

Hargreaves Collieries in Rossendale and Baxenden 1870 (© Clive Seal 2020 used with permission)

Hargreaves collieries were the biggest mining firm in Rossendale, but not a great deal is known about their origin or the early operations. An amazing document has come to light thanks to Janet Barrie and the Springhill History and gives a little insight into the past and we find out for certain the opening dates for some of the pits that were operating. There is not space at present to go right into the document which is a long protracted court case brought about by the sad break up of the original company of Ashworth Hargreaves and Co and sadly the company went the direction of many many more where one partner either takes advantage or accuses the others of doing so. It is doubly sad as the main partners at that time; George Hargreaves and John Hall, by which time were both in their 70's had been in partnership for over 50 years. It is a long story that will be told but at present it would be good just to lay down some of the facts about the collieries that were working at the time.

Ashworth Hargreaves and Co

The Hargreaves family and mining within Rossendale go back at least to the 1750's (M Gill BM33) when the Clitheroe company of mining adventures operated the lead mines on Goodshaw Hill, Hambleton and Gambleside. John Hargreaves, of Newchurch, gentleman, is listed as one of the shareholders. John Hargreaves was the grandson of John Hargreaves of Balladen who died in 1716 (P Brown 200) and the father of Henry Hargreaves who, according to Jack Naden, began a lease for the Accrington and Rossendale collieries on land belonging to the Duke of Buccleuch in 1805. These estates were administered from Clitheroe castle and so we see a connection with the Hargreaves family and those estates dating back 50 years at least by then. Did they lease the collieries prior to that date of 1805?. In evidence given during the court proceedings John Hall states he had been in association with the Baxenden collieries his entire life and his father was before him.

Henry Hargreaves had at least 8 children one of whom was George who followed into the family mining business, Henry dying in 1829. The lease dates don't quite match but if Henry started his lease in 1805 then it would have run until 1826. A new 21 year lease was signed around 1824 between the Duke on one side and George Hargreaves of Newchurch, John Ashworth of Cloughfold and John Hall of Haslingden on the other and thus the firm of Ashworth Hargreaves and Co was brought into existence.

Very little is known of the operations of this time. In Rossendale mining was certainly being undertaken between Goodshaw and Gambleside mainly adjacent to the old road which connected Goodshawfold and Gambleside those workings centred around Meadow Head and across the hill side to the clough behind Oak Mill. Other mining looks to have been taking place on Brex Moor and on the Hyle above Stacksteads, an old Poor law assessment puts the Hargreaves as working coal in Tunsted in the 1750's. George Heys names an old pit up there as 'Turlers' colliery possibly a nickname.

At Baxenden there looks to have been more activity and Mike Rothwell names quite a few of these old pits that lie either side of the road from Baxenden down into Accrington in his Industrial Heritage series.

In the late 1820's and early 30's demand for coal grew along with the local textile trade and the company sunk and drove some of the pits we recognise today. The lease was due

for renewal in March 1845 and adverts appeared in newspapers all around the country for tenders to work the leases, which were divided up into different Lots. The three partners of Ashworth Hargreaves and co were confident that they would get the lease renewed however they were shocked to find that three other serious tenders besides theirs had been made to work the Baxenden and Rossendale collieries and so they had to match the best price of the would be new owners. As with most land owners, they considered it best dealing with the devil you know so the Duke was more than happy to lease the mines to Ashworth Hargreaves as long as they matched the price and also took on the area of Yate and Pickup Bank. The agreed lease was signed and the terms were £6000 per annum certain rent and £170 per foot per Lancashire acre. A further addition was that of a new partner, John Hargreaves of Broadoak, the Calico printer. The original idea was the George Hargreaves and John Ashworth would take the Rossendale collieries and John Hall and John Hargreaves would take the Baxenden collieries but the Duke would not allow this and all 4 partners became liable for the whole of the collieries. In practical terms though, George Hargreaves and John Ashworth took the day to day running of the Rossendale pits and John Hall looks to have maintained control over the Baxenden collieries.

As the time came for that lease to expire in 1867 the partnership had undergone changes; John Ashworth of Spring Hill House, Higher Cloughfold, died in 1850 aged 72. His daughter Mary Anne inherited the Spring Hill estate and then married Charles Patrick and he took his father in laws place within the partnership. John Hall paid his son, Johnathan out of his own pocket to manage the Baxenden collieries and George Hargreaves , also out of his own pocket paid his nephew Henry Hargreaves Bolton, to manage the Rossendale collieries. Johnathan sadly died at a young age before the lease came up for renewal and the events following that resulted in Henry Hargreaves Bolton and others involved in the administration of the Rossendale pits to become involved more closely with the Baxenden collieries where they found great anomalies in the accounts. It must be stated right away that the Hall's had not embezzled any monies, quite the opposite they had let the accounts go totally, account books were not made up and literally thousands of pounds were laid out with customers who had not paid for a considerable time. Also because no proper scrutiny had been maintained, what were supposed profits at the coking plant were almost losses when other factors were taken into consideration and despite the Baxenden collieries being far more profitable than the Rossendale ones, the bank account was also considerably overdrawn. As a result John Hall was removed from his position of responsibility and a thorough audit of the accounts at Baxenden began. What also began was a titanic struggle between two men now in their 70's who had been partners for over 50 years.

Had you been a visitor to Haslingden during the March of 1867 you couldn't have failed to pick up a buzz that went round the town in an undertone. Nowadays nobody would equate Haslingden as ever being a mining town but heavily reliant on coal for the mills the town was and it's growth and success as a textile town was to a great part dependant on the district on the edge of town called Baxenden. So from the mills and market of Haslingden down into Accrington and over the Grane towards Green Howorth, the buzz around the district was of Haslingden's impending equivalent to the gun fight at the OK Coral which was due to take place on March 25th 1867, the date of the new lease being signed, the Day John Hall, who had been breathing fire and brimstone, stated that he would be taking on the new lease and would personally evict from the Baxenden office all those from the Hargreaves camp that were now operating the Baxenden collieries. He would then install his own general manager, Henry Bridge, and run the mines with his new partners. For both parties vowed to take the mines on their own. On one side there

was George Hargreave, John Hargreaves and Charles Patrick and on the other was John Hall. At the colliery there was much bitterness and worry, some fearing they may lose their jobs if one or the other parties got control. Such was the interest that on the 25th of March, just a month before easter, crowds filled the main road leading to the colliery office and the hill above the coke ovens and railway took on the appearance of a small football terrace as people eagerly awaited the promised spectacle of two elderly Gentlemen brawling in the street an event that we can happily say didn't happen. The nearest to a direct conflict was sometime before hand when the safe from the Baxenden colliery office was removed by John Heap, a wheel wright at the colliery and to get it they also had to remove some brickwork. Whilst this was taking place Henry Hargreaves Bolton arrived on Horseback and had a heated discussion with John Hall.

The day was won in the offices of Clitheroe Castle as history tells us by George Hargreaves and the firm that bore his name was formed along with the partners John Hargreaves and Charles Patrick and the noble firm of Ashworth Hargreaves came to a very ignoble end, and certainly no discredit to John Ashworth who served the company well. But that is by no means the end of the story, its not even scratched the surface of the preface page. A big court case ensued between on the one side, George Hargreaves, John Hargreaves and Charles Patrick (Plaintiffs) and on the other John Hall (defendant). Many details now are revealed about the collieries and how they were worked and some of the men involved and it runs to over 300 pages. John Hall also accused George Hargreaves of using company profits from the old lease (1845/66) to develop the pits in Rossendale so they would be in a position to make great profits under the new lease, of which he was no longer a part. The focus then fell on the method used to work the collieries and mining engineers were brought in to ascertain whether or not the charge was true. Running in conjunction with this was, but not part of the court case was the issue of how the established working practices of the men affected the profitability and efficiency of the Baxenden collieries and this brought the new Manager; Richard Hudson into a bitter and at times violent conflict with the men it is in itself, a story for another day. Before setting out on both the above mentioned cases, as it would be good to deal with them on their own merit, we will put down some hard and fast facts that previously have been a matter of conjecture amongst those interested in the History of the Rossendale pits.

Most of this following initial information was taken from Affidavits from Richard Hudson who in was then the general Manager of the Baxenden collieries, formerly at Cupola Colliery and former manager of Cupola Wholaw and Townley Collieries for 8 years and Charles Townley's mineral agent for the previous 3 years. He was an extraordinary man, born on New Laith farm Dunockshaw and probably associated with the Cupola colliery since he was able to walk up to it. He was an accomplished musician and close friend of Moses Heap and brother In law of Peter Pickup (Of Brooks and Pickup).

The collieries operating at the time were Baxenden; Hole in The Bank, Victoria (Railway), Cat Hole and Woodnook (Dunnyshop). In Rossendale they were; Swineshaw, Gambleside, Brex, Fox Hill, Dean, Grimebridge, Stacksteds, Old Clough, Scar End, Dog Pits and Old Meadows. The Baxenden pits were more productive than the Rossendale pits, indeed Victoria by itself was worth half the combined Rossendale output. The method of working is what was in dispute, it was termed ...Straight work... We know it as pillar and stall and yet when you consult the old mining journals you do find much difference. The many methods described in the journals show how after the shafts are sunk, main roads are driven out to the boundaries and the coal worked back to the shafts with pillars formed and extracted in a regimented fashion. As you can imagine quite a lot of expense and time is spent getting the pits developed. In the Rossendale and Baxenden

area the opposite was true only 4 pits required shafts and they were shallow, Victoria being the deepest. Most of the pits were accessed from the outcrop by tunnels and with the exception of Swinshaw there was very little or no expense in development. The coal was cut up into pillars from the start headings driven against the cleat of the coal and working bords driven off those headings at 9 yard centres, or in the case of Swinshaw 8 yard centres. The working bords would be 60 yards long (40 at Swinshaw) The width of the workings was 9 feet however in many cases they were 12 feet and wider thus reducing the size of the pillars and as the royalties were measured on 9 feet wide, a lot of coal was mined on which no royalties were paid but it would fall due when the pillars were worked. Hargreaves didn't like working pillars as they were deemed unprofitable and the quality of the coal was inferior. In consequence only work in the solid coal was carried out and pillars were left thus they robbed the pits on the way in making big profits from the start but making the pits more uneconomical for future leasees or for themselves if they renewed the lease. Bearing that principle in mind Richard Hudson calculated in 1867 that (since 1846) 320,2937 tons had been extracted in Baxenden whilst in Rossendale 284,889 tons had been got. There remained still to be got in pillars at Baxenden 394,640 tons and in Rossendale 339,177 tons. So the profit lost for the new leasee in working the inferior pillars rather than the solid coal he calculated at £18,345 or in the value of 2020 over £2 Million. Then also there was the royalty to be paid on the pillar coal that no coal existed for because it had already been worked in the wide bords at Baxenden 23 acres 3 rods 39 perches Acres at 1 foot thick of coal equalling 56,458 tons had been worked without royalty due to wide working in Rossendale it would be 15 acres 3 rods 28 perches 1 foot thick of coal equal to 37,474 tons. At the present price of royalty which was £180 per foot per Lancashire acre it would amount to £7,185. 7/6d. other things to be taken into consideration was the excess cost of working the pillars due to roadway crush and floor lift, excess timber, lower quality coal and subsidence damage to the surface.

The short conclusion to Mr Hall's charge was that profits had not been syphoned off to develop the Rossendale pits, the pits as a whole had been badly developed as to reap the biggest profits in the shortest possible time with minimal investment. Development at all the pits had been at an almost standstill when it should have been ongoing for years and the money invested in Rossendale should have been invested years before and the same could be said for Baxenden. But let us now take a look at some of the pits.
Swinshaw Colliery.

Opened 1835 from the drift at Greenfold. This had been throughout the current lease (1847/67) by far the most profitable and prolific of the Rossendale pits. Its area is 193 acres by far the largest area worked by the partnership from one opening but by 1867 it was almost worked out of all solid coal and only pillar and crop coal remained to be got. Some pillars were taken in 1847/48 which amounted to an area of 17 perches. Production at Swinshaw in 1860 was 26000 tons per annum but fallen off to 16000 tons per annum year ending March 1864 mainly to poor quality pillar and crop coal. Over 2300 yards of Horse road were in existence and for the most part the horse roads had been kept up with the workings To aid in the working off of the pillars at Swinshaw and to provide a new source of best quality coal to augment the pillars, the development of Gambleside colliery should have been began at least 10 years previously.

(By the author);Swinshaw obviously carried on for many years afterwards finally closing in 1918 in 1863/64 new drifts were opened out at Epping Forrest on the slopes of Liver Hill, a further one near Higher Hough Edge on Liver Hill and these were connected to the main pithead by temporary tramways. Further traveling drifts were put in down by

Chamber Height Barn but these then must have been to run out old pillars. They certainly were close to the crop edge on Liver Hill. Coal to the NE of Compstons Cross and Higher Cross farm in the crop was abandoned as it was unfit to work.

Gambleside Colliery.

Now we get a true Idea of the development of Gambleside colliery Work was commenced around 1861 when they tried to drift into the coal, probably from the drift at Nodlock or possibly even from behind Greenfold farm but they found the dip was against them so the project looks to have been shelved until 1864.

The only untouched solid area of coal lay, as they said, in Dunockshaw at the deep up to the lead mine fault We know the area today as from the Gambleside winding pit NE to the end of the Clowbridge res where the leadmine fault cuts off the coal and the approximate surface position for that is the corner of Clowbridge Res on Limey lane. The plan to win this coal initially was to drive a drainage drift out of the valley a mile into the coal, I am presuming from Clowbridge given the Duke's royalty. According to Richard Hudson this would take 3 years to develop and the take of coal would be 2 and a half miles away from the markets (Crawshawbooth). Nothing more is stated regarding the development of this coal. We do know that it was developed but no drainage drift was ever driven instead the new shaft was sunk that is still there to be seen today, the Pumping pit which is 40 and a half yards deep.

We used to think that the pumping pit predated the winding pit up near Swineshaw Barn but obviously that is not the case . The bottom of the winding pit lies 21 foot higher above sea level than the top of the pumping pit so between the two shafts there is a fall in the coal of around 120 feet, quite a dip. The winding pit is drained by a free drainage drift which comes out near the reservoir but all to the dip of that would have to be pumped. If the connection was driven to the dip from the winding pit then it would have been a rough old job but when the project was completed all the coal from this district was sent underground to the winding pit by chain rd, the coal was wound up the shaft and sent through the hillside to Swinshaw colliery via Nodlock cabin. Part way along this road between the two shafts, a chain drift was put up into the Upper mountain mine, there also being a connection from the winding pit bottom.

The coal at Gambleside in the Lower Mountain was only 2'2" whilst the Upper Mountain was 2'. The Uppermountain was not present at Swineshaw, though it extended under Nodlock farm and Meadow Head, the shaft outside Nodlock farm goes down to the coal. Before the pumping pit district was commenced, sometime after 1870, coal was obtained from the rise of the winding shaft at Gambleside that was sunk 48 yards to the Lower Mountain in an area, Richard Hudson points out, was heavily worked from ancient times The situation at the new pit was such that pit room could only be found for less than half the Swineshaw men and those remaining continued to work the pillars at that pit. Indeed the new works at Gambleside hadn't progressed further than a hundred yards from the pit bottom before they hit old workings and during February of 1869 further old workings were hit and the pit was inundated trapping 15 men underground. Most were got out quite quickly but it was with great difficulty some cleared the pit bottom as they were getting washed off their feet. Five men were trapped on higher ground for a number of hours, but again that's another story.

Interestingly Richard Hudson commented that the solid coal available at the present winning of Gambleside, without the new development, was only sufficient to work off the Swinshaw pillars (to blend with the good coal to make a saleable product) and that it was

only right that the old lessees pays for this development in light of the fact that they left the pits in such an unprofitable condition. Let us move on to the other Rossendale pits.

Fox Hill Colliery

Opened in about the year 1849 from a drift and no further extension to that has been added. It was after Swineshaw, the most profitable in the district. The field comprised about 100 acres the whole of which is now exhausted with the exception of a small area of unsalable crop coal and pillars which are now under water. The pit is not now in operation and has been replaced by Grimebridge pit which sends its coal 1 ¼ miles by steam power to take its place. The pit was very profitable and little expense incurred to develop it. The coal was sent down to market vis self acting incline.

Damage was done in the years 1861, 62 and 63 because Grimebridge which was commenced in 1861 was not ready to aid Fox Hill in satisfying the great demand for coal which existed in those years and consumption at the pit fell off 25%.

Grimebridge Colliery.

This pit, like Gambleside, was sunk to work off the pillars at Fox Hill and I find that from the books the first coal was got in 1863/64. All of the coal at Grimebridge up until 1867 had been obtained with the least possible outlay, the boys bringing all the coal to the pit bottom with no outlay for traveling roads or haulage. Since then an underground chain rd has been constructed 300 yards in length and a steam engine erected on the surface to run it. A further 700 yards of chain rd will be needed. A considerable amount of pillars have already been left in an attempt to raise good quality coal to work off the Fox Hill pillars.

Dean Colliery.

Opened about the year 1835 and is worked by a day eye. The workings extend a distance of 750 yards from the entrance and all of the coal has to be brought out by the drawers. No traveling roads nor haulage roads have ever been constructed then pit is now in such a state that the boys cannot go any longer in this method. Horse or chain roads must be provided for the colliery to continue. The outlay to do this will far exceed the original outlay to open the colliery. I believe after then full consideration of the costs it has been decided to abandon the colliery completely. From measuring the plans the amount of pillars to be got, and the extra widths that the workings were driven, it would seem that a considerable loss would be incurred in working the pillars.

Stacksteds Colliery.

The Stacksteds Colliery, worked from a Day eye was opened about 1858. No new developments have been made since and the necessary extensions to the haulage roads have been left very much in arrears and nothing has been done to keep the working arrangements of the pit on a par with the position of the workings. The horse road is some 500 yards in arrears, the boys have been drawing the coal very excessive distances and the present chain road ought long since to have been carried up to the workings. The field is very extensively wrought from ancient times from the crop and by numerous pits scattered over the area as was the custom in former days, pits being sunk and the coal worked for about a hundred yards around then abandoned and a new one sunk to avoid the longer haulage and the difficulties in drainage.

The present pit is presently working out that which had been thus left over. 70 Acres have been exhausted and the present drainage only serves to drain 7 acres more. A considerable amount of pillars have been left under the old lease which will entail a considerable loss on the present lessees to extract them. A large fault crosses this field

which will cut it off entirely. A new winning will be required and this should be progressing immediately .

John Tattersall, manager of the Rossendale pits, was told to put the pit on a good footing for the start of the new lease. To extend the chain road from the surface 400 yards into the pit and to work as many pillars as practicable. Many problems were incurred by encountering lots of old workings.

Brex Colliery.

The Brex colliery which worked a portion of the Fox Hill field was opened at first in 1835 and afterwards in 1854. The pit was worked under the same advantageous circumstances and little expense incurred developing the pit. The boys have brought the coal out there being no outlay on haulage roads. The pit is now entirely exhausted.

Old Meadows Colliery.

Two drifts are driven. One opened in 1847 and the other about 1851. The workings are now far in advance of the chain and horse roads. Since the expiration of the lease, 500 yards of chain road have been put in towards the workings and a further extension of nearly 1000 yards is now necessary. The drainage arrangements have also fallen into arrears some 240 yards of drift are required to drain a portion to the North and 680 yards more for a portion to the south east. These drifts will be in rock and will be expensive, the cost will far exceed the cost of the original opening. The area of pillars is also excessive. In 1865 amidst much opposition a toll gate was placed in Burnley rd between the pit and Bacup. A great deal of expense has been made constructing a new surface tramway to Bacup to avoid the Toll gate on Burnley road which was constructed with the intention of catching the Old Meadows traffic. The Lessees were compelled to put in a new tramway to Lanehead to retain the custom. Even then the owner of the land on becoming aware of what the lessees proposed, set out a street for building purposes right across the only opening to the town for the purpose of stopping the tramway and he several times caused the tramway to be pulled up. Had any delay what ever occurred and the land owner been allowed to get in the footings of the houses, the construction of the tramway would have been prevented. The neighbouring freehold collieries would then inevitably seized a large portion of the custom of the pit to the great loss of those copyhold mines. Coal was first brought down the new tramway in January 1866

Scar End Colliery.

The colliery is entered by a drift and was opened in 1857. No new developments have been made nor have the necessary extensions been made at the end of the lease. No haulage or traveling roads are provided. At the end of the lease the greatest returns have been realised with the smallest possible outlay and without regard to the future. The whole of the coal has been brought out by the boys with no expense save that of getting and drawing the coal. All expenses for haulage and extensions fall upon the new lessees together with such plant that is required. The quantity of pillar coal left at this pit was comparatively large and undue cost and expense will be incurred by the new lessee during it's extraction.

Old Clough Colliery.

A drift opened about 1836 since when no new developments have been made . This pit, like Scarr End had been worked up to the expiration of the lease with the least possible outlay, the whole of the produce been brought to daylight by the drawers. By March 1867 the lads were running the coal to very excessive distances and a large proportion of pillar coal remains.

Dog Pits Colliery.

The pit, a drift, was opened in 1856. No outlay for plant or extensions have ever been made. Like Scarr End and Old Clough the whole produce has been brought to the surface by the boys without any further expense.

That is an overview of the collieries in Rossendale at that time period. During the year 1867, a great demand was found for coal and to meet that demand incentives were made in both The Rossendale and Baxenden pits to maximise production. As we have seen, conditions were hardly ideal for this increase. The Banksmen at all the pits were instructed to carefully note the get of each collier and ascertain who was neglecting their work. Any collier so doing was to lose his place and a new man set on instead of him. Cash incentives were given to the best Collier and drawer teams. John Tattersall stated that in Rossendale alone a further 17000 tons were that year mined than any year previous.

Much time has been taken explaining the situation and the state of the Rossendale pits. The Baxenden pits would occupy far more room as Richard Hudson was directly involved. That situation shall be developed at a later time but in short I shall give the opening dates for those pits then running in the Baxenden Area. Railway Pit opened 1848, closed 1857. Victoria originally sunk 52 yards to the upper Mountain in ancient time but in 1856 it was deepened to the Lower Mountain a further 56 yards. Dunnyshop pits opened 1831-36 and closed in 1848. A drift at Wood Nook opened 1831 to 34. Big developments were undertaken at Woodnook in 1865 and the drift extended to within 250 yards of the Victoria shaft. Hole in the Bank was opened around 1844 to work the field of coal on which it was sat. That area was quickly worked out and the pit utilised to work the coal on the other side of a fault up towards Goodshaw Hill and under Moleside and this created many engineering and geological problems. To partially help matters an air shaft was sunk at Shoe mill and an underground chain powered from there. Cat hall opened in 1833 and by 1867 horses were drawing the coal 1200 yards to daylight.

I hope this information thus far will be found useful by many who have shown an interest in the Rossendale Coalfield over the years. There is more to come on the subject. My special thanks to Janet Barrie of the Springhill History. And Paddy Brown of Whalley.

Clive Seal Dec 2020.