

Yet more LiDAR

In a recent essay (March '18) we drew attention to the value of LiDAR, a sort of laser light 'radar', for the interpretation of our landscape. The sample area chosen included the village of Bickton and the surrounding patterns of medieval 'ridge and furrow' cultivation ('butts & reans') which had survived more recent ploughing. By moving our attention to the north-west corner of the parish, we can not only encounter the same patterns in neighbouring Mytton, but also a whole lot more natural and man-made features around the confluence of the Rivers Severn and Perry and upon Forton Heath.

The image of Bickley Coppice demonstrates how well LiDAR can see through tree cover to reveal the ground beneath, which here includes parts of the Severn flood plain. In particular two 'barge gutters' by-passing around fish weirs, stand out (Sept '17). One belonging to Mytton was listed in 1575, but probably went out of use in the following century after flood damage. By contrast, the Forton Weir has no such early record, but appeared on an eighteenth century map. Its 'gutter' still flows, although weir timbers have long since decayed. The sites for weirs were usually on gravel banks in the channel and, significantly, the water flow at the Mytton site gives a disturbed reflection as the water tumbles over a particularly rough bed of gravel and boulders brought in from the Perry valley or eroded from the 'Bickton' moraine at this point.

A further reminder of 'glacial' history is the uneven surface of the Forton Heath area left by the ice some 18,000 years ago. Such an uneven surface was no doubt the reason why the area was unfit for cultivation in the Middle Ages. Anyone driving through this area en route to North Shrewsbury should already be familiar with the undulations along the road. This odd pattern of low banks, some of which hold up ponds on the valley side, may mark the fluctuating margin of the Severn Valley Glacier. The very course of the Perry itself may have been created at the ice margin, so that such odd shapes are confined to one side of it.

In the 'age of improvement', the problems posed by such ground could be overcome, so that the heath was 'inclosed' in 1780, producing a pattern of new straight roads and fields not unlike those on the Bickton Heath (May '18).

Also, in a similar way, by this time some cottages and encroachments had already appeared around the margins of the open land, including those at Bromley's Forge. Here one cottage was associated with the fish weir, but the other two would have been linked to a seventeenth century iron works at the confluence of the rivers, which exploited water power from the Perry and transport links along the Severn.

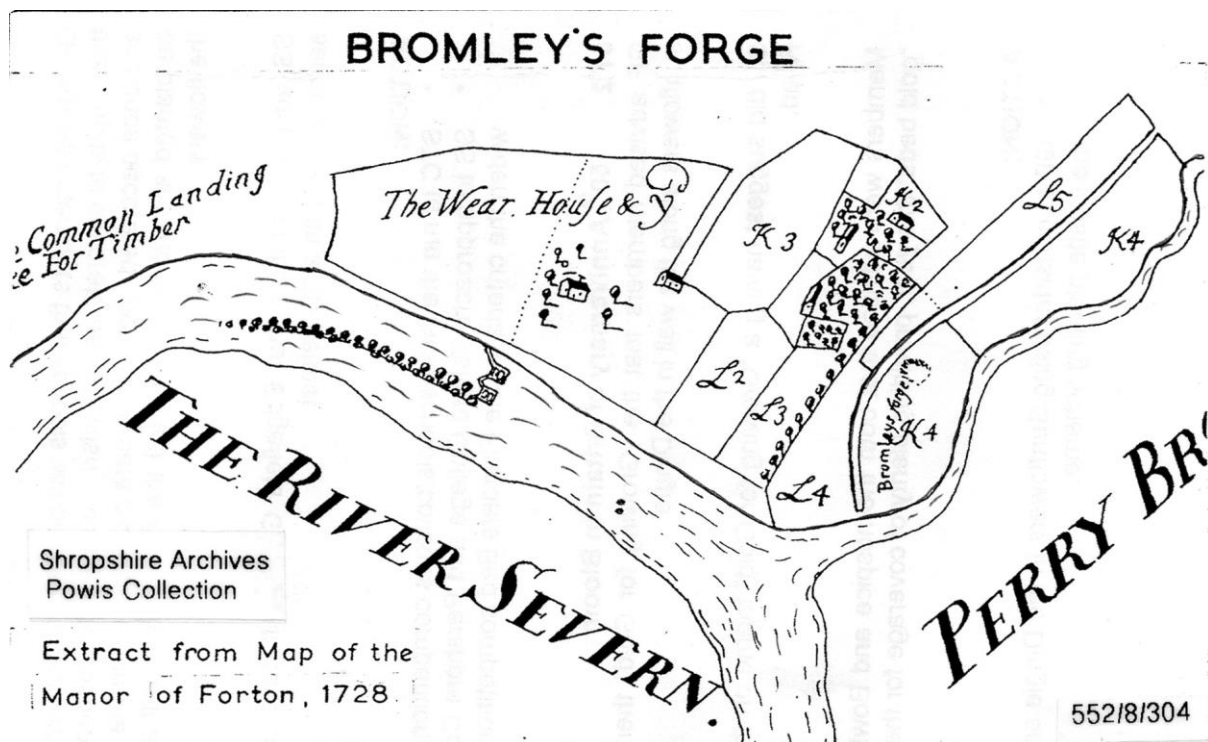
Records point to the involvement of Sir Basil Brooke, Lord of the Manor of Madeley, who also owned operations in the Forest of Dean and Coalbrookdale. In 1623, he was presented at the Manor Court of Forton for diverting the River Perry and building a dam on Forton Heath, where he had lately erected certain 'iron mylles' (SA 6000/18523). In 1616, he had been involved in a dispute over the

cutting of cordwood (logs for charcoal) near Borreaton when it was said that he had been cutting wood for at least seven years (SA 6000/8494).

What iron products he made here is not known and anyway it all came to an end when he backed the wrong side during the Civil War and then died in 1646. At the same time, Lord Bromley, local Lord of the Manor, lost his castle at Shrawardine, but has left his name here.

In any case, such works would have become obsolete as production shifted to the coalfield, where coke and steam engines continued the Industrial Revolution. LiDAR shows lengths of leat (millstream) which drove a waterwheel for the bellows and hammers at the mill still surviving, though some parts near the road have been since lost. Otherwise, many eighteenth century features can still be recognised around the cottages, showing how much of our history is 'written in the landscape'.

If you are suitable equipped why not explore the landscape of the Severn Valley on houseprices.io/lab/lidar/map/





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