

North East Derbyshire Industrial Archaeology Society



NEDIAS Supplementary Newsletter – October 2020

Price: £2.00 (Free to Members)



Whilst the Committee have taken the difficult decision to cancel all remaining meetings for the foreseeable future we thought that our membership may appreciate an occasional supplementary Newsletter based on previously published articles that you may have missed.

Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Company Ltd.

David E. Jenkins

Early Beginnings:

The 1820s following the French wars and the defeat of Napoleon had been a very depressed period for the British iron industry and many companies went to the wall. In Chesterfield John Barnes had pulled out of his works close to the new canal, John Brocksoppⁱ had died and his works were closed, the Smith's works at Wheatbridge, Brampton and Calow were shut down in the 1830s and the Staveley iron company was only kept afloat by its coal mines.

But, with the coming of the railway age, the demand for iron products was starting to pick up again in the later 1850s and it was in that more buoyant climate that the Fowlers of Whittingtonⁱⁱ started the **Dunston and Barlow Mineral Company** in 1858. They were backed by Arthur Sankey a London financier and took over existing mines in Barlow and Dunston that held leases from the Dukes of Rutland and Devonshire and several other private coal owners. This little company thrived and by 1864 was capable of producing 600 tons of coal and iron a day from three collieries in Whittington and Barlow. Some of this coal was fed into 23 coke ovens and with mineral won from 28 ironstone mines (and lime stone fed through a calcining plant) supplied the company's iron works consisting of four blast furnaces and a sizeable foundry and mechanics shop.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 1862 the Companies Act had reached the statute book and provided limited liability for investors in industrial activities. This provided the motivation for **David Chadwick**, a Manchester accountant in private practice to join with **H. D. Pochin** (the owner of a considerable chemical business) to float a series of new companies taking over existing smaller companies and boosting their capital. Chadwick and Pochin had already floated the new **Staveley Coal and Iron Company** and now turned their attention to the Dunston and Barlow Mineral Company.

Agreement was reached with **William Fowler**, who continued as Chairman, for the formation of a new company; **Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Company** that **started** to trade in July 1864. The floatation attracted 62 shareholders with a number of well-known business men as directors including John Brown, the iron and engineering entrepreneur of Sheffield, Arthur Hankey, Benjamin Whitworth M.P., James Holden and H. D. Pochin.

The new company was almost short lived because no price had been agreed with the Fowlers before the new company was set up. The stock and properties were valued by an independent valuer at £256,744, 7 shillings – rather more than Chadwick had expected. There were no funds available to cover the 'excess' of £56,404 but William Fowler agreed to be paid this balance over a period of ten years and the company was saved from a very short existence. The principal profitable activity of the company for the next 80 years was **coal**

mining although in the later years, during most of living memory, the company is remembered for its iron and engineering activities.

Because of this it is perhaps easiest to look at the history of the company in four parts: The coal activities up to the First World War, then the iron activities for the same period, followed by coal from 1920 to 1947 and then similarly iron and engineering. In this article there is not space to deal at length with the intricacies of the funding of the public company or to say much about its management but some references to its attitudes to social responsibilities warrant a mention.



Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Company Ltd. – Dunston Headquarters

Coal Mining to the First World War:

The new company started off operating three roughly equi-sized mines each producing 250/300 tons of fuel daily. Two of these: **Nesfield** with a 9ft shaft, 79 yds. deep, opened in 1861 to work the Blackshale and Silkstone seams, was connected by rail to the works at Sheepbridge and **Dunston** had two 100 yds. deep shafts near Cobnar Wood with fair long term prospects. The third, right in the heart of the works, the **Sheepbridge** pit, was nearing the end of its economic life. It suffered flooding and was on several occasions nearly closed down but it managed to struggle on for another ten years. All three enjoyed the benefits of a technological breakthrough, the provision of guide rails in the shaft to stop the cage swinging about.

But not all the coal leased by the company from the Dukes of Rutland and Devonshire was worked directly by Sheepbridge. One mine in Cobnar Wood was leased to **C. H. Plevin**'s company and when it failed to pay its royalties on the coal worked, despite the outcry from local investors, it was repossessed by Sheepbridge.

Profits were ploughed back and were soon sufficient to finance expansion. The first such move was the sinking of **Norwood** colliery in Eckington, 9 miles north of the works.^{iv} By 1869 it was producing 400 tons daily and soon doubled that output.^v Agreement was reached to work under the Chesterfield Canal and by 1871 the Deep Hard and Silkstone seams were being worked.

The markets for this output were primarily with the iron masters of East Midlands, who held 21% of the Sheepbridge shares,^{vi} so that, of the roughly 10,000 tons raised at the four pits weekly, 3,000 tons went to the works, 6,000 tons were sold in various external markets and 1,000 was converted to coke. Conversion to coke

was still fairly primitive using 23 beehive ovens at Dunston that continued to work until 1908. (The Midlands iron masters were reluctant to try new coke making methods fearing a decline in quality and it was not until the twentieth century that the first by-product recovery ovens in Derbyshire were built by the Clay Cross company.)

Large coal sold well but disposal of 'slack' was always a problem. There were three outlets: coke ovens, gas works and brick kilns. Coke went to blast furnaces and railway locos required to run on smokeless fuel. Whittington gas works and a battery of retorts built at Norwood to service the company's works and some local residential properties took a share. And thirdly, since the clays in the area were very suitable the remainder fired the new brickworks at Barlow built by the company to supply colliery and housing needs as the population of Whittington and Chesterfield expanded.

As the company prospered it looked for new avenues of expansion. The first was a joint venture with the Staveley Coal and Iron Company, brokered by Pochin (who sat on the Sheepbridge and Staveley boards) to sink a new mine at **Newstead**, in the Nottingham coalfield. The partnership was formed with Fowler, John Stores Smith (the Sheepbridge M.D.) and Ben Whitworth from Sheepbridge sitting on the management committee

But even this arrangement, for Sheepbridge were at the same time organising the sinking of **Langwith** and **Glapwell**,^{vii} overtaxed the cash flow of Sheepbridge and they asked if they could reduce their share in Newstead to only a third.^{viii} Staveley were in no stronger a financial position so it was agreed to form a new company, the shares of which could be sold off to other investors by either of the founding companies.

The new company was floated in 1878 valued at £160,000. In the event, by the time this solution had been worked out, Sheepbridge had recovered sufficiently not to need to sell any of its shareholding in the **Newstead Colliery Co.** and went on to use the shares to guarantee bank and other borrowings.

Using its various assets in this way, including the many hundreds of railway coal wagons, to underwrite borrowings to fund expansion soon became a feature of the company financial strategy.

By 1872 the next round of expansion was underway with the company taking a lease of coal at Glapwell (including some of that owned by the Arkwrights of Sutton) and a little later taking a lease at Langwith of coal owned by the Duke of Portland, the Marquess of Hartington and Lord Bathurst.

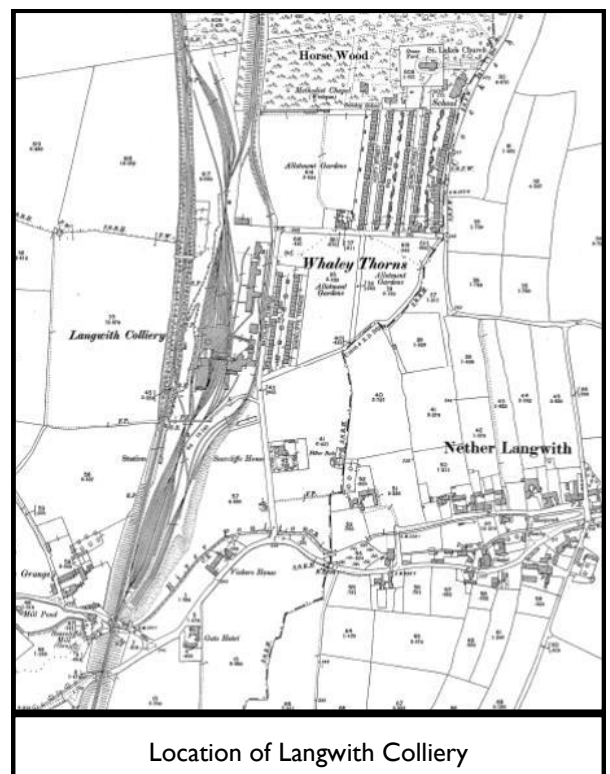
Both were green field sites where only a thin scattering of farmsteads existed and with no railway connection at Glapwell, although there was some service near Langwith. This made the laying out of the surface easy and minimized damage through subsidence but presented serious problems in providing and retaining manpower and access to markets.

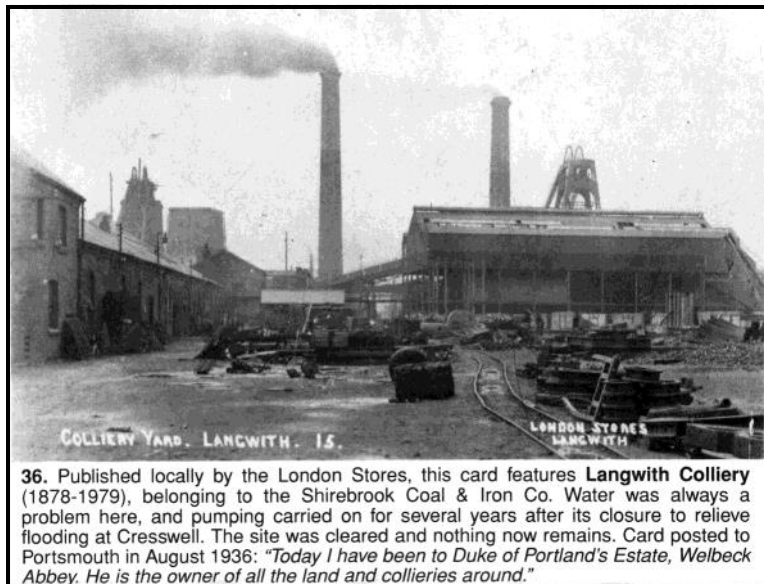
Langwith was given priority with sinking started in 1876. Olivers of Chesterfield supplied the winding engine for £2,300.^{ix} Progress of the sinking was reasonable good but the Directors kept a close eye on it, chartering a train on Saturdays from Chesterfield to visit the site. These early Directors were much involved in the detailed development of the company. Many were very wealthy men who were willing to put in personal funds by way of loans but at risk if the company went under.

The Langwith coal was finally accessed but there was almost immediately a setback when the drivages hit a nest of faults and coal production was delayed. But these faults were soon driven through and results were good enough to justify the erection of a coal cleaning plant.

As Langwith came on stream the sinking delays there had been at **Glapwell** were overcome and the Deep Hard seam was accessed in July 1883. But the full potential of the mine was delayed until the Doe Lea branch railway line was completed in 1886.

The inter-relationship with the railway companies is a study in itself and it was not surprising that the Sheepbridge chairman, by then H. D. Pochin, emphasized how dependent the





company was on the Midland railway and backed the proposal for a more direct line to Sheffield which would serve their Norwood colliery as well as many Staveley Company collieries and open up a new route for an annual 180,000 tons of Sheepbridge coal to London. These sales, in London, and also in Manchester, were handled by company agents paid by Sheepbridge on a commission basis.

All this frenetic expansion was against a background of feast and famine in the coal markets. Sales to London were on the increase but overproduction was a constant industry problem. The mine workers were beginning to flex their muscles. Despite parliamentary intervention the Coal Mines Regulation Act of

1872 still allowed children between 12 and 16 to work a 54 hour week on the surface.

J. E. Williams has told the story of the Derbyshire Miners and it need not be repeated here except perhaps to draw attention to a big difference between Staveley and Sheepbridge in their attitude to the burgeoning Trade Unionism. Charles Markham at Staveley was violently opposed to unions but Stores -Smith, the M.D. of Sheepbridge, in a public speech said that trade unionism "was now an accomplished fact; you are here- a great fact- strong in numbers, strong in union strong in funds, strong in enthusiasm. We must accept and endeavour to co-operate with you in making the best of it."^x

Working in the mines was still very hazardous. Deaths, principally from falls of ground, declined steadily but still in 1868 one in every 403 employed was killed though this rate had declined, twenty years later to 1 in 919. Relief to bereaved families was provided by a mutual fund^{xi} contributed to by the miners which paid 5/- a week to a widow and an extra 2/- for each child under thirteen, until the Workmen's Compensation Act (which was opposed by many companies but was supported by Sheepbridge) superseded the need for the mutual fund.

The company was always willing to advance technologically though perhaps strangely there was no mining engineer on the Board until 1873 when G. Jeffcock was appointed to the Board to be joined in 1896 by Maurice Deacon a most capable mining engineer. Jeffcock gave 26 years' service and was responsible for the design and commissioning of Langwith and Glapwell.

The 1880s were years of economic depression with fluctuating trade fortunes but the Directors were nevertheless willing to fund improvements in anticipation of trade improvement.

New fans were installed at Langwith and Glapwell to improve ventilation and coal cleaning plant was provided. Electric lighting was put in at Langwith and by the end of the century Glapwell was employing 888 men underground and 250 on the surface while Langwith had 950 underground and 212 above. The company's total annual coal output had risen from 384,000 tons in 1878 to 1,120,000 tons in 1900.

But this success in an extractive industry carried a price. Norwood was running out of coal; it closed in 1914, and new investment was needed. Sheepbridge again took the road of joint enterprise moving into the South Yorkshire coalfield taking shareholdings in new sinkings at Dinnington Main, in 1902, and Maltby Main six years later. Along with an old associate, the John Brown Company of Sheffield, the Rossington Main Colliery Co was formed to exploit the Rossington and Wadworth coal fields.(As an aside, Maltby is one of the ten collieries still, in 2006, producing coal in the U.K. and Rossington is mothballed and could be called back into production).

As First World War broke out the Newstead Mining Co. (still partially owned by Sheepbridge) started the development of **Blidworth** colliery in Nottinghamshire while Sheepbridge in conjunction with **Wallingwells Boring Company** obtained a controlling interest in the development of the Carlton area of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire.

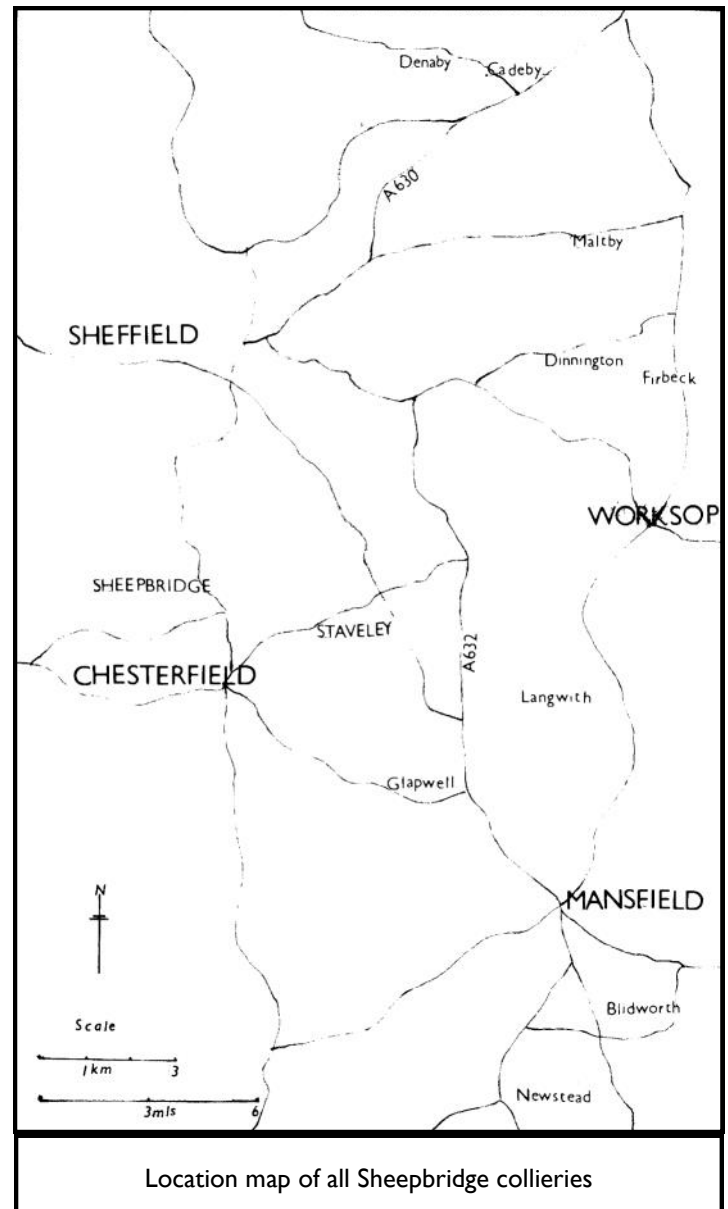
There was a short excursion into the chemical industry when Perchlorate Safety Explosive Co. Ltd. proposed building a plant at Langwith colliery to use the sulphate of ammonia manufactured in the coke by-product plant.^{xii}

Production during the war was at first hampered by a shortage of manpower, coupled with a marked decrease in productivity, but then as demand reached a crescendo the mines were taken over, in 1917, by the **Controller of Mines**,^{xiii} who promptly made unprecedented wage awards to the miners and raised the price of coal by 4/- a ton. The future of the coal mines of Sheepbridge looked good as the war drew to a close but this concealed a smouldering unrest in the labour force and the national onset of trade depression.

Social Responsibilities of the Company.

Before turning to the **development** of the iron works a word may be interjected about the company's attitude to its social responsibilities. The population of Whittington had risen from 2,863 in 1861 to 5,779 ten years later. Of these some 2,000 men and boys were employed by Sheepbridge. The new inhabitants needed schools, chapels and churches and welfare institutions and naturally looked to the main employer for help with funding. At first Sheepbridge were slow to respond but soon they were contributing £50 here and £70 there towards the building of Killamarsh^{xiv} parish church, the Primitive Methodist chapel at Sheepbridge, Newbold and Whittington churches. And soon funds were similarly applied at Glapwell and Whaley Thorns.

Likewise the company helped the establishment of schools at Barlow, Heath, Bolsover, Killamarsh and Whittington, contributions that went right on into the next century.^{xv}



The company's housing policy was also progressive. It had taken over 48 cottages built by the Dunston company close to the works in Cavendish Square and went on to build workmen's houses at Norwood. The miners at Langwith and Glapwell were largely migrant from across the country coming with their families who needed accommodation. To meet the need Sheepbridge built most of Langwith and much of Glapwell and Doe Lea. The demand for housing outstripped the company's

funds at times and H. D. Pochin built 50 houses at Langwith at his own expense which were leased back to Sheepbridge for 25 years at a rent equal to 7% of the gross land and building cost. (A nice little earner!) Shops were also provided and quickly let.

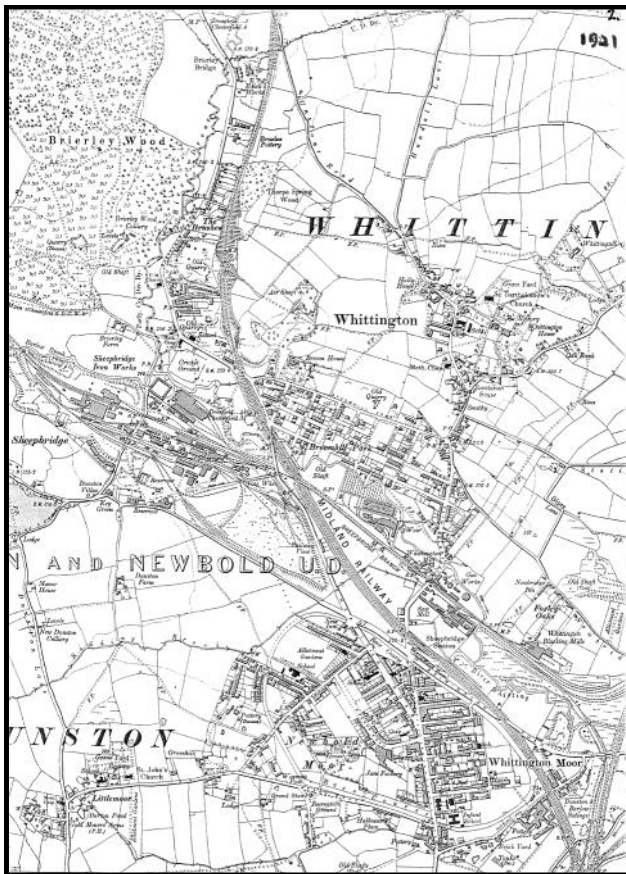
The Iron Works

Now let us catch up with what was happening on the iron producing side of the company. After the Great Exhibition of 1851 there was a resurgence in the demand for iron products particularly so as railways started to be developed. It was on this wave of enthusiasm that the Fowlers had built their iron works at Sheepbridge. It suffered from being supplied by three mines of which only the old Sheepbridge mine produced hard or 'potters' coal most suitable for furnace work. Its competitor, the Staveley Company, on the other hand had ample supplies of suitable coke making coals.

Despite this drawback Sheepbridge was able to make high quality cold blast iron that found a ready market in Sheffield. The **John Brown Co** processed Sheepbridge iron into armour plate^{xvii} which excelled itself in tests. Sales were 968 tons of hot blast and 759 tons of cold blast monthly. But sales away from Yorkshire were rarely at a profit.

Fowler, still behaving as if he was the sole owner, financed from his personal funds a **rolling mill** handling 250 tons of product a week. Paying back this advance and distributing profits from it were a bone of contention for many years.

By the mid-1860s supplies of local ironstone **were** running out^{xviii} and the company turned to alternative supplies from Northampton. **The Midland Counties Iron Ore Co.**^{xix} was formed by four companies; Sheepbridge, Staveley, Clay Cross and Wingerworth Co's, to negotiate with the mineral owners in Northampton and Lincoln. Sheepbridge took up leases at **Cottismore** and later at **Brixworth** in



Location map of the Sheepbridge Works

Northamptonshire so that by 1880 the Directors declared they had assured supplies for 40 years. Railways connections were built but extraction of the ore proved more difficult than had been expected and the ore was less than satisfactory, so the company turned to seek ore in **Frodingham** in Lincolnshire. This led to a brief period when Sheepbridge debated whether it would be more profitable to move the works to Lincolnshire and ship coal in rather than continue to move ironstone.)

Trade during the 1860s and 70s was depressed and only the American civil war and the Franco/Prussian war gave a boost to trade with a demand for shot and shell but this was short lived and by 1879 five of the eight blast furnaces were blown out. This trade hiatus, when neither side was properly organised, led to the formation of the **Iron and Steel Federation** of which Fowler was a member. It began organised research into such projects as wrought iron puddling by mechanical means and continued with valuable research.

Even in this depressed climate the directors agreed to a considerable investment in a new blower engine, a new blast furnace, railway sidings, a carpenters' shop, and a Hudswell Clarke shunter, to replace horses, all to be sited on 30 acres of newly bought land.

Stores Smith, the Managing Director, retired and **James Colquhon** from the **Tredegar Iron Co** was brought in to run the show. But trade conditions were very much against him and in the late 1880s the Directors (paralleled by those at Staveley) nearly decided to close down the iron side of the business. Colquhon pleaded for another chance and iron making continued, but profits were minimal, and it was the success of Glapwell colliery that kept the Company viable.^{xx}

Matters hardly improved but surprisingly again the Directors decided to make a big investment sending officials to America, Belgium and Germany to seek new ideas; the furnaces and rolling mill were modernised, a 5-ton hammer replaced the 5-cwt hammer. **Charles McLaren** (later to become **Lord Aberconway**), who was Pochin's son-in-law, took over as Chairman of the Company.^{xxi} He was a great propagandist for his companies, and was able in 1900 to describe the plant as 'the most beautiful piece of mechanical ingenuity seen anywhere in Europe.'

Pig iron was now being manufactured into pipes for the gas and sewerage industries that were booming as municipalities vied with each other to modernise their towns and cities.

But by 1907 the trade cycle had again thrown the company into difficulties. Management was blamed and changes were made. Strikes ensued and dragged on for three months. The claim for an eight hour day was abandoned and the workforce accepted a 5% cut in wages.

Depressed trade conditions persisted and by 1912 as the War loomed on the horizon the company was working well below capacity but all that changed as the demand for armour plate, shell steel and munitions soared.

In 1916 the **Ministry of Munitions** took over the production of the iron works as a 'controlled establishment' and promptly financed new steel making furnace and rolling mill. There was a shortage of manpower as men were encouraged to join the armed forces^{xxii} but to the credit of the company during the war there were no strikes at Sheepbridge but as the war came to an end industrial relations were very unsettled and a new phase of the Company's iron making started. So successful was the munitions production that the directors toyed with the idea of patenting their own cast iron shell design.

The war had salvaged the iron side of the Company from extinction.

The Coal Trade after World War 1.

In 1913 coal production in the U.K. had reached its maximum. The war had seen a decline in productivity and the Government's taste for intervention in the industry was not lightly given up. The social consequences of any decline in production worried the Government and the **Sankey Commission** was charged with looking into how the industry was run. This was followed by the **Samuel Commission** looking into such minutiae as to how the basic wage fund assessments (the basis for wage levels) were being distorted by the way directors made charges of insurance premiums for workmens' compensation and so on. All this was against a background immediately after the war of festering relations between the coal owners and the mine workers. Syndicalism and nationalisation were being mooted. Sheepbridge, along with its 'subsidiary' companies, Dinnington, Maltby, Rossington, and Firbeck at annual general meetings were quick to raise the strongest objections to any suggestion of nationalisation or state management of the industry.^{xxiii}

Fortunately for Sheepbridge their larger newer collieries in Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire were much better placed to weather the storms of the 1920s than the small pits of South Wales and Northumberland and Durham.^{xxiv}

During the 1920s Sheepbridge and Staveley, maximizing the advantages of interlocked directorships, ran Newstead Colliery company very successfully, so much so that it financed the sinking of **Blidworth** colliery (the Top Hard coal of which was accessed on the eve of the General Strike). During this episode of history owners were very voluble about labour relations Charles Markham at Staveley being more flamboyant than Aberconway at Sheepbridge but both played an important part in the industrial affairs of East Midlands.

Langwith and Glapwell prospered. The lower seams were developed (Blackshale at 667 yds.), A new Baum washing plant was built at Langwith.^{xxv} Underground conveyors and a new steam driven winding engine from Markham's works was installed. Electricity generated at Langwith was sold to Shirebrook colliery and power from Glapwell colliery was sold to the Staveley mine at Ramcroft.

At the same time, in a period of fluctuating trade fortunes, the Sheepbridge Company was looking for new investment possibilities. The interest in the Fittingley coal field was sold and the money put into the Firbeck area **potential**. Again, with joint financing, Staveley and the Sheepbridge and Dinnington Company sank **Firbeck** colliery to the Barnsley seam, 4feet 9ins thick.

Marketing coal was never easy and competition was always fierce. To meet the challenge the sales methods became increasingly sophisticated but attempts to form selling agencies with French and Belgium firms were unsuccessful as was a disastrous link-up with a Hull sales agency. Sheepbridges's timber supply links to a Canadian company were also in difficulties, the collapse of that company throwing a heavy debt on Sheepbridge.

The immediate post Great War period was peppered with strikes at many of the Sheepbridge pits, the whole fermentation boiling over into the General Strike, which started at the beginning of May 1926. All the Sheepbridge collieries were locked out **but** since the miners elected to go out before the strike notice expired the owners were able to argue that the men had broken their contracts. Men drifted back in September and the collapse at Langwith and Glapwell weakened resistance elsewhere.^{xxvi}

The strike had damaged the flow of funds for investment and Sheepbridge looked to rationalisation. **Maltby** was sold to the **Denaby** company, and a new holding company was formed to run Sheepbridge, Dinnington, Rossington and Denaby and Cadeby colliery companies' directors being nominated by the various companies to the controlling board. This left Sheepbridge with, 4200 miners in its own pits and 5,500 more in the other three in which it had controlling interests.^{xxvii}

But trade was uncertain. The selling side was also overhauled with the formation of the **Central Collieries Commercial Association** which controlled the sales of 90% of the region's 100 million tons of production and was linked to an export promotion levy and a production quota system.^{xxviii}

Sheepbridge, to strengthen its London sales, bought a share of **Rickett Cockrell** which company refused to enter into an agreement not to exclude sales arrangements with other East Midlands coal companies.

Into the 1930s trade was not improved and permitted production quotas were tightened, Langwith and Glapwell having to cut back by 500 tons a day.^{xxix} Companies took to buying up collieries to close them while retaining their quotas. In this way Sheepbridge bought **Tibshelf** and **Birchwood**,^{xxx} closing Tibshelf but keeping Birchwood until 1941. But despite the poor trade prognosis the company did not starve its collieries of new investment and as the upper seams were exhausted the lower less attractive seams were opened up and cleaning costs rose.

The Second World War saw a welcomed increase in demand. But as in the First War absenteeism was a problem although the mistake of allowing men to leave the pits was minimised. Emergency Controls were introduced and were only withdrawn as the collieries were nationalised in 1947 and Sheepbridge ceased to be a Coal and Iron company.

Post First War Iron Works Activities.

The Armistice saw a cut off of munitions production but the back log, caused by the war, in municipal gas, water and sewerage schemes soon resulted in full order books. This little boom was peppered with strikes as wages awarded during the emergency were adjusted to commercial conditions.^{xxxi} Trade, though, warranted the investment in a new blast furnace and for the first time the iron side of the business, in terms of profitability compensated for the trouble on the coal mining side in the early 1920s.

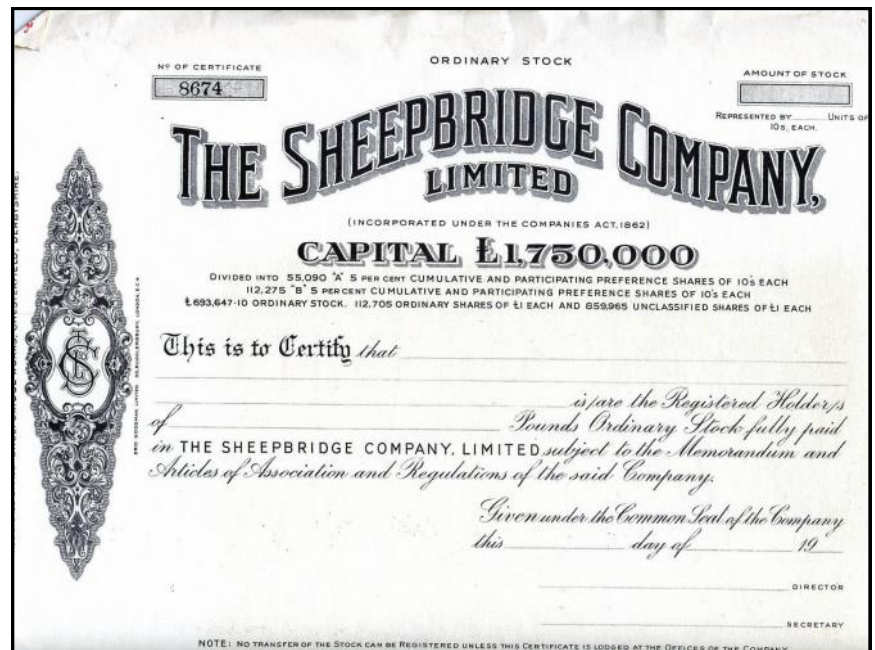
Forward looking the Directors cast around for a new niche to fill and found it in the manufacture of cylinder liners for large piston pots while the company commenced its practice of buying up small companies . First they looked to the manufacture of spun castings for pistons rings forming a new company with **F. W. Stokes, Sheepbridge Stokes Centrifugal Castings Company**.^{xxxii} Newton Chambers were also working in this field and to gain the advantages of scale Sheepbridge bought their interest out, severing a trading connection that had existed for a few years.

This line of business led to the acquisition of **Van der Horst of Amsterdam** specialist manufacturers of chromium plated cylinder liners.^{xxxiii} And the company was soon supplying Rolls Royce, de Haviland, Bristol and Napier with aeroplane engine parts.

Profits were ploughed back and in the 1930s dividends were small but still the Company successfully raised new capital on the open market.

Considerable research was undertaken and the company with a Belgian associate ventured into the manufacture of Nitri cast iron used in the manufacture of centrifugally spun parts.

The prime product in the 1920s and 30s was still pig iron although the water and sanitary pipe wear business continued to prosper. The quality and availability of Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire ores fluctuated as



Sheepbridge share certificate of the 1920s

did the pipe market so the Company took up the Hornsey and Hopkinson iron making process building new plant for the purpose. At the same time a tar-macadam plant was built but was soon leased to William Prestwick and Son. This was an outlet for slag and tars as was the investment in the **Chesterfield Asphalt Company**.^{xxxiv}

By the Second World War Sheepbridge production was vital to the war effort, notwithstanding the problems caused by the glare from the plant at night.^{xxxv} The Ministry of Supply financed new buildings at the company's subsidiary, **Humber Co. Ltd.**, at Coventry and new plant to make bomb forgings. And in this war the company did make some block-busting bombs.

By the end of the war Steel nationalisation was on the horizon and with compensation from the nationalisation of the coal mines and the steel industry the Sheepbridge Company was reinvented in 1948 as the **Sheepbridge Engineering Company**,^{xxxvi} effectively a holding company buying up and operating a series of smaller companies throughout the U.K. and in America. (Its logo was S.E. on either side of an image of the Chesterfield crooked spire with the motto 'The centre of industrial England.') The old Sheepbridge Coal and Iron Company was only finally wound up in 1970.^{xxxvi}

The new engineering enterprise, still under the chairmanship of the second Lord Aberconway, was led by a general manager brought in from the Nuffield Motor Company. His name was Tom Brown. By nature he was a bit of a martinet who became something of a legend in Whittington but he had the drive and imagination that the Company needed to survive in a very competitive market. He was a hirer and firer who changed the ethos of Sheepbridge. Christian names were no longer used, name plates appeared on office doors and the old 'family trust' evaporated.

The physical links on the ground between the nationalised plant and the separate engineering company, the supply of electricity, compressed air etc. with some under the control of the new Steel Corporation and some still with Sheepbridge Engineering could not easily be severed and continued for fifteen years until the Corporation closed down the Sheepbridge blast furnaces. The centrifugal casting plant was extended and die-casting replaced sand moulding as demand swelled after the war.

As more cash from nationalisation^{xxxviii} flowed in diversification went on apace: Automotive Engineering was set up at Twickenham employing 700. Harding Machine Tools at Hanworth, Middlesex. Clews Peterson, Light Production, the Advanced Motor Manufacturing Co. and many more were floated or bought up in the U.K. In Canada, Sheepbridge (Canada) was formed. Most of these new acquisitions prospered but others failed or were sold off at a slight loss. The labour force peaked in 1972 at 5,500

The diversification that resulted protected the company from any serious setback in any one sector but the profitability of the group inevitable attracted the interest of competitors.

The **Guest Keen and Nettlefold group**, twenty times the size of Sheepbridge Engineering made a bid in May 1979, 70% in excess of the capital value. The board could but recommend acceptance to the shareholders. So commenced **G.K.N. Sheepbridge Stokes Ltd.** in Chesterfield, a company that survived on the original Sheepbridge site until this year, 2007 (143 years after the Barlow Co started here) only finally succumbing to wage competition from China.

Other Aspects.

Space does not permit but there is much more (covered in the book *Sheepbridge, a history of the coal and iron company*) that could be said about the industrial relations of the Sheepbridge Company, their enlightened housing policy, particularly during the 1920s, the loyalty of their workforce (a great many of the employers starting as apprentices and spending their whole working lives with the company) the way in which they successfully appeased shareholders and raised capital in particularly difficulty times and the constituency of the board and drive of their chairmen.

References:

This contribution is based on a talk given to NEDIAS in November, 2006. For the more detailed context see *Sheepbridge: a history of the Sheepbridge Iron and Coal Company Ltd.* ISBN 0 9525678 5 7 (Chesterfield 1995) David E. Jenkins.

The following abbreviations are used in the ensuing footnotes:

M Minute Month/Year e.g. M 4/64, refers to minute of April 1864, in the ten minute books of the Sheepbridge Company deposited at the Derbyshire Record Office (D3808)

D.T. = Derbyshire Times.

- i. *The Brocksopps of Hasland, Yeomen Ironmaster Industrialists of North East Derbyshire (1730-1830)* Unpublished Nottingham University M.A. dissertation 1991 David E. Jenkins p.48-53
- ii. D.T. 27 Jan 1877
- iii. D. Higginbottom, 'Sheepbridge Works' *Derbyshire Miscellany* UIX I (1975) and Sheepbridge Collection, Chesterfield Local Studies Library, SHE 146
- iv. M 1/65
- v. Williams p 40
- vi. R. Church *History of the Coal Industry. Victorian Pre-eminence Vol 3* (Oxford 1986) p 140
- vii. M 7/72
- viii. M 6/77 and 11/77
- ix. M 7/79
- x. DT 16 Aug 1873
- xi. M 12/86
- xii. M 6/15
- xiii. M 2/17
- xiv. M 9/74
- xv. M 12/04 and 12/05
- xvi. M 10/83
- xvii. Williams p 40
- xviii. J. C. Carr & W. Taplin *A History of the British Steel Industry* (Oxford 1962) p 88
- xix. (Cambridge 1981) Chap 3.
- xx. DT 3 Oct 1896
- xxi. M 5/98 DT 5 Oct 1901
- xxii. DT 3 Sept 1916
- xxiii. DT 2 Aug 1919
- xxiv. B. Supple *History of the British Coal Industry. The political economy of decline* (Oxford 1989) p 24
- xxv. M2/24
- xxvi. Williams p 699
- xxviii. Supple p204
- xxix. M 7/36
- xxx. M 9/32 & 5/33
- xxxi. M 5/39
- xxxii. M7/21 & 11/21
- xxxiii. M 8/29 & 12/29
- xxxiv. M 1/42 & 10/44
- xxxv. M 11/23
- xxxvi. M 7/39
- xxxvii. M 8/48
- xxxviii. M 2/70
- xxxix. M 5/50

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