



Over the last three months volunteer archaeologists have unearthed secrets of the Mill chimneys and the leat, and Gary Simpson and his team have consolidated the arches and capped them with a splendid green turf cover. Peter Jackson gives more information later in the Bulletin. However, the project is about much more than the physical remains of the Dukesfield Mill. While the work has proceeded on the arches, we have held the first stage in our artistic exploration of the site; "Reading the Past", in which volunteers are transcribing the written records of the WB Lead Company, has got off to a flying start; and we have been planning our post-Christmas events. In this issue we have news about these ongoing and future activities that explore the place of the mill in the social history of the area between Hexhamshire and Blaydon, and its legacy for today (see below for more details).

Leisure time at Dukesfield Arches



The first photograph, generously given by Mrs Betty Martin via Hilary Kristensen, shows the White family enjoying a trip to the arches in the 1900s. The place has been popular for informal events for many years. For example, the Halliwell Picnic was held annually, for many years, at the Halliwell mineral spa just along the track from the arches. In the second photo, a group picnics in style at Halliwell Spa in about 1900 (from Hilary Kristensen "Memories of Hexhamshire", Wagtail Press, Hexhamshire).

News from the last three months

Consolidation and Archaeology

Volunteers gave a vast amount of time to the Archaeology Dig in 2013. We uncovered unique remains which provide important information about the development of lead smelting mills in England. The holes in the chimney bases are unexplained and the tapered hopper through the top of the Arches is a puzzle waiting to be solved. The tasks ranged from heavy digging into demolition rubble to detailed trowel work on the top of the Arches wall. The excellent weather helped to make it enjoyable for most of the time.

The work has revealed some interesting pointers to the work programme for 2014. The water supply leat will benefit from more detailed digging in the probable sluice gates - the west side retaining wall has some mysteries to reveal, and the ground around the valley track is hiding at least three buildings.

In 2014 we should gain access to the foundations of what might be a peat store, silver refining building and possibly the furnace area of the mill. We might discover more evidence of the history of the site. Most smelt mills of the period were destroyed by rebuilding as they developed in the 19th century. The demolition of Dukesfield at an early date has hopefully preserved examples of how mills were designed in the 18th century.



The chimney dig before and after.

Topping Out

Right : Celebrating completion of the the consolidation of the arches Mr Ridley Roddam, under the approving eye of Gary Simpson, inserted the last trowel of lime mortar on November 22nd.

This was the first opportunity for many of us to get a good view of the new grassed top, which uses a cutting-edge approach to this kind of work.



Smelters and Carriers Research

SILVER

In each Bulletin we intend to include a note about some aspect of the research that volunteers are carrying out into the business and social history of the WB Lead Company and the people who worked for it. In this issue we report on investigations that Susanne and Chris Ellingham, volunteers on the "Reading the Past" programme, have been making into the production of silver by the company. The silver was obtained from crude smelted lead by further refining at the company's main refinery at Blaydon or, from 1765, at Dukesfield

Letters from the company's agents show that consignments of hundreds of ounces of silver at a time were despatched by road to a London goldsmith. A typical letter to Plumb & Browne, the goldsmiths, reads :

Gentlemen, I have this day sent you by Thos. Jennings the London Carrier Two pieces of fine Silver, in a Box, containing together One Thousand seven Hundred & Seventy two Ounces ... which I desire you will place to Account with Sir Walter Blackett Bart. at the Markett Price and advise me on your Receipt of them

If the agent did not get a receipt within a fortnight he would chase it up. Remarkably, despite the apparent casualness of the arrangement, and without security guards, apparently no silver ever went missing. A piece of fine silver of a thousand ounces is the equivalent of a bar 11 inches by 5 by 3.

The goldsmiths would write to confirm they had received the silver and what price they were paying. Occasionally the Agent replied that another local silver seller had received a farthing an ounce more and he hoped this would be matched. On one occasion he pointed out that Birmingham goldsmiths were offering better prices. However, Plumb & Browne must have given satisfaction because the company used them exclusively for many years. They effectively acted as bankers, holding the money on account until it was drawn on via Bills through the Newcastle bank of Bell, Cookson & Co.

The picture below shows the WB account book entry for the silver sold in 1760, worth about £50,000 at present prices, and the distinguishing mark with which each piece was stamped. The sum received for this silver represents about 3% of the total lead company receipts for the year

Bullion Acco: is Deb: to The Refining House		Ounces	
Oct ^r 9 For a p ^r of fine Silver recd this day	£ 630		at 5. 11 1/2 p ^{oz} ... RWBL. 187. 13. 9.
Nov ^r 29 For a p ^r D ^o recd this day	£ 596		at 6. 0 1/2 p ^{oz} ... AWBE. 180. ... 10.
Jan ^y 31 For a p ^r D ^o recd this day	£ 723		at 6. 1 1/2 p ^{oz} ... WBE. 221. 8. 4.
May 14 For a p ^r D ^o recd this day	£ 982		at 6. 2. p ^{oz} ... RWBL. 302. 15. 8.
June 5 For a p ^r D ^o recd this day	£ 433 1/2		at d ^o ... WBE & X 133. 13. 3
For a p ^r D ^o recd this day	£ 822 3/4	03	at d ^o ... list bottoms 25. 8. 9.

Here's an instructive little problem for those who can still remember £sd : assuming an average price of 6 shillings per ounce, how much was the delivery of silver mentioned in the Agent's letter worth? The present-day price is about £15 per ounce - what would the consignment be worth now?

Volunteer Opportunities

It was great to see so many people at Whitley Chapel Village Hall on a very windy and rainy night to hear Richard Carlton and Gary Simpson explain first hand the archaeology and consolidation work completed on the arches.

The evening was also our first opportunity to explain in more detail all the creative celebratory activities that will happen throughout 2014, and invite people to 'sign up' to participate.

GET INVOLVED

The posters on display that evening are available for all to view on the Dukesfield website 'Get Involved' section <http://dukesfield.wordpress.com/get-involved/> but here is a quick update on a couple of those activities :

Photography - We are looking for about 10 enthusiastic volunteers to be called upon to document all aspects of the project throughout 2014. A skills-sharing session will be held in Slaley on **Friday, 7th March, 10 am - 2pm**

Community Play - Local playwright David Nixon has spent November writing the first draft of what promises to be an amusing yet educational piece of drama. Opportunities range from script reading in February, through costume-making in June, to taking part in auditions in September for winter performances.

Meet Project Staff and Volunteers at a Lead Road Show

In January and February there will be opportunities at local libraries and other venues to pick up a booklet about volunteer opportunities and talk to people already involved. The first of these Lead Road Shows will be at Blaydon Library on **Tuesday, 21st January 2014**.

**Look out for mail alerts and posters about other dates and venues,
or email us at dukesfield@outlook.com and Mandy Roberts will contact you with details.**

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