

Baslow in 1760

*George the third said with smile
Seventeen sixty yards in a mile*

Many many years ago when I was a small child ago my father taught me this ditty which has served me well ever since. It so happens that the date 1760 and the reign of George III is very relevant to Baslow.

The main event was the arrival of the 1759 Turnpike road from Chesterfield to Manchester. There had always been long distance traffic through the village and the new road boosted both traffic and the economy. Locally it started at Robin Hood, crossed the Heathy Lea Brook ¼ mile downstream from the inn and came through fields (later the Park) to the old bridge near Thatch Cottage. It passed the Cavendish Hotel (then "The Peacock"), crossed the old bridge and on to Hassop via Wheatlands Lane.

Lead Mining in the White Peak was booming. Some benefit came to Baslow from the lead smelter on the Barbrook, situated where there is still a pond close to the junction of the A623 (completed later in 1818) and the side road to Curbar Gap. In 1760 it was replaced by a new state of the art Cupola lead smelter ¼ mile downstream. The cupola furnace has gone, but the smelter's cottage, the house on the main road today, remains.

Coal had been mined in a small way at Robin Hood for centuries. In 1760 development was enhanced with deeper underground workings and much better road access. Coal was needed for the new lead smelter and also for the many lime kilns throughout the area including the large ones at Calver. The improved road would have made transport easier and cheaper.

The industrial revolution was said to have started with the opening of Arkwright's new cotton mill at Cromford in 1771 but the economy had been stirring for years. Towns were developing. Food was needed. Soon the wars with France reduced food imports and encouraged farmers to produce more.

In Baslow little is known about fields and farming before 1760. Probably most of the better low lying land had been enclosed for years and the produce used locally. Between 1760 (about) and 1800 land on the upper slopes and some moorland were converted to farmland (lime was needed in large quantities). By 1800 the process was complete. The village itself stayed much the same, but the work and effort taking in land would have had a major impact on the villagers. There is today very little difference outside the village between the Rutland estate map of Baslow in 1799 and modern OS maps, except for the enlargement of many fields by the removal of internal walls

One feature affected other villages but not Baslow. It missed out on getting a cotton mill or any other factory. Instead it had more than the average number of craftsmen. The scene was set for Baslow becoming a tourist attraction in the 1800s. Beautiful scenery, a rural idyl, no industry, good roads, all enhanced of course by the presence of Chatsworth.

And seventeen sixty started it off.

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