

From the Chair

The first issue of 224 for our new season contains a startling revelation by Colin Cohen of how close this area came to being strip-mined 40 years ago. It is heartening to note the effectiveness of widespread, determined, well-argued and well-led opposition in the face of powerful vested interests. Local history plays an important role in reminding us of such episodes: in Santayana's much quoted remark, 'those who forget the past are doomed to repeat it'.

I rather wish that members' memories were wiped clean at the end of each season, so that we could just repeat our programme each year! Finding new speakers can be problematic, but I think that we shall provide another varied and interesting programme this year. Many thanks to all our members for your continued support. It is a reasonable assumption that if you are renewing your membership you enjoy our meetings and activities, so why not persuade a friend or neighbour to come along and share your enjoyment? We always need new people and new ideas to stir us up.

Chris Day

Programme for the start of our 2004-2005 season

8 September: Alan Rosevear 'The turnpike roads of North Oxfordshire'

13 October: John Woolley, 'A history of policing'

A full programme is in preparation

Our meetings take place at the Windmill Centre at 7.30 on the second Wednesday of the month during the winter season

The Oxfordshire ironstone enquiry of 1960

There is no point being editor if one cannot indulge oneself from time to time—and this is one such time. One of the more intriguing aspects of researching a history of the Barfords has been the number of 'standalone' stories I came upon. The post-war plan to dig up a large chunk of North Oxfordshire and ship it to South Wales to be smelted down is one such.

Ironstone (technically Marlstone rock) was first recognised as an iron ore at Fawler (west of Stonesfield) in the 1850s by the British Geological Survey¹ and was worked from about 1859. The Marlstone had been used for building from 'time immemorial' and its iron-rich nature must have been pretty obvious to anyone. Economic working would have been a non-starter, even in the days when transport was difficult, as very much richer ores were available in other parts of the country.

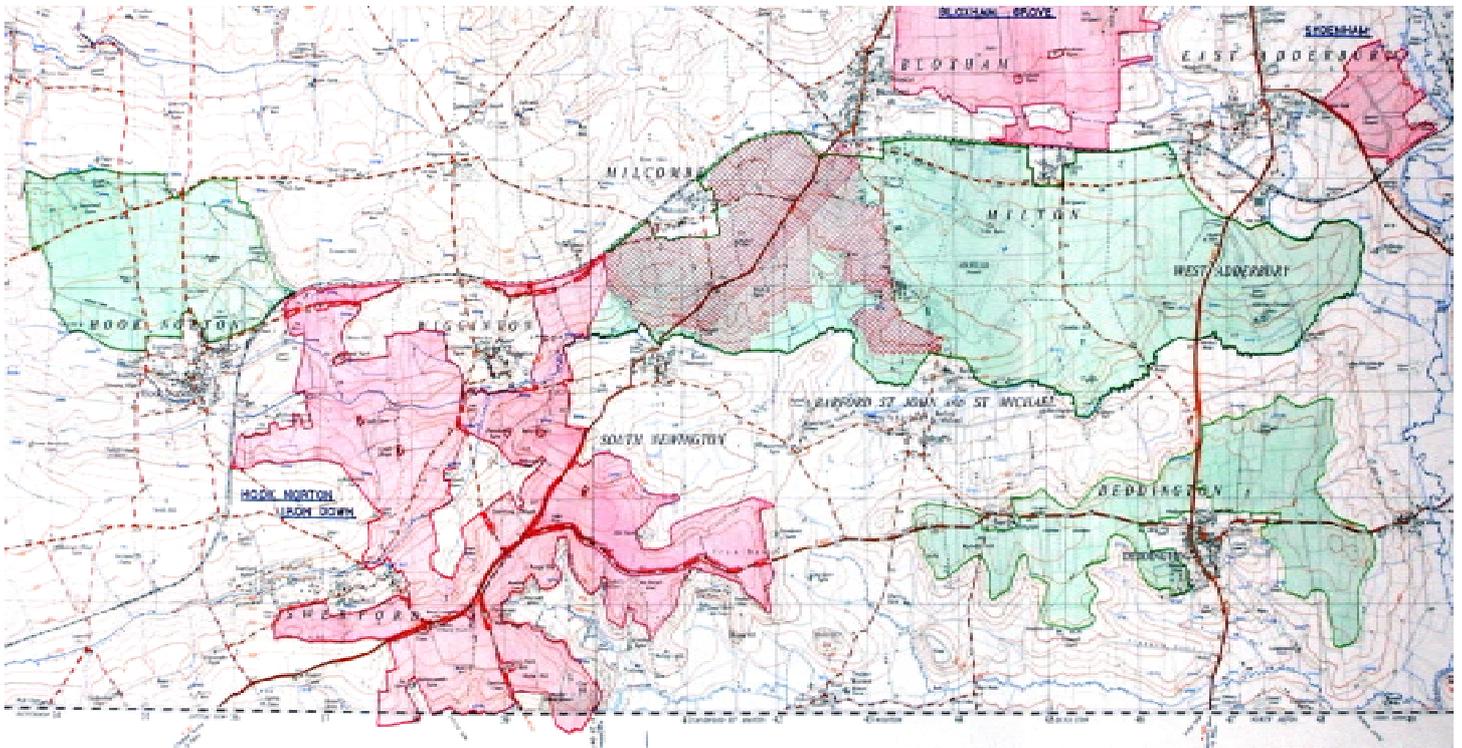
There had been no working on the scale proposed in the fifties. The issues were complicated and there were two public enquiries, in part because the company promoting the scheme does not seem to have anticipated any serious opposition and prepared its case so badly that the first enquiry was stopped.

There might have been an atti-

tude that the scheme would inevitably go ahead as the applicant (the Dowsett Mineral Recovery Co Ltd) had been bought by Richard, Thomas and Baldwin Ltd, who were a 50% nationalised steel company. Thus the scheme was effectively being promoted by one Secretary of State and would be judged by another.

On page 2 there is a map that shows the area for which applications were being made. The original is hand-coloured, as it is on the Web; the pink area was to be mined first (mainly from Bloxham to Hook Norton) while the green area (including Deddington and northwards to Adderbury) was to be stripped later: literally stripped, as this was to be open-cast mining to a depth of about 30 feet. After the ore had been removed the top-soil would have been replaced and the





Part of a map showing the areas of up to seven applications from 1957 to 1960. Deddington would have been a later phase. Ordnance Survey mapping © Crown copyright. AM130/04

land 're-instated' in the way that is familiar north of Banbury with the fields lowered and hedges standing proud on sharp embankments. The open-cast mining was due to last for 30 years or so and ironically would have come to an end at about the same time as the purpose-built mill in South Wales closed down.

Needless to say the countryside would have been devastated by the operation, and the noise, dirt and disruption would have been terrible. One of the documents produced for the objectors shows that in the Hook Norton and Irondown Hill areas no less than 1,750 acres of the application area of 2,550 acres would have been strip mined (708 of 1032 hectares). Initially the applications had been for only 185 acres east of Adderbury and 973 east of Bloxham—the thin end of a wedge.

It was very much due to the efforts of Major John Schuster² of Nether Worton House and Major Eustace Robb of Tew Park that a fight was put up by no less than 20 local parishes, five boroughs, districts and the County. They were coordinated by the North Oxfordshire Area Protection Committee and joined at the Inquiry by other bodies including 44 WI branches, the Banbury Historical Society and many others. Perhaps the smartest





thing the Protection Committee and County Council did was to commission the well-respected Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) to report into the scheme which it did twice in 1960³. The Protection Committee not only raised funds to cover its own costs, but contributed over £1,000 to the County Council's costs.

The ultimate success of the objectors must be largely due to the fact that the EIU so clearly demolished the economics of the plan. However, even they were not confident that one minister would turn down another's project.

One of the more specious claims made by the applicants was that the area had no significant landscape value and thus was not worth preserving. The campaigners commissioned photographs to disprove this, eight of which are reproduced here with the whole set to be available on Deddington OnLine⁴.

As can be seen on these pages the landscape photos presented to the enquiry and taken by W R Bawden of Eagle Photos of Cheltenham⁵ give the lie to any idea that it lacked value. More were commissioned from Blinkhorns of Banbury⁶ to show the effect of large-scale mineral workings in the area. Inevitably the former are the more attractive, especially as it would not have been appropriate for them to have dramatised existing ironworkings: they simply show the devastation in its drabness and simplicity.

I have been able to identify the location of most of the images, but there are still some that readers may be able to help with. All are shown on DoL. Captions are overleaf, as are my contact details if you can add any information on the photos.

To quote Major Schuster, 'Rarely can a countryside have been more united or worked more closely together under the leadership of its County Council. This unity of purpose was, of course, founded on a deep appreciation of the countryside threatened, but it owed very much to the theme behind the local case, which was not a thoughtless "extract iron-ore from any countryside but ours" but rather "take this iron-ore from this countryside, much though we love it, if it really is in the national interest, but *first* you must show this, convincingly, to be so".'²

Colin Cohen

Captions to all photos, from front to back, top to bottom. The text is largely taken from the back of the photos

1 Swerford. [near the Griffin pub]. An every-day scene in this unspoiled village. Farmer Cox taking his cows home for milking.

2 Swerford. The view southwards from the by-road Hook Norton to Swerford. The Chipping Norton to Banbury main road runs along the skyline and gives fine views over the valley. The upland fields behind the village are included in the present ironstone application, as well as a considerable acreage over the hill on the far side of the main road.

3 Unknown location. Probably north of Banbury—exhausted ironstone workings returned to agricultural use.

4 Bloxham. The view south east from Wyckham Park [now Tudor Hall School].

5 Milcombe. A charming scene immediately adjacent to the railway line and land concerned in the application. [Most of the line from Chipping Norton to Banbury was single track, with passing places at the stations].

6 Milcombe. Looking east along the railway line in the vicinity of the village, which lies just beyond the trees. The land right of the railway is included in the application. [Where the sidings will be?]

7 Milcombe. A peaceful country lane, the road from Milcombe to Wigginton. The railway line is up the bank to the right and the ore will need to reach it across this lane.

8 Unknown location. Flooded river and bridge. It has the same number of arches as the bridge at Rousham, but could it be south of Adderbury or north of Deddington?

Notes

1 *Memoirs of The Geological Survey of Great Britain, The Mesozoic ironstones of England, The Liassic ironstones*, T H Whitehead et al. London, 1952. I am in-



debted to Mike Sumbler of The British Geological Survey for his advice.

2 I am most grateful to the Hon Mrs Lorna Schuster for making her late husband's enquiry papers available to me.

3 *A survey of sources of supply of iron ore to the United Kingdom and A study of the factors bearing on the decision whether or not to undertake large scale iron ore mining in North Oxfordshire*, Economist In-

telligence Unit. London, 1960.

4 Any further information about the photos would be most welcome at the address below. To see all 20 photos on the web go to www.deddington.org.uk/history/ironstone.

5 I have used 'best endeavour' to trace them, but have been unable to do so.

6 I am grateful to Blinkhorns for permission to reproduce their photos.

If undelivered please return to: Deddington & District History Society, c/o 37 Gaveston Gardens, Deddington OX15 0NX. 224 is the newsletter of the Deddington & District History Society, published three times a year and distributed free to members.

The Society meets on the second Wednesday of the month during the season, normally at the Windmill Centre in Deddington. Membership £9/16 pa single/couples, or £2.50 per meeting at the door.

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