

“ TO MENDIP FOR COAL ”—A STUDY OF THE SOMERSET COALFIELD BEFORE 1830

BY JOHN A. BULLEY, M.A.

Part 2: MASTERS AND MEN

OWNERSHIP

It is possible to distinguish three main categories of persons who, individually or in partnership, were responsible for the ownership of mines in Somerset.

Firstly there were working colliers, who leased small mines with limited output ; this group was influential before 1750, when the amount of capital needed was small. Secondly, there were tradesmen, professional men and others of moderate means—men who, having little connection either with coal or with the land, indulged in mining speculation ; this type of person is usually a passive shareholder rather than an active entrepreneur, but he is present from the 17th century down to the end of this period of study. Thirdly, there were the landowners, some of whom mined coal on their own estates and had a financial interest in the adventure quite apart from the mere drawing of royalties, and others who invested capital in mining enterprises conducted on land that was owned by someone else. This third group was by far the most important in the history of the coalfield and provided the most influential coalmasters. It should be noted, however, that the three types of colliery proprietor were co-existent and there was at least one colliery in Somerset where ownership was shared jointly by representatives of each group.

COLLIER-OWNERS

As long as mining was confined to the outcrop areas and as long as the unit of production was sufficiently small to necessitate the investment of only a small amount of capital, it was possible for the working collier to be a coalmaster. Thus in 1477 a partnership of six—John Wene, Richard Warre, Thomas Frampton, John Benet, Richard Robyns and Julian Frampton—paid a rent of £1 6s. 8d. for the new coalwork at Stratton.¹ In 1571 John Hobbs, Richard Spark, John Shepherd and Richard Purle held a coalmine at Bullock's Hill in Kilmersdon hundred, for which they paid an

¹ P.R.O. Ministers' Accounts 1123/No. 3.

annual rent of 40s.¹ Miners called Robbins and Purle were still working in the Stratton area in 1641,² evidence perhaps of the growth of a family tradition of mining.

Sometimes an individual collier was the sole tenant of a mine, as at Mells in the mid-17th century when Henry Aishman took a lease of Sir George Horner, "by virtue whereof he did worke the same uppon some parte of this land."³ In 1678 William Gould of Stockhill described himself as having "for the most part of forty yeares either as a workman or on his own account wrought in or been concerned in the colemynes within the manor of Chilcompton of which one Mr. Stocker is present lord."⁴ James Champion on the same occasion was said to have been originally a day labourer and then to have become a partner with William Long, one of the landowning adventurers of Stratton.

The wealthier coalworkers also played the main part in the development of the northern sector of the coalfield.⁵ In 1656 George James of Publow, "collier," took a lease of the coal in the manor of Compton Dando, for which he paid an annual rent of £30, and he was succeeded in 1681 by another miner, Edward Morgan. At Marksbury there was a succession of leases, all in the names of partnerships of colliers. Thomas Stoakes, Christopher Dolling and Edward Rodman held the lease in 1681 and in 1703 William Dolling (Christopher's son) and the two Lambrook Longs, father and son, were the lessees. The royalty records show that these pits were very small and their resources were exhausted within the first thirty years of the 18th century.

Names and occupations are much harder to find for the area round Paulton and Timsbury for the years before 1750; but the Goosewardsham lease (Paulton) of 1708 was to two colliers, Simon Dando and George Carter.⁶ One thing is clear; by 1750 colliery ownership was getting beyond the reach of the working miner; and it is significant that of all the lessees named after that date only one, John Crang of Timsbury, is described as a coalminer,

¹ *Ammerdown MSS.* Survey of Kilmersdon, 1571.

² *P.R.O.* L.R.2/207, M.138-46.

³ *P.R.O.* E.134/30 Chas. II/Mich. 11.

⁴ *Do.*

⁵ *S.R.O.* DD/PO, 12.

⁶ Society of Genealogists—Paulton deeds.

though this was in 1765, and by 1791 the description of his occupation had become changed from "coalminer" to "gentleman."¹

TRADES AND PROFESSIONS

The non-mining, non-landowning class of proprietors was in the main composed of persons of limited means and in the 17th century these people were also associated with some of the smallest enterprises. At Chelworth in 1685 Roger and Josias Cofton were described as glaziers, and they were local men.² The Queen Charlton lease of 1717 refers to one tenth shares held separately by two Bristol men, Gydean Noble, a baker, and Samuel Fry, a tinplate worker.³

When the mines increased in size and activity we still find local tradesmen and professional men taking part in the partnerships. At Camerton in 1792 shares were held by Thomas Flower, a Timsbury carpenter, and James Flower, a Chilcompton apothecary.⁴ A clergyman, Rev. Henry Gould, was a partner in the Smallcombe works, begun in 1797; and in 1803 the Rev. B. D. Smith bought an eighth share in a works at Timsbury.⁵ Joseph House, who became a shareholder at Old Welton in 1802, was an Ashwick brewer. The two things that can be assumed about these men are, firstly, that they were resident in the area of the coalfield and, secondly, that their investments could best be measured in tens or hundreds (not thousands) of pounds. There is little indication before 1830 of an attraction of capital into the area from sources that lay outside the N.E. part of Somerset, though further examination of the early records of the provincial banks may modify this assertion. As late as 1837, none of the Timsbury proprietors lived further away from the mines than Bath or Bristol,⁶ and even these men were patently the descendants of the original partners who had belonged even more closely to the locality of the mines; and it is not until the 1850's that the addresses of the Timsbury shareholders bear such distant place-names as

¹ *Cholwell MSS.*—Timsbury Leases.

² *S.R.O.*—DD/PO, 12.

³ *Do.*

⁴ Society of Genealogists—Camerton Deeds.

⁵ *Cholwell MSS.*

⁶ Minute books of the Timsbury Collieries.

Henley-on-Thames, Brighton and London, although the surnames at that time—such as Bush and Savage—still remain familiar.

LANDOWNER PROPRIETORS

Some of the landowning proprietors of coalmines were men who had sole control over the enterprises started on their own lands. For example, in the mid-17th century Thomas Pacy, lord of the manor of Babington, “did worke a colemyne in some lands within his own manor . . . and did goe on and pursue his worke and continued the same soe long, as he had any incouragement thereunto by the coles there.”¹ The lords of the manor of Kilmersdon in the period 1659-1721, Gabriel Goodman and James Twyford, also took a direct interest in their mines.² Both were Bristol merchants originally. Goodman bought the manor and parsonage in 1659, but it would appear that the coalworks within the manor were not included in the purchase, since he spent a number of years and a great deal of money in getting them under his control. However, he discovered in practice that it was best for him to be content with drawing his free share of one eighth shilling, and that as long as the landowner kept a watchful eye upon the activities of his colliers to make sure that they would “work your workes fayre,” he was likely to find that the collieries “may be as profitable as the Manor, if not more.”³

Goodman’s successor, James Twyford, had a different outlook; he was convinced that “coal workes should never be let, but wrought for the person in possession of the inheritance.”⁴ “It is my opinion,” he wrote, “not to let them to any person at all, but work himself and advise with and gett a skilful collièr as manager.” This was the policy he adopted, though family disputes did much to complicate his career. After a successful period as Bristol merchant, during which time he had been a member of the Corporation, Sheriff (1684-1685) and a company commander at the time of the Monmouth rebellion, he married Sarah, one of the two daughters of Gabriel Goodman, and settled down at Kilmersdon. A lengthy dispute⁵ over the inheritance with his sister-in-law and

1 *P.R.O.* E.134/30 Chas. II/Mich. 11.

2 Hylton—*History of Kilmersdon*, 16ff.

3 *Ammerdown MSS.*, Survey of 1679.

4 *Do.*—Twyford’s Notes.

5 *P.R.O.* C.7/343/5 and C.7/343/13 Twyford v Hilliard and others.

her second husband, Colonel Hilliard, was fought largely over the question of the possession of the coalmines, beginning in the early 1680's, when Twyford cancelled a sixteen year's lease that had been granted to Anthony Stocker and began "adventuring for the cole on his own account." An award in Chancery of 1694 effected a compromise settlement that satisfied neither party and soon fresh legal action was taken. Meanwhile a certain measure of violence was displayed on both sides, Twyford having been alleged to have come "with guns, pistols, and other weapons to disturb the works and threatened to kill the workmen," while Hilliard was alleged to have broken into Twyford's house at Charlton in 1697 "in company with his bailiff and a crew of brutish colliers" and, amongst other things, "drew his bayonet and punched an old man on the nose." In 1700 Twyford complained that his rivals had irreparably damaged the inheritance by digging "such multitude of pitts and raising thereout mostly the top coales," and that they "drove on such their workes by new pitts without working such coales and mines to effect and to the depth thereof that the same is in (Twyford's) judgment severall thousand pounds damage . . . such topp working by them done being never to be drained without severall thousand pounds of expenses and charges." In 1706 Twyford gained re-possession of his mines, but by that time the workings then in existence were practically exhausted of coal. In his writings he reveals one of the characteristics of the capitalist living in the earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution, an intimate knowledge of every aspect of his undertaking. He would seek out the "skilful colliers" as managers or bailiffs, but he saw to it that he was the expert on the working of the coal, the ventilation of the pit, the drainage problem and the general conditions of labour and sale that held good for the area in his lifetime. His zest for technical details, his scientific interest in most problems relating to estate management and his training in the speculative business of 17th century overseas trade combine to make him the most progressive and most interesting figure in the history of the Somerset coalfield before 1830.

Twyford died in 1721. His successors at Kilmersdon reverted to the passive position of freeshare owners. Nor, during the remainder of the 17th century, was the coalmaster usually the sole proprietor of a mine; and when the landowner took part in an undertaking, it was almost invariably as one of the shareholders

in a small industrial partnership. Thus the Pophams of Houndstreet were drawing freeshare from the local mines in the 17th century; and it was not until after 1800 that they became shareholders in the Heighgrove Company, drawing one-third of the profits from 1806 to 1819 and taking over full ownership of the mines from 1819 to 1829, when their resources had been exhausted.¹ Similarly, other landowners like Samborne Palmer of Timsbury and James Stevens of Camerton drew freeshare from the mines that had been sunk on their lands in the 1790's, but only had a share in the control and profits of the mines. The story at Radstock differs again, in that there the mines were leased to various companies down to 1847, when the landowner, Countess Waldegrave, took possession of them and began to work them in her own name and interests.

FAMILY TRADITION

A strong family tradition runs through the history of many of the Somerset mines. This was one consequence of the influence of the local landowner over mining development. This was true of the Crown lands at Stratton-on-the-Fosse from the 16th century onwards where one of the most important families was that of the Longs. Its connection with Somerset began at the end of Henry VIII's reign, when Robert Long, a London mercer, was granted the demesne lands and the two coalmines on Stratton Common.² Mining in this area was still going on in the lifetime of Thomas Long at the end of Elizabeth's reign,³ and was extended into enclosed ground early in the 16th century, when William Long was accounted lord of the manor. William Long was a member of a number of mining partnerships, mainly with "Gentleman" John Salmon and Hercules Horler, two other well-known adventurers. The main features of the enterprises with which the Longs, Horlers and Salmons were connected were the relatively short life of the pits they worked, the extension of workings from common to enclosed ground, the resulting growth of disputes between mine-owner and landowning tenant or copyholder over the question of damages, and the unscrupulous way in which the earth was stripped

1 *S.R.O.*—DD/PO, 32, 33.

2 *P.R.O.* L1 and P. H. VIII, xx (2) g. 496 (57).

3 *B.M.* Add. MS. 39213.

of coal, regardless of the physical dangers involved or the sacrifices made to long-term working in the cause of short-term profits.

One or two episodes in the lives of these men may help to throw some light on their importance. For example, Hercules Horler and his partners were on one occasion held up by the refusal of one Nicholas Everett to allow them to break his ground; but when Everett died Horler married the daughter and was able afterwards to come to a satisfactory financial agreement with the widow.

William Long and Horler at one time held a lease of the Barrow pits at Stratton which expired in 1641. The new Crown lessee, John Wykes, discovered that the mines had been overworked, that more than the two pits stipulated had been working at a time, that many of the pillars had been "rubbed out" and that the Wild Drift vein had probably been worked beyond the boundary of the Barrow concession.

John Wykes served as a Captain in the King's army during the Civil War and was deprived of his lease of the Barrow after 1649; and the possession of the Stratton mines after the Restoration was the subject of much controversy between Wykes, Thomas Kingston, Mr. Tooker, George Stedman and George Long, son of William Long.¹ George Long secured a lease of Plummer's Close mines in 1677 and in the following year was accused of making an attempt to establish a local monopoly of mining in Stratton by buying up his competitors' lands and trying to compel them to close down their works.² An action brought against him alleged that he had "advanced the price of coal for his own interest," causing scarcity and oppression of the poor, and that he had threatened those people who had dared to come and collect loads of coal from workings other than his own.

The family element in colliery ownership was a feature, too, of the development of the Farrington Gurney area. On 27th February, 1636, Richard Mogg was granted a licence to dig for coal within the manor lands.³ The undertaking was not a very profitable one, on account of the expenses incurred in sinking new pits, and it was abandoned about the year 1640. In 1669 a new agreement was

¹ Cal. Treasury Books, II-384, III-521, V-499-500, etc.

² *P.R.O.* E.134/30 Chas. II/Mich. 11.

³ *P.R.O.* E.317, No. 19 (Parl. Surveys, Somerset).

reached ; this time John Mogg was the coalowner and he preferred to lease the mines to a partnership consisting of John Curtis, Walter Smith, John Tooker and Richard Naish.¹ During the next few years "a greate many pittes were sunke." But undoubtedly the most important representative of the Mogg family in the history of the coalfield was Jacob Mogg, who in the second half of the 18th century became one of the leading coalmasters in Somerset. His career corresponds with a rather significant development in ownership. Up to 1750 it is the exception to find a mineowner connected with enterprises outside his own parish, and still rarer to find him engaged on a number of different undertakings in various parts of the coalfield.

Jacob Mogg had considerable property in the parishes of Farrington Gurney, High Littleton and Timsbury, and was owner or part-owner in coalworks in each of these places.² He owned a mine in Farrington Gurney, he had a quarter share in Mearns pit at High Littleton³ and he had a share in the Old Grove and Old Tyning works at Timsbury when they were started in 1766.⁴ Later, when the latter undertaking was reorganised in 1791, he had a one quarter share in the new Timsbury partnership. One of his earliest partnerships was that at Old Welton, formed in 1765.⁵ In addition he played a leading part in the Heighgrove Company at Farmborough from 1771⁶ and he helped to finance the Old Rock Colliery at Downside in 1786.⁷ His capital and enterprise, therefore, may be said to have influenced mining in nearly every part of the coalfield ; and some of the collieries he helped to start were still being worked a century after they had been begun. The last of them to close down was Upper Conygre at Timsbury in 1916.

This extension of ownership did not involve an appreciable reduction in the number of units of ownership in Somerset. The partnerships formed in Mogg's time were mainly for the purpose of financing one or two pits ; and although certain family names often recur in the various leases and articles of partnership, the

1 E.134 (as above—deposition of Richard Mogg).

2 Collinson—vol. ii, 137.

3 *Wm. Smith MSS.*—notes on High Littleton.

4 *Cholwell MSS.*—leases of 1766 and partnership of 1791.

5 *Cholwell MSS.*—Old Welton partnership.

6 *S.R.O.* DD/PO 12.

7 Society of Genealogists—Midsomer Norton Deeds.

organisation of ownership remained one of diverse groupings of shareholders rather than the formation of large companies. Contemporaries of Jacob Mogg included William Savage of Midsomer Norton, John and William Crang of Timsbury, Alexander Adams of Hunstrete and John James of Chew Magna, each of whom had shares in three or more colliery concerns and largely on account of this their families achieved a degree of local importance. It was said of Jacob Mogg in 1791: "He owns the greatest part of the parish of Farrington and has two good houses therein."¹ Their shares passed for the most part into the hands of their children and grandchildren. Thus George Mogg inherited his father's mining interests, and the Bush family, the Savage family and the Palmer family all passed their shares to their children in the early years of the 19th century,² even though the new shareholders tended to retire more and more from the actual scene of operations, allowing a greater part of the administration to fall into the hands of the agent and managers.

PARTNERSHIPS AND CAPITAL

The Somerset partnerships deserve some attention, since they were the fundamental type of organisation on which the fortunes of the coalfield were built. They never included a large number of shareholders. The pre-1600 partnerships at Stratton were mainly of working colliers and had up to six members. Later all types of owner—collier, landowner, and business man,—preferred to belong to a partnership rather than to rely upon individual control. Between 1600 and 1750 the usual number of shareholders was two, three or four; but between 1750 and 1830 there was an increase in size, most concerns consisting of five or six members and sometimes more—for example, seven at Downside (1786), nine at Camerton (1792),³ and twelve at Smallcombe (1797).⁴ There is little doubt that the number of partnerships exceeded the number of individual owners at any one time from the 17th century onwards. The explanation for this prominence of the partnership was probably threefold: (a) the need for an initial amount of capital

¹ Collinson—vol. ii, 137.

² Minute books of the Timsbury Collieries.

³ Society of Genealogists—Midsomer Norton and Camerton deeds.

⁴ *Cholwell MSS.*—leases.

normally beyond the means of one person, (b) the lack of very large estates, the owners of which might have been prepared to risk a part of their fortunes in individual undertakings, and (c) the exploitation by one unit of production of the coal resources of several estates, where each owner was prepared to become a shareholder in the enterprise.

Before 1700 the capital needed to start a mine was not beyond the means of the small yeoman farmer or a group of wage-earning miners. In Charles I's reign William Long sold a sixth part of his mines in the Barrow at Stratton to Hercules Horler and John Salmon "for the sum of Tenn Pounds a year by them payd unto the said Mr. Long."¹ If the coal raised was worth more than £10 a year then they paid Long another five marks a year. Towards the end of the century some of the mines were obviously more ambitious in scope; for instance, at Kilmersdon Twyford estimated the expense of finding and digging the new mines within the manor during the 1680's to have been at least ten thousand pounds.² This presumably refers to the financing of the five pits that were still in production in 1692-3.

In the 18th century many of the mines were on a larger scale than this. The cost of commencing the original Conygre work at Timsbury was £7,200, which was subscribed by six shareholders.³ In 1801 John Crang of Timsbury purchased local colliery shares from William Crang for the following sums (fractions of the shareholdings are not specified): Amesbury's—£450, New Grove and Tynning—£1,500, Hayeswood—£250, and Conygre—£300.⁴ In 1803 Samborne Palmer assigned the Rev. B. D. Smith an eighth share in Hayeswood for £800. In 1850, due to the larger diameter of the shaft, it was estimated that a subscription of £10,000 would be needed to sink a new pit at Conygre.⁵ Between 1760 and 1830 it would appear that the unit of capital required for a colliery undertaking in Somerset was somewhere within the £2,500 and £10,000 range. This, compared with some of the contemporary undertakings in the North of England and in South Wales, is a moderate rather than a large figure.

¹ *P.R.O.* E.134/30 Chas. II/Mich. 11.

² *P.R.O.* C.7/343/13.

³ Timsbury Minute Books.

⁴ *Cholwell MSS.*—Timsbury Deeds.

⁵ Timsbury Minute Books.

Some of the partnerships described themselves as Joint Stock Companies, without, however, bearing those special characteristics generally associated with that type of organisation today. The number of shareholders was restricted in size and in locality. Transfer of shares was done only on certain conditions; at Old Welton it was stipulated that offers be first made to the other partners, who were to be given the first refusal unless the price they offered was not the highest.¹ If a partner failed to attend one of the quarterly or half-yearly meetings he was subject to a fine of 2s. 6d.; and if he failed to make any necessary payments within a period of 28 days he was liable to lose his share. In cases of dispute provision was made for the calling in of three or more coalminers or other persons independently chosen, to give a decision. In some instances the partnership was dominated by one or two members, while others played an insignificant part. At Welton Hill in the early days it was William Kelston who "took a considerable share in the management of the work," though the Hollweys later became important.² At Camerton the freeshare owner, James Stevens, was the leading figure in the company.

When further subscriptions became necessary to finance development, and profits were not used (or were not sufficient) to meet the demands for improvements, they were raised from the partners in proportion to the amount of their share. The Timsbury proprietors did this in 1841, when they wanted £400 to deepen Old Grove pit. On occasion, too, loans may have been sought from outside sources, though no evidence has been found of this having taken place before 1830. Loans certainly played their part in financing Somerset mines later on; for example, the Timsbury treasurer was empowered in 1842 to obtain a loan of £600 from the Bath bankers, Messrs. Tugwell, for the purpose of making "several trials to re-establish the Hayeswood coalworks."³ In 1847 the same firm of bankers declined to make an advance to assist the development of a new pit at Conygre "in consequence of the age of some of their partners." In August, 1850, £1,000 was borrowed for this project and in September a loan of £4,000 was stated to be required, on the security of the Conygre Company.

¹ *Cholwell MSS.* Partnership of 1765.

² *Timsbury Notebook*—Notes on Welton Hill.

³ *Do.*—Minute Books.

In the earlier period, however, it would seem that the capital for the development of the coalfield came mainly from local sources and that loans were sought only occasionally when profits were insufficient to provide for the extension of established workings, or capital was insufficient to provide for the commencement of new undertakings.

PROFITS

Billingsley's verdict on profits in the Somerset coal industry was that they were considerable to a few works, but small for the remainder—that on the whole they were not equal to the extent and risk of adventure.¹ This is borne out up to a point by the existing records of profits. At Benter in James I's reign James and Clement Huish and their partners found that their receipts were no more than paid the wages of the "labourers and workmen which did digge . . . and were otherwise employed and the chardges of light and ropes and other necessaries."² At Farrington Gurney in 1650 it was said: "The said coles when they were opened about twelve yeares since were of little or noe profit to the undertakers whereby they were discouraged to make further progress therein and allso because the said colemines are comonly reputed to be of noe worth if they were oppenned againe and that none undertakes to sink any new pitt not considering it wold quit the charges of the working."³ At the Holmes in Stratton at the same time it was reckoned that the "need for removeing and planting new mills making new goutes and water courses . . . will eat out most part of the profit which otherwise might arise out of the saide cole-workes."⁴

Twyford had something to say about the profits of his pits at Kilmersdon. In the years 1681-3 he believed that "the profitts arising thereby did not much exceed the disbursement and expenses thereof by reason of the many expensive and unprofitable pitts opened by way of adventure and discovery and in search for coals."⁵ Between 1694 and 1700, when the pits were "in great

¹ p. 27.

² *P.R.O.* Ch. Proc. Jas. I, B.20/72.

³ *P.R.O.* E.317, No. 19.

⁴ *P.R.O.* E.317, No. 39.

⁵ *P.R.O.* C.7/343/13.

perfection" but not in Twyford's possession, he estimated the value of the coals raised (not the profit) to have been at least £4,000.

John Bush, who held an eighth share of Mearns pit at High Littleton, in 1793, reckoned it a very good work "so far as the expenses and freeshare did not exceed half the produce of the pitt."¹ Rather more specific figures exist for the Heighgrove work for the years 1806 to 1819, when General Popham was drawing a third share of the profits. His accounts record the following:²

						£	s.	d.
1806	Profit	..	..	..	..	52	18	10
1807	Profit	..	..	..	..	63	14	1¼
1809	Profit	..	..	..	..	106	18	1¼
	Loss	..	..	..	..	18	7	9¼
1811	Loss	..	..	..	..	30	10	4
1812	Loss	..	..	..	..	54	14	5½
1813	Loss	..	..	..	..	128	12	4½
1818	Profit	..	..	..	..	284	1	4
1819	Profit	..	..	..	..	4	7	8½

It is interesting to notice that in no year from 1806 to 1819 did Popham's share of profits exceed his royalty income, and from 1810 to 1813, when he had to stand a loss of over £200 in the working of the Heighgrove Company, he drew over £650 in royalties.³ In this instance, therefore, the figures seem to endorse the advice given by Gabriel Goodman a century and a half earlier, to have no share in a coalwork, but be content with the freeshare. In thirteen years Popham drew net dividends that averaged £20 per annum, which scarcely justified the risk of the adventure.

Another set of profit figures, rather later than this, exists for the Camerton Coal Company, which enjoyed a greater measure of prosperity in the late 1830's than Heighgrove probably did at any time of its existence. The following profit and loss account refers to the years 1829-1842,⁴ and concerns a Company that controlled two pits, Camerton Old and Camerton New:—

¹ Wm. Smith MSS.—High Littleton Notes.

² S.R.O. DD/PO, 12.

³ S.R.O. DD/PO, 33, 34, 35.

⁴ Timsbury Note-books—Survey of Camerton.

					£	s.	d.
1829	Debt in hand	..	..	..	155	18	11
1830	Profit	..	..	..	1,544	7	5
1831	Profit	..	..	..	1,322	10	6
1832	Loss	..	..	..	995	12	0½
1833	Profit	..	..	..	680	12	6
1834	Loss	..	..	..	654	8	6
1835	Loss	..	..	..	92	18	2
1836	Profit	..	..	..	2,186	11	5
1837	Profit	..	..	..	3,599	7	4
1838	Profit	..	..	..	3,005	11	2
1839	Profit	..	..	..	1,671	6	9
1840	Profit	..	..	..	891	7	5
1841	Profit	..	..	..	2,549	16	4
1842	Profit	..	..	..	1,209	5	1½

The total profits for these years came to £16,761 18s. 8d., of which all but about £5,700 was distributed in dividends. The annual dividend, spread out evenly over the fourteen-year period, came to about £800 per annum; and if the original division of shares held good at this time it meant that the largest shareholder received about £250 per annum on an average, and the smallest shareholder received about £35 per annum. Receipts for the sale of coal at Camerton in 1842 were £17,966 8s. 5½d., roughly four times as much as receipts at Heighgrove in a good year. Unfortunately the units of capital invested in the Heighgrove and Camerton enterprises for these varying periods are not mentioned in the records, so it is not possible to give an accurate assessment of these profits as a percentage of capital. However, in the light of what is known about neighbouring concerns at corresponding times, it is unlikely that the annual Heighgrove profits, expressed as an average, represented a yield of more than 2%, while the yield at Camerton was somewhere between 5 and 10%.

SUMMING UP OWNERSHIP

The picture, then, is of a small coalfield, developed almost wholly by local enterprise, in which the bulk of the capital is provided by the landowner. Frequently, but by no means always, the man who draws the royalty is the man who owns, or partly owns, the coalmine. The dominant form of ownership throughout is the small partnership, usually in control of one or two collieries, and never in control of more than six collieries at one time. In

the 17th century the partnership consisted mainly of active entrepreneurs, and on occasion it included wage-earning colliers ; but in the 18th century and afterwards a division may be drawn between the passive shareholders like General Popham at Farmborough, Lady Jones at High Littleton, and William Coxeter James at Midsomer Norton and Timsbury, and the active coalmasters such as Jacob Mogg, John and William Bush, William Kelston, James Stevens, Samborne Palmer and Thomas Hollwey. The latter group had the main responsibility for the development and running of the industry, though in the Timsbury Company, for instance, much of the day-to-day administration after 1800 was in the hands of the paid agent of the Company and the separate managers of the pits.

The family tradition of mineownership was a strong one and in the case of the Longs and the Moggs it extended over a period of centuries. The development of larger units of production after 1750, necessitating a greater capital expenditure, did not disturb the influence of the landowner over ownership, although the shareholder tends to become more remote from the scene of operations ; nor are there signs of an influx of capital into the coalfield from other sources. The increase of investment after 1750 seems to have been met by local capital. Profits tended to increase as the size of the enterprise increased, and the risk of failure was greater in the years before 1750 than afterwards. Before 1830 conditions in the coalfield may have enabled the coalmaster to earn a living, but only in one or two instances were they conducive to his gaining a fortune.

CONDITIONS OF LABOUR

The Size of the Labour Force

Prior to 1750 the coalfield was an area of small or moderate-sized units of production and no mines approached in size or in numbers of men employed the larger enterprises of, say, the N.E. of England. The Clutton pits were in 1610 worked two at a time and employed two or three men underground, four or five boys for carting and three men to wind up the coals.¹ The Compton Dando lease of 1656 provided for only two breakers working at a time.²

¹ *Hist. MSS. Comm.* (12th Rep.) app. i, 71.

² *S.R.O.* DD/PO, 12.

In the most active part of the coalfield at the end of the 17th century—the southern valley,—it was considered remarkable by Twyford that there should have been 88 men and boys employed at the five Kilmersdon pits and that in 1692-3 George Stedman should have had upwards of 200 men and boys at work in the Stratton Common pits.¹ On this reckoning it is doubtful whether the working population of the mines in the area in 1700 much exceeded 500 men and boys.

On the other hand, the difficulties of working the coal had helped to build up a tradition of mining skill; a number of the working colliers themselves became coalmasters and landowners like Twyford came to rely upon local colliers like “Carter, Sam Gallimore, Bendle, and William Ruddick” as managers of their mines. This is in contrast with the South Wales coalfield, where the relative simplicity of the coal-working rendered less necessary the development of a local skilled labour force. It is clear that the demand for labour in Somerset before 1750 could be met by local resources without the necessity for large-scale immigration from other parts of the country.

Later, however, the unit of production became larger and the increased output that resulted from greater activity suggests an increase in the labour force. At Mearns pit in 1792 there were 16 men and 5 or 6 boys employed merely on the job of raising the coal to the surface by means of gugs and twinways;² and this does not take into account the hewers, the carting boys and the maintenance men. In the same year at one Radstock pit there were about 56 hewers and carters. The average pit of the 1800-1850 era had between 100 and 150 employees. Of the pits which were at work, or were started, during these years, some information is given in the Child Employment Commission Report of 1842.³ For example, Coal Barton, near Coleford, employed about 100, of whom half were under eighteen years of age and a fifth were under ten. James and Company of Radstock, a concern that controlled five pits, employed 700 workers, of whom about half were under

¹ *Ammerdown MSS.* Twyford's Notes.

² *Wm. Smith MSS.*—High Littleton Notes.

³ Vol. iii, 47ff.

eighteen. The manager of Clandown, Smallcombe and Paulton Engine pits, William Ashamn, had then 420 workers under his control. The combined manpower of the two Writhlington pits and Huish pit was about 350. These twelve pits were therefore employing about 1,570 men and boys altogether, and as the total number of pits in Somerset varied from 30 to 35 during the first half of the 19th century, the total labour force was probably between 4,000 and 5,000. In the riots of 1817 the *Bristol Mirror* reported that colliers to the number of 3,000 had assembled in the vicinity of Paulton; and in a letter to the Press following the riots Sir John Coxe Hippisley estimated the numbers of colliers in Somerset to be little short of 6,000.

This growth in the mining population which must have taken place in the period 1750-1830 was not altogether met by the natural population increase that was common to most of Britain at that time. The census figures from 1801 to 1831¹ show an increase for the county of Somerset amounting to about 50%. The increase in the population of the mining parishes of the northern and central sectors of the coalfield over the same period was considerably more than this; at Dunkerton the increase was over 200%, at Radstock, Writhlington and Camerton it was over 100% and at Midsomer Norton, Timsbury and Paulton it was over 75%.

From what sources, then, did this influx of population come? The comparable figures for the S. part of the coalfield and the fringe of the coalfield may help to provide the solution of this problem. In the S. area, no parish, with the exception of Stratton (where several collieries flourished during these years) had a population increase that was as much as 50%, the mean rate of growth for the county; and Babington and Holcombe experienced a fall in population. At Mells the increase was only 20%, testimony alike to the decayed state of the Ringing Bells pits there and to the decline of its once prosperous woollen industry. The parishes on the fringe of the mining area also record a small increase, or, as in the case of Ston Easton, a decline in population. Despite the lack of confirmatory evidence, it is tempting to conclude, there-

¹ *V.C.H.* vol. ii, 338ff.

fore, that the growth of the labour force of the coalmines during the late 18th and early 19th centuries was accomplished in part by the natural increase of population and in part by the transfer of workers from the less prosperous southern part of the coalfield and from the surrounding agricultural districts. The discontents of the wage-earning agricultural community in the early 19th century and the decline in the cloth-making industry of E. Somerset may have assisted in the achievement of this transfer of population. No signs have been found of any movement of workers over long distances into the area.

SPECIALISATION

Specialisation of labour had before 1700 led to the recognition of various types of mine-worker. The Kilmersdon wage accounts then had separate entries for breakers, carters, landsmen, sinkers, carpenters and smiths. But after 1800 these distinctions had become much more pronounced, with the employment of larger numbers and the development of new techniques. The hewers or breakers, usually numbered about one third of the total at each pit—for example, 35 out of 131 at Wells Way, 63 out of 199 at Tynning and 46 out of 128 at Ludlow's pit, all at Radstock. Roughly another third of the workers, usually boys or youths, were carting boys or twinboys, whose job was to haul the coal from the face or the head to the foot of the shaft, using the guss and crook, the wheeled cart and the gug-windlass. This group was supplemented by drivers, when part of the underground haulage was done by horses. The remaining third performed a variety of tasks. Underground there were trappers and cutmen, branchers and a group of workmen who were all paid a daily wage and were referred to as "deading men." At work at the pit-head were landsmen, who checked the quantity of coal raised, veerers, who were responsible for the landing of the coal, engine-men and firemen wherever steam power was used. There were also fillpits, craftsmen such as carpenters, masons and smiths, and labourers for odd jobs. The administration of the collieries was carried on at a counting-house, where a small staff of clerks worked. If one company owned several pits each pit had its own manager and over the whole concern there was an appointed superintendent or in some cases a managing partner.

The mid-19th century list of men and boys at Wells Way pit, Radstock, reads :—¹

Bailiffs	3
Carting Boys	24
Breakers	35
Twin Boys	33
Trappers and cutmen	1
Deading Work	23
Branchers	4
Fill Pits	2
Veerers	3
Engine and Firemen	2
Labourers	1
	<hr/>
Total employed	131
	<hr/>

The larger proportion of carting boys and twin boys here than in other pits was accounted for by the lack of underground horse haulage.

In passing, it should be noted that no record has been found of the employment of women in Somerset pits.

HOURS

The miner's work was done by turns or shifts. In Twyford's time during the summer months the turn started between 3 and 4 a.m. and finished between noon and 1 p.m. In the winter the working day was often longer than this. A six-hour turn was mentioned for Radstock in 1792, but an account of the early 19th century states that the usual shift was from 6 a.m. to about 3.30 p.m. There was, however, nothing to stop the hewer from doing a second turn in the same day, though in the main an eight-hour day was normal.

The hewer's task was to fill a certain number of carts or bushels ; this number varied according to the thickness of the seams being worked and according to the peculiarities of the conditions of working. About the year 1700 the turn was stated to be 80 carts when the veins were 5 feet thick or over, 60 carts when the veins were 3 feet thick and 30 carts when the veins were 20 inches. Quite a complex system of tallies was used to check the number

¹ N.C.B. Account Books (Radstock).

of bushels loaded. "They tell the carts by the boys, who put into the second or third cart, each boy his sort, viz., one with forks, one with crooks, one with a notch, one with a flat back, and when their number of 80, 70 or 60 as their tales are all near out, they call to the wind-keepers to demand how many carts are wanting and see if their tales agree."¹ A century and a half later William Fairley described the same practice,² the tally being called a pin and consisting of a piece of wood about 14 inches long. To avoid fraudulent changing of pins in transit they were sometimes hung on a corkscrew-shaped nail attached to the put. Each hewer had his own special type of pin and a host of shapes were in common use, each with its special name, such as the straight top, the picket top, the chisel top, the two notch, the half ass and the ring dagger. The record of the amount of work done was kept on a "noddy," a piece of board with holes marked on it, in the same fashion as a cribbage board. At Radstock pins were not always used and identification marks were chalked on the tubs in the form of pictures,³ representing such things as "a banjo, a cart-wheel, a gateway, a circle and dot, a square and dot, or a cockspar."

Isolated cases of exceptionally long working hours are noted from time to time, without there being any general grievance on this score. In 1828 Skinner was told that the engine-man at Radford pit had only slept for four hours during a whole week, as he had been engaged night and day for that period in the engine-house. But it is only fair to add the diarist's comment: "I hardly think this is true, and indeed if it be, it argues great want of foresight and humanity in the masters of the works."⁴ A minute in the records of the Timsbury coalworks suggests that the clerical staff in some ways fared worse than the underground worker. "Clerks to continue unceasingly the whole of every day at their respective offices, not to leave at any meal time, to be in their work from 6 a.m. and not leave till half-past five in the evening except Saturdays when they are requested not to leave before they have made up their week's accounts and balanced with the Company's agent."⁵

1 *Ammerdown MSS.* Twyford's Notes.

2 Fairley—*Glossary of Terms used in the Somerset Coalfield* (1868).

3 Wickham—*Records by Spade and Terrier*, 51.

4 Coombs and Bax—*Journal of a Somerset Rector*, 154.

5 *B.M. Add. MSS.* 33717, f.113.

Yet in an age when even the introduction of machinery had not persuaded the employer that a reduction of working hours was a desirable and practicable reform of the industrial system, and when the public conscience was still not fully roused to demand such a limitation, it is hardly surprising that excessive hours of labour did not appear to be such an economic evil as short time and irregularity of employment. This was especially true of times of depression. The Camerton miners in 1830 complained of having to work a four-day week, and Moses Horler recalled the times in the 1820's and the 1830's when the hewer brought home a pay-packet of about 8s., because he had been limited to a four-turn week.¹

Holidays can also be subtracted from the working year; Whitsun was the main holiday time, apart from a day or two at Christmas. Whitsuntide was usually reserved for "club days," the times of the celebrations of the workers' clubs and friendly societies. There were also many causes of irregularity in employment—when the miner was "out on strick," when there was a breakdown of the pit machinery, when there was an irruption of water into the workings or when depression forced the employer to reduce output and economise on staff. Sometimes a pit ceased production altogether for a number of weeks, such as at Heighgrove in 1810, where no coals were landed between 14th July and 8th September.² One of the main causes of the discontents of 1817 was the widespread unemployment of colliers.

There is no doubt that many miners worked as agricultural labourers, especially in the summer months, when production tended to slacken in some, but not in all, parts of the coalfield. Some men may have been smallholders, and often miners were employed to help with the harvest. In July, 1828, Skinner wrote: "The day has been threatening, but I hope that the hay of the two fields now about will be on the rick, as two waggons and a number of hands from the coal pits are gone to assist."³ On one occasion Skinner employed some out-of-work miners on his archaeological excavations, but this did not last very long, as the miners trod down the farmer's corn.⁴

¹ "Recollections," 14.

² S.R.O. DD/PO, 32.

³ B.M. Add. MS. 33703, f. 23.

⁴ B.M. Add. MS. 33663, entry for 13th June, 1817.

WAGES

The earliest reference to wages comes in the 1610 report on the state of the Clutton pits,¹ where the hewers received 4s. a week and the carting boys 1s. 6d. a week. This seems to have been regardless of output, though there was an "increase for working by night." This, on the assumption that a six-day week was being worked, meant 8d. a day for hewers and 3d. a day for the carting boys. At the beginning of the 18th century² the piece-work system described above, based on landing so many bushels per turn according to the seams worked, was in operation and then a hewer could receive between 1s. and 1s. 2d. per turn. Thus east of Vobster and in the manor Kilmersdon the rate was 1s., and west "towards Stockhill" it was 1s. 2d. In addition to this the miner received certain allowances in kind, "the coal they burn and working waistcoats and coats, that is drawers or breeches and also shirts, while they are working but not otherwise." Custom regarding these allowances varied from one district to another; thus in the southern area pits "the Masters find tools and all, but at Paulton the men find all."

The carters at this time received 9d. or 10d. a day and the windkeepers 1s. 2d. The bailiff of the Kilmersdon pits, a "violent Presbyterian" named James Board, was in the 1690's paid £30 per annum, and his son £15 to assist him, but Twyford's supporters alleged that Board was a particularly lazy man, often attending the works not more than a quarter of an hour at a time, and that a much more reliable manager could have been appointed for £15 per annum.

One other method of supplementing wages was a custom whereby the man who loaded a plough was allowed a pit bushel, for which he paid 6d., which sum the owner of the works usually gave to the hewers "to have to themselves to drink."³ In the Coleford area this privilege became abused, so that the colliers demanded 1s. 6d. for every plough loaded, making 6d. for the pit bushel, 6d. for breaking and hewing large coal and 6d. for the windkeeper. The result was that "the colliers, coveting to load as many ploughs as they can, rob or rule the works."

¹ *Hist. MSS. Comm.* 12th Rep. app. p. 71.

² *Ammerdown MSS.* Twyford's Notes.

³ *Ammerdown MSS.*—Twyford's Notes.

In the absence of statistics for the middle part of the 18th century it is only possible to make certain assumptions regarding the wage level for this period. The labourer's wage in this part of Somerset was fairly steady at 1s. a day for the period 1721-1750, according to the Ann Harris Charity Accounts for Midsomer Norton;¹ but we find labourers being paid 1s. 1d. a day in 1768 and 1s. 2d. a day in 1778 for doing a similar type of work. Moreover, there is some indication of a slight rise in the price of coal sold in Somerset after 1750; and this may possibly be connected with a slight rise in the miner's money wage during the years between the middle of the century and the outbreak of the French wars.

A much greater and more rapid rise in wages affected most British coalfields during the war years. For example, in South Wales the hewer's wage rose from 1790 onwards to 2s. a day in 1796, 2s. 6d. a day in 1801 and 3s. a day in 1814. In the North of England and in Scotland it involved an even steeper rise. No such direct evidence is available for Somerset; but there is a document in existence which records an important wage increase made in 1792.² This is an "Agreement for the regulation of miners' wages," made at the Old Down Inn on the 22nd of August, following a successful strike for an advance in wages made by about 4,000 colliers in the Timsbury, Paulton and Radstock districts. The new rates, given in full below, represented an increase of 2d. or 3d. a day on those hitherto paid in the county:—

<i>Breaker.</i> For every turn carrying in his wall and turning his own dung and breaking the coal for Tale of the vein	1s. 8d.
<i>Carting Boy.</i> For carting the tale of the vein 70 yards to be measured straight to the head, the carting boy to keep his way good and make his wall and haul what stones may be in the road for that purpose	1s. 3d.
Upon the distance increasing for every 30 yards ..	5d.
<i>Gugmen.</i> A rise of 3d. upon every 15d.	
<i>Fillpit and Veever.</i> Ditto.	
<i>Twinboys and Gugboys.</i> To be regulated by the Bailiff.	
<i>Deading Men.</i> An able bodied man to take a Breaker's place for six hours	1s. 6d.

¹ Midsomer Norton—Churchwardens' Accounts.

² I am indebted to Mr. Fred Swift of Radstock for this information.

Disabled ditto. A disabled ditto and boys at the discretion of the bailiffs.

Deading Boys. An able boy 1s. 5d. for 6 hours.

Sinkers. For each turn of 6 hours 1s. 8d.

For working under a pump 1s. 9d.

Branchers and Sinkers. For each turn of

Six hours 1s. 8d.

On land 1s. 6d.

Resolved that the foregoing Regulation of Wages shall be adopted in the several Collieries of Chelwood, Clutton, Haygrove, Mearns, Amesbury, Timsbury, Priors, Grove, Camerton, Dunkerton, Lammass Field, Priston, Radford, Paulton, Salisbury, Welton and Radstock and that the same be printed and dispersed at these Collieries.

By 1830, when factual details emerge again, the hewer was earning 2s. a turn and the carting boys between 6d. and 8d. a turn. Some increase took place during the 1830's, but the period 1830-1860 is one of frequent fluctuations. Hewers' wages were 2s. to 3s. a turn at Radstock and Coal Barton in the early 1840's, between 2s. 2d. and 3s. 1½d. between 1856 and 1859 (though they had been higher still during the prosperous years 1853-1855) and between 2s. 2d. and 3s. 1d. in the years 1860-1862. During the same period the wages of the carting boys were also subject to frequent changes, more difficult to compare because of the different jobs and different ages. In 1842 children under 9 were paid 4d. a turn, those between 10 and 12 were paid 6d. to 9d. a turn, and those over 12 were paid 1s. to 1s. 4d. a turn. At Coal Barton boys' wages ranged from 2s. 6d. to 12s. a week in 1842. Carters at Timsbury in 1844 were paid 12s. a week, but had received more than this previously; their wages went up by 3d. a ton in 1853, but, like the hewers', underwent no change in the reductions of 1856. At Radstock in 1858 carting boys and twin boys received a weekly wage varying from 3s. 4d. to 8s. 2d. a week.

Other types of employment carried with them rates of pay that reflect the difference between the skilled and unskilled workman. The rates for horse-drivers (1s. a day in 1858), labourers (10s. a week in 1844), and rubbish haulers (1s. 2d. to 2s. 4d. a shift in 1858), may be compared with rates for masons (2s. 6d. to 3s. a day in 1839), enginemen (3s. a day in 1858) and carpenters (16s. a week in 1844). The responsibility of the bailiff was not rated very highly, it would seem, judged by his £1 2s. a week at Radstock in

1858 ; while the clerical staff earned at most weekly wages that compare roughly with those of the skilled hewer.¹

Apart from money wages there were always various allowances to be taken into account. By the 19th century it was universal practice in Somerset for the masters to find the colliers' tools ; and in some instances working clothes were also provided. The miner's " bag-coal " or free allowance was still maintained. The expression " bag-coal " dated from the time when the miner was allowed to take home the coal he burned in a small bag brought for the purpose. By the first years of the 19th century this practice had become standardised and it was customary for the married underground worker, whatever his job, to receive 3 cwts. of coal weekly, while some, but not all, of the married surface workers qualified for a similar amount. This alone in the years between 1800 and 1830 could signify an extra allowance of between 1s. 3d. and 2s. a week, represented in terms of cash. Some colliers were given a house with their job and lived rent free. On the other hand, the Camerton miners had to rent their cottages from the Lady of the Manor, Mrs. Jarrett, and in 1830 their rent was about 2s. a week.²

SCARCITY AND UNREST.

In common with the bulk of the population, the miner in the 18th century was less affected by any adjustment in his money wage by his employer by the periodic occurrence of years of scarcity, coupled with the high price of corn and other foodstuffs. The years 1753, 1757 and 1766 were notable in Somerset for the outbreak of food riots, in which the colliers played a large part.

The first of these riots occurred at Shepton Mallet and a letter written by Richard Slade of Wells on 12th May in that year gave the following account of what took place :

" We had yesterday news from Shepton Mallet which is this day confirmed by several people that were there. that five or six hundred colliers and their followers came into the market and first made a proclamation by a cryer that things should be sold at a reasonable price and then dispersed themselves over the market and ordered the sellers both of corn, garden stuff, meat, butter, etc , to sell at such a price as they themselves set

¹ Wage statistics for 1830-60 taken from *Child Emp. Comm. Rep.*, Timsbury Colliery Notebooks and Radstock Wagebooks.

² *B.M. Add. MS.* 33717 f. 113.

and those that would not comply they took it from them and sold it themselves. Then they examined all the inns and brought out all the corn they found there and sold it as they thought proper and delivered the money to the farmers that owned it, if they would receive it and told the people that they intended to be, as this day at Warminster and next Friday at Shepton and next Saturday at Wells by which means I apprehend our markets will be virtually spoiled except timely prevented."¹

One account estimated the number of colliers "assembled in a riotous manner" as over 700,² and another described how they "put the market in great confusion by throwing the butter, cheese, etc., about the streets."³ However, the Government was informed and Newcastle dispatched a force of troops "to disperse the rioters and preserve the peace of that part of the country."

A fortnight later, a more serious riot took place at Bristol, where a corn ship, the "Lamb," was boarded and plundered; and it is possible that some of the Shepton Mallet colliers were among the "many country people" who supported the Bristol mob, in this case mainly composed of the Kingswood miners.⁴

Another disturbed period in Somerset was the spring of 1757⁵—the local price of wheat was in April and May up to 7s. 6d. a bushel and disorders were widespread. In the first week of April about 200 colliers broke open a mealman's house near Frome and it took a party of soldiers from Bruton to suppress them. In the first week of May a mob of women at Frome upset the market in an attempt to reduce the price of potatoes from 1s. 4d. to 8d. a peck. And at the end of May further riots took place, when colliers attacked two mills. Three colliers were killed and two seriously wounded; the son of one of the millers, who had armed himself against such an attack, was imprisoned on a charge of wilful murder, and order was not restored until two companies of General Wolfe's regiment, quartered at Frome, intervened.

On 20th September, 1766, a crowd of several thousand men (miners are not actually specified this time) attacked the flour mills at Beckington; and at Frome a week later another assembly of

¹ *B.M. Add. MS. 32721 ff. 444-6.*

² *Gentleman's Magazine* (1753) p.246.

³ *Felix Farley's Journal* 14th May, 1753.

⁴ *Felix Farley's Journal* 21st May, 1753.

⁵ *Bath Journal* 9th April, 7th May, 28th May, 1757.

women seized a load of flour and divided it for the poor.¹ The price of wheat at that time was between 6s. 6d. and 8s. a bushel at Westbury, the nearest local market for which quotations are given.

It is only fair to point out that in Somerset in 1757 there were equally serious bread riots at Yeovil, Sherborne, Bruton and Castle Cary that cannot be attributed to the tumultuous miners, and across the border in Wiltshire there was at least as much discontent and disorder brought about by the workers in the woollen industry—witness the riot of Trowbridge weavers in 1727 and of 300 Bradford-on-Avon weavers in 1766. Moreover, this unrest among the Somerset miners does not appear again in most other years of dearth between 1766 and the end of the century. The hardship and suffering of the Somerset villagers are recorded in the newspapers of 1773, 1795-7 and 1799; but in those years the working man did not again take the law into his own hands.

FRIENDLY SOCIETIES AND COMBINATIONS OF WORKMEN.

To alleviate the distress caused by dearth, by sickness and by unemployment the miners evolved their own methods of self-help in the form of friendly societies and benefit clubs. This was especially important from the second half of the 18th century, when the system of parish poor relief was becoming less capable of meeting the increasing demands made upon it by changing conditions and by a growing population. One of the earliest societies of this type in North Somerset was the Brotherly Society, started at Pensford in August, 1769,² though it is not clear whether this was specifically organised for miners. In the early 19th century there were two separate clubs at Radstock, one at Clandown and one at Camerton. Dallimore's Club at Radstock took its name from the landlord of the inn where it had its headquarters, and it was also known as the Bell Inn Friendly Society and the Old Club. It held its annual procession on Whit Tuesdays. The other club at Radstock met at the Waldegrave Arms and had its celebrations on June 28th. In 1823 the Camerton Club had its own doctor, who attended the sick miners in their homes; and by 1829 the number of people

¹ *Bath Journal* 22nd September, 29th September, 1766.

² *Soc. of Genealogists*—Pensford Deeds.

who took part in its annual procession, held on 11th June, was about one thousand four hundred.¹ According to the manager of the Clandown works in 1842,² no miner had been forced to go to the workhouse in his recollection, and he attributed this to the existence of the Club and the benefit societies in the district.

The corn riots of the 18th century and the development of the colliers' clubs and societies formed part of the education in concerted action that eventually led to the creation of trade unions. There was, too, the example in union activity set by the journeymen weavers and wool-combers in the West of England. Between 1792 and 1830 there were no permanent unions of miners in existence, as far as we know, but there were during this period several combinations of miners and a number of incidents in the coalfield, affecting the relations of miner and mineowner, that reveal a growing, organised and articulate workers' movement.

The earliest of these incidents is recorded in Felix Farley's *Journal* for 25th August, 1792.

"The colliers of Timsbury, Paulton, etc., having left work and demanded an increase of wages, on Monday last were met in a body of near 4,000 by the High Sheriff of the County, J. Hippisley Coxe, Esq., Major Tucker and other proprietors of the pits, who having represented to them the dangerous consequences of behaving in a tumultuous manner and recommended peace and good order, promised that their requests should be complied with . . . Hereupon they dispersed quietly and all returned to work."

The wage agreement that followed this strike has been quoted in full above.

The most serious of the disputes began on the last day of February, 1817.³ It was occasioned by a 10% reduction in wages enforced by the proprietors at Paulton, Radstock and Clandown on the grounds that trade was slack, prices falling and profits for the past year non-existent. Locally there was a good deal of unemployment and in the background lay the nation-wide demands for reform, the spread of Radical literature and the unsympathetic attitude of the Liverpool Government towards any working-class movements.

¹ *B.M. Add. MS.* 33713, f. 251.

² *Child Emp. Comm.* (1842) vol. iii, pp. 47-50.

³ Descriptions of the strike of 1817 can be found in "Felix Farley's *Journal*," the "*Bath Chronicle*" and the "*Bristol Mirror*." Hippisley's report to Lord Sidmouth, is at the P.R.O. (H.O. 42161).

During the day a strike which had begun at Paulton extended to High Littleton, Clutton, Clandown and Radstock. Estimates of numbers involved vary from several hundred to three thousand. The Riot Act was read in each village, and twenty guineas was offered for the discovery of the strike leaders. Despite this, the miners took possession of several pits and persuaded those still working underground to come to the surface, where an oath was administered "not to work any more until their grievances were redressed." By evening the situation had worsened and threats were made that the works would be destroyed, so the military were called in. These included a detachment of the Royal Lancers from Bristol, and the militia of the North Somerset Yeomanry under the command of Col. T. Strangeways Horner of Mells.

On the following morning—a Saturday—the miners split into two sections, one remaining at Paulton and the other making its way to Radstock. The strikers were armed with "immense bludgeons" and upon the approach of the cavalry made a show of resistance and cried out slogans, such as "Bread or blood," and "We're starving." Two men at Paulton and three at Radstock were arrested for riotous assembling. Speeches were made by the magistrates, backed by the local gentry in force, and the crowds dispersed. By the following Tuesday all the miners were back at work "with apparent satisfaction and content," though no mention is made in contemporary accounts of any further adjustment in wages. Of those arrested, John Simes and George Bruton were found guilty of "riotously assembling and drawing away the workmen from Upper Ham (Paulton) coal pit," William Brooke and William Norris were found guilty of "heading a party with clubs and going round to the coalworks in Timsbury, inciting the men to leave their work and disobey their masters' orders," and William Amesbury was found guilty of "riotously assembling with other persons and forcing Elisha Green and William Cogan to leave their work and join in unlawful assemblies of coal-miners." Each man was sentenced (at Taunton Assizes) to 18 months imprisonment.

Skinner has described two other strikes that took place in 1830,¹ another year of widespread unrest in the S.W. counties. The Camerton miners struck on April 19th, mainly because their

¹ *B.M. Add. MSS.* 33717, ff. 112-3, 115.
33719, ff. 223-4, 227.

wages were about to be reduced by about 3s. a week, though a subsidiary grievance was the demand for the re-instatement of the "man who raised the steam," who had been dismissed. Skinner tried to persuade the miners to send a deputation to present their case to the proprietors. "The men were very civil . . . but they said it would be difficult to find any to go on the mission, as the masters had determined, they said, to turn the people out who should venture to speak to them on anything of the kind and would first be dismissed from their works." On 12th December the Radstock miners went on strike, because they resented not being paid for landing small coal. They met at Clandown, where the local magistrates, under Mr. James, again had recourse to the Riot Act. There was a strong rumour in the locality that the Cornish tanners were marching up to join the Somerset colliers, but this had no foundation. Nevertheless, there was a call-up of special constables to guard the pit ropes and machinery.

These examples of industrial disputes in the Somerset coalfield, reflecting a growing belief in the effectiveness of direct action, preface the inauguration of a permanent trade union body in the early 1860's.

THE MINING COMMUNITY.

The dissolute and tumultuous behaviour attributed to the miner in the 18th and early 19th centuries is a general verdict applied to particular instances that could be matched by most other sections of the British people at that time.

Many of the Somerset colliers, it is true, had a reputation for rough manners and insobriety. When Warner was passing through Radstock in 1799 he found "the dingy tenants of the coalmines . . . busily employed at the publick house, either in taking their morning rouse, or concluding the festivities of the preceding night, and the village rang with curses and vociferations."¹ So much was he affected by the scene that he fled from the village, "not only to avoid the sound of discord and confusion that distracted my mind but also to escape some of the blows which I saw were being dealt about with great activity amongst those early carousers." To Skinner, Christmas Day was "the joyous day when half the parish

¹ "Walk through some of the Western Counties"—p.10.

at least will be drunk.”¹ When a new vein of coal was discovered at Camerton, drinking continued for two days on the strength of a distribution of money by the proprietors—“no work done at the pit and the people are more brutified than ever.” When the miners were called to assist with the hay-making at Camerton on one occasion they had drunk three hogsheads of beer while there were still seven acres of hay to make.²

Roughness of behaviour and disregard for the law are frequently mentioned. In 1827 one Walters averred that “it was worse at Radstock than it was at Camerton, since if a man purchases a piece of meat on Saturday at a kind of market held there, he cannot put it out of his hand but it was immediately stolen.” In the same year Skinner made a boat for himself to use on the canal, but he intended to keep it in the cart-house “as the colliers would destroy it in one week if it were left on the Canal.”³ In 1795 thefts and burglary were so frequent at Farmborough that the local property owners formed a Society for Prosecuting Felons,⁴ towards which each member had to subscribe half a guinea.

Drunken brawls were common and sometimes protracted over a whole week-end; though it is likely that the “pitched battle” which took place at Clandown on 29th April, 1828, attracting many people from long distances in their carriages, was in reality an organised contest of boxing or wrestling. Even so, “the whole collieries are put into excitement and the pockets of their families picked, because we have no proper person to control the turbulence of the people.”⁵

In contrast with this, many visitors to the area were impressed with the civility of the miner. William Smith, having overcome the barrier of dialect by making himself cognisant with local terms and phrases, found the miners he worked with both civil and communicative, and he remarked that some of them, particularly the sinkers, were well-informed about the pits and strata. John Wesley, who made frequent preaching tours of the area between

¹ Coombs and Bax—*Journal of a Somerset Rector*—p. 73.

² *B.M. Add. MSS.* 33673, ff. 5-6. 33703, f. 23.

³ Coombs and Bax—p. 118-9.

⁴ *Soc. of Genealogists*—Farmborough Deeds.

⁵ *B.M. Add. MS.* 33702, f. 19.

1745 and the end of his life, was invariably friendly in his comments on the people he met and addressed in the mining villages.¹ The Coleford miners were described as "earnest, honest colliers." When he preached at Midsomer Norton he found the Church "filled with serious hearers"; and he called the inhabitants of Paulton "plain, simple people."

And if drinking occupied some men's leisure, there were other popular and more innocent pursuits. Fives was played at Radstock against the gable-end of the Bell Inn² and at Midsomer Norton it was played beside the Church until 1780, when the Churchwardens saw to it that it was stopped.³ Cricket and rounders were also popular in the early 19th century, and skating on the canal at Midford enlivened the occasional severe winters.

The introduction of more refined standards of behaviour was in large part due to the influence of evangelical religion in the area from the middle of the 18th century; and special mention should be made of organised education. In the first quarter of the 18th century charity schools were founded at Wellow, Farmborough, Midsomer Norton and Kilmersdon. The last-named place had such a school at least as early as 1706, built "for teaching forty poor children to read, write, cast accounts and the Church catechism, and if that number cannot be found within the parish of Kilmersdon any neighbouring parish may send in poor children as are real objects of charity to make up the number of forty."⁴ At Midsomer Norton the Ann Harris Charity was founded in 1721 to establish a school, with a master whose salary was fixed at £20 per annum (a figure that remained constant until 1816, when an extra annual allowance of £4—£5 became customary in view of the "increase in the necessaries of life.")⁵

The work of the Dame Schools and the Sunday schools in the district was also extensive, and the impression is gained that the proportion of children who attended a school of one kind or another

¹ *Journals* (Everyman Ed.) iii, 143, iv, 449, iv, 89.

² Moses Horler—" *Early Recollections* " p. 10.

³ Churchwarden's Accounts.

⁴ Hylton—p. 57.

⁵ Ann Harris Charity Accounts.

in the early 19th century was high. The following is a list of schools at Camerton in 1828,¹ with attendance numbers :—

Mrs. Jarrett's	..	..	..	..	61 (girls).
Mrs. Maggs'	..	..	..	..	50 (30 boys, 20 girls).
Mrs. Sellers'	..	..	..	..	20 (girls).
Mrs. Moon's	..	..	..	..	16
The woman in Edgill's Building, Carlingcott					7
Job Edwards	..	..	..	..	12

There were thus 166 children at school in a parish which then had a population of about 1,200 ; and there were many towns in England which did not reach the stage of having 14 per cent of their population at school until well after 1850. On the other hand, the four last-named places on the list were described as "smaller schools for young children to learn their letters at twopence a week ;" and one school for young children at Camerton had been closed down a few months before this report was drawn up, on account of the immoral character of the young girl who was in charge.²

Upwards of 50 children attended Camerton Church Sunday School for training in spelling, reading and learning the Catechism, that they might be prepared for confirmation. In 1828 a Sunday School master was appointed at a salary of £11 a year, and he reported that out of 39 boys "twenty can read in the Testament, thirteen in the spelling book and the remainder have just begun to spell."³ By 1840 a majority of the children employed at the Coal Barton pit were able to read and write, as a result of attendance at Sunday School or night school, and at Huish and Writhlington some of the boys employed underground (aged 9 to 12) could both read and write, although some were only able to read and others were completely illiterate.⁴

Dr. Stewart's report on the coalfield in 1842⁵ contains references to various social improvements that were due in part to the religious revival and in part to the school. Drinking, he commented, was not universal and there were more teetotallers than of late. The colliers were not "proverbially thieves, not particularly debauched

¹ *B.M. Add. MS.* 33702, f. 57.

² *B.M. Add. MSS.* 33701, ff. 44-6.

³ *B.M. Add. MSS.* 33677, f. 44-5, 33, 46.

⁴ *Child Emp. Comm. Rep.* (1842) p. 47 ff.

⁵ *Do.*

if their fondness for drink be not set down against them." There was no evidence of ill-treatment of boys by adult workers, though there was bullying of the younger carting boys by the youths. The miner considered himself better off than the farm labourer and in general had no wish to exchange his job for another. He tended to marry early and was self-supporting practically from youth. There was little mixing between the mining community and people in other walks of life.

We may conclude, therefore, that the brutality, insobriety and other purely physical satisfactions of life in the coalfield were by the beginning of the Victorian era becoming balanced by the fruits of a gradual moral and mental reformation. Workmen's associations of various kinds, evangelical religion and the village school all contributed to this end; and so far from being submerged by the materialism of the new industrial society, the miner was gaining self-respect and a stronger sense of purpose.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS HISTORY.

The problem facing the Somerset mineowner was, and still is, how to exploit effectively and profitably a small coalfield with limited resources and a restricted market, in a part of England that lay outside the main thoroughfare of the Industrial Revolution. Set in the background of the national economy it was a matter of little importance and its effect upon the development of the S.W. counties was relatively slight.

The record of the attempts to solve that problem contains many features that are familiar to students of British economic history. There is the gradual growth of the industry from medieval times, with an acceleration during the last 80 years of the period before 1830. There is the influence wielded by the landowner over proprietorship and the provision of capital. There is the build-up of larger units of production, together with the increase in the specialisation of labour. Expansion depends upon the provision of quicker and easier means of carrying the product of industry from source to market. In an age which is often described as a time of growing individualism, there emerge associations of employers and combinations of workmen whose aim is to extend rather than restrict the spirit of co-operative enterprise and action. And permeating the life of the whole community there is the effect

of a social and spiritual reformation, indicative of the virility of the spirit of an increasingly industrial society.

On the other hand, there are features which, if not unique, may be regarded as special consequences of the smallness and isolation of the coalfield. First of these was the dependence upon local personnel. This brought with it a Somerset tradition of coal-mining—"such a manner as Mendipp men did use to worke their colepittes"—a skilled body of colliers, some of whom were fitted to become managers and even owners of mines, a distinct dialect with its own vocabulary of technical terms, and a lasting tradition of family ownership. It is a story relatively free from the domination of any national figures or great families.

Secondly, there was the failure to attract outside capital to assist in the exploitation of the coalfield; and it has been seen that dependence upon local financial resources made the adventurers cautious of spending money on technical improvements and prevented the completion of one important canal scheme that might have had considerable influence on the development of the area.

Thirdly, the persistence of small units of ownership in Somerset seems to have delayed and modified the distinctions that can be drawn elsewhere between the representatives of capital and the representatives of labour. That a collier could become a coalmaster up to the mid-18th century, that a shareholder in a partnership could continue to draw a weekly wage equivalent to that drawn by a workman, that the coal master would provide free treatment for his injured workmen, that serious disputes over wages and working conditions do not appear to have occurred before 1792, that the coalmaster should still in the 1790's depend on the technical knowledge and advice of his colliers—these are some of the indications that the conception of industry as consisting of two widely separated and opposing sides was either not present in the Somerset coalfield before 1800, or if it was present, had very much less effect upon industrial relationships than it was going to have in the 19th century. No evidence has been found of serfdom or the bond in this history.

Mining is an adventure, and an adventure involves both a hazard undertaken and a goal to be achieved. The hazard in this instance lay in the speculation by men of no great means in an enterprise of little economic importance except to themselves and to the community they sought to prosper. The reward lay, not in the

realm of financial success (as the miner in Somerset today well knows) but in the growth of a tradition of local adventure continuously proceeding over six centuries of English history—which, for all its limitations, can be looked upon as the epitome in Somerset of the evolution of a great industrial nation.

NOTE ON THE EXTENT OF THE COALFIELD.

Geologically there are four separate coalfields within the county of Somerset—one at Avonmouth, a second at Nailsea, a third in and around Bristol and the fourth centred on Midsomer Norton and Radstock. All but the first have been extensively worked in the past; the present writer has concerned himself exclusively with the fourth. Within this "Radstock" coalfield three sub-divisions may be distinguished—

a. a northern sector including the parishes of Pensford, Chew Magna, Marksbury, Hunstrete, Stanton Drew, Farmborough, Clutton, Timsbury, High Littleton and Farrington Gurney.

b. a central sector including the parishes of Paulton, Midsomer Norton, Welton, Radstock, Writhlington, Clandown, Camerton, Dunkerton, Foxcote and Shoscombe.

c. a southern sector including the parishes of Chilcompton, Stratton-on-the-Fosses, Holcombe, Ashwick, Coleford, Kilmersdon, Babington, Vobster and Mells.

It is quite impossible to identify, or even to name, the very large number of workings in existence before 1700 in both the northern and the southern sectors (the central sector not having been exploited at all before that date), though many small rubbish heaps ("batches") can still be seen, for instance, on Stratton Common and around High Littleton. The following list contains the names of pits in operation between 1700 and 1850, arranged according to parishes, roughly from north to south of the area. The sites of the great majority of these pits can be identified today.

BISHOP SUTTON

Old Pit.

New Pit.

Travis Pit.

FARMBOROUGH

Farmborough New.

Old Haygrove (Heighgrove).

Woody Heighgrove.

Heighgrove Engine.

Ratcombe.

TIMSBURY	Amesbury's. Upper Conygre. Lower Conygre. Old Grove. New Grove. Old Tynning. New Tynning. Hayes Wood. Withy Mills.
HIGH LITTLETON	Mearn's.
CLUTTON	Fry's Bottom. Temple Cloud. Greyfield. Rudge's.
FARRINGTON GURNEY	Farrington Gurney Pit.
PAULTON	Engine Pit. Paulton Hill. Paulton Ham. Britton's. Salisbury.
CAMERTON	Old Pit. New Pit.
DUNKERTON	Old Pit. New Pit.
MIDSOMER NORTON	Old Welton. Welton Hill. Old Norton Hill.
RADSTOCK	Wellsway. Ludlow's. Old Pit. Middle Pit. Tynning. Smallcombe. Huish.
VICINITY OF RADSTOCK	Upper Writhlington. Lower Writhlington. Foxcote. Shoscombe. Woodbarrow (Woodborough). Clandown.
MELLS AND VOBSTER	Upper and Lower Catch. Bilboa. Old Vobster. Old Lower Vobster. Old Vobster. Breach. Goodeaves. Newbury. Ringing Bell Pits.

VICINITY OF COLEFORD	Duck's Nest.
	Edford Common.
	Old Moorwood.
	New Moorwood.
	Coal Barton.
VICINITY OF STRATTON	Old Rock.
	New Rock.
	Old Nettlebridge.
	Pitcot.
	Strap Pit.
	Barlake.

Dates for the commencement of workings are difficult to ascertain. Old Norton Hill (1846), Withy Mills (1804), Welton Hill (1813), Wells Way and Tynning, (Radstock), and Greyfield (c. 1830) are possibly the only places which were not producing coal before 1800.