The Northern Mine Research Society Newsletter

August 2005

Society News

The last meet of the year will be held at Nenthead, Cumbria on Saturday 17th September. The trip will be an underground meet and will start at 10.30am in the Nenthead Visitor Centre car park (NGR NY781437).

Autumn Meeting

Details of the NMRS Autumn Meeting are on the enclosed booking form.

The Newsletter Editor would like to thank all those who have contributed to the August edition, and would like to remind all members of NMRS that this is Your newsletter. If you are carrying out a research project, or have explored any interesting sites, please write in and tell us.

Call for Meets for next Year

If you have any ideas for surface or underground trips, please contact the Society Secretary. Maybe you have been on an interesting walk and would like to share it with others, or there is a mine you have always wanted to explore, let us know. Offers to lead meets are particularly welcome (guidelines will be provided to all leaders) Leading meets can be fun!

Inside this issue:

News

Northern Pennine Silver in the Late Medieval Period

A seminar to be held at the North Pennines Heritage Trust Centre, Nenthead, Saturday 8 April 2006

The evidence for silver production from the northern Pennine orefield in the late medieval period has been addressed by both historians and geologists in recent years. Whilst there is strong documentary and statistical support for the position that an area in the north Pennines, encompassing parts of Cumberland (now Cumbria), Northumberland and CountyDurham, was the major source of newly mined English silver in the latemedieval period, that is not backed up by the geological evidence. The majority of the ores mined in the modern period were low in silver and there is, as yet, no evidence for significant quantities of silver-rich minerals at the shallow depths accessible to the medieval miner.

Although the quantity of silver produced during the 12th century can be estimated with some confidence we do not know the precise location of the workings. Neither can we be certain as to the nature of the ores worked, where they were processed, nor the quantity of lead which might have been produced as a by-product. Information is available on the organisational structure under which mining was carried out but there is currently little to indicate how it fitted into the social framework and upland agricultural practice.

This seminar is being held to consider the evidence for silver production and discuss how our understanding of mining in the area during the late medieval period might be advanced. The intention is to hear presentations from all those with an interest in the area - geologists, historians, archaeologists and mine explorers.

If you are interested in contributing, please contact Dr Peter Claughton, Blaenpant Morfil, Clynderwen, Pembrokeshire, Wales SA66 7RE; tel. 01437 532578. P.F.Claughton@exeter.ac.uk

There will be no charge for the seminar itself, commencing at 10:30 - lunch will be available in the Centre café.

To book, please contact Sheila Barker, The Rise, ALSTON, Cumbria CA9 3DB;

Dr Peter Claughton,

DEADWOOD, South Dakota - The Homestake Gold Mine at Lead, closed since late 2001, is giving a Deadwood museum tens of thousands of items dating back to its start in 1876. The maps, letters, legal records and other items will take up more than 15,000 square feet of space on display. Mary Kopco, director of the Adams Museum & House, said the executive producer of the HBO Series "Deadwood" and his wife have made a donation that will be used to find a building suitable for the collection. Associated Press

Mike Gill

Coal Mining Comments

I am quite pleased that NMRS is producing more material on the history of coal mining as I have thought since I first joined about 1980 that Society members neglected this.

My particular interest is iron mining but I have no axe to grind against any aspect of mining history, whether it be coal, metal, gold, potash or even molasses! Just reading the May 2005 Newsletter reveals mention of visits to lead mining sites, the NAMHO conference with its variety of mining subjects, Caphouse Colliery, the Dixon Rock drill, and cobalt in Cheshire. A good mix of subjects which I know could be expanded if more of us could be bothered to bring them to the notice of fellow members via future Society publications.

Simon Chapman.

In response to the note in the NMRS Newsletter: No, I don't think so - Coal mining does seem to me to have been relatively neglected in the past and I would welcome an even further move towards coal!

Colin Bowden

Artifact, Silvergill Mine

The wooden artefact shown on the next page was recovered from the Emanuel Level of the Silvergill Mine, Caldbeck Fells, Cumbria and is now in the possession ofthe Lake District National Park Archaeologist, together with other finds. Before 1999, it had been generally assumed that the main C16th lead/copper/silver mine of the Society of Mines Royal in the Caldbeck Fells was in Roughtengill. Following an analysis of the mining reports in theHechstetter Diaries, it became apparent that this could not be the case, given the extensive development of the levels described in the diaries. Subsequent surveys showed that the levels in neighbouring Silvergill matched exactly with the descriptions, except that one, the Emanuel Level was missing. With the permission of the LDNP, excavation by Warren Allison and a team of colleagues uncovered the level at the predicted position. The level was a typical picked working in hard rock.

An account of this work was published in R. Smith, S. Murphy and W. Allison, "The Lost German Mines at Caldbeck", Trans. Cumb. & Westmorland Antiq. & Arch. Soc., 89-104, 2001.

Subsequent clearance by Warren Allison and his colleagues uncovered a level extending a distance described in the Hechstetter dairies and several fragments of oak wood with peg holes which were thought to be part of a barrow way and possibly one of the earliest railways in the UK. These have since been radiocarbon dated to a felling date of 1450-1580 AD. Together with these fragments they found a clay pipe bowl (probably C19th), a wooden cylinder about 10 inches long with a diameter of 6-7 inches and a bore of 4 inches. (though to be the end of a pumping pipe) and the artefact shown in the photograph.

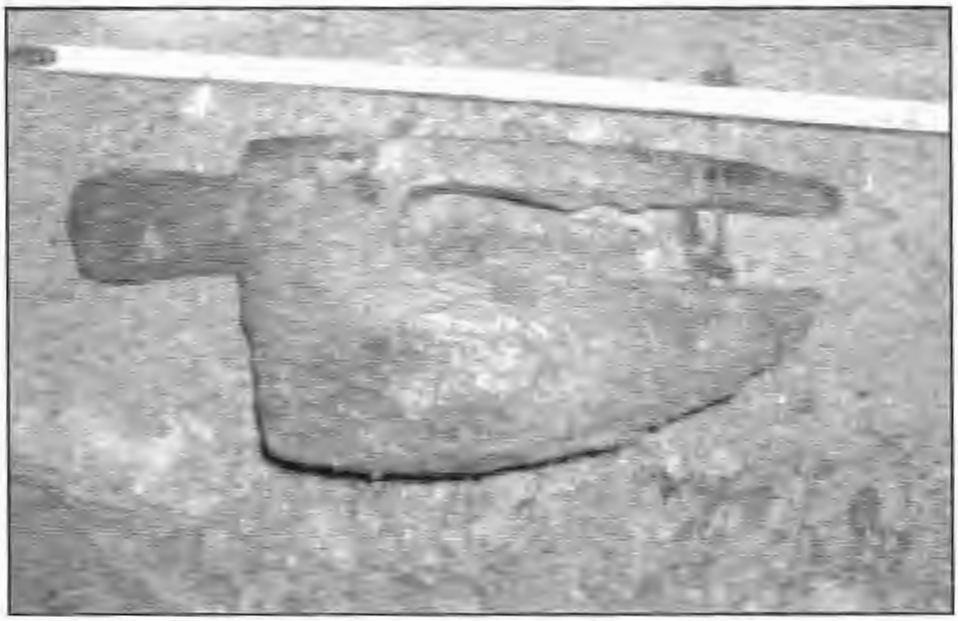
This is 13 inches long by about 7 inches at its broadest point. What appears to be a handle has been formed at one end and there are at least two holes drilled in the piece. A roughly rectangular slot appears to have broken away from the interior, although it is possible that at least part of this may have been a fabricated slot. The lower edge, as shown, has been bevelled to give a dished surface on one side. The artefact is now undergoing conservation and further study. The upper edge is straight and does not appear to have been a result of breakage.

At first it was thought to be a scoop, trowell or possibly some sort of vanning shovel. However, it is felt that if this were the case, the article would have been symmentrical. Suggestions have been made of a barrow handle or hopper handle but to date no re-

alistic identification has been made.

It would be very much appreciated if any reader who might be able tooffer a suggestion on the identity of the object can contact Richard Smith at rsmith6@mmm.com or 07785-508013. Alternatively please correspond with the Newsletter Editor.

Richard Smith



Book Reviews

The Cultural Landscape of Prehistoric Mines. Edited by Peter Topping and Mark Lynott, Oxbow Books ISBN 1 84217 147 X

This newly published book comprises papers from a variety of authors mainly dealing with Neolithic flint extraction. It also introduces ethnographic studies of traditional, pre industrial, mining techniques used by North American Indians as well as quarrying techniques from southern India.

This would perhaps not be the immediate choice of reading for society members and may appear to be a weighty academic tome; however it has much to recommend it. The prehistorians approach to many activities is to look for ethnographic comparisons to explain their findings. In this case we see examples of mining activities that most of us would look at in functional and practical terms, mixed up with superstition, rituals and religion.

It makes you think about the superstitions of 18th and 19th century miners in a different light.

Martin Roe

The Moorlands of England and Wales: An Environmental History 8000BC - AD2000, I.G. Simmons Edinburgh University Press ISBN 0 7486 1731 0

Published two years ago this book is described on the back cover as "a history of the moorlands and the part that they have played in English and Welsh history over ten millennia". The North Pennines (including the Yorkshire Dales), Dartmoor and South Wales all feature in detail as do the human activities, including mining that have shaped these landscapes.

This should be a very useful book for anyone studying upland mining landscapes who wants to understand the wider perspective of historic landscape use, but there is a major flaw in this publication and that is the reliance of old published sources. A prime example is the use of Raistrick and Jennings "Lead Mining in the Pennines" as a principle source. This is now 40 years old and much of the chronological framework it presents and our understanding of the process of mining has been challenged and corrected in more recent publications. I.G. Simmons is an emeritus Professor at Durham University and it is a pity that he has chosen to conduct such shallow research, basing his work on the most easily available books rather than subsequently published short papers. Our understanding of lead mining in the Pennines has changed considerably in the last 40 years, but this book does not represent those changes.

Martin Roe

A Georgian Gent & Co. (The life and times of Charles Roe)

Dorothy Bentley Smith is to be congratulated in pulling together this huge piece of work on the life and business affairs of Charles Roe, much of it from documentary sources. Her book gives a comprehensive overview of the Roe family background and its links with lead mining in Derbyshire before looking at Roe's entry into the early silk industry at Macclesfield. He then went into copper smelting and eventually had mining interests throughout Britain. These events are examined in the wider context of the events which formed Georgian life.

As well as detailing the major undertakings of Roe & Co. the book reveals a fascinating network of contacts between miners and investors. Using these links, Roe was able to tap into the major sources of British copper ore and become one of industry's principal players. Whilst not written by a mining historian, this book will, nevertheless, become required reading for anyone looking at copper mining in Georgian Britain (1714-1830).

Published by Landmark Publishing, A Georgian Gent & Co. (ISBN 1 84306 175 9) has 655 pages, including an index and 53 pages of notes and references, and costs £25.00

Mike Gill

Meet Reports

Swinnergill Meet

This was my first turn as meet leader,so when I first arrived at Keld I was a bit disappointed to see only three members had turned up. Alan mills and Mike Richards , which are fully fledged mine explorers now and a new face , Malcolm Mccallum who had drove down from Northumberland , I think this was his second trip underground . Just as the numbers weren't looking too promising , the old faithfuls turned up . Richard Platt , Paul Dollery and Steve Mitchell

We departed in pouring rain to start the steady walk up , pointing out various levels along the way.We elected to get changed in the blacksmiths shop at Crackpot , but by the time we were ready the rain had stopped , Sod's law !!.
The underground trip started with the crawl in between the strata at the edge of the waterfall. We continued at a nice steady pace through the mine so that every member could see what they wanted and snap pictures . I might point out that our trip photographer discovered that he had no film in the camera after happily snapping many pictures (no name mentioned).

Points of interest were the many stopes which disappear into infinity above , the incline with ore chute and man way and a date , 1865 MM , which I had missed on five other visits to the mine. Also Malcolms one piece suit that ended up in two pieces , but I still think it is under warranty .
Thanks to all who turned up for what turned out to be a successful day.

Wayne Martin.

Grassington Mines Saturday 25th June 2005

A small group met on a cloudy & windy day on the desolate moors of Grassington at Yarnbury. However the day was enlightened by Martin Roe's extensive knowledge & enthusiasm on all things related to lead mining. His GPS work has extended the foundation work carried out originally by Mike Gill. Suffice to say, I shall now be looking for evidence of gins, quarter chords & meer stones whenever I tramp over other lead mining areas. We even found a genuine row of bell pits (coal) eroded by a stream to reveal the original access ladder crushed by later infilling. Several mountain bikers chasing all over the place were warned about scheduled ancient monument status before letting them go on their way. The recently identified hushes in Hebden Gill were also demonstrated & the day finished off with the classic view down Beever Engine shaft.

Neil Dyson

Grassington Moor, Saturday 25 June

Four members braved a cool north wind and grey skies for a visit to Grassington Moor. From Yarnbury we walked round the Duke's New Road to John Young gate we then explored the out moor for the evidence of eighteenth century working.

Lines of shafts and associated dressing floors clearly delineated the New Ripon vein, the Burnt Ling vein and the Castaway vein. Meerstones marked out the leases of Shackleton and Company (ES 20) and Bagshaw and Company (WB). Knocking floors, where ore had been broken by hand, were characterised by the fine spoil and the gritstone blocks which had once supported the stone slabs on which the work was done. Shallow coal workings had disturbed the ground between the veins as did prospecting trenches which cut the ground at 90 degrees to the veins.

Horse gins were a feature of the deeper shafts further east. A substantial stone wall clearly marked the gin at the New Glory shaft and the arrangement of shaft and gin floor at the Sailor shaft suggested a cog and rung gin.

The collapse of the Coalgrovehead shaft had left a large crater but the floor of the gin was still apparent as was the stone arch through which the winding rope from High Winding Mill had once passed. A pile of cinders was all that remained of the blacksmith's shop.

Taylor's shaft was a wide shaft having been partitioned for pump rods and winding. The line of the gin circle was clear as was the dressing floor below the shaft.

Coalgrove Beck lived up to its name. The stream had cut through a line of bellpits and exposed a thin seam of coal and a section of the bellpits. There was some excitement when we realised that more recent erosion by the stream had exposed a short length of wooden ladder sticking out from the bottom of the collapsed pit. An urgent rescue job required! Below the Cupola Mill more coal workings and evidence of a coke oven.

The sun got out and it was warm as we crossed to Yarbury to examine the remains of a hush dam and eleven hushes on the Cockbur vein. Back to the Beever shaft to look at the balanced bob and where the protective shaft cover allowed a good view of the adit and the bottom of the shaft.

A particular thanks to Martin Roe whose

expertise and painstaking work in the area gave us all new insights.

William Varley

A note about the coal shafts cut by Coalgrove Beck.

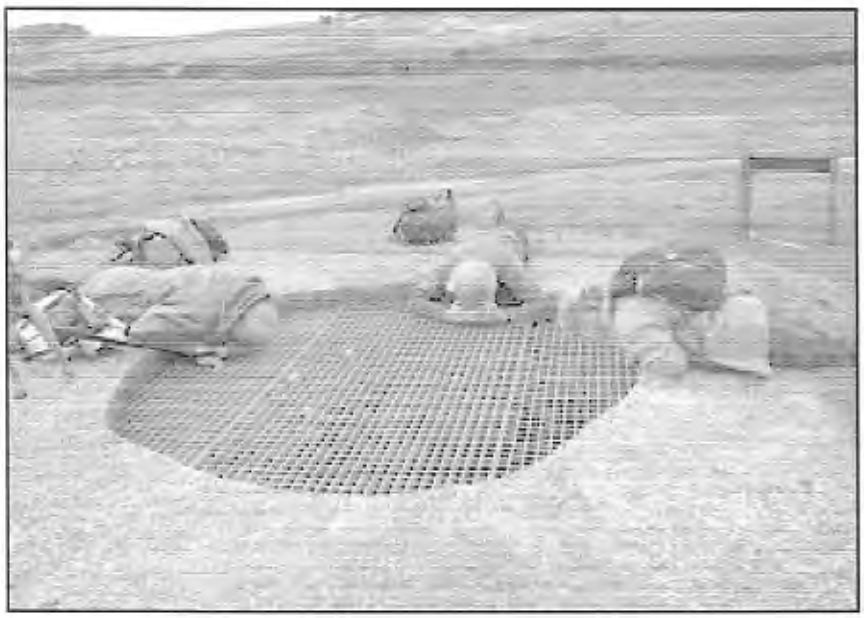
Coal has been mined in a number of locations on Grassington Moor. Some of the shafts date from the mid 19th century but these particular shafts are part of a distinct group near Coalgrove Beck that appear to be much older. The name Coalgrove Beck was already in use before lead mining began on the moor in 1732. Grove and Groove are common names for mining sites in the dales and seem to have a connection to areas worked in the later medieval / early post medieval period and so it would appear that Coalgrove Beck can be interpreted as coal mine beck, therefore confirming that these could be the earliest evidence of mining on Grassington Moor.

The question that does need to be answered is are these bell pits? The majority of sites described as bell pits are not and they usually represent a form of pillar and stall mining where new shafts are sunk to reduce haulage distances as the workings advance, but in this case it may be possible that as the shafts are so close together we are dealing with true bell pits. There is evidence of a coal seam at the bottom but as it is only about an inch wide this is unlikely to be the seam that was being worked therefore the shafts, which are unlined, are deeper than currently appears. The possibility of recording the shaft and recovering the ladder is currently being discussed with the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Martin Roe

Collapsed bellpit in Coalgrove Beck

Wooden ladder at base



looking down a shaft on the Grassington Meet

Facit Stone Mines - Saturday July 23rd 2005

10 members met at 10.30am on the Facit main road. We normally do this trip by parking at the quarry gates at the top of High Barn Lane above Cowm Reservoir, but on this occasion we decided to walk up the steep incline, which was used to transport the stone down from the quarries. It still has the remains of a chimney halfway up. Following the path of the railway track we reach the extensive surface workings that cover a huge area of broken and disturbed ground resembling a 'lunar landscape'. A local motorcycle club uses the area for scrambling and bikes were been ridden all over the place.

In May, a few of us did a recce to find our way through from the 'backdoor' entrance to the main entrance. We achieved this comfortably in about 2 hours even after taking photographs. These mines are a complex matrix of pillar and stall workings and it is extremely important to follow the correct arrows marked on the walls and string laid out on the floor to find ones way through.
But this time our president Martin decided we would do this underground trip in the opposite direction. Fatal (not quite!) we got lost in the middle section for about an hour until we recognised some of the arrows on the floor.

The going under foot is slow and hard work, this is because the roof is continuing to collapse causing the explorer to clamber over large blocks of stone laying on the floor that have fallen from the roof.
Of interest underground is a huge rectangular wooden water tank that still holds water, a few examples of rails laid on the floor and a complete crane in situ. By the crane there is a fine example of a half removed working stone face and piles of dressed stone setts waiting to be taken out. There is area of red ochrous mud behind the crane. This is where there is a filled in shaft that was used to raise the stone to grass.

We exited from the 'backdoor entrance' to a beautiful summer's day much to the relief of some members. We then walked back on the surface and on the way we looked at

the top of the shaft that descended to the chamber where the crane is located.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who attended the meet.

Richard Platt

John Taylor - the discussion continues

Reading the last NMRS newsletter I found it curious that two gentlemen from the north of England were debating whether John Taylor was a Cornish mining engineer. He was not!

Cornishmen are born west of the Tamar. Taylor was born as far from Cornwall as is geographically possible: in Norwich. Perhaps our Birmingham friends would like James Watt to be described as Cornish because some of his fame (and much of his money) came from that county?

An engineer in Cornwall (witness Lean's Engine Reporter) was employed by the mine management to maintain their engines. He may or may not have designed and / or installed them: that was immaterial. He was a specialist paid employee. Arthur Woolf was Taylor's engineer, and since he was born there, he can be called a Cornish mining engineer. Taylor cannot.

Your correspondent, Dr Willies, refers to "consolidated at Gwennap, over which sett (sic) the Cornish had vacillated...", as if 'set' were an alternative word for mine. Again, it was not. A set was the grant for working a mine (not a tin mine), taken by one or more persons, from the proprietor of the land in which a lode may be found. A tin mine was embounded under stannary law.

Nor, if one is being pedantic, is it usual to refer to "consolidated". The mines were either "consols" with the spoken emphasis on the second syllable or "the consolidated mines".

Perhaps more important is Dr Willies description of the Cornish system as "mining engineering and management methods", and he writes of Taylor "developing and exploiting" it, besides "seizing new mining technology". Had he read Taylor's own contributions to the literature, he would not have been under these misapprehensions.

It seems to have been Charles Babbage who first used the words "system" which Taylor described later as "the Cornish System". (See "on the economy of mining" Quarterly mining review 10 (1837) pp261-72). In brief, it is the arrangement by which the miners bargained, at (say) two-monthly intervals, for their remuneration in terms of their expectation and the produce of their labour.

Cornish miners were self-employed: they were not company employees like workers in the coal mines. The system had been in use for hundred's of years before Taylor, an incomer, choose to give it a name. It was not mining engineering nor management methods, nor did it relate to the controversy,

to which Dr Willies referred, over single versus compound engines.

Cornish mining has its own terminology, and its practices are very different from those originally used elsewhere. Perhaps anyone who chooses to disparage it might first make sure of their facts.

Another interesting comment is on the "perfidious" take over of Consols as described in the Mining Journal. Surely by now everyone knows that most of the MJ articles were contributed by those who had a financial stake in the operations discussed or its companies promoted? Mining was a commercial undertaking with potentially rich rewards. No doubt Taylor was displeased to loose control of Consols, and no doubt his agent (who probably sent in the text) thought it was a dirty trick, but no one, least of all his competitors, owed Taylor a living. It is the duty of a historian to examine the origin of evidence he cites.

As to Taylor himself, how should his many talents be described? Was he an entrepreneur, an administrator, a manager, an innovator, and educator, or an interpreter of empirical experience? Great Cornish engineer? No! That goes to Trevithick, both in the narrow 19th century Cornish, and in the modern, definition of that profession. Perhaps with Samuel Grose Junior in second place as a great mining engineer.

Bridget Howard

Thanks to all who contributed to this newsletter. Please continue to send material for the newsletter. Contributions can either be sent by email via the website or direct to me. Alternatively, you can post contributions either as text, or on disc, all are welcome. If you require anything returning, please ask and it will be returned with the next newsletter. In particular, photographs, plans and pictures are welcome as long as they can be reproduced well in black and white.

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Visit our website www.nmrs.co.uk

Data Protection Act

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