

BRITISH MINING No.87

# COAL MINING IN MORLEY

by

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Finally, I thank my two sons Robert and Christopher who not only encouraged but advised and guided me through the world of information technology, which I shall never understand.

I dedicate this volume to my wife June - for her patience throughout its preparation.

*Frontispiece: shows the Morley coat of arms from a stained glass window in Morley Town Hall. It was designed in 1886, to reflect the town's heritage and manufacturing links. The cannon balls represent the Civil War conflicts of 1643; the cotton plant and the shuttle represent the textile industry and the pickaxe represents coal mining. The motto — 'Industria omnia vincit' translates from Latin as 'Industry conquers All'. [Copyright Leeds Library and Information Service].*

## INTRODUCTION

Morley is a town in the county of Yorkshire (since 1974, West Yorkshire), England, in Leeds Metropolitan Borough and is situated 7 km south-west of Leeds City Centre. The Borough of Morley covered in this work existed from 1937, when the urban districts of East and West Ardsley, Gildersome and Drighlington were added to the Borough, until 1974 when it was incorporated into Leeds under the local government reforms. The outer boundaries have remained unchanged and were the previous parliamentary and poor law boundaries. (Figures 1,3)

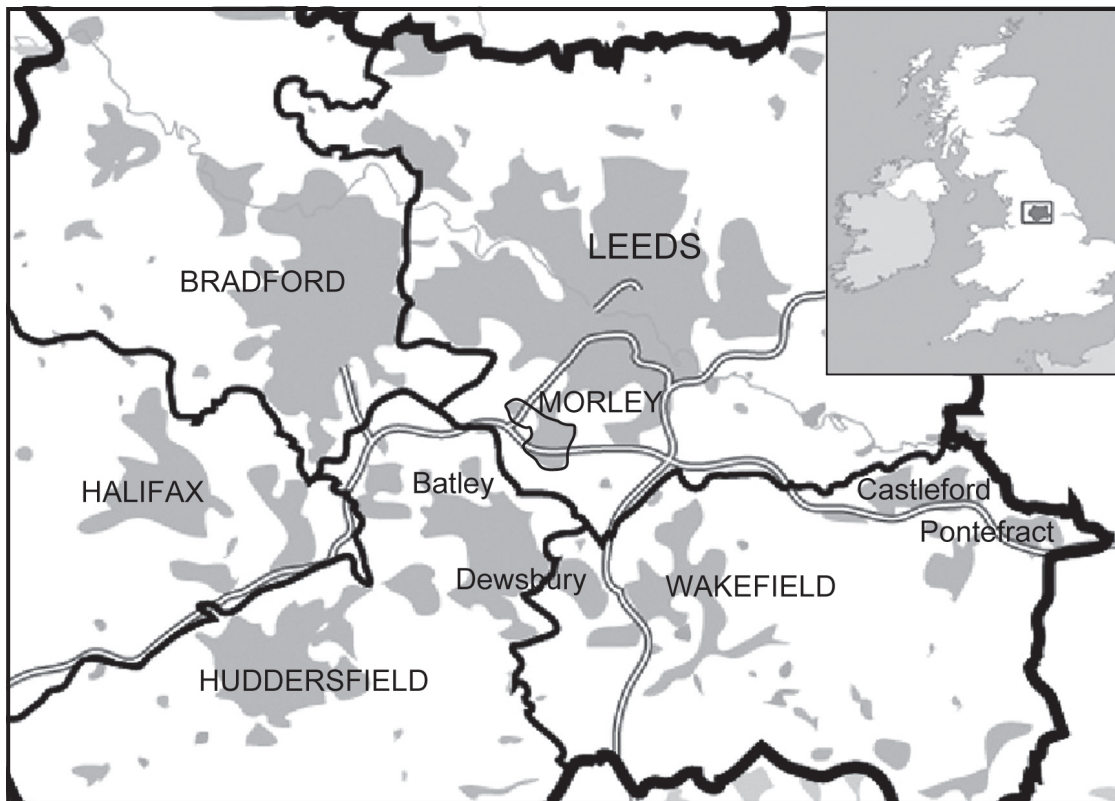
Morley is a good example, although not unique, of several obscure Yorkshire villages first mentioned in the Domesday Book which later became urbanised and industrialised during the Industrial Revolution. Like Rome, it is built on seven hills: Scatcherd Hill, Dawson Hill, Daisy Hill, Chapel Hill, Hunger Hill, Troy Hill and Banks Hill. Until the early 1800s Morley was a largely agricultural settlement, owing to the poor quality of the soil and farmers supplemented their income by having weaving looms in their homes. The earliest mills were located on two series of becks and harnessed water as a cheap power source. Crank Mills, built in 1790, was one of the first steam-powered mills in Britain. The production of a cheap wool known as 'shoddy' led to Morley's success during the Industrial Revolution and in its heyday, Morley had 44 mills.

Morley was granted a charter of incorporation in 1885, with a mayor, alderman and councillors. Soon afterwards it possessed a splendid town hall only 7 km south-west of the equally splendid but more famous Leeds Town Hall and in 1857 the Borough was granted a coat of arms which symbolised its textile and coal-mining industries (see Frontispiece) proudly carrying the motto '*Industria Omnia Vincit*' (Industry overcomes all).

The town grew from 2,108 residents in 1801 to 24,800 in 1901 and its current population is approximately 60,000.

The source material, particularly for the identification and location of individual pits is drawn from O.S. maps together with maps, articles and books from the mining industry and set out in the Bibliography. Existing collieries, including disused pits, are shown as part of the survey but other collieries have been added later by HM Inspector of Mines and are on maps from the former Mines Department of the Home Office. (Appendix 3). After the Lofthouse Colliery flooding disaster of 1973, there was a massive effort by the National Coal Board to identify and plot the sites of old workings and this may well be the source of many of the additions. The locations of the collieries referred to are shown in Figure 2.

In an area such as Morley, there are still large numbers of retired miners and a comprehensive oral history. Whilst it is acknowledged that this must be approached with great caution, it cannot be discounted but must be tested along with other evidence and this is reflected in the text wherever possible.



*Figure 1 . Location map showing the position of Morley within the West Riding of Yorkshire.*

Appendix 3 shows a total of 87 collieries in the Borough, all nineteenth century, for which there is proof or anecdotal evidence but the lists are far from exhaustive. There are well in excess of 250 unnamed shafts, pits and air shafts shown on various O.S. maps and even that number excludes pre-nineteenth century operations or unknown workings which have only come to light with modern housing and highway development. More than one colliery may have the same name but at different times - for example 'Victoria' was popular for obvious reasons and there were probably two 'Dartmouths' in the Borough.

Finally, the research for this work leans quite heavily on the local newspapers - the Morley Observer and the Leeds Mercury. The former only saw the light of day a year or so before the explosion at Morley Main and early reports are often couched in terms which would be considered flowery or 'over the top' by modern readers. There is, nevertheless, a real sense of enthusiasm and a desire to report everything in the fullest detail. These sources of information must of, course, be examined critically and analytically and note taken of editorial opinion.

Perhaps what we may take for certain is that the reporting of the paper and the language in which it is reported give us a taste of the period and probably an indication of how the people of Morley perceived the events which were part of their daily lives. This work is, therefore, an attempt to bring together under one cover a general history of the many facets of a once vital industry in the Borough but leaves a 'rich seam' for more detailed historical and archaeological research in the future.

## NOT JUST A TEXTILE HISTORY

In 1855, the year in which the Crimean War was at its height, when Charles Kingsley's novel 'Westward Ho' was published and when the good citizens of Morley still relied on springs and wells for their water supply, the Ackroyds of Birkenshaw sank a coal mine on ten acres of land leased from the Earl of Dartmouth in Albert Road, Morley. Already the owners of extensive mining interests in Birkenshaw, Drighlington, and Birstall, the Ackroyds' new venture – or Morley Main Colliery as it was known – was the biggest state-of-the-art colliery in Morley at that time. It was destined during its fifty-five year lifetime to become tragically famous and also a springboard for the foundation of an industry which continued to thrive into twenty-first century Morley.

Although there are many physical reminders of the town's famous textile history, the imagination of a stranger walking round modern day Morley would be stretched indeed to find any tangible evidence of its less well known involvement with coal mining; so before looking in detail at the history of Morley Main Colliery, or the other collieries in the area, it is necessary to consider why it was sunk at all and especially what historic or economic connections there were between coal and a West Yorkshire village mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Coal had probably been scoured or outcropped in the West Riding of Yorkshire since the Roman period and was most likely used domestically and by lime-burners and brewers and for forging. The first reference to the probable use of coal in the greater Morley area occurs in the mid-twelfth century, when the monks of Kirkstall Abbey were granted land and a forge at East Ardsley – a village incorporated as part of Morley Borough in the twentieth century. This, of course, is not evidence of coal mining but, in the same period the monks of Kirkstall had been granted lands in Snydale, Losco and Ackton (coal mining areas until recent times) and it is a matter of record that coal was extracted there in the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> In 1274 Richard le Neyler of Hipperholme was granted a licence '*to dig sea coals this year for forging*'.<sup>2</sup> It may not be unreasonable, therefore, to speculate that land granted for forging contained the means of forging, which may have meant coal.

The mining of coal was becoming a public problem in the area when it became necessary, in the fifteenth century, for the Wakefield Manorial Court to introduce monetary fines against anyone digging coal pits in the public highway and in West Ardsley, which in those days was part of the Manor of Wakefield.<sup>3</sup>

The most positive documentary evidence, however, for early coal mining in Morley itself appears in the West Yorkshire tithe awards which show field names of Coal Pit Close, Near Coal Pit Close, Far Coal Pit Close and, importantly, Coal Staith, presumably a place, or embankment, for loading coal. There are three other field names in Morley – Lower Pit Close, Upper Pit Close and Pit Hills which may have had their origins in coal or may have been clay or stone pits (Morley established a national reputation for the quality of its quarried stone). All seven names were incorporated into the estate map prepared for the Earl of Dartmouth around 1720, a time when coal was sold

in the Morley area for about one shilling and sixpence (7½p) per ton. There were similar coal-related field names in Drighlington, particularly Coal Pit Close and Coal Royd in 1849, and both East and West Ardsley had a Coal Pit Close in 1785 and 1735 respectively. Churwell had an abundance of coal-related field names with Colliery Garth, Collier Row, Coal Pit Hill, Victoria Colliery and no fewer than seven simply named 'Colliery'. Strangely, however, there were none in Gildersome, a village which would become heavily involved in 19th century coal mining, although the Ordnance Survey Map of 1851 shows a Coal Pit Lane, no longer extant.<sup>4</sup>

As early as 1639 one Thomas Wake had made a series of test bores in the neighbourhood of Leeds.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly from the late 16th century dwindling wood reserves, especially for the supply of charcoal for smelting became an acute national problem which was partly resolved in 1710 by Abraham Darby's development of coke for iron smelting. This resulted, however, in the iron industry moving to the coal-producing areas of the north. Before the construction of the canal system during the 18th century the cost of transporting coal over much distance was prohibitive because of its value in relation to its bulk but the new canals resolved that particular problem. The harnessing of steam power early in the next century not only stimulated the demand for coal by the mills and factories of a burgeoning industrial revolution but also stimulated the increased production of coal by the use of steam for lifting coal to the surface and pumping out water.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, coal was produced in West Yorkshire from a large number of small collieries employing only a handful of workers; indeed, the workforce often comprised a whole family, including women and children.<sup>5</sup> Some farming families mined coal during the winter and many farmers in the area supplemented their incomes by carting or 'leading' coal but, as the shallow seams became worked out and coupled with the extension of the railway from Barnsley to Huddersfield, there was fierce competition for good quality coal. It was this competition which led to the increased exploitation of coal seams in Morley and the surrounding villages.

The increased exploitation of coal seams around Morley (Figure 3) was crucial to the rapid growth of the steam powered local textile industry, which was essentially the manufacture of woollen cloth, or shoddy, from recycled textiles. Local water power was insufficient to drive machinery, although it had been used at some mills such as the Crank Mill but, in any event, the burgeoning industry created an influx of labour which required domestic coal for heating and cooking and the railways required to service the area had its own substantial demands for coal.

In her essay entitled 'Black Diamonds', Mary Fisk<sup>6</sup> explained that, in the 1790s, the Earl of Cardigan and a number of other landowners made representations which ensured that the Lake Lock Railway, which operated from the north of Wakefield carrying coal to the River Calder, was extended to East and West Ardsley. The Haigh Hall Spring Line, as it was known, was owned by a number of businessmen with interests in local coal mines who were eager to exploit the growing demand for quality coal. At the





*Figure 2. An undated photograph of Queen Street Morley. Tram No.255 is bound for Meanwood and there are two other means of transport - a car outside the Exchange Buildings and a horse and cart in front of the Town Hall. The entrance to the Market Place is marked off on the pavement edge which is also the entrance to Hope Street. The lock-up stall in line with the Exchange Buildings and Queen's Hotel appears to be selling produce. It may have been a greengrocery stall about the time of the end of the First World War as it was when Mr. Kelly ran it at the end of the Second World War. [Photograph from the David Atkinson Archive, copyright Leeds Library and Information Service].*

time both of these lines were horse-drawn wagonways. Much of the track was literally unearthed in the area of Ramper Bend at East Ardsley when the M1 motorway was constructed in the 1960s.

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## RICH COAL SEAMS

As the Industrial Revolution burst across the nineteenth century, the primary role of Morley was that of the manufacture of a specialized form of textiles but the production of coal of varying grades for use around Morley and beyond was an integral and rich part of that revolution. The rapid growth of Morley in this period is no better illustrated than in an address given by the Earl of Dartmouth to the local Conservative Association when he said that in the 30 years since 1853 he had sold over 400 plots of land, most of which were of one acre or under, upon which had been built one church, ten chapels, six schools, Conservative Rooms, a Liberal Club, a Working Men's Club, a Masonic Hall, an Oddfellows Hall, a Co-operative Hall and stores, a police station, a market, two banks, a coffee tavern, sixteen mills, twenty warehouses and workshops and about eighteen hundred houses.<sup>1</sup> A much larger number of buildings had also been erected in the same period on land not owned by the Earl.

Morley and the surrounding villages were fortunate in the quality and variation of the coal seams (Deep, Middleton, Little, Beeston, Black Bed, Cannel, Flockton, Doggy and Cromwell), combinations of which were mined simultaneously at the same collieries and which provided the appropriate coal for 'coking', 'gas', 'manufacturing' and 'household' use.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, there were also, in some areas, seams of firebrick clay and pottery clay and, in the case of West Ardsley Colliery, or 'Topcliffe' as it was better known, a seam of ironstone was exploited and sent to the Yorkshire Iron and Coal Company's forge at East Ardsley, both the colliery and the forge being owned by the company. A more detailed explanation of the geology of the Morley area is set out in Appendix 4

What of the men who exploited these coal deposits and the men and women whom they employed? Looming large on the scene was Abraham Holliday who in the earlier part of the nineteenth century owned pits in Gildersome, Bruntcliffe, Neepshaw Lane and the land now covered by the Ingle Avenue estate and who was possibly the owner of the somewhat mysteriously named 'Philadelphia' Colliery at the junction of Rooms Lane and Gelderd Road. It was said<sup>1</sup> that Holliday had mined coal in Morley in the first half of the nineteenth century by rather primitive means in which he was assisted by his 'buxom wife', who travelled from Gildersome to Morley every Monday morning to collect the accounts at their pits. More importantly, Holliday and his wife were the founders of a coal mining dynasty – sons, grandsons and great grandsons who were extensively involved in local mining as owners, managers and engineers, indeed, an old invoice of about the mid-nineteenth century, shows Abraham's son Samuel Holliday selling 'Dressed Engine' coal at his New-Market Collieries at Adwalton for three shillings (15p) a ton. Abraham's grandson, Robert, sank East Ardsley colliery in 1875 to the Middleton Main seam, a colliery which at its peak probably employed 600 men and produced 200,000 tons of coal per year. Although not owned by the Holliday family after 1923, it was the last surviving pit in Morley Borough lasting long enough to be nationalized and closing in 1968 when it was still referred to locally as 'Hollidays'.

John Haigh had mined coal in the Almondbury-Shawhead area of Huddersfield on land leased from the Earl of Dartmouth but, pushed out by the exhaustion of the shallow seams, he leased land at Bruntcliffe once again from the Earl of Dartmouth, where

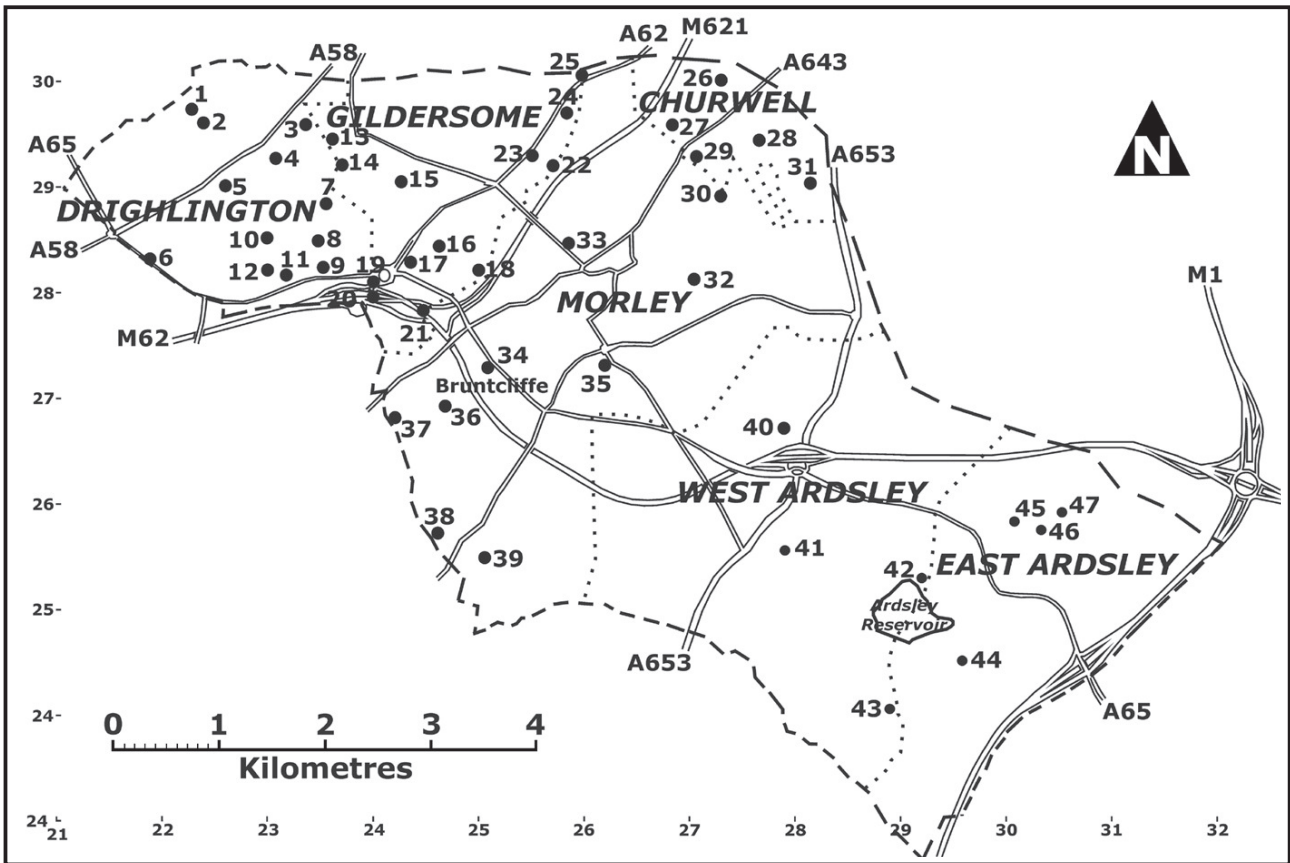


Figure 3. Collieries in the Morley area. The key to the map is shown opposite.

he sank Victoria Colliery in 1848. This colliery became a landmark on the road to Bradford and remained in the ownership of the Haigh family until its closure shortly before World War 2.<sup>2</sup> John Haigh's son Joseph served for 25 years on Morley Council as Councillor, Alderman and Mayor, in which capacity he read the Proclamation of the Accession of George V from the Town Hall steps in 1910.

The Ackroyd family, who will be discussed in connection with Morley Main were involved in varying aspects of mining across the district and there were other owners too numerous to mention, who continued to operate shallow mines and 'day holes', a few well into the twentieth century.

Until the introduction of steam power, which made possible the sinking of shafts to the deeper seams, coal had been mined by using bell pits, which consisted of short shafts to the coal, which was extracted from a large circular area until the pit became unsafe when a new pit was started. Day holes consisted of a drift into the coal usually from a hill or bank side but in either case raising the coal to the surface was slow and difficult. In the pit, coal was loaded into corves or sleds, often made of wickerwork, which were pulled by 'hurriers' who were harnessed to the corf by means of a leather belt which was fastened to a chain running between the hurriers legs. Sometimes 'thrusters' were used to assist the movement of corves by pushing with their heads and once the coal arrived at the shaft bottom it had to be carried in baskets to the surface. The raising of coal to the surface in some pits was by a gin, powered either by a horse or a woman, whichever, presumably was cheapest or the more readily available.