

# HELID COLLIERY, RHYMNEY

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## Proposed Open Cast Mining

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### AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

The Glamorgan-Gwent  
Archaeological  
Trust Ltd.

August  
1990

HELID COLLIERY, RHYMNEY  
PROPOSED OPEN CAST MINING  
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 The Assessment

The proposals of the British Coal Corporation Opencast Executive; South Wales Region to develop an area of land to the north-east of Rhymney for opencast mining led to consultation and an agreement with the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust to carry out an assessment of the impact of these proposals on the man-made heritage of the area.

1.2 The development area and its surroundings

The geographical area covered by this report conforms to the proposed mine area as shown in British Coal Corporation Opencast Executive drawing number 07D9159. The area to be affected was surveyed in the field in August 1990 and documentary research was carried out at the same time. The study has included an outline of the general archaeological context of the development site as a guide to the degree of probability of archaeological material being encountered either as stray finds or as features which do not exhibit any surface evidence.

### 1.3 Acknowledgements

The Trust gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the staffs of British Coal Corporation Opencast Executive, Newport Museum and Newport Library. The finance for this report was provided by British Coal Corporation Opencast Executive.

## 2. Topography

### 2.1 Landuse

The land is situated on the eastern slope of Rhymney Hill rising from 291m O.D. to 374m O.D. The majority of the area has been mined and then been used for spoil tips except for a small area at the north-western end of the proposed development between Susannah's Cottages and Ffos-yr-hebog which has apparently been moor land from time immemorial.

### 2.2 Geology

The assessment area lies on the Coal Measures which in this vicinity belong to the Lower comprising sandstones and shales with occasional coal seams. The outcropping coal was exploited in the late medieval period (Edwards 1974 p 50). The soils which are typical of those which overlie the Coal Measures have been extensively disturbed by previous mining activity but it was in the nineteenth century that deep mining into the Elled coal seam spurred the industrial development of the area.

### 3. History of Assessment Area

#### 3.1 Historical Features

The survey area has been changed completely since the eighteenth century by mining activities. Most of the features listed below have been completely destroyed or covered by tipping. This list therefore comprises features that might possibly be uncovered during opencast work.

#### 3.2 Recent mines

There have been two recent mines in the area Lower Ras Bryn-oer Small Mine situated at SO11910818 and Tai-Level-Lo Small Mine; both were being worked during the 1970's.

#### 3.3 Historic mines

In an area estimated to have had fifty mines in a radius of three miles it is impossible to identify all the workings (Edwards 1974 p.50). The coal seams on the Rhumney Hill have been worked since the Medieval period and identifying all of the individual sites is impossible especially as many workings have been incorporated into later mines.

### 3.4 Mine sites

Three mine sites can be identified in the survey area: -

3.4.1 Bryn-oer Level (SO 11340887) can be seen on the 1886 Ordnance Survey Map. It was not worked in the Twentieth Century. PRN 01056m

3.4.2 Gwaun-Fawr Pit (SO 11510845), owned by the Rhumney Iron Company, was opened in 1842 but not mined for twenty-five years after this date. It was sunk to a depth of 156 feet and during its working life an upcast shaft was formed ( Edwards 1974 p.51). This was one of the first collieries in the Rhumney area to have steam power and as such had an engine house noted by the Ordnance Survey surveyors in 1886. It finished production in 1879 and the shafts were filled in 1953. 01038m

3.4.3 Castle Pit was situated in an area centered on SO 11400800. Worked in the mid nineteenth century, it had a shaft 142 feet deep which was infilled in 1974 (Edwards 1974 p.51). No traces of these workings were recorded in 1886. PRN 02643m

### 3.5 Tramways

The area around Rhumney had several horse drawn tramways for the movement of iron and coal. When these started to be used in the local area is not known but the first communication outside the locality was the Bryn-oyer Tramway which connected to the Brecon and Abergavenny canal at Talybont-on-Usk in 1815 (Edwards 1974 p.42). This line started from the Bryn-oyer Patch, an area currently being used for open cast mining.

3.5.1 A connection from the Bryn-oyer Tramway ran along the northern edge of the survey area. This ran from Ras Bryn-oyer (SO 11790916) to Susannah's Cottages (SO 11320900) (Edwards 1974 p.45). PRN 02644.0m

3.5.2 A tramway ran from the Gwaun-fawr Pit (SO 11510845) to the Castle Hotel (SO 11320805) (O.S. 1886). PRN 02645.0m

### 3.6 Farms

Four farms are shown on the 1886 Ordnance Survey map in or close to the survey area.

3.6.1 Upper Ras Bryn-oyer (SO 11790916) outside the present survey area. PRN 02646m

3.6.2 Lower Ras Bryn-oyer (SO 11780900) now demolished and the site of the offices for the present opencast mining. PRN 02647m

3.6.3 Ffos-yr-hebog (SO 11640883) a farmhouse with two cottages.

PRN 02648m

3.6.4 Pant-y-glo (SO 11570906) outside the survey area and now demolished.

This had the remains of of a horse-driven mill and a stone-built bread-oven

(Edwards 1974 p.13). PRN 02649m

### 3.7 Cottages

There were a row of 19 cottages at Tai-level-glo (SO11440862) also called

Collins Row until at least 1922. In 1881 103 people lived here (Census

1881). PRN 02650m

## 4. Archaeology Context of the Assessment Area

### 4.1 Archaeological Features Recorded in the Vicinity

The Rhymney area has seen human activity from at least the Bronze Age onwards. Examples are given below.

### 4.2 Bronze Age

4.2.1 To the west of the assessment area at Ffos-yr-fran (SO 07310552) are

a series of 5 burial mounds (round barrows - (PRN 47~~3~~-6M)).

4.2.2 To the north of the assessment area during the construction of the "Heads of the Valleys" road a pair of bronze spearheads were found at SO 1171011. These date to between 1000 and 1200 B.C. and were probably lost by accident (Savory 1972; Green and Northover 1982 PRN 2136G)

#### 4.3 Roman

The principal recorded Roman activity in the immediate area was military: -

4.3.1 To the south there is an auxilliary Fort established c AD 75 at Gelligaer (ST 12051269) (Nash-Williams 1956; PRN 0661M)

4.3.2 To the west at Pen-y-darren (SO 05030678) there is another auxilliary fort of similar date (Nash-Williams 1956; PRN 0823~~07~~)

#### 4.4 Medieval

4.4.1 At Trefil (SO 07310552) there is a Deserted Medieval Village (PRN 2351G)

### 5. Archaeological Features in the Assessment Area

5.1 As noted in paragraph 3.1 most of the assessment area has been substantially altered since the eighteenth century. This change in topography has been increased by landscaping of the tips which appears to have removed most of the formerly observable archaeological features.



## 5.2 Recent mines

The two recent mines noted in 3.2 are situated at SO 11910818 and probably SO 11890887. The existing records relating to these are considered to be adequate; consequently no further work is proposed.

## 5.3 Historic Mines

No structural evidence of earlier mines was identified except for a pond at SO 11970883 which might be connected with early mining practices.

## 5.3 Tramways

5.3.1 No physical evidence for the tramway between Ras Bryn-oer and Susannah's Cottages noted in 3.5.1 could be seen; however its route might have followed the current road to the opencast offices.

5.3.2 No physical evidence for the tramway between Gwaun-fawr Pit and the Castle Hotel (noted in 3.5.2) could be identified, however it should be noted that this route has been perpetuated by the line of a modern footpath.

## 5.4 Farms

5.4.1 Of the four farms noted in 3.6 Upper Ras Bryn-oer will be preserved outside the assessment area. Pant-y-glo lay just beyond the proposed development area and has been demolished.

5.4.2 Lower Ras Bryn-oer (SO 11780900) has been demolished and the site is now used as the opencast offices. It is unlikely that any features connected to this building will remain as large scale earth movement has occurred in this area.

5.4.3 Ffos-yr-hebog (SO 11640883) is the major surviving man-made feature in the assessment area. The name has been translated by Edwards to mean the "Ditch of the Fallow" however it is more likely to be the "Ditch of the Hawk". The present building according to local tradition dates to the seventeenth century, but has seen many renovations and alterations so that very little of the original structure is evident at present.

5.4.4 Beside the gate (SO 11580877) of Ffos yr Hebog farm are the remains of a cottage recorded on the 1886 Ordnance Survey. There were no visible traces of the second cottage north of the farmhouse. *PRN 02651m*

#### 5.5 Cottages

There is no visible physical evidence for the cottages noted in 3.7.

## 5.6 Field boundaries

There is a field boundary beside the road to the opencast offices (SO 11400890) comprising a low bank made of stone covered by turf. On the northern side of the road there is a similar bank, outside the assessment area. These are similar to examples on Dartmoor known locally as "reeves" which were used as field boundaries and are dated to various periods from Bronze Age to Post-Medieval (Fleming 1978). The examples in the Rhumney area are probably of the latter date.

## 6. Effects of Development Proposals on Archaeological Interests

### 6.1 Ground disturbance

As noted in 3.1 and 5.1 the major changes in the topography of the assessment area allowed little of archaeological interest to be noted during the survey part of this report. The clearance of the covering spoil tips might reveal areas of archaeological interest which have not been damaged by the coalmining activities. The probability of significant archaeological interest surviving in this way is considered to be low.

## 6.2 Below ground disturbance.

The excavation of the coal seams might reveal evidence of previous workings. It appears that when mines have been closed much of their equipment may be left underground. It is therefore possible that galleries and tunnels might be revealed during the opencast work thus giving a chance of study of mining techniques and the recovery of equipment.

## 7. General Recommendations

The low archaeological value of the assessment area indicates that there is no valid archaeological objection to the Opencast Executive's proposals. It would be advisable to brief excavator drivers, and engineers about the possible discovery of evidence for earlier mining activity and equipment. If such features/equipment are detected the Glamorgan-Gwent Archaeological Trust should be contacted. We recommend that a financial contingency should be set aside to cover any costs that might thus be incurred, and that the Opencast Executive should agree both to conserve any significant items found and to donate them to an appropriate museum.

C. N. MAYLAN and N. A. PAGE

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