

## MEETS REPORT West Yorkshire Collieries, 29th April 1979

Leaders Dr. I.J. Brown and Mr. J. Goodchild

This proved to be a very popular meeting, numbers anticipated greatly exceeded those for whom provision had been made. An alternative date was arranged for the three large groups expected but still a total of 56 turned up on the day.

A week before the visit it was announced that the Walton Colliery would remain open a little longer but men and equipment are continuing to be removed from the colliery.

The party was well received by the NCB and given virtual freedom of the colliery surface, the engines, fan-drift and workshops proving to be of particular attraction. The winding engines were put through their paces and camera addicts were to be seen in action at most vantage points.

As well as the 2 steam winding engines, 2 turbo generators, 1 auxiliary steam generator, steam driven fan and steam driven compressor, 3 steam pumps and a steam hammer were also noted.

The party took lunch in the gas-lit and 'listed' Kings Arms on Heath Common and then some 17 car loads invaded Sharlston Village, much to the concern of the locals. The bell pit workings and later mining remains were inspected and the exterior of the 17th century mineowners' Hall viewed from a distance (numbers present prevented entry). Further bellpit workings (together with a traditional horse-drawn gypsy caravan) were seen when crossing Sharlston Common en route to New Sharlston Colliery Village. The uniqueness of this village, houses, chapel, school, literary institute and Co-op was appreciated and is fully described in a booklet 'Coalmining at Sharlston' by J. Goodchild, published by Wakefield District Council Library Service at 50p.\*

The party then visited Stanley Ferry to see the early cast iron aqueduct (1834-40) carrying the commercially successful Aire and Calder Canal (over 2 million tons freight in 1978) over the River Calder. Alongside could be seen the present British Waterways Repair Yards and Docks, 'listed' Canal Co. office and toll house and the staithes. A new aqueduct is to be constructed here shortly.

In view of the fact that the nearby, but rather isolated Silstone Row Colliery Settlement had just been evacuated prior to demolition (chiefly "to remove another stigma of the area's mining heritage") the party decided to extend the itinerary to include this. The Settlement contains houses in 'rows', Co-op, school and chapel and dates from 1868. It is probably the oldest surviving planned settlement in Yorkshire and was erected by Messrs. Pope and Pearson, owners or nearby West Riding Colliery (closed about 1967). One row of houses, Sharlston Row, contains 52 three-storey through cottages, the longest such terrace in Europe. Two rows are of concrete construction and are very early examples of this technique. The 1871 census shows 2666 persons in residence (including 12 families from Derbyshire and 10 from Shropshire) while in 1901 there were over 4000 persons in the Settlement, now there are only a handful. The history and demise of the community is described fully in the booklet 'Pope and Pearson and Silkstone Buildings' by J. Goodchild, published by Wakefield District Architectural Heritage Group, price 75p.\*

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\* Mr. J. Goodchild, Wakefield MDC Library Headquarters, Balne Lane, Wakefield, West Yorks. Please add 20p for postage and packing.