Manchester people with coal at half the price they were paying currently. Against the toughest opposition imaginable, of the hard-headed Lancashire coal owners and their many friends at Westminster, permission was granted to make the canal. The task of making the canal was, for many reasons, a formidable task but from 1761 onwards the people of Manchester got their 'cut price' coal as promised. The 'coal mountain' was the source of a huge fortune. Most of the coal was brought out by water - eventually 40 miles of canals were constructed in the workings, at three different levels, connected by inclined planes which were brain child of John Gilbert.

The Earl Gower, who was one of the shrewdest men of his day, watched the progress of operations at Worsley with mounting interest. Coal and ironstone had been mined on his Lilleshall Estate in east Shropshire for generations. Indeed, estate deeds in Salop Record Office, dated 1592, refers to 'and shutings along the Colpyt way near unto Donnington Wood Yatte' and a mention of 'Coal pit yate'.

Articles of Partnership, under the title of "Earl Gower & Co.", were signed on 8th September, 1764 between Earl Gower, Thomas Gilbert of Cotton, Staffs and John Gilbert of Worsley. The object of the partnership was to develop the mineral resources on the Earl's manors of Lilleshall and Sheriffhales.

As the impression has been given in some writings that the Earl Gower was an active partner in the Earl Gower & Co., there may be dispelled by showing that on the day before the Articles of Partnership were signed (see previous paragraph) that is, 7th September, 1764, the Earl Gower, for considerations therein mentioned, signed an Indenture of Agreement by which he granted to John and Thomas Gilbert "all these mines, rows, veins, seams and Quarries of Coal, Ironstone, Limestone and Treestone then opened and known or should or might be discovered in, under or upon the lands, grounds or wastes of the said Earl Gower within the said Manors of Lilleshall and Sheriffhales...etc." The Indenture goes into considerable detail as to what was involved.

On the following day, 8th September, 1764, the three signed Articles of Partnership, which established what we know to have been the Earl Gower & Co. In this second document the Earl Gower accepts a half share in the concern, with the Gilbert brothers sharing the other half. As the Partnership deed recites the lease of the previous day, we assume that this was the price they had to pay.

Further to this, the Earl had commitments both in and out of Parliament. So far that matter had Thomas Gilbert. Not that either of them neglected the Lilleshall set up once operatives were underway but we may be quite certain that most of the practical working such as surveying, sinking of mines, getting of limestone and the making of their canal and soughs to drain the mines, were left to John Gilbert as this was the kind of work he took in his stride.

By the end of October 1766, John Gilbert had turned over certain duties he performed at Worsley to a Mr. Brough and thus he was able to give more time to his many other personal affairs. Even so, he never neglected his duties to the Duke of Bridgewater, to whom he was deeply attached.

As one tries to assess all the work that the development and operating of the Lilleshall industrial estate must have entailed between 1764 and 1790, one is impressed with the amount of success that was achieved. From the inception of the Earl Gower & Co., John gave much time to local developments but it can also be said with confidence that he looked well to all his other engagements, which took him as far north as Alton in Cumberland.