

Kingswood Coal - Part 4

David Hardwick

Introduction

In the early 1970s Matthew Southway published two articles in the *BIAS Journal* titled 'Kingswood Coal'¹ and 'Kingswood Coal - Part 2'². The second of which concluded with:

'..there were .. pits at Cromhall Rangeworthy Wapley and Yate which we have deliberately excluded ... one was sorely tempted to include the Bedminster and Ashton Collieries.... Perhaps .. the story of these latter collieries might legitimately be included at some later date.'

He later published 'Kingswood Coal - Part 3'³ on the Bedminster & Ashton Vale Pits.

The research into the collieries in Cromhall published in the last *BIAS Journal*⁴ has led on to an investigation of the other pits Southway referred to. This research is ongoing and far from complete although sufficient has been established to permit a general overview to be prepared. The Southway articles are widely regarded and in choosing this title to continue his overview of the Bristol Coalfield it is hoped that this article can live up to the standard he set.

Cromhall

Cromhall marks the northernmost outcrop of the Bristol coal basin. In addition to earlier workings, described by Rudder⁵ in the 1770s as '*laxed for some time*', there were three principal sites.

Tapwell Bridge (ST686895)

Very little is known about this site. There is a description by Anstie⁶ in 1873 of two seams of coal and a shaft. The site is included in the 1871 Royal Commission Report⁷ in the list of coal pits no longer working. The depth to the coal is listed as 28yds 2ft, the top band being 5 feet thick but '*bad*' and the lower band at 2 ft 6 inches thick.

Old Engine Works (ST695891)

may have been started in the late 1770s.^{6&8} It was sunk at the expense of Lord Ducie and there was clearly a fire engine at this pit since it is referred to in an inventory of 1786.⁹ At that time the pit was leased by Robert Baylis.¹⁰ Much of the pitwork was sold to Cowhorn Hill Colliery in 1795¹¹ and by 1803 it is described as '*Ruinous*' by Rudge.¹² The pit was

reopened and a new engine erected in 1815⁸ with Walker & Teague becoming the Lessees.¹³ Geological and financial difficulties are the most likely reason for closure in 1818 although it reopened with a new lease to Walker & Pope in 1819.¹⁴ The geologist Thomas Weaver⁸ indicates that the original shaft was sunk about '*80 yds in depth*'. He also describes the section in one of the shallower pits down to the lower of two seams at 49 yds 1 ft. This is different from Henry Woollcombe's¹⁵ description of the shafts in 1819 as '*built up with bricks about nineteen fathoms*'.

Samuel Long, the owner of the mills in Charfield, was already operating mines in Cromhall at the time of signing the 1827 mining lease with Lord Ducie.¹⁶ It is likely that the **New Engine Works** (ST692888) were commenced soon after this. The 1838 tithe schedule¹⁷ shows Long & Keeling as leaseholders of both the Old Engine and New Engine sites although the Old Engine site is described as Old Engine Cottage. The 1842 Child Commission Report¹⁸ confirms Long & Keeling were operating the pit as well as describing the poor conditions. The pit suffered from bad air and was very wet. The seam work was 2½ ft thick at 60 fathoms. The colliery ceases to be referred to in Hunt's mineral statistics¹⁹ after 1855. There were two seams, Cromhall '*Top*' and Cromhall '*Bottom*'. The 1871 Royal Commission Report⁷ suggests only one of these was worked and the depth to the lower seam was 161 yds 5 ft.

Wickwar (including Bagstone)

Moving South from Cromhall leads onto what was previously Wickwar Common. The Yate Hard Vein outcrops on the common and there is evidence of bell pits and shallow workings near to this edge (e.g. in fields between Fords Lane and Ladden Brook ST691881). Much of this may have been early workings although it should be noted that the leases for the collieries in Cromhall refer to rights regarding both commons. Geological survey maps show pits near to Brooklands Farm and a label **Old Horse Gin Pit** (ST689877). A short distance in from the line of the outcrop marking the Eastern edge of the coal seam there are two pits, one on either side of **Old Close Farm**. Both of these are on land called '*Coal Pit Leaze*' on the tithe map. The northern one (ST694878) is listed as 23 ft 6 in deep and the coal seam is 3 ft thick, no other details are known. Even less is known about the southern one of these (ST697873) although there is a sizeable 'batch' of coal waste.



Plate 1 Aerial view of circular black marks in field between Fords Lane and Ladden Brook



Plate 2 Former office and weighbridge buildings, Oldwood Colliery

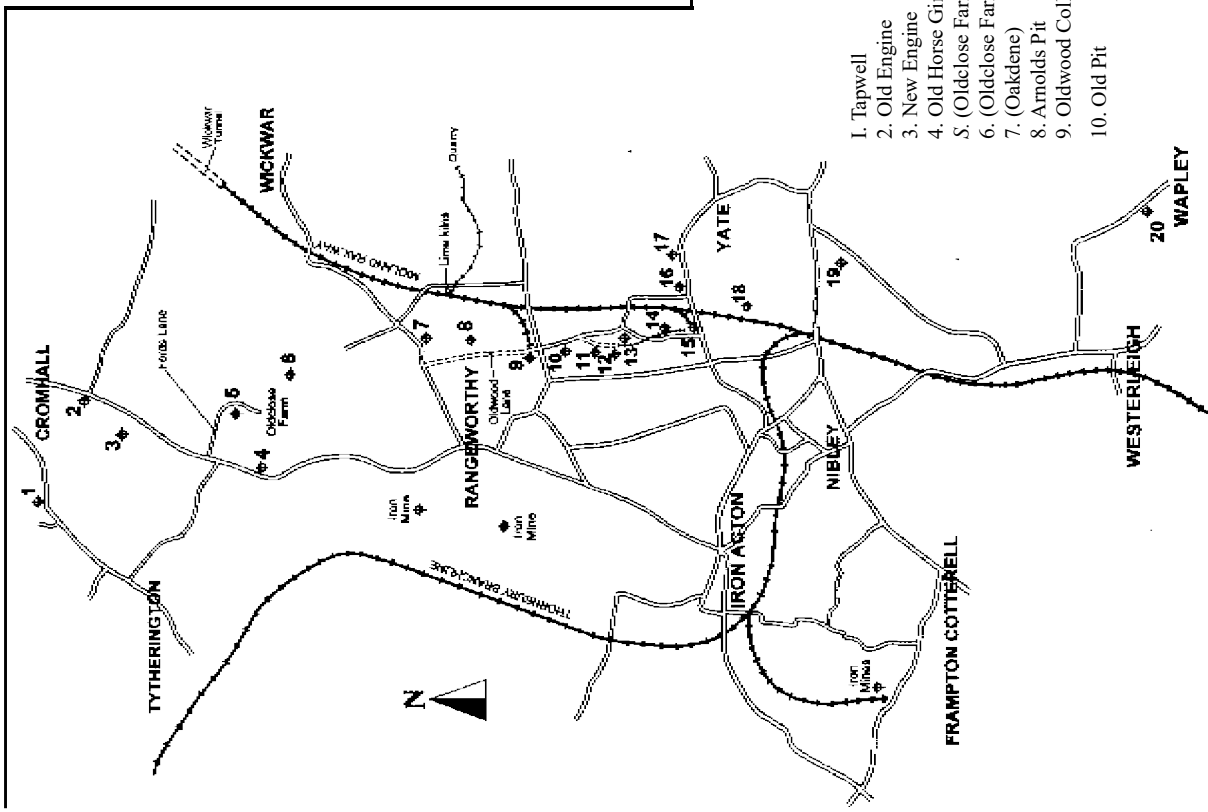


Fig. 1 Bristol Coalfield Northern Section

Where the outcrops cross the road from Rangeworthy to Wickwar (New Road), there is a property called *Oakdene*. Mr J H Hardwick built this in 1936 and the house itself is between two batches. The site is listed on ordnance survey maps as '*trial pit*' (ST701862). The shaft was filled with rubble at the time of excavating the well for the house. The land adjacent to this property includes the former brick and tile works, which had its own clay pits and kilns. Being located in the same field and ownership it is probable that the shaft was sunk in conjunction with brickworks to obtain coal for the kilns. Neither the shaft nor the batches appear on the 1880 ordnance survey map although the brickworks and kilns are shown, one labelled '*Old Kiln*'. The shaft is shown on the 1903 Ordnance Survey Plan and the brick works did not close until about 1903. Mr Jim Harford of Rangeworthy recalled going into the kiln as a small boy after the last firing when the walls were '*still warm*'.

Rangeworthy

Running from New Road to Engine Common is a track known as Oldwood Lane. On the tithe map this appears as the Cinder Road. At the Southern most end is '*Oldwood Colliery*' (ST700851) although it was probably never called this during its working life. The 1871 Royal Commission Report⁷ refers to it as '*Rangeworthy New Pit*', with a shaft section 102 yds 2 ft 6 in. Anstie⁶ describes the shaft as '*...a new one which was, at the time of the author's visit, being sunk by the Frampton Iron Company*'. Anstie's visit was in connection with the preparation of the 1871 report and he was employed for 21 weeks from June 1867. Mineral bores carried out in Rangeworthy c.1865–67,²⁰ which confirmed the number and depth of the seams, may have been connected to the intention to commence this new shaft.

The Frampton Iron Company had extensive iron mines in Frampton Cotterell and Anstie describes the new shaft as being to '*supply their works*'. The section given is 104 yds deep. Anstie obtained these details from Mr Owen. Edmund Lloyd Owen appears in the mining returns for 1862 as manager at Frampton Cotterell (then owned by Chillington Iron Co).¹⁹ An indenture for the Frampton iron mines dated 31 August 1867 includes Owen and John Crossley of Halifax.²¹ The Frampton Haematite Company then appears as the owners name on the returns.

It is this company that held a 42 year lease for the Rangeworthy site taken out 25 March 1870²⁰ including the colliery site in 620 acres. The 1869 List

of Mines²² includes Rangeworthy giving the name of Crossley and Co as the operator.

By 1869 it would appear that the Frampton Company had financial problems since *The Bristol Times and Mirror* of 26 June²³ & 10 July²⁴ includes a notice that '*Coal & Hematite mines*' are to be sold at public auction. In 1871 Crossley leases the Frampton Mines to Brogden and Sons.

By 1880 Murley and Sons appear in the List of mines²⁵ as the operator of the Rangeworthy Colliery. The Ordnance survey plans of 1881 show a much smaller spoil heap than later plans. It appears that a significant amount was extracted during this later period. The 1903 Ordnance Survey plans show new buildings and a new tram road linking the site to the main Bristol to Gloucester line of the Midland Railway. The Adit also appears for the first time on the plans and may also be of this date. By 1889, however, the mine has closed.

The official reason for closure is '*very inferior and unmarketable coal*'. In 1945 Mr Powell who had lived at a the adjoining Newhouse Farm for fifty years indicated to the mines inspector F.B.A. Welch that the '*...coal was excellent and in large lumps...trouble was too many officials. The company took on an Admiralty contract they couldn't fulfil and finally when Yate Collieries closed and pumping ceased Oldwood got too much water*'

The abandonment plans show a '*water level*' the Inspector of mines commented in October 1896 that this level is stated to connect to Yate Colliery. The mine closed almost immediately after Yate Colliery closed. The plans also show a connection of the Hard Vein to '*Arnolds Pit*' (ST700857) to the north. Welch's drawing marks this as '*Old Pit*' about 100 ft deep. An Advert appeared in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*²⁶ in 1819 for the lease of '*Rangeworthy Coal Works*'. Which site this refers to us unknown but it does indicate earlier workings existed. The advert refers to a horse wheel, a pit to 18 fathoms and a 3 ft vein, the Smiths Coal.

Yate (Engine Common)

It is clear that there were coal works in Yate in the early 1800s. The coroner's book for 1805²⁷ refers to the death of George Rogers falling 7 fathoms from the way mouth of a pit belonging to Brooke Neale & Co at Yate. An entry in the parish records for Westerleigh in 1807 refers to the death of Samuel Bryant at Robert Redderdones Yate Coal work. There is an advert in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*²⁶ in 1819 for the

remainder of a lease of 'Yate Common Coal Works' and includes reference to a steam engine. There are other entries for deaths at the mines and in 1827 there was a court case at which two miners who worked at the pit of Bendall & Co. were sentenced to death for attempted murder.²⁸

In addition to his woollen mills and the pits at Cromhall, Samuel Long had mining interests in the Forest of Dean²⁹ and Yate. The tithe schedule confirms his ownership of land in Yate, which included 'Longs Pit' (ST704832). Plans showing the proposed line of the Bristol to Gloucester Railway dated 1837³⁰ show that there was a 'coal works' on the site at that time. This may be one of the 'three pits on Yate Common worked by Messrs Long & Co' referred to in the 1842 Child Commission Report.¹⁸ They employed about 50 hands, none under 12, only four under 18. The shafts are 'about 60 fathoms' pumped with a 40hp steam engine. Abandonment plans for Yate Colliery³¹ include reference to this pit being 55 fathoms to the Hard Vein, although a note from 1884³² records that Long's pit was 63 fathoms and the 'Air Pit' (ST705830) 53 fathoms. The engine had a 5 ft dia. cylinder and 7 ft 6 in stroke with 12½ in pump buckets, 2 lifts. An earlier note on one of the Yate Colliery plans dated 23 Nov 1870 indicates the pit was being used for pumping only at that time. The pumping engine continued to supplement the pumping of Yate Colliery until 1886 when improvements to the pumping arrangements at that pit meant it was no longer required.

At the time of the 1842 Child Commission Report¹⁸, Staley and Parkers were working two pits on Yate common. These are most likely to be 'Staley's Pit' (ST701842) and 'Kedge Pit' (ST701839), which appear on the Yate Colliery abandonment plans as 'Staley's Old Workings'. The name Joseph Staley appears in the Yate Vestry minutes from the 1830s. An advertisement³³ for renewal of the lease in 1824 includes the names John Parker & Peter Parker along

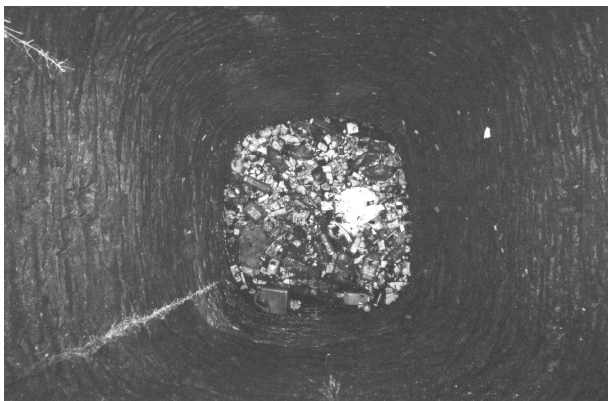


Plate 3 View down shaft at Kedge Pit, Yate
S. Grudgings

with Joseph Bendall and Thomas Neale. The 1842 Report¹⁸ described the shaft as 45 fathoms worked with a steam engine and plaited rope with 30 to 35 hands employed; the youngest two being 8 - 9 years old but no more than five or six were under 13. The boys assisted in working a 1 ft seam. The thickest seam was only 2 ft 6 in, as was the height of the passage the boys carted through. The ventilation was good with no need for boys to operate the doors. The pit at that time had a 60 hp pumping engine constantly at work in wet weather.

Soon after this Report the companies working on Yate common appear to have amalgamated to form Yate Colliery. The 1846 lease plan³⁴ shows a number of pits, the one described as 'No 20 or Engine Pit' appears to be this one. By 1861 the site is called 'Old Engine Pit'.³⁵ A pumping engine continued to be used at Staley's Pit up until final closure of the Yate Colliery in 1888 described in the Auction details³⁶ for 'No 2 Pumping Pit' as:

'One large Condensing Engine 7 ft Stroke and 54 in Cylinder with Galloway Boiler 26 ft long by 7 ft 6 in dia and two 13" lifts of pumps. One Egg-end Boiler for occasional use, with Tank.'

By 1886 this engine was pumping water principally for the steam boilers.³⁷

Handle Cossham, who later became the owner of much of the Bristol coal works and the largest employer in the Southwest, started work as a Clerk at Yate Colliery in 1845. Within two years he is signing documents relating to the new lease to extract minerals on the Iron Acton side of the parish boundary as manager.³⁸ Walter Long of Rood Ashton, a family who made their fortune in the woollen trade around Trowbridge, held the Iron Acton mineral rights. By this time the colliery is being run by Long Keeling & Nowell. This Long and also Keeling appear to be the same people involved at Cromhall. Mr Nowell is believed to have been the same engineer responsible for the excavation of the nearby Wickwar Tunnel for the Midland Railway,³⁹ which opened in 1844.

The lease was still not finalised in 1849 when Walter Long's advisers are commenting on the conditions of the lease. They indicate concern that the older workings will flood the new workings, as the proposal is not to sink any new shafts on the Iron Acton side of the boundary but to drive an incline down the slope of the strata. This was ultimately to prove to be the case and a contributory factor to the eventual closure of the mine. The lease was signed in 1850. A new lease was also taken out dated 23 Jan 1851 with Rev Randolph,⁴⁰ who was lord of the manor of Yate

and was allocated the common land at the time of the enclosure. By this time it is Samuel Long's sons who are named among the lessees.

The plan of the workings in 1861 shows that coal was mainly being worked from what was then 'New Engine Pit' (ST701836), later this became 'Yate No 1'. This pit is also known as 'Dog Trap', which is also the old name of the lane adjacent to this and said to be derived from an incident when a miner's lunch kept being stolen until the canine culprit was caught. This site became known as 'Old Pit' when the 'New Pit' (ST699843) was commenced in the early 1860s. New Pit was located close to the boundary line with the Iron Acton to minimise the length of the incline into that property to work the coal, since despite having obtained leases to extract coal from Iron Acton Parish permission was not obtained to sink any shafts. In the final years of the colliery much of the coal was raised at the new pit and then taken by surface tram road to Yate No 1 where the main mine buildings were. From there was a short connection to the Midland Railway Line. The 1887 Auction details³⁶ refer to New Pit as the 'Winding Pit' and collectively with the Old Pumping Pit, formerly known as Staley's Pit, this site was called 'Yate No 2'.



Plate 4 Black Lane (tramway), Engine Common, Yate

A new lease, granted for the Iron Acton minerals of 1872,⁴¹ shows that as well as the family of the late Samuel Long the name of Monks is connected to this mine. William Boulton Monks became managing director of this Colliery. This would appear to be the same William Boulton Monks who later became Manager of Easton Pit and who died when he threw himself down the pit shaft 'suffering from

melancholia' in 1892.²⁷ He was said to have never got over an incident in 1886 when an explosion killed eight miners at that pit.

In Jan 1873 the 'brook broke in' and flooded the lower workings.⁴² The pumping arrangements were old and to increase output improvements were necessary. In 1877 shares were issued to raise money for improvements to the 'Old Pit' (Yate No 1). The new company was formed as 'Yate Collieries and Lime Works Limited'.⁴³ The 'Lime Works' refers to a Quarry and set of limekilns nearby which utilised much of the lower quality coal. There were delays in finalising the details for the new company and in raising the finances for the improvements.

Things were not helped by the collapse of a flue in 1882.⁴⁴ The flooded deep workings were not drained until 1883 in conjunction with considerable expenditure on the mine including replacement underground pumping and hauling engines, replacement boilers and linking the works with a new heading below ground. A Direct acting 60 in cylinder Haigh & Co Pumping engine with a 9 ft stroke in the cylinder and 7 ft in the shaft is erected at Yate No 1, where there was also a 40 hp Single cylinder Winding Engine, a condensing 22 in cylinder Beam hauling engine to work the incline and a 12 hp horizontal engine working the above ground machinery.

By 1886 the ongoing difficulties in raising the capital to complete the works meant that despite the works being described as '*in very good condition*', no coal was being raised other than for the pumps. Attempts by Henry Jones to raise enough money to purchase the site, complete the outstanding improvements and

settle the arrears failed and the colliery was put up for auction on 31 March 1887, but it did not sell.

The auction particulars for the winding pit at Yate No 2 include a Beam Engine with 20½ in Cylinder with Drum, a 28 ft x 7 ft Heywood & Duckworth Lancashire boiler, two egg end boilers each 34 ft x 6 ft 6 in and a Pearne & Co. Donkey Pump. Below

Ground was a Hathorn, Davey & Co Compound Differential Pumping Engine.

Further attempts to sell the Colliery to Jones and keep the Pits open failed. On 31 Dec 1887 the manager Mr Worthy wrote to the landlord's solicitors advising:

"I have instructed the men to start dismantling ... it is a great pity for the place is better now than it has been since I have known it."

Further attempts to save the mine also failed. The pumps were stopped and the plant was sold 20 February 1888.⁴⁵

The coal at Yate was described in 1842¹⁸ as 'remarkably good and comes out in blocks of regular thickness'. Tests proved the coal burnt with little ash and the quality was such that the coal was sold to the Midland Railway

To the north of Yate No 2 is a small pit which appears to have been operated by Yate Colliery as it is shown on the abandonment plans³¹ as 'Little Vein Pit' (ST699846) and was only working the Little Vein seam. It is also shown on the 1861 Yate Colliery plan³⁵ but is labelled 'Wet Pit' (abandoned). This appears to be the pit labelled 'No 30' on the 1846 lease plan.³⁴ There is a pit further north again shown on the abandonment plans as 'Old pit' (ST700848) which is approximately in the position of the pit labelled 'No 40 pit' on the 1846 plan. The 1837 plans for the



Plate 5 Building remains at Yate No 1 S.Grudgings



Plate 6 Excavation at Yate No 1, December 2001 alongside heapstead wall S. Grudgings

railway line³⁰ show a coalworks on the land between Yate No 1 and the Railway. The 1846 plan reference to 'No1' or 'Tun Pit' may be this site.

East Yate Colliery

There were shallow workings on the Eastern side of the railway opposite the branch line from Yate No 1.⁴⁶ There were at least two shafts and an adit. The depth is given as 10 yards deep and the works were abandoned by 1885. A reference in a pocket book from 1884³² with the name Ponting Monks of Fishponds and East Yate Colliery may refer to this. The pocket book goes on to describe a trial shaft sunk further to the East at Goose Green (ST709838). It is also noted that on the 1877 prospectus for Yate Collieries and Lime Co Ltd, in the list of directors E.W.B. Monks is shown as 'colliery proprietor, Fishponds and Yate'. This link is further supported by a reference in the pocket book to sinking 'Monks Pit' on the causeway. The Goose green trial shaft was 6 ft square and 87 yds deep.

Yate (Eggshill)

The right to mine on Eggshill Common is referred to in the 1851 lease to Long Keeling & Co for minerals on Yate Common. All that remains of the common now is the name of the road, which ran alongside 'Eggshill Colliery' (ST708824). The earliest date shown on the abandonment plans⁴⁷ is 'Old works contacted 1890'.

The latest working date on the plans is 1907. The manager was Seth Dyer who previously worked at Yate Colliery. In 1896 the colliery was being worked by Yate Pottery Ltd., employing 30 below ground and 9 on the surface. The seams worked were the Black Vein, Hard Vein, Smiths or Gas Coal, Fireclay Vein and Sodbury Seam. A Survey of the Fireclay Vein was carried out in June 1907 for Mr Stirling by Mr E.H. Staples some of the other plans were prepared by J. Naysmith. The Black Vein is described as 2 ft 2 in thick, the others 1 ft to 1 ft 10 in thickness. In 1908 the list of Mines includes Eggs Hill Colliery as worked by Yate Brick Co (C.J.R. Stirling) Cranham House nr Stroud.

Wapley

The 1842 Child Commission Report¹⁸ indicates that 'Wapley Coal Pit' belonged to Sir Bethel Codrington and at that time employed 31 hands, 5 under 13 and



Plate 7 Bob wall of engine house (now cottage) at Yate No 2. Note arch and higher opening S. Grudgings

one more under 18. Plaited rope was used instead of chain and the pithead had a sliding cover. This type of cover is described elsewhere in the report as a sliding stage on which the top man stands. As he grabs hold of the loaded tubs the stage is drawn across the pit's mouth on wheels and plates. The pit was ventilated with a furnace and was 217 yards deep.⁴⁹ Only one seam was worked.

An advert in the *Bristol Mirror* of 8 Feb 1857 indicates that the Wapley Coal Works is to be sold by auction. The sale includes a 14 HP condensing steam Engine.

Other Pits

There is a reference to a Pit some distance to the east of the Yate Colliery works called 'East Pit' (ST711842). Being located beyond the outcrops of the seams worked in Yate, it could only have been working the lower seams found at Cromhall. No records of this pit have yet been found. There were many small pits and shallow workings in the area, particularly at the edge of the outcrop. Again most

have no known names and no records now exist. The records and physical remains that do still remain give an impression of the nature and extent of this industry in the area and the working conditions at the time. However, what it was really like to work in these collieries in the eighteenth and nineteenth century can only be imagined.

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Plate 8 New Engine Works Cromhall