

# WINSTER LOCAL HISTORY GROUP

## NEWSLETTER

No. 6     March 1997

### Notes of meeting on 24 February 1997: Winster Underground, an Illustrated Talk on Winster's Lead Mines, by Tony Wood.

Despite atrocious wind and rain, we were overwhelmed (but pleased) by the interest in this, the first of our series of village talks. Forty-six people attended at the Market House, so we were very short of chairs and space. But by packing ourselves in and using the window sills as seats, we all were able to enjoy an interesting and informative talk.

Tony took us on a rough tour of the village mines, starting near Winster School at the 60ft deep shaft of **Lucky the Lane**. Not a lot is known about this mine, but it was obviously being worked in 1782, because that date was carved with some initials on the wall of one of the passages. Nearby is **Horse Buttocks** Mine, of which the 'founder' shaft (i.e. the first to be sunk) is in the garden of Sunny Bank on Wensley Road. (Cf. 'drawing' shaft, the main shaft by which the ore was drawn up, and 'climbing' shaft, by which the miners made their way down.)

Across the other side of the Winster to Wensley Road is a group which includes **Limekiln, Shack, Drake** and **Mary and Anne** Mines, and further up the hillside towards Birchover is the big **Yatestoop** Mine, begun around 1700. Yatestoop was the first in Derbyshire (1720) to have a steam engine (or 'fire-engine', as they were called then) to pump out the water. It was situated first on the surface and later underground, as the workings got deeper.

**Plackett, Horsecroft, Orchard** and the **Old Wesson** Mines are nearer to the centre of the village, the first two on the Birchover side of the main Road. They form an extensive system and there is a lot of documentary evidence about them, such as that dealing with a dispute in 1856 between the owners of Plackett and Orchard over the rights to a piece of mineral ground situated roughly below the churchyard. When a jury appointed by the Barmaster arrived to inspect the Orchard Mine they found it locked against them, so a fine was imposed on the owner, Ralph Staley. Horsecroft is a shaft 'ginged', or lined to bedrock level, with dressed gritstone, which was investigated and published by Tony in 1991. **Old Wesson**, up on Winster Common, is virtually an underground museum. It looks as though the miner left expecting to return the next day, but never did. There are tubs on wheels, a set of tools, tallow candles, clay pipes and a 'Bradder' hat. Photographs of some of these are displayed in the Miner's Standard pub.

Near to Winster Burial Ground on Elton Road is **Kirkcroft** Mine, and near it, just off Water Lane, is **Wills Founder**, of which the chief claim to fame is the huge hydraulic pumping engine, which was discovered in 1975 and has since been removed to the

Going up Buckdale Lane towards Westhills Farm we pass **Buckdale Shaft**, and by turning up Islington Lane we reach **Lickpenny** and **Portaway**. The two Lickpenny shafts, on the branch of Islington Lane known as Lickpenny Lane, were explored in 1973. **Portaway** is the earliest recorded mine to be working in the Winster area. It started in the 1650s. Nothing now remains except enormous hillocks. At its height the activity here was so extensive that a small community, almost a separate town, grew up at Islington, near where the Grangemill Road meets the Pikehall Road, as recorded on Burdett's map of Derbyshire in 1767.

Moving across to the south of the village, towards Bonsall up near Luntor, we come to the **Longtor** Mines. These are wide shafts, ginged with rough limestone, but not deep, none being over 150ft. The mines were first worked in the late 1600s, and around 1710 they were sold to the London Lead Company, much to the amusement of the local miners, who knew that the most easily worked lead had already been taken. Eventually the London Lead Company abandoned these mines and turned their attention out of the village to **Mill Close** Mine.

On the hillside near the Winster – Bonsall footpath below Luntor are the remains of the **Winster Pitts** Mine. There are signs on the surface of at least 2 coes (small buildings) and a buddle (for washing the ore). About 1910 the mine was worked by a villager called George Bark. It seems that he was lowered down the drawing (main) shaft in the morning by his friends and wound out again in the evening, being left alone in the mine during the day. The shaft thereafter came to be known as **George Bark's Hole**.

Drainage was always a major problem in lead mines. Various 'soughs' were constructed, the largest being **Yatestoop Sough**, begun in 1751. It ran right down the valley, almost from Elton towards Mill Close, and various owners paid for the privilege of having their mines drained into it.

Tony also spoke about a day in the life of a typical miner. This will be summarised in the next issue of this Newsletter.

After the talk there was a great deal of further discussion, and gratitude was expressed to Tony for having introduced this fascinating subject and having conveyed such enthusiasm for it.

(SEE END OF THIS NEWSLETTER FOR A MAP OF THE VILLAGE SHOWING  
THE POSITIONS OF THE MAIN LEAD MINES)

## **Oral History Project**

The project is now up and running, and several recordings have already been made. Copies are kept by Gill Elliott, Market House, East Bank. The next meeting of the group is at Gill's house on 14 April at 7.30. If you are interested in becoming involved or can suggest people to be tape-recorded, please see Gill or ring 650090.

