

4P Report on the Mine in 1863

A parliamentary enquiry into the condition of mines in Britain included the following information about Snailbeach. The Underground Plan (Document 4M) will be useful in identifying some of the features mentioned.

Chapel Shaft

340 yards deep, cutting the vein at 280 yard level. It is used for drawing (lifting lead ore out of the mine) using skips on 1 ¼ inch (30 millimetres diameter) wire ropes.

Engine Shaft

A vertical shaft down to the 280 yard level and then continues at an angle following the vein to the 402 yard level. The gradient might be described as 3 in 1; that is, for every yard of descent the shaft moves one yard sideways.

Ore is removed from the mine using two kibbles hauled on flat wire ropes measuring 3 ½ by 5/8 of an inch (90mm by 15mm.) The kibbles pass each other in the vertical section of the shaft.

Old Engine Shaft (George's Shaft)

Down to 252 yards. Used as a footway for miners to get to and from the area of working. They descend on ladders in 10 yard lengths which are inclined at 7° down to the 150 yard level and 10° beyond this point. The ladders rest on wooden staging. All the levels are 7 feet high and six feet wide (210 cm by 180 cm) which aids ventilation. Men can comfortably walk upright and pass each other.

Changing Houses

A row of sheds about 70 feet long, 10 feet wide divided into six houses. The roofs are very low. There is no ventilation. The floors are loose earth. An iron pipe with a fire at one end runs through them. There is no provision for washing.

Dressing Floors

Men and boys are employed on several dressing floors.

Snailbeach Miners' Benefit Society

Men pay four pence to 9 pence a month depending on their level of pay. If sick or injured they receive seven shillings a week for six months, reducing to five shillings and sixpence for the next six months and after that four shillings and six pence. In case of death each adult paid six pence and each junior paid four pence to the funds, and the widow received £4. The same sum was paid if the wife of a member died.

Smelting Works

A new smelting works has opened near the mine in the past year. Since then there has been a good deal of illness among the men working at the smelter.

Working

203 men work underground for eight hours a day. This includes the fact that it took 30 minutes to descend George's Shaft via ladders to the 372 yard level, and an hour to climb to the surface at the end of the shift. Though this sounds arduous, the report described it as a 'most capital ladder road, there being plenty of room, plenty of air and easy ladders. I do not think it possible to find a more easy or safer footway'.

There have been no fatal accidents from blasting in the past eight years. One man was killed by a falling stone and another fell into a sump.

No women work at the mine. Surface workers have a 12 hour day. Men have to buy tallow candles. A kilo of candles lasts a week and costs 8 pence. Housing is described as unhealthy with many people living in mud huts.