

BARBER FIELDS COAL DRIFT WORKINGS, RINGINGLOW, SHEFFIELD

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INTRODUCTION

During the summer of 1959 the authors, who were members of the then Caving Section of the Sheffield University Mountaineering Club, carried out a preliminary underground and surface survey of a drift coal mine at Barber Fields, Ringinglow, Sheffield. A rough draft of a plan and some notes on the mine were prepared but not published as it was intended to complete the survey and undertake some historical research at a later date. Unfortunately this was never accomplished, although a note by John Matthews and Denis Price (1961) based on the Deep Sick Coal Pits at Ringinglow mentioned the Barber Fields survey. However the project was not forgotten and following the untimely death of John Matthews in 1985 the second author decided to edit the available notes and prepare the survey for publication. The present article is the result.

THE SURVEY (AC, 1987)

The entrance to the mine, which has now been closed, was at approximately NGR SK 2925 8347, in the valley of the Limb Brook, a small tributary of the River Sheaf. This location is 290 m downstream from Sheephill Road in Ringinglow village and 80 m northwest of the north corner of Copperas House in the direction of the Norfolk Arms. The most prominent surface feature is a 3 m high tip from the mine on the left or north bank of the stream. The entrance was about 4 m downstream from the rounded east end of this tip but under the opposite south bank, which is 13 m from the present watercourse. The site of the entrance also lies on a line joining a point on the stone-block section of the footpath on the south bank, 3 m from its curved east end, and the corner of a dry stone wall on the skyline on the north bank.

An underground plan of the workings, based on the 1959 survey, is shown in figure 1. The measurements were made, using a prismatic compass and a 33 ft tape, between 26 underground stations. They included two circuits of 171 ft and 186 ft with closure failures of only 5 ft and 2 ft respectively. No doubt these are fortuitously small but they suggest that the survey is reasonably accurate. The passages of the mine have been sketched on the plan, broken lines indicating regions of lower accuracy. Several heaps of rubble arising from roof falls and several low tunnels which could not be surveyed have been noted. In addition one passage which contained many limonitic straw stalactites is marked.

DISCUSSION (JM 1959, edited by AC 1987)

The mine is situated in the Ringinglow Coal, a seam in the Millstone Grit rocks, lying on top of the Chatsworth Grit. It is stratigraphically the lowest coal seam worked in the Sheffield area. The mine is probably one of the few surviving examples of a small, shallow mine worked by a small number of men. Such workings must have been common in the early days of the coal industry in the Sheffield area.

The workings extend for about 200 ft in a north-westerly direction under Limb Brook, and are only a few feet below present ground level. So near to the surface are they that when underground one can hear the footfalls and voices of people above. Such shallow coal would be worked by open cast methods today. The main passage of the mine runs approximately parallel to the stream for almost the whole of its length. It is about 4 ft square in section and ends at a wall. The entrance was in line with this passage but may not be the original one.

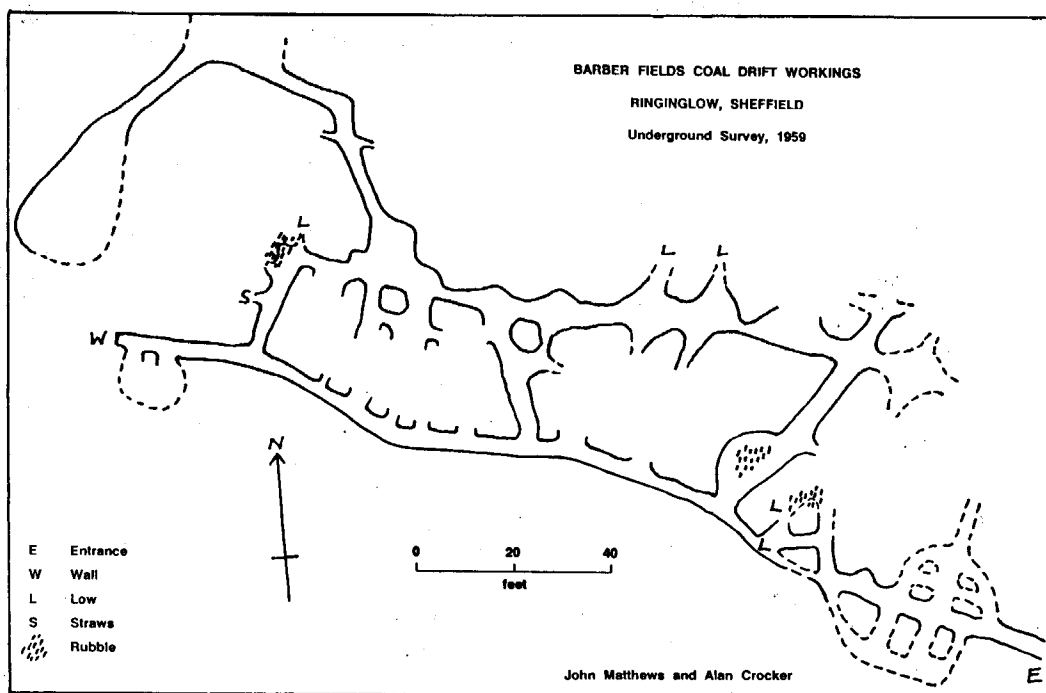
A number of arched side tunnels were driven at right angles to the main passage and down the dip of the rocks which is about 15° NE. More arched tunnels were then driven parallel to the main passage so that in effect pillars of undisturbed rock remain to support the roof. The whole area appears to be vaulted. At the bottom of the arches the remains of the coal seam can be seen. This method of mining, to produce a criss-cross arrangement of passages, may have had several advantages. It would enable almost all the coal to be removed from the seam without the necessity of supporting the wide area of roof by props or packing. The comparatively thin layer of rock above probably reduces the danger of a roof fall, whilst the alternative routes would remove the danger of being cut off, should a fall occur.

One finds that only where wide areas of roof have to be supported were any props used. These were very insecure, and roof falls in various parts of the mine showed that it may be only a matter of time before these interesting workings either disappear entirely or become completely inaccessible.

REFERENCE

Matthews, J. and Price, D. 1961. The old coal mines and works of Ringinglow. Bull. Peak Dist. Mines Hist. Soc. Vol. 1, No. 5, pp. 41-45.

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Editor's Note:- As a boy during World War II, and as a student in the late 1940's I visited the area, before I had any professional interest in mines. I have memories of a corrugated iron building adjacent to the track from Furness Farm to the Limb Valley (SK 294 836) with a winch and mine tubs at the top end of a short railway down to mines near Copperas Farm. I don't think it was in working order. I entered the mine described above and remember seeing an array of red-coloured soft and squashy stalactites and stalagmites (limonite?) a few yards inside. I also entered a coal mine adit at about SK 296 834. Going south from the present public footpath it went in some 10-15 yards to a collapse with a continuation visible beyond. It was over 6 feet high and wide with coal visible in the walls, and a few timbers. All trace of it had vanished on a visit in 1985. There was another adit nearby but I did not explore it.

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