

**Conservation Fund final project report 1.4**  
**Shropshire Caving and Mining Club barytes industry projects**

For the first half of the twentieth century the mining and milling of barytes was an important industry in south west Shropshire and the county's industry was of major national importance, its production often exceeded that of any other county in the years between the two world wars. To a great extent this activity has been forgotten despite the fact that the last (known) miner employed in the industry only died in 2019. Shropshire Caving and Mining Club has run several small projects to create awareness of this history, to educate people of all ages and to protect and display some of its heritage.

The recently completed exercise has had four foci, three involve the continuation of work at sites which were beneficiaries of funding from the recent Stiperstones and Corndon Hill Country Landscape Partnership Scheme (LPS) and the fourth (hoping that some funds remained after achieving the first three aims) to reduce the damage to the remains of some of the industry's built heritage by felling invasive non-native trees and clearing gorse to reveal enough of the remains to enable sense to be made of them. Spending did permit significant work on this fourth project which has also involved many hours of volunteer input so far with much, much more to come.

The LPS funded the initial phase of recovering and re-erecting a trestle of an aerial ropeway at Bog Mine on the line of the ropeway which served that mine from 1919 to 1925 carrying barytes from the mine to railway sidings then later to a grinding mill at Malehurst and bringing coal back for the gas works which enabled electricity to be generated for the mine and the village. Ropeway technology is an almost forgotten aspect of transport which was important from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s. By the time that time and money ran out on the LPS project most of the trestle had been erected (photo 1) though the whole thing would have been too tall for the planning consent which had been granted, it proved impossible even for the contractor who recovered it from Lancashire to accurately measure its height until it was down, by which time there was no time for a further planning application. The key project for which this current funding was sought was to cover the planning fee for a variation consent and, if granted, to complete the top metre of the trestle (photo 2). The opportunity was taken whilst the lifting platform was on site to add a 'rope' on the other side of the trestle which balanced the jockey wheels and kept them level (photo 3). This has been achieved and adds to the educational value of the exhibit by not only looking right but being complete with the topmost section which would have carried telephone wires, indicating a key part of the functioning of such a line (photo 4).

The hopes that this work would cost less than a ball-park figure from a contractor prior to the funding application proved correct and sufficient funds remained to carry on the interpretation work at Cothecott barytes Mill, Church Pulverbatch. The LPS funded some clearance work, the siting of a mine truck on a plinth and the excavation of several mill-stones, some to carry information material and some for future display. A community archaeology project is active on this site and it became clear that the millstones for display were blocking part of the site which ideally would be excavated so funding was sought to cast a hard-standing outside the footprint of the mill on which the stones could be displayed. These are a bed stone and runner stone as they would have related to each other when working and a runner stone whose iron bands had broken allowing the stone to fall into its component parts to show how such a French buhr mill-stone was made. This work was carried out with the grant used to purchase concrete, timber and steel for club members to carry out the work, at the time of writing the slab is a few days old and the shuttering has just been struck (photos 5 & 6). Also at this site the LPS funded the stabilisation of a drying floor hearth, unfortunately this was damaged when a grazing cow put a foot through the top, the repair was effected by volunteers for the cost of material (photos 7, 8 & 9).

From a funding point of view the fourth project involved having sufficient left over for a tree surgeon at Bog Mine for half a day, in the event enough was left for a full day (photo 10). The surgeon felled several conifers growing on and around the foundations of the buildings containing the gas engines which generated the mine's power, which would have been damaging the archaeology. Following this work, club members have removed the gorse bushes which were covering key parts of the gas works and begun clearing the bases of the gas producers (photos 11 & 12) and gas holder (photos 13 & 14) and trying to establish the size, layout and use of a building marked on the Abandoned Mine Plan as 'New Gas Plant'. This building is slowly emerging though most of it is still choked with demolition rubble (photos 15 & 16). Before available and reliable diesel engines were readily available gas engines were widely used but away from town supplies users had to produce their own gas; there is possibly only one such system surviving intact at its workplace in the UK and perhaps two others in ruinous states, leaving concrete bases as the principal remains. The bases at Bog with its four producers supplying two or four gas engine is a rare survivor, if the second two gas engines existed they will have been in New Gas Plant, hopefully the archaeology will enlighten us, ultimately. Single gas producer sets of bases are fairly numerous including part of one elsewhere at Bog Mine and the remnants of a rather more elaborate set at Cothercott. Like ropeways and the barytes industry these 'country gas' plants are forgotten technology and the club aims to educate the public about them, particularly as Bog should be proud of being the first village in the county to be lit by electricity generated by gas engines. Once sufficient has been revealed and interpreted an illustrated report will be produced for the use of visitors to the Bog Visitor Centre.

#### Captions

##### Trestle

Ph 1

*The trestle newly erected, March 28<sup>th</sup> 2019 complying with the initial planning condition (photo M Shaw)*

2

*The trestle being worked on October 28<sup>th</sup> 2019 (photo A Wood)*

3

*The trestle's new 'rope' in place, October 28<sup>th</sup> 2019 (photo K Lake)*

4

*The trestle topped out, October 28<sup>th</sup> 2019 (photo A Wood)*

##### Cothercott

5

*The shuttering and reinforcement in place for the slab at Cothercott, March 19<sup>th</sup> 2020. The mill-stones for the display are to the left, (photo A Harris)*

6

*The slab with the shuttering struck, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 2020, (photo A Harris)*

7

*The materials laid out to repair the top of the drying floor hearth at Cothercott, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2019 (photo A Wood)*

8

*The hearth top excavated for repair, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2019 (photo A Wood)*

9

*The newly completed repair, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2019  
(photo A Wood)*

##### Bog clearance

10

*The tree surgeon at work on October 24<sup>th</sup> 2019 (photo M Shaw)*

11

*Clearance of the workshop floors on March 12th 2020 looking the opposite way to Photo 10 (photo A Wood)*

12

*The western part of the gas works showing a reasonable state of preservation, March 12<sup>th</sup> 2020 (Photo A Wood)*

13

*Details of the octagonal base of one of the gas producers revealed, March 12<sup>th</sup> 2020 (photo A Wood)*

14, 15

*Before and after photos of the gas holder base emerging from the boscage, May 25<sup>th</sup> 2007 and March 16<sup>th</sup> 2020, in 14 New Gas Plant is beyond the gorse, 15 was taken standing on the rubble of that building. (photos M Shaw),*

16, 17

*Before and after photos of the SE wall of the New Gas Plant, December 4<sup>th</sup> 2017 and March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020 (photos M Shaw)*