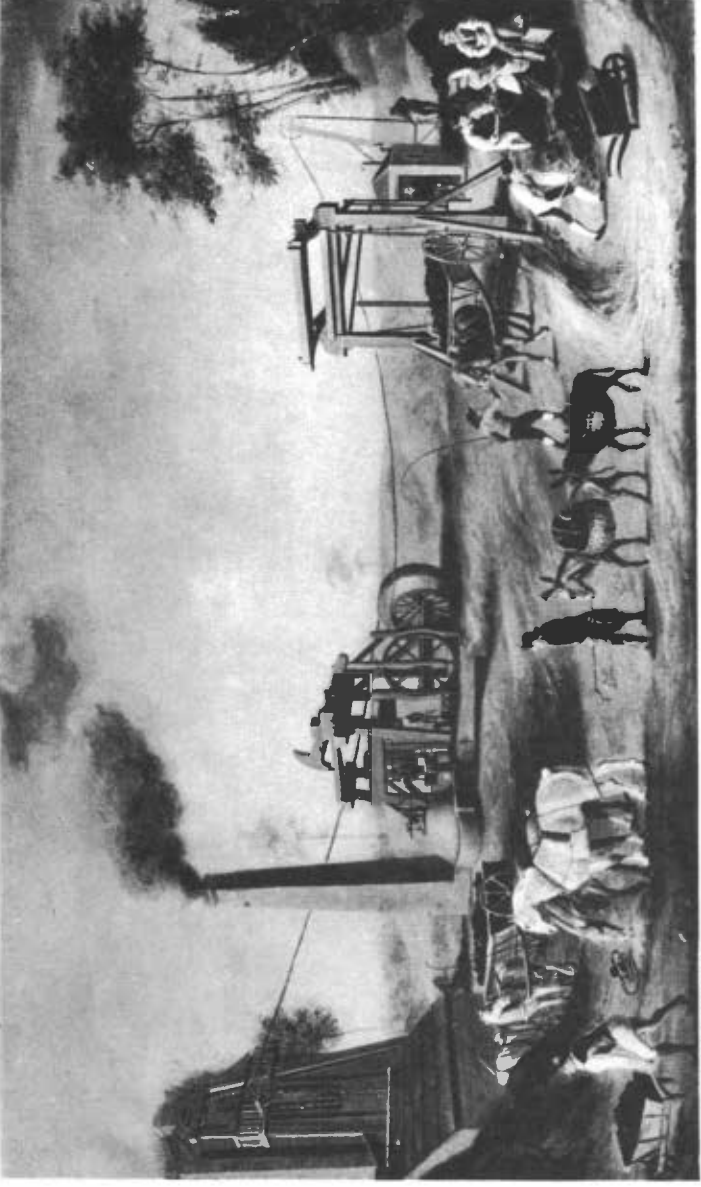


*A Merseyside Town in the
Industrial Revolution
St. Helens
1750—1900*



T.C. BARKER and J.R. HARRIS

A MERSEYSIDE TOWN IN THE
INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION
ST. HELENS 1750-1900



[Photo : R. K. Robertson]

COLLIERY (ABOUT 1800)

The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

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and

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A

Merseyside Town

in the

Industrial Revolution

St. Helens

1750–1900

3rd Impression

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	ix
INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD IMPRESSION	xi
SOURCES OF UNPUBLISHED AND MANUSCRIPT MATERIAL	xvii

PART ONE

DEVELOPMENT IN THE CANAL AGE

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
I. COAL AND SALT	3
II. THE FIRST ENGLISH CANAL	11
III. THE EARLY COAL MAGNATES: THE CASES OF HUYTON AND SARAH CLAYTON OF LIVERPOOL, 1757-1762	24
IV. THE GROWTH OF COMPETITION ON THE COAL- FIELD, 1763-1775	31
V. DEPRESSION, DISASTER AND RECOVERY, 1775-1815	49
VI. COLLIERY PROBLEMS AND PRACTICE	62
VII. THE COPPER INDUSTRY: ANGLESEY AND LANCASHIRE, 1770-1815	75
VIII. THE GREENALLS AND THE BREWING INDUSTRY, 1762-1812	90
IX. THE GLASS INDUSTRY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, 1696-1826	108
X. OTHER INDUSTRIES	120
XI. SOCIAL LIFE: THE POOR OF PARR, 1730-1815	131
XII. SOCIAL LIFE: AN INDUSTRIALIST AND MAGISTRATE, 1779-1825...	149
XIII. THE BEGINNINGS OF THE TOWN	168

PART TWO

THE AGE OF PETER GREENALL 1830-1845

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Page</i>
XIV. THE COMING OF THE RAILWAY	181
XV. THE MERSEYSIDE COAL TRADE, 1830-45	193
XVI. THE GLASS INDUSTRY, 1830-1845	202

XVII.	THE EARLY YEARS OF THE ALKALI INDUSTRY, AND THE REVIVAL OF COPPER SMELTING ...	223
XVIII.	COMBINATION AMONG MASTERS AND MEN ...	246
XIX.	COLLIERS, IRISH GLASSMAKERS, AND OTHERS ...	270
XX.	THE GROWTH OF THE TOWN AND THE BEGINNINGS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT	290
XXI.	THE NEW POOR LAW	305
XXII.	ST. HELENS IN THE 'FORTIES	313

PART THREE

THE MIDDLE YEARS

1845-1870

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
XXIII.	THE TRANSPORT MONOPOLY	327
XXIV.	INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT	338
XXV.	URBAN GROWTH	374
XXVI.	THE IMPROVEMENT COMMISSION	395
XXVII.	TOWN LIFE	412

PART FOUR

INDUSTRIAL PROGRESS AND THE RISE OF
RESPECTABILITY, 1870-1900

<i>Chapter</i>		<i>Page</i>
XXVIII.	INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT	433
XXIX.	SOCIAL LIFE	453
APPENDIX I.	POLITICS AT ST. HELENS, 1832-1900 ...	471
APPENDIX II.	THE RAPID GROWTH OF CO-OPERATION AFTER 1884	477
APPENDIX III.	BIRTHS AND DEATHS IN THE ST. HELENS REGISTRATION DISTRICT, 1837-49 ...	480
APPENDIX IV.	NOTE ON BANKING AND CREDIT AFTER 1830	481

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

Colliery (about 1800) Frontispiece

	<i>Facing Page</i>
The Sankey Viaduct and Newton Common Lock ...	22
Sarah Clayton (1712-1779) 	23
Concerns under the Control of Thomas Williams ...	78
Michael Hughes of Sherdley (1752-1825)	79
Two Views of St. Helens in 1805 	178
Peter Greenall (1796-1845) 	179
William Pilkington (1800-1872) 	324
The Union Plate Glassworks, Pocket Nook, in 1843 ...	325
St. Helens Foundry about 1860 	326

MAPS (Drafted by R. P. Brady, M.A., B.Sc., cartography by

A. G. Hotchkiss) *between pages 470-471*

The Lower Mersey (1750-1950)

St. Helens in the Eighteenth Century

St. Helens in the Nineteenth Century

The Growth of the Town (1830-1954)

INTRODUCTION

MODERN St. Helens can justly be described as a product of the Industrial Revolution. The local coal industry received a powerful stimulus from the cutting of the first English canal, and to the coalfield were attracted the furnace industries, glass, copper and chemicals. These industries have received relatively little attention at the hands of economic historians, and no apology is made for devoting much of the book to them. The new industries brought people from far and near, and many pages have also been given to the life and condition of the population during the years when the town was growing rapidly.

We have been particularly fortunate in discovering much documentary evidence which seems to modify to a considerable extent what has been written on town life at this period. At all times we have tried to keep in mind that St. Helens is part of Merseyside, and that the life and trade of Merseyside are part of a national picture. We are emphatic that the history of any industrial town, seeking its raw materials over a wide area and selling its finished products over the whole world, cannot be studied in isolation. We have accordingly related the growth of the town to the economic pattern of Merseyside and to national events. It is our hope therefore, that this book will be of interest not only to the people of St. Helens, and to other inhabitants of Merseyside, but to those interested in economic history generally.

This study has been largely based upon hitherto unpublished documents in local, county and national archives, and upon other materials which we have unearthed for ourselves. Newspapers have also been of great importance, particularly the Liverpool papers from 1757 and the St. Helens press from the middle of the following century. It is from these two types of source that much of the detail is derived, and if that detail serves to show readers that the growth of a modern industrial town was an extremely complex process, brought about by influences both small and great, it will not have been presented in vain.

This book is a work of collaboration ; a task made easier by the fact that both the writers have spent most of their lives in the district which they are describing. Although, generally speaking, the eighteenth century has been the responsibility of Dr. Harris and the nineteenth of Dr. Barker, there has been a constant interchange of ideas and notes during the five years over which this study has extended. Certain chapters have, in fact, been written jointly. These are : I, II, V, IX, and X. Chapters III, IV, VI, VII, VIII, XI and XII have been the work of Dr. Harris, Chapters XIII to XXIX of Dr. Barker.

So many people have helped us in the writing of this book that we cannot thank them all here. From the outset we have received the warmest support from Mr. N. F. Newbury, the Director of Education for St. Helens, without whose personal interest this book would not have been attempted. The University of Manchester provided the generous post-graduate scholarships which enabled the necessary research to be undertaken. Professor Arthur Redford and Dr. W. H. Chaloner gave us the wise advice and careful training in research which we hope has enabled us to produce a book which will be worthy of the tradition of the Manchester History School. St. Helens Corporation not only helped to defray the expenses of research, but also made a most liberal grant towards the cost of publication. We are deeply indebted to Professor F. E. Hyde for the great interest he has shown in our book, and for recommending it to the University Press of Liverpool, whose Secretary, Mr. R. A. Downie has given us much helpful advice.

Among those who have assisted us by putting manuscript material at our disposal we would especially wish to thank Col. H. A. Bromilow, Mr. Griffith of Greenall, Whitley & Co Ltd., Lt.-Col. M. Hughes-Young and his agent, Mr. W. V. Spencer, and Sir Harry Pilkington, Chairman of Pilkington Brothers Ltd. The number of references to documents at the Lancashire Record Office and at the St. Helens Library sufficiently show our indebtedness to Mr. R. Sharpe France, Mr. H. C. Caistor and their staffs. We have received splendid co-operation from the local press from the very outset. Mr. R. P. Brady of Cowley School planned the maps, the cartography of which has been the responsibility of Mr. A. G. Hotchkiss of the Department of Geography in the University of Liverpool. The Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire kindly lent the block of the illustration at p. 18. We have not space to thank all the hundreds of people, particularly at St. Helens, whom we have burdened with enquiries or who have brought material to our attention ; we hope they will not be disappointed with the book they have helped to make.

Certain sections of the book have received helpful criticism from Dr. W. H. Chaloner at Manchester, from Mr. G. Clayton, Dr. S. B. Saul and Mr. B. B. Parkinson at Liverpool, from Mr. A. J. Taylor of University College, London, from Dr. E. M. Hampson of the University of Aberdeen, from Dr. R. Dickinson and Dr. D. W. F. Hardie of Imperial Chemical Industries, from Mr. M. N. Leathwood and Dr. W. B. Price of Pilkington Brothers Limited, and from Mr. F. A. Bailey and Mr. N. H. Barker. They are in no way responsible for any of our errors or opinions.

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AUTHORS' INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD IMPRESSION

In introducing the third impression of this book to what is in fact a new generation of readers it may be opportune to explain the circumstances of research which was carried on more than forty years ago and clarify the ideas behind it.

From the standpoint of the present, urban history in the 1940s seems to have been at a surprisingly early stage of development. It is true that the tradition of writing urban history in Britain goes back a long way: it can be traced to the sixteenth century, though it really began to expand in the eighteenth. An unusually good example, of obvious value to us in the writing of our own work, would be William Enfield's *An Essay Towards the History of Liverpool*, published in 1773. Nevertheless, down to the twentieth century urban history attracted the interest of few professional historians. A breakthrough in this respect was Professor Hoskins' illuminating study of Exeter of 1933; followed in 1939–40 by the late Professor Redford's three-volume administrative study (with Ina S. Russell), *The History of Local Government in Manchester* (1939–40), a sequence which culminated with Gill and Briggs' broader study of Birmingham, published in 1952 when we had completed our own work. The size of the big city and the official commission inevitably implied some concentration on organization and administration by the historian in the last two works. What had not been so far attempted was a history of a modern industrial town with its industries studied at an equal depth, and with the same basis in primary material, as local government. Fortunately for us Dr (later Professor) W. H. Chaloner's *The Social and Economic Development of Crewe 1780–1923* appeared not long after we started work, and we enjoyed the great privilege of his and Professor Redford's help and advice while we undertook our research as graduate students at Manchester. They encouraged our belief that town history could be written only in a full context of regional history and with continual reference to the national, and sometimes the international, economy, and by consulting appropriate sources away from the town itself. We were again fortunate in being part of the first generation of historians to have available the resources of a County Record Office, and the Lancashire Record Office at Preston was already among the best in the country.

We cannot claim to have had any doubts or hesitations about our subject. St. Helens chose itself for us. We had both grown up and been schoolfellows there and in the same form from the age of six. To us, as young and dedicated historians, the great gap in the historical reading and education open to us had always been the explanation of how communities like the one in which we

and so many of our fellow-countrymen lived had come into being and assumed their present fascinating, if often unlovely, form. It may surprise some readers to learn that the idea of the book had been broached between us before we were sent on our different ways by the exigencies of the war, while both were still nineteen, though serious work did not begin until our final undergraduate years after its conclusion.

Though we obviously knew the town fairly well, our first task was to explore on foot every part which we did not know really intimately, so that throughout our studies the topography should be vividly in our minds. The town had particular attraction for economic and social historians interested in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It provided a splendid case-study for those problems of urbanization and the standard of life which were currently emerging as key issues for those who, just after 1945, were studying the subject. Hitherto this kind of theme had been investigated using sources of a national nature, especially from the evidence given to parliamentary commissions and committees. Similarly, by examining St. Helens we were able to study a town depending on three important industries which had been comparatively neglected and certainly little studied: glass, copper and chemicals.

We were able to unearth a great mass of documentary record – we had to, for printed sources were scarce and indeed almost totally wanting for these important industries. Once again we were fortunate in those to whom we turned for help. St. Helens people, and even families and individuals who had moved away from the town, were most generous in letting us see family and business papers. Sometimes they had been unaware that such papers could be of any historical value and indeed that they possessed such historical treasure trove. We, knowing that their businesses had been conducted from the same premises for a century or more, restrained our youthful ardour as far as we could by a mixture of diffidence and persistence. The latter paid off. Only too pleased to help, they agreed, for example, to produce a ladder so that we could (at a solicitor's office) inspect what lay above a trap door which had caught our eyes in the ceiling, or (at an estate office) a series of cupboards we had spotted high up on a wall. We would once more wish to emphasize our indebtedness and our gratitude to those who so cheerfully co-operated with the two young men who, often complete strangers to them, visited their houses or business premises over 40 years ago, not least the managers of the local brewery, now alas removed from the town, who quenched our thirst during a well-timed visit in hot high summer.

This book should of course be judged in terms of the era in which it was written. Interestingly, in the very year it appeared,

the Economic History Society, for the first time, chose urban history as the theme of its annual conference. Growing interest led to the formation of the Urban History Group, meeting annually in sequence with the Economic History Society's conference and publishing its valuable Newsletter. As historians have come together in this way, great strides have been made. Population historians in particular have transformed the techniques of studying the modern town, and more recently studies involving sociological methods, such as Professor Anderson's study of the family in nineteenth-century Preston, have given urban history an important new facet. It may be worth noting, however, that our volume used the evidence of census examiners' books; those for 1841 and 1851 were consulted immediately upon the latter becoming available at the PRO. Likewise, with the kind permission of the local Registrar, we used the first Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages from 1837 to 1849. This enabled us not only to give details of deaths in coal-mines in the 1840s (then a subject of some concern) but also to tabulate birth and death rates at that time, together with the main causes of death. Had we been writing later we would certainly have made more of this table, in the compilation of which much blood and sweat, not to mention tears, were shed. As it was, we relegated it to Appendix III, where, so far as we know, it has been totally neglected by demographers and others ever since. We also investigated hundreds of wills and inventories to discover the investments and other economic activities of testators, a type of research which has been increasingly employed since.

British economic and social historians have made great advances since we wrote this book and we have both been fortunate to take part in this forward march. Population history, the history of technology, the study of particular industries, women's history, and the whole story of atmospheric pollution and the improvement of the physical environment, together mean that, were we still two young men rather than two elderly professors, we would today wish to write this book with different perspectives, all the more so because much more primary source material is available. On one thing, however, we would not wish to change our approach. We would still want to write the history of the town in terms of its people, the influential industrialists, the skilled workers, the paupers, the civic leaders, and not to lose sight of individuals in the abstractions of class social theory or economic trends.

There have been a number of further studies which have in some degree arisen from or extended the work embodied in our book. Theo Barker became Pilkingtons' historian, a task he has happily continued to the present. He published *Pilkington*

Brothers and the Glass Industry (Allen & Unwin, 1960) taking the company's history down to 1914, and added an epilogue chapter. In 1977 appeared *The Glassmakers* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson) a revised version which continued the story in detail to 1939, again with an epilogue chapter. He has just completed the manuscript of a short, illustrated, history, *Pilkington 1826–1992* which summarizes the 1977 book and concentrates on the great developments since 1950, particularly associated with the float glass process and the major international acquisitions which have made the St. Helens-based concern the largest glass manufacturer in the world.

John Harris set the local copper industry of the eighteenth century in a national context in *The Copper King* (Liverpool and Toronto, 1964). He extended and revised his account of eighteenth-century glassmaking in 'The Origins of the St. Helens Glass Industry', reprinted in his collected essays, *Industry and Technology in the Eighteenth Century* (1992). He compared the eighteenth-century British and French plate glass industries in 'Saint Gobain and Ravenhead', reprinted in the same volume. The eighteenth-century public debate on the kind of canal system the local community wanted was explored in 'Liverpool Canal Controversies', reprinted in his edited volume *Liverpool and Merseyside* (1969). In that collection also appeared the highly innovative paper by Theo Barker and the late F.A. Bailey on 'The Seventeenth-Century Origins of Watch Making in South West Lancashire'. In a later paper John Harris took the opportunity to reflect on the general history of Merseyside in 'Trends in the Industrialisation of Merseyside 1750–1850' (*L'Industrialisation en Europe au XIX^e Siècle*' (Paris, 1972).

Others have taken up themes we were glad to see pursued further, two items being research supervised at Liverpool University by John Harris. B.L. Anderson followed up work in Harris's thesis (work only partly used in the Barker and Harris volume) with his much-read thesis on 'Aspects of Capital and Credit in Lancashire during the Eighteenth Century' (MA Liverpool 1966). A main section of this was printed in *Liverpool and Merseyside* as 'The Attorney and the Early Capital Market in Lancashire', and again reprinted in François Crouzet's *Capital Formation in the Industrial Revolution* (1972). In *Liverpool and Merseyside* Dr G. W. Oxley greatly advanced the more favourable view we had taken of the administration of the Old Poor Law in his 'The Permanent Poor in South Lancashire under the Old Poor Law'. Dr P. A. Pemberton, then Pilkingtons' archivist, wrote her Liverpool MA thesis on 'The Origins of the British Cast Plate Manufacturers 1773–1798'.

We are delighted that interest in the town's history has grown since the formation of St. Helens Historical Society in 1959,

though of course the Society does not confine itself to local history. For instance, much has been discovered about the canal's early history by the Sankey Canal Restoration Society, while students of St. Helens College (A.C.H.E.) local history programme have just published a study of the Bromilow family of coalmasters. That more people than ever are now keen to learn about the district's past was evident from the audience of over 200 people who paid to attend a whole day of meetings on the subject on a November Saturday in 1992, on the occasion of the St. Helens Museum centenary. We are very pleased at this continuing interest in the town's history. We hope that other scholars, national as well as local, will return to the ground we did our best to cover in this book, but using more modern techniques and the additional resource material now available. This allows the exploration of evidence about local society back in the sixteenth century, before modern industry had made its appearance. There is also a strong case for a further volume covering St. Helens' history in the twentieth century. Until that new research is done, we are content to echo the words of our old friend Professor T. S. Willan, who commented on the reprinting of one of his works with the remark that a complete rewriting was hardly justified: 'It would be a different volume . . . but I do not think it would be a different story'.

Theo Barker
John Harris
February 1993

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE FOOTNOTES

B.P.G. Mins.	Minutes of the British Plate Glass Co.
B.M.	... ..	British Museum.
Chet. Soc.	... ..	Chetham Society.
<i>C.J.</i>	... ..	<i>Journals of the House of Commons.</i>
<i>C.S.P. Dom.</i>	... ..	<i>Calendar of State Papers Domestic.</i>
<i>Chem. News</i>	... ..	<i>Chemical News.</i>
<i>Chem. Trade Jour.</i>	... ..	<i>Chemical Trade Journal.</i>
Ch. Emp. Comm.	... ..	Children's Employment Commission.
<i>D.N.B.</i>	... ..	<i>Dictionary of National Biography.</i>
<i>Econ. Jour. (Ec. Hist. Ser.)</i>	... ..	<i>Economic Journal (Economic History Series).</i>
<i>Econ. Hist. Rev.</i>	... ..	<i>Economic History Review.</i>
<i>Eng. Hist. Rev.</i>	... ..	<i>English Historical Review.</i>
Guard Mins.	... ..	Minutes of the Prescott Poor Law Guardians.
<i>Gore's Gen. Ad.</i>	... ..	<i>Gore's General Advertiser (Liverpool).</i>
Inst. C.E.	... ..	Institution of Civil Engineers.
Inst. M.E.	... ..	Institution of Mechanical Engineers.
Lancs. Par. Reg. Soc.	... ..	Lancashire Parish Register Society.
L. & C. Antiq. Soc.	... ..	Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society.
L. & C. Hist. Soc.	... ..	Lancashire and Cheshire Historic Society.
L. & C. Rec. Soc.	... ..	Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society.
L.R.O.	... ..	Lancashire Record Office.
Lpool.	... ..	Liverpool.
<i>Lpool Chron.</i>	... ..	<i>Liverpool Chronicle.</i>
<i>Lpool. Merc.</i>	... ..	<i>Liverpool Mercury.</i>
<i>Phil. Trans. Royal Soc.</i>	... ..	<i>Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society.</i>
P.R.O.	... ..	Public Record Office.
Ref. Lib.	... ..	Reference Library.
R.C.	... ..	Royal Commission.
St. H.	... ..	St. Helens.
St. H. C. & R.	... ..	St. Helens Canal and Railway.
St. H. Cong. Ch.	... ..	St. Helens Congregational Church.
St. H.I.C.	... ..	St. Helens Improvement Commission.
<i>St. H.N.</i>	... ..	<i>St. Helens Newspaper.</i>
<i>St. H.R.</i>	... ..	<i>St. Helens Reporter.</i>
St. H. and R. G. Mins.	... ..	Minutes of the St. Helens and Runcorn Gap Railway (later the St. Helens Canal and Railway).
S.C.	... ..	Select Committee.
Soc. Chem. Ind.	... ..	Society of the Chemical Industry.
Soc. Glass Tech.	... ..	Society of Glass Technology.
U.C.N.W.	... ..	University College of North Wales, Bangor.
V.C.H.	... ..	Victoria County History.
<i>Williamson's Lpool. Ad.</i>	... ..	<i>Williamson's Liverpool Advertiser.</i>

Parliamentary Papers are cited in the form in which they appear in the official indexes, with the year of publication first, then the number of the particular paper (in square brackets), and the volume in which it is bound (in Roman numerals). E.g. 1878 [2159] XLIV.

PART ONE

DEVELOPMENT IN THE

CANAL AGE

CHAPTER I

COAL AND SALT

THE South Lancashire town of St. Helens takes its name from that of a chapel-of-ease which stood on a busy stretch of highway. The chapel was situated at the junction of the boundaries of the four manors and townships of Windle, Sutton, Eccleston and Parr, and near it the roads from Liverpool to Bolton and from Warrington to Ormskirk converged.

About the year 1700 the district around St. Helen's Chapel wore a very different aspect from that which it presents today. A predominantly agricultural population tilled fields already enclosed. A mixed farming prevailed, but the acres of arable and pasture were frequently interrupted by barren stretches, indicated on the modern map by place-names embodying elements like "Heath" and "Moss." Amid the oatfields and the barley, the "scores" for cattle and the fruit gardens, the peat mosses and the wild heaths, the first signs of the industrial age could just be discerned, but these did not as yet seriously affect the essentially country atmosphere. Here and there in each of the four manor-townships a few fields or patches of waste were scarred by tips and coal banks, where, to the creaking of primitive windlasses, the colliers of the district disappeared from the light of day to pursue their grimy and dangerous calling. Close by one of these small collieries, marked out as rather more important than the others by its horse-propelled gear, a new cone-like chimney and a trail of smoke gave evidence that another race of industrial workers, the glassblowers, had just made their appearance.

Many of the industrial activities already carried on were not, however, pursued in mine or works, even on the smallest scale, but in the scattered houses and cottages of the four townships. Linen-weaving was carried on in many homes (though cotton was soon to begin to supplant linen), some farms were combined with nailmakers' forges, and there was at least one combmaker. Even brewing was virtually a domestic industry at this time, being carried on either in the mansions of the gentry and the well-to-do for the benefit of their households, or in the brewhouses which formed an essential adjunct of most inns.

These industrial beginnings, however, must not be over-emphasised. It would be the reverse of the truth to suppose that it was by a gradual growth of existing trades and crafts that the modern town was created. Nor was its good position in relation to road communications—though responsible for the existence of the small hamlet of Hardshaw-within-Windle which

already lay close to the chapel—the real reason for the phenomenal growth of the place. Changes of a different nature came to this obscure neighbourhood, changes which had a threefold origin; in certain raw materials, hitherto little exploited, of which the district possessed an abundance; in new and momentous economic events taking place on the Cheshire saltfield and at the rising port of Liverpool; and in the presence of an insignificant stream, the Sankey, formed from the confluence of several local brooks, and running down to the Mersey near Warrington.

The raw materials present were coal, sand, and fireclay. St. Helens was situated near the south-western tip of the South Lancashire coalfield, and in the early eighteenth century its position gave the district two advantages. It was on the side of the coalfield nearest to the mouth of the Weaver, the artery of the saltfield; equally important, it was only twelve miles from Liverpool. The possibility of water communication with the Mersey and the presence of the essentials for glass and other furnace industries were, to begin with, of secondary importance as compared with the juxtaposition of coal and salt. Indeed the whole economic history of St. Helens is a lengthy commentary on the inter-relationship between these two vital and complementary raw materials as they have been organized and manipulated by the men of Merseyside, and upon the world-wide trades to which they have given rise. To understand why a vigorous coal trade developed in the St. Helens district it is first necessary to realise what was happening on the other side of the Mersey.

Before the middle of the seventeenth century coal replaced wood as the fuel employed in the Cheshire saltfield.¹ This started a train of events which was to determine to a very large degree the industrial character of the Merseyside region. At first the salt-boilers looked to the Staffordshire coalfield as their main source of supply. By the later years of the seventeenth century, however, Lancashire coal was carried by pack-horse to Hale,² shipped across the Mersey and transferred to waiting carts or pack-horses at Frodsham Bridge.³ It was delivered at the most westerly saltworks in the vicinity of Winnington Bridge for 11s. 10d. a ton,

¹ "Some Inquiries Concerning the Salt Springs and Ways of Salt Making at Nantwich in Cheshire," Answered by Wm. Jackson, Dr. of Physick, *Philosophical Trans. of the Royal Society of England* No. 53, 15 Nov., 1669, 1065. For a more detailed account of the Cheshire salt trade see T. C. Barker, "Lancashire Coal, Cheshire Salt and the Rise of Liverpool," *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.* 103 (1951), 83-101.

² Lpool Ref. Lib., Holt and Gregson MSS. X, 263.

³ "Considerations concerning a project to make ye River Weaver in Cheshire Navigable from Frodsham Bridge to Northwich." B.M. Add. MSS. 36914 fo. 94 *et seq.*

a shilling or two cheaper than the Staffordshire coal which had to be brought a longer distance overland.¹ Although this was a slight saving for the saltboilers concerned, carriage continued to be a most expensive item. It still cost more than twice as much to transport the coal from the colliery to the saltworks as it did to raise the coal out of the ground. A reduction in these disproportionately heavy transport charges would greatly reduce the saltboilers' production costs, for they burnt a ton of coal every time they made one and a half tons of salt.² In an attempt to effect such an economy some of the Cheshire men started to prospect for coal at the saltfield itself. One of them, William Marbury, conducted a search under his land at Marbury, near Great Budworth, in 1670. The borers failed to strike coal; instead they discovered a deposit of rock salt.³

This altogether unexpected find was a severe blow to the Cheshire brinemen. It not only disappointed their hopes of obtaining a cheaper supply of coal but also opened the way to competition in the salt trade which might have proved their ruin had not Parliament intervened in the struggle. The brinemen were burdened by two costly transport charges; for coal carried into Cheshire (either from Lancashire or from Staffordshire) and for white salt transported away from the saltfield. The newly-found rock salt, however, could be carried towards the coalfield for refining and only one transport charge was incurred.

Liverpool, the natural outlet for the produce of the Cheshire wiches, profited the most from Marbury's discovery of 1670, for rock salt was soon being despatched by sea from that port for boiling elsewhere. Moreover, enterprising manufacturers were able to export from Liverpool cargoes of white salt refined on the shores of the Mersey. There supplies of rock salt from Cheshire met the pack-horses carrying fuel from the nearest pits of the Lancashire coalfield. This, in turn, reduced the price at which the producer of salt from brine sold his product to merchants in Liverpool. John Holt, the Liverpool historian, was probably writing with his customary care when he expressed the opinion that

"The Salt Trade is generally acknowledged to have been the Nursing Mother and to have contributed more to the first rise, gradual increase, and present flourishing state of the Town of Liverpool than any other Article of Commerce."⁴

The traffic in rock salt increased rapidly at the close of the

¹ B.M. Add. MSS. 36914. Note attached to a letter dated 29 Aug., 1699. Staffordshire coal cost between 9/2 and 10/- per ton at Middlewich and the cost of transport to Winnington Bridge was a further 4/6. (*Ibid*).

² T. S. Willan, *The Navigation of the River Weaver in the Eighteenth Century*, Chet. Soc. 3rd Ser. III (1951), 3. For the pithead price of coal, see below, p. 10.

³ *Phil. Trans. Royal Soc.*, No. 66, 12 Dec., 1670, 2015-7.

⁴ Holt and Gregson MSS., X, 253.

seventeenth century to the growing dismay of the brinemens. In 1702 they obtained an Act of Parliament restricting the number of refineries to those already in being and to any erected within ten miles of the rock pits.¹ Petitions from refiners of rock salt at Bristol² and Bideford³ indicate the extent of the trade by 1701. By that date salt was already being refined at Frodsham⁴ and Dungeon⁵ and the names of Thomas Johnson and John Blackburne, powerful men in the Liverpool rock trade, are encountered for the first time at the end of the seventeenth century.⁶

The Act of 1702 which closed the growing industry of refining rock salt to all newcomers must have been highly acceptable to the existing refiners, even though later legislation permitted the boiling of rock salt at several other places in England and Wales.⁷ It is reasonable to suppose that the refineries at Liverpool, Dungeon and Frodsham increased in size during the early decades of the eighteenth century, and the opening of the Weaver Navigation to traffic on January 1, 1732,⁸ which eliminated the costly pack-horse journeys between the salt mines and Frodsham Bridge, led to the doubling of rock salt cargoes carried down the Weaver in the next twenty years.⁹ The Weaver Navigation also stimulated the brine trade at Northwich by reducing the price of fuel. Coal shipments up the Weaver increased from 2,634 tons in 1732-3 to 9,400 tons in 1752-3.¹⁰

It is very appropriate, considering the primacy of coal in the economy of the St. Helens district, that mining is the earliest local industry of which we have evidence. How early the existence of

¹ 1 Anne cap. XXI, section 10.

² *C.J.* 13, 599. 6 June, 1701.

³ *Ibid.* Philip Doubt, John Adams and Robert Wren were the petitioners.

⁴ W. R. Scott, *English, Scottish and Irish Joint-Stock Companies to 1720* (Cambridge, 1910), II, 470.

⁵ B.M.Add. MSS. 36914 includes a pamphlet (n.p.) printed in 1697 entitled *Reasons for Continuing the Duty of Eight Pence Upon Each One hundred and twenty Pounds Weight of Rock Salt without allowing a Draw-back upon the same by comparing the Brine Salt made at Northwitche in Cheshire with the Salt-Rock Refined at the Dungeon near Leverpoole in Lancashire*. Dungeon, near Hale, situated close to the place where coal was shipped for Cheshire, was the most obvious position for such a refinery.

⁶ Edward Hughes, *Studies in Administration and Finance 1558-1825* (Manchester, 1934), 225.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 396n.

⁸ Willan, *op cit.*, 31.

⁹ 7,954 tons of rock salt were carried down the Weaver between Michaelmas 1732 and Michaelmas 1733 and 14,359 tons between Michaelmas 1752-3. Willan, *op cit.*, 39-40.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

coal was either known or suspected, it is impossible to say ; in the contiguous township of Ashton-in-Makerfield mining was taking place as early as 1330,¹ and it is likely that outcrop coal was used as soon as wood became scarce. Such a scarcity may have occurred quite early, for in 1327 Alan, lord of the manor of Eccleston, was altering his tenants' right to gather fuel in the wood of Eccleston " which now begins to decay " to the right of turbarry in the heaths and mosses of the manor.²

Possibly the very fact that so much of the land was desolate peat moss helped to delay the coming of the coal age. Turves were used in brick-making until the opening of the nineteenth century, " moss reeves " were appointed by the township of Sutton until 1750, if not later,³ and even Michael Hughes, a man of broad acres and industrial wealth, was not above noting in a pocket book in 1796⁴ his right to " turf-rooms " on Sutton Heath.

Nevertheless it was in the midst of this very source of turf, Sutton Heath, that about 1540⁵ the first recorded mining took place, the coal being discovered by accident during the digging of a clay pit. The opening of mines about this period was general rather than local. Nef has shown a widespread expansion in Lancashire coal-getting about the middle of the sixteenth century,⁶ and very important mines at nearby Prescott were entered into in 1521.⁷ The discovery of the Sutton mines meant a severe struggle between those who claimed rights on the now valuable piece of waste, and the Bolds of Bold, the lords of the manor, started to enclose it. Between the 1540s and the 1630s there was a series of lawsuits between the Bolds and the principal freeholders, led by the Eltonhead family, who endeavoured to claim, without much success, that their land was a manor in its own right. It was in 1580, during the taking of depositions for these lawsuits, that an elderly inhabitant stated that mining had begun about forty years before. The evidence makes it clear that the presence of coal in common land was often a reason for enclosure, and helps to explain why this process was so advanced in the district by the

¹ H. T. Crofton, " Lancashire and Cheshire Coal Mining Records," *Trans. L. & C. Antiq. Soc.*, 7 (1889), 35.

² A. J. Hawkes, " Some Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century Documents relating to Parbold, Ince, and Sutton." *Trans. L. & C. Antiq. Soc.*, 51 (1936), 72. Right of turbarry allows the collection of turf or peat as fuel.

³ The Township Book of Sutton (1658-1750). In the possession of the Prescott Historic Society.

⁴ Hughes Papers, Sherdley Estate Office. Michael Hughes's Pocket Book, 1796, April 30.

⁵ P.R.O. Duchy of Lancs. Depositions, 30 Eliz. No. 25, Sept., 1588. Transcript at St. Helens Ref. Lib.

⁶ J. U. Nef. *The Rise of the British Coal Industry* (1932), I, 60.

⁷ F. A. Bailey. " Early Coalmining in Prescott, Lancashire," *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.*, 99 (1947), 2.

mid-eighteenth century. At the same time the importance of the lord of the manor in colliery development is underlined ; he possessed the coal rights not only under his own estates and demesne, but also under the highways and wastes.

From the middle of the sixteenth century down to the Restoration scattered references to mining occur, involving all the constituent townships of the modern St. Helens. In addition to the activity in Sutton, coal-getting is mentioned in Windle in 1610,¹ in Parr in 1655² and in Eccleston in 1660.³ This part of Lancashire, however, saw no development in the scale or technique of coal mining to equal the contemporary achievements in the North-East. In this period the economics of transport were overwhelmingly in favour of water communication ; the prospects of collieries close to the sea, or to a river either naturally navigable or improved by the making of a "Navigation" were vastly better than those of merely "land-sale" collieries. The distance over which coals could be moved by cart, pack-horse or donkey was limited, ten miles seems to have been the rough economic radius of the land-sale colliery, and on occasion even that short journey may have multiplied the pit-head price of coal five times. Against this physical barrier to sales various forces could operate, the growth and intensity of demand of adjacent markets (Liverpool and the saltfield in the case of the St. Helens collieries), the turnpiking of roads, the making of navigations (like the Weaver Navigation), or, most powerful of all, the cutting of canals. In fact all these remedies were applied one by one to remove the disabilities under which the St. Helens coalfield laboured.

No difficulty appears to have been placed in the way of mining expansion by the local lords of manors. The Bolds in Sutton, the Ecclestons in Eccleston, the Gerards in Windle, the Byroms in Parr were all willing to have their coal exploited. But even if they had been reluctant to see their fields torn up and their land subsiding, the variety of other freehold landowners within the manors would have made the entry of the colliery speculator easy. There was a surprising diversity in the ownership of coal rights. Between the Restoration and the nineteenth century the local colliers hewed away coal their masters had bought or leased from Catherine of Braganza, George III, the Society of Friends, two Colleges (King's and Brasenose), and, at the other end of the scale, innkeepers, cabinet makers and yeomen.

Between the Restoration and the canal era the coalfield saw a number of attempts to make mining a regular and paying business. One difficulty was that the St. Helens district was long a "marginal" mining area as far as the Cheshire saltfield and the

¹ L.R.O., Cross Papers DDCs., 53/16.

² L.R.O., Gerard Papers, DDGe., 844.

³ L.R.O., Scarisbrick Papers DDSc., 12/16.

Liverpool market were concerned ; pits at Prescot, Whiston and Huyton were closer to the destinations of the coal, and would certainly have the preference. This factor alone tends to account for the sporadic nature of many of the ventures, the local collieries chiefly being engaged in taking up the slack in the market. There were, however, other factors inherent in the nature and technique of early eighteenth-century mining which served to make it an uneven and irregular process. Many of the local entrepreneurs were acutely short of capital ; a windlass, a few baskets, buckets and picks, a string of horses or donkeys to carry away the coal, a stock of hay and candles—these few simple demands on their resources were as much as they could handle. Sometimes the piece of land they leased was small ; once they had worked out the coal within it neighbouring owners might not be prepared to lease them more on suitable terms, and the colliery might stop. Perhaps the greatest problem was drainage. In the flat Lancashire plain the favourite drainage device of the period, the ' adit,' a tunnel running from the workings to a point on the surface at a lower level, was generally impracticable. Hence coal was often taken only near the outcrop or from very shallow seams, and once water came in fast the pits were left. Mines generally consisted of several small workings dispersed over a number of fields, each perhaps employing only three or four colliers. Sometimes a mine drained by bucket and windlass was abandoned, to be resumed later by means of a whimsey, a sort of capstan turned by a horse, which enabled deeper working, and was then abandoned again only to be revived when the steam pumping engine was introduced, an innovation which reached St. Helens a decade before water transport. In some cases these various degrees of exploitation might be attained by entirely separate successive groups of partners, for each required a greater investment of capital than did its predecessor. This again helps to account for the way these collieries tended to die out and then come to life again on a more ambitious scale.

Space does not permit the examination of all the known colliery ventures prior to 1750, but one example is so typical that it should be given. In 1690 a gentleman of Frodsham in Cheshire leased from the Crown (in the person of the Queen Dowager, Catherine of Braganza) part of the common or waste of Thatto Heath on the borders of Sutton and Eccleston townships. He obtained permission to mine and drain the land, and in the following year extended the area of his operations in association with a London capitalist. Also involved was a Sutton yeoman, John Shaw, who lent the Cheshire man money, supported him when he was arrested for debt, and bought out his widow's share after his death. Shaw then became involved with the Turners, another Cheshire family, of Middlewich and Norley, who invested in the mine in 1715 and sent horses into Lancashire to be employed in

draining. By 1718 the mine was a prosperous concern, with 'three hundred works of coal set upon the bank or Brow,' and we are told of 11,400 works raised at 7s. 6d. the work, and 1,200 works at 10s. the work, in all worth £4,000.¹ In the subsequent period mining around Thatto Heath was less active, but in 1770, in the canal and steam engine era, the collieries were revived amid great stir by a remarkable Scots industrialist, John Mackay.²

This single example shows the succession of speculators and of techniques which was necessary to develop one corner of the St. Helens coalfield, and how it was often only after long efforts that a short period of great prosperity came, until once again the limits of capital or technique were reached for the time being. It is also noteworthy that, when no further expansion could be achieved on local capital, the collieries of the area were a sufficiently good business proposition to attract outside investors, even so early as 1700. It was not, however, until the middle of the eighteenth century that by means of an infusion of capital into its communications system the coalfield became the centre of a vigorous, even hectic, economic life. That infusion did not come from the metropolis or even from Cheshire, but from the members of a new and vital commercial oligarchy, the merchants who dominated the Common Council of Liverpool.

¹ P.R.O., P.L. 6. 61/11. A work was about three tons.

² See below, pp. 43-4

CHAPTER II

THE FIRST ENGLISH CANAL

THE later 1660s and early 1670s saw significant changes at the port of Liverpool. As the Town Books of the day reveal,¹ to the existing coastal and fishing trade there was added a wider overseas connection. This is corroborated by a statement, issued at the end of the century by the Corporation :

“ It was formerly a small fishing town, but many people coming from London, in time of the sickness and after the fire, several ingenious men settled in Liverpool, which caused them to trade to the plantations and other places, which occasioned sundry other tradesmen to come and settle there, which hath so enlarged their trade, that from scarce paying the salary of the officers of the customs it is now the third part of the trade of England, and pays upwards of £50,000 per annum to the king ; and by reason of such increase, many new streets are built, and still in building; and many gentlemen’s sons of the counties of Lancaster, Yorkshire, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Cheshire and North Wales, are put out apprentices in the town . . .”²

Defoe had the same story to tell. On his second visit to Liverpool, in 1690, the inhabitants claimed that the town was twice as large as it had been in 1670 and he himself testified that it had again doubled in size between 1690 and his third visit in 1705.³ Liverpool, he thought, was “ one of the wonders of Britain.”⁴ Another traveller, Celia Fiennes, was so impressed by the new streets and buildings that she proclaimed the town “ London in miniature.”⁵ This remarkable expansion continued throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. All the indications seem to point to the fact that the population and trade of the port grew

¹ The Town Books for this period have not yet been published. They are kept at the Lpool. Record Office.

² “ The case of the Corporation of Liverpool, in relation to a bill for making a new parish and erecting a new church there,” c. 1699, printed in *The Moore Rental* ed. Thomas Heywood, Chet. Soc. 12 O.S. (1847) 77n.

³ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through England and Wales* ed. Cole (1928) II, 255-6. Defoe does not state the date of his third visit but Mr. Hall wrote to Richard Norris on 28 Sept., 1705 : “ Danl. Defoe hath been some days in town which hath been the great subject talked of, and been great matter of speculation to some persons.” *The Norris Papers* ed. Thomas Heywood, Chet. Soc. 9 O.S. (1846), 145.

⁴ Defoe, *op. cit.* II, 255.

⁵ *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, ed. C. Morris (1947), 184.

roughly threefold between 1700 and 1750.¹ Each additional hearth increased the pressure on the town's fuel supply.

There was also an industrial demand for fuel which was almost certainly quite as great as, and probably considerably greater than, that of the domestic consumers. Sugar baking, a direct result of the new West Indies trade, began about 1670.² Salt boiling, as we have noticed, started in the mid-90s. A thriving pottery industry, which included not only common earthenware mugs, sugar moulds and the like but also the high-class Delft ware, arose in the eighteenth century.³ Glassmaking can be traced back to 1724.⁴

¹ E.g. the number of christenings at St. Peter's exceeded 200 a year after 1708 and 600 a year after 1747. William Enfield, *An Essay Towards the History of Liverpool* (1773), 25-6. The average amount of shipping which entered and cleared the port of Liverpool in the seven years ending 1716 was 18,371 tons and in the seven years ending 1751 was 32,702. Thomas Baines, *History of the Commerce and Town of Liverpool* (1852), 491. The earlier returns are not given but it would seem probable that the figures for about 1700 were appreciably smaller and the increase over the period 1700-50 nearer threefold than double.

² Moore recorded in 1667-8 :

"... one Mr. Smith, a great sugar baker at London, a man, as report says, worth forty thousand pounds, came from London on purpose to treat with me ; and, according to agreement, he is to build all the front twenty-seven yards, a stately house of good hewn stone, four story high, and then to go through the same building with a large entry ; and there, on the back side, to erect a house for boiling and drying sugar, otherwise called a sugar baker's house." *Rental*, 76-7. William Fergusson Irvine in his edition of the *Rental, Liverpool in King Charles the Second's Time* (L'pool, 1899), 99, points out that the earliest reference to a refinery is in Redcross Street. Therefore, if the refinery was ever built on the site mentioned by Moore, it must have been soon removed. No doubt Smith was one of the "ingenious men" whom the Corporation had in mind when they drafted their statement. An instruction to a Liverpool captain, dated 1700, shows that Liverpool ships were already engaged in the slave trade by that date. Picton Ref. Lib. Norris Papers, 2/199, 2/567. A number of broadsides and pamphlets issued by the Royal African Company between 1708-10 makes it clear that the Company's monopoly started to be infringed by interloping soon after 1688. By 9 and 10 Wm. III., cap. XXVI, merchants who were not members of the Company were permitted from 24 June, 1698, to engage in the Africa trade on a payment of 10% on all cargoes, slaves excepted.

³ For sugar moulds, see James Touzeau, *The Rise and Progress of Liverpool* (L'pool, 1910) I, 401, and *Williamson's L'pool. Ad.*, 18 June, 1756, quoted in *V.C.H. Lancs.*, II, 404. For Delft Ware see articles by Joseph Mayer in the *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.* 7 O.S. (1854) ; Llewellynn Jewitt, *The Ceramic Art of Great Britain* (New York, 1883), 310-27 ; V. W. Bladen, "The Potteries in the Industrial Revolution". *Econ. Jour. (Ec. Hist. Ser.)*, Jan., 1926.

⁴ The transcribed registers of St. Nicholas's Church, Liverpool, at the L.R.O., contain no references to glassmakers until 6 July, 1724. Thereafter glassmakers are mentioned with regularity. A glasshouse is marked on Chadwick's map of Liverpool, 1725, and George Skene, a visiting Scot, noted in his journal on 17 Sept., 1729, that there were then two glasshouses in operation. *The Miscellany of the Third Spalding Club* (Aberdeen, 1940), II, 132. It would seem, therefore, that Francis Buckley was probably incorrect in stating that the first glassworks were built at Liverpool in 1715. "Old Lancashire Glasshouses," *Trans. Soc. Glass Tech.*, XIII, Sept., 1929.

Beer-brewing was probably an even older occupation. All these industries required large and—perhaps just as important—regular deliveries of coal. To these must be added the cargoes of coal which were shipped from Liverpool up and down the coast, to Ireland or abroad.¹ While it is true that salt boiling in Cheshire and, later, salt refining on the Mersey, were the chief reasons for the more vigorous exploitation of the coal measures in south-west Lancashire, it is also true that Liverpool, with its growing population, its developing industries and its commercial commitments, was geographically the most important single destination for these coals.

Now Liverpool was highly articulate. In its Common Council it had a body of able and resourceful men who knew their own minds and were not afraid to voice their opinions. As the port became wealthier, the Council was able not only to protest against shortage and inefficiency; it was in a position to embark upon (or to give material encouragement to) development schemes which would eradicate them. By the eighteenth century, Liverpool Corporation was a power to be reckoned with.

The need for an abundant supply of cheap fuel gained the attention of the Council more and more as the eighteenth century wore on. So early as February 1698, very soon after the saltworks had been built, they authorised the expenditure of not more than £10 on an experimental bore for coals,² and in March 1717 they allowed one of their number, Alderman Gildart, to carry out another search within Corporation lands.³ But neither of these investigations yielded any satisfactory result and Liverpool continued to rely for its deliveries of coal upon the precarious link with Prescot. This road was “almost unpassable”⁴ for traffic, particularly in the wet weather when the heavy rains washed away the surface and transformed it into a succession of deep holes and ruts surrounded by a sea of mud.⁵ It was customary, therefore,

¹ In August, 1663, the Common Council took notice of damage to the roads of the town on account of carts laden with “Coales and Muggs etc. to ye waterside . . . to be transported and carried away”. (Touzeau, *op. cit.* I, 263). When the Sankey Canal was opened, special delivery prices were always quoted for loading upon vessels in the river.

² Touzeau, *op. cit.*, I, 344.

³ *Ibid.* I, 404. In 1723 Gildart sought permission to find lead and other ore as well as coal.

⁴ Liverpool Town Books, Nov., 1725, quoted in Touzeau, *op. cit.*, I, 417. “Several Gentlemen, Merchants, Tradesmen, and other Inhabitants living in and near the road from Liverpoole to Prescott” in a petition to Parliament, claimed that “several Parts of the said Road are so very deep, and other Parts so narrow, that Coaches, Waggon, and other Wheel-carriages, cannot pass through the same”. (*C.J.* 20, 568, 12 Feb., 1725/6).

⁵ For observations on the pre-turnpike road, see F. A. Bailey, “The Minutes of the Trustees of the Turnpike Roads from Liverpool to Prescot, St. Helens, Warrington and Ashton-in-Makerfield, 1726-89,” *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.* 88 (1937), 160-4. This paper, which covers pages 159-200 of this vol. and pages 31-90 of vol. 89, is based on the minutes of the Trust.

for most of the coal to be transported during the drier summer months, the road having been repaired in the spring by statute labour.¹ But the summer of 1725 was very wet and the people of Liverpool are said to "have suffer'd much for want of getting their Coales home Dureing the Summer season, thro' the Great Rains that have happen'd in these parts".² This led the Corporation to seek Parliamentary sanction for turnpiking the road. The necessary Bill received the Royal Assent on 26 April, 1726.

This Act authorised the formation of a Turnpike Trust for twenty-one years. By 1746, when this term had almost expired and the Trust was obliged to seek a further Act to prolong its existence, there is a clear indication that the output from the collieries at Prescot and Whiston no longer sufficed to meet the growing demand. Permission was sought to extend the Turnpike from Prescot to St. Helens in order to open "a Way to several Ranks of Coal-Pits, whereby all the Country adjacent, and particularly the Inhabitants of the Town of Liverpoole (now become very numerous) and also the shipping of the said Port, may be commodiously served, both in Winter and Summer, with Coals".³ A witness told the Committee of the House of Commons that the extension would enable customers to be "more certainly and commodiously supplied with Coals than they now are . . . [and] if any Accident should happen to the Collieries at Prescot, Liverpoole could not be served with Coals, other than from St. Helens".⁴ He also spoke of "People often being obliged to wait a considerable time at Prescot, before they could be supplied, there not being, in general, a sufficient Quantity of Coals upon the Bank to answer the Demand". In his opinion the collieries at Prescot would not suffer as a result of opening the road to St. Helens for heavy, wheeled traffic "because Prescot, being Three Miles nearer to Liverpoole than St. Helens, Persons will naturally go to the former Place for Coals, if they can be supplied as well and as cheap there as at the latter".⁵ But the very fact that Liverpool was so anxious to obtain easier access to the pits which lay beyond Prescot was a sure sign that coals were not, in fact, being supplied so well or so cheaply as was required.

The improvement of the road to St. Helens, carried out in

¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

² Liverpool Town Books, Nov., 1725, quoted in Touzeau, *op. cit.*, I, 417.

³ *C.J.*, 25, 43, 28 Jan., 1745/6. Petition of the Trustees.

⁴ This is a clear statement that coal from the Wigan field was not, as yet, making its appearance in any quantity at Liverpool. Although several inhabitants of the "Borough Town of Wigan" presented a petition against the Bill on 25 March, others from the town and the townships to the south of it were among those who signed a petition in favour which was laid on the table of the House on 8 April, along with seven other favourable petitions.

⁵ *C.J.* 25, 80, 28 Feb., 1745/6. Evidence of John Eyes.

1749,¹ does not appear to have made the supply of coal as cheap and plentiful as its promoters had hoped. The mounting fuel crisis came to a head in 1753 when the Turnpike Trustees reimposed a toll on back-carriage which they had lifted in 1746,² and, almost simultaneously, the proprietors of Prescott Hall Colliery, the most important on the coalfield, advanced their prices by 20% in order to pay for a new pumping engine which they had just installed. These two acts of unwise self-interest transformed what had previously been an irritating hardship into an intolerable imposition. The Corporation decided to explore the possibility of providing a link by water between the coalfield at St. Helens and the river Mersey. Such a waterway, by permitting regular boatloads of coal to be brought all the year round from the coalfield down to the Mersey and from there to Liverpool or the wiches, would eliminate the costly road transport altogether and would make the consumers of coal independent of the pits in Prescott and Whiston.

On 5 June, 1754, the Council ordered that "two able and skilful surveyors" should, at the Council's expense, survey the Sankey Brook to see if it could be made navigable.³ Their report was apparently favourable, for on 25 October the Council resolved to lend £300 towards securing the necessary Act of Parliament.⁴ Four of the five Liverpool merchants whose names appear as the undertakers were prominent members of the Corporation. James Crosbie was Mayor, Charles Goore was Mayor in the following year, Richard Trafford was Mayor's Bailiff in October, 1755, and John Ashton had been Town Bailiff in 1749. The fifth undertaker was John Blackburne, junior, the owner of the Liverpool salt works. He joined the others on the Council in July, 1755. The measure could hardly have had more influential backing. Two enthusiastic petitions were presented by the interested parties: one was from the merchants, proprietors of salt works, sugar bakers, glass makers, distillers, beer brewers, maltsters and other tradesmen in and near the Borough and Port of Liverpool, the second from the proprietors of salt works at and near Northwich and Winsford.⁵ William Taylor, one of the surveyors, testified that

¹ F. A. Bailey, *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.* 88, 196-7.

² In April, 1753, the Trustees were permitted to extend the Turnpike from St. Helens to Ashton and from Prescott to Warrington. The Warrington Road was improved first. Apart from erecting a toll gate at Ashton Cross in December, 1753, the St. Helens to Ashton road was not touched until after the opening of the Canal. The reimposition of the toll on back-carriage was supposed to meet the additional costs incurred in connection with the 1753 Act. Bailey, *op. cit.*, 89, 45-9.

³ *Town Books.* 5 June, 1754.

⁴ *Town Books.* 25 October, 1754.

⁵ *C.J.* 27, 55-6, 17 December, 1754.

“ large Quantities of Coals are consumed in the Salt Works at Liverpoole, Dungeon, Northwich and Winsford and by the Inhabitants of the aforesaid Towns and Places who have met great Complaints of the advanced Price which Coals have been sold for of late and of the short and uncertain Measure thereof ; and that he apprehends such advanced price is owing as well to the Difficulty of the Carriage as the Scarcity of the Coals.”¹

The Bill received the Royal Assent on 8 April, 1755.²

The two men who were chiefly responsible for the successful completion of the Sankey Brook Navigation, John Ashton and Henry Berry, were both of local origin. John Ashton's father, Nicholas, who died in 1728, possessed estates in Ashton, Parr and Eccleston and described himself in his will as “ of Parr.”³ We do not know when John Ashton left home to seek his fortune in Liverpool nor have we any information about his activities there until 1749 when, as we have seen, he acted as Town Bailiff. When he came to make his will in November, 1753, he styled himself “ Merchant and Cheesemonger ”⁴ and we know from another source that he was at that time engaged in the Africa trade.⁵ He had also entered the salt industry on a large scale, for he owned the important Dungeon Salt Works,⁶ having probably

¹ *C.J.* 27, 102, 17 Jan., 1755. On 7 February the principal landowners and coalmine proprietors upon the upper parts of the three branches of the Sankey Brook petitioned that the northern limits of the Navigation be extended to reach their collieries. An agreement on this was reached between the undertakers and Sir Thomas Gerard on 4 February, 1755. L.R.O., Gerard Papers DDGe 882.

² 28 Geo. II. cap. VIII.

³ Will of Nicholas Ashton, of Parr, yeoman, proved Chester 9 May, 1729. He married “ Margaret, daughter of James Orrell of Ashton,” according to the family pedigree, but as his will mentions his brother-in-law “ Humphrey Orrell of Parr ” it is obviously the Blackbrook (Parr) family of that name. They were large farmers or small squires, possessed coal mines by 1750, and regarded themselves as gentry, and as protectors of the local Catholic community. We are indebted to Mr. N. C. E. Ashton of Kensington for use of the family pedigree compiled by Richmond Herald in 1787 and for access to a collection of material on the family formed by the late J. W. Ashton.

⁴ Will proved at Chester 29 July, 1760.

⁵ Gomer Williams, *History of Liverpool Privateers* (1897). Appendix VI, 674.

⁶ Will of John Ashton.

acquired it at the time of its sale in 1746.¹ If we add to these varied interests the information that he was accused in 1757 of engrossing corn,² we have the picture of a man who rose to a position of eminence by shrewdly speculating in the numerous business ventures in which Liverpool was involved. The Sankey Brook Navigation was yet another of his successful speculations. He was its financier-in-chief, advancing close on £9,000 in all and holding 51 of the 120 shares.³ In the first eighty years the Navigation was to pay an average yearly dividend of 33 $\frac{1}{8}$ %.⁴

Henry Berry, who also hailed from Parr, was born in 1719 or 1720,⁵ and came of a dissenting family. His elder brother John was a trustee of the Independent Chapel in the 1720s⁶ and Henry Berry himself, described as "of Parr Batchellor," is mentioned in a trust deed of 1742.⁷ In the following year he acted as township surveyor for Parr and his name occurs frequently in the Parr township papers during the next four years.⁸ In 1747, however, he disappears from these local records and we next encounter the name in the Liverpool Town Books on 7 November, 1750 when, shortly after the death of Thomas Steers, the dock engineer Henry Berry, styled "late clerk to him", was instructed to "continue to oversee the works till further notice."⁹ By the following year, Steer's clerk was himself engineer at the Liverpool Docks.¹⁰

There can be no doubt that the man who at the age of thirty

¹ When these works were advertised for sale in *Adams Weekly Courant*, 9 December, 1746, it was stated that the premises were in the possession of a Mr. Ford. Further particulars were to be had from Jonathan Case at Wills Coffee House opposite Lincoln's Inn Gate, London, or from Richard Eccleston, attorney at law, Liverpool. The advertisement is quoted by the late Mr. A. C. Wardle in his paper, "Some Glimpses of Liverpool During the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.* 97. (1945), 150. For Jonathan Case's tenure see below p. 25.

² *Lpool. Chron.*, 18 Nov., 1757.

³ Will of John Ashton. £155 was paid up on each share. P.R.O., P.L.6. 84/3.

⁴ See below, p. 185.

⁵ When he died on 31 July, 1812, he was stated to have been "in the 93rd year of his age." Tombstone at St. Helens Congregational Church, cited in S. A. Harris, "Henry Berry (1720-1812): Liverpool's Second Dock Engineer," *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.*, 89 (1938), 107.

⁶ Trust deeds at St. Helens Congregational Church, 2 Feb., 1726, 22 March, 1728.

⁷ Trust deed at St. Helens Congregational Church, 10 Nov., 1742.

⁸ He was highway surveyor in 1743, overseer of the poor and constable in 1742. About this time, when not in office, he featured as an intermediary. He was paid for clothing for the poor on several occasions; it is just possible he kept a shop.

⁹ *Town Books*. 7 Nov., 1750, quoted in S. A. Harris, *op. cit.* 93.

¹⁰ *Town Books*. 3 July, 1751, quoted by S. A. Harris in an additional note to the above paper, *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.*, 90 (1939), 197.

was entrusted with the responsibility for the completion of Liverpool's second dock was the same person who, only a few years before, was repairing the lanes of Parr.¹ When new trustees were appointed at the Independent Chapel at St. Helens in 1753, Berry was described as "late of Parr and now of Liverpool, yeoman"² and in 1756 in a deed relating to Parr, he was styled "of Liverpool, Engineer."³ Many years later when he died in Liverpool at the great age of 92, his body was carried, at his own request, to the Independent Chapel of St. Helens to be buried, "not in the Chapel, where my parents are buried, but in the Chapel Yard."⁴

Unfortunately we do not know whether the ratepayers of Parr made such constant use of Berry because he had already served his apprenticeship as a millwright or in some other trade where he could acquire engineering skill, or whether they were merely taking advantage of an able young man who revealed a natural bent for that kind of work. There can be no dispute, however, that once he came under the tuition of Thomas Steers at Liverpool, he received the finest instruction from one of the few experienced dock engineers of the day. The suggestion has been made that Steers had been George Sorocold's chief assistant in the construction of the famous Rotherhithe Dock in 1700.⁵ Liverpool Corporation was certainly advised by Sorocold before embarking on its first dock,⁶ and that may explain how Steers was sent up from London in 1708 to undertake the task.⁷ By the late 1740s, when Berry came into contact with him, Steers had a long line of engineering successes to his credit and a full lifetime of valuable experience. On several occasions he had turned his attention to inland navigation. He had been connected with the Mersey-Irwell, Weaver, and Douglas schemes and, between 1736 and 1741, was Adviser to the Newry Navigation Commission.⁸ Young Henry Berry was, therefore, in a position to learn at first hand all the theoretical principles and practical methods of waterway construction.

¹ The Parr Township Papers (Surveyors) St. H. Ref. Lib. include the following entries written by Berry in 1743 :

July 11	For myself a day laying a plat in the cartway of old Simcock's	0	0	5
12	For myself letting of water	0	0	10
Aug. 5	Paid John Berry for 2 Load of Stones	0	2	0

² Trust deed at St. Helens Congregational Church, 11 Dec., 1753.

³ St. H. Town Hall. Indenture dated 7 October, 1756.

⁴ Second codicil to will of Henry Berry dated 4 June, 1808. Will proved at Chester 5 Aug., 1812.

⁵ H. Peet, "Thomas Steers, The Engineer of Liverpool's First Dock, A Memoir," *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.*, 82 (1930), 170.

⁶ *Norris Papers*, 165.

⁷ Peet, *op. cit.*, 170.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 183-4.

It was not surprising that Liverpool Common Council, having decided to explore the possibility of making a navigable waterway up to the coalfield, should turn to their able young dock engineer who had just proved his worth by completing the Salthouse Dock. He also had an additional recommendation: an intimate knowledge of the upper reaches of the Sankey Brook, where he had spent his childhood. This resourceful and well-informed servant of the Council was an obvious choice for the preliminary survey¹ and, when Parliamentary permission had been obtained, the Council resolved

“That liberty be given to Mr. Berry for Two Days a Week to Attend the making Sankey Brooke Navigable—he providing and paying a skilfull person to superintend the works of the docks in his absence—to be approved by the Council.”²

It was generally believed at the outset that the Council's order and the Act of Parliament would be adhered to and that the project was to be yet another river improvement scheme—dredging and widening the stream, making cuts to eliminate awkward bends and erecting locks to maintain the water level—on the same lines as the Mersey-Irwell, Douglas, and Weaver Navigations in which Liverpool had been interested. The Sankey Brook had already been made navigable from its mouth up to Sankey Bridges where it ran under the Warrington-Prescot road³ and it was assumed that this improvement of the existing channel would be continued northwards until the coalfield was reached.

But the Sankey was only a brook. It was narrow and in wet weather overflowed its banks.⁴ Such a small and unreliable stream was quite unsuitable for vessels and Berry was aware of this. But he also knew that, were he to come out into the open and suggest that the entire waterway be made a “cut”—or a canal, as we should call it—he would risk a complete and overwhelming defeat in Parliament. Only a few months before, in March, 1754, a Bill to make such a navigable channel from Salford to Leigh and Wigan had been thrown out by the Commons.⁵ Berry's predicament

¹ He undertook the survey in company with William Taylor during the summer of 1754.

² *Town Books*, 7 May, 1755. Berry was paid 16s. 6d. per day for this work. T. S. Willan, *The Navigation of the River Weaver in the Eighteenth Century*, Chet. Soc., 3rd Ser., III (1951), 57. The proprietors presented him with a silver cup on its completion. Will of Henry Berry.

³ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour from Downing to Alston Moor* (1801), 17. The will of John Woodcock of Warrington, merchant, dated 15 June, 1745, proved at Chester, 25 May, 1751, mentions “my share in the Navigation at Sankey Bridges”.

⁴ E. A. Pratt, *A History of Inland Transport and Communication in England* (1912), 166.

⁵ *C.J.*, 26, 944, 968-9, 972-3, 977 ; 4, 25, 28 Feb., 5 Mar. 1754.

is ably summarised by the well-informed writer who was later called upon to compose his obituary notice :—

“after an attentive survey he [Berry] found the measure [making the Brook navigable] impracticable and, knowing that the object they had in view could be answered by a canal, he communicated his sentiments to one of the proprietors who, approving the plan, the work was commenced on 5 September, 1755, but the project was carefully concealed from the other proprietors, it being apprehended that so novel an undertaking would have met with their opposition”.¹

The proprietor in question was almost certainly John Ashton, by far the largest single shareholder.

The extremely sketchy information relating to the actual construction of the Canal and the manner in which Berry used the Sankey Brook merely as a source of water supply and a means of overflow for his ten-mile cut, have been outlined elsewhere and need not detain us here.² The Canal joined the navigable portion of the Brook by a lock at Sankey Bridges and from this junction the waterway was gradually raised 80 feet by eight further locks to the point in Parr township where it forked into two arms, the northern branch continuing towards Penny Bridge at Blackbrook and the westerly branch towards Gerard's Bridge. A plan of 1763, based upon an earlier survey, shows that the Canal had been completed as far as Gerard's Bridge by the spring of 1759, at which date the northerly arm was half-finished.³ The new waterway had been open to traffic along two-thirds of its length eighteen months before this : on 4 November, 1757, the *Liverpool Chronicle* carried the advertisement that “Sankey Brook Navigation is now open for the passage of flats to the Haydock and Par collierys.” The Sankey Canal, opened almost four years before Brindley's much publicized waterway from Worsley to Manchester, ushered in the Canal Age.⁴

¹ *Lpool Merc.* 7 Aug. 1812.

² T. C. Barker, “The Sankey Navigation : The First Lancashire Canal,” *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.*, 100, 139-143.

³ “A Plan of the Sankey Navigation From the River Mersey into the Townships of Parr and Windle in the County of Lancaster. Survey in April and May 1759 by John Eyes and Thomas Gaskell and Plan by John Eyes in July, 1763,” at the Estate Manager's Office, Euston Station, London. The northerly arm does not appear to have been completed until about 1770. Evidence was given to a parliamentary committee in 1829 that “In 1769 an application was made by Mr. Legh of Lyme for a Canal to be cut up towards La Fog [Laffak] Colliery . . . which was executed very shortly afterwards.” (Quoted by L. W. Evans in evidence on the St. Helens Railway (Transfer) Bill 1864). The southern spur into Sutton was completed about the same time. See below, p. 44.

⁴ For similarities between the Sankey and Bridgewater Canals and the suggestion that Brindley may have been aware of Berry's work twelve miles away, see Barker, *op. cit.*, 152-3.

The opening of the Canal had an illuminating sequel. Throughout the growing fuel crisis, in all its official pronouncements Liverpool had emphasised the sufferings of the townspeople rather than the industrial shortages which had undoubtedly occurred. The shortage of coal in the domestic grate was, no doubt, calculated to win the most widespread public sympathy. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the inhabitants' claims were being pressed by members of the Council, prominent merchants and industrialists who had their own business reasons for wanting a more plentiful and cheaper supply of coal. John Ashton and John Blackburne, who always featured as the chief promoters of the Canal, were the leading salt refiners on the Mersey, the former at Dungeon, the latter in Liverpool itself. By this time back-cargoes of salt had become an integral part of the commercial life of Merseyside in which almost every merchant was interested in one way or another.

From the point of view of this all-pervasive salt interest, the Sankey Canal was the logical conclusion to the Weaver Navigation, for it secured access to the coal just as the Weaver Navigation had opened a route for the carriage of salt. The two waterways were complementary. It was obviously the intention of the promoters of the Sankey scheme that the same flats should sail¹ up to St. Helens for a cargo of coal which they would then ship across to Northwich, returning to Liverpool laden with salt. As soon as the Canal was ready to be opened in the autumn of 1757, Liverpool Corporation, having received a petition from several merchants of the port "complaining of the ill management of the navigation of the river Weaver," offered to "bear the expenses of any gentleman who shall take the trouble to go and order a survey of the said river and to meet any gentleman concerned in the said navigation, in order to have the inconvenience and mismanagement of the said river redressed."² This was the signal for the beginning of protracted negotiations in which the Liverpool men brought extreme pressure to bear on the trustees of the Weaver to improve the river, enlarge the locks (and so make the Navigation a five-foot waterway, as was the Sankey Canal)³ and accept receipts given on the Sankey as valid statements of cargo.⁴ The Liverpool men gained their objectives and the improvements and alterations in the Weaver were effected by the early 1760s.⁵ At the outset they

¹ The Canal was navigated by barges fitted with sails. For this reason swivel bridges were used.

² J. A. Picton, *City of Liverpool Municipal Archives and Records* (1886), II, 145-6, quoted in Willan, *op. cit.*, 49.

³ Willan, *op. cit.*, 54.

⁴ The negotiations are fully treated in Willan, *op. cit.*, caps. IV & V.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

even had Henry Berry (whom a Cheshire gentleman referred to as their agent)¹ in charge of the work. But the assignment was to prove his undoing as a canal engineer. In March, 1759, while he was building a new lock, weir and cut at Pickering, a "fresh" coming suddenly in the river breached the banks of a temporary channel which he had dug to take off the water while he was constructing the cut.² Shortly afterwards the weir was "intirely washed away" and the Commissioners thought it "imprudent to employ him any longer."³

It would appear that Berry, outstandingly successful though he was in harnessing the stream of a mere brook, was unable to manage the more variable currents of a river. But it must not be forgotten that he was looked upon as the agent of the pushing Liverpool men in the land of the more leisurely Cheshire gentlemen who showed an intense dislike to the changes being imposed upon them. It is certain that the people of Cheshire would be only too glad to make the most of every imperfection, however small, in order to discredit this symbol of foreign dictation. And it may be significant that, in the midst of these trials, Berry lost his staunchest and most influential supporter. John Ashton died in August, 1759.⁴

There can be little doubt that the events of 1759, whether entirely Berry's fault or not, explain his eclipse as a canal builder. When in 1762 the Sankey Canal was extended from Sankey Bridges to Fidler's Ferry in order to cut out the winding mile and a quarter of original waterway down to the Mersey, Berry was not placed in charge.⁵ By that time James Brindley had already caught the public imagination and Berry returned to his important work at the Liverpool docks, the forgotten pioneer.⁶

By the beginning of the 1760s the salt interest had instituted an internal triangular trade between Liverpool, the St. Helens coalfield and the Cheshire saltfield. In one respect in particular—the provision of a valuable back-cargo—this was as crucial to the

¹ Sir Peter Warburton to John Stafford, *ibid.*, 186.

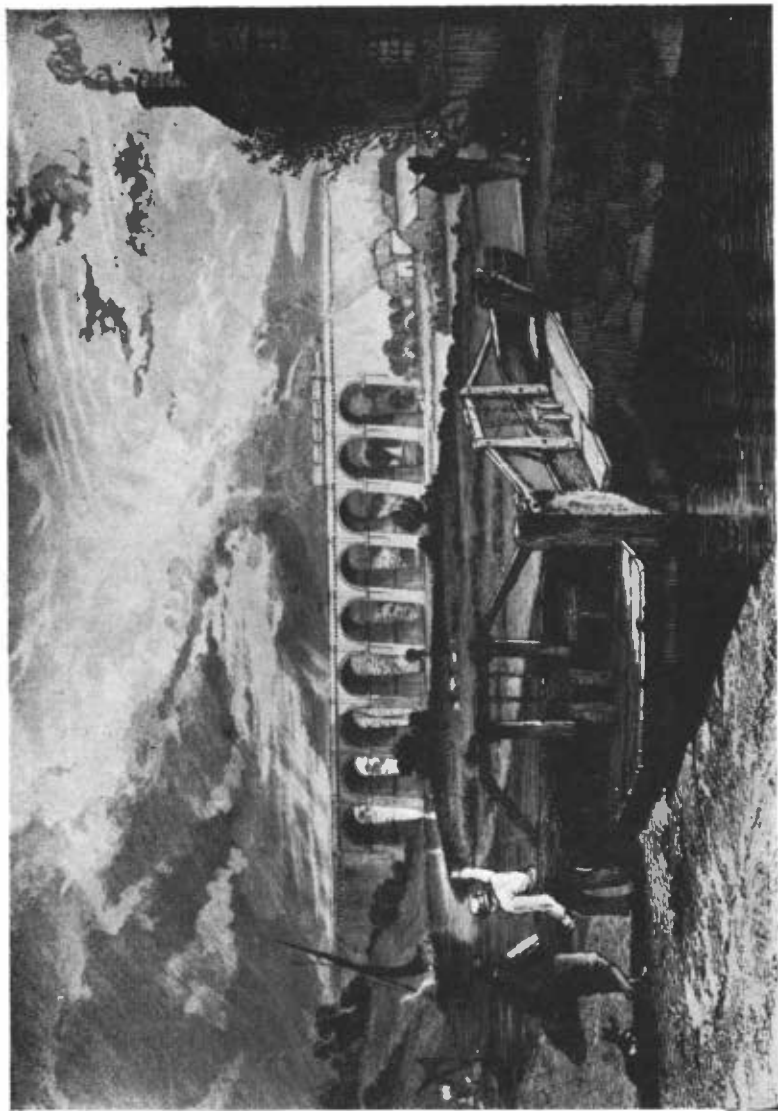
² *Ibid.*, 58-9. In a letter to Sir Peter Warburton, written on 13 March, immediately after the accident had occurred, Berry protested that "the breach is not as bad as was represented to you. If the weather hold good, I think we can make it good in about three or four days time." *Ibid.*, 166.

³ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴ *Williamson's Lpool Ad.* and the *Lpool Chron.* noticed his death, in the briefest of obituaries, on 10 Aug., 1759.

⁵ Barker, *op. cit.*, 143.

⁶ Berry, however, was not so discredited that his opinion as an engineer could not be sought on important projects. He achieved some prominence in the mid-1780s in connection with the first proposal to bridge the Menai Strait and his favourite device of the swivel-bridge was one of the most debated features of this project. U.C.N.W. Bangor. Plasnewydd Colln. Bundle of uncatalogued papers, 1785-6. *Gore's Gen. Ad.*, 14 July, 1785.



THE SANKEY VIADUCT AND NEWTON COMMON LOCK

Reproduced from I. Shaw's *Views of the Most Interesting Scenery on the Line of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway*, Liverpool 1831



[Photo : R. K. Robertson]

The Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

SARAH CLAYTON (1712-1779)

port's growing prosperity as was that other, better-known triangular trade to Africa and the West Indies in which Liverpool vessels were engaged. The Weaver Navigation had, in effect, taken the Mersey traffic up to the Cheshire wiches and the Sankey Canal brought it into the St. Helens district. The Canal was an extension of the Mersey and its northern terminus became an extension of Merseyside.

For the next seventy-five years the economic life of the St. Helens district was dominated by this waterway, and in relation to most of the chief developments its significance will scarcely need stressing. One interesting example of its influence is, however, worth noting. Advertisements in the Liverpool papers when land, coal rights, or works sites were to be sold almost invariably mentioned the distance from the canal. "The Sankey Canal flows through the estate" appears to have been the highest commendation possible. Even property at Rainford, a good four miles from the waterway's extremity, seems to have appreciated because of its construction. Colliery expansion was largely governed by proximity to the Canal; every hundred yards of distance from its banks diminished the value of a mine and every mile further north on the canal itself meant that flats would prefer to load coals lower down; even the increased use of the waggon-way never seems to have offset the disadvantage of distance from the banks. For St. Helens and its industries this was indeed the Canal Age.

CHAPTER III

THE EARLY COAL MAGNATES: THE CASES OF HUYTON AND SARAH CLAYTON OF LIVERPOOL, 1757-1762

IN the early eighteenth century the most important coalowners on the western side of the St. Helens-Prescot coalfield were the Cases of Redhasles. They held the manor of Huyton and, by intermarriage with the Ogles of Whiston, they had come into possession of that manor and its important coal measures.¹ In 1701 a Jonathan Case figured prominently in a petition of rock salt proprietors interested in the Cheshire trade,² and in 1714 he was partner in a Huyton colliery supplying the great salt proprietors Sir Thomas Johnson and John Blackburne. Significantly, as will appear, there were also among the colliery's customers a Mr. Clayton and other owners of the ship called the "Clayton Galley".³

As early as 1719 the diarist Nicholas Blundell recorded that the Cases had a remarkable new pumping engine near Prescot :

" I went to Mr. Case his, but he was not at home so I smoaked a Pipe with his Son Henry and then went to ye New Engin as is to draw up water from one of ye Cole-pits, thence I went to ye New Glass-hous, Mr. Case came past whilst I was there so I followed him to his Hous where I stayed awhile and desired him to be one of my Executors."⁴

An abstract of title to the Case property shows that the engine was in fact a " fire engine " or Newcomen steam engine. The permission to erect it together with the expense of erection had cost Jonathan Case's son Thomas at least £1,500.⁵ Since the first Newcomen engine was only erected in 1712, the one owned by the

¹ L.R.O., Cross Papers, Abstract of Title of Henry Case : Lease from Cuthbert Ogle of Whiston, Esq., to Jonathan Case of Redhasles in Huyton, Esq., 1701. Matthew Gregson. *Portfolio of Fragments*. (Manchester, 1869) 176.

² C.J. 13, 6 June, 1701.

³ P.R.O., P.L. 6. 56/49.

⁴ *Diary of Nicholas Blundell of Crosby*. Ed. Rev. T. E. Gibson. (Lpool, 1895) 154.

⁵ L.R.O., Cross Papers, Abstract of Title of Henry Case, quoting will of Jonathan Case, 1721. For this and other local Newcomen engines see J. R. Harris, " The Early Steam-Engine on Merseyside." *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.* 106, 109-16.

Cases must be among the earliest, and may be claimed as the first Lancashire steam engine.¹

The capital outlay involved in running the collieries became increasingly heavy, and must have come near to ruining the family. In 1731, two years after his father's death, Thomas Case already owed £1,000 to Elizabeth Clayton, the widow of his former customer, and borrowed a further £1,500. Ten years later the debt to Elizabeth Clayton was "£690 and no more," but Case owed her daughter Sarah £940. Lands in Whiston had been mortgaged to a celebrated capitalist, Nicholas Fazackerly of Lincoln's Inn, for £1,500; by the transfer of one of the debts formerly owed to Elizabeth Clayton a lesser lawyer-financier, Thomas Barron of Prescott, was involved. In 1744 the creditors set up a trust for administering the Case property, one of the administrators being Sarah Clayton. These trustees strictly limited the income which Thomas Case and his son Jonathan were to receive from the estates and mines, provided for the discharge of some of the mortgages, and sold off property in Prescott, Whiston, Huyton and Hale, including the "Salt Works in Hale," the well-sited and very important Dungeon Works.² As already shown, the acquisition of this works by John Ashton had a bearing on the building of the Sankey Canal.

Sarah Clayton was to be of the greatest importance in the creating of the St. Helens coalfield, and her mining concerns become at this point integral to the narrative. Her father, William Clayton, was descended through the Claytons of Fullwood from the Claytons of Clayton Hall, near Manchester. During the reigns of William and Mary and of Anne he was one of the greatest Liverpool merchants; Mayor of Liverpool in 1689, he represented the port in six Parliaments from 1698 to 1713.³ A few years before his death he purchased the manor of Parr, formerly owned by the Byroms, who were going rapidly downhill at this period. Several mentions of lunacy in the family are recorded and Samuel Byrom, the last of the line, died in York Castle in 1741.⁴ Long before this the Claytons had taken their

¹ For the early history of the Newcomen engine and its exploitation by a company of proprietors under the Savery patent see H. W. Dickinson, *A Short History of the Steam Engine* (1938), Chaps. I-IV; and a document published in "The First Steam Engines on the Durham Coalfield" by Prof. E. Hughes. *Archaeologia Aeliana* (1949) 41-3.

² L.R.O., Cross Papers, Abstract Title of Henry Case : Agreement of 15 and 16 March, 1744.

³ S. A. Harris, "Sarah Clayton's Letter and John Wood of Bath." *Trans. L. & C. Hist. Soc.* 100, 55-8.

⁴ James Byrom was mentioned as being mad when owning the manor in 1655. Roger Lowe the diarist also records : "14 March, 1665. Henry Houghton came to me and William and had me to go with them to Parr Hall to seale lease to Mr. Byrom. He seald it, and Mr. Edward Byrom and his two Brothers that were destrected went and brought us to an Ale

place in the manor; the Hall was in their hands in 1713, and the demesne coal mine in the next year.¹ The following year William Clayton died, and the manor passed to his widow, Elizabeth, who long outlived him. On her death in 1745 the manor descended to her daughter Sarah.

Sarah Clayton seems to have lived with considerable ostentation. From 1752 she began to lay out the Liverpool square still bearing her name, now in the centre of the city, but then in a field of the suburbs, and she herself occupied the largest house.² In the early 1750s she was one of the four people in Liverpool owning their own coach,³ and her frequent residence at Bath enabled her to meet John Wood the architect and advocate his employment in the design of Liverpool's new Exchange.⁴ Few charitable causes seem to have been advanced in her native town without her support. Both the Clayton ladies were rather particular in their choice of title, for Elizabeth Clayton, at least during her widowhood, was called "Madame Clayton," while Sarah was referred to as "Mistress Clayton," which explains why, though unmarried, she is always "Mrs. Clayton." She appears to have rejected the title of "Miss" which was becoming the rule.

The Claytons were not merely bound to the Cases by financial ties, for Sarah's sister Margaret had married Thomas Case in 1721; it was in fact to his mother-in-law and sister-in-law that his chief debts were owed.⁵ From this it followed that the change

house, where we sat drinking a good while." *The Diary of Roger Lowe of Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire, 1663-74*. Ed. William L. Sachse, (1938), 81. See also Administration of Samuel Byrom, Wills at L.R.O. 22 Oct. 1741. Two creditors were administrators, one of whom was an innkeeper, the bond taken out being for only £80.

¹ St. H. Ref. Lib. Parr Township Papers. Land Tax Returns. Only a few of this period are preserved; returns for the County are not available before 1781.

² S. A. Harris, *op. cit.*, 56.

³ J. A. Pictou, *Memorials of Liverpool, Historical and Topographical*. (Lpool, 1903), I, 182.

⁴ S. A. Harris, *op. cit.*, 58-62.

⁵ L.R.O., Cross Papers, Abstract of Title of Henry Case. Marriage settlement of 5 & 6 March, 1721. While dealing with the Clayton family, it may be remarked that Elizabeth Clayton's tomb in St. Nicholas' Church was one of the sights of Liverpool in the late eighteenth century. A photograph of the monument is frontispiece to H. Peet, *Liverpool in the Reign of Queen Anne*, (1908). Her epitaph and that of her daughter Sarah may be of interest:

"Near this Place lieth deposited the Mortal part of Elizabeth, Daughter of George Leigh of Oughtrington in the County of Chester, and Relict of William Clayton of Liverpool, Esqrs. to whom She was Married the 7th of August 1690, and had Issue 2 Sons and 7 Daughters, viz. Eleanor married to Mr Richard Houghton of this Place Merchant; Anne Married to Banastre Parker of Cuerden in the County of Lancaster Esqre.; Margaret, Married to Thomas Case of Red-Hasles in the same

in the control of the coal supply to the Cheshire saltfield and to Liverpool which was a consequence of the building of the Sankey Canal was not so great as might have been expected. There was of course a strong shift in the balance of the trade from one end of the local coalfield to the other. Huyton, Prescott and Whiston became relatively less important than Sutton, Eccleston, Parr, Garswood and Haydock. As far as the capitalists were concerned, however, the effect was largely to take some of the trade from the Cases and place it in the hands of Sarah Clayton, for Parr was the first mining township to be reached by the canal and for many years remained the most important. Indeed the process can be regarded from Sarah Clayton's point of view simply as an extension of an existing interest in the coal trade, a change from financing other colliery venturers to operating her own mines. The fact that the prices of coal on the new canal did not long remain as low as the citizens of Liverpool desired and considered feasible may well have been due to Sarah Clayton's wish to safeguard her allies and relatives in Huyton, for even after her direct participation in the trade the Cases remained of importance. After the death of Thomas Case his eldest son Jonathan began to extend his interests eastwards towards the St. Helens district, whilst his younger son Thomas, a great Africa and West India trader, many years later became associated with Sarah Clayton's mines. In a way the extension of the Clayton-Case control of the coalfield may be likened to a military pincer-movement, Jonathan Case's attack being on the line of the turnpike, Sarah Clayton's on that of the canal.

As soon as the canal reached the Parr collieries Sarah Clayton and her agents were in evidence.

"The Collieries belonging to Mrs. Clayton in Parr, adjoining to Sankey Brook Navigation, are opened; where there are two Delfs already worked, and a Quantity of each Delf got ready for Sale.

Mrs. Clayton proposes to put the new raised Coal on board the Flats in the Navigation at Four Shillings and Twopence a Ton. The Waggon Road and other conveniencies are fixed in such a manner that Flatts may be loaden in a few hours.

Orders will be received, and punctually obeyed, on these Terms

County, Esq. and Sarah Clayton, by whom this Monument was erected to her Memory : the Rest died Young. She died after a Life well spent in her Duty to God, and the care of her Family in the 78th Year of her Age, A.D. 1745."

The length of Sarah Clayton's epitaph to her mother is in ironic contrast to her own, when the family star had set.

"Mrs. Sarah Clayton exchanged this life for a better May the 1st, 1779, Aged 67, and was interred in the vault with the Remains of her late Father William Clayton, Esqe, many years Representative in Parliament for this Borough".

by Richard Sherrat, at Parr Collieries aforesaid, or Alexander Tarbuck at Mrs. Clayton's in Liverpool.

N.B.—A Quantity of Coals, that was raised last Winter in the first entrance into these works, will be sold something under the above Price."¹

This advertisement was to appear at frequent intervals for over two years.

In the February of 1759 Sarah Clayton stated her prices for delivery at Liverpool ; coals would be supplied to ships at 7s. for 30 bushels, about a ton in weight, and to householders at 7s. 6d. per ton.² Comparing this with the prices at the pit-head or wharf, as quoted previously, it is obvious that even accounting for the 10d. per ton toll on coal on the Navigation there was plenty of room for profit between 7s. or 7s. 6d. and 4s. 2d.

As the 'sixties opened the Clayton interest and the Canal interest were a little on the defensive, and a note of explanation and reassurance crept into their insertions in the Liverpool papers.

" At a General Annual Assembly of the Proprietors of the Sankey Brook Navigation, 30th April, 1761. It being represented in this Assembly, that the toll or duty of 10d. per Ton on Charcoal, Coal and Cinders, is too great a Duty, and more than those commodities will well bear : it is therefore ordered That for the encouragement of Persons to convey these Commodities down the Navigation, the Collector of the Tolls and Duties shall, for the future, . . . take no greater Duty than the Sum of Seven-pence . . ."³

The day of graceful gestures was not over. The very next issue of the paper carried this insertion :

" Whereas there has been a kind of Smiths Coals carried down the Sankey Navigation and sold in Liverpool for Winstanly Coals, tho' much inferior in Quality ; these are therefore to acquaint the public, that there is now in carting, down to the Sankey Navigation, a Quantity of the right Winstanley Coals as good in Quality as any that was ever yet there raised and intended for Sale. Who ever wants any of the said coals, may depend upon being well used upon reasonable terms, by applying to John Foster, Blockmaker in King Street, Liverpool ; Alexander Tarbuck at Parr Colliery, or Thomas Farnworth, agent to the said Winstanley Colliery . . ."⁴

¹ *Williamson's Lpool. Ad.* 16 Dec., 1757.

² *Ibid.* 16 Feb., 1759. The Sankey Canal Act was not only concerned with the construction of the waterway, but with the establishing of a correct and fair measure of the coal which was to be supplied by it. A standard bushel was specified, which would contain a bushel and a quart of water, Winchester measure. Thirty such bushels made about one ton.

³ *Williamson's Lpool. Ad.*, 1 May, 1761.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 May, 1761.

The Parr Colliery must be that of Sarah Clayton, for Alexander Tarbuck was her agent. Another six months passed and reform was again in the air.

“Whereas it has been represented to the Proprietors of Sankey Navigation that some of the Sellers of Coal which are brought down the said Navigation and sold at Liverpool, do frequently give short measure, by not filling the Tubs even with the Top or brim to the great Detriment of the Inhabitants of the said Town . . .” [the Proprietors are printing those clauses of the Act of 1755 which legislate against short measure, and the penalty of £50 wherever recovered will be given half to the informer and half to the poor].¹

This would seem admirable on the part of the Proprietors, did not the notice have very much the air of what contemporaries termed a “puff.” Obviously the coalmasters and canal proprietors felt that there was a great need to conciliate public opinion.

Strong light is thrown on their apprehensions by a letter which appeared in the Liverpool press only a month later. After referring to the coal dealers as “Coal Jews” and comparing them to the corn monopolists of the famine year of 1757, the writer went on to give the reasons for shortage and high prices.

“It is not long since we were dependent on Prescott and places adjoining for our Coal, which we looked on as a very great Grievance ; And in Order to remedy the Evil petitioned for an Act of Parliament, to get a navigation opened from Sankey Brook into the River Mersey; which was granted, suffered, and looked upon, by everybody, to be for the Good of the Town, by reducing the Price of Coal ; but instead of reducing the Price or increasing the Quantity, they have lessened² the one, and consequently raised the other. The Country Carters, at the opening of the new Navigation, found there would not be the Demand for Coal that there formerly had been ; therefore, as their Livelihood chiefly depended on that of leading Coal, they were obliged to convert their Carts to other Uses, which discouraged the Proprietors from raising the Quantities they had done. The Engrossers of the Navigation Coal, finding that the Town was likely to be distressed (which

¹ *Ibid.*, 8 Jan., 1762.

² It is difficult to believe that, however monopolistic the canal proprietors and coal-masters may have been, the building of the canal actually resulted in *less* coal arriving in Liverpool than in the previous period when only land-sale coal was available. The position was doubtless that the town was growing so rapidly and industrial use extending so quickly that the newly increased supplies were swiftly absorbed, leaving the householder as badly off as before.

they certainly are at present, especially the Poor, who are not able to buy above a Load, or what is called a Ton at a time) takes all means they possibly can to distress the Inhabitants. They began the sales at Seven Shillings per Ton, and in the space of Four Years . . . has got them to Eight Shillings and Sixpence ; nay I may safely say, any Price they please to demand for there is none to be sold to the Poor ; Therefore how dangerous . . . is the consequences.¹

I observe . . . a Part of the aforementioned Act, printed in this Paper of the 29th ult., quoted I suppose to skreen the Proprietors, and throw the Culpableness on the Persons employed by them ; or rather to clear them all from, I believe, a just Imputation of retailing out bad measure . . .”²

This letter is a perfectly good explanation of the conciliatory attitude recently shown by the Sankey Canal party. It must be borne in mind that we have here a Liverpool newspaper, owned by a mercantile family, the Williamsons, attacking—or allowing others to attack—the most powerful group in commercial Liverpool, a very dangerous set of people to quarrel with. There can be no doubt that for the letter to appear at all the newspaper must have been sure that a strong public opinion was behind it, and the Sankey Canal proprietors and the coal owners seem to have thought the opposition dangerous enough to make some show of giving way.

¹ The writer may have had in mind the several food riots about Liverpool and Prescot in 1757.

² *Williamson's Lpool. Ad.*, 12 Feb., 1762.