

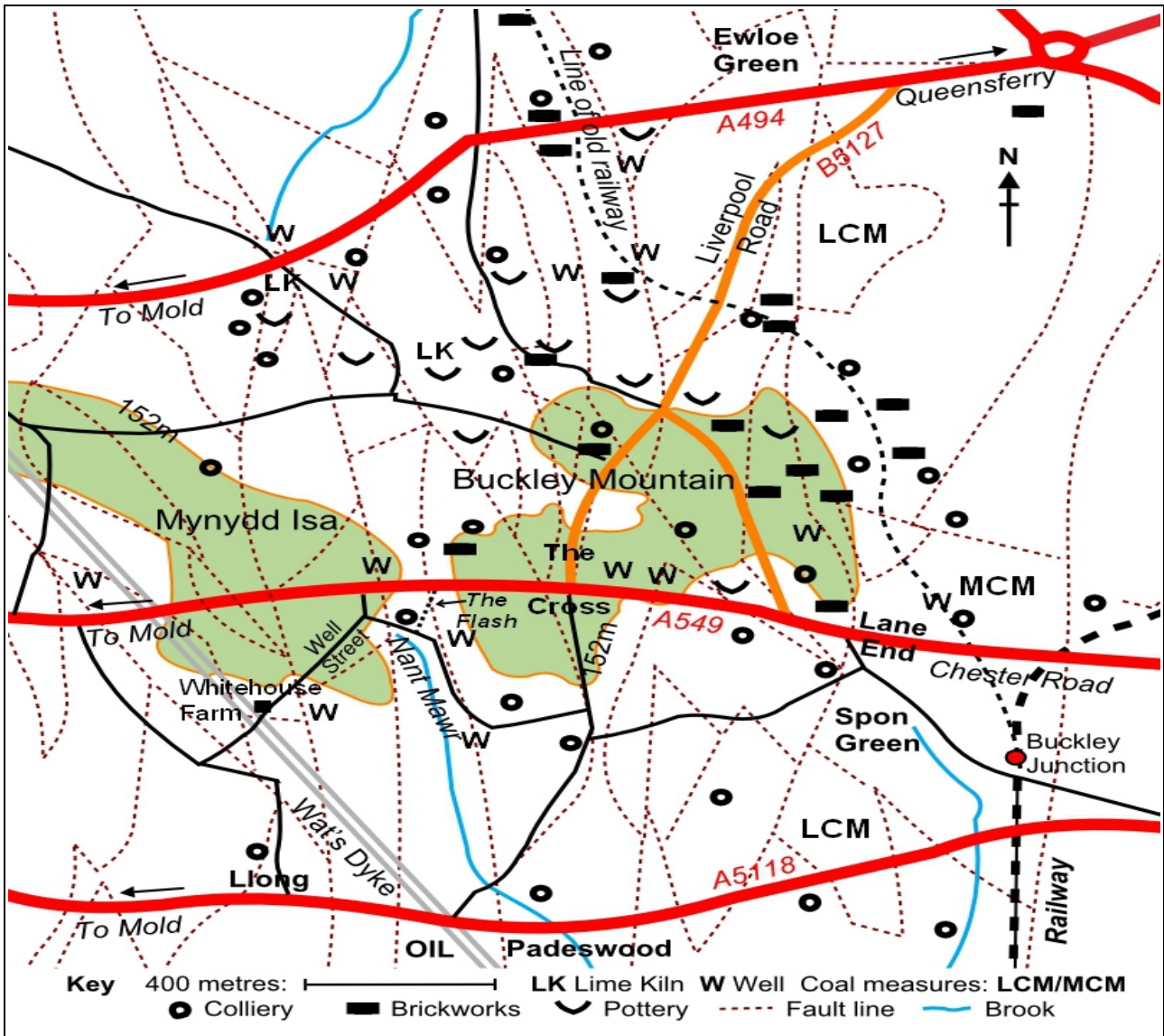
Buckley, Flintshire



Thomas Ellis, Buckley Railway Wagon Builder

David Miller

Buckley, Flintshire



A map of Buckley, Flintshire showing the main roads and former railway line serving the industrial area. The Nant Mawr (Big Stream) brook runs between the high land of Buckley Mountain and Mynydd Isa (Lower Mountain). The Flash, a footpath from Nant Mawr to the Chester Road, is just visible. The numerous geological faults in Buckley are mostly north-south. Wat's Dyke crosses Well Street at Whitehouse Farm west of the Nant Mawr. Superimposed are the known collieries, brickworks and potteries, courtesy of The Buckley Society. Several wells are shown and the site of seven shale oil works as OIL at Padeswood.

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The Connah and Ellis Families

This article was written because my mother's paternal ancestors, the Connahs, lived in Buckley for several generations, as I did briefly, playing football on The Flash with Welsh cousins.

Robert Connah came from Mold probably in the 1860s and lived in the Nant Mawr, as did his descendants until 1964. Robert was a brick-maker but his sons and grandsons were miners, including my grandfather Bill Connah.

The maternal branch of the family, the Ellis', lived for several generations in Chester. My mother's grandfather Thomas Ellis went to the Blue Coat School in Chester and then settled in Buckley some time after 1885 as an employee in the railway industry and didn't have a Buckley accent. He married Welsh-speaking Elizabeth Jones from Leeswood who couldn't read or write English as a result of her Welsh upbringing. They had twelve children. The Connah and Ellis families each lost two sons in World War One.



Bill Connah, miner

Buckley as a Frontier Town

Buckley is not recorded in the Domesday Book but was within the manor of Bistre¹ which was part of the lordships of Mold, Hawarden and Ewloe.

Dr Philip Morgan transcribed Domesday entries for Cheshire which included Flintshire. The entry for Bistre records that before 1066, "*Bistre was a manor of the Saxon Earl Edwin which never paid tax. It was waste when Earl Hugh (of Chester) acquired it (from William Duke of Normandy).*"

In 1086 the entry reads:

"All of this land belongs to Bistre. It was waste². It never paid tax, nor was it hidated³. In this manor the woodland is one league⁴ in length and half a league in width; There is a hawk's eyrie⁵. The Earl has this woodland, which he has put into his forest."

Thus the value of the manor of Bistre was nil before and at 1066 and nil at 1086. Bistre later became recorded as a medieval township extending from the centre of the present Buckley to Mold.

Buckley is an English town planted on Welsh moorland near the English border. The name is Old English meaning 'clearing in a wood', first recorded in 1294. This may indicate that the forested moorland was a lord's hunting ground. Many of the surrounding place and farm names are Welsh. The Buckley area has often been a frontier between England and Wales, the earliest being the eighth-century Wat's and Offa's Dykes. Wat's Dyke crosses Well Street at Whitehouse Farm west of the Nant Mawr. It is a 40-mile earth work which runs from Maesbury in Shropshire to Holywell, usually quite close to Offa's Dyke. It may date from the early eighth century and was originally quite

1 The word Bistre is from *biscop* and *treow* tree, both Old English, hence the 'Tree of the Bishops'.

2 There are several interpretations of 'waste' in the Domesday Book but it probably meant 'of little value'.

3 Hidated means taxed. 'Hide' is from the OE *higid* or *hyda*, meaning 'household', and may represent the value of the ideal land to support one family group. In the Domesday Book it was used as a unit of tax measurement.

4 A Domesday league was thought to be about three miles.

5 A hawk's eyrie was important as a source of young hawks for the lord's mews for rearing and training hunting birds.

sophisticated, now often reduced to a hedgerow. The dyke was up to 65 feet wide to divide Mercia from Powys, with a two-metre high bank probably with a wooden palisade on the English side, and a two-metre deep ditch on the Welsh side. It formed a border between the British Cornovii and the Welsh tribes. Offa's Dyke, five miles west of Buckley, was built later in the eighth century and runs from Chepstow in Monmouthshire to the Dee estuary. In the conquest of Wales in 1284 by the Normans, Buckley became a frontier camp and settlement.

Buckley Geography & Geology

Buckley stands on a moor about 500 feet above sea level on ground rising beyond Mold in the west into the mountains. It overlooks the Dee valley to the north, Chester to the east, and the Welsh hills to the south. Within the moor there are two areas of higher ground: Buckley Mountain and Mynydd Isa with the Nant Mawr valley running between them. Buckley is a *strassendorf*, a town with a single two-mile street, now the A549. This was probably developed in the mid-18th century in response to the growing Buckley industries to provide a centre for the town and had a string of dwellings on each side. The original Chester to Mold route would have followed the lower southerly ground of the A518 through Padeswood.

To the west of Buckley and Mold, the mountains of the Clwydian Range rear up with Moel Famau, the highest, rising to 1,821 feet. The mountain is very distinctive across the Cheshire Plain approaching from Kelsall in the east. On top are the remains of the Jubilee Tower of 1810 to commemorate the golden wedding of George III. The incomplete upper part was brought down in a storm of 1862. The Offa's Dyke path crosses its summit. It is surrounded by several Iron Age forts including Foel Fenlli at 1,677 feet with its very deep ramparts and Offa's Dyke crosses the western flanks.

Other than the River Dee four miles to the north-east, the local river is the Alyn which runs west to east through Mold and Padeswood one and a half miles south of Buckley and eventually into the Dee. The river flows through carboniferous limestone and is noted for the Alyn Gorge near the Loggerheads with several small caves which are protected by their Site of Special Scientific Interest status. In the summer, part of the river runs underground and is dry on the surface. Normally a placid river used for bathing, it has dangerous holes and several people have been drowned in it.

Coal Mining

Most of the numerous geological fault lines in Buckley lie north-south and are the reason for the coal field. Some faults are 1,000 feet deep. Coal seams up to six feet deep occur in the heavily-faulted rocks which brought coal to the surface. Mining coal from surface deposits is recorded in Buckley from the late thirteenth century and would have been exported to Chester and Flint and ports along the Dee valley. It later replaced charcoal for firing pottery. In the eighteenth century deep mining took place with the demand for coal for the Industrial Revolution and experienced miners were recruited from Lancashire and Cornwall. Coal was used to fire brick kilns and to power steamships.

Thirty-two named collieries are known in Buckley, all on the east side of the town, the last closing in 1935. The 1869 OS map also shows many old coal shafts, including one on The Flash off the Nant Mawr with the spoil heap left known as 'The Bonc' (Welsh, 'the hill'). The 1920s Hawarden estate map lists thirty three disused coal shafts under their responsibility.

Potteries

Buckley pottery is said to date from the late thirteenth century, with the kilns initially fired by charcoal. Red and buff clay for pottery lay as superficial boulder clay deposits from the last glaciation and white clay used for tobacco pipes was found with the coal deposits. The pottery

industry took off when local coal gradually replaced the use of charcoal for firing. Lead for glazing was found in faults in the local limestone, as well as iron and manganese for colouring the glaze. Initially the clay was trodden by boys but later horse-drawn pug mills were used.

Pottery kilns were fifteen feet wide and high and beehive shaped. Eight to nine tons of pottery would be fired at a time, using five or six tons of coal used to raise the temperature to 1,000 degrees centigrade.

The Welsh naturalist and traveller Thomas Pennant visited Buckley in 1784 and reported fourteen potteries. Exports mainly via Connah's Quay were to Ireland and Swansea but some pottery was shipped to the USA and the West Indies. However they struggled to match the quality and cost of Staffordshire Ware.

There are nineteen known pottery sites in Buckley and the last closed in the 1940s.



Buckley Pottery

The Brick Industry

Plenty of clay suitable for brick making was found superficially in Buckley but the more important fire clay was situated close to coal seams. Coal was essential for firing brick kilns. Parliamentary legislation of 1478 determined when bricks and tiles should be made. Bricks, hand-moulded originally, had to measure 9 by 4.5 by 3 inches similar to modern times. Brickworks in Buckley dated from the sixteenth century but reached their peak in the late eighteenth century. In Pennant's day the brick industry was developing and six kilns were producing fire bricks. Fire bricks were an important production line with suitable clay found with coal seams. The firebricks made included large curved ones for industrial chimneys. Clay was hand-treaded by boys until the 1920s and bricks were wire cut from 1894. Bricks were exported mainly via Connah's Quay and ended up as far away as India. Many stopped production in World War One and the last in 2003.

Shale Oil

Two miles south of Buckley at Padeswood and Leeswood, there was an oil rush in the late 1850s when the price of oil warranted the distillation of 'cannel' coal, a shale-like form, to oil. The seven sites shown as OIL on the map such as the Padeswood Oil works and the Coppa Oil, only thrived for ten years after which they could not compete with the price of oil from the USA. They were usually associated with a colliery. Some of the works are shown on the 1869 OS map. The Padeswood works was where the golf course is today.

Hanson Cement Works

The one remaining industrial site is just south of Buckley at Padeswood. The cement mill started in 1949 and crushes local limestone, clay and other materials which are then heated to 1,500 centigrade and rapidly cooled to produce cement clinker balls which are ground to produce cement. The white smoke is clearly visible across the Cheshire plain when approaching Wales from the east.

Railways

There were two railways in the Buckley area but neither reached the town because of its altitude above sea level. One runs from Wrexham to Hawarden and on to Shotton before crossing the

River Dee. In 1890 a railway link was made at Buckley Junction and many tramways were linked to it to serve the brickworks (line now demolished). A second railway line runs from Wrexham to Mold with a station at Padeswood which serves southern Buckley after a steep hill.

Churches & Schools

In 1901 Buckley had twenty-three religious buildings including two Anglican churches, a Roman Catholic church and fourteen Non-Conformist churches when the population was 2,949. The churches and the council organised a Jubilee Procession in 1856 which still continues, led by the town band. The 1840 Bistre Church at the top of The Flash is a Grade II listed building. Records for the Buckley Mountain Chapel go back to 1820.

Buckley's first school started in 1813 and the Bistre Church of Wales School in 1842. Today there are four primary schools and one comprehensive secondary school.

Leisure

There were twenty-one public houses in 1860 but a strong Temperance movement developed. The public houses are now reduced to six due to the general closure of pubs. A Royal Buckley Town Band was formed which leads the Jubilee procession and competes nationally. There are a couple of choirs. In the 1930s and 40s there were two cinemas, the Tivoli and the Palace. The Buckley Football Club is very active as is the Cricket Club.



The Jubilee in the early 1950s

Surrounding Towns

The name **Mold** derives from the Norman *de Mohaut* family who resided there in the early 1100s. Mold is two miles to the west of Buckley and had a 1072 Norman Motte-and-Bailey castle, the mound remaining today as the substantial Bailey Hill with a memorial garden on top.

Hawarden is a village four miles from the English border and about two from Buckley with a population of about 2,000. It is on the escarpment leading to Buckley Mountain and has a defensive medieval castle and park. The castle may be on the site of an Iron Age fort and was later a Norman Motte-and-Bailey castle.

Connah's Quay six miles north of Buckley is the largest town in Flintshire with a population of about 24,000 and near the English border. It lies just south of the Deesite Industrial Park which includes the Tata steelworks, formerly John Summers.

Flint (Welsh *Y Fflint*) is a town on the Dee estuary six miles north of Buckley, originally the County Town, and has a population of about 13,000. It was first recorded in 1277 as a Norman town and was defended by an earthen ditch and palisaded bank.

Chester is in Cheshire near the Welsh border nine miles east of Buckley. It was founded by the Romans as a *castra* or fort about 79 AD with the name Deva. It has some of the best-preserved city walls in Britain and a castle, used today as a Crown Court and a military museum for the Cheshire regiments. It has been a city since 1541 and has a population of about 120,000. It was

one of the major army camps of the Romans with Roman roads linking to London, Manchester and into North Wales. Chester Cross is the centre of the original fort. In 689 King Ethelred founded the Minster Church of West Mercia which later became Chester Cathedral and the Saxons strengthened the walls to protect the city against the Danes. Chester was one of the last cities to fall to the Normans who constructed a castle to dominate the town. Under the Normans it became a Palatine, ruled by the Earls of Chester rather than by the monarch.

The Buckley Dialect

Dennis Griffiths was very active in the Buckley community, producing pantomimes for twenty-seven years from the 1930s. However he found time to record aspects of the Buckley dialect in his book *Talk of My Town*. It has been said that the Buckley accent derived from the various regions which contributed to the industrial development of the town. Miners came from Lancashire and Cornwall to dig coal and potters came from Staffordshire. These and local people from Wales and Deeside mixed to provide a rich Buckley dialect. My own Grandfather Bill Connah used Old English 'oo' when speaking of a woman friend instead of 'she'. He also used to say "can tha pee" meaning "can you pay". The word 'duck' was much used to as a term of endearment by women.

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