

HISTORICAL SITES OF INDUSTRIAL IMPORTANCE ON FORESTRY COMMISSION LAND IN DEAN

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The Devil's Chapel, in the Scowles, near Bream.

In the past arbitrary divisions were often made between antiquities and the 'scars of industry'. The former often enjoyed protection whilst the latter were frequently obliterated. Today no such divisions exist for the Council for British Archaeology cover a period from the Palaeolithic to modern times. The Department of the Environment afford statutory protection to sites of all ages by Listing and Scheduling.

In addition there has been a large upsurge of interest in industrial and technological history by the general public.

In 1977 Anne Ellison produced a report entitled 'A survey of the archaeological implications of forestry in the Forest of Dean'. This was produced under the auspices of the Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset. A large section of this report was devoted to industrial history and particularly to the iron industry. Unfortunately some of the information presented is incorrect whilst the terminology is muddled in parts. Many of the sites noted are not on Commission land or even forested.

This list has been drawn up by S.D.Coates and I.J.Standing at the request of G.S.I.A. following informal contact with the Commission. It should not be regarded as a definitive list for unknown sites of interest may well come to light during forestry operations, particularly those connected with the iron industry before 1700.

The sites listed here vary widely in importance. Many sites are of interest but not worthy of preservation. Some sites are important in a national as well as a local sense and justify active conservation. Some areas contain several sites e.g, Darkhill with its furnace, brick making, smithing shop, tramroads and mines. Another example is Bicslade with tramroads, mines and quarries. At Stapledge are excellent unspoilt scowle holes with a ventilation furnace of later date together with tramroads and collieries above whilst in the valley below are the remains of a 17th century furnace. A possible conservation approach might be indicated at such places as they could be incorporated into existing forest trails.

It is not really possible to produce a complete list of sites for in some cases exact location is not known. Additionally the importance of a site may not be recognised, or alternatively a site previously considered important may prove on investigation to have little left to be of value. It is recognised that there will be sites which cannot be preserved and may even have to be demolished, but it is essential that any site which may have been an industrial one is considered for surveying and recording before any work is carried out.

It is thought that the sort of operations likely to be carried out on Commission lands which could threaten or destroy sites could include the following:

1. Landscaping schemes including the creation of lakes.
2. Opencast mining.
3. Roadmaking.
4. Developments such as picnic sites.
5. Disposal of industrial waste eg: filling of quarries, scowles and pits.
6. Timber felling and clearing work. Damage from heavy plant and the disposal of stumps and broust.

IRON MAKING

1. Drummer Boy Stone. S.O. 655090.

Primitive smithing hearth probably associated with bloomery era. Date: could be anything from Iron Age to 17th century. Ref. Historical Metallurgy Vol.11, No2. pp 84/85.

2. 17th Century Blast Furnaces.

Lydbrook. SO 609152. "The Kings' Howbrook Furnace".

At confluence of Great How Brook and Lydbrook. No surface remains. Importance: Possible excavation site.

Soudley SO 653108. Probably largely demolished but masonry remains are discernable. Possible excavation site.

Parkend. SO 614083. No known remains. Possible excavation site.

Cannop. SO 609116. No surface remains. Possible excavation site.

Rodmore. SO 582027. At confluence of Cone and Aylesmore Brooks. May be on private freehold. Possible excavation site.

Redbrook. SO 537107 and approx. 545108. No known remains. Possible excavation site.

Blakeney SO 657071. Probably on private freehold.

3. 17th Century Iron Forges.

New Weir 55856. On W. side of Wye opposite and below the island. Built in 17th century to process pig iron probably from Whitchurch Furnace, closed around 1803. Considerable surface remains consisting of low walls indicating buildings, water courses and slags.

Lydbrook so 608152. No surface remains.

Soudley SO 664106 at Camp Mill, and 666095 at Bradley. No surface remains.

Whitecroft Upper Forge 625049; Middle Forge 632037. No surface remains.

Redbrook SO 537107 Forge and stamping mill. No surface remains. All possible excavation sites.

4. Iron Mines

Iron ore mining commenced in the Iron Age and continued to the 20th century. It falls into two main phases - Ancient phase lasting from the Iron Age to about 1750 and the modern deep mining phase from about 1800 to 1945. The Ancient phase is well represented by scowle holes and shallow mines. The best scowled areas (ancient opencasts) are at Perrygrove Farm and Devils Chapel, Bream, but the Commission has several very good groups some of which lead into shallow mines of great interest and antiquity. Scowle Holes have, in addition to their mining interest, their own value as specialised habitats particularly for ferns, mosses and liverworts and often considerable scenic impact and interest as well. Shallow iron mines associated with scowle holes form the most important habitat for the Greater Horseshoe bat and other bat species.

Scowle Holes and shallow iron ore mines are threatened by the dumping of rubbish, the deliberate tipping of building and industrial waste and forestry waste (stumps brouse etc.). Also by deliberate bulldozing and blowing up.

Best examples on Commission land occur:

Wigpool Common

Edgehill Plantation From the sand quarry to Green Bottom.

Abbots Wood Buckshaft and Shakemantle. Largely capped and infilled.

Staple Edge SO 651104: A good unspoilt group with 19th c. remains.

Noxon Park and Beech Grove.

Lady Park Wood

Great Doward and Symonds Yat W.

Iron Mines: Deep Phase Remains.

Wigpool. Pit House 19th century, Steam engine House, now a domestic dwelling.

Fairplay SO 656165. A fine masonry shaft with the remains of a bull engine house around it. It was one of the three shafts serving the Fairplay Iron Mine. Worthy of preservation.

Oakwood Mill Land Level SO 600063. The Portal of the adit is adjacent to the road opposite the old Oakwood Inn. The level was driven through to reach the Crease Limestone below Bream. The mine was at its most productive under David Mushet and later his son Robert. An entrance such as this is vulnerable to bulldozing.

Highmeadow Iron Level 551137

Findall Iron Mine: Ventilation Furnace SO 601106. A ventilation furnace consisting of firebox and 40ft high masonry chimney with sucking flume. Hot gases from the fire created an updraft

in the chimney. This sucking effect was taken underground by a flume and would cause fresh air to enter the mine. The principle as applied here is extremely primitive which may suggest an 18th century date. Extensive restoration work over 1976/7 has made the structure safe again. Extant ventilation furnaces of this design are uncommon nationally. This one is unique in Dean. Importance: Merits active conservation and further repair work to the top of the structure would be beneficial.

Robin Hood Mine 560119

5. COAL MINES

It is felt that active conservation of one or two sites dealing with different methods of working would be of interest to the visiting public.

Primitive Coal Mining: An area of ground racked by bell pits probably dating from the 18th century. Good examples occur in Beechenhurst Enclosure along the crop of the house coals.

Primitive Winding One good example of a horse whim circle ought to be made a conservation project. An ancient and primitive hand capstan removed from Bicslade in 1976 is currently in private hands awaiting a permanent home.

Small pit tramway embankments such as those to bring coal from pits to the main road in the Edge End district.

Deep Mining One or two stone lined adit portals should be actively conserved.

Particularly good examples are those at Bicslade and another at the Dark Hill site.

Specific Sites of Interest.

Trafalgar Colliery SO 625147. Masonry embankments, shaft tops, sidings and extensive dirt tips mark the site of the 19th cent. colliery. Of importance as the first colliery in the world to use electricity below ground for motive power when electric pumps were installed in 1882.

Lightmoor Colliery A fine 19th century, Beam Engine House. Scheduled or due to be scheduled by the Dept. of the Environment as an Industrial Monument. May be privately owned.

Flourmill Colliery A fine group of Victorian colliery buildings. Listed by the DoE. May be privately owned.

New Fancy Colliery Excavation by the Commission has partially uncovered a large cast iron 'beam' associated with a shaft at Fancy View. This may be a beam from a beam engine or a counter balance bob. Further uncovering & preservation to be encouraged.

6. QUARRIES

Stone quarries were abundant in Dean particularly in the Pennant Sandstones. Once disused they possess additional features of interest in that they become special habitats for plants and birds. They add intrinsic interest to the landscape on account of their size and shape.

From an industrial point of view it is felt that a few first class examples ought to be actively conserved from infilling with rubbish or waste. In particular :

Oak Quarry SO 595114

Wimberry Quarry SO 595121

Spion Kop 598103

Point Quarry 599084

7. BRICKMAKING The remains of brickmaking plants are found at
Darkhill Brickworks 595084
Darkhill Ironworks Gorsty Knoll.
8. TRAMROADS It is suggested that one or two good examples are actively conserved.
Exposed stone sleepers Bicslade and Dark Hill Ironworks.
Overbridge a stone bridge over the Cannop Brook at 609116 dating from approximately 1820.
Tramroad Tunnel Fetterhill 599084 just below Point Quarry.
9. RAILWAYS Recommend conservation of Blackpool Bridge 652086 and the Mirey Stock Tunnel Portals at 615148 (both ends).
10. 19th CENTURY IRONWORKS
Darkhill Ironworks SO590C90 An industrial complex including brickmaking, a coke blast furnace, smiths shop etc. Closely associated with David and later Robert Mushet. Excavated 1977 under active conservation by Forestry Commission.
Cinderford Iron Works 650130. Little surface remains.
Bromley Hill Furnace 600063. Remnants of the furnace remain, as do the bulldozed remains of Oakwood Foundry a little to the north.
Titanic Steel Works 588090. Occupied by Robert Mushet and site of many of his researches. Largely bulldozed. Some buildings do remain eg. Steelworks Cottage. Important deposits of slag occur - of great interest to students of the iron and steel trade. Any roadmaking here should avoid disturbance - or alternatively allow rescue digging.
11. LIMEKILNS
One or two good examples should be conserved. Great Doward and Symonds Yat have good ones.
12. CHARCOAL BURNING
One or two charcoal burning pans ought to be actively conserved. Charcoal burning would be as ancient, and closely connected with, the iron industry.

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The authors in no way claim that the above list is definitive, and they would always be interested in other sites that members may be able to bring to their attention.