

The Gillibrands, Coal Mining and the Gillibrand Hall Viaduct Keystone

It is interesting to note that Thomas Gillibrand quarrelled with his Catholic priest who would not allow him to smoke his “churchwarden” in church and his children became protestants. Thomas moved to the continent in 1816, and the hall was then leased out to various families; in 1816 to George Hilton, merchant, in 1817 to John Wilkinson, calico printer. When Baines’s Directory was published in 1824, the hall was the home of John Fowden Hindle, Barrister and Magistrate.

Thomas died in 1828 and his estate was inherited by Henry Hawarden Fazakerley(HHF), who, when his will was written in 1830, was described as being of Mollington Hall, Cheshire. (He died in 1851, the same year as his son). The family had property at Walton and Fazakerley near Liverpool and Henry had daughters born in Cheshire and on Anglesey. However, he also had another daughter and his son born in Chorley, and it is most probable that it is Henry’s initials that were displayed on the keystone on Gillibrand Hall Viaduct.



The whereabouts of the keystone are not now known, although Ian Calderbank, who was contracted to demolish the viaduct, believes it may have been left in Astley Park next to the path, adjacent to the coach house. We would like to hear if anyone has seen it and knows where it is now, so that it can be preserved as a reminder of a fine piece of Chorley Heritage.

The Gillibrands had been more than happy to allow coal mining on their land and share the profits. In 1776 an agreement was drawn up between William Gillibrand, John Hollinshead and John Hawkshead, gentlemen and William German and Roger Fishwick of Charnock Richard, colliers, “to search and dig for coal in Gillibrand Lands in Chorley and clay to make bricks.” Henry’s will of 1830 refers to coal leases for 31 years, so there was an expectation that the Gillibrand estate would continue to be exploited for coal for a considerable period.

Unfortunately, it was a coal pit that was to cause the early demise of the second HHF. He was Henry Hawarden Gillibrand Fazakerley, born in Chorley in 1832. When the census was taken in 1851 he was living with his family in Sussex Square in Paddington, London in a household with 9 servants. Later that year, on 23rd June, Henry senior died. Henry Junior, via a trust, inherited the family estate. He brought a friend to Chorley less than a month later to view his inheritance. The tragic events were reported as follows:

Annual Register 1851 p98.

21. Coal-pit explosion AT CHORLEY.—A melancholy event occurred at Chorley, by which a young gentleman, who had just succeeded to his patrimonial estates, was deprived of life on occasion of his first inspection of them, together with a friend and two miners. Some years ago, Mr. H. H. Gillibrand, of Gillibrand Hall, Chorley, on succeeding to the Fazakerley estate, near Liverpool, assumed that family name, and resided at Fazakerley Hall; the more ancient seat of Gillibrand Hall being little occupied. This gentleman died on the 23rd June last, and was succeeded by his son, Mr. Henry Hawarden Gillibrand Fazakerley, aged 19 years. The family having paid a visit to the older mansion, the widowed mother and her daughter returned to London, leaving the young heir at the Hall, to receive a visit of his schoolfellow, Mr. T. W. S. Green, a son of Admiral Sir A. P. Green. Among the curiosities of the estate are some coal-pits. The young gentlemen were desirous of inspecting these, and in spite of the remonstrances of more experienced persons, who stated that the pit was foul, being unworked in consequence of an irruption of water, they descended the “New Pit” accompanied by the underlooker and a miner. Mr. Fazakerley and the miner descended first—their lights were extinguished by the foul air; but, unheeding the warning, fresh lights were procured, and Mr. Green and the underlooker also went down. In a few minutes there was a rush of air, and it was apparent that an explosion had taken place. Some time elapsed before the bodies could be recovered; life was of course extinct, and, in addition to burns and other injuries, the skulls of both the unfortunate young gentlemen were fractured by the force with which the explosion had driven them against the work.

Sadly the second HHF did not have sufficient time as owner of the Gillibrand estates to make his mark, and so it has to be assumed that that the key stone indicated that the viaduct was built between 1828 and 1851, during the life of Henry Hawarden Fazakerley (1809-1851).

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March 2019.