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SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES ON THE MINING REGION OF ALSTON MOOR

by

PETER JACKSON

Alston Moor lies wholly within the eastern extremity of Cumberland and includes the head of the River South Tyne and its associated tributary, the Nent. The main centre is Alston, a small market town, lying at a height of 1400 feet, with smaller settlements at Garrigill and Nenthead. The area has a bleak aspect and is surrounded almost entirely by high moorland, which renders communication difficult.

The following account is based on field work between 1964 and 1969, most of which has been concentrated in the valley of the Nent, particularly around Nenthead. Work has been hampered by the inaccessibility of the area, but it can be claimed that the majority of the mine workings have been investigated, at least on the surface.

AVAILABLE INFORMATION

For the early history of the area we have to rely upon Sopwith (1833) and Wallace (1890), but later history is poorly documented as well. The Records of the London Lead Co., one of the biggest operators [41] in the area in the past are preserved at Newcastle¹ and these proved to be a mine of information, particularly with regard to underground plans.

The geology is well documented, most of this being well summarised by Dunham (1948) and there are several other useful works on the area.

With the relatively recent working of the mines compared to other areas, there is a large amount of spoken information available from the local inhabitants, but some of this should be treated with care.

SURVEY METHODS

Whilst engaged in the field work, it was thought imperative to record the exact location of mine entrances and their present condition as a first priority. Some mines have also been investigated underground, but most of the underground effort has been concentrated at Nenthead. In addition, sketch surveys were made of associated plant and buildings, and a start has been made on producing scale drawings of the more interesting buildings.

PRESENT MINING POSITION

No metal mining is being undertaken, though there are three active anthracite mines. Several mines have been prospected in recent years, though up to the time of writing no further developments had taken place. The Black Burn Level and Roughside mine have been prospected, and the Nentsberry Hagsgs Horse Level has been reopened, ostensibly for scrap recovery.

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Black Ashgill Low Level A9 NY 7775.4110 1550 OD

The entrance is walled-up except for a small culvert, with affords access. Exploration was carried out for 200 yards to a point where [43] deep mud and water made difficulties. The level is otherwise in excellent condition.

Black Burn Level A10 NY 699.427 1050 OD

During 1965 the level was reopened by Mr. W. Stoddert as a fluorspar prospect but abandoned in the same year. The main crosscut is in excellent condition and open to Rotherhope Fell vein. Here the engine rooms for No.1 and No.2 Underground Shafts are visible, and the cages are in position on No.2 Shaft. Both shafts are flooded to the top. To the west the level is open for 179 yards to a complete block, in concrete arching. At one point there is a hole in the level sole, and this showed that the concrete tunnel was floating on the water in the flooded stopes. To the east, the level is blocked after 60 yards. It is quite probable that the level is now blocked beyond Victoria vein due to a strong waterfall which washes debris into the level.

Black Moss Wood Level* A11 NY 758.426 1520 OD

An ancient level which is blocked at the entrance.

Blagill Moss Level* A12 NY 751.472 1250 OD

Driven directly into the main limestone, this level has collapsed at the entrance.

Bloomsberry Level A13

See under Brownley Hill Low Level.

Browngill Level A14 NY 7515.4245 1425 OD

The entrance, a few yards to the east of the Alston-Middleton road, is walled up, and could probably be easily opened.

Brownley Hill High Level A15 NY 779.449 1500 OD

Blocked 10 yards from the entrance, in shale.

Brownley Hill Low Level A13 NY 776.446 1375 OD

Accessible for long distances, and very extensive. Little work has been done here due to heavy demands by other mines.

Caplecleugh Level A16 NY 7865.4230 1775 OD

Originally blocked at the entrance, this level was dug out and [44] found to be blocked under a run-in surface shaft a few yards from the entrance.

Caplecleugh Low or Horse Level A17 NY 781.435 1430 OD

This level was originally blocked by a fall on the crosscut to Black Ashgill vein which was subsequently cleared to give access to the main workings at the head of the valley. The journey is rather arduous and combines deep water with dangerous falls. On the main vein the workings to the east are

flooded due to a collapsed rise holding water back, whilst to the west the workings are open, though often up to 4 feet deep in water. The exploration has been discontinued for the time being to allow other work to be completed.

Carr's Level A18 NY 7850.4315 1525 OD
An old level open for a short distance with several interesting workings. It is reported that a collapse has blocked off the innermost workings.

Cash-well Level A19 NY 717.368 1950 OD
When visited in November 1965 this level was walled up at the entrance. It was subsequently reopened by Mr. M. Maddison as a fluorspar prospect, for 79 yards to a point where a bad blockage occurs, and subsequently abandoned.

Cocklake Level* A21 NY 7560.4695 1400 OD
A small flank level has been driven into a string here and is blocked at the entrance. Probably very ancient.

Colonel's Level A22 NY 726.425 1500 OD
In November 1967 the level was open for 59 yards to a fall holding back 3 feet of water. The first 33 yards of the level are arched, and the arching commences again at the fall.

Coulson's Level A23 NY 787.423 1775 OD
An old level into Middlecleugh North vein with a small stoping in the vein. An attempt was made to reopen it as a fluorspar prospect during 1966, but it was soon abandoned.

Cowperdykeheads Level A24 NY 7415.4260 1400 OD
This level is the water supply for Garrigill, and consequently inaccessible.

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Cross Fell High Level A25 NY 711.358 2300 OD
Open and in good condition at the entrance.

Cross Fell Low Level A26 NY 715.361 2200 OD
Badly blocked 10 yards from the entrance, due to ground subsidence.

Eden Braes Level A71 NY 7605.4540 1185 OD
Entrance open and level appears to be in good condition.

Farnberry Level A72 NY 732.448 1385 OD
Walled up at the entrance, and very close to Holyfield Low Level. Would be opened up fairly easily.

Flowedge Level A73 NY 736.444 1400 OD
A large level which is open and in excellent condition.

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- Firestone Level** A29 NY 7875.4350 1650 OD
Driven into Rampgill vein and in good condition at the entrance.
The dumps are at present being turned over for fluorspar.
- Fistas Rake East Level*** A30 NY 744.476 1440 OD
An old high level on Fistas Rake which is blocked at the entrance, but could be reopened comparatively easily.
- Fistas Rake High Level** A31 NY 741.473 1250 OD
Open and slightly wet, though reported to be blocked not far from the entrance. Barytocalcite is abundant on the dumps.
- Fistas Rake Low Level** A32 NY 7395.4725 1125 OD
A very old level of small cross-section, which is partially walled-up. Water flows out over the wall.
- Fletchers Level** A33
See under Hundybridge High Level
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- Fletchers Low Level** A39
See under Hundybridge Low Level.
- Force Level*** A34 NY 7860.4305 1550 OD
Lies on the west side of the river Nent close to waterfall above Nenthead smelt mill. It was revealed by floods in 1968 which washed away dumps covering the entrance.
- Foreshield Level** A35 NY 752.472 1265 OD
Badly blocked at the entrance, and almost obliterated.
- Foreshield Shaft** A36 NY 7485.4675 1110 OD
One of the air shafts for the Nentforce Level, now capped with concrete.
- Galligill Sike No.1 High Level*** A74 NY 757.443 1500 OD
A very small level which is walled up at the entrance.
- Galligill Sike No.2 High Level*** A75 NY 7575.4430 1490 OD
A small level, which is open and dry.
- Galligill Sike Low Level** A37 NY 7585.4550
A very large horse level, which is open and relatively dry.
- Grassfield Level** A38 NY 7670.4460 1332 OD
The entrance is well concealed and almost walled-up, lying immediately to the north of the road: very little water issues forth.

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Middlecleugh Level A45 NY 789.424 1750 OD

In November 1965 the level was blocked 10 yards from the entrance. This block was subsequently cleared by the lessees and the level was surveyed during June and August. During a visit in June 1967 the level was blocked again. In one of the foreheads of the level are the dates 1790 and 1798.

Middlecleugh High Level* A46 NY 7885.4775 1950 OD

An old short level to the east of Perrys Dam, which is open to the forehead and rather wet.

Middle Fell Level* A80 NY 744.461 1325 OD

Blocked at the entrance and well grassed over.

Mill Level A47 NY 715.364 2050 OD

The level is open, but the first 20 yards of the arching has collapsed, and is holding back about 2 feet of water.

Nattrass Level A81 NY 735.448 1400 OD

The entrance is walled-up, but a collapse on the line of the level indicates a probable block.

Nattrass Low Level A82 NY 7315.4475 1275 OD

Open and in good condition with a small amount of water flowing out.

Nells Well Level A48 NY 7825.4375 1455 OD

A small crosscut level which is open for about 125 yards to a block. It intersects most of the major cross veins of the area, and these are well exposed in the level.

Nenthead Fields North Level A49 NY 7770.4385 1430 OD

Blocked at the entrance.

Nenthead Fields South Level A83 NY 7785.4370 1430 OD

Blocked at entrance, and well grassed over.

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Nentsberry Hags Horse Level A50 NY 766.450 1250 OD

Entrance is immediately east of the main road, and is gated. (See opening paragraphs.)

Rampgill Level A51 NY 782.435 1432 OD

Open for a long distance with 3 feet of water in the levels for long distances. The main level on Rampgill vein is blocked by a run-in rise immediately after Rampgill Cross vein. This block was dug during August 1967, but the attempt to clear it was unsuccessful. A large kibble lies by the Engine Sump which comes to surface immediately north west of the Nenthead-Coalcleugh

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Watergreens Level* A62 NY 7450.4665 1100 OD
The level entrance is open but there are several collapses in the field above and it is known that the first section of the level was driven through boulder clay.

Wellhopeknot Level A63 NY 7690.4085 1500 OD
The level is silted-up to within 3 feet of the roof, but is otherwise in good condition.

Whitesike Level A14
See under Browngill Level.

Whitewell Level A87 NY 7495.4615 1300 OD
The level entrance has collapsed and is well grassed over. Probably a very old trial.

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Additions

Ashgill East Level* A94 NY 7810.4135 1750 OD
Small old trial, collapsed at the entrance.

Birds Nest Level* A101 NY 755.492 1190 OD
Walled up at entrance; otherwise in good condition.

Brewery Shaft A95 NY 7835.4350 1525 OD
The final shaft on the Nentforce level: it is open at the top but covered by timbers. It is best seen in Rampgill Level, which intersects it.

East Wellhopeknot Level* A90 NY 777.411 1600 OD
Entrance collapsed and the level contains about 4 feet 6 inches of water.

Little Gill Level A93 NY 777.395 1725 OD
Entrance collapsed and well grassed over.

Little Gill South Level* A96 NY 777.394 1740 OD
An old drift exposed in the side of the stream, and flooded up to 2 feet from the roof.

Nentforce Level A92 NY 7190.4675 890 OD
In use as a water supply for the Alston Foundry Co.

Nentsberry No.1 Level* A97 NY 7625.4545 1350 OD
Blocked at entrance.

Nentsberry No.2 Level* A98 NY 7630.4535 1250 OD
Blocked at the entrance.

Nentsberry No.3 Level* A99 NY 7635.4525 1350 OD
Blocked at entrance, and very old.

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Nentsberry No.4 Level* A100 NY 7640.4525 1350 OD
Entrance collapsed, and is well grassed over.

Nentsberry Bridge Level* A88 NY 768.449 1275 OD
Walled up at the entrance; very little water coming out.

South Nentsberry Level* A89 NY 765.449 1225 OD
The level appears to be in good condition; the entrance section was once used as an explosives store for Hags Level.

South Tyne Level* A102 NY 754.403 1170 OD
Open and in excellent condition, this is a small old-mans level, which is not documented elsewhere.

Wellgill Shaft A91 NY 7775.4435 1375 OD
The shaft top is in a small building, and is covered with closely spaced rails. The ladders are in position in the shaft.

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10th May, 1969.

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