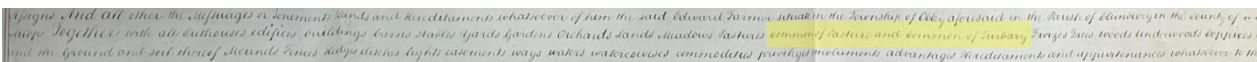


4 How was Black Hill used between 1854 and 1914?

1. For turves of peat

Peat cutting and drying will certainly have been an activity on Black Hill and not just in the area demarcated as a turbarry. In a conveyance document relating to part of the Cwm Estate of 1828 (Fig. 8)¹, the rights to ‘*common of*

Fig. 8



Included by permission of Shropshire Archives

pasture and common of turbarry’ are specified along with other details of the transaction. Fig. 3 shows that the turf had been exploited for many years and the Inclosure Commissioner would not have allocated an area to turbarry use unless such a claim had been made to him. Once dried, the peat could have been used as a fuel for domestic purposes but there may have been other uses such as a roofing material or in farming. Traditional practices such as cutting peat are unlikely to have changed simply because of the ‘privatisation’ of the Common land and the erection of fences. However, there is doubt about the scale of peat extraction on Black Hill. The *turbarry* was entrusted to the ‘Churchwardens and overseers of the poor’, however, it was to be ‘used by the inhabitants of the said Township of Obley’ so the *whole* population not just the poor. It is hoped that some information about the management and use will be found in Clunbury Parish records, however such evidence has proved elusive so far.

It is worth speculating about how important peat might have been as a resource to the inhabitants of Obley. Peat cutting leaves clear evidence of the activity having taken place as fig. 9² from Brown Moss in North Shropshire

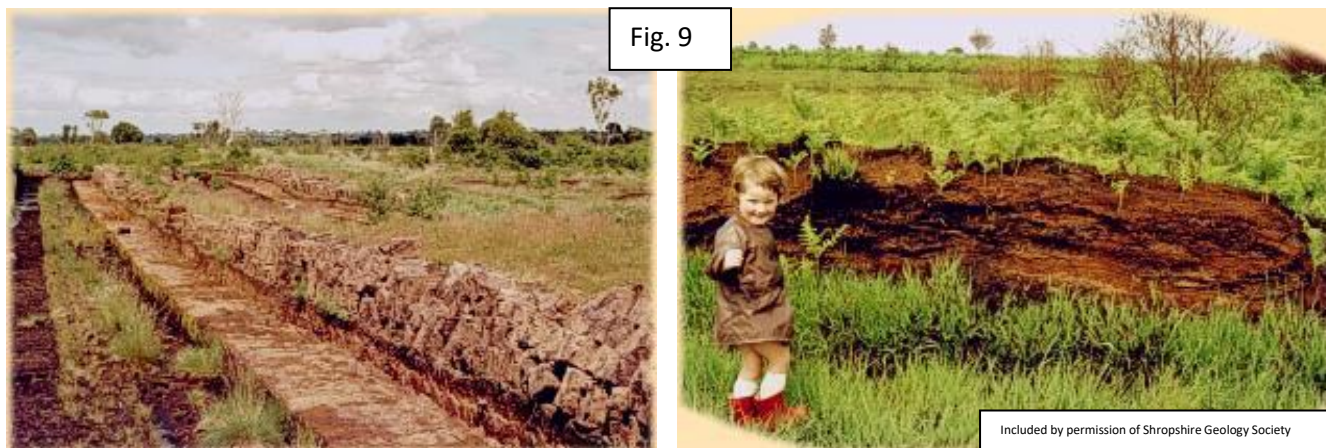


Fig. 9

Included by permission of Shropshire Geology Society

shows. If such cutting had taken place on a large scale over a long period of time on Black Hill, particularly if such cutting WAS restricted to just the turbarry, then there would be visual evidence to show even after vegetation regrowth.

To calculate the possible scale of peat removal and the resultant landscape change requires various assumptions.³ The outcome of the calculation suggests that if all the households of Obley relied on peat for their fuel, then the land surface over the whole of the turbarry (not including the recreation ground) would be lowered by nearly 1 metre in a decade relative to the surrounding land - which was presumably used by the landowners for other purposes and not subject to such extraction.

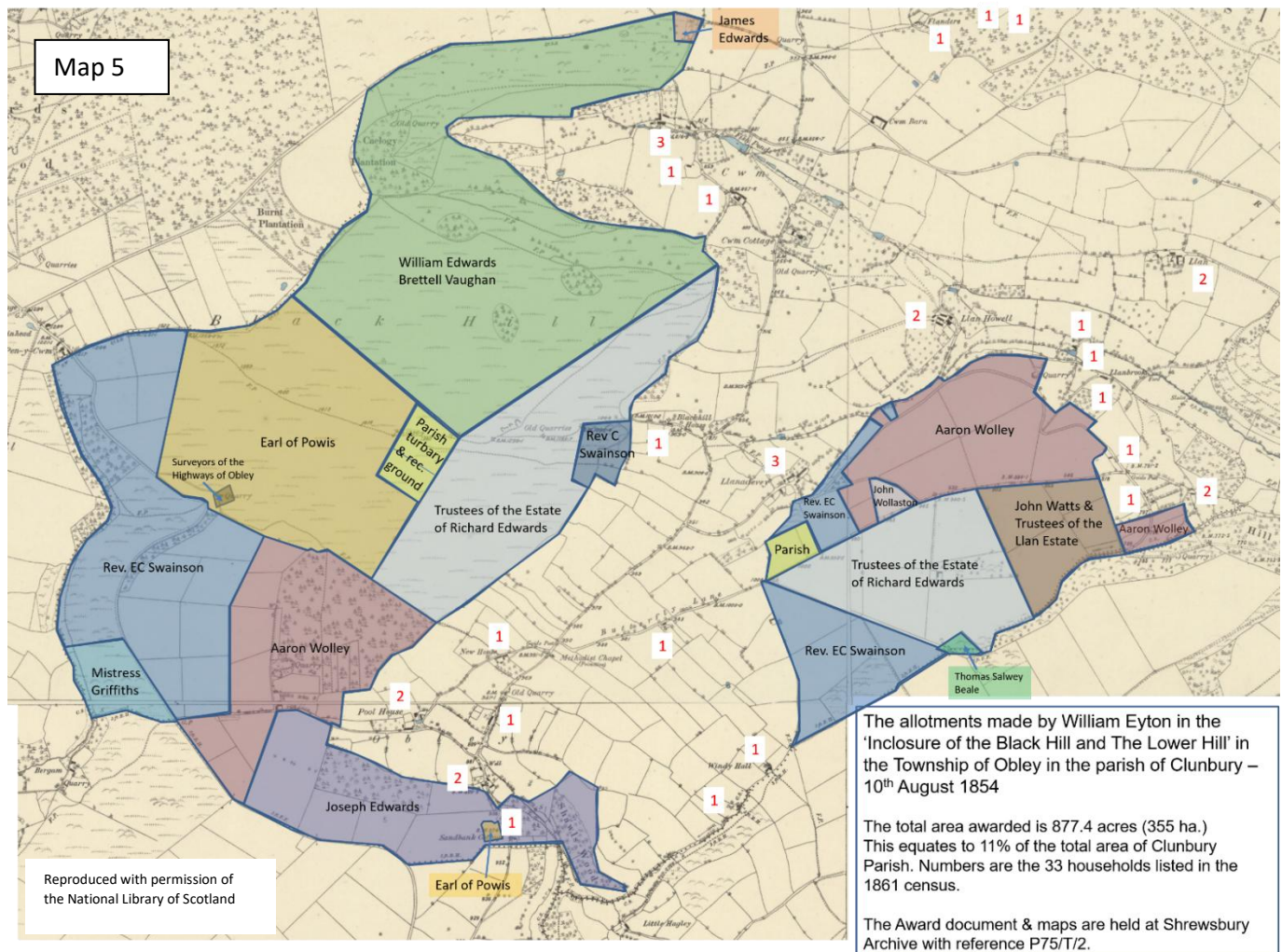
Assessment of peat usage – the assumptions made in the calculation given in footnote 3 are not realistic and a number of objections about this scale of peat extraction should be made. Four are given here. Firstly, in an area such as south Shropshire, timber is likely to be at least as prevalent as a source of fuel as peat. The importance and financial value means that timber and standing trees are almost always part of the negotiations and included in legal

¹ Lease and release (Ref. no. 4763/1/23-24 at Shropshire Archive)

² Taken from: <https://shropshiregeology.org.uk/brown-moss/>

³ The Scottish Highland History & Culture website, <https://www.ambaile.org.uk/asset/28975/>, suggests that a croft would burn 15,000 or more peats per year. Using this figure and the average size of peat turves (125 x 125 x 300 mm) each household would require 70.3 cubic metres of peat per year. The 1861 census shows that there were 33 households in Obley Township, so 33 x 70.3 = 2320 cubic metres of peat if all households relied on peat for their heating. If this volume is spread evenly across the area of the turbarry (approx. 25,000 sq.m) then the surface area would be reduced annually by over 90mm.

conveyance documents of land of the time⁴. The widespread occurrence of trees in the township is also shown on map 5⁵ by the OS symbol. A second concern surrounds the practicalities of shifting this volume of material from the turbarry to the home. The 33 households in Obley shown in the 1861 census are widely distributed within the township (map 5)⁶. None are within half a mile, some nearly two miles from the turbarry which, at 425 m above sea level, is 100-200 metres higher than the homes. So, cutting the peat is one thing but drying it, moving the peat and making use of it, is quite another.



A third problematic aspect of using the turbarry for peat is that while the Award gave the responsibility for its use to the 'Churchwardens and overseers of the poor', there is no guidance as to how the area should be sub-divided amongst interested households nor how potential disputes should be avoided. Enquiries have been made to the 2025 Clunbury Parish authorities but no information concerning regulation of the turbarry has come to light so far.

A fourth doubt concerning any large-scale extraction of peat is that no visual evidence can be seen (e.g. on the aerial photo shown on the title page) of tell-tale steps or slopes that would indicate that an area has been subject to persistent exploitation for peat. Certainly, not on the scale of a landscape lowering of 90 cm per decade relative to the surrounding areas which would have been the case had such diggings been restricted to the turbarry areas.

Fig. 10⁷ shows a LiDAR image alongside an aerial view. The main natural features shown are two small valleys (locally called gutters) running to the east. Artificial features include the modern forestry tracks, a small reservoir and quarry workings. The only probable peat diggings are indicated both to the south and west of '3'. If these

⁴ For example, in the settlement of Richard Edwards (d.1840) will (Item 4763/1/41 at Shropshire Archive), some land which was valued at £5300 had timber growing on it which was valued at £530. So 10% of the land value. Both values were itemised in the document.

⁵ The 1883 OS map and the allocation of lands are separated by nearly 30 years. Some features, including woodland, will have changed in the interim. For example, it is thought that 'Wolley's Plantation' which is SW of the turbarry must have been planted by Aaron Wolley during this period of time.

⁶ The base map in map 5 is an amalgamation of 2 sections from Map B of the Inclosure award. The join between the 2 sections could not be avoided. On to the base map, the 33 dwellings identified in the 1861 census have been numbered. Unfortunately, the base map does not distinguish between dwellings and other buildings so barns etc. may have been confused with houses so the precise numbers may be inaccurate.

⁷ From - <https://www.nls.uk/> - the image on the left is a LiDAR DTM 50cm-1m image. On the right is an ESRI World Imagery image.

markings represent former peat extraction, they are outside the area demarcated as a turbary and more recent forestry operations have obliterated visual evidence.

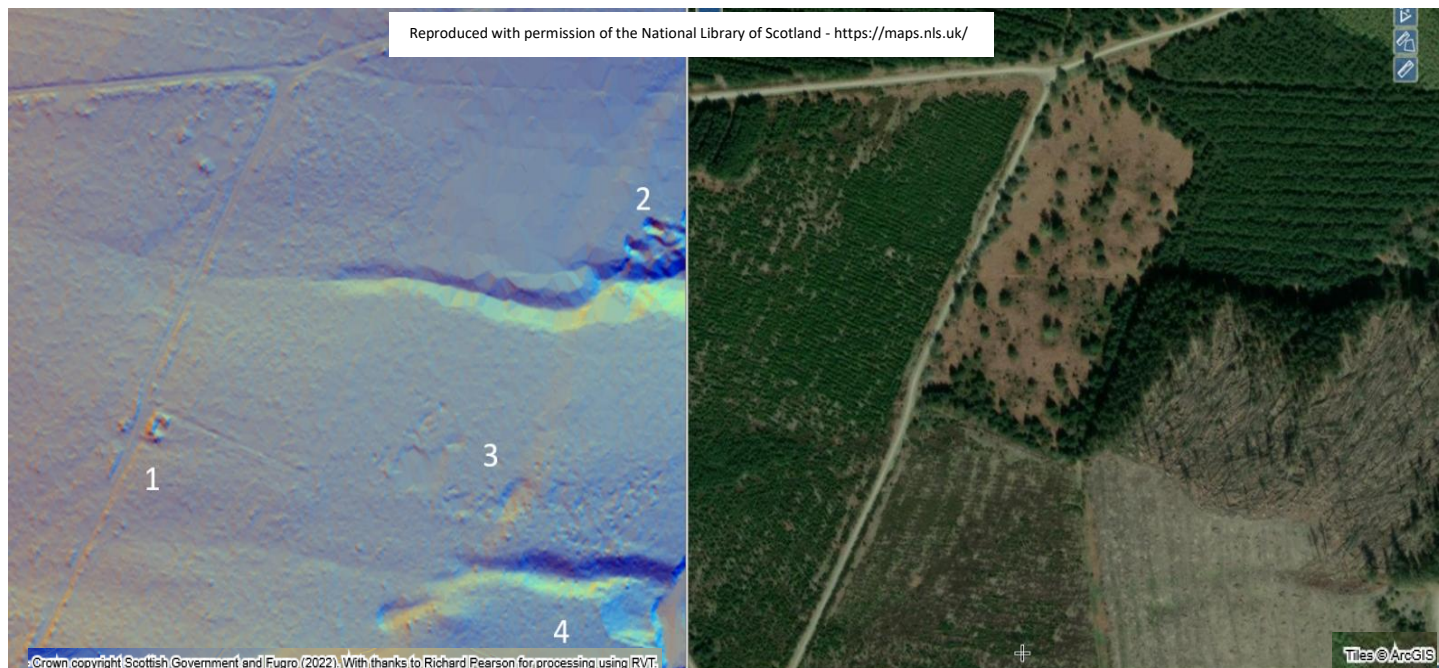


Figure 10 - Key 1 - Forestry Commission reservoir 2 – Quarry workings 3 – probable peat diggings 4 – valley (or gutter)

Based on the evidence which has been found, one is drawn to the conclusion that peat extraction following the creation of the turbary was of limited volume. Peat may have been an additional source of energy for some households rather than a mainstay and if the diggings were to be used for other purposes than fuel, again such use appears to have been limited in extent⁸. However, a counterpoint to this assertion is that a serious fire in 1939 could have removed evidence of earlier diggings as well as significant amounts of the remaining peat deposits.

2. For whinberries⁹

While these small dark blue berries will have grown and been collected for domestic use in jams and tarts for many years, the commercial attraction probably did not start until the early 19th century and the use of the berry for dyeing and in particular for naval uniforms, as shown in fig. 11.¹⁰

This commercial opportunity is thought to be associated with the industrialisation of the Lancashire textile industry in the 19th century. As the cutting describes, since the harvest of whinberries coincides with grain and other harvests, the collection seems to have been an activity solely followed by women and children. As fig.12 shows, the

August 1889
 It has been a great year for Whimberries [known elsewhere as Bilberry – *Vaccinium myrtillus* – used for jams and tarts but in this case most probably sent off to be used as dye for naval uniforms. Ed] and large quantities have been brought into Clun from the Black Hill and the hills above Newcastle. Many tons have been dispatched to the large towns in Lancashire and even as far as Glasgow. We are glad to think that the women and children are happy to reap such a nice little harvest, which will, we hope, pay off old scores and still leave some to put by for the short days of winter.

Fig. 11

involvement of children in harvests had an adverse effect on school attendance. The photograph on the title page, thought to have been taken in Bucknell towards the end of the 19th

⁸ An equivalent turbary to the one for Clunbury had been designated near Pen-y-Cwm for Clun residents. A newspaper article of 1915 states “There are several pieces of turbary land in the parish formerly used by the parishioners for turf fuel, and now being utilised for grazing free of expense”. This suggests that by the 20th century the use of peat had dwindled. Its use was probably replaced by coal which was widely available throughout the area.

⁹ There are many variations for the name of *Vaccinium myrtillus* throughout the UK. The variations include – whinberry, bilberry, whimberry, blaeberry, whortleberry, and wimberry.

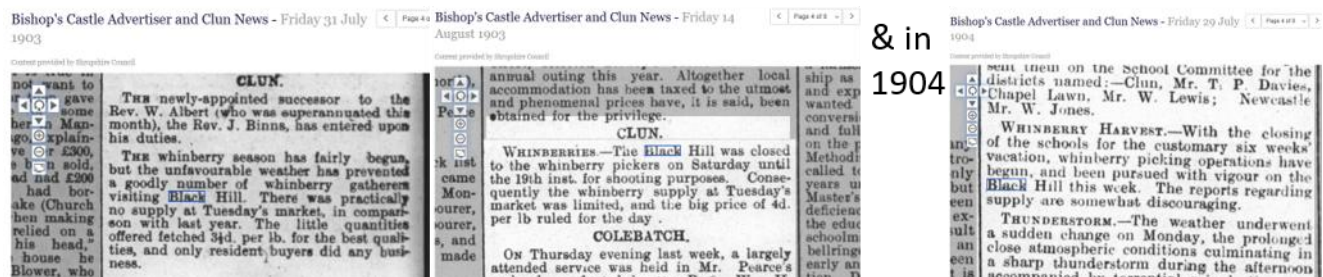
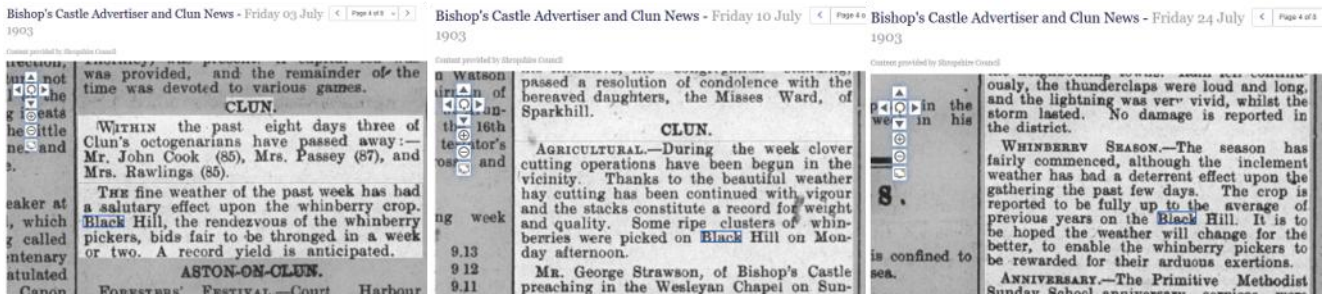
¹⁰ No primary sources (e.g. railway or mill records) concerning the trade with Lancashire in whinberries have been found but this contemporary description is unambiguous. From - ‘Chapel Lawn and the Redlake Valley’ Ed’. Patrick Cosgrove (2025) p.5. which is a collection of extracts from the Clun Valley Parochial Magazine 1889-1899.

century, shows the large scale and also the manual nature of the work.

The last sentence in fig.11 suggests that the whinberry harvest played a significant part in many family economies. While the harvesters, especially the school children, were probably keen to be involved for as long as possible, the quality of the harvest depended upon the weather. As fig. 13 shows the fickleness of the season was a serious drawback for those families. Since the poor whinberry harvests probably coincided with poor harvests for grain and other farming output, hard winters would have lain ahead for many families in those years.

On 13th July 1866 Mr Johnson wrote "The classes have been broken up this week, many children being absent gathering windberries. It is likely this irregularity will continue for some time." On 27th July "The attendance has been so low both this and last week, that it has been determined to close the school for a fortnight to prevent the annual average from being greatly reduced. All the children will now have an opportunity to gather windberries for a couple of weeks, and it is expected by that time that the school will be better filled than at present." On 13th August "School reopened - very poor attendance." On 23rd August "School closed for harvest holidays for 3 weeks." On 17th September "The school re-opened. Owing to continuous falls of rain the harvest has not yet been secured and a poor attendance is the consequence." On 12th October "The week just closed is the first in which the classes have mustered fully since the beginning of July. This irregularity in attendance has had a most injurious effect upon many of the children, some having been thrown very backward in their work. The circumstances which induce this irregularity are local and not easily overcome. It is very discouraging to the teacher, as his efforts are almost wasted on irregular children."

Fig.12 from 'A Country education: A history of the schools at Clunbury in the County of Shropshire' by Christopher Train (1999)



& in
1904

Figure 13 – the sequence of items from 1903 is encouraging about that year's harvest. But in the years of the first decade of the 20th century, both 1904 and 1907 had poor harvests with the latter being described as 'a total failure owing to the continuous wet and cold weather'. All cuttings by permission of Shropshire Archives.



Fig. 14 - example of a hand-made fruit picking comb.

The 'big price' of 4d per pound reported in August 1903 equates to about £1.75 per pound at 2025 prices. Even using the type of hand tool shown in fig. 14 rewards are unlikely to be higher than those paid to the first link involved in most supply chains. The supply chain for Black Hill whinberries involved the harvesters carrying the fruit from the hills to the valleys where it was sold to merchants. It is assumed that the merchants in fig. 15b¹¹ are the men. They would transport the harvest to the nearest rail station – probably Bucknell or Hopton Heath both of which opened in 1861 – from where the fruit would travel to its destination in the cities of Lancashire and elsewhere. Each stage of the supply chain would raise the price of the crop and, involve more people. If the pattern of most fruit harvesting around the world is followed, the pickers would be rewarded the least.



Fig. 15 – (a) a group in Chapel Lawn ready to go whinberry picking.



(b) the 'wimberry market in New Radnor. Neither photograph is dated.

3. For shooting

It is believed that WEBV built Cwm Hall in the 1850s as much as a shooting lodge as well as a country house and retreat from his main residence which was in Castle Street, Ludlow. The evidence for this assertion is that in the censuses of 1871, 1881 and 1891 a gamekeeper is listed among the residents of the Cwm. It is thought that all the working people of the hamlet were employed by WEBV or his successors at Cwm Hall. Indeed, in the 1911 Census summary book one cottage on the estate is named 'Keeper's Cottage'. In addition to the census information, one visual feature of the Cwm remaining to the present day are the many mature deciduous trees, in particular oaks and beech, which can be seen. Some of these are scattered throughout the parkland immediately around Cwm Hall itself, but others were planted along carriageways towards Clunton and Hopton Heath. A third avenue forms the access track from Cwm Hall leading to the shooting moor of Black Hill.

WEBV seems to have followed the growing fashion in the mid-19th century for game shooting, with grouse being the particularly favoured target. The practice had been regulated in the Game Act of 1831 for the first time which created what became known as the 'Glorious Twelfth' of August as the start of the red grouse shooting season. Open seasons in the autumn/winter for the shooting of other species were also laid down in the Act.

In Britain more broadly, shooting in the 19th century had an important commercial aspect. A contemporary account in The Field Sports Journal website states -

'Unlike pheasant and partridge shooting, both of which tended to be the preserve of the shoot owner and his invited guests rather than paying clients until the 1970s, grouse shooting was commercialised during the mid-19th century with many English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish landowners letting out their moors to wealthy businessmen or members of the aristocracy and the landed gentry either annually or for a month or a fortnight at a time. It was something of a tradition on some northern moors for the owner to let the shooting from 12th August until the end of September or early October at a relatively high rental and to retain the remainder of the season for his own use. Accommodation

¹¹ With thanks to Patrick Cosgrove of Chapel Lawn for the photographs of the whinberry trade used in figs. 11, 12, 15 and on the title page.

*for paying Guns was either provided in a specially built shooting lodge (often referred to as a 'shooting box') or in a local inn or farmhouse dependent upon the size of the moor.*¹²

There is no evidence to suggest that the shooting on Black Hill was commercialised by WEBV in the way described above and the relatively small scale of the moorland (370 acres) suggests that the area would be used solely for private use by WEBV and his friends. In which case, the level of use between 1860 and WEBV's death in 1884 was probably quite low.

When WEBV died in 1884, his land and property around Black Hill passed to his widow, Margaret Sheppard who was then aged 37. It is not known whether she took much interest in living in the Cwm Estate or managing Black Hill nor whether the uses of Black Hill so far described were interrupted. What is known is that Margaret remarried 2 years later and went to live in Bredon, Worcestershire. She died there aged just 42 in 1889. The inheritance of the estate thereafter was not straightforward – the beneficiary was WEBV's cousin twice removed, Edward Shipley Hewett, who was then a 17-year-old schoolboy. Like his benefactor cousin nearly 40 years earlier, to benefit from the inheritance, Edward had to add the names Brettell Vaughan to his own but that could only be achieved once he reached the age of 21. He will be known here as EBV (rather than Edward Shipley Hewett Brettell Vaughan!)

It seems likely that legal complexities delayed the inheritance, and for good reason, it was a complicated will. A newspaper report, which cannot be shown for copyright reasons, describes how in Autumn 1891 a case was brought before Clun Magistrates when local council rates for Cwm Villa (now called Cwm Hall) and the shooting rights on Black Hill had been left unpaid. The parish had sought payment from Annie Hewett - EBV's widowed mother and since EBV was under 21, the trustee of his inheritance. However, Annie Hewett had died in the spring of 1890 and so the role of trustee and guardian to EBV passed to Annie's own mother, Elizabeth Shipley. Elizabeth Shipley was mother-in-law of WEBV's first cousin once removed, and until EBV reached the age of 21 in 1895, she was in charge of his huge inheritance. In 1891 she was aged 68, and lived alone in Vauxhall, South London. It is doubtful whether she had ever been to Cwm. So the delays in the legal settlement of the will had got in the way of the day-to-day running of the estate. If WEBV's intention had been to keep his fortune 'in the family' then circumstances had conspired against him, despite the will allowing inheritance to both female and male descendants.

The newspaper article also suggests that the estate was probably being managed, in the absence of an in situ landlord, by a member of the family firm of Estate Agents - Messrs. R, J & R Tench of Ludlow. It seems likely that this company handled the tenancy arrangements for Cwm Hall, Cwm Farm and the shooting rights on Black Hill. It was stated in court that the shooting rights had been let to Mr. Staveley Hill since 1890. The cutting is rather ambiguous but Hill was probably also renting Cwm Villa. If it is a guide to the arrangement made with Mr. Hill, a later tenant, HJ Hampson rented Cwm Villa (including furniture) along with sporting rights, council rates and game keeper wages on an annual basis between 1904 and 1910.

In the whole period from 1884 to 1910, though the pieces of evidence do not cover a continuous period except for Mr. Hampson from 1904 to 1910, there are enough other dates to be reasonably confident of interpolating between the dates and suggesting that neither Margaret Sheppard nor EBV lived at Cwm for any length of time. It seems more likely that the estate was managed by Tench's who appointed tenant farmers and gamekeepers as required. These employees would be housed with their families either at Cwm Farm or one of the estate cottages. In addition, Cwm Hall was rented out as a furnished property with rights to grouse shooting on Black Hill and trout fishing in the several fish ponds close to the house.

¹² <https://fieldsports-journal.com/game-shooting/history-of-red-grouse-shooting/>

No evidence has been found for the period up to 1905, but the game register for the next 6 years is shown in fig. 16.

Year	Plover	Partridge	Pheasant	Hare	Rabbit	Woodcock	Snipe	Grouse	Black game	Woodpigeon	Various	Totals
1905	2	92	161	6	212	1	2	25	-	40	-	541
1906	-	161	179	2	178	-	-	45	2	75	6	648
1907	2	87	87	3	104	1	1	28	2	18	1	334
1908	-	56	156	2	105	1	-	24	5	21	-	370
1909	-	97	301	2	269	3	-	11	1	21	4	709
1910	-	70	187	1	1132	5	-	41	10	10	-	1456

Fig. 16 - The game register for the Cwm estate including Black Hill from 1905 – 1910.

The game register was probably compiled by John Husbands who was employed as gamekeeper. The table appeared in an article called 'On Whinberry Hill'¹³ in the Clun Chronicle. In the article, Tom Wall writes '*The register takes us back to what seems like a different world in which red grouse were still quite common and black game (black grouse) were unexceptional. In Shropshire, black grouse had disappeared from the county by the 1950s and the red grouse are now found only on The Stiperstones and The Long Mynd. The partridge column is of note too: these will have been the grey or English partridge, not the introduced red-legged or French partridge which are nowadays released in large numbers for shooting. The grey partridge is now effectively extinct in south Shropshire.*'

The register does not continue after 1910 though shooting continued in later years to some degree as fig. 18 reports but apparently without a full time gamekeeper. John Husbands was recorded in the 1911 census as being an 'out-of-work gamekeeper' and he was no longer living on the Cwm Estate. It is unclear whether someone else was employed in his place, whether the game keeping role was given to one or more of the remaining seven estate farm workers or whether EBV decided that the role was not necessary in the future.

In the same census, EBV and his family were recorded as living at Cwm Hall. As a member of the National Rifle Corps of the School of Musketry, he was, presumably, a gun enthusiast so grouse shooting may have appealed to him. The cuttings in fig. 17 and 18 suggest that he tried to manage the competing requirements of grouse shooting and whinberry picking so that both could take place but it appears that his agreement to whinberry harvesting by the community was somewhat grudging and that if he had arranged a shooting party, that that would take precedence. From the evidence that has been seen, it is suggested that EBV was keen to generate an income from Black Hill in ways that had not been recognised by WEBV. It may also be that WEBV did not need to get revenue from the Cwm estate because of the wide portfolio of property that he controlled. Certainly, EBV's inheritance was only a part of the whole estate left by WEBV in 1884.

EBV's close connection to the Cwm Estate appears to have been short lived. In 1913, EBV sold the contents of Cwm Hall and rented-out the property, this time unfurnished. The family moved to Wolverhampton. An attempt to sell the whole estate was made just before the First World War. This attempt did not achieve a sale but the property was sold in 1919 soon after the Armistice. It seems probable therefore, that game shooting on Black Hill was much less frequent from 1913 to 1920 than in the previous decade and may not have happened at all during the war years.

¹³ With thanks to Tom Wall for 'On Whinberry Hill' by Tom Wall (for Clunbury Climate & Environment Group). Clun Chronicle 3rd May 2023.

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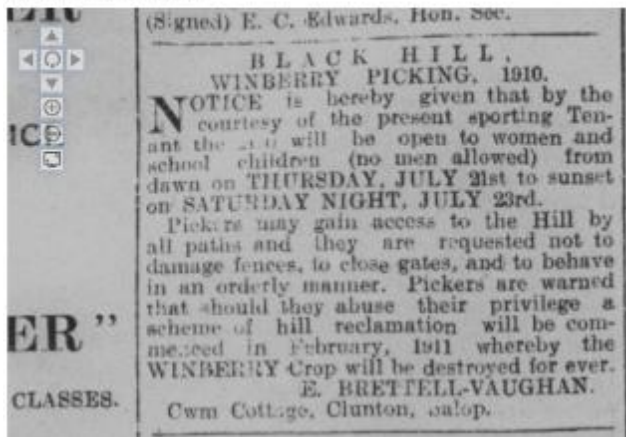


Fig. 17 – limitations on whinberry harvesting enforced by the landowner.

4. For grazing

Apart from humans, animal grazing is the main threat to the whinberry plant and its fruit. In 2025, the animals which graze on the fruit of Whinberry Hill are thought to be Roe and Muntjac deer. In the 19th century, deer populations were much lower than now. Red and roe deer were largely confined to Scotland and other species were largely confined to deer parks¹⁴. It is unlikely that any deer grazing took place on Black Hill in the 19th century. Similarly, while populations of ponies are known to have existed on the common land of Long Mynd for centuries, there is no record of them on the much smaller common land of Black Hill. Of the various animals that might have competed with humans for whinberries, sheep grazing would be the chief concern.

Probably as an unforeseen consequence, the 1854 Inclosure Award may have given rise to the conditions that allowed whinberries to flourish in the second half of the 19th and the first part of the 20th centuries. In the detail of map 6, one can see a contrast in the ways in which the different owners managed their land. The base map upon which the colours and labels have been added was surveyed in 1883, about 30 years after the Award. In those three decades, Joseph Edwards, Aaron Wolley and Samuel Miles (tenant farmer for Rev. EC Swainson) sub-divided the allotments into fields for farming purposes and also planted trees in plantations – these details can be seen ‘under’ the colours on map 5. By contrast, the allotments of WEBV, Earl of Powis and the estate of Richard Edwards show no signs of fences, indeed nor does the turbarry/recreation ground. The reason for this contrast has, it is believed, two aspects. Firstly, in the years following the Inclosure Award, WEBV had inherited both from his uncle James who died at Cwm in June 1859 and in March 1860 when the estate of James’s brother, Richard Edwards, was settled. Both wills were to WEBV’s benefit. In addition, WEBV had purchased in 1856 an area across the parish boundary in Clun Parish from Rev. EC Swainson¹⁵. The tract had been allotted to Swainson by the Clun Inclosure Award in 1845. Then in September 1860 WEBV purchased the area that had been allotted to the Earl of Powis.¹⁶ Another purchase from Rev. Swainson followed in 1862¹⁷. All these acquisitions lay adjacent to WEBV’s own allotment to the north and west his on Black Hill. So by the middle of 1862, WEBV owned an unbroken area of about 450 acres (182 hectares) surrounding the Parish turbarry/Recreation Ground – the light green area on map 6.

¹⁴ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/animals/mammals/>

¹⁵ An area of 28 acres for £125 = approx. £4-10-0 per acre.

¹⁶ An area of 128 acres for £650 = approx. £5 per acre. At 2025 prices, £650 is equivalent to £69,000.

¹⁷ An area of 29 acres for £155 = approx. £5-7-0 per acre.

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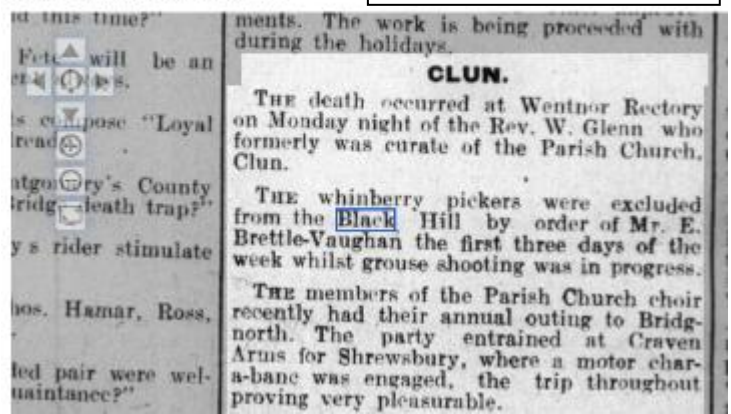
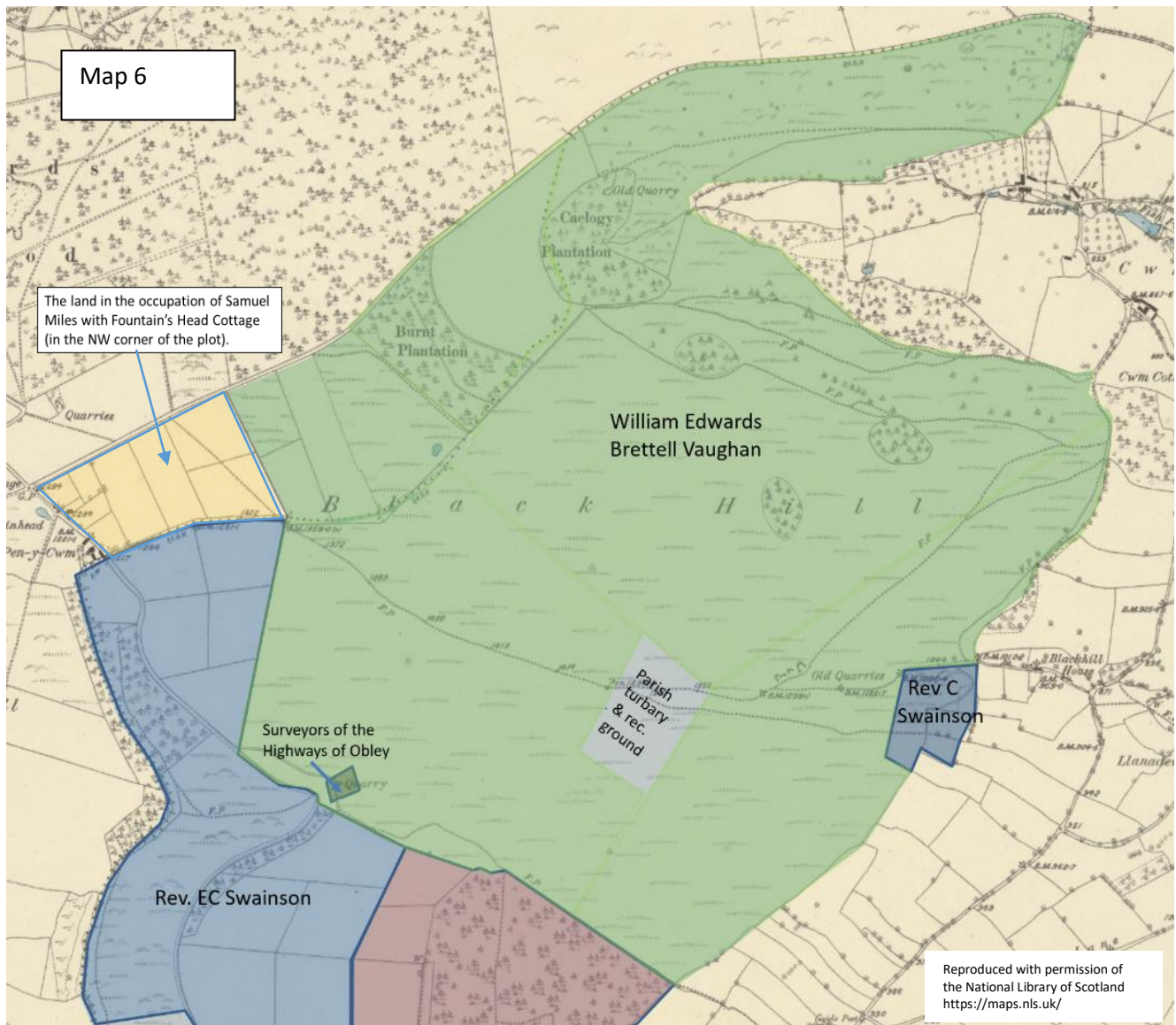


Fig. 18 Grouse shooting takes priority.



Fig. 19 EBV at Cwm Farm with his wife Sarah and children. Probably 1913.



Secondly, it is believed that WEBV's intention was to create a shooting moor on Black Hill. If so, removing as many obstructions as possible made sense. Whether the guns were to remain stationary in shooting butts and the birds were to be flushed out by beaters, or if the guns were to walk across the moor and flush the birds themselves, fences would be in the way. After removing the fences which had been erected some years earlier to demarcate the various Inclosure Award allotments, apart from some patches of woodland there was nothing to hinder WEBV's ability to enjoy his 'sport' from 1862 onwards. The exception to this open-moorland regime on WEBV's ownership of Black Hill is the NW corner. This part was acquired in 1869 and remained fenced, and presumably farmed, by some of the family of Samuel Miles who himself lived a couple of miles to the west at Rock Hill. In 1871, Edward (aged 22 – farmer of 15 acres), William Miles (13) and their elder sister Elizabeth (30 - housekeeper) lived at Fountain's Cottage.

5. Would a shooting moor be compatible with other uses of Black Hill?

It is thought that sheep grazing and an economically viable whinberry crop would be compatible so long as the grazing wasn't highly intensive. In much of the UK, the intensification of both sheep and cattle grazing was a feature of 19th century agriculture but this was normally associated with the smaller fields created by fences. On WEBV's land on Black Hill, without field boundaries, sheep would graze widely but intensive use would not be possible. In these circumstances, whinberries could flourish and the vibrant annual harvesting which has been described could become established.

For obvious safety reasons, game shooting is not compatible with whinberry picking but as described earlier, game shooting was outlawed before 12th August. Much of the whinberry picking will have taken place before that date and with suitable management, as fig. 18 shows, it would be possible for the 2 activities to happen without conflict.

One is drawn to the conclusion then, that shooting, grazing and whinberry picking could be compatible with each other as long as the shooting parties were scheduled in advance and appropriate public announcements were made. Since peat digging is not thought to have been of great significance on Black Hill anyway, a plan to prioritise shooting but allow some managed grazing and whinberry picking to take place as well, appears to be practical.