The 'charter' or lease to the chartermaster was a properly drawn up document, showing in
detail what work was the duty or expense of the owner and what had to be done by the
chartermaster. If the pit was already in work then the chartermaster would have to pay
a sum of money for the lease of the pit. He paid the day to day expenses and for candles
and he was also due to pay 'royalties' on all coal and ironstone mined. The amount of
royalty depended on the variety 'got'. The charter also laid down the order in which the
minerals were to be taken, particularly that the more valuable seams must not be worked
and the poor seams left behind; that the owner's agent should have access to the workings
for the purpose of inspection at all times; and that the mine must be left in good condition
at the expiry of the lease. Where the pit had to be sunk, the chartermaster was allowed
to get an amount of mineral royalty free.

We can expect that there were plenty of visitors to Lilleshall and Donnington during the
last three decades of the 18th century. The list of visitors to the Coalbrookdale Coalfield
during the whole of the century and well into the 19th century is most impressive. There
is a record of a visit of the Duke of Bridgewater in 1767, and it would be surprising to learn
that this was his only visit to these parts. The Earl Gower was a well known personality
and his partners were not without some aura in their own particular fields. Then there
was the surprising fact that with all the industry between Donnington and the river Severn
it was upwards of 20 years before a second canal was constructed.

One other famous visitor to these parts was Sir Joseph Banks, the naturalist and explorer,
who after his Shropshire visit, accompanied Captain Cook on his voyage round the world.
Years later the accompanied Charles Darwin in 'The Beagle' to the Galapagos Islands.

In his diary for 9 January 1768 he wrote:-
"Return tonight to Bishton, in the morning set out for Lilleshall, near Newport, Shropshire,
on the way pass through Stafford and on the street way get there at night and meet the two
Mr. Gilbert's. Sir Joseph spent two full days touring the lime works and quarries at
Lilleshall and descended several coal and ironstone mines at Donnington. From the entries
in his diary he had evidently asked many questions and noted down the answers.

Probably the largest pumping engine erected on the northern end of this coalfield to date is
listed in the Boulton & Watt Engine Order Book as for J. Gilbert & Co., Donnington Wood,
Shropshire, which had a cylinder 30 inches in diameter with a stroke of 8 feet and a nominal
horsepower of 19.7. William Murdoch completed the installation of this engine, which
pumped water from the coal measures into the canal. When replacement parts were required
they were left at the "Fighting Cocks" Inn, Oakengates.

The Donnington Wood Canal must, in its heyday, have been an extremely busy thoroughfare.
To quote only two examples, a contract was made in 1797 - to supply Thomas Botfield with
9,000 tons of limestone for his three furnaces at Old Park, whilst John Bishton's contract for
7,000 tons. Both amounts were a year's supply. Along this canal came in either direction -
coal, ironstone, bricks, lime, manure, etc.

John Gilbert, born at Alton, in North Staffordshire in June 1724, ended his extremely
busy life at the scene of so much of his labour - Worsley, on 3rd August 1795, aged 71.
It is believed that he never had a portrait made because he regarded himself of being of
little importance. His brother Thomas died in 1798 at the age of 78.

As he approached his declining years, one problem was uppermost in his mind - to provide
for the future of his younger son, Granville. The elder son was married to the Countess of
Sutherland, an intelligent, beautiful and wealthy woman. He would inherit the estates in