

# Times Past

Issue No. 27, Summer 2007

Storrington & District Museum

Preserving Yesterday for Tomorrow

## THE IRON INDUSTRY IN SUSSEX- ITS RISE & FALL

It is difficult now to appreciate that Sussex was ever anything but a county which most Britons, wanting a quiet and pleasant rural life, would like to inhabit. The condition of the “roads” is well-chronicled and the dense Wealden forest was avoided where possible. No wonder that Sussex was the last county to be Christianised! But the coming of the Normans saw the growth of small-scale iron production which lasted for four centuries.

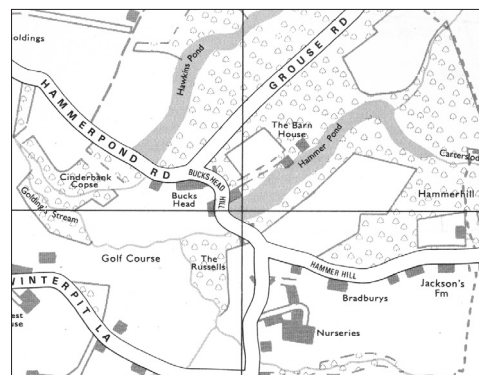
Why Sussex? The peculiarities of iron production called for several essential ingredients:

1. a fuel capable of reducing iron ore to a liquid form from which “pig” and cast iron could be achieved;
2. (the use of coked- coal for that purpose had to wait for Abraham Darby to invent his blast furnace in which higher temperatures could eliminate the impurities of coal;)
3. a plentiful supply of timber for conversion to charcoal;
4. the proximity of suitable and plentiful iron-ore;
5. the availability of water, especially for the “hammer ponds” to work the bellows and the drop hammers.
6. Lastly (of course) a demand for the output.

Near each “bloomery” – a forge – would be a number of charcoal sites where production involved clouds of smoke, which hung over the countryside and, no doubt, made the lives of charcoal-burners (possibly the origin of “Charman”?) very unpleasant. Place names often arose from iron activity; e.g. Abinger Hammer; Hammerpot, Colwood, Furnace Green, Furnace Wood, Colgate, Cinderhill and many others. Oak was the predominant tree in Sussex but it did not make the best “cole”; this honour went to beech, with ash and hornbeam also acceptable as the woods became depleted.

Here we see one important reason for the decline of the Wealden iron industry; there were other demands for timber, especially oak. Ships and homes were hungry for oak and other trees and, since only a fraction of a tree was of the right size and shape for these uses, much time, timber and labour was wasted. No doubt charcoal - burners used much of the discarded wood. Since trees were cut down faster than they could be

replaced, increasingly, the gap between a forge and its source of raw materials grew so that costs rose. To set up a new site was very difficult, especially as power came from a ready supply of water for the blasting process and for the huge drop hammers. Where nature did not supply a pond capable of being dammed, there would be no alternative but to choose another site.



Hammer Ponds (Hawkins Pond & Hammer Pond)  
south of Horsham

Anderida, as the Romans called the Weald, was probably the biggest oak forest in Europe but is now limited to small woods like St.Leonard's Forest or more open areas such as Ashdown Forest. So serious was the de-forestation that, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the government made it illegal to fell timber except with permission and placed extra restrictions on the glass industry, an important enterprise in Sussex and

Surrey. Another law forbade the felling of timber south of a twelve-mile coastal line or within 32 miles south of London. But these laws failed to halt the destruction of the Wealden Forest, because most of the timber-using industries were already outside those areas. The 12-mile coastal limit was to ensure that such timber as was available there should be reserved for the ship-builders of the Cinque ports, on which the safety of the nation heavily depended.

Canons were in great demand for warships and the iron masters invested in massive new forges capable of casting the guns in a single piece instead of in smaller units then bound together. So a new social class began to emerge like the Fullers of whom "Mad Jack" was the last. (*See below*) They acquired estates and built themselves fine homes, like Leonardslee at Lower Beeding. In this they up-staged the new rich of the textile revolution in the North. The industry became more capital-intensive and the smaller bloomeries were abandoned. Partnerships were formed in order to raise the capital and this led to legal disputes as at St. Leonard's. There are still the two ponds at the site near Horsham; one is called Hammer Pond and the other Hawkins Pond. The whole site was let for a rent of £36 – 13 - 4 per annum. The lease was taken up by Roger Gratwick of Sullington, who passed it on to his son, also Roger.

A nearby site, Gosden, was also involved in an arrangement between Gratwick and two other iron-masters – Caryll and Covert. Oddly, the partnership collapsed, not because of financial differences but over fishing rights in the two ponds. In 1587, Caryll found that Gratwick had already fished there and the former took offence. Further quarrels ensued over who should pay the rent and the quarrel soon became physical. Led by a Giles Moore some 20 "riotous persons" attacked Gratwick's men and carried off "great quantities of ore" to Carryll's works. One man was struck with a mattock and then thrown into a pit, The fight reached Horsham when Thomas Marsh drew a dagger on Richard Whitebread as he went to church. Ultimately Carryll won the legal battle and Gratwick was dispossessed.

Abraham Darby's invention freed up the forces waiting to launch the Industrial Revolution. The Sussex monopoly was broken; now iron and steel would be produced where coal and iron ore were found together. Such figures as are reliable show a rapid fall in the eighteenth century. Exports from Hastings in 1780 were 348.5 tons; nine years later it was nil. The fall of Wealden iron resulted from its own success. The demand for iron meant that the deforestation of Sussex was leading, inevitably, to a shortage of iron goods, higher prices and a renewed search for a substitute for charcoal. So it can be claimed that the Industrial Revolution began here!

NOTE> "Mad Jack" is better known for his eccentricities than for being an iron master. Much of his inheritance was spent on "follies" on his estate at Brightling, such as the 60 ft. pyramid under which he is buried. M.P. for Lewes, he was once forcibly ejected from the Commons for calling Mr. Speaker "an insignificant little fellow in a wig."  
E.P.B.

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## **1884 - THE YEAR WORTHING DECLINED TO BE SAVED**

Most of us will have met sincere people who genuinely want to save us from the awful consequences that follow our misdemeanours and are convinced that they, and the particular sect to which they belong, alone have the answer to the world's problems. Your present writer has been attacked on many fronts by nice folk who are convinced that they, having themselves seen the error of their ways, are anxious to pass the secret on to the unenlightened rest of humanity. First came the Oxford Group, also

known as Moral Rearmament. They believed that Absolute Truth was the solution to the world's problems. Later came the Plymouth Brethren (Strict, and not be confused with Open Brethren) . The P.B.s believe that women should be silent at the meetings and should never cut their hair. The Jehovah's Witnesses are in a class of their own for persistence and their total immunity to humiliation and abuse. They continue to make new members despite their embarrassment for having failed to forecast correctly the end of the world some years ago. Of all the new movements in the last hundred-plus years, none has a better record than the Salvation Army. Founded by William Booth in 1878 as an evangelist movement, it

practised as it preached, bringing help to the needy in the form of cups of tea and buns, shelter in their Citadels and asking only that such assistance be accompanied by the occasional prayer of thanks to God. Booth was a shrewd and far-seeing leader. He felt that his followers should be visible and easily recognised so he equipped them with military style uniforms and gave them ranks as does the real army; he himself becoming General Booth. Starting in London's East End, where the need was greatest, but resentment less than he probably expected, he urged his followers to attack the provinces where, as in London, people were in need of practical help as well as guidance in their lives; where Satan was, there would be the Army to fight him.

Worthing hardly qualified for such attention except in their enthusiasm for public bonfires which were organised by the Excelsior Club. It was an old Sussex custom, famously at Lewes, to burn effigies of unpopular individuals on November 5<sup>th</sup>. The bonfire was invariably followed by drunken behaviour and this was the target for the Salvationists.

At their head was a 23-year old "Captain" Ada Smith, who believed in carrying the fight to the enemy and saw the Bonfire Boys as being in great need of being rescued from the clutches of Satan. But the Bonfire Boys (also called the Skeleton Army) saw no need for salvation; they preferred beer and bonfires and probably enjoyed their regular fights, on November 5<sup>th</sup>, with the police. It was Ada's decision to confront Satan, along with his acolytes, at the time and place of her choosing. Twice each Sunday the Army would march through the streets of Worthing despite the growing opposition from the bonfire boys and anyone else interested in the inevitable fracas that followed. Abuse was thrown along with more solid missiles, parodies of hymns were sung intended to intimidate and humiliate "Booth's Baa-lambs" but the Salvationists were of sterner stuff and survived the paint, eggs, rocks and anything else hurled at them. Captain Ada was surprised at all this, saying that she was unaware that so much sin existed in Worthing. So serious did the situation become that the Home Office ordered the police to protect the marchers - a worthy decision that made matters worse. The Skeleton Army had no love for the police, anyway, and the latter then had to be protected by the Royal Irish Dragoons, drafted in from Brighton on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1884. After the reading of the Riot Act the Soldiers charged into the crowd (estimated to be three to four thousand strong)

who had gathered in South Street. Some rioters were arrested and fined, much to the anger of their wives, who then joined another crowd the following week. Children had a new game now - Salvationists versus Skeletons and sang their own versions of General Booth's hymns. By the autumn, the heat of August having moderated, Worthing resumed its normal, passive demeanour so the the Bonfire Boys, under whatever title, could happily resume their preparations for November 5<sup>th</sup> Why Worthing? We have to see the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in the light of 19<sup>th</sup> Century attitudes.

London was a far-off city of which Sussex people, for the most, had only heard. Likewise, Londoners would probably not have heard of Worthing; this being the Cockney attitude to almost any part of the kingdom. If Londoners ever left their vast and over-crowded city it was likely to be in cheap excursion trains or (later) charabancs. How sleepy Sussex saw them can be measured by reading a board at Bury which tells us that these noisy coach-loads were less than welcome. Then there was the universal dislike for authority, especially when it came in uniform. Real soldiers were acceptable as long as they did their fighting in someone else's country. Sussex memories went back to the smuggling days and to the rural discontent that followed the Napoleonic wars; to the rick-burning, the deportation and hangings.

The apparent aggression of the Salvationists with their military appearance, their battle-cry (Blood and Fire) and their paper (The War Cry); their marching and their bands - all were totally foreign to the Worthing folk who, unconsciously perhaps, were really saying, "Save yourselves if you like but leave us to make our own decisions".

*We are grateful to Dr. Sally White for her permission to quote from her "Worthing Past", published by Phillimore*

### **The Wit of "Soapy Sam"**

*The article in our last edition called "The Wilberforces in Sussex" prompted a reader to send us this poem attributed to Bishop Samuel Wilberforce.*

If I were a Cassowary  
On the plains of Timbuctoo  
I would eat a missionary,  
Coat and bands and hymn-book too.

# The Storrington & District Museum Society

now has its own website, namely :- [www.Storrington-museum.org](http://www.Storrington-museum.org) upon which we can keep members updated regarding our activities and associated functions.

## Chairman's Comments

As the new Chairman of the Society, I would like to share my thoughts about the Museum and its Society with you. First I would like to thank you all for your continued support of the Museum, the more members we have the greater the standing of the Museum in the community. Although I have been involved with the Museum from its outset, I know very few of the members personally. I would like to change this by getting the Museum community together socially once or twice a year, so we could get to know each other and exchange ideas and discuss happenings. If you have any views on this idea or any other matters, I should like very much to hear from you. I can be contacted by e-mail at [megeveritt@btinternet.com](mailto:megeveritt@btinternet.com) or [chair@storringtonmuseum.org](mailto:chair@storringtonmuseum.org) or by sending a letter to the Museum addressed to me.

## Wanted Urgently

Someone with a computer and basic computer skill to take over the post of membership secretary. Jean MacWhirter will not be seeking re-election but will happily introduce her successor to the system already in place. If you are interested please contact the Secretary, Kate Wise, on 01903 742833.

## Museum Society Committee:-

- Chairman:** Meg Everitt  
(Contact No. 01903 745051 )
- Secretary:** Kate Wise
- Treasurer:** John Wharmby
- Programme Secretary:** Pauline Archibald
- Membership Secretary:** Vacancy
- Education Officer:** Vacancy
- Web Master:** Michael Leeming
- Members:** Philip Beaumont, Patricia Colebrook, Trish Cook, Gena Grenney, Michael Taylor, Cindy Waters, & Helen Whittle.
- Archivist:-** Mrs Joan Ham

## Future Activities:-

- Sept. 10** "Sussex People" by Peter Brandon
- Sept. 30** Local Family History Day
- Oct. 8.** "Warminghurst Church & Manor" by Rodney Gunner
- Nov. 12.** "The Shelley Family & Their Sussex Properties" by Adge Roberts
- Dec 10.** "The Good Old Bad Old Days" by Chris Hare.

## Future Exhibitions:-

**Sept. - Dec.:** *Remembrance - A Local Tribute:*

## Curator's Corner

The immediate projects are increasing the Museum security and improving the external display of the Museum. Hence new security doors and alarms are to be installed and a window display within a new arrangement will soon be fitted.

There is also to be a reorganisation within the Museum, including new items on display, and in future there will be four exhibitions a year giving the public more time to experience them.

The Museum Mystery that we ran during the Victorian Market week brought us a lot of publicity and most shops taking part said that their customers came into the shops talking about the window displays.

The winners were:-  
Bryone Martin (aged 8); Oliver Martin (aged 5) with:-  
"Storrington and District Museum is important because it teaches us all what life was like in the past compared with now."  
Aidan Ratchford (age 11- 14 group) with:-  
"... there is a lot of old and valuable things to look at in the museum."  
Andrea Carlson- Hedges (Adult group), with:-  
"...it offers knowledge and insight of our past encouraging us to love our future."

## Editorial Team

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