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BUCKDEN OUT MOOR LEAD SMELTING MILL

J.M. Dickinson

Situation: In Buckden Gill, Buckden near Grassington
North Yorkshire. Alt. 1700 AOD. NGR. 50954799

History

Early mining for lead was carried out on Buckden Out Moor where the Gavel Veins run northwards into Bishopdale Head. These veins were first worked by small hand shafts along their outcrop and later by larger shafts, equipped with whimseys, sunk through the millstone grits into the limestones on the flanks of Buckden Pike. The main shafts are at an altitude of 1,800 AOD and explored the veins and flats under the Pike down to approximately 1,656 AOD.

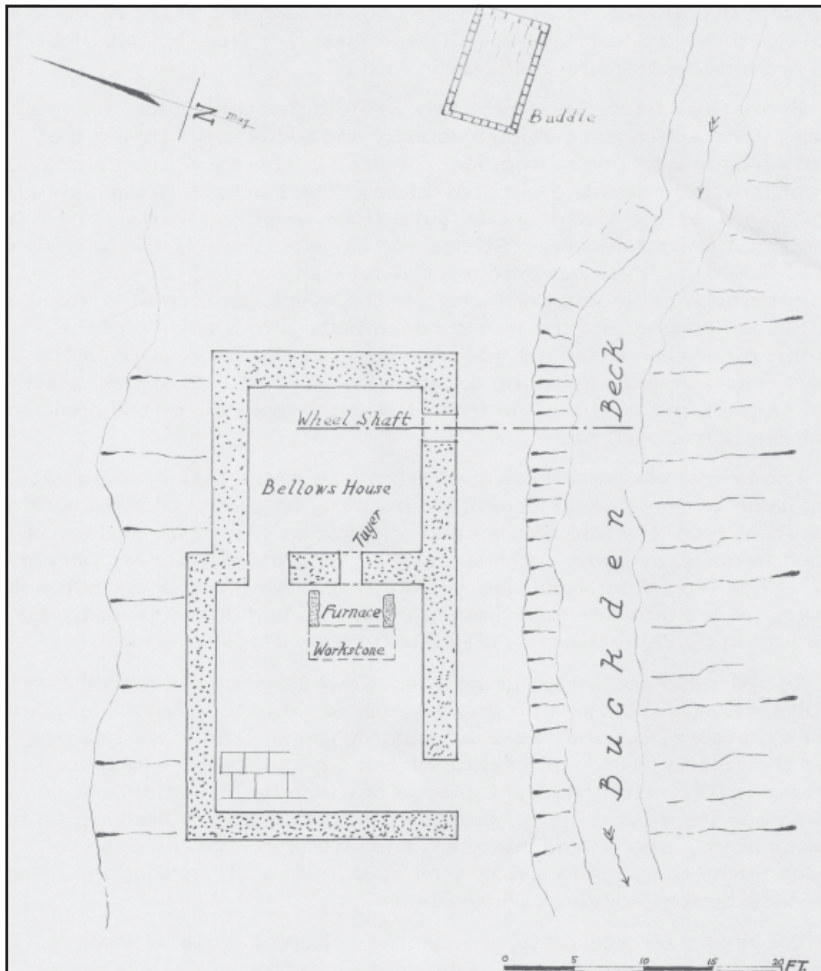
It can be stated that the mill was built in 1698, as reference to it is made in 1702 when it is said to have been smelting for four years. In 1718 the mill is called the 'Over Mill' but whether this refers to it being over the hill from the Bishopdale Mines, or because it used an overshot water wheel, is not known.

In 1713 a new mill was built on Birks Fell (SD932768) comprising an open ore hearth and a slag hearth and this, no doubt, led to the closure of the Over Mill. The date of closure is not known, but an account in the Birks Mill records states 'Willm Chapman ffor carage of some olde harthstones ffrom the olde mill on Buckden Out Moor. Pd.2/-' 1733/34 (sic). Over the years the mill was robbed of stone and materials and eventually the site was lost.

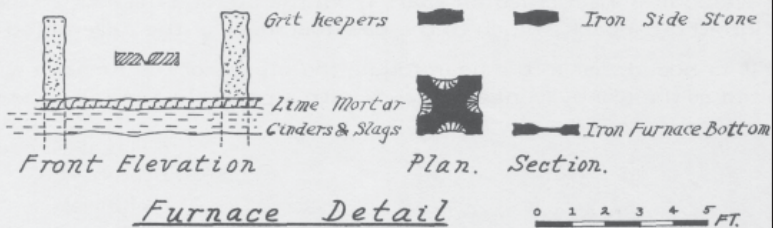
Re-discovery and Excavation

During 1974/75 the Society was engaged in a detailed study and survey of the Bishopdale Head and Buckden Gavel Mines and in the course of this effort, the question of the location of the Over Mill was raised. No trace could be found at Bishopdale Head or on the Out Moor.

Some time in the summer of 1975 the writer and Caleb Wade were camping at Buckden. One wet afternoon we set off up Buckden Gill to the Gavel Mine and on approaching the foot of the tips of the latter's dressing floors, the aged members stopped for a rest on the site of a small dressing floor at the side of the beck. This dressing floor had been pondered over throughout the years. Why was it so? The Gavel Mine had its own dressing floors and, in fact, the spoil from the latter spilled down almost onto the site being rested upon. The conclusion was that the tips of the Gavel Mine now overlay an earlier dressing floor used for the ore mined in Bishopdale head. A ritual search for minerals was made among the spoil heaps and near to the beck several samples of ore hearth slag were found. A more detailed examination of the site was then made. To the east, a small paved area could well have been the remains of a buddle or trunking box and to the west of this was a large heap of fine tailings apparently held from slipping into the beck by a low dry stone wall. A preliminary dig along the [38] line of the wall revealed a doorway. In view of the



Plan of Buckden Out Moor Lead Smelting Mill



Furnace Detail

BUCKDEN OUT MOOR LEAD SMELTING MILL

finding of slags and the realisation that Buckden Beck was the only stream in the Out Moor area capable of driving a water wheel all year round, it was thought that this would prove to be the site of the Over Mill.

Some time later, the first of three field meetings was held to explore the site. The actual excavation was easy and tedious, involving the shovelling of fine tailings, in places 7ft deep. The lower levels provided a mix of building stone and old grey slate. The Furnace House was cleared at first to within one foot of the original floor level and by the time this was accomplished the Keeper Stones and Tuyere Stone of the furnace were visible. The final excavation to floor level was carried out with some care in the hope of finding artefacts. In the event, an iron side stone was found in the doorway and the iron furnace bottom in a corner of the building; other than these nothing else was found. Excavation of the Bellows House revealed nothing except a hole in the wall for the wheel shaft. Outside the building, no indication of a wheel pit or the position or type of wheel has been found.

The preservation and removal from site of the pieces of furnace found, deserve some description (and possibly an award of some kind!) The descent from the site at the head of Buckden Gill to the village of Buckden is not easy by any standards, dropping 912ft in three quarters of a mile. The iron side stone was moved first. Weighing about 80lbs it was carefully loaded into a rucksack and, after this had disintegrated, was carried down by relay via the Gill bottom and waterfalls.

The furnace bottom weighing about 2cwt presented a rather more difficult problem; at one time there was wild talk about landrovers and farmers tractors, but instead a large party (some larger than others) visited the site in the frosts of mid-winter equipped with a long rope. The return route ran along the top edge of the Gill with an almost vertical descent near its mouth. It is reported that things went quite well up to the latter point, when furnace bottom and anchor man were seen to disappear over the edge in a flurry of sods, rope, arms and legs. Fortunately the furnace bottom survived undamaged.

The next attempt was to remove the gritstone Tuyere Stone. For this purpose and to ease the clearing of spoil from the Bellows House, a builder's wheelbarrow was obtained and to make it easy to transport up the Gill, was made dismantlable. However, upon arrival at Buckden carpark it was found that the spanners had been left behind. Therefore a direct assault on Buckden Gill with wheelbarrow was made from 788 AOD to 1700 AOD. (Is this a British Record ?). The return journey with the Tuyere Stone was quite spectacular apart from the 50 mph descent of the gill flank into the carpark, much to the bewilderment of the assembled trippers.

It is hoped that in the near future the pieces of the furnace will be exhibited at the Earby Mines Museum with a possible partial reconstruction.

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