

Spring 2013
Volume 151



Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club

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Editorial

The first newsletter of 2013 and an interesting bunch of articles including the final part of Dave Tuffley's history of Westbury Brook Mine.

It's nice to see things are finally drying out after the wet winter we've just had. Water levels in Noxon are starting to drop after being the highest I've ever seen (although I'm sure there are some who will disagree with me). It only remains to be seen whether we will have another drought like last year which dropped the levels to rarely seen lows.

New Members

A warm welcome to our newest member Scott Fisher

FODCCAG

John Hine has asked me to reiterate that
RFDCC Wigpool keys are held by him & Dave Tuffley.
Do NOT ask Clearwell Caves for keys.

FoDCCAG AGM, GCRG DEPOT, 8pm. Thurs 14th March

Robin Hood Mine closed until further notice
I appreciate that the number of visits to Robin Hood Mine are not large
but we must be seen to adhere to this notice.

The FoDCCAG Lock is going to be removed and a Temporary
alternative fitted.

I have not been to look at the site myself but will try and do so in the
near future - Paul Taylor

Other News

"Together Forever", a play based on a mining disaster in the FOD early last century, is being presented by the Churchdown local history society on Thursday, April 11th at 7.30 in St John's Church Hall in Churchdown. Paul Gait, the author, will introduce the evening giving background information about his research. Refreshments will be served after the production. There is an admission charge of £2 to help defray costs.

Directions to the hall: from the Elmbridge Roundabout on the A40, take the 1st left which is signposted Churchdown. At the 2nd set of traffic lights (by the Hare and Hounds pub) turn right and then 1st right. The church is on that corner. There is off road parking at the hall and on road parking is also permitted here.

Diary Dates

FoDCCAG AGM, GCRG DEPOT, 8pm. Thurs 14th March.

Nenthead at Easter: 28th March to Sun 7th April. Contact John Hine for details.

RFDCC meets list 2013

Sat 12th Jan	Easy/beginners trip to Miss Graces Lane
Sun 20th Jan	GSS Thrupe Lane Swallet (Mendips) trip
Sat 9th Feb	Ogof Fawr (and possibly Ogof Fechan) http://www.ogof.org.uk/ogof_fawr.html http://www.ogof.org.uk/ogof_fechan.html
March 3 rd	Rescue practice (Likely to be a Cave or Mine Site in the Forest of Dean)
Sat 9 th March	Old Ham/Old Bow/Lambsquay
Sat 20th Apr Sun 7th Apr	Otter hole wardens meet (between tide) OR (over-tide) [date not finalised yet but possibly the latter or maybe even both!] http://www.zen159313.zen.co.uk/rfdcc/sites/caves/otter_hole/otter_hole.htm
Sat 11 th May	Ogof Draenen (round trip). http://www.ogof.org.uk/ogof_draenen.html
Sun 2nd June	Rescue practice (Normally held at the GCRG Depot as a "Round Robin Event")
Sat 8 th June	Woolaston Wood Cave (If dry enough. This has been cancelled twice... 3 rd time lucky?)
July 12-14	Mendips (Priddy folk festival). Shepton hut booked. Swildons? Any suggestions for other caves and will try to book them?
Sun 18 th August	Redhouse Lane Swallet (if dry enough) http://www.zen159313.zen.co.uk/rfdcc/sites/caves/redhouse/redhouse.htm
Sun 1st Sep	Rescue practice (Likely to be a Cotswold Stone Mine Event)
Sat 14 th September	Agen Allwedd (if date clashes with Hidden Earth I will try to reschedule) http://www.ogof.org.uk/agen_allwedd.html
Sat 12 th October	Wet sink. Anybody got a particular place they would like to go? http://www.zen159313.zen.co.uk/rfdcc/sites/caves/wet_sink/wet_sink.htm
Sat 9 th Nov	Westbury Brook Iron Mine
Sun 1st Dec	Rescue practice (Again likely to be a Cave or Mine Site in the Forest of Dean)
Date TBC	Retro trip
Sun 29 th Dec	OFD http://www.ogof.org.uk/ofd2.html

GCRG Practice Sept 2012 (inc. SARCALL)

I would just like to say a big thanks to everybody who took part in the Training Exercise at Balls Green Mine (Lower) on Sunday. Not only all of you who came out to the mine but also those of you who, although not able to attend, took the trouble to respond to the SARCALL message.

Yes we know that we sent out the wrong telephone number in the message. We did suggest that we could say that we did this deliberately to see if you were paying attention but that was not the case. It was a genuine mistake but despite this we still had an excellent response so you have either got the number logged into your phones or made use of the cards that Gareth has been circulating.

As has been said before, responding even if you are not able to attend is as important as those that respond to say they can attend. It saves the GCRG Wardens spending time calling people who are not able to attend. We are also well aware that many who fell into the None Attending area would have attended had this been to a real incident.

We plan to make use of the SARCALL System on all of our practices as this helps to keep everybody up to speed in all areas of the system. It is changing and moving forward all of the time and has certainly been an excellent step forward for GCRG. A full report on the exercise is to be prepared for the next newsletter. (*or maybe the next – Ed*)

I was particularly pleased with how the First Aid Session developed and I have asked Nicky to continue this type of approach for future events. This was another new location for GCRG and although not a massive site did give a good and varied underground terrain for the search and the carry back to the entrance. Neither were completely straight forward and involved all who were underground.

Our last three exercises have all been very well supported and this is very encouraging for those who are involved in putting them together. Please keep up the good work.

If there is an aspect of training that you would like to see covered please let either Dave Appleing (dappleing'at'aol.com) or Ian Healey (ianandrachrtw'at'hotmail.com), who are acting as the joint GCRG Training Coordinators, know and they will do their best to get it into the programme.

Paul Taylor
Chairman GCRG

999 Text available

A mountaineering expert is urging walkers and climbers to sign up to a new service that allows 999 calls to be made by text.

Mountaineering Council of Scotland safety adviser Heather Morning pointed out that in many remote mountain areas, mobile phone coverage is weak and where a phone call might not get through, a text message could do.

But outdoors enthusiasts need to register for the service in order to use it.

Ms Morning said: "If you cannot make voice calls, you can now contact the 999 emergency services by SMS text from your mobile phone. This is going to be particularly useful for those needing 999 assistance in the hills when mobile reception is poor and there is not enough signal to make a call."

She urged walkers and climbers to register for the service now, not to wait for an emergency.

She added: "To register, text 'register' to 999. You will get a reply; then follow the instructions you are sent. This will only take approx two minutes of your time and could save your life!"

The service, which is run with the Government's support by the major mobile phone providers and the fire, police and ambulance services, was initially set up for people with hearing difficulties and those unable to communicate by talking.

Mountain rescue teams in the UK are usually mobilised by the police.

Ed's note, this article is taken from Grough Magazine
<http://www.grough.co.uk>

Distressing trip to Box Stone Quarries

On a recent sunny Sunday a group of 5 of us set off for a wander around Box. Parked on the common near the Quarry Man Arms, a pleasant walk to the entrance but were then greeted by a lot of litter - mostly bottles and drink cans. Once inside we were all upset by the amount of graffiti of a type one would expect at the back of the bike sheds of a very rough inner city school. Distressingly some of the graffiti was written over the original old quarrymen's. It is hard to understand why people want to explore and then destroy what they have come to see. Also there was lots of litter left inside - old tea lights, crisp packets etc.

What can be done about it is obviously tricky. Educating people before they go down is difficult - perhaps information on suitable sites on the net and some sort of signage on the old interesting graffiti but who would pay/install?. We all could help a little with the litter by remembering to take a plastic bag with us and collecting some up on our visits!

Mary Dupree

Westbury Brook Iron Mine © Dave Tuffley

Part 2

Some fatal accidents

In 1860 the Mining Journal reports that the Engineer, named Davies, left his nearby house and headed to the mine for the purpose of putting his pumping engine to work, along with two children, one of his own and the other the child of a local preacher friend, accompanied him. He left the children in the engine room and went to the boilers to turn on the steam power to start the working of the pumps. Suddenly a pipe fractured in the engine room and steam escaped with a great roar of pressure. Davies ran back to rescue the children but the engine room was full of scalding steam pouring from the fractured pipe and he failed to get in. He had to run back to the boilers and turned off the valve to halt the escaping flow. When he went back to the engine room once again he found his child lay on the floor literally scalded to death and the other child so badly injured that it lingered until midnight when death released the child from its dreadful suffering. Engineer Davies at that time was known through the local area as a renowned preacher

The inclination of the strata in the mine was very steep, being around 65 to 70 degrees in the area of the shafts, but gradually decreasing to about 45 degrees at the northern extent of the mine. This is due to the geological effects of the Stapledge Monocline. The steepness of this strata consequently brought about many accidents at the height of the mine's activities in the 1870's when the mining of iron ore was at its highest production rates. The local Coroner at one time, pointing out that he was then attending the fifth inquest of a Westbury Brook miner within a 12-month period. It has been often rumoured that the iron miners gave the mine the name of 'Slaughter Pit', due to the number of deaths, but this is anecdotal.

Timothy Mountjoy, a former union Miners' Agent, in his book 'Sixty Two years of the life a Forest of Dean Collier', published in 1887, records the story of two Westbury Brook miners, Joseph Ferris, aged 43 of Pope's Hill, and Thomas Gardner, aged 38, of Hangman's Hill, who both descended into the mine to work one fateful Friday morning in mid November 1877. At the end of the shift neither miner had arrived back home at the usual hour and the wives had concluded that they had been put to work a consecutive or double shift. This was not such an unusual occurrence, as miners were not expected to leave at the shift's end and leave a situation that might endanger the safety within the mine. The two men did not arrive home at the end of the second shift and the wives started to become anxious. Ferris's wife went to another Westbury Brook miner's home and asked if he knew where her Joe was as he now very late. The miner replied that as he did not work near to the two miners he did not know the reason for their lateness. On the Saturday morning there was still no sign of Ferris or Gardner, so the wives spoke to yet another miner named James Appleby, who also lived on Pope's Hill, but he could not give any information on them either. At the request of the alarmed wives, he walked over the Edge Hill to the mine and asked at the pithead if anyone had seen both men. He found that they were last seen on that very spot

on the morning of the previous day. Appleby, James Barnard and others descended the shaft and made a search of the mine where the men were known to have been working on their own. Both miner's top clothes were soon located and then their "tommy bags", which contained their food. It was soon found that Ferris and Gardner were both held fast under a large 15 ton rock, or 'clumper', that had fallen, crushing them both to death in an instant. A later search in Gardner's workbag revealed that none of his meagre food, a few morsels of bread and a small apple, had been eaten and therefore they must have been killed shortly after starting work the previous day. The rock had to be lifted up with a large screw jack in order to release the bodies, which were brought out in bags with due reverence by the other miners.

The Manager of the mine, now Mr William Phillips, of Edge Hill House, Plump Hill, came under direct criticism from the Forest of Dean Coroner, Mr M. F. Carter, at the subsequent inquest on the 16th November at Mitcheldean Police Court, due to the neglect of proper supervision in the mine. There was no routine inspection of the work places which was apparently not required in metaliferous mines but Phillips came under a lot of criticism from the Coroner, Mines Inspector and the Inquest Jury of 23 men, for not doing a basic safety precaution. He agreed to make sure that the workplaces were inspected by competent persons and for written reports to be completed and stored for inspection. This may have proved to be more difficult for Phillips than he promised as a lot of the experienced iron ore miners at this time were illiterate and therefore would not be able to produce a written report.

However, Phillips kept his employment but poor Ferris's and Gardiner's wives and families were all left destitute, as there were no compensation schemes in existence at the time nor, indeed, for some years after. (The 1881 National Census records the following persons named Ferris, from Pope's Hill, who were now resident in the Westbury on Severn Union Workhouse – Alfred aged 11, John aged 9 and Louise aged 6. Could they be the unfortunate children of Joseph Ferris?)

Six months later, on the afternoon of Saturday, 25th May 1878, at around 2 pm two more miners, George Malsom, aged 40 and Thomas Moore, aged 42, were killed and 7 were badly injured in a rather careless accident. The head banksman, Philip Smith, was watching the winding of the group of nine men and boys up the New Pit shaft from the depths below and they had ascended about 70 yards up the shaft. Absentmindedly forgetting what he was doing, Smith had previously neglected to secure the winding machinery correctly by his removal of a securing key, pin and bolts that secured the winding drum to the engine and this then eventually slipped the winding mechanism gear cogs out of mesh and this caused the wire rope to slip from the winch drum. This then resulted in the mine cart that the men were riding in, to fall straight back down the shaft. At first the miners thought that the engineman for some reason was lowering them down in order to pull them back up again. As the velocity of their descent increased they soon realised what their fate was about to be. Their screams of "Lord, have mercy upon us," could be heard in the pit as they plummeted back down the shaft to the bottom level. The descending velocity of the two ton weight of the heavy steel wire rope caused it to snap near to the winding drum, which then caused the rope to fall upon the men as the cart hit the bottom of the shaft. The two miners mentioned died of their injuries after about an

hour, Joseph Parry sustained serious back injuries, Charles Davies and Allen Jenkins were described as seriously injured, a boy named George Barnard and Richard Trigg, each had a broken leg, one of these last two miners was later reported as loosing his leg due to his injuries but was not named. The final miner Edwin Bellamy was described as badly shaken. All were cut, bruised and traumatised. A verdict of manslaughter was returned by the jury at the inquest in the nearby Point Inn. The Manager, Mr William Phillips, was once again criticised by the Coroner's court, this time for not having a brake fitted on the winding drum and strongly recommending that Phillips arrange the fitting of one forthwith.

Later in early August 1878, Smith was tried at Gloucester Assizes on a charge on manslaughter and found guilty. The prosecution did not press for punishment as Smith was stated as being of a good character. He was ordered to come up again before the court for judgement, if required. He apparently was never called to reappear and was recorded to be living in Westbury on Severn a short time later.

(Again, the 1881 National Census records the following named Malsom now resident in the Westbury on Severn Union Workhouse – Edward aged 8, George aged 10, Mary aged 13 and Jane aged 37 – all registered as being from the Forest of Dean)

(Thomas Moore previously dictated evidence to the local Police, when they were taking contemporaneous notes whilst investigating the death of 13 year old miner Clement Barnard, who was killed in the mine by a fall of stone from the roof in April 1874)

It was always customary in the Forest of Dean coal and iron mines that when a miner was killed in a mining accident, the rest of the workforce downed tools and left the mine as a mark of respect to the unfortunate victim. It is not recorded that this was done in any of the above fatalities.

(The above are just some typical examples and there are other fatalities that occurred in this mine and are further documented and recorded by the author)

Later History

In October 1913 the Dean Forest Mercury reports that in the early 1870's there was a large surface collapse of ground in the vicinity of the Old Pit. This may have affected this shaft as by 1880 the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map shows no buildings or any shaft now recorded at this position, which is unusual as shafts no longer used were usually marked as 'abandoned' or 'old shaft' on the map. The newspaper report also mentions that old miners had stated that there were chambers underground that could swallow up the Holy Trinity Church, at Nailbridge. (Recent explorations by local cavers have proved that this claim is not an exaggeration, as one churn is known to be approximately 400 feet long, up to 150 feet high and in places up to 50 feet wide!)

The fact that there may now only have been one shaft being used presented no problems because there were numerous scowl holes, and possibly Beech Pit, that allowed access deep into the workings. An accident at the New Pit shaft would not have therefore sealed the miners down the mine. It was rumoured locally that the miners used to leave the northern most part of the mine, near to the top of the Stenders Hill, Mitcheldean, by a scowl hole and go straight into a pub or ale house adjacent to the mine exit to quench their thirst before going home!

On the 8th June 1870 the Western Mail daily newspaper reported a case where an

overman, James Kibble, and master miner, John Cooper, aged 70 years, were both charged at the Newnham Magistrates' Court with defrauding the Dowlais Company of a total of £17 and 10 shillings (£17.50) by sending out of the mine 80 ore carts filled with sand mixed amongst the iron ore and also claiming for 185 ore carts. It was decided after 6 hours of evidence to send the case to be heard before a jury at the Gloucester Quarter Assize and the men were bailed in the sum of £50 each to this appear. It was also stated in the report that the workers wages were being paid every six weeks by the Dowlais Company. The final outcome of the court proceedings against Kibble and Cooper is not yet known.

A written report in the Bristol Mercury in late December 1873 reported that Mr Halliday, the Miners' Union President and Timothy Mountjoy, the local Miners Agent had visited several collieries and iron mines to discuss the level of wages that were reported to be being paid lower than the norm in the district. Westbury Brook was recorded as being one of the iron mines, but the discussions at Westbury Brook Mine were adjourned for Mountjoy to prove how much lower the men were being paid compared with the rest of the iron miners.

A report, written by Mr Forster-Brown, the Deputy Gaveler, in 1875, whilst looking into a complaint from St Annals Mine, owned by Messrs Henry Crawshay Co., that water was seeping into their workings from Westbury Brook Mine, records the following at Westbury Brook Mine after an underground visit on 10th August:- There were four boilers, one on the winding shack and three on the pumping shack (sic). Two were in use supplying both the winding and pumping engines. Obviously two of the boilers were then out of action or unused. In the No 2 Smith Heading, which was the heading against the St Annals Mine, there was a feeder of water about 34 chains from the bottom of No 2 Level, giving off about three or four gallons per minute which was drained by means of the No 3 Level to the pit sump. The No 2 North Heading had successfully advanced for sometime, but owing to the great influx of water supposed to flow from an adjoining work (now known to be Wigpool Iron Mine), killing the working in the dipples (inclined workings) on either side of the road. This water flowed through to No 3 North Heading 40 yards below again to the pit sump from where it was pumped up the New Pit shaft. The great influx of water had steadily increased since Christmas 1874, but especially since the floods from a very wet July in 1875 gave the Dowlais Company at least four times the average amount of water to be pumped to the surface. The Forster-Brown report also stated that on the western side of the Deans Meend gale there was another pit belonging to Messrs Firmstone, Onion and others, sunk to a depth of 120 yards. Very little appears to have been done in the way of working this pit and at the time of the report it was full of water. (A bore hole is shown on the 6" geological maps of that area, near to the current Drybrook Rugby Club playing field and the depth is written there as 240yds deep)

In early November 1877, the iron industry was in a state of depression and the Dowlais Iron Company notified their miners at Westbury Brook Mine that all wage contracts with the iron miners would be terminated at the end of the month. All new contracts with the miners would result in a reduction of wages. This depression in the industry would continue for some time.

A report in the Bristol Mercury on 17th May 1879 shows that The Dowlais Company offered to deliver iron ore to the nearby Cinderford iron furnaces for the price of 9 shillings (45p) per ton in order to get rid of some of their output from

Westbury Brook Mine. The transportation of the ore to the nearby furnaces would be shorter and therefore cheaper than taking it to Merthyr Tydfil. The Dowlais furnaces situated in Merthyr Tydfil were in a state of depression and were probably unable to take delivery of all the iron ore from the mine. The Cinderford furnaces probably did not take up the offer as it would have the consequence of making many miners from the Crawshay's Buckshaft, St Annals and Shakemantle Iron Mines unemployed

In May 1879, the Manager, William Phillips, is recorded in going to the Westbury-on-Severn Union Assessment Committee to appeal for the Poor Rate of 1 shilling (5p) per ton of ore, be reduced as the mine was not making a profit at the current rateable value despite making a recent 15% reduction in the men's wages. It appears that since 1875 a one shilling rate per ton of produced ore was imposed to help pay for the Union Workhouse at Westbury. When pressed by the committee as to why he continued working the mine if it was as unprofitable as Phillips maintained, he replied that he was waiting for more favourable trading conditions to prevail. Phillips required that the rate be reduced to 3d per ton in order to maintain an acceptable profit. Despite Phillips's pleadings, the committee decided that they would not reduce the rate, and so the mine continued mining ore at a supposed loss for a while longer.

All the numerous scowls along the outcrop of the Westbury Brook and Deans Meend Gales had long been filled in probably to help prevent the circulation of air being short circuited within the greater mine workings. The large Old Sally Mine Scowl situated at NCR SO6642 1602, is a long open cast trench about 150 yards long which has now been truncated by a forestry road built approximately in the 1990's. This scowl has the remains of a stone ventilation flue situated at its southern extremity and the course of this flue is set into the ground and passes to the side of a masonry doorway and the flue then disappeared into a sealed off part of the mine workings. The access door, which would have been wooden, would have also prevented the short circuiting of air being drawn up the flue from just inside the door. This site was the place of the discovery of the smithing hearth mentioned at the start of this article

In 1881 Messrs Insole and Bunning produced a report to the British Society of Mining Students that confirmed that little had changed in the way of surface plant and equipment since the earlier reports of 1866 and 1875. This 1881 report confirms that there were a mixture of two Lancashire Boilers (32 feet long by 7 feet diameter), one Egg-ended Boiler (40 feet long by 7 feet diameter) and one Cornish Boiler (42 feet long by 7 feet diameter), which supplied both the pumping and winding engines. The total capacity of the boilers was rated as 67 horsepower. They consumed a hefty average 14 tons of steam coal in a twenty-four hour period to produce a nominal pressure of 37 pounds per square inch, which by later standards in the century was to be considered very short of 'wind'. The New Pit is reported to have had a rotary Cornish beam engine with a 45inch diameter cylinder with an 8 feet stroke at the engine and with a 5 feet stroke down the shaft. It was now pumping an average of 326 gallons of water a minutes at a rate of 10 strokes per minute and the water was lifted 225 yards by a three lift forcing plunger pump, (each lift was of 75 yards) via 14 inch pipes. The water was then discharged eastwards down the Westbury Brook. The pumping engine, itself having been installed around 1846. The mine at this time had worked over an area of 73 acres. This report, interestingly, makes no mention of any shaft,

pumping or winding plant situated at the Old Pit site.

The report also puts the Forest of Dean low down in the league table as an iron ore producer as it is quoted as producing 0.42% of total iron ore raised in 1880 in Great Britain. This figure was stated as coming from the Mines Inspector reports for that year.

At a Forest of Dean Gale Owners Dinner held at the Speech House in August 1884, the Mine Manager, William Phillips made a speech complaining that the iron industry was almost a thing of the past as steel had now replaced iron as the preferred material and the rivalry was depressing the iron mines most severely. However, what he failed to say was that without the raw iron ore material there would be no steel to be made.

Level No 4 Northern Drivage was completed in 1881, and the Southern Drivage was completed in 1884. Only a few ore bodies reached down to this level and there was little ore deeper than this depth.

Sometime prior to 1888 the Westbury Brook Mine workings were trespassed into by the adjacent St Annals Iron Mine, effectively the ore was being taken by the St Annals' Henry Crawshay and Company and this resulted in June of 1888, a case in the Court of the Queens Bench which the plaintiffs, Dowlais Iron Company won a referral to the Deputy Gaveler, Mr Forester Brown. Damages were to be assessed by the Deputy Gaveler, but the exact result of this has not yet been discovered. However, as the drivages in this part of the Westbury Brook mine were completed up to the boundary, and that the ore quantity had diminished with depth, it is probable that damages were minimal.

In 2002 a pair of hob-nailed boots were found by members of RFDCC at the top of the incline between Level No 2 and Level 3. They were approximately size 8 and one has to ask the question of why they were left there? The miner must have had another pair to put to go home, if so, why did he not wait until he reached the surface until he changed them. He certainly did not go home in bare feet. We will never find out the reason why the boots were abandoned where they were.

Closure

By the early 1890's vast quantities of cheap Spanish ore were now being imported directly into Wales, and the continued diminution of ore with depth, sounded the death knell for the mine and a sustained period of depression in the iron industry drew the life of the mine to a close. What also helped bring about the mine's closure was a hefty 70% protectionist tariff imposed on British made tin plate imported into the United States of America, called the McKinley Tariff. This was also accompanied by a national coal strike throughout the British Isles which virtually stopped the supply of coking coal to the furnaces. William Phillips, the Mine Manager, was reported stating that orders for iron ore had never been as low as in the previous six years. All this also brought about the shutdown of many iron furnaces across the nation.

According to the Bristol Mercury, the mine ceased production in late April 1893 after producing over 958,000 tons of prime Forest ore over a period of about 50 years. 761,000 tons were won from the Westbury Brook Gale and 197,000 tons were taken from the Deans Meend Gale. Taking into consideration the amount of old workings as a whole, it can be safely assumed that the total

amount of ore produced over several thousand years of iron ore working could easily be in the range of 2 to 3 million tons.

The Deans Meend Gale was surrendered on 8th February 1894, and the Westbury Brook Gale was surrendered in 24th June 1902. The Deans Meend Gale was later taken up by William Kear in 1906 who then sold it to Graham Jones

(In July 1900 the Dowlais Iron Company merged with Arthur Keen's Patent Nut and Bolt Company to form the Guest Keen Company Limited. This new company in turn took over the Nettlefold Company Limited in 1902 and became the industrial giant of Guest, Keen and Nettlefold Co. Ltd. This still flourishes to date as the

G. K. N Co. Ltd, within Augusta Westland. This company, in turn, is currently, at time of writing, owned by the giant Italian aerospace conglomerate Finmeccanica)

However, the Dowlais Company had not immediately abandoned interest in the mine site in 1894 as it still had a large quantity of surface ore still located on the site. It had renewed its land lease on the site up to the surrender of the Westbury Brook gale at a cost of £4 per annum. An extension of the lease was then reapplied for in June 1902, but as this was deemed by the Crown to run contrary to the Dean Forest Mines Acts due to the surrendering of the gales, the Crown therefore refused this request. This bureaucratic hiatus was overcome by the granting of a surface licence, which was substituted for the lease but this was only to be granted if any outstanding royalties on the ore now left on the surface were paid. The Crown also sent a strongly worded letter to Guest Keen and Company complaining about the derelict state of the offices and workshops that were situated adjacent to the mine but across on the northern side of the Mitcheldean to Monmouth road. The company was ordered to replace the wooden doors and windows and make them secure at an estimated cost by the Crown of £50. The remains of the ore and any debris also had to be cleaned up to the satisfaction of the Deputy Gaveler. Whether the company complied with this terse request for the refurbishment of the buildings is unknown.

The Western Mail newspaper printed on Saturday October 12th 1895, recorded a court case where it was alleged by a witness, George Edwards, a marine store dealer, of Cinderford, that he was offered four very large brass valves taken from the Engine House of the now closed mine. The valves were offered to Edwards at £1 per hundredweight (50.8 Kgs) by two brothers, William and Thomas Hawker, but Edwards went to the Police, who then subsequently arrested the alleged thieves and brought them to trial at Littledean Petty Sessions Court. However, the brothers in their defence alleged that the witness, Edwards himself had led them into the trouble. Both Hawkers brothers were committed for trial at the next Quarter Sessions at Gloucester.

The tram road was left in position possibly for the adjacent, but also long abandoned, Fairplay Iron Mine and also the still working Wigpool Iron Mine. It is believed that a lot of the Westbury Brook's machinery, plant and equipment were disposed of at a large auction in 1907 by the Chaston Syndicate, owners of the Fairplay Mine, as the sheer amount of stock for disposal is believed to be too large for such an undeveloped mine such as Fairplay. This sale included 4,090 yards of tram plates on the tramway from Westbury Brook Mine to the tramway wharf at Whimsey, and these were lifted and removed in 1908.

The derelict engine house and the two chimneystacks were, for many years,

still prominent features and could be seen for many miles upon the skyline of the hill and proved to be a favourite with local artists. It was also known to be a great attraction and a dare for young boys to climb up the inside of the flues and sit on the top dangling their legs down over the outside of the high chimneys! The mine buildings, including the office and workshops, and the chimneys were demolished finally in March 1939 by Mr Ted ('Bandy') Halford and the rubble used to create new extensions at the airfield, at the Gloster Aircraft Company's Brockworth factory (*Dean Forest Guardian 10th March 1939*).

It has been reported that a mine ledger was rescued from the mine offices sometime prior to demolition, but confirmation of its existence, exact nature and location still remain a mystery.

Suicide

In 23rd March 1906 it was reported that a women named Mrs Bennett, who lived locally on the Plump Hill, was believed to have thrown herself down the New Pit shaft after suffering, what is now believed to have been post-natal depression. She was diagnosed at the time as being mentally unstable and was about to have been committed to the Barnwood Asylum, in Gloucester. Having got wind of this and the subsequent disgrace this would have brought upon her, she left the house and was seen up on the bank near to the New Pit shaft. She was never to be seen again. Edwin Hook and James Winters, both miners from Crump Meadow Colliery were brought to the site, along with a "crab" winch and a large tripod, approximately three weeks later on the 13th April. Under the instructions of their manager, Mr Nicholls, they were lowered 450 feet to the water table where they searched the waters with long wooden poles but no evidence was ever discovered of her whereabouts. The Levels 3 and 4 were by now permanently flooded after pumping ceased at the abandonment of the mine. Subsequent recent investigation has proved that her body could have rose to the surface after about 3 days as a result of gases due of human decomposition, and then she would have almost certainly sunk back down to the depths in the shaft by the time the search was made. This is of course true if she was in fact down there. No one will ever know where she finally rests.

In the summer of 2004, both the author and historian Brian Johns conducted an interesting dowsing experiment at the New Pit shaft site, whose contentious results confirmed that Mrs Bennett is indeed down there somewhere in the depths of the shaft.

Surface Collapse

On a Wednesday afternoon at around 3 p.m. on 12th October 1913, in the vicinity of the Old Pit, a young boy, named Tom Meek, went down into the valley to the Westbury Brook stream itself in order to draw some water for the family's animals. As he was in the act of filling his buckets the ground began to tremble and shake and he immediately ran away with a huge cavity forming at his very heels. A massive surface collapse of old mine workings had suddenly happened, with the area of this collapse being described at the time as being 60 yards across. So big was this area that the void progressed right up the back door steps of an adjoining cottage belonging to Mr Isaac Phelps and family, which had to be immediately abandoned with the owner and his furniture removed to a place of safety with the help of his neighbours. Ducks, hens and boar pigs fell into the

collapsing hole never to be seen again. Mr James White and his son also had to quit their home also taking with them all the contents. An adjacent derelict cottage of his also disappeared into the void. The Crown eventually gave the owners of the uninhabitable cottages a new plot of land each as compensation but no help was given to construct the new property and friends and neighbours all stepped in and helped build the new houses. The cavity was gradually filled in and the Westbury Brook was run across the edge of the area by means of a new stout elm wood trough in order that those people who made traditional use of it could water their animals once again and to prevent the water undermining the infill. It was reported in the contemporaneous Dean Forest Mercury report that the Dowlais Company still owned an undisclosed small parcel of land in this very area of the incident.

Proposal to reopen

By 1914 Graham Jones was in possession of the Westbury Brook and Dean Meend Gales, and on his death in 1915 then passed the Westbury Brook to Frederick Brown, a solicitor from London. The Deans Meend Gale was going to be sold to Brown but the sale was aborted. Brown had an imaginative plan to obtain a large number of iron ore gales on the Eastern outcrop with the plan to sell them to the Steel Company of Scotland. The plan was for the company to drain the whole of these contiguous mines by installing pumps in the Shakemantle Iron Mine shafts at a projected estimated cost of not less than £65,000. However, due to the complexities of the Dean Forest Mines Acts, any surrendered gales would have to be applied for through the Freeminers, there could be no guarantee the company would get all the gales required. A survey of ore obtained from the still working Wigpool Mine showed that the quantity of ore was irregular, wet and full of clay. There was even talk of changing the gales boundaries but all these complexities, including the Crown's belief that Brown did not have enough capital to pay all the dead rents arrears on the gales, brought about a collapse of this plan.

Captain Henry Pringle, of Longhope, eventually bought the mine, again including practically all the iron gales on the eastern outcrop of ore, by around 1925. In 1926 he had a similar grand plan to install modern pumping gear which was to be situated at the deepest point in the area on the site of the old iron mine at Buckshaft, near Ruspidge. The whole of the eastern outcrop was to be drained by means of a very long adit driven all the way from the banks of the Severn to the Buckshaft Mine. However, the period of Pringle's ownership coincided with the long period of the depression of the 1920' and 30's and this plan also came to nought and probably helped bring about Pringle's subsequent bankruptcy. The Westbury Brook and Deans Meend Gales were surrendered back to the Crown after Pringle's death at the end of World War Two on 18th January 1944 and the Westbury Brook Gale still sits in the Crown Office awaiting a speculative freeminer to take the gale out once again. The Deans Meend Gale at the time of writing, is now owned by both Ray and Jonathon Wright, owners of Clearwell Caves

The Westbury Brook Mine shaft was left only with a rather insecure stone wall surrounding it for many years, which was eventually securely capped by Forest Enterprise in the late 1980's. A couple of visitors to the Forest were looking at the shaft area and to their horror they saw some young boys playing at

the shaft top. One of the boys was balancing himself over the gaping shaft by standing on an insecure branch of an elderberry bush growing out over the shaft. This was reported to the Gaveler's Office of the Forestry Commission and immediate action was taken to secure the shaft top before another tragedy occurred. About the time the shaft was capped, the spoil tips were landscaped, with more of the site's industrial archaeological remains destroyed forever.

The mine plan or rather, plans, are unusual as this mine has two sets of abandonment plans in the Deputy Gaveler's Office, one at 2 chains per inch scale, and another at 3 chains per inch scale. Mines generally at that time used the latter scale. The author has since redrawn a composite map combining features from both original plans. Unfortunately, at over 3 metres in length it is far too long to reproduce for this publication.

Modern Exploration

The story of the Westbury Brook Mine does not end there, fortunately. Members of the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club reopened the mine for exploration in 1970. This period of exploration was initially undertaken by members who kept their exploration secret for a period of time. They were at the bottom of a large chamber, or churn, looking at the blocked Level No 1 when club members Roger and Laurence Bailey both suddenly heard someone shout "Hello!" which startled them both, as they knew that no one else had been informed of their discovery. Immediate investigation in the direction of the distinct shout showed that there was no one there. The large chamber was subsequently called Echo Churn.

In 1990, the author, along with two other cavers, Howard Roberts and Rob Smith, heard voices talking when at the top of this churn. Being curious and also thinking it was fellow cavers, they decided to find out to whom the voices belonged to. However, there was no one there and there was no place where anyone could hide in that area. It was a while later whilst the later story was recounted to the Bailey brothers, who then retold their experiences in the same place. Are these the ghosts of miners who experienced a tragic death? It will be left to the reader to speculate on that question.

Bats

In the decades since the mine has been since been reopened by the caving club it has been colonised by hundreds of both the Lesser and Greater Horseshoe Bats which are rare and greatly protected by legislation. The mine has since been designated under European conservation law as a Special Area of Conservation.. It was due to the mine being designated under this act of conservation legislation that a total of £118,000 was spent by the Forestry Commission and English Nature to stabilise the only existing mine entrance from collapse in 2004. (NGR SO 66263 16499) Had the entrance scowl collapsed in the winter hibernation period then the bats would have been sealed in and starved to death, wiping out the whole of the colony.

The surface site of the mine is now a Forestry Commission created, but rather unused amenity area with all evidence of the mine having been swept away. One will find it hard to imagine that beneath your very feet lies huge drivages over one and a half miles long and large chambers often full with beautifully distinctive azure blue pools of water shielded well away from the gaze of curious eyes.

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Thanks must go to the following persons or organisations that gave invaluable assistance with research into this article:-

Roger Bailey, Ron Beard, Clive Brain, Steve Jackson; Brian Johns, John Harvey, the Deputy Gaveller; Averil Kear, Neil Parkhouse, Ian Pope, Ian Standing, Les Tuffley, Ian Winstanley, Forest of Dean Local History Society, Forest of Dean Family History Society and the Royal Forest of Dean Caving Club.

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