**Whitby Iron Company at Beck Hole – What the Papers Say.**

Since my previous installment back in CIH issue 26, I have continued the search for additional information about the short-lived Whitby Iron Company mines and furnaces at Beck Hole. With the recent launch of the British Newspaper Archive (http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) it is now possible to search a large collection of local newspapers which has yielded some additional references. My thanks also go to Phil and Tamsyn Naylor who provided clippings from the Whitby Gazette which is currently not available in the online archives.

*Through the second half of 1857 the following articles relating to construction and hiring appear.*

**York Herald - 6th June 1857**
Smelting Furnaces. During the week the Whitby Iron Company (a number of gentlemen residing in Leeds) have purchased of Mr John Scarth, of Goathland, twenty-seven acres of land situated at the bottom of the incline, about eight miles from Whitby, on which they intend to erect smelting furnaces and cottages for the workmen.

**Yorkshire Gazette – 25th July 1857**
To Builders. Parties desirous of contracting for the various works required to be done in the erection of Offices, Managers Houses, Engine House, Workshops, etc, at Goathland, near Whitby, for the Whitby Iron Company, may inspect the Plans and Specifications at our Offices from Tuesday, the 28th July, until Monday the 3rd of August. Tenders to be delivered at the Offices of the Company, 59 Albion Street, Leeds, not later than twelve o’clock on Tuesday the 4th of August. The lowest tender will not necessarily be accepted. Quantities not supplied. Dobson and Chorley, Architects, 19 Park Row, Leeds, July 22nd 1857.

**Whitby Gazette – 15th August 1857**
Ironstone and its Accompaniments – Many of our readers will be surprised to learn that what has been a barren wild and most despised part of this district is suddenly to be transformed into a busy hive for the manufacture of Iron. Mr Roberts of Leeds the contractor for building blast furnaces and thirty-three cottages at Goathland, contemplates having about two hundred men upon the works next week, and we see by advertisement that tenders are wanted for the erection of offices, managers houses, workshops, engine-house, etc.

**Newcastle Courant - 18th September 1857**
To Blast Furnace Brick Setters – The Whitby Iron Company are in want of a competent person to take charge of the Furnaces and Hot-Air Stoves, etc. Must have undeniable character for sobriety and ability. Reply, stating wages required and where last employed, to the Manager, Goathland near Whitby.

Wanted, immediately, a man thoroughly acquainted with the routine of Blast Furnaces to act as Foreman. Must have unexceptionable character for ability and steadiness, etc. Apply by letter to the Whitby Iron Works, Goathland, near Whitby, giving particulars of late employment, etc.

**Whitby Gazette - 7th November 1857**
To Joiners. Wanted two good hands, accustomed to Country Work. Apply to the Manager of the Whitby Iron Works, Goathland near Whitby.

*In November 1857 a serious setback occurs when there is a major landslide*

**Leeds Mercury – 12th November 1857**
Falling in of an Ironstone Mine. An ironstone mine at Beckhole, Goathland, near Whitby, fell in during Saturday night. The loss is estimated as £2000. No personal injury was sustained.

**Whitby Gazette – 14th November 1857**
Land Slip – Between the evening of Saturday and daylight on Sunday morning, an extensive slip of land occurred on the grounds of the Whitby Iron Company, at the bottom of the incline, at Goathland. During the whole of Saturday, slight indications were observed of the earth giving way, by the falling of loose stones, but not of sufficient importance to cause alarm, and fortunately not until the workmen were cleared off did anything serious take place. The mining operations of the Company are carried out
by piercing the face of a cliff, which rises almost perpendicularly; at its feet runs a tributary beck, and just above are the entrances into the mines. In the distance of 120 yards, the length of this cliff, many thousands of tons have fallen into the beck, causing the formation of a large lake of water beyond it, and closing up the mines, whilst around are strewn the uprooted trees of many years growth. Beyond necessitating the making of fresh openings for working the ironstone, and the loss of the rails which formed the tramway, no serious damage may be said to be done. The cause of the slip cannot be accounted for but from the loose nature of the soil and the overhanging form of the cliff

**Yorkshire Gazette – 14th November 1857**
Whitby Iron Company - some months ago a number of gentlemen, residing in Leeds formed themselves into a company, bearing the above designation and purchases the ironstone mines at Beck Hole about 9 miles from Whitby, with a view to carrying out the extensive business. Building operations were forthwith commenced and at the present time, about 20 cottages are nearly complete and the 2 large furnaces for smelting the ore in such a state of progress that it is expected they will be ready by March next. There are now upwards of 200 hands employed in the various works and we are informed that when all the buildings are finished, there will be regular employment for 200, so that in a few years, Beck Hole is likely to become a populous and important place. On visiting the iron mines on Saturday afternoon last, we were cautioned not to approach the entrances of the mines as there were indications that portions of the cliff were giving way. Mr John Greenough, overlooker, told us he had been alarmed, about 5 o’clock that morning by an unusual noise in the mines. On coming out, he observed part of the cliff, at the western extremity, had fallen. He afterwards examined the ground above the mines and found there was a vacuum about 40 yards from the face of the cliff, from which he inferred that the whole would give way in a short time. His forebodings were soon verified, for during the same night, the cliff fell with a fearful crash, blocking the beck below, and doing considerable damage. The portion of the cliff which has fallen is about 120 yards long, 30 broad and 20 deep. The loss has not yet been ascertained, but it will not be more than a few hundred pounds. No person sustained an injury.

**In December 1857 there are advertisements for the sinking of shafts (perhaps as a response to the landslip) although there’s no indication these shafts were ever constructed.**

**Whitby Gazette –12th December 1857**
To Miners and Pit Sinkers. The Whitby Iron Company are prepared to receive proposals from competent persons for sinking two shafts at their works, Goathland. Particulars may be learned as to size etc. and the ground pointed out on application to the manager.

**In March 1858 there are many mentions nationally of the landslip at Wreck Hills in association with the Whitby Iron Company, this is however a reporting error as the company were not involved with the Victoria Ironworks where that separate incident occurred.**

**Whitby Gazette –29th May 1858**
Iron Manufacture – The means by which this very important trade is to be developed in our district are steadily manifesting themselves. Only a few months ago the operations of the Whitby Iron Company near the foot of the incline, were quietly commenced and have so far progressed that a long line of cottages and 2 blast furnaces are nearly completed, while all their necessary appendages of engine house etc are advancing, and the mines are so far opened out that a full supply of ironstone can be obtained as soon as the furnaces are ready to receive it.

**Whitby Gazette –28th August 1858**
Floods – The site of the landslip of the Whitby Iron Company’s Works shows the first traces of its effects – the channel of the adjoining stream, in consequence of the slip, having been greatly contacted, the water, on this occasion, widening its course and in doing so, threw down and scattered the trees which recently adorned its banks.

**Despite the assurances that the works are nearly complete there are no more press mentions at all in 1858 and the next appearances in 1959 all hint at troubles.**

**Whitby Gazette –19th March 1859**
Iron Works – An unusual commotion and display of flags at these works on Wednesday, inspired us with hope, that the desire long felt by the inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood was about to be
realised, by the company making the mighty blast resound through the valleys and glens of the Esk, but on inquiry we found it was caused by the marriage of Mr Waddington the son of one of the directors. We trust that as a flame has fused two hearts into one, a flame of another kind will speedily fuse the mineral wealth of the place, so that in precious lumps it may be distributed through the manufacturing districts.

Whitby Gazette – 23rd April 1859
Incline – On Saturday evening last, a train of ironstone wagons with the break, had just reached the top of the incline, when the shaft or coupling iron between the stationary engine and the large drum which winds up the metal rope suddenly broke. The engine was consequently disabled and the luggage had to be lowered with the break and taken up by horses, while passengers had to walk to and fro between the carriages at the top and bottom. Every effort was made to get the casting replaced and the engine in working order and on Wednesday the incline was again used for the transit of passengers,

Worcester Journal - 29th October 1859
A TRIP TO THE YORKSHIRE COAST.
We did not escape from Dinah without some bewitchment from whatever quarter it arose, for our watch has stopped and were too late for the train at ‘T’upper Incline’, as the folks say, and so had to make a long detour down Goadland Dale to the Lower Incline of the railway, which gave us an opportunity to look at the towers and works erected here by the Whitby Iron Company, who has been induced to build them for the purposes of smelting the ironstone that is interstratified with the Oolite. Handsome towers have been erected, bridges made, and rails laid, and, as usual, all the subscribed money of the shareholders spent; so that if anything be at last effectively done, it will be by the wiser heads who come in second best in point of time, but will profit by the outlay of the original shareholders.

Finally in late 1859 / early 1860 it appears the furnaces are ready for action and more people are being hired.

Whitby Gazette 10th December 1859
Beck Hole – Blast Furnaces – It is with sincere pleasure that we are able to announce the fact of the blast furnaces at Beck Hole being about to be blown into life under the auspices of Wm J. Armitage, Esq of the Farnley Iron Works, the present chairman of the Whitby Iron Co.; and the practical management of Mr Barnes, who under difficulties of no ordinary character, have displayed such zeal and energy in the erection of the works

Whitby Gazette 24th December 1859
To Miner – Proposals will be received for the sinking of two shafts at Beckhole – Particulars of the letting, etc to be had from Mr Barnes, the Whitby Iron Companys Offices, Goathland

To Carpenters – To be let by proposal, the labour in the formation and erecting of an Elevated Timber Gantree Railway. The company find the whole of the materials, further particulars may be obtained of Mr Barnes, the Whitby Iron Companys Offices, Goathland

Newcastle Guardian and Tyne Mercury 4th February 1860
Wanted, Two Keepers, Two Slaggers, Two Heaters, Four Fillers, Two Breaksmen, for Hydraulic Lift, Two Weighers, One Engine Keeper, Two Engine Firemen, Two Limestone Breakers, One Smith and one Helper, Two Slagg Tippers, etc capable of taking odd turns in the works. As the Works are conveniently arranged for working, none but First-class men, (whose characters for Sobriety and Ability will bear the strictest enquiry) need apply. Married men preferred, as comfortable Houses are provided. Apply, by letter in the first instance, with full particulars of experience. etc to the Manager of the Iron Works, Goathland, near Whitby.

MWN&CA ?? – 24th March 1860
The Iron Trade – The briskness of the iron trade is not only confined to the banks of the Tees, for if we may believe a communication we have received from the Whitby correspondent, things there, and along the borders of the Esk and beginning to look animated and propitious new furnaces are to be blown in, for the first time in Beck Hole and the directors from Leeds started a staff of workmen last week, who are getting all in readiness for smelting operations.
Yorkshire Gazette – 26th May 1860
The proprietors of the Beckhole blast furnaces intend to have one of their furnaces in blast in the course of a few days. A quantity of coke and limestone is now on the spot, and for quite some time the process of calcining the ironstone has been carried on, so that everything seems almost ready for action. If those who conduct the operations prove to be thorough men of business, we have no fear as to the quality of the ironstone. It is in fact not generally known, that the iron of which the present Whitby Bridge is constructed (and a firm structure it is) was manufactured from Whitby ironstone exclusively, by the Birtley Iron Company, near Chester-le-Street, Durham. We heartily wish success to the spirited proprietors, and hope we shall soon have the occasion to congratulate them on being the first of a host of companies of capitalists, who have long been waiting for profitable investment, so as to develop the various minerals with which this district so richly abound.

Finally on the 7th of June 1860 the furnace actually goes on blast, with the plaque in the Whitby Museum stating the first iron was produced the next day on the 8th.

Whitby Gazette – 9th June 1860
Ironworks – It affords us great pleasure to be able to announce that one of the furnaces of the Whitby Iron Company at Beckhole, was put into blast on Thursday afternoon. We heartily join with the public in wishing them success.

Whitby Gazette – 16th June 1860
Goathland Iron Works. It is our pleasing duty to report the successful operation of the Whitby Iron Company’s (Limited) Works, at Goathland, which we noticed in our last impression as having been blown in on the 7th June. A few of our principal townsmen spent Monday evening at these works and were delighted with the various departments. The magnificent engine which supplies the blast for smelting the iron from the ore moves round like a thing of life, and at one the everlasting hills of the valley resound with the voice as a tide bursting upon our shores. We heartily wish the Company success, as the pioneers in a pursuit which is destined to revolutionise the habitats and maxims of the valley of the Esk; and with the facility of rails and our own good port, we venture, the day is not distant when capital and enterprise will demand the whole of the district becomes one grand scene of industry, and that, from one end of the valley to the other, Old King Coal, supported by the genius of man, will assert his power in developing those vast storehouses of wealth with, during the last few years, have attracted the attention of strangers to those exhaustless beds of minerals which nature has provided and stored up in this locality, for the use of man in the arts of civilised life. And Whitby will one day rejoice in the fact, that she is one of the principal ports in the kingdom of the export of iron to the commercial ports of the world.

Beckhole the little village at the head of the valley where these works are situated, has now a strange sight to look out upon morning and evening, which are ushered in with torrents of molten iron and a flood of lava gushing forth from the bowels of the company’s furnace. The sweet songsters of the woods and glens are now giving up their claim to the morning dawn and evenings calm. The voices of the sons of toil mingle with the music of the compressed air of the blast engine, wait for the dawn of the East, whilst the perpetual columns of vapour, smoke and flame tell of the presence of man, successfully reducing to practice the maxim of the company’s tablet, viz., “Tis the prerogative of man to command, develop and appropriate to his service the elements with which God has surrounded him.”

The tablet at the foot of which the above inscription is fixed commemorates the incorporation of the company, the date at which the first iron was made upon the Works, and the names of the directors; and was cast from the iron first run from the furnace. In this notable course of action the W.I.C.L have lead the way. We heartily wish them good speed, and doubt not the success which awaits their spirited enterprise; and hail with joy the event as a blessing to the neighbourhood and the watchword to the progressive establishment of similar works, whose effort will be to convert this district into one of the most thrilling seat of the iron trade of the country, creating labour for man and beast, and scattering in it’s train the blessings of trade hitherto unknown in the locality.

Despite this gushing report, a year passes without further news, and next the whole site is up for sale, which gives us much detail of the equipment on site, although no buyer is found.

Newcastle Journal – 31st August 1861
Sale of Valuable Freehold Estate, Iron-Works and Stock-In –Trade etc At Beck Hole Near Grosmont and about eight miles from Whitby, In Yorkshire
To be sold at auction by Messrs. Hepper and Son, On Wednesday, the 18th Day of September 1861, at two o’clock in the afternoon, at the house of Mr Giddey, the White Horse Hotel, in Boar Lane, In Leeds, subject to such conditions as shall be produced at the time and place of sale.

All the freehold estate, consisting of about Twenty-six and a half acres of land, and thirty-three new and substantial stone-built cottages, several other cottages and dwelling-houses, with the outbuildings and appurtenances. Also all those extensive iron works, for the manufacture of iron, consisting of blast furnaces, iron hoist, worked by pumps; hot air ovens, two steam engines, boilers, engine and boiler houses, weigh house, blacksmiths, carpenter and other workshops, offices and premises; together with the commonable and other rights incident to the estate and all other the real estate, the property of “The Whitby Iron Company, Limited” The purchasers of the estate will also be required to purchase of the vendors, at a valuation to be determined in the manner set forth in the Condition of Sale the following, viz :- All the stock-in-trade and effects of the Whitby Iron Company Limited in and about the above mentioned premises, consisting of about thirty-eight tons of pig iron, upwards of eight thousand tons of calcined iron stone, a quantity of wood, timber, bricks, water wheel, coals, slack coke, hematite ore, iron slag wagons, iron barrows, wrought iron, wood bridges, sleepers, bridge rails, sand castings, drain tubes, utensils, implements, stock of hay, oats, cattle and other farming produce. Office furniture and utensils and all other effects and property whatsoever in and upon the premises of which the Whitby Iron Company Limited are owners.

Further particulars of the estate and premises and of the effects will be given in the catalogue, distinguishing those to be sold by auction and those to be purchased by valuation, and may be had, price sixpence, on application to the Auctioneers in Trinity Street, in Leeds aforesaid, on and after Monday the ninth day of September 1861.

The premises are situated at or near Beck Hole and Grosmont about eight miles from Whitby in the North Riding of the County of York, are contiguous to the North-Eastern railway, and the station there, with sidings to communicate, are well supplied with water, bound with quarries of stone, beds of iron ore, and are immediate contiguity to other large and valuable beds of iron ore, and the whole are advantageously located for carrying on an extensive manufacture of iron.

For further information apply to Barr, Nelson and Barr, Solicitors, Leeds.

Whitby Gazette – 21st September 1861

The property of the Whitby Iron Company, situated at Beckhole, was offered for sale by auction at the White Horse Hotel, Leeds on Wednesday. The attendance was respectable, whether composed of others than shareholders could not be known. The auctioneer was unable to obtain a single bid, and the affairs of the company consequently remain without alteration. A very general impression prevails that the property will eventually pass into the hands of a smaller company, composed of the principal shareholders of the present one.

Whitby Gazette – 12th October 1861

Larceny - George Lockwood of Goathland, was charged with stealing seven pieces of fir plank and one piece of fir wood of the values of five shillings, the property of the Whitby Iron Company, Isaac McIntyre, employed as a watchman upon the premises at Beckhole said that a great variety of things had at various times been stolen from the empty cottages. On Sunday morning the 29th September, he traced a footmark from the house of James Young, where the prisoner lodged, to an orchard on the works. He then suspected George Lockwood, and gave information to the police constable William Pickering, who went with him to the prisoners workshop, and they there found a quantity of apples, some wood, a fire range and a grate. Part of the wood was cut up, but he identified it as belonging to the company. This was on Tuesday, the 1st of October – Police Constable William Pickering proved finding the wood, etc and charging the prisoner who said “I’ll give you anything to make it up” – The prisoner was convicted and sentenced to two months hard labour, at Northallerton. It appears that materials have been stolen and damage done to the property to the amount of £15 within the last four months.

Missing wood and apples were the least of their troubles; Joseph Whitley from the next excerpt is named as the manager on the plaque from the first iron cast in June 1860.

Leeds Times – 9th November 1861

Joseph Whitley, of Leeds, ironfounder, also passed, and the same day is fixed for his certificate. The assets are estimated to produce 14s in the pound against liabilities amounting to £1,359 1s 4d. The cause of bankruptcy is stated to be the failure of the Whitby Iron Company.
Yorkshire Gazette – 1st March 1862
The partial failure of the furnaces at Beck Hole does not appear to be speculative capitalists from renewing the experiment of blasting the stone in this locality – a matter of no small difficulty, owing to the expense of procuring an adequate supply of suitable coal. Grosmont, it is said, is to be the scene of renewed operation where two extensive, Mr Hayes and Mr Wilkinsons, which contains immense quantities of ironstone, have recently been purchased on behalf of a well known capitalist, by Mr Barne, late manager of the Beck Hole Company.

After the failed attempt to sell in 1861 the same advert runs for a second auction on 2nd April 1862 which also fails.

Whitby Gazette – 5th April 1862
The Beckhole Iron Works, near Whitby – The winding up of this limited liability company having to undergo various legal stages, the property was again offered for public auction, at the White Horse Hotel Leeds, on Wednesday 2nd April, but no sale was effected, not a price being offered. These works will have to be conducted by a small portion of the above shareholders, who are well able to raise the capital. It will not require a large sum to put the works into working order. This and good management is all that is required. The materials are all on the spot, expecting coal and coke, and both are accessible by rail at a moderate rate, and when the railway is constructed from Castleton to Grosmont every facility will be afforded. Good marketable pig iron has already been made there, and two or three spirited capitalists have before them a fair chance of accumulating a large amount of wealth in the course of a few years. We trust these works will soon be in successful operation.

Whitby Gazette – 26th April 1862
The Blast Furnaces at Beckhole – Benjamin Thompson, Esq, the well-known engineer, has been appointed to value the Beckhole Blast Furnaces, part of the original company having agreed to purchase them at the price which he may recommend. It is expected that the operations at the works will shortly be resumed. Mr Thompson was the constructor of the Birtley and Wylam ironworks, Near Newcastle, and is the gentleman who ordered a survey be made of the Yorkshire coast by the late Joseph Bewick Esq for ironstone.

Yorkshire Gazette – 21st June 1862
The Beckhole Blast Furnaces – We understand that these furnaces have been disposed of by their late proprietors to a Leeds company for £21000. They are expected to be ‘in blast’ within two or three months.

Whitby Gazette – 5th July 1862
A number of workmen have also been sent from Leeds to commence work on the furnaces of the Whitby Iron Company at Beck Hole, to put them in a proper and efficient state for making pig iron.

Things again go quiet until 1863 when recruitment adverts appear suggesting efforts were made to try and get things up and running again.

Whitby Gazette – 7th February 1863
Iron Works – The works of the Whitby Iron Company at Beck Hole are so far completed that they are advertising for a manager who thoroughly understands the cold blast.

Leeds Mercury – 15th December 1863
To Blast Engine Tenters – Wanted by the Whitby Iron Company, a steady man to act in the above capacity, apply, with references, to the Whitby Iron Company, 21 Victoria Chambers, Leeds

Press references then evaporate completely until 1865 when it’s apparent the venture has completely failed.

The London Gazette, 25th April 1865
Resolved unanimously – That Messrs Joseph Gill and Thomas Craven, two of the members of the said company be and they are hereby appointed Liquidators to wind up the said company, and the affairs thereof, according to law. Given under the common seal of the said Whitby Iron Company. William H Wilks, Chairman.
As a footnote despite the works being closed and dismantled further reports emerge years later.

**Yorkshire Gazette – 1st June 1867**
Susan Hattom, convicted of doing wilful damage to some wood at the Whitby Iron Works, Goathland, was ordered to pay £1 2s. fine and costs.

**The Literary Examiner - Saturday 7th September 1867**
One may see at Beckhole a rare sort of ruin, the ruin of a railway, with the ruin of a railway station, and a ruined blast furnace besides it.

**York Herald - 30th September 1871**
Jas Watkins was ordered to pay 33s including costs for having entered an orchard at Beck Hole, on the 17th and pulled nuts off a valuable hazel tree, the property of Whitby Iron Company.