

DRAUGHT CHIMNEY AT FAIRPLAY MINE

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SO 6593 1657

For some years I have been taking pupils on an economic geology study of the Edghehills area. This includes a look at the Fairplay Mine. I had noticed a tumbled area of stones to the east of the air shaft and thought that there was perhaps some order in them. When I learned of Ian Standing's restoration of a chimney at Staple Edge, I wondered if this heap of stones was the base of a similar structure.

I had the area examined by Mr. Ken Herring, who works for the Wilderness on estate work involving our teaching. The result of his excavation and subsequent restoration are detailed here.

Below the surface tumbled stone and infilling the base of a draught chimney is virtually intact.

The size of the hearth area is an oval of 123 cm x 110 cm. The grating to hold the fuel is 56 cm x 110 cm. It seems that the flat bars of the grate are re-used rail fishplates. Each has three square holes at one end and probably three at the other (partly obscured) with an unmarked section between.

There was no sign whatsoever of any clinker in the hearth and there was also very little indication of blackening on the stone. This evidence and the fact that the width of the gaps between the hearth slats is wide (up to 9 cm) suggests that the fuel used was wood, not coal.

There are no marks on the stone at the entrance to suggest a door. I wonder if there was a wooden or stone shed over the entrance to give protection to the fireman and store the fuel. This would also exclude a draught from that direction. The draught hole is 41 cm x 30 cm into the air shaft. The air shaft itself must have been covered or the draught would not have worked. This was, one supposes, a wooden roof. The purpose of the structure was to create a current of air through the iron workings beneath. These are at a depth of 221 yards.

History of the Fairplay Mine

The gale exists just to the west of the Westbury Brook Mine gale. It does not appear in the Sopwith's Award of 1841 but appears to have been first awarded in 1847 to Moses Harris, William Harris, John Roberts and others. By 1856 certain buildings, including the existing Fairplay cottages or building on the same site, had been erected. The deep pit and the land pit (air shaft here) had been commenced.

Timothy Bennett between 1847 and 1857 acquired by purchase from the galees the rights to the gale. Henry Crawshay, the well known iron master also acquired a sixth part interest by purchase, later re-purchased by Bennett.

In 1861, Bennett died and the mine was inherited by Osman Barrett (son-in-law) and Richard Yearsley. By 1895, it was in the hands of their successors James Barrett and Edwin Yearsley.

By March 1907, there were 4 interested parties in the gale. Edwin Yearsley, Jane Barrett, The Capital and Counties Bank and Osman Barrett (grandson? of above Osman). These appear to have sold the gale to Frederick Jones, solicitor, of London. F.G.Jones was a director of Chastan Syndicate Ltd, a gold mining company.

At this time, the buildings and works were elaborate. Reservoir pools were built by 1860 and a culvert ran N-E towards the mine engine house for the steam engines.

At about the same time a drainage level was driven from Steam Mills towards the shafts but this was a failure as the necessary slope could not be achieved.

A tramway was built about 1857 by Timothy Bennett.

In later years, the gale was acquired by Fred. Brown of Coleford (1915). It was then inherited by his 3 sons (1923). It then rapidly passed to the Hon. Marcus Crofton of Roscommon, Ireland (June 1923), Gerald Thompson of Regent Street (Oct. 1923), Henry Pringle of Longhope Manor with John Haines solicitor (1925). The gale then went to the Wigpool Coal & Iron Company 1927 and returned to Henry Pringle (1934). In 1944 the gale was surrendered to the Crown.

The mine machinery was sold in 1907. An advertisement for the sale on July 3rd 1907 exists and commences "By Direction of the CHASTAN SYNDICATE LTD."

A detailed description of all the machinery follows (previously published in Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club Newsletter No.31 April 1971).

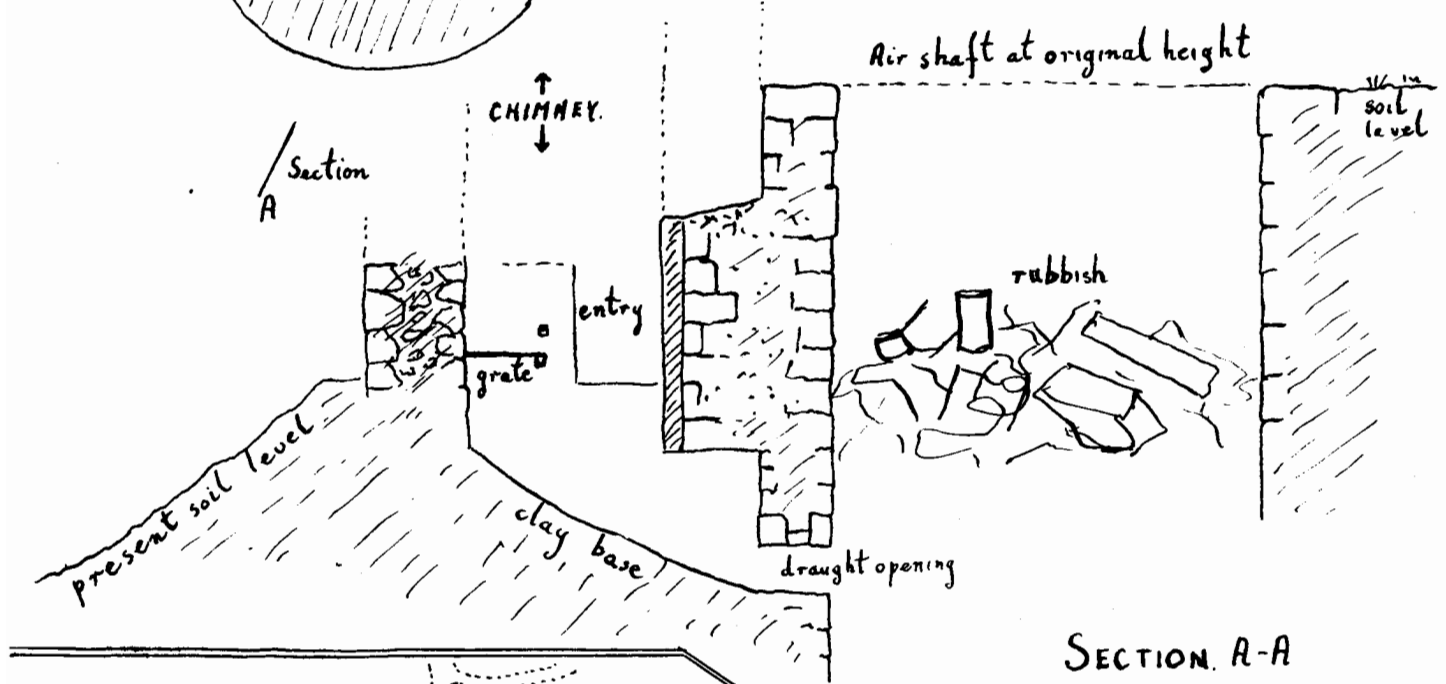
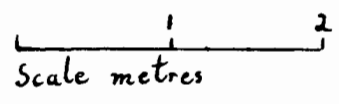
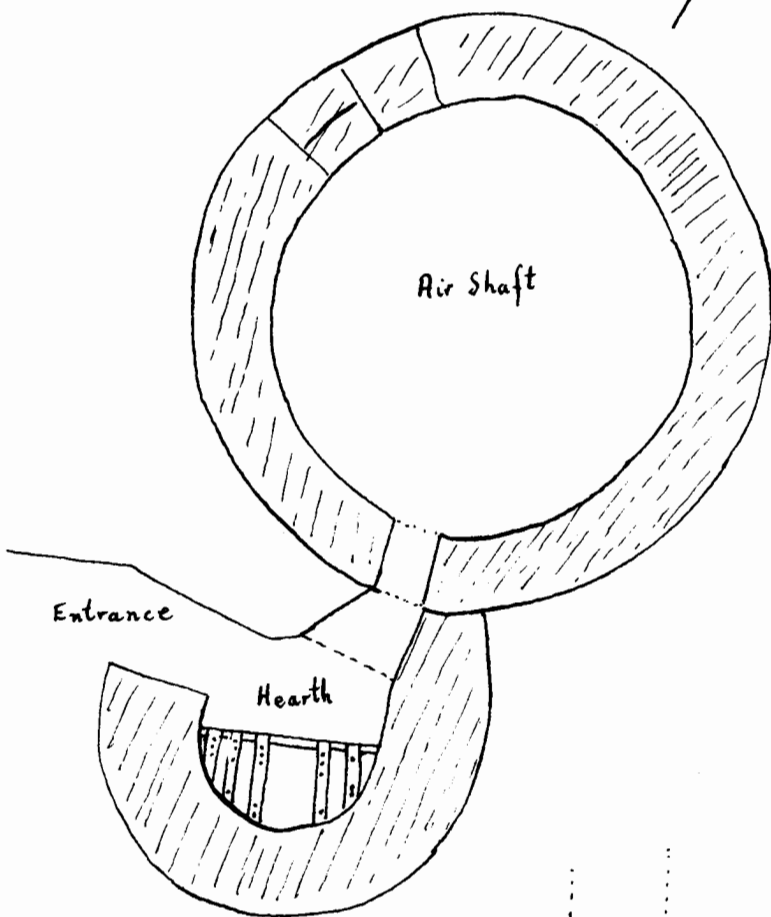
On the Thursday before 20th September 1907 (Newspaper report above mentioned) the mining buildings were in process of demolition. The buildings were reported as owned by the Gold Mining Company. The newspaper report is particularly commenting on the throwing down of the chimney stack. This was 80 feet high, the first twelve feet of grey or blue forest stone. The base was square, each side 14 feet long. The flue was 4 feet 6 inches tapering towards the top. This chimney was at the time leaning to the South West and (one supposes) dangerous. The newspaper has a photograph of the event. This chimney is not, of course, the one to the air shaft.

At the end of the second World War, the air shaft was partly filled with smoke bombs and empty shell cases previously stored in Acorn Patch. Since then, further building and

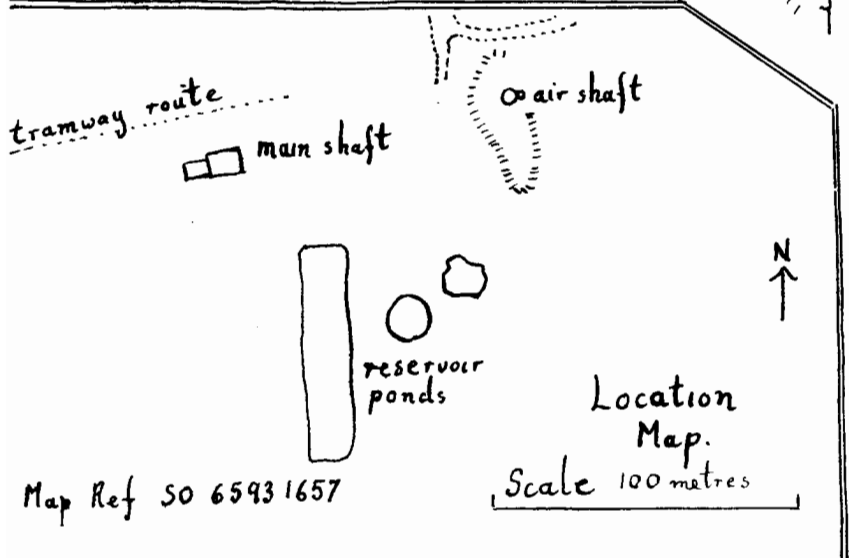
Section A

PLAN.

FAIRPLAY
AIR SHAFT



SECTION. A-A



Map Ref 50 6593 1657

domestic rubbish is added by the unthinking.

There is, at Fairplay, no spoil heap by the main shaft. There is no evidence of any ore ever having been extracted. The whole affair seems to have been abortive. The main shaft remains standing to about 15 feet above ground level and the air shaft to its top at about 6 feet. Both are superbly built with excellent ashlar in pennant sandstone. Possibly the draught chimney was very little used.




The reservoir ponds with the area surrounding them are now a nature reserve leased to the Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation. The main pool has a small stand of the uncommon cotton grass. It is also odd in that there is a seepage of alkaline water through the culvert at the northern end, whilst the main part of the pool is acid.

These notes were compiled with information from:

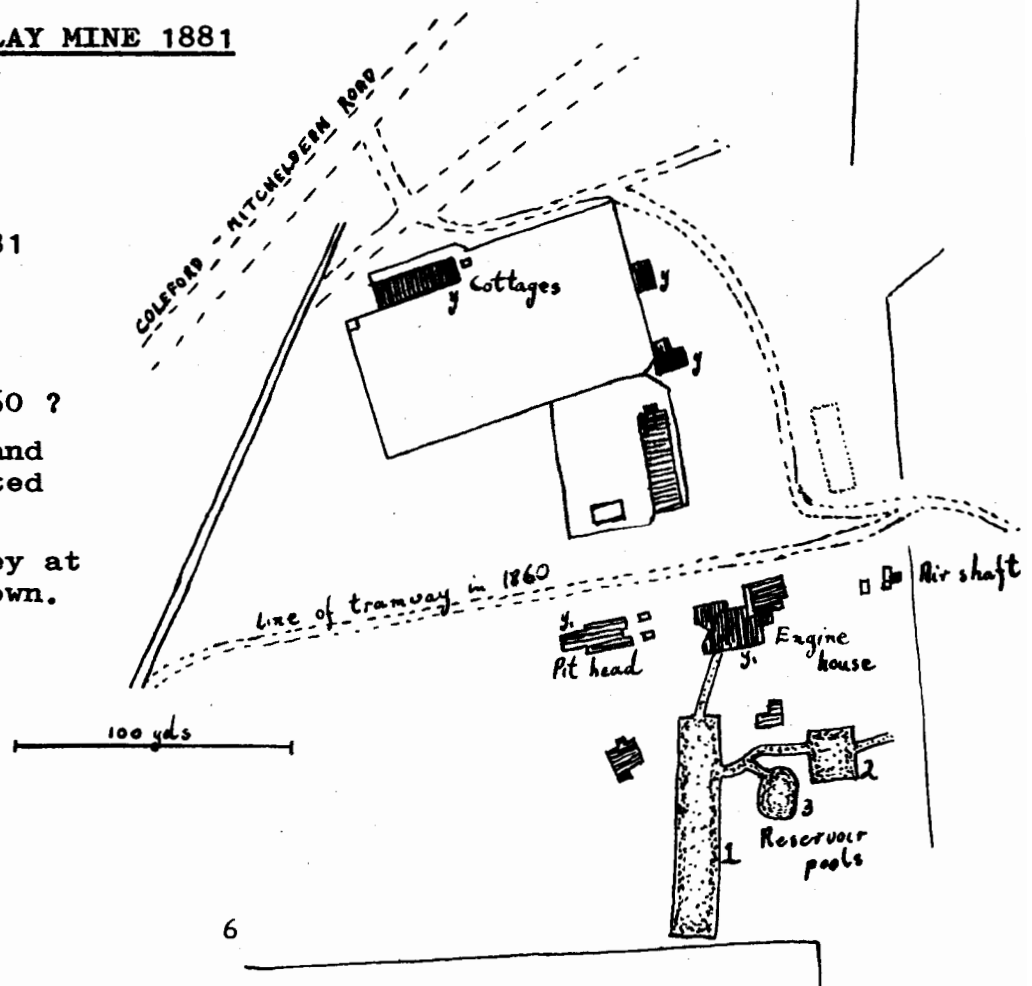
- Notes from the Dean Forest Mercury taken by Mr.R.P.Allen.
- Notes from the Deputy Gaveler, Mr.A.E.Howell.
- Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club Newsletter No.31
- Paar - The Great Western Railway in Dean
- Sopwith - Award of the Dean Forest Mining Commissioners 1841.
- Hart - Industrial History of Dean.

The Deputy Gaveler has given photocopies of legal documents relating to the history of the Fairplay Mine to the Wilderness Field Centre, where they may be consulted.

FAIRPLAY MINE 1881

-  Building existing before 1860
-  Building erected between 1860-1881
- Pools 1,2 before 1860
- Pool 3 after 1860
-  Building existing between 1856-1860 ?
- Buildings labelled y and y (part only) existed before 1856.

The date of the chimney at the air shaft is unknown. The shaft was sunk before 1856.



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