

GREYFIELD COLLIERY

Until 1956, when there were changes to the parish boundaries, Greyfield was in Clutton parish. Since then it has been in High Littleton. Because Greyfield Colliery was the local pit to so many High Littleton miners, it has been considered appropriate to include something about Greyfield in this section.

In the 1820s coal production in High Littleton was small and most resident miners worked outside the parish at Timsbury, Paulton, Clutton or Farrington pits. Nevertheless, Rev. John SKINNER wrote in his diary for 1825 that "Hallatrow" coal-mines had just begun to be profitable; the mineral was being found in Gravel's Field at a depth of 26 fathoms (156 feet). SKINNER regularly referred to High Littleton as Hallatrow. Gravel was presumably Old Greyfield Pit, near the entrance to Greyfield Wood, south-west of where the well-known Greyfield Colliery buildings later stood. In the same area are signs of old bell-pits from an earlier era.

By an indenture dated 9 Mar 1833 between the Earl of WARWICK (1) and John Savage CAMERON (2), (1) granted (2) the rights to sink a pit and search for coal under his estate in Clutton for 40½ years from 29 Sep last past in return for (1) receiving a tenth of the coal raised from the pit or money equivalent.

A further document dated 12 Mar 1833 set out the shares of the partners in the venture, namely John Savage CAMERON land agent of Eastbourne 4/8, David COOK of North End Farm, Clutton 2/8, Samuel FOSTER of Lincoln's Inn 1/8 and the Earl of WARWICK 1/8 and at the same time it was reported that the necessary engines, works, machinery and horses etc. had been obtained.

This was the birth of Greyfield Colliery, which at first was known as Clutton New Coal Works.

CAMERON died on 18 Oct 1833 and in his will left his 4/8 share to his nephew Alexander Cameron FORD. FORD subsequently sold half of his share to John and William REES MOGG, leaving him with 2/8.

Extract of an Indenture dated 28 Sep 1839 between Samuel FORSTER (sole executor of John Savage CAMERON, land agent of Eastbourne, deceased) (1) Alexander Cameron FORD (2) & John REES MOGG, gent. of Cholwell House (3).

Refers to Lease dated 9 Mar 1833 between Earl of WARWICK & John Savage CAMERON, of mines lying under Earl of WARWICK's property lying within an imaginary line beginning at Cloud Hill & following boundary fence eastwards round to a road (south of a house lately occupied by Thomas TAYLOR, farmer) at top of Clutton Hill & following road to Green Brook & continuing to follow the same road to Church Lane and still following lane into Bristol Turnpike Road before turning left & following road to Cholwell, then turning to left to the Manor boundary fence & continuing along the boundary fence to Cloud Hill, from 29 Sep last past for 40½ years for 1/10 of the coal extracted.

John REES MOGG now acquires from Alexander Cameron FORD a 1/8 part of Grayfield Coal Works (being part of 4/8 devised to FORD by will of CAMERON) for £1,500 etc.

William REES MOGG acquired a further 1/8 share from FORD at the same time.

A document dated 11 Feb 1842 stated that "*large sums (have) been from time to time expended in and about the said colliery and a new 90 h.p. Engine has been erected but the shaft has not been sunk to the Bottom vein and the pumps and working pieces have not been completely constructed and a considerable time will elapse before such work will be completed*". The large sums included £5,250 for the engine, shafts and pumps. In 1846 the reported coal output of Greyfield was 11,900 tons.

Once the shaft was completed, a call of £1,000 per share was made on the partners, to provide additional working capital. COOK and FORD were not as wealthy as the other partners in The Greyfield Coal Co., as it was then known, and were unable to meet their calls. FOSTER, the REES-MOGGs and Earl of Warwick made up the shortfall in required capital. COOK subsequently left North End Farm and moved to a small cottage on Clutton Hill. He died in 1848 and the REES MOGGs were appointed trustees of his estate and thus had control of his shares.

On 15 Jul 1848 Charles HOLLWEY was appointed manager of the colliery at a salary of £100 p.a. and admitted as an additional partner with a 1/9 share of the Company. Thereafter the other partners held ninths instead of eighths. The share holdings were then as follows: Alexander FORD 2/9, John and William REES-MOGG 2/9 + 2/9 as trustee for David COOK, Samuel FOSTER 1/9, Earl of WARWICK 1/9 and Charles HOLLWEY 1/9.

The REES MOGGs bought out Samuel FOSTER's share in 1855. By Indenture dated 27 Jun 1859 John REES MOGG of High Littleton House transferred to William his brother, on trust for sale his 2/9 + 1/18 part of Grayfield Coal Works.

In 1847 it was proposed to run a broad gauge railway to the colliery but these plans came to nought. Because of the lack of any road access to the pithead, a double track tramroad incline, with drum and hauling engine was built from the colliery, along the line of the Gug (which came later) to a coal depot located near where Greyfield House stands at the top of Scumbrum Lane. From here coal could be hauled onwards to Paulton Basin on the Somerset Coal Canal or transported by road to a variety of destinations. In 1855 High Littleton Vestry complained that trucks from Greyfield Colliery, conveying coals to the canal, were damaging the roads. The lack of a direct link with the Somerset Coal Canal was a considerable handicap and Greyfield struggled financially for many years because of it.

The pit was suffering a bad time in 1858, when HOLLWEY wrote that "the underground workings are very dismaying and the trade, with the exception of the Gas contract is scarcely worth mention." In the first quarter of 1861 income was only £529, whilst expenditure (excluding wages) was less than £200.

Greyfield had four shafts, of which two were winding shafts. The original shaft, near the winding engine, was square with wooden guides, while the other was circular and 10 ft in diameter with wire rope guides. The latter was probably sunk in the 1860s, when cages were introduced. A third shaft, for ventilation, lay to the north of the winding shafts. The fourth shaft, equipped with a Cornish beam engine, was for pumping water from the workings. Records show that the engine was completely overhauled in April 1864 at a cost of £350. There was also a drift, called "The Cuckoo", which led to the bottom of the shafts at Mooresland Colliery. Mooresland was located about 200 hundred yards north east of Greyfield. A shaft of 5 ft diameter was sunk into the Radstock series sometime during the 1840s and reached a depth of 231 ft. Output was subsequently transferred to Greyfield by way of the drift and a narrow gauge tramway. Mooresland's shaft was used for ventilation only thereafter.

Greyfield's coaling shafts, the deepest of which was 900 ft., were wound by a steam engine, as were many of the underground inclines. Records show that the engines were repaired by Paulton Foundry in the 1860s and a new one supplied in September 1861 at a cost of £254. Like many pits Greyfield had a constant need for bricks and a brickworks was established close to the winding shafts, on the north side.

Greyfield's financial salvation came with the opening of the railway through Hallatrow in 1873 and for a few years coal was believed to have been taken by horse drawn wagons through Greyfield Wood to Hallatrow Station. This was not altogether satisfactory and at the Earl of WARWICK's instigation a siding was laid from Clutton Station to Greyfield Colliery, which was completed in 1876. By then the original coal lease had come to an end and the Earl took control of Greyfield, which operated thereafter as the Earl of WARWICK's Colliery before being incorporated as The Greyfield Colliery Co. Ltd. in about 1900.

Initially trucks used to run down to Clutton Station by gravity and horses were used to pull the empty trucks back up the incline. In 1885 a steam locomotive called Francis (named after the Earl of Warwick and nicknamed the Coffee Pot) was introduced. By 1889 Greyfield was producing 60,000 tons of coal a year and was one of the most important collieries in Somerset. Francis was never very reliable and, when it was being repaired, gravity working was resumed. On one such occasion in January 1894 a train of wagons ran out of control into the GWR sidings and were smashed to pieces. Later that year Francis was replaced by Daisy (named after the Earl of WARWICK's wife).

Not all of Greyfield pit ran under WARWICK land. The Will of Henry Hodges MOGG of Newbridge Hill, Weston, clerk, 1889 refers to his freeshare in Grayfield Colliery (*SRO DD/MGG/2*), which shows that the MOGGs owned some at least of the land above the coal workings.

On 4 Jun 1904 the Mooresland workings and the Cuckoo drift were abandoned. A couple of years later the GWR somewhat inadvisedly built a siding to serve the brickworks. This was hardly ever used and the brickworks closed in about 1909. By now it was becoming increasingly obvious that Greyfield Colliery's days were numbered. Clutton Coal Co. was formed in 1908 as a subsidiary of Greyfield to work an old shaft near Clutton station and start a new drift was started to the west of the railway.

On 14 September 1909 Greyfield suffered a disastrous flood, when water from old workings broke into the Streak Vein. Fortunately, most of the water was carried away into the lowest workings of the New Vein, where

no men were working at the time. Two men were trapped for a while, before finding their way to the safety of the main shaft. Otherwise there was no loss of life or injuries. Six pit ponies were drowned in the Dabchick Vein. It was the practice in most pits for ponies to be raised to the surface in slings, after first removing the cage from the shaft. This took time and therefore they were rarely brought up.

Two weeks later the water had been cleared from the pit and work was resumed. However on 31 Dec 1909 one of the districts was closed and a number of miners and labourers were made redundant. The rest of the pit did not survive long and on 28 May 1911 the whole colliery was closed and 152 men and boys were given notice. Most of these were taken on by Burchells Colliery. Salvage work continued the employment of a few at Greyfield for a few months, as reusable machinery and equipment was brought to the surface and transferred to Burchells. On 21 November Messrs J.H. and F.W. COOK cut the cage guides at the bottom of the pit and the shaft was used for the last time. Burchells only lasted another ten years before it too was closed in August 1921. Ironically it had been flooded a year earlier from an inrush of water from the flooded Greyfield workings.

Compared with many pits Greyfield had a good safety record and only 9 people (including a 6 year old who fell down a shaft) were killed there between 1845 and 1905.

Until recently visitors to Greyfield Woods could observe stones carved like headstones in various places. These were known locally as "diallers stones", a dialler being a colloquial name for a mining surveyor, who carried an instrument with dials on it. After carrying out an underground survey, the surveyor would repeat the exercise on the surface, marking strategic points below ground with a stone above. Unfortunately a number of these stones have now found their way into people's gardens.

It is worth saying something about Francis, Earl of WARWICK. He was no absentee landlord and spent some time in the area each year. He and the Countess took a keen interest in Clutton and were particularly interested in the welfare of the miners. Miners were used to walking long distances to work and back but the Earl of WARWICK was anxious that the Greyfield miners should be able to get to work as dry as possible, so had a row of cottages to accommodate the miners near the pit. These were completed in 1900 and the cottages were named Maynard Terrace. Maynard was the Christian name of the WARWICK's son.

The Earl of WARWICK was the principal landowner in the parish of Clutton and owned most of the land on which Greyfield Colliery operated but all he owned in High Littleton was 12 acres of Greyfield Common. Greyfield incidentally is a corruption of Greyville or Grevile, the name of one of the progenitors of the Earl of WARWICK. The Earl built Oakdene on part of his High Littleton land and used it as his residence when visiting his Somerset estates and as a hunting lodge when hosting shooting parties. Amongst his guests at Oakdene was the Prince of Wales, later to be Edward VII, who it was said was attracted more by Daisy, the Earl's wife, than the shooting. Although the Countess was well known as the mistress of the future king, she was nevertheless loyal to and supportive of her husband and much loved locally.

The Earl would travel from Warwick Castle by rail to Clutton, where his own private railway carriage was coupled up to the colliery locomotive and hauled up to Greyfield. Greyfield Road was "unmade up" at that time, so the Earl had a causeway pavement built the length of the road for the convenience of himself and his guests. From 1896 Oakdene was occupied by Matthew WATSON, the Earl's colliery manager and agent. The WARWICKs then used Woodlea, which was nearer the colliery, for their personal use. Matthew WATSON served as a High Littleton parish councillor from 1896 to 1904 and was from 1901 to 1904 deputy chairman.

Today it is hard to believe that there was once a thriving colliery at the far end of Greyfield Road and so much activity on and under the land on which new houses now stand.

MLB