

Darkshire
Jan
 At a place where several streets met, he paused. A stony, reddish stream was piped under the road and along the back of a terrace. He looked around at the houses. Behind him, two bungalows. Modern. At the left, a terrace of fair sized houses. About 1910ish? And the stream terrace? Those houses were very small and all the building at the back was haphazard. Before the 1850s anyway, he thought. Down a lane on his right, too narrow for a car, he could see the ruin of some shops on a raised pavement. Two smashed up. One lived in but no longer a shop. After the 1850s, those. Something about them. Just a bit too grand. The yellow brickwork round the windows. And in front of him, climbing the slope of the mountain, some modern houses. A cluster of pensioners' bungalows and three rows of low rise flats. He remembered the original Three Rows, the condemned tenements. And then on the left past the 1910 terrace, the Lion. Hard to place. Pubs get so mucked about. A house set back, the other side of the pub, on its own patch of land. Old. Farm perhaps. He could see its name on the gate at the side of the Lion. Henfein. And up there, up behind the new three rows, a flat wide patch running north to south along the hill. He followed it with his eye north to the moor and thought of the limestone quarries, and then south where it disappeared round the curve of the mountain.

(How did we get here? What is his story?)
 Keith took off his glasses so the picture blurred slightly, and tried to focus his mind back through time. Turn of the century was easy enough. Before that he had to replace the lefthand terrace. Houses there? Perhaps nothing. 1850s. No street pumps. Streamwater dammed further up for scouring the iron. On the path above Three Rows, horsedrawn drams taking limestone from the quarries to the furnaces. The rough path at the back of the stream terrace would probably not be there because it was made of iron waste. The women would walk up to the hill where the spring was with jugs or buckets for the water. The spring had a Welsh name that he couldn't remember. He focussed back further, mentally removing a piece of land that he thought was an old tip. And finally 1800. No Three Rows, no terraces, no shops. Henfein, probably. The pub perhaps. No dramlines. A donkey team on the path with baskets of limestone. The man driving them blowing his hands. Wrapped in sacking perhaps. Christ. Doing that in a blizzard.

Making up where I was again the previous - how long to do as a part of the work
 Keith shivered. He rested a hand on a gatepost. There was no one near, so he risked muttering to himself:

'A storm was brewing in January 1800, when a small gang of men started —'

from local
 'No good.'

'A blizzard was raging in January 1800, when the first hard-won iron was tapped from the first furnace —'

to
 'Worse. He didn't want to lay it on too thick. The cool factual approach might be better.'

from work
 'On January 12 1800, after much careful preparation, Samuel Moonlow, an English businessman, personally supervised the lighting —'

to
 No. Wordy.

He put on his glasses and the present jumped back into place. Knowing how to start was the problem, he thought, as he worked his way up onto the track above Three Rows and began to walk southward along it. The cold wind sliced through his coat. Rounding the curve of the hill, he saw below him the partly excavated remains of the furnace arches — they were later of course — and the few tumbled blocks that were left of the first furnace. It stood in a little horseshoe gap in the grass covered coaltip, a few dozen yards from another row of houses. He could see in a hollow near the river several hundred yards away the big house Moonlow had built for himself, Ty Mister.

Keith focussed back again and tried to imagine supplies arriving at the new little works. Limestone, yes, and the ore of course, and charcoal.

'Idiot.'

The loudness of his own voice surprised him.

Trees. Naturally, there would be trees everywhere, even here. Old deciduous forest. Just a patch cleared around the furnace for the smelting. Patches here and there cleared by the charcoal burners. He closed his eyes and imagined how they would slaughter him if he made such a blind simple mistake. He tried to picture the trees, and everything changed. Sound would carry differently. The snow would be different. The light would be different. And of course a lot of the hill would be different because no tips.

He walked on feeling, hopelessly, that he would have to start all over again.

The place itself formed through human activity