finance it.

It was the company's policy to employ local agents who were men of considerable experience in local mining circles; apart from its own agent, Robert Burdett, the company had employed John Stubbs, George Buxton Tissington, and William Potter at various times, and in its latter years the company also employed Joseph Wass, a member of the family that was to dominate the industry during the nineteenth century. Apart from its bitter and protracted dispute with the Rantor partners the company had considerable success in working the Goodluck vein. Stokes (1880, p. 28) noted that the company had had a horse gin fitted up with spur gearing, cranks and pinions necessary for working the pumps in a mine, and in a letter to William Longsdon in 1807, John Alsop of Lea, a lead smelter with considerable local influence, wrote that the company "had spent much money in attempting to lift water to the surface by a steam engine" (S.C.L. Bagshawe colln. 587/9). This engine was one of only two to be erected in Wirksworth, and the shell of the building still stands, although the chimney has gone. The company's activities and expenditure at the mine eventually led to financial difficulties, however, for in 1835 their 10/18 share in the Goodluck and in Dinah mines were advertised for sale at the Greyhound Inn, Cromford (Derby Mercury, June 24th, 1835). The sale notice gave a glowing account of the prospects, saying "it may be justly considered as the most eligible and promising of all the veins contained in the rich valley of Wirksworth". The Barmasters books for 1793 to 1806 show that the company was also operating in the Colehills area, just north of Wirksworth; its agents were claiming possessions in the Gatestoop mine there as well as at the Glow-worm vein and several other titles. The company had also worked south from Goodluck; in 1800 Burdett freed a new vein and 42 pairs of possessions "in the East side of Burdett vein ... reaching to the top of Gilkin" a distance of several hundred yards. However, that the company's activities were getting into difficulty towards the mid-nineteenth century is shown by the fact that Daniel Wilson, a local agent, took action against them for not paying their 1/24 and 1/48 shares in Greyhound mine (D.R.O. Stone-Symonds colln.).

Finally, despite the facts being somewhat scanty, all the available evidence points to the fact that the company made a significant contribution to lead mining in the Wirksworth liberty for upwards of 70 years.

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