

Leckhampton Hill: Scrub Clearance on Industrial Archaeology Sites

Ray Wilson 9 November 2021

The main purpose of this note is to formally thank the Friends of Leckhampton Hill and Charlton Kings Common (FOLK) for their interest in the industrial archaeology of the site and the work they have done over the years. Most recently they cleared the area known as the 'Sidings' again and I am grateful to Mike Donnelly, the FOLK work party coordinator, (and a GSIA Member) for the photograph which appears below.

The substantial remains of the quarries and the tramroads that served them, on Leckhampton Hill near Cheltenham, form an important part of the county's industrial heritage. Our former chairman, the late David Bick, gave a very good account of the industrial history of the hill in his book *Old Leckhampton – Quarries – Railways – Riots – Devils Chimney*, first published in 1971 and updated in 1994. A detailed account of the industrial archaeology of the hill appeared in the GSIA Journal for 2001 pages 35–46 which can be downloaded at gsia.org.uk/reprints/2001/gi200135.pdf

Many of the sites are now covered with grassland and indeed the hill is an important Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its "Unimproved limestone grassland". This needs careful management and much of the work has been carried out for the last 20 years by volunteer working parties from FOLK. The group works closely with the Senior Ranger at Cheltenham Borough Council (the owners of the hill since 1929) and Natural England.

Much of the work involves scrub clearance as, given time and no active maintenance, this can completely take over the grassland which would be highly detrimental to the SSSI. Happily, this maintenance work is also highly beneficial to the IA sites where they are now covered by grassland.

Three sites which immediately spring to mind are 'No 4' or 'Top' Incline, the 'Sidings' and the line of the tramroad connecting 'Top' Incline to Brownstone Quarry. The Sidings (see Fig. 2 of the Journal article) were located in short cuttings and provided a parking area for trams employed in bringing stone down from Brownstone Quarry.

Once these features become covered in scrub, it makes it very difficult for the public to appreciate them. In the early days of FOLK their priorities, (perhaps understandably), did not include the industrial sites but GSIA members were able to form work parties to carry out clearance work on selected IA sites under the auspices of the Borough Council and sometimes in conjunction with FOLK.

However, in recent years GSIA are extremely pleased and grateful that clearance work on the IA sites has been undertaken by FOLK and at some stage (I believe) some work was carried out by Cotswold Warden volunteers.

The first of the following photographs shows the outcome of recent clearance on the 'Sidings'. The remaining photographs are "for the record" and include 'before' and 'after' photographs for clearance work carried out by GSIA in 2002-2004 on 'Top' Incline and the line of the tramroad connecting 'Top' Incline to Brownstone Quarry. An undated photograph shows the very impressive 'Top' Incline which was installed in 1830 at some time before 1924 when it went out of operation.

Finally there is a group photograph of GSIA volunteers who formed a work party in 2002 and one showing members clearing the 'Sidings' in 2004.



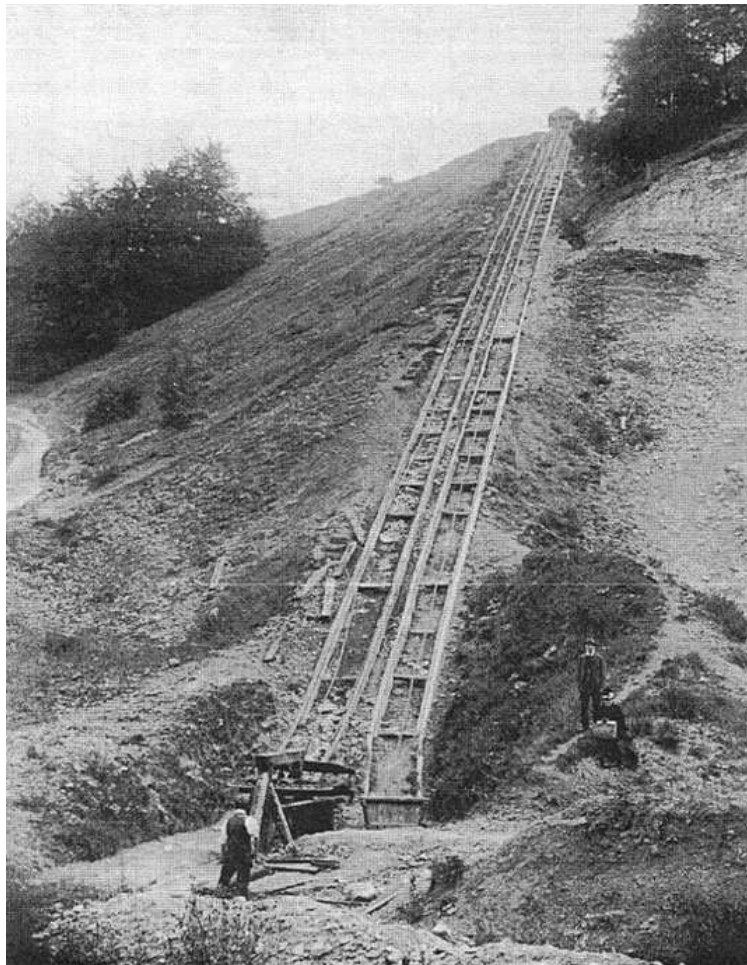
Two of the Sidings after clearance by FOLK October 2021 [Photo: Mike Donnelly]



Scrub clearance on the Sidings by GSIA work party. [8 February 2004]



GSIA work party. [24 February 2002]



Number 4 or 'Top' Incline date unknown



Number 4 or 'Top' Incline before clearance in 2002



Number 4 or 'Top' Incline after clearance on 24 February 2002 by a GSIA work party



Line of tramroad leading to Brownstone Quarry before clearance in 2004



Line of tramroad leading to Brownstone Quarry after clearance 8 February 2004 by GSIA