

A NOTE ON THE ANGLO-SAXON LEAD INDUSTRY OF THE PEAK

by Martin Daniel

The presence of a substantial lead industry in the Peak from at least the early eighth century is well attested by documentary evidence. According to the "Life of St Guthlac", Aedburga the Abbess of Repton sent a coffin of lead to Lincolnshire in 714 (Birch 1881). It is probable that this lead came from the Peak, with which Repton was closely associated. In 835 Cynewara the Abbess of Repton granted land at Wirksworth to ealdorman Hunbert for a rent of 300/- worth of lead, payable to Archbishop Ceolnoth and Christchurch, Canterbury (Birch 1888).

Repton supplied lead from the Peak to European as well as to English ecclesiastical centres. Lead was produced and transported not by merchants but by churchmen in this period, and it was bartered for goods such as salt rather than being sold. Again, clerics rather than merchants were responsible for conducting the transactions. As far as lead was concerned the operation centred on an English monastery, unnamed but almost certainly Repton. Repton's connection with the ascendant Mercian kings points strongly in this direction (Van Werveke 1926). The trade continued until the destruction of Repton in 874 by Norse invaders. Thereafter, until Domesday Book was compiled in the late eleventh century, there is little documentary evidence of the lead industry. The Domesday Book itself shows a well established industry, at least seven plumbariae (leadworks) then being active (Stenton, 1905; Fuller, 1970).

The documentary evidence, then, witnesses to the existence of an industry for much of the period, but gives little indication of its scale and location. Nor, apparently, does place name evidence. Cameron, in his meticulous analysis of Derbyshire place names, comments that "early place name evidence (of the lead industry) ... is disappointing. The only group of names which has been noted before 1500 contains the element bole ..." (Cameron, 1959, Vol. 1 p. xlv. Moreover, this group is itself not that early. Few of the names recorded by Cameron are first mentioned earlier than the fourteenth or fifteenth century. Evidence of mining is for the most part even later (Kirkham 1970). After the Romans and before the Domesday Book the only reference to location would seem to be that to Wirksworth in 835.

However, there is one piece of place name evidence which, as far as I am aware, has not been recognised. This is the Old English element 'cost', which Cameron (1959, Vol. III, p.677) interprets as meaning "temptation, trial, examination". The fact that there are 16 or so place names incorporating the element in the Peak, whereas in most parts of the country it is found only occasionally, might suggest that a more precise meaning should be sought than that of "place where a trial was made" (Cameron, 1959, Vol. I, p.25).

In fact 'cost', and its later forms 'coast' and 'coarse', must refer to a trial bearing specific mining or smelting connotations. There are good grounds for assuming this. The Anglo-Saxon cleric Aelfric writes of "costere vel delfisen vel spadu vel pal fossorium", that is, of four types of digging tools. 'Costain' may mean to try in the sense of prove (as in the later mining usage) as well as to try in a more general or legal sense, (Aelfric). The clear connection of the element with mining is shown in the name Coast Rake Mine at Elton, where 'costefelde' is first mentioned in 1413. (Cameron, 1959).

What then does 'cost' mean? The common association of the element with hill or low suggests that it has some smelting connotation. This is borne out by the sites, where they can still be identified, which show

the same characteristics and locations as bole sites: exposed, westward-facing eminences with possible traces of former smelting. The probability that 'cost' is an earlier term for bole seems strong. Whereas bole is first used commonly from the fifteenth century, 'cost' tends to appear fairly early. Aelfric's use of the term suggests that it must have existed from very early. Many of the cost sites are now lost, and have not been recorded for centuries, a further indication that the term lost its meaning as the same site changed from being called 'cost' to bole. In at least one case there is clear proof that this happened. This is Abney Low, so called only from the late seventeenth century, earlier known - in 1317 - as Burton's Boole. But this was itself a new name. In the thirteenth century the hill was known as Costlow, being so recorded in 1220; the name still continuing in the Coarselow wood that lies on the side of Abney Low.

What I am suggesting is that 'bole' replaced 'cost' as the description of the place where ore was smelted during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (the latter being when bole is first mentioned). Whether this change was accompanied by a parallel change in the mode of smelting or lead production is uncertain.

One reading might be that 'cost' referred not just to lead-smelting but also, or even entirely, or a trial for silver in the lead ore. The low silver content of Derbyshire lead ore militates against such an interpretation, although Domesday Book's reference to a payment in "pure" silver may imply a locally produced silver. It is also true that surface ore tends to be more argentiferous than that found deeper, (Kirkham, 1967). Such being the case, the abandonment of attempts to extract silver from Derbyshire lead ore, as production increased and the deeper and less argentiferous ores were reached during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, could have led to the change in terminology.

Whatever the cause of its demise, however, it seems very likely that 'cost' is an indicator of early lead production; although how early must remain uncertain. The reference in Aelfric is suggestive of at least a tenth century provenance, but this is no proof of when any particular site was first used. The meaning of 'cost' may itself have changed as the centuries passed. In this context it may be worth asking if the "pr of costrels" referred to in Bryan Melland's inventory of 1635 has its etymological descent from the 'cost' of Anglo-Saxon days. As with so much relating to the early lead industry we are unlikely ever to know. (Kirkham, 1968 p. 25).

The following is a list of place names incorporating the element 'cost', culled for the most part from Cameron's exhaustive work.

<u>Place</u>	<u>First Mentioned</u>	<u>Latest Reference</u>	<u>O.S. Reference</u>
Abney	costelow:cal220	Coarselow Wood:today	SK 207798
Baslow	costelow:1424	Coastlow:1849	
Calver	coster:1250	1250	--
Over Haddon	costlaue:1300	1300	--
G. Longstone	costlow hill:1610	1848	
? Stanton	coast wood(O.S.)	today	SK 245640
Taddington	coarse low:1795	today	SK 153717
Youlgrave	couthill:1652	today	SK 198643
Eyam	coast stone		SK 224772
Bonsall	costlowes:1415	1415	--
Carsington	costhull:1305	1305	--
Elton	costefelde:1413	Coast Rake Mine:today	SK 227612
Kniveton	costelowe:1318	1318	--

<u>Place</u>	<u>First Mentioned</u>	<u>Latest Reference</u>	<u>O.S. Reference</u>
Crich	1e cost:1248	Coasthill Lane:today	SK 348543
Hulland	1e costlowe:1262	1262	--
Tansley	coast:1845	1845	

(Where the O.S. Reference is left blank a map reference has not been obtained but should be available; where the O.S. reference is dashed the site is lost.)

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