

THE NORTHERN MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY



Newsletter

DECEMBER 1997

Diary Dates

28th March, 1998. Annual General Meeting and Dinner.

After the success of the 1997 AGM and Dinner it has been decided to follow the same formula for 1998. Once again it's going to be at Yorkshire dinner time; 2 o'clock in the afternoon. The venue will also be the same as last year, The Wensleydale Heifer at West Witton (NGR SE 056 884). Tel: 01969 622322. The AGM will start at 12 noon and dinner will be at 14.00. Cost will be similar to last year. A menu and booking form will appear with the February newsletter. The Wensleydale Heifer offers accommodation, and other accommodation is available at Ivydene, West Witton (B&B). Tel: 01969 622785, and Chantry Caravan Park. Tel: 01969 622372.

15th - 17th May 1998. NAMHO Field Meeting 98.

The Friends of Killhope and the North Pennines Heritage Trust give advance notice that this event will be based at Nenthead. A variety of surface and underground activities are proposed and further details will be given as they become available.

FROM THE PUBLICATIONS EDITOR

Sorry, the 1997 Memoirs will not be ready in time to go out with this newsletter. Although it has been full since the early summer, I have been overwhelmed with work and have not had chance to edit more than a couple of papers as yet. By the time you get this newsletter, however, things should be progressing and it will be ready for distribution with the February newsletter. This will be sent automatically to all those who were members in 1997.

Hazel Martell

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1998 Subscriptions - Due on 1st January

Once again subscriptions have been held at 1996 levels. A subscription form and deed of covenant are enclosed. If you pay UK income tax please complete a deed of covenant form. Although it is for four years, it doesn't matter if you fill one in every year. The Society derives a lot of benefit from reclaimed tax and it costs you nothing extra. (See Subscriptions and Covenants on page 14).

<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~RBurt/MinHistNet/NMRSevents.html>

Meet Reports

Hude Valley - 13 September, 1997.

Saturday turned out to be a bright and windy day interspersed with three or four showers of about five minute duration - reasonable photographic weather!

Twelve members set off from Middleton market square and travelled up the Hude Valley to park on the flat dressing area below Coldberry Mine. The morning was taken up with visits to Marlbeck shop, level and upper dressing floors (which over the years have literally been washed away by heavy storms).

Marlbeck level is one of the few levels in the area known for its bad atmosphere, and it is of some significance that on old London Lead Company plans two water blast shafts are indicated on what is not a particularly long level. Proceeding down the valley the remains of High Skears Mine were inspected. The Skears hushes above the mine are quite extensive, but are best viewed from the opposite side of the valley. The Skears washer boys' shop roof has now gone completely and the building remains are probably beyond preservation. The 30 foot wheelpit used for crushing, the remains of the three trunk buddles and the bouse teams were also noted. The portal of this mine is now hidden in the back of a concreted sheep pen, but the access slab above and behind the rear wall was removed to allow three of the party to confirm that the level was open and the water just above Wellington height!

The final level inspected in the morning session was Jack Scar level. Here the only remains are a set of four overgrown bouse teams and the level itself. This also is hidden under a nondescript slab of rock, identified by three of the party, and the level briefly inspected by those with wet legs from the Skears excursion. The party returned to the cars at Coldberry for a late lunch.

The afternoon commenced with a climb up to Coldberry, an inspection of the recently uncovered remains of a wooden circular buddle and a trunk buddle, to arrive at the recently preserved shop. The Northern Pennine Heritage Trust has recently spent some £35,000 of European money to point up, re-roof and install windows to the shop, and to convert one room of the stores/smithy into an interpretation room. The party viewed in turn Hunts Coldberry portal, the water balance incline used for raising ore up an adjacent shaft, the reservoir (fed by a stone covered leat) which served the water balance, and then ascended to the highest level worked at Coldberry - the Slate Sill level and adjacent ruined shop. This level is open. The view from the spoil heaps at this level (1510 feet asl.) is over a large part of the Hude valley. The party then descended from Slate Sill via the old shop (later converted to a powder house), past North or Dog level (last worked in the 1940s) and back to the car park. At this point in time (about 15.00) the NMRS Hon. Sec. finally caught up with the party having missed us by five minutes in the morning.

To complete the day the party then moved down to Kings Walk, Middleton and parked by the magnificent array of six lime kilns (built at four different dates). The two Old Snaigill levels were visited, High and Low and the two Low Skears levels, Lower and Upper and finally the limestone gorge of Jack Scar itself. Back at the car park the Hon. Sec. redeemed himself for his late arrival by rescuing a field-mouse found in the bottom of a steel waste bin! The party dispersed at around 17.30 after a varied and interesting day. The Meet Leader is indebted to his DDMS colleague Alan Suddes (Curator of Darlington Museum) for his knowledgeable assistance on the day.

Firestone Level of Low Skears - 14 September 1997.

Twelve members turned out for the visit to Firestone level and jammed themselves into five cars for the journey up the valley to where limited parking exists above the mine. The Meet Leader had the invaluable assistance of Alec Fitzsimmons (Chairman of DDMS) during the trip and the party was able to do the trip as a single group. DDMS have been working in this level over a period of some fifteen years and have also proved and done a through trip down to Low Skears Low level some 350 feet below.

The party traversed the main horse level through to its current series of falls in shale. It was originally driven to dewater Hunts Coldberry Vein but during the driving (which commenced in 1827) it cut C, D, E, & Raines Veins and produced some 7500 tonnes of lead ore at 5 oz. silver per tonne which more than paid for the driving. After negotiating barrels through a branch off the Horse Level the party climbed 60 feet of fixed ladders up the combined manway/orchute into the main level on Raines Vein. On this level are two winzes down to two hairy sub-levels with severe shale problems, and a rise of 60' to a higher level, also with roof problems. Access to the Eastern section of Raines Vein was achieved via a pre-fabricated plywood box (carried through the barrels and up the orchute) then bolted together and pushed through a fall. Although placed in 1989, this remains in reasonable condition, as the party were able to testify. To complete the trip the party descended to the horse level and then returned to the D2 vein intersection and descended to Mud level. After passing the 300' deep shaft (formerly used for dropping ore to the Low level and now with 125' of water in it) we walked through to the area known as the Blue Pools where limestone deposits have formed over an ancient fall and have also formed rim pools. An excellent photographic opportunity. Beyond this point the party descended diagonally over a wooden bridge spanning a 100' winze, and proceeded to the point where a gated barrel gave access to the shaft forming the start of the 'wet-suit, electron ladders & SRT' through trip to the Low level. The party then retraced their route to the Horse level and thence to day. Once again many thanks to Alec for leading the way.

Tony Fretwell

Robertsbridge Gypsum Mine - 7 October, 1997.

A select group of five arrived at Robertsbridge for this postponed meet. We were treated as VIP guests and provided with coffee and biscuits in the conference room while we learned a bit about the background to the present works. It appears that gypsum was discovered by accident while drilling for coal on the site in the 1870s! The original mine is now closed (and flooded) and a new mine was opened about 3 or 4 miles away in the 1960s. Unfortunately this mine also has something of a doubtful future due to flue gas desulphuring at power stations - which produces gypsum of a very high quality as a waste product. Most of the raw material used on site now comes from this source - specifically Drax power station - so the mine is working at a fraction of its capacity to provide anhydrite for cement manufacture.

After a drive through the Sussex countryside (about 7 miles by road but 3 by the conveyor belt which carries the rock from mine to plant) we were equipped with hats, lamps and emergency breathing masks (the mine is gassy but not seriously so). We then boarded a Land Rover to descend the drift at a steady slope for about a mile to the working seam 1000 ft. below surface. Pillar and stall working is employed and the workings are very extensive, seeming to stretch interminably in every direction. We were able to examine a face drilled and charged ready for firing and also the shot firer's tractor with churns full of ammonium nitrate and locked boxes of primer and detonators. Close by, two stalls at right angles had been fired previously and not yet cleared. By firing simultaneously the rock was piled neatly in a heap at the junction. An adjacent stall fired singly had thrown the rock more widely with "clonkers" up to 50 yards up the road from the face. The rock is cleared by huge power shovels and loaded into a crusher before being conveyed to surface up a second drift. This and other impressive pieces of machinery were examined, including an ancient compressed air operated drilling tractor, abandoned, ready to provide excitement to future generations of mining historians no doubt.

Emerging from the mine for an excellent lunch back at the main site, we were then able to see the surface remains of the old mine. The closed off entrance to the steeply inclined drift aligns with a building which is the terminal for the conveyor from the new mine (replacing a previous overhead ropeway).

The old winding gear is still in place under a layer of gypsum dust. The building also houses some crushing plant and hoppers to store the mine produce which is now transported elsewhere for cement manufacture.

The new plant starts with a miniature Albert Hall housing a "Homogeniser". Installed when rock from the mine was the raw material this impressive installation now acts merely as a buffer store for the incoming power station waste gypsum already in powder form of consistent quality. The incoming material is spread, by an oscillating conveyor, onto a huge semicircular heap which is then slowly eaten away and fed to the main plant by a huge slicer and bucket conveyor. All completely unattended. The object was to produce an output of good "average" quality when the feed stock was rock of variable nature.

The gypsum is baked to form plaster which then goes to the board plant. This is a continuous process carried out in a plant several hundred yards long. Basically a plaster mix is spread between two ribbons of paper (white for the face, brown for the back) travelling at appreciable speed. The paper is folded around the edge at the 1200mm dimension, glued and stuck down. All this is controlled by laser sensors and speed controllers. The board then travels some distance while the plaster sets. The continuous board is scored at 2400mm intervals and chopped every 4 x 2400mm. These quadruple length boards are turned over (to place the decorative white side up) and sent back via a drying oven, broken into individual 2400mm boards, paired face to face, trimmed and labelled and stacked to be removed by manic fork lift operators who were the only visible "workers". I estimated one board pops off the line every 15 seconds. Apparently the plant is even more impressive when something goes wrong! As an electrical engineer I have great respect for the team that set up all the hundreds of microswitches, position sensors and speed controllers! Thanks to British Gypsum for a most enjoyable meet. The trip round the plant was an added bonus.

John Heaviside

Buckden Gavel Mine - 19th October, 1997.

Fourteen members met at Buckden car park and made the steep ascent directly up the gill to the mine tip - actually the leader made the trip three times to collect late arrivals. It was not their fault; they were delayed by thick fog.

As we were behind schedule only a quick inspection was made of the High Smelt Mill (excavated in 1974 by the NMRS) before entering the portal of the mine (Flank Level). A little way in graffiti dated 1808 was noted. After approximately 400m. a detour along Wiseman's Sun Level was made to inspect ornate copper-plate graffiti dated 1844 in the clay/compressed sand through which the level was driven.

The route into the northern part of the workings to reach the most productive area of the mine (on the main pipe) was via Wiseman's West Level North and Old Man's Cross-Cut. This involved a traverse along rails placed over a drop into sub-level workings and a climb down, back into the main haulage level. The task of overcoming both obstacles was accomplished, to the credit of the less experienced members present.

To reach the Main Pipe workings a low crawl through a wet fall (dug out some years ago by Earby Mines Research Group) was needed. The close proximity to mud/water brought several comments about the advertised "bone-dry" nature of the mine (true of the vast majority of the workings).

Along the Main Pipe an inspection was made of an usual cistern/trough (timber, pitch lined) and lead piping system; its purpose is open to conjecture. Yet more graffiti dated 1860/70 was found along a cross-cut which also contained a pair of disintegrating clogs. After a short period of exploration of the workings at this point we commenced our return, via a different route.

This involved a short climb up into the flats to avoid several impassable falls along the haulage level (Sunter's North Level). Thanks are due to Martin Roe for plotting a successful course through these labyrinthine flat workings.

On reaching the portal, again via the Flank Level all fourteen members negotiated the descent of the gill and returned to their cars after an absence of some five and a half hours. Hope John and Kaye Heaviside found the refreshments at Kilnsey to their liking prior to their long drive home.

Steve Mitchell

Traffic Damage to Stang Level

Mr. D. F. King has sent in a copy of a letter from the Estate Office, Arkendale, Richmond, Yorkshire, to their solicitors concerning Stang Level.

"I thank you for your information contained in your letter of 25th inst. relating to the Stang Mining Level. The old level under the Stang road is an arched stone level, this some four years ago ran and the road subsided, the council at this time let the re-arching of this level by contract without notifying the Estate of their liability in this matter.

There appeared to be, a few weeks ago a slight subsidence taking place on this same area of road, this dropped a matter of two inches, the subsidence was reported to the Council (of which I am a member), and a Committee was appointed which included myself, another member and the District Surveyor to survey the level and report to the council at the next meeting.

We made the survey and the report was that not the least movement had taken place since the arch was rebuilt four years ago and there was no danger of further subsidence taking place. The Surveyor then put in a rider to the effect that he considered the level unsafe. There is no doubt that the level is put to much more severe test in these days of excessive traffic, and as you say the estate is liable I think it would be wise to do a little at a time to safeguard the estate against any risk of what might happen".

The letter is dated **30th June, 1928!**

Mining History E-mail Discussion List

The Mining-History list is intended for the discussion of all aspects of mining and associated activity, including ore preparation, on-site smelting, transport systems, social conditions, etc., related to British and Irish sites. As such it will be inter-disciplinary in its approach, bringing together economic historians, local historians, archaeologists, archaeometallurgists, geographers, - in fact all those with an interest in mining; academic, professional and amateur alike. If you have any views on the proposal, if you would support such a list if it went ahead and would like notification, or would like more information - please contact Peter Cloughton.

The Mining History Information website is created and run by Peter Cloughton at the University of Exeter. It is accessed using the URL <http://www.ex.ac.uk/~pfclaugh/mhinf/contents.htm>. The site is currently biased towards Wales and South-West England, reflecting the author's research interests, but it also incorporates mining history related information for Britain and Ireland as a whole. Details of the proposed Mining-History e-mail discussion list will be found on the website and these will be updated as the list develops. A 'Notice Board' page will shortly be added to the website. If you have any mining history matter which would benefit from exposure on the World Wide Web please pass the details to Peter. Send by e-mail to P.F.Claughton@exeter.ac.uk or (for those with no connection to the Internet) by post to Blaenpant Morfil, Rosebush, Clynderwen, Pembrokeshire, SA66 7RE. In the latter case a text file on disc would be preferred, (including a first class stamp will ensure your disc is returned).

Peter Cloughton

Books

A Partial Index to the Mining Journal 1835 to 1851 and other mining references -

Tony Oldham.

41 pp. Millions of references, mainly Wales, but includes such exotic areas as: Bishopston Silver Lead Mines, Devon, Forest of Dean, Ireland, Mendip Hills, Silver-lead mines, The Paull family (Cornish mine Captains) etc. SB £4.00.

Also available on disc. A more useable format as one can do word search etc. 3.5" Microsoft Word 6™ format for £10.00.

Hastened to Their Eternity or Tales from the Mining Journal - Tony Oldham.

1997. 15 pp. One of my favourite pastimes is reading the Mining Journal. In order to do this, once a week I get up at the crack of dawn and drive to the National Library at Aberystwyth, the location of one of the few remaining sets of the Journal. Although many people have consulted the Mining Journal only one other person appears to have published an index [Claughton 1995]. I started my search of the Journal by looking up references on the mines of Anglesey, kindly provided by Jeremy S. Wilkinson. I was soon sidetracked into collecting references to other mining areas including the Mendip Hills and the Forest of Dean. Whilst I was thus engaged my wife Anne would be slaving away at the local FE College and when we met for lunch the conversation would centre around what I had read that morning. I would relate the tragic and gory accidents that had been recorded. My wife said that I should record these anecdotes as they would make a good book, so here it is: SB £2.00.

A Welsh Mining Bibliography from Current Titles in Speleology - Tony Oldham.

1997. 23 pp. This bibliography is compiled from the card index which was used by Ray Mansfield when compiling Current Titles in Speleology. CTS, as I shall call it, was published from 1969 to 1992 when it was taken over by the Swiss based Speleological Abstracts. Consequently a lot of ephemera, newspaper cuttings and mining information was omitted. I have enriched the card index by adding the contents of my mining library, most of which is Welsh orientated. This means that I can supply a photocopy of most of the articles.

There is some duplication with Roger Burt's Bibliography of the History of British Mining and the British Mining History Bibliography published by the Peak District Mines Historical Society Ltd. alas, no longer published. No attempt has been made (yet) to incorporate these works. I make no apologies for the caving bias of this bibliography. Cavers do explore mines and mines are found in caves and vice versa. This bibliography was created using Microsoft Access.

Consequently it is also available on disk, and with Access one can then carry out all sorts of exciting searches, print queries, correct my spelling mistakes and add your own data. SB £2.50.

Available on disc. 3.5" Microsoft Access™ format for £10.00.

All books and discs are available from Tony Oldham, Rhychdywr, Crymych, Pembrokeshire, SA41 3RB Tel / Fax 01239 831 371. Answerphone 24 hour. E-mail: anne.oldham@virgin.net.

Metal Mines of North Wales (A Collection of Pictures) - C. J. Williams.

The mineral wealth of North Wales has been exploited by man since prehistoric times. Mines of lead, zinc, copper, gold, manganese and iron have all been worked at one time or another. Today only a few mines are in operation, but past mining activity is remembered in the many physical remains it has left behind; engine-houses, wheelpits and watercourses, and countless abandoned shafts and levels.

The mining industry of North Wales is well documented in collections of old photographs, pictures and engravings. This book comprises a selection of this material, drawn from record offices, libraries and private custody. Each illustration has a caption explaining what is shown, and providing appropriate background information.

There are sections, with brief introductions, devoted to the Flintshire and Denbighshire lead and zinc mines (including the Halkyn drainage tunnels and the Minera mines); foundries and smelting; the lead-zinc mines of the Conwy valley; the copper mines of Parys Mountain, Snowdonia and Llandudno; and the gold mines of Merioneth. The new edition of this book includes illustrations which have not previously been published. 66pp, 108 black & white and colour illustrations, 2 maps. Price £9.95 + £1 postage from Bridge Books, 61 Park Avenue, Wrexham, LL12 7AW. Tel: 01978 358661. Fax: 01978 262377. ISBN 1 872424 58 9.

Mike Gill has also written a short review of the book as follows:

"Much has happened in North Wales since this book was first published in 1980. For example, archaeologists have found evidence of prehistoric copper mining on the Great Orme and at Parys Mountain, Morris's Shaft has been sunk by Anglesey Mining plc, Cathole Mine closed in 1987 and the Minera mine has been opened to the public. To reflect this, Chris Williams has added 25 plates. The change to a wider format than the first edition has allowed the book to be well laid out. The reproduction of plates is good and the clear, informative captions are particularly helpful. Grid references of the mines are also given. If you got the first edition, it's worth updating, and if not - this enlarged and enhanced edition is well recommended.

My Village - Luckett. Its people, its History and my Memories - Yvonne Pellow King.

What makes this publication of particular interest is the large section devoted solely to mining carried on in and around the village of Luckett. The village is a veritable time capsule of industrial archaeology. Unlike most other villages of south east Cornwall around the Tamar Valley, which have been heavily redeveloped, there have been relatively few alterations here since World War II. The majority of the engine houses, beam engines and other equipment were still intact until a scrap drive just before the war deprived us of a unique historical collection.

An intriguing series of postcards from around the turn of the century gives excellent views of the mining set in the context of the village, which lies at the bottom of a steep valley which feeds into the Tamar Valley. A selection of photographs show various village scenes and individual houses, many with mining connections. The book contains a series of local and national newspaper cuttings on the re-opening of New Consols Mine (Wheal Martha in the 1870s) in 1945 and up to its demise in 1952, together with extracts from various articles on these mines from such publications as the Tamar Journal, De la Beche's Geology of Cornwall and Dines two volumes on mining in the south west of England. Although there are sections on the history of the village, the railway, the cricket team and the Methodist chapel they are all closely intertwined with mining and mining folk. In fact, some 31 pages are concerned with mining topics.

Of 72 pages in A4 size it is available for £5.50 + £1.00 p&p, from Callington Museum, Liskeard Road, Callington, Cornwall, PL17 7AH. Please make cheques payable to Callington Museum.

W. A. R. Wright

Exploring Cornish Mines (Volume 3) - Kenneth Brown and Bob Acton.

Another copiously illustrated volume in this series.

Although it looks as though volume four may be the last, volume three has five guided walks to: Wheal Jenkin & Marke Valley, East Wheal Rose & Cargoll, West Kitty, Polberro & Trevaunance, Mines of Wendron parish, and Geevor & Levant. For any visitors from 'up-country' these guides are a cheap and easy way of finding not just the obvious parts of mines, but some of the detail associated with them.

At £8.25 it can be bought direct from the publisher - Landfall Publications, Landfall, Penpol, Devoran, Truro, Cornwall, TR3 6NW, by adding £1.50 for p&p.

Mike Gill

The History of Sandwell Park Collieries - Nigel Chapman.

The Staffordshire Thick Coal was up to 30 feet thick and reserves were running out by the late nineteenth century. There were two schools of thought as to whether or not the seam continued beyond a fault under a cap of Permian sandstone. One held that the seams ended in a cliff, where the coal measures were replaced by the sandstone, and the other that the seams continued at a greater depth. The shafts at Sandwell Park proved the latter camp right and paved the way for a new area of coal to be developed.

Using a variety of sources, Nigel has written a readable account of the histories of Sandwell Park and Jubilee Collieries from their sinking to their closure in 1960. The book is liberally sprinkled with plates and figures. The useful appendix on working the Thick Coal brings a whole new meaning to 'Things that go Bump in the night'!

The book (131 pp. Softbound) retails at £8.50 + £1.00 p&p is available from Heartland Press, 100 Frederick Road, Stechford, Birmingham, B33 8AE.

Williamson's Tunnels

Mike Gill

Under the streets and houses of Edge Hill, north-east of Liverpool city centre, lies a quite extraordinary historical 'site' which is now threatened with redevelopment - many miles of tunnels built by a famously eccentric and very wealthy merchant, Joseph Williamson, as a philanthropic exercise in the early 19th century. Williamson was born in Warrington in 1769 and arrived in Liverpool in 1780, becoming an apprentice to a tobacco merchant, Richard Tate. He soon made his fortune, marrying his master's daughter and eventually taking control of the firm. During the Napoleonic Wars he saw terrible economic and social distress which was characteristic of Lancashire and determined to use his wealth to provide paid work for the poor and unemployed. Between about 1806 and his death in 1840 he constructed a labyrinth of tunnels, caverns and passageways through the sandstone of Edge Hill. The tunnels were lined with high-quality brickwork and one of the chambers, known as the Banqueting Hall, is 80' long, 30' wide and 40' high. There was no practical need for these immense subterranean excavations; simply the fact that the projects gave employment to many labourers, bricklayers and stonemasons. Williamson, who eventually spent much of his fortune on these bizarre works, and was known locally as 'The King of Edge Hill', is buried in the Tate family vault at St. Thomas Church, down at the bottom of Toxteth Park. The site is now a car park.

The Proposal last year to develop student accommodation on the site of two of the main entrances to the tunnels prompted the formation of a campaign group, the 'Friends of Williamson's Tunnels', which skilfully generated extensive local and national publicity for their cause and drew attention not only to the immediate planning application but also to the subject of Williamson and his works. They produce a newsletter entitled 'The Mole'. This is well produced with scanned-in illustrations and is registered as a serial publication with its own ISSN number. The contact names include no fewer than 3 e-mail addresses and one website, and the group is a company limited by guarantee. The campaigners give slide presentations, talks to local schools, radio interviews, charge for advertising in the newsletter and - via the Internet - have developed world-wide contacts. Contact Friends of Williamson's Tunnels, 15-17 Chatham Place, Edge Hill, Liverpool, L7 3HD. Tel 01551 475 9451.

The URL is http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/bill_douglas/ - Ed.

Mining History Tours

Alan Crosby - Sent in by W. S. Harvey

Atalaya Tours are offering a discount of at least 5% on the basic tour price to members of NMRS provided that they identify themselves as such at the time of booking. A leaflet giving details of the 1998 programme is enclosed with this newsletter.

Mining Songs and Ballads

With reference to Peter Claughton's request in the February 1997 Newsletter; and to further requests in the May 1997 Newsletter; for songs associated with lead mining, there are two of which I have knowledge. The first is *Fourpence a Day*, said to have originated at Middleton in Teesdale.

(This song is said to have been sung by the lead miners of Middleton in Teesdale in the days when the lead ore was washed by men and boys).

Fourpence a Day

The ore is waiting in the tubs, the snow's upon the fell.
Canny folk are sleeping yet, but lead is reet to sell.
Come me little washer lad, come let's away,
We're bound down to slavery for fourpence a day.

It's early in the morning, we rise at five o'clock
And the little slaves come to the door to knock, knock, knock.
Come me little washer lad, come let's away,
It's very hard to work for fourpence a day.

My father was a miner, he lived down in the town
'Twas hard work and poverty that always kept him down.
He aimed for me to go to school, but brass he couldn't pay
So I had to go to the washing rake for fourpence a day.

My mother rises out of bed with tears in her cheeks
Puts my wallet on my shoulders, which has to last a week.
It often fills my great big heart when she unto me does say
I never thought thou would have worked for fourpence a day.

Fourpence a day, me lad, and very hard to work
And never a pleasant look from a gruffy looking Turk.
His conscience it may fail and his heart it may give away,
Then he'll raise up our wages to sixpence a day.

The second is a ballad referring to a "great flood" at Ramshaw in the Derwent Valley lead mining district, on the North West Durham/Northumberland border. This ballad, known as *Ramshaw Flood*, was written by Tom Lough, brother of the famous English sculptor John Lough. Both were born at Greenhead, a hamlet around three miles from Shotley Bridge. In Tom's early days as a blacksmith, his task was to sharpen jumpers at the Derwent Mines. He did not settle to this task, however. Using his skill of playing the violin, he is said to have become a wandering minstrel, entertaining folk by playing his instrument left handed whilst holding it between his knees. Tom ended his days in a workhouse at Lanchester near to Durham City.

This was not before composing the following ballad that was inspired by a savage thunderstorm in the headwaters of the valley, and caused one of the mine dams to burst its banks and flood the Boltsburn valley.

Ramshaw Flood

Now I begin to sing or tell,
What in those modern days befell,
How mossy waters, sticks, and sods,
Or direful wrecks sent by the Gods,
With double fury thunder'd down,
Upon the folks of Ramshaw Town,
A dam was built by Mr. Bell,
Upon the rough and rugged fell;
Of architects he was the best,
And was with powerful genius blest,
But mortal works are weak and vain,
Opposed to tempests, floods, and rain.
With ill fate, how short time stands,
The proudest piles of mortal hands!
But I must now to you rehearse,
How streams did rise with vexed force,
Raised by the summer's rains,
That swept the hills and boggy plains.
Rookhope waters, far and near,
Did augment their watery store,
And peat pots spewed forth their rills,
Loud roaring down the stoney hills.
It thundered loud from pole to pole,
Lightning flash'd and tempests roll'd,
With cracks and sulph'rous roarings loud,
Dark torrents rush'd from every cloud.
The thunders rag'd with awful sound,
And lightning blaz'd along the ground,
Dread and awful for to view,
The flame like wreaths of sulphur blew.
The storm in watery torrents fell,
That did ten thousand streamlets swell,
That rough and dark did chafe and roar,
Through mossy reeds and rushes tore,
Did from the mud, huge eels bring,
Among the heather, bent and ling,
The thunder shocks shook highest hills,
Whilst like a deluge, sluic'd the fells.
It was a dire - tremendous sight,
This second deluge, at midnight.
Huge logs, and rocks, were rent away,
Whilst nought could stand its vengeful sway.
The flood like gulfs and channels tore,
And from deep veins raised lumps of ore;

Like mighty waves, the waters curl'd,
Roaring like a delug'd world -
Such noise and tumult it did make,
The mighty globe did seem to shake.
Had pyramids been near the mound,
The flood had shak'd them to the ground.
It was when men lay fast asleep,
And some with wine their cares did steep,
A night of tempest and dark gloom,
That threaten'd dread impending doom,
When men did rest from toils below,
In sleep forgot love, debts, and woe,
When mossy floods and storms came down,
And burst far west of Ramshaw Town;
The mound was raised, the dam gave way,
And to its seat it bid good day.
More loud than thunder was its heaves,
Rocks, sods, were whelm'd 'neath the waves.
The flood, with fury, did augment,
A mile above the house of Dent.
Brave Dent, he was a hearty blade,
And never let his heart be sad;
Of queer stories he had plenty,
And o'er a tankard few more canty,
But social glee, strong ale, or sporting,
Cannot bar out stern misfortune.
The wife she prophesied aloud,
That late or soon would be a flood;
She oft warn'd Dent and Bell the same,
But warning would not take in time,
To raise the dam's broad watery gate,
And save the dam from unlucky fate.
The wife had dream'd strange predigies,
How birds flew backwards in the skies,
How howlets, strange in open day,
Upon the chimney tops did lay.
How unlucky magpies, far and near,
In flocks did whistle through the air.
How fiery horse, in the air did fling,
How storms and floods the wind did bring,
How sturdy oaks were overblown,
And gloomy spectres, dark, did frown;
How dogs howled from the hills,
With unlucky cries and yells;

How storms o'er Boltslaw did appear,
 That did gloomy tempests bear,
 That swept the mounds and dam away,
 Did all in wide destruction lay -
 (When women's counsels they are wise,
 Men their counsels, oft despise).
 So, by these gloomy, dark portents,
 Did threat unlucky, dread events.
 Dent's dog first heard the bursting roar,
 And gave three howls upon the floor;
 Now as he sat smoking by the fire,
 Against his peace the floods conspire.
 The waters rushed with yeasty roar,
 like tides broke in upon the floor -
 Dark, deep, and rough it did extend,
 Dent thought the world was at an end!
 He reasoned short, and thought the gods,
 Would not destroy the world with sods,
 Or with huge rocks, or waters dark,
 Dent took the hint from Noah's Ark,
 Now the muse has hardly power,
 To tell this dreary wild uproar;
 To sing how chairs and cutty stools,
 Were whirled among the frothy pools,
 And how Dent's watch fell from the tacket,
 Loud and brisk, 'neath water - nackered!
 How his tobacco, favourite store,
 Was wrecked, like whirlwinds, out of door.
 Two pounds, sooth, of weed - the prime,
 The best of Cuba's sunny clime.
 And two canaries that could charm,
 The coldest hearts and make them warm,
 They both could sing in sweetest choir,
 With warbling notes that did inspire,
 The gloomy heart, and cheer the breast,
 When with love or debt oppress'd.
 They Dent at night did charm, delight,
 He fed them oft with sugar white,
 They various tricks did understand,
 At his voice and mild command,
 They in a cage, built of wood,
 Both were rolled in the flood,
 And left him grieved. In dark forlorn,
 His birds of music he did mourn;

Where'er he wandered, mus'd or went,
 The loss did wound the mind of Dent.
 Like a cloud his mind o'erspread,
 He sweetest music thought was dead;
 Like the harper, Ovid sings,
 That with life could touch the strings;
 How, in a river he was drown'd,
 And banks with mortal strains resound;
 So the birds sung mournful breath,
 Till they sunk down to watery death.
 Now sing direful strains of woe,
 What watery mountains did below;
 How they rag'd with fury down,
 Upon the folks of Ramshaw Town.
 Peat logs, like stacks of hay were whirl'd,
 Rocks, trees, just like a delug'd world;
 But what will floods or tides obey?
 A garden soil was swept away,
 And roared in with foaming shock,
 Into a cellar scooped from the rock;
 With rising swell the boiling deep,
 Raised Fairbrigg's floor when fast asleep.
 He slowly raised his slumb'ring eyes,
 And thought he saw or dreamt of seas;
 He thought him sailing on the main,
 But soon he felt the truth too plain;
 For, delug'd in it he stood,
 And naked roll'd him in the flood;
 Then, with might his life to save,
 He breasted each opposing wave;
 But by a smith humane and good,
 He was extracted from the flood;
 And got him clothes and whisky warm,
 Soon him removed safe from harm.
 His son, in this wild mossy sea,
 To save his life leap't on a tree;
 And from a watery death did screen,
 Safe log'd among the branches green.
 Ulysses in the days of old,
 When sea-monsters round him howl'd,
 Then on a marble rock he sprung,
 With arms closed, to the fig tree clung;
 And saw the monster's gape beneath,
 Whose shaggy jaws were dens of death;

With razed teeth and nostrils wide,
 That did suck in and spout the tide;
 With joy he saw the dark blue sea,
 And monsters baulked of their prey;
 So Fairbrigg, on the plain tree high,,
 His heart did leap with thankful joy,
 And viewed below the mossy flood,
 Huge rocks, trees, and logs of wood,
 But fortune sometimes turns to good,
 Two veins were bared by the flood,
 And whirled huge rocks and soil away,
 Quite left two veins exposed, to day,
 Huge, massy ore, like silver bright,
 That filed the miners with delight;
 Large pieces shined along the ground,
 Like a new Potosi found,
 Well mixed with silver, useful gain.
 The flood had ploughed up from the vein,
 Placers like a blazing pile,
 That made the miners blithe to smile,
 At erey treasures of the earth,
 That gives to trade quick life and birth,
 And spar concealed in the rocks,
 As white as lasses summer smocks;

And blooming spar, like flowers bright,
 That paint the meadows with delight.
 The ores - the treasures of the vein,
 Are sent abroad, down over the main,
 To far eastern climes serene,
 Afar from northern blasts so keen.
 Now on the flood was heaved presses,
 Gowns and smocks and other dresses;
 And what more strange did come to pass,
 On the flood was swept alas,
 A fiddle tin, of hugest strength,
 For size and thickness, width and length;
 With brass and sulphur she was glued,
 Her tones were saturn, rough and loud;
 Folk ought to feel for each other,
 Whether neighbour, friend, or brother;
 Or think upon each other's woes,
 That's felt sharp fortune's kicks and blows.
 Think on the loss of loaves, and goods,
 Wrecked by earthquakes, storms or floods.
 Soon recompense for to augment,
 And not forget the loss of Dent;
 His tobacco's gone, his favourite store,
 His birds of music sing no more.

There are other folk songs, ballads and poems of note connected with mining - mostly coalmining however. The more well known of these (as follows) are well documented:

Name	Artist	Source
The Gresford Disaster		
Rapper to Bank		
Jowl and Listen		
The Blackleg Miner	Steeleye Span	Hark! The Village Wait
The Trimdon Grange Explosion (Armstrong)	Willard's leap	Adieu John Barleycorn
Ee Aye Aa Cud Hew (Pigford)	Ed Pigford	Songwriter
The Blantyre Explosion	Raven, Jones & Rose	Songs of a Changing World
One Miners Life		
I Am An Old Miner		
Jolly Joe, The Collier's Son		Songs of a Changing World
You Won't Get Me Down Your Mine (Wilkie)		Songs of a Changing World
Collier Laddie	Hall & McGregor	Glasgow Street Songs

W. Kennon Pirt

Autumn Meeting

As was hoped, the changed venue for this event attracted some new faces. Ironically, one of the reasons for bringing the date forward was to avoid the mist which regularly troubled us at Sicklinghall - what joy then on Saturday morning to awake to visibility of around 100 yards. The mist soon burnt off though and we had one of the hottest days of the summer!

Once the business meeting was over, the talks began. Ed Dennison described the surveying and recording work that he has been doing for the National Park Authority at Bolton Park Mine and at Grinton How smelt mill. Ron Callender showed us some examples of his photographic technique which he calls 'painting by light'. To someone who has had little success with flash bulbs, it was amazing what Ron had achieved with a very long exposure and a beam of light gradually filling in the detail.

After Martin Roe showed his photographs of Dales mines, especially Cononley, we broke for the buffet. The Cross Keys had done us proud and everyone seemed to get their fill. What's more, when the meal was over, there was no imposing on the lady members by expecting them to wash up!

Next, Colin Hindle took us round mines in the north Pennines. Mike Gill then showed a selection of slides from the Society's Records showing Cononley Mine in the early 1960s. It was very informative to compare some of the underground scenes with the same places photographed by Martin some 30 odd years later! For those going on the following day's field meet Mike also showed some slides of Buckden Gavel and the High smelt mill taken in the early 1970s.

The meeting broke up around six, but the convivial atmosphere encouraged a few to sit and talk rather than dashing to get away.

Welsh Gold

Mike Gill

Clogau gold mines, the only working gold mine in Wales not open to the public, is introducing an initiative to combat interlopers by using new technology to detect imitators. There are only two working gold mines in Wales and each mine uses its own gold exclusively for its own production. Neither mine has sold any gold to outside jewellers for many years.

The University of Sheffield's Department of Earth Sciences have now perfected a method that traces element profiles from every gold mine, which can be proved to be unique. Using laser ablation analysis and mass spectroscopy it is now possible to identify Welsh gold by the unique signature of each mine. It will now be possible to check that Welsh gold is included in jewellery described as such. Those selling jewellery purporting to contain Welsh gold risk being implicated in a criminal Trading Standards action if those statements are found to be false.

Eric Gray-Thomas

Eric also points out that he has a very good rocks/minerals department and books and gold-panning equipment for sale. Contact Eric at 9-11 Pen Deitsh, Caernarfon, Gwynedd, LL55 2AU. Tel: 01286 672602. Fax: 01286 676728. - *Ed*.

Query Corner

John A. Knight has recently joined the Society and writes as follows:

"Has any member any site maps/drawings, etc. to identify buildings at Surrender, Gunnerside Gill, Blakethwaite and old Gang lead mines, which were recently visited on a holiday in the area?"

Please contact John at 40 Fladgate Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 1LY. Tel: 0181 989 4303.

Just a thought from your Editor - Why not try the NMRS Library, John? - See overleaf.

NMRS Library

After many years as the Society's Librarian, Eleanor Greenough has decided to hang up her date-stamp and reclaim some room in her loft. Sallie Bassham has volunteered to take over and will have the books from early December. Borrowing conditions remain the same and Sallie may be contacted at: 4 Penyghent View, Horton in Ribblesdale, Settle, BD24 0HE. We would like to thank Eleanor for her hard work and efficient service over the years.

Miners Strike

A strike commenced among the lead miners of Arkengarthdale under the following circumstances: instead of the stewards having let what is known as the bargains, according to the nature of the workings, they now simply calculate the previous earnings of the men - a custom which is opposed to all precedent and has consequently given great dissatisfaction to this hitherto peaceful community, for such a thing as a strike was never before known among them.

Darlington & Stockton Times. 28th September, 1867. Sent in by D. F. King

Meet Leaders

We still need Meet Leaders for 1998. If you would like to lead a meet please contact the Secretary, Clive Torrens, Jubilee House, Preston-under Scar, Leyburn, North Yorkshire, DL8 4AH. Tel: 01969 624721.

Subscriptions and Covenants

Thank you very much to all members who covenant their subscription and have returned to me so quickly their "Green Forms" - known to the Inland Revenue as R185(Covenant). The Green Form has to be signed to certify that you have actually paid your promised Covenant Money (the NMRS subscription) and income tax for 1996. The Inland Revenue sent me a different style Green Form this year and new instructions. In the past they asked me to get everyone to sign a Green Form for every year of their Covenant; now it is only for the first year. However, NMRS may only reclaim the tax for years that you pay your subscription and pay income tax. I can check whether subscriptions have been paid - from the Society's records. However, if you are in your second, third or fourth year of a Deed of Covenant and you no longer pay income tax, please let me know. I think this is a somewhat intrusive question and apologise for having to ask it (in the past you only needed to not return the old Green Form). I regard this information as confidential and I do not pass it on to anyone.

Don't forget your 1998 subs are due on 1st January - Ed.

Sallie Bassham

Finally

Thanks to all who contributed to this newsletter. Your Editor and the Committee wish all readers a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year. Please keep the contributions rolling in - they are very much appreciated. Contributions on 3½" discs are welcome - ASCII text format only please. Discs will normally be returned with the following newsletter unless otherwise requested. Contributions for the February newsletter by 17th January, please, to:

Keith Nolan, West End Cottage, Woodhall, South Duffield, Selby, North Yorkshire, YO8 7TG. Telephone or Fax: 01757 638503. E-mail: kjn100@york.ac.uk.

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