

Newcastle Courant, 8 January 1820, p4 col 2.

[Transcribed by Stafford M Linsley.]

An illegal combination of the pitmen of the Collieries in the neighbourhood of Berwick has taken place, with an intention of compelling the proprietors to alter the time of binding, which has for some years past been at Whitsuntide, to Christmas, and allow them an advance of wages. During this inclement season, the *heap coals* have all been sold at the different pits, and even a scarcity of coals was dreaded by the inhabitants.

On the 3rd inst. the coal works at Ford, Greenlawalls, Thornton, Shoreswood, Murton, Lickar, and Berwick Hill, were deserted: the men rambled about from pit to pit, compelled those who were inclined to work to join them, and on the same day they assembled at Scremerston Colliery, but the men refused to come out, in consequence of which, no coals were drawn up. When matters were in that state, the Rev Joseph Barnes and James Forster Esq. justices of the peace, and the Veterans now at Berwick, at the request of the Coal-owners, repaired to Scremerston; the magistrates calmly reasoned with the men on the illegality of their conduct, which was the more culpable, as the period of their engagement had not expired, and advised them to return to their work, but to no purpose. It was then proposed that two or three as a deputation from each colliery should attend the Magistrates and Coal-owners at Mr Gilchrist's in Tweedmouth on the following day, at eleven o'clock, that the affair might be settled, which was agreed to, and the men quietly dispersed. But after all, no agreement can be made: and all the collieries in that part of the country are as yet laid idle. Four of the leading characters concerned in this combination have been apprehended, and on the 5th inst. were sent to the House of Correction at Durham, guarded by six constables, and also by a military escort for a short distance, to prevent their rescue.

It is to be hoped that this well timed and vigorous step will operate as a caution to the rest. The magistrates swore in on the 5th inst. a considerable number of special constables at Tweedmouth, for the preservation of the peace on that occasion. The conduct of the pitmen deserves the public censure as each can earn about a guinea a week at the present wages, and their combination at such a season as this is highly criminal. But to alleviate for the present the distress that may be felt for want of coals, it was agreed upon by the magistrates and a select vestry, at a meeting held on the 5th inst. at the Town Hall in Berwick, that a proper supply should be immediately procured by having them freighted from the nearest port, and be sold out to the public at prime cost.

Newcastle Courant, 15 January 1820, p4 col 3.

The want of coals has been rather severely felt at Berwick and that neighbourhood, owing to the combination formed among the pitmen, to compel their masters to alter the time of binding, from Whitsuntide as has for some years past been the case, to Christmas as formerly, and allow them an advance of wages, as stated in our last paper. We now understand that Ford Colliery, which belongs to the Right Hon. Lady Delaval, has been working all this week, an advance in wages being to be given to the men until Whitsuntide. The collieries at Felkington and Shoreswood, belonging to Mr Robert Sibbit, of West Allerdean, recommenced on the 11th and 12th inst. as he has allowed his coal hewers an advance. About seven men have gone to work at Scremerston pit for some days past, but are obliged to be under the protection of a military guard while at work for fear of being stopped by the rest. About ten of the men belonging to Berwick Hill coal works have returned to their work, under a promise of their wages being advanced. The rest of the pits are as yet not at work. Nine of the

principal ring-leaders of the pitmen who refuse to return to their employ, are in custody. From the sources enumerated as above, that part of the country has been able to procure some small supply of coals, which have sold at about double the prices usually given, or indeed rather more, as the vessels freighted from Blyth, had not arrived at Berwick on the evening of the 12th inst owing to contrary winds. There is however no doubt but that the difference between the Coal-owners and the workers will be adjusted in a few days, as three of those collieries are at work, and will of course strive to monopolize the trade; besides so many of the principals in this combination being in custody, the alternative intended to be proposed, whether they will go to work again, or suffer their comrades to be sent to the house of correction, must have a great effect in settling every point. A population of not less than 70,000 inhabitants absolutely depend on these collieries for their coals.

Newcastle Courant, 22 January 1820, p4.

The combination among the pitmen of the collieries near Berwick, may now be said to be dissolved, as most of the men have returned to their work. All the collieries are now going on except one, which is expected also to be at work in a few days, as several of the hewers are in custody. One of the vessels freighted with coals from Blyth arrived at Berwick on the 15th inst. and two on the 28th. [the newspaper date is the 22nd? - probably should read 18th] On the 17th inst. the ship which had arrived, began to be unladen for sale at 1s. per cwt, and afforded considerable relief.