The Landmark Trust

BUSH COTTAGE

History Album

Memoirs of the Life and Times of John Mytton, Esq.
(Ackermann, 1835)

Written & researched by Caroline Stanford
Updated January 2013

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KEY FACTS

Built	**Constructed in -/+ 1548 (dendro-dated)**
Listed	**Grade II**
Rescued from dereliction	**1999**
Contractors	**Treasures of Ludlow**
Given to Landmark	**2012**
Dendrochronology	**Dan Miles of Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory**

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Bush Cottage (mid right) in its landscape of ancient field patterns.

Summary

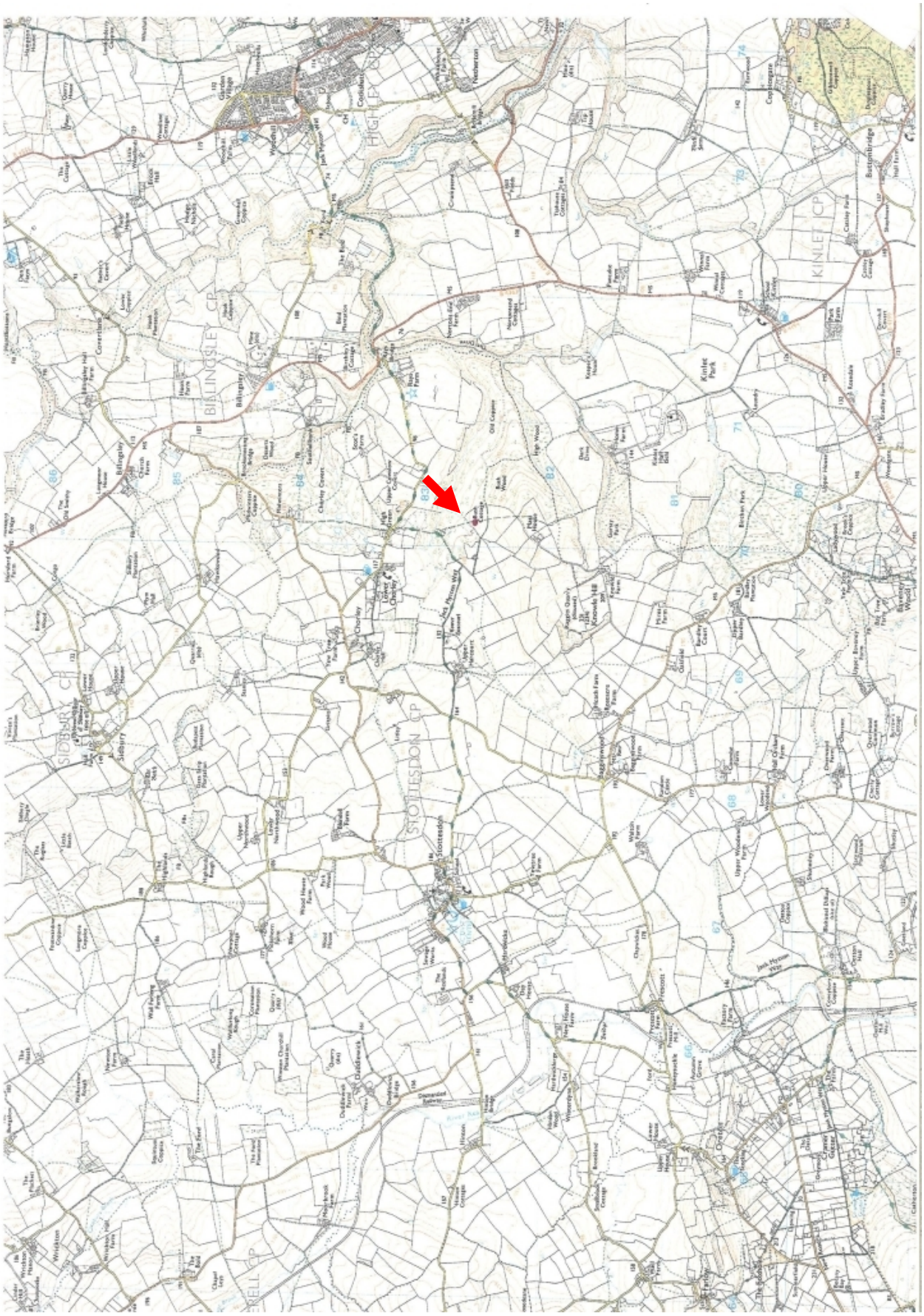
According to dendrochronology (tree ring analysis) the dwelling on the landholding known as the Bush was constructed in 1548, sheltered by a remnant of the ancient Forest of Wyre and facing south-east towards the Clee Hills, among ancient field patterns. It lies in the township of Chorley, part of Stottesdon parish, and its very survival indicates that this was a sturdy yeoman's house of some quality. In 1792, the Bush was bought by William Childe of Kinlet Hall to the south-east and this means that the very early deeds survive as the Kinlet Collection in the Shropshire Archives.

From this documentary evidence, we discover that in the early 17th century the Bush belonged to one William Grennows of Bagginswood, a neighbouring farm. Soon after, it passed into the hands of Thomas Bayly and then in the next generation, its ownership was fragmented into two 3/8ths and 1/4th. It remained in the ownership of Bayly's descendants until acquired by Childe in 1792. Bush Cottage's *occupiers* were a different story. They were clearly all farmers and yeomen, farming a mixture of arable and pasture and bearing good parish names like Malphas, Perry and Pugh. The proximity of the woods for charcoal and availability of coal and iron deposits close to the surface thanks to the local geology mean that other employment was available and archaeological investigation has found the remains of early bloomeries and blast furnaces nearby. In reality, the early leases mostly prohibit the occupants of Bush Cottage from exploiting either the woodland or the mineral deposits of the Bush Piece.

In the 19th century, the service end of the cottage was extended, or more probably rebuilt, since the main beam has also been dendro-dated to 1548 and earlier footings were found during restoration. The bread oven and washing copper were added, with their own flue under a small outshot.

Life at Bush Cottage evolved only slowly through the centuries, and probably changed relatively little until the cottage was sold by the Kinlet estate to Mr Roland Wall in 1960. The Walls lived in the cottage only briefly, moving out because the roof leaked. After that, it was left empty and increasingly derelict. In 1999, charity SAVE Britain's Heritage put it on the front cover of their annual Buildings at Risk Register. Meanwhile, someone who enjoyed staying in Landmarks had bought the adjoining woodland and was intrigued by the ruinous cottage. He bought it and proceeded to carry out an exemplary restoration with Treasures of Ludlow. The cottage was reroofed and extensive if conservative repairs were carried out throughout, splicing new timber in where original rafters and framing had decayed beyond repair, putting in replacement stairs and dormer framing, replicating window ironwork from surviving examples, everything done in traditional materials and techniques.

In November 2011, the owner offered Bush Cottage as a gift to Landmark. We had no hesitation in accepting: we found the cottage had been restored entirely to our own standards. We are enormously grateful, as will be all who stay here.


HIGH
BILLINGSLEY CP
KINLET CP
STOTTESDON CP
SIDBURY CP
KELL CP
Bush Cottage
Stottesdon
Kinlet Park
Kinlet Hall
Billingsley
Chorley
Sidbury
Upper Wood
Lower Wood
Old Coppice
Kinlet Pool
Buttonbridge
Woodhall
Hazlerton
Upper Woodcroft
Lower Woodcroft
Dowles Brook
River Severn

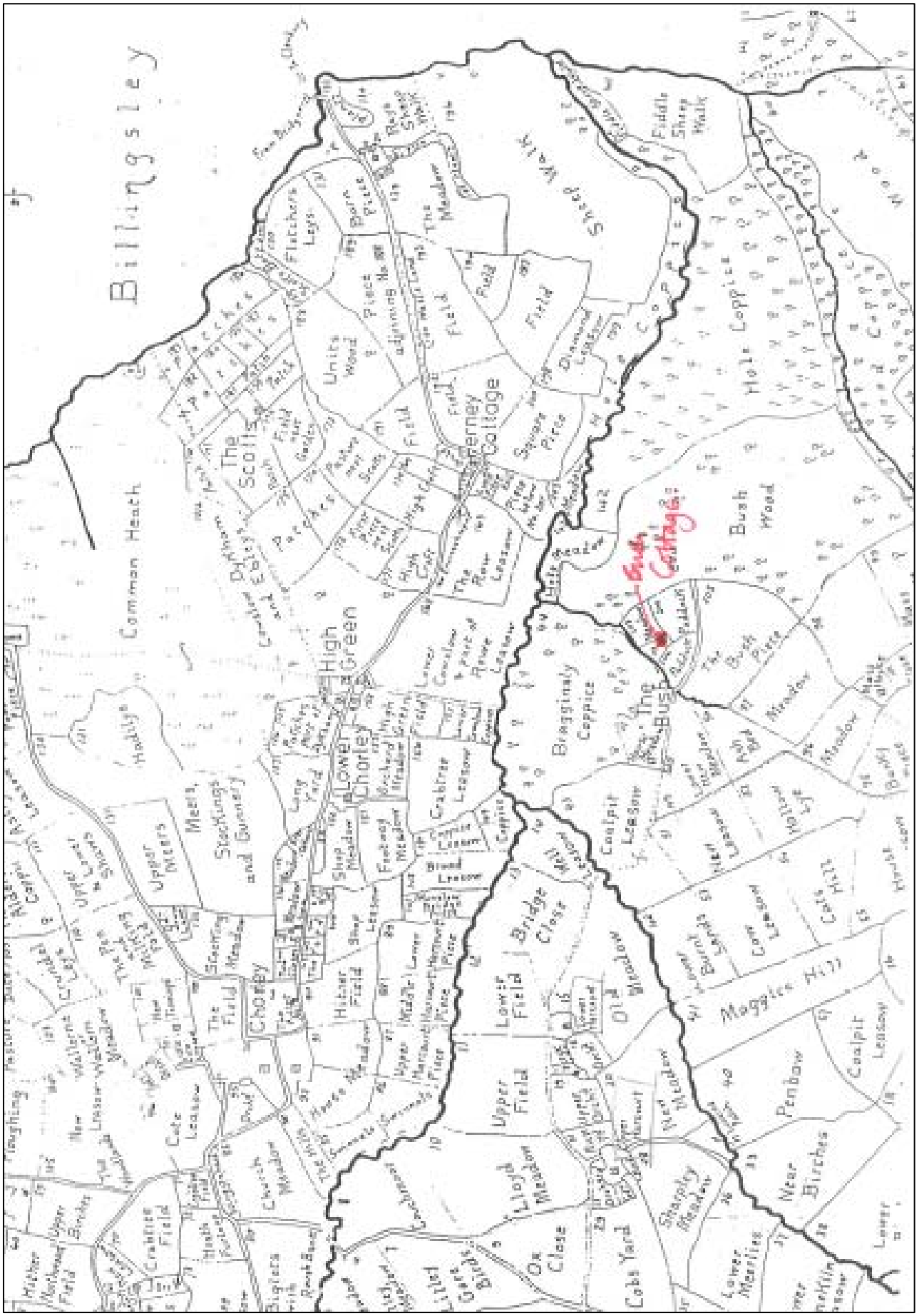
History of Bush Cottage and its occupants

The history of any vernacular building must begin with an intimate understanding of the landscape in which it sits, and an awareness of the influence of local topography on patterns of life and land ownership. This part of Shropshire is archetypal English countryside: scattered hamlets and farmsteads in the rolling, be-mistletoed Clee Hills, with ancient hedgerows and field systems and remnant belts of even more ancient forest.

By their very nature, humbler buildings often leave fewer documentary traces than grander ones, and the question 'why was it built here, and for what purpose?' can often only be answered conjecturally. In the case of Bush Cottage, even though a relatively humble building, a documentary trail does survive, but to set the context, let us first examine the landscape to see what it can tell us about 'why here and what for.'

Historically, Bush Cottage lay in the 'township' Chorley (in reality a hamlet), on the eastern edge of the parish of Stottesdon. The name Bush Cottage and its position in the lee of a remnant of the ancient Forest of Wyre in the Clee Hills initially suggest that the cottage had some association with the management of the belt of coppices and woodland nearby. The Forest of Wyre was already a royal forest at Domesday, and its wild cherry trees are said to have been the source of the first cultivated stock. The forest was once so extensive that it gave its name to a county – Wyrecaster (Worcester) was a Roman station in the forest.

Forests were a hugely important resource from the early medieval period onwards, jealously guarded by the barons and, by extension, their retainers. A 13th-century inquisition records complaints from the jurors of Stoddesdon Hundred, that the foresters of Sir Walter de Clifford were able to claim from every householder within the bailiwick of La Cleye a hen at Christmas and five eggs at Easter, and also collected wheat sheaves from various vills within the bailey,



Field names, from an amalgamation of tithe maps.

clearly an onerous and resented imposition. The importance of woodland as a resource in its own right also shines through all the documents.

However, a glance at the site's topography on the modern day OS map - the plot facing southwest along a valley around the hillside, the alignment of the ancient field boundaries still today radiating out along the contour lines from Bagginswood Farm. The medieval open fields had been largely enclosed by the early 17th century to something close to today's pattern of farms, and their pattern on the map immediately raises the hypothesis that Bush Cottage might originally have gravitated southwards rather than north or east towards the woodland. As will emerge, this is borne out by the documentary records and the activities of its occupants.

It is also worth remembering that, while Bush Cottage may seem to us today a humble dwelling, it would have been of some status in its day. Well constructed, the very fact of its survival indicates its desirability as a home for a self respecting yeoman, compared to lesser dwellings not substantial enough to have survived. As so often, it was only with the rise in modern expectations of comfort after the advent of electricity that such isolated dwellings were allowed to fall into disrepair, given the expense of installing such services.

Looking at the 19th-century map evidence and old field names, it seemed plausible that The Bush holding was originally made up of Bush Piece at its centre (Bush Cottage, plus paddocks and meadows), flanked by Bush Wood to the east and perhaps by Braggingsly Coppice to the north west. Beyond Bush Wood but contiguous to it was Hole Coppice, and then Fiddle Sheep Walk as common pasture. The cottage was not, then, named out of whimsy, but because the area of woodland to its east was called Bush Wood. The holding that included it became known as The Bush, or the Bush estate.

Fortunately for future historians, deeds and leases for the 'messuage[1] and farm' known as The Bush survive as part of the Kinlet Collection at the Shropshire Record Office. This is because between 1791 and 1813, the (by then fragmented) holding was consolidated as part of the Kinlet Estate by its owner, William Lacon Childe. Childe undertook a comprehensive programme of land acquisition during these years to enlarge and simplify his landed estate based at Kinlet Hall, a few miles south-south-east of Bush Cottage. Childe bought up parcels of piecemeal land that, like The Bush holding, had become divided and transferred through marriage and inheritance over the centuries. When a single major landowner takes possession, the earlier deeds and legal documents even for smaller buildings are more likely to be professionally and carefully kept together. Through these Kinlet deeds and leases, the ownership of The Bush holding (or rather, the ownership of various 3/8ths and 1/4ths) can be tracked - and the names of its tenant occupants are also glimpsed, since these are not the same as its owners.

As so often after the upheavals of the Civil Wars, the earliest surviving documents appear at the time of the Restoration of 'our most glorious Sovereign Charles II'.[2] The first document relating to Bush Cottage is a demise[3] dated 17th December1660, and at that date the 'messuage and farm called the Bush' are indeed in the ownership of one William Grennows, gentleman, and his wife Elizabeth, of Bagginswood. The demise records that the messuage was 'late in the occupation of Humfrey Bennet, now William Grennows,' begging the question of whether Grennows himself lived at Bush Cottage before moving to Bagginswood.

The papers in the Kinlet collection are well-catalogued by holding into sub-collections, and in the collection that otherwise relates to the Hole & Fiddle is a

[1] A messuage is 'a dwelling house with outbuildings and land assigned to its use'.
[2] As Bush Cottage opens as a Landmark in April 2012, we are still awaiting the results of dendrochronology or tree ring dating, which may well provide a construction date some time before the earliest surviving documents. Our information will be updated as soon as this analysis is in hand.
[3] A demise is a property conveyance.

purchase deed dated 30th July 1659,[4] when 'William Grenows of Bagenswood' sold to John Wheeler of Little Meaton in the parish of Kinlet, yeoman, several parcels of land (Beard Field, Calves Croft, Upper and Lower Rayes). Rayes Sheep Walk appears on 19th-century maps as north of Fiddle Sheep Walk around today's Rays Farm, and indeed from this time on, the ownership of the Hole and Fiddle estate is separate from The Bush until William Lacon Childe reunited them in the Kinlet estate. Nevertheless, it is interesting that, until the mid-17th century, both The Bush and Hole and Fiddle holdings were apparently united under single ownership.

To return to The Bush and its occupants, from the Stottesdon parish registers, we find a Humfrey Bennett baptised in 1592. (St Mary's, Stottesdon is an ancient church of Saxon origins, given to Shrewsbury Abbey in 1085 by Earl Roger Montgomery, cousin of William the Conqueror who gave Roger most of Shropshire. The church has two exceptional features: a pre-Conquest tympanum[5] above a door under the tower and a beautifully carved Norman font. Both of these features would have been familiar to all Bush residents, and those whose baptism appears in the parish registers would indeed have had their heads wetted over the intricate ribbons and fabulous creatures of the font).

On 10th September 1621, Humfrey Bennett married Dorothy Ibell, although all is not quite what it seems – on 23rd May the following year, one Thomas is baptised, 'a base child of Humfrey Bennett and Elizabeth Hollens.' Humfrey appears in more respectable mode in 1636, when he serves as church warden, and just when the researcher might have given up on Humfrey and Dorothy's relationship, on 29th October 1637, a daughter is baptised – called Elisabeth. A possibly sloppy entry in the register for 24th April 1660 records the burial of 'John, son of John Bennet of ye Bush '- this could be the death of Humfrey, who

[4] SRO 1045/372
[5] The area enclosed by a pediment, itself the name given to the triangular area above the horizontal of a door or gable.

Anglo Saxon tympanum, Norman font and Jacobean pulpit: all these features of St Mary's Church in Stottesdon would have been familiar to the inhabitants of Bush Cottage.

would have been 68 in 1660. Such an interpretation also fits with the change of tenure in the same year as recorded by the demise.

The evidence through the deeds suggests an original holding of some size (several refer to it as 'the estate known as the Bush ') and the 1660 document[6] lists it as 'all singular houses, outhouses, other buildings, barns, stables, orchards, gardens and backsides, lands, meadows, leasows,[7] pastures, feedings, woods and underwoods, wayes, wastes, waters, watercourses, commons, commons of pasture, commodities, liberties and easements.' All this of course reads like a standard legal catch-all list – but nevertheless, the holding was substantial enough to make such an exhaustive list worthwhile.

In it, William Grennows reserves for himself 'all oake, ashe, lime [?] and crabbtrees with free liberty', perhaps an indication of where the true wealth of the site lay. The demise sells the holding to Thomas Bayly the Elder of Snead, in Montgomeryshire. Bayly, and then his daughters and their sons, continued to own The Bush for the next sixty years, though as absentee landlords rather than as residents and their names do not appear in the Stottesdon registers.

Despite selling the estate to Bayly, it seems it was William Grennows who arranges its next tenant. In December 1662, articles of agreement for a lease for 21 years at £12 10s a year were drawn up by William Grennows under which The Bush was to be leased to Thomas Perry, husbandman of Tedshill in the parish of Chetton.[8] This document provides a vivid and detailed description of activities at the Bush, emphasising too the vital importance of the seasonal round.

In these articles, Grennows again reserves for himself the oaks, ashes, crabtrees and underwoods, this time also specifying that he will keep back any minerals,

[6] SRO 1045/201
[7] A local dialect word for fields or meadows.
[8] SRO 1045/208

with the liberty of working them. (From very early times, inhabitants of the Clee Hills exploited their mineral deposits, as explained in a following chapter). Grennows also covenants that before Michaelmas next, at his own charge, he will set the messuage, house and barns in 'tenantable order.' This gives him nine months to do so, and suggests that they may not have been tenantable at the time the agreement was made, providing 1663 as a possible date for a refurbishment date for the original house (the brick infill to its panels is an alteration typically ascribed in such cases to the 18th century, as brick became more cheaply available but an earlier date for such a change is not impossible).

Perry in turn agrees he will then maintain the buildings and also the hedges and fences. He will also be allowed, in a flourish of phrases that Piers Plowman[9] might have recognised, 'houseboote, gateboote, plowboote, wayneboote and cartboote, to be used on the premises, upon delivery, and necessary fireboote, stakeboote and hedgboote without delivery, making no waste or spoyle.' These – bootes, Anglo Saxon in origin, give Perry the right to take timber for the specified and limited purposes of repair, and only for use on his own premises – to repair his house, gates, ploughs, wains, carts, fire, fences and hedges. Perry then covenants to pay all 'ancient and common levies to the Church and the poor,' while Grennows will deduct from the rent all contributions, military and other taxes, charged on the premises.

Perry is allowed all the muck and compost (valuable commodities) made on the premises that winter of 1662 and in return will leave for Grennows all muck and compost made in the last year of his lease term. The reason for this provision is clear in the next, which stipulates that, immediately after Christmas, Perry may enter to plough any of the tillable land, presumably including ploughing in the muck in time for the spring sowing, even if ahead of the formal commencement of his lease. In return, at the Christmas before the end of his term, he will permit Grennows, his heirs or assignees to do the same. Perry may bring his cattle into

the meadow grounds at Candlemas next and the pasture grounds at Lady Day following, and will similarly have convenient ground allowed him for his cattle until the May Day after the end of his term. At the harvest after the end of his lease, Perry may reap and take away any corn he may have standing on the property, provided he does not do any extra sowing on any part of the premises at Michaelmas before the end of the lease, but only 'according to the course of husbandry.' And so William Grennows signs to allow quiet possession, and illiterate Thomas Perry makes his mark to covenant to pay his rent.

Thomas Perry's occupancy of the site is confirmed by a document setting out a feoffment[10] 'in a messuage called the Bush ', giving Thomas Bayly its use as owner but also naming Perry as tenant on 27th March 1664.[11] (The scribes for such documents must have been paid by the word, and it is suspicious how completely such documents fill the parchment sheet! As an example of their synonym-rich verbosity, the Grennows 'have given, granted, bargained, enfeoffed and confirmed…all that messuage and tenement and every of these appurtenances and commonly called or known by the name of The Bush situated, lying and being in the township of Chorley in the parish of Stottesdon in the county of Salop…') Perry does not appear in the Stottesdon parish registers but there seems little doubt that he occupied the site.

Bayly also takes possession of two other parcels of land in Stottesdon known as the Stickinges, for 500 years at a peppercorn rent, and the document is labelled 'A Deed of the Stickin for Colaterall Seacurity for the Bush ' – reinforcing the impression of The Bush as a substantial property of some value.

When Thomas Bayly died (date unknown) he was followed by his son and executor, also Thomas, but who died before he could divide ownership of the property according to the will's provisions (both Thomases are recorded as 'late

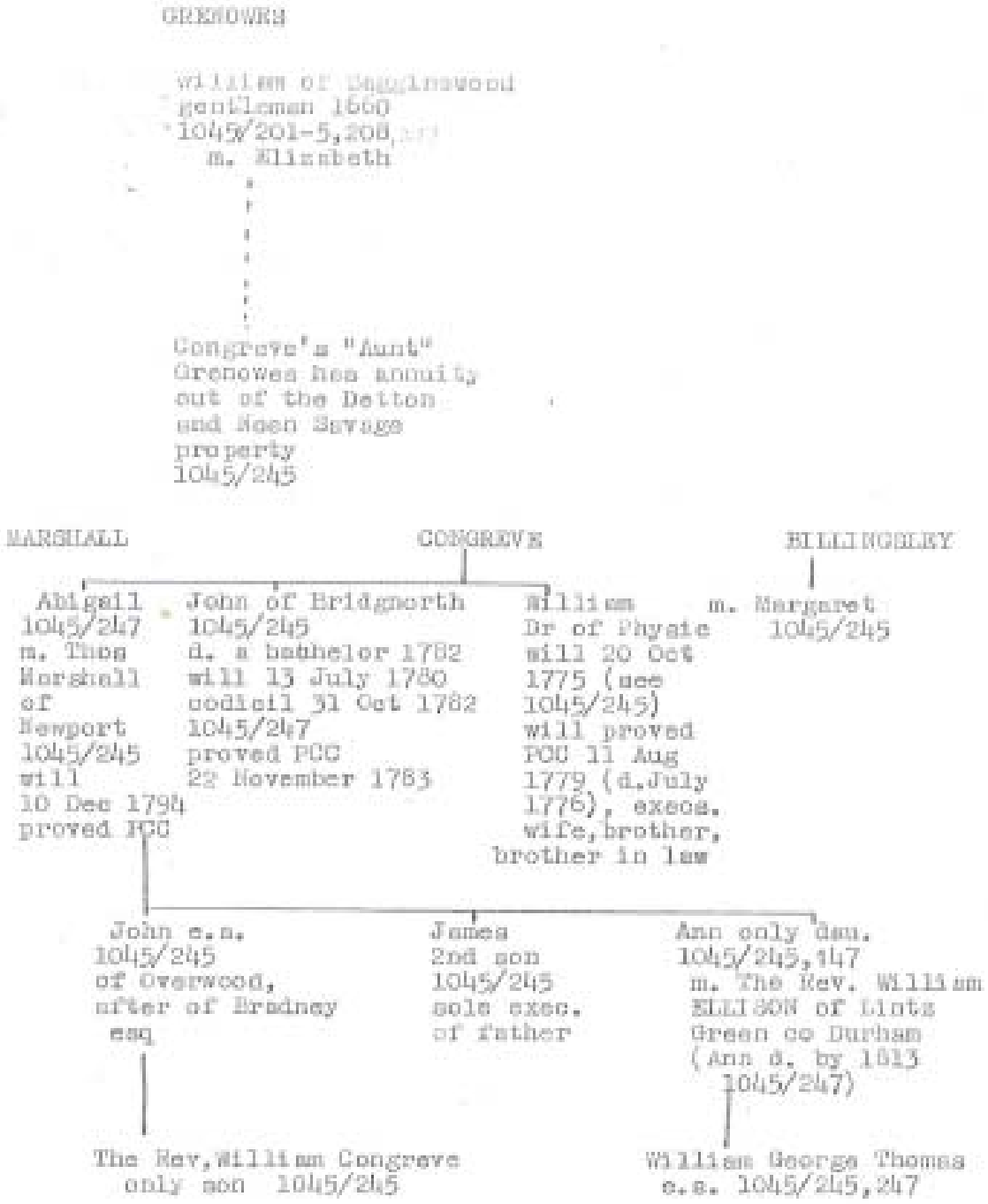
[9] Stottesdon is traditionally claimed as the birthplace for William Langland, author of the 14th century narrative poem, *The Dream of Piers Plowman* (although scholars dispute over several other possible locations).
[10] A 'feoffment' is the total relinquishment and transfer of all rights of ownership of land.

of Astley Abbotts' so therefore absentee owners). An undated legal opinion states that young Thomas' sisters and eventually their heirs should indeed be entitled to their shares of The Bush holding, and this triggers a tripartite division of the holding that will last until the end of the 18th century. The division is two parts of 3/8ths and one of 1/4th. Sadly, no maps appear to have survived to define this split. The Baylys must have been of resilient stock, since in 1724 we find Sarah and Rebecca, both daughters of Thomas Bayly the Elder, and their husbands carrying out a land swap of 2/4th of a messuage called Allmarch in Montgomeryshire and 1/4th of the Bush, the two being reckoned to be of equal value. Rebecca's son, Edward Jeffries, takes on the 1/4th of the Bush. We also have another glimpse of the value of the woodland: £65 was to be paid 'for coppice woods ready to cut growing on the premises at Stottesdon' as part of the land exchange.' This is quite a sum, more than five times the annual rent in 1660, and speaks of diminishing timber supplies at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.[12]

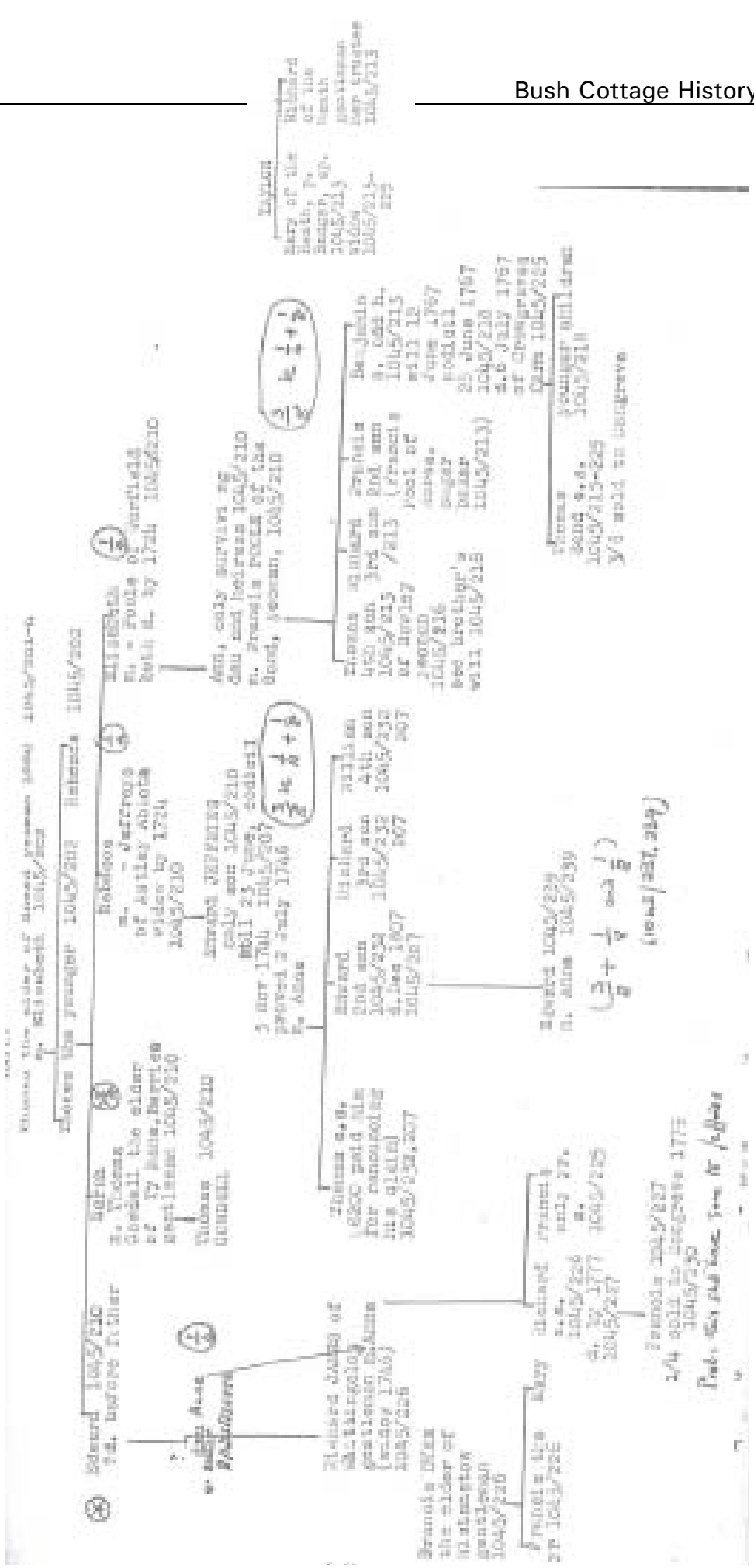
In April 1745, Edward Jeffries, great grandson of Thomas Bayly, inherited 3/8ths of the estate[13] and in May 1745, ownership of another 3/8ths of The Bush 'late [occupied by] William Elcock, now [by] Samuel Pugh' passed to a Francis Poole. (Both Pugh and Elcock are family names that appear in the parish register through the 16th and 17th centuries, even if the landlords of The Bush come from further afield. A son, William, is baptised in Stottesdon in September 1679 to Thomas and Mary Allcockes, who could be the same William Elcock.) This 1745 document describes a complicated marriage settlement between Francis Poole's son Benjamin and Mary Taylor. The Pooles' holding is described as '3/8ths of [the ownership of] one messuage, one barn, one garden, one orchard, 20 acres land, 10 acres meadow, 20 acres pasture, 20 acres wood and 20 acres of furze and heath and common of pasture', to be assigned to Benjamin, his heirs and assignees 'forever'.

[11] SRO 1045/203
[12] SRO 1045/210
[13] SRO 1045/232

These two pages show the complicated division of ownership of the Bush estate between Thomas Bayly's daughters and their descendants.



(Shropshire Archives)



This is useful specifying the acreages involved for the first time, which amount to a respectable smallholding, from which the three landlords, Jefferies, Poole and James were each to receive their share of the total rent.

A simpler joint arrangement for the whole property survives from March 1760, when Benjamin Poole, gentleman; Edward Jeffreys [sic], yeoman of Stokenmilborough, and Richard James of Witanstow granted a lease to John Malphas of Stottesdon (Malphas is another good Stottesdon parish name) 'all the messuage or Dwelling House called the Bush , with the Lands and Buildings thereunto belonging now in possession [i.e. occupation] of John Malphas', reserving to themselves as landlords and their heirs 'all that Coppice ground and all Timber and other trees and underwoods thereupon growing or being, with free liberty to fell, cutt and carry away the same of his and their own pleasure, and excepting all mines, minerals and quarries whatsoever in and upon the said premises…' John Malphas 'shall not Cutt Crop Top or Cutt any Timber Tree not yearly cropped, or spoil or destroy any young tree during the said term that shall grow upon the premises upon pain to forfeit ten shillings apiece, over and above the Value of the Tree or sapling so Cutt down.'

These swingeing stipulations reflect the importance of the active long term management of the woodland to the landlords, its valuable crop of wood to be protected from the small farmer tenanting Bush Cottage, who leased the farmland only and was not able to benefit financially from the arboreal or mineral resources of the Bush. Interestingly, Malphas did attempt to exploit coal seams north of The Bush in the field known as Cowslow around 1778 and this is discussed in the following chapter. Note too that there is a field NE of Bush Cottage called Coalpit Leasow[14] - but this belonged to the farm at Harcourt. The Bush holding itself was, essentially, a farm, and all its tenants were described as yeomen or farmers.

[14] 'Leasow' is a local dialect word for a pasture.

The -boots have also got stricter: Malphas is allowed 'to take sufficient Hedge boot to be used and spent upon the premises' without the owners' specific permission, but needs their assignment for 'House boot and other necessary boots.' He is also held to 'spend all Hay Straw Muck and Fodder on the premises and not elsewhere', so ensuring the fertility of the soil.

A rent roll survives from 1772, 'An account of the Rents of The Bush estate as given to me by Mr Jeffries (who is entitled to a 3/8th share thereof:'

			£ s d
Annual rent pd by Jn Malpas			7 : 0 : 0
Deduct for Land Tax at 3	15 : 0		
Chief rent	6 : 8		
Coppy Lewn [?]	2 : 0		
Expences	1 : 0		
		Remains	5 :15 : 4
My 4th & 1/8th share			2 : 3 : 3
Mr Jeffries ditto			2 : 3 : 3
Mr James's 4th ditto			1 : 8 : 10
			5 :15 : 4

Interestingly, the 'chief rent' of £6 8s is exactly the same as John Perry was paying for the holding more than a century previously. John Malpas was still tenant until at least 1779, when Francis James sold his 4th of The Bush holding to one John Congreve.[15]

In June 1791, William Lacon Childe of Kinlet Hall first enters the picture. He attended an auction in Shrewsbury on 29th & 30th June 'of several Estates in county of Shropshire' as part of a land purchase campaign in these years to add to and consolidate the Kinlet estate. One of his successful bids was for the Hole & Fiddle, Lot 26 in surviving Sales Particulars. The eventual demise of 31st December 1791 covered 'all those Tenements and farms called the Hole & Fiddle

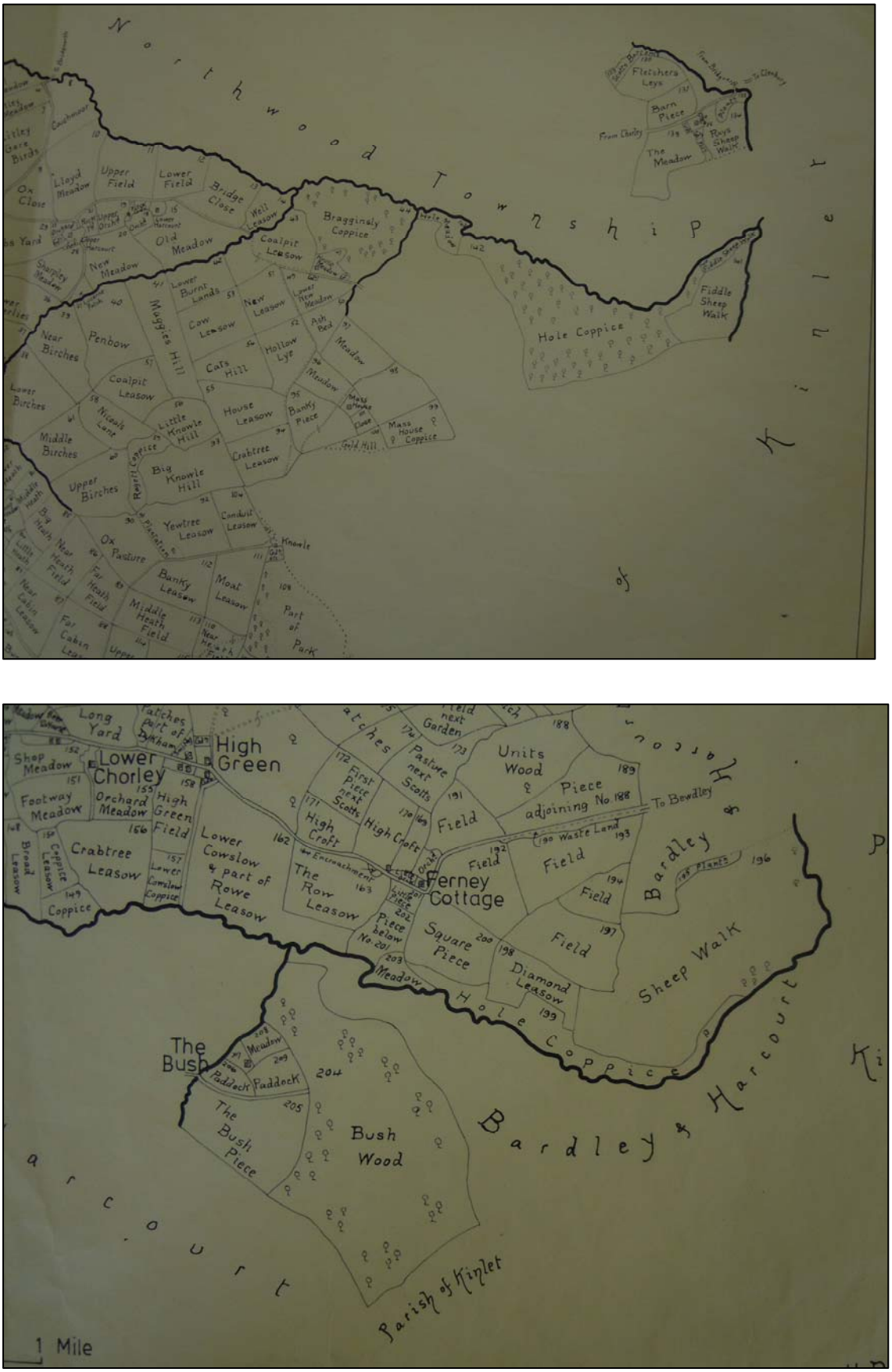
[15] SRO 1045/236-7. In 1779, Congreve brought a case to the summer Assizes against the inhabitants of neighbouring Kinlet parish for the poor repair of a stretch of road between his estate in Chorley and the turnpike, to which he wanted to convey a large quantity of timber to be felled on his Chorley land and so on to the Severn at Bewdley. This felling may well have been in the woods around Bush Cottage.

containing an estimation of 58 acres, one rood and 11 perches…now in the occupation of [space] Edwards. And also that *parcel of wood ground with the timber and Coppice Wood thereon now growing adjoining the said last mentioned farms and containing 60 acres or thereabouts*.'[16] This last adjoining 'Coppice Wood' can only have been Bush Wood or the adjacent Bragginsley Coppice, and someone has noted on the particulars by hand 'NB This is an excellent Coppice and is of Eight Years Growth.' Lacon Childe paid £3,360 for Lot 26, a large sum so his bid may not have been uncontested, and perhaps surprisingly its vendor was one 'Thomas Budgen Bridgen…of the City of New York & the States of New York America and his wife Catherine.' A label to this bundle of documents relating to the Hole & Fiddle estate also records that this was when Lacon Childe acquired the Jeffries moiety of The Bush estate.

Then in March 1813, William Lacon Childe and his son and heir William bought the remainder of The Bush estate from Congreve / Marshall ownership, as part of another acquisition of a complicated group of similarly fragmented holdings in and around the Kinlet estate.[17] One Thomas Millichap appears to have tenure of The Bush (or 'his undertenants or Assignees'[18]), farming at least part of the holding at this date.

From 1813, The Bush disappears into the wider Kinlet estate and sadly its rent rolls were not kept with the solicitor's papers later deposited as the Kinlet Collection with the Record Office. If such records have survived, their whereabouts is unknown. The next time the holding surfaces in the documents is in the 1840s as a result of the Tithe Commutation Act of 1836. This piece of legislation provided a mechanism for the tithe (or tenth part) of local produce due to the church since time immemorial to be translated into a cash value. Detailed maps of the land holdings of each parish were required for this, and subsequent apportionment of cash tithes was allocated according to their ownership.

[16] SRO 1045/75
[17] SRO 1045/244-5, 246-7.
[18] SRO 1045/241



Transcripts of the tithe maps for Bardley & Harcourt (1841, top) and Chorley & Northwood (1843).

The tithe apportionments reveal the extent of The Bush Cottage tenancy, which straddled two of the maps. It was now a significant holding within the Kinlet estate, combining The Hole & Fiddle parcels of land in Bardley & Harcourt township in the parish of Kinlet, while The Bush fields remained in the Chorley & Northwood township. In 1842, the tithe register recorded all these plots under the tenancy of one Richard Dodd, Farmer, who was adjudged liable for Great Tithes of £8 10s 8d. In 1841 the first census was initiated, and from the Chorley returns we learn that Richard Dodd was born in 1791 (and so was 52 at the time of the census) and lived with his wife Anne (49), and children Martha (17), Richard (15), Jane (13) and Sarah (11).

The family was still living in the Chorley township (and we may safely assume at the Bush) in 1851, but had moved elsewhere by the 1871 census. (The 1861 return looks unreliable, since Richard Dodd is still listed as being 60 years old). After the great effort put into the tithe apportionments initially, the loosening ties of the church over the countryside through the nineteenth century meant that the liability for tithes cannot be traced after the initial burst of energy in the 1840s. As census returns rarely record house names and census officers cannot be relied upon to follow the same route in enumerating isolated dwellings, tracing the census returns for isolated rural buildings once a tenant name changes is notoriously unreliable. Such is the case for Bush Cottage, and after Farmer Dodd in 1851, we lose sight of individual tenants.

To complete the account of ownership, The Bush remained in the ownership of the Lacon Childes, who became Baldwyn Childes, until 1960. From modern deed searches, Roland Baldwyn Childe inherited the Kinlet estate in December 1959 and on 24th May 1960, Bush Cottage was sold to Ronald Godfrey Wall (his predecessors apparently lived in the cottage with no fewer than eleven children). Mr Wall and his wife lived at Bush Cottage for a few years, but by 1964 the roof was soon leaking and they moved to Bragginsley as that was empty.

Shropshire

BUSH COTTAGE, CHORLEY, STOTTESDON

Status:
Grade II

Planning Authority:
Bridgnorth District Council

Contact:
Stephen Ponder, Conservation Officer, Bridgnorth District Council, Westgate, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV16 5AA

Tel: 01746 713100

Bush Cottage was built in the early to mid 17th century and the timber frame was infilled with brick in the 18th century. The gable ends, of the later date, are limestone rubble with brick quoins. The building is relatively small - a two unit plan with one storey and attic. Bush Cottage is in a very isolated position and can currently only be reached on foot, although there is a track nearby which could possibly be used for access if the building were to be reused.

The cottage would suit residential use, although its current condition is very poor. The roof is failing, rainwater goods are missing and the windows are broken and their cills are rotting. Internally the floorboards and plaster are beginning to rot. Chorley is a small village in a rural area within easy distance of Birmingham.

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Bush Cottage's entry in SAVE's 1999 Buildings at Risk register

Bush Cottage fell into dereliction. It was spotted by the buildings at risk charity SAVE Britain's Heritage who drew attention to its plight in their1999 Register of Buildings at Risk. Meanwhile, in 1998 a Landmark supporter had bought the nearby patch of woodland, formerly Bagginslye Coppice. He was intrigued by the 'romantic ruin' next to it and was already making enquiries about it. After buying and restoring the cottage, he lived there for almost ten years, creating a vegetable plot in front of the cottage much as occupants must have done in earlier centuries.

A summary timeline for Bush Cottage

Known occupants are shown in **bold**; other names are owners of The Bush holding.

1548	Dwelling constructed on The Bush
Early 17th C	**Humfrey Bennet** ('late in the occupation of' in 1660)
By 1660	William Grennowes leases to Thomas Bayly the Elder of Snead, Yeoman (SRO 1045/201)
1662	(Sub)lease to **Thomas Perry of Tedshill** (SRO 1045/203)

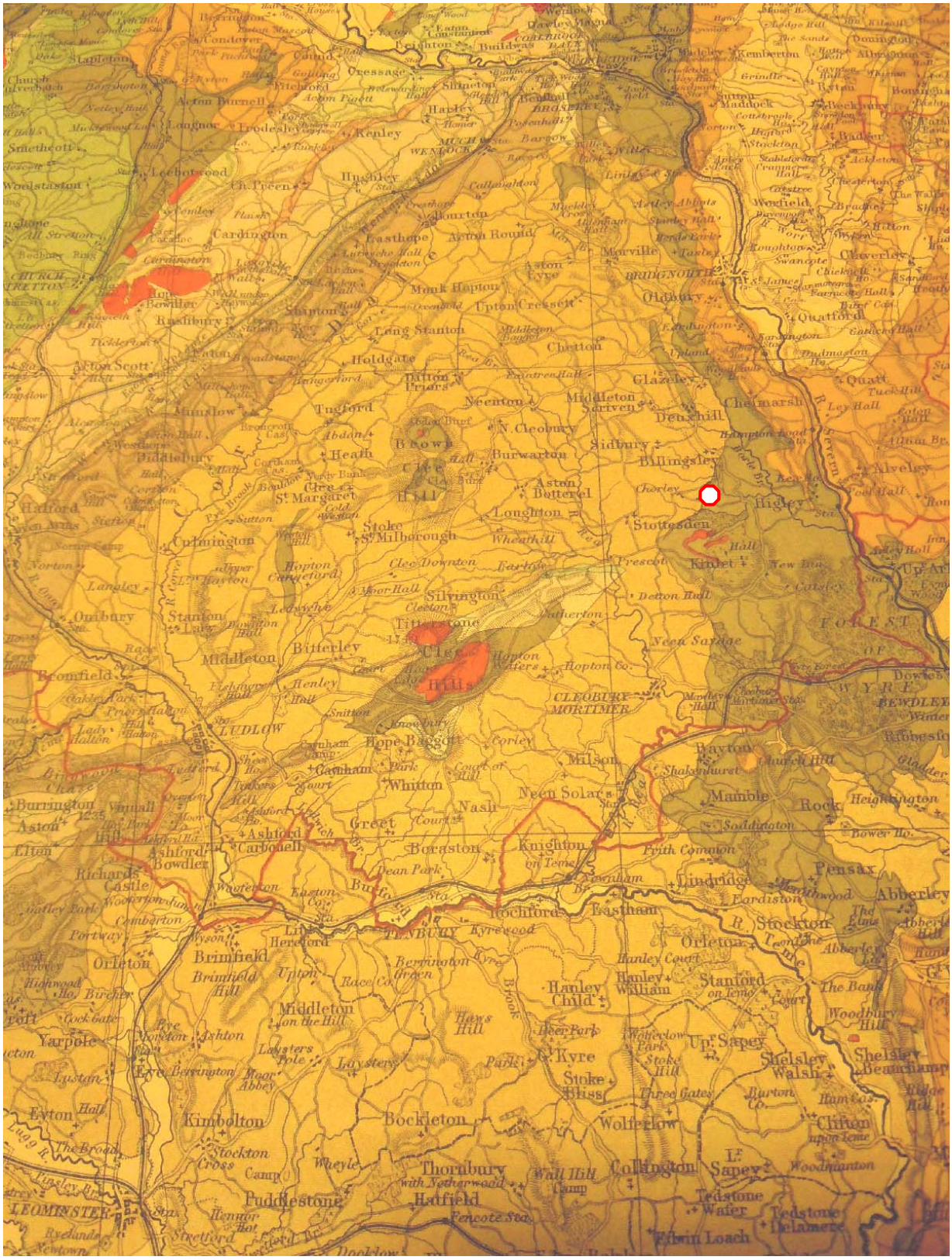
(After Thomas Bayly's death, ownership of the holding is split between his offspring, Sarah, Rebecca and Elizabeth. Ownership settles down to 1/4th to the Jameses/Congreves, 3/8th to the Jeffries and 3/8th to the Pooles).

1724	Sarah (and her husband) exchange their ¼ of The Bush with her sister Rebecca and Rebecca's son, Edward Jeffryes, for land in Allmarch, Montgomeryshire. (SRO 1045/210)
	William Elcock ('late' in 1745)
1745	**Samuel Pugh**, when Mary Taylor brings 3/8ths of the messuage as part of her the settlement of her marriage to Benjamin Pool (SRO 1045/211-12)
1760 – at least 1779	**John Malphas, yeoman, possibly followed by a son by the same name.**
By 1812	**Thomas Millichap** (SRO 1045/246-7)
1791-1813	The Bush estate (3/8th, 3/8th and ¼) acquired by William Lacon Childe for the Kinlet Estate.
1841- at least 1851	**Richard Dodd, farmer**
1960	Sold to **Ronald Wall**
1999	Sold to Landmark supporter
2012	Freehold transferred to Landmark.

Geology and coal

Bush Cottage lies on the western boundary the Forest of Wyre coal measures, as they merge into the Devonian belt of Old Red Sandstone. This belt was laid down in this area at the end of the Silurian period, which lasted from some 443 to 416 million years ago. This part of Britain is particularly associated with the palaeontology of the period, naming two of its epochs, the Wenlockian (428-423 million years ago) and the Ludlow (423-418 million years ago). The Earth underwent considerable changes during the Silurian period, with important repercussions for the environment and life within it. The melting of large glaciers brought a substantial rise in sea levels. The climate also began to stabilise, ending the previous pattern of erratic climatic fluctuations. There was a remarkable evolution of fishes and from the Silurian, the first good evidence of life on land is preserved: ancestors of spiders and centipedes, and the earliest fossils of vascular plants.

By the late Silurian period, the greater part of Britain was probably a land-tract, and formed part of a continent which extended to the North and West. The sea in which the Silurian rocks were laid down had contracted and now lay over what is now the southern part of Britain. From the sea, a long gulf or estuary probably extended inland towards the north and in this was deposited the Old Red Sandstone of South Wales, Herefordshire and Shropshire. The Bush lies near the edge of Lower Old Red – made up, in geology's poetic language, of red- and



Geological map of south-east Shropshire, showing deposits of Red Sandstone (Old and New) and the Lower and Middle coal measures around Highley. (VCH)

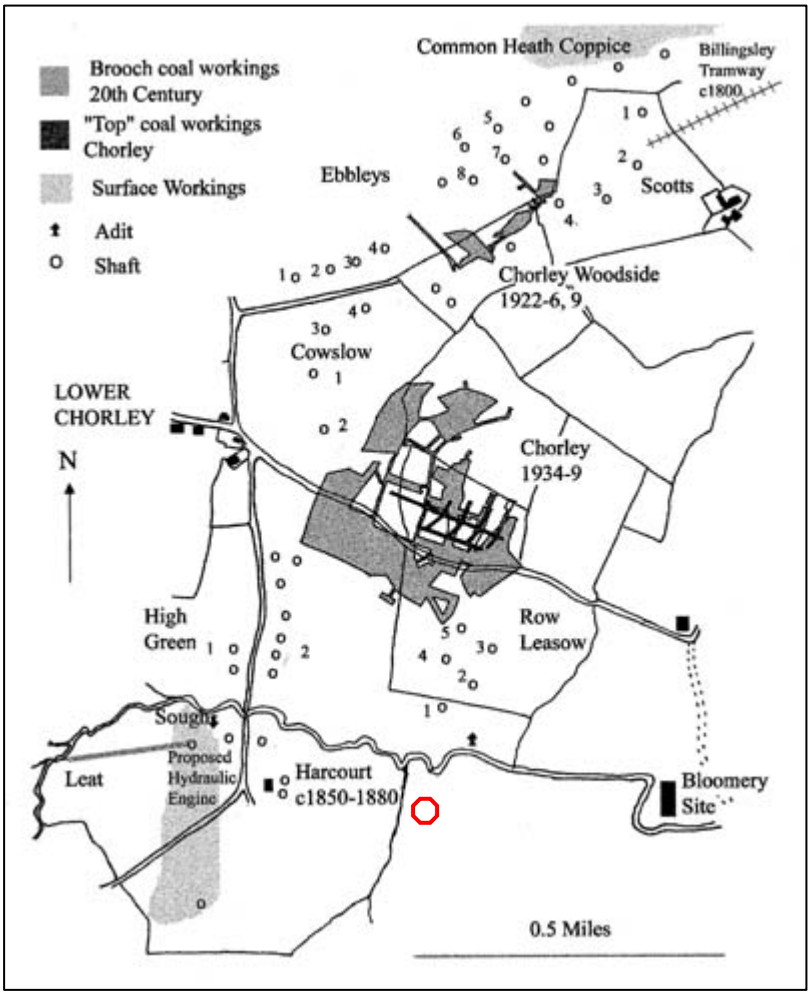
○ Approximate location of Bush Cottage

yellow- and green-mottled sandstones, flagstones, shales, marls and cornstones, with fossils of fish and crustaceae.

This sandstone plateau tilts down to the south-east where, in the valley of the Borle brook, the Lower and Middle Coal Measures are encountered at Highley and Kinlet, on the northern edge of the Wyre Forest. The lumpy landscape around The Bush is therefore indicative of underlying deposits of both coal and ironstone near the surface.

There have been small open cast mines and shafts in the area since the Roman period, and this easy availability of coal deposits enabled and facilitated the development of expertise in iron smelting, making Shropshire the cradle of the industrial revolution. Ironworking will be explored in more detail in the next chapter. As for coal mining, around 1800 Thomas Crump of Chorley wrote a remarkable and very detailed account of mines in his neighbourhood. His family had lived in Chorley since the 16th century. The original manuscript is now lost but was copied in the late nineteenth century by geologist Daniel Jones, which is how it has survived. A full transcript is included to this album as an appendix.

The Bush lies just south of the area Crump so meticulously records, Bragginsly Coppice, Bush Wood and Hole Coppice acting a natural barrier. Crump includes in his description an account of Cowslow, a tract of land running due north from the other side of Bragginsly Coppice, just north of Bush Cottage. Crump records that the coal deposits at Cowslow were exploited by John Malpass [sic] senior 'from about the year 1768 to about 1778.' The Bush holding was also tenanted by a John Malphas in these years (and Thomas Crump's account also implies that a John Malphas junior may have followed).



Mines in Chorley, 1775-1950. The numbered mines are those referred to by Thomas Crump and are based on his maps. The locations of 20th-century mines are also shown.

Approximate location of Bush Cottage

From his perspective of around 1800, Crump tells us that:

> 'In the field called Cowslow at the High Green now divided into two parts one of which is a coppice, some coal mines had been worked in very ancient times. From about the year 1768 to about 1778 the coal mines were worked there by John Malpass Senr on the side next to High Green. They were followed from the break-out or basset at the depth of 5 or 6 yards to the depth of 26 yards and the last pit, No 2 by the side of the lane leading to Ferney Hall was 36 yards deep and had a deal of water. They had in No 2 the Yard or Four Feet Coal, sweet coal as before described as also the rider and bottom coal, tho' often when the Yard coal was good the Four Feet coal immediately below it was soft and of no value, tho' of the usual thickness, also sometimes when the Yard Coal was soft and useless the Four Feet Coal was found good and oftentimes all the coals were found

good. They deepen very much, firstly towards the SE or SE by E. All these coals and indeed all the coals found in this country are extensively subject to faults, breaks or troubles which sometimes cut them off in all directions; these faults may considerably lessen the quantity of coals expected from any pit and increase the expense of the workings. There are veins of good ironstone found in all the pits in Cowslow tho' subject to faults and it is all ungot and it is expected there are veins of ironstone below the coal.

The workings of John Malpass in Cowslow are all left off at faults or water and it is very probable that these coals extend (faults excepted) on the eastern or deep side under the remaining pits of Cowslow and under the adjoining lands of Thomas Crump called the Scots land (and under the field called High Croft belonging to Mr George Childe and communicates with those got in the Scots meadow also with those got by Messrs Thursfield at the top of the Ebleys and they evidently extend into Row Leasow tho' at a great depth and probably may extend under the Sulphur coals that are found in the Row Leasow, they also lead with little interruption from Cowslow to Lady Blount's works at Harcott Brook and from there in a line to the top of the Knowle Hill, Harcott.

There is a large pit mount in the middle of the coppice, part of Cowslow, which was begun by Jno Malpass about 1778 but was never completed on account of the great quantity of water and it is unknown whether there are coals in that part or not. There are also two old pit mounts at the bottom of Cowslow marked BC which were worked in very ancient times and by the quantity of slack in the mounts appear to have afforded a great quantity of coals and are supposed to have been discontinued on account of the water. The coals are worked in the bottom of High Green Leys (now belonging to Lady Blount) by Mr Thomas Childe about the year 1768 or 1766 afterwards all up the field to the top by a Mr William Vernon until 1780, they were left off on the eastern side at faults or water and probably deepen into the Row Leasow. Lady Blount began work at Harcott brook about 1790 and continued it 2 or 3 years, all the coals were very good and thick and in plenty (subject to faults) and the pits were 60 yards deep. She left off on account of the great quantity of water which could scarcely be kept under by a gin going night and day and there was a probability of more water coming into the work when it should be more extended. There was no engine of any kind erected to draw the water but a weir was built across the brook considerably higher up the stream and a trench cut from it to convey water to near the pit heads where there was a fall for the water of about 16 or 18 or 20 ft and it was intended to erect a lever engine to be worked by the water to pump the water out of the pits, but the engine was never erected and the works were discontinued.... About 1780 to 1790 a sough or level was begun at Harcott Brook and was carried on and coals got all up Harcott Coppice and thro' several fields beyond the coppice, but not being sufficiently deep it laid dry but a very narrow ridge of coal from the old hollows or workings and having many large faults to head thro' and

> as they carried up the bank the level pits becoming more and more deep it was given up, the proprietors Messrs Humphreys and Fennel having sustained very severe loss. About 1776 on Craddock sank two pits in the southernmost field but one at the Knowle Hill. The coals were found very good and a great quantity were raised and the coals were left whole and good the whole length of the workings on the deep side where they were limited by the water.'

Knowle Hill is the steep hill immediately south of Bush Cottage; Harcourt the neighbouring farm to the west. There are coal spoil heaps in the wood near Bragginslye and there were opencast workings in the fields below Harcourt in the 1950s. There was even a small mineral railway which ran from Pit Cottage, north of Bragginslye. How frustrated the Malpasses must have been, prohibited from exploiting the mineral deposits on their own main holding and finding those at Cowslow so difficult to exploit, while Lady Blount of Harcourt got on with workings that must have been virtually in sight of Bush Cottage.

However, these small local ambitions were soon overshadowed by the larger scale of the coal mines required to supply the industry of Telford, Ironbridge and beyond. A note added to Crump's manuscript records that 'The furnace at Billingsley [a village north of The Bush holding] and the coal and ironstone mines were stopped working in 1812, the holders having become bankrupt, they were carried on about 17 or 18 years by four different successive companies and £50,000 was lost by these works.'

Communications must also have hampered these early forays into mining, the contours of the landscape prohibiting canal cuts and making even turnpike roads difficult. Various mines were more successfully established for a while in the vicinity, but none lasted for long. In the 1790s, Sir William Pulteney, MP for Shrewsbury, acquired land at Billingsley and called in two of the foremost mining engineers in the country, George Johnson of Newcastle and Dr Henry Grey MacNab, to have another go at exploiting the deposits there. They formed a consortium which at one time included the great Thomas Telford, but this

enterprise also failed, with the death of Johnson in 1801 and MacNab's flight from creditors the following year.

Some seventy years later, new deposits were discovered and the Billingsley Colliery Company was formed. Overcoming unscrupulous initial ownership, the colliery was then run successfully by its former chief clerk Alfred Gibbs from 1883. After 1910, the mine expanded but outgrew its strength and closed in 1921.

Surviving miners cottages at Highley provide more tangible reminders of past mining activity (most of the Billingsley colliers lived in Highley). The Highley Mining Company was formed in 1877, and in the 1890s a second pit was opened at Kinlet. The company, which had its own mineral railway for a time, flourished well into the 20th century before closing in 1937.

Stottesdon, the parish in which Bush Cottage stands, had relatively little coal mining activity. The Old Red Sandstone on which most of it stands produce a better arable soil than the coal measure clays to its east and so activity remained mostly agricultural. The River Rea, running just west of the village provided power for various mills through the centuries, for corn, fulling (for woollen cloth) and even cotton. It also served several small iron forges, the subject of the next chapter. Chorley township, however, lies at the boundary of the Old Red and the coal clays, which explains the localised mining activity recorded by Thomas Crump. Indeed, the last deep mine at Chorley did not close until 1938.[19] Today, appreciating the surrounding countryside that has survived, we can feel grateful the exploitation of the coal deposits in the Clee Hills was relatively small scale and that, Gaia-like[20], any scars have now faded from the landscape.

[19] There is an excellent local history society, the Four Parishes Heritage Group, from whose website this information about local mines has been drawn. www.shropshirehistory.org.uk

[20] Gaia, named after the goddess of the earth, is the name of James Lovelock's hypothesis that the earth is a self regulating mechanism, capable of self-healing even in the face of human or climatic depredations.

Iron, bloomeries and blast furnaces

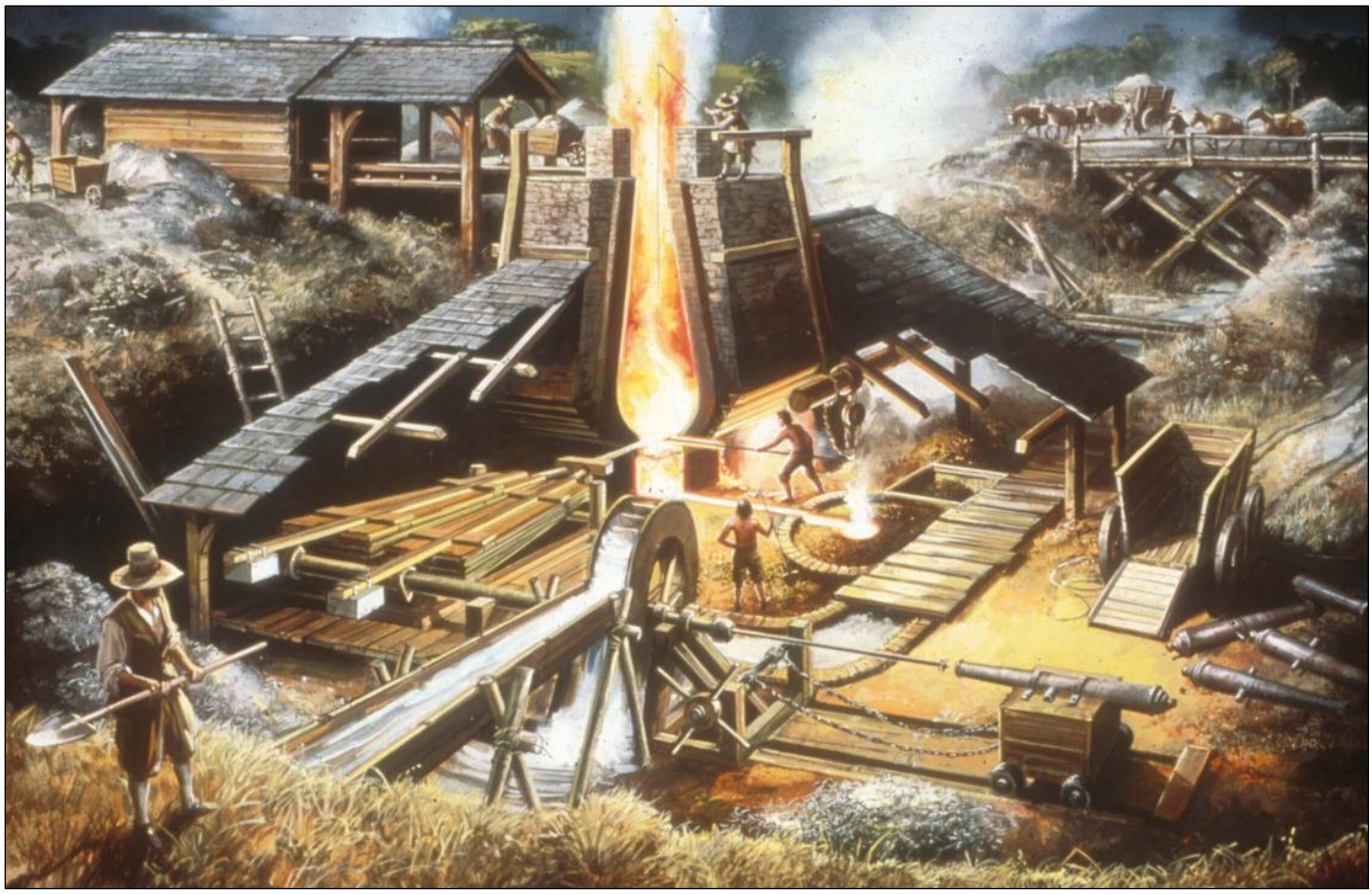
Coal and ironstone often go hand in hand geologically, and the first was eventually (but not initially) necessary for the exploitation of the second. Iron was introduced into Britain around 600 BC and became one of our most ubiquitous materials, necessary for even the most basic agricultural and industrial advances. Iron takes three forms: *wrought iron*, which contains no, or very little, carbon and is malleable; *cast iron*, which is rendered brittle and not malleable by the incorporation of 5% carbon but which can be moulded, filed, drilled and ground, and *steel,* which contains up to 1.5% carbon and can be both forged and cast.

Wrought iron is the simplest form, produced by smelting ironstone or ore with charcoal. At first this was done in a simple scoop out of the ground (a bowl furnace) but from around 100 AD an upright furnace was used, making it easier to maintain the heat and so burn the carbon out of the iron by oxygen, introduced with bellows through a clay pipe low down in the furnace wall. The iron collected at the bottom in a small lump known as the bloom – and the furnaces consequently became known as bloomeries. The bloom was hammered to consolidate it and remove any remaining carbon, and was then ready for reheating by the smith and working into any required form.

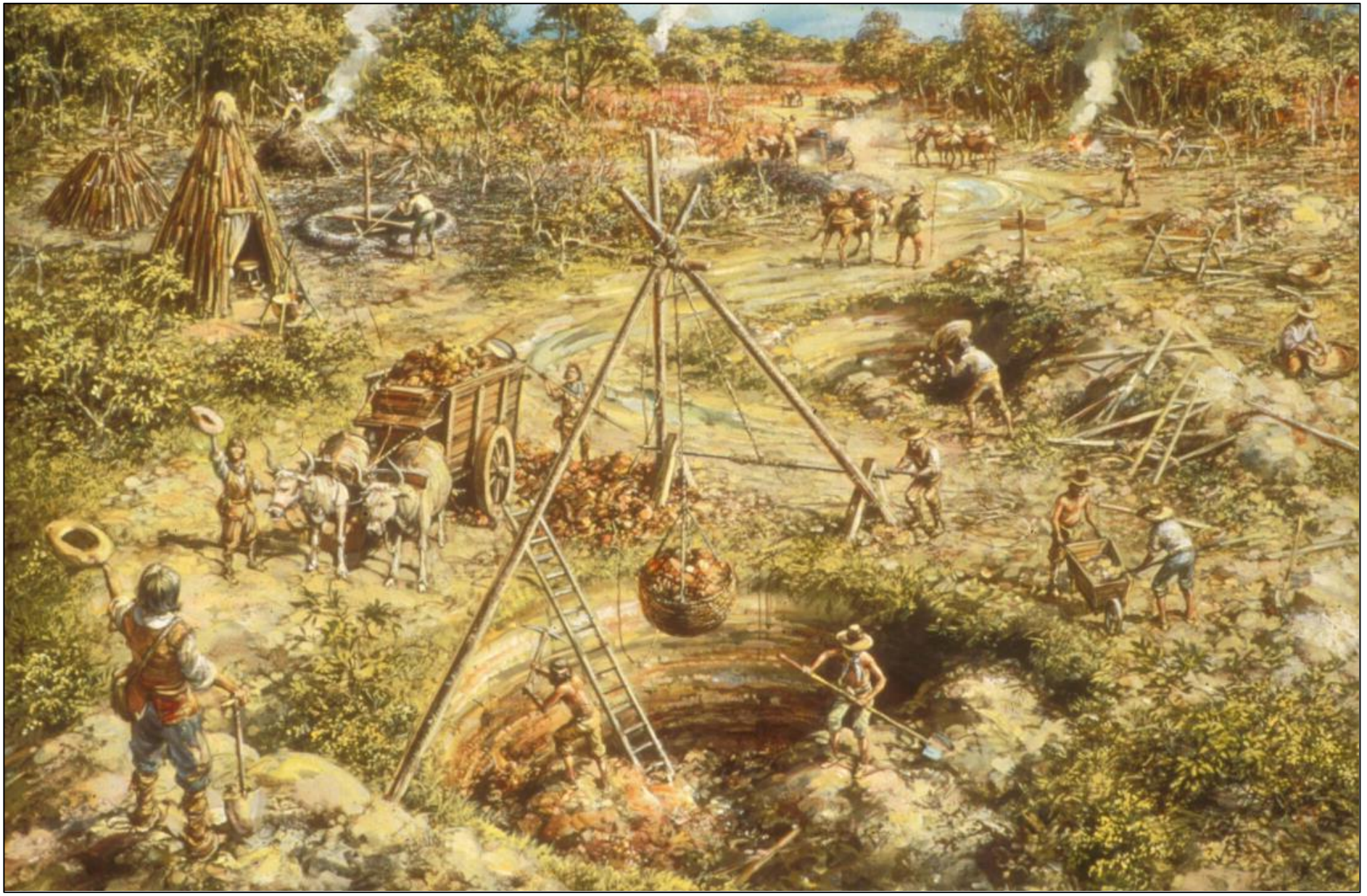
A medieval iron furnace, with bellows. It seems more likely that the furnace would have been enclosed than open as depicted here.

Experimental archaeologists have successfully recreated early blast furnaces. Ironstone and charcoal are fed from the top in layers, and the fire fanned with bellows. The 'bloom' settles at the bottom, but is initially contaminated with impurities: fragments of charcoal and glassy slag (below left). It must be reheated and hammered ('wrought') to remove these impurities, the carbon burning off as sparks.

The furnaces got progressively larger, requiring by the mid 15th century the bellows to be powered by water (there were several water powered furnaces along the River Rea). From 1496, blast furnaces began to appear in Britain, heated with a powerful blast of air from two water powered bellows, worked by an overshot waterwheel fed by a millpond. The larger quantities of molten iron so produced ran out from the bottom into moulds sunk into sand or loam outside the furnace. This was cast iron, and the ingots were known as sows or pigs depending on their size. The fuel was still charcoal, since the sulphur found in coal ruined the iron.

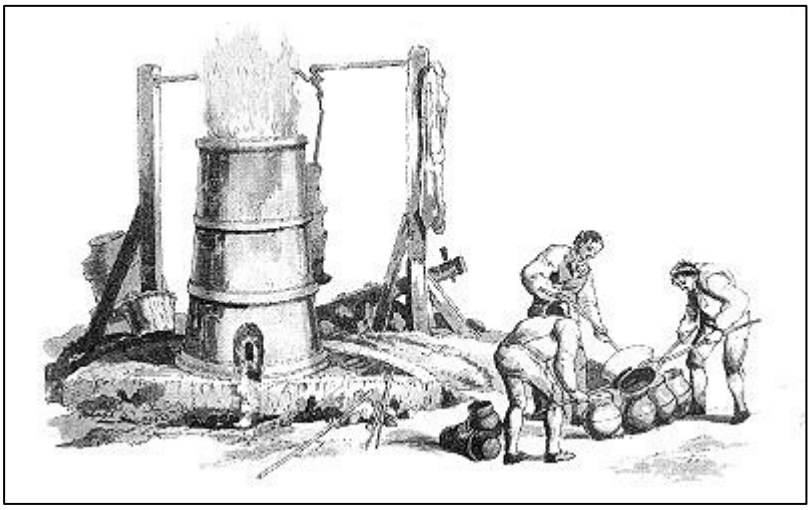


Reconstructive drawing of a water blown iron furnace, such as were once found along the River Rea.
http://www.wealdeniron.org.uk/hist.htm



The early modern landscape in Shropshire must have looked much like this depiction of the early Wealden iron industry. Ironstone is dug from shallow open cast mines and carted off to the furnaces. Charcoal burners in the coppices and woodland laboriously burn the charcoal needed for smelting

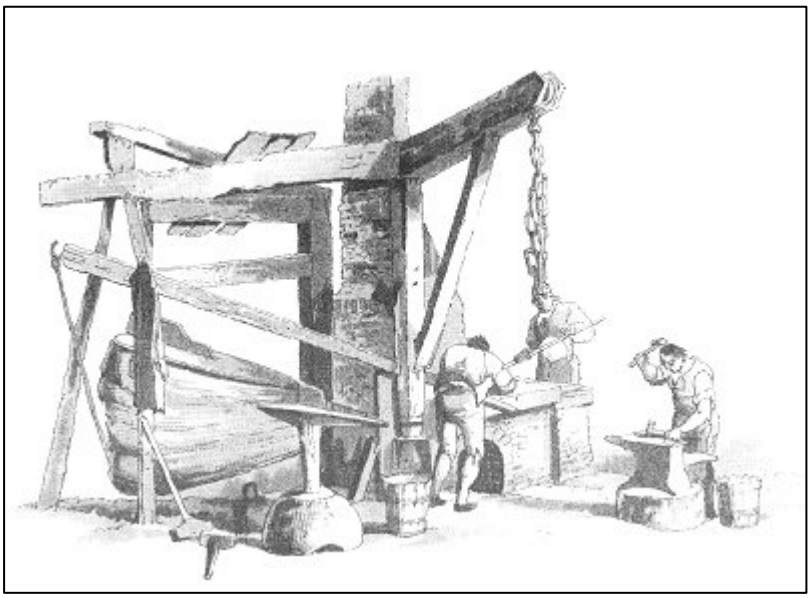
There is evidence of early bloomeries and blast furnaces all around the Chorley area, the local deposits of ironstone and abundant wood for charcoal encouraging widespread, if relatively small scale, activity. Cleobury Mortimer had iron forges by the late sixteenth century. The closest such activity to Bush Cottage known to date was at a site called Ned's Garden (SO706840), investigated by GeoArch and lying by the stream that runs east/west to the north of Bush Cottage along the edge of Old Coppice (formerly Bragginslye Coppice and the Hole), along the line of the Stottesdon/Billingsley parish boundary. There are significant quantities of bloomery slag on both sides of the stream and the archaeological evidence (pottery shards, domestic refuse) suggests that there was a sizeable iron works here from the 12th century into the early 14th century. After a break in sequence (perhaps due to the series of poor harvests followed by the Black Death in the first decades of the 14th century) activity begins again on the site in the late 16th or early 17th centuries, continuing into the 18th.



A bloomery.

A little further north, on Fiddle Brook near High Green in Chorley (SO705832), by the mid-17th century there was another site, known as Cinder Mill. Geophysics has revealed a number of hearths here, perhaps ore roasting hearths, around a water course indicative of a water blown furnace. Radio carbon dating of a piece of charcoal from this site provides a date between 1400 and 1440. While

research for this album has only served to reinforce GeoArch's preliminary hypothesis, that Bush Cottage has no direct link with these bloomeries, there is no doubt that such activities must have been part of the daily scene and conversation for earlier inhabitants of the cottage.[21] It will still be interesting to calibrate the date from tree ring analysis (dendrochronology) for Bush Cottage once this is available with activity at these bloomeries. Their slag is black, blue-black when broken; that of blast furnaces is more often glassy, due to the higher temperatures melting silicates in the discarded material. It ranges from blackish to green (most often) to creamy yellow.



A (still small scale) blast furnace, 1790s. Note the bellows. On a water blown furnace, the bellows would have been harnessed to a waterwheel, rather than pumped by hand as here.

We cannot leave the story of early iron working in South Shropshire without reference to Abraham Darby's revolutionary discovery in 1709, of how to smelt iron ore using coke rather than charcoal. By 1700s, the increasing scarcity of the timber required to produce charcoal had made timber per se too valuable a commodity to transmute into a mere industrial fuel through the laborious process of a long, slow, airless heating (although Mr Wall, Bush Cottage's owner in the

[21] I am grateful to David Poyner of GeoArch and Aston University for sight of his report on *Medieval Iron Workings around Cleobury and Stottesdon* prior to its publication.

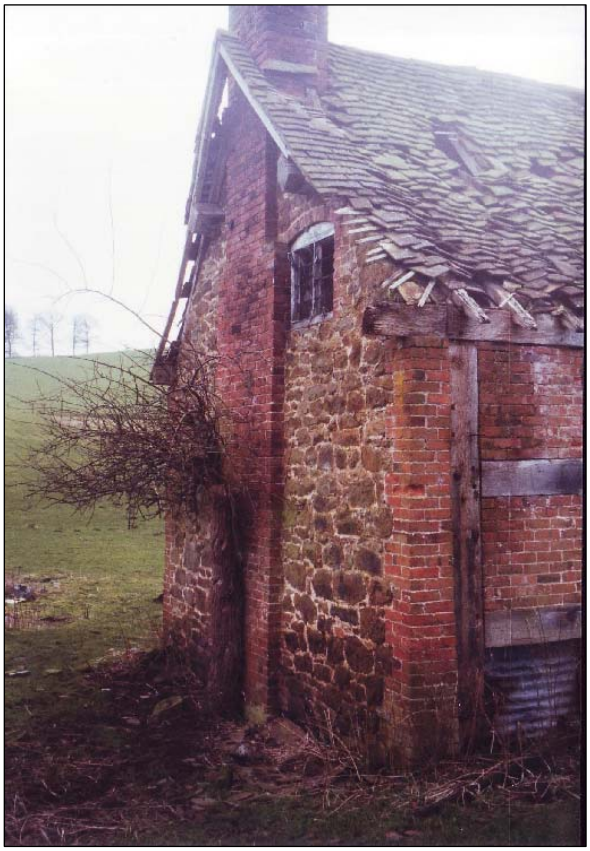
early 1960s, remembered sitting with charcoal burners in the woods well into the 20th century). Another drawback was the speed with which charcoal broke down in extreme high temperatures, which meant that only small quantities of iron could be produced at a time. Abraham Darby realised that coke, produced in a very similar fashion to charcoal by airless heating at very high temperatures to drive off volatile impurities, could provide a solution to the by then acute shortage of charcoal, at the same time avoiding any danger of sulphur contamination from untreated coal.

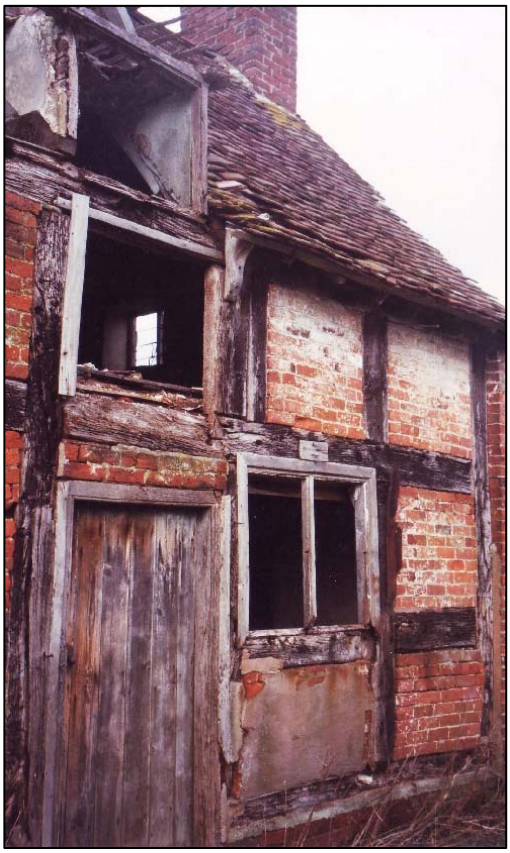
Darby was born not far away in Woodsetton, a village now part of Dudley. While he also spent time in Birmingham and Bristol, his discovery was very much a Shropshire affair, made at Coalbrookdale in what is now known as the Ironbridge Gorge. Darby deduced that coke, already used for roasting malt as part of the brewing process, could also be applied to iron smelting. It has been suggested that his initial breakthrough was facilitated by his use of the low-sulphur Shropshire 'clod-coals.' His coke-fired blast furnaces enabled the production of large quantities of inexpensive iron, a key driver for the rapidity of development of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

The remains of Abraham Darby's coke-fired blast furnace at Coalbrookdale. By using coke, Darby was able to build taller, and therefore hotter, furnaces.

BUSH COTTAGE BEFORE RESTORATION

During their occupation of Bush Cottage, Mr & Mrs Wall sold the fruit from these blossoming cherry trees, over several years, to pay for their first cow.





The bread oven, shown here externally, had collapsed.

The earlier footings found beneath the kitchen floor.

Note the surviving shutter. The glazing bars were modern, but one casement had survived.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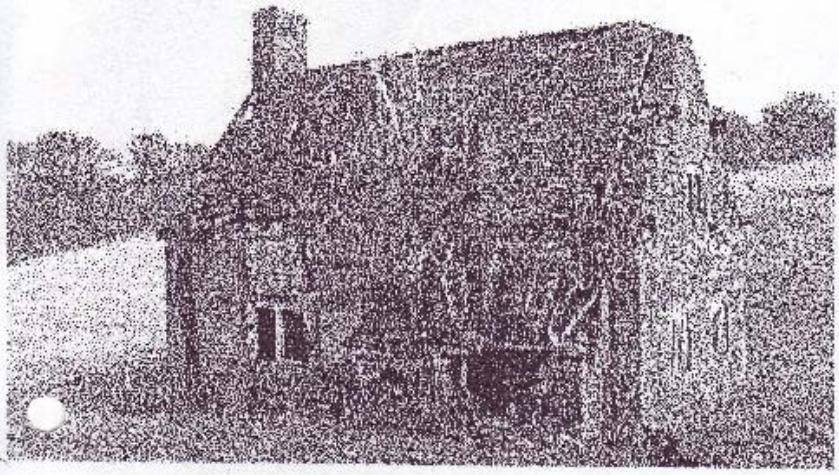
http://www.savebritainsheritage.org/pr_bush.htm

Shropshire



BUSH COTTAGE, CHORLEY, STOTTESDON

Status:
Grade II

Planning Authority:
Bridgnorth District Council

Contact:
Stephen Ponder, Conservation Officer, Bridgnorth District Council, Westgate, Bridgnorth, Shropshire WV16 5AA Tel: 01746 713100

SAVE
BRITAIN'S HERITAGE

Bush Cottage was built in the early to mid seventeenth century. The timber frame was infilled with brick in the eighteenth century. The gable ends from the same date are limestone rubble with brick quoins. The building is relatively small, a two unit plan with one storey and attic. Bush cottage is in a very isolated position and can currently only be reached on foot although there is a track nearby which could possible be use for access if the building were reused.

The building would suit residential use but is currently in a very bad condition. The roof is failing, rainwater goods are missing and the windows are broken and their sills are rotting. Internally the floorboards and plaster beneath are beginning to rot. Chorley is a small village in a rural area within easy distance to Birmingham.

back

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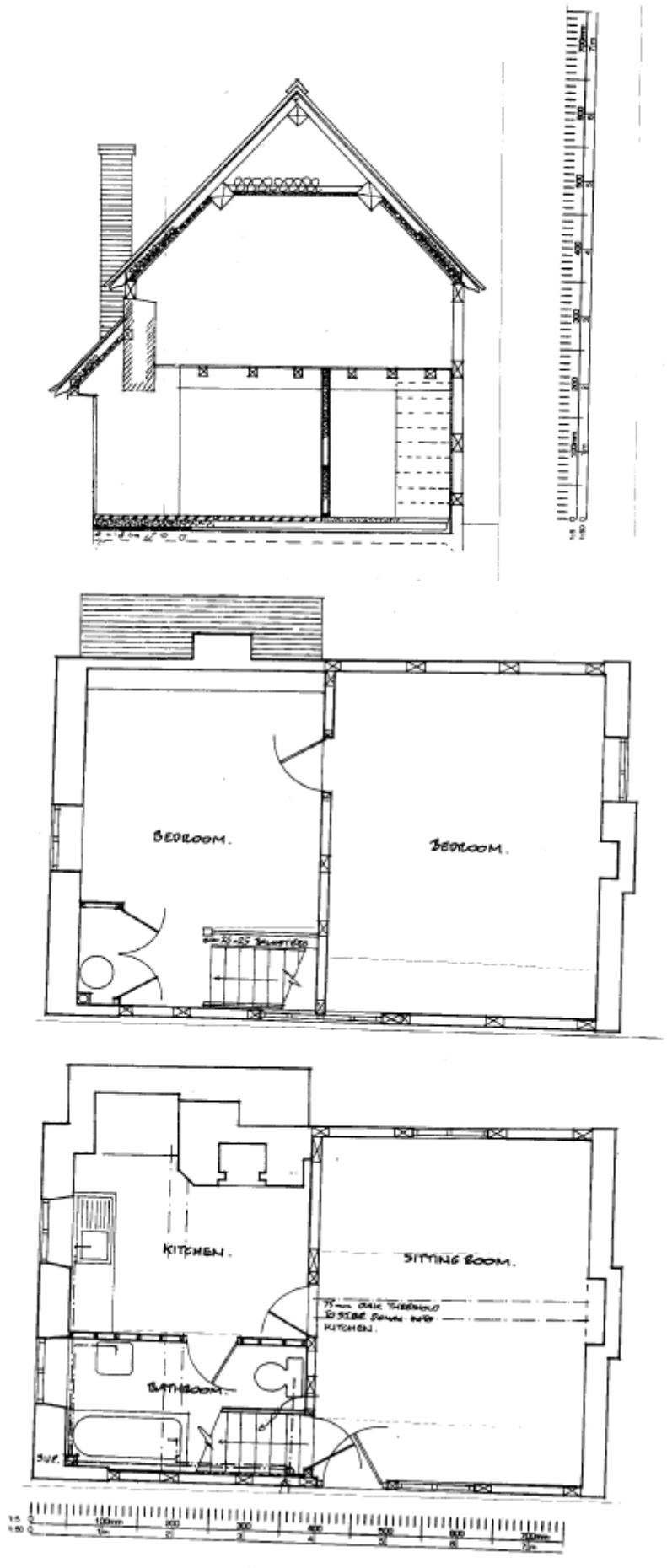
The Restoration of Bush Cottage

The restoration of Bush Cottage was carried out, most competently, by its last owner using Treasures of Ludlow, before it came into Landmark's care. We have changed nothing. The following comments are therefore based on inspection of the building as it is today rather than our own forensic examination during works. The previous photos make clear that it was in a very poor state indeed and it is likely that it was found by its new owner in the nick of time. A comprehensive restoration was required, although comparison of the original with the restored fabric shows that a very conservative approach was adopted to retain as much of the original fabric as possible in a repair project that was a real labour of love.

The construction date of the cottage remained uncertain, so it was Landmark's pleasure to commission dendrochronology from the Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory, to see if it was possible to identify the felling season for its timber, and so its date of construction, for its previous owner as well as future visitors.

Not many timbers proved suitable for sampling. All the samples were very slow grown, and so quite tricky to measure because the growth rings were so narrow. Only one sample retained its bark edge, and this gave a precise felling date of spring 1548. All the other timbers sampled without bark edge also gave felling dates consistent with this. Interestingly, this included the main ceiling beam in the kitchen, which from the walls might have thought to have been a later alteration or extension. This beam had a last measured ring date of 1545, and about 6mm of sapwood crumbled to the bark edge when drilled. As the last few rings had an average mean ring width of 3mm, this brought it conveniently again to 1547 or shortly afterwards. It suggests that the current kitchen was a reconstruction of an earlier service end, reusing the still perfectly serviceable main beam from the original room.


BEDROOM.
BEDROOM.
KITCHEN.
SITTING ROOM.
BATHROOM.

During restoration works, earlier footings were found beneath the floor of the current kitchen. Its bread oven and washing copper were added at the same time in a small outshot with its own flue.

Aspects of the various refurbishments were sometimes somewhat bodged, even if durably so: the kitchen end frame was found to be merely nailed in, the joints now reinforced with proper mortise joints. Even so, the cottage has a 15cm fall from one end to the other – which explains why the first floor door has a tendency to slam! The timber frame sometimes vibrates in strong wind, although a structural engineer was consulted and he confirmed it as sound.

Once inside, the sturdiness of the primary timber frame is immediately apparent in the parlour, where the main beam has nicely worked chamfers. These chamfers are consistent with room's current dimensions and framing, indicating that the beam is in its right place, and has not been re-used from elsewhere (hardly necessary to import when the cottage stands so near the forest). This also means that the cottage was always ceiled (and therefore not an open hall house). In fact, this would have been quite a progressive dwelling for 1548, since integral chimney stacks and two storey, ceiled buildings only begin to appear in such relatively humble dwellings well into the second half of the 16th century.

The shutters to the windows date from the 1999 restoration, but are entirely consistent with what might have been here at an earlier date. The diamond plugs on the parlour beams hide steel ties inserted by Treasures to prevent spreading, caused perhaps by cutting the tie beam of the central roof truss at first floor level at a much earlier date, to facilitate use of this floor. The dormer window was perhaps inserted at the same time to light the upper chamber. Iron strapwork was introduced on first floor level to reinforce the truss, either at the time it was cut or later when the risk of movement became appreciated. There are simple carpenter's marks on the truss. The purlins (horizontal members supporting the rafters) are part of the primary roof structure, albeit their ends repaired in 1999.

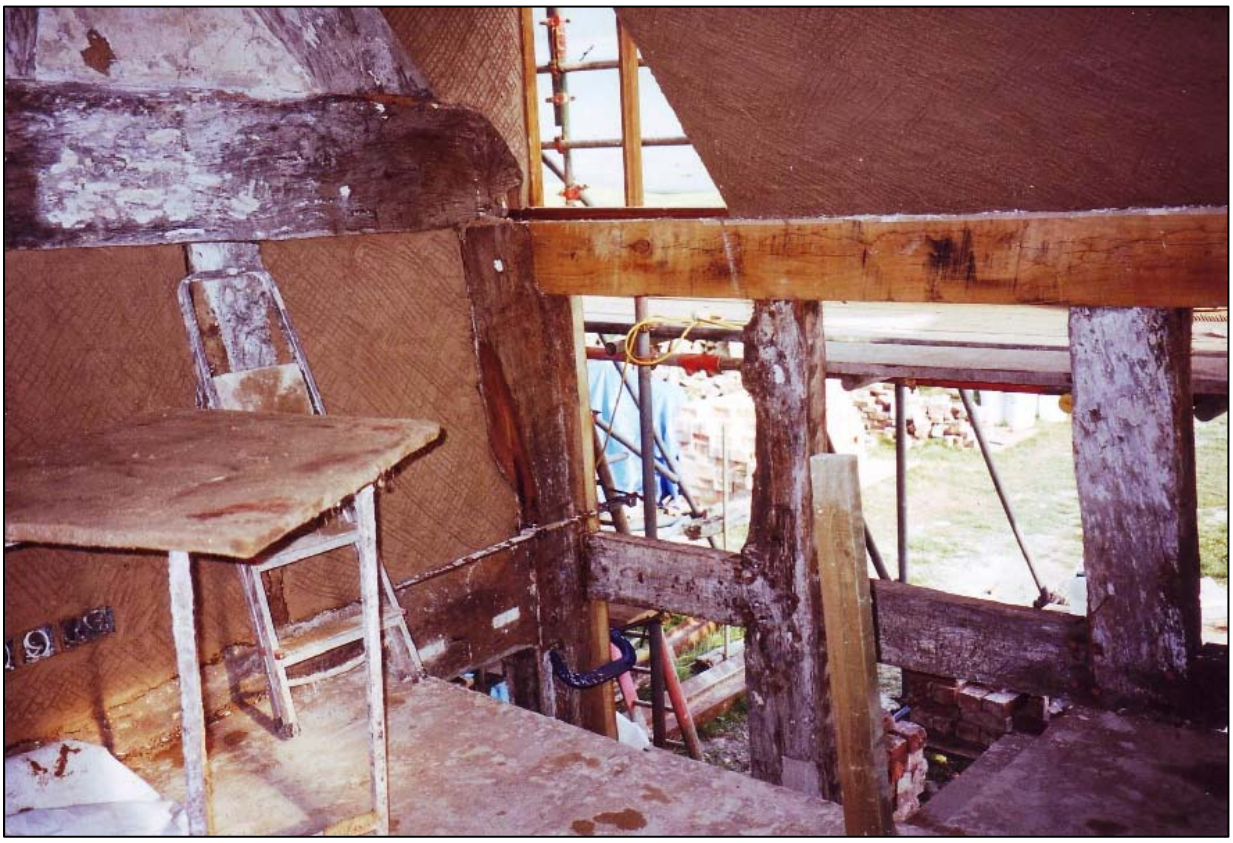
The stairs could well have been an insertion, the upper floor initially reached by a simple ladder. The nice panelled door to the stairs is early, as is its ironwork. The door is not dissimilar to the penultimate building to open as a Landmark, Cowside in the North Yorkshire Dales, which we believe on the basis of its wall paintings to date from the 1680s – this could be an approximate date for the insertion of the staircase at Bush Cottage.

Repair underway

As much original fabric as possible was kept.

Honest repair: a new doorpost tenoned to the first floor truss. Hand riven lathes were used to reinstate the wattle and daub ceiling. The ceiling timbers were green oak cut from the neighbouring wood. All internal timbers were originally limewashed.

Replacement of the decayed end of the ridge pole, where it rests on one of the end gables. Most of the rafters had to have their chamfered ends replaced, and some had to be entirely renewed.



Scratch coat of lime mortar.

Decayed timber cut away from a roof member and replaced with splice tenoned new oak, reinforced with a stainless steel brace.

Just one panel could be salvaged in the first floor partition. Interweaved slender coppiced branches were used to renew the others, just as they would have been in the past – houseboote.

The dormer had to be renewed.

The elm stairs were too rotten to be saved, but like-for-like elm was used for their replacement, despite being hard to source since Dutch Elm Disease.

Bush Cottage in 2002, its restoration complete and vegetable plot and Munstead lavender in all their early summer abundance.

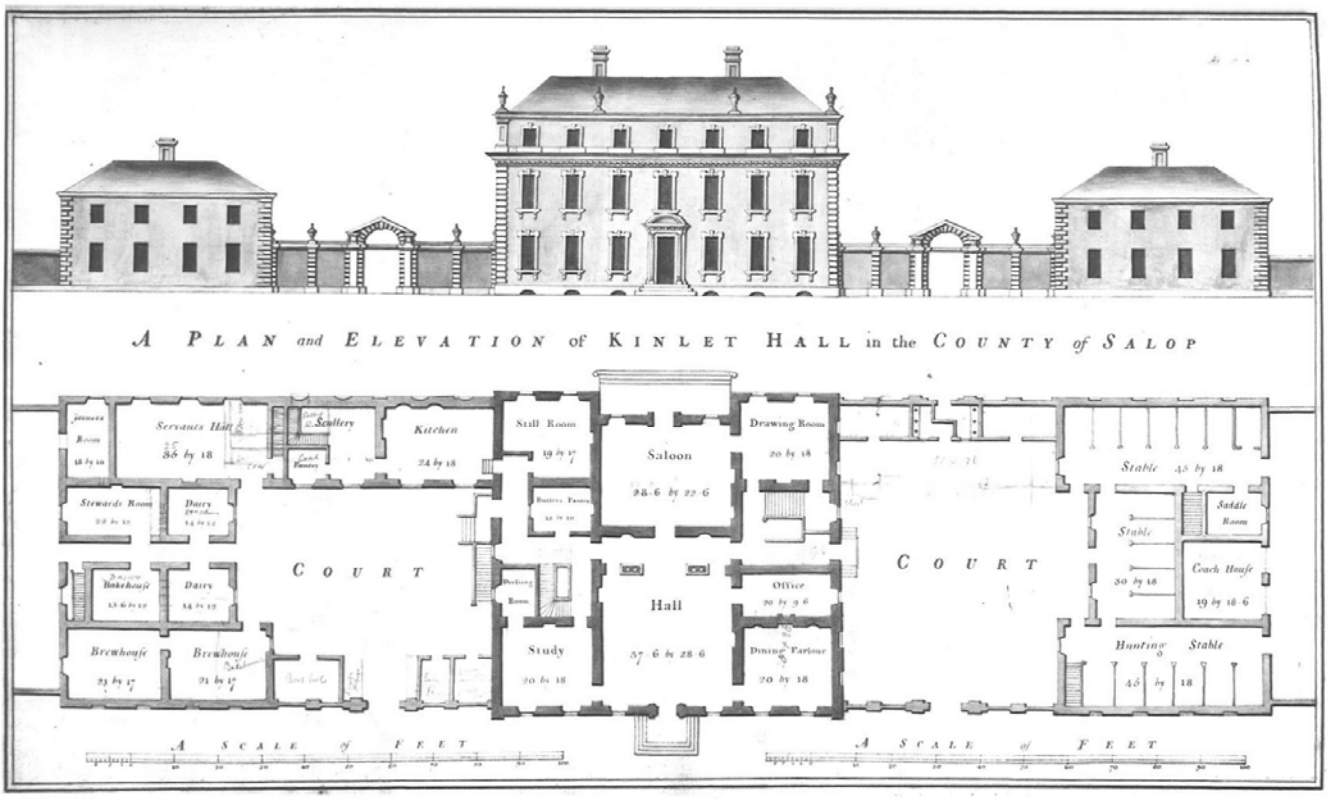
Lacons, Childes and Baldwyn

So far we have only considered the yeomen and tenant farmers associated with Bush Cottage. However, the account of this corner of Shropshire over the past 300 years or so would not be complete with also mentioning a few of its more colourful gentry, whose antics, as on our title page, the 'yokels' of the Bush must have sometimes watched with bemusement.

Although the Bush holding did not start to come into the ownership of the Kinlet Hall estate until the 1790s, the Lacons and Lacon Childes were a force to be reckoned with well before that. Several of them are commemorated (with the earlier Blounts) in exceptionally fine tombs the church of St John the Baptist at Kinlet. The church is all that is left of the original village, which was swept away for the building of a new Palladian hall.

The Lacons had acquired Kinlet Hall in 1608. In 1727, William Lacon Childe decided to build his new mansion in the Palladian style, for which it is a relatively early foray into the genre since Giacomo Leoni's first English translation of Palladio's *Quattro libri dell'architectura* was only completed in 1720, and Isaac Ware's more famous translation would not appear until 1738. Kinlet Hall's architect was Francis Smith of Warwick who, with his son William, emerged as a preferred architect of such West Midland gentry during the mini-building boom in Shropshire in the 1720s. Mawley Hall at Cleobury Mortimer is also by the Smiths.

The 'greater' houses in Shropshire 1700-40 were distinguished by their relative lack of ornament – a sort of vernacular classicism - and Kinlet Hall is no exception. Their plainness may be attributed to ingrained provincialism and ignorance of, or indifference towards, the aesthetic fancies of the great – or to lack of financial resources, and that ornament was less suited to their shorter facades. Kinlet's floor plan is fairly typical of such houses: a large entrance hall with garden front saloon behind, staircase compartment to the side, ground floor



A plan of Kinlet Hall from the terrier of 1782.

The Church of St John the Baptist at Kinlet, with its unusual timber-framed clerestory. It is all that is left of the ancient village swept away by William Lacon Childe in 1727 for the building of his new mansion. He incorporated the church in new pleasure grounds, surrounding it with walled garden, shrubbery and specimen trees.

communication via a corridor running along the back of the hall. Often, also as at Kinlet, the kitchen and service offices were placed in the pavilions. One whole pavilion at Kinlet was given over to stabling – no doubt useful for the hunting Childes later in the century. Unusually, Kinlet is also a first floor corridor house.

William Lacon Childe died in 1756, and his eldest daughter Catherine Lacon inherited the estate. In 1752, she had married Charles Baldwyn Esquire, of Aqualate in Staffordshire. Baldwyn served as county MP for fourteen years from 1766, reportedly a typical 'puzzle-headed' Tory gentleman. He was also a magistrate, but became embroiled in financial difficulties and a worsening relationship with his son, William who took the name Childe according to the terms of his grandfather's will. Both father and son took to self-published pamphlets to put their own case to the wider world. Baldwyn was in a difficult position since his late father-in-law's estate was entailed upon William as male heir. This extract from Charles Baldwyn's pamphlet is representative of the state of their relationship by 1782, when his son has not written to him for a year:

> 'Although I have refrained for two years from making even my most intimate friends acquainted with the transactions which were depending between us; trusting that you would act , not only honourably, but kindly, towards me; and though I do not, in general, approve of troubling the public with private family concerns, I find it necessary, for my justification, to depart from my own rule; being unwilling to be classed with the gamblers, and other thoughtless extravagant persons of the age, who squander away their fortunes in dissipation and vice.... On my marriage with your mother (whose memory will ever be dear to me) my hands were strictly tied up, when I was heavily loaded with debts, not of my own contracting; I submitted to very hard terms in confidence that the person who imposed them would make me amends at a future time; but...I found that his only view was, to aggrandize an unborn grandson; I found that after being flattered with the hopes of a considerable fortune...I was made a mere conduit pipe, through which a fine estate was conveyed to you...'[22]

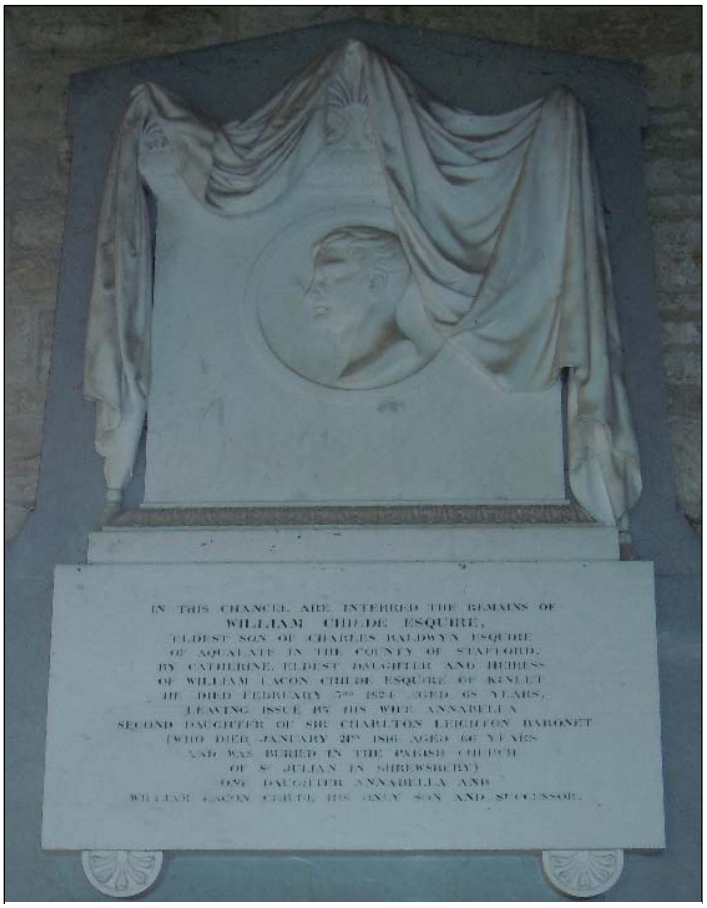
Baldwyn eventually had to sell his own family estates to keep the Kinlet estate intact.

[22] ***An address from Charles Baldwin Esq to His Son William Childe Esq.*** Printed, dated Jan 10th 1782

William Baldwyn Childe became a renowned sportsman and a leading light in the Shrewsbury Hunt, founded in 1769, superseding an earlier society known as the True Blue. Hunt Week in November became an important social gathering in Shrewsbury for gentry from across the county, with a ball and concerts. William Childe was an early president and distinguished horseman. After hunting in Leicestershire where he lived for a while (to escape his father?), Childe introduced riding to the hounds to Shropshire, (i.e. following fast hounds on horseback, rather than the earlier practice of 'drag' hunting which demanded hounds with a good sense of smell above speed, followed on foot usually early in the morning). Childe was also earliest recorded master of hounds, forming a pack in 1800 at Kinlet to hunt the Clee Hills.

In so tearing around the county, he earned the nickname of 'Flying Childe', a reputation enhanced by an exploit in which he took a wager that he could ride from his club in St James's in London to Kinlet in a hitherto unfeasibly short time. Bags of sovereigns were lodged with an intermediary and changes of ride arranged along the route; all was going well until Childe arrived in Bewdley, where he found the Severn in full spate and the central span of the bridge swept away. Without hesitation, he urged his horse on at full pelt – and they cleared the gap, riding on to Kinlet to claim the wager.

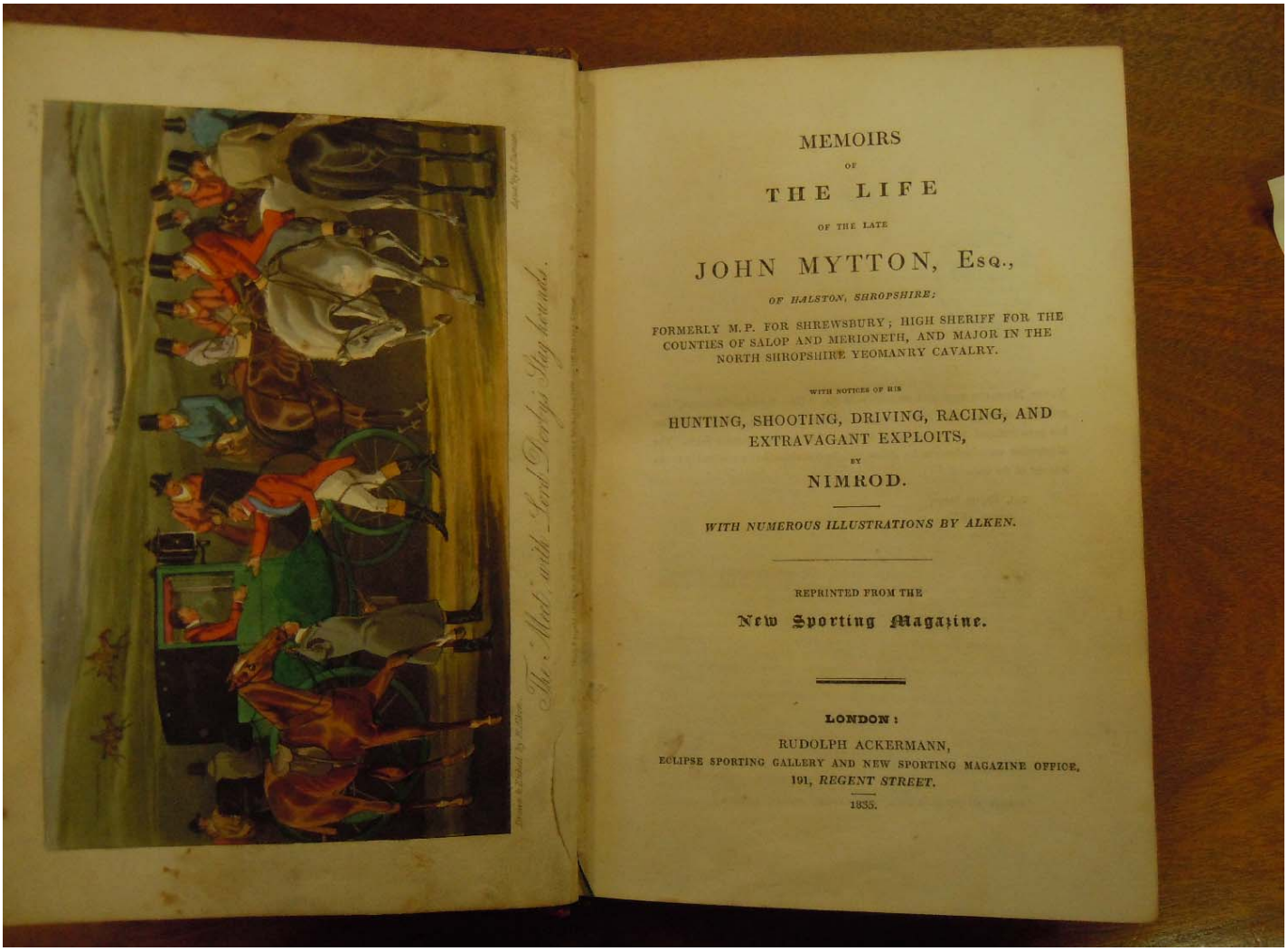
As shown by his careful extension of the Kinlet estate through purchases like the Bush holding, Childe was an improving landlord for all his equestrian recklessness. He bred sheep and cattle, importing breeds and practice, again from Leicestershire. In 1820, Childe claimed to have improved the wheat yield at Kinlet from 16 to 46 bushels an acre. However, he earned more in reputation than profits, since at his death in 1824 he left heavy mortgages for his successors of £25,000.



Memorial to William 'Flying' Childe in the church at Kinlet

His heir was another William Lacon Childe, under whom the large home farm continued to lose money. By 1862, the debts on the Kinlet estate were believed to have grown to £150,000 while the extravagant and unbusinesslike Childe was borrowing to pay the interest charges and 'muddling away his money with little or no show for it.' Yet debt seems to have been an occupational hazard for the Shropshire landed gentry in these years and, like his father, Childe seems to have been well-meaning in his expenditure. In the 1830s, the responsibility for the repair of approach roads to the vital county bridges fell in some cases to magistrates living nearby (as opposed to turnpike trusts or road commissioners). Most magistrates dropped out but William Lacon Childe of Kinlet, and then his son of the same name, were for a long time the only magistrates in the area undertaking such repairs of seven approach roads between Bridgnorth and Cleobury Mortimer, and this into the 1880s.

William Lacon Childe died in 1880 at the advanced age of 96. His son took over the estate, but tragedy struck when in 1900 the next heir, Charles Baldwyn Childe Pemberton, a professional soldier who had retired in 1887, was moved to re-enlist for the Second Boer War and was killed at Spion Cop, as the British fought unsuccessfully to relieve besieged Ladysmith. After the Great War, economic difficulties forced Mrs Childe to sell 2,700 acres of outlying land, in July 1919. It is perhaps surprising that Bush Cottage survived that cull, but it did and, as explained above, and would not be sold from the estate until 1960.



MEMOIRS

OF

THE LIFE

OF THE LATE

JOHN MYTTON, Esq.,

OF HALSTON, SHROPSHIRE;

FORMERLY M.P. FOR SHREWSBURY; HIGH SHERIFF FOR THE COUNTIES OF SALOP AND MERIONETH, AND MAJOR IN THE NORTH SHROPSHIRE YEOMANRY CAVALRY.

WITH NOTICES OF HIS

HUNTING, SHOOTING, DRIVING, RACING, AND EXTRAVAGANT EXPLOITS,

BY

NIMROD.

WITH NUMEROUS ILLUSTRATIONS BY ALKEN.

REPRINTED FROM THE

New Sporting Magazine.

LONDON:

RUDOLPH ACKERMANN,

ECLIPSE SPORTING GALLERY AND NEW SPORTING MAGAZINE OFFICE,

191, *REGENT STREET.*

1835.

John 'Mad Jack' Mytton

Sharp-eyed walkers will notice on the OS map that Bush Cottage lies yards away from a route marked as Jack Mytton Way. This long distance footpath and bridleway passes through Stottesdon and Cleobury Mortimer, over the Clee Hills and includes parts of Wenlock Edge. Perhaps somewhat ironically, it is named after a notorious Regency rake, gambler, hell raiser and drinker, John Mytton, known as Mad Jack, and before whom the exploits and family tiffs of the Childes pale into insignificance.

Mytton was born in 1796, heir to an ancient Shropshire gentry seat at Halston, near Oswestry. In 1835, the year after Mytton's death of alcoholism in a debtor's prison, a friend and neighbour, Charles James Apperley, published a collection of articles he had written for The New Sporting Magazine as *Memoirs of the Life and Times of John Mytton, Esq.* (Ackermann, 1835) using the pseudonym Nimrod. Now highly collectible, this book is beautifully illustrated with colour illustrations as befits a publication by Ackermann. Some are reproduced here.

Nimrod compares Jack Mytton to the late 17th-century roué, Lord Rochester, and his account is full of anecdotes of Mytton's escapades and pranks. 'Before he was ten years old Master Mytton was as finished a Pickle as the fondest mother and his own will could make him.' His mother nicknamed him Mango, as 'the king of the pickles.' He was expelled from both Westminster School and Harrow in quick succession and thereafter tormented a series of private tutors until he went up to Cambridge, taking with him 2,000 bottles of port. He left without graduating, finding university life boring. In 1818, Mytton married Harriet Jones of Stanley Hall, Shrops. Perhaps fortunately, Mrs Mytton died a few years after the marriage.

According to Nimrod, 'Never was a constitution so murdered as Mr Mytton's was' – and that constitution was of iron. He dressed lightly in all seasons: 'His winter shooting gear was a light jacket, white linen trousers, without lining or

drawers of which he knew not the use; and in frost and snow he waded through all water that came in his way…he once actually laid himself down in the snow in his shirt only to await their [wild fowl] arrival at dusk. On one occasion…he followed some ducks in puris naturablils – angelice stark naked – on the ice.'

'Scarce a day passed over his head in which he did not put his life to the hazard….in the saddle too he ran prodigious risks in his life, not only by riding at apparently impracticable fences with hounds, but in falling from his horses when intoxicated.'

'He once galloped at full speed over a rabbit warren to try whether or not his horse would fall, which if course it did, and rolled over him. He was once driving an acquaintance in a gig "who expressed a strong regard for his neck, with a hint that he considered it in some danger. 'Was you ever much hurt then, by being upset in a gig?' 'No thank God', said his companion, 'for I was never upset in one.' 'what!' replied Mytton – '*never* upset in a gig? What a d—d slow fellow you must have been all your life'; and running his off wheel up the bank, over they both went' (see title page to this album).

Mytton once got a visiting horse dealer extremely drunk and then put him to bed with two bulldogs and a bear; on another occasion, he rode the bear into his drawing room in full hunting costume. The bear, which he kept in the stable yard, carried him quietly at first but in being spurred bit his rider through the calf.

Mytton once put a red hot poker in the pocket of a bore holding forth in front of a fireplace at a Chester hotel during race week; he fought dogs with his own teeth and once picked a fight with a Shropshire miner who disturbed his hunt, going twenty rounds before the miner gave up. A notorious gambler, he was also a careless spendthrift – he once lost £3,000, a prodigious sum, which blew away through the window of his carriage as he fell asleep counting the notes on his


Mystic / wild duck shooting.

way home from the races. Mytton dismissed all such scrapes amusement. Nimrod records that Mytton was extremely popular in Shropshire as his home county for 'his… dashing personal character, and extreme and unaffected good humour…together with his fox hounds, his race horses, his ale, his wine, and many other things besides.'

Mytton was also a womaniser, his 'amours, like Jupiter's, are too numerous for recital, but having been for the most part of the lowest description, they were chiefly injurious only to himself, and had nothing to do with the heart.'

Eventually, Mytton exhausted his fortune, paying little heed to warnings to that effect. He fell deeply in debt. His agent Mr Longueville calculated that if Mytton could only reduce his expenditure to £6,000 a year for the next six years, he could avoid having to sell his Shropshire estate. 'Jack considered this option for a mere minute before replying "You tell Longueville [the agent] I wouldn't give a damn to live on £6,000 a year!"' In 1830, his second wife having left him, Mytton fled to Paris to avoid his creditors and prison. A pretty 20 year old girl he met on Westminster Bridge joined him, having accepted his offer of £500 pa to flee to France with him and be his companion.

By now Mytton was in poor shape. Irritated one night by a fit of hiccups as he undressed for bed – 'Damn this hiccup!….But I'll frighten it away!' – he set fire to his own nightshirt with a lighted candle and was instantly enveloped by flames, beaten out by a friend and servant but not before he had sustained considerable burns.

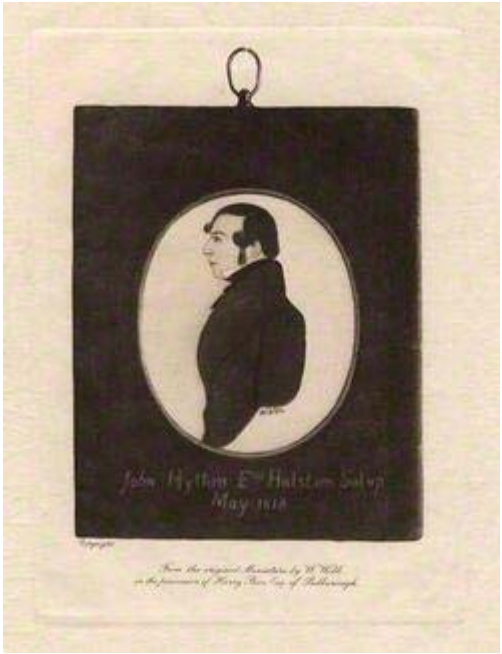
He returned to London a couple of years later, only to end up in the King's Bench debtor's prison in Southwark, where he died in 1834. *The Literary Gazette* contrasted the young Mytton, 'heir to an immense fortune, gifted by nature with a mind susceptible of noble cultivation and a body endowed with admirable physical powers' with the wretched alcoholic who died in prison at the age of


Drawn & Etched by H. Aiken.

thirty-eight, 'a worn out debauchee and drivelling sot.'

In Nimrod's view, 'It was the largeness of his heart that ruined Mr Mytton, added to the lofty pride which disdained the littleness of Prudence....Did the late Mr Mytton really enjoy life amidst all this profusion of expenditure? No. He lacked the art of enjoyment. He was bored and unhappy. There was that about him which resembled the restlessness of the hyena. A sort of pestering spirit egged him on.'

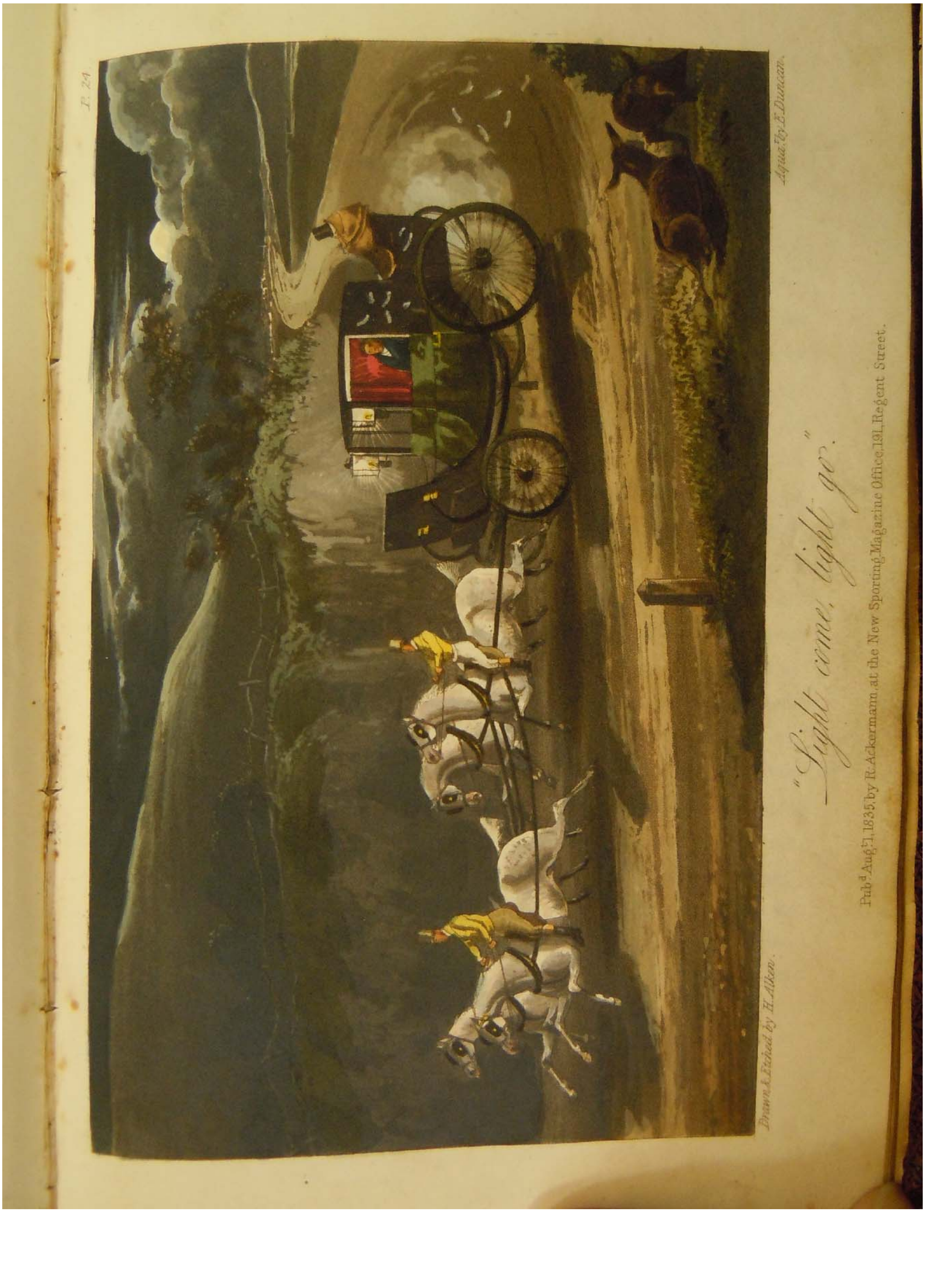
Before his decline, Jack Mytton no doubt rode out from Halston down the lanes and byways near Bush Cottage and hunted across the fields and over the Clee Hills. For that, eccentric though he was, he earns his place in this account.



(National Portrait gallery)


Mytton masters the savage dog.
Drawn & Etched by H. Alken.
Aquat.d by E. Duncan.


P. 177.
Blood and the Bull Dog.


P. 24
Drawn & Etched by H. Alken.
Aqua T. by E. Duncan.
"Light come, light go."
Pub.d Aug.t 1, 1835, by R. Ackermann, at the New Sporting Magazine Office, 191, Regent Street.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