

**THE  
JOURNAL  
OF THE  
WILKINSON  
SOCIETY**



**No.18 1996**

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# THE WILKINSON SOCIETY

The Society was formed in 1972 to meet the demand for an organisation to preserve the material and documentary evidence of Broseley's industrial past. Since an important part in this industrial past was played by John Wilkinson, who lived for a time at "The Lawns", it was decided that the organisation should be known as The Wilkinson Society. The aims of the society are :-

- (i) to act as custodian of any relevant material and information and to make such material and information available to interested individuals and organisations ;
- (ii) to promote any relevant preservation activity and to assist individuals or organisations in such activity where deemed appropriate ;
- (iii) to provide a link with the community of Broseley for individuals or organisations undertaking local historical research.

Administration of the Society is by an annually elected committee. Membership is open to anyone interested in the Society's aims and activities. These activities include illustrated lectures, social evenings, researching and exhibiting the collection, field trips and coach tours. Members are kept informed by newsletters, and this annual Journal presents articles on the history of the Broseley area, John Wilkinson, and industrial archaeology in general.

Applications for membership, together with £3 annual subscription, should be addressed to the Secretary, Gestiana, Woodlands Road, Broseley TF12 5PU.

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## NOTES AND NEWS

### The Year's Activities, 1995—1996

It is not unusual when secretaries of societies such as ours come to record the happenings since the previous report that they find themselves hard pressed. Happily, I am not in that position. Each year since the Society was revived has been marked by at least one memorable event. The first year saw us visiting the Wilkinson sites in Bersham and thereabouts. The enjoyment was enhanced because of our travelling in a 1950s Vauxhall bus.

Last year we had the honour of hosting a visit from the Friends of Shropshire Records and Research. Members from across the County joined us for a series of talks and a walk around sites of interest in Broseley. It was a glorious sunny day, and a highlight was lunch in the open air at the Foresters Arms.

We were singularly fortunate to acquire a large quantity of ephemera, amassed by Mrs Smith, formerly a Broseley resident. These were chiefly bills from traders in the town, but the winter and early spring of 1996 saw an excited band of enthusiastic members and others assembling each week to sort these papers. There was a great deal of good humour on those evenings, and much unrecorded history came to light. It is true that much of this did not relate to John Wilkinson, but it gave us a fascinating insight into pre-war Broseley and it had an enormous benefit in cementing the membership of our Society.

In our lecture series we have had the good fortune to secure the services of a number of excellent speakers. We have learned considerably more about the history of railways in this country, and we were treated to an outstanding lecture from Dr Paul Stamper on the formal gardens of Shropshire.

Of somewhat less high profile is that the Committee has met each quarter. We have now received from the former committee the tokens in their possession. These are Wilkinson halfpenny tokens for 1790 (two), 1791 and 1792; a Coalbrookdale halfpenny token of 1789 in 'good' condition and a cartwheel halfpenny which is sadly not even 'fair.' Mr Tony Mugridge has very generously donated a number of artefacts to the Society, including a bowler hat belonging to a foreman at Broseley Tileries, a print box formerly the property of the late Jack Dixon, and a number of Jackfield tiles. The Society is much indebted to donors for all such items, which we catalogue.

**David Shinton, Secretary**

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## Programme of Events, 1996-1997

(Note—indoor meetings are held at The Pipeworks Museum, Broseley).

- 21 September: Annual General Meeting, 2.30 pm.
- 9—10 November: *Photographs of Broseley* Weekend, 12.30—4.00 pm each day.
- 17 January: Visit of replica Trevithick Steam Carriage, Blists Hill Museum, 7.30 pm (jointly with Friends of Ironbridge Gorge Museum).
- 14 March: A talk on Researching John Wilkinson (Neil Clarke), 7.30 pm.
- 11 May: Coach trip to Matthew Boulton's Soho House, departs Broseley Square, 12.30 pm.
- 11 July: A guided tour of industrial archaeology sites in North Telford associated with John Wilkinson; cars to meet at Telford Central Station car park at 7.30 pm.
- 3 October: Annual General Meeting.

Further details will appear in the Newsletter and the local press.

**Eric Cox, Chairman**

## The Journal

It gives me great pleasure, after nine years, to resume the editorship of the Journal of the Wilkinson Society. May I add my thanks to Maurice Hawes and Rex Key for their work in 1988 and 1995 respectively.

The main articles from journals between 1973 and 1988 (Nos. 1-16), now termed first series, are being put together by Peter Cooper in one volume which will be available shortly. The journal, second series, begins with No. 17 (1995).

In this issue there is the first part of a stimulating analysis of John Wilkinson's part in the Iron Bridge project; a commentary on the account of a group of early eighteenth century visitors who passed through this area on their tour of England; and a photographic survey of an industrial archaeology mystery in West Africa.

Contributions to the next issue of the Journal would be welcome and should be sent to me (by July 1997) at Cranleigh, Wellington Road, Little Wenlock, Telford TF6 5BH.

**Neil Clarke, Editor**

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# JOHN WILKINSON AND THE IRON BRIDGE

## Part 1. The Bridge in Modern Times

by Michael Berthoud

The iron bridge, spanning the River Severn near Coalbrookdale in Shropshire, is universally esteemed as a monument to its presumed builder, Abraham Darby III. This has not always been the case. Abraham Darby has not always been given credit for building the bridge — which passed, during the early years of the present century, from being one of the wonders of the industrial world to being an eyesore and a white elephant. In 1949 one Edmund Vale was moved to write

*'About half a mile down stream there is a free bridge, but no doubt they will, in time, make another on the old site. If so, I venture to hope that the authorities will use more discretion than they did at Atcham. A derelict bridge is an unsightly embarrassment and spoils the view. It would be better to take it down (as could quite easily be done in this case) and re-erect it at some place like Whipsnade where it could be both used and well seen'.*

Mercifully, nobody heeded Mr. Vale for some years. Ownership of the bridge and its tolls had passed into the hands of the Rathbones, a Quaker family in Liverpool. Wheeled traffic was then no longer allowed but foot passengers still paid a halfpenny toll between 6 am and 9 pm.

In October 1950 a ceremony took place in which Major Rathbone, representing the family, symbolically threw the key into the river and handed the bridge over into the care of the Shropshire County Council. The traditional halfpenny toll from foot passengers was no longer worth the effort of collecting, the bridge was in a poor state of repair and it soon became an embarrassment and a nuisance to the County Council. In 1953 the original Minute Book, which provides some valuable information concerning the origins of the bridge, was discovered in the County Library at Shrewsbury. In 1956 the County Council proposed demolishing the bridge and replacing it with a more modern structure. William H. Butler, on whose shoulders the mantle of Thomas Farnolls Pritchard and Thomas Telford had fallen, drew up a plan for a new bridge. Following the advice of Edmund Vale, Butler proposed demolishing the original bridge

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(my copy of his plan makes no mention of Whipsnade) and building a new one on the same site. This seems to suggest that the original designer had chosen the ideal—possibly the only—site for a bridge over that part of the Gorge.

There matters rested for a while. The late Brigadier Goulburn told me, some years ago, the story of what happened next. As a County Councillor he had been at a meeting in Shrewsbury one evening when the proposed demolition of the bridge was discussed. After the meeting he decided to drive home by way of Ironbridge to see for himself the condition of the bridge. He was surprised to see, parked by the bridge, a London taxi cab. The brigadier stopped his car and engaged the cab driver in conversation.

He had apparently picked up a fare at London Airport, three Japanese gentlemen who had asked him to drive them to Ironbridge. They wanted to inspect and pay homage to what they regarded as an important industrial monument. Whether they had heard of the proposed demolition of the bridge and had thoughts of buying it and shipping it back to Japan we shall probably never know. The cab driver was quite happy to wait while the brigadier and the three Japanese exchanged courtesies.

Brigadier Goulburn told me he had been deeply moved by this encounter. He decided there and then that the bridge must not be demolished, went straight home and telephoned anyone he thought might be interested in saving the bridge. The result of his endeavours was the formation of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust. The bridge recovered from the threat, the plan it was that died.

Abraham Darby had not, at that time, been given credit for his part in the history of the bridge. On the other hand, the names of John Wilkinson—King of the Ironmasters— and Thomas Farnolls Pritchard, the Shrewsbury architect, had long been associated with it. C. V. Hancock, in *'East and West of the Severn'* (published in 1956) described it as '...an ancient monument' and a monument also to the faith of the ironmasters of genius, John Wilkinson and Abraham Darby the third'.

Gradually, over the past few decades, claims on behalf of Abraham Darby as the builder of the bridge were promoted. Almost every writer on the subject since the 1950s has credited Abraham Darby with the building of the bridge while the part played by John Wilkinson and others has been gradually eliminated from the story. Indeed, some modern accounts seem to suggest that Abraham Darby promoted, designed and built the bridge, if not single-handed, with very minimal involvement by

anyone else. On closer inspection this version of the legend proves to be of fairly recent origin.

Until the discovery in 1953 of the original Minute Book of the bridge, almost the only authority quoted was John Randall of Madeley. Randall, a former painter at the Coalport factory, retired in 1880, publishing a *History of Madeley* in that year and an account of John Wilkinson and his family in 1886. Randall's account of the origin of the bridge is unambiguous and credits the proposal for an iron bridge to Wilkinson. Randall describes how:

*'Wilkinson had faith in his favourite metal. He believed in iron thoroughly. . . . When, therefore, it was proposed to put a bridge across the Severn, to connect the Broseley and Madeley banks of the river, at that time two great ironmaking districts, Wilkinson at once proposed that his favourite metal should be employed for the purpose. But the thing was pronounced to be preposterous and Wilkinson was declared to be "iron mad".'*

Other nineteenth century writers, including Thomas Telford, believed Thomas Farnolls Pritchard was the designer and original promoter of the bridge. Gradually though, Pritchard's assumed contribution was eroded until, in the section devoted to the iron bridge in the 1958 edition of Nikolaus Pevsner's *'Shropshire'* (appearing unchanged in the 1979 edition) the blunt statement appears, 'It was designed by **Abraham Darby**'. This is followed by a footnote which reads, 'The attribution of the design to the Shrewsbury architect Thomas Farnolls Pritchard is not justified. The designs he submitted in 1775 were for a bridge of stone, brick and timber (see the Minute Books at the Shrewsbury Public Library, and A. Raistrick: *Dynasty of Ironfounders*, 1953)'.

It was the shock of reading this categorical assertion by a widely respected authority that prompted me to re-examine the evidence and try to establish the truth of the matter as opposed the widely disseminated propaganda version. I was, at the time, living at John Wilkinson's former house at Broseley.

The propaganda, or 'authorised version', has a number of minor variations but is essentially as follows: Abraham Darby II had wanted to build a bridge across the Severn but died before his dream could be realised. A group of local businessmen, including Abraham Darby III and John Wilkinson, met in 1775 and proposed building a conventional wooden bridge across the Gorge near Coalbrookdale. Abraham Darby and John Wilkinson were both devoted to iron and insisted that the bridge should be entirely of cast iron. Pritchard, who had offered the meeting a plan for a stone bridge (with cast iron brought in only to form a



crown to the arch), was told to go away and design a bridge entirely of cast iron.

Sixty shares were issued, of which Abraham Darby took fifteen and John Wilkinson twelve. Abraham Darby was appointed treasurer and agreed to build the bridge. Edmund Vale thought it 'remarkable that in spite of the confidence of Wilkinson and Abraham Darby III and his very capable and eminent manager Richard Reynolds, it was thought necessary to consult an architect for the design of the bridge'.

Arguments and disagreements broke out among the trustees and a 'schism' developed in their ranks. The shareholders broke up into two camps, those (including Wilkinson and Darby) who approved of building in cast iron and those who thought the idea 'preposterous' and 'mad'. Almost a year had been wasted. Darby had prepared an estimate for building the bridge and, to strengthen his hand, he took over John Wilkinson's twelve shares, taking his holding to thirty-seven out of sixty and assuring him of a majority vote. Wilkinson must either have changed sides or had cooled off and lost interest in the project. These figures, which appeared to be confirmed in the Minute Book, disposed of any idea that Wilkinson had taken any active part in promoting, designing or financing the building of the bridge.

This apparent discrepancy will be discussed in a later part of the article—Ed.)

Matters were well advanced by 1777 when further money was raised and the specification was altered to provide a higher arch and a broader carriageway. Pritchard was, by that time, a sick man and Darby took over the responsibility for designing the final version of the bridge and for casting the components at his Coalbrookdale foundry. Pritchard died before it could be completed. It could therefore be asserted that Abraham Darby had promoted, designed, cast and built the world's first iron bridge while Wilkinson, Pritchard and others had played no more than a supporting role in the early stages.

This version of events broadly concurred with that given by Randall and was confirmed by the Minute Book when it was rediscovered in 1953. The old myths and legends surrounding the building of the bridge could now be laid to rest and Darby given his rightful place in the history books. The statements by Raistrick and Pevsner delivered the coup de grace to Pritchard and seemed to be the last word on the subject. That, broadly speaking, is where matters stood in 1988 when I began my investigations.

A cursory reading of the Minute Book appeared to support the conventional wisdom but I was left with an uneasy feeling that all was not well. The story did not ring true. There appeared to be some irreconcilable contradictions in the various versions of the

events that took place in the Severn Gorge in the 1770s. I decided the best way forward was to assemble all the available evidence and to reconstruct the story from scratch. A number of interesting facts began to emerge. Firstly, that a continuing re-appraisal of Pritchard's place in the history of Shropshire's architecture had already begun. This largely rested on the identification by John Harris, the librarian of the Royal Institution of British Architects, of a book of designs for chimney pieces. The book was discovered in a museum in America and Harris identified the designs as those of Pritchard, thus considerably extending the list of houses on which Pritchard is known to have worked.

In a wry comment in an article published in *Architectural History*, Volume I, 1968, Harris suggested that as recently as 1954 all that had been ascribed to Pritchard had been the 'rebuilding of St. Julian's Church, Shrewsbury, in 1749-50, and his third design in 1775 for Abraham Darby's famous Coalbrookdale cast iron bridge.' 'His ghost,' wrote Harris, 'must have been dispirited to have had even the bridge denied him in 1958, although this was happily rectified in the same year'.

This referred to Pevsner's damning footnote in the 1958 edition of 'Shropshire', denying Pritchard any credit for his part in the design of the iron bridge. Harris noted that this was reinstated in the same year, a reference to an article by R. Maguire and P. Matthews, *The Iron Bridge at Coalbrookdale*, published in the Architectural Association Journal, July-August 1958, of which more later.

It was noticeable that while Pritchard was gradually being reinstated as a local architect of some importance, this was having little or no effect on the 'authorised version' that was still in circulation. An article by J. L. Hobbs in the *Shropshire Magazine* for September 1959 was similarly ignored although it had thrown some fresh light on the subject. Here the author quoted Tredgold, in an essay on the strength of cast iron (published in 1824), as claiming that 'the original idea of applying cast iron to bridges came to Pritchard in 1773 and was communicated to John Wilkinson'. Hobbs suggested that this might have happened the other way round, that Wilkinson may have suggested the use of iron to Pritchard—who had originally trained as a 'mason and statuary'. Quoting the minutes of the meeting of September 15th 1775, at which Pritchard and Samuel Thomas were desired to prepare estimates of the proposed bridge, Hobbs commented 'It is difficult not to see the hand of John Wilkinson behind this proposal'.

Dr. Barrie Trinder's 1981 edition of *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire* took things a stage further. Although continuing to make the claim that 'Abraham Darby III was principally

responsible for the construction of the bridge,' he added the challenging comment that Pritchard 'remained a shareholder until the time of his death, and was probably responsible for the design of the bridge which was eventually built'. There were so many contradictions appearing, so many cracks in the 'authorised version' that could no longer be papered over, that nothing short of a complete re-appraisal of the facts could produce a coherent and credible scenario.

My dossier on Pritchard continued to grow. All the evidence was pointing towards Pritchard's involvement at every stage of the development of the iron bridge and there remained many unanswered questions about Wilkinson's involvement. Pevsner's position was no longer tenable. At that stage, I found myself unable to continue my researches, having moved to Bridgnorth and the Pritchard material having been temporarily mislaid during the move. After a lapse of several years my interest in the subject was rekindled when I came across my copy of John Randall's book *'The Wilkinsons'* and read once again his account of how the bridge came to be built.

The iron bridge seems destined to remain the subject of paradox and contradiction. Widely advertised as the centrepiece of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, its familiar image features prominently on the 'passport tickets' giving access to the various museum sites and is used as the Trust's logo. In fact, access to it is free, it belongs not to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust but to English Heritage, and a commemorative plaque attached to the bridge reads,

*'This bridge was the first great iron bridge in the world, built between 1777 and 1781. It has a span of just over 100ft (33m), spanning the Severn Gorge. It was intended from the start to be a spectacular advertisement of the skills of the Coalbrookdale ironmasters.'*

*'The bridge is built entirely of components cast at Abraham Darby's ironworks. It was he who developed the design in conjunction with the architect Thomas Farnolls Pritchard.'*

**John Wilkinson's name does not appear.**

# PASSING THROUGH WILLEY IN 1735

by Neil Clarke

We have learned a lot about the important developments in the Ironbridge Gorge area in the late 18th and early 19th centuries from those who visited East Shropshire at the time and recorded their impressions.<sup>1</sup> Earlier visitors were fewer in number but their observations make a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the area on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. One such group passed through Willey on their tour of England in 1735.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I intend to examine what the writer of their account tells us about the area in the period before the arrival of John Wilkinson.

Both Celia Fiennes and Daniel Defoe had visited East Shropshire on their respective tours of 1698 and 1723.<sup>3</sup> Travelling from Shrewsbury ('a pleasant town to live in') to Patshull Park, Celia Fiennes noted the coal pits operating in the Oakengates area ('there are great hills all about which I pass'd over full of coale pitts')<sup>4</sup> and the condition of the roads along which she passed ('here I came into the Whatling [Watling] Streete which is one of the great roads of England...the roads are pretty good but the miles are long').<sup>5</sup>

Daniel Defoe, taking the same route as far as Whiteladies and Boscobel, also commented on 'the great antient road or way call'd Watling Street which comes from London to this town [Shrewsbury] and goes on from hence to the utmost coast of Wales'.<sup>6</sup> Later he explained how the road between Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury was part of a postal route, 'a cross-post thro' all the western part of England ... to maintain the correspondence of merchants and men of business, of which all this side of the island is so full'.<sup>7</sup> The writer of the 1735 account showed a similar interest in trade and industry, roads, towns, natural features and the estates of landed gentry:

*Sept. 30 We left Bridgnorth<sup>8</sup> and went through Willey<sup>9</sup> to some coal pits belonging to Mr Weld, who has a very good house in the last mentioned place.<sup>10</sup> The manner of drawing up coal from the pits and of draining the water from them is well worth seeing.<sup>11</sup> From the pits we went through a village called Barrow to Wenlock, a very paltry, dirty town and corporation, its present members being Samuel Edwards and Wm. Forester Esquires.<sup>12</sup> Two miles from this town on a hill called Wenlock Edge we had an extensive and very pleasant view of Shropshire and Shrewsbury, at 10 miles distant; but we may truly be said to have paid for our peeping. For the descent of this hill for a mile to a village called Harley is so steep, stony and slippery that we were an hour walking and leading our horses down it.<sup>13</sup> Four miles*

*beyond this we saw at Cund [Cound] an exceedingly pretty house and park, belonging to Dr Cresset, Dean of Clogher in Ireland,<sup>14</sup> and opposite to it on the other side of the Severn is Ighton [Eyton] in the parish of Wroxeter, a good old house, situate in a very pleasant wood, belonging to the Earl of Bradford.<sup>15</sup> About a mile and a half from Cund we crossed the Watling Street<sup>16</sup> and at 2 miles and half further, came to Shrewsbury to the Talbot.<sup>17</sup>*

It is significant that this group of travellers chose to make a detour from the main route between Bridgnorth and Much Wenlock in order to visit Willey. The brief description of what they saw there confirms that coal mining was a well-established industry in the area by that date, but the failure to mention iron making is both puzzling and disappointing. The reference to local road conditions in the period immediately prior to turnpiking is also of interest. We should be grateful to the Rev. Cole for preserving this little gem.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

1. An anthology of visitors' impressions of Ironbridge, Coalbrookdale and the Shropshire Coalfield appears in Barrie Trinder, ed., *The Most Extraordinary District in the World* (1977).
2. Additional MS, 5842, British Library. This is one of almost 100 folio volumes containing a collection of manuscripts compiled by the Rev. William Cole (1714-82), the Cambridge antiquary. On p. 244, under the heading, 'Tour of England in 1735', he wrote:

*The following journal was lent to me in 1775 by Mr Alderman Bentham of Cambridge who married the only sister and heir of Mr. Riste, one of the party in the expedition. It is all written in Mr. Whaley's hand, who was the writer of it and went as tutor and companion to John Dodd of Swallowfield in Berkshire, Esq. then a fellow-commoner of King's College in Cambridge, where Mr. Whaley was then Fellow. Mr. Riste went as companion and governor to Francis Shepheard Esq., son to Francis Shepheard of Exning in Suffolk Esq. and then a fellow-commoner of Clare Hall, who died soon after his return. Although a great part of the journal seems to be mere common place and trite observations, I shall nevertheless transcribe the whole as I shall find it.*

3. Celia Fiennes, *The Journeys of Celia Fiennes*, ed. Christopher Morris (1947); Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (Everyman edn., vol. 2, 1927).
  4. Celia Fiennes, *Journeys* p.228. In fact, coal was being mined in the Wombridge priory demesne in the early 16th century; both Leland (1586) and Camden (1586) mentioned the mines, by then firmly established; and by the third quarter of the 17th century mining was also established at Coalpit (later Ketley) Bank and probably at Snedshill (*Victoria County History of Shropshire*, vol. xi, 1985, p.292)
  5. Celia Fiennes travelled along Watling street and the road to Shifnal some 28 years before the first major attempt to improve them. By the Act of 12 Geo. I, c. 9 (1726), Watling Street was turnpiked between Crackley Bank and Shrewsbury, together with the connecting road from Oakengates to Shifnal (Barrie Trinder, *The Industrial Revolution in Shropshire*, 1973, pp. 142-43).
  6. Defoe, *Tour*, p. 77, In the appendix to volume 2 of the *Tour*, Defoe referred to the 'wonderful improvements' made to the London end of Watling Street by the setting up of turnpikes (p. 124). As noted above, the Shropshire section was turnpiked at about the same time as the publication of Defoe's *Tour*.
  7. *Ibid.* p. 188. A cross-post was a postal route running from one major route to another, as opposed to bye-posts, which followed major roads which did not run to and from London. The cross-post from Bristol to Exeter was set up in 1696 and that from Bristol to Chester, via Worcester, Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury in 1700. The notable Ralph Allen of Bath offered to farm the cross-and bye-posts in 1720, after which there was a steady growth in these services (Pat Rogers, ed. Penguin Edition of Defoe's *Tour*, 1971, p. 712).
  8. The four companions had set out from London on Monday, 28 July 1735 and journeyed through southern and western counties of England before arriving at Bridgnorth ('a large and handsome town and burgh, situated on a very high rock...populous but of no great trade') on 29 September.
  9. The journey to Willey would most probably have been via Nordley, and beyond Willey to Much Wenlock via Barrow. In fact, this route across Willey Park was later turnpiked by the Wenlock Trustees (18 Geo. III, c, 91, 1778), and then closed to the public early in the 19th century when a new road was built from Broseley past (New) Willey Furnace towards Barrow (Trinder, *Ind. Rev. Shrops.*, pp, 144-46).
  10. The Weld family had been at Willey since 1618 when John Weld purchased the manor from Francis Lacon. Their mansion, referred
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to in this passage, later became known as the Old Hall, following the building of the new Hall in 1813-15. It was mainly Jacobean in structure (H.E. Forrest, *The Old Houses of Wenlock*, 1915, pp. 95-96). The owner of the estate at the time of this visit was George Weld, great grandson of John.

11.

For over 100 years the Welds had successfully exploited the mineral wealth of their estates (which also included the Marsh and part of Broseley), particularly coal and ironstone (M.D.G. Wanklyn, 'John Weld of Willey, 1585-1665: an enterprising landowner of the early 17th century', in *West Midland Studies*, vol. 3, 1969, pp. 88-99; Trinder, pp. 10-12, 110-11). Coal was mined by using either adits or shafts, and depth was mainly determined by drainage considerations. In this passage, the writer appears to be referring to mining shafts, with possibly a horse-worked system of drainage. As for the number of pits operated by the Welds and the amount of coal mined, evidence for the early 1750's suggests about 20 pits working in Willey and Broseley: in 1752 these produced 3,676 tons of coal, of which 762 tons were delivered to the Old Willey Furnace: in 1753 4,360 tons were mined, of which 1,002 tons went to the furnace; the bulk of the output was for the Severn coal trade (Wanklyn, pp. 96-97; Trinder, pp. 13-14, 90).

Intriguingly, there is no mention in the passage of the ironworks at Willey. Located on the Linley Brook  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to the South of the Old Hall, an earlier furnace had been rebuilt by John Weld when he bought the estate in 1618. There are references to its operation in 1657, 1687-88 and 1717. In 1733 Richard Ford and Thomas Goldney leased Willey Furnace to help Coalbrookdale meet the demands of its Bristol customers for pig iron; and in 1735, for example, the blast furnace made 92 tons. On the expiry of this lease (probably in 1754), the furnace appears to have fallen into disrepair, but was eventually taken over by the New Willey Company in 1757 and operated by them until final closure in 1774. Throughout its working life the Old Furnace was dogged by an inadequate water supply, particularly in dry seasons. When operated by Ford and Goldney, it was never able to keep in blast for more than 40 weeks in the year (Ralph Pee and Maurice Hawes, 'John Wilkinson and the two Willey Ironworks', in *The Journal of the Wilkinson Society*, no. 16, 1988, p. 7; Arthur Raistrick, *Dynasty of Ironfounders*, 1953, pp. 59-62). Is it therefore not possible that the travellers who visited Willey in 1735 (at the end of September, traditionally a fairly dry month) may not have mentioned an ironworks there because they did not see one operating at that particular time?

12.

Much Wenlock clearly did not impress our visitors. Incorporated by a charter of Edward IV in 1468, the borough at first returned one member of Parliament but by 1491 there were two, and this representation continued until the borough was disfranchised in

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1885 (W.F. Mumford, *Wenlock in the Middle Ages*, 1977, pp. 131-34). The M.P.s named in 1735 had been elected by the burgesses in the previous year, William Forester of Dothill was the father of Brooke Forester, who in 1734 had married Elizabeth, daughter and heir of George Weld of Willey.

13. The travellers were impressed by the panorama presented by Wenlock Edge, but not by the effect of the latter on their route to Cound. Two centuries earlier Leland had recorded the 'rough ground, passynge ovar an hiqhe rocky hill caulyd Wenlok Egge' (Leland, *Itinerary*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, 1908, vol. ii, p. 84). Seventeen years after the journey described in the passage, the road between Shrewsbury, Much Wenlock and Bridgnorth was turnpiked (25 Geo. II, c, 40), but in 1778 the Wenlock Trustees turnpiked the road from Cressage through Sheinton to Much Wenlock in order to avoid 'that very disagreeable part of the old road well known by the name of Wenlock Edge' (18 Geo. III, c, 91).
  14. Cound Hall had been built in 1704 for Edward Cressett. Designed by John Prince of Shrewsbury, it was of classical style with three storeys and a basement and divided by tall Corinthian pilasters. Its owner at the time of this visit was Edward Cressett's son, also named Edward, who was to become Bishop of Llandaff in 1749 (Jonathan Humphries, *Cound Hall Past and Present*, 1989).
  15. The mansion at Eyton was built by Sir Francis Newport of High Ercall in 1607. Its owner at the time of this visit was his great, great grandson, Thomas, 4th (and last Newport) Earl of Bradford. Following the destruction of most of the building by fire, the Shrewsbury architect Thomas Farnolls Pritchard acquired the banqueting house and converted it into a house for his own occupation in 1767-69 (Department of the Environment: *List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest—Borough of Shrewsbury and Atcham, Parish of Wroxeter*, 1986).
  16. This was not the section of Watling Street between Crackley Bank and Shrewsbury turnpiked in 1726, but the route across the River Severn at Wroxeter which was later turnpiked when the powers of the Watling Street Trustees were extended in 1764 (4 Geo. III c, 70). It linked the main road with Pitchford, Acton Burnell and Frodesley. There was no bridge at Wroxeter at this time, but travellers obviously forded the Severn when conditions allowed. The road ceased to be a turnpike route in 1829 (*V.C.H. Shrops.*, vol. viii, 1965, pp. 15-16).
  17. The final stage of the travellers' journey on 30 September 1735 was the 5 (not 2 1/2) miles to Shrewsbury. They spent four nights at the Talbot, then an inn in Market Street just off the Square and 'one of the chief posting establishments here in the days of the stagecoaches' (H.E. Forrest, *The Old Houses of Shrewsbury* 1912,
-



p. 49). Leaving Shrewsbury ('the pleasantest situated I ever saw') on 4 October, the four companions travelled via Chester, Manchester, Derby, Nottingham and Peterborough to Cambridge, where they arrived on 19 October.

18. The whole tour took almost 3 months to complete (28 July-19 October 1735). It cost a total of £232 12s. 10d. which included the purchase of 'three books and a map for the journey', accommodation, letters and washing. Commenting on this, the Rev. Cole concluded:

At the end of the book is an account of the expenses for the journey which for four gentlemen and probably two servants, at least one, with their horses, at 10 shillings for each person a day, with money given to see places, seems to be very reasonable and would not be so easy at this time (1775)(MS. 5842, Brit. Lib.).

## ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE

**A portion of *John Rocque's Map of Shropshire (1752)*, covering the area between Bridgnorth and Much Wenlock and clearly showing**

**\* the main route between the two towns via Morville and Muckley Cross (turnpiked in 1752)**

**\* the route taken by the four travellers in 1735, via Nordley (probably), Willey and Barrow**

**\* the coal pits in the vicinity of Willey described in the passage (marked as small lumps of coal to the south, north east and east of Broseley)**

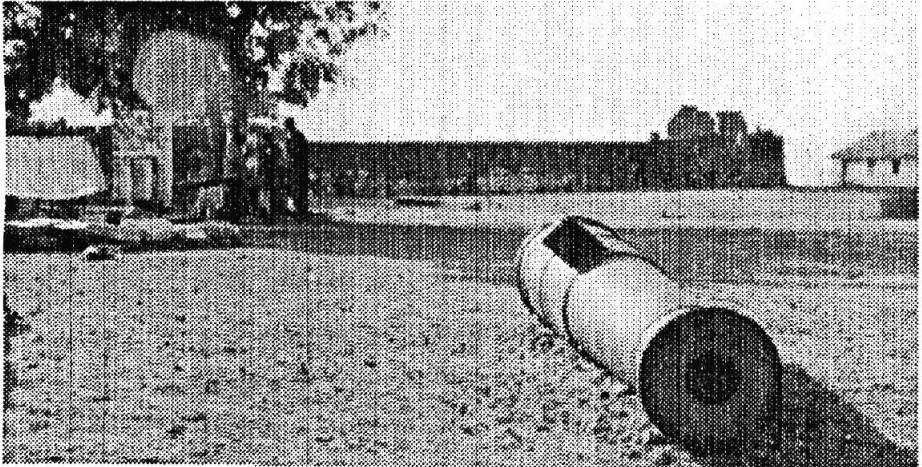
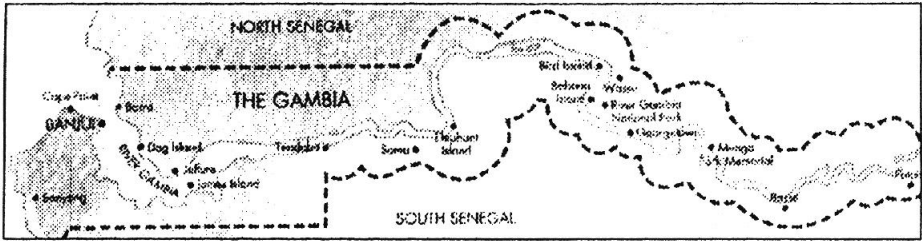
**\* the location of Willey Old Hall (the largest of the three buildings shown to the north of the pool on the Linley Brook)**

**\* the ironworks complex at Willey (shown immediately to the south-east of the pool, with the word 'Furnace' printed to the right), in operation at the time of the visit but not mentioned in the passage.**

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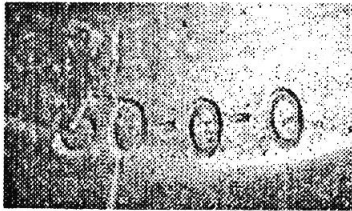




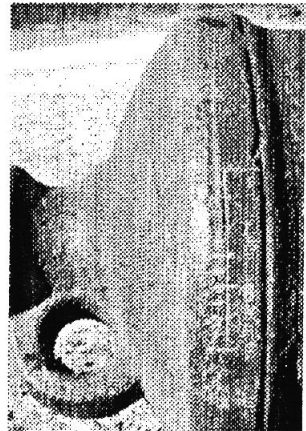
The fort at Barra as approached from the dock. In the foreground is cannon C. Two more cannon A and B, lie together below the wall in the background. RIGHT: Aaron, 'the geological hammer' of approximately 6 feet, lies on cannon A to give an idea of its length. Cannon C is larger.



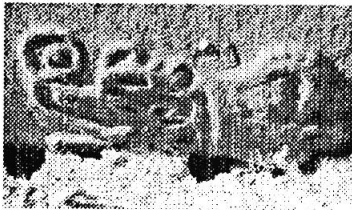
RIGHT: The number series 50-0-0 on the curved rear edge of cannon B. Cannon A has the numbers 30(50?)-3-0.

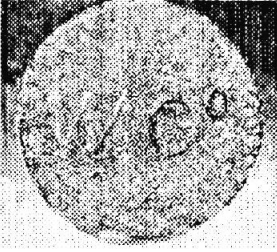


FAR RIGHT: The rear of cannon C, bears a scale from 0 to 3 in quarterly gradations.

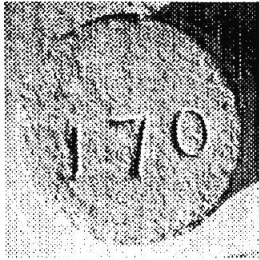


BOTTOM: A royal insignia (GR?), corroded and half buried in the dry earth, on cannon B.





The lettering *W C* on one of the mounting arms of cannon *A* —the really exciting discovery!



The number *170* cast or stamped on another mounting arm.

Cannon *A*'s bore. As a guide, the extended Swiss Army knife measures  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. (16cm.)... and the boots are size 11!

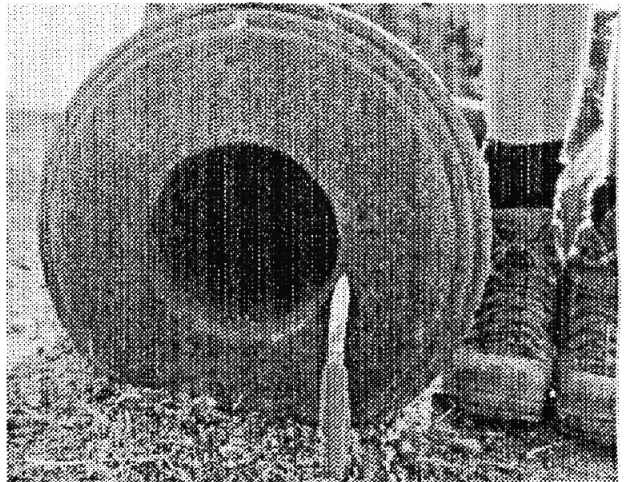
## CANNON IN THE GAMBIA

By Margaret Barrett

The Gambia, West Africa, is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has few natural resources, and its only cash crop is literally peanuts. The country itself is a strategic construct, and this has determined its linear configuration (see map). It is seven miles wide (in places) for a distance of 292 miles along the Gambia river and the boundaries were supposedly determined by the distance a cannon ball could be fired to north and south from the middle of the river.

Which brings me to cannon . . . nearly. To get to the cannon you need first to catch the ferry from Banjul, the capital (Bathurst before independence in 1965) to the opposite side of the mouth of the Gambia river, Barra. If you've read anything about travel in Africa you'll have some idea of this ferry; oily, smelly, packed with people and produce. There is nowhere to sit for what is a journey of about three quarters of an hour. Poverty spawns lots of things, but not health and safety regulations.

The journey is worth it. Some distance from the dock is a fort. I don't know the date of the founding of this fort, or its purpose. From one person I heard that slaves were held there prior to their shipment to America. From another that it was built in the middle of the nineteenth century, and slaves were never taken there. The Gambian who takes dalasi (the local currency—Ed.) in exchange for unlocking the fort gate preferred the former explanation.

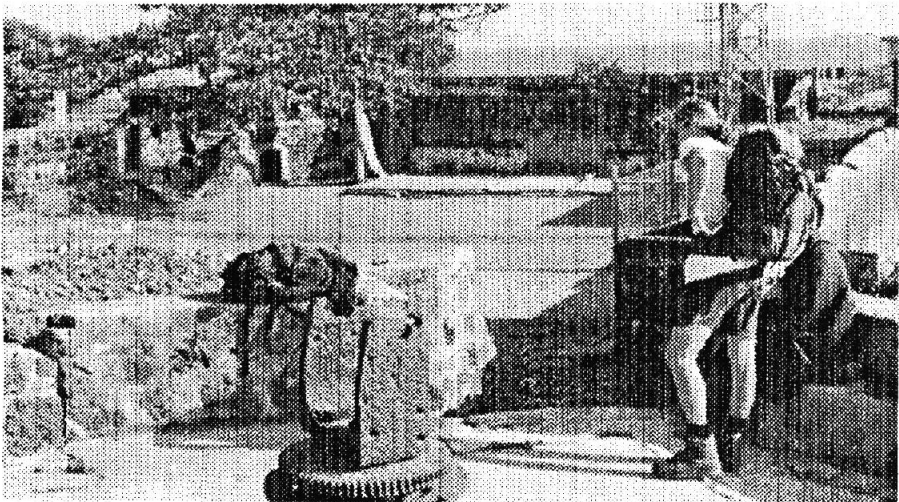


Outside the fort, and some distance away, near to the compound where this man lives with his family, are the cannon. There are three of them, and they really are huge. They're still there by virtue of the fact that the Gambia has no iron smelting facilities. Most Gambians are very poor, and everything is utilised. For example, steel runway matting used by the British in World War II appears throughout the country variously disguised as fence posts, smoked fish racks, etc. These cannon are too heavy to shift and impossible for the Gambians to make ploughshares of, so to speak.

I first discovered these cannon about 18 months ago when visiting my son, Aaron, who was doing a year's volunteered teaching in the Gambia. I didn't have a camera at the time and so the following photographs were taken when his brother went to visit him two months later. I cannot therefore always be completely confident about which markings belong to which cannon.

I hope that this information will be of interest to the Wilkinson Society. I would be very grateful if members could throw any light on the origin of the cannon as well as on the history of the fort at Barra.

**General view of the interior of the fort at Barra, showing gun emplacements of World War II.**



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Diversification at the pipeworks! This advertisement in the official guide to the Borough of Wenlock published in the 1940s shows that Broseley's traditional clay pipe industry was feeling the cold wind of change. The works closed suddenly during the '50s and the building and its contents were left as if in a time-warp. In September the pipeworks came to life again as Broseley Pipe Museum, boasting 600 visitors during its first weekend.