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# NENTHEAD MINES CONSERVATION SOCIETY

**Newsletter No 6**

**December 2013**

## SOCIETY NEWS

The last few months have been a very busy time for the Society. We have been involved in a great deal of work dismantling and removing the ex-NPHT Museum, and we have participated in site management meetings and we have continued to take care of the buildings around the smelt mill and mines. We have also held a series of public open days and had excellent and useful feedback from our visitors.

Many members have made all this activity possible via the voluntary support that they have offered. Thank you to everyone who has helped throughout the year.

## NEGOTIATIONS WITH CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL

Our programme of Open Days in 2013 was an experiment to test whether a volunteer operated programme of occasional open days would generate enough income from visitors to provide a degree of confidence that the Society could manage the site in future. In the next section of this Newsletter, you can read more about what happened in the summer season.

Based on our experience this year, we have now applied for a license to formally occupy and use the site. This will mean that we will be responsible for caretaking the property and paying for utilities. CCC suggested that we should make a business case to show that this application would be sustainable and not lead to another financial collapse similar to that causing the demise of NPHT.

## OPEN DAYS 2013

We opened the Nenthead Mines site for eight days in the summer and autumn. On all those days, we invited visitors to donate towards our running costs. We sold the NPHT book stocks and also had drinks and cakes for sale.

The model for our open days was to offer at least two trips into Carrs mine, with advance booking available by phone. We also accepted walk-in visitors on the day. On most days we had sufficient visitors for three trips into the Mine.

The Reception and Cafe was set up in the Smelt Mill Barracks building using the ex-NPHT tables and chairs.

Publicity for the open days was done at a minimum cost. Our poster was emailed to all the local Tourist Information centres, displayed in local shops, available on the Roof of England Sunday bus, shown on our own website, and posted on the Facebook pages of the Friends of the North Pennines. We were also included in the national Heritage Open Days, which got us mentioned in money saving email newsletters. We installed temporary notices on the Nenthead Mines roadside signs.

As the summer progressed, we installed displays of pictures, artefacts and mineral specimens within the Barracks building, which had a positive response from our Visitors.

Our income from these sources was £1744.00. This income is sufficient to cover the basic utility and publicity costs for future years and shows that our model of a occasional open days staffed by volunteers would be a practical way of opening the site to visitors.

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## **OPEN DAY VOLUNTEERS**

Our volunteer members made the Open Days possible. Nick Green and Rosemary Vidler were trained to be Mine Guides and contributed to our script for Guides. Hazel Kendrick made cakes and sold them to visitors. Sheila Barker was site manager. Steve Holding provided lamps and practical experience as a mine guide. Joyce Jackson welcomed the visitors and kitted them out with helmets and lamps. Peter Jackson was a mine guide.

We asked visitors to complete a customer survey form. The feedback was excellent and gave us useful suggestions on how we could improve our performance.

## **SETTING UP OUR MUSEUM**

The Society purchased the small assets of the NPHT from the administrator. Your committee decided that the old NPHT Museum and café could not be viable in the foreseeable future. We therefore decided that we should work with Cumbria County Council to remove all the property that we wanted to keep and store this in the Smelt Mill buildings.

The committee anticipated that this would be a long and onerous task and we started the work not knowing how we were ever to complete the job.

In between our public open days, members have now dismantled the Museum displays and moved the majority up to the Smelt Mill. We have also sorted through the ex-NPHT archaeology site files, catalogued all these, and moved them to a room in the Barracks building. We have also moved and stored and catalogued the NPHT artefacts collection, and gathered together other useful items.

We have donated furniture and shop fittings to the South Tynedale railway, and given some education materials to Nenthead school and the Shropshire Mines Trust. We also gave some furniture and pictures to the Nenthead Chapel project. We donated the Halton lea Gate tapestry to Herdley Bank School.

We have sold scrap material and have also arranged for the Rampgill mine yard to be cleared of all rubbish and redundant materials. Sheila Barker and Hazel Kendrick sorted through all the kitchen and domestic material and held a Yard Sale, which brought in more cash. We sold some surplus books and kitchen equipment. All these sales raised £700.00.

Helen Wilkinson, Hazel Kendrick, Joyce Jackson and Sheila Barker have sorted through all the material stored in the Smelt Mill and made an excellent start on providing displays of mineral specimens, mining artefacts and pictures. Helen has continued to work on sorting and cataloguing our rocks and minerals.

Dave Carlisle, Graham Brooks, Bob Vidler, Colin Fowler, Don Borthwick and Nick Green put a lot of physical effort into moving the heavier items, including scaffolding, furniture, rails and mine wagons.

Beamish Museum took back the loaned Schram drill from the ex-NPHT display and they also gave a home to three small coal mine tubs from the old café yard. A retired surveyor from the Weardale Lead Co is now caring for one of our Settlingstones wagons. The scrap contractor removed the mine wagons that were beyond saving – some of these were on the point of collapse.

This has been a huge task and the demands on time and energy should not be underestimated. However, we have now completed this daunting task and the Society thanks everyone who worked to make this happen. We have now cleared the ex-NPHT Museum and yards.

## **SITE MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE**

During the year, we have also done minor maintenance to the buildings in the smelt mill complex. This has included checking smoke alarms, painting doors and windows, repairing fences and river walls, and

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cleaning the interiors of all the buildings. Paul Thorne, Dave Cushing, Mike and Mavis Luff have all helped with essential maintenance.

Cumbria County Council have been awarded Higher Level Stewardship of the site by Natural England. The stewardship plan has provided funding to develop a Management Plan for the continuing conservation of the ancient monument. Your Society has been represented at many of the meetings when the plan has been developed. We have provided copies of documents from the site archive and have been involved in wide ranging discussions about water management, maintenance and pollution.

The Environment Agency is studying the ways in which the polluted mine waters might be treated. As a first step, water flow meters have been installed in Rampgill and Caplecleugh Low Level entrances. The objective is to obtain at least 12 months data about water flows from these mines. This data will then be used to inform the design of water treatment systems.

The Environment Agency have also commissioned work to map the movement of dump material into the River Nent and Rampgill Burn in order to understand how longer term controls might be applied to prevent this movement.

Cumbria County Council have discussed surface water, and road management with Nenthead Hydro Company Ltd (the owner of the site hydro-electric scheme) and the Hodgson Brothers (the operators of Flinty Fell quarry). The surface water run-off is causing increasing erosion to the bridleway track from the smelt mill to the head of the valley. The water running off the road is damaging walls and buildings.

## **HIGHER LEVEL STEWARDSHIP (HLS)**

Environmental Stewardship is an agri-environment scheme that provides funding to farmers and other land managers in England to deliver effective environmental management on their land. NPHT had qualified for Environmental stewardship payments and work had started on a Higher Level stewardship application prior to the closure of NPHT. The North Pennines AONB Staff Unit supported this work and they continued to facilitate the application, which was eventually made by Cumbria County Council. A HLS scheme for the Cumbria land holding at Nenthead Mines started from March 2013.

The first work involved drafting an outline proposal for the design of a Management Plan. Countryside Consultants of Alston (CCA) obtained the contract for this work.

CCA commissioned several reports including Archaeology and Structural Engineering. The Archaeology contractor is Northern Archaeology Associates represented by Matt Town and the engineering report has been produced by Blackett-Ord Consultant Engineers.

The draft plan has identified key areas for action. The smelt mill spine wall is affected by collapse and has structural problems. Recent work has discovered that the structure is largely two walls separated by a loose fill of rubble with many open cavities. My reading of reports is that past repairs have sealed water into the structure and the freeze-thaw process has caused the fill to expand and cause sections of the wall to collapse. Any approved repair work to the wall will have to be contracted to specialist stonemasons.

Repairs to Rampgill burn culvert are likely to be recommended to prevent dump material being washed into Rampgill Burn. The culvert outside Smallcleugh level entrance is collapsing and a rebuild of the arch is recommended. The washing floor retaining walls above Carrs level entrance may receive some attention.

Conservation of the North Powder House is also likely with the walls, roof, doors, and structural timber being reinstated. It has been suggested that NMCS may want to undertake a project of reinstating the interior wood lining.

The draft plan was presented to a meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> November and final decisions should be made by January 2014. There are likely to be contractors working on site during 2014.

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## THE FUTURE

For 2014 we would like more members to volunteer. Many of our visitors want to learn more about Nenthead Mines and some of them want to share their own knowledge of mining. We need more mine guides and more people to host visitors to the smelt mill and interpret the visible remains on the site.

Visitors have told us that they want to know more about the mineworkings in the valley and we should also have displays about the objectives of NMCS.

We also need to review our exhibitions in the barracks and workshop buildings and decide how to rearrange all our Interpretation panels. We need to make decisions about which mine wagons to bring inside – our collection of wagons is gradually decaying outside in the Nenthead rain.

Site signposting is now misleading or missing. We have made a start by removing some of the ex-NPHT signage, which has become redundant.

Visitors suggested that we need a site map leaflet and more information about the history of the mines.

We need your help to deliver all these objectives. Can you think about how you might be able to help the Society?

Bob Vidler joined the Society in mid-summer and has painted doors and windows, fixed leaking doors, installed shelves, dug out rubbish and moved artefacts. Helen Wilkinson has sorted through our rocks and minerals and is compiling a register. She continues to work on printing labels for our display cases. Sheila Barker has labelled and catalogued our artefacts and relics.

### **Whatever your skills, we could use your help!**

We will publish the days in 2014 when we will open the mine and buildings to visitors. Please come and help!

## NATIONAL ASSOCIATION (NAMHO)

NAMHO Newsletters are published on the NAMHO website. I can recommend these as a reliable source of news about mining history and mining throughout the UK.

The next NAMHO Conference is to be held at Bangor in Wales from July 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> 2014. The theme of the event is “Technical Innovation in the extractive Industries”.

Your Society had agreed to be the host for the 2015 Conference. We are therefore looking for members to lead surface walks and underground trips and to give talks. The theme is “Mining and War”.

## NORTH PENNINES MINING NEWS

### **Dukesfield Smelting Mill, near Slaley**

The Friends of the North Pennines Dukesfield project has completed the 2013 programme of conservation and excavation of the remains of Dukesfield smelting mill. The structure has been repaired and repointed, condensers and chimneys excavated, and a clay and turf capping placed over the spine wall section. The project has a Facebook page “Dukesfield Smelters and Carriers project” and a blog at [Dukesfield.wordpress.com](http://Dukesfield.wordpress.com).

The project includes a Transcription Group who are transcribing archive documents relating to the Mill and the Carriers. A programme of archaeological work is proposed for 2014.

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## **Killhope - the North of England Mining Museum**

In June 2013 Heritage Lottery Fund North East awarded a grant of £428,400 (75%) so that Killhope Museum is able to conserve and bring back into use the Grade II listed Buddle House building, undertake a programme of restoration and refurbishment on site, conserve the core collection of the museum, install new interpretation and exhibitions, and develop a programme of volunteer and training opportunities as well as a new activities and education programme.

During October and November, part of the floor of the Buddle House was excavated and the remains of two round buddles were discovered. This work was part of the North Pennines AONB Altogether Archaeology project.

## **Minco PLC**

Minco is a London listed (AIM Market: MIO) mining exploration and development company engaged in zinc exploration in Ireland and England as well as zinc-lead-copper-silver exploration and development in Newfoundland Canada and manganese development in New Brunswick, Canada.

Minco has commenced a new exploration initiative in the North Pennines, planning an initial US\$1 million exploration programme, including 4,000 metres of diamond drilling.

Minco is exploring for stratiform, replacement-style zinc and lead deposits in the unexplored, more massive limestone formations of the basal Carboniferous stratigraphy. The company believes that there is significant untested potential for such mineralisation approximately 300-400m below previous workings, and such deposits could be significantly larger than any previously discovered. Minco has already identified specific exploration targets and initial exploration drilling has taken place around Nenthead.

The company is holding discussions with Cumbria CC about the possibility of using the Rampgill Mine workshop buildings and woodyard as their local offices and store. Your committee has informally met some of the Minco managers.

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## **NMCS COMMITTEE**

Peter Wilkinson  
Nick Green  
Ray Hall – Treasurer  
Sheila Barker – Membership Secretary  
Peter Jackson – Chair and Newsletter

Contact details are at the end of this Newsletter.

Alastair Myers has now resigned from the committee.

## **NEW IDEAS**

Your committee is always looking for fresh ideas and alternative views. If you think that you might be able to contribute, please tell us about your opinions and ideas. The Society *contacts list* is at the end of this Newsletter.

## **SOCIETY CONTACTS**

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The Society website is at [www.nentheadmines.com](http://www.nentheadmines.com)

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***Best Wishes for Christmas and the New Year!***

***Hope to see you at Nenthead in 2014***