

# EAST CORNWALL MINING HISTORY ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER - 2019

<http://mininghistoryeastcornwall.btck.co.uk>

CHARITY NUMBER 1082887

### Notes from the AGM, held at Koffi Lodge, Gunnislake, 20 July 2019

#### Committee matters

Office holders as follows:-

Caroline Vulliamy	Chairman
Kim Tasker	Treasurer
Terry Faull	Manager of the website
Susan Pittman	Membership Secretary and Editor of the Newsletter - (01322 669923)

27 Old Chapel Road, Crockenhill, Swanley, Kent BR8 8LL

**More Committee members would be welcome, and it is vital more join the Committee, so please make contact if you are interested.**

#### **From the Chairman's Report**

##### **Grant applications**

Two grants are in the process of being completed, and two grant applications to the AONB Sustainable Development Fund have already been submitted:-

- ❖ To restore the two windows and door of the lower cottage and to paint all the woodwork facing the road. The type of paint used will depend on recommendations from Cornwall Council Conservation team.
- ❖ To cut the vegetation across East Kit Hill mine site, repair fencing, set up a new grazing regime, and install warning and information boards.



East Kit Hill Mine from Sevenstones to Kelly Bray road. Note the stack of South Kit Hill mine on the sky-line to the left, July 2019

### Work undertaken

- ❖ Thanks to Simon Streatfield and Richard Vulliamy vegetation at the miners' cottages has been cut back twice.
- ❖ The ridge beam of the lower cottage has been strengthened by John Rowe and Richard Vulliamy.
- ❖ Work continues on stabilising the privy and restoring door and bench seat.



I to r: Richard Vulliamy, John Rowe and Derwent Dawes working on the restoration of the privy behind the cottages, July 2019



### Success of Programme of Events for 2018-2019 -

ECMHA continued to run a series of events to raise the profile of the Association and, hopefully, to boost income, attract new members and encourage offers of help. In September there was a viewing of the SCATS video 'The Price of Poison', with a re-run in March at which composer, Dave Secombe, played the songs beforehand. In November John Manley gave a stirring talk describing mining processes. In February Jeff Harrison, from CRL, the mining company hoping to reopen Redmoor, updated us on progress, and he has promised to return in 2020 to talk about further investigations. Stoke Climsland Parish Archive is making a short film about the different day in the 1850s of a farmer's daughter going to school, while a miner's son emerges from the lower cottage door, himself to go to work in the mine.

**SATURDAY AUGUST 24 - 10.30-1.30 Jumble Sale  
at The Old School, Stoke Climsland (Please bring  
jumble from 8.30am - it & help welcome)**

**Keep an eye on the website for details of these and other events in the pipe-line.**

### **From the Treasurer's Report**

Despite making a determined effort to put on more events to raise funds, expenditure continues to exceed income:

Income	£592.70	Membership / Fund Raising
Expenditure	£1,204.90	Insurance / Companies House Annual Return Fee

**Carried forward from 2018** £1520.12

**Balance at 19/07/2019** £908.03

The charity has, therefore, made a loss of £612.20 since the 2018 AGM.

Ongoing, but necessary, insurance costs continue to take their toll on our resources, and leave us with little to spend on conserving the important heritage cottages and mine buildings. Hopefully, if grant funding is forthcoming, progress will be made on repairs and enhancements before the next AGM.

**Ideas for fund-raising and help at events would be much appreciated.  
Contact Kim Tasker: [kimtasker67@hotmail.com](mailto:kimtasker67@hotmail.com)**



View looking east from some way down from the summit of Kit Hill. East Kit Hill mine stack to left of gateway at lower end of track. Devon in haze beyond lower sky-line, July 2019.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF WALK BY TAMAR FROM LOCK COTTAGE TO NEWBRIDGE, GUNNISLAKE, 20 JULY 2019

The quiet rural riverside scene which now presents itself is a far cry from the days when the Tamar was the vital link between Gunnislake and the rest of the world. Yet when you look closely, evidence of the riverside's rich industrial past can still be found. Remains of mines, quarries, mills, lime kilns, wharves, brickworks, bone-meal factory, gasworks and, of course, the Tamar Manure canal bear witness to the past, though now crumbling and partially hidden by vegetation. It takes a keen eye and some knowledge to spot these ruins, and Caroline Vulliamy, the walk guide, had both at hand to help unfold the past to the group. I will not attempt to cover everything we saw, but will concentrate on those aspects which I most enjoyed discovering.



**Industry and agriculture formed close and subtle connections with each other to become part of an economic complex that today is completely shattered.... The Tamar, which had been a highway for all the trade and supplies of the district, became - and has remained - a deserted river, killed by the railway and improvements in road transport.**

*Industrial Archaeology of The Tamar Valley, Frank Booker (2nd edition 1972) p.14*

### **Tamar Manure Navigation**

In 1774 an Act to construct a canal transecting Cornwall from Bude to Plymouth via the Tamar was passed, but only the Bude part of the canal was completed. In 1796 the project was revived, but only the canal at Gunnislake was constructed by the Tamar Manure Navigation to overcome the obstacle of the salmon weir. Its main purpose was to enable lime and possibly sand to be carried inland to meet increasing demand.



The modern weir with salmon-leap in centre, July 2019.

On John Rennie's advice the river was dredged to a five-foot depth to allow access for 60-ton barges. Barges were hauled by 'hobblers' pulling on two ropes attached to the masts against the current. Between Calstock and Gunnislake the river was crossed by skulling four times to towpaths on either side of the river - from Okel Tor crossing to Gawton Quay, back to Harewood, then across to Morwell rock, before finally ending on the Cornish bank at Netstakes.



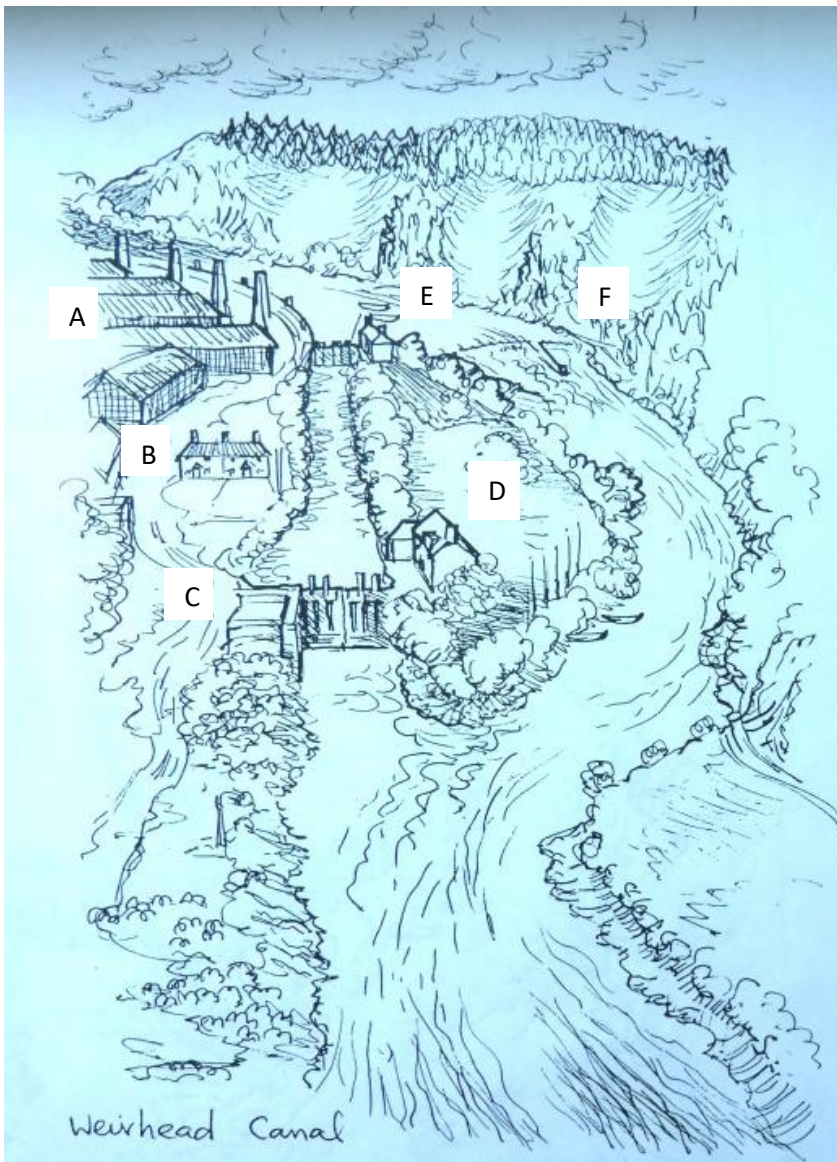
The modern lock at the north end of the canal, 20 July 2019.

The canal was 500 yards long, with lock, lock basin and lock keeper's cottage at the lower end. The granite block walls were meticulously cut with the date 1798 on one. The whole is now a Scheduled Monument.





The lock-keeper's cottage, July 2019.



The canal had a long and profitable existence until the 1920s when the river ceased to be navigable. The Company was liquidated in 1942.

- A. Bealswood Brickworks
- B. Cottages at Weir Head
- C. Lower lock with basin beyond
- D. Lockkeeper's cottage
- E. Top lock with cottages
- F. Weir head

Drawn from a postcard c.1926. (Calstock Parish Archive Trust)

**THE RANGE OF GOODS CHARGEABLE THROUGH THE CANAL, with the proviso that also charged were 'other goods, wares, merchandises and things whatsoever'.**

**Livestock:** cattle, calves, sheep, swine and other beasts

**Agricultural related:** wheat, potatoes, barley, oats, hay, straw, lime, limestone, dung and manure, sand

**Timber related:** rough timber, bark, faggots

**Mining related:** tin, ironstone, pig iron, pig lead, culm, coal, coke

**Building related:** freestone, tiles, slates, bricks, stones

### **Some of the enterprises using the canal**

#### **The Lime Kilns**

The lime trade was one of the oldest Tamar Valley industries. Lime was used to correct acidic soils, but also among other things provided a waterproof & germ-killing wash both outside and inside buildings, and was an ingredient in cleansing hides and skins for the tanning industry. The nearest lime deposits were in Plymouth, so lime was shipped from there. For centuries sea sand was applied directly onto fields, but at the end of the C18th the burning of lime in kilns was introduced. This means that most lime kilns along the valley date from the 1700s to 1830s, after which artificial manure and guano became more popular. These lime kilns, built in 1801 by William Dugdale, lie alongside a quay, 600' long and 40'-60' wide. The date and initials JW (John Williams of Scorrier, principal shareholder), now obscured by vegetation, are cut into the top of the central arch.



The 2nd group of lime kilns nearer to Newbridge, 20 July 2019.

#### **The Quay Granary**

At the same time a three-storey granary was built sideways on to the quay. The river end was arched to allow the access road through. It was difficult to discern what was left of this distinctive building.



From a Valentine series postcard c.1926, and the remains of the riverside pillar, July 2019.

### Mining



Below this quay top wall near Newbridge adits from Old Gunnislake mine emerge.



David Adams checks this adit periodically and had this photo on his phone to share. The mine was opened in the C18th and abandoned c.1883.

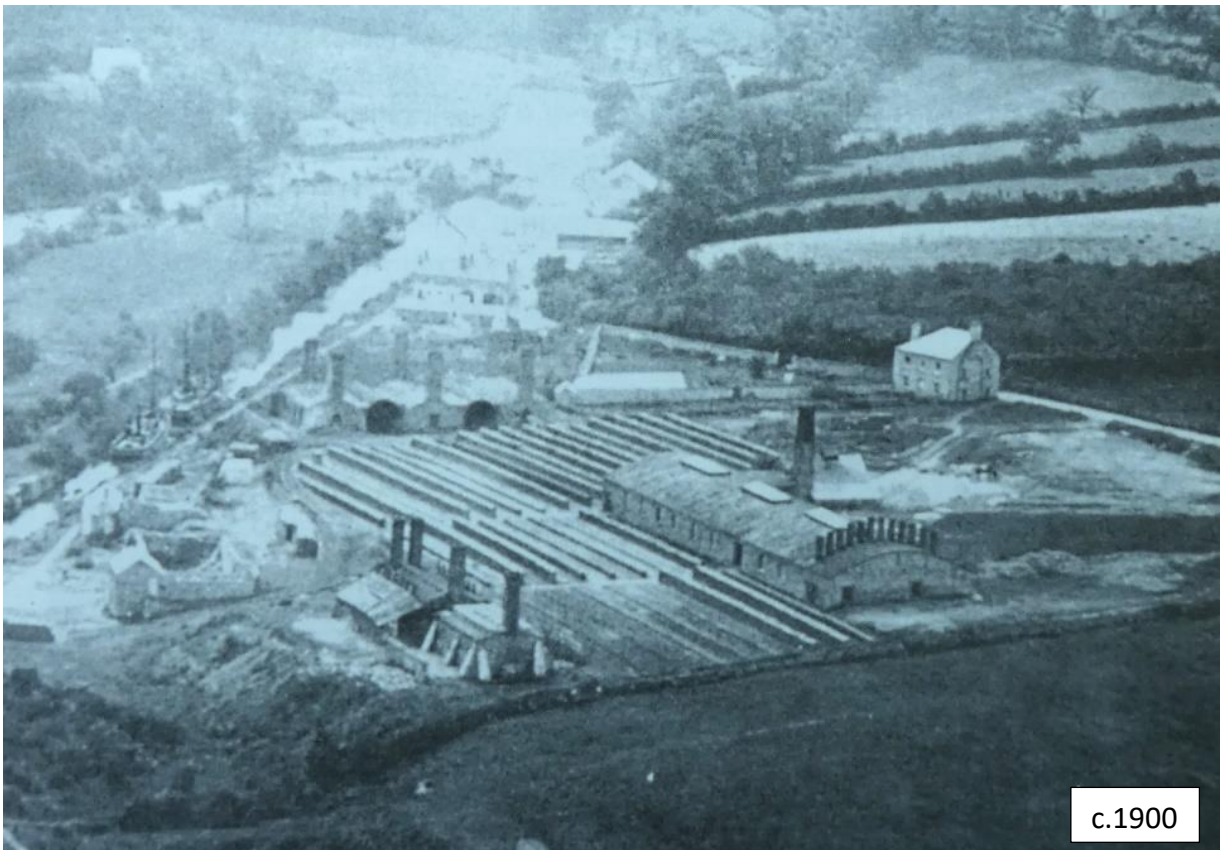
## Bealswood Brickworks

The group, led by Caroline Vulliamy, at Little Bealswood house, shown below in 1900 standing isolated just inside Bealswood Brickworks. Note the ships in the canal.



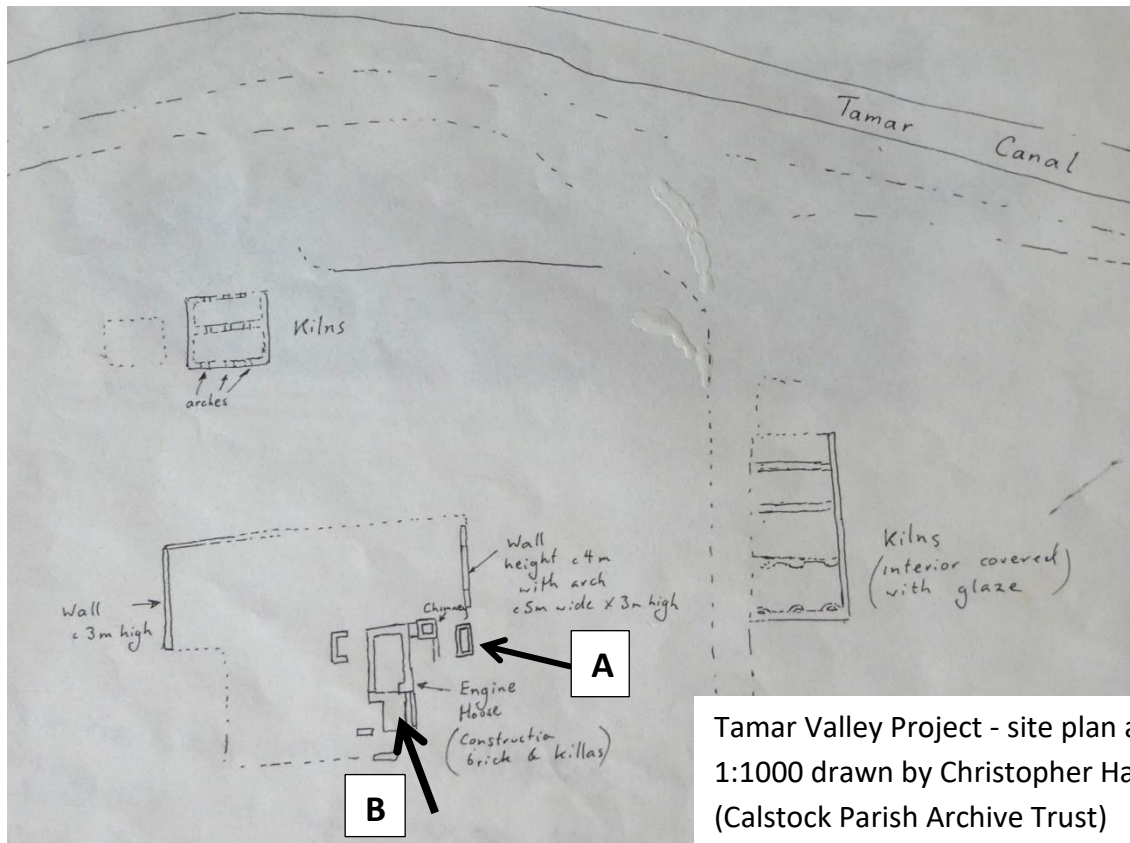
After the repeal of the tax on bricks in 1850 several brick works started in Calstock parish, one of the earliest being founded by Thomas Westlake at the north end of the canal at Bealswood. It became the largest brickworks in Cornwall, but the boom ended in 1900, and the brickworks were closed in 1914.

Blue heavy duty bricks were made from decomposed elvan dug from the pit across Bealswood Road. The clay was hauled to the works along an incline tramway - the power provided by a steam beam engine. There appear to be 5 rectangular downdraught kilns (3 at back beyond brick drying area and 2 bottom left), as well as a rectangular Hoffman or Belgian kiln (centre right in photo). The engine house contained a rotative beam engine, which drove the machinery on the site and might have powered the tramway. A small quay by the canal enabled the easy transit of goods on and off the site.





Remains of the engine house, July 2019

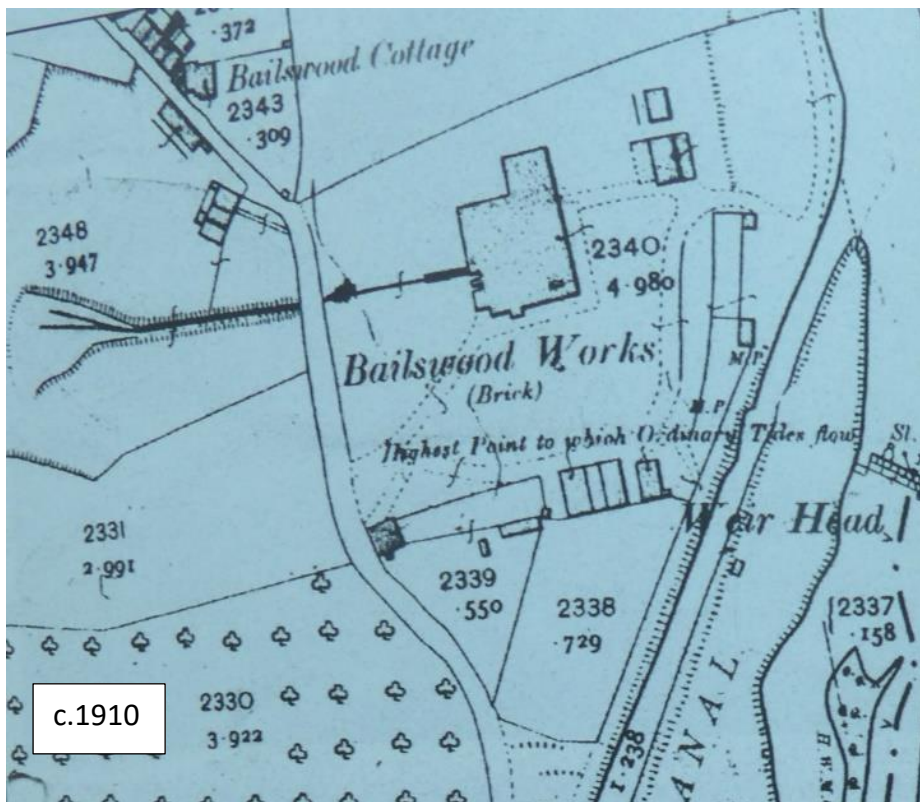


Tamar Valley Project - site plan at 1:1000 drawn by Christopher Hack (Calstock Parish Archive Trust)

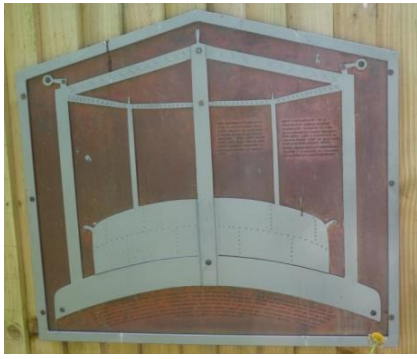


A broken brick from Bealswood Brickworks inscribed (WE)STLAKE. These bricks were red with no frog, July 2019.

An arched tunnel under the roadway through which clay was hauled from the pit to the brickworks, July 2019.



## The Gas Works



The gas works were opened in 1872 by Gunnislake Gas and Coke Company, with great celebrations in Gunnislake - an old folk's supper, bands playing and a fireworks display all adding to the atmosphere as street lights were lit. Two years later the lights were extinguished as the village could not afford them, until in 1876 it was agreed to spend more and the streets were lit again.

On the gates of the former gas works are two panels, one in the shape of a gasholder and the other of the retort house. The wording tells the story of the gas works, which made, stored and distributed gas to the district from 1872-1954. Until the First World War coal was brought up river to the gas works, and by-products, such as coke and tar, could be distributed by river too. Thereafter, Gunnislake station, opened in 1872, rail and road transport were used. All structures have been removed from the site, which has now been planted with native shrubs and wildflowers.

The Tamar Manure canal profited from all these enterprises, but when the brickworks and gasworks ceased to use river transport, the maintenance of dredging and of infrastructure became unaffordable and gradually the various enterprises stopped, and the bankside took on a very different character. However, just as a footnote, the Tamar is now a tourist attraction and when I was in Cornwall I enjoyed a steam launch rally at Calstock, so will finish with a photo of that event.



### Sources:

My thanks to Calstock Parish Archives Trust for access to their collection

Frank Booker	Industrial Archaeology of The Tamar Valley	1971
Diana Cook & Dorothy Kirk	Turner in the Tamar Valley	2009
J. Ferguson & C. Thurlow	Cornish Brick Making and Brick Buildings	2005
Charles Hadfield	The Canals of South West England	1967
Ken Isham	Lime Kilns & Limeburners in Cornwall	2000
Roger Massey	Postcards from the Tamar Valley & Calstock Parish	2000