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Report on the First Field Meeting.

The Millclose Mines at Darley Dale, Derbyshire.

Members met at the Darley Institute at 11 am and proceeded to the main entrance of the Millclose Smelting Works.

The area as a whole is one of the most interesting lead-mining districts of the Peak and its contemplation carries one over two centuries of mining. Raistrick describes the operations before and after the taking over of the leases by the Quaker Lead Company. A Report of April 1722 runs: "The Company are undertakers of several old works in Bank Pasture, Winster, as follows:

- Longtor Old Vein E-W 21 meres
- Longtor Gate Vein N.W.-S.E. 16 meres
- Land Vein N-S 18 meres
- Delf Vein N-S 18 meres
- Horse Hay Vein N-S 24 meres
- Accow Stool Vein 10 meres
- Barton Stool Vein 8 meres (crosses Delf Vein
- Clark Old Vein N.W.-S.E. 24 meres
- Sellory Langtor Vein 36 meres
- Longtor Steele Vein N-S 12 meres

Taken in September 1720 by Geo. Greaves and sold to the Company and stand unwrought by reason of great cost of bringing up a sough which is now in constant workmanship and will unwater all these veins at their deepest soles which have stood in water of several fathoms for many years now.

In September 1723 the Visitors report that the drainage sough has been driven up 100 fathoms and is going forward; 10 veins are now at work and producing ore. The mines Winster and Wensley were continued and the sough pushed forward with varying success but by 1741 the works were approaching the line of old workings on the Millclose Vein half a mile west of the River (Derwent) and it was decided to purchase the mine for £1,050. In the next year the level was carried through to cut the Millclose Vein, later being carried further westwards to Watering Close Vein.

With the idea of unwatering all the Birchover ground, a sough was started from the mouth of Cowley Brook in 1743 and driven west to the Yatestoop Vein. This was not completed until many years later in 1764 at a cost of £30,000.

As Millclose Mine was opened out it was soon evident that the sough at the intersection with the vein would be fairly shallow, so, in order to win at a greater depth, a pumping engine was necessary to lift water up to the drainage level. A "Fire Engine" (Newcomen Steam Engine) was decided on in August 1748 and on November 30th a 42-inch (diameter) cylinder engine was supplied by Darby of Coalbrookdale at a cost of £246-4-2d (47 horsepower) from test figures taken in 1759.

The Company subscribed liberally to the project of the Stockwith-on-Trent to Chesterfield Canal, which would give them easier and cheaper transport of their smelted lead to the Hull market.

The engine test figures taken in 1759 were prior to the proposed sale of the engine to Thomas Stephens of Dalefield Mine.

The prospects of Millclose Mine, however, changed slightly and by mutual agreement the sale of the engine was deferred for a while. In September 1764 a General Court Minute reads: "Millclose Mine, Derbyshire, has been effectively tried under level and there is no prospect of success. Resolved to stop the Fire Engine and sell the coal and store such material as will not spoil". From another source we learn that the engine was bought by the Gregory Mine, Ashover, where it worked until 1803.

There appears to have been a large number of Fire Engines in the area, ten being known in the Winster area, and perhaps the most unique was the one erected underground in Yatestoop Mine by Francis Thompson of Ashover in 1730. The excavation alone, for the underground house for this engine cost £300. Built of gritstone, the house had a five-foot thick bob-wall carrying the engine beam, three feet thick side walls. Local residents can speak of ancestors who remember coal being taken underground to the boiler of this engine. Exploration of this entrance of Yatestoop Mine is on the list of the Society's projects. The engine raised water to the level of the sough and permitted the development of workings below it.

We read that in 1771 an estimate was made of the cost of unwatering in order to reopen the Millclose Mine. The cost was thought to be too high. A shaft thought to be on the original Millclose Sough was seen during the afternoon with a notice: "Danger Gas", and over it a sheer-legs and winch. On the opposite side of the valley are the ruins of a pumping engine house, on, it is reasonable to believe, the site of the original "Fire Engine" of the "Quaker Mining Company". This venerable ruin amid the surrounding greenery and built in cyclopean masonry made a colourful picture with glimpses of distant greens and browns visible through its arched openings. From a photograph showing the engine at work, it was possible to reconstruct the scene. The engine was erected by a Mr. Wass in 1859. It was a 50 inch diameter cylinder Cornish Engine made by Thornwell and Washam of Burton-on-Trent, and appears to have met the needs of Mr. Wass until 1874, at which date another shaft was sunk at Warren Carr to a depth of 50 fathoms. Warren Carr Shaft is a quarter of a mile away to the deep of this shaft. A Cornish Engine with an 80 inch cylinder was erected (at Warren Carr), to the design of Jabez Bukle; a famous Cornish Engineer of the period. It was built by Harvey of Hayle.

Article then goes on to describe a visit to New Millclose Mine.