



Between the Lines

Land of Oak & Iron Mapping Project Newsletter

September 2020

Earlier in the year we had hoped to re-start our physical meeting, be poring over paper maps and discussing our findings during September. Recent events have made it clear that this will not happen for several months more and with regret we must inform you that physical meetings continue to be suspended until further notice. This month the Spotlight falls on Swalwell to discover that it has much more to offer than a history of iron making.

Mapping meetings

Video meetings are likely to be our main meeting forum for at least the remainder of 2020. The Mills Team have embraced this technology and are holding their group meetings prior to updating the core team, with other team leaders, in a video meeting a few days later. This approach potentially sets a model which could be followed by other teams and we hope to bring you more news about arrangements for video meetings in the near future.

Sets of maps and equipment are available for volunteers to borrow on request to allow individual project tracing activities to be carried out. With shorter and colder days in the offing is there a topic you would like to study? Would you like some ideas of topics that we feel could be included in our mapping project? We have a big list of topics which we are happy to share. Let us know what your interests are and we can suggest what you might work on. Collaborative working, using video meetings, can work well and we encourage the formation of teams to share ideas. We know some people prefer working on their projects individually and that is totally acceptable also.

Please get in touch, share your ideas and let us know how we can support you.

Last month we explained our progress on the digital mapping front. If you have not yet had an opportunity to view the maps on the web-site please take that opportunity and we would welcome your feedback. More details are in [last month's newsletter](#). The maps may be viewed using [this link](#) to the mapping section of the LOIT website. If you have read the page which explains about our project before, use the shortcut near the top of the page "Jump to Topic Map List". The password for all of the maps is "showmemore".

Thread of Iron book launch

Also last month we mentioned that the LOIT Publications Group were launching a new edition of this book which gives an extensive historic review of the Shotley Bridge and Consett area, with a particular emphasis on iron and steelmaking.

To support the (virtual) launch a video was produced and is available to [view on Youtube](#). So far over 200 views have been recorded and a list of outlets where the book is on-sale is shown in the text that accompanies the video.

Spotlight on Swalwell

The earliest documented history of Swalwell is in the Boldon Book which states :

"The land of Swalwell yields 16s.

William son of Arnold for a certain intake of 120 acres pays 1 mark."

In the guide to Technical and Common Terms, in the Boldon Book, intake refers to "ground newly broken from the waste" and a mark is a "unit of account 13s 4d".

Swalwell was largely a farming community with **three** corn mills and a fishery near Derwent Haugh until, by the end of the 17th century, staiths had been established in this area with access by coal roads and waggonways. Development of the iron industry was to start in the very early years of the 18th Century.

William Shield - Composer

Born in 1748, in Swalwell, Shield became a very popular composer in the latter part of the 18th/early 19th centuries. He was appointed Master of the King's Musick, in 1817 and is known to have composed, or contributed music to 36 operas and 7 pantomime pieces, plus 3 collections of songs.

Educated by his father, a music teacher, Shield continued his music studies whilst being apprenticed as a boatbuilder. He later became a professional musician and performed widely across the north of England before moving to London, as a violinist in the orchestra of the King's Theatre, in 1773.

A piece written by him in 1782, and called *Rosina*, contained, in the overture, a tune that would later become well known as the music to *Auld lang Syne*, by Robert Burns.

Shield died in early 1829 and was buried in the south Cloister of Westminster Abbey.

"Community Music Wickham and Swalwell" have featured a selection of his music in their William Shield Festival events since 2016, highlights of which may be seen and heard [here](#).

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The Crowley connection

Whilst today there is a strong connection between the Winlaton Mill site and Crowley's Iron Works, the Swalwell site could easily be considered to be of secondary importance. Operations on both sites are documented in M.W. Flinn's, 1962 book *Men of Iron* (available from the [LOIT on-line shop](#)). This information is complimented and updated in an article by David Cranston published in *Industrial Archaeology Review*, 33:1, 2011, entitled *From Slitting Mill to Alloy Steel: the Development of Swalwell Ironworks*.

From the original works on the hill in Winlaton the Crowley operation soon spread to Winlaton Mill and, in 1707, Ambrose Crowley III took over the site in Swalwell. This site had been established in 1702 when a partnership of Harrison, Bayliss and Wood started to acquire leases on property, including 3 corn mills, a mill dam and race. Their intention was to set-up an iron works; leases included provision for a new dam and watercourse to carry water to the works. The ironworks, located around 300m from the natural course of the river, started operations in 1704. On the 1862 OS 6" series map, Durham VI, a dam and mill race running directly to the site are shown on the River Derwent, in a position that would be consistent with the description given by Flinn (p.53). The weir remains (NZ193616), however, of the mill race, whose route passes through almost the middle of what is now a cricket pitch, no trace remains, until one reaches High Forge (now Swalwell Visitor Centre). From here the modern access track follows the mill race route, almost to the junction with Hexham Road, adjacent to Blaydon Rugby Club.

As Cranston points out access to information had improved considerably between the 1960s and the time he did his research on the area. His article contains several maps from the Tyne and Wear Archive and Durham Records Office which he uses to trace the development of the Swalwell site from 1714 until 1901.

The speciality of the Swalwell site was anchor and chain manufacture although, in common with the other sites, general wares, hoes, spades, pans and nails, were also made. By 1711 administration for Crowley's factories in the north of England had transferred from Winlaton to Swalwell and between 1707 and 1728 extensive building works lead to the site becoming the main centre of manufacturing. A detailed inventory from the time of John Crowley's death in 1728 shows the relative values of the three Derwent Valley sites.

Winlaton village site had a value of £4,105, Winlaton Mill £5,361, including £1,720 buildings and Swalwell £25,005, including £2,895 buildings. Swalwell site contained the "Grand Warehouse" with a keel dock giving access (via the mill watercourse) to the River Tyne. It may be speculated that this, in part, accounts for the higher valuation of the site.

The Swalwell site continued to operate under the control of the Crowley family until 1782 when it was

taken over by a former employee, Millington, who along with his descendants, continued to run the site until 1862. Under different ownerships the whole site continued as an iron and steel manufacturing works until 1883, when the northern part of the site was leased to William Grace & Co. for a new papermill to be built. It is the chimney of this papermill that now stands in the supermarket car park.

Cranston traces these developments through the maps mentioned earlier, drawing from them many details about how the site developed.

Brickworks, collieries and breweries

Around 600m due north of the ironworks site another industrial area developed (NZ 204628). Here the Axwell Park and Swalwell Firebrick Works were located flanking the lamp-black works of Richard Doyle and Co. Further firebrick works were located on both side of the river near Derwent Haugh (NZ 205631 & NZ 205633).

The largest brickworks, operated by G.H. Ramsay and Co. until 1925, was capable of making 7 million bricks per year. Many of these bricks were exported, with a world wide distribution. According to William Bourn's *History of the parish of Ryton*, G.H Ramsay was born in 1790 and, after being educated by Rev Simpson of Tanfield, he "joined his grandfather at the Derwent Haugh brickworks, collieries and ammonia works, and, under his direction the works were vastly increased, to which were added coke-making, malt houses manure works and bone mills". Clearly the Ramsay family had a great influence on the industrial development of this part of Swalwell.

Swalwell Colliery, around 350m south of the brickworks (NZ204624), and Axwell Park Collieries (NZ200620), around 800m south of the brickworks, provided supplies for good quality fireclay to the brickworks.

Anchor manufacture was extremely heavy work and this could, in part, explain the number of breweries recorded in Swalwell. Whilst the Crowleys, coming from a Quaker background, would not have encouraged the consumption of alcohol, it was customary for the anchor smiths to be supplied with an allowance of 70 quarts of ale per 70 cwt. of anchors produced.

Twelve breweries are listed in the article, on the Swalwell History website, and from the dates indicated many of these would have operated concurrently. The largest was Matthew Taylor Brewery, located on Brewery Bank (NZ203622) which operated from 1765 until 1901 and was at one time the largest in County Durham.

Useful links and references

[Oxford Dictionary of National Biography - W. Shield](#)
[Men of Iron](#) - M.W. Flinn (2019 ed., Land of Oak & Iron).
[D. Cranston, Industrial Archaeology Review, 33:1, 2011](#)
[Swalwell Local History Society website](#)
[History of the Parish of Ryton](#) - W. Bourn ([online extract](#))

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Coming up:

Physical meetings are suspended until further notice.

To join the secure messaging service please send an e-mail to volunteering@loit.org.uk requesting that we include you in the group.