

## AN ATTEMPT IN 1935-37 TO REWORK COALPITHOLE MINE, PEAK FOREST, DERBYSHIRE

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**Abstract:** A rise in the price of lead in the late 1930s led to a re-examination of various lead mining prospects in Derbyshire and elsewhere. The survival of a bundle of papers compiled by Dr. G.P. Lafferty of Bradwell has enabled a reconstruction of one such attempt at Coalpithole Mine, Peak Forest.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> August 1935 George Henry Smith of the firm of Mylan and Smith (Engineers) Ltd. of Bamford wrote to John Mort, the High Peak Barmaster, enquiring about Coalpithole Mine near Sparrowpit, Derbyshire. He had noticed that the tips had been reworked intermittently, but stated that he was particularly interested in reopening the mine in order to work lead. He was aware that the mine had been closed around 1870 as a result of the water overpowering the pumps in use at the time, but his interest was stimulated by the success of the electrical pumping apparatus recently installed at Millclose Mine, much of which apparatus he had supplied. He did not know the correct procedure to reopen the mine and appealed to the Barmaster for assistance and information.

Crabtree (1967) gave an account of the exploitation of the mine from the staking of a founder meer in 1760 through to the decision taken by the Peak Forest Company at its AGM in 1867 to concentrate on the deeper western part of the mine. Unfortunately part 2 of his paper leading up to the closure of the mine never appeared. Salmon (1963) gave an account of the exploration of these mines undertaken by cavers in the 1950s and early 1960s. An article on J.W. Puttrell (Bird, 1991) features sketches made by Brindley of remains at Coalpithole. The geology is covered by the *Memoir* for Chapel-en-le-Frith. (Stevenson and Gaunt, 1971).

Mort replied the following day from his address at the Westminster Buildings, 37 Brown Street, Manchester. He apologised for not being able to supply copies of the Barmaster's Records as they had not always been handed down as they were supposed to be, and consequently a number of old Records were missing and the Peak Forest Records were amongst them. He was able to supply the information that in January 1874 the shares of the Peak Forest Company were being transferred at about £8 per share, in February they were being transferred at 30 shillings per share, whilst later in the year they had been transferred at 5 shillings per 100 shares, "which would make it appear that something tragic had occurred". He pointed out that the Duchy of Lancaster was entitled to the Lot and Cope on Lead Ore which was 1/13<sup>th</sup> of the total amount got. He enclosed details of the Rules under the High Peak Mining Customs and Mineral Courts Act, 1851, which covered the Liberty of Peak Forest.

Roger Flindall in his *Calendar of the Barmasters' Derbyshire Lead Mining Records* (Flindall, 1998) listed some correspondence concerning Coalpithole Mine. Part of this concerns a dispute regarding the removal of scrap machinery and the safety of the shafts. This matter does not appear in the Lafferty bundle of papers.

Later, on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1936, Mort wrote to Smith enclosing his copy of the Geological Memoir for Smith's perusal, and asking for its later return. Smith acknowledged its loan three days later. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> November Smith wrote, from his home address at Nicholas Hall, Thornhill, Bamford, to officially apply for possession of Coalpithole Mine, enclosing £3 on account for expenses. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> December Mort issued the official Notice that Coalpithole Mine would be forfeited in three weeks if it were not duly and reasonably worked. On the following day Mort wrote to Smith informing him that his application had been attended to, and that the inspection would take place at 1.00 pm on Wednesday the 23<sup>rd</sup> December when "I expect you will be present to receive the finding of the jury". On the 16<sup>th</sup> Smith acknowledged this, and in a separate letter with a handwritten note on it, arranged that Mort would arrive at the Bamford Works at 10.30 on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, when he would be conveyed by car to Coalpithole. They would pick up two jurymen at Windmill en route.

Whilst the freeing process was going on Smith was attempting to discover more about the closure of the mine in the 1870s. For this reason he searched out several of the oldest inhabitants and arranged to interview them. On the 17<sup>th</sup> December Smith, Dr. Lafferty and L.C. Brameld interviewed a Mrs. Fletcher, described as the widow of the late John Fletcher. Mrs. Fletcher lived with her son at Dam Dale, Peak Forest and was aged 93. She had been born at Perryfoot and had resided in the district all her life. She was described as active and vigorous and, with the exception of a slight deafness, was in full possession of her faculties. She stated that the mine was the richest known in Derbyshire at that time and employed "scores of men" who mainly resided in Peak Forest, Dove Holes and Sparrowpit. All working men in that district were desirous of obtaining employment at the Coalpithole Mines for the reason that they were able to earn considerably more money than in any other form of employment. Mrs. Fletcher stated that the workers at Coalpithole were the only men in the district who were able to purchase their own houses as "all others belonged to the Duke". During the working of the mine Peak Forest had three licensed inns, all of them prosperous. By 1936 there was only one remaining. She remembered new machinery being put down at the mine, and that coal was brought by horse and cart from Whaley Bridge and Stubbfield and that the ore was taken to Brough Lead Mill for smelting. She recollected the mines shutting down in 1874 due to the in-rush of water overwhelming the "new engines", which were too small for the work.

Dr. Lafferty also interviewed Mrs. Maltby of Hugh Lane, Bradwell. Her father was William Bradwell, who was the manager of Coalpithole Mine when it closed down. He had only died some seven years previously at the age of 93, and it was

stated that his "faculties were bright until the end". She stated that Coalpithole had the reputation of being the best mine in the neighbourhood. There were great quantities of ore, but although Coalpithole was still producing well, the price of lead had fallen and the mine was only just covering costs. The increase of water inflow finally caused the mine to close. Mrs. Maltby stated that great distress was the result of the closure, and was of the opinion that (in 1937) they would be unable to find anyone with experience of working lead veins.

Another interview was conducted with Mr. White of Little Hucklow, then aged 73. He had worked as a boy aged between seven and ten on the surface at Coalpithole. He stated that some 20 men and boys worked on the surface, and between 40 and 50 men underground. All the Sparrowpit houses were full of miners as lodgers and he stated that they were mostly Cornishmen. All the lead was bought by "Squire Ashton". Shaft riding was in a single cage which held four men or one wagon.

The meeting at the mine on the 23<sup>rd</sup> December duly occurred and the following entry was made in the Barmaster's Book.

*This is to certify that on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of December in the year 1936 we inspected a mineral piece of ground and that the neglected mine there called Coalpithole in the Liberty of Chapel-en-le-Frith in the District of the King's Field in the Hundred of the High Peak had not been duly and reasonably worked to our satisfaction and that no sufficient reason had been assigned to us for not working the same.*

*John Mort, Barmaster of the High Peak  
John Redfearn, Joseph D. Hancock, Two of the Grand Jury*

*23<sup>rd</sup> December 1936. In the presence of John Redfearn and Joseph D. Hancock two of the Grand Jury and Leonard Creswick Brameld gave George Henry Smith of Nicholas Hall, Thornhill, Bamford via Sheffield possession of the Coalpithole Mine in the Liberty of Chapel-en-le-Frith and title consisting of a vein commencing about 130 yards north of Gautries Side Farm on the north side of the road between Sparrowpit and Castleton (the boundary which divides the Liberties of Chapel-en-le-Frith and Peak Forest) and ranging West by North for 16 meers 19 yards or thereabouts and including all the old workings contiguous to the vein as shall prove to have belonged to the original title.*

*On the same day with John Redfearn and Joseph D. Hancock two of the Grand Jury and in the presence of George Henry Smith and Leonard Creswick Brameld set out a roadway to the shaft at the west end of the title along the track of the roadway considered to be the old roadway to the mine.*

*John Mort, Barmaster of the High Peak"*

On the following day John Mort again wrote to Smith giving details of the ore production from Coalpithole between 1862 and 1880, as copied from his Barmaster's Books. These are laid out in Table 1. In total, ore production in this period amounted to 17501 Loads 1 Dish. At the usual approximation of 4 Loads equals 1 ton, this gives a production of around 4375 tons of lead ore. It may be noted that most of this production is missing from the Mineral Statistics as published by the University of Exeter (Burt et al.). These give a figure of 520 tons for 1878 for Peak Forest Mine, and none for Coalpithole.

John Mort again wrote to Smith on the 29<sup>th</sup> December as he had been carrying out further research. He stated that he could not go back far enough for the first opening of the mine, but was able to give some details of the Peak Forest Company and its working.

Nothing much appeared to happen during January 1937, but at the beginning of February Smith received a report on the mine

from Harry Rhodes of the firm of C.E. Rhodes and Sons, Mining Engineers and Mineral Agents, of Rotherham. Harry Rhodes had inspected the site of the old shafts, and "the shafts themselves as far as can be seen from the surface, without, of course, actually descending them." He explained that there were several shafts on the property, two of which, Nos. 8 and 10, were open and said to be in good repair. He estimated from the remains of the pumping plant that it had been capable of pumping 350 gallons per minute, a figure which he said was "a comparatively simple proposition with modern plant." Given that "not only was there every probability of prices being maintained at, or even exceeding, their present level", "there is no scientific foundation for this belief (that Derbyshire lead deposits get poorer at depth), and later researches, coupled with actual exploration, have proved that the old idea was totally unfounded" and "The geological conditions of the Coalpithole property differ materially from those at most other mines and, in my view, favourably so, since they appear to resemble more closely those of the locality in which the successful Mill Close Mine is situate" it was not surprising that "all go to prove that the mine was a valuable property and, in my opinion, given the adoption of modern methods, there is no reason whatever why, when re-opened, the mine should not prove a profitable enterprise".

At this point Smith then appears to have realised that the other half of his prospective mine was not only in a different Liberty but was under a different Barmaster. Therefore he wrote on 6<sup>th</sup> February to Alfred Hodgkiss, of Hawthorne Dene, Baslow, the Barmaster of the Duke of Rutland's private liberties, enclosing a formal application for possession of that part of Coalpithole Mine near Perry Dale in Peak Forest Liberty. Hodgkiss acknowledged receipt two days later and also answered a question re land for mineral dressing. Smith wrote to Hodgkiss a week later following a meeting Smith and Lafferty had had in London attempting to raise money for their mining project. He asked four questions about the reason the mine closed and

**Table 1: Lead Production Figures for Coalpithole Mine, as supplied by John Mort to G.H. Smith in 1936.**

Date	Ore Measured	Price s - d per load	
		Highest	Lowest
Sept 15 1862	7 Loads	60-0d	
Dec 20 1862	8 Loads	4 9-9d	
Dec 12 1864	17 Loads	62-0d	
Oct 16 1865 to Mar 1866	202 Loads	64-6d	61-9d
Oct 17 1865 to Mar 20 1867	639 Loads	63-6d	57-3d
Apr 17 1867 to Sept 13 1867	1137 Loads	63-9d	63-0d
Oct 16 1867 to Mar 5 1868	1206 Loads	63-4d	62-9d
Apr 7 1868 to Sept 15 1868	879 Loads	65-0d	62-9d
Oct 6 1868 to Mar 2 1869	1057 Loads	63-3d	59-0d
May 6 1869 to Sept 21 1869	1327 Loads	63-3d	57-9d
Oct 13 1869 to Mar 8 1870	1806 Loads	60-0d	57-6d
Mar 31 1870 to Sept 21 1870	2141 Loads	60-3d	57-0d
Oct 26 1870 to Mar 13 1871	895 Loads	53-9d	51-9d
Apr 24 1871 to Sept 18 1871	455 Loads	59-3d	55-9d
Nov 1 1871 to Mar 18 1872	426 Loads	64-3d	55-9d
May 6 1872 to Sept 26 1872	320 Loads	70-3d	67-9d
Dec 16 1872 to Mar 25 1873	476 Loads	78-6d	74-9d
Mar 29 1873 to Sept 10 1873	1018 Loads	81-9d	73-0d
Oct 8 1873 to Feb 26 1874	567 Loads	77-6d	40-0d
Mar 27 1874 to Aug 19 1874	791 Loads	70-0d	40-0d
Dec 24 1875	18 Loads	45-0d	
Sept 29 1877 to Mar 25 1878	297 Loads	64-0d	59-9d
Apr 2 1878 to Sept 26 1878	1078 Loads	65-0d	48-0d
Oct 18 1878 to Marc 25 1879	666 Loads	45-6d	41-0d
Apr 9 1879	6 Loads 8 Dishes	14-6d	Hillock Ore
Apr 9 1879	3 Loads 8 Dishes	35-3d	Hillock Ore
Apr 9 1879	8 Loads 5 Dishes	21-3d	Hillock Ore
May 20 1879	5 Loads 2 Dishes	31-6d	Hillock Ore
May 20 1879	8 Loads	13-6d	Hillock Ore
June 26 to Der 24 1879	30 Loads 6 Dishes	46-0d	23-0d
Mar 26 1880	4 Loads 8 Dishes	51-3d	Hillock Ore

whether any ore was remaining. He asked Hodgkiss as to whether his records could cast any light on these crucial matters. Unfortunately no answering letter remains in the bundle.

On 26<sup>th</sup> February Hodgkiss gave Smith notice that he intended to view Coalpithole Mine on the following Tuesday afternoon. He intended to commence at the west end of the Liberty near the old Coalpithole Shaft and would then proceed eastwards. However, on the 1<sup>st</sup> March, Hodgkiss wrote to Smith cancelling the view "owing to the present climatic conditions" and promising to carry this out at the first opportunity. About this time a couple of newspaper cuttings appeared concerning the re-opening of Coalpithole, one of which stated that "It has been found that the mine still holds rich deposits of lead ore, the veins extending for over five miles from Perryfoot to the Dolly Mine at Buxworth". The Dolly Mine was a coalpit and had the vein extended that far in the same strata, it would have been some 4-5,000 feet deep at Buxworth!

Hodgkiss then wrote to Smith again, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> March, rearranging the View for the 24<sup>th</sup>. Smith replied that he was leaving for Southampton, but that he would appoint Dr. Lafferty and Leonard Creswick Brameld, his Secretary, to represent him. He asked that the records be made out jointly to Gerald Patrick Lafferty and to George Henry Smith, as they were both partners in the matter.

In fact Smith and Lafferty had signed an Agreement between themselves on the 9<sup>th</sup> March. George Henry Smith was to hold three-fourths part and Gerald Patrick Lafferty was to hold one-fourth part of the company. In the event of a successful flotation Smith was to have the first £6,000 cash, but shares were to be split as per the agreement. They were to act as Joint Managing Directors. The Agreement was witnessed by L.C. Brameld, Accountant, of Shatton Lane, Bamford and Walter Foster, Engineer, of Loxley Road, Sheffield. On March 24<sup>th</sup> 1937 Hodgkiss issued the following notice:

*Then in pursuance of the Derbyshire Mining Customs and Mineral Courts Act, 1852, First Schedule, Articles 19 & 20, I, Alfred Hodgkiss, Barmaster, together with John Mellor and Henry Hill, two of the Grand Jury, viewed this day the Veins known as the Coalpit Hole and Gautries and finding that no work had been done since the posting of the Notice to work on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of February 1937, gave to George Henry Smith of Nicholas Hall, Bamford and G.P. Lafferty, Phys. and Surgeon, of Nether Cottage, Bradwell the following possessions -*

*Coalpit Hole Vein. 70 Meers commencing at the highway leading from Sparrowpit to Castleton in plot 49 on the O.S. sheet IX S.W. Second Edition 1899, and continuing SE by E through plots Nos. 51, 52, 103, 104, 293, 271, 276, 299, 300, 301, 303, 305 and 306 to the west end of the Portway possessions.*

*Gautries Vein. Also on Gautries Vein commencing in plot No. 54 on Gautries Hill, and continuing E through plots 124, 104, 267, 270, 291, 293, 271, 294, 296 and 276 to the Coalpit Hole Vein being a total length of 50 Meers.*

Whilst Smith and Lafferty were engaged in claiming their mineral ground, enquiries were being made into the previous ownership. The Peak Forest Company had worked the ground between 1858 and 1880 and Messrs. Wake, Smith and Fielding, Solicitors, of Sheffield, expressed the opinion that there might still be heirs of the original shareholders who had a claim on the ground. As a result a meeting was set up with both John Mort and Alfred Hodgkiss. Eventually an agreement was signed whereby Smith and Lafferty purchased the Peak Forest Mining Company for the sum of £1,000. The vendors were various and represented the interests of the heirs of numerous

**Table 2: The trustees of Coalpithole Mine entered in the Barmasters' Book on March 5<sup>th</sup>, 1858**

We the trustees of the Mines now known as the Coalpithole or Peak Forest Mines in the liberty, etc., request you to enter in your books the undermentioned names to whom the shares are now allotted.

Signed	John Hewett, Francis Wright Chadburn, John Fairburn, Henry Hills		
Adam Hill of Broctor	50	John Hewett of Sheffield	100
F.W. Chadburn of Sheffield	100	John Fairburn of Sheffield	100
Hen. Hills of Sheffield	100	John Linley of Sheffield	100
Wm. Linley of Sheffield	100	G. Hullersby of Sheffield	40
Arthur Perk of Mirfield	30	T. McGovern of Sheffield	30
Jos. Angus of Sheffield	40	John Wicks of Sheffield	40
Chas. E. Smith of Sheffield	25	John White of Sheffield	40
Fra. Brookfield of Sheffield	30	Abm. Booth of Sheffield	15
Thos. Stanley of Sheffield	15	Jas. Stanley of Sheffield	20
John Newton of Sheffield	30	Jn. Woodhouse of Sheffield	50
Saml. Seaton of Sheffield	10	Wm. Favell of Sheffield	30
Thos. Hills of Sheffield	15	G. Hattersley of Sheffield	15
Edwd. Smith of Sheffield	5	Wm. Holdsworth of Sheffield	10
Geo. Angus of Sheffield	5	John McClorry of Sheffield	10
John Hall of Sheffield	20	Zacc. Hinchcliffe of Sheffield	10
John Beckett of Sheffield	50	Jas. White of Sheffield	50
G.F. Dinning of Sheffield	30	John Pitt of Sheffield	100
Wm. Hobson of Sheffield	100	Len. Maltby of Eyam	50
Geo. Maltby of Eyam	20	Chas. Davy of Spondon	5
Ed. Bussy of Sheffield	20	Jos. Smith of Sheffield	20
Jn. Fordham of Sheffield	70	Edw. Hudson of Sheffield	30
Jn. B. Roberts of Sheffield	40	Roger Brown of Sheffield	70
Jn. P. Lewis of Sheffield	10	Jn. G. Hewett of Sheffield	5
Jn. Crowley of Sheffield	40	Edw. E. Hewett of Sheffield	4
Geo. Wilson of Sheffield	40	Mary A. Morgan of Sheffield	10

deceased owners of shares. In all they represented 481 shares out of the original 831, and were therefore deemed to represent the Company.

A list of the original shareholders in 1858, together with a list of shareholders who took part in a Small Barmote Court case in 1875 was in the possession of Smith and Lafferty. These lists have been reproduced as Tables 2 and 3.

In return for their payment of £1,000 Smith and Lafferty were to obtain all interests in Coalpithole and Hark Forward Mines in the Liberty of Peak Forest together with interests in Coalpithole and Seaton Vein Mines in the Liberty of Chapel-en-le-Frith together with all plans, reports, letters and other papers regarding to the working of the mines and all the accounts balance sheets and minute books of the Company. They did not receive the title deeds to any surface lands owned by the Peak Forest Mining Company. Smith and Lafferty agreed to take all reasonable steps to form a Public Limited Company with a nominal capital of no less than £3,000 and to transfer the assets to such a company. A year was granted to complete the purchase.

In response to the need to float a company to work the mine, Smith had been in contact with White Drummond and Company, of Cannon Street, London. However, on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1937 Smith received a letter from Jas. Edeson, manager of the Issue Department, turning down the idea of a public flotation on the grounds that no modern exploration work had been carried out and that all evidence of reserves, etc., came from sixty year old hearsay. Edeson suggested that a small syndicate should be formed to unwater the mine and obtain modern reports upon it's prospects and upon samples obtained. Edeson offered to approach a friend with a view to forming such a syndicate, but declined, on behalf of White Drummond, to take any part in this syndicate.

**Table 3: Plaintiffs on behalf of the Peak Forest Mining Company in the Small Barmote Court on the 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1875.**

William Hugill Walker	Ironfounder, Wicker Ironworks, Sheffield
John Bramhall	Lydgate House, Cresspool, Sheffield
William Wild	
Joseph Swinden	
Thomas Birks	Tea Merchant, Market Place, Sheffield
Alfred Booth	Tea Merchant, Market Place, Sheffield
Phoebe Falshaw	Widow, Change Alley, Sheffield
Thomas Falshaw	
Joseph Fox	Huddersfield
Richard Wheen Garland	Wharcliffe Works, Sheffield
J.G.A. Gross	Pork Butcher, Castle Street, Sheffield
Ebenezer Hall	Silver Plater, Shrewsbury Works, Sheffield
Marriott Hall	Glossop Road, Sheffield
Robert Henderson	7 West Brook Place, Glossop Road, Sheffield
S.F. Holmes	St. James Row, Sheffield
Richard Martin	Shrewsbury Works, Sheffield
Ellen McGlory	Sheffield
Dun McDougall	58, Queen Street, Sheffield
Geo. Mercer	Wine Merchant, Snig Hill, Sheffield
Thos. Morgan	25, Wilmot Street, Derby
Edward Newton	Sheffield
John Newton	Grocer, Westbar, Sheffield
Marriott Oakes	Norfolk Row, Sheffield
Geo. Edwin Parkin	America
Isaac Read	Metal Broker, St. James Street, Sheffield
Sarah Ann Rhodes	
William Ryland	Electro Plater, Eyre Street, Sheffield
Samuel Smith	Sheffield
Joseph Smith	Timber Merchant, Sidney Street, Sheffield
Thomas Smith	Eccleshall
Wm. C. Taylor	Iron Merchant, High Street, Sheffield
Charlotte Tinker	Sheffield
Thos. Arnold Watson	
Wm. Hy. Watson	Sharebroker, Fargate, Sheffield
John Westerman	
Samuel White	
Arthur Wightman	Solicitor, George Street, Sheffield
John Wilkinson	Old Rectory, Mirfield
Rowland Wilkinson	Old Rectory, Mirfield
Walter Wilson	Nottingham
John Woodcock	Bank Cashier, South Street Park, Sheffield
Wm. K. Woodward	Mulberry Street, Sheffield
Jess Young	
Mary Ann White	

About this time Smith contacted Leslie B. Williams, the manager of Mill Close Mine, asking him to perform some consultancy work. Williams agreed at a fee of 25 guineas a day!

Unfortunately at this point the papers come to a chronological end, so presumably Smith, realising that to proceed further would start to cost him serious money, decided to drop the project. Coalpithole Mine was left alone, and the shafts still stand, flooded, to this day.

### Acknowledgments

The Bundle of papers were passed on to Doug Nash of O.M. Mines, whom I would like to thank for access to them.

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