Some Account of the HISTORY of the LILLESHALL COMPANY together with a brief resume of the EARL GOWER & Co. (the parent company).

To date (December 1972) no worthwhile account of the Earl Gower & Co. has been produced. It is not intended to put that right here and now, as this would require a considerable amount of research. However, with so much material evidence in the Lilleshall Co. Collection at Ironbridge Gorge Museum, and a considerable amount in the Sutherland Collection at Stafford Record Office, there is every reason to hope that such a task may not be long delayed.

Who was the 2nd Earl Gower and how did he come to establish an industrial concern that gave birth to another which earned world wide renown? Granville Earl Gower, born 1721, was of the Leveson (pron. Lewson) line who purchased the Lilleshall Abbey estate in 1541 from the Crown. By various purchases this estate was increased until it was over 20,000 acres in extent, in east Shropshire alone. Much of it was valuable agricultural land and most of the old Lilleshall parish, which included Donnington Wood and part of St. Georges, together with a portion of Sheriffholes, was rich in minerals - coal, ironstone and lime.

The Earl was a great Parliament man, having in his time held most of the important offices in various governments. He was tremendously interested in communications, his pipe dream being to see Liverpool, Hull and Bristol connected by water transport. His support for several such schemes often reduced his financial position. Perhaps, however, mention of the fact that the 2nd Earl Gower was the father of George Granville Leveson Gower, who in the last year of his life became 1st Duke of Sutherland, to whom the obelisk on Lilleshall Hill was raised, may better place him in local intelligence.

The Earl Gower had had a long connection with Francis Egerton, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater, before he took for his second wife the Duke's sister, the Lady Louisa Egerton. It was the son of this marriage who became 1st Duke of Sutherland. By his third marriage - to Lady Susannah Steward, daughter of the 6th Earl of Galloway, was born Granville, who in 1815 became Baron Granville and in 1833 Earl Granville. He was 1st Chairman of the Lilleshall Partnership 1802 and Lilleshall Company formed 1807.

Rejected in love, Francis, 3rd Duke of Bridgewater turned his attention to 'a mountain of coal' on his estate at Worsley, about 7 miles from Manchester. To assist him to develop the mineral resources of this estate (there was limestone there too), he employed John Gilbert, a lime-master of north Staffordshire. John was the brother of Thomas Gilbert, of Cotton Stuffs; a barrister-at-law, who was not only Earl Gower's land steward, he looked after the Earl's affairs in Parliament.

No two brothers were so different in make up or in their life's work. Thomas Gilbert, by the grace and favour of Earl Gower, represented both Lichfield and Newcastle-under-Lyme in Parliament, at various times. He was a distinguished reformer, working for the improvement of industrial relations, poor law reform and founder of the Gilbert 'Unions' and a champion of friendly societies. At 19 John had taken over the family's lime and limestone business, this led him into mining interests all over the north of England - coal, salt, lead, black-lead - you name it John was in it.

James Brindley was engaged to survey and engineer the making of the Bridgewater Canal and he and John Gilbert worked in very close liaison in the work. Their master 'The Dook', had promised that if granted permission to cut the canal to Worsley, he would provide