

## Coal Mining in Shropshire

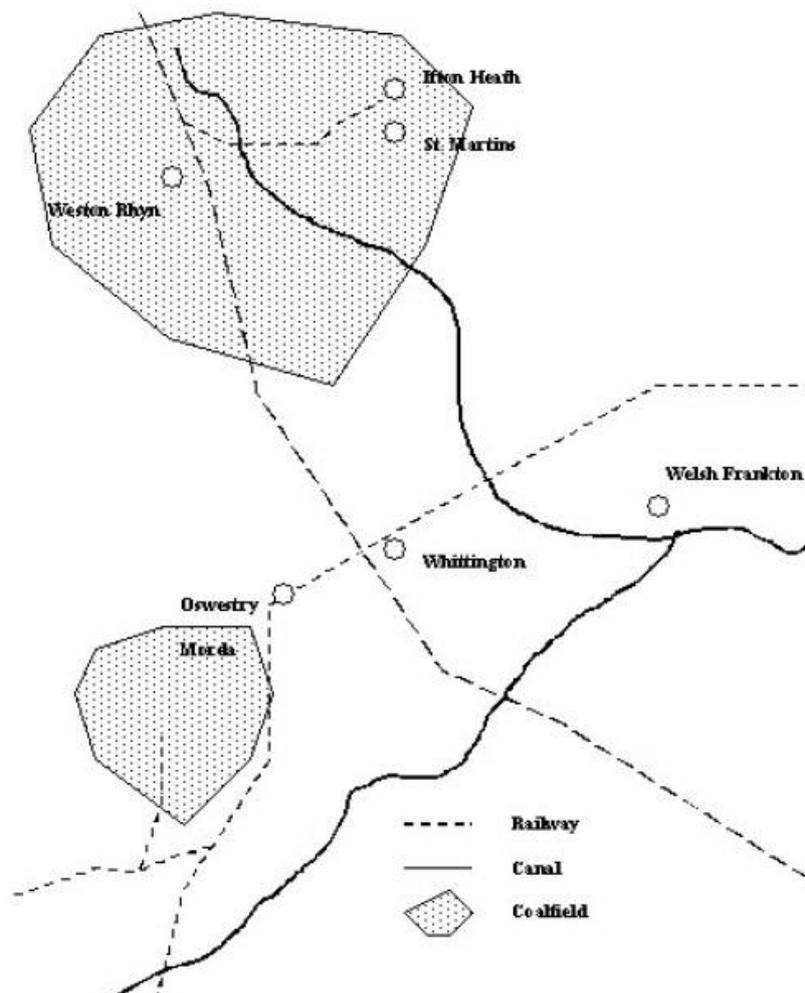
There were several good sources of coal in Shropshire and in its heyday the local mining industry rivalled neighbouring Staffordshire in its output. The large North East Shropshire field and its associated connection with Ironbridge is considered separately within this theme and on other sites. This section will deal with the contribution played by the two other main Shropshire fields.

### **Where was the Oswestry Coalfield?**

The mines in this area were part of the southern tip of the North Wales coalfield. They were known locally as the Morda field and the St. Martin's field. There were mines across most of St. Martin's parish but the Morda mines were concentrated mainly around Coed-y-go and Trefonen. The coal in these areas was often quite close to the surface and for many years surface digging was used to extract it. The 'Bell Pit,' so named because of the wide bottom of the hole, was a common form of extraction. A simple hole was dug down until either water was reached or there was a danger of collapse. The pit was then abandoned and a new one dug.

By the turn of the 19th Century, the recently completed Ellesmere Canal and the Shropshire Union offshoot opened up the markets to the north and coal extraction began in earnest. A new tramway was constructed to link the Morda pits to the canals and the Cambrian Railway.

The coal in this southern field was not of very high quality and the seams were fairly thin. Most coal extraction had ended in the Morda field by 1900.



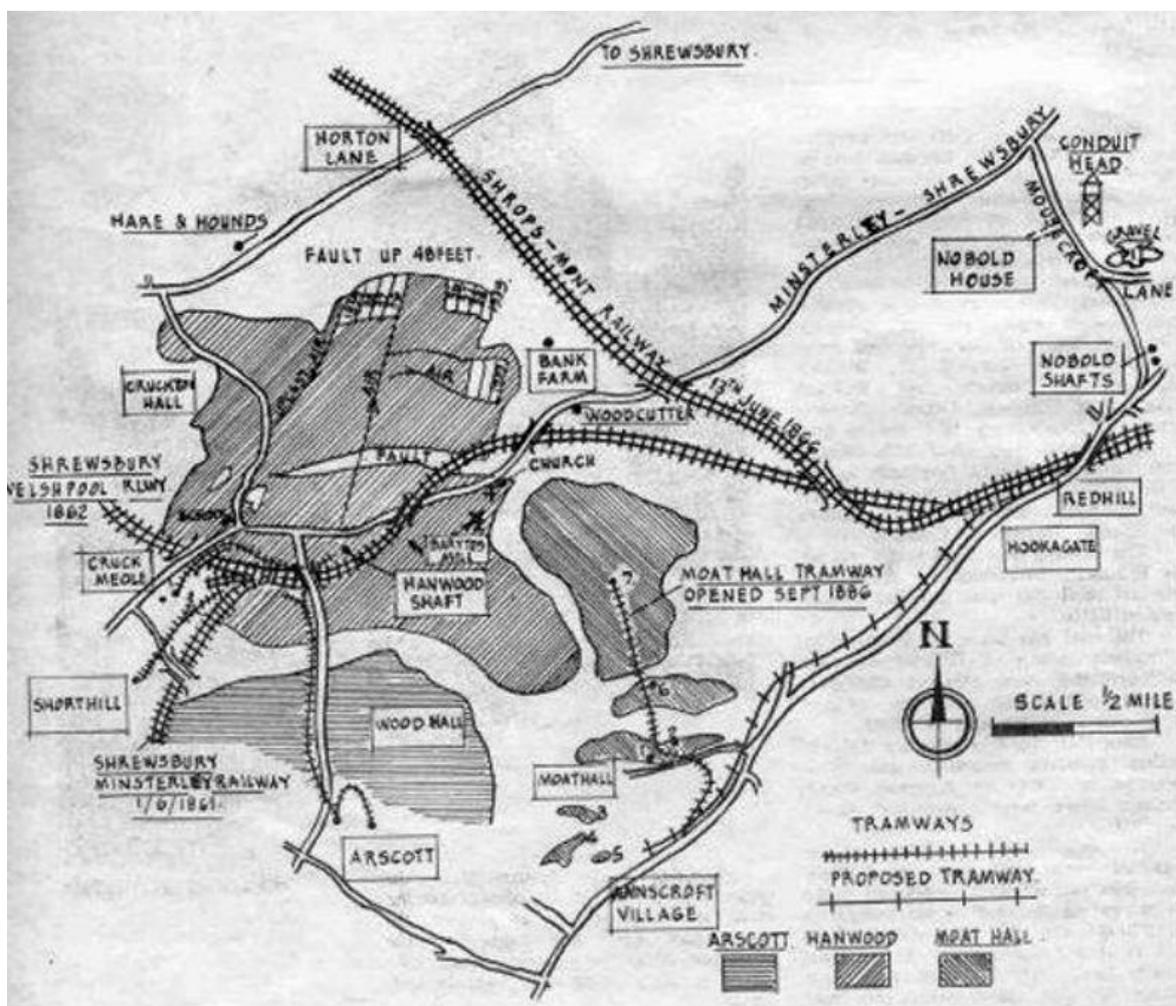
Further north at St. Martin's it was a different story, where the Ifton shaft was sunk and the Ifton colliery was born. This was a very profitable field and became the largest mine ever to operate in Shropshire, employing over 1,300 by 1928. It continued in operation until 1968, when, like so many abandoned collieries, the outbuildings became small industrial units, using the communications network created for the earlier industry.

### Where was the Shrewsbury Coalfield?

The Shrewsbury field was part of a mile wide seam that ran from the Breidden Hills on the Welsh Borders, through Alberbury to Westbury, and on through Asterley to Meole Brace and Sutton Farm in Shrewsbury, finally diving down beneath Haughmond Hill to end near High Ercall.

Although the field had been mined for many years, up until the mid 19th century it had been purely for local consumption.

The mines around the south and east of Shrewsbury were already in decline when, in the late 1870's, a Lancashire miner by the name of Atherton, sank a shaft at Hanwood to the south-west of Shrewsbury. A rich seam of good coal was discovered, and to add to the good fortune there was very little in the way of Fire Damp, or Methane gas.



The Hanwood field was alongside the Shrewsbury to Welshpool railway, and it was a simple matter to transport the coal from the pithead to the Cruckmeole sidings. The field was worked continuously, with the coal face at 900ft below ground, and up to a mile from the entry shaft. By the time of its closure in 1940, it was producing 800 tons a week. The occupation of Miner has always been a hazardous one, with many disasters, but the ingenuity of man has always been up to the challenge.