The Queenstock furnace at Buxted, Sussex: the earliest in England?
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ABSTRACT: Recent work suggests that Queenstock furnace at Buxted dates from at least as early as 1491. It thus predates the 1496 blast furnace at Newbridge in Hartfield, hitherto accepted as the first to be established in England.

Work carried out over the last four years by various members of the Wealden Iron Research Group suggests that the 1496 blast furnace at Newbridge in Hartfield, Sussex was probably not the first to be established in England.

At the suggestion of Christopher Whittick, documents in the Public Record Office relating to the Archbishop of Canterbury’s lordship of South Malling in Sussex were examined by Brian Awty. South Malling included the ironworking parishes of Framfield, Buxted, Mayfield, Wadhurst and the Sussex portion of Lamberhurst, and the earliest documents were two consecutive court books running from the 1490s to 1513. In entries for courts held at Uckfield in July and December 1509 there were two mentions of an unnamed furnace at Buxted.

In July 1509 three crofts of old assart adjoining the ‘Furnes in the said parish [Buxted], which land was used for the manufacture of iron in the days of lord Sir John Morton, Cardinal, Archbishop of Canterbury’ were granted to Robert Mauncer the younger. Because the archbishop died in 1500, this furnace must be presumed to date from the fifteenth century.

In December 1509 four acres of waste land called Jenensy and Jenensey Medue in Buxted adjoining the ‘Furnes’ were granted to Thomas Hudson. Using local maps, of which the principal were the Buxted Tithe Award of 1840, and a map of Totease Farm made when it was acquired by the Buxted Park Estate in 1859, Pam Combes was able to identify Jennys Mead and Jennys Mead Hop Garden on the ground. These two fields are separated from the Uckfield stream only by Pond Bottom, which itself lies immediately above the field named Iron Plat, which Ernest Straker identified in Wealden Iron as a furnace site of unknown date.

Around the time this piece of research was began another WIRG member, Judith Brent, had drawn attention to an inquiry held by the Commissioners of sewers at Uckfield in May 1537, which resulted in the discovery of the ancient name of the site. Among the landowners liable for rating towards the new cut at Newhaven were Thomas at Wel and John Page for land ‘in the hammer pond at Oborne [Howbourne forge]’, and William Olyffe and Thomas Hudson for 6 and 3 acres respectively ‘in the hammer pond at Queenstoke’. Thomas Hudson’s name suggested that the second hammer pond might be the one immediately above Iron