



Figure 2.1. Relevant waggonways superimposed onto OS map of present-day County Durham. The short black line shows the surface outcrop of the High Main Coal, the modern name for the seam. It outcropped along the valley sides of Kyo burn from which Bushblades colliery worked it westwards under the high ground of Pontop Pike. Contains OS data© Crown copyright and database right (2022). © John Hunter. All rights reserved.

may well have influenced his appointment because Bushblades, sunk in 1754, was owned by the Silvertops, a landed Roman Catholic family from Northumberland [see Figure 2.1]. There, John Curr [II] would have been exposed to coal mining operations from an early age.

John Curr I's burial inscription at All Saints Church, Lanchester,¹⁸ gives his place of residence as Bushblades, which is situated near East Kyo. A photograph of the house, taken c. 1955, is shown in Figure 2.2.

John and Elizabeth had three sons: George (1749–1826), William (1753–1823) and John (c. 1756–1823). There may have been an earlier John, for there is a record for the burial of

*John Curr, son of John Curr of Cadger Row. Buried 1752 at Holy Cross, Ryton.*¹⁹

George, William and John were all employed by the Duke of Norfolk's Sheffield estate. Few records survive for George and William but both are mentioned in colliery accounts. George had a position with some responsibility and was to be found living in the Ponds area of Sheffield in 1790:

for sale by auction, by order of the assignees of Joseph Matthewman, a bankrupt. Lot 6: a large leasehold messuage, with outbuildings and



Figure 2.2. 'Bushblades, near East Kyo. Once the home of John Curr, an early genius of mining and an inventor of mining machinery.' Photo and caption reproduced by permission of Stanley Library and Durham County Record Office ref. DRO/5217.

*gardens in the Ponds, leased to Messrs Birkes & Co, with another adjacent messuage, with offices and garden, now let to Mr George Curr (both held of the Norfolk family).*²⁰

The brothers' mother, Elizabeth, was perhaps living with one of her sons, for her sad end in 1801 is recorded:

*A few days ago died, Mrs. Curr, of Sheffield. Though at an advanced age, her decease was unfortunately hastened by one of the most melancholy accidents, which, too frequently, cut off both the old and the young. In approaching the fire her clothes caught the flames, and she was burned so severely that she only survived for a few days.*²¹

George was still living at the Ponds in 1810:

*[A] violent thunder-storm ... lightning struck the houses of Mr. Curr and Mr. Thompson [George, son-in-law of George Curr], in the Ponds, demolishing the windows, looking-glasses, picture frames, and cupboards in its course, and with a tremendous explosion rocking the buildings to their foundations. Though it passed through the bed-chambers where the families lay, providentially no person was hurt.*²²

Marriage

John married Hannah Wilson on 1 May 1781 at Sheffield Parish Church, by licence.²³ The witnesses were Hannah's brother Richard and John's brother George.

The Wilson family

Little is known about the Wilsons. Of Protestant persuasion, Hannah converted after marriage to Roman Catholicism.

Hannah's baptism is recorded in the Sheffield Parish Church register on 29 June 1759: