

**The Top-Hard Seam Ponies
in Markham No.2 Pit**

		Nights		
		8/7/29	19	
		Week ending		
Day	Ref	Pay	Tu	W
1	Jet	W Gosling		
1	Star	C Mullins		
1	Ref	J Cottle		
1	Bray	H Smedley		
1	Mack	G Small		
1	Wag	C Pitchford		
1	Mark	H Harris		
1	Hero	D Harris		
1	Toby	J Kitchen		
1	Dick	J Harbour		
1	Boxer	J Gibbin		
1	Nat	H Burr		
1	Sam	H Biggs		
1	Bert	R Pitchford		
1	Sid	J Carter		
1	Rock	G Hampson		
1	Jeff	G Weedham		
1	Tony	H Wilkinson		
1	Peter	ob Joseland		
1	Smitt	G Collins		
1	Trim	L Leonard		
1	Jack	J Tompson		
1	Leek	L Turner		
1	Cris	L Balby		
1	Fock	J Wilkinson		
1	Bell	J Smith		

UB: J Jarvis



THE TOP HARD SEAM PONIES IN MARKHAM NO. 2 PIT

by G. Downs-Rose

A record survives of the names of ponies stabled near the Top Hard landing in Markham No. 2 Colliery over a period of thirteen weeks between 25 May 1929 and 27 August 1929, together with the names of their drivers or 'pony lads'.

The record was found in old stables which once served the Top Hard seam workings. They were situated near to No. 2 downcast shaft. A Plan is reproduced on Page 2 which shows the relationship between No. 2 Pit's Top Hard workings and those of pits No. 's 1, 3 and 4 at Markham. A contemporary section of No. 2 Shaft shows the Top Hard seam to have been 5 feet 1½ inches thick.

The book in which the ponies' record was kept was a Time Book, of the type used by mine deputies and other company officials, for recording the shifts worked and the rates of pay due to daily-paid workmen. The format of the book gave the check, or tally number, name, and job of each employee for two consecutive weeks, and the information was normally entered on facing pages. Each Pay Week ran from Wednesday to the following Tuesday and was known as the 'take-up time' for which wages were paid on Fridays.

The horse-keepers, or 'hostlers', who kept the pony record ignored that format and, using separate pages for each day and nightshift, made two columns on each page with the names of the ponies and the drivers in charge of them. Few of the book's pages are dated but, although some pages are torn or missing, it is fairly easy to follow the sequence of days and nightshifts recorded and to arrive at the period covered by the book. The entries were made in indelible and ordinary pencil as follows, e. g.:

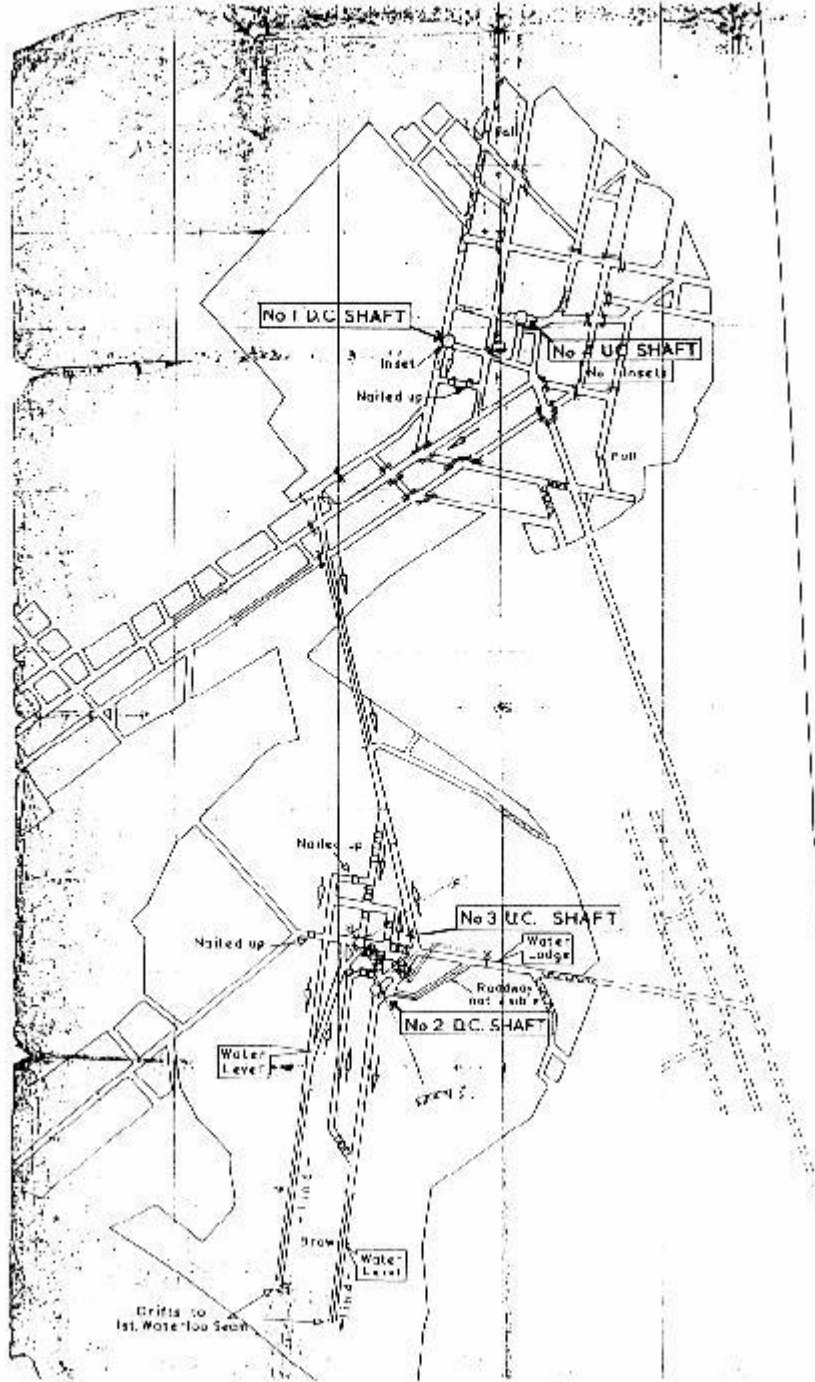
'Days:	'Jet'	J Brown
	'Bray'	A Bannister
	'Reg'	C Watkinson
		etc.

The purpose of the record was simply to show how frequently ponies were used, on which shifts, and which driver was responsible. Generally, the ponies and their drivers changed shifts weeks about, allowing a driver and pony to become used to one another. However, the exigencies of working the pit, the fitness of the ponies, the frequent use of ponies on two consecutive shifts, and the transfer of drivers to other jobs, militated against such relationships.

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The mining industry was late in using machinery to win the nation's coal, and relied on animal power to move the coal from the face to the shaft. In 1913, the peak year, over 73,000 ponies were in use. The numbers dropped to 24,000 by 1949 and from the 1970's the National Coal Board discouraged their use.

TOP HARD LANDING, Nos. 1, 2, 3 & 4 shafts, Markham Colliery



The use of ponies in Derbyshire mines was declining by 1929. In the Top Hard seam in Markham No. 2 there was stabling for up to 400 ponies. During the period of the pony record in 1929 the numbers in use there fell from 46 to 43.

Ponies had been most numerous when coal seams were worked by the 'pillar and post' method. Under that method tunnels, wide and high enough for ponies to haul tubs on rails from the workings to the shaft, were driven out into the coal seam. As the tunnels, or 'headings' advanced, 'stalls', employing small teams of miners, were driven at right angles into the sides of the main tunnel at short distances apart and only the coal was cut out. When two stalls had advanced a distance into the coal, more stalls were set on at right angles to the advance of the first stalls. The result was to cut out the coal, leaving squares of coal to support the roof in a chess board pattern, called 'the pillar and post' method. Later, the coal supporting the roof was also removed.

The miners used picks to cut out the coal, and shovels or forks to fill it into low tubs. They pushed the full tubs through the workings to the nearest pony tunnel, or 'gate'. From there the pony lad, or driver took over and his pony hauled the tub or train of tubs to the shaft, returning with empty tubs for the miners to fill.

Most large Derbyshire mines were changing over to 'long-wall' working by 1929, a system which employed teams of up to forty fillers on lengths of coal face which had endless-belt conveyors to carry the coal to trains of tubs in the main gateways. There, the trains of full tubs were attached to endless steel ropes and hauled to the pit bottom.

The job of pony lad gradually gave way to the 'haulage lads' - boys and young men responsible for clipping the tubs to the steel ropes in the pit bottom, at every transfer junction, and at the coal face. Miners were still employed in cutting out the rock roof for the tunnels. Others maintained and repaired old tunnels which were needed for access and ventilation. These men still depended on the use of ponies for tub haulage, and the two- or three-man teams usually took a pony each shift from the the pit bottom stables.

In Markham No. 2 Colliery, the Top Hard seam was nearing exhaustion and it closed in 1931/32. The seam was still being won by the pillar and post method and required up to fifty ponies on two shifts for pulling tubs. Teams of three to four men, at that time, were clearing 30 yards of coal each shift. The coal face was undercut by machine and the coal was filled on to shaker pans which emptied into tubs.

At that time, No. 2 Colliery was working three seams: the Hazle (or Hazell), the Top Hard and the Ell Coal. To cope with winding and screening the coal from three seams, the Top Harde was worked on afternoons, the Hazell on nightshift and the Ell Coal on dayshift and shafts No. 2 and 3 were used for winding.

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A second use of the record book was for shift hostlers to pass information to one another. The pages often carry brief messages about sick or injured ponies, the cleanliness of the mangers, water tubs and 'boshes' and when ponies needed shoeing or had been re-shod. The record for the night-shift of 26 May 1929 reported: '*Don has been destroyed.*' He was replaced by another 'Don' later in the record. There are no other reports of pony deaths in the period.

There is a lack of exact information as to where, precisely, in No.2 Colliery Top Hard seam the ponies were being used, though there are a few references to named ponies being allocated to the Inkersall, Waterloo, Sutton and Doe Lea districts of the mine. The workings were driven out from the pit bottom in various directions. Such workings were known as 'districts' and were named, either by the compass bearing- e.g. 'North District'- or by a place on the surface above- e.g. Sutton, Doe Lea, Inkersall. Exceptionally, where the workings were in a lower seam and reached by driving a drift, the district might take the name of the new seam- e.g. 'The Waterloo'.

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There is a break of seven days in the record from 18 June 1929 to 24 June 1929. After a list of ponies and drivers for the 17 June comes this notice:

'See that all Ponies are Cleaned for going out in the morning at 8 Past 6, also there (sic) caps on Ready. ['caps' refers to the leather hoods put on the ponies's heads to protect their eyes from sunlight on the surface.]

Ben, Tom, Peter, Bass to Stop in Pit

Let the ponies eat up so there will be no corn left in the mangers'.

The Markham break appears to coincide with the summer holiday, traditionally taken at Whitsuntide, the time of chapel Anniversary celebrations, union rallies and the Staveley Feast. Evidence taken by the *Children's Employment Commission, 1842*, records that the only recognised holidays in Derbyshire at that time were Christmas Day, Good Friday and a few days at Whitsuntide.

In 1915, Lord Kitchener appealed to the miners to limit their Easter and Whitsuntide holidays. According to the *Derbyshire Times* of 27 March 1915 the miners agreed to take only two days at Whitsuntide instead of the customary four or five. Evidently, by 1929 the old custom had resumed. Agreement with the owners for paid holidays was not won by the Derbyshire miners until November 1937, though paid holidays had been first demanded in 1919.

Except when they died, were seriously injured or became unsuitable, the Whitsuntide break was the only time that ponies were taken out of the pit. Accustomed only to artificial light and dry food, they wore leather hoods to protect their sight while on the surface and had to be acclimatised to eating fresh grass.

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The number of ponies working in Markham No. 2 Colliery Top Hards during the period of the record book was:

Start of period:	46
New Ponies:	<u>6</u>
	52
Left in period:	<u>9</u>
End of period:	43

About half the number of ponies worked on the dayshift and half on the afternoon shift. It was quite common for two and sometimes eight ponies to work a double shift.

Fewer ponies were used on the Sunday nights which preceded or followed a holiday. For the nightshift of 29 June a note was left in the book:

'No Horsekeeper coming on Sunday Night.'

Sunday Night Ponies if wanted:

Doe Lea, 'Peter', 'Ted'

Waterloo, 'Boxer', 'Ben'

Sutton, 'Alf', 'Joe'

Inkershall, 'Jet', 'Star'

'Jim' Pony not to go out

(signed) W. Pheasant'

Old miners and pony drivers can tell a wealth of stories about the ponies. Some were said to have second-sight and would refuse to enter a place when danger threatened. Bonds were established between pony and driver, the latter taking tit-bits to work for his regular 'mate'. Many ponies could work without a command being given. There are also stories of miners and pony drivers who were known to ill-treat the animals. It was part of the bootler's job to examine a pony at the end of its shift for signs of ill-treatment or unnecessary injury. If in doubt, he left a note for the head bootler:

'Have a look at Pal's near-side eye.'

'Trim has cut his nose a bit. He came in at 6.30.'

'Look if Ob 's lame when he goes out to work.'

'They had Nick (fall) down on the plate and he cut his nose.'

[The 'plate' was a slippery square metal sheet on which coal tubs were twisted and lined up to run on the rails.]

Some ponies were stubborn and refused to work, especially for a strange driver:

'I had to fetch Adam in from No. 1. They could not get to his head.'

'Have a look at Sweep. He would not stand up in the ladders (shalls) nor the sling gears (chains). I tried him with both.'

'They brought Ben (No. 2) back. He sat on his rump in the ladders.'

The last report drew a sarcastic comment from the head horse keeper: 'Very good, Mr. Barnard, very good!'

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Familiarity with the use of deep mine pit ponies now exists only in the memories of a few old miners. Here, in tribute to a few of those ponies and their pony lads, their names in the 1929 Top Hard record are listed:

THE TOP HARD PONIES

[! = recorded start of period. ! = recorded end of period
/ = started and left during period]

Adam !	Lion ! !
Alf ! !	Mack ! !
Bass !	Mark ! !
Bell ! !	Nat ! !
Ben ! +	Nick !
Bert ! !	Ob ! !
Bill ! +	Pat ! !
Bob ! !	Peter ! +
Bond ! !	Reg ! !
Boxer +	Rock /
Bray ! +	Roy !
God ! +	Sam ! !
Crib ! !	Scott ! +
Gris ! +	Sid ! !
Dandy ! +	Sim !
Dick !	Smutt ! +
Don ! +	Star ! !
Fly ! !	Ted !
Fred ! +	Tick +
Hero ! !	Tiny ! +
Jack !	Toby ! !
Jet ! !	Tom !
Jeff ! !	Top +
Jim ! !	Trim ! +
Joe ! +	Vick +
Josa ! !	Wag ! !
Len !	

THE PONY DRIVERS

J. Arblaster
T. Ashmore
L. Bailey
A. Bannister
W. Bannister
A. Bargh
B. Battersby
H. Bear
K. Biggs
A. Britton
J. Brown
L. Brown
H. Burn
L. Caddywold
T. Cambridge
C. Carlisle
J. Cartledge
J. Carter
A. Clark
N. Clifford
A. Collins
J. Cooke
F. Cooper
H. Cooper
S. Coupe
F. Cropper
T. Cuttle
A. Dawson
H. Derricott
A. Dickerson
G. Downs
A. Edwards
L. Edwards
W. Evans
L. Furniss
J. Gaunt
T. Gerviss
T. Gibbons
W. Goodall

W. Gooling
D. Griffin
H. Griffin
C. Hall
J. Hampton
J. Harbour
J. Hardwick
L. Harper
D. Harper
D. Harris
H. Harris
W. Herthill
F. Haslam
L. Haywood
W. Haywood
C. Higgins
F. Holloway
J. Holmes
C. Howell
T. Hudson
W. Hunt
W. Jackson
J. Jarves
A. Kay
J. Kelly
J. Kitchener
L. Leonard
A. Longden
J. Mansell
C. Markham
T. Marshall
K. Manks
C. Mellin
T. Marcott
F. Muscopp
J. Nall
J. Needham
E. Newcomb

S. Nottingham
C. Parsons
J. Pegg
L. Pheasant
A. Pickering
C. Pitchford
R. Pitchford
J. Price
J. Riley
L. Roberts
A. Roper
T. Shard
A. Sharman
J. Slack
W. Slaney
H. Slater
H. Smedley
J. Snell
J. Tart
W. Taylor
J. Tench
F. Thompson
C. Toplis
A. Toceland
L. Turner
C. Warwick
T. Waterfield
C. Watkinson
G. Webster
W. Webster
A. Welsh
H. Wilkinson
J. Wilkinson
T. Whitley
J. Wood
M. Wragg
L. Wright
S. Young

THE PONIES OF THE TOP HARD SEAM IN MARKHAM NO. 2 PIT

By G. Downs-Rose

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I am grateful to Steve Bates for allowing me to draw on the pony book record, and to Cliff (Rusty) Davidson for his memories of mining practices in the Top Hard seam at Markham No. 2 Pit, where, I understand, one under-manager ran the pit and grew mushrooms!

Thanks also to Frank Jackson for reminding me that when we walked along Inkersall Road, to share the excitements of Staveley's Feast, the elder flowers were invariably in bloom and the sun was always shining.

Author

