

SOUTH GLOUCESTERSHIRE MINES RESEARCH GROUP

In 2002 GSIA supported the formation of the South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group and made a contribution to the start up costs. The following report on the group's highly successful first two years of operation has been prepared by David Hardwick and Roger Gosling, the Chairman and Secretary of the group, respectively.

Introduction

The South Gloucestershire Mines Research Group (SGMRG) was formed in December 2002 and by the end of 2003 it had 61 members, spread all around South Gloucestershire and from further afield. The Inaugural General Meeting was held in March 2003 at which the group was given a generous and unexpected donation from the GSIA. The first Annual General Meeting was held in March 2004. A quarterly newsletter is published which has received very favourable comments from members and other mining historians.

The group is a member of the British Association for Local History (which provides third party insurance cover) and it is also a member of both the National Association of Mining History Organisations (NAMHO) and the South Gloucestershire Council Museums Group.

The focus of the group is specific to mining, covering all aspects of this in the area including celestine, coal, iron, lead, ochre, silver and stone mining; all of which have been carried out in South Gloucestershire. Inevitably this overlaps with other organisations such as the GSIA, Avon Industrial Buildings Trust (AIBT), Bristol Industrial Archaeological Society (BIAS) and local history organisations for those parishes where mining took place. The group very much sees its role as ancillary to such bodies rather than an alternative, and working together to pool resources and information has already been achieved successfully on a number of occasions.

Events so far

The group has already hosted a NAMHO meeting in South Gloucestershire at Oldwood Pit, Rangeworthy, so the group's next turn should come around again in about 15 years!

In summer 2003, the Group mounted a successful exhibition at the Yate Heritage Centre, with exhibition boards paid for by a grant from Hanson.

The information was also put on display at the NAMHO conference in the Lake District in summer 2004 where it was very well received. There is a growing collection of artefacts, some donated to the group, others loaned by private individuals for displays. The Group is keen to locate and record as many artefacts and photographs of mining in the South Gloucestershire/Bristol area as possible and to achieve a fuller index of what still exists.

SGMRG is very lucky to have Jenni Humphris of Oldwood Pit as a member and she has hosted several open days at her Colliery site, assisted by other members of the group. Past open days and a number of talks given by members of the group to other organisations have raised the profile of mining in South Gloucestershire; various bodies are already consulting the group on aspects of mining heritage in our locality.

Excursions have been organised to coal mines in the Forest of Dean and South Wales as well as walks around the local mining heritage. There have also been various visits to Record Offices, which have extended members' knowledge of the mining history and heritage of

South Gloucestershire; future visits will continue this valuable research work. There has been a considerable amount of archival research, with new information about mines in the area coming to light as a result. This research is giving a much clearer picture of the extent of mining in the area but also of the wealth of information available and the scale of possible research available.

There have also been a number of talks on mining related themes put on for the group members by both members and by visiting speakers.

Conservation, Projects and Field work

Partly assisted by material donated by Hanson, stabilisation to the retaining wall at one side of the drift mine entrance at Oldwood has been carried out. There is much more that could be done at Oldwood, finance and resources permitting, with further repairs to the drift a high priority and stabilisation of the chimney base also commenced.

Other conservation works have been undertaken including preliminary undergrowth clearance at Ram Hill. An assessment and conservation plan has been prepared for the council by an archaeology student, with the assistance of SGMRG. A new "friends" group has been set up to help with ongoing maintenance of the site and the SGMRG is working with them in this and in further research of its history. Emergency recording was carried out at the former Yate Number 1 colliery following an indication from the owner that part of the land was to be sold and another area of the site was to be cultivated. Preliminary investigations and photographic recording of other sites in the area has also been carried out e.g. at, Yate No 2 colliery, Bitterwell lake area, and Serridge engine pit. It is also hoped that further progress can be made on safe-guarding the remains at Cromhall New Engine pit.

One sad loss recently was the demolition of the engine house at Frog Lane Colliery in Coalpit Heath. The building was not listed and despite various people's efforts made to raise the awareness of the importance of this building, there was nothing to stop the owner taking it down, which happened without any warning or notice being given. The background behind this is covered fully in the SGMRG Spring 2004 newsletter (Number 7). There are a lot of fragmented remains of the mining industries in South Gloucestershire, much of which is under threat of development and needs to be recorded before it is lost forever.

A series of information recording exercises have been instigated, including a bibliography of related information, an index of photographs and one on artefacts as well as a database of miners and people associated with the industry. One project includes recording oral history from people with memories of mining in the area. There are one or two old miners still in the area but many others have memories of relatives who worked in the mines or just their own anecdotal snippets that also need to be recorded.

Concluding Remarks

The SGMRG exists to research, investigate and help to preserve the mining heritage of South Gloucestershire. There is a wide range of activities for those who want to get involved at whatever level and there is much that needs to be done. The group has made significant steps in its first few months of existence. It has established a firm foundation on which to build and is already being recognised as an important body regarding mining history in the locality.