

## 5 Industry and World War touch Black Hill

The tone of the newspaper announcements in fig. 17 and 18 suggests that EBV wanted to determine exactly how Black Hill was to be used and who should benefit from any income that derived from the land. As the landowner such is his right. The sense of community involvement in the local environment which has come to the fore in the latter part of the century was missing in the early part of the 20th century. So landowners, including EBV as far as Black Hill is concerned, could exploit land for their own benefit with little regard as to the consequences for others or the potential impact on the natural environment. So it was with a notion to use Black Hill in a way that now seems rather far-fetched.

Technical developments in electric lighting had followed rapidly after Edison's patented invention of the incandescent bulb in 1878. The great advantages of electric lighting compared to candle, oil or other sources of power in terms of convenience, safety and efficiency can readily be appreciated. At this time, electric power generation was on a local scale so there were opportunities for entrepreneurs throughout the country. The world's first coal powered generating plant opened in London in 1882. In the same decade, the British parliament legislated to make it possible for entrepreneurs, companies or local authorities to set up plants and it was not until the 1920s that the first steps towards a national approach to power generation and distribution were taken. Of course, there were few of the electrical appliances and gadgets that developed later in the century but convenient and good lighting offered huge benefits in homes and also in factories, shops, offices and streets especially in the winter months. So the 'race' was on to reap the benefits of making and selling the power.

Probably the first that most people will have heard of a scheme to generate power on Black Hill were the articles in Fig. 20 during the early summer of 1905 –



Fig. 20 – the potential building of a power plant on Black Hill is brought to the notice of the public

At a time when any electric generation and use was a novelty, many sources of power were being harnessed in different places. At the time of the Black Hill suggestion, work was underway to build a power plant using 'suction gas'<sup>1</sup> in Ludlow. At the opening of the plant in December 1906, Councillor Marston of the Ludlow Town Council having heard from the engineers that suction gas was the cheapest power on earth said 'they in Ludlow were often charged that they were very much behind the times, but he thought that that charge would no longer remain against them now that they had the electric light.' Subsequently, a hydro scheme was built on the Teme to supply lighting for the Dinham and Castle areas of the town although the premises were destroyed by fire in 1924.

Newspaper evidence suggests that while the people of the Clun Valley were keen to benefit from scientific advancements in transport and energy technology, there was uncertainty about how development would happen. Fig. 21 describes rather different views concerning Black Hill while fig. 22 shows how Clun stayed up-to-date in 1905. In the case of Black Hill, it is assumed that the source of power which would be harnessed was the peat found under

<sup>1</sup> Suction Gas, or Producer Gas, is a fuel gas manufactured by blowing air and steam simultaneously through a coke or coal fire. The gas being drawn into the gas generator by an internal combustion engine. (from - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Producer\\_gas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Producer_gas))

the surface of the land. The newspaper extracts suggest that Clun Rural District Council was inclined to be in favour of the scheme – see fig. 23.

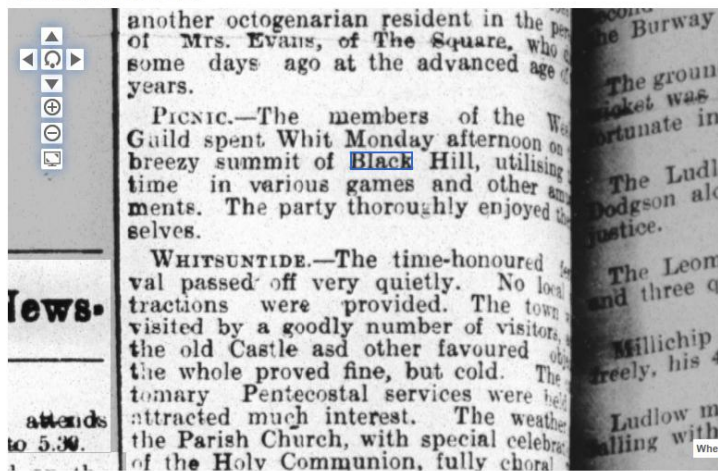


Fig. 21 While a Shrewsbury newspaper reported that “the land in question was left a considerable time ago to the poor of Clun, but, being so far away, out of cultivation, and on top of an hill, it is useless to them or any one else in the town” the more local paper shows that there was some community use made of Black Hill.

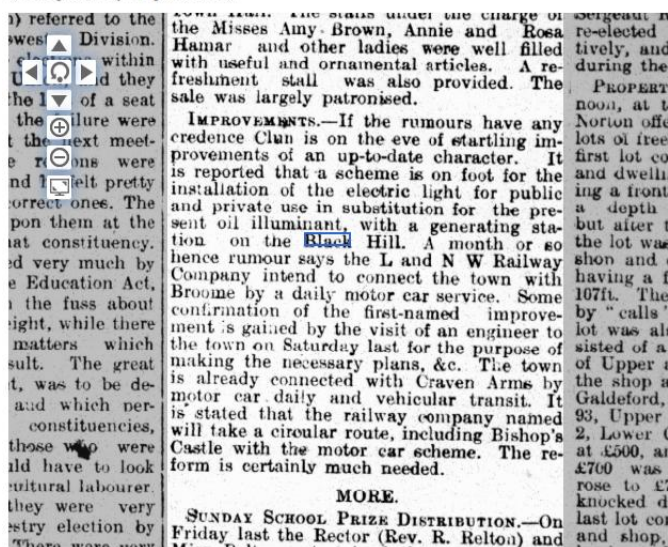
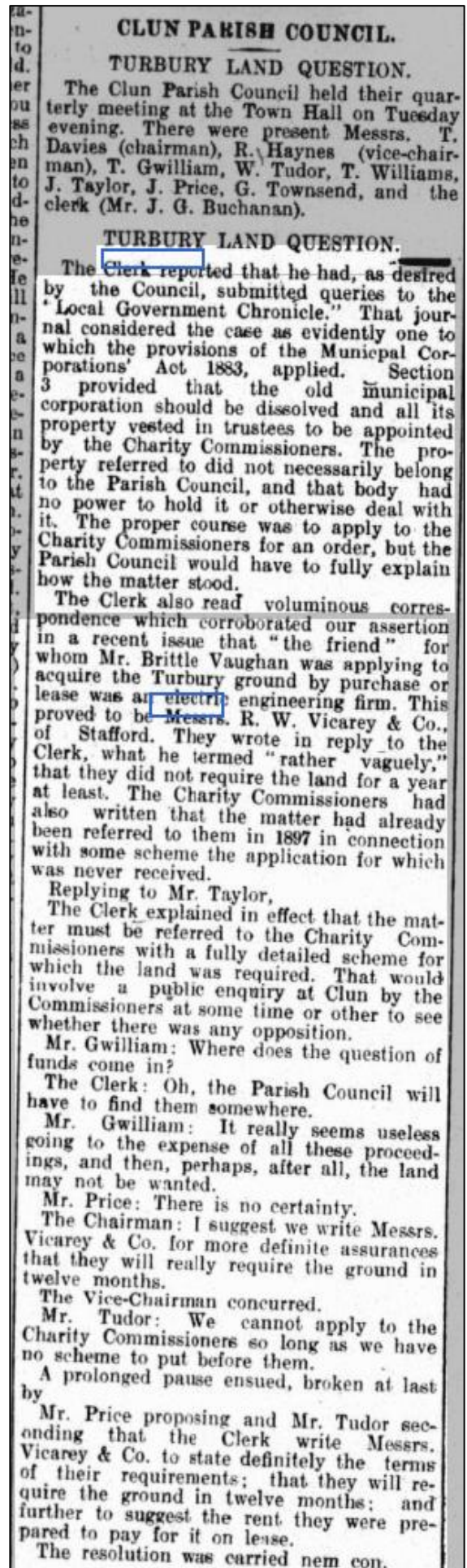


Fig. 22 Power and public transport improvements are planned for Clun and the surrounding district.

Fig. 23 – Clun RDC deliberate on the subject of using Black Hill for making electricity.

From: Bishop's Castle Advertiser and Clun News – Fri 14 July 1905.

Content provided by Shropshire Council.



They were perhaps mindful of advances in the making of chemical or artificial dyes which was starting to bring about a terminal decline in the importance of whinberries as an industrial raw material. The RDC would also be aware of the benefits of bringing electric power to the town as well as the scheme providing an income to the Council that a sale or lease of their land would bring. However, the vagueness of the enquiry from the electric company involved plus the complicated administration suggested in the reply from the Charity Commissioners to the Council Clerk's enquiry, seem to have scotched the plan. No such power plant was erected and it was not until several years later, in 1913, that the Shropshire County Council approved plans from the Clun RDC for the erection of part overhead/part buried power lines in the town. It was not until just after the British Foreign Secretary was moved to say "*The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our life-time*"<sup>2</sup>, that electric lights came on in Clun and the RDC started to make regular payments to the 'Clun Electric Supply Syndicate' for street lighting.

It is unlikely that the Great War had any significant effect upon Black Hill. Of course, the surrounding farms were subject to the same regulations as other rural areas and many young men, as well as horses, had to join the armed

forces and many made the ultimate sacrifice. But with the prospect of peace not far away, the war in mainland Europe touched Black Hill in August 1918 as reported in the Bishop's Castle Advertiser and Clun News – fig.24.

As mentioned earlier, EBV was unable to sell the Cwm Estate in early 1914, but after the Armistice of 1918 he wasted no time before trying again. This time he was successful and JPT Jackson, a textile manufacturer with farming interests from North Lancashire, became the new landowner in June 1919 at the price of £14,500 (about £650,000 at current prices).

In the sales brochure<sup>3</sup> and in the signed sale contract<sup>4</sup>, both the pieces of Parish land are listed with the acreage corresponding precisely to that given in the Inclosure Award of 1854. However, the map which is part of the contract and is based on the 1904 Ordnance Survey map, does not show either the turbarry or recreation land delineated by black (fence) lines. The three rectangular enclosures (numbered 873, 799A and 802A), which had been erected since the death of WEBV 20 years earlier, are assumed to be pens or sheep folds created for use in managing livestock. Three other areas (801, 802, 803) appear to be wooded plantations. That the contract refers to Black Hill as a grouse moor and that **no** fences surround the Parish land either on the 1905 OS Map or the 1919 legal contract support the notion that, at both dates, Black

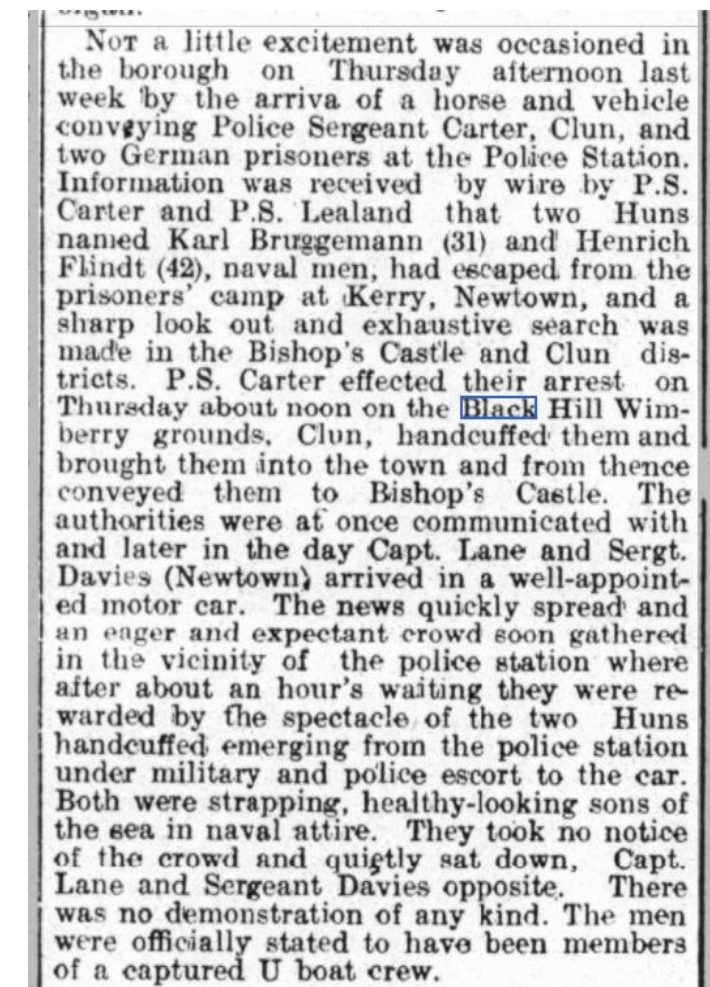


Fig. 24 'Excitement' caused by 2 escapees from Kerry camp.

Hill was kept as open as possible to allow for its use for shooting.

In the 1921 census, JPT Jackson and his family were not listed as being resident at Cwm, rather they resided at their main home at Wheelton in Lancashire. However, there is no evidence that Cwm Hall was rented out at this time and Cwm was to become the main home for at least some of the family during the interwar years. The same farming family (Powell) managed the estate based at Cwm Farm as in EBV's time while farm labourers, a forester and a gamekeeper were employed and housed on the estate. The nature of these appointments suggests that Jackson managed the estate, including Black Hill, in much the same way as had been done by his predecessor – sheep grazing

<sup>2</sup> From: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_lamps\\_are\\_going\\_out](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_lamps_are_going_out)

<sup>3</sup> Shropshire Archive item - 4763/1/153 Sale particulars of Cwm Estate 1919

<sup>4</sup> Photographed by kind permission of Chris Carpenter (grandson of JPT Jackson) from his private collection.

and shooting during the season. The major change in usage compared to the early years of the century was the abandonment of whinberries as a commercial resource. After WW1, and perhaps caused by WW1, the use of cheaper chemical dyes in making cloth for military uniforms, which had been the mainstay of whinberry-based dyes at an earlier date, was complete. No references documenting the declining role of whinberries in industry have been found but both documentary and anecdotal information suggests that the heyday of the industry was in the 1880s and 1890s and that whinberries reverted to being used solely for domestic purposes in the Edwardian period.

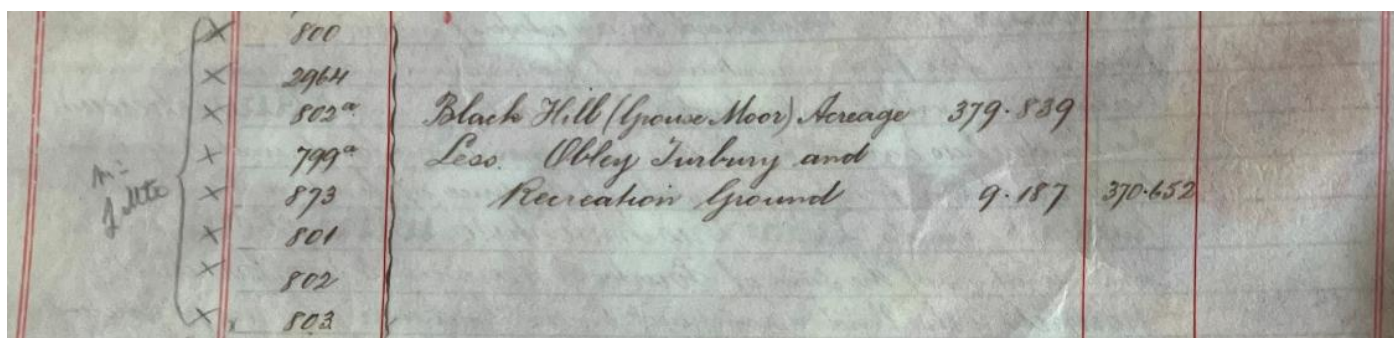


Fig. 25 - Extracts from the sale contract between E Brettell Vaughan and JPT Jackson and accompanying map of 1919 (by permission of Chris Carpenter)

Coming at a time of depression in the farming industry and following the human losses of war,<sup>5</sup> the loss of income caused by the collapse of the whinberry trade will have been felt particularly acutely by local families.

Few sources have been found to shed light on the way that Black Hill was managed in the interwar years. Jackson enlarged the Estate by acquiring Llanhowell Farm at the same time as the purchase of Cwm. Llan Farm and Llan Top were added in 1921 and so was much of Purslow Wood in 1924. These acquisitions took place at a time when land and property prices were depressed and in much of the country large estates were being broken up so in this sense Jackson bucked the national trend. JPT Jackson seems to have followed a conventional rural way of life in Shropshire – he supported the United Hunt, local farmer's groups, sporting groups and he maintained links and a residence in his home area around Preston, throughout his life. The enlarged estate was sold to his son Colin ET Jackson in 1928 for the sum of £16,500, which appears to be below the market value. However, there seems to have been no change in the way in which Black Hill was managed. On this basis, it is probable that it continued to be used for sheep

<sup>5</sup> The war memorial in Clunbury records 27 deaths among parish residents in World War 1 – about 3.6% of the total population recorded in the 1911 census.

grazing, seasonal grouse shooting and as a source of timber and stone throughout the Jackson ownership, that is from 1919 to 1946.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, in June 1939 a significant wildfire took place on Black Hill. The cutting in fig. 26 briefly tells the story of the fire, attempts to control it and the damage it caused. The article is revealing about nature of the hill at that time – while some trees were destroyed, most of the woodland was on the sides of the hills towards Hurst and Cwm, and was saved. The broad summit was mainly composed of the heath,

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Bridgnorth Journal - Saturday 10 June 1939

It was reported that the invitations extended to the Rev. Preb. J. S. Jobling and Messrs. J. L. Barritt and U. C. Brunner to become members of the Committee, and their acceptance, and the desire of the Roman Catholic Church to be represented, every church and school in the Town is now represented on the Lads' Club Committee.

Further progress with the proposed new Club Room scheme was also reported.

It was decided to have a cricket match between the Committee and members of the Club, and this will be played next Tuesday evening. It is hoped that four ministers of the Town, including the Rural Dean, will be included in the Committee team.

**Value of Sunday Schools**

Writing in the current issue of the "Parish Magazine," the Rev. E. A. Toulouise, Rector of St. Leonard's appeals for children to be sent to Sunday Schools, adding: "Children are growing up in an age when the old landmarks, which made England great, are being threatened, i.e., the neglect of Bible Reading and Christian instruction, the non-attendance at public worship, and the desecration of Sunday."

**YOUNG FARMERS COMPETITION**

**BRIDGNORTH DEFEAT ELLESMERE.**

The opening round of the inter-club cricket competition of the Shropshire Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs was held at Wenlock Road, Shrewsbury, on Friday of last week.

**FIRE AT BLACK HILL, CLUN**

**Threat to Woods**

The greater part of the 600 acre Black Hill, Clun, is involved in the worst fire remembered in the Clun Valley. Dozens of farmers have been fighting continuously to save plantations on the lower slopes.

The fire was discovered at about 11 on Wednesday night, and it apparently broke out near the 1,400 foot summit. Within a short time a large area of dry heather and gorse had ignited, and the hill-top became a flaming landmark, which is said to have been seen as far away as Manslow.

When the flames were noticed Lady Jackson, of Cwm Hall, and her daughter, Miss Pat Jackson, sent S.O.S's by telephone to neighbouring farmers. Lorry-loads of men with spades were driven to the slopes of the hill, and by 1 a.m. a large number of men were tackling the fire. They found that it was burning in the form of a circle with rapidly advancing edges. The heat was so intense that those who had brought spades found them practically useless as they could not get near enough to use them. "The flames were as high as the tree-tops," said one of the helpers.

After dawn the number of fire-fighters was augmented to nearly 100 by men from Clunton, Clunbury, Kempton, Clunbury and neighbouring villages, and by workmen from the Forestry Commissions estates.

An effort was made to stop the fire spreading by digging trenches and clearing away lines of bracken. In this way the fire was stopped a few yards short of the woods above Cwm Hall.

The fire was fiercest near the Hurst Estate. Clearances in the bracken had been outflanked by the fire which was creeping near to a plantation of 300 acres. Desperate efforts were being made to clear away another line of bracken as soon as one was burnt over.

Members of Clun Fire Brigade took part in the work, but there was no water for their engine. Unless there is rain it is unlikely that the peat will burn itself out for several weeks.

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Fig. 26 an account of the 1939 Black Hill fire.

Included by permission of Shropshire Archives

gorse, bracken vegetation often called fridd<sup>6</sup>. This was the area of greatest damage as the fire remained dormant in the peat deposits, only becoming apparent when winds fanned the hill so exposing the area to repeated outbreaks of fire. Once the fire had been alight for several weeks, in addition to the obvious loss of vegetation, other wildlife will have suffered greatly.

<sup>6</sup> The upland fringe or fridd is made up of a collection of diverse habitats including some or all of the following; scattered trees and small woodlands, bracken, heather and bilberry heath, wet and dry unimproved grassland, bog, scree and rock. It can be an incredibly diverse habitat, with the variety of vegetation communities and structural features making it very important to a wide range of wildlife. From - <https://farmwildlife.info/how-to-do-it/existing-wildlife-habitats/upland-fringe-fridd/>