

Extracts from "Diaries of Sir Daniel Gooch"

"I was born at Bedlington in Northumberland on the 24th day of August 1816. My father had then lived in Bedlington about a year. He was engaged in the Bedlington Ironworks, at that time the property of my second cousins, the Longridges. The village of Bedlington was a tolerably clean and large country village, with half a dozen good houses in it and I was only four years of age when I went to school. How well I remember the first day I was led there by the servant, and also the appearance of the two ladies who kept it. The ladies were a Miss Robson and her sister, Miss Betsey. I do not know exactly how long I was at that school, but probably a few years, as the next I went to was at Mr. Thompson's, the clergyman of Horton parish about four miles from Bedlington. It was a large school and the boys were chiefly the sons of farmers living round about; and, as most of us rode there on donkeys or ponies, probably some thirty of those animals were congregated in the old buildings used as stables at the school. Mr. Thompson was very indulgent, and often when the Northumberland pack of foxhounds, then belonging to Sir Matthew White Ridley, came past the school, he did not punish us if we mounted our steeds and went after them. It was a great amusement for the gentlemen hunting to see some eighty donkeys and ponies and us boys. My chief playmate was George Marshall, who lived at Bedlington. He was the son of a widow, farming their own farm. For some time we used to ride together on the same pony to school. My Saturdays were always spent either on the farm, or at the collieries or ironworks. I used to go often to a pit called the Glebe, and nothing pleased me so much as going underground and driving the trams"

(The Glebe Pit was at Barrington – see extract from Bergen's book below.¹)

"My father was rather strict with us on Sunday. We went to church morning and afternoon, and at the afternoon service I, with the rest of the young people, had to say the Catechism before the congregation. The church and churchyard at that time (it has since been much altered, I think, for the worse) were kept in the most beautiful order. It was the great pride of Mr. Coates to see the churchyard kept neat, and filled with flowers and pretty shrubs"

(Henry Coats, BA was vicar of St. Cuthbert's from 1788 to 1835.)

"The old women of the village had a considerable dread of me, yet I believe they liked me all the better for the pranks I used to play upon them. One great amusement was to fill a cow's horn with old tar-rope, and then to put a hot cinder in it, and insert the small end of the horn into the keyhole, or any other opening we could get through the cottage door, and by blowing at the large end, driving the smoke into the cottage. This we called funking the old women, and it was generally a winter evening's amusement. There were no policemen in those days to protect the victims of this iniquity"

Bedlington, at the time I was there, was often the scene of sharp fights between the excisemen and the smugglers, who used to carry whisky across the Scotch borders. These men used to ride generally a very good horse with kegs of whisky hung like saddlebags on the saddle; and as the population of the village in all cases took the part of the smuggler, the excisemen often got the worst of it"

¹ http://www.bedlingtonironworks.org/history/bergen_booklet.pdf

George Stephenson was a regular visitor in the works at this period. He used to call upon John Gooch at what is now known as 'the King's Arms', or, more familiarly, 'The Grapes'. Sir Daniel tells us how as a boy, George Stephenson used to take him on his knee and tell him about the wonderful new railways, or 'waggonways' as he would call them. Perhaps the most interesting chapter in the whole history of the ironworks is that which tells of the part they played in the development of the iron road. In 1818 the owner or owners of Willowbridge Pit, of the 'Glebe' Pit, now known as Barrington, offered Michael Longridge coal on very favourable terms if he would be at the expense of putting down a waggonway from the pit to the ironworks. He agreed to do so and began to consider the advisability of putting down rolled iron rails instead of the usual cast iron ones.