

MAIN POINTS taken from the tape recorded conversations with Mrs. Thompson and Mrs Mason – Summer 1968 - Summer weekend course at Ford Castle arranged by Mr Jack Bainbridge entitled ‘Industrial Archaeology’.

[Transcribed by Stafford M Linsley from a workbook at Ford Castle.]

Introduction Mrs. Thompson is the caretaker and guide in the old Ford School, wherein may be seen the Lady Waterford wall-paintings. She has held this post for twenty years. Mrs. Mason now lives in the vicarage at Doddington. Previously, she lived in Ford Village, and before that at the settlement at Ford Moss Colliery. Her father is reputed to have been the last miner to work in that colliery. She remembers very clearly her life in the area and makes a very good guide.

(a) Mrs. Thompson’s conversation.

‘The village would be very quiet if it weren’t for the visitors, but it wasn’t always like this ... in the days of Lady Waterford, and previous to Lady Waterford, and in the days of the Joicey family, large families lived here. There are not so many big families now. They go away to other jobs, girls go away to shops or to be nurses, or teachers, etc.

Mrs. Cootes used to live in the cottage I now live in (i.e. at the top of the village street in Ford Village). She had previously lived at Ford Moss and Mr. Cootes was a stone-dresser; for many years while they lived at Coldstream, Mr. Cootes walked daily from Coldstream to Ford Moss to dress stone in the quarry there ... and back again. The mine was going at that time’, as well as a number of other quarries around Ford Village ... The quarry at Ford Moss was not as big as the colliery, but they must have been very busy, because they built all the older Ford cottages with stone from there. There was a problem over some of the stone, because they had struck a softer seam and it would have given them a lot of trouble to get beyond it to a firmer stone for house-building. After this they had to buy in stone to finish the houses.

The coal for the village came from Ford Moss ... in carts ... small coal of about 2” in diameter ... led by the farm people. Delivery was always by the cartload. Coal was carried to Lowick, Wooler, by the present roads, and there was a road across the fields. There were coal mines all the way from Alnwick to Berwick ... zjg - zagging across the seam, just as the River Till does. From Chillingham there was a line of pits. Hebron Bell, Chillingham, Chattons, Hettons, Bite About, North Field, Lowick, Boust (?), and (up here) to Ford Moss, Berry Hill, Slainsfield, Grillow (Greenlaw) Walls, Shoresdean and on to Scremerston to the sea, following the River Till. The seam of coal at the top of the hills, the river down in the valley and the quarries on the hills ... Flodden, Ford Moss, Ford Village and at Etal Roads (Rhodes). The quarry at

Flodden is still working. The Castle Quarry just above the village in two parts is well named, Ford Castle was built with stone from there.

Cottages near the Ford Moss colliery (with gardens) were for the workmen initially, but when the colliery declined, other people in the area were allowed to rent them. The "under-footman" at the Castle lived in one of the houses at one time in Blue Row, as there was no accommodation in the village. The Cootes family lived in the house 'in the wood', the gamekeeper's house. The father was the stone-dresser.

Nearer the road are two settlements, one of which has been renovated and made into a shooting lodge for Lord Joicey. The other, four rooms intended as two cottages initially, but later knocked into one, was occupied by Mr. Crawford's family before they transferred to Ford Village. A building further from the road was occupied by the Moscrop family. The White family was another tenant. Many of the people who once lived at the Ford Moss community moved into the Ford Village houses as they became vacant.

The manager's house stood at the top of the hill [part of it still remains] and Mr. Prescott was the last manager to occupy it. His son has visited the village since, Mr. Prescott must have been about my age (Mrs. Thompson gives this as 74) because we went to school together. Mr. Prescott Jnr. recently visited me; he has a hotel at Ryton, Co. Durham. In conversation with me, he tried to recall the name of the sediment that used to run from the old Ford Moss workings, a coloured flow running into the burns ... between a red and a yellow ... named the 'ochre' ... and recalled the small bridge on the Kimmerston road under which the burn ran, and when heavy rain had been falling the burn ran full flood yellow and red.

The pink gravel now to be seen on all the drives around Ford Castle and the village came out of the colliery as stone. Rock, soil, chalk and slime were to be contended with by the miners ... and the bog, which stretches for miles was also a nuisance in an area which is reputedly 'still full of coal'.

The Mason family lived at Ford Moss originally but were the last to move from Blue Row over to Ford Village, where other children were born, some of whom still live in the area. They regularly visit the Ford Moss area as a picnic spot.

The old mines were progressively filled in to avoid accidents, especially to Lord Joicey's hounds when running the area. The shafts were filled in with old railway sleepers and covered with soil and rubble, but some of them have rotted since then and become quite dangerous. The miners of the area acted as Models for the celebrated paintings done by Lady Waterford, and now to be seen on the walls of the old school building in Ford Village. Isaac in the

painting is one of the characters painted from living models. Joseph (with his coat of many colours) was the son of the man who built the 'Mission' Chapel at Ford Moss, and the villagers went across there, packing the small hall, for services. They held 'soirees' or evening services and they were very well attended.

HERE the conversation ended at Ford Village, and, on the advice of Mrs. Thompson, the interviewer went across to Doddington to meet Mrs. Mason, the daughter of the last miner's family to live at Ford Moss. The remainder of the material is best told in the third person.

'Ms. Mason was born at Ford Moss in 1912 recalls that the colliery was still going at the end of the 1914 - 1918 War, and that the last coal was taken out in 1920. She also recalled that there was a soldier buried in the coniferous wood just West of the stone quarry. She maintains that the Middle Pit still has in it all the tools that were being used by the men in it, as it was overwhelmed by the sudden inflow of bog-slime. the men got out in extreme haste, discarding their tools. To this day, they have not been excavated. The tools were referred to by Mrs. Mason as "Lady Waterford's tools" in that she was considered to be the owner of the pit at the time. No-one was injured at the time of the hasty exit.

When Mrs Mason left school, the main buildings of the colliery still stood, the shaft engine house, the associated rows of cottages, the loading chutes and bays etc. The limestone quarry was still working for quite some time after the colliery closed down. Mrs. Mason referred to the Planting [perhaps plantation] House and said that the Cootes' family was the last to live there. [N.B. This is the building previously referred to as the 'Managers House and may have been so used till near the end when the two cottages nearer the road were made into one to accommodate the Manager's family]. Mrs. Wright is named as the last occupant of the cottage now used as the Shooting Lodge by Lord Joicey.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Fred Rutherford is a person who used to work for a Dr. Bousfield or a Dr. Blaiklock.

HERE the conversation ended at Doddington, and the interviewer and Mrs Mason went to the Ford Moss Site where they chatted as they went round the various parts of the settlement.

The Main Shaft was that which is called the Middle pit nowadays, lying generally to the East of the chimney still standing, and this is the shaft down which the tools were left. At the time when this pit was operating, there was a pithead winding wheel powered by a steam engine, remnants of the base of which are still to be seen. The 'carriages for the men' were pulled up by this, and the coal was put out from this into a long shed from which the chutes slid the coal into waiting carts or waggons (colliery-type). Mrs. Mason confirmed that the remnant building to the West of this pit was another pit that once worked too. Mrs Mason said that there were once 32 houses at this site and indicated that they stood along the ridge that skirts the Moss,

and that her father was born in one of these houses. He must have spent his entire working life in the area. The steam engine was either coal - or coke - fired, and was used to pump the water out of the mine. The stream that now runs round the side of the derelict site was once very much deeper because of this pumping. The spoil-heaps were also much bigger than they are at the moment. Most of them have been disseminated in filling in the disused shafts. When questioned about the height of the spoil-heaps of years ago, Mrs. Mason indicated that they were almost as high as the remnant chimney, i.e. 40 to 50 ft, and that the children of that day used to slide down them sitting on the pit sleds that were used underground in those days. The base of the boiler can still be identified being an obviously circular cemented block on the site. The whole of the bog-side was used as an ideal dumping-ground for spoil from the mines. Drainage channels across the bog have been recently cut by the farmers to try to dry up the area. The water supply for the houses and the mine were taken from the wells on the site (according to Mrs. Mason) and horses and carts from the farms of the surrounding areas came to the colliery staiths for loads of coal as they were required. There were troughs at the pithead for the horses. The 'Blackhill' area, as this was called, was considered 'full of coal'.

Further across the site (Westward) we noted the remains of small cottages one of which had earth floors. There was once a school/chapel very close to the chimney on the colliery site there. The chimneyed site was the main part of the colliery, and stood by the main route out of the site. The school stood beside the mine, and Mrs. Mason's father went to the school as a child of four. It was later turned into a chapel, when a school was opened in Ford Village. Blue Row was the nearest row of cottages to the mine.

Further West there is a complex of filled-in mine entrances in approximate line West-East, and all once leading down into the same seam at different points and different angles. A miner could, once he went down, travel down the line of the seam and come up at any one of a number of entrances. The tunnel between each of these small mines must have been left very narrow, because the miner had to travel down it sideways to get through. This might have been for a number of reasons ... to provide good ventilation ... or escape routes or gas-clearing methods, or security of roof because of pillars left in for support, or economy of effort by following the seam only where it was very productive. We were reminded that the miners put their candles in their helmets to enter the mines, and Mrs Mason pointed to the small row of two cottages (which were knocked into one at some time) and named them as the place where Mr Prescott the mine manager lived. He might well have moved down there from the house on the hill. The cottages were built in the 'Lady Waterford' style recognisable in the village of Ford, and had one special refinement, an additional outbuilding on the end, which contained the 'set-pot', thus indicating the use of the space as a wash house.

Entry to the mines at that point could be achieved in 'drift' mine style, i.e. walking into it as into a cave in a hillside, but there is a bricked circular mine shaft entrance on the spot which has also been filled in for safety reasons. The fact that the shaft is easily discernible suggest that the material put in to fill the shaft must have subsided some six feet or so since it was filled in.

Blue Row sat between the quarry and the colliery and the cottages had no water supply on the spot. Water was carried, two pails at a time, from a well situated down the bank-side near the road, the carrier using a 'gord' or iron hoop to assist in the even carrying of the water, a custom little known nowadays. The cottages were single-storeyed, and of different sizes, according to family. Mrs Mason was born in Blue Row, in the third house from the 'quarry end', worked in the garden behind the house, and kept pigs and a family cow in the outbuildings to the SW of the street. The miners' families were encouraged to keep such small stock. The cottages had a fire-range, in which the fire was flanked by a water-boiler on one side and an oven on the other. Behind the seat of the fire was a very deep shelf built to take a great quantity of small coal, which could be raked forward as required, throughout the evening. The pot was used for washing, and general boiling of the water, etc.

There was no shop in the settlement, and so the villagers walked across to the little shop in Ford Village. This was a tiny shop set up in the wood just above the village. It has now been replaced by the building in the centre of the village of an excellent stone building, by the Joicey family, which serves as a post office and shop. The building is an excellent example of artistic and craftsmanlike building, incorporating stones from many of the local quarries, and being very well-designed, fits splendidly into the village's stock of fine buildings, and is well worthy of its place. Robert Lyall of Ewart provided groceries for the community at Ford Moss, presumably by the order system, such as was (and is) used by some rural Co-ops.

There was no organised amusement in the village; some people had gramophones in those days, and after that, the amusement was self-organised. Mrs Mason had enjoyed the life of the time, and regretted the closure of the industry and of the community.

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<sup>i</sup> This presumably refers to the cottage by the road side, 'Ford Moss Cottage', which SML was told had most recently been used by a rabbit. It was also used once or twice by the Industrial Archaeology Project Group as overnight accommodation during survey weekends.