

AN ATTEMPT TO SAVE THE SNAILBEACH MINING AREA FROM LAND
RECLAMATION

by Members of the Shropshire Caving and Mining Club

SUMMARY

The Salop County Council has for some time been considering what might be done to "reclaim" the South West Shropshire Metalliferous Mining area. In 1976 the Council adopted a policy of reclamation, which in the view of many meant complete obliteration of all the features remaining from the area's industrial past. Such a policy was consequently written into the Draft Structure Plan.

The Shropshire Caving and Mining Club became concerned at this situation and felt that it was time to make a stand for the protection of the relics which provide many members of this and other similar societies with an opportunity to follow their interests. Contact with other "conservation" societies showed that these would not support, for political reasons, the Club in its stand against the Establishment. Limited support was in fact obtained from the Nature Conservancy Council. The following account indicates the present position in this 'stand' and the contents may be of assistance to other societies in areas where "reclamation" has also come to mean "obliteration" particularly where this affects mineshafts, adits and old mine buildings.

During 1977 the Salop County Council published its draft Structure Plan. Policy No. 85 stated that the Council would give priority to the reclamation of 47 hectares of derelict mining land in the Snailbeach area. In Autumn 1977 the Club considered the implications of this and during March 1978 submitted a statement to the Council concerning this. Later in 1978 the Club were invited to give evidence at an 'Examination in Public' at the Shirehall, Shrewsbury. This 'Examination' was held in January 1979, the Club being represented on 26th January by Dr. I.J. Brown, Mr. J. Heathcote and Mr. R. Hall. The discussion was foreshortened, however, when in the opening remarks the Council agreed to the Club's suggestion that the clause "giving due consideration to the archeological and historical value of the industrial remains" should be added to their statement, suitably modified to include in addition the recreational and nature conservation interests.

The statement of the Club's case, its submission and further submission, were as follows:-

STATEMENT OF CASE

The main concern of the Club is the interpretation of the word 'reclamation' in Policy 85. Though it would appear from correspondence with the County Planner that our concern for industrial archaeological remains is shared and though we appreciate that the Plan deals only with broad policy issues and not with the details of such 'reclamation', nevertheless, members wish it to be known that they are not entirely convinced that the policy as written will ensure the most satisfactory development of the Snailbeach Mining Area. Although no specific mention is made of Snailbeach, the area will obviously be the subject of Policy 85 - 'The County Council will give priority to the reclamation of large areas of derelict land ... which are visible from areas of high landscape quality (especially the AONB)". To safeguard our position the following is suggested for your consideration as an addition: "giving due consideration to the archaeological and historical value of industrial remains".

We would suggest also that Policy 95 - "to ensure that sites and features of outstanding archaeological and historic importance are preserved" - and Policy 103 - "to ensure sites created provide an opportunity for reclaiming derelict land for recreational use" - are equally relevant to the future of the South Shropshire lead mining area.

SUBMISSION (March 1978)

Policy No. 85 of the Structure Plan Written Statement states that some 47 hectares of derelict land in the South Shropshire/Snailbeach lead mining area are, after Telford, priority for reclamation in the County since they are 'visible from areas of high landscape quality (especially the AONB) or from the main tourist routes'.

The Shropshire Caving and Mining Club considers that the policy proposed may be misconceived and wishes to lodge an objection to the proposals as stated. It is accepted that some works may be necessary for safety or environmental reasons but these must be carried out sympathetically and following consultation with interested parties.

The policy statement has been discussed at length by the Club membership and we have received two written statements for communication to you. The following represents, as far as we are able to express the diversity of opinion in a single statement, the views of the members. These include an expressed desire to seek the deletion of the policy and, alternatively, to question the interpretation of the word 'reclaimed'.

If the latter were to mean the clearance of all the post-mining debris, abandoned cars and the like, a degree of protection for the surviving remains and an agreed policy resulting from consultation between this Club and like organisations, the South Shropshire District and the County Councils for alternative uses of the sites, allowing for their historical and recreational value and the least disturbance to the existing unaltered spoilbanks, then such a policy may be acceptable. If, on the other hand, the wholesale destruction of remaining buildings and the re-shaping of the spoilheaps is envisaged, then the following should be taken into account before final decisions are made:

Spoilheaps

- (a) afford an opportunity to the geologist to search for rocks and minerals in comparative safety for both educational and scientific reasons;
- (b) provide a training ground for students in geology, geography and history;
- (c) are the habitat of certain distinct species of flora and fauna;
- (d) provide 'cover' for undisturbed industrial archaeological remains and historical artefacts which at some future date might form the subject of archaeological excavation;
- (e) indicate the location of shafts and adits for safety purposes;
- (f) by their shape and form provide information on the development of mining technology and demonstrate the various phases in the evolution of plant and machinery;
- (g) provide a feature of interest in the overall topography of the area; and
- (h) provide an alternative to the expanses of moorland and forest so common in the area and so often the result of 'reclamation' schemes.

The white tips at Snailbeach and other mines in the area may be considered a 'blot' on the landscape of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; alternatively, they do add interest to what might otherwise be a scenically uninteresting forested hillside, and should certainly be preserved in part as an industrial monument in their own right. The interpretation of their history by the visitor to the AONB provides further justification for their retention as part of an overall scheme for the area of mining activity.

Shafts and Adits

- (a) provide training and recreational facility for caving and mining clubs who in turn offer a service for search and rescue purposes to the Police and emergency organisations over a wide area, the SCMC covering the West Midlands and West Mercia Police areas in Wales and the Border Country. Trained Club members have also assisted in the search for minerals, for water and in other utilitarian projects involving skills obtained from practice in these shafts and adits;
- (b) provide a place of refuge for wildlife, particularly the decreasing number of colonies of bats and the larger animals such as badgers. The warmth of the workings also shelters birds, insects and small animals during harsh wintry conditions;
- (c) provide access to underground areas where historical remains can still be found and technological developments in mining be discerned; and
- (d) provide access to minerals and rocks 'inside' and to geological features not visible at the surface.

On safety grounds, access to underground workings is a cause for concern. The Club appreciates the obligations of owners and local authorities under the Mines and Quarries and Public Health Acts to prevent public access to disused workings but considers that methods of prevention are available which nevertheless allow continued access for the adequately equipped and knowledgeable enthusiast. In addition, the blockage or infilling of shafts or adits may have a detrimental effect on drainage systems which are now adapted to the artificial watercourses provided by mine workings. Such blockages can have dramatic and dangerous effects in these areas.

Shaft capping can be carried out with an access manhole retained to allow for inspection, though cappings can become lost in the passage of time and become a hazard for future generations. Attempts to fill shafts would be expensive and, as well as disturbing underground water, may lead to pollution. Fencing is the preferred method, adequately marking out the dangerous area, keeping out animals and the public, but allowing inspection or descent when required. Adits are generally not so dangerous as few of the uninitiated will venture far into them. If dangerous, warning signs stating 'bad roof', 'shaft', 'winze', etc., and the distance from the entrance, should be displayed, the adit be gated or a dam be built to impound water, thus deterring the casual visitor. The dangers can be emphasised in publicity material distributed locally, as at present in the Derbyshire Peak District.

Buildings

- (a) are valuable as educational features representing as they do all stages of steam engine development from Boulton and Watt to the most modern (as at the turn of the century) and almost all types and sizes of engine (pumping, winding, combined, beam, horizontal) and a variety of mining machines (crushers, washers, classifiers, compressors). All aspects of the social life of the mining community are represented (barracks, changing rooms, offices, counting houses, stores, workshops and powder magazines); and
- (b) are valuable as a tourist attraction; nowhere else in Britain is so much evidence of mining activity still visible in so small an area. Cornwall is 'cashing in' on the romance of steam and mining, so too is the Peak District, but neither area can offer as much as Shropshire in variety, in accessibility and in such close proximity as to make comparisons in such a short time possible.

The mine buildings are an important record of industrial and commercial heritage, as important for the future as the County's scheduled Ancient Monuments or Listed Buildings. The National Record of Industrial Monuments at the University of Bath has a poor record of the Shropshire lead mines despite the significant extent of the remains. The lists of buildings of architectural or historic interest now contain many 'commercial' buildings dating up to 1914 and some consideration should be given to the service of Building Preservation Notices on the following buildings to afford some immediate protection and to enable consideration of their future protection:

The Lord's Hill Engine House,
The Lord's Hill Smelter Chimney and Flue,
The complex of buildings surrounding George's Shaft at Snailbeach,
The Snailbeach Powder House and Valve House,
The remains of the headgear at George's and Black Tom Shafts,
The Halvan Company Crushing House near the main road,
The Engine House and Chimney at New Central Mine,
The remaining buildings at Tankerville Mine,
The Wood Winding Shaft Engine House at the Gravels.
Building Foundations at the Roman Gravel Mines,
The Lady Well Engine House,
The East Grit Engine House,
The Engine House and Powder House at White Grit Mine, and
Ritton Castle Engine House and Chimney.

These are the buildings over which the Club have the deepest concern; there may be others. While funds may not be available to restore these buildings, steps should be taken urgently to protect them from demolition and to prevent the dumping of refuse in proximity to them. Unless vandalised, legally or otherwise, many of these buildings will stand for many years without attention.

A measure of the interest in the area can be gained when it is realised that up to December 1976 over 4000 copies of the book 'The Shropshire Lead Mines' by Allbut and Brook had been sold, and between June and December 1976 over 1000 copies of the much more expensive publication 'The Mines of Shropshire' by Club Member, Dr. I.J. Brown. It is appreciated that all of the buildings cannot be saved; natural decay and vandalism will inevitably take their toll, but for the reasons given above some of the better examples should be preserved. Grants of up to £50,000 have recently been spent on preserving just one such group of buildings in Derbyshire (Magpie Mine) and there are at least three groups of buildings of equal interest in South Shropshire.

In recent years a great deal of interest has been generated in this Country's industrial heritage, aided by the work of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, the Beamish and Black Country Museums and many others. Industrial remains have become a source of revenue from tourism and their exploration and interpretation is growing in popularity. Mining remains are being preserved for this purpose; by the nature of the industry, often in the best of the countryside, the National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. South Shropshire is an area of prime importance in mining history where evidence of the mining activity is exceptionally well represented on the edge of the AONB. The retention of that evidence for interpretation by the visitor to the area can only enhance the amenities of the locality by adding a sense of past activity to the visual amenity of the landscape.

FURTHER SUBMISSION (November 1978)

Having re-read our original submission, we now feel that while the surface remains are adequately covered, no mention is made of the underground workings. We, therefore, feel that the following should be added as sites where special consideration should be given to maintaining access:

(a) Mines having extensive accessible underground workings:-

Snailbeach	Maddox Coppice	Boat Level
Westcott	Huglith	Rorrington
Burgam	Ramsden's Shaft	Sallies

(b) Other mines having accessible workings of lesser interest:-

Calcot	Batholes	Rhadley
Perkins Beach	Callow Hill	Leigh Level
Potters Pit	Rock Mine	Cothercott

The other mines in the area are either unenterable, or have all their workings below water-level. The Club feels that the entrances to the latter would be best blocked, though this may be technically difficult. It must be noted that most of the mines are connected to the two long drainage levels, namely Boat Level and Wood Level, the blockage of which may cause considerable drainage problems.

There are two adits which present special problems, as they run only a few metres beneath public roads, these are Leigh Level (beneath the Minsterley - Brockton Road) and the Nipstone Adit (beneath the Bog - Linley Road). The Leigh Level is unlined and the Nipstone Adit is believed to be in the same condition.

As a result of a recent survey we now feel that a number of sites within the area are of no further interest to the Club due to the recent removal of spoil tips and the infilling of shafts and adits. These are:-

Roundhill Mine	Bog Mine	Batholes
Pennerley Mine	Shelve Pool Trials	Knick Knolls Mine

A comprehensive survey (in draft form) of the area compiled over the last two years can be submitted to the Examiner if required.

The survey mentioned in the above submission is now available, price £1.50 (post free) under the title SCMC Account No. 12, A Survey of the South West Shropshire Metalliferous Mining Area. Copies are available from the address given below.

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