TRANSACTIONS
1960-61

Vol. One **Number One**

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Moorhouse, J.W. 1961
"When the Boom Was On, or Reminiscences of Mining Days at Cononley"
Transactions, 1960-61, Vol.1 No.1, pp.49-57

Published by the

THE NORTHERN CAVERN & MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY
SKIPTON U.K.

NB
This publication was originally issued in the 10 by 8 inch format then used by the society. It has now been digitised and reformatted at A5. This has changed the original pagination of articles, which is given in square brackets.

"WHEN THE BOOM WAS ON", OR; REMINISCENCES OF MINING DAYS AT CONONLEY

J.W. Moorhouse

Transcribed from the original manuscript notebooks
by Robert T. Clough, 1961.

When J.W. Moorhouse of Main Street, Cononley died in 1959 at the age of eighty, he left two exercise books containing his notes and jottings taken down over four decades. These notes contain a considerable amount of information relating to mining and the living conditions of the lead miners of Cononley. Although Moorhouse was not himself connected with mining work for his living, he did throughout his life maintain a lively interest in the old industry. In his younger days Mr. Moorhouse lived at Ball Croft Farm, Cononley, combining some small farming with the cobbling of boots and shoes.

He was not an educated man in the modern sense of the word; but he had a full appreciation of the countryside, a sense which he put to valuable use as the Clerk of the works to the Airedale Drainage Commissioners, a post which he held for a long number of years until his retirement in September, 1955. Even after his retirement he continued to give the commissioners the benefit of his valuable experience and knowledge of the drainage area; for which service they were willing to pay to him the sum of ten pounds annually, in addition to an hourly payment for his services.

Much of the interest and character of the notes made by Mr. Moorhouse, lie in their apparent lack of cohesion, and I am afraid also to a certain extent to their lack of complete accuracy; however they were never intended to be academically correct records, and it is for the historian to glean what he will from such notes as are now to follow. It is often the case that a after the death of a local sage or "antiquary", that his relatives put aside his old "books", which in most cases soon become [49] lost to his family and to posterity; information which is often quite impossible to replace unless it has been properly recorded.

To have reproduced the following pages in a fully edited form would have taken away much of their interest; hence these notes have been quoted as written in the manuscript, with the exception of a little amendment to the punctuation.

"Not much work recorded until the 1820s or 1830s, when John Garth started opposite Hadfield House, Cononley; this place is clearly visible today. He did not succeed and lost his money. In the 1830s the Duke took up the work and already had mining interests at various places. Mr. James Eddy of Carleton Grange was the Duke's agent: he had charge of the Duke's mines at

Grassington, Hebden, Stump Cross, Craven Moor and mines in Derbyshire, Snailbeach in Shropshire and in the Lake District; offices were at Carleton.

"He was one of the greatest mining experts of the day and said to be the cleverest man at working the dial. This I ought to explain was an instrument which was supposed to indicate the presence or otherwise of the metal; I cannot tell much about the instrument beyond the fact that it was very light, stood on a tripod and had a face like a clock face. It seemed to me to leave much to the judgement, or instinct; or was it the personality of the man who operated it.

"James [Stephen] Eddy, (1800-61) it was, who first put down the shafts and drove the levels. He was helped and succeeded by his son James Ray Eddy, (Fellow of the Geological Society of London – Ed.), (1833-1918), who really was the 'big noise' in the Cononley Mines. He had charge during and through the boom years and up to the time of closing down. He was a very decided character in every way and did with great thoroughness whatever he took in hand. He was a well known musician, conducted Carleton Church choir, also a choral society at Skipton which counted amongst its members all the elite of the district together with a sprinkling of the working class who possessed voices of outstanding merit. He had some connection with the Halle Orchestra which came down from Manchester to accompany his concerts and [50] he was able to call on some of the best known singers of the day to act as principals. He was on the management committee of the Leeds Musical Festival and more than once took his singers to the festival both afternoon and evening sessions, standing all the expenses and providing a first class lunch and supper. There is living in our village a lady who sang in this old time choir and journeyed to the Leeds Festival with Mr. Eddy. Some of the best known musicians of today owe much to the training their fathers and grandfathers received at the hands of Mr. Eddy.

"Not only was this man a musician; he was a scientist 'of the very first water'. His business was his hobby and as befits a mining engineer his pet subject was geology and the making of geological maps. Twice he lectured before the British Association; 'Lead Mining in Craven' and 'The Geology of the Craven Dales'. Many famous scientists visited his home and the mines; he was the friend and associate of the Einsteins', Jeans', Rutherfords', Thompsons', and Madame Curies' of his day. This was the man who was in charge through the most important period of the mine working; he it was who put down the Garforth Shaft, extended the incline, sunk the Engine Shaft, the deepest of the workings, and carried out experiments numerous and varied and finally closed down the works. He was commander in chief, 'boss of the show' in every sense of the word. He let the pitches and engaged the men, his word was law and his decision final. I have not heard that he was a bully, though he could be very stern indeed, especially when he found men guilty of some neglect which involved the safety of their follows. His verdict was invariably the same; "go to the surface and work my pleasure". This meant

working at labourers wages until he thought fit to let them another pitch. This seems to have been the principal if not the only cause of dispute between him and his men. He could, and did command the respect and obedience of all. Such was James Ray Eddy; he died some seven years ago. He had a sad trouble; his two sons in training at Cambridge were both drowned. He never seemed to get over it and was never the same again. [This part written in 1925, Ed.). After him, (Mr. Eddy) there were three captains in charge of the works. The first of these lived at Hadfield House; the present Nethergill House and was his office. The first captain appears to have been Remphrey, a Scotsman, who had to do with the beginnings; [51] then came a man called Smith, he did not reign long. Last and greatest and most important came Capt. Tom Ward, he reigned longest, and indeed he only finished when the mines closed down. He it was who built Brooklyn now the home of Miss Tetley. He was the perfect foil for James Eddy; if one was commander, the other was a leader of men. He did not lead from behind if there was heavy, risky and dangerous work to do, he was there in the front doing two men's work. James Eddy often deferred his opinion and admitted that in some ways Tom Ward was master. Captain Ward sunk the Good Hope Shaft, better known perhaps as 'Pismire'. The story goes that when both Eddys together with geologists from Leeds University, the British Association and mining engineers were gathered on the level below Weasel Green; all tried their skill with the dial, with varying results. Mr. Eddy Snr, said, 'Tom, take the instrument'. Mr. Ward did so, and staked his pitch, others differed; 'Try again Tom', he did so, and marked the same place. Calling him aside, he said, 'I will take these lot up the gill, you stop and try again. On their return he said, 'I have tried all I know, and with all respect to the learning and experience of these men, I cannot alter more than a few inches. In due course the shaft was completed within a yard of the bottom where the richest deposits yet found were located. (Mrs Ward)

"So much for the men who were responsible for the development and working of the mines.

"Drinking Water – Mining fouled the streams, with the result that the Duke had to provide a supply of water, wells were set up at the top of the village near the Institute, opposite Cross Farm and near the 'Co-op'. Wells were raised by public subscription, the Duke providing the supply. Only one well now remains; near Calvert's Lane just below the gate turning from Stockshott Lane to Scarcliffe Farm.

"In the early 1830s work began in earnest. The low level was driven, the waterwheel erected for the grinding mill, stamps set up and a smelt mill and furnace erected. By the late 1840s work was in 'full blast', men came from Wales and Cornwall; the latter did not mix with the Yorkshire men, who would not work with them, they said that: 'The beggars could not put up a prop fit for a canary to peak on'. They had been used to hard rock and were lost in the millstone grit, shale, clay, and feldspar, which [52] alternated

and mixed here. It was at this time that the Club Row Building Society was founded, (7th August, 1832) also at this time one of the new power engines was installed and work began in earnest at the top mines. Prior to this all had been done either by the waterwheel or by man-power.

"There were two divisions at the mine, – the top 'floorings' and the low floorings. The underground works were now beginning. Where the water company tank now is in this drift and ran up the valley across Brigg Piece, crossed the road and ran down the fields towards Glusburn Beck, into which stream part of the water flows before entering Miner's Dam Field, the level forks the turn to the left, goes close to Manor House (Overend's), straight across the moor piece till it ends in the field behind Lingstead. The other fork went to the right under Weasel Green, across the road and right away to the top of Pismire Gill. A large wooden 'Jenny' stood on the level to the right of the road below Weasel Green. The metal from the west Level (?) was drawn to the top by a horse which walked round the huge wooden cage, thus winding up the kibble. In addition to this there was the Incline, perhaps the most important work they made; it sloped quite steeply into the ground; pitches being worked to the left and right of the main gallery. Levels ran across Gib in various directions; these only fielded small portions of metal and were finally abandoned, one of them being eventually used as a flue for the smelting mill. There was also the Engine Shaft, an experiment in deep working; this shaft needed artificial ventilation, a boy turning a handle which revolved a fan.

"A certain amount of metal was found in the limestone quarry at Park Head, this the Duke claimed. A trestle bridge spanned the valley from bellow Little Gibb to the lower end of Weasel Green Meadow. Metal was drawn up the incline by the engine power; as much as possible of the dross being removed and the remainder man-power waggoned across the bridge, where it was tipped down a tube known as the 'hopper' into the Low Level and waggoned down to the Low Floorings, again by man-power to be ground, dressed and finally smelted and turned into pig lead. The archways seem just as good as ever; while the lines laid, and the waggons used by these old time miners are still in existence and quite recently have been in use. I myself, have made more than one trip up the levels in one of those [53] waggons. The Garforth's of High Hall, Steeton, were Lords of the Manor. Twenty one pigs of lead made a ton one of which belonged to the Garforth family, (royalty owners). Mr. Bennet Johns, accountant of Ulverston, (was a villager trained by Mr. Eddy) had charge of all the financial matters in connection with the Duke's mining interests.

"Life during the Boom. During the boom years every household in Cononley had lodgers; the population rising to over 1500 people. The long terrace had not yet been built; the 'club row' was in course of erection. These houses were built for hand loom weaving and could not take lodgers. Many of the miners worked two shifts, and many of the houses worked two shifts as well.

In fact the beds were never cold. The bottom of West Lane was known as the 'Miner's Square', every house having a double compliment of lodgers: just how they managed when it was a wet washing day, and the bedding failed to get dry, I will leave to you. One house situated in a farm yard known as, 'The flag of all Nations', and had two large bedrooms; in these two rooms the proprietor managed to accommodate no less than eleven miners and millworkers. Overcrowding: that from the eight houses in the court known as Piccadilly, now called Gordon Terrace, no fewer than forty-nine schoolchildren turned out each morning to go to school; there were others not yet old enough to do so.

"At this time Cononley Hall was a 'kind of hostel', eleven persons found shelter under its roof. Capt. Eddy was 'bang up to date' with his methods, he selected for important posts young men of ability, newly married; these were the people who lived at the hall. I am told that they bought co-operatively and had a communal kitchen. Some were of Scottish descent; these scoured the fields and hedgerows for fallen wool which they carded and spun by hand, and knitted it into socks and scarves for their menfolk.

"Closing of the mines. It is not easy to fix the exact date of closure. Mr. Eddy was never the same after the loss of his two sons. The office at the mines was the first vicarage at Cononley, and was enlarged to accommodate the vicar's large family; Nethergill House. Possibly the mines were closed in 1869. Prices dropped; many tons of lead lay in the canal wharf at Gargrave. The power loom had 'got into its stride'. The last man to be paid off at the mines [54] was Thomas Cherry. William Hudson (Bill-o-Wilks) farmed the land and acted as a sort of caretaker for many years; daily going to Carleton to work in the gardens and on the farm at the Grange, the home of James Ray Eddy. At this time the works were intact, (1870s Ed.) the writer's father making periodical inspections of the works and reporting to Mr. Eddy. In 1886 a worthwhile order came to hand, and thus: it came about that father want to Nelson 'then on the make' to contact an old miner. He came and an inspection was made and it was decided that the lead could be got in Good Hope Shaft, (Pismire West Level). Plans were made and William Hudson and William Mackwell got the ore; the former lived with us while the job lasted. Dobbin was once more put into harness to wind up the kibble. They struck quite a good seam and got it with the minimum of dross; they did not start up the smelt mill or other works; William Overend carted it to Grassington to be dressed. Thus ended lead mining.

"Work at the Mines. Wages: blacksmith's shop, joiners, stamps, grinding, waterwheel, surface workers, - 12s 6d a week. (in the 1860s Ed.)

"Method of Working. Each miner was let a pitch of so many fathoms, each Fathom equal to 5 feet [No, it was 6]. On a given date monthly, each in their turn brought what they had got to the 'floorings'; a flat area covered with flags near the waterwheel. Here the whole was mixed by shovelling and

turning over. What was considered a fair sample was taken, heated until it was dry, then smelted in a miniature furnace. From the proportion of lean to dross was reckoned the price per ton that the miner got for his own metal dug from each particular pitch. In the case of a dispute the office boy was blindfolded, turned round and given a shovel to take a sample. He was then taken to another part of the heap and a third sample was taken. All three samples were tested, the average of the three then gave the price and no comment. In working the miniature furnace a small amount of silver came to light and was carefully collected in the 'fullness of time'; enough was collected to make a chain for Capt. Ward: further there had been much dodgery by those with good pitches. Many and varied were the tricks they played to make the pitches look much poorer than they actually were.

General notes:
1809 – Johnson Atkinson Busfield elected to the [55] Registrarship of the West Riding Registry of Deeds at Wakefield, a coveted sinecure. He lived at Cononley Hall.

1859 – Cononley Hall was a hostel for miners. The Hall was owned by a Mr J. Turner, and descendants, 1803-80.

1865 – James Lund Esq., of Malsis Hall near Cross Hills bought the Cononley Estate, excluding the hall.

Stephen Eddy – born 14th June, 1800; died 6th July, 1861.
James Ray Eddy – born 18th April, 1833; died 13th November, 1918.
The two sons of the above were drowned at Cambridge on 29th April 1880, aged 18 and 19 years; both were students.

"When the Duke of Devonshire came of age in 1854 as Marquis of Hartington, one of the attractions of his coming of age was a cricket match held at Grassington and played between the Cononley and Wharfedale lead miners. H. Lewis and Tom Peel of Cononley took part. There was a great dinner afterwards at the Devonshire Hotel (purely a man's affair). This was possibly the first cricket match played in the district.

"William Towers, schoolmaster at Cononley for 50 years; 'he took successive generations through the industrial revolution'. He retired in 1889 and was presented with a testimonial and a purse of gold.

"Early Records. 'We know, because the Romans themselves left particulars and details; these may be found in the Victoria County History of Yorkshire, a copy of which may be found in the Skipton Public Library.' [One of Mr. Moorhouse's best pieces of unconscious humour, Ed.]

"William Brown. He travelled extensively on the continent, studying mining methods. It was he who had the chimney moved from its former position on

Low Gib. (Just above the water company's tanks) to its present place at the summit. It was found that this new position resulted in more lead being extracted from the ore than previously; whether the increase in height gave a keener draught or the longer flue cooled the smoke and left a greater residue in the flue, I am unable to say. Certain it is that a swamp [56] on the top was drained and a channel made, so that the water could be turned into the flue, and the accumulated residue which was almost pure lead, swilled into a trough just above the smelt mill, and then again put through the furnace. Another result of this alteration was that within two years the smoke had removed every scrap of vegetation from the moor; the whole surface was as bare as the road and in fact became a sort of playing field for the district. Knurr and Spell matches were frequently held there. Rabbit coursing, pigeon shoots and cock-fighting also took place on this moor. Several schools of gamblers met there (one of these possessed a two headed coin). Many prize fights took place there, famous bruisers from Bradford, Leeds and the Lancashire towns fought battles there; and there were frequently rows and fisticuffs amongst the spectators. Twenty seven acres of moor surround the chimney.

The latter pages of the manuscript were written when Mr. Moorhouse was nearly eighty years of age; here his writing is confused and disjointed and the author has not thought it politic to quote from this portion.

The author wishes to express his especial thanks to Mr. D.L. Moorhouse, of 30, Station Road, Cross Hills near Skipton-in-Craven, a nephew of the late Mr. J.W. Moorhouse, for his permission allowing the author to transcribe and make public for the first time these interesting reminiscences of the mining days at Cononley.

[57]