
NENTHEAD MINES CONSERVATION SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2020

FROM THE CHAIRMAN – a personal view

Welcome to our latest Newsletter. It is quite some time since we produced a newsletter and this edition is therefore aiming to report on what has happened on site during 2020.

The Covid 19 pandemic has seriously disrupted our work during the year. However, lockdowns can help to generate new ideas and the Trustees have adopted a routine of fortnightly meetings using Zoom and I believe that we have made greater progress working remotely compared to meeting in-person. The Trustees have also adopted a system of storing meeting documents on-line and have agreed a process which delegates work responsibilities to working groups. More of that elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Have you done your membership renewal? I hope that you used the on-line membership renewal system that will reduce the time spent on administration.

Whenever possible, work has continued on site and a variety of tasks have been completed, or nearly finished. The power of water timber structure has now been demolished and some of the finishing details of that site have been started. The old fencing around the smelting mill has been replaced in part using materials from the Power of Water structure. Some buildings have had pointing repaired and we are developing ideas for projects during 2021. The flooding of The Barracks was a disaster which has taken up a lot of working and thinking time. It has driven the Trustees to consider priorities for the site, to review our risks and to consider our strategic objectives.

14th October was a momentous day when Sheila Barker and I met the NMCS solicitor and signed the documents to finalise the transfer of site ownership from Cumbria to NMCS. The transfer was completed on 23rd October. My quote for the press release was "Our members have put a great deal of time and resources into managing the Mines. We are proud to be taking over the responsibility for caring for this fabulous, historic site". So now it is up to us all, to effectively share the ownership of the site and to come together to show that a group of enthusiasts can

look after the site, help everyone to understand and enjoy the mines, and protect everything that makes the site important.

My New Year's resolution is to make sure that you receive a newsletter at least every two months during the year. Best wishes for the New Year and I hope that we can all meet again during 2021 at Nenthead.

Peter Jackson

SITE OWNERSHIP

On Friday 23rd October 2020, the legal ownership of the Nenthead site was transferred to the Society. The transfer also includes a detached piece of land around the entrance to Brownley Hill Low level.

Cumbria County Council used their powers under the Community Asset Transfer laws. The Society have paid our part of the very reasonable legal costs and there will be some Land Registry fees to pay when the registration is completed.

The Trustees are now drafting a long-term development plan for the landholdings. Two maps showing the approximate boundaries of the landholdings are now on the website at

<https://www.nentheadmines.com/category/members-news/nmcs-landholdings/>

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2020

The Virtual AGM was held on 19th September 2020. The new Trustees team was appointed and a list of Trustees is placed later in this Newsletter. The virtual meeting may not be thought to be an ideal way of conducting the AGM but it has allowed us to appoint Trustees and complete the business for the year 2019-2020.

The current legislation now allows virtual AGMs to be held until 31st March 2021. The Trustees have not yet decided on the date for the 2021 AGM.

Hopefully we may be able to hold an in-person meeting during 2021

WORKING GROUPS

The Trustees have agreed a new Management Structure which includes Working Groups (WG). Each WG has a mandate from the Trustees. Here is a summary of the mandate for each WG.

SITE WG

The practical delivery of site maintenance and development above and below ground.

CONSERVATION WG

Compliance with the designations of the site (SSSI and Ancient Monument) and archaeology, nature and geology.

COLLECTIONS WG

All aspects of the NMCS collections of minerals, artefacts, documents and other information.

MEMBER EXPERIENCE WG

Giving value to Society members.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE WG

All aspects of Visitor's experiences either in person or virtually via our WWW presence.

INFRASTRUCTURE WG

Providing admin. and technical infrastructure, including work planning, marketing and IT services.

STAMP MILL SITE

Members have now completed the demolition of the NPHT Power of Water structure. The Stamp Mill waterwheel pit has been given a temporary substantial cover to prevent visitors falling into the pit, and a new launder has been installed which directs surface water into the wheel pit and onwards to a river drain outlet.

The best timber has been used to replace some of the fence around the smelting mill site and this incorporates the steel railings from the old structure. Some timber has been set aside to provide a foundation for a set of jigs which we intend to recover from Silverband Mine, other timber has been moved to Thompsons Level for shaft protection work, and the remainder has been offered to a group in Nenthead village who are planning a communal raised bed vegetable garden.

Work has continued to fill the old leat channels and the plan is to make the area suitable to use as a car park for visitors.

THOMPSONS LEVEL

Only limited work was possible on site during 2020. Regular safety inspections have taken place and during one check it was noticed that the shaft fill had settled and the surrounding fence was dropping further into the shaft. Some remedial work has now been done to prevent more of the debris falling into the shaft and a stock of large timber has been carried to site. We hope that the shaft top can be reinforced during 2021 and clearance work restarted in the level.

If you are interested in being involved in this work, please email us via admin@nentheadmines.com. We will set up a mailing list to keep you informed about work days.

MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCIAL

From Anne Hopkirk

MEMBERSHIP

I picked up at renewal time last year that we needed to streamline this process for you all. To that end, I've created a new online system which will put you in control of your data. You will be able to login and amend your data at any time and after this year, renewal will be simpler as you will just have to check your data on the pre-completed renewal form. Your financial data will not be shown.

In addition, you can now pay by credit/debit card. We are using a secure system used by many companies the world over for many years. You can still pay by BACS, cheque or cash – this is just another option. It charges us commission, but is less than half that of PayPal – hence the change.

More details were included with this year's renewal request, but rest assured that if you'd prefer a paper form, these are still available.

FINANCE

Most of our income comes from donations from Open Days and Private Visits, followed by the Assay House (Bunkhouse) takings. We have lost all of that in 2020 and 2021 is looking uncertain as well. We have a reserve fund, so we are fine for just now (flood repairs to the Barracks building will take 30+% of that reserve), so we have to look at other ways of finding income. In spite of this, we have not changed our Membership fee again this year – it is still only £10.

To help us raise money, the Government's Gift Aid scheme is now a higher priority than it used to be. We have just made a successful Gift Aid claim for just over

£2,600. This is a backdated claim, but helps offset this year's losses.

Gift Aid works in two ways –

1. If someone signs up to Gift Aid and makes a donation, we can claim back 25% of that donation.
2. There is also a Small Donations Scheme, where we can claim 25% of small donations (up to £30), on 10 x the total from part 1. In a normal year, this gives us more than part 1 does.

To maximise our Gift Aid claim, we are making a change to the way we charge for the bunkhouse. Currently we reduce our bunkhouse charges from £10 a night to £7.50 a night for Members. This is a benefit to members in the eyes of HMRC that disallows a claim for Gift Aid on any Membership fees. The Trustees have therefore decided all Bunkhouse users will pay a flat rate of £10 a night. This will let us claim Gift Aid on Membership fees, where a Gift Aid form has been signed. I hope you understand why we are making this change.

However, there is still no charge for members who are working on site and using the bunkhouse while doing so.

An example:

Joe Bloggs signs a Gift Aid declaration, pays his NMCS fee of £10 and doesn't make a donation. If he signs a Gift Aid declaration, we can claim £2.50 from HMRC. In addition, we can claim back 25% of small donations to the tune of 10 x the Membership fee (£100) – potentially giving us £25 extra per £100 of small donations made.

Can I please ask you to sign up for Gift Aid if you can – the conditions are on the Renewal form - it does not cost you anything.

Your comments on any of this are most welcome – email me at membership@nentheadmines.com. Stay safe.

BARRACKS BUILDING AND FLOODING

THE BARRACKS

The Barracks building has always been a rather damp place but the building became worse in February 2020 when a heavy rainstorm caused a flood which submerged the ground floor to a depth of about 25mm. The ground floor consists of stone slabs sitting on a sand layer incorporating polystyrene sheets which in turn sits on a concrete base. The original specification also indicated that a water proof layer ("tanking") was under the concrete. The sand and the slabs were waterlogged with no prospect of draining the water away.

Fortunately, we had just received consent to allow us to complete the demolition of the office space and walls at

the north end of the building, with the intention of constructing a better, well insulated office. First job was to remove the office contents into the Assay House where a temporary large cupboard was been installed upstairs which eventually was equipped with dehumidifiers and power. The office was then demolished and after a great deal of discussion, we decided to remove all shelving and materials from the Barracks ground floor.

Some of us hoped that the floor might dry out gradually but it became apparent that this was unlikely to happen. Around the same time, we were able to tap into the expertise of Peter Kempsey of Countryside Consultants of Alston (<https://www.countryside-consultants.co.uk>) who gave us his time pro-bono. Although Peter was not the architect for the original conservation work on the Barracks, he has been involved in more recent work on the site and has practical knowledge of buildings in the Pennines.

Using a combination of our own and Peter's knowledge, the agreed plan was to remove the slabs, clear the sand and reinstate with dry sand and dry slabs. The Trustees debated this plan in detail and resolved that a contractor should be employed to carry out this work.

This work was started in December 2020 with the slabs stacked to dry and the sand (with decayed polystyrene sheets) removed. The Drying Room and its floor have not been removed and we might create air circulation routes in the sand under the floor. The good news is that the concrete base is in good condition. There are two sections of the east wall where there is evidence of water leakage at the top of the concrete base which we aim to prevent before the floor slabs are re-laid.

Trustee Nick Green has been our site representative for the Contractor and has also assisted with the work.

FLOODING

The building was flooded because the track above the smelting mill become a drain for water running down the hillside. When the floodwater reached The Barracks area, the existing drains could not cope with the flow. There is a historic culvert and a modern rainwater drain, both of which run to Rampgill Burn. The historic culvert is blocked at its exit and in between, and the modern drain did not have a connection to the area around The Barracks. The Site Working group are planning to improve the capacity of the drains to cope with flooding.

Work has also been carried out on the trackway to divert flood water into Rampgill Burn and we are also planning further short term works to improve that flow. Members have also visited the hillside during heavy rainstorms and we now have an understanding of the origins of the flood water. More about this in our next Newsletter.

DONATIONS

John Crompton has donated a collection of mining tools and several books, photos and maps. John has conserved the tools and mounted them on display boards which makes them practicably portable for displays and exhibitions.

VOLUNTEERS OF THE YEAR

from Joyce Jackson

2020 has been a strange and difficult year and the unanimous view of the Trustees is that we should award the "Volunteer of the Year" title to all 5 nominations.

Colin Agnew "for his continued care and consideration to his work and others. I wouldn't have been able to dismantle the PoW without his knowledge and experience".

Chris Battersby "always attends work meets, carrying out work in an enthusiastic and informative way. Keeps us amused at break time with interesting stories".

Nick Green – "the one who has done the most over the past year".

Anne Hopkirk who "sorted out a Gift Aid solution, giving a significant one-off income boost in a difficult 2020; Designed, developed, delivered an online membership forms process and an online card payments process; Ongoing memberships administration and financial administration; Taken on Trustee responsibilities."

Martyn Langley – "his work on the PoW was second to none. Taking it down safely - without his expertise and time it would have been impossible! Hats off to him!".

ALSTON MOOR MINING LEASES IN THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The chance discovery of a collection of late seventeenth century Alston Moor leases amongst the papers of the Greenwich Hospital at The National Archives in Kew sheds some light on development of mining in the area.¹ It is a period much less well-documented and researched than the following century when the Greenwich Hospital and London Lead Company were at work.

¹ TNA ADM 75/68-9, described in the catalogue merely as 'leases, expired'. Unless otherwise specified, other references to leases in the area are taken from this source.

Within the north-east region as a whole, however, the second half of the seventeenth century witnessed the rise of lead mining from obscurity to a position of national significance. Shipments of lead from Newcastle and Sunderland were probably less than 200 tons before the 1650s, but reached over 2,400 tons by the mid-1670s.² Demand for lead was rising rapidly at home and abroad, not least because of the rebuilding of London after the 'Great Fire' of 1666, and the relatively underexploited North Pennines could be mined more cheaply than the more mature orefields of Derbyshire.

This rapid regional expansion was led by William Blackett of Newcastle, who was by far the most important merchant amongst lead exporters in the 1670s. Most of his lead came from Allendale and Fallowfield, near Acomb, north of the Tyne.

But Blackett also had an important mining lease at Greengill, less than a mile east of Nenthead, from 1671 onwards, for 21 years. The vein at Greengill was not newly prospected by Blackett in 1671. An earlier lease, of 1660, described '*Greengill Raike, old works*' as having been '*lately discovered and worked by Geo Bacon of East Allendale*', who went on to buy the duty ore rights for the whole of Alston Moor for three years in 1664.³

The scar of the hush that can be seen on the hillside there today was presumably thus first worked at least as long ago as the 1650s, if not earlier. However, it must have been deepened greatly –and quickly– after 1671, for Blackett extracted the huge amount of 650 tons of lead ore from Greengill in just six months in 1675, 167 tons in August alone. In addition to the hush at least two shafts were at work there by 1678.⁴

Unfortunately, it is impossible to measure the overall rise in lead ore output in Nentdale and Alston Moor in this period, but the rate at which mining leases were issued gives some indication of the changing pace of development, especially in the 1680s. The mining rights had been owned by the Radcliffe family of Dilston Hall near Corbridge since the 1630s, and it was under the energetic second baronet, Francis (1625-96), head of the family after 1663, that much of this development took

² Tabulated from the Exchequer Port Books TNA E190/192/10-11, 196/6-8.

³ G. Dickinson, *Allendale and Whitfield; Historical Notices of the two parishes*, 2nd edition (1903), p.54. Bacon was originally from Derbyshire, having moved up to the North Pennines in the 1640s.

⁴ W. Hylton Dyer Longstaffe, 'Francis Radcliffe, First Earl of Derwentwater', *Arch Aeliana*, New Ser. Vol 1, (1857), pp.99-100; Michael Blackett to Wm Blackett, 20 Apr 1678, Cambridge Univ Lib Special Collections, Dd 7.26. 650 tons of ore in six months of 1675 would smelt down to around 340 tons of lead, easily more than a tenth of exports from the Tyne in the whole year.

place.⁵ Amongst the National Archives bundles (which may not be comprehensive) eight were issued between 1670 and 1681, but sixteen in the following two years alone. Their basic structure appears the same as that described over fifty years later:

'The Method in which the Derwentwater Family have always managed the Mines in Aldston Moore, is, By granting Tack Notes or Articles of Leases, to make Tryals of the Veins of Ore; which Tack Notes were to continue for a Year, and if the Party to whom the Tack Note was granted, upon Tryal, found the Vein likely to prove well, then he was to have a Lease for 21 or 31 Years, Paying every Fifth Bing of Ore to the Lord'.⁶

The number of leases cannot easily be converted into levels of production but nearly all of them in 1682-3 were granted to Dr David Nairne of Newcastle, or merchant John Errington in partnership with others and who it is probably safe to assume were serious investors. It was also in these years that Radcliffe built his own lead smelting mill at Woodhall, east of Haydon Bridge on the south side of the Tyne, to handle the duty ore he obtained from the Alston Moor mines. An impressive 89 tons of lead was carried away to Newcastle from the mill in July 1686 alone.⁷

Alston Moor lead must have made a significant contribution to overall shipments from the Tyne in these years. In 1679 1,200 tons of lead left the port for coastal and overseas destination. By 1686 the total had more than doubled to 2,600 tons.

Both Nairne and Errington were Catholics. While the Catholic Radcliffe was quite happy to do business with Protestant Newcastle merchants like Blackett, John Rumney, Ambrose Barnes, Nicholas Fenwick and Nicholas Ridley, it is striking that in this great surge of new activity in 1682-3 the principal lessees were his co-religionists. Errington was granted the right to build houses for his miners at Blagill in 1689, possibly representing an attempt to build an industrial hamlet akin to Allenheads and Coalcleugh, developed under Blackett's auspices in the late 1660s.⁸

The same favour to Catholics is apparent during an even more intensive period of development on Alston Moor in

⁵ L.Gooch, 'A Northumbrian Recusant Gentry Family: The Radcliffes of Dilston in the long Seventeenth Century', *The Dilston Papers*, 1, (2007).

⁶ Memo by John Watson, agent to the estate, 22 Dec 1732: TNA ADM 75/157.

⁷ J.Fenwick (ed) 'Extracts from the Accounts of the Steward of Sir Francis Radclyffe, Bart., at Dilston, from June 1686 to June 1687', AA, New Ser. Vol 2, (1858) p.163.

⁸ TNA ADM 75/68; G.Finch, 'Allenheads transformed; the rapid growth of a seventeenth century mining settlement', *exham Historian*, 29, (2019).

the early 1690s. Sixty lead mining leases in Nentdale and Alston Moor were issued between 1689 and 1695, some to members of the Errington family and also to Sir William Creagh, another Catholic merchant in Newcastle. The shared religion is one thing, but a much stronger feature is the prominence of Newcastle merchants amongst the lessees. From Blackett in the early 1670s to Creagh in the 1690s, it was predominantly Newcastle capital and enterprise which opened up mining in the area, enthusiastically encouraged by Sir Francis Radcliffe, 1st Earl of Derwentwater from 1688.⁹

⁹ The development of the lead mining in the northeast is explored more widely in a new book I am preparing on the Blacketts, Newcastle and the regional lead industry due for publication in 2021.

Greg Finch

NMCS TRUSTEES

Sheila Barker
Chris Chilton
Graham Derbyshire
Nick Green
Andy Hopkirk
Anne Hopkirk
Peter Jackson
Martyn Langley
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NMCS is a charitable incorporated organization, number 1166281.
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Our website is www.nentheadmines.com

When in Nenthead.....

Visit The Hive – an Arts and Visitor Centre with Cafe

<https://hivenenthead.co.uk>

Open Thursday to Sunday in winter. Best to phone in advance 01434 408040 to confirm opening times and services.

Use the Community Shop – Mon-Fri 0800 to 1730, Saturdays 0800-1500, Sundays 0900-1400. Post office weekday mornings. (The Shop is a community cooperative).

The Hive and the Shop both have Facebook pages.