



Between the Lines

Land of Oak & Iron Mapping Project Newsletter

March 2019

In this edition we report on volunteer meetings in March; and the outcome of the “What do we want to do next?” discussion. There are also reports on a further visit to Beamish Regional Resource Centre and attendance at the Tyne & Wear Heritage Forum.

Volunteer meetings March 2019

Meetings in March continued the work of earlier months as we start to consider what we would like to look at next. A special meeting to discuss this was held on 11th March at The Lodge in Consett. Whilst attendance numbers were low there was a huge amount of enthusiasm resulting in a productive outcome.

A follow up visit to Beamish Regional Resource Centre on 21st March 2019 was attended by seven members of the group. In addition to continuing our investigation of wagonways, for which the centre’s volunteer team had drawn a large number of items from the archive, we were given free reign to delve into their map cabinets. Some highlights of the visit are shown below.

A few days later a couple of members from the volunteer group were able to join us at the Tyne & Wear Heritage Forum Conference where the topic was Heritage Trails. The main points are reported below.

Highlights of visit to Beamish Regional Resource Centre

AP - “Fascinating to look at so many maps and be able to see the changes over the years. The enormity of the collection is amazing - I just want to come back!”

GM - “Vast range of maps, geological maps, colliery maps..... all sorts of map”.

KR - “Being handed a manuscript written by a man from Yorkshire in 1972 called Ten Waggonways was a thrill. Eight of them are in the Derwent Valley and it is a remarkable piece of work particularly when you consider the technology he had available”.

CG - “Meeting Julian, the Curator, really made it for me. He chatted about the collection with such enthusiasm and was so knowledgeable”.

NA - “It’s an absolute treasure trove!”

As you may have gathered from the above comments an enjoyable day was had by those attending and when we plan a further visit later in the year I am certain that the places will be snapped up quickly.

In addition to all of the map study GH diligently reviewed the ephemera catalogue noting the

classifications of interest and the corresponding archive reference. This will be very useful for the future as we will be able to let the centre’s staff know what we are interested in and where they will be able to find it. The catalogue is based on the [SHIC \(Social History and Industrial Classification\) system](#) which can be explored further by expanding the list using the “+” symbols. For example the classification for Iron and Steel manufacture is 4.412., which could be useful when seeking reference materials from other organisations.

Tyne and Wear Heritage Forum Conference

The very impressive Wallsend Memorial Hall ballroom was the venue for this conference. The keynote speaker, Michael Chaplin, talked about his early life living near the River Tyne and his book “Tyne View” written when he was writer in residence at the Port of Tyne. It documents his walk along the Tyne banks, frequently stopping to chat to “ordinary” people; many of whom had fascinating stories to share.

Presentations on sketching illustrations for display boards on trails and using an app called [OurPlace](#) to design trail routes, specifically utilising the capabilities of smart mobile phones, were of particular interest. A talk about The National Lottery Heritage Fund and their plans for the next 5 years indicated that what we are doing fits in well with some aspects of what they look for in a funding application.

The day was rounded off by a performance by the pop-up choir. Three songs, all with local relevance were performed by a group who six hours earlier had not even met each other.

Along with Land of Oak & Iron several other heritage groups had display stands and useful contacts were made for follow-up after the event.

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What do we want to do next?

Since its conception the mapping project has been intended to function on a number of levels. From providing an easy source of information for a visitor to the area, through to being a robust source of reference to support academic study. Whilst many people will simply want to obtain information from our maps, we aimed to provide an interesting and fulfilling experience for a group of dedicated volunteers who would be preparing the information. Part of that experience was to be involved in shaping the content and direction.

Our guiding principles are laid out in a "roadmap" or plan for the project. As funding for the Land of Oak & Iron included preservation of the industrial heritage of the Derwent Valley and surrounding areas, which risked slowly fading from memory, there was to be a focus on the old industries; their effect on the landscape of today and the vital role of that landscape in the development of those industries. Crowley moving into the area marked a shift in industrial development and based on this we set the first time frame for mapping as 1690 to the present day. We will probably need to look at earlier periods as part of the background, however, more detailed study and documentation of these periods appear later in the roadmap.

With the above in mind we decided to hold a different type of meeting on 11th March 2019. There were no maps in the room (shock and horror expressed by several of the devotees). We were going to talk: share ideas and together develop a plan of how to progress.

As background a summary of the Aims and Objectives of the mapping group were explained, as shown below.

Aims (Summary)

Share information with a particular emphasis on the industrial past.

Objectives (Summary)

Gathering of information

- *Develop an information resource and contribute to the historical record of the area.*

Dissemination of information

- *Share information related to specific periods of time and/or specific topics.*

With the scene set discussion started. It soon became apparent that there is so much history packed into this area that we are privileged to call home. We have made a start with the tracing activities of township boundaries and woodlands. We are now adding to that; identifying the locations of mills and the routes of waggonways. These will be transferred to the base digital map with rivers, contours and major roads.

For people visiting the area, be it from a different country, another part of the UK or just from "down the road" there is some information that is pretty useful such as; where can I get a cup of tea; where is there a playground for the children; what trails can I follow to explore this area and, arguably most important of all; where is the nearest toilet? So, one group will be looking at **Leisure and recreation (Including NT and EH site links)**. Lead GH, Supports AP, CG (with RHe looking at potential Leisure Trails).

Coal has been crucial in the development of industry in our area. It is not any old coal though, the north-west Durham coal field is one of only three areas of the UK with significant quantities of good quality coking coal. We have started looking at the coal industry by mapping the **Waggonways; their routes and associated features**.

In time this will be progressed to Collieries and Railways. The group looking at this are: Lead KR, Supports CP, NA.

The fast flowing River Derwent waters provided power for much of the early industry before steam power and electricity were available. We have an abundance of mill sites on the river and its tributaries. Sadly, most of the mill buildings have long since disappeared or are now residential properties, although their remains are still in evidence with the weirs, mill races and a few buildings to be found along the Valley. A further group will be looking at **Mills**. Lead CG, Supports JC, AC.

It was felt that there was a great deal of benefit to be gained by working with other existing groups in the area. Land of Oak & Iron does not wish to displace any of these groups, several of which have been operating very successfully for many years. Making their information readily accessible though will add to the experience of the interested visitor. To compile a list of **Local History/Interest Groups**, BT will lead and be supported by NA.

There is some interest within the group to map the development of our early road systems and how they have grown from tracks or drovers roads into those routes we are familiar with today. This **Early Road System** group requires members to be confirmed, however, MM and GM are very likely to be involved.

The early Iron Industry is well represented by Crowley's Works. To incorporate the later era iron and steel industry of Consett it was suggested that we contact Consett & District Heritage Initiative. BT will contact the chairman to explore possible co-operation and information sharing for the **Iron and Steel Industry**.

Townships form the basic administrative division of land and are key for researching documented history. Within these townships are settlements; some with a history which long pre-dates the industrial period, others solely present due to the resources or industry that developed in the area. There is an appetite to explore these settlements; their origins; how they grew and particularly the lives of the people who lived in them.

The social aspects of a settlement could include topics as diverse as Co-op societies and shops (of which Blaydon was the second in England), non-conformist churches and congregational areas, and war memorials. There is so much in "**Settlements**" that could be mapped that it was recognised the first task should be to decide the structure and information sources, then perhaps run a pilot study focusing on one township. Lead and support people are yet to be confirmed. This is clearly a part of the project that could hold interests for a very long time.

Perhaps you have not joined us for some time and the above topics have sparked new interest for you. If so, you will always be welcome to join the meetings and participate to the extent that suits your needs.

Coming up in April:

Monday 9th April 2019, [The Lodge](#), Laburnum Avenue, Blackhill, Consett, DH8 5TA

Tuesday 23rd April 2019, [The Winlaton Centre](#), North Street NE21 6BY (in Winlaton village)

Please register to attend using the links above.

