

WEST SOMERSET MINERAL RAILWAY ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER NO 4 OCTOBER 2015

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Once again we have had a successful programme of walks. In addition to the monthly walks there have been several talks and special walks arranged for particular groups. These often encourage people to come again on a different walk. They always say they enjoy it, and give generously to help us with conservation. As is usual in the Brendon Hills, the weather has not always been kind, so we appreciate the kindness of the Methodists in allowing us to use Beulah Chapel, the perfect place to explain the historical background and enjoy the atmosphere of Brendon village. The Methodists have celebrated the 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Bible Christian Society this year. This group founded the chapel in 1861 to provide for the needs of the growing miners' village.

Our long walk remains very popular. In May it formed part of the Exmoor Walking Festival, drawing in visitors to the area who came specifically for the walking on Exmoor. The mining activities here were new to them, and they enjoyed the walk down the incline and past Comberow, with its engineering achievements almost buried in spring greenery and primroses. Lunch at Leyland Chapel, the traditional farm buildings of Leyland Barton, the old cottage in the woods and the beautiful waterfalls make this a varied walk in any weather(almost). Twenty five Taunton Deane Ramblers also enjoyed it and said they might make it a regular event. Six people, some local and some visitors to the area, came on our last long walk. Garrick has written an article on this, with photos.

On May 17 The Rolle Canal Group came for an all day visit to the Raleigh's Cross Mine, the Brendon Hill village and the Incline, and the Langham site.

There have been three bus trips, as well as the usual shorter walks around Raleigh Cross and Langham. Only one walk had to be cancelled because of the weather. The walk from Watchet to Washford, part of the 'Watchet in Summertime' event, was very popular this year. The Barnstaple geology U3A came on the last bus trip for this year. We had a full bus, a cold east wind and a feeling of autumn. They enjoyed poking around Watchet and Roadwater so much we needed a coffee and a warm-up at the Valiant Soldier before heading off to the Brendon Hills.

Phil has done a number of talks for various groups. On June 24 Phil and Tessa gave a talk to the Dunster Family History Society, and consequently some of them are interested in a bus trip. Phil also did a broadcast on July 25 for 'Somerset Sound'. All this publicity can only be good, as still many people do not know about our hidden heritage or the activities we offer.

Four children and their parents thoroughly enjoyed the Family Treasure Hunt. We were invited to visit the adit in the back-yard of Eisen Cottage, where one family lived. Perhaps it is not surprising that they, the present owners, wanted to know more about the industry that led to the building of their home. We appreciated seeing the part of the Eisen Hill mining activities we could not visit last year. (See Newsletter 3, and article in this newsletter).



The display of our photographs, rails, chairs and other WSML memorabilia at Cleeve Abbey during the first week end of October was again very successful. We now have or can borrow three models of the Incline and have an interesting collection of museum items to supplement Phil's great collection of mineral samples. We are very grateful for these loans and donations and for the opportunity that Cleeve Abbey have given us. Over 160 people paid us a visit. **T. Wilson.**

The WSMLA website

Things never stand still in the internet world. Since we put our current site together several years ago websites have become responsive, in other words they optimise themselves on different devices. We have the challenge of not only making our site responsive but also trying to amalgamate the two websites that currently carry information about the West Somerset Mineral Line.

We have a website at www.westsomersetmineralrailway.org.uk which contains a vast array of historical information that was put together by the original Mineral Line Project and another at www.wsmla.org.uk Unfortunately for administrative reasons we are not able to edit the original www.westsomersetmineralrailway.org.uk website set up through Somerset County Council and so we are going to have to find a way of extracting the information from it and adding it to the website we set up and fully control at www.wsmla.org.uk.

This will be a huge task as there is so much information. However, once completed the WSMLA will be in a much better position to offer historians, walkers, students and followers of the Mineral Line more and better information on the history and current activities of the WSMLA.

If you are interested in working with us to develop the new website we would be very pleased to hear from you. You do not need to be knowledgeable about the inner workings of websites as we have roles for people who can enter information right through to those who want to get involved at the design and coding end of the process.

Our Information Leaflets have been brought up to date and reprinted, as the stock left to us by the Lottery Project was nearly used up. In view of the cost of this we need to make a nominal charge for them, but they can be downloaded free from www.wsmla.org.uk. You will also find copies of our events leaflet, our newsletters and some recent photographs. **R. Edwards.**

DATES FOR YOU DIARY

Mon Nov 9 9.45am Short Walk from Ralegh's Cross Inn YTA23 OLN

This 3 1/2 hour walk visits the Winding House and iron mines near Beulah Chapel It includes the Incline: steep, spectacular, but optional.

Tues Dec 8 9.45am Chargot Woods Walk Meet at Chargot Woods Car Park SS975355

A short 1 hour stroll to look at Langham Engine House and the history of the Mineral Line. Followed immediately by a 2 hour walk down the steep miners' track looking at other features connected with iron mining.

Wed Jan 20 9.45 am Ralegh's Cross in Winter. Meet at Ralegh's Cross Inn TA23 OLN.

This 3 1/2 hour walk visits the Winding House and iron mines near Beulah Chapel It includes the Incline: steep, spectacular, but optional.

Mar 12 11 am Bus Trip. Meet at Watchet Station. We travel by minibus as close as possible to the old mineral line and see the sites along the way. Cost £7 for the bus. Please book by Mar 5 on 01398 323841. **This is planned to coincide with the West Somerset Railway's spring gala.**

WEST SOMERSET MINERAL RAILWAY ACT and PROXY LETTER

Our Secretary, Chris, was fortunate enough to purchase copies of the WEST SOMERSET MINERAL RAILWAY BILL and the subsequent ACT of 1855.

‘For authorising the Making and Maintaining of the West Somerset Mineral Railway, and the Improving and Regulating of the Harbour of Watchet, in the County of Somerset, and for other purposes.’

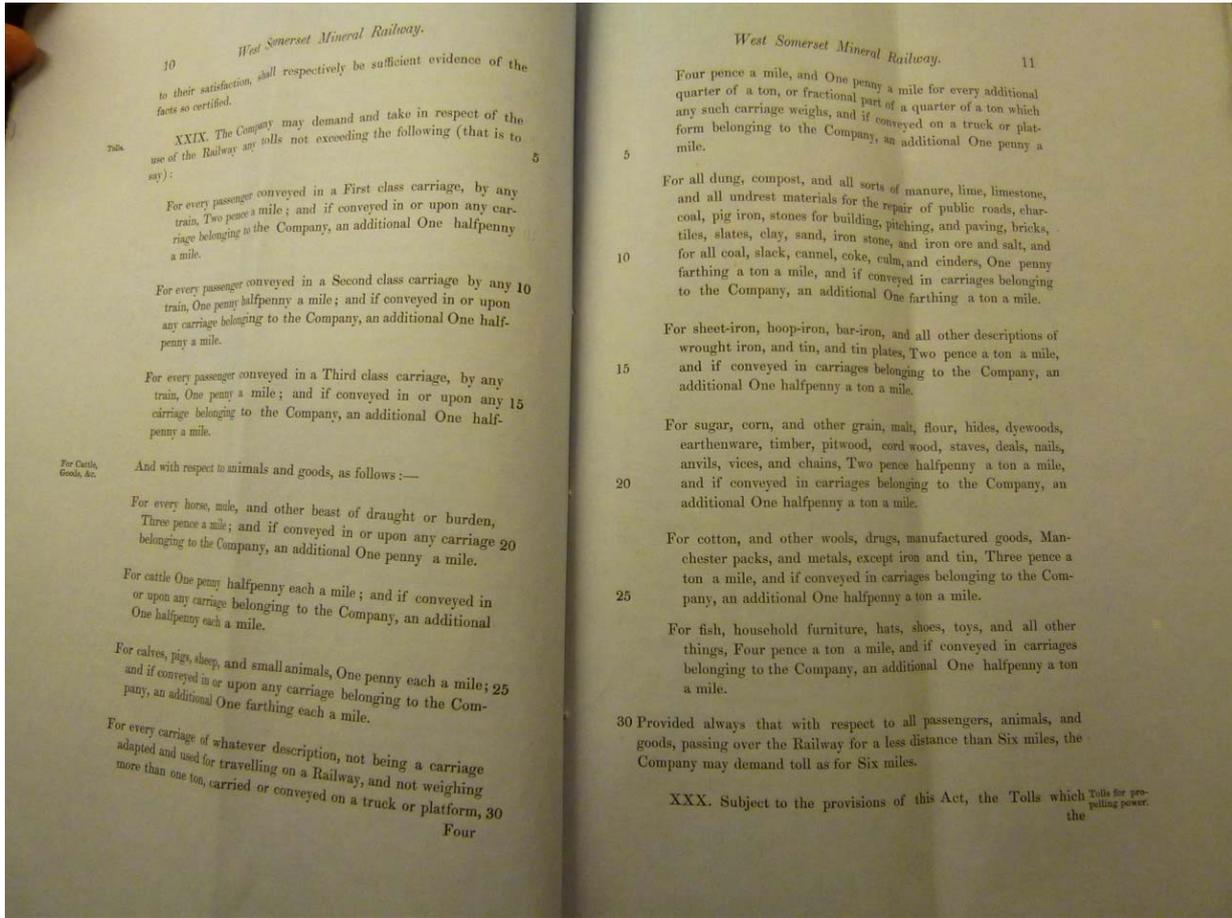
PHOTO OF ACT



These papers were found at auction in Taunton earlier this year. The Bill is stamped TAUNTON MY18 1855 and the Act has ‘Mr Alexander’ written on the cover. The Bill was prepared by Rowcliffe & Son, Solicitors, Stogumber. Charles Edward Rowcliffe Jnr was Secretary of the WSMR. The Bill had its third reading on 11 July, passed and the Act received Royal Assent on 16 July 1855 (Jones & Hamilton, 2010). The auction lot also contained a copy of THE SEVEN VALLEY RAILWAY ACT, 1853 also with Mr Alexander’s name on it. It has been suggested that the SVR Act may have been used as a template for the later WSMR Act.

Readers may be interested to see part of the Act showing the tolls that could be taken by the Company from those using the railway from First class passengers at 2½d a mile to fish, hats, shoes and toys at 4½d a ton a mile.

PHOTO OF SCHEDULE



Our Chairman was also fortunate to be offered an original letter dated 17 March 1922 appointing a proxy at the meeting of the Proprietors of the WSMR held on 23 March 1922. It was interesting to note that it bore a 'postage due' 2d stamp.

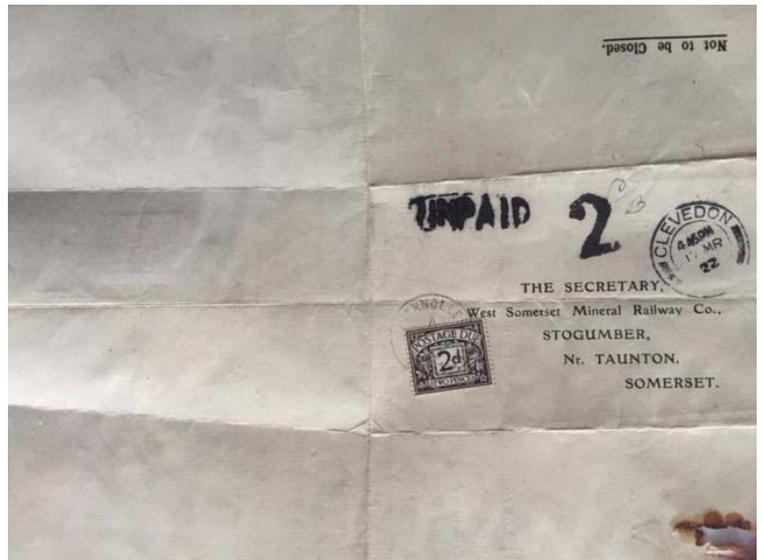
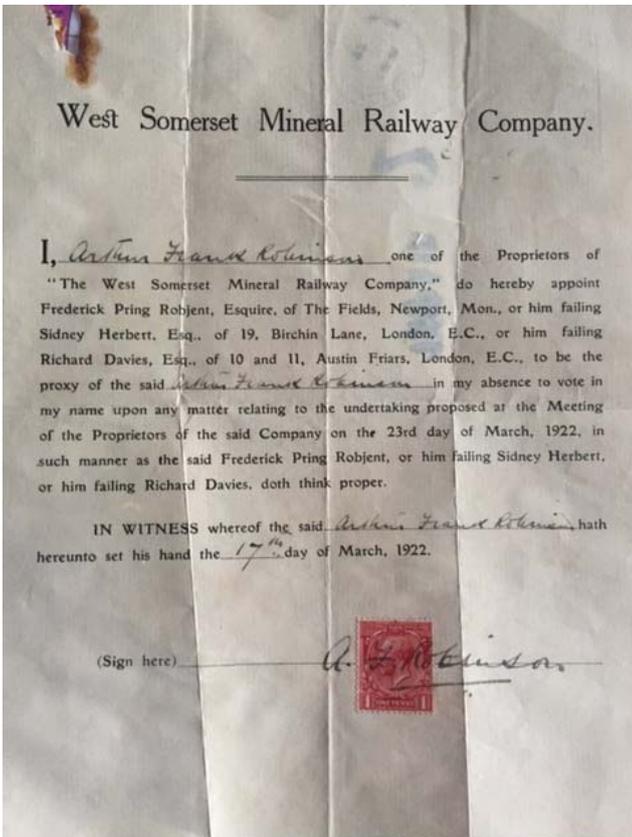


PHOTO OF PROXY STATEMENT

C. Sampson



WHO'S BEEN CHEWING OUR LEAFLETS?

There is a finger post in the garden of Rose Villa, Roadwater, on which we've attached a leaflet holder for the Association's walks leaflets and another that holds the Association's business cards giving our website address. These have proved very popular with holiday makers and other visitors to the village. But not only the visitors it would seem; there is another creature that manages to crawl all the way up the finger post and nibbles away at our business cards through the drain holes at the bottom of the holder. A piece of card was put over these holes to thwart the creature's hungry habits, but despite our best efforts the creature got through as evidenced in the photo you see. But not to be defeated, the card barrier has now been replaced by a section of aluminium beer can. That should stop him!



Following this success another leaflet holder has been placed in the Winding House at the top of the Incline. C. Sampson.

PLEASE !

Join us: membership only costs £5 (£6 for the whole household). This helps towards conservation and publicity costs. In return we keep in touch and send you news of our activities.

Help us: we need more people to come on walks, or help with leaflets or proof reading, to help clear paths, or put up posters, and especially now, to help with the website.....

The 'Long' Walk along the WSML – Sunday 6th Sept 15

There is always something for everyone along the route of the Long Walk of the WSMLA and the walk on Sunday 6th September this year proved no different. It was helped with sunny clear skies and a very pleasant temperature when in the sunshine.

After meeting at Ralegh's Cross and parking closer to the old Brendon Village the small group led by Phil Gannon and accompanied by Tess and myself made our way to Beulah Chapel where Jill Tapp engaged us with a review of the history of the chapel, originally founded by the Bible Christians in 1861 as one of three places of worship for the Brendon Village community of around 250 people. However, following closure of the mines in the late 1870s, the mine and railway workers moved away the Chapel fell into disrepair before in 1910 it was restored as a place of worship and has been in use as such ever since; this year it even featured as one of the noted places of worship in the 2015 Methodist Heritage Handbook.

The Winding house at the top of the incline is always an interesting place to take stock of how life might have been when the whole operation was in full swing - imagine two thirds of the space being occupied by the great Winding wheels whirring away pulling wagons up and down the incline whilst the engineer looking after them occupied the other third with his family going about the daily family business.

On this particular sunny Sunday the views from the top of the incline were magnificent providing clear views to the Bristol Channel where Steep Holm poked out through the waters; Wales could be seen clearly in the distance and some of the party even claimed to be able to make out the blurred forms of the Brecon Beacons!



The incline itself has become quite overgrown again with brambles etc so care was needed to

get to the bottom but no major obstacle were encountered.



Near the bottom we were able to walk through 'Underpass 14' which, when the Incline was constructed, maintained the thoroughfare that was the Market Way from Leigh Farm to Ralegh's cross and is just wide enough for the standard wagons of the day to pass through; however, there is not much traffic these days!

At the base of the Incline is Comberow where once there was a station and it was from here that passengers on the railway had to pay for their trips to Watchet and the stations along the way. Looking carefully through the undergrowth we were able to find the platform now covered with all manner of vegetation.



It's a bit of a stretch of an analogy but Cambodia has Angkor Watt and the WSMLA has Comberow Station!

Moving on, we found ourselves at Leighland Chapel where we were able to relax for a while and eat our lunch. The Chapel, dedicated to St Giles, is a 19th Century church with interesting

features, built on a site where there has been a structure for worship since the 12th Century. At this point, having walked down an elevation of approximately 800 feet it was time to make the walk back up! But the warm weather and good company eased the ascent through the fields to Leigh Barton Farm where we stopped briefly whilst Phil entertained us with the clerical history of the Farm and pointed out some of the more interesting features of the Farm Buildings including the Gin House (which housed the 'Engine' - originally horse-drawn – as opposed to being the drinking room ...) and some original Millstones leaning against the Farmyard walls. And so to the remainder of the walk upwards through Broadfield, Western Cliff and Forehill woods. The track took us past a waterfall which was quite full after recent rains (Photo 4). At this point the Waterfall also became the focus for a convoy of 15 – 20 LandRover & Range Rover enthusiasts also enjoying the good weather – and no doubt rough terrain – of this sunny Sunday afternoon (Photo 5 and 7). Finally we walked back over the incline to the hillside car park to rejoin our vehicles and make our various journeys home leaving the local wildlife once more to enjoy the peace and quiet of the Brendon Hills.



photo 4



photo 5



photo 6



photo7

Mr and Mrs Steve Bishop kindly allowed a visit to their property' Eisen Cottage in September 2015 for members of the WSMLA to inspect (at their own risk!) the 'office level'. Only the first 50 metres is accessible due to the collapse at the first junction.

Hewn out of clay slate rock without evidence of support, the adit has become a dumping ground over the years for a variety of 'domestic' rubbish. However a former rail support chair for the narrow gauge ore wagons was found and donated to the WSMLA by Mr Bishop.(see photo).

Many thanks to the Bishop family for their hospitality.

The Early History of Eisen Hill is not recorded. However surface working for iron ore extraction of a considerable age was clearly evident in the 19c. Aldworthy(Oldray Farm) was reputed to be a corruption of 'old foundry'.¹ The word 'eisen' may perhaps be linked to German miners in Queen Elizabeth I's reign. However there is no evidence to support this in this locality.² It has been suggested that 'Isern'(old English) or 'Isarn'(Welsh) words meaning 'iron' are possible. Eisen appears mid 19c.

Carbon dating of the slag at Oldray Farm indicates iron smelting using charcoal in 14c, and over some considerable time³.

19c Mining.

A license to explore for iron was issued in 1854 on Nov 3, to Brendon Hill Mining, a subsidiary of Ebbw Vale Company. Thomas Brown required, in his opinion, a 'first rate man' to exploit the ground. James Jones, aged 61, was appointed to the Eisen Hill western area, while David Richards was appointed to the eastern Brendon Hills section. By all accounts David Jones was not 'the first rate man' and failed to locate the main ore body. The Office Level next to the Mines Office(now a dwelling) was driven 181 m on the eastern side of the turnpike road but failed to produce any economic ore.

In 1857 a new adit started 400m above the valley and was driven in 90 m. Ore was found, and taken to Minehead along the turnpike road, via Dunster. A load was about one and a half tons. There were charges for both full and empty loads. Local carts were hired, but the hills were steep and this method of transport was not economic or practical for large amounts of ore.

The final lease of the western land was signed in 1857. Jones started Poorsland Adit, so named after the Winsford Charity, who owned the land. It started too far north and missed the lode, but the work continued in hope. A smithy and a bridge were built and an underground pumping engine was installed in 1860. Morgan Morgans was appointed Mines Captain for the Brendon Hills in 1858 but did not take control of Eisen Hill until 1861. He changed the direction of the adit to the south and drove a new adit in at Hoccombe. This located the main ore body and produced 7000 tons per annum for a number of years.

It was intended that the railway would be extended in 1864. However the difficulties and costs of doing this were prohibitive. Ore production began to fall; in 1868 4,473 tons were produced. The decline continued.

Accidents.

1862 Thorne and Cowling, 2 miners, set charges that failed to explode. They decided to rebore the charge, but without water. As a result an explosion occurred. Thorne had shattered his thigh, and died after amputation. Cowling was burnt in the face.

1863 James Gay died by falling into a heading.

1865 Matthew Burnell suffocated, due to poor ventilation.

1870 James Taylor(aged 60) died from suffocation. His co workers had left, but Taylor decided to stoke the boiler before leaving. Too Late! The resultant explosion claimed 5 lives.

¹ RJ Sellick South Wales Institute of Engineers 1849-1850

² N.Drew: Copper Mining.

³ M Jones: Brendon Hill Mines and West Somerset Mineral Railway.

1876 Henry Stevens was fined for cruelty to three horses pulling a load up hill to the Goosemoor terminus; he was fined £2. At least a dozen carters were employed. Prior to 1870 2500 tons per annum were taken to Minehead.

Closure.

These mines were abandoned in 1880. There are no final records of ore output.

Minerals. brown hematite, Goe3tit/limonite, Siderite (manganiferous) Psilomelane. The site was reexamined by Dr Groves from the Home Ore Dept. Could it contribute to the war effort? Very small quantities of ore remained. Mining would never be worthwhile.⁴



RAIL CHAIR (NARROWG)
EISEN HILL, EAST ADIT
FOUND - S. BISHOP.
DONATED 2015



Top
Hill



left:
Eisen
Mine.
Office
Level
Portal

Sept 2015

Top Right: Narrow gauge rail chair for ore wagons in Eisen Hill mine. Donated by S Bishop. Eisen cottage. Sept 2015

Bottom Left: Eisen Hill Mine Office level. Rubbish dumped at the entrance. Adit is blocked at 50m from the portal, at the first junction on the abandonment plan. Sept 2015, The reddish colour of the clay slate shows the presence of iron oxide.

Bottom Right: Poorsland adit, on the west side of the river Quarme. Sept 2015.

⁴ Exmoor mines research group letter 40

