

UPPER REDBROOK IRON WORKS 1798-9: DAVID TANNER'S BANKRUPTCY

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Since the GSIA Journal article of 2003 examining David Tanner's iron works at Redbrook more information has been found for the Upper Redbrook works at the point of Tanner's bankruptcy, (1). The final winding down of activity on the site and financial settlements with the workmen can be traced from a combination of accounts from the works and from letters between Lord Gage, who owned the site, his steward James Davies and solicitors, (2).

David Tanner became bankrupt on December 28 1798. He also owned the Lower Redbrook Tinworks which had been partly supplied with iron from Upper Redbrook, but the Tinworks was under the separate management of the firm of Cowley and Hathaway, partners with David and William Tanner. At Tanner's bankruptcy that lease was re-assigned to William Cowley and that business continued.

The Upper Redbrook site was already under-used well before the date of bankruptcy and David Tanner was in arrears of rent to Lord Gage before March 1798 and owed £292 16s 6d for cordwood taken from the Highmeadow estate. Local rumour reported that Tanner was paying debts with Bills of Exchange payable at 2 months but local banks were returning them. Lord Gage encouraged him to surrender the site but he refused to do so until a full allowance was agreed for the improvements he 'claimed' to have made there. By July 12 1798 Mr. Harvey, on behalf of Lord Gage, had distrained on the stock at Redbrook and Lydbrook as payment for the rents of Redbrook furnace, Lydbrook forges and other property rented in Redbrook. A Mr. Stokes, on Tanner's behalf, claimed back the goods, taking legal action that the distraint was illegal (replevin), (3). In 1796 David Tanner had conveyed the works at Redbrook to Edmund Estcourt "that he might sell them and pay any trusts" i.e. money due. The sale took place in 1824 (4). Edmund Estcourt was working up this stock at Upper Redbrook by late 1798, possibly from late October. Lord Gage, the site owner, was informed by his steward, *There is little stock on the premises. What there is Mr Estcourt is working up, and he still keeps possession of the works*, (5). Mr. Estcourt had lent at least £7,500 to Tanner, secured on the business and so became a significant creditor, (6). The brief accounts relate to this work and detail expenditure between November 9 1798 and February 2 1799. The final winding up of activity can be traced.

Finishing work

Expenditure between November 9 1798 and February 2 1799 was made in three phases. For the first group of payments £128.4.0 was provided by Edmund Estcourt, Lewis Richards and from the sale of a mule. That money was spent by November 22 1798. Wages were already in arrears. 23 employees had received 2 week's wages on Friday, November 9. On the following day, Nov 10, the same men mostly received another week's wages. Some had worked only 4 or 5 days instead of the usual 6 days a week. Two appear to have left, (William Morgan and Stephen Reeves). From this point payments and work were less regular. Payments were again made on Wednesday, November 21 and Thursday November 22, again of the regular weekly sum, for all except two men of the same name and probably of the same family whose names do not appear again, (Edward and Thomas Jones). This was probably pay due on November 17, so again in arrears. All the money in hand was used in these payments. Examples of weekly wages are shown in Table 1.

The next payment of wages (part of the second phase of expenditure) was not made until Saturday, December 15. Lewis Richards provided £25.16.9, which was completely used on that day. It was 24 days since the last payments were made and most of the new payments were 'on account', in effect part payments. A few payments were to regular workmen but more were to suppliers of particular services. More men were paid off. William Morris and John Edwards do not appear again.

The third group of payments was made from money provided by William Lane, on December 22 and 23, another week later. Now employees were paid 'in full,' the arrears remaining from their last payment and anything earned since. More people were paid off, Thomas Colborne, Lewis Davis, Charles Digges, Richard Jordan, Sarah Morris and William Williams. David Tanner was made bankrupt on December 28. On January 3, the last men were paid off, some of them in considerable arrears, and other outstanding creditors paid. This marked the end of activity on David Tanner's account.

It is not clear where all the money came from which was used to pay the men. Lewis Richards is mentioned in the Gage documents as handling money for Tanner. The ledger also contains a list of sales of iron between January and June 1799. The deliveries are all dated after the last payments to employees and are given by weight not value. Of the total, Cowley and Hathaway at Lower Redbrook took all the refined iron and approximately 15 tons of bar iron, (Table 2).

Edmund Estcourt may have cleared up stock on the site but there were still debts to be paid. On March 1799 Lord Gage was still writing, *Mr Estcourt is answerable for the last half year's rent, ... Mr Tanner's assignees shall be answerable for all the damage done to the works while they remain in possession... I think you should give Mr. Estcourt notice of the damage done to the works from neglect since they came into his possession and that I shall look to him and the assignees for damages..*, (7). Lord Gage had been advised that he could still claim for the repair of buildings as required under the property leases despite Tanner's certificate of bankruptcy. Throughout 1799 Lord Gage was concerned about identifying which items at Upper Redbrook were his and which David Tanner's. Negotiations for a settlement continued with difficulty. Edmund Estcourt surrendered the keys in October 1799 and James Davies took the lease, (8). By then agreement over the improvements and damages had been reached. Lord Gage was to pay Edmund Estcourt £700 for the 'supposed' property of Mr. Tanner left on the premises, Mr. Tanner to pay £100 towards repairs and the County Sheriff to pay the year's rent due while he held the Upper Redbrook site on behalf of Mr Estcourt. Despite his clear dissatisfaction at the way negotiations for a settlement were so long drawn out, Lord Gage took care to point out to the more gossipy and critical James Davies that *Mr Tanner in his distress never offered me a Bill at a longer date than 6 weeks*. Tanner himself was in Monmouth still trying to raise loans to pay his creditors in January 1800, (9).

Work on site

The accounts of the first phase of payments are reasonably full in that the jobs done by some of the workers are named, indicating the range of activities still carried on at the site.

The furnace was repaired by John Evans who received four separate payments. It is unlikely that the work was done on the blast furnace which had not been used since 1796, but more likely on one of the refining or puddling furnaces (10). Pig iron was melted, for which payments were made to John Ellis first, then to Thomas Reynolds & Co. (11). Pig iron underwent preliminary refining to remove impurities before being puddled.

At Upper Redbrook puddling must have been introduced since 1794. Puddling was done in a reverberatory furnace. The furnaces at this period had floors of sand. A furnace was worked by a puddler, who stirred and worked the molten iron, assisted by his underhand. Two shifts were worked at this period, so a team of 4 men was required. When the impurities were released the iron thickened and was formed into 'balls' of iron which were hammered into oblong blooms, (12). Teams of puddlers named in 1799 were James Jones & Co, William Goodall, Thomas Burgum & Co, Thomas Thomas & Co. Each team was paid quite considerable sums on 12 occasions, at the rate of 15s 6d per ton, presumably to pay all members of each team. As the site appears to have been long under-used, if not disused, the several teams of puddlers probably came from Tanner's other local works. Flues were cleaned, again by Reynolds, Thomas and Burgum, so probably at the puddling furnaces.

The blooms of iron were reheated in a balling furnace then rolled into various categories of bar iron. William Knight & Co were always the rollers used, paid a total of £21.13.5. John Dudley, engineer, also cleaned flues and boilers, probably of a steam engine to power the rollers (13). John Crocket provided fuel. On Nov. 10 he was paid £1.1.9 for carriage of forty three and a half cords at 6d. a cord, and £4.1.9 for "coaling 12.7 (?) at 6s 6d a load." This sounds like charcoal being supplied, possibly for the initial refining. Some of the coals or charcoal were brought on the turnpike for which a 1s 8d toll was paid. Sand was bought possibly for reflooring the puddling furnaces (£1.2.4), and the Carpenter was at work (£3.4.0). Nails were bought, (1s 6d). Were repairs necessary before the site could be used or was this for repairs which Lord Gage, the property owner, was already urging?

The firm also owned a barge which was repaired, then hauled up. Payments were made for shoeing horses, candles and postage.

Where some of the men's occupations are given it is possible to work out the wages paid per week: William Morris Snr, roller, £1.0.0; William Taylor, 'balls' who possibly worked at the balling furnace, 13s 6d; John Dudley, engineer, 12s; James Green and Edward Jones, labourers, 8s. Those paid at the same rate, so doing jobs of a similar status, can be listed, (Table 1). Puddlers and Rollers were among the more highly skilled employees at an iron works but because they were paid by the team here and by the ton of iron processed it is not possible to calculate the regular weekly wage. 'Melting' was paid at 4s 10d a ton and 24.65 tons were melted. Puddling was paid at 15s 6d a ton and 69.7 tons were worked. At 5s a ton 87 tons were rolled. Some of those who lost their jobs in December and January 1798-99 continued to live at Redbrook where their burials are recorded sometime later.

It is likely that the Refined and Bar Iron delivered (Table 2) may have included that worked at Upper Redbrook but most of it came from another source.

Conclusion

The accounts of November 1798 to February 1799 are fragmentary, but of value. They show that Upper Redbrook Iron Works survived as a functioning site in 1798, able to be quickly brought back into use, if partially, after some years of decline. The activities undertaken were short lived and limited. They help to put into context the contemporary gossip in James Davies's letters to Lord Gage. The employment of an engineer and teams of puddlers do support Tanner's claim to be credited with investment in new buildings at the site. The level of workmen's wages illustrate the hierarchies of skill and status within a 1790s ironworks. The deliveries of bar iron show a range of markets supplied. Edmund Estcourt's efforts may have done a little to reduce his own losses, David Tanner's optimism appears to have survived his

business failure and Lord Gage appears to have regained the money owing to him, though only after persistent effort and legal expense.

References

- (1) Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology Journal (GSIAJ) for 2003, pp 3-9; Gloucestershire Archives (GA) D326/Z4.
- (2) GA, D326/Z4; GA, D1677 GG 1545.
- (3) GA, D1677 GG 1545/30-33.
- (4) GA D639/11
- (5) GA, D1677 GG 1545/28 Ba.
- (6) Morris, P., 2008, Redbrook Iron Works: An Examination of the Evidence from Thomas Ansley's Account Book for 1794-1798, GSIAJ 2008, 24-36.
- (7) GA, D1677 GG 1545/36.
- (8) GA, D1677 GG1545/43.
- (9) GA, D1677 GG1545/43, 47, 49, 51, 53, 81A. In the latter Mr. Harvey, the solicitor, in his bill to Lord Gage details the dates and procedure of each action in the legal proceedings.
- (10) In 1794 the site contained a furnace, finery, chafery, rolling mill and balling furnace. Riden P. 1993, *A Gazetteer of Charcoal fired Blast Furnaces in Great Britain in use since 1600*, 46.
- (11) *The furnace at Redbrook is never in blast. They melt some pigs there which Partridge calls one of his whims [ie Estcourt's] and the rolling mill is much out of repair. Some of the furnaces are taken down.....* Davis to Gage, GA D1677 GG 1545/33.
- (12) John AH, 1995. *The Industrial Development of South Wales, 1750-1850*, Cardiff, pp 157-9.
- (13) In 1800 the engine house needed repairing. Harris, Upper Redbrook, p.16, GA, ROL/E5.

Table 1

Employees Weekly Pay

£1.0.0	Thomas Pierce, William Morris Snr. (Roller), John Taylor
15s	Lewis Davis
13s 6d	William Taylor (Balls)
12s	David Morris, John Dudley (engineer), John Edwards
10s 6d	Stephen Watkins
10s	William Viggors
9s	James Jennings
8s	Thomas Cowborne, James Green (lab.) Edward Jones (lab.)
7s	William Morgan
5s	Charles Diggott, Jos Hanbery, Thomas Jones, Sarah Morris, William Morris Jnr. (These may all have been young).
4s 9 ½d	Richard Jordan
4s	William Williams

Table 2**1799 Refined Iron Delivered**

		Tons	Cwt	Qrs	Lbs
Jan. 19	Cowley & Co	2	0	0	0
	"	0	16	3	0
Jan. 26	order	2	0	0	0
March 9	"	12	7	3	0
March 16	" "	<u>14</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
		<u>31</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>

1799 Barr Iron Delivered

		Tons	Cwt	Qrs	Lbs
Jan. 7	to W Tanner for himself No 38	0	10	0	0
Jan. 16	Cowley & Hathaway	0	4	0	23
Jan. 26	" "	2	1	0	6
Feb. 26	" "	4	0	0	3
	" "	2	0	2	22
Feb. 28	" "	2	14	3	14
Mar. 23	Harvey Mason & Co.	10	0	0	7
	Broome Price & Co	1	0	0	0
April 2	Furye & Co	12	6	1	0
	Mrs Barlow	4	5	2	24
April 15	Cowley & Hathaway	0	6	0	1
April 16	Daniel Harford, Weare & Payne	2	0	0	0
April 22	Cowley & Hathaway	0	0	2	24
	Broom Price & Co	1	0	0	0
	John Taylor	0	2	3	4
May 4	Daniel Harford, Weare & Payne	31	10	1	23
June 14	Hen. Jones	2	2	2	4
	Geo. Buckle	29	6	1	26
	Wm. Walters	<u>7</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>
		<u>117</u>	<u>10</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>17</u>