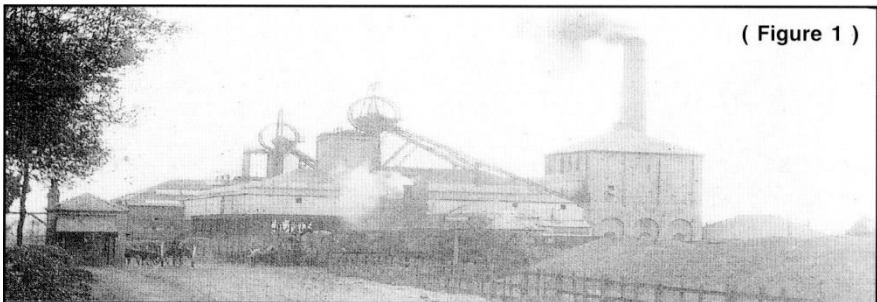


MINING IN GIPTON

© By Peter Kelley, and Murray Mitchell.

Less than one mile south of where Oakwood Clock now stands, a colliery existed a hundred years ago. The Gipton Pit with all the features of a busy coal mine had winding gear for two shafts, pithead buildings, waste tips and a $\frac{1}{2}$ of a mile long railway linking it to Harehills Lane (see Map on the Inside of the Back Cover). It worked coal, fireclay and ironstone, and was a sight common enough in the days when the Yorkshire Coalfield played such an important part in the prosperity of Leeds during the Industrial Revolution. There was no colliery village at the pit so the miners presumably came from the Harehills area, either walking the mile or so to work or perhaps travelling on the railway in trucks converted to carry them.



No photographs of Gipton Pit have yet been found. However, this view of South Kirby Colliery gives some idea of what would have been seen at Gipton between 1891/1892 and 1921. (Reproduced from Goodchild 2000, p.20; by kind permission of the author).

The Gipton Pit (Figure 1) and its' railway, opened in about 1891/ 1892, was owned by the Low Moor Coal and Iron Company of Bradford who had extensive mineral leases in the Harehills area, primarily to be able to work the Black Bed Ironstone and the Better Bed Coal to smelt the ironstone. The Pit was sunk in wooded farmland between Harehills Lane and Oakwood Lane. Taken over by the Harehills Colliery Company in about 1898, it was closed in 1921.

In the James Brown Collection of papers (BRO 3 - West Yorkshire Archive Service, Sheepscar, Leeds) there is copy of the lease, dated 30 th June 1874, between the Devises of the James Brown Estate on Harehills Lane and the Low Moor Company. The lease was for 40 years and covered the extraction of coal and ironstone under the land at Potter Newton and Coldcotes. In 1896, the lease was renewed for a further 40 years.

The document includes the following valuable details of the workings at Gipton, and the costs of the mineral rights, rents and royalties.

The lease was signed by: James Brown of Copgrove and Rossington.
James William Scarlett of Spellow Hill, near
Boroughbridge W.W. Wickham of The Low Moor Co.
Witnesses:- John Burnell (Butler, Rossington)
Fred Harrison (Footman, Rossington)

Extract

"All beds, seams and veins of coal called Rock Bed or Crow Coal, the Black Bed Coal and the Bottom Bed (=BetterBed) Coal, the beds, seams and veins of Ironstone called The Black Bed Ironstone and the bed, seam or vein of Fireclay laying under the said Better Bed Coal, and being in and under all those several parcels of land in the Township of Potter Newton and Coldcotes in the Parish of Leeds, (four hundred and seventeen acres and 26 perches.)"

The term of the lease was for Forty Years beginning on the 1st July 1874. The price was to be £2000 per year plus rents and royalties, paid in equal half yearly payments on the 1st January and 1st July.

Rents and Royalties were set at;-

Rock Bed or Crow Coal	-£50 per acre
Black Bed Coal	-£50
Bottom Bed Coal	11 " or under -£70
	12"-17" -£80
	18"-20" -£90
	21 " or over -£100
Black Bed Ironstone	-£110
Fireclay	1/- per acre

Surface Rent - £7 -10/- per acre

Compensation must be paid to tenants for loss or damage to crops or herbage.

No more than 20 acres of land was to be in use at any one time
Ventilation shafts were to be 10ft in diameter and safely fenced
The estate stewards and surveyors were to be given access t(the workings and to be provided with tools and light free of charge

The high price per acre for working the Black Bed Ironstone and the Bottom Bed (= Better Bed) Coal, goes some way to confirming that the main aim of the Low Moor Company in developing the Gipton area was to be able to mine these two horizons. The Fireclay at the bottom of the shaft was perhaps only mined to enable the Better Bed Coal which was only 10-20 inches (25 to 51 cm) thick, to be worked more easily.

In present day terms the £2000 annual lease would be worth £100,000, and gives an indication of how valuable mineral rights were to major landowners in coalfield areas.

GIPTON PIT

The area of east Leeds from Burmantofts and Harehills to Killingbeck, Seacroft, Manston and Crossgates has a long history of mining for coal, ironstone and fireclay, with a large number of pits. There are for example, six shafts marked along the length of Harehills Lane between Roundhay Road and York Road (Lake and others 1992, map 1). The part of the Coal Measures strata worked at Gipton was above the Elland Flags, the sandstone quarried for building stone in the Oakwood area (see Oak Leaves No. 2 published in 2001).

The following information about the three coal seams and the associated ironstone and fireclay worked in the Gipton Pit is from Green and others (1878, pp. 127-172), Edwards and other (1950, pp. 25-26), Pugh (1954), and British Geological Survey records.

1 The **CROW COAL** , the highest seam proved, was reached at 111 feet (33.83m) below the surface. In the Harehills-Gipton area it consists of 15-20 inches (38-51 cm) of excellent quality house coal separated by 6-12 inches (15-30cm) of dirt from an underlying seam 4-7 inches (10-18cm) thick. It gives off abundant gas in burning, and the Crow was one of the coals used for the manufacture of gas at the Leeds Gas works. No record has been found of the thickness of the Crow Coal in Gipton Pit.

2. The **BLACK BED COAL** was found at 141 feet (42.98m) with the important **BLACK BED IRONSTONE** overlying it. This coal averages 1 feet 9 inches (53cm) thick in the Harehills area where it was widely worked as a house coal. It was only 13 inches (33cm) thick in the Gipton Pit.

The **BLACK BED IRONSTONE** has a long and very important history of working in Leeds, often by means of shallow bellpits worked from the ground surface. It was worked back in medieval times when mining the ironstone was the primary aim, and the underlying coal was sometimes not extracted. The measures with the ironstone consist of about 2 Vi to 6 feet (76 -183cm) of black carbonaceous shale with 3-7 layers of clay - ironstone partly in thin continuous layers, and partly in bands of nodules or in nodular beds. The combined thickness of the ironstone layers never totalled more than 1 foot 10 inches (56cm). The ore bearing beds are thinner but richer in iron in the east Leeds area than elsewhere in Leeds. The Black Bed Ironstone was 26 inches (66cm) thick in Gipton Pit.

Green and others (1878, p. 155) recorded the following invaluable information about the working of the Black Bed Ironstone. "The excellent quality of the iron produced from this ore is due partly to the purity of the Better Bed Coal (see below) which is used for smelting it, and also in large measure to the extreme care taken that the ironstone is thoroughly cleaned from all the shale which adheres to it when it is brought out of the mine before it is put in the furnace. The ironstone is spread out in a flat heap that the shale may weather off, and is repeatedly turned and carefully picked clean". It must have been a laborious and dirty task hand picking the ironstone from the shale.

3.The **BETTER BED COAL** was reached at 246 feet (74.98m) and is recorded as 10 - 20 inches (25 to 51cm) thick in Gipton Pit, with the underlying **BETTER BED FIRECLAY** being 20 - 42 inches (51 - 107cm) thick. The fireclay, because of its geological characters, was much valued and exploited as a refractory and pottery clay, and was worked at Gipton Pit.

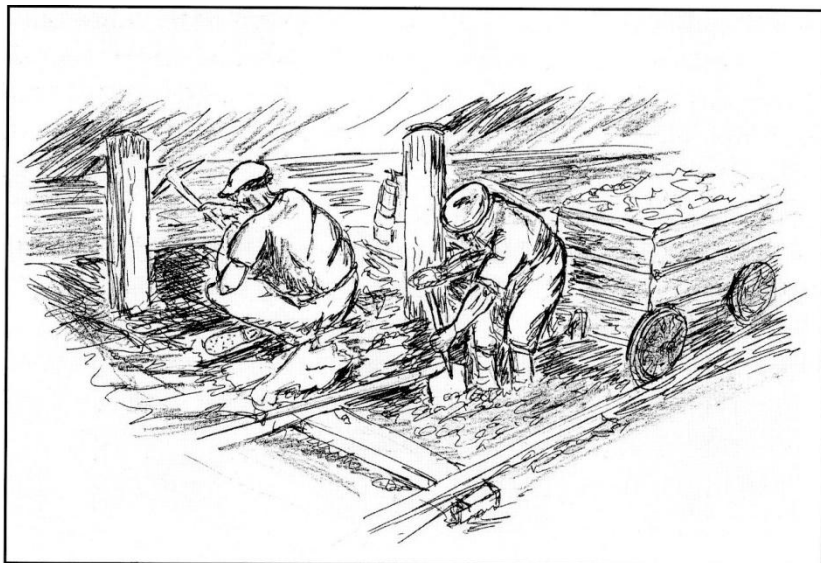
Green and others (1878, p. 130) noted the value of the Better Bed Coal to the iron smelting industry. 'This seam is a 'bituminous' coal, dense, bright in colour, and singularly free from sulphur, phosphorous, and the other impurities which unfit a coal for smelting purposes. It burns to a white ash, of which it contains

0.75 per cent. It is chiefly used by the iron companies for the purposes of the furnace and the forge, and it is to the purity of the coal that the excellence of the bars known as Low Moor, Bowling, and Farnley iron is largely due. The high value set on this coal is shown by the care with which even the 'smalls' are collected; none of it is ever allowed to go to waste".

The pit bottom, below the Better Bed Fireclay, was at 250 feet (76.20m) below the surface.

Workings ceased on the Black Bed Coal in September 1896; on the Crow Coal on the 31 st January 1919; and finally on the Better Bed Coal on the 16th August 1921 when the pit closed for good (Doughty in Yelland 1990).

With none of these coal seams being more than 20 inches (51cm) thick, the cramped underground working conditions can only be imagined. However, combining the working of coals with the ironstone and fireclay perhaps made the extraction of the Black Bed and Better Bed coals less difficult.



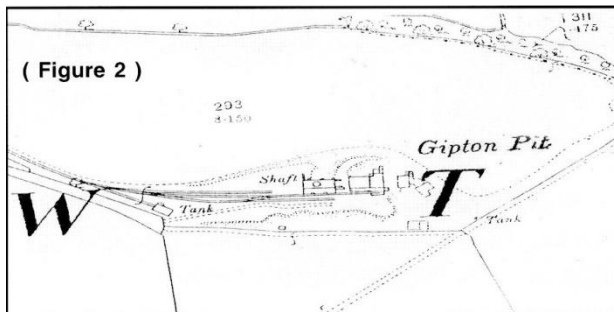
One hundred years ago men from Gipton and Harehills laboured in narrow wet seams of coal and ironstone two hundred feet below the area where Easterly road runs alongside the Gipton Estate.

LOW MOOR COLLIERY RAILWAY.

The line of the Low Moor Colliery Railway (see Map on Inside of the Back Cover and Figures 2 and 4) linking the Gipton Pit with the coal staithes on Harehills Lane, can still be traced for much of its length.

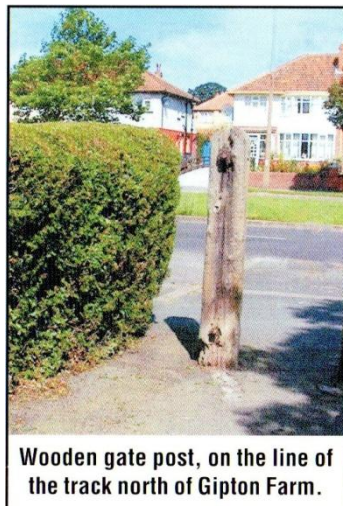
The first plan for this proposed railway to Gipton Pit was dated 7th February 1876

(BRO 4 - W Y A S Leeds). It was drawn by George Foster of Osmondthorpe Colliery, and shows the line passing south of Gipton Farm. This was not built, probably because of the steepness of the gradient. A second plan, drawn up later the same year, shows a route to the north of Gipton Farm. This was the line that was used, and ran in a rough semicircle following the contours on the north side of a low hill (spot height 321 feet - 97.84m), in order to have a smaller gradient. This rise, known as "Hare Hills" in the nineteenth century, is now topped by Harehills St. Augustine's R.C. Primary School in St. Wilfrid's Circus. At the eastern end of the railway, the pit head buildings, with winding gear, two shafts and railway sidings were just north of where Thorn Mount and Thorn Walk meet (Pugh 1954). The waste tips were to the north of the buildings. The shafts were on the north side of the railway sidings. The western one was the winding shaft for hauling materials from the workings, and the eastern one was for pumping water. Only one shaft is shown on the 1893 map (Figure 2) so the pumping shaft was presumably sunk after this date.



Part of twenty-five inch to one mile map of 1893, showing the eastern section of the Low Moor Colliery Railway and lay out of Gipton Pit.

The spoil heaps have been gradually removed over many years for use in various infillings. The only remaining heap has been levelled and grassed over. It is situated behind Amberton Court residential home which was opened on 18th July 1985. From the pit to the farm lane which formerly ran north from Gipton Farm, the course of the railway followed a line between where the houses on the south side of Amberton Road and those on the north side of St. Wilfrids' Crescent and Avenue now stand. The route must have been close to the line of mature trees between these two rows of houses. To the north of Gipton Farm, the line was in a shallow cutting, allowing the north-south farm track to be carried across the railway on an overbridge. The route of this track is followed by the present day ginnel between Numbers 130A and 132 Easterly Road. An ancient wooden gatepost, (Figure 3) from the days when this was an important lane to Gipton Farm, still stands at the Easterly Road entrance to this footpath.

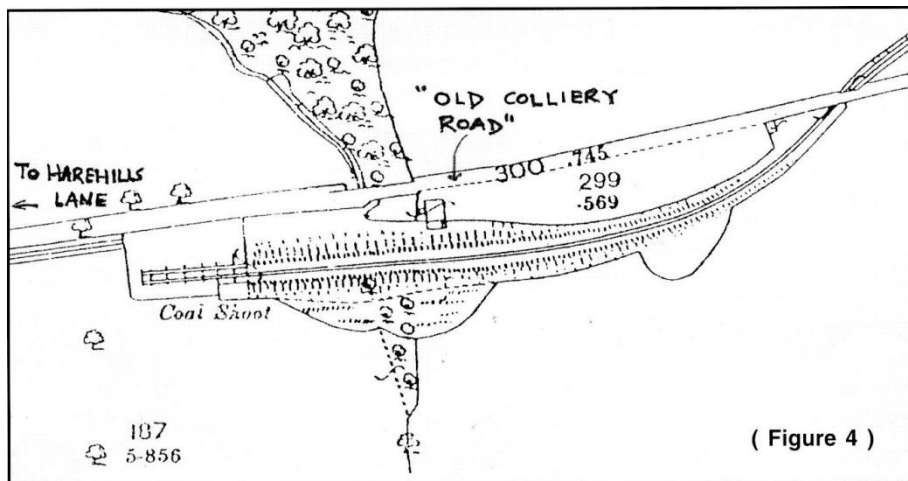


Wooden gate post, on the line of the track north of Gipton Farm.

From north of Gipton Farm the line continued westward, again in shallow cutting, at the bottom of the gardens of the houses now on the south side of Easterly Road until it crossed an east-west track which connected Harehills Lane with Gipton Farm. In the 1930s this lane was known locally as "Old Colliery Road". Much of this old track is still in use as a footpath and is shown on the 1893 map (Figure 4) as crossing the railway on an overbridge.

From this crossing point to the coal staithes at the end of the line, about 130m east of Harehills Lane, the railway was on a low embankment which still exists north of Hovingham Avenue. There were no sidings at the coal staithes when first laid out, and the rails continued a short distance (perhaps 30m) west of a Coal Shoot that allowed coal to be transferred from the railway trucks to carts for delivery. However, by the time of the 1915-1920 revision of the 6

inch to 1 mile map (Map on Inside of the Back Cover), there appears to have been a double line with a crossing point and a siding.



Part of twenty-five inch to one mile map of 1893, showing the western section of the Low Moor Colliery Railway and the coal staithes east of Harehills Lane.

The line of the Low Moor Colliery Railway subsequently became part of the boundary between the private houses developed to the north along Easterly Road (constructed in 1926-1927), and the Council built Gipton Housing Estate to the south. Work on the Council housing, planned as a "garden estate", did not start until 1934, well after the closing of the Gipton Pit in 1921. Only when the coal was worked out did mining land in the Harehills area come on the market, when developers took the opportunity to put up estates from the end of the 19th century. East Leeds thereby benefited from a higher standard of back-to-back housing than in the older inner suburbs, particularly in relation to the provision of internal water-closets in place of shared privies down the street, better building design, and a small garden. These properties remain very popular today. By the time the Gipton Pit closed, the Council was prepared to take over the role of house-building, and the Gipton Council Estate consisting of well-spaced modern semi-detached homes with gardens and open spaces was developed in the early 1930s, bringing tenants out of unhealthy areas into a more wholesome environment.

Soper (1996, pp. 515-517), in his impressive work on Leeds transport history, recorded valuable details about the Low Moor Colliery Railway

and the movement of materials from the Harehills Lane coal staithes. The railway from Gipton Pit was built with a standard gauge track, and had at least two steam locomotives which were both 0-4-0 saddle tank engines. House coal was delivered through the Harehills area by horse-drawn carts until the late 1940s. However, large steam tractors and trailers were used to haul coal and ironstone to the Low Moor Iron Company's works at Farnley, and coal and fireclay to the Leeds Fireclay Company's works at Wortley.

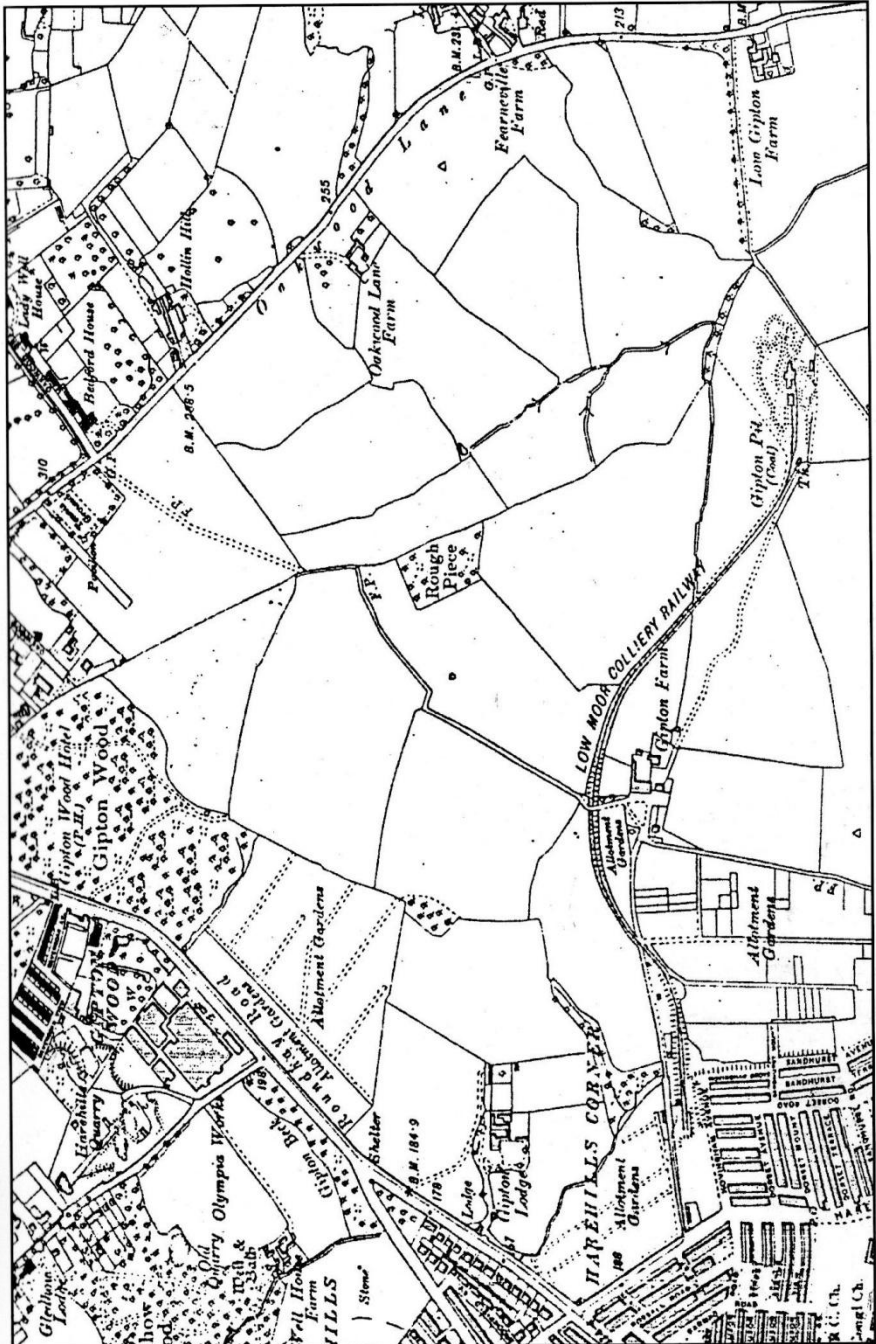
To avoid noisy and dirty steam tractors travelling through the increasingly busy parts of central Leeds, the Leeds Fireclay Company negotiated for materials to be transported by the Leeds City Tramways Committee at night. The application to build a tram link up Harehills Lane between the Roundhay Road tram route tracks and the Low Moor Colliery Railway coal staithes was approved by the Board of Trade on 14th November 1914. This link was built between July and September 1915, although there were problems gaining approval for the line to be built on the privately owned track from Harehills Lane to the coal staithes. Goods-carrying on the new spur started on 4th October 1915. Specially adapted trams were used with two large tipper hoppers fitted to tram car chassis. They travelled on the tram tracks during the night. This tram link however, had a short life and there are no records of its use after November 1917. With the closure of Gipton Pit in 1921, the Harehills Lane tram tracks were lifted and the road reinstated in 1923.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

Dr Tony Cooper is thanked for supplying information about the Gipton Pit from the British Geological Survey Records.

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Part of six inch to one mile map, revised 1915 -1920, showing the sites of Gipton Pit and the Low Moor Colliery Railway.