

CLAY MINING IN THE HOLYMOORSIDE AREA OF CHESTERFIELD

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Abstract: Notes are provided on the method of working, and surviving remains of the Cathole Clay Mine, worked 1933-57.

In the years before the motorcar and public transport altered the pattern of village life, Holymoorside, like other villages, had its share of local industries such as wheelwrights, blacksmiths, carpenters, builders, cobblers, cotton and corn mills, and even a laundry. There were also quarrying and mining. The main mining was for minerals associated with the Coal Measures, including coal, fireclay, gannister and potting clay. The earliest abandoned mine on record was Cathole Colliery in 1877; the last clay mine abandoned was Cathole Clay Mine in 1957. Upwards of twenty mines worked at three localities between those dates.

There was doubtless a long history of mining before the earliest plan of 1877. As yet undated bellpit type hollows beside Harewood Road (SK 304674) may have been for coal. In the Upper Loads area of Holymoorside the extraction of clay predates any known mine plans, the earliest being 1892, with opencast claypits probably supplying Eastmoor Pottery and the nearby brick kiln: both of these are marked on the Ordnance Survey map of 1864. The pottery is now converted into three cottages below the Highwayman Inn on the A619 road between Chesterfield



(1) Miners outside the portal (left to right): Ted Hopkinson and Jack Halksworth of Holymoorside, Dick Bowmer of Stone Edge.

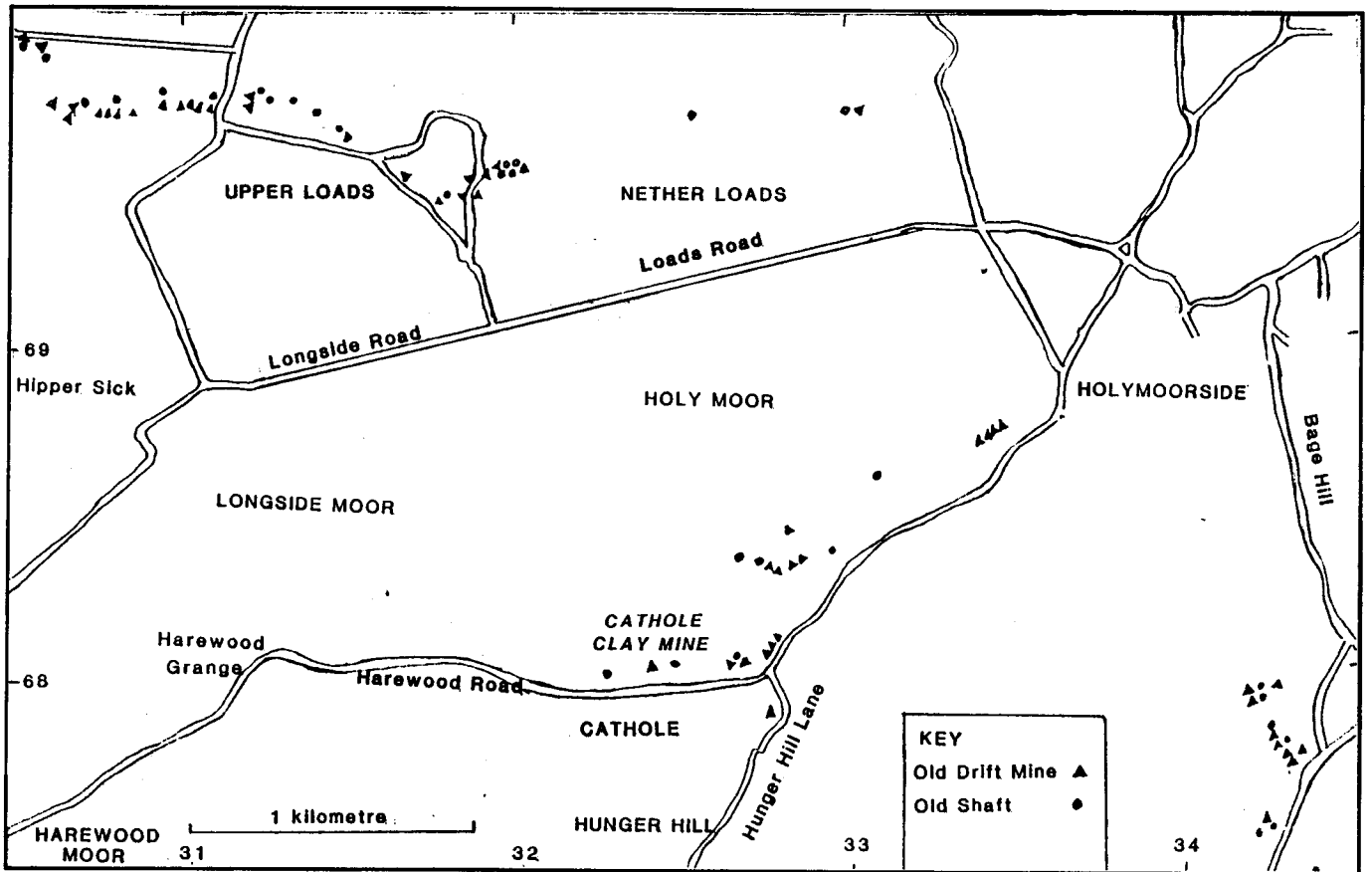


(2) A "headless" miner - probably Dick Bonsall, loading the lorry.

and Baslow. Plans exist for most mines worked after 1877 and, with information gradually coming to light from local people, there is a field for research open.

CATHOLE CLAY MINE 1933-1957.

Cathole fireclay mine worked the fireclay or seatearth below the Belper Lawn Coal under fields adjacent to Cathole Farm (SK 325680). It was the most extensively worked both in terms of production and working life of the underground mines in the Holymoorside area, being continuously in operation from 1933 to 1957. It was first worked independently by John Halksworth under licence from Chatsworth Estates; in later years until its closure it was worked by his son Jack (John) Halksworth in partnership with Chesterfield Fireclay Ltd., a subsidiary of



Cathole Clay Mine

Pearson's Pottery of Chesterfield.

The usual number of men employed at any one time was eight. The clay was blasted from the face by gelignite using two or four shotholes; it was then loaded manually into tubs and trammed to the bottom of the incline where it was pulled to the surface. In early years this was by hand windlass, and later by Lister petrol engine. Working was by pillar and stall method; one man's stint was to load six tubs a day giving a weekly output of about 50 tonnes. The mine suffered no problems from water. Inefficient ventilation was provided by means of a shaft further up the hillside. The air was often so bad in some parts of the mine that the miner had to waft his shovel to stop his candle burning at "a quarter past three". Candles were the only form of illumination until the mine's closure.

Once at the surface the clay was tipped on to a roadside loading chute before being taken away by motor lorry to Pearson's Pottery as well as to potteries at Stoke-on-Trent.

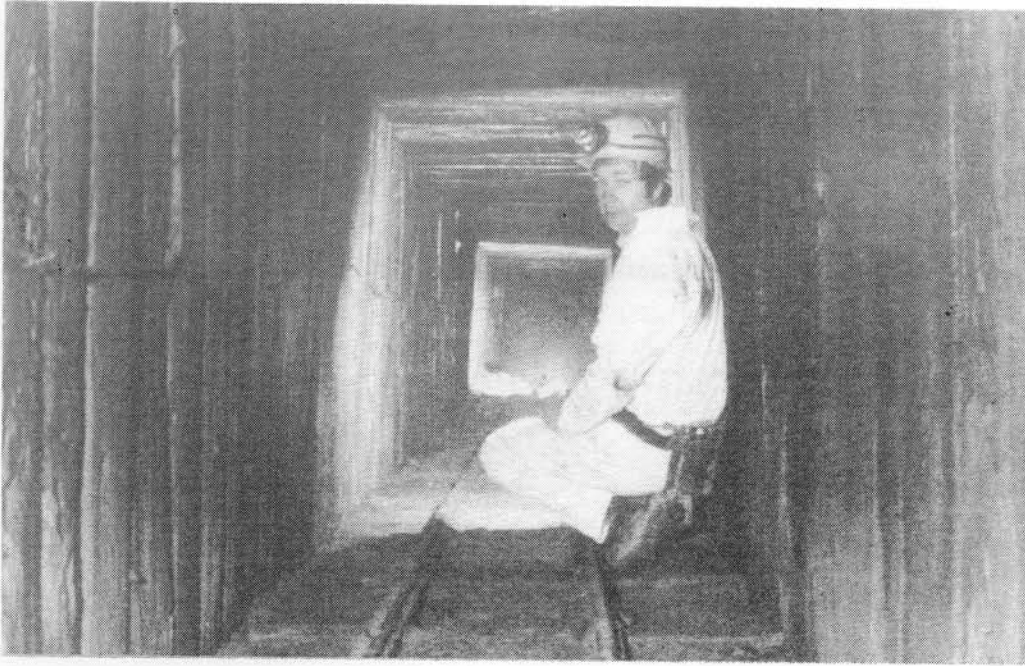
As parts of the mine were abandoned the roof support timbers would be salvaged and reused in the working parts of the mine. This was one of the reasons why both during the working life of the mine and subsequently, right up to the present day, holes appear occasionally in the land above the mine. It was a condition of the licence that land above the workings had to be made good; an example of this reclamation is on an old 8mm movie-film made by John Halksworth in 1956 showing the considerable trouble taken in making good.

The hard grey clay was used extensively in the manufacture of firebricks and saggars for the pottery trade. The refractory bricks made from this clay were used in lining steel furnaces.

REMAINS TODAY OF CATHOLE CLAY MINE

The mine was measured and photographed by Raymond Marsh and Jon Scaife on Friday the 14th of September 1984. It was found to be in a very poor state. The roof had fallen in at 123 feet from the entrance, but was passable to a maximum of 151 feet, still 360 feet from the bottom of the incline. The cross-section was 3 ft 6 ins wide by 4 ft high. The dip was 1 in 7 and followed a 2 inches coal seam visible at each side at roof level. From the entrance the walls and roof were completely timbered with sleepers for 47 feet; after that the sleepers were alternated with tree trunk props and thinner roof supports spaced 9 inches apart. It was these thin roof supports having rotted which caused the collapse. The first fall was climbed over, but looking ahead the mine was filled with fallen debris.

The mine's corrugated iron buildings consisted of a blacksmith's forge, workmen's cabin, and a timber store with a concrete bath sunk in the floor for soaking timber with creosote. There was a brick-built powder magazine and a loading chute. The surface buildings were dismantled in 1984 and the land partly resored. Since our survey the roof has fallen in just beyond the entrance.



(3) The fully timbered incline just inside the entrance.



(4) The collapsed roof and timbers near the end of the accessible part of the incline in 1984.

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