

Colebrook Dale

Image: The Iron Bridge, near Coalbrookdale Shropshire. Thomas Harral, *Picturesque Views of the Severn* (1824). Harral's views were largely based on the account provided by Samuel Ireland when he visited the area in the 1790s. This scene shows an industrial tourist attraction, the Iron Bridge located within a picturesque setting.

Image from: Shropshire Archives

Scene of superfluous grace, and wasted bloom,
O, violated Colebrook!
... thy grassy lanes, thy woodwild glens,
Thy knolls and bubbling wells, thy rocks, and streams,
The soft, romantic, consecrated scenes;
Haunt of the wood-nymph[s],
.....Now we view
Their fresh, their fragrant, and their silent reign
Usurpt by Cyclops;
... thick, sulphureous smoke ... spread[s], like palls,
And stain[s] thy glassy waters.
Ah! What avails it to the poet's sense,
That the large stores of thy metallic veins
Gleam over Europe;
..... expanding Birmingham,
Illum'd by intellect, as gay in wealth,
Commands her aye-accumulating walls,
From month to month, to climb the adjacent hills;
.....
Warn'd by the Muse, if Birmingham should draw,
In future years, from more congenial climes
Her massy ore, her labouring sons recall,
And sylvan Colebrook's winding vales restore
To beauty and to song, content to draw
From unpoetic scenes her rattling stores,
Massy and dun; if, thence supplied, she fail,⁸

This poem, written by Anna Seward, 'the Swan of Lichfield', in about 1785, shares a theme with *A Letter from a Mechanick*. The earlier poem, in a few words, recognizes the detrimental effects on Wednesbury of being the source of coal for Birmingham industry. Seward's whole poem mourns the violation of 'Colebrook's muse-devoted vales'. Its 'metallic veins' are a source of the iron essential to the Industrial Revolution; the natural environment has been 'outraged'. The Classical nymphs have been 'Usurpt by Cyclops'.

Seward goes on to muse that, if Birmingham's industry should falter, that town might be superseded by Wolverhampton or Sheffield. And each of these latter towns has a 'long-desolate' or 'arid' iron-bearing region nearby which, like Colebrook Dale, could be exploited and spoiled by a more powerful neighbour.

⁸Anna Seward, *Colebrook Dale*, pages 314-319, Vol. 2, *The Poetical Works of Anna Seward, with Extracts from her Literary Correspondence*, Edited by Walter Scott, Esq. in Three Volumes, John Ballantyne and Co., Edinburgh, 1810.