



COALFACE

OCTOBER 2015

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

After a not so good summer, autumn is now upon us, and along with it, so far, some much better weather. The Friends are pleased to welcome the new Chief Executive, Mhairi Cross, to the Museum. Mhairi brings a wealth of experience to NMMS and she has already begun to make an impact, and has joined the Friends in recent talks and our visit to Arniston House, of which more below.

Along with Mhairi and Tom Young, museum guide, I was privileged to meet Her Majesty the Queen, and HRH the Duke of Edinburgh, at the opening of the new Newtongrange Station on the Borders Railway on the occasion of its official opening on Wednesday 9 September. Although it was a chilly morning, and the arrival of the Royal party was delayed by poor weather on Royal Deeside, the Newtongrange Silver Band did a great job in keeping the large crowd entertained. A picture from the day is shown below. Indeed, this was a once in a lifetime experience.



The Friends' new programme of "Fridays at 11" talks got underway on 4 September, with an excellent presentation on the Tobacco Barons of Glasgow given by Tom Dowds. I was particularly interested in how these very wealthy men profited from the slave trade, which was not an aspect of Scotland's history which had occurred to me before. The talk on 2 October was by John Reade on the subject of beer advertising

and how it reflected social history members were able to take away a small sample of John's beer, brewed at his former brewery at the Abbott's House, Dunfermline. I have not tried mine yet. Both these talks were well attended and I am looking forward to the next one on 6 November on the Cousland Smiddy.



On 29 September, a group of 15 Friends paid a visit to Arniston House, the ancestral home of the Dundas family. We were shown round by Mrs Althea Dundas-Bekker and her daughter Henrietta. We saw wonderful paintings, furniture and room settings in a way which very much brought the history of the House and the family alive. It was a much appreciated visit, following which we had a delicious afternoon tea and home-baking. We were also able to take a stroll around some of the beautiful estate in brilliant sunshine. A picture is attached of the visiting group.

Finally on 2 October, in the evening, Linda and I travelled to Blantyre, South Lanarkshire, where we met up with Bob McDonald of the Friends at the Blantyre Miners Welfare and Resource Centre. The purpose of the visit was to see the first public showing of a short film on the subject of the Blantyre Mining Disaster of 1877. The film had been made by South Lanarkshire Council's "Pits, Ponies, People and Stories" project and was based on research carried out by Gordon Cook, who also narrated the film. After the film had been shown, I had the opportunity to have a public discussion with Gordon on how he had gone about his research, and the surprising and moving story thus revealed. The Museum has made a substantial educational input to this project over the last 2 years and it is a fine example of how communities and people of all ages can re-connect with their history.

Arrangements are now in hand for a Friends Christmas lunch. Further details will follow.

BRORA—A Historical Time-Line

1529. It is believed coal mining first started in Brora, initially as an open cast pit. Over the years, large shafts were discovered, the most recent at Fascally.

1598. Jane, Countess of Sutherland, began to actively exploit the availability of local coal.

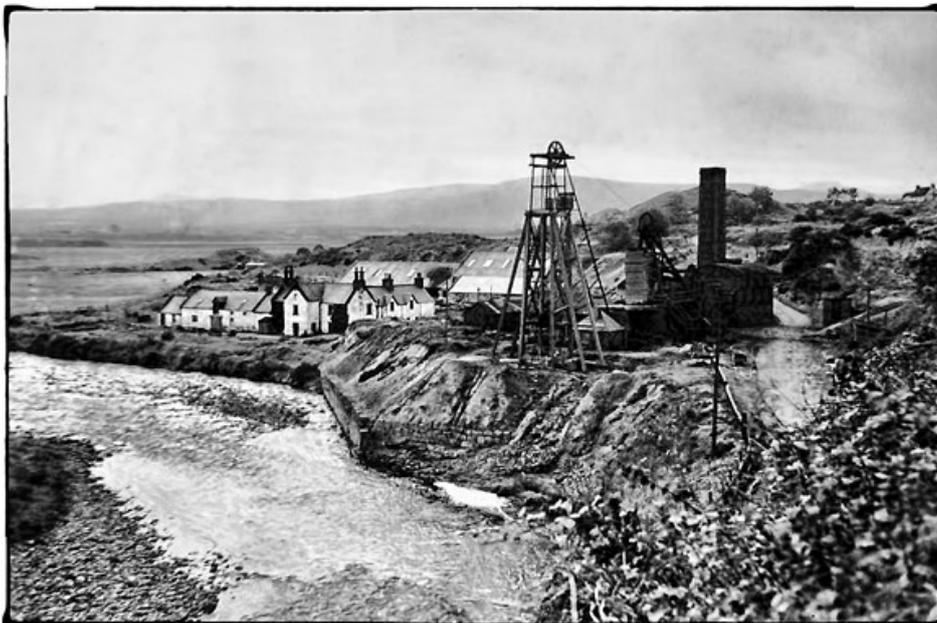
1598. The Brora Salt Pans were developed, because of the coal available locally. Earl John, son of the Countess of Sutherland, who had sunk a shaft at Castle Hill, was credited with starting the salt pans. They provided salt for the curing of fish caught locally. The salt pans led directly to the construction of an ice house, plus establishment of new trades such as coppers and specialist curers.

1770s. A new shaft was sunk at Castle Hill and a 20" wooden tramline was laid to the salt pans where coal was in use, to speed evaporation in salt making.

1811. After the Highland Clearances, this was one of the coastal towns where many inland glen people, from more north and west parts of Sutherland, after being dispossessed, were resettled to learn fishing or to go into manufacturing. The settlement was laid out in its present form. With its neighbours Golspie to the south and Helmsdale to the north, it has much in common with the English county town of Stafford and the West Midlands, when it was the most north and east parts of the huge Stafford and Sutherland Estates and the industrial heartland of Sutherland. For example, a local street is Stafford Terrace.

1817. Lady Stafford set up a brewery by the harbour, known as the Stafford Arms.

1818. The Marquis of Stafford established a brickworks which was soon producing 10,000 bricks and tiles. A thriving quarry, as an adjunct, produced Jurassic sandstone, used for extensions to Dunrobin Castle, the Ben Bragghie monument and was exported to London by ship to help in the building of London Bridge.



1818-1819. The Marquis of Stafford, later Duke of Sutherland, established the Clynesh Distillery and by 1821 production had reached over 10,000 gallons a year. The major reason was to induce local crofters not to sell the grain they grew to illegal whisky stills. The marquis was one of the architects behind the 'clearances' during which tens of thousands of tenants were evicted from their highland farms. The land was needed for sheep farming to

supply the booming wool industry. Many of the evicted tenants moved out to the coastal areas and these families had a hard time making their living and many of them soon started to illegally distil whisky to boost their income. In an attempt to stem this spreading illegal activity, the marquis built the Clynesh distillery and licensed it so that the coastal farmers would have a legal market for their grain.

1820. The Marquis of Stafford, later Duke of Sutherland, commissioned the building of a new harbour. It became a centre for local import and export, even a starting place for emigrants from Brora to New Zealand and elsewhere.

1825. Competition from England, mostly in the Midlands and Black Country, offered better quality and cheaper coal. As a result, the Brora coal mine closed. The brick and salt industries also suffered and Brora went through a period of decline.

WILSONTOWN

An Iron Community

From 1799 until 1842 the first ironworks in Lanarkshire was churning out tons of iron each day. Furnaces, rolling mills, slitting mills and a forge were in operation in this remote part of South Lanarkshire. In its heyday there would be 2,000 worked in the complex producing 41 tons of iron a week. The ironworks had a rail line to the station at Auchengray, which was on the Caledonian Railway.

Robert Wilson had a small coalmine on this land but the idea of an ironworks took root when his brother William found ironstone in a nearby burn. Another brother, John, sent a letter to his brothers from London confirming the viability of the ironstone.

"We have at last got measure of the ironstone sample you sent me this summer. It demonstrates great promise in your and William's suggestion of an ironworks on the family estate at Cleugh. Perhaps there is merit in this enterprise after all."

Letter from John Wilson to his brother Robert in 1778.

The family had made its money as lawyers and merchants so starting an ironworks could be seen as a gamble.

The ironworks produced rails, cannonballs, pipes, boiler-plates, nails and axles. In 1828 it was noticed that a blast of hot air improved the production of iron. The "Hot Blast" soon took hold in ironworks across the country. In addition to hot blast a nozzle called the "Scotch Tuyere" was introduced at Wilsontown and again this innovation was used world-wide in iron production.

However, in 1811 the enterprise was declared bankrupt. In 1821 William Dixon bought the site. Dixon kept iron production going until 1842. Most of the equipment used at the works was sold off to the Carron Ironworks near Falkirk. Coal mining carried on at Wilsontown until 1955.

The Forestry Commission took over the site in the 1970s. Until recently a visitor to Wilsontown would have been confronted with acres of trees. In 2008 a change began to take place at Wilsontown. The Commission removed the trees, many by helicopter and the remains of the ironworks were revealed. The most notable feature was the cluster of 77 Bell Pits.

I visited the site in July 2014 and found a refurbished site laid out by the Forestry Commission, which gave excellent information about the site on what was obviously new information boards. The artist Michael Blackmore has produced excellent illustration, found on the information boards, showing what the ironworks would have been like in its heyday.

Details of the site at Wilsontown can be found at www.forestry.gov.uk/wilsontown

Jim Waugh
Friend of NMMS



An aerial view of the Bell Pits at Wilsontown

Ian's Memories

In mid September 1947 I started a four year course in metallurgy at what is now Strathclyde University. The course fees were 15 guineas a year. Lanarkshire awarded me a bursary of £50.

At the end of my first year I spent 10 weeks at William Beardmore's Parkhead Forge. In the summer of 1948 I travelled to London by the newly inaugurated S.M.T. night bus to see my aunt and uncle. The cost of a return ticket was £2.50.

In my second year I was responsible for all the clocks, including the master clock, stopping. The Clerk of Works was not best pleased but it was only some two years later at his retirement party that I admitted that I was the one responsible for stopping time.

Each year, the last Saturday in January, was Charities Day when students of Glasgow raised money for hospitals and other charities. To raise money we stopped the trams by erecting road barriers and got on the trams rattling our cans asking for donations. The "polis" arrived and told us to remove the barriers to restore order.

The photo below shows me, with other students, dressed as a traffic light.



Ian Hogarth
Friend of NMMS

FORTHCOMING EVENTS/EXHIBITIONS

FOR FULL DETAILS OF THE MUSEUM'S EVENTS PROGRAMME PLEASE SEE OUR WEBSITE www.nationalminingmuseum.com

Tapestry Panel

For those of you interested in the Tapestry of Scotland we currently have some information on display in the foyer at the Museum. Make sure you check it out!

12th October-
15th November

“Treasures Found: Archaeology from the East of Scotland” exhibition is now on in the Special Exhibition Gallery.

12-16th October
11.30am-12.30pm

Explore the Energy Lab as part of Midlothian Science Festival. For children 1 aged 8-14.

20th October, 10am

Community Consultation in the Power House

Some of you have already been involved in one of our other consultation events but, if you are free, please come along to this one! We will be talking about the work done so far and discussing where we should go next so your opinions will be invaluable! **You need to book a space**, so please tell Lynsey or Ellie if you would like to come or sign up online via Eventbrite <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/boiler-house-consultation-tickets-1873100180>.

6th November, 11am

Fridays at 11am—Cousland Smiddy

20th December

12pm and 2.30pm

Jack & the Beanstalk Pantomime in the Power House. Call Reception for tickets.

JOIN THE FRIENDS

I wish to join the Friends of National Mining Museum Scotland and enclose a cheque for the appropriate subscription.

Adult (Annual) £20 Family (Annual) £30

Please make cheques payable to “The Friends of National Mining Museum Scotland” and return to:-

AGH Moore, Membership Secretary, Friends of National Mining Museum Scotland,
16 Shafto Place, Bo’ness EH51 9JE.

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