

GREAT RAKE MINE, BRASSINGTON, IN THE 1920S: RECALLED BY JOE GOULD

by R. Slack

Abstract The three hundred and fifty years old Great Rake mine at Brassington was used during the twentieth century as a site for processing iron oxide, and, in its last phase, mined for barytes. Its underground workings have been surveyed in recent years. The functions of the buildings and equipment whose remains are still on the mine site are described by a former worker there, with the help of photographs, including one taken in about 1900.

Great Rake Mine, three quarters of a mile South-East of Brassington, is about three hundred and fifty years old. It has two shafts, four hundred and twenty-five feet apart, sunk on two parallel veins whose direction is shown by an open cut between the shafts to be twenty degrees North of West. There is a climbing shaft sixty feet to the North-West of the main (Western) shaft, and a further large shaft fifty feet to the East. A recent survey of the mine found this shaft to be blocked at a depth of seventy-five feet. The Southern vein was found to be four feet wide and composed of barytes with a large limestone breccia content. The Northern vein is the major one and is ten to twelve feet wide. The main shaft (S.K. 2395 5357) is three hundred and twenty feet deep to the main tramping level, but blocked from two hundred and thirty feet. All modern working has been above this main level, which is reached now by a level from the shaft at one hundred and seventy feet. A fifty feet winze at the Eastern end of the main level leads into the old lead workings on scrins. Here were found the remains of a wooden-wheeled ore tub and a newspaper dated 18 November 1900, used as cartridge wadding. There is an incline to four hundred feet and three winzes down to four hundred and twenty-five feet.* Levels East from the four hundred and four hundred and twenty-five feet levels lead to forefields but levels West are blocked. The Eastern shaft (S.K. 2405 5334) is two hundred and fifty feet deep, with lead workings intact in places, though baryte working in the South vein has obliterated most of them.

From the nineteenth century the mine used powered winding. A surviving Reckoning Book records the Great Rake Mine selling a steam engine for £10. in 1860 to the Old Brassington Mine, which was then enjoying a late resurgence of high production. Great Rake's best days were probably during its early period, in the mid-eighteenth century. During the periods when its production figures are known, they were modest. The periods were 1792-1802, 1822-26 and 1848-1849. Examples from the first period are three dishes during the second quarter of 1802. From 1822 to 1826 one hundred and forty-one loads seven dishes were sold and in the middle of that century, when the mine was being worked by the Fearn family, the Reckoning Book, covering 1847-50 and 1860-73, shows losses at most periods. Great Rake shares were bought by E.M. Wass about 1860. By the late-nineteenth century the mine is recorded in the Derbyshire Mineral Statistics as having "no detailed return" for lead production. Its owners are given as Great Rake Mining Company (1875-79), John Fearn (1884-86), Jas Hodgkinson (1887-88) and J.B. Hodgkinson (1889-1907).

Photograph 1 was probably taken during 1899-1901, when the Mineral Statistics say there were six underground workers. At other times there were two or four. The owner of the photograph, Miss A.A. Dicken of Brassington, identified two of the men - her grandfather, Moses Gould, second from the left, and Tom Hodgkinson at the right.

*Editor's note:- The mine is dry to the final depth of 425 feet and no signs of pumps or soughs were seen. This means that the water table must be below 525 feet O.D., which is lower than the floor of the Carsington Reservoir and the Via Gellia. It seems likely that the drainage finds its way to Meerbrook Sough, some 3 miles to the east.

Another of Moses Gould's grandchildren, Mr. Joe Gould, has thrown light on what can still be seen at the site (photograph 2). Mr. Gould, who also still lives in Brassington, was born in 1907 and worked at Great Rake during the 1920s. He and his father sank a shaft to the rake in an unsuccessful venture into prospecting. During his time the wooden winding gear was intact and he says that there was iron gear there before it. One of the wheels, filled with concrete, can be seen in photograph 2, covering the main shaft between the winch and the ruined building. A second wheel covers the eastern shaft. The mine was owned by Dr. Keith Fearn and the work carried on there consisted of processing iron oxide brought to the site after unloading at Longcliffe Station on the Cromford and High Peak Railway. The building consisted of a storeroom in which the owner kept engine parts and equipment, and, on the right, the workmen's cabin - Mr. Gould thinks the term "coe" had been dropped when the mine stopped lead production. The building can be seen on the left of photograph 1. The winch shown in photograph 2 among the concrete engine mountings pulled wagons up the ramp (photograph 3) from a mine road, now vanished, which ran from Wester Lane, round the back of the mine hillock, into the mine yard. The climbing shaft was on the same side of the hillock, near the top. The engine during the time that Mr. Gould worked at Great Rake was a gas engine, housed in the shed shown in photograph 1 and mounted on the concrete blocks still there (photograph 2). This engine powered the winch and also the grinding machinery. Mr. Gould says that it also powered the winding gear at the earlier period.

Dr. Fearn's business failed, and during the last phase of the mine's life a new owner, Mr. G.H. Key, mined barytes, without much success. The gas engine was replaced by a smaller diesel engine. During this period the winch was used for winding the mineral from the shaft, a practice which, not surprisingly, Mr. Gould imagines would not be allowed today. There is a five inch thick, iron-rimmed gritstone wheel, about four feet in diameter lying on the site. Mr. Gould says this was one of a pair used in grinding barytes. He describes the way in which the ore was washed in the trough (photograph 2). A griddle filled with ore was moved up and down in the water by means of a long handle until the particles had separated, leaving lead at the bottom, barytes above it, and waste at the top. This process, usually called "jigging", was known to Mr. Gould as "buddling". The metal attachments for the wooden superstructure which supported the griddle and allowed it to be moved in the water by the handle are still fixed in the trough. The thick-walled powder magazine in photograph 4 is about one hundred yards from the other mine buildings. It was already disused in Mr. Gould's time at Great Rake as the IRA were active then and it was not sufficiently secure - when explosives were needed they were brought from Golconda Mine, owned then by G.H. Key's Hopton Mining Company.

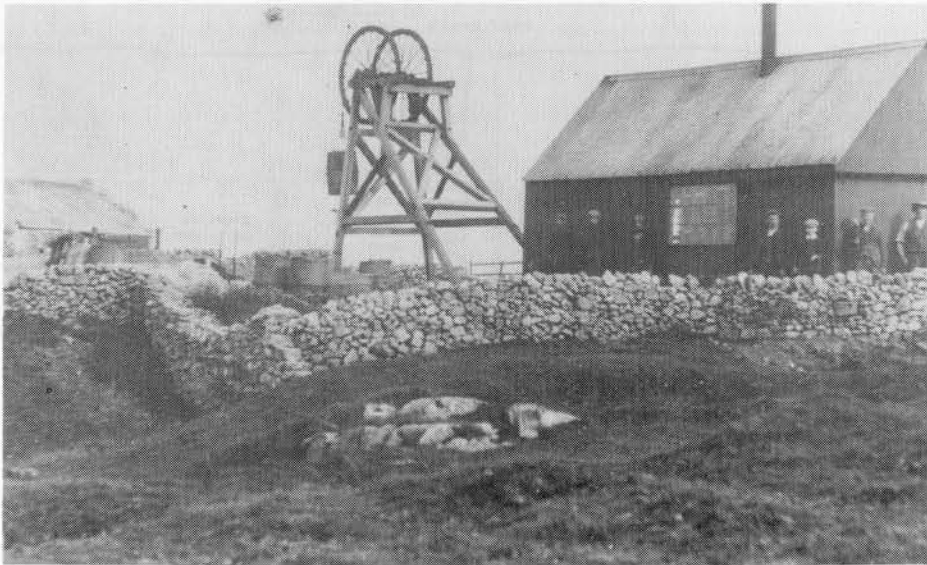
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Derbyshire Mineral Statistics 1845-1913, by R. Burt and others. Exeter University, 1981.

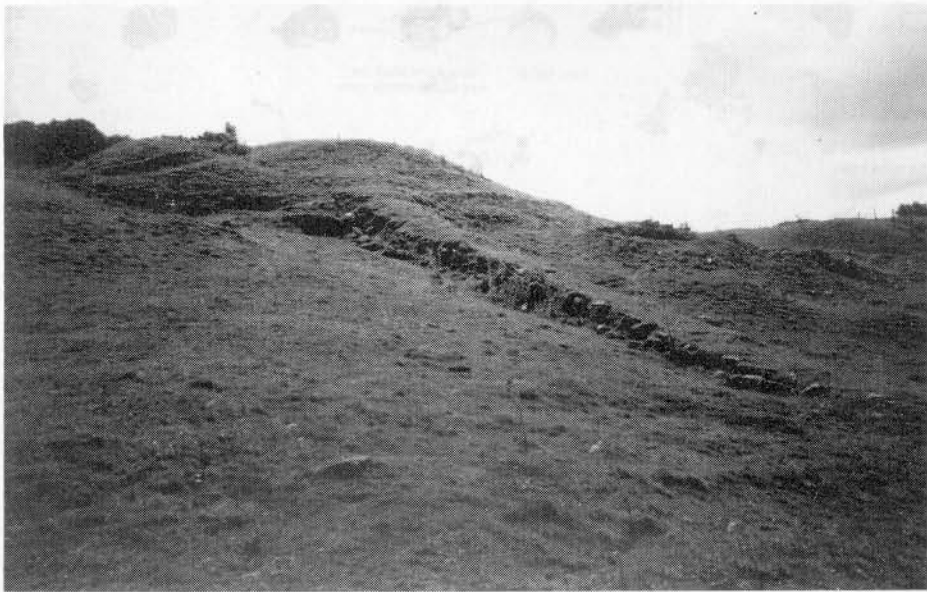
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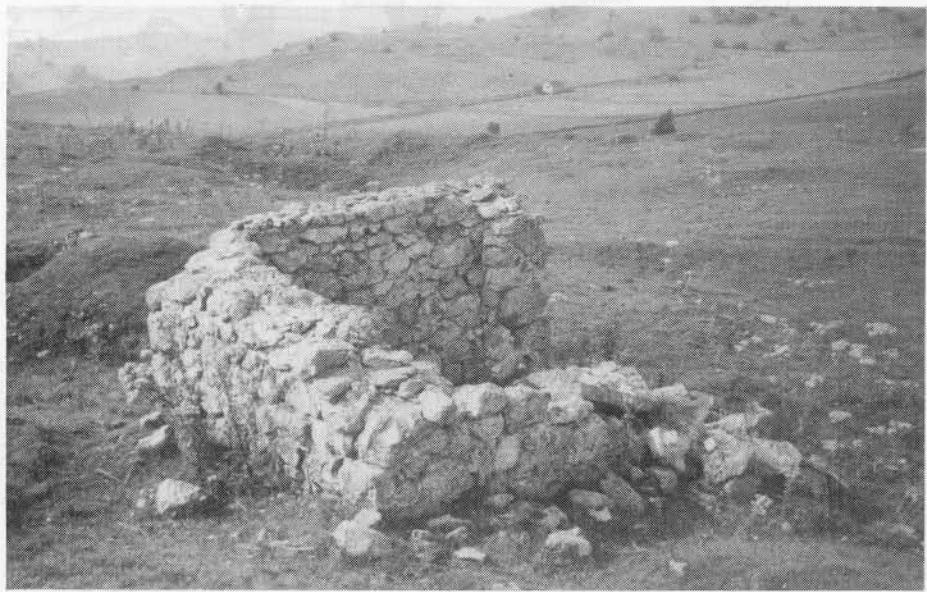
1. Great Rake Mine about 1899-1901.



2. Main shaft capped with a wheel and concrete between the winch and ruined building beyond. The winch pulled wagons up the ramp shown in photo 3.



3. Ramp for mine wagons from a mine road off Wester Lane.



4. The thick walls of the ruined powder house.