

WEALD IRON RESEARCH GROUP

Winter 1973/4 scheme for revising information on water-powered sites included by E. Straker in Wealden Iron (1931).

The following points are designed to produce a rapid survey of these sites, many of which have not been visited in recent years. You will be aware that Straker's site-comments were unsystematic, and, beyond this, modern developments such as tree clearance or planting, bulldozing, or building, have made major changes.

Please ensure an adequate National Grid Reference.

1. Name of site. State if that used by Straker is in any way misleading.

ASH BURNHAM FURNACES.

W.I. ps. 364-72

2. National Grid Reference (2 letters, 6 figures).

T.Q 686171

3. Access. State problems of terrain or land-use. (If the name of owner and tenant is easily available, this could be useful.)

On private land. Public N. & S. fences very near.

4. Features on the ground.

Main Dam Length c. 75 yards

Height (estimate from both upstream and downstream sides if possible.)

Upstream 6½ feet

Down - 12 feet

Condition (i.e. gaps, erosion etc; are there any good cross-sections in bulldozed gaps? If so, do these show the construction materials used at different stages?)

Good. rivetted by masonry to half its height on downstream side. Towards S.E. end is a stone and brick tunnel or culvert through the bog, now blocked, giving out a wheel pit, still in fair condition. Near N.W. end is a declivity main sluice which takes the present stream + a fallen wooden gate lies in the stream bed. Further N.W. is a now dry leat, which led from the pond, under the bog in a culvert, and in a straight line to for c. 120 yards to the

Pen-ponds - is there any evidence for dams upstream from the main supply pond?

Yes. Probably 2

Mine pits - are there any close by?

The area below the dam

Clear indications of buildings, wheel-pits, sluices, etc.

Almost no sign ~~of~~ of anything immediately below the dam. In the 2nd. working area, 120 yards below the dam, beyond the causeway in the 2nd wheel pit fed by the last. Near the area signs of a circular level floor and 2 stone beams or worksheds now made into cottages.

see sketch plan

Surface irregularities

5. Slags and cinders. (Keep samples.)

- Blast furnace slags (glassy). How much?

What is the general colour range? (In particular are there significant quantities light in colour?)

As glassy slag in both working areas, average number are very high

- Forge cinders (generally rusty, bubbly, but varying widely in form.)
How much?

Are there many large cakes ("Furnace bottoms") over, say, 18"x 18"?

- Ore - any scatter?

- Purple shelly limestone - any?

Other surface finds (pottery, clay pipes, timbers, etc.) Note these
mud broken moulds (clay) in area below 2nd working
area, see sketch. Samples taken.

6. Are there any buildings, industrial, domestic or agricultural, apparently dating from the likely period of the site? Note briefly.

2 building (now made into cottages) in 2nd working area
also the Pany Cottage (see sketch + illustration)

7. Has the site been re-used (e.g. corn or fulling mill)?

No

8. Do you know of any published or unpublished excavation which may have taken place? Note details, in particular of the excavator and location of finds in the case of unpublished work.

Site now scheduled

9. Is the site apparently threatened in any way?

Scheduled but quite a lot of development
close around.

10. Do you know of any documentation missed by Straker? State details and whereabouts, if known.

11. Other comments.


See sketch plan.

BURIALS in the Parish of Ashburnham
in the County of Sussex in the Year 1813.

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
No. 1. William Jones	Ashburnham	March 3 ^d 1813	6 years	William Frivett Vicar
No. 2. The Right Honourable George Lord Viscount S. Asaph He died on Monday June the 7 th in London		June 15 th 1813	26	Wm Frivett Vicar
No. 3. Miles Stollery	Ashburnham	Nov. 20 th 1813	63	William Frivett Vicar
Sarah Elliot	Ashburnham	January 18 th	75	William Frivett Vicar

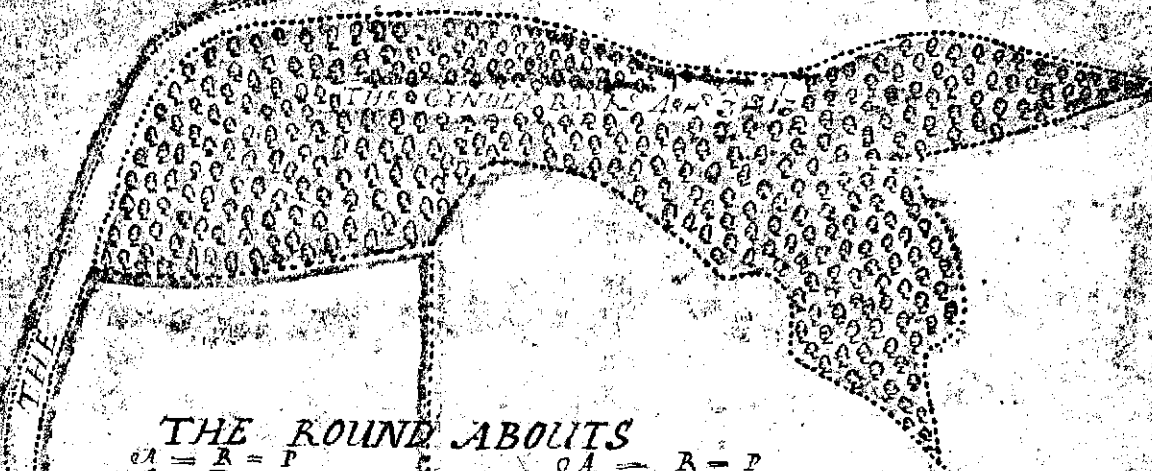
EAST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE

233 1/5/1

Reference 



FURNACE



THE ROUND ABOUTS
A = R = P
4 = 3 = 00
4 = 2 = 15

A = R = P
S = J = 4
C = 0 = 23

E ROUND ABOUTS
A = R = P
2 = 3 = 50
2 = 7 = 14



HILFREYSON VOCLD 18-13-2
9967711
8-92-11

SHELDON THE ONE

DATE 1707

Ye old Boering House.

TQ. 686. 164.

EAST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE
Reference ASH 4385

Affirmation for the confirmation of said lease granted bargain & sold unto
the said John doth grant bargain & sell unto the said William Roff his heirs &
affs all that part of land way or passage in Dallington aforesaid & all by right
of right of way had hath or claim'd in the said part of land way or passage
the said premises: it is now let out or appointed to be let out a high building
from the high way between Dallington & Althornham aforesaid through
lands in the occupation of Thomas Althornham or his affs with the said surveyor
called Dallington Surveyor & other of the premises mentioned as aforesaid to be
runneth. And also out of the said part of land way or passage as it is now used
through the lands of the said Thomas Roff in Dallington aforesaid with
land of the said Thomas lately acquired of the said Sir John Althornham together with
course the said way was designed) & high building from the way with land of
the said Dallington to Althornham & Dallington Surveyor aforesaid and also a var-
iegant way of passage as it is now let out in Althornham aforesaid leading
from the said course of way through the lands now or late of the said Sir John
Althornham now or late in the occupation of Richard Bray or his affs, and
the high way leading from Dallington to Althornham aforesaid. And
also out of other carrying way or passage as it is now let out in Althornham
aforesaid leading from the Mill bridge of Althornham through the lands now or
late of the said Sir John Althornham called Duchman farm & Halbooke now or
late in the occupation of Thomas Formingot & Richard Formingot & their
affs and also the said Sir John Althornham
the the said course aforesaid hath granted bargain & sold & by those
particulars doth grant bargain & sell unto the said William Roff his heirs
and affs all the words & conditions & covenants & covenants growing & being in and
about all the said premises before by those premises made to be
granted bargain & sold & in & upon any & every part or parts thereof
together with all the singular parts thereof waters rapids profits conditions
advantages & hereditaments & to the said premises before
mentioned to be granted or to any part or parts thereof in any way
belonging or appertaining or required to belong or appertain or heretofore
therewith used or occupied or enjoyed & also all the other parts right titles profits
conditions or possessions now or hereafter remaining in heritages & tenements & in
manors of the said the said premises before by those premises mentioned
to be granted unto the said William Roff his heirs & affs & of in & to
any & every part thereof. And the said Sir John Althornham for the
confirmation aforesaid hath granted bargain & sold & by those
doth grant bargain & sell unto the said William Roff his heirs &
affs all the singular those deeds & charters & writings & covenants
& covenants & conditions & covenants & covenants & covenants
containing any part or parts thereof by the said Sir John Althornham
or any other person or persons or by his or their hand or hands or by his or
their or any of them may lawfully go or come by without suits in the law, all with
out cost or charge & without any other charge or charge of all by those
deeds, & covenants, & charters & writings, & covenants, & covenants & covenants
of the said Sir John Althornham or any other person or persons or by his or
their hand or hands or by his or their or any of them may lawfully come by
without suits in the law as doth in and with those
manors the premises & any part thereof, the said Sir John Althornham
& covenants & covenants & covenants & covenants & covenants & covenants
of the said Sir John Althornham Roff his heirs and affs & of all
of the said day at the recording thereof. The said Sir John Althornham
for himself & his heirs doth & doth grant bargain & sell unto the said
William Roff his heirs & affs to hold unto the said William Roff
his heirs and affs within five months next after the date of those
particulars at the Manor house of Althornham aforesaid in the
County of Essex. To have & to hold the said William Roff

the King

Tel: 78555 Ext. ~~204~~ 655



Dept. Economic History,
The University,
Sheffield S10 2TN.

16. x. 72.

Find

For information — maybe you would like
to keep this in the file. I sent a brief note
to J. Load, also showing him Mr. Fairbrother's
letter. Stanlock's note is the result.

I have not replied to
Mr. Fairbrother — best to let it cool.

David

ack



EAST SUSSEX EDUCATION COMMITTEE

HAILSHAM SCHOOL
BATTLE ROAD
HAILSHAM
SUSSEX

Tel. Nos.

Hailsham 841468 & 841443

Headmaster,

J. G. Quinn

4.10. 72.

Dear, Mr. Crossley,

I am a member of the Wealden Iron Research Group and the head of History at our school. Being aware of your experience with early modern furnaces, I would like to keep you in touch with a development of our own and would be grateful for your comments and any sources of information you could put me in touch with.

The site we are interested in is the rain furnace plat at Ashburnham. This area has been bought by a Mr. Wallace, a trained Archeologist whose experience is mainly with Roman sites. He is, however, willing to initiate further investigation of the area. I have a school archeological Society and would be very happy for us to assist Mr. Wallace, certainly in the early clearing stages, and if possible in actual excavations.

As far as we are concerned, this would be a very long -term project of great Educational value. Obviously, you should know what is going on, if only to put a stop to anything you feel we should not be doing

Yours sincerely,

G.H. Farebrother,
(Head of History).

2x 387



Department of the Environment

Room Fortress House 23 Savile Row London W1X 2AA

Telephone 01-734 6010 ext

David Crossley Esq
Department of Economic History
The University
SHEFFIELD
Yorks.

Your reference

Our reference Sussex 387

Date 12 Oct. 72

Dwar Mr Crossley,

Jonathan Coad has shown me this letter you have had from the history master wanting to dig the Ashburnham furnace.

This site is already in the scheduling pipe-line but I will see that it is scheduled as soon as possible to stop any bad archaeology.

Yours sinverely,

David Sherlock.

D Sherlock,
Asst. Insp ector of Ancient Monuments.

1803

Baptized 1803.

- March 27th Grace, D. of Richard & Elizabeth Phillips. ~
- April 3^d Henry, S. of Henry & Mary Boney. —
- April 17th Harriet, D. of Thomas & Emory Church. —
- April 17th William, S. of Thomas & Eleanor Hobdy. —
- April 17th Elizabeth, D. of Elizabeth Harmon base born. —
- May 15th Elizabeth, D. of John & Mary Bost. —
- June 5th Mary - Maltman, D. of Walter & Elizabeth Maltman. —
- June 12th John, S. of Robert & Mary Isid. —
- July 2Ath
- August 7th Hannah, D. of Richard & Sarah Mitchell. —
- Sept. 11th Mary, D. of Alexander & Elizabeth Walter. —
- Oct. 16th William, S. of Thomas & Elizabeth Noaks. —
- Oct. 16th Mary, D. of George & Mary Isid. —
- Oct. 16th Charlotte, D. of Robert & Ann Pettet. —
- Oct. 16th George, S. of George & Sarah Heering. —
- Nov. 27th Thomas, S. of Thomas & Frances Poole. —
- Dec. 4th Rebecca, D. of Robert & Mary Roberts. —

1804

1804.

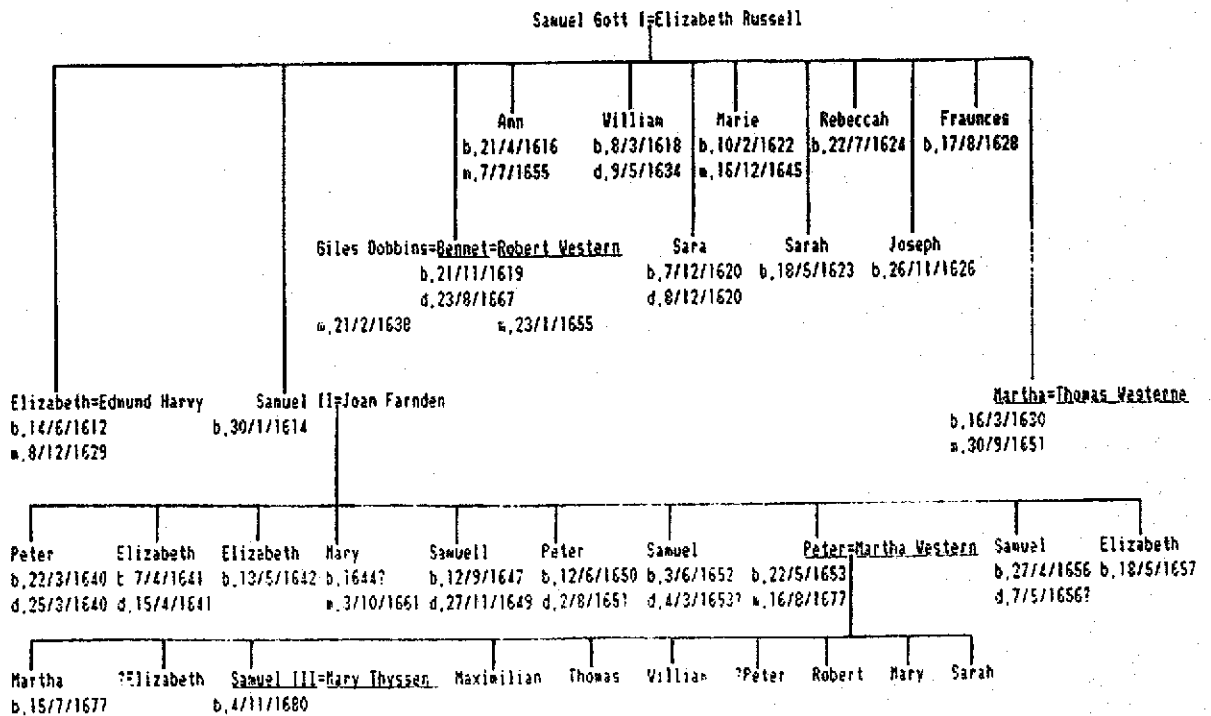
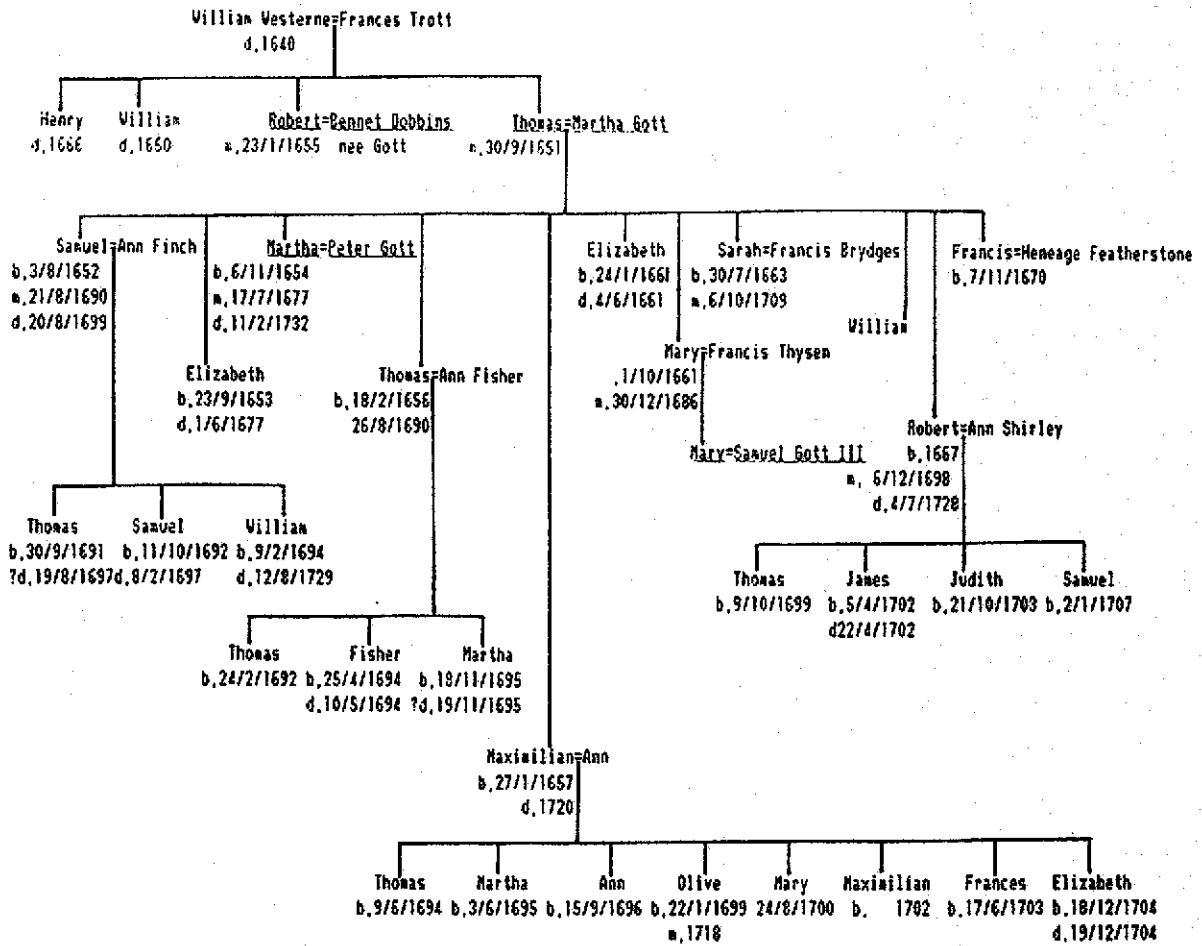
- January 29th
- April 1th Peter, S. of Peter & Elizabeth Pettet. —
- May 27th William, S. of Henry & Mary Sellows. —
- May 27th Mary, D. of Joseph & Sarah Bray. —
- July 8th Jesse, S. of John & Elizabeth Winchester. —
- August 3^d John, S. of Richard & Elizabeth Phillips. —
- August 19th Henry Isid, S. of Charity Collins. —
- August 19th Joseph, S. of Lucy Sargent. —
- August 19th Mary, Elizabeth, D. of Lucy Sargent & Debrah Pease. —

Reference
APR 233 1/13
ASHLE.

BURIALS in the Parish of Dallington
 in the County of Sussex in the Year 1883.

Name.	Abode.	When buried.	Age.	By whom the Ceremony was performed.
Sophia Messiter No. 745.	Dallington	August 5 th	55 Yrs	R. R. Tatham Vicar.
William Tobday No. 746.	Dallington	Aug 9 th	81 Yrs	J. Hayley Rector of Brightling
<i>E.H.R.T. August 5, 1886.</i> Richard Robert William Neot No. 747.	Asbwinham	Sept. 18 th	53 Yrs	E.H.R. Tatham Chaplain of B.N.C. Coon
James Russell No. 748.	Dallington	November 8 th	76 Yrs	R. R. Tatham Vicar.
Ellen White No. 749.	Dallington	November 20 th	47 Yrs	R. R. Tatham Vicar.
Moses Crouch No. 750.	Dallington	January 24 th 1884	56 Yrs	R. R. Tatham Vicar.
Ernest Winchester No. 751.	Dallington	March 8 th 1884	23 Yrs	R. R. Tatham Vicar.
Thomas Collins No. 752.	Dallington	May 9 th 1884	42 Yrs	R. R. Tatham Vicar.

Reference
 EAST SUSSEX RECORD OFFICE
 302 1/51



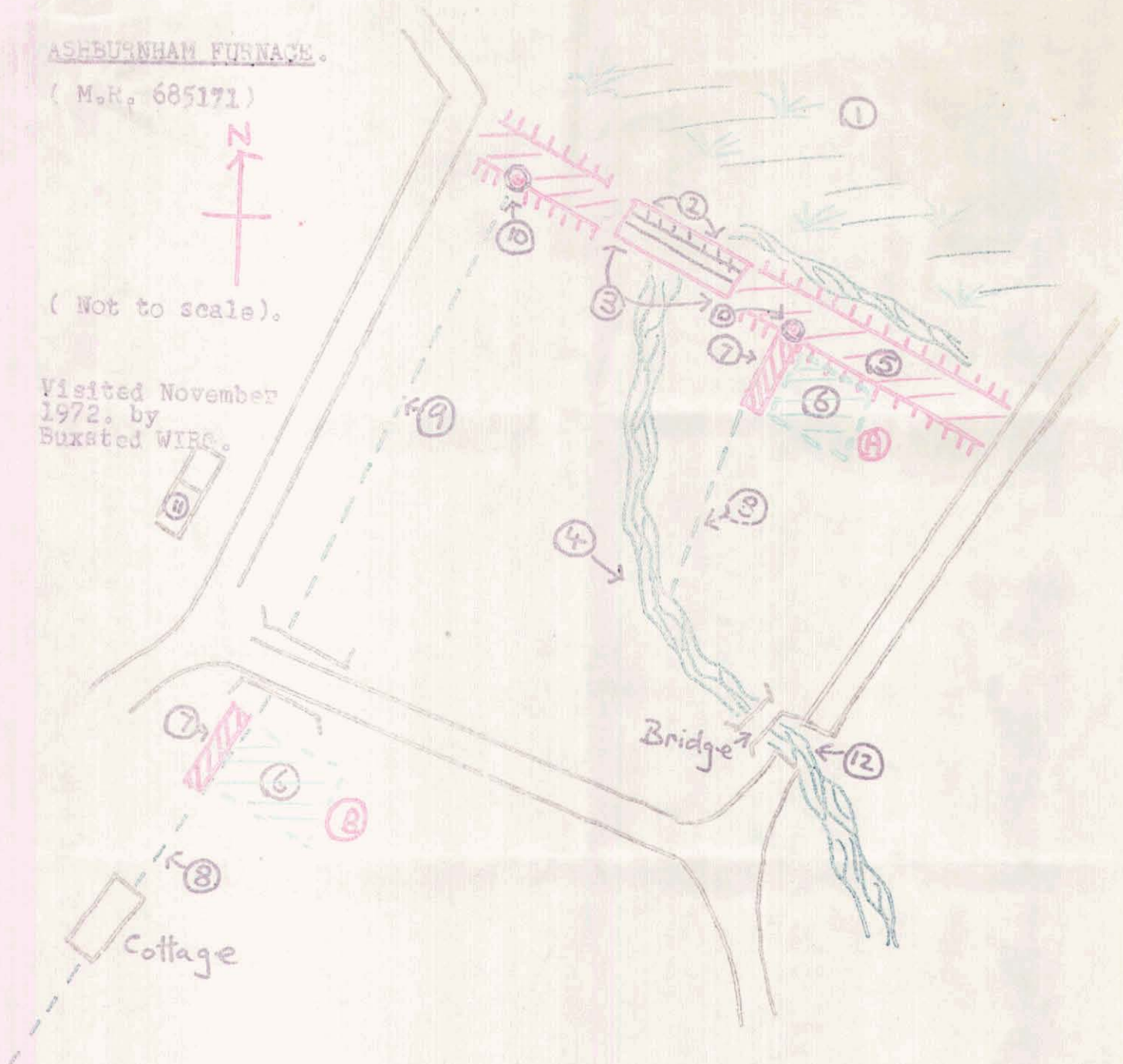
ASHBURNHAM FURNACE.

(M.R. 685171)



(Not to scale).

Visited November
1972. by
Buxsted WIRC.



- Key.
- 1. Pond
 - 2. Floodgates
 - 3. Weir
 - 4. Spillway
 - 5. Bay
 - 6. Piatts

- 7. Wheelpits
- 8. Tailraces
- 9. Headrace
- 10. Sluiceways
- 11. Payhouse.
- 12. Ford.

The pond is approximately 350 yards long. The floodgates have long since collapsed and the relics are visible at the top of the weir. As a result, the pond is now no more than a rather treacherous marsh. The weir itself is quite spectacular and consists of 3 steps about five feet high. The surrounding Masonry has partially collapsed and is now overgrown. This Masonry is of sandstone and extends into the Bay. The Bay itself is massive and obvious. It contains a large concentration of B.F. slag. The sluice-hole at the N.W. end of the dam is just visible under the roots of the tree. The other one is more clearly visible. No sluice holes are visible on the pond-side of

the bay. Both wheelpits are well-preserved with brick and masonry. The ford has been recently concrete^d over. In the spillway nearby are large pieces of furnace-bottom. The headrace is dry.

The payhouse is brick and tile-fronted, but there are signs of an older timber-framed building beneath the surface,

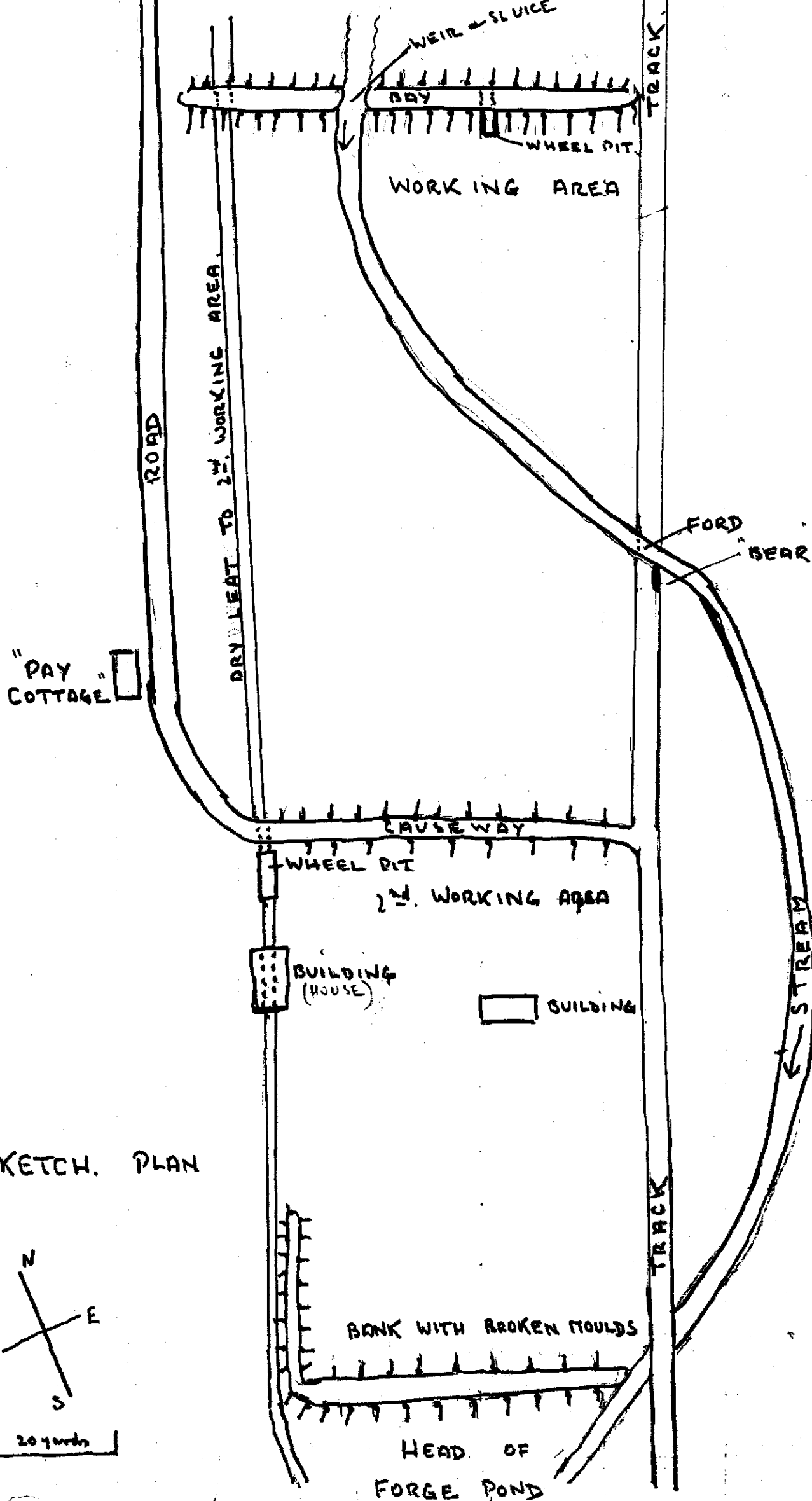
The platt-area at Ashows less-sign of surface B.F. slag and one have expected, from its position, that it was the primary furnace site. The platt at B, however, shows far more evidence of furnace work. The bridge-area had been well built-up and the Masonry embedded in it shows signs of burning. In the area, firebricks have been found. There is a great deal of scattered slag and odd pieces of cast-iron. Small fragments of mould, possible for cannon, have been found here as well.

A mile to the South, beyond a forge pond even larger than the furnace pond, is the forge. The garden, in which it is situated has black earth and large quantities of forge-cinder. The wheelpit is visible and the water is distinctly red, the more so on this occasion due to the making of drainage ditches. Shot, of varying sizes has been discovered in the garden.

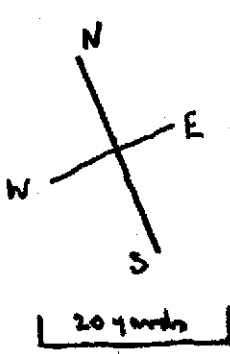
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G. Fairholter
1972

ASHBURNHAM FURNACE
DRY POND



SKETCH. PLAN

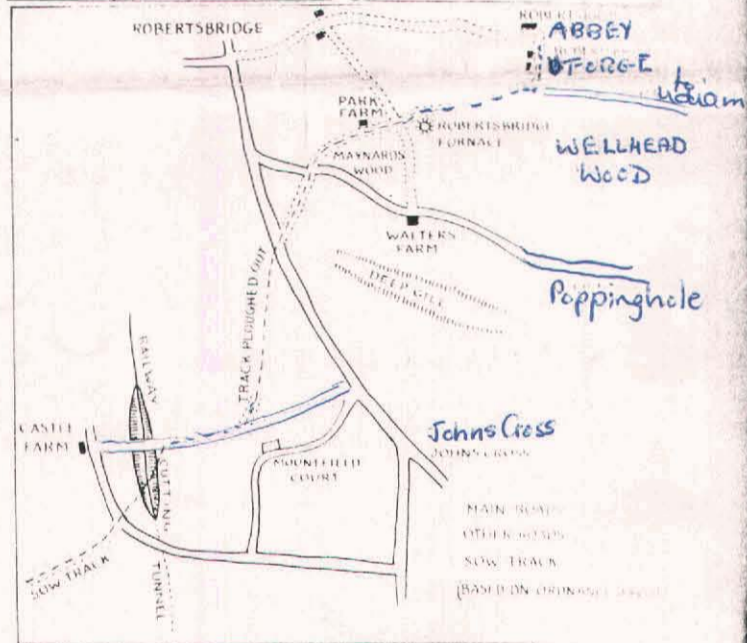
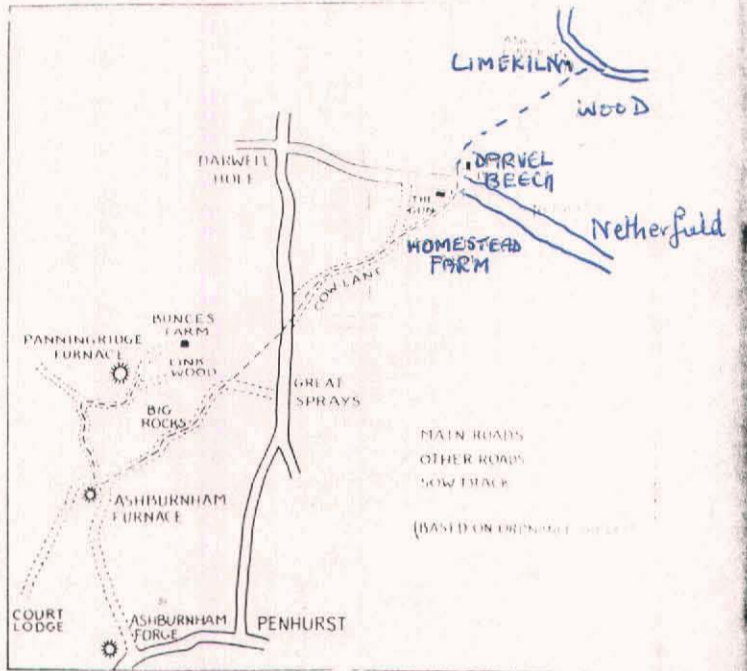


In the Steps of the Ironmasters

By JAMES DONNE

DURING the early part of the sixteenth century, ironworks were being erected all over the Weald, and for the carting of crude iron, ore and timber, primitive trackways came into existence. The large majority of these ancient tracks are embodied in the intricate network of deep, leafy lanes that are so characteristic of the Weald today; others gradually fell into disuse and were finally left derelict. Of these latter, one of the earliest, and certainly one of the most important, was the sow track from Panningridge Furnace to Robertsbridge Abbey Forge. This track, cutting across country for a distance of some seven miles, can still be easily identified for the greater part of its length, and apart from its historic interest, passes through the cream of East Sussex scenery, remarkable for its remoteness. You hardly meet a soul for the whole of the seven winding miles. Cutting deeply through open field, tunnelling through scrub and undergrowth, blossoming out into a broad green highway as it sweeps through the silent woods, opening out into wide, hedge-lined grassy lanes, it is the ghost of a highway. One can almost hear the shouts of the teamsters, and see the steaming, plodding oxen.

After the surrender of Robertsbridge Abbey in 1538, the lands passed to Sir William Sydney,



(Top)—The Sow Track from Panningridge Furnace to Castle Farm
 (Bottom)—From Castle Farm to Robertsbridge Forge

Fig.
Fig.
Fig.
Fig.

especially regarding the pottery; to Mr H.C. Bishop for advice on the masonry in the light of his experience of medieval sites in the North and Midlands and, not least, to various boys of Boarzell School, who devoted a lot of their time to the hard work, some with considerable expertise.

A NEW DISCOVERY CONCERNING ASHBURNHAM FURNACE

by

C. Ennever

In the 15th - 18th centuries when the Sussex Iron Industry was at its height, a considerable amount of water was needed to turn the water-wheels which were used to work the bellows of the furnaces and hammers of the forges; thus we find them sited alongside or at least reasonably near to streams, brooks or gills. These were not always to be relied on, for, in time of drought the water level would fall at an alarming rate, in fact in some places men had to tread the water-wheels to work the machinery so as to maintain production. To try and overcome this shortage of water and ensure a comparatively continuous supply, earthen banks were built across the neck of a convenient valley to form a dam, thus producing artificial lakes known as hammer ponds, but in spite of this a shortage of water was often experienced.

The Ashburnham Furnace, which was in operation until as late

(9)

as 1812, and incidentally was one of the largest of its kind in Sussex, obtained its water from two main gills - Giffords and Buckwell, Map Ref. TQ 686171, a bank running from east - west being still visible. This dammed back the water which was released through a small gate as required for working the furnace, whilst 125 yards further north, a channel was dug to convey water from the Buckwell gill which led approximately 175 yards to another furnace site due south.

It appears, however, that insufficient water could be stored for the industrial use of the furnace, or it may have been merely that they felt the need for a backup supply in the event of the water falling too low in time of drought, for we find an additional safeguard in a recently discovered 16th century feat of engineering whereby the Ashburnham furnace could receive the extra water required. This was in the form of an aqueduct channel which followed the 100 ft. contour line as far away as Penhurst field which is situated on the western side of Creep Wood, a working distance of nearly five miles.

The height of the aqueduct has been ascertained purely by what is visible of the channel along the various stretches which still remain. The first of these, map Ref. TQ 704165 (1), runs due south for 125 yards before disappearing under the Ashburnham to Stevens Crouch road approximately 100 yards west of the bridge over the Ashbourne. It follows that the source or tapping for this water channel was somewhere above the northern extent of the 100 ft. contour line, TQ 704168, and below the meeting of the two waters of the Ashbourne, TQ 703172.

Travelling along the contour height from the road mentioned above, the aqueduct channel, which was dug out of the clay soil to a very approximate depth of $3\frac{1}{2}$ ft. deep x 6 ft. wide, continues parallel to the Ashbourne and can be seen clearly following neatly round a small drainage at TQ 702161. It then draws away from the Ashbourne valley to the north, running across a field until it reaches Izlebridge Wood gill. Here it turns due north for 200 yards. Just below the apex of the gill an earth bridge was constructed to facilitate a crossing over this part, the centre has now been washed away. Soon after this it makes a slow right hand circle to follow round Ten Acre gill and up to its apex. Turning south again, TQ 692161 an intact portion of channel of about 15 yards sheers away to the right. Here the contour line again circles to the right across a now ploughed field, but the channel can be rediscovered in Peens Wood travelling north. Once again it crosses under the Ashburnham to Stevens Crouch road at a point 110 yards east of Giffords gill bridge in the vicinity of Ashburnham forge.

The channel then travels north to the furnace in a contrary flow to Giffords gill and above the footpath parallel to the old forge hammer pond, which is now a meadow, on its left. It criss-crosses first to the left, then the right and enters a tunnel in

3

the sandstone rock, TQ 686169, which is approximately 75 yards long, the southern end of which is believed to still be open.

Finally, the last traces of the channel appear above the bridle-path linking Ashburnham furnace with Rocks Farm, and ends abruptly opposite the eastern end of the furnace dam, TQ 686171.

The recent tracing is only a walking exposure of these exciting works. It is hoped that a more detailed survey can be undertaken at some later date.

(1) A further inspection of part of the channel has been undertaken since the above article was written. This suggests that at TQ 704165 there could have been an alternative tapping point for water from the Ashbourne at exactly this position. There is a bank running west to east from this point across the Ashbourne Stream which could have been a dam of shallow water. There is a hump on the east side. The height of this dam is at present approximately 2 ft. and when allowing for erosion is not really a formidable 'dam bank'. There are signs however, that a furnace existed 100 yards downstream of here, close to the northern side of the road where quantities of slag have been uncovered. It is possible that the bank was a water hold-back for this furnace although consideration should be given to both cases, i.e. for this furnace or the aqueduct channel.

The Author wishes to thank Mr Jack Harmer for his assistance also the various landowners for their permission to walk over their lands.

MAKING BRICKS IN 1901

by

R.H. Charters

It was in 1901 that Mr W. Keeley took over and rented Claws Farm, Shrub Lane, Burwash and Mr P. Keeley his son, who still lives in Burwash was then four years old. The farm consisted of about forty acres but Mr Keeley also rented some further brook

In the 15th - 18th centuries when the Sussex iron industry was in full reign, ~~and~~ water wheels were used to work the bellows at the furnaces and the hammers at the forges. Thus, the siting of furnaces and forges alongside or nearby to streams, brooks and gills. To enable a continuous supply of water to ^{be} made available ^{for working,} storage was achieved by dams of earthen banks which produced artificial lakes (hammer ponds).

The Ashburnham furnace in operation until as late as ¹⁸¹² ~~1812~~, and one of the largest ~~in Sussex~~ of its kind in ^{Sussex}, was ~~one which~~ obtained its water from two main gills -

Giffords and Buckwell (map ref. T2 686 171). A bank running east/west and still to be seen, dammed the water which was released through a small gate as required for on the spot furnace work^{ing}, whilst 125 yards further north a channel was dug to tap water direct from Buckwell gill and led in all about 175 yards to another furnace site due south.

// However, it seems that either not enough water could be stored for the furnaces' industrial needs or prudence dictated that ^{a further} ~~an additional~~ ^{of water} ~~water~~ supply for lights or drought conditions was required. This is illustrated by a considerable 16th century feat of engineering whereby the Ashburnham furnace received ^{the} additional water by an ^{channel} ~~acqueduct~~ following the 100 ft contour line from as far

away as Penhurst field close to the west side of Creep Wood, a working distance of nearly five miles.

The height of the ^{acqueduct} ~~aqueduct~~ channel has been ascertained by evidence ~~now existing in the form of~~ still to be seen of many lengths of this channel.

A first portion commencing at a point map ref. TQ 704 165 runs due south for 125 yards before disappearing under the Ashburnham forge/Stevens Crouch road, ~~at~~ (100 yards west of the bridge ^{over} ~~under~~ the Ashbourne). It follows that the source or tapping ^{for} of this water channel was somewhere above the northern extent of the 100 ft. contour line (704 168) ^{and below} the meeting of the two waterings on the Ashbourne (703 172).

~~and below the northern extent of the 100 ft contour line (704 168).~~

Travelling on then along the contour height from the road mentioned, the acqueduct channel which was dug out of the clay soil to a very approximate depth of ^{deep} $3\frac{1}{2}' \times 6'$ wide, continues parallel to the Ashbourne and can be seen clearly following neatly around a small ^{drainage} ~~gill~~ at point 702 161. It then draws away from ^{the} Ashbourne valley to the north running ~~west~~ west across a field until it reaches Islebridge Wood gill. Here it turns due north for 200 yards. ^{Just below} ~~at~~ the gill apex an earth bridge was built to ^{facilitate} ~~cross~~

^{a crossing} over this part, now washed away in the centre, and to allow it to continue south again. Shortly after it makes a slow

right hand circle to ~~the~~ follow round Ten Acre gill and up to its apex. Then turning south again (TQ 692 161) an intact portion of the channel of about 15 yards sheers away to the right. Here the contour line again circles to the right across a now ploughed field but the channel can be rediscovered in Peas Wood travelling north. It ^{again} crosses under the Ashburnham forge/Stevens Crouch road ^{and} at a point 110 yards east of Giffords gill bridge in the vicinity of Ashburnham forge.

The channel ^{then travels} continues north to the furnace ^{which} in a contrary flow to Giffords gill and above the footpath parallel to the old ^{some} hammer ponds ^{on its left but now a meadow.} It crisscrosses the footpath first ^{left} ~~right~~ and then ^{right} ~~left~~ and then enters a tunnel in sandstone rock (TQ 686 169) which is believed to be about 75 yards long. The southern end is thought to be still open.

Finally the last traces of the channel appear above the bridlepath linking Ashburnham furnace with Rocks farm, and ends abruptly apposite the east end of the furnace dam (TQ 686 171).

The recent tracing is only a walking exposure of this exciting works. It is hoped to survey in ^{more} ~~greater~~ detail at some later date.

(With acknowledgments to Mr. Jack Harmer and the permission of the landowners involved)

copy

The Relf family of Mayfield

Mr. J.E.Ralph of Weald Cottage, Burwash Weald, Etchingam. TN19 7LA (Tel. Burwash 882735) telephoned me a few days ago, on the recommendation of Mr. Peter Kirrage of Mayfield, to ask whether I could help him to trace an ancestor of his called William Relf of Mayfield, who had been granted arms in the reign of Hentry VIII and was an 'ironmaster'.

Mr. Ralph told me that he had been doing research into his family at the E.S.R.O and knew that William Relf had been involved with the Ashburnham iron works and that in 1620 a William Relf had bought Church Farm House, Penhurst, for his son. The male line of the family is said to have died out about 1700, though Mr. Ralph doubts this. His interest in William Relf of Mayfield is genealogical and Mr. Ralph said that he knew nothing of Mayfield history nor of that of the Wealden Iron Industry.

Miss Bell-Irving's 'Mayfield' contains a number of references to the Relf (Relfe, Rolfe) family over some 130 years, starting with William Relf the elder in the Subsidy Roll of 1523 and ending with reference to "Robert Relfe's house" during the Civil War. The Christian names of the men of the family, William, John, Robert and Thomas, seem to repeat themselves in each generation as was often the case in families of the 16th and 17th centuries. In Miss Bell-Irving's quotations from the Parish Registers, it would seem that in 1578 there was a John Relf living at Homestall and a John Relf living at 'the Oke', presumably descendants of William the elder, William his son, John or Robert Relf, all of whom appear in the Subsidy Roll of 1523, as well-to-do inhabitants of the village. A William Relf and his brother, John, described as yeomen, were, according to the Privy Council list of ironworks in 1574, living in Warbleton and Cranhurst respectively, so I think one can assume that by then the various branches of the family had begun to spread out from Mayfield, separating in their activities but still keeping the same set of Christian names.

I attach a copy of my letter to Mr. Ralph of Burwash Weald in which I offer various suggestions for further reading by him on the subject of his family's history. If you have any suggestions for him would you please get into touch with him? I am sending copies of this note, and of my letter to Mr. Ralph, to the Chairman of the Wealden Iron Research Group, Mr. Jeremy Hodgkinson, 20, Spinney Close, Crawley Down, Crawley, for his information.

Mrs. Isabel Pike,
Hon. Secretary,
Mayfield Local History Society,
Heronry Cottage,
Little Trodgers Lane,
Mayfield.

Isabel Pike

Mrs. A. Dalton
Retherdale Cottage,
Mayfield.
26th January 1985

C. for J. Hodgkinson - Chairman
W.I.R.G.

J.E.Ralph, Esq.,
Weald Cottage,
Burwash Weald,
Etchingham. TN19 7LA

COPY

Mrs.A.Dalton
Retherdale Cottage,
Fir Toll Road,
Mayfield. TN20 6NB
East Sussex

26th January 1985

Dear Mr. Ralph,

William Relf

I have been thinking of how best to advise you to pursue the trail of William Relf of Mayfield who was granted arms in the reign of Henry VIII and of the William Relf who was an ironmaster, owner of the Ashburnham iron works and the William who bought Church Farm House, Penhurst for his son in son in 1620.

From what I have read of the history of Mayfield and of the Wealden Iron industry I think you may be looking for two if not three 'Williams' of the large Relf family, whose Christian names of William, John, Robert and Thomas repeated themselves in each generation and branch of the family.

My suggestions for further reading which might help you to disentangle the web of your family are:-

A. "Mayfield. The story of an old Wealden village" by Miss E.M.Bell-Irving (1903). This book has recently been reproduced in replica by the E.S.C.C.Library Dept. It can be borrowed from the library or you can buy a copy (Libra Bookshop, West Street, Mayfield. tel.Mayfield 872460 can supply a copy, post free, @ £10.95). Miss Bell-Irving's book is not at all well indexed so requires careful reading to pick up all the references to a family or subject, but I knew that the Relf family are mentioned many times in the extracts she gives from subsidy rolls, parish registers etc. etc. I think the first mention in her book of William Relf is in the subsidy roll of 1523, when he, his son William, a John and a Robert Relf appear as well-to-do residents of the village. In the 1570s there is mention of a John Relf 'of the Oke' and a John Relf 'of Homestall', both living in the village at the same time; in 1582 John of the Oke's brother Thomas was buried and William, son of John of Homestall, was baptised. By 1614 the name is spelled Relfe and by the Civil War there are Relfes in Miss Bell-Irving's book.

There is a Relf's Farm in Mayfield and Homestall still exists.

B. "Wealden Iron" Ernest Straker (1931. reprinted by David & Charles 1969) This is the book on the history of the Wealden Iron industry and of the men who owned or rented the furnaces and forges. Straker has several references to William and John and the Ashburnham properties.

C. "Wealden Ironmasters in the Age of Elizabeth" by Dr. J.J.Gering. This article appears in "Wealth & Power in Tudor England" (Athlone Press University of London. 1978) and discusses the ironmasters and ironworks listed in the Privy Council's survey of 1574. In 1562 William Relfe leased land in Waterdown Forest (Eridge/Frant) from Lord Abergavenny in order to build ironworks with a partner. In 1574 he was described as living in Warbleton, a yeoman and owning and renting a furnace and forge in Fletching and Heathfield. His brother John, also a yeoman, lived in Crewhurst and rented a forge there.

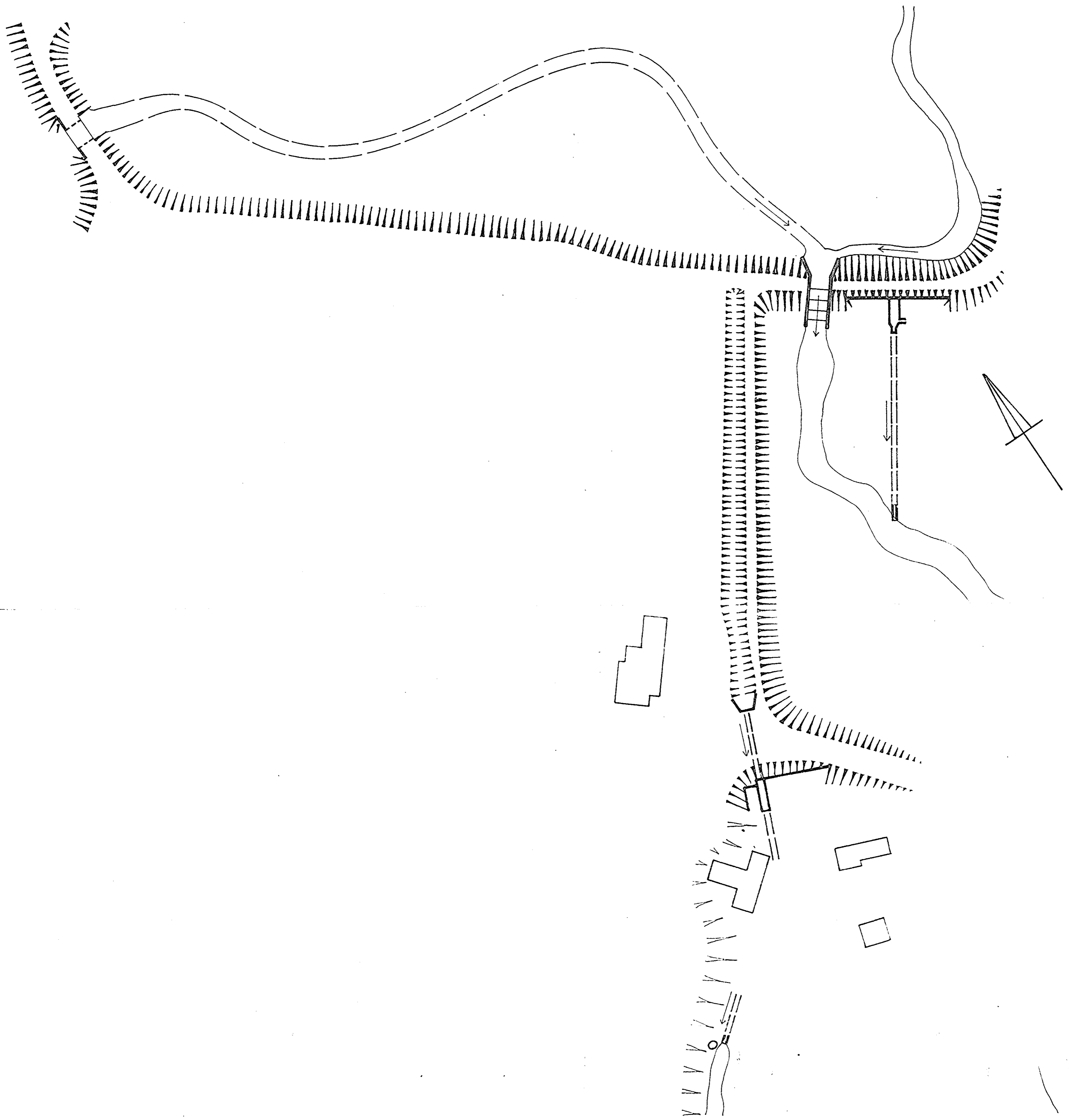
I think that both B. and C. can be borrowed from the library.

I hope that this information may be of help to you in your search. I am afraid that I do not know of a genealogist specialising in Sussex. Have you thought of consulting the Society of Genealogists (in London I think - the address is in Whittakers)?

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Hon.Secretary of the Mayfield Local History Society, Mrs.I.Pike, Heronry Cottage, Little Tredgers Lane, Mayfield and to the Chairman of the Wealden Iron Research Group, Mr.J. Hedkinson, 20 Spinney Close, Crawley Down, Crawley, in case either of them can make any suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

Ann Dalton



ASHBURNHAM

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