

## THE BEAUMONTS



The Norman family of de Beaumont was one of the great baronial Anglo-Norman families, who became domiciled in England as a result of the Norman Conquest.

The first de Beaumont, Robert de Beaumont, 1st Earl of Leicester, Count of Meulan (circa 1040 -1118) was a powerful Norman nobleman of Norman-French ancestry, one of the Companions of William the Conqueror during the Norman Conquest of England. Robert de Beaumont was revered as one of the wisest men of his age. Chroniclers spoke highly of his eloquence, his learning, and three kings of England valued his counsel. The Beaumonts can be considered to have become English nobles, since soon after the Norman Conquest.

### **Robert de Beaumont, 2nd Earl of Leicester (1104 – 5 April 1168).**

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The Second Earl Robert founded Leicester Abbey and Garendon Abbey in Leicestershire, the Fontevraldine Nuneaton Priory in Warwickshire, Luffield Abbey in Buckinghamshire, and the hospital of Brackley, Northamptonshire. He refounded the collegiate church of St Mary de Castro, Leicester.

Sir William de Beaumont with Henry Tudor, fought against Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field (23 August 1485). The Beaumonts were one of only seven great families who remained irreconcilably anti-Yorkist throughout the Wars of the Roses.

Overton Manor in which Coleorton Hall is located, was acquired by the Beaumont family by marriage in the 15th century. Coleorton Hall was built around 1600, was destroyed in the Civil War (1640's) and rebuilt by 1660. The present building was commissioned by Sir George Howland Beaumont (1753-1827), between 1804-1808. Further additions and improvements continued until the 20th Century. The Beaumont wealth and prosperity arose from coal mining.

The family owned and worked their coal bearing lands around NW Leicestershire. Later by 1520, it is known at least one pit at Coleorton was being worked, which was then closed due to an underground fire. There were 17 outcrop seams being worked between Smoile and Newbold and Swannington.

In 1547 Nicholas Beaumont (pre 1526- died 1585) developed the mines. Later, in the area of Newbold Moor, he constructed a channel (a sough) across the moor for draining water out of his pits. Beaumont had financial issues partly because of his efforts to mine coal on his estates. During the 1560's the coal pits at Newbold, Coleorton and Staunton were producing 18,000 tons of coal per year. Between 1570 and 1576, when Beaumont tried to sell Coleorton, the mines there were worked by the coal magnate Sir Francis Willoughby of Wollaton.

Huntingdon Beaumont was also involved in coal working and eventually in the late 16th Century during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), he began mining in his own right in the Nottingham area. During his partnership with Sir Percival Willoughby, Lord of the Wollaton Manor, he constructed the Wollaton Wagonway in 1603-4. The Wagonway may not be the world's first wagonway with edged rails, but the earliest known specific documentary evidence relates to it, so it was credited as the world's first. Recent work suggests that a wagonway in Shropshire may be earlier.

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The Wagonway ran from Strelley where he held mining leases (from Willoughby) to Wollaton Lane. Huntingdon Beaumont can therefore be credited with the title of "Great Grandfather of Railways".

### Coleorton Hall

In 1948 the Hall was sold to the Coal Board, who used it as administrative offices and recreational facilities for miners. In 1997 a number of private dwellings were built and the Hall itself converted into apartments. Coleorton Hall is now a conservation area.

Huntingdon Beaumont was an innovator in the development of mining techniques. A key idea is his use of boring rods for coal location without the cost of drilling a shaft. His working life included involvement in coal mining activities in Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Northumberland. Like most of his ventures, his mining was unprofitable. However, the boring rod and wagonway ideas were used successfully by others to great benefit. The wagonway evolutionary chain he started in the English north east was later to encompass George Stephenson's works.

Huntingdon Beaumont lost considerable sums of his own and his family's money. He died in Nottingham Gaol in 1624 having been imprisoned for debt.