

NEWTON ST CYRES HISTORY GROUP

HISTORY IN SAND DOWN LANE PART 2

This is a continuation of the report on the walks of last October. Part 1 appeared in the December issue of the Newton Wonder.

There is a need to correct information on Frank Bellman, the long-serving early headmaster of the board school. He lived at Coburg Cottage, not Mount Pleasant. Apologies too to David Vallance for spelling his name wrong.



MANGANESE MINING

Manganese miners were active in the village between the 1790's and the 1870's. Manganese was first mined in Upton Pyne, where it was nearer the surface and could be obtained by the digging of large pits. The seam ran for seven miles from Huxham in the east, to Woodley in the west. Although there was mining activity in the fields around Ashfields, (then known as Snake Ash) to the north of the A377, the main site was in the lower area of the big field now known as Sandown. This field is shown on the Tithe map of 1843 as nine separate small fields some with names indicative of the activity there: black pit field, coffin field, miner's meadow.

As we stood on the high ground of Sandown, we could see the orchard of Ford Farm, where the main manganese mine adit is still to be found on low ground very near to the A377. It is still possible to look into the entrance and see the rough hewn sides, although the tunnel has collapsed in several places within the orchard.



*Manganese mine adit
(photo Brian Please 2016)*

The mine works and offices were within Sandown field quite near to the hedge of the lane serving Hayne Farm, nearer the farm than Compass .)House. From newspaper reports of their sale in 1874, we know the buildings were of wood and were fairly new at that time. There was an office, a stable and a carpenter's shop. There was also a launder for sale, which was a vessel used for washing the ore. The Tithe map (1843) indicates a track leading down to an area of the brook, in the

valley, running to the south east of Hayne Farm, dammed to make a washing pool.

Tithe Map Hayne 1843

The entrance to the main shaft still exists and was situated between the main works and the hedge of the now Hayne Orchard. These days, it is fenced off and covered in brambles. Between the main shaft and the adit in Ford Farm Orchard were two air shafts at intervals across the field. We know that early in the 20th century, there were major land collapses in Rose Field, and in Miner's Meadow, the latter nearer Ford Farm but both farmed by the Berry Family from Hayne. It is likely these collapses occurred at the sites of the air shafts. The one in Rose Field was filled in by the Berry Family, who apparently needed to insert a concrete platform 70 feet deep to stabilise the ground. Thus it would seem that mining was at a depth of at least 70ft at this point.

Newspaper accounts of local mine accidents give us a little more information. From an accident in the local newly reopened lead mine (on a different site) in the 1850's, we learn that shafts were lined with wooden slats. The captain of the mine caught his foot in the slats as he was hoisted upwards in the kibble and fell out to his death on the mine floor.

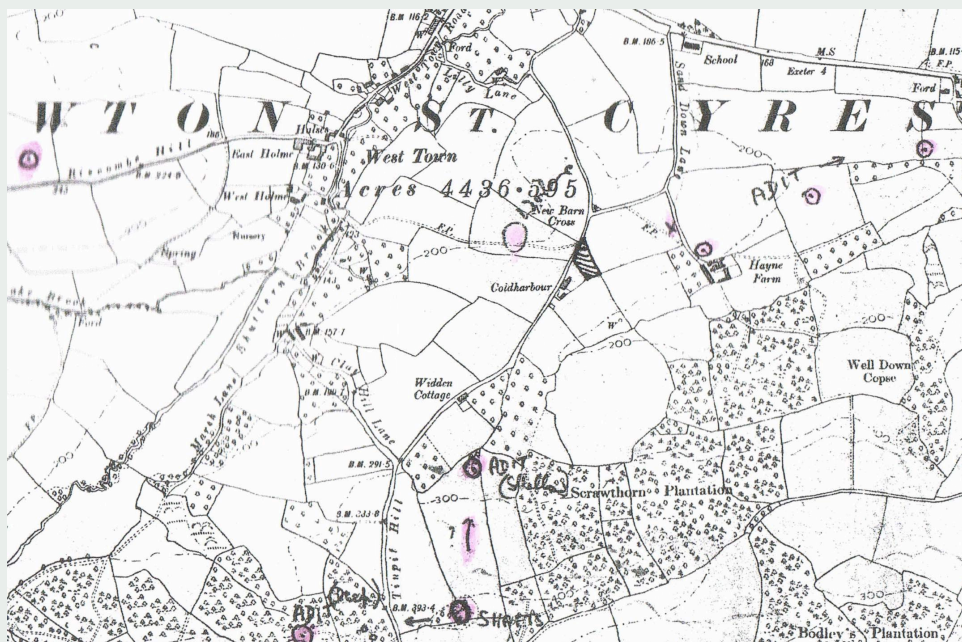
It is reasonable to expect that the manganese shafts were similarly lined and that a kibble was similarly used. Kibbles were iron buckets used for hauling waste and ore up from the workings but also men could travel up and down in them. We know, from the description of another accident, this time on the

manganese site near Ashfields, that two men were rescued from drowning after they were hurriedly pulled to the surface in the same kibble. Above the shaft there was a whim (windlass), which is a gear for moving heavy weights. The operator moved loads up and down by winding a crank handle, and probably did well to haul two wet miners to the surface. He was alerted by the men tugging on the kibble rope. From this description it sounds as though the whim was manned while men were underground. These two miners unknowingly broke into old workings that were flooded.

Two years later, miners under Sandown field also hit old workings but this time their drowned bodies were washed out of the adit in Ford Orchard.*Sun (London)*

NEWTON ST. CYRES.—FATAL ACCIDENT.—A melancholy accident occurred early yesterday (Thursday) morning, at the manganese mines of J. Quicke, Esq., near this place, by which two labourers were killed, a third escaping as if by miracle. About five o'clock yesterday morning, Mr. Pope, a hat-maker, residing near the "Fine Oak," was awoke by cries of distress; and on proceeding to the spot, he found a man just escaping from the mouth of the adit of the mine, who informed him that, as himself and two others were at work at the other end of the lateral shaft, the water suddenly burst in upon them, carrying him the whole length of the adit to its mouth, whence he had just escaped. Mr. Pope, on proceeding to the mouth of the adit, saw the body of one of the unfortunate sufferers in the water, entangled between a wheelbarrow and one of these upright timbers. He immediately procured assistance, and extricated the body, but life was extinct. About ten minutes afterwards, the body of the other man was found farther up the adit, also entangled in timbers.—The names of the unfortunate deceased are **John Crump** and **John Barnes**. **John Crump** was about twenty-five years of age, and had been married only twelve months. **John Barnes** has left a wife and four children to deplore the untimely loss. The bodies now await a coroner's inquest.—*Exeter Gaz.*

2.4.1842 attributed to Exeter Gazette



Part of a Map given by Sir John Quicke of Manganese sites (1954)

Before we continued on up Sand Down Lane, we stopped in the entrance to the field to the south west of Hayne Lane. Here there was further mining of manganese. It was formerly three fields, the lower two being Buckey Pit and Buckey Pit Orchard. However it was in the higher field, Priest Park, that there was major subsidence. It was said that it could have taken two horse and carts. 1888 maps show a footpath across this field which would have speeded communication between Hayne Farm and the village, but also between the mine office and further mining in the steep field known as Pathfields. As we looked down over Pathfields, we remembered tales of ore washing in the brook at the bottom, and of the possibility of a shute to move the ore. Looking across Pathfields we could see Riscombe Lane climbing towards Woodley. It was in the field to the north of this lane close to Woodley that a major accident happened as a result of subsidence. A cart horse was swallowed into the ground and had to be shot, as a rescue was impossible. Fortunately a second cart horse was saved.

Arriving at Coldharbour, we noted the house had previously fronted the fields with a single storey dairy to the north- west, where now the 1970 kitchen extension is. We know there was a property here in 1407/8 and that William Prudham was a tenant of the Priory of Plympton, farming pockets of land nearby. After a major fire in the 1820's and after the 1970's 'renovation', it is doubtful that much very old structure remains. However the house shows the three room plan, with the dimensions of the old rod and perch system. The

middle room has a large open fireplace of brick and stone. Throughout the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, it was the home of the village tanner, who also had a 30-acre farm.



Coldharbour during the 1960's when it was 2 cottages

The farm buildings no longer belong with the house and are mostly 20th-century rebuilds, but by using the 1843 tithe map it is possible to work out roughly where the entrance to the tan yard would have been - also the area in the field behind, where the tanning pits were once situated. Tanning is a very smelly

business and tanneries were usually outside villages or centres of population.

According to Tony Robinson, who considered it the very worst job, tanner's children married other tanner's children and socialising tended to be within the tanning business.

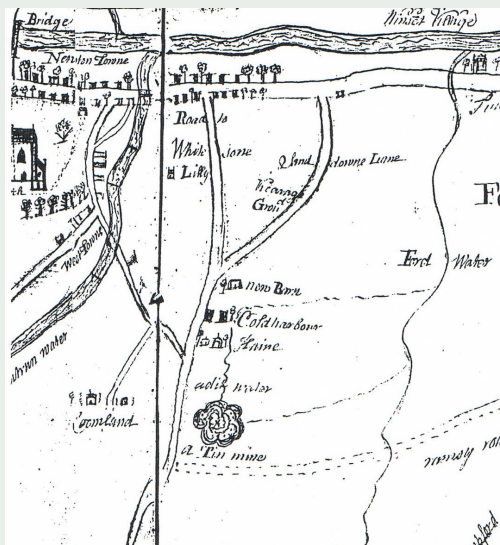


Tithe Map 1843 Coldharbour Tannery

For tanning, animal hides were needed, plentiful water was necessary, dogs were needed and oak bark.

One of the first village census returns noted the presence of a butcher at Bakers (the very end of West town). This was at a time that Clay Hill Lane still connected West Town with Sand Down lane, so it seems likely that animal hides

were transported up the hill to the tannery. We have some evidence that their horns were still attached. On digging a trench across the lawn at Coldharbour, many, many, horns were unearthed. Incidentally, their sharp tips had been removed (presumably during life).



Dick the Plowman's Map 1782 showing lead mine adit and Coldharbour

Dick the Plowman's sketch map of 1782, although inaccurate in the placing of Hayne and Coldharbour, seems to show water diverted from the lead mine adit at Whidden towards the tan pits.

After the skins arrived at the tannery, dogs would be encouraged to remove any remaining flesh from them. The skins would then enter the first pit, either of lime or of urine, which would loosen hair and cause the fat to swell. After a few days, the skins would be removed and put over a wooden horse to be scraped as clean as possible. The next pit was a solution of dog

faeces. This was acidic and neutralised the alkali of the lime or urine. The enzymes from the dogs' stomachs helped further in a digestion process.

Then, after washing, it was the start of the steeping in the tan pits themselves, solutions of increasing concentrations made with oak bark chippings. After months, the skins were removed and dried in barns gently heated by fires. The leather thus processed was hard and suitable to sole shoes. If leather was for shoe or boot uppers, a currier had to skilfully thin and treat the skins with oils to make them supple. We know from the 1841 census that there was a currier, William Ponsford, working at Coldharbour shortly before the tannery closed in the mid-19th century. At that same time, there were ten shoemakers listed in the village census for a population of around 1300. Periodically, saddle and harness makers advertised in the directories throughout the Victorian age, but I failed to see one present in the village in 1841.

We hope to complete the Sand Down Lane walk and story on another occasion.

Jean Wilkins