



Friends of Chatterley Whitfield

www.chatterleywhitfieldfriends.org.uk.

Newsletter - Summer 2017

WELCOME to the Friends of Chatterley WhitfieldSummer 2017 Newsletter



HERITAGE OPEN DAYS 2017

Well we managed it yet again, ALL 240 allocated places gone in under twenty four hours. Would have been a bit quicker, but we had a few issues the Eventbrite ticket site. Operator error...!!!

This year we will not be joined by James Worgan as he has double booked and can not attend. First time in fourteen years. So a bit of a challenge as we are now down to two tour guides, Jim McPhillips and Nigel Bowers... (They are going to be busy.)

We are looking at the following tour start times:

10.00 - 10.45 - 11.30 - 13.00 - 13.45 - 14.30



We have a great response from members who can spare some time over the weekend and this is very much appreciated. We welcome anymore help for things like: Serving Tea and Coffee, Looking after Car Parking, helping out as Stewards on the tours, being seen on site, generally making sure the public don't roam off....

A FULL BRIEFING WILL BE GIVEN



www.chatterleywhitfieldfriends.org.uk

www.facebook.com/ChatterleyWhitfield

www.twitter.com/chatt_whit

The Chatterley Whitfield Colliery site is acknowledged to be the most comprehensive survival of a deep mine site in England, with a range of surviving structures and buildings unequalled in any other former or surviving coalfield site in Great Britain. It is not usually open to the public, however this FREE guided tour by The Chatterley Whitfield Friends will allow you to appreciate the array of buildings on site, which makes Chatterley Whitfield Colliery so unique. Please come and join us before, or after your tour for a chat and a cuppa!

Sorry but no underground tours.



Some sad news....



Geoff Oakes, former miner and long standing member sadly passed away.

We also lost one of our longest serving members, Sadie Bryson - Her funeral service was earlier this week (7.8.2017)

On behalf of 'The Friends' are condolences have been conveyed to both families.



WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENING ?

WHAT DO I GET AS A MEMBER?

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE FUTURE ?

A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY/MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

We have had a strange year so far..... Why ?

Well since the beginning of the year we had quite a few new members coming on site, resulting in the 'Friends' deciding to hold Working Parties on Saturday mornings, once a month, with the first one happening in January. This has enabled us to transform the Deployment Centre, where most of the maps, books, documents and artefacts are stored. Without this help, we could not have got to the point where we are now. We can now offer members of the public interesting things to see when on the Heritage Open Day weekend. In addition to this we have established a small library, which is being looked after by Paul Rushton and we have started to archive some of the vast amount of material we have. My thanks go out to Mike Ansell, who took on the task of auditing the Chatterley Collection. Also I must mention the work of Lloyd Boardman and Brittain Adams who are making use of the converted kitchen area. Now the computer archiving area. They are starting to scan and digitise stuff.

We are getting organised, but we could not have achieved this without your help and monetary contributions (Membership) -So a big THANK YOU.

At this point I must mention the 'TEAM' - Daz, Macca, Geoff and Mark and others who have put up shelving, tidied up and of course PAINTED.....

In addition to the work carried out under the mining theme we have been kept busy with requests to visit the site from local students doing Photographic, Video and Audio course, individuals as far afield as Edinburgh, local photographic groups, former miners, prospective members, local schools and film companies..... Lloyds TV commercial being just one example.



How has this been made possible WELL !!!!!

The majority of requests come through to the secretary, via email, because of the Social Media presence we have with the website and Facebook. It keeps him very busy as all requests have to be sent to the council for approval. The majority are given the GREEN LIGHT with the visits being supervised by the 'Friends'. All visits are monitored in terms of the relevant insurance being in place and the Health and Safety documentation completed. This puts a few people off, but it MUST be complied with.

So as you can see with your support Chatterley Whitfield is still here and looking forward to the future.....

Dates for your Diary:

Heritage Open Day Weekend Saturday 9th and Sunday 10th September

Annual General Meeting Saturday, YES Saturday 11th November 2017



WORKING PARTY DATES.....

We are building up to the Heritage Open Day weekend....
SO
Saturday 19th August 2017 betw 0900hrs and 1300hrs
 We will be in the deployment centre putting the finishing touches to the displays etc.... We have some posters, displays to fix. Also looking at display boards to put up in the Enterprise Centre.....
Saturday 2nd August 2017 betw 0900hrs and 1300hrs
 Weather permitting we will be out on site making sure the SAFE ROUTE is OK for Heritage Open Day.....
 In other words clearing brambles, repainting footpath edges, making safe the Lamp Room and Building 23.
 If you can along please let us know - **YOU MUST WEAR SUITABLE FOOTWARE, Hi Viz jackets and Safety hat provided.....and Tea, Coffee, Biscuits.....!!!!**

WE ARE ALSO ON SITE MOST THURSDAYS BETWEEN 09.00 AND 11.30HRS

There is a proviso..... There Must be a Committee Member on site when you ever you visit.....

MEMBERSHIP2017/2018

You can become a member on line now.....via PAY PAL

STILL ONLY £5.00 A YEAR

We would like to use the internet more to keep you informed about what is happening.

Oh nearly forgot.....
 Email Nigel Bowers, at:
membership@chatterleywhitfieldfriends.org.uk

MONEY..... WE TRIED
Applied for a grant for digitation, got to the final round.....Unlucky.
However we are going to try for a Start-Up Grant from Stoke on Trent City Council worth between £2,000 to £10,000 through the Community Investment Fund

Chatterley Whitfield Friends - Exciting News

The Chatterley Whitfield Friends are a group of volunteers who have been given permission by The City of Stoke on Trent City Council to access the colliery and former museum. The main aims of The Chatterley Whitfield Friends are to preserve the heritage of the site. The site closed as a museum in 1993 and since that date members of the public have been allowed limited supervised access. However every year the site is made available to members of the public via English Heritage, Stoke on Trent City Council and the Chatterley Whitfield Friends. By working closely with the City Council there has been a designated safe route authorised around the site. This allows visitors to see some of the buildings close up, enter a few buildings and see what the site is like today.

The relationship with the City Council has continued to develop during the past year and recently we had a meeting with them. We are working very closely with them looking at Permits to Access and a protocol/licence giving the 'Friends' more access to the Deployment Centre. We will continue to update you as soon as things have been finalised. This may mean having to issue membership cards.....

The meeting was very positive and followed on from a Council Health and Safety workshop a number of members attended in July.

**CHATTERLEY WHITFIELD FRIENDS
 PRESERVING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE
 OUR AIMS.....**

1. To promote the site through the Friends website
2. To work in close co-operation with the City Council in the regeneration of the site
3. To accompany visitors to the site at the request of Stoke City Council
4. To catalogue and digitise (where necessary) the archives in the Deployment Centre



The 'Friends' are on the Internet..... AND !!!!!

We have a very active FACEBOOK page. This is a result of Ray contacting us and been asked to do an article.....So we would like to share it with you....

No greater collection of steam driven winding engines could be found in the land. Five shafts, all in a row and all on one site was unusual and formed a huge deep pit mining colliery. From the smaller engines of Middle Pit, Winstanley and Platt Pit to the gigantic monoliths of Hesketh and Institute. They were a magnificent spectacle to see and hear operating, lowering and drawing coal, men and materials with speed and efficiency.

The Royal Navy called them 'grease monkeys' but that job description at Whitfield was 'oiler and cleaner'. At the age of 15 in 1949 I was just called an 'oil lad' and in my teen years it was my job to clean, oil and grease those engines under the watchful eye of the winding engine men (operators). They had cause to be wary. Shortly before my arrival one such 'oil lad' had been killed instantly in the crank race at the Middle Pit. I eventually became a 'winder' at the minimum age of 22 but I left the industry to pursue another career in 1960. It was during this period, the fifties, that Whitfield was having its 'heyday' with coal production at its highest serving the country, which was still struggling after the war years. The winders were almost a race apart and were no doubt selected for their sobriety and trustworthiness before they developed their considerable skill.

In some cases the job ran in families with fathers and even grandfathers having done the same job. In those days they all worked a 7 day week in rotating shifts to cover the 24 hours at the 3 coal drawing pits, Hesketh, Institute and Middle Pit. A spare winder to stand in occasionally would be available and another would operate the Winstanley engine on a single day shift. Very often they would work 12 hours between 2 of them to cover a colleague off with illness.



The winders I knew were all dedicated individuals but were often 'crusty' and would not suffer fools gladly. As an 'oil lad' I more than once felt the brunt of their wrath if my work was perceived to be below par. These men were responsible for the engine houses and the engines within, showcases of cleanliness and smooth running. They were justly and sometimes obsessively proud of their engines.

Coal owners and later during my time, the National Coal Board managers, would often proudly bring VIP visitors to see the engines and were usually amazed at the spectacle. It was said 'you could eat your dinner off the engines'.

The Hesketh engine was undoubtedly the top of the bill as a show-piece and it is of great sadness that it is in a rusty, parlous state at this time (2017). However, it is still intact and hopefully it may be restored sometime in the future. The forty or more years it has been out of use has taken its toll. The sheer size and dimensions are considerable when compared to the diameter of the car combustion cylinder which is 2 to 3 inches in diameter with a 5 inch stroke whereas the Hesketh's 2 cylinders have an internal diameter of 36 inches and a stroke of 6 feet! The drum, like a bobbin onto which the winding ropes (steel cables) were wound and unwound is a semi-conical shape. This allowed the smaller diameter part of the drum to work like a lower gear for the rope, drawing its load out of the bottom of the deep shaft and gradually easing and speeding up as it rose and gained momentum.

The Institute engine was no less remarkable if not quite having the allure of the more modern Hesketh engine. In fact, the basic dimensions were the same but of a simpler and older design, being installed in the 19th century and of a marine type sometimes used in early steam ships. It was nicknamed the 'the Cockshead' because of the beak like pointed structure at the top of the headgear. This was amazingly, a vertical engine, unlike all the others at Whitfield which were horizontal. It was housed in five floors, two of which were below ground level. The drum, weighing 50 tons, was a simple parallel shape, like a bobbin and was suspended on the top floor of the building. It was a powerful experience to stand near the engine man on the ground floor, watching and almost feeling the hot piston rods working the upward cranks to the hissing and puffing of super heated steam. The supporting walls were immense but nevertheless the building shuddered during the operation of the engine. The engine and engine house were no less clean and spotless than the Hesketh with similar tiled floors to be mopped and cleaned to kitchen standard.

The oil lad was nearly always out of sight of the winder at the Institute and oiling and greasing took place during the momentary pauses at the end of each run (top to bottom with the cages and vice versa). The winder had to rely on shouted signals from the lad on other floors to safely start the next run. What 'Health and Safety' would make of this nowadays is something to ponder.

Sadly the Institute was demolished and removed. A great loss to history.

CONTINUED.....

The Middle Pit, along with the Hesketh and Institute, was also coal drawing. It was a shallower shaft and the engine was smaller but it had 3 decker cages and was extremely busy, swiftly lifting a seemingly never ending stream of laden coal tubs. Like the other two coal drawing pits, the night shift was always a busy time with constant ongoing maintenance of the shaft and equipment and during the night the winder himself would, during quiet times, clean various parts of the engine that could not be accessed during daytime operations

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This engine has been demolished and removed.

The Winstanley Pit had the smallest winding engine. It was not used for coal drawing but was near to and secondary to the Middle Pit and at the same depth. It was of course mandatory to have at least 2 shafts to each mine. This had enclosed headgear with an airlock system of doors. Fresh air was drawn down the open Middle Pit out through a vent near the top of the closed Winstanly Shaft by the use of a steam driven fan engine.

It should be said here that a similar air flow system was operated with the other 3 shafts. The Hesketh being open and the Institute and Platt Pits both being enclosed and air locked. A powerful small steam engine in a separate building drew the air through this deep mine complex. Such was the importance of maintaining a clean air flow that there was a separate engine (unused) in another building near the Platt Pit in case of a failure or major maintenance to the main fan engine.

It was of course a legal requirement that all coal mines should have at least 2 shafts. It was equally important to have an air flow system and a secondary means of escape from below.

Historically these changes were embraced legally following a major disaster in 1862 at Hartley colliery near Newcastle upon Tyne. Almost unbelievably this deep mine had only one shaft which was divided throughout its depth by a wooden shuttering construction which allowed one side to be used for lowering and lifting men, materials and coal while the other side contained vertical pipes which pumped water out of the workings below. All mines would fill with water if not pumped out. The pump was operated by a huge beam engine. The heavy cast iron beam, which worked in an up and down motion over the shaft, broke off and plunged down the shaft taking with it all the dividing woodwork and crushing it down to about a 3rd of the shaft depth where it stopped in a tangled mess, blocking the shaft. All 204 men and boys working below perished before a rescue could be made. The youngest was 10 and the oldest 71. It is hard to believe that some callous coal owners needed the law to ensure they had two shafts. The life of a coal miner in those days must have been regarded as cheap.

Even in my day coal mining was a hazardous business and many was the time that I saw injured men (sometimes fatally) brought out of the pit on stretchers.

Lastly, the Platt Pit is probably the most intact at this time and as I mentioned before it had enclosed and air-locked headgear. To this day its distinctive green painted enclosure panels are visible. It shared common airways with the Hesketh and Institute.

The engine was much smaller than the Hesketh and Institute engines but larger than the Middle Pit and Winstanly engines. It was occasionally used for materials but was mainly for safety in the fifties.

Finally I should mention some of the personalities involved with winding engines at that time. As I mentioned previously, some of the winders ran through families. My father Eddie Sherratt was a winder at the Institute and later at the Hesketh. His father was a winder at the Institute and so was his grandfather. The latter was nicknamed 'Peg-leg' due to his loss of a leg in a dreadful accident when a cage he was entering at the pit bottom rose before he was fully inside, destroying his leg.

The Simpsons were another such family. Father and then son (Ted) operated the Middle Pit engine, the latter during part of the time I was there as an 'oil lad'. Another greatly experienced winder there was Cecil Johnson, a dignified and kindly man who operated with great skill. Another father and son were Fred and his son Alf Rhodes who operated the Hesketh and Middle Pit engines respectively.

Among the larger than life personalities were Tom Boulton (Hesketh) and Harry Holdcroft (Institute). Tom Boulton's brother, Syd, was not a winder but is worthy of mention as not only was he a very efficient engineer, he specialised in hydraulics and took part in promoting Whitfield's museum after its closure as a working colliery. He was an ex submariner.

Claude Winter was another highly talented engineer who specialised in reshaping the white metal bearings in the engines, a major undertaking when the drum and spindle shaft had to be raised out of the bearing beds. There are many others worthy of mention and to their memories I apologise.

Personally I am not sorry to see the end of deep coal mining which has always been dusty and dangerous, although many would disagree.

Ray Sherratt. QPM

Available on our web site :

<http://chatterleywhitfieldfriends.org.uk/the-winding-engines-and-engine-men-of-chatterley-whitfield/>