

## **Stanley Colliery**

**Location** - 1 mile south-west of Alveley (SO750827)

**Minerals** - Coal

**Working Life** - Known working life : 1803-1826

**History ("Survey of Stanley Colliery", David Poyner & Robert Evans, SCMC Journal No.3)**

Stanley Colliery was situated on the banks of the River Severn in Highley and worked for 20 years at the start of the 19th century, employing perhaps 100 people and sending coal down the Severn to Bewdley, Worcester and beyond. It was to be the largest and most successful example of a colliery in the Wyre Forest Coalfield until the Highley Mining Company's efforts in the late 19th century. Its existence was largely forgotten until recently, however, partly because its remains were obscured by the construction of the Severn Valley Railway, and then by the subsequent colliery of the Highley Mining Company. This article presents a survey of the main surface features to be found on the site of Stanley. It also gives an account of observations made on a trench and shallow excavations arising from building work currently being undertaken in the vicinity of the mine.

Although the history of Stanley has been dealt with elsewhere, a brief overview will be given here. The mine appeared to have started in 1803/04 and the owners were John & Benjamin Thompson, ironmasters and entrepreneurs. In December 1804 George Sheffield, a miner, was killed "in a certain footrid ... called Stanley footrid". Thus it seems that the initial mine was a drift from the surface. The shallowest coal seam found here is the Brock Hall Seam, thin and full of sulphur, but worked at a depth of 20-30 yards elsewhere in Highley and Chelmarsh. This was the most likely target of the drift. However, at about 100 yards depth are to be found the Main Sulphur and Hard Mine Seams, much thicker and with a lower sulphur content. These lower seams were the mainstay of the mine. A 100 yard shaft with a steam winding engine had been sunk by 1807, when best "tops" and "bottoms" coals were both being sold, and in 1810 a miner was killed in the No.3 pit . Benjamin Thompson have up his share in the mine about 1811 and, in 1812, the colliery was purchased by William Hughes and partners, together with the lime and brickworks the Thompsons owned at Arley and Stourport. Hughes eventually came to lease at least some of the sandstone quarries adjacent to the mine and also in Arley, as well as houses and farms in Highley. The mine finally closed by 1824 , as a result of the coal being lost through faulting.

The dispersal sale of the colliery gives some indication of its size. This included a 20HP pumping engine with 120 yards of 8" pumps, two 7HP winding engines, 170 yards of flat rope, 150 pairs of 6ft iron rails with rail and road waggons, "a

variety of blowing tack", smiths tools, counting desks, weighing machines, timber, two Severn barges each of 60 tons and a threshing machine, presumably from the farm owned by Hughes. The shafts reached to 110 yards and the colliery had rights to coal under 180 acres. The sale did Hughes little good, however, for by 1826 he was bankrupt.

Although not mentioned in the sale documents, a substantial settlement had grown up around the colliery, with 24 families living there in 1822. This gradually shrank in size but was still one of the most densely populated parts of the village 30 years later. The quarries continued in production until the end of the century and, with the river adjacent, the area retained some of its economic base. The area was mapped by surveyors for the forerunner of the Severn Valley Railway, firstly in 1846 and then 1852. These show several houses, other buildings, areas of quarrying and two of the Stanley shafts. The buildings compare well with those shown on a 2":1 mile plan of the area prepared by the Ordnance Survey in 1815, although the scale of this latter survey unfortunately makes it of limited use. The remains of the colliery were quite obvious at this time for, when in 1858 a report of the construction of the Severn Valley Railway appeared in the Bridgnorth Journal, the author described the area as being a dangerous place on account of the remains of a coal mine. It appears that the railway was driven through the middle of the colliery, for the shafts are now to the west of it, whilst a spoil tip is to the east. Most of the houses were probably pulled down at this time but a brick terrace remained occupied until the 1950s. It subsequently fell down but is now being rebuilt. A stone cottage, Stanley Cottage, remains as a dwelling house.

The Highley Mining Company established their colliery on an escarpment above the Stanley Colliery. To provide a connection with the railway, a standard gauge self-acting incline plane was constructed, this time cutting the colliery site in a north-south direction. A further encroachment was made by the construction of the exchange sidings, where part of the site was cut away and then dumped to create a level area. The area of Stanley taken by the Highley Mining Company is now part of the Severn Valley Country Park. The rest of the area to the west of the railway is largely wooded. Between the railway and the river there is a strip of woodland and then pasture. Here a drive has been constructed in association with the rebuilding of the riverside house.

### **Surface Remains**

The incline of the Highley Mining Company emerges from a cutting in the solid sandstone escarpment and almost immediately starts cutting through softer ground as it heads towards the sidings site. This site was extended in the 1950s, truncating the incline which now ends 20ft above current ground level. Between the sandstone escarpment, the sidings and the railway is an area of undisturbed ground marking the site of early 19th century activity. Cut into the sandstone are quarries. These have associated access roads; one is deeply sunken below ground level whereas another rests on an embankment on its east side, as the

ground slopes towards the river. One quarry is substantially larger than the other; the northern face shows many toolmarks indicating that it was worked by hand; blasting seems to have been used on the southern face reflecting use in the late 1920s to obtain stone for road building. There is a suggestion of a steep track leading straight to the river, which might have been an incline to a riverside wharf.

About 20 yards due south of the incline, just above the edge of the HMC sidings, is the site of one of the shafts marked on the 1846 survey. There is a distinct mound containing brick fragments, on the east side of which is a track leading down to the river; this was probably a tramway but its route is now curtailed by the sidings. On the other side of the mound is a conical depression approximately 15ft deep, probably marking the shaft itself. This depression is separated from a second depression immediately to its north by a ridge, about 4ft high and 10ft long. We speculate that this second depression may mark the site of an engine house but this can only be proved by excavation.

The incline seems to have been cut through the earthworks of the Stanley Colliery, leaving a triangle of elevated ground bounded by embankments to the north. According to the 1846 survey, the second shaft should be close to this but its position is no longer obvious. It may have been sufficiently close to the Highley Mining Company's incline to have been infilled in the 1880s. The elevated ground rests on what may itself be an additional platform of made-up ground, sloping towards the road to the north, and with embankments to the east and west. It must have functioned as a general reception area for the colliery and quarries. The whole area between the incline and the road appears largely undisturbed by subsequent mining and quarrying events. Across the road is a triangle of land bounded by the railway station to the east. In the northern corner of this is a shaft, marked on the 1882 O.S. map but not the 1846 survey. Its position close to the documented features of Stanley Colliery is clearly intriguing but its absence from the 1846 survey suggests that it may post-date the colliery.

Beyond the southern edge of the sidings is another area of undisturbed ground, although rendered somewhat inaccessible by fallen trees. The most striking feature is a low embankment, which runs in an east-west direction and disappears into the railway embankment. It roughly aligns with a spoil heap on the other side of the railway and it is tempting to assume that there was a shaft in this area with which these features were associated. The 1846 survey marks a cottage close to this but, although there are bricks scattered here, the conditions preclude detailed survey.

Between the railway and the river, the ground is much flatter. According to the 1846 survey, this was the location of much of the colliery housing and, in addition, must have been the site of the colliery and quarry wharves. This is the area recently sectioned by a 3ft deep trench for drains and cables. The only house currently standing is Stanley Cottage. This is a long 2 story building, with

thick sandstone walls. There are grounds from documentary evidence and from its style of construction to think that it predates Stanley Colliery. The current excavations have extended to its boundary hedge, from which two 17th-18th century clay pipes have been recovered, supporting this early dating. Within the present garden of the cottage is a large spoil mound, marked on the railway survey, and clearly from Stanley. As the trench passes through this point, a layer of red ashes is apparent, presumably representing clinker and burnt shale from the colliery. The red ash is most apparent by the spoil tip but it occurs periodically further south along the trench.

Beyond the garden is a brick storage tank, built in the 1880s to supply water to Highley Colliery, and the cast iron pipe which carried this to the pump house has been exposed in several places. South of this, the 1846 map marks the site of 3 cottages. At the first of these, the excavations have sliced a bank, rising about 4ft from the ground and extending back to the railway. About a 15ft section of this is white clay, with a band of unburnt coal debris up to 1ft thick towards the top of it. The clay contains fragments of brick, tile, red and white sandstone, and on either side is surrounded by soil containing pottery fragments. Beyond the section, on top of the bank are 3 low mounds. We speculate that these represent the sites of the first set of cottages and outhouses marked on the 1846 map, and that spoil had been dumped in front of them to create the present bank.

Beyond the mound is a spring, leading to the river. Arising out of this boggy area is a low mound, about 15ft x 20ft, the site of the second cottage. The trench here reveals fragments of brick, tile, stone and pottery. The third cottage is set on the bank overlooking the valley and about 10ft of sandstone wall, one course high, still stands. This is adjacent to a track leading to another sandstone quarry, partly infilled. However, below the second cottage the trench contains a layer of unburnt coal debris approaching 1 ft in thickness. This seems to be interrupted by brick and tile from a "building" shown on the 1846 survey. It is difficult to interpret the significance of the coal layer, unless the area was used for stockpiling from Stanley. Close to this deposit, and about 10ft from the river bank, the recent excavations have revealed very large sandstone blocks, approaching 3ft in all dimensions, which may have formed part of a quay for loading the coal.

Below this building, the 1846 map shows an area clear of houses. However, the trench has thrown up further quantities of stone, brick and tile, suggesting the sites of further buildings. The final set of features are the gardens and remains of the brick terrace currently under reconstruction. This was originally 4 separate dwellings, each 2 up and 2 down with individual rooms 10'6" x 15'9". Beyond was a further quarry, working Keele Sandstone, which was probably abandoned in the mid 19th century.

The current building operations have revealed a number of artefacts of interest. A large number of fragments of domestic pottery have been recorded. These seem to be mainly earthenware cooking or storage vessels, or brightly decorated plates

and jugs, either slipware or printed "blue & white" pottery. Most of the pottery is consistent with an early to mid 19th century date.

Three items which may be specifically associated with Stanley Colliery have been recorded. A length of winding chain was found in the garden of a bungalow erected close to the site of a cottage. Chain of this type was never used at Highley so it is possible that it may have come from Stanley. A wheel hub was found in a mound of earth which came from the immediate area of the spoil tip. This is 4" long with 4 spokes, with the hole for the axle tapering from 1.75" diameter to 1.125". It may have run on plate rail. A length of this, covered in red ash, was recovered from the area of the spoil tip. This is 2" wide with a 1.5" flange. At its unbroken end is a lug, 1.5" x 2", which must have been used to locate the rail into a sleeper.