Lost Villages During the 1860's and 70's many landowners and businessmen tried to copy "Paraffin" Young's success and make their fortune from shale oil. Small-scale oil works were established throughout the shale districts, but few proved profitable and most closed after only a few years of operation.

Little trace survives of these short-lived enterprises and the housing constructed for their workforce. On the night of the 1871 census, 52 people, (mainly shale miners and their families), are recorded as living at "Kipsyke Cottages" and "Kipsyke Huts"; property of Messrs Mungle and Thornton of North Cobbinshaw Oilworks. These eight houses were probably sited close to the company's shale mine in lonely moorland high above Cobbinshaw Loch.

Valuation records show that by 1872 the oil company had also constructed twelve houses, a store and a foreman's cottage associated with their "Paraffine-oil works" at North Cobbinshaw, probably sited close to Cobbinshaw Station. The oil works were abandoned and dismantled after less than five years of operation. Their failure was perhaps due to mining problems, as no subsequent efforts were made to mine the isolated pocket of shale at Kipsyke. Much of the company housing at Kipsyke and at North Cobbinshaw lay unoccupied for many years and all seem to have been demolished prior to 1890.

Possible site of Kipsyke Cottages, looking East

Site of Kipsyke shale mine

North Cobbinshaw Oilworks did not survive long enough to be marked on maps, and left no company records. Today the site of the mine at Kipsyke can still be found amongst the trees of Cobbinshaw Forest, and the railway that linked it to the oilworks is now a forest path. There are however few clues as to the precise location of the lost shale villages of North Cobbinshaw and Kipsyke and no record of what these settlements would have looked like.

The Brief Lives of North Cobbinshaw and Kipsyke

A project by the Almond Valley Heritage Trust

The Sorry Story of South Cobbinshaw. In 1870 the South Cobbinshaw Oil Company began construction of an oil works, brick kilns and about sixty houses in desolate moorland south of Cobbinshaw Loch. The enterprise was not successful, and by 1880, the site was virtually abandoned.

Ownership of the Cobbinshaw shalefield, and of South Cobbinshaw village, changed hands on several occasions and shale mining eventually resumed to serve oil works in Tarbrax. A new school were built to serve the village in 1894 and a new church erected. With the collapse of the Caledonian Mineral Oil Company in 1903, the village was sold to a private owner and the population gradually declined. The last houses were demolished in about 1925.