

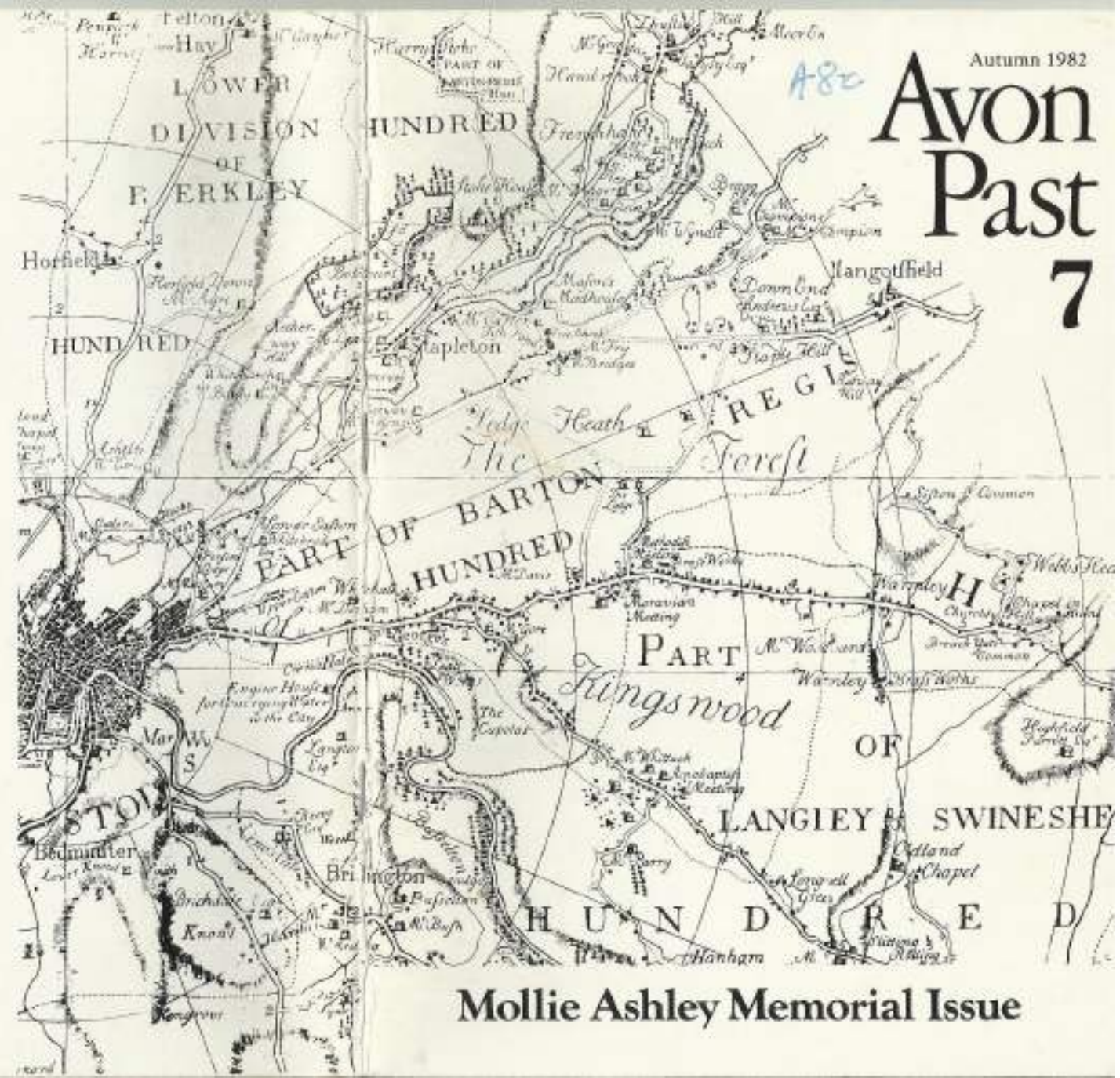
Autumn 1982

# Avon Past 7

A82

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- THE KINGSWOOD COLLIERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY
- CONSTITUENT SOCIETIES: KINGSWOOD & DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY



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# Avon Past

the joint journal of  
AVON ARCHAEOLOGICAL COUNCIL  
and AVON LOCAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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## EDITORIAL

To mark Mollie Ashley's untimely death, the Avon Local History Association and the Avon Archaeological Association asked me to edit a special number of *Avon Past* concentrating on her home territory of Kingswood. It has been an honour and a pleasure to do so. It was decided to mark the occasion by asking for specially written articles of a longer length than usual and incorporating references. Both bodies and I are grateful to the contributors for their ready agreement. They are

**Robert Malcolmson**, Professor of History at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Author of *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (1973) and *Life and Labour in England, 1700-1780* (1981), as well as a chapter in J. Brewer, J. Styles (ed), *An Ungovernable People: the English and their law in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (1980), of which his article is a substantially shorter and rewritten version.

**John S. Moore**, Lecturer in Economic History, University of Bristol. Author of *Laughton: a study in the evolution of the Wessex landscape* (1964), *The Goody and Chattels of our Forefathers* (1976), *Clifton and Westbury Probate Inventories* (1981) and *Domesday Book: Gloucestershire* (1982), editor of and contributor to *Avon Local History Handbook* (1979).

**James Russell**, Treasurer of the Bristol and Avon Archaeological Research Group and Secretary of the Westbury on Trym Local History Society.

Both Robert Malcolmson and myself are grateful to Messrs. Hutchinson of London for permission to reprint portions of his original chapter noted above. Robert Malcolmson wishes to record his thanks to Dorothy Vinter, who generously lent him some of her research notes on Kingswood, and to John Beattie, John Brewer, John Styles, Edward Thompson and John Walsh. He is also grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for financial support. All the writers wish to thank the staffs of the Avon Reference Library and of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Record Offices for their help with relevant sources.

Copyright in all contributions remains with the contributors. It is hoped that this number will be regarded as a worthy memorial to Mollie Ashley by all who knew her. Finally, I wish to thank my wife Brenda for helping me cheerfully and efficiently with the reading of the proofs of this issue of *Avon Past*.

John S. Moore, B.A., F.R.Hist.S.  
President, A.L.H.A.



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## MOLLIE ASHLEY - 1931-1981

The traditional industries of the Kingswood area were part of Mollie Ashley's childhood, her father being a bootmaker, her grandfather a Kingswood miner, so it was with all the facts and legends of these two important trades that her mind was set off on its never-ending search for answers. As a young girl she was always asking "Yes, but why, what was before?" "Where did they come from?" These questions led her on journeys and travel to all parts, starting with a South Gloucestershire Youth exchange to the Siegerland in Germany (where she met Evan Ashley who was to become her husband and subsequently to Holland, France, Austria, Italy, and archaeological sites in Greece and the Greek Islands.

Archaeology will be the way through which Mollie is best recalled, for she was never happier than in jeans and jumper, with bucket and trowel, on hands and knees, at the Keynsham Abbey site with the Folk House Group, Barrs Court site with her own Kingswood Society, on the Bristol Bridge site with Bristol Museum, to mention a few, and with thermos and rucksack helping to plan the measuring of Mangotsfield Mill, or just walking the "Tram Road" across common and field.

Her enthusiasm for local history and genealogy rekindled the Kingswood History Society; her family tree researches led her to Record Offices and Repositories from Bristol to Truro, Gloucester to London and across the seas to Canada. Whilst on holiday she still had the urge and determination to research, which ended by finding a cousin in Buffalo, U.S.A. Alas, she died before the fruits of this research reached England.

Mollie was always keen that her knowledge should reach others. She led guided walks for Avon Planning Department in and around her beloved Kingswood; she wrote articles in local magazines and was deeply concerned for the future of Willsbridge Mill, which now seems assured.

Service on the Parochial Church Council for Kingswood, Secretary of Kingsfield School P.T.A., Vice-Chairman of A.L.H.A. and Chairman of Kingswood History Society were a few of the offices she held, not to mention, as her two children grew, going off to Soundwell Technical College to take some 'O' levels to, as she put it, "Keep up with the children," all this together with coping with a husband and home was typical of Mollie's boundless energy and zest for life.

The Congregational Church in Kingswood was crowded for her funeral. In his address, Canon John Ware, Vicar of Holy Trinity, Kingswood, described Mollie Ashley as a "Digger" and a "Seeker". Her warmth and enthusiasm, together with her quest for knowledge, find a fitting tribute in this Kingswood edition of Avon Past.

Roger Angerson; Nicholas Thomas.

I met Mollie Ashley a few years ago through our mutual interest in family and local history. After our friendship progressed we found to our great delight that we had a double common inheritance - from our Kingswood roots and a shared ancestry, both of us being descended from Stephen Pillinger, 1808-1899, Kingswood coalminer and his wife Jane Summerell. Mollie's grandmother and my grandfather were first cousins. Mollie's serious approach to her work was balanced by her terrific sense of fun. I miss her every time I come upon a piece of particularly choice behaviour of one of Kingswood's historical citizens in the

records and remember that I can no longer pick up the 'phone so that we can chuckle over it together. I am sure that she is equally missed by the rest of her friends and the colleagues she served so ably.

Patricia Lindgaard.



## THREE KINGSWOOD HISTORIANS

On Saturday morning, 8th January 1983, about 100 Kingswood historians and relatives gathered in Courtney Road to perpetuate the memory of Mrs. Mollie Ashley 1931-81, by a seat donated by her husband, Evan; the plate was added by Kingswood History Society, of which she was a keen member and former secretary.

The President, Mrs. Doreen Buckler, and the Chairman, Mr. David Leakey, paid tribute to Mollie's years of excavation and research on records for Barr's Court, on boundary stones and on parish surveys.

Nearby, a red-twigged lime tree was planted by the Society and a commemorative plaque dedicated by Rev. Gerald Gossage to the deceased co-founders of Kingswood History Society: Ewart Lovell and Matthew Southway, researchers of local collieries and quarries.



## THE MEDIEVAL FOREST OF KINGSWOOD

by John S. Moore.

### Introduction

Despite the work of Braine and other historians, in 1982 Dr. Margaret Sharp was still lamenting

'The early history of Kingswood Forest, as indeed of all the wooded areas of south Gloucestershire, demands detailed investigation. The origins of the forest, its extent, even its very name, are wrapped in obscurity.'<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this article is to dispel as much of this obscurity as possible, by summarizing the present state of work in progress on this subject.

Obviously the sources for the history of medieval Kingswood are far more accessible than they were in Braine's day, when also methods such as field archaeology and place-names were hardly started. But a more fundamental flaw in most work on the subject, from Braine to Dr. Sharp, is the confusion enshrined in Braine's phrase 'the chase or the forest of Kingswood'. For 'chase' and 'forest' are not interchangeable synonyms but quite distinct terms. A 'chase' was a private hunting preserve which might belong either to the Crown (as Kingswood Chase did after 1228) or to a subject (e.g. Tidenham Chase in west Gloucestershire belonged to the Marshal Earls of Pembroke and their successors). All the lands within a chase belonged to the owner of the chase, which was only to be distinguished from a park by its size and the operation of forest law within its boundaries for the benefit of its owner. By contrast, the lands within a forest rarely if ever belonged to one owner: Domesday Book in 1086 reveals many manors in different hands within the areas of Dean and Kingswood Forests, though it did not mention the former by name or the latter at all. Nevertheless, a 'forest' was a unit in a different sense: it was an area, not necessarily wooded in its entirety, within known bounds, reserved for royal hunting and administered by special officials.<sup>2</sup>

Given these definitions, we can clearly distinguish between Kingswood Forest and Kingswood Chase. Kingswood Forest covered an enormous area of approximately 200 square miles in south Gloucestershire, and came to an end when it was disafforested in 1228. Kingswood Chase was a much smaller area of between 3000 and 5000 acres east and south-east of Bristol which continued in existence into the 18th century. This article, it must be emphasized, is concerned only with the forest of Kingswood up to 1228, and will try to clarify its area, origins, history and name, all objects close to Mollie Ashley's heart.

Precisely because forests were outside the normal county administrative system, their history presents special difficulties.<sup>3</sup> Sources such as the records of the *Curia Regis* or of the itinerant justices are almost silent on royal forests, and in particular about Kingswood.<sup>4</sup> All the main series of Forest Proceedings and subsidiary accounts in the Public Record Office start too late to contain any information on Kingswood Forest, whilst the various series of Chancery enrolments (Charter, Patent and Close Rolls) begin only under King John and are useful only for the last 30 years of the Forest's existence. Nevertheless, enough can be pieced together to reconstruct much of the past history of Kingswood Forest.

### Extent

The basic details of the boundaries of Kingswood Forest are given in the charter of disafforestation on 6 May 1228, as follows:

'between Gallows Wood, near Bristol, and Huntingford, and between the River Severn and the Ridgeway on Sodbury Hill, as the Ridgeway extends from Lansdown to the water of Alderley.'<sup>5</sup>

Gallows Wood appears to be the later Fillwood in Brislington and Keynsham, though the name also is occasionally applied to Kingswood Chase.<sup>6</sup> Huntingford adjoins the Little Avon river north of Tortworth and Charfield, the latter also being known as *Hantewataw* in the eighth century and as 'Hunterford' until the 14th century.<sup>7</sup> The 'ridgeway on Sodbury Hill' is the prehistoric trackway along the crest of the Cotswolds, later followed almost entirely by the Roman road north-west from Bath and, from Dyrham northwards, also by the modern A46 road.<sup>8</sup> The mention of Lansdown, until the 19th century mostly in Weston parish, supports the belief of Grimes, Grundy and Margary, based on field archaeology, that the trackway and the Roman road to Bath did not follow the line of the present A46 road south of Oldfield Gate in Dryham, but continued along the Cotswold crest past Tog Hill and Freezing Hill to Lansdown, whence the Roman road continued south-east into Bath whilst the trackway turned south through Weston to cross the R. Avon at Twerton.<sup>9</sup> Finally, 'the water of Alderley' may simply be the Alderley Brook, but the mention of Huntingford suggests that it also stood for the Little Avon river, at least downstream from the junction with the Alderley Brook.

Taken together, the boundaries of Kingswood Forest in 1228 seem to be, in the north, the Little Avon river from the R. Severn at least as far as the confluence with the Alderley Brook; in the east, either the modern A46 road or, as Grundy suggested, the minor road from Starveall through Hawkesbury Upton to Little Sodbury Camp, as far south as Oldfield Gate and then the road to Lansdown; on the south the R. Avon from Avonmouth at least as far east as Weston; on the west the R. Severn from Avonmouth to the Little Avon (Berkeley Pill). These boundaries need to be confirmed and their ambiguities resolved. Given the absence of sources already outlined, this can only be achieved by collecting from the Pipe Rolls (the annual accounts of the medieval Exchequer) the names of all places occurring in the 'pleas of the forest' sections of these rolls and plotting these names on a map.

It is, however, impossible to collect a complete list of such places from the Pipe Rolls for four main reasons. First, officials often accounted simply for a lump sum given in detail in a list that no longer survives. In 1180, for example, the sheriff of Gloucestershire accounted for a total sum of fines for unspecified 'wastes, assarts, purprestures and pleas of the forest'; only in 1182, when part of the total was pardoned to William Crassus, do we learn that one of the areas involved was William's manor of Old Sodbury.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, the modern historian may have great difficulty in identifying places and people accurately. The unnamed manor of Helias Oriescuile in 1167, named as *Wika* in 1199 when it was held by Helias' son Richard, can only be securely located at Wickwar by tracing Helias' descendants into the 13th century. Gilbert 'des Ivez', who appears in the 1167 Pipe Roll in the Hawkesbury area, can only be identified after much research as Gilbert de Livez or Levet, lord of Hillesley manor.<sup>11</sup> Thirdly, lords who were exceptionally lucky or law-abiding would not be fined and therefore would not appear in the Pipe Rolls: the abbots of Malmesbury, lords of Littleton on Severn, and the abbesses of Shaftesbury, ladies of Kelston, are cases in point. Finally, some lords held more than one manor within the Forest area, and it is usually impossible to be sure whether a fine imposed on, for example, Elias Giffard refers to Filton, Stoke Gifford or Rockhampton or more than one of these manors.



Nevertheless, the list of places identifiable from the Pipe Rolls as apparently lying within Kingswood Forest, given in Appendix 1, is impressive. The results are also presented in Map 1. It will be seen that a few places listed in Appendix 1 are outside the bounds given in the 1228 charter of disafforestation. The reason for this apparent discrepancy lies in the precise nature of the forest offence involved. It seems obvious that 'assarts' and 'purprestures' (the unauthorized clearance and enclosure of land, and the unauthorized erection of houses, mills and other buildings) are offences that only residents within the forest will commit, and usually this will also be true of 'waste' (the unauthorized cutting of timber in excess of the recognized customary 'botes' for mending houses and fences). By contrast, other offences against 'vert' (e.g. theft of timber and unauthorized pasturage) and 'venison' (e.g. illegal hunting of 'beasts of the forest' — deer and wild boar — or with illegal means such as 'unlawed' dogs — dogs with unclipped claws —) could be committed both by residents within the Forest and by those living outside the forest bounds. None of the places east of the Cotswold ridgeway — Acton Turville, Didmarton, Elmestree and Oldbury on the Hill *in toto* and Cold Ashton and Tormarton of which only small portions lie west of the ridgeway — were fined for assarts, purprestures or waste which would necessarily imply that these places were inside the bounds of the forest. Indeed, the entries relating to Acton Turville and Tormarton in the 1199 Pipe Roll suggest that their lords led a communal poaching-party into the forest:

Walter de Tormarton (fined) ... for acquitting his men who killed a hind within the bounds of the forest ... Robert de Turville (fined) ... for a stag which his men killed with Walter de Tormarton's men ...<sup>12</sup>  
killed with Walter de Tormarton's men ...<sup>12</sup>

Thus the mention of these places does not affect the validity of the Cotswold ridgeway as the eastern boundary of Kingswood Forest.

The southern and western bounds of Kingswood Forest require little comment: the boundaries stated or implied by the 1228 charter of the Severn and Bristol Avon are confirmed by the occurrence of forest fines for Ham, Hill, Rockhampton, Thornbury, Elberton, Aust, Kingsweston, Henbury, Clifton, Bristol, Barton Regis, Easton, Hanham and Biton. The northern and eastern boundaries, however, need rather more consideration. Forest fines relating to Ham, Stone, Torrworthy, Charfield, Kingswood and Hillesley confirm that the northern boundary was the Little Avon from the R. Severn as far east as Kingswood, and then the Alderley Brook, but the precise point where the northern and eastern boundaries meet is uncertain, since neither the Little Avon nor the Alderley Brook intersect with the A46 road, though both the branches of the Alderley Brook rise very near the line of the alternative ridgeway from Starveall via Hawkesbury Upton to Little Sodbury Camp which Grundy favoured. Field-names such as Waste Bottom and especially 'The Lawn' (from the Old French *lawn*, 'a forest glade') in Boxwell and the inclusion of Boxwell within the area of the 'Seven hundreds of Grumbald's Ash' (see below) might suggest that this village should also be included within the forest, but the field-name evidence is late and therefore inconclusive.<sup>13</sup> On balance, therefore, whilst a case could be made out for Boxwell and part of Lasborough being inside the forest, the boundaries being the Little Avon from Alderley to Lasborough, the Roman road from Lasborough to the A46 at Goss Covert, and the A46 from Goss Covert southwards, it is preferable to accept the Alderley Brook as the boundary up to Lower Kilcott. Either of the two branches of the Alderley Brook above Lower Kilcott, or the road



Map 1. Kingswood Forest as disafforested in May 1228.

from Lower Kilcott to Starveall, would link the brook to the ridgeway.

From Starveall southwards, two routes are possible for this ridgeway. Grimes and Margary favoured the A46 down to Oldfield Gate in Dyrham, which was certainly the Roman road, but Grundy's suggestion of the road from Starveall via Hawkesbury Upton to Little Sodbury Camp has the merit of following the crest of the Cotswolds almost exactly along the 575 foot contour.<sup>14</sup> But Grundy's further suggestion that the ridgeway made two sharp turns to rejoin the A46 east of Little Sodbury seems both unlikely and unnecessary, when there is an alternative line, still followed by modern footpaths, past Little Sodbury Camp to join the A46 just north of the A432 junction. The rest of the line of the Cotswold ridgeway presents no problems until Lansdown is reached. There can be no reasonable doubt that the 'La(w)nesdowne' of 1228 is the later Lansdown, since the name is recorded from the 11th century onwards.



Smith, hopelessly misreading the 1228 charter, tried to link it with Lance Wood in Hawkesbury.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, it has previously escaped the notice of Gloucestershire historians that there is more evidence to confirm the inclusion of the Lansdown area within Kingswood Forest: this is the mention in the bounds of a Weston charter of 946 of *Kyngeswada*, which can be approximately placed near the site of the modern Chapel Farm.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the two Anglo-Saxon charters for Weston confirm Grimes' conclusion from fieldwork that the course of the Ridgeway did not follow that of the Roman road and the modern Lansdown Lane to pass through Weston village and cross the R. Avon near its confluence with Lock's Brook. Lansdown Lane seems to be the major boundary between the two estates at Weston granted to Bath Priory in 946 and 956-8 (BCS 814, 1009), and in the former is called *baelles wæge*, 'a road on top of a mound (? or ridge)', in the latter *hæwey*, 'a highway'.<sup>17</sup> The course of the Ridgeway south from Chapel Farm thus seems to be down Lansdown Lane to High Street, along High Street to Weston Lane and then down Combe Park and its continuations, Chelsea Road and Station Road, to the R. Avon. Thus, with the aid of Anglo-Saxon charters, the records of forest fines in the Pipe Rolls, later field-names and present day fieldwork, it is possible to reconstruct the boundaries of Kingswood Forest with reasonable precision.

#### History

It is clear that by Henry II's reign, when the record-evidence begins to proliferate, Kingswood was a recognized royal forest. Despite the verdict of a Gloucestershire jury on the eve of disafforestation in 1228 that

'... In the same county, moreover, on the other side of the Severn towards the east all woods which are forest between Gloucester and Bristol were afforested after the Coronation of King Henry (II) ... except the king's park of Alveston which was anciently enclosed and ought to be kept enclosed by the men of the same province.'<sup>18</sup>

there is no evidence that Kingswood Forest ever extended north of the Little Avon river, or that there was any other forest between the Little Avon and Gloucester. There is also no evidence for afforestation in the area after 1100, whilst we have already seen that Kingswood is mentioned in a charter of 946. The only evidence for any extension of the hunting-area in Henry I's reign in south Gloucestershire relates to an enlargement of Alveston Park in 1130, when the sheriff claimed allowance

'for cultivated land taken into Alveston Park 72s.'<sup>19</sup>

As Miss Bazeley pointed out, the findings of 13th century juries about afforestation were usually based on unsubstantiated folk-memory which, in the case of the Forest of Dean, can be disproved by reference to Domesday Book.<sup>20</sup>

By itself the occurrence of the name Kingswood in the Weston charter of 946 would not be conclusive proof of the existence of a forest in the post-Conquest sense of a royal hunting-preserve, but as it happens in the same year King Edmund was killed at the royal palace of Pucklechurch, an event noted in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle whilst further details were preserved in the *Chronicon ex Chronicis* of 'Florence of Worcester' and William of Malmesbury's *De Gestis Regum Anglorum*, drawing on sources now lost.<sup>21</sup> The existence of the royal palace at Pucklechurch where King Edmund was killed adds weight to the likelihood that the Kingswood area was already a hunting-preserve, and a charter of 940 recording the name *Huntensforda* (the modern Huntingford, 'the ford of

the hunters') suggests that the Little Avon was the northern boundary of this hunting-preserve in the tenth as in the 13th century.<sup>22</sup>

The history of Kingswood can be taken back a further century and a half in the north by two charters of ca.770 and 796 which refer to Charfield by its earlier name of *Huntentun*, 'the hunters' settlement'.<sup>23</sup> In the south-east where Kingswood extended as far as Lansdown, it is likely that the boundaries of the hunting-area predated the transfer of the Bath Forum hundred from Mercia to Wessex, which took place after 864, whilst the early tenth century 'Burghal Hidage' suggests that Gloucestershire was then still administered from Bath, not Gloucester.<sup>24</sup> Within the later forest area, some of the local place- and field-names also refer to its original character. Horton means 'a hill frequented by stags', whilst the names Yate and Bridge Yate, the first recorded in a charter of 778-9, refer to gates into the main wooded areas; *Merkleye Lepeyat* in Cromhall, 'the deer-leap at the boundary clearing', again refers to the northern boundary of Kingswood Forest.<sup>25</sup> Recent comparative work on place-names elsewhere in England suggests that the element *feld*, when it is not applied either to medieval open fields or to modern enclosures, is often used to emphasize the contrast between cleared and wooded land on the edge of forests.<sup>26</sup> In S. Gloucestershire 'field' names are particularly concentrated at the northern and southern ends of Kingswood. To the south of the Little Avon, *Hystfield* in Ham and Stone, *Charfield*, *Falfield*, *Whitfield* in Cromhall and *Falfield* and *Haroldsfeld* in Kingswood mark out a distinct area of cleared land, while *Horfield*, *Marshfield*, *Mangotsfield*, *Redfield* in Easton and *Redfield* in Bitton display the same contrast at the other end of the forest between cultivated and woodland areas. Finally, the name *Dyrham*, 'the deer enclosure', evidenced in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 577 and in two tenth century charters, raises the fascinating possibility that the basic use of the Kingswood Forest region for hunting may have persisted since Roman times, for the context of the Chronicle entry is the battle that transferred political control of the area from Romano-Britons to Anglo-Saxons.<sup>27</sup>

Little can be learnt about the administrative history of Kingswood before the 12th century, since the forest is not mentioned in Domesday Book by name. There are, however, probable allusions to the area of Kingswood Forest in three counties. In Wiltshire it was recorded of Roger de Berkeley's unnamed holding (which can be identified as Kingswood near Wotton, remaining in Wiltshire until 1844) that 'Ceolwin held it before 1066 as a purpresture from Edric the sheriff' (DB, Wilts, 45, 2), a clear reference to an intake from a royal forest. In Bath Forum hundred in Somerset, the only manor with a large amount of woodland is Bath Priory's manor of Weston (DB, Som, 7, 5); this, together with the 130 acres of pasture at Langridge (DB, Som, 5, 36) and 90 acres of pasture and woodland in Arnulf of Hesdin's manor of Weston (DB, Som, 41, 1), must refer to the Lansdown section of Kingswood within Somerset. Similarly in south Gloucestershire, the Domesday woodland falls into four main areas: the woodland at Hawkesbury, Horton, Little Sodbury and Old Sodbury (DB, Gloucs, 1, 48; 14, 2; 30, 3; 46, 2) clearly constitutes the core of what is later called 'the forest of Horwood', the modern Lance Wood in Hawkesbury, Horwood in Horton and Harwood in Old Sodbury. Pucklechurch and Daynton woods to the south (DB, Gloucs, 6, 5; 8, 1) are doubtless a remnant of the woodlands once hunted from the royal palace of Pucklechurch, whilst woods at Charfield, Tortworth and Wiekwar to the west (DB, Gloucs, 67, 5; 69, 7; 74, 1) linked Horwood to the other main hunting-area, later called 'the forest of Alveston'. Ironically,



there is no mention in Domesday Book of a park or woodland at Alveston, though the park probably existed in William Rufus' reign and was certainly in existence and being expanded under Henry 1.<sup>28</sup> But substantial woodland is recorded at Acton Ugar, Rockhampton, Thornbury and Tytherington (DB. Gloucs. 1, 47; 5, 2; 6, 1; 50, 1) which formed the nucleus of Alveston forest.

By the middle of the 12th century, increasing record-evidence makes it clear that Kingswood Forest, like other royal forests, was controlled by hereditary foresters-in-fee, the Gansells. In 1212 it was officially recognized that Idonea Gansell's

'ancestors were accustomed and ought by hereditary right to be keepers of the forest and park of Alveston.'<sup>29</sup>

and a line of Gansell foresters can be reconstructed from the 1150s onwards, ending with Idonea's husband Richard son of Edwin, king's huntsman (see Appendix 2). The only gap in this sequence is the period of civil war and Henry III's minority (1213-24) when specially appointed royal officials administered the forest. In addition, many lesser officials of the forest are also known, though in most cases they are little more than names to us. In the few instances where more is known, many of the lesser officials, like the Gansells, appear to have been fairly substantial local gentry or manorial officials and 'peasant aristocrats'. The Gansells were lords of the manors of Gaunt's Earthcott and Lea in Almondsbury under the Doyntons as mesne lords, as well as holding some land from the Berkeleys of Dursley, possibly at Dodington or Siston.<sup>30</sup> Roger de Berkeley who was appointed forester in 1214 was the current head of the Berkeleys of Dursley, who in addition to their main estates around Dursley held Dodington and Siston manors in south Gloucestershire.<sup>31</sup> Robert de Vein, verderer of Alveston in 1213-4, was lord of Lawrence Weston manor under the bishop of Worcester,<sup>32</sup> and when in 1219 arrangements were being made to choose his successor, it was stipulated that he should be 'one of the more worthy and discreet knights in the neighbourhood of Alveston',<sup>33</sup> although in the event four men appear as verderers by 1223. Of these, William Mansel held Redland manor under the bishop of Worcester, whilst Peter Croc held the manor of Berwick and land in Elmington from the bishop and leased Olveston manor from Bath Priory; Jordan la Warré was lord of the manors of Widwar in Gloucestershire and Brislington in Somerset.<sup>34</sup> Even the minor forest-officials for whom *Foresterius* was an occupational surname were clearly men of standing within their localities: Drogo had sufficient legal knowledge to act as attorney for Matilda de Saltmarsh in the courts at Westminster, and Geoffrey and Peter were at least substantial peasants.<sup>35</sup>

The name Kingswood, evidenced in the Lansdown area from 946, east of Bristol from 1231 and in the Little Avon valley from 1148, proves that the whole area delineated in the charter of disafforestation in 1228 was a unit of administration in its own right. Why then is the name apparently never used in official descriptions of the forest? We have already seen that absence of evidence is one possible explanation: the accounts of foresters, if rendered to the Chamber, have not survived, and the main series of Forest Proceedings post-date the disafforestation. Another explanation is that the grant of the royal estate at Bucklechurch to Glastonbury abbey after King Edmund's assassination may have marked a decisive stage in the decline of direct royal control over south Gloucestershire. The very incomplete series of Anglo-Saxon charters nevertheless suggests that the region had once consisted entirely of royal manors which were granted-away to churches and to laymen from the late seventh-century onwards.<sup>36</sup>

As a result, by 1086 the remaining royal manors in south Gloucestershire were Alveston, Barton Regis, the Berkeley outliers of Almondsbury, Cromhall, Elberton, Hill, Horfield and Kingweston, Bitton, Marshfield, Old Sodbury, Thornbury, Tockington, Wapley and Winterbourne. Of these manors, Barton Regis was administered by Bishop Geoffrey of Coutances and the Berkeley outliers were effectively controlled by the Berkeley family as reeves. We have already seen that the woodland within the forest had been reduced to four main areas centred on Alveston in the west and Horwood in the east. By 1166 the area under royal control had shrunk still further, with Alveston, Bitton, Wapley and Winterbourne all being given to laymen.<sup>37</sup> Most of the Berkeley outliers had been given to St. Augustine's abbey, Bristol, and the manors of Old Sodbury, Thornbury and Tockington had passed to the honour of Gloucester.<sup>38</sup> It was therefore hardly surprising that royal interest in Kingswood as a hunting preserve gradually declined, or that it should be described as 'Bristol Forest', especially when the foresters from 1220 to 1224 were also constables of Bristol. Since the main rural centre of the forest was the royal park of Alveston, retained until 1230, it is also hardly surprising that the forest should be called 'the forest of Alveston' in 1202, 1214, 1219 and 1222-3,<sup>39</sup> or 'the forest of Alveston and Horwood' in 1220-1 and 1224,<sup>40</sup> though 'the forest of Horwood' is also recorded.<sup>41</sup> Had the area not been disafforested in 1228, Kingswood might well have been divided into two halliwicks of Alveston and Horwood, just as the Forest of Dean was divided into ten halliwicks, but the term only becomes common in the second half of the 13th century, occurring once in connection with Kingswood, four years before the final disafforestation.<sup>42</sup>

#### Conclusion

We have seen that the area of Kingswood Forest comprised most of south Gloucestershire before 1228 and that its boundaries can be traced back into the tenth century at least in the south-east and into the eighth century in the north; also that the basic use of the area for hunting may go back to pre-Saxon times. This leads me to ask what was the connection between the Forest and that apparently pre-feudal unit, 'the Seven hundreds of Grumbald's Ash', which covered virtually the same area as Kingswood Forest.<sup>43</sup> Here we may remember the use by the jurors of 1228 of the term 'province' to denote south Gloucestershire. For 'province' in early medieval Latin usually stands for the Old English *ge*, 'a (tribal) district or territory', and Sir Frank Stenton noted that

'The medieval "seven hundreds of Cookham and Bray" in east Berkshire correspond pretty closely to the probable area of the district which in the seventh century was called the *provincia* of Sonning.'<sup>44</sup>

The use of 'province' in 1228 may thus indicate a continuing tradition of separate origins in south Gloucestershire, crystallized and perpetuated in local institutions like the 'Seven hundreds of Grumbald's Ash' and 'Kingswood Forest', for which there is other, independent evidence. In particular, the dialect of south Gloucestershire is basically West Saxon, in contrast to the Midland dialect of the rest of Gloucestershire.<sup>45</sup> Now that the area and historical development of Kingswood Forest have, it is hoped, been clarified, serious study of the effects of the forest's existence on local life can begin in earnest. It is work that Mollie Ashley would have appreciated and enjoyed.



**Appendix 1: Places mentioned in the 'Forest' sections of the Pipe Rolls.**  
(To save space, only dates are given here, without references or discussion)

Abson (1167, 1176); Acton Igar in Iron Acton (1167); Iron Acton (1176);  
Acton Turville (1199); Almondsbury (1208); Alveston (1167, 1208, 1214); Ashley in  
Stapleton (1173); Cold Ashton (1167); Aust in Henbury (1167).  
Cold Ashton (1167); Aust in Henbury (1167).  
Baron Ragie (1208); Birton (1167); Bristol (1176, 1189); Buchover in Thornbury (1167),  
Charfield (1167, 1208); Clifton (1167, 1190, 1208); Cromhall (1176, 1188).  
Didmorton (1167); Dodogton (1167, 1176); Doynton (1167); Dyrham (1167).  
Earbott in Almondsbury and Alveston (1176, 1208); Easton in St. James and St. Philip  
and St. Jacob out-parishes, Bristol (1185); Elberton (1185); Elmstree in Tetbury (1208).  
Filton (1167, 1208, 1210, 1214); Frampton Cotterell (1167, 1208).  
Ham and Seone (1167); Hanham in Birton (1167, 1176); Hawkesbury (1167, 1187, 1199);  
Henbury (1162, 1167, 1189, 1208); Hill (1167, 1208); Hillesley in Hawkesbury (1167);  
Hope in Falfield (1167); Horfield (1208); Horton (1167, 1176, 1199).  
Ichington in Tytherington (1176).  
Kingrove in Old Sodbury (1199); Kingsweston in Henbury (1167, 1183); Kingwood near  
Wotton (1167, 1171).  
Latteridge in Iron Acton (1176).  
Mangotsfield (1167).  
North Hill in Thornbury (1167).  
Odlury on the Hill (1176); Okland in Birton (1176); Olveston (1167, 1176, 1208); Owe in  
Almondsbury (1167).  
Packlebarch (1167, 1185, 1187, 1199).  
Rangeworthy (1167); Rochampton (1208, 1210).  
Saxon (1176); Little Sodbury (1167, 1199); Old Sodbury (1167, 1172, 1180, 1183, 1199);  
Stankewes in Yate (1167); Stapleton (1185); Stoke Gifford (1167, 1208, 1210, 1214);  
Harry Stoke in Stoke Gifford (1167).  
Thornbury (1167, 1199, 1208); Tomnorton (1167, 1208); Tytherington (1176).  
Upton Chyney in Birton (1167, 1176).  
Wapley (1167, 1208); Wickwar (1167, 1199, 1208); Winterbourne (1167); Woolford in  
Thornbury (1167).  
Yate (1167, 1190, 1208).

**Appendix 2: Officials of Kingswood Forest**

(To save space, no detailed references or discussion are included).

**A. Foresters-in-fee:**

Richard Gansel, forester before 1166. Ranulf Gansel, forester ca 1155 - ca. 1175. Robert  
Gansel, forester ca. 1175 - ca. 1198. Richard son of Edwin, forester 1198 - 1213. Alex-  
ander de Kellaway, forester 1213-4. Roger de Berkeley, forester 1214-6. Hugh de Vironne,  
forester 1216-21. Bishop Parthulf, forester 1221-4. Richard son of Edwin, forester (restored)  
1224-8.

**B. Other forest officials:**

Peter Forester, ca. 1200. Thomas, parker of Alveston, 1208, 1214. Robert de Veim, *verdenor*  
of Alveston, 1214. Drogo Forester, 1219. Peter Croc, *verdenor*, 1223. Peter de Tockington,  
*verdenor*, 1223. William Wansel, *verdenor*, 1223. Jordan la Ware, *verdenor*, 1223. Geoffrey  
Forester, ca. 1230. Adam Forester, ca. 1237. Matthew the parker, ca. 1230-50.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

Cal. Co. R. *Calendar of Charter Rolls*  
Cal. Cl. R. *Calendar of Close Rolls*  
Cal. Pat. R. *Calendar of Patent Rolls*  
Gloucs. PN A.H. Smith, *The Place-Names of Gloucestershire* (4 vols, 1964).  
P.R. *Pipe Roll* (for the -th year of King -'s reign, published by the Pipe Roll  
Society).

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6. M. Sharp, *op. cit.*, pp.xlviii-1.
7. *Gloucs. PN*, vol. 2, p.257. *Hunterwas* (BCS 218, 278) has the same hidage as Char-  
field in DB. *Gloucs.* 74, 1: 'Hunterford' occurs as an alternative name for Charfield  
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14. G.B. Grundy, *loc. cit.*
15. *Introd. to the Hist. of W. Hunt, op. cit.*, pt. 1, no. 31; *Gloucs. PN*, vol. 3, p.33.
16. BCS 314. The bounds of Weston in this charter are complicated and I am grateful to  
Mr. M. Costen for discussing them with me. *Kyngeswade* seems to be somewhere  
between *Hida mude* (identifiable as Hide Wood in the Langridge Tithe Map (S.R.O.  
D/D/Rt 204), field no. 78, at ST 729700) and *olencambe* (almost certainly the same  
as *alencambe* in the N. Stoke charter (BCS 327) and identifiable as Coombs, South  
Coomb and Coomb Bottom in the Kelton Tithe Map (S.R.O. D/D/Rt 56), field nos.  
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since the preceding point in the bounds, *thow wice*, survived as 'Old Wick' in the  
Weston Tithe Map (S.R.O. D/D/Rt 471), field nos. 101-2. *Higway* is the next point  
after *thow wice*, which appears to be Upper Weston Farm at ST 729673.
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28. DB, *Gloucs.* 1, 14; J. Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p.313; *P.R.* 31 Hen. I, p.77.
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## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE KINGSWOOD AREA — A SURVEY TO A.D. 1700

by James Russell

The aim of this article is to summarise our current knowledge of the archaeology of the Kingswood area up to the end of the 17th century. No attempt has been made to deal with the later industrial archaeology of the area, most aspects of which have been adequately covered by recent books and articles. Similarly, with the exception of the ecclesiastical remains of the Anglo-Saxon period, lack of space has precluded any detailed discussion of the area's architectural heritage; descriptions of most major buildings will be found in the relevant volume of the *Buildings of England* series. The area's rich stock of vernacular buildings has yet to receive any detailed study; Mrs. Linda Hall's forthcoming monograph on Northavon houses should provide the framework within which such a study could be undertaken.

The area covered by this article comprises the six civil parishes making up the present administrative district of Kingswood — Bitton, Hanham, Kingswood, Mangotsfield, Oldland and Siston — together with two adjoining parishes to the east — Doynton and Wick and Abson. It should be noted that Hanham, Kingswood and Oldland were all carved out of Bitton parish in the 19th century, while other parochial boundaries were adjusted during the same period. This area, which measures some 9 km. from east to west and a maximum of 10 km. from north to south, is bounded on the west by the modern town of Kingswood, occupying the site of the medieval Kingswood Chase, on the east by the Cotswold escarpment and on the south by the R. Avon. In between lies a belt of undulating countryside dissected by the valleys of the Warmley and Siston Brooks and the R. Boyd.

The existing literature relating to the pre-industrial archaeology of the Kingswood area is not extensive. Much useful incidental information can still be gleaned from the county and parish histories of the 18th and 19th centuries. In particular H.T. Ellacombe's *Bitton*, published in 1881, remains invaluable as a judiciously compiled collection of source materials, including maps and plans. More recently, in addition to scattered papers in local archaeological journals, parish surveys of Hanham, Mangotsfield and Oldland have been produced by members of the Bristol and Avon Archaeological Research Group, while other fieldwork has been undertaken and published by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments and the County of Avon Planning Department. The present article is based on these published sources, together with the information contained in the County of Avon Sites and Monuments Record and fresh fieldwork carried out by the writer between 1978 and 1981 in collaboration with the late Mollie Ashley. In order to help locate the sites mentioned in this article, National Grid References of six or eight figures are given wherever appropriate; to save space the prefix "ST" has been omitted from these references.

### Prehistoric

Evidence for prehistoric occupation in the area covered by this survey is at present sparse, although in the absence of any sustained programme of intensive fieldwork it would be premature to conclude that this represents a genuine lack of early settlement. The earliest occupation site so far reported is that at Tog

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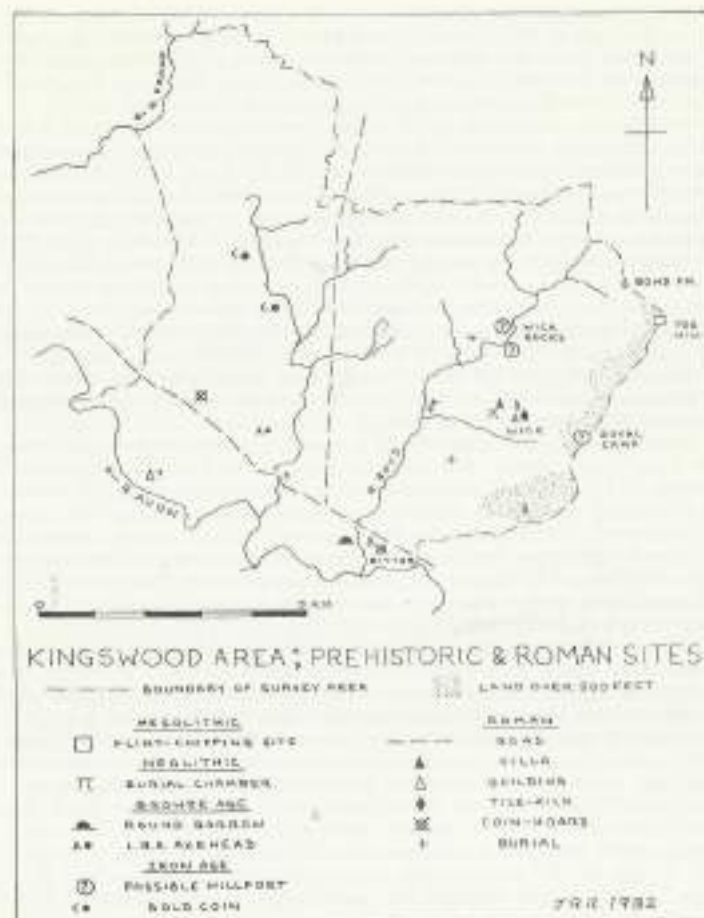
Hill, Doynton (737737 centre) where several thousand Mesolithic flint implements and waste flakes have been found spread over a wide area on the brow of the Cotswold escarpment (TBGAS, vol. 84, pp. 5-14). The Neolithic period and the Bronze Age are represented in the area by thinly scattered finds of flint implements, a socketed late Bronze Age axehead from California Road, Oldland (663715; TBGAS, vol. 76, pp. 148-9) and by two funerary structures – the chamber of an otherwise destroyed Neolithic long barrow at Coldharbour Farm, Wick (70607189) now reduced to two upright slabs of conglomerate (TBGAS, vol. 79, pt. 1, p. 94) and a large Early Bronze Age round barrow, fairly well preserved and apparently unexcavated, on Barrow Hill to the west of Bitton village (67806945; TBGAS, vol. 79, pt. 1, p. 104). The presence of these substantial monuments indicates that, around the Boyd Valley at least, permanent communities were becoming established from the 4th millennium B.C. onwards.

The only finds of the Pre-Roman Iron Age so far reported from the Kingswood area are three gold coins, discovered in recent years on the eastern edge of the town of Kingswood itself. The earliest, as yet unpublished, is a stater of "Clute" type, dating from ca. 50 – 20 B.C. The others are respectively of "British Bemic" type (663738; TBGAS, vol. 83, pp. 143-4) and of the Dobunnic ruler "Corio" (658747; TBGAS, vol. 90, p. 220). These three finds were made some distance apart, and there is no evidence that they were interrelated.

Several earthworks in the area have been claimed as the sites of Iron Age hillforts, but none are entirely convincing. The most likely candidate is the so-called "Royal Camp" on Freezing Hill, Doynton (722712) where a single bank and ditch runs for some 600 m. along the south-west edge of the hilltop, passing beneath the 17th - 18th century boundary bank of Tracy Park. This has been rejected by the Royal Commission as a hillfort site but is still tentatively regarded by them as of Iron Age date. It can probably be identified with an "caud dâc" mentioned in the Pucklechurch Charter of A.D. 950 (RCMM, pp. 45-6). To the west, in the Boyd Valley, 18th and 19th century antiquaries from Atkyns onwards thought that they could recognise ancient fortifications on either side of the river at Wick Rocks, where it passes through a steep-sided, winding gorge. The supposed fortification on the south-east bank, in Doynton parish (710730 approx.) seems to have been totally destroyed by quarrying by the end of the 18th century, leaving only placenames such as Bury House, Castles Wood and Oldbury Lane to testify to its former existence (RCMM, p. 45). On the north-west bank, in Wick parish (707734) the outline of the "noble Roman camp" described by 19th century writers (Warner, p. 343) can still be distinguished, with its apparent "double vallum" surviving at 70727330. Closer examination of the remaining earthworks suggests however that they may well be of geological origin, the product of outcropping limestone strata.

#### Roman

Virtually the only feature of the Roman period visible in the Kingswood landscape today is the line of the Roman road from Bath (*Aquae Sulis*) to Seamills (*Abonae*) which appears to be followed fairly closely through the parishes of Bitton, Oldland and Hanham by the modern A431. A second road has been postulated by the Ordnance Survey running from the junction of the A431 with Cherry Garden Lane (67257115) due north towards Gloucester (*Glouern*). The physical evidence for the existence of this road within Kingswood District is at present somewhat tenuous, consisting of little more than a straight



length of hedgerow between Warmley and Goose Greens (67477352 to 67507405) and an ill-defined hollow-way running up the hillside south-west of Lodge Farm (67577515).

In the western part of the Kingswood area evidence for Roman occupation is sparse. In Hanham tiles and pottery were found during the early 19th century when digging a well at Castle Inn Farm (64077074; Scarth, p. 125), while in 1934 a large Constantinian coin hoard was discovered at 64997208. In Oldland,



coins of Valentinian and Arcadius were found at Oldland Bottom in 1836 (Ellacombe, pp. 5, 267) while a fine freestone coffin from Willsbridge, unfortunately not closely provenanced, is now in Bristol City Museum. It has been suggested on etymological grounds that Oldland may have been the site of a Roman estate surviving into the Anglo-Saxon period.

Further east around the Boyd Valley a more coherent pattern of Roman settlement can be discerned. The village of Bitton, straddling the road from Bath to Seamills at the point where it crossed the Boyd, has in the past been identified with *Truxectus* ("ferry-crossing") a site mentioned in the 3rd century Antonine Itinerary. Numerous finds of Roman material, including pottery, tiles, tesserae and a small 4th century coin hoard, are said to have been made in the churchyard and adjoining vicarage garden in the early 19th century (Ellacombe, pp. 4-5). However, no further significant discoveries have been reported from the village, and the status of the settlement remains uncertain. A supposedly Roman rectangular earthwork on the north side of the village (682697) was shown by excavation in 1952 to be of medieval date (*TBGAS*, vol. 72, pp. 45-9). A so-called "Roman bath" of close-fitting lias slabs, found north-west of the village at Westover (678700) around 1862, must similarly be regarded with considerable suspicion (Ellacombe, p. 267; Scarth, pp. 125-6).

Bitton is only one of a number of known Roman sites on the eastern side of the Boyd Valley, spread out along the foot of the Cotswold escarpment at intervals of approximately 3 km. At Bowd Farm, in Doynton parish, (73057419), trial trenching in 1970 by Richard Kent produced pottery, flue tiles, painted wall plaster with floral decoration and a mid-4th century coin; air photographs indicate a rectangular structure in the area of the excavation. At Congrove, high on the slopes of Hanging Hill, east of Upton Cheyney (710700), a building associated with querns, pottery, coins and brooches was excavated in the mid-19th century (Scarth, p. 125).

The most important site in the valley, however, seems to have been that at Coldharbour Farm, Wick (70677192) where a villa of 13 to 14 rooms, lying within a two acre rectangular enclosure, was excavated in 1865 in the same field as the Neolithic burial chamber mentioned earlier (*PRNHAF* vol. 1, pp. 1-22). To the south-east of Coldharbour Farm, towards Tracy Park (71127141) casual 19th century excavation and subsequent surface fieldwork has revealed several buildings, a well and a probable tile-kiln, all almost certainly belonging to the villa estate (Scarth, p. 125). To the west of the villa, close to the R. Boyd (69367195) two late Roman burials in stone coffins were found in 1955; another, empty, coffin is reported from Naishcombe Hill to the north (70157320; *TBGAS*, vol. 75, pp. 193-9). Further stone coffins, probably Roman, are said to have been found in "Coffin Tynning", near Beach in Bitton parish (69807092; *RCHM*, pp. 16-17).

#### Anglo-Saxon

There is an almost total absence of historical evidence for the development of the Kingswood area during the Anglo-Saxon period, despite the fact that two events of national importance occurred immediately outside it — the Battle of Dyrham in 377 A.D., which opened the way for the Saxon colonisation of Gloucestershire, and the assassination of King Edmund I in 946 at his hunting lodge at Pucklechurch. A charter of 950 relating to Pucklechurch contains a long and detailed boundary survey which mentions a number of places in the present parishes of Wick and Doynton (Grundy, pp. 199-220). Otherwise the earliest

documentary source for the area is Domesday Book, which contains references to Bitton, Doynton, Hanham, Mangotsfield, Oldland and Sixon.

Known archaeological remains of the Saxon period are entirely confined to the churches of Bitton and Abson. Bitton Church (68206932), the centre of a large medieval parish which included the modern parishes of Hanham, Kingswood and Oldland, incorporates substantial parts of a late Saxon "minster" of seemingly exceptional size (Ellacombe, pp. 5-10; H.M. and J. Taylor, vol. 1, pp. 73-76). The Saxon church appears to have had a cruciform plan consisting of a nave and a chancel with north and south side chapels or "porticus" leading off the nave towards its eastern end. The nave, which was formerly 21 m. long and 8 m. wide, retains Saxon masonry in its north, south and east walls, the original western front having been removed to make way for the present 14th century tower.

In the north wall of the nave the entrance arch of the northern "porticus" survives almost intact, retaining its massive voussoirs and its jambs of long and short work. Foundations of the southern "porticus", extending beyond the present churchyard wall, were discovered during excavations in 1826. The chancel arch was completely rebuilt in 1843, but traces of the Saxon original can still be discerned around it. Rising from a string course above the arch into the roof timbers of the present nave can be seen the feet of a life-size "rood" or crucifix. An arm and the probable head of this imposing carving survive as loose fragments in the north chapel. Despite the excellent 19th century survey by Ellacombe, and a more recent reassessment of the Anglo-Saxon work by the Taylors, much remains to be discovered concerning Bitton Church; the length and height of the Saxon nave are still open to dispute, as is the method by which the eastern end of the nave with its massive rood was adequately lighted. Few churches in the Bristol area could benefit more from a controlled programme of archaeological research such as has been recently carried out at Deerhurst.

Compared with Bitton, the Saxon work at Abson (70546485) is of minor importance. The church itself, formerly a dependant chapel of Pucklechurch, is entirely post-conquest, dating from the late 12th century onwards. Built into the exterior of the south wall, however, are two fragments of a 9th century freestone cross. They consist of the inverted upper portion of the cross-shaft with a relief panel showing a bird entangled in interlaced, and an arm of the cross itself, again with interlaced decoration. The robustly carved but curiously lugubrious phallic figure high on the east wall of the church is generally considered to be of post-conquest date, although its posture has in the past been somewhat naively compared with that of the well-known angels at Bradford-on-Avon (*TBGAS*, vol. 55, pp. 266, 270).

#### Medieval and Later

By far the most striking topographical feature of the Kingswood area between the 11th and 17th centuries was undoubtedly the great royal hunting-ground known originally as Furches (or Gallows) Wood and later as Kingswood Chase. The somewhat obscure early history of the Chase and of the much larger "forest of Horwood" of which it originally formed part is dealt with elsewhere in this journal and will not be discussed further here. The topography of the Chase, as established by the mid-13th century, is clearly delineated in a well-known sketch map of 1610 (Ellacombe, pl. 8). Sandwiched between the Rivers Frome and Avon, it consisted of an area of waste and woodland some 4.5 km. square, traversed from east to west by the eastern approach roads to Bristol. As late as



1610 the Chase area contained few man-made landmarks other than these roads and a hunting lodge situated on high ground close to its centre, near the site of the present Cosham Hospital (643745 approx.)

Surrounding the Chase on its eastern side was a network of greens and commons, the largest surviving examples of which are Siston Common and Rodway Hill, Mangotsfield. These commons, together with the blocks of enclosed and cultivated land between them, seem to represent piecemeal colonisation of the early medieval forest area. At Syston Hill Farm (66317503), adjoining and overlooking Siston Common, is a rectangular earthwork consisting of up to three concentric banks and ditches enclosing a central area 30m. square. This is almost certainly of medieval date and was probably used for rounding up animals grazing on the adjacent common. A similar square cattle enclosure, close to the former Oldland Common, can be seen at Barry Road, Bitton (67557084). (Fig. 2).

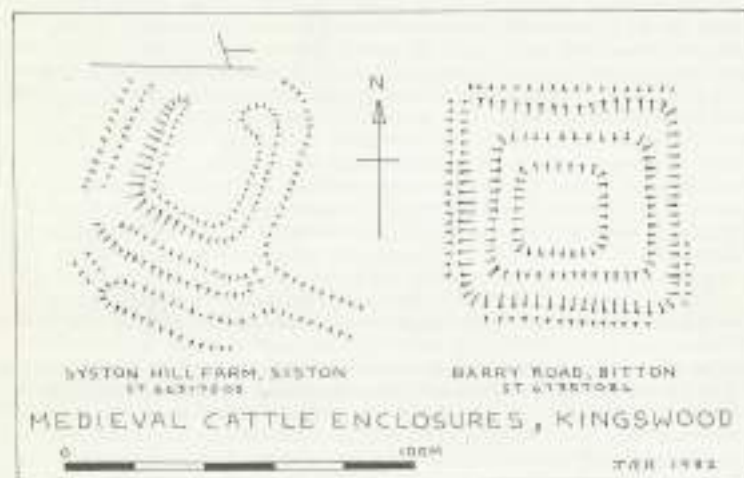


Fig. 2. Medieval cattle enclosures at Syston and Bitton.

In the western part of the Kingswood area medieval settlement seems for the most part to have been scattered around the fringes of the greens and commons; only in the eastern parishes of Bitton and Doynton does one find nucleated village centres of any size. Over the centuries various shifts and shrinkages have taken place in the dispersed settlement pattern of the western parishes. A good example of this is the "lost" hamlet of "Churebley" on the boundary between Siston and Wick parishes, for which there is little documentary evidence after about 1440. Slight earthworks in a field called "Chapel Hayes" on Chesley Hill north-east of Bridgegate Common (68607335) may be connected with this settlement and its chapel of St. Bartholomew, ruins of which survived into the 18th century (Rudder, p. 212). Other earthworks probably representing deserted house sites can be seen north of Hanham Green Lane (64717057) and south of

Hanham Court (64906995), where remains of at least three stone-based structures survive on a spur overlooking the R. Avon.

The Kingswood area contains a number of major surviving houses dating wholly or partly from before 1700. They include the Grange at Bitton (68206929), Tracy Park, Doynton (71357187), Hanham Court (64947027), Hanham Hall (64427160), Rodway Manor, Mangotsfield (66357583), Siston Court (68677536) and Wick Court (70067268). An important house which has now almost entirely disappeared is Barrs Court, Oldland (65887203), the home of the Newton family from 1485 to ca. 1730. While the mansion itself, which in its final form seems to have been similar in appearance to Siston Court, was totally destroyed by Sir Michael Newton around 1740, the splendid rectangular moat which partly surrounded it survives rather forlornly in the centre of a new housing estate. A ruined farmhouse on the north side of the moated enclosure may have incorporated parts of the manor house outbuildings (*AP* vol. 2, pp. 5-12).

Associated with several of these Kingswood manor houses are the less conspicuous remains of fishponds, rabbit-warrens and deer parks. Despite, or perhaps because of, the proximity of Kingswood Chase there is little evidence for medieval deer parks in the area covered by this survey. The only definite example known is that at Siston, a licence for which was granted to Robert Walerand in 1252 (*Cal. Cb. R.*, vol. 1, p. 415). Its exact location and boundaries are at present uncertain, although it most probably lay in the area between Siston Court and the 17th century Lodge Farm (67647526). Other parks in the area all seem to be of post-medieval origin; at Barrs Court, for instance, the 95 acre park surrounding the moated mansion is described as "new-made" in a deed of 1661 (*AP*, vol. 2, p. 8). A small park to the east of Hanham Court is shown on an estate map of 1670 (Ellacombe, pl. 10). Probably also of 17th century origin is the best surviving park in the area, Tracy Park at Doynton. This is divided into two parts, the 18th - early 19th century landscaped park around the house, with its ornamental plantations and imposing gateways, and the "Old Park" to the east, running up the steep slopes of Freezing Hill and surrounded by a low bank planted with magnificent beech trees. The south-east boundary of the "Old Park", running along the crest of the Cotswold escarpment, forms a striking landmark visible from every part of the Kingswood area.

A good example of a manorial rabbit warren, referred to in Court proceedings of 1628 and a survey of 1783 (Jones, pp. 99, 180), can be seen on Rodway Hill, Mangotsfield (66307560), close to the early 16th century manor house of the Berkeley family (Fig. 3). Remains survive of at least three long earthen banks or "pillow mounds" thrown up to facilitate burrowing in the rocky subsoil. Another, even better preserved group of pillow mounds can be found on Siston Common, 1 km. to the South of Rodway Hill (66437447). Set on a west-facing slope, it consists of three mounds, two rectangular and one circular, all surrounded by well-defined drainage ditches; the southernmost mound is partly overlain by the embankment of the 1832 Avon and Gloucestershire Tramroad. Other, similar mounds on the Common are said to have been levelled in the 1930s. Little is at present known of the history and associations of the Siston Common Warren; the existing pillow mounds appear to be of late 17th or early 18th century date.

The most elaborate and well preserved group of medieval fishponds in the Kingswood area is to be found at Court Close to the north of Doynton parish church (72047418). This consists of a complex of embanked ponds and tanks,

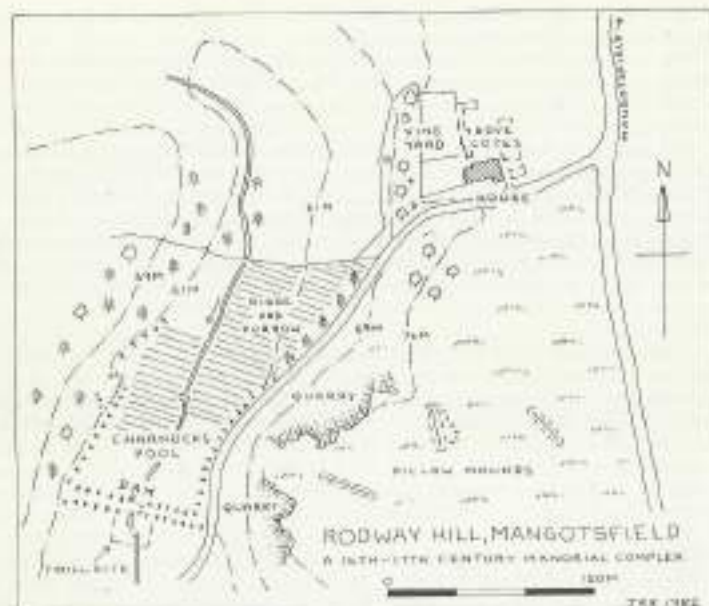


Fig. 3. Rodway Hill, Mangotsfield: a 16th-17th century manorial complex.

originally fed by two converging tributaries of the R. Boyd (AP, vol. 1, pp. 34-5). Almost as impressive, though less technically sophisticated, are the remains of the huge Charnocks or Charnells pool north of Rodway Hill (66127370), constructed by Lord Thomas Berkeley in the early 16th century (Fig 3). Parts of the massive earthen dam built to contain the pond can still be seen, although a contemporary mill located immediately outside the dam has entirely vanished. It is recorded that in March 1537, during a Berkeley family feud, the dam was broken down and the pond drained by Sir Nicholas Poyntz and a gang of armed retainers (Jones, pp. 111-112). Like most of the Kingswood fishponds the Charnocks pool has long been permanently drained; traces of narrow ridge-and-furrow indicate post-medieval cultivation of the rich soils in its base. Other, smaller fishponds of the same type as Charnocks pool formerly existed at Bares Court (66007202) and Doynton (72607400; AP vol. 1, pp. 34-5); another example, still water-filled, survives north of Hanham Court (64927041).

The present town of Kingswood, which covers virtually the whole of the medieval Chase, is almost entirely the product of 18th and 19th century development. The process of industrialisation which gave rise to modern Kingswood had however begun long before 1700. From the 13th century onwards there are references to coal-mining within the Chase (VCH, vol. 2, p. 265) as well as to stone-quarrying and the extraction of clay for pottery. In 1478 the Bristol antiquary William Worcester was patronising a potter working at Hanham (Harvey, pp. 76-7). A survey made by John Norden in 1610 shows that by then

the potentialities of the Chase as a hunting ground were being rapidly extinguished by uncontrolled exploitation of its mineral resources (Braine, pp. 58-60). By 1681 it was estimated that at least 2000 coal pits had been opened within the Chase area (Jones, p. 22). These early mines were shallow shafts or "bell-pits" with none of the elaborate surface structures of later collieries. Normally these early workings are revealed only by their accidental collapse or during building operations; on Siston Common, however, the top of a "bell-pit", marked by a small ring of spoil can be seen north of the group of pillow-mounds described above (66457448), while to the east on Webbs Heath (681738) two grass-grown, barrow-like spoil heaps may also be of early date.

The expansion of the Kingswood mining industry during the 17th century was accompanied by the building of numerous "squatters" cottages, spread across the open expanse of the Chase in a completely haphazard manner which is still reflected in the irregular street pattern of the modern town. On Siston Common widely scattered groups of 18th and 19th century houses, successors to the ephemeral shacks of the original miners, give some idea of the appearance of this early industrial landscape. Sandwiched between modern, urban Kingswood and the still essentially rural landscape of Siston parish, the Common is, for the writer, one of the most evocative locations in the Kingswood area, epitomising a district rich in scenic contrasts and under-explored archaeological potential.

#### Acknowledgements

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#### Abbreviations

AP	Avon Past.
Cal.Ch.R.	Calendar of Chester Rolls.
PENHAFPC	Proceedings, Bath Natural History and Antiquaries Field Club.
RCM	Royal Commission on Historic Monuments, Iron Age and Romano-British Monuments in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds (1976).
TRGAS	Transactions, Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society.
VCH	Victoria County History, Gloucestershire.

#### Other References

A. Braine	History of Kingswood Forest (1891).
H.T. Ellacombe	History of the Parish of Biton (1881).
G.B. Grundy	Saxon Charters and Field Names of Gloucestershire (1936).
J.H. Harvey	William Worcester, Bimerian (1969).
A.E. Jones	Our Parish, Mangotsfield (1899).
S. Rudder	A New History of Gloucestershire (1779).
H.M. Searby	Aquae Solis (1864).
H.M. & J. Taylor	Anglo-Saxon Architecture, vols. 1, 2 (1965).
D. Verey	Buildings of England, Gloucestershire, vol. 2 (1970).
R. Warner	Excursions from Bath (1801).



## THE KINGSWOOD COLLIERIES IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

by Robert W. Malcolmson

The exercise of established authority in eighteenth century England was not only subtle and complex, it was also very uneven in its impact and effectiveness. In some parts of the country authority was unchallenged and securely enforced; in other areas it was tenuous and often ineffectual. Everywhere some men had the legal right, reinforced by economic strength, to rule over other men, but the actual effectiveness of such authority in any particular place depended on a multiplicity of local circumstances.

In one type of community — perhaps a small market town or a dominant squire's parish — we detect evidence of firm social discipline, outward deference, and quiescence; in other places we uncover a social reality of dissent, frequent social conflict, and plebeian independence. Perhaps for some localities the image of a hierarchical social order, smoothly functioning and almost universally accepted — an image which some historians have espoused — is accurate enough; however, for other localities — the eastern parts of London, some fenland communities, numerous industrial towns and villages, many recent settlements in forests and on wastelands — this image is patently inadequate.

For in many parts of England the formal institutions of power were neither deeply rooted nor widely respected; the populations of these places were partly withdrawn from, and sometimes resistant to, the exercise of "lawful" authority. These, in short, were areas which had not been fully colonized by the nobility and gentry: official authority was weak, plebeian independence was prominent and relatively unconstrained. And it is clear that one of the least deferential districts in eighteenth century England was the Forest (or Chase) of Kingswood in Gloucestershire.

Although popular "lawlessness" in the eighteenth century occurred in many different localities and involved a variety of occupational groups, it is clear that some types of locality were more prone to disturbances than others, and that some groups of labouring people were especially inclined to challenge certain actions of established authority. Throughout the country at large, forest regions appear to have been particularly notorious for their unruliness; by common repute they were thought to be amongst the most lawless parts of seventeenth and eighteenth century England. In the forests of the country, whether still wooded or not, settled arable agriculture had not taken root; consequently, although the game of the forests was protected by law, there had been no economic basis for gentlemen, farmers, and ecclesiastics to impose their characteristic imprints of permanence (manor houses, substantial farmsteads, churches) on local society. The exercise of parochial authority — in the form of resident gentlemen and prosperous tenant farmers, church discipline, a manorial court, a select vestry — was either non-existent or very weakly felt. The forest-dwellers, as a result, were relatively unconstrained by the immediate presence of institutional authority and only minimally involved in any relations of clientage with members of the governing class. They subsisted by a variety of (often makeshift) devices; they were able to fashion their own distinctive modes of existence; and their culture and conduct were often sharply in conflict with the imperatives of the established order around them. Gentlemen complained of them often — because of their religious nonconformity, their persistent unruliness, and their apparent disrespect for the law of the land.

Just as forest regions had acquired a clear notoriety, so too men of certain occupations had become noted for their independent habits, and among these the coalminers of England were probably the most prominent. Colliers are well represented in the documentation concerning eighteenth century popular protests, ranging from the numerous accounts of industrial disputes in Durham and Northumberland to the bulky files of evidence which relate to years of food riots.

On these latter occasions colliers frequently played leading roles in trying to force the local magistrates to ensure "just" prices, or in taking over the marketplace, or in compelling farmers to bring provisions to market, or in preventing the export of grain from their own localities. An inspection of the evidence bearing on the widespread price disturbances in 1740 and 1756-57, for instance, leaves little doubt as to the prominence of colliers as well-disciplined activists in the cause of "redressing" popular grievances. From almost all parts of the country where coal was dug — Somerset, the Forest of Dean, Wales, the West Midlands, Tyneside — there are frequent reports of popular disturbances involving miners (and the tanners of Cornwall might justifiably be added to the list).

Miners had a strong sense of corporate identity and were able to mobilize their forces for collective actions with particular effectiveness. They lived in communities which were culturally and sometimes physically isolated; they lived apart from other men — partly cut off from ordinary life by the blackness of their skin, the mysteriousness of their underground places of work, the peculiarities of their manners — and they depended very much on their own resources, sharing a distinctive and dangerous working environment. Their distance from others helped to draw them closely together; their social solidarities were highly developed, they were well disciplined, and they were re-





solute. When they had grievances the colliers of England were certainly a force to be reckoned with.

Both of these themes – the unwilliness of forests and the corporate solidarities of miners – come together in this essay, for Kingswood Chase, a partly deforested region which was occupied principally by colliers, was certainly one of the most unmanageable areas of eighteenth century England. Kingswood, indeed, gained a reputation for independence and rebelliousness which few other areas could match. John Wesley, who first came in contact with the district in March of 1739, wrote in November of that year of the notoriety of its colliers: "Few persons have lived long in the West of England who have not heard of the colliers of Kingswood: a people famous, from the beginning hitherto, for neither fearing God nor regarding man".<sup>1</sup> The reputation seems to have been justly earned. During the reign of George II the colliers were involved in numerous incidents of popular protest; on several occasions the city of Bristol was thrown into turmoil by their interventions; and as a result of their disposition for collective action, troops and the local authorities were often kept busy in the defence of the law. One student of popular protest during the early Hanoverian decades has claimed that the Kingswood colliers were "the rioters par excellence of the period" – "the most prominent rioters in the country over the period 1714-54".<sup>2</sup>

Kingswood Chase, covering some 3,400 acres, included parts of four parishes directly to the east of Bristol: St. Philip and Jacob (later to become the parish of St. George), Bitton, Stapleton and Mangotsfield. The whole Kingswood area, as well as several parishes immediately to the north, east and south of the forest, abounded in coal, much of which was readily obtainable at or near the surface of the ground. The city of Bristol was almost entirely dependent on the region for its supply of fuel, both for domestic and industrial uses; the local industries included copper and brass works, distilleries, glass-houses, and sugar refineries, all large consumers of coal. The control of the chase was for many years a matter of dispute between the Crown and the large local landowners; these manorial lords gradually appropriated most of the forest (and especially its mineral resources) for their own use and successfully resisted the claims which various officials and patentees of the Crown attempted to exercise. (The indiscriminating designation of the area by contemporaries – it was sometimes called a chase, sometimes a forest – was a reflection, perhaps, of the erosion of any clear sense of a special royal presence).

By the end of the seventeenth century almost all of the deer were gone, much of the wood had been destroyed, and the royal rights were in practice defunct.<sup>3</sup> During the early eighteenth century the forest was divided into four main private "Liberties", each controlled by a powerful family: the Chesters, the Berkeleys, the Newtons and the Payers.<sup>4</sup> The profits from their mineral "rights" were reputedly very substantial, and thanks in part to this wealth, two of the lords, Norborne Berkeley (1717-70) and Thomas Chester (1696-1763), served for long periods as M.P.s for Gloucestershire. The actual coal workings were leased out to master colliers, sometimes known as the "adventurers of the coal mines". A few of these men were substantial entrepreneurs, many were small, and some of them worked in partnerships; these adventurers had charge of hiring the labour required for their pits. About 70 pits were being operated in the later seventeenth century,<sup>5</sup> and most of these coal workings were organized on a relatively small scale. The lords normally received around one-eighth to one-fifth of the value of the coal which was raised.<sup>6</sup>

In the early modern period the uncultivated forests and wastelands of England were among the principal centres of immigration and rapid population growth, and Kingswood certainly conformed to this pattern. These migrants were attracted to the chase by the easy availability of land (they often took it by straightforward encroachment), by *de facto* common rights for their animals, and by the possibility of industrial employment. By the late seventeenth century a large number of cottages had been erected in Kingswood; around 300 would seem to be a reasonable estimate, though one source suggests almost 500. The majority of Kingswood's inhabitants probably depended directly on the coal-workings for their living, either as actual miners or as "hosedrivers" – that is, as drivers of the horses which carried coal to Bristol. (The roads east of Bristol were heavily used for the carriage of coal; in 1698, when passing through Kingswood, that indefatigable traveller, Celia Fiennes, "was met with a great many horses passing and returning laden with coals dug just thereabout").<sup>7</sup> One observer in 1672 reported that Kingswood contained a "multitude of coal pits, and was stuffed with cottagers and alehouses, and overlaid with horses for carrying coal" to Bristol.<sup>8</sup> In 1722 a local resident noted that "the cottages multiply greatly every year in Kingswood",<sup>9</sup> and there is no doubt that the population was growing very rapidly in the area. By the end of the eighteenth century it was said that the colliers' houses were so numerous "that Kingswood has from the neighbouring hills the appearance of being one vast, rural suburb of Bristol."<sup>10</sup>

This, then, is the basic social background of Kingswood: but what about its reputed unwilliness? There were already complaints about the character of Kingswood's squatter-inhabitants shortly after the Restoration. It was said in 1667 that large numbers of cottagers were settling in the Chase "without leave .... and generally live there without government or conformity in idleness and dissoluteness", and that they were not "responsible to any Civil officer or Minister for their behaviour or Religion". (There was no church in the forest until the 1750s, and the impact of civil parochial controls seems to have been extremely weak). The people of Kingswood, according to these representations, were "of all persuasions living in a lawless manner, almost every Cottage selling Ale without Licence & keeping what rule they please and never going to Church & in pilfering and stealing". As a result of these depredations it was said that the main road between Bath and Bristol "is become very insecure to Travellers and so are ye goods and houses to the adjacent Inhabitants".<sup>11</sup> Here, it seems, was a group of men very much withdrawn from the normal means of social discipline; established authority was likely to be significantly limited in the ways in which it could deal with such people.

The looseness of social discipline in Kingswood probably accounts for the area's apparent attractiveness as a haven for a variety of criminals. Forest regions tended to provide the sort of cover of obscurity which was an inescapable fact of life when faces, habits, topography and social relations were not well known to gentlemen and magistrates; and such obscurity – physical and social – must have been an active encouragement to those who perceived the rewards of living outside the law. "Criminality" in Kingswood is only documented in a fragmentary way, but the evidence which exists is worth reporting. Poaching had long been common in the area, and until the deer disappeared, guns and hunting dogs were kept, along with ferrets, nets, and snares; sheep-stealing may also have been practised.<sup>12</sup> There are passing references to robberies, two of which suggest the existence of an organized criminal community in Kingswood. In April 1738 a



collier who was awaiting execution for horse-stealing, and who confessed to stealing 35 horses, revealed the activities of a gang of thieves working out of Kingswood, he also declared that there were "several Coiners among the Colliers", exposing two of them by name. Numerous Kingswood coiners, according to this report, had been discovered and prosecuted a few years earlier, though some had succeeded in avoiding arrest.<sup>13</sup> In early 1749, when two Kingswood colliers were committed to prison for various robberies, it was said that around 30 other colliers were "concern'd in divers other Burglaries and Felonies ....., several of whom have absconded from their Dwellings." This "gang" was referred to again a few months later.<sup>14</sup> Two Kingswood colliers were executed for highway robbery in March 1741; and in April 1750 a man who had several warrants against him, and who was briefly apprehended in Bristol, was described as "the noted Thom. Summers of Kingswood".<sup>15</sup> Kingswood was conveniently situated, not only for the robbery both of the neighbouring estates and of the travellers who were obliged to pass through the chase on their journeys to and from Bristol, but also for the sort of crime which depended on the existence of a nearby populous and wealthy city — and Bristol was virtually on its doorstep. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries parts of Kingswood were notorious for their organized criminality and special measures had to be taken to deal with the problem.<sup>16</sup>

There is, then, considerable evidence which suggests that Kingswood was, to a remarkable degree, a territory beyond the effective control of the local authorities in both Bristol and south-east Gloucestershire. The law could not be fully enforced in the chase and the colliers were often able to behave more or less as they pleased, sometimes in opposition to "lawful authority"; and with little fear of punitive retribution. In 1729 a condemned man was ordered to be executed in Bath and his body hung in chains outside the city; but the colliers, for reasons which are not revealed, "rose in a Body & swore he [would] never be hang'd there; whereupon he was conveyed to Wells and there executed in the most private Manner."<sup>17</sup> Official interventions in Kingswood were infrequent, and when one such intervention did succeed it was a matter for public comment. In July 1739 a Sheriff's execution was levied "upon one William Hains of Kingswood, without the least Obstruction. This may be deem'd a great Favour, no Officer having within the Memory of the oldest Man Living, been able to effect an Undertaking of this Nature in so peaceable a Manner."<sup>18</sup> The early Methodist preachers, who began their evangelizing mission in Kingswood in 1739, were unanimous in viewing the colliers as a "neglected" people, withdrawn from any civilizing influences, and thus especially suitable for spiritual ministrations. By the mid 1720s it seems that the colliers had already acquired a reputation for a strong sense of corporate identity and effective collective action, for in the winter of 1726-27, at a time when there were serious industrial disturbances in the Wiltshire woollen towns, it was reported that some of the riotous weavers had been sent "to invite the Kingswood Colliers to their assistance".<sup>19</sup> The colliers must have already engaged in some actions which had allowed them to gain such a reputation, though because of the thinness of the evidence we have no clear picture of their conduct during the early years of the eighteenth century. It is only with the accession of George II in 1727 that the evidence on the colliers becomes fairly abundant, and it is this evidence which allows us to examine the nature of their relations with the established authorities, and the patterns of interaction between those entrusted with enforcing the law and a body of men who had their own ideas about the law, its legitimacy,

and how it should operate.

A prolonged period of often intense conflict between the colliers and the established authorities began in 1727 with the passage of two Acts which affected the roads leading east from Bristol. In late February two petitions were presented to the House of Commons, one from the corporation and merchants of Bristol concerning the roads leading out of their city, and one from some gentlemen in the Chippenham area concerning that part of the London to Bristol road which ran between Studley Bridge in Wiltshire and Toghill in Doynton, Gloucestershire, leading directly to Bristol through Kingswood. Both petitions complained of the bad conditions of the local roads and pointed to the need for special measures to keep them in better repair.<sup>20</sup> The result, as expected, was two turnpike Acts, both of which received royal assent on April 24th. The Bristol Act (13 George 1, c. 12) allowed tolls to be levied on twelve roads leading out of Bristol, six of which ran through or near the coalfields to the east of the city. Every horse or mule was liable to a toll of one penny, though animals carrying coal were to pay only a half-penny apiece; the Studley Bridge-Toghill Act (13 George 1, c. 13) allowed no such reduced rate for carriers of coal. Each Act appointed a large number of trustees to manage the affairs of their respective turnpikes, presumably in an effort to mobilize as much support as possible for the new enterprises: the Bristol Act named 146 individuals, the Studley Bridge-Toghill Act 62, almost all of the trustees were gentlemen of substance in their own localities.

The colliers of the Bristol region wasted no time in demonstrating their opposition to these new impositions. On the first day for the collection of the tolls, June 26th, the colliers of Kingswood, along with some from Brislington in Somerset, another mining community just south-west of Kingswood, "assembled in a Body, and pulled down 4 of [the turnpikes] ... some of which they set on Fire, and some they threw into the River: That at Totterdown, in the Bath Road, being erected again, they went the next Day to view it, and finding it not done to their Minds, demolisht it again the second time, and swear, they'll bring no Coal into the City, nor suffer any Turnpikes in their Roads till they are exempted from paying Toll".<sup>21</sup>

The rioters were estimated to number about a thousand by one report, "some hundreds" by the major of Bristol. They continued to destroy the turnpike gates during the following week, letting it be known that they would allow none to stand. On one occasion, to demonstrate their determination and sense of grievance, and presumably hoping to intimidate the authorities, the Kingswood colliers marched through Bristol "with Clubs and Staves in a noisy manner"; according to Bristol's mayor they "Committed no violence here Tho I am persuaded had any opposition been made the Consequence would have been fatal." In response to their refusal to deliver coal to Bristol, the city government felt obliged to send to Wales for special supplies. The Kingswood colliers, said the mayor, "are a set of ungovernable people violent in their way, and regardless of Consequences." On July 4th troops were sent in pursuit of some colliers who had just cut down a gate and four prisoners were taken. The colliers, who were regarded by many Bristolians as "desperate Fellows", threatened to come and pull down the jail where the prisoners were held; there was talk of the citizens arming in their own defence, a picket guard was posted at the Guildhall, and patrols were despatched to watch the borders of Kingswood.<sup>22</sup>

By mid July the colliers were in a more subdued temper, largely because no



attempt was being made to reconstruct the turnpikes near Bristol, and deliveries of coal to the city were resumed. Some of the gates further afield were still standing, but later in July and early in August several of these were also destroyed, including at least two on the road leading from Toghill through Marshfield to Chippenham, erected under the Act of 13 George 1, c. 13. Some of the rioters were disguised, "being dress'd in Women's Cloaths and high crown'd Hats."<sup>23</sup> It was rumoured in October that the Bristol turnpike commissioners were intending to set up eleven new gates in place of those destroyed, but there is no evidence that these plans were ever realized. In May 1728 it was said that at Marshfield the turnpike gate had been cut down at least half a dozen times and that "now they are oblig'd to hire Six or Seven Soldiers at a time, to guard the said Turnpike Day and Night; which is a great Expence".<sup>24</sup>

How can one account for this vehement popular hostility to turnpikes? On one level the colliers were clearly acting to resist a new and unpopular form of taxation. It was reported that they "thought themselves aggrieved by being made to pay the Turnpikes, being excused in other Places; and their Cry is, K. George and no Turnpike."<sup>25</sup> They must have been aware, then, of the more attractive provisions in some other Acts: the Bath Turnpike Act of 1708, for instance, specifically exempted the carriage of coal from paying tolls (6 Anne c. 42, sect. 17). But there was more to the colliers' grievances than simple dislike of a new tax. Indeed, one gets a reasonably clear idea of the broader context of their resentment from a document which was sent to the Bristol Trust, entitled "The Colliers Letter to the Turnpike", dated 3 July 1727 from Kingswood and signed "We Colliers of Kings-Wood". First, they complained about the power given to the trustees by 13 George 1, c. 12 to remove furze and heath from any common lands, for road repairs, without paying for them. The concern here was for the preservation of their commons and the sustenance derived from them: furze bushes, for instance, might be useful, not only for firing, but also for pasturage and shelter for livestock. (Much later, in October 1776, when Arthur Young was travelling through the Forest of Dean, another Gloucestershire forest in which coal was dug, he noted that "the colliers in winter get young furze, chop it in a trough, and give it to their horses with great success."<sup>26</sup>) Second, the Kingswood colliers alleged that the bad condition of the roads was partly a consequence of various forms of abuse of these roads by the local land-owners, most of whom were now turnpike trustees, and their tenants. (The poor state of the English roads at this time resulted in part from the increase of wheeled traffic — that is, traffic mostly of and for wealthy people; and turnpikes were particularly intended to better facilitate wheeled travel and transport, an objective which would have meant little to the colliers, whose main concern was the carriage of coal by horse). Third, and perhaps most important, the colliers complained that these poor road conditions were a consequence of the failure of the magistrates to enforce the existing laws for repairing the roads; these men of substance were accused, in short, of having neglected to act properly in accordance with the authority and responsibility which was vested in them as justices. As the colliers' letter put it, "by the Omission of your Duty, and your Carelessness and Over sight, you have lost your Honourable Magistracy, and brought your self under the reproach of a Turnpike". The supposed "necessity" for imposing road tolls was felt, then, to stem from the previous failure of the authorities to behave responsibly; and the so-called "riots" in which the colliers had been involved were represented by them as forms of corrective action, conduct which was intended to set things right — the colliers likened their

actions to efforts to put out a fire which had been "wilfully kindled" by others.<sup>27</sup>

There was a strong sense in all this that the colliers regarded the initiatives of the turnpike promoters as patently illegitimate and dishonourable and their own reactions to these initiatives as entirely proper and reasonable. They may have objected to the fact that the Bristol Act specifically stated that all persons who had been previously chargeable for the repair of the roads now to be turnpiked would remain liable for such costs and duties in the future: in short, while new burdens were being introduced, old ones were continued. Moreover, turnpike trusts normally involved the transference of some of the costs of road repairs and upkeep from the landowners (who were assessed for highway rates) to the road users, and this was unlikely to please working people who were as heavily implicated in road transport as were the Kingswood colliers and coal-carriers. (Pedestrians were seldom, if ever, liable for road tolls, and this helps to explain the absence of popular opposition to turnpikes in many other parts of England). The colliers certainly thought poorly of the motives of those whom they addressed, in the singular, as "Mr. Turnpike". They recited a short verse apropos the recent interest in turnpikes:

"Now Turnpikes are grown much in Fashion  
The hardest Tax in all our Nation —  
For where Wine & Women & Stock-jobbing past,  
The Turnpike must help us at Last —"

The turnpike Act they saw as "a thing clandestinely purchas'd" and the trustees as men needing pointed instruction as to their social duties:

"So Mr. Turnpike, we most humbly beg you, when you Purchase another Act of Parliament against the Colliers, not to put any Latin in it; one thing more we would desire of you, that you would lay out all the Money that you have got by the Turnpike — in Catechismas, which you may have for two pence a piece, and give one to every one of those whose name are quoted between the 8th and 13 pages of your Act [i.e., the trustees], and by that they may Learn to do their Duty in that State of Live unto the which it shall please God to call them."

This sense of the illegitimacy of turnpike tolls may have supported the belief which was attributed to them by one witness, who said that their "pretence" for destroying turnpikes was "that there was no Act of Parliament for Turnpikes in those Parts, for that the King had not set his Hand to it."<sup>28</sup> The King, the defender of justice and moral authority, could not, in some eyes, have sanctioned such acts against his people. The colliers were not rebelling against authority *per se*. In fact, they may have regarded themselves as perfectly loyal Englishmen, for they concluded their letter by acknowledging that "we remain our Gracious King's Subjects untill Death". Their complaint was against authority which had not fulfilled the people's expectations of it, and which needed to be reminded of its duties.

The local authorities, as one would expect, did not take kindly to these popular interventions in the cosy world of oligarchical rule. On 30 September 1727 a letter was sent to the Duke of Newcastle, signed by eight Gloucestershire gentlemen, at least seven of whom were turnpike trustees, complaining of "the Violent Outrages of several licentious Persons (particularly our Coleworkers) who have held unwarrantable Assemblies and committed great Riots and Disorders in pulling down the Turnpikes which at no small Expence were Erected on the Roads leading from Bristol", and seeking advice on how to handle the



situation and deter such "disorders" in the future.<sup>29</sup> Little headway was made in apprehending or punishing any of the rebellious colliers, as these correspondents admitted. The prisoners who were tried at the 1727 summer Assizes in Gloucester were acquitted, and subsequent and apparently determined efforts by the Bristol authorities to prosecute some of the colliers were unsuccessful. This failure cost the corporation almost £125 in legal expenses.<sup>30</sup> One problem facing the authorities was that it was unclear, at least to some gentlemen, under what statute such hostile acts against turnpikes could be successfully prosecuted. The Acts of 13 George I, c.13 included a clause providing for a fine of 10 shillings for the destruction of toll bars, though the Bristol Act included no such provision. As a result of this uncertainty and the concern about the lack of a serious deterrent, on 9 May 1728 the Studley Bridge-Toghill trustees petitioned Parliament for a law which would provide a more effective punishment for the destruction of turnpikes.<sup>31</sup> The result, less than three weeks later, was an Act (1 George II, c.19) which allowed, for the first offence, a jail sentence of three months and a public whipping, and for the second offence, transportation for seven years. This statute was a direct result of the events around Bristol in the previous summer.

The other direct result of the colliers' actions was an amendment to the Bristol Turnpike Act. Little, if any, progress was made in repairing the roads leading out of Bristol. The new Act which was obtained in 1731 (4 George II, c.22) introduced some administrative changes in the management of the Trust's roads, intended to allow the gentry more effective control over the turnpikes which ran through their own localities; and it included a clause which exempted animals bearing coal from paying tolls. One (though only one) of the colliers' grievances, then, had been satisfied, though the toll on coal remained in force on the road from Chippenham through Marshfield which met the Bristol turnpike at Toghill, just east of Kingswood.

Armed with this new Act, in late June 1731 the trustees began to re-erect toll-gates on the roads leading out of Bristol. The colliers, however, along with some of "the country people", took immediate action to oppose these new initiatives and destroy some of the gates, several of which were quickly reconstructed, but just as quickly cut down again. On June 30th, while a party of colliers were destroying a turnpike set up in Dyrham, at the end of one of the turnpiked roads, they were attacked by a private posse led by William Blaitwaite, the principal landowner in Dyrham (and also a Justice of the Peace and turnpike trustee), who took four of the rioters prisoner. The next day, however, before the prisoners could be conducted to jail, "a great Body of Colliers" laid siege to Blaitwaite's house, threatening to destroy it if "their Brethren" were not released. Blaitwaite "was forced to permit a Rescue", and he found it prudent to refresh his visitors with several casks of ale. Some of the colliers (said to number some 400) then travelled eastward to Marshfield and Chippenham and destroyed more gates; and though Blaitwaite and another justice and turnpike trustee, Sir William Codrington of nearby Dodington (he also owned land in Marshfield), tried to stop them by reading the Riot Act, "they went on in the most impudent Defiance to Authority." There were reports of other popular "outrages": on July 15th the London Post was stopped for several hours and "used in a rough Manner by the Colliers"; and it was said that several turnpike commissioners had received threatening letters.<sup>32</sup> The local authorities in southern Gloucestershire were much concerned about the weakness of their position (Codrington, for instance, in explaining the diffi-

culties in ensuring public order in this area, noted that justices "are but few on this side on the County nor indeede could wee have more for want of Gentle-men"), "the Insolencies of the Rioters", and their inability to protect the turnpikes without the assistance of troops. "The License these Rioters have Taken", wrote Codrington and Blaitwaite to the Secretary of State on 22 September 1731, "makes it difficult to execute any Process or warrant of the Law at present."<sup>33</sup>

Several features of these disturbances in 1731 deserve to be emphasized. First, the colliers appear to have concentrated their attacks, not on the turnpike gates near Bristol and Kingswood itself, where the exemption on coal unquestionably applied, but on those to the east and north-east of Kingswood, where a toll may still have been levied on the carriage of coal. There was no exemption for coal on the turnpike through Marshfield and Chippenham, where gates had been destroyed; and at Dyrham and Yate, which had experienced similar disturbances, there may also have been tolls on coal, for the gates were at or beyond the terminal points of two of the turnpiked roads from Bristol, and it is not at all clear that the exemption would have applied at these places. Another Gloucestershire turnpike Act, for instance, which applied to a large area north of Kingswood and included within its rather vague frame of reference a road or roads "leading to or near" Chipping Sodbury, and for which Codrington was also a trustee, allowed no exemption for the carriage of coal (12 George I, c.24). These facts, which are partly circumstantial, may account for the selectivity in the colliers' direct actions, and their apparent inattention to those gates where it is certain that no coals were being taxed. Second, it is noteworthy that the two justices who were most active in contending with the colliers on this occasion both had substantial estates in the neighbourhood east of Kingswood, and both were likely to benefit from the improvement of the roads running near their properties. Third, it appears that the military assistance which was rendered by the central government to the Bristol region was concentrated in the city itself and was not extended to the troubled county jurisdictions to the east, despite the urgent entreaties of the Gloucestershire magistrates. Perhaps this was a reflection of the superior political clout of Bristol's city corporation, which was controlled by the Whigs, certainly not a negligible consideration during this period of Walpole's ascendancy. At any rate, with no troops available to protect the toll-gates east of Kingswood, the local authorities remained unable to enforce the law. No prosecutions resulted from the summer's disorders.

Confronted with this unhappy situation, the local gentlemen looked for relief through an extension of the 1728 statute concerning the penalties for destroying turnpikes. In March 1732 three petitions to this effect were received by the Commons, one from the trustees of the Studley Bridge-Toghill turnpike, one from the justices and gentlemen in the two hundreds east and north-east of Kingswood which had experienced the disorders of the previous summer, and one from the trustees of the Hereford turnpike Act, who had been faced with similar manifestations of popular revolt. The petitioners complained of these recent "outrages" and the inadequate deterrents which were provided by the existing laws.<sup>34</sup> The result of their initiatives was an Act of 5 George II, c. 33 which allowed a person convicted of destroying turnpikes to be transported for seven years. This new and more severe law, it was hoped, would discourage future attacks on turnpikes. When the Kingswood colliers let it be known that they had "enter'd into Articles not to suffer any Turnpikes to



be erected", the *Gloucester Journal* of 30 May 1732 pointed to the risk they would now be taking, and hoped that, given the new statute, "they will alter their Resolution".

Newly armed at law, on 31 August 1732 the trustees of the Studley Bridge-Toghill turnpike ordered that two toll-gates be erected on their road between Marshfield and Chippenham. The consequence was that two weeks later, on September 16th,

"a Party of Bristol Colliers, arm'd with Axes and Hatches, came up from Kingswood, and cut down the Turnpike at Ford in Wiltshire, without any Opposition: Notice thereof was given to Mr. Holland at Chippenham ...., Representative in Parliament for that Borough, and that they were coming on to destroy the Turnpike which stood about two Miles from that Town, on the Bristol Road; Mr. Holland, with two other Gentlemen and Servants, immediately mounted their Horses to go and defend it; but before they came thither the Colliers had cut down the Gate, and were proceeding to demolish the Walls on each Side, and the Turnpike-House: The Gentlemen required 'em to surrender, or they would fire on them; the Colliers swore they would die first, and attack'd them with Stones very smartly: The Return they met with was a Discharge of small Shot amongst them, which made 'em take to their Heels and run away across the Fields, but they were soon pursued, and three of them taken Prisoners. The next Morning they were sent away under a strong Guard to Salisbury Jail."

The turnpike trustees wasted no time in reasserting their authority, for two days after this disturbance they met again to authorize the reconstruction of the demolished gates. The taking of the three prisoners caused considerable agitation among the colliers, for a little later it was reported that they were holding frequent meetings to determine how to release "their brethren", and that they were threatening to pull down the house of Rogers Holland and set fire to the town of Chippenham.<sup>35</sup>

This incident at Chippenham brought the colliers into a direct confrontation with one of the West of England's most energetic proponents of turnpikes and a prominent local supporter of Walpole's government. Rogers Holland, born in 1701, served as M.P. for Chippenham between 1727 and 1737; except for the excise bill, he voted with the Administration in all recorded divisions during this decade.<sup>36</sup> He was perhaps more actively involved in the promotion of turnpike trusts than any other man in the Bristol-Chippenham region. In the winter of 1727, before his election to Parliament, he gave evidence in favour of the establishment of a turnpike between Studley Bridge and Toghill; and he was later named as a trustee for both the Bristol and the Studley Bridge-Toghill turnpikes. In May 1728, when the Commons was considering the need for specific penalties for the destruction of turnpikes (the petitioners were the Studley Bridge-Toghill trustees, of whom Holland was one), he took the leading role in seeing the bill through Parliament; he helped to prepare the bill, reported from the committees, and carried the bill to the Lords. In 1732, when a harsher law was sought concerning the destruction of turnpikes, Holland was again the leading figure in preparing an appropriate bill and superintending its passage through Parliament.<sup>37</sup> He was present at both of the Studley Bridge-Toghill Trust's meetings in the late summer of 1732 which ordered the erection of toll-gates. Here, then, was a man who had been actively engaged in promoting turnpikes and in trying to secure them against popular attack: he was unlikely to feel much sympathy for the Kingswood colliers.

In the winter of 1733 strenuous efforts were made to secure convictions of the three imprisoned colliers. This determination was undoubtedly reinforced by one further hostile act against established authority, for in February Holland was sent an anonymous threatening letter warning him not to proceed against the three prisoners. As an active government supporter he could expect to get material assistance from the highest authorities: a reward of £200 was offered by the King for evidence leading to the conviction of those involved in making these threats, and a few days after the receipt of the letter it was announced that the rioters would be prosecuted at the Crown's expense. At the Salisbury Assizes in March two of the colliers were convicted and sentenced to transportation, presumably under the Act of the previous year (5 George II, c.33).<sup>38</sup> Rogers Holland was much encouraged by these convictions; and in a letter written a few days after the trial to one Thomas Haynes (in Bristol), a fellow trustee of the Bristol turnpike Act, he suggested that "We must now resort to Turnpikes again, if we will amend our ways, and I cannot but suppose that they will stand now, even if you set them up in the middle of Kingswood". A little later he received some further evidence which led him to suppose that the colliers might behave more submissively in the future. On April 14th he wrote to the same correspondent that

"Last Night Stock [one of Holland's tenants] sent me a Petition from the Kingswood Colliers to the King, imploring pardon for their two convicted Brethren, with above 200 Names to it. As soon as I am able I will lay it before the Secretary of State, but I don't know what Effect it will have, however they promise in their Petition to oppose any Attempt for destroying Turnpikes for the future (if ever made), Sure the Gentlemen about you may make a very good use of this if you think proper, & I should be glad to hear that they did."

Here was a clear statement of one influential man's expectations of what the criminal law, when properly used, could achieve in terms of popular quiescence. The colliers' petition, unfortunately, does not seem to survive, and there is no indication as to what affect it had, and no record of the deliberations it may have caused among men of power. The lack of any evidence of a pardon suggests that the sentences were probably carried out.

Rogers Holland's hopes for a full restoration of law and order, and a tranquil life for the friends of the turnpikes, were clearly premature. During the following two years turnpike agitation in the Bristol area certainly subsided, and a few of the toll-gates remained securely in place; but there were renewed disturbances in the summer of 1735, some of which probably involved the colliers, and Sir William Codrington was again writing to the Secretary of State, providing some details on the disorders and complaining about the government's lack of support for the local authorities. The turnpike commissioners, he said, "are all determin'd never to act any more if the Government will not support them & if the Laws are to be broke through by such a set of villins without being made an example of. God knows where it may end." Some troops were ordered to be sent to the area as requested.<sup>40</sup> By 1735, however, the centre for turnpike disturbances in England was no longer around Bristol: it had shifted northwards to Herefordshire, and largely as a result of these disorders there was a final extension of the law concerning the destruction of turnpikes, an Act of 8 George II, c.20 (1735) which allowed the penalty of death for a first offence. This Act, yet another addition to the swelling list of capital crimes in England, was passed quickly and after little debate.



In the Bristol area the efforts to construct turnpikes had already been seriously frustrated, and their promoters may have become dispirited for there is no evidence that much was done through the 1730s to revive the turnpike schemes. At the end of the decade most of the roads running east from Bristol were in much the same condition as they had been in the 1720s, as several observers attested. Because of the confusion and uncertainties associated with the Bristol turnpikes, it was difficult for the trustees to borrow capital for road repairs on the security of their tolls. The two main roads between Bristol and Bath certainly remained unturnpiked, at least partly because of the colliers' opposition: as Ralph Allen of Bath said in 1739 with reference to one of these roads, "the Colliers have pulled down, and do constantly pull down, any Turnpikes that have been at any time erected."<sup>41</sup> A decade later it was said that "several thousand pounds" had been spent in erecting the Bristol turnpikes, but that because of the risings against them the two Acts of Parliament had been rendered largely ineffectual.<sup>42</sup> In early 1738 there had been further talk of re-erecting the turnpikes, and rumours circulated that they would be guarded by troops, but the talk came to nothing. It seems as well that efforts were being made to have a regiment of soldiers quartered in the Kingswood area "in order to reduce those stubborn People to a proper Obedience of the Law". The report added that "a Judge's Warrant is come down for taking into Custody upwards of 40 of those Persons, for divers Offences",<sup>43</sup> but there is no record that any colliers were actually prosecuted.

These were not the only collective actions in which the colliers were involved. In 1749 they participated in further protests against turnpikes (on this occasion the authorities were much more successful), in 1738 they were involved in a major industrial dispute, and in 1740 and 1753 they rose to protest against the high price of grain. These disturbances are all examined in detail elsewhere.<sup>44</sup> (Later, during the reign of George III, such direct actions noticeably subsided). Given this ample evidence as to Kingswood's "unrulyness", what, in conclusion, can be said about the "politics" of these colliers? And what can we conclude about the conduct of the established authorities and the constraints they experienced?

It is clear, for a start, that the Gloucestershire magistrates were in a weak position to deal with the colliers. There were few gentlemen in the Kingswood area, and the local justices were confronted with a large and rapidly expanding population of relatively independent, and "undisciplined", industrial workers. Patriarchal authority was weakly implanted in the neighbourhood of Kingswood; many of the miners worked their pits (just as the coal-drivers conducted their trade) in an independent or semi-independent manner, and the landlords and coal proprietors had as yet little control over their everyday behaviour. Moreover, the central government was not normally disposed to place troops in the Kingswood region at times when disorders occurred (it was, perhaps, not unaware of the thinness of the local support for Whig rule), and without military assistance men such as Codrington and Blithwaite were unable to discipline the colliers with any effectiveness. In contrast, the authorities in Bristol, which enjoyed the status of a county borough, were much more energetically supported by their fellow Whigs in Westminster, though it is clear that during the initial stages of any Kingswood disturbance the interventions of the colliers in Bristol's public life caused great consternation, especially at times when no troops were quartered in the city. Kingswood was near Bristol but beyond its jurisdictional control; it was alien territory, a potential threat to the city's

tranquillity. As the mayor, writing in May 1753, said of the colliers, "the place they come from is very populous, & has in it a great Number of Under Ground Workmen, who are but little known and on that account very desperate fellows".<sup>45</sup> For the most part the corporation was content to keep the colliers at bay, to exclude them from the city itself; they seldom attempted to extend their authority into the colliers' own territory. Similarly, the colliers were usually cautious about exercising their muscle within the city: except for 1753, they always confined their actions in Bristol to processions, demonstrations, and negotiations for the redress of their grievances. They certainly were not inclined to invade the city on whim. When the authorities became anxious about public order, as they normally did at the first appearance of the colliers, they made haste to mobilize the resources immediately at their disposal (constables, citizen pickets, and the like) and solicit troops from the Secretary of State. The presence of troops was essential to ensure peace for the city, though the soldiers might be very careful about the way in which they exercised their power. In September 1740, for instance, the colonel of the troops who was called upon to secure the city against a possible food riot justified his cautious action by noting that "Captain Porteous' unhappy Fate was too fresh in my memory not to make me act with the utmost Caution & Security."<sup>46</sup> (Captain John Porteous had suffered grievously for his role in trying to control an Edinburgh crowd at a public hanging on 14 April 1736). Moreover, the soldiers stationed in Bristol usually refrained from intervening in the colliers' own district. The relationship between Bristol and Kingswood was, it seems, an uneasy stand-off: a somewhat delicate relationship in which neither side normally violated the other's territory.

The Kingswood colliers, like most eighteenth century labouring people, had a clear set of ideas concerning how authority should be properly exercised. They held specific expectations as to the duties and responsibilities of those entrusted with enforcing the law, and these expectations sometimes differed from those of the authorities themselves. Moreover, they felt relatively few inhibitions about taking direct action in defence of their conceptions of what was legitimate and lawful behaviour. Their public encounters with the law occurred, of course, mostly at times of "crisis": when traditional standards of subsistence were threatened, and when popular liberties were being challenged by new, officially-sanctioned exactions and impositions. They took the position that the authorities should be held *accountable* for certain actions (or inaction) — those which they perceived as illegitimate or contrary to law — and they were frequently determined to exert pressure on the authorities in order to induce some alterations in their conduct. Their various protests and risings may be seen, I think, as regulatory initiatives intended to change public policies and to articulate values and priorities which were not satisfactorily represented through the conventional political process. They employed supplications, threats, demonstrations of power, and collective attacks on objectionable targets in an attempt to attain their ends. Sometimes they won concessions, on other occasions the authorities stood firm. If the colliers' exertions were resisted with armed force, they might be compelled to beat at least a partial retreat, but the authorities could seldom rest assured that further challenges would not re-emerge. Moreover, it always proved to be extremely difficult to employ the criminal law against them. Satisfactory evidence was sometimes hard to obtain, arrest warrants could seldom be executed, and witnesses and jurymen might be encouraged to think better of the colliers' supposed "offences" after suitable forms of intimidation.



On numerous occasions the colliers exhibited a capacity to resist or manipulate the processes of the law, or even to usurp the functions of the duly constituted authorities. Considering the large number of indictable offences they committed, very few colliers were ever apprehended and brought to trial. The authorities might hope to be able to contain the colliers, but for many years they could not realistically expect to accomplish much more.

The history of the Kingswood colliers after the mid-eighteenth century cannot at this time be examined in detail. We know, of course, that Kingswood played a major rôle in the early history of Methodism, though it is difficult to assess with any precision the actual impact of Methodism on the colliers. John Wesley himself was fairly confident in pointing to the social transformations which he thought were taking place: in 1768 he observed that "no Indians are more savage than were the colliers of Kingswood; many of whom are now an humane, hospitable people full of love to God and man; quiet, diligent in business; in every state content, every way adorning the Gospel of God their Saviour."<sup>47</sup> While the Methodist leaders probably exaggerated the success of their early ministry, there is no doubt that in the long run Methodism became well established in the Kingswood area and gained a substantial body of adherents, thereby helping to transform the values and behaviour of many colliers. We can suggest, very tentatively, that Methodism may have introduced into Kingswood a new form of authority, a set of religious imperatives which attracted at least some of the colliers to a new outlook on life and a new set of aspirations. Methodism tended to have its greatest impact in areas where patriarchal structures of authority were weakest, and from this point of view Kingswood was clearly a "dark corner of the land": there was something of a psychological vacuum to be filled, and Methodism offered spiritual renewal as an alternative orientation to the worldly independence of the colliers. The early preachers brought to Kingswood, not only a compelling personal dynamism, but also a message of concern and compassion and personal salvation to people who had stood alone — and some of them may have realized that they could not stand alone much longer. Outsiders were certainly inclined to credit Methodism with much of the change which was thought to have occurred in Kingswood. Methodism was thought by one writer in the early nineteenth century to have been responsible for "the amelioration of the savage manners of the colliers", and a local observer in 1794 drew attention to similar changes: "The colliers of the forest," he said, "were 40 or 50 years ago, so barbarous and savage, that they were a terror to the City of Bristol, which they several times invaded; it was dangerous to go among them, and their dialect was the roughest and rudest in the Nation; but by the labours of Mess. Whitefield and Wesley, by the erection of a parish Church and some meeting-houses, and the establishment of several Sunday and daily schools, they are much civilized and improved in principles, morals and pronunciation."<sup>48</sup> It is possible, then, that a new sort of discipline was emerging in Kingswood. A parish church (St. George's) was constructed in Kingswood in the 1750s, largely to provide accessible accommodation for the previously neglected people of the forest, and thus for the first time established religion became a visible presence in the area; and in 1756 a friendly society was formed among the colliers, a society whose articles emphasized the maintenance of good order and proper conduct and of loyalty to the established government.<sup>49</sup> Kingswood, like many other forest areas, was no longer relatively insulated from outside interventions; the spreading suburbs of Bristol were threatening to absorb it; and with the decline of social and cultural isolation

it became more subject to forces of authority and disciplines which were mostly not of the colliers' own making. And as many colliers accepted or submitted to these various disciplines, the social basis for collective action and plebeian independence probably contracted. In the long run Kingswood was tamed, and its eighteenth century turbulence was succeeded by a nineteenth century of quiescence. The limits of authority had expanded to incorporate Kingswood within its territory of social discipline.

#### Notes

1. Nehemiah Cunnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* (8 vols., 1909-16), vol. 2, p. 322.
2. D.G.C. Isaac, "A Study of Popular Disturbances in Britain 1714-1794" (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1953), pp. 66, 299. I must acknowledge my general indebtedness to this work and to John Latimer's *The Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (1893) for many initial leads on the history of the Kingswood colliers.
3. H.T. Ellacombe, *The History of the Parish of Biton* (1881), pp. 178ff.; Avon Ref. Lib., Ellacombe MSS., especially vols. 6, 7, and 8, *passim*; and John Latimer, *The Annals of Bristol in the Seventeenth Century* (1900), pp. 59-61, 224, 302-04, 557-58, 557-58.
4. Ellacombe, *Biton*, Appendix, plates IX and XI; and A. Braine, *The History of Kingswood Forest* (1891), p. 88.
5. Latimer, *Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 445, and Braine, *Kingswood Forest*, p. 84.
6. Only miscellaneous evidence is available on the organization of the colliery undertakings: see for instance Ellacombe, *Biton*, Appendix, plates IX and XI; F. Forley's *Bristol Journal*, 29 November 1746 (advertisement for the sale of Blackworth Manor); Gloucestershire R.O., D 1844C 10 (letter of 18 November 1706), D 1844C 11 (letter of 24 August 1713), D 421/E 20 (including plan of 1755), and D 1844/E 13.
7. Avon Ref. Lib., Ellacombe MSS., vol. 6, pp. 131, 173-74, vol. 7, p. 15, and vol. 10, "Survey of Kingswood Chase, 1691"; Ellacombe, *Biton*, Appendix, plate IX; and Christopher Morris, *The Journeys of John Pinner* (1949), p. 237.
8. Quoted in Latimer, *Bristol in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 104.
9. Gloucestershire R.O., D 1844C 12, letter of 18 April 1722, Mr. John Meredith to Sir John Newton.
10. W. Matthews, *The New History, Survey and Description of the City and Suburbs of Bristol* (1794), p. 44.
11. Avon Ref. Lib., Ellacombe MSS., vol. 6, pp. 172, 154.
12. Avon Ref. Lib., Ellacombe MSS., vol. 7, p. 17; and Braine, *Kingswood Forest*, p. 85.
13. *Political State of Great Britain*, vol. LVI (July-December 1738), pp. 143-44.
14. *Bristol Journal*, 7 January and 15 April 1749.
15. *Gloucester Journal*, 31 March 1743; and *Bristol Weekly Intelligencer*, 28 April 1750.
16. Ellacombe, *Biton*, pp. 209ff.; Braine, *Kingswood Forest*, pp. 92-94; *Journal of the Life, Labours, and Travels of Thomas Whitefield* (2 vols., 1839), vol. 1, chap. 10 (especially p. 171); Latimer, *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 469, and his *The Annals of Bristol in the Nineteenth Century* (1887), pp. 48-49.
17. *Bristol Weekly Journal* (Exeter), 12 September 1729.
18. *Gloucester Journal*, 17 July 1739.
19. P.R.O., S.P. 35/64, fol. 1.
20. *Commons Journals*, XX (1722-27), pp. 769-70, 779, 781, 791.
21. *Kerley's Bristol Journal*, 1 July 1727.
22. This account is based on P.R.O., S.P. 36/1, fol. 56; Bristol Record Office, "Common Council Proceedings 1722 to 1738", p. 131; *Northampton Mercury*, 7 July 1727, and *Northampton Mercury*, 3 and 17 July 1727.
23. *Northampton Mercury*, 24 July, 7 and 14 August 1727; and *Commons Journals*, vol. XXI (1727-32), pp. 157, 159.
24. *Northampton Mercury*, 9 October 1727; and *Commons Journals*, vol. XXI (1727-32), p. 159.
25. *Northampton Mercury*, 3 July 1727.
26. Arthur Young, *Tours in England and Wales (Selected from The Annals of Agriculture)* (London School of Economics and Political Science: Series of Reprints of Scarce Tracts in Economic and Political Science, no. 14, 1932), p. 21.



27. Gloucestershire R.O., D 15/2; this document is reprinted in full in William Albert, *The Turnpike Road System in England 1663-1840* (1972), pp. 27-28. In 1770 John Wesley expressed the view that the country gentry could readily raise enough money to repair the roads in their own localities and thus avoid "haddling the poor people with the vile imposition of turnpikes for ever." (*John Wesley's Journal*, vol. V, p. 370).
28. *Commons Journals*, vol. XXI (1727-32), p. 159.
29. Br. Lib., Add. MS. 76, 136, fol. 356.
30. *Northampton Mercury*, 31 July and 14 August 1727; and Bristol Record Office, "Common Council Proceedings 1722 to 1758", p. 18.
31. *Commons Journals*, vol. XXI (1727-32), pp. 157, 159. There was no consistent view of the punishment available at law for turnpike rioters. In April 1728 at the Gloucester Assizes two men were convicted for destroying turnpikes, apparently in the Stroud-Dursley region; both were sentenced to death, though one was reprieved for transportation. *Gloucester Journal*, 16 April 1728, and *Northampton Mercury*, 22 April 1728.
32. *Gloucester Journal*, 6 July 1731; *Northampton Mercury*, 12 and 26 July 1731; and P.R.O., S.P. 36/23, fols. 206-07, 250, and S.P. 36/25, fols. 257-58.
33. P.R.O., S.P. 36/25, fol. 257; S.P. 36/23, fol. 250; and S.P. 36/24, fol. 113.
34. *Commons Journals*, vol. XXI (1727-32), p. 828.
35. Wiltshire R.O., 'Chippenham Turnpike Trust Minutes', meetings of 31 August and 18 September 1712; and *Weekly Worcester Journal*, 29 September and 27 October 1732.
36. Rumney Sedgwick, *The House of Commons 1715-1754* (2 vols., 1970), vol. II, p. 145.
37. *Commons Journals*, vol. XX (1723-27), p. 791; vol. XXI (1727-32), pp. 157, 159, 161, 169, 170, 828, 849-50, 881, 923.
38. *London Gazette*, no. 7173, 24-27 February 1732/33; *Real's Weekly Journal*, 17 February 1733; and *Gloucester Journal*, 20 March 1733.
39. Bristol Record Office, MS. 09701.125 and 203.
40. P.R.O., S.P. 36/35, fols. 170-75, 197; and Br. Lib., Add. MS. 32, 690, fol. 73.
41. *Commons Journals*, XXIII (1737-41), pp. 258-59, 273-74, 330; cf. John Oldmixon, *The History of England, During the Reigns of King William and Queen Mary*, Queen Anne, King George I (London, 1735), p. 804.
42. *Bristol Journal*, 29 July 1749.
43. *Salisbury Journal*, 6 March 1738.
44. See the full version of my study of the Kingswood colliers in John Brewer and John Styles, eds., *An Unforgettable People: The English and their law in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (1980), pp. 106-123.
45. P.R.O., S.P. 36/122, fol. 41.
46. P.R.O., S.P. 41/32, letter of 24 September 1740, Leighton to Wake.
47. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (8 vols., 1931), vol. V, p. 121, V, 121.
48. J.P. Malcolm, *Excursions in the Counties of Kent, Gloucester, Hereford, Monmouth, and Somerset, in the Years 1802, 1803, and 1805* (1814), pp. 211-12; and Matthews, *New History of Bristol*, p. 75. Cf. George Eyles, *Wesley and Kingswood and Its Free Churches* (1911), pp. 93-97; and Braine, *Kingswood Forest*, p. 225.
49. *Commons Journals*, vol. XXCI (1750/51-1754), p. 95; William Barrett, *The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol* (Bristol, n.d.), pp. 339-40 (written c. 1789); Latimer, *Bristol in the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 282-83; and (on the friendly society) Avon Ref. Lib., Elacombe MSS., vol. 9, p. 217.

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## CONSTITUENT SOCIETIES:

### KINGSWOOD & DISTRICT HISTORY SOCIETY

In local authority terms, the Kingswood District has a population of 85,000 and about 33,000 rateable properties. It is divided, very amicably, into two history societies. The Downend History Society covers Downend, Staple Hill and Mangotsfield, whilst the Kingswood and District History Society embraces Kingswood, Hanham and Warmley. The suburban sprawl of Kingswood and Hanham gives way to the rural setting of Warmley. There is a good mixture of local interests from the industries of coal-mining, shoes, motorcycles, clay pottery and zinc to religions (outstanding are Wesley and Whitfield), family history and large houses, for example Siston Court, Hanham Court and Warmley House.

The original Kingswood History Society started in 1965 and was very active until the early 1970s. Prominent members at this time were Mr Alfred Lovell, Mathew Southway, Mr and Mrs Street and Mrs D Buckee. The Society was disbanded due to members not coming forward to take office, (not a rare problem in societies). The Kingswood and District History Society came into being in 1975 at the Warmley Community Centre founded by Mrs Ashley, Mr Francis Greed and Mr Alec Brain.

Many projects have been researched by members. They assisted in the Parish Survey. Mollie Ashley and James Russell excavated at Barrs Court. The histories of Willsbridge Mill and Grimbury Farm have been investigated. At the moment, Mr Spittal and his team are researching the history of the Nonconformist Chapels in Kingswood and district. Mrs D. Street and Mrs D. Lindgaard are two local historians who have thoroughly documented several families.

The Society moved from Warmley to the Community Centre in Kingswood and then to its present meeting place, the Congregational Church Hall in Hanham Road. Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month from October to May inclusive. Talks range from family history (The Caines of Cock Road fame) to topics of wider interest, Egyptology and Ancient Britons. Walks take place from May to August when visits to historical sites are arranged. The local planning authority supplies the Society with a weekly list of planning applications, including those of listed buildings, which are submitted so that any observation or objection can be made within the statutory time.

The aims of the Society have always been to foster research of the history of Kingswood District, to record development, to keep a photographic record of any redevelopment which takes place, and to arrange meetings of interest for the members. Unfortunately one aim has yet to be realised and that is a newsletter giving results of research. Finally a cry for help to get the Hanham Abbots area of Stonehill and Hanham made a greenbelt conservation area. It was in the Avon structure plan, but this was never implemented. There are developers trying to get planning permission to build on 207 acres and it is the last green space between Bristol and Longwell Green. Any letters of support to the Avon County Council planning department would be appreciated.

Margaret Franco.



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