

Coal in the North

Coal is said to have been known in the district in the time of the ancients. The discovery of ashes in the Roman stations at Ebchester, Lanchester, and other places, is recognised as conclusive testimony to the use of coal by that people.

Fordyce, in his "History of Durham," says :- "One of the earliest documents in which coal is mentioned, relative to the county of Durham, is the Boldon Book of Bishop Pudsey, 1180, in which, though the term 'wodlades' frequently occurs, are the following notices of coal :- At Bishopwearmouth, 'the smith has twelve acres for the ironwork of the carts, and finds his own coal' ; and at Sedgfield, the smith has one oxgang upon similar conditions. At Escomb, near Bishop Auckland, a collier holds a toft and croft, and four acres, providing coals for the cart-smith of Coundon." He goes on to say that the earliest workings of coal in the county of Durham are understood to have been by drifts at the its outcrop, "along its western limit, which passes by Heleyfield, Broomshields, Wolsington Common, Bedburn, Woodlands, and Barnard Castle."

With regard to the early shipment of coals from the North, the following incident, which is related in the *Shipping World* for November, 1883, proves that there was not only a coal trade on the Tyne five centuries and a half ago, but a foreign coal trade, however limited it may have been in its scope and character :- "During the night of the 31st July, in the year 1325, when Edward II had exhausted the patience of the nation, Thomas Rente, a merchant of Pontoise, was sailing in the North Sea, homeward bound. Suddenly he found himself surrounded by armed ships, and taken as a French Prize into the harbour of Yarmouth. Rente petitioned the king and Parliament for the recovery of his goods, affirming that he was a liege man, who had been to Newcastle with a cargo of wheat, and was returning with a cargo of coals, and had nothing to do with the king's trouble in France. The petition was preserved, and printed in the Rolls of Parliament." The same article goes on to say :- "By the time that the first Stuart monarch in England was established on his throne, four hundred English ships were engaged in carrying coals from the river to various parts of his Majesty's dominions, besides foreign vessels that come in fleets of fifty sail at once," as often and rapidly as wind and weather

permitted, to convey the staple produce beyond the seas.

MARK NOBLE, Blackhill.

The statement that Henry III granted license to the good men of Newcastle to dig coals, &c., is probably an historical fiction. It was originally made by Ralph Gardiner in his "England's Grievance Discovered," and has been faithfully copied since. Brand found some difficulty in accepting the statement, for, in quoting it, he adds, "which, however, on a search in the Tower of London, I could not find." No one seems to have taken any further trouble in the matter till Mr. Robert L. Galloway, making a searching investigation into the early history of the coal trade for a paper he was about to read before the Society of Antiquaries a few years ago, discovered that Gardiner was wrong. Instead of the grant being made by Henry III in 1238, it was not until 1350 that the men of Newcastle obtained it, and the monarch who gave it to them was Edward III. Here is the proof from Mr. Galloway's paper in *Archæologia Æliana*, vol viii., p. 184 :-

We have now arrived at the period when the men of Newcastle obtained their first licence from the king to dig and to take coals and stone in certain portions of the land outside the walls of the town, and to make their profit therefrom in aid of their fee-farm rent. In the year 1350, upon supplication made, they obtained a grant on the following terms :- "The King to his beloved Mayor and bailiffs and good men of our town of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, greeting. Because on your part petition has been made to us that, since you hold the town aforesaid from us at fee-farm, we may be willing to concede to you that the common ground of the town aforesaid, without the walls of the town, in places called the Castlefield and the Frith, you may have the power to dig and to take coals and stone from thence, and to make your profit in the same in aid of your farm aforesaid, as often and in such way as may seem to you to be expedient ; we, favourably acceding to your petition in this matter, have caused a licence of this kind to be granted to you. And this to you, and others whom it may concern, we signify by the present letter to have effect during our good pleasure. Witness as above (witness the king at Westminster, the first day of December), by the king himself and the Council, and for 20s, paid into the haniper."

The above payment is acknowledged in the Exchequer Roll for the same year :- "Maior ballivi et probi homines ville Novi Castri super Tynam dant viginti solidos solutos pro licencia fodiendi carbones et petram in communi ville predicte extra muros ejusdem ville."

The license recited above occurs on the Patent Roll of the twenty-fourth year of Edward III. That this is the license usually stated to have been granted to the men of Newcastle by Henry III, on the first day of December, in the twenty-third year of his reign, is evident, not only

from the terms of the grant, but also from the circumstances that Gardiner [upon whose sole authority the statement came to rest], having given it as belonging to the reign of Henry III, makes no allusion to it under the reign of Edward III, among the rolls of whose reign it is now to be found. Several writers have noticed a difficulty in connection with the date which Gardiner has assigned this grant ; but, the patent roll for the year in which it was referred happening to be one of the few which was missing, the detection of the error was more difficult. The Exchequer roll for the twenty-third year of Henry III is, however, extant, and there is no such payment from the men of Newcastle entered upon it.

In regard to the second grant stated by Gardiner to have been made to Newcastle by Henry III, in the thirty-first year of his reign, it need only be remarked that it is evidently a mistaken reference to that given to the town by Edward III in the thirty-first year of his reign.

The Patent and Charter Rolls for the thirty-first year of Henry III are in existence, and in neither of them is such a grant to be found.

Those who care to investigate the early records of the coal trade should read Mr. Galloway's paper, which is the most exhaustive treatise of the kind that we possess. In the meantime, readers of the note will promote the accuracy of local history if they will make a marginal reference to Mr. Galloway's discovery in the following publications :-

- Bourne's History of Newcastle, page 146.
- Brand's History of Newcastle, vol ii., pages 140 and 252.
- Mackenzie's History of Newcastle, page 603.
- Sykes's Local Records, under date 1239.
- Richardson's Local Historian's Table Book, vol i., page 72.
- Industrial Resources of the Tyne, Wear, and Tees, page 17.
- Bruce's Handbook to Newcastle, 1886 edition, page 7.

RICHARD WELFORD, Newcastle.

At about the close of the twelfth century, William the Lion (whose reign terminated in 1214 A.D.) granted the monks of Holyrood Abbey the title of the colliery of Carriden, near Blackness, along with the title of the harbour at the same place. This seems to be the first reliable record in the history of coal mining. In the same reign (between 1210 and 1214), the monks of Newbattle Abbey received the grant of a colliery and quarry on the sea shore at Preston, in the lands of Tranent, a district from which that early period downward continued to be famous for its production of coal.

Previous to the reign of King John, there appear to be no allusions to the existence of a coal trade in England. At the close of his conflict with the barons, when, by the granting of the Magna Charta (1215), a greatly increased security was given to his subjects in the possession of these lands and rights, we have evidence of a

commencement having been made to work coal and to convey it from the North to London. As early as the year 1228 a lane in the metropolis is mentioned under the name of Seacole Lane, clearly showing that some trade in sea coal was at that time in progress there.

In 1236, the monks of Newminster Abbey, near Morpeth, in Northumberland, received a grant of some land on the sea-shore near Blyth, with a right-of-way to the shore to obtain seaweed for tillage and sea coal wherever it might be found. In 1240, the same monks received another charter authorising them to get sea coal for use at the *forge* at one of their Granges. From this time forward, references to the working and use of coal are frequently to be met with.

The earliest allusion to the coal trade at Newcastle-upon-Tyne appears to be in 1268-9, when a number of persons were brought before the justices to answer to the complaint of the Prior of Tynemouth for "having *vi et armis* come to the Prior's mills, at Shields, burned them down, threatened and maltreated some of the monks, and seized and taken away a ship of the Prior's, lying there laden with sea coal." In 1281, the town was returned as worth £200 (temp. Edward I) to the burgesses, the advance in its value being ascribed to the new trade in sea coal.

The working of coal soon became general throughout the kingdom, and, at the close of the reign of Edward I (1307), the mineral was being dug, though doubtless on a small scale, in most of the coalfields of England, Wales and Scotland.

J. M. RUSSELL, Liverpool.

Monthly Chronicle of North-Country Lore and Legend, Volume I, No. 1, March 1887