



NEWSLETTER NO 9 November 2020

WEST SOMERSET MINERAL RAILWAY ASSOCIATION

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Walks and Talks, Events *Phil Gannon, Chairman*

In January this year, when Covid-19 was first reported, no one would have imagined the global pandemic or its negative impact upon the economy, life and recreation. The immediate prospect is unclear. Let us hope that the vaccine will be effective worldwide and we can all look to the future and rebuild with some certainty.

Our programme of walks, talks and events has been severely affected, like those of so many voluntary tourism/history organisations. No Cleeve Abbey Exhibition! No bus trips! The AGM has been delayed until the spring of 2021. The Committee have agreed to continue in post until an election can take place. Nominations would be welcome.

On a positive note, the walks which did take place prior to the March shutdown, and after we resumed our programme in September, were much enjoyed and endorsed with notes of appreciation. All walks were limited to 6 people, socially distanced. Alas, no more walks this year! We will be providing a programme of events for 2021.

Membership Secretary's report 2020 *Garrick Mound*

As of Tuesday 20th October 2020 there were 18 'single' paid-up memberships, 11 'family' paid-up memberships, 2 'corporate' memberships and 2 'honorary' memberships; this translates as at least 42 paid-up members (including the honorary members) and 2 corporate memberships. This compares to Last year's total at 29th October of at least 50 paid-up members (20 single, 14 family and 2 honorary memberships) and 2 corporate membership which represents a 16% decrease in membership over 2019. However, the membership levels in 2019 were at their highest and the current level is similar to 2018's membership.

Whilst there are always a few people that decide not to renew their annual membership, it is the regular activities of the WSMLA, ie the walks, talks, AGM and exhibitions which tend to attract new members and as much of this has been cancelled this year the drop off in membership is not surprising. Hopefully the resumption of the walks programme next year will continue to attract new visitors and new memberships.

In 2020 we have tried to ensure appropriate communication with active members, generally via email and especially during the pandemic and have had some positive feedback from appreciative members for this. However, we welcome any comments and suggestions from members about what more can be done in terms of communication and keeping them up to date with the Association's activities.



Mining Adventures *Phil Gannon*

March 2020 Bamfylde and Florence Mines

Just days prior to lockdown, Vicky and Steve Friedrich (enthusiastic members from Kent) came for their holiday visit; They returned to West Somerset again in September for further mining adventures. We once again visited the Brendons enterprise, but suggested a visit further afield to the west of Exmoor, to the Florence iron mines and Bamfylde iron/copper mines at North Molton.

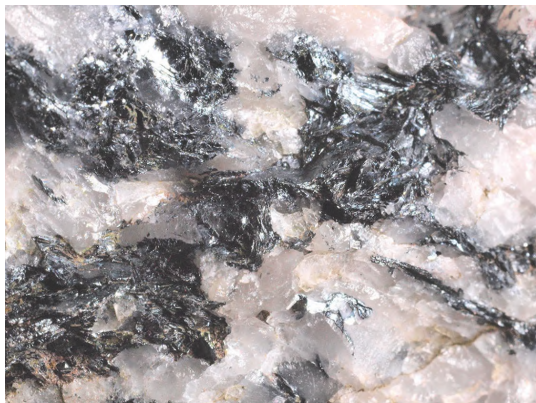
The Bamfylde mine is an extensive sett in the Mole Valley with some remaining buildings. Of particular interest is the former winding/crushing house, conserved by the Exmoor Mines Group. Roger Burton and Norman Govier spent considerable time and expense over the last few years consolidating this structure, the legacy of a very early copper mine, worked periodically from the 1300 's until the late 1800 's. A full history of this mine can be found in Exmoor's Industrial Archaeology, by Atkinson (Exmoor Books). Sadly Norman Govier passed away earlier this year. He and Roger contributed so much research and physical work to the Brendon Hills Project and the restoration of mines on Exmoor.

The nearby Florence mine follows a narrow valley under the lee of Tabor Hill and was worked by adits on both sides of the valley, some still evident, but flooded. The produce was iron ore (siderite and specular haematite). The Devonian host rock consists of shales/sandstones of the Pickwell Down band, unlike the Brendon's Morte slates. Working was contemporary with the Brendon Hills mines and finished in 1888. A brief trial was made in the 20th century and investigated again in 1942. The remains of a small twin-cylinder steam winch, boiler house, iron kibble, and flooded shaft are evident. Examination of the vast dumps revealed a few minor mineral samples that Steve obtained for photographic purposes.



The Florence engine: Phil found it was made by Clark and Chapman Ltd

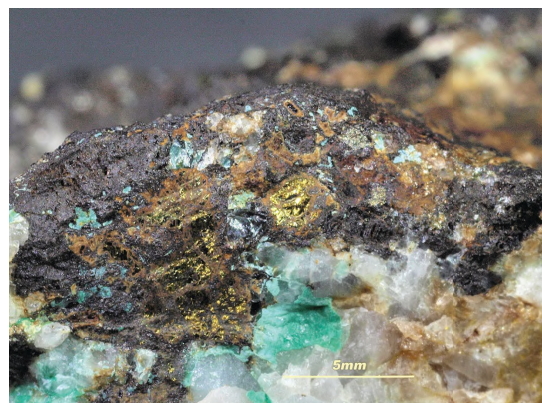
specular haematite in quartz



quartz crystals stained with iron



malachite showing formation



malachite, chalcopyrite and azurite

September 2020 Kennisham.

We inspected the adit and the mineral spoil heap at the site of the former engine house. This area is becoming engulfed in brambles and self-set conifers. A careful search revealed a number of small mineral samples: siderite, haematite, goethite/limonite, psilomelane (manganese compounds), specks of iron pyrite and chalcocopyrite (copper/iron), malachite and a curved brick, possibly from the chimney!

On our way back we briefly visited the site of Smallcombe mine engine house. Once again this was excavated and recorded by the Exmoor Mines Research Group, but is now very overgrown. Some of Steve's photos have now been added to the website gallery.

Adit entrance



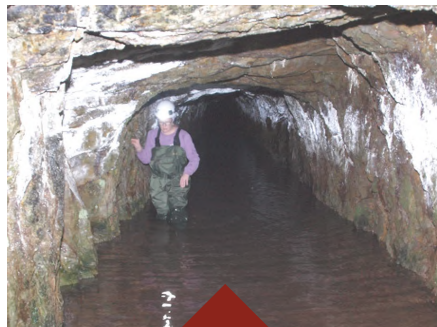
Some way in there is a bend in this long adit and a ledge where a boy may sit, manoeuvring the skips round the corner



Core hole



Brilliant mineral staining




Return trip



Eyes on the spoil heap

Burrow Farm Board *Tessa Wilson*

We have been planning for some time to replace the interpretation board at Burrow Farm Engine House as it is becoming more and more faded and illegible. The owners of the farm and the National Park are in agreement and will help us, and the donation we received when the Mines Group disbanded will go a long way towards it. The first plan looked something like this:




THE OLD MINERAL LINE

BURROW FARM ENGINE HOUSE

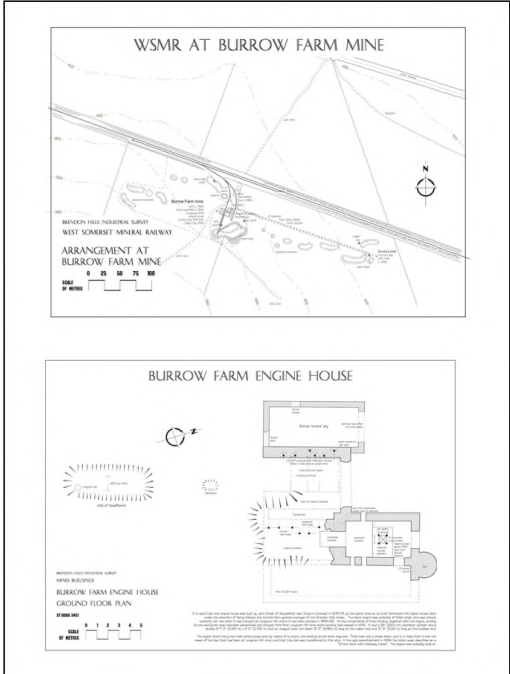
The WSMRLA leads monthly walks along the line. Website: wsmr.org.uk
All information is based on M Jones & J Hamilton 'Neither Here nor there.' (ENPA)

The big idea

In 1851 the Great Exhibition displayed iron ore from the Brendon Hills, said to be currently not exploited. The Ebbw Vale Co was interested. Ore would be transported to South Wales, so they promoted the West Somerset Mineral Line, which by 1864 ran from Gupworthy to Watchet.



Burrow Farm engine house



Burrow Farm Mine

The Brendon Hills Mining Company knew there were patches of iron ore along the Brendon Hills but ancient workings seemed to show the lode split here. In 1866 Gundry's shaft was sunk close to the split. Tunneling followed the S lode. The results at first were promising, but petered out.

In 1879, in a final effort, Skip Shaft was sunk to 396 feet and a crosscut made linking the north and south lodes. Henry Skewis (Mines Captain 1867-1883) dismantled the big 25 inch beam engine and the engine house at Langham and had it re-erected at Burrow Farm, by John Greet from Herodsfoot in Cornwall, in the Cornish style. This is the building you see today.

To the south an adit was to be driven, which if the mine had been developed successfully could have drained the mine. But results were poor and production stopped in 1883 when all the mines closed.

But this does not include any explanation of how the engine house operated nor does it give any other photos for comparison. A visitor will react: 'Oh that was the plan, was it? It isn't like that now. I can't make sense of the plans.' So we try again! We keep the sections: 'The Big Idea' and 'the Burrow Farm Mine'. The centre should show diagrams of the working building with explanation. Mike Jones's plans might come later and so should the photos. Reproducing the faded image of Mike's diagram on the old interpretation board is not easy! p5

Burrow Farm Engine House

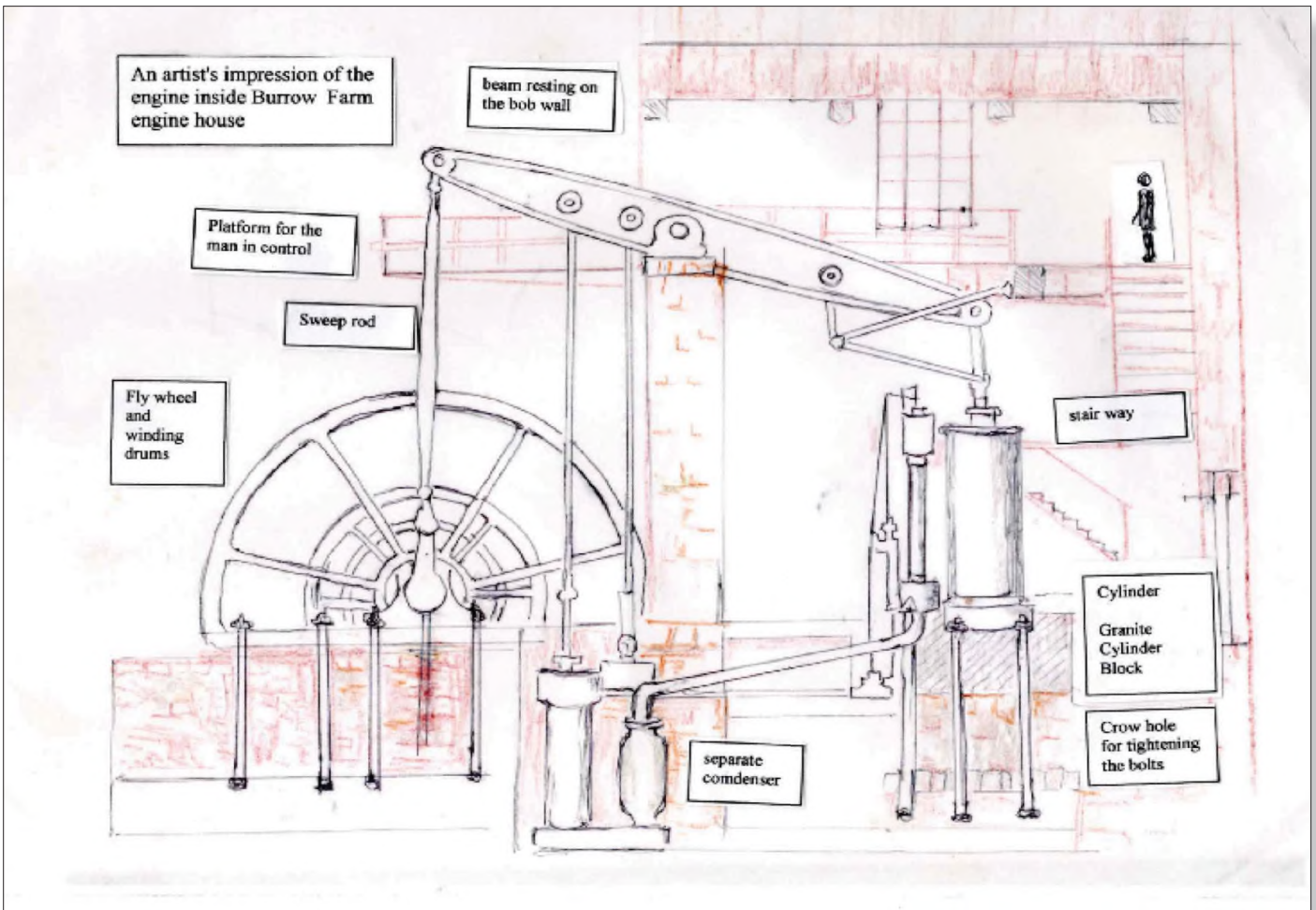
Burrow Farm Engine House is the only remaining engine house on the Brendons, built to the design of Capt Henry Skewis, the Cornish Mines Captain, in typical Cornish style. The 25 inch cylinder rotary beam engine used steam generated in the boiler house by a coal-fired Lancashire boiler (housed in a shed to the east). This drove the 26 foot long cast-iron beam which rotated the flywheel (16 feet diameter) via the sweep rod.

The engine provided both continuous pumping and intermittent winding. A slate tally board on the wall recorded the strokes per minute and the volume of water raised. This engine could probably raise 100-200 gallons per minute. The water was piped to a settlement pond through the small diagonal hole in the west wall, for supplying the steam engine.

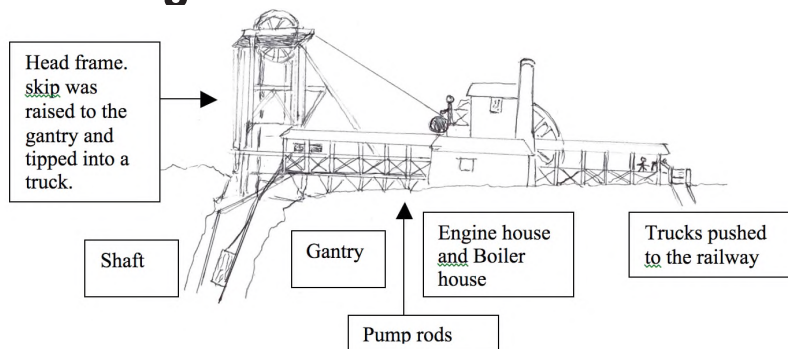
The ore required no dressing, and could be hauled straight from the shaft in skips to the ore platform by the winding cable. Here the skip was tipped into a truck and pushed by hand along the rails to the siding of the West Somerset Mineral Railway. This took the ore to Watchet, where it could be shipped to South Wales.

A modified diagram of Burrow Farm Engine House from the East is needed as we now know that Skips were raised by a headframe in the Cornish style. See p 5. Mike Jones's plans are useful, but the detail may be lost if they are too small.

Burrow Farm Engine



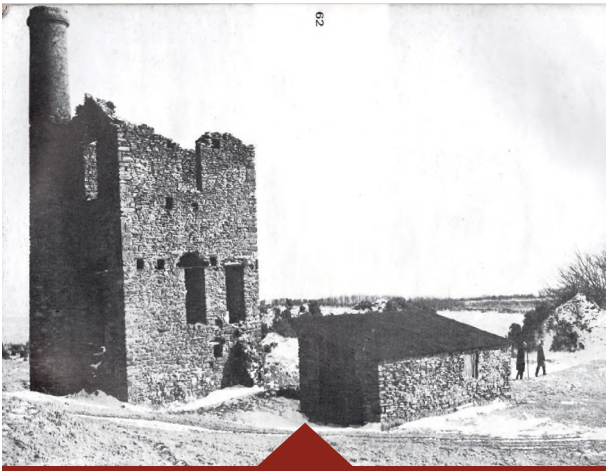
Engine House from the East



The End

The engines at Burrow Farm and Kennisham were advertised for sale in the Mining Journal in 1884. The cylinder block (always considered as part of the engine) remained at Kennisham, but the block from here has gone so the engine may have been sold on. The land owner, Insole, demanded that all mine sites be restored to their original state; this was not practicable here. Shafts were filled in and buildings allowed to decay. In 1990 repair work to the Burrow Farm Engine House was carried out, including re-pointing of stone and brickwork, replacement of lintels and consolidation of standing walls. The miners' dry is now rapidly collapsing.

Photographs can give people a chance to compare what took place here in the C19, with what remained in the C20 and the decaying ruins they see today. They need to relate this to our wider history with a timeline like the one at the bottom of our other interpretation boards. We must tell them of other places they can visit to find out more, including our web site, www.wsmr.org.uk. The board will be placed near the building but the site is very exposed so durable material is required. We hope the National Park will provide the expertise needed!



1961 Sellick photo with M Jones
Miners dry has roof!



2018

Conservation/Artefacts *Phil Gannon*

The Winding House

The ENPA carried out a review of the winding house, as it is now over ten years since the original project conservation work and over two years since our volunteers carried out further work on the brake duct excavation. The second position of the blacksmith's forge in the former cottage was in danger of collapse. It has been consolidated with brickwork and tile masonry to a satisfactory standard. The new work is clearly evident.

A wheel barrow, or one wheel on my wagon!

A resident of Washford was disposing of items including a wheel, formerly part of an old wheelbarrow. It was discovered and retrieved from the Washford River, just adjacent to the Mineral Line. The item is clearly of nineteenth century origin, its construction typical of that time. Without doubt many a labourer would have been familiar with heavy timber barrows used during the line's construction. While no exact provenance can be given, it is still an interesting artefact. The wheel is some 21 inches in diameter, comprising a turned elm hub, shaped oak spokes and ash felloes, contained by an iron tire.



The Darby Blowing Engine *Ebbw Vale Phil Gannon*

Bound copies of Engineering Journals 1866-1867 were lent to me by Nick Cotton of Watchet. These contain a wealth of information about engineering practice over 150 years ago. A feature covered on Sept 7th and Sept 14th 1866 was a description of the Darby Blowing Engine at Ebbw Vale. A photocopy is reproduced on p 7

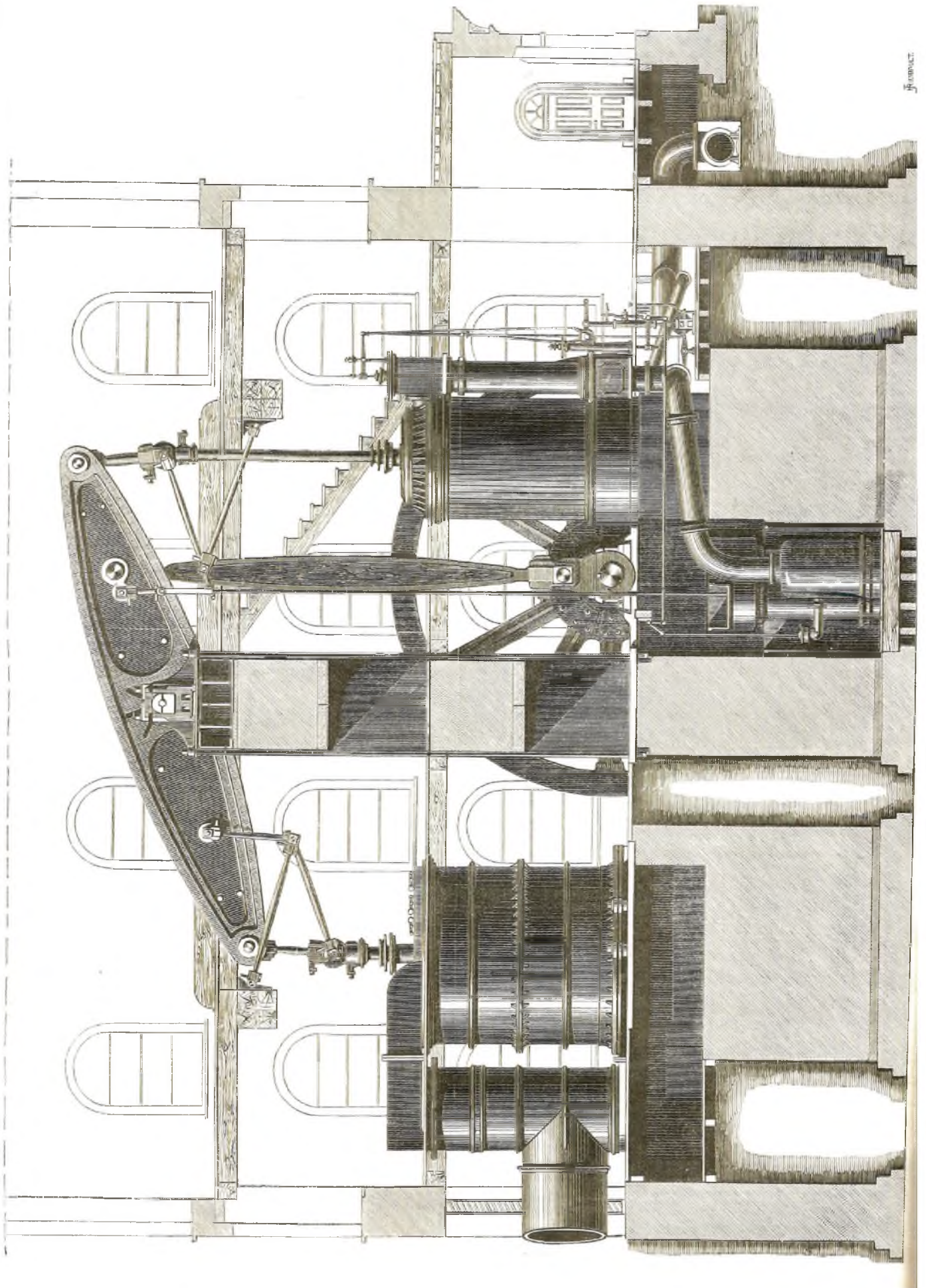
The article claimed it was the largest blowing engine in the world at that time. Designed by Matthew Loam, the cylinders were cast by the Perran Foundry in Cornwall. The steam cylinder was 76ins in diameter, the blowing cylinder

was 144ins diameter, both with a stroke of 12 feet (144ins). The beam is described as Pontypool cold-blast iron, 36 feet long between centres. The Darby engine must have had a ferocious appetite for coal fuel as the description asserts that nine boilers were required to supply the steam at 17 revolutions per minute to support four huge furnaces. Only two were in blast at that time.

It is believed that the former smaller engine was dismantled, shipped over to Raleigh's Cross Mine, where it was re-erected and adapted for pumping in 1865.

Matthew Loam was a well respected engineer of the period. It is recorded that he sent a letter of recommendation to Ebbw Vale to support Henry Skewis as the Brendon Hills replacement manager/mines captain following Morgan's departure in 1867.

The Darby Blowing Engine. Ebbw Vale.



Website *Robert Edwards*

In these unusual times the website has continued to provide a valuable source of information for people wishing to learn about the history and recreational possibilities of the West Somerset Mineral Line. A popular WSML website page in recent months has been the page on Exploring, perhaps as people mindful of Covid-19 seek to find ways to venture into the countryside in the safest way possible.

The website continues to have steady use and, having just looked up the data for the last 28 days, I see that 509 people have visited the website, over that particular period. This is typical of the visitor pattern over the year. The website is certainly a useful asset for the West Somerset Mineral Line Association, as it enables us to spread knowledge about the Mineral Line to those who cannot attend the splendid guided walks or talks.

The majority of the website viewers are from the UK, with a small number from the United States and Canada. The website has proved useful for those wanting to use pictures from our collection of historic Mineral Line photos because they can easily view our complete collection online. We get occasional requests from authors wishing to use the images in their publications.

In case you wondered, the website can be viewed via either of our domain names:
www.westsomersetmineralrailway.org.uk or the much shorter version wsmr.org.uk