



The Northern Mine Research Society

Newsletter - August 2002

Society Meetings -2002

Provisional Field Meet Programme (Dates & details to be confirmed)

September	Boulby Potash Mine - underground, limited numbers and subject to approval
October	Autumn General Meeting - slides / social
Saturday-Sunday 26,27th October	Hude Valley, Teesdale Leader; Tony Fretwell, Tel. (01388) 605965 Meet-10.30am (both days) Middleton in Teesdale NGR NY947255

Meet Leaders

The secretary will always welcome offers from members to organise and lead field meetings. If you have a suggestion for a meet, please contact:
Steve Mitchell (c/o 38 Main Street. Sutton in Craven. Keithlev. West Yorkshire DB20

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Visit our website: <http://www.ex.ac.uk/%7ERBurt/MinHistNet/NMRS.html>

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Meet report Grinton Mines and smelt Mills 11 May 2002

15 Society members met at the designated lay by at the allotted time (although 1 member met himself at another lay by about a mile away - oh dear, George).

The first half of the meet was a surface walk (in perfect weather) led by Ian Spensley, over the moor track and up Grovebeck Gill. Ian pointed out the remains of Grovebeck, New Mill & Scotts smelt mills and in addition to inspecting these, several bale smelting sites were also located.

Features which may have been prehistoric fields/boundaries etc were also pointed out by Martin Roe.

At the head of the gill the large tips gave away the location of Grovebeck Mine where the horse level portal and the well preserved mine shop (now shooting lodge) were examined before the party proceeded along the track leading to the site of the dam for How Hush.

The hush was descended to the hush gutter, the walk ending up at How smelt mill and peat house - the mill being a listed Ancient Monument having been restored/consolidated by the YDNP Authority in recent years.

A break for a picnic lunch was followed by the underground component of the meet. Martin Roe took charge of the trip into Devis Hole mine and what a fascinating place it proved to be with mined and natural cave passages to explore. It was a relief that the tight oil drum crawl is now a much easier albeit muddy crawl at the entrance (portal collapsed so a short shaft has been sunk onto the level a few yards inby).

Thanks to Ian for the smelt mill walk and Martin for the underground trip (and added value prehistoric dimension).

Steve Mitchell.

Meet Report Swinnergill Level 22nd June 2002

A large group met at Keld Village (still no sign of George) and the 40 minute walk/ascent was made up to the portal of Swinnergill main level. The A & B teams arrived at slightly different times and encountered each other on several occasions within the mine.

Richard Platt was the meet leader (ably assisted by back marker Paul Dollery) and both ensured a safe, well informed A team enjoyed several hours underground. Explorations took in workings on the North, Middle and Sun veins.

Back on the surface, the smelt mill above the level and Crackpot Hall halfway down the track back to Keld, were inspected.

The views gained from the vantage points available from the track were truly breathtaking/humbling and combined with the fine weather, made for

a splendid conclusion to the meet.

All involved expressed their thanks to Richard (and Paul) and confirmed their intention to attend Richard's next Swaledale meet in a months time.

Steve Mitchell.

Meet Report Whitaside 20th July 2002

A dozen or so members met on the Grinton/Askrigg road for a trip down Whitaside mine. It was warm, dry summer weather, following torrential rain the day before, so some people did a surface walk instead of going underground and some did a surface walk later in the afternoon.

The way into Smithy Level is down a short, recent shaft. However, it is a very narrow shaft and we could only get in by sliding down with our arms above our heads and later there was a certain amount of heaving to get everyone out and we all looked as if we were squeezed out under pressure - like corks from bottles. This sounds ungrateful (but much humour was provided by the spectacle) and many thanks are due to whoever dug, lined and made safe the entrance shaft. At the bottom of the shaft, it was the typical mudslide into water. Careful reconnoitring beforehand by the meet leaders meant that we were discouraged from wasting our time in the multitude of small "scratchings" off the main level and were led along the labyrinth of passages, through deep water, over rock-falls, up and down mud slides, through small holes, over stony ground and boulders, to two shafts which led down to lower workings - one shaft had clear tally markings. Towards the end of our trip, there were several foreheads where we could see the last few shot marks, the clean stone where the rock had come away and the last picking at small pockets of mineral before the miners have turned round and left yet another exploration as not sufficiently productive to be worth continuing. The last section to be worked was Flank's Level and it is closest to the entrance. It is tall enough to walk upright and, in the latter half, wide enough for two sets of rails. There is no evidence that any vein was intersected and at the end, there are shot marks and clean rock; but unlike the others, there is no evidence for even a single pocket of ore. How long was spent on working this section for no reward? Elsewhere off the main level there are many fine mineral specimens and Whitaside is known particularly for its witherite. There are also sleepers, rails, chairs and one clog iron left in the mine. Many thanks to Richard and the other leaders and to all who contributed their specialist knowledge on a variety of mining topics and joined in lively discussion when knowledge was in shorter supply.

Sallie Bassham

A novice underground at Whitaside.

Although I have been a member of the Society for a number of years I had never ventured underground until this year. Thus it was with some trepidation that I eyed the way in to Whitaside lead mine. The original arched entrance to the level has long since collapsed and the way in is via a very small hole in the ground, which seemed hardly big enough for a healthy rabbit, let alone a tubby-ish 50 year old; me, not the leader Richard Platt! In fact it turned out to be relatively easy; a drop of about 4½ feet down the narrow stone-lined shaft and then a relatively easy manoeuvre into the level.

This is a horse level, with beautifully executed stone arching. When in use this would have had rails along which the wagons of ore would have been hauled by a horse or pony, probably on iron rails but possibly wooden. In places there was evidence of the positioning of the rails and marks in the side walls where the wagons and possibly the ponies had brushed up against the sides.

In addition to the fine stonework of the abundant arching there are a number of interesting features in Whitaside. Strikingly, there is what seems to be early graffiti! This was made by using candle smoke to write on the roof and seems to be initials of miners. Two I recall were JAR and WN; it might be possible to trace these men, particularly if they were mid-19th C miners and are recorded in the local censuses (available every 10 years from 1841 – 1901).

There were fine examples of witherite (barium carbonate), the remains of a clog and clog marks still visible in the mud to the side of the level. In several places pick marks are visible. Most striking and evocative are the tally marks on the wall, deep in the mine, where somebody, probably a young lad, sat and made a mark each time a bucket of ore was hauled up the adjacent shaft from the workings below.

We spent between 3 and 4 hours underground and negotiated one or two falls with fairly narrow squeezes which confirmed that I have no desire to go caving! Getting out was not quite as easy as getting in, and one or two of us needed to be hauled up by the more agile of the 10 on this visit!

A brief tour of the surface workings identified the wheel pit for the water wheel which would have driven crushing rollers on the dressing floor. The wheel seems to have been about 12 feet diameter.

diameter.

Overall an interesting and stimulating trip; I would recommend any members who have never been underground to join one of the visits. My thanks to all those there who once again were very helpful in pointing out things of interest to me and my particular thanks to Richard Platt for organising the trip.

Alan Mills

JOINT VENTURE SEMINAR

NMRS and the Peak District Mines Historical Society Ltd

The joint seminar will take place on Saturday 9th November in Calver Village Hall. Members of both societies are cordially invited to participate in this new venture which will feature a series of short presentations during the day. A buffet lunch will be served.

There is a bar at the village hall and ample parking is available. Displays and publications are welcome; stands will be provided.

Those who would like to give a 15-20 minute talk, please ring Alan Mutter before he rings you! Tel: 01629-584468. Usual audio-visual equipment available.

The provisional programme is:

9.30 to 10 am	Meet at Calver Village Hall
10.00	Welcome address from both Chairmen.
10.15 to 11.15	Seminar begins.
11.15 to 11.45	Tea/coffee break.
11.45 to 12.45	Seminar continues.
12.45 to 2.00 pm	Buffet lunch.
2.00 to 3.30	Seminar continues.
3.30 to 4.00	Tea/coffee break.
4.00 to 5.30	Seminar continues followed by closing remarks by both Chairmen and observations from participants.

If you wish to attend this new venture which takes place in the well-appointed Calver Village Hall, please fill in the form below as soon as possible, as accommodation is limited and there may be a first-come first-in basis. Send form and cheque for £8 per head to Alan Mutter, 72 Wolds Rise, Matlock, Derbyshire, DE4 3HJ. Cheques made out to PDMHS. If no lunch required, £4 per head.

Calver Village Hall is situated in the middle of Calver Village on the A623, Sheffield.

BOOKING FORM FOR JOINT VENTURE SEMINAR

At Calver Village Hall on Saturday 9th November

Names _____

Address _____

Tel No _____ **Buffet supper(s) at £4 each** yes / No _____ **Cheque etc. enclosed** £ _____

Please return to 38, Main Street, Sutton in Craven, KEIGHLEY, Noth Yorkshire BD20 THD

JOHN MACPHERSON

It is with regret that we note the recent death of John MacPherson, from Middlesbrough. John, who with his wife Hilda, regularly attended meets from the late 1960s into the 1980s and was President of the Society in 1974. They were great friends of Bob and Jessie Guthrie and were active in the North Pennines – where they recruited many members for the Society. An enduring memory of that group was its bonhomie, especially when enjoying a pint after the day's activities. John enjoyed attending social events and his President's Dinner at Marton Country Club (Teesside) is remembered for the arrival of three miners dressed straight from the pages of *Agricola* to present the Society's prizes. We send our sympathy to his wife, Hilda, and their family.

Mike Gill

Editor's Report

Editorial duties changed hands at the AGM in March this year and I was elected as publications editor, taking over from Hazel, who relinquished the job after nine years of service to the Society. Ray Fairbairn was elected as the replacement newsletter editor, as members will, by now, be aware.

Hazel hasn't retired just yet, however, because she is finishing the editing of a monograph on the Derwent Valley Mines which is due to be released in December. My first publication will be the 2002 memoirs, which should also be ready for distribution with the December newsletter. I have received a couple of very good papers so far and would appreciate a few more articles from members to help make it into the kind of quality publication that we have all come to expect. So please provide some encouragement to me in my new role by finishing off all those incomplete research reports you have been working on and starting those that you have always intended to write.

Another monograph is at an advanced stage of preparation to follow the 2002 memoirs and material is available for a further monograph.

Material can be submitted in electronic format (preferably MS Word or text) by email to me at: johnhunter.2000@btinternet.com.

Printed material via snail-mail is equally welcome. Send to 3 Leebrook Drive, Owlthorpe, Sheffield S20 6QG. Our phone no., should you need it, is 0114 251 4883.

John Hunter

New Newsletter Editor

Again I thank all that contributed to the newsletter. Please keep sending articles and other material suitable for publication - it is greatly appreciated. Contributions can be in text (*.txt) format by email or diskette, but please don't hesitate to send submissions on paper if necessary. If sending printed text, 12 point Arial scans nicely. Photos, plans and sketches can also be scanned, but please advise us of the copyright ownership. Diskettes will be returned with the following newsletter unless instructed otherwise. Material received and not used this time should appear in the next newsletter. Contributions for December newsletter by mid-late November please, to:

**Mr. R. A. Fairbairn, Pethfoot Cottage,
Allendale, Hexham, Northumberland. NE47
9ND**

raymondfairbairn@lineone.net

AUTUMN MEETING, October 12th 2002. To be held at the Cross Keys Hotel, Otley Road, Skipton, North Yorkshire (opposite the Police Station), where there is plenty of free parking. This informal event kicks off with a short business meeting at 2.00 pm and is followed by a pot-pourri of members' slides and a buffet at £6.00 per head. Remember, your talk does not have to be of earth-shattering importance. For instance, it might be about something that you've seen and want other people's opinions on. It might be a few pictures of mines that you've seen on holiday (at home or abroad). It might even be about a project that you are planning to start. There will be both slide and multi-media projectors available. Please contact Mike Gill (01535 635388) if you wish to use a powerpoint, but do not leave it until the last minute. Please use the booking form provided.

Mike Gill

BOOKING FORM FOR THE AUTUMN MEETING

Name(s) _____
Address _____
Tel No _____ I wish to book ___ buffet(s) at £6 per head Enclosed my cheque for £ payable to NMRS
I would like to give a short talk on _____ and will be using slides/power point
Please return to: 38, Main Street, Sutton on Craven, Keighley, North Yorkshire, BD20 7HD

Leadmining at Shaw Beck and Prys Level, Sunday 18th September 2002.

A guided walk in aid of Grinton Church is taking place on Sunday 18th Sept 2002, visiting mining sites on Shaw Beck and Prys Level. This is a comfortable walk of six miles to discover leadmining history to be found in this peaceful valley. Meet at Marske Bridge (SE 104 004) at 2 pm. Anyone interested could first visit Marrick Smelt Mill before the walk starts. A charge of £2.50 for adults and £1.50 for children, please wear stout shoes.

Barr, Jones

Longannet closure

Scotsman 30.3.02:-

The future of Longannet, Scotland's last deep coal mine looked bleak last night after it was placed in liquidation with the loss of more than 500 jobs.

Scotsman 4.4.02:-

The liquidator appointed to oversee the future of Longannet colliery in Fife, Scotland's last deep mine, yesterday gave a bleak assessment of its prospects.

Bryan Jackson, of the accountancy firm PKF, said he was "disappointed" to confirm there had been no interest from any potential buyer, nor any offers of grant-aided assistance.

The verdict is unsurprising and supports predictions that the mine now looks certain to close. Union leaders have already begun meetings with staff to discuss redundancy.

Safety measures have now been put in place at the mine, which was flooded with 17 million gallons of water on 23 March, and only a skeleton staff is reporting for duty. Another 50 million gallons of water could enter the mine and the cost of restarting operations has been put at £50 million.

Alistair Lings

Fill-hammer and pan

The following account was seen in the Mining History web site, and I felt that it contained some unique information which should be on the record. Fortunately Tony agreed to its publication.

Ray Fairbairn

To: mining-history@JISC MAI LAC UK
Sent: 18 July 2002 18:47
Subject: Re: Mining Baskets

Andy Cuckson was asking about a reference to permystone being "put on baskets...which are small vessels made of iron" and asks if the term basket could be an alternative to kibble or bucket.

When I was a student I worked for two months in the summer of 1951 at the Grangesberg iron ore mine in central Sweden. My job was to drive a two metre square heading along the footwall contact of a steeply-dipping (70 degrees) orebody; drilling a round; blasting; barring down then mucking out; doing all this single-handedly, but under the general supervision of an old chap who had spent 44 years in the mine and was eking out his time until retirement looking after trainees.

All mucking-out was done using a "fill-hammer" and "pan". The "fill-hammer" was a cross between a pick and a shovel. The shovel blade was triangular, but fixed at right angles to the wooden handle, so that the pointed blade could be used like a pick. The "pan" was like a large sheet-metal dustpan, a handle at each side. My report, which I still have, contains sketches of these, sadly without dimensions, although in the text I say that the pan holds 40 to 50 kilos of ore (a rich hematite/magnetite mix). From memory I would say the pan was about 18 to 20 inches across. To muck out, one placed the pan on the floor at ones' feet and scraped the ore into it using the "fill-hammer".

Initially the tunnel had not progressed far beyond the ore transfer raise and was not long enough to carry any rails, so, having filled the pan, one went to the edge of the ore-pass and tipped the pan's contents into the raise. Once the tunnel had progressed far enough, rails were installed and an end-tipping wagon put in. Thereafter, one filled the pan as before, but emptied it into the wagon, which held about 1.25 tonnes.

Later, in the summer of 1954, I took leave from the Royal Engineer's tunnelling unit in Gibraltar and spent a couple of weeks at the Rio Tinto mine in Spain. There, I was interested to see essentially the same mucking-out implements being used - a tool like the Swedish fill-hammer' being now teamed up with a wicker basket rather than a sheet-metal pan. The system, however, was identical.

One day I was shown the displays in the remarkably small mine museum, and one of the items on show was a Roman mucking-out tool -- identical, within a centimetre or so, to the ones then in use at Rio Tinto and the "fill-hammer" I had used in Sweden. The same design of tool, so successful its use spanned about two thousand years and the breadth of Europe from Spain to Sweden

Later again, when I was working at the Marampa iron ore mine in Sierra Leone, run by a U.K.-based company, an old stockpile of iron-ore fines, unsaleable in the 1930s but with a market as sinterplant feed in the 1960s, was loaded into 30-ton railway wagons by teams of women, in this case using sheet-steel "head-pans". The same head-pans, about 24 inches in diameter and no doubt made in the U.K., were used by market vendors selling lunch snacks to workers in the concentrator plant so were, to all intents and purposes, "baskets".

I think the terms kibble and bucket apply to much larger vessels used for hoisting in shafts. The "baskets" used by the women and girls sorting pennystone in the Shropshire iron mines are, to my mind, much more likely to have been like the pans or head-pans I have described above.

Tony Brewis
18/07/2002

A use for old coal mines

Environment Times

Vol 8 issue 1 (3/02)

Scotland's abandoned coal fields could soon provide inexpensive energy for industry.

One disused mine-Cardowan near Glasgow-has become an

experimental site for the collection of methane as a fuel for a small power station. Five other abandoned mines in the Kilsyth area are being investigated.---the first power station could be in place in about a year's time.

The company, Alkane Energy---has close links with Scottish and Southern Energy- has already established three similar power stations in England with a further six being built. It says it has plans for another 100 across Britain within the next five years.

Alistair Lings.

Copa Hill Bronze Age mine project : Final project. (Grant 2000)

N. I. Royal Archaeological Institute 23,13-14

Simon Timberlake.

Receipt of a large series of radiocarbon dates in May 2001 has eased the process of post excavation analysis and interpretation, with the result that all of the remaining research and the writing-up of the final report for publication was completed by the end of 2001

The Royal Archaeological Institute grant (2000) proved to be invaluable in assisting the final stages of this work, supporting both fieldwork at the site (including one of the most comprehensive site-specific studies of utilitarian stone mining tools ever carried out), documentary research, photographic work, additional radiocarbon dating work undertaken to confirm some unusually early dates from the oldest mining horizons, and geochemical/mineralogical work carried out to try and confirm whether or not lead (as well as copper ore) was being purposefully removed during the Bronze Age. The task of writing and illustrating the final report was also helped through the award of this grant.

Today Copa Hill is probably the best-studied Bronze Age metal mine in Britain (in terms of archaeological excavation), and will be of considerable value for the understanding of the c.20 other putative mines so far identified, which appears to be similar type. Significant finds have been made here since 1993, including the discovery of stone and antler tools, withy rope, basket fragments and broken withy handles for hammerstones, plus wooden stemples and several intact or near-intact wooden drainage launders made of alder or oak. One launder was almost 5m long and found *in situ* was found within the entrance to the mine, and dates from the earliest period of working (c.2000 BC). These objects are currently being conserved at the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff and they will be on display within the new museum galleries in Swansea in the near future.

Submitted by Paul Sowan

Hudgill Bingsteads, near Alston NY 752463

At Hudgill the Northern Pennine Heritage Trust have completed the conservation work on the Bingsteads. Roofs and walls are complete again and the yard has been cleared of soil and debris. This site now shows a complete set of Greenwich Hospital bingsteads with associated buildings. Based on a report in North Pennine Heritage No 49,2002

Submitted by Ray Fairbairn

Members wants

Faithful Cookson

I have been collecting information on Faithful Cookson (1835-1885) for many years, I am now beginning to put it all together for publication. I have had a great deal of help from some NMRS members but if any one else has any references to him please get in touch with me.

One mystery is his alleged involvement with a colliery at Tan Hill. Can you help? Is there somebody who knows about his Tram-Railway Company, which had plans in 1871 for a system in Bolton and other towns, as well as one to connect with the "Great Iron and Coalfields of Yorkshire"?

Any ideas or references to these or any other of his projects will be gratefully received.

Bridget Howard,

66, Birkdale, Little Common

Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex.

TN39 3TG. Tel 01-424 845470

NMRS Library

Very many thanks for all donations to the library, some recent gifts have been very generous indeed (and involved thousands of miles of travel) and this brief mention is an inadequate acknowledgement.

Thank you to Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland for Newsletter 19, to the Great Orme Exploration Society for their latest Journal, to British Geological Survey for Earthwise Issue 18, to Mike Gill for a new copy of Schmitz' 400 plus page book "World Non-ferrous metal Production and Prices 1700-1976"

Thanks also to Rick Godfrey for Sheffield University Mining Magazines 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963, 1964, 1966, 1967 and Leeds University Mining Society Journals 1952, 1954, 1959, 1961. (I started to write a brief summary of these two sets of Journals, but each volume has some 70 or 80 pages of articles plus several pages of advertisements and there is a lot of excellent material. If there is sufficient demand, I will see if I can do lists of article titles or some such.)

A special thank you to Barry Hunt who discovered that the Library copy of QJGS 1945 was missing a geological map, eventually found a map copy elsewhere and sent a full colour version to complete our QJGS.

We are always grateful for all donations to the library and now ask if any one has spare copies of "Industrial Archaeology Review". As a Research Library, it is particularly useful to have complete runs of journals so that members can scan through these in search of whatever esoteric details they need for their particular interest. The library has two parts each of "Industrial Archaeology Review" volumes 7 to 14, volume 16 and volume 23. We also have volumes 15(1), 17(1), 18(2), 20(1) and 22(2). If anyone has unwanted copies of "Industrial Archaeology Review" volumes 15(2), 17(2), 18(1), 19(1), 19(2), 20(2), 21(1), 21(2) or 22(1), please will they get in touch?

Sallie Bassham, NMRS Librarian, sbassham@nildram.co.uk

BENEATH YOUR FEET / TANKARDSTOWN MINE by Ike Wilson [2002]

32 pp 30 colour photos. Published privately by the author. SB £4.95. I got my copy from Mike Moore

This is my type of book, all pictures and very little writing and I have even been there so I can vouch for the spectacular scenery in this part of Éire. Tankardstown Mine in Co Waterford, Ireland has a dramatic appearance, two ruined engine houses and a chimney, over looking the cliffs at Knockmahon. On the opposite side of the road from the engine houses are a series of very shaky shafts and in the cliffs below are a series of adits which connect with these shafts. Ike Wilson begins by warning us of the dangers of mine exploration and then proceeds to take us on a hazardous underground journey through the heavy timbered and rather dodgy stopes of Tankardstown Mine. After seeing the insecurity of these working one is impressed by the beauty of the formations. Flows of bright blue stalactite waterfalls, delicate bright blue straw stalactites and sheets of blue sinter on the walls, truly amazing! What the author fails to mention are the unfenced open shafts so take care when walking. However, this is a beautiful area and this book can only serve to whet the appetite for a visit which I can highly recommend. My only criticism is the lack of a survey.

Tony Oldham

SEATHWAITE GRAPHITE

B. Young and D. Millward

Down to Earth 38. p.4 Published: 2002

This article reviews the locations of reported occurrences of graphite in the United Kingdom, and notes former commercial mining at Glen Strathfarrar near Fort Augustus and at Ayrshire, Scotland, and Bannerdale near Blencathra in the Lake District, as well as the most important mines at Seathwaite in Borrowdale, in the Lake District. The Seathwaite mines are now a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Mining is recorded at this location since Elizabethan times.

The nature of the graphite ore bodies mined at Seathwaite is described, as well as current theories concerning the geological origin of the material.

Paul W. Sowan,

ROBERT MUSHET AND THE DARKHILL IRONWORKS by Keith Webb 2001 88 pp numerous photos, illus maps etc. SB £7.99 Black Dwarf Publications.

<http://www.blackdwarfpublishations.co.uk>

I first "discovered" Darkhill in the early 1990's whilst searching for mines in the Forest of Dean. I was surprised to find this vast industrial complex hidden in the trees. When viewed from below the site resembles an Inca village, but from above it looks like war zone. The hotch potch of furnace

foundations, ore bunkers, stone rail chairs and a wheel pit present an industrial archaeological puzzle of some magnitude. My researches only made me more intrigued. Robert Mushet was a secretive genius, a pioneer inventor of self hardening steel and these works were modified time and time again both to confuse his rivals and to experiment further. Robert was so secretive that he even conducted experiments at home, mostly alone, but when he needed help he got his wife to work the bellows and hold the red hot billets in tongs while he hammered them into shape.

He became manager of Darkhill Works in 1845 and was the first to experiment with manganese, tungsten, titanium and chrome and produced some fine steel alloys which are still in use today. In its day this was a dream site surrounded by mines of coal, limestone, iron and possibly clay - all the raw materials need for the manufacture of iron and steel. A nearby spring and reservoir provided water.

The Titanic Ironworks were built in 1862. Robert employed three hundred men to produce "Titanic Cast Steel" but the venture was not a success and it was wound up in 1874. The buildings were finally demolished in the early 1960s. The bulldozed material was used as hard-core for the approach to the Wye Bridge section of the first motorway Severn Bridge crossing at Chepstow.

Now enter Keith Webb who lives in a house overlooking the Darkhill Ironworks, and has spent many years researching the area. He modestly claims no expertise but his book is the key to the riddle of Darkhill. Mr Webb has identified the locations of individual buildings, furnaces, workshops, boilers etc. Assisted by examples from Ironbridge in Shropshire and the Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet near Sheffield he has produced a logical explanation of how the site was organised.

Nowadays it is no longer possible to wander through the works, as, due to Health and Safety legislation, the whole area is securely fenced off. It is still possible to view the works from a distance, making this pocket book an essential companion for your visit.

Tony Oldham

BOX FREESTONE MINES

by the Cotham Caving Group. Third Edition, revised and updated 2002.

iv + 67 pp, 4 pp maps, 7 colour plates on 4 pp [=total 79 pp], 17 B&W photos in text. A5 SB price £7.95

The first edition was published in 1967 and if I remember correctly it was a quarto sized publication, run off on an old Gestetner duplicator. Interest in these mines is still as keen as ever, hence this new glossy publication.

Since 1967 the mines have seen many changes, as mining became uneconomic many quarrying firms

ceased production and only three companies are still working today. The end of the cold war sounded the end of the great underground weapons store at Box and this closed in the 1990's. Likewise, many of the entrances have been filled in and today only the entrance to Jack's Workings is left. The Backdoor is officially closed.

Bath stone or Oolite is quite soft when first cut, but after being allowed to dry out, it turns into hard building stone. It has been used in the construction of such edifices as the Georgian Crescent in Bath and the Houses of Parliament in London. The removal of the stone has left a maze of passages over 35 miles long.

In 1959, teenage cavers, from Cotham Grammar School, Bristol, rediscovered the old Box workings. Exited by what they found, they began to spend their weekends exploring and map making. Travelling to and fro by bus, they often camped underground to gain extra time for the work. The major routes were surveyed, measured and recorded in scrupulous detail. The only omission I could find was that they did not identify the original explorer of the A. O. Route.

Tony Oldham

WEST SHROPSHIRE MINING FIELDS

by Ivor J Brown. 2001.

Tempus Publications Ltd., The Mill, Brimscombe Port, Stroud, Glos. GL5 2QG. 128 pages. ISBN 0 7524 23263 0. Cost £10.99.

This little book is largely a collection of some 200 old photographs (black & white) of the western half of the Shropshire mining fields. These cover the Snailbeach, Tankerville, Pennerley. Bog, Roman Gravels and several other lesser lead mines, as well as barytes and copper mines, together with associated mills, smelt houses and railways. A short chapter on the Shrewsbury and northwest Shropshire coal mines is included. The photos provide a valuable record of a defunct industry, many showing installations which have now disappeared. There are many groups of miners whose descendants probably still live in the area. The book starts with a short introduction to the area, but the sketch of the geological setting is very brief with little said on the vein pattern or on the gangue minerals. Each photograph has a full caption and each mine or group has about one page of introductory historical text. These all make a useful summary of the mining activity of the region, but it is a pity that plans of the mineral veins, mine workings and mine building layouts are confined to a few small sketch-maps. There is no plan at all of the largest mine complex, Snailbeach, and as one not so familiar with the area, I found placing some of the photos difficult. There is a comprehensive bibliography, but some of the entries are incomplete, lacking details of volume numbers or publishers.

Dr T Ford

NAMHO NEWSLETTER – 2002

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THIS SPACE COULD HAVE BEEN FILLED WITH AN ARTICLE WRITTEN BY YOU

Why not send those snippets of information that you come across that are too short for the Memoirs but are worth sharing with the members.

Member wants or queries will be published, space permitting, as will be answers.

Help to make the Newsletter alive and interesting. Remember, use it or lose it.

Ray Fairbairn