
46 Florence Mine

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

46 Florence Mine — iron mining and link to Norman Nicholson. Now an arts centre southeast of Egremont [NY 01804 10305].

Description

Two rocks, coal and iron ore, were the backbone of the economy of west and south Cumbria for more than 100 years. Florence Mine was a major player in that economy.

Huge iron ore (hematite) deposits were known to exist near Egremont. Florence Mine was opened in 1914 to extract them. When large scale production ended in the 1970's over 100 million tons of ore had been mined. There were several other large hematite deposits in the area and these were mined at Beckermeth and Ullcoats, as well as Frizington, Cleator Moor, Millom and Barrow. Iron ore mining in Cumbria, which began in Roman times, stopped completely in 2007 when British Nuclear Fuels at Sellafield ceased to need cooling water from the mines and stopped paying for the pumping which kept the mines dry and workable. Hematite (or haematite) formed when warm iron-rich fluids percolated through rocks and replaced areas of Carboniferous limestone. The ore tends to occur near fractures (faults) in the rocks. Hematite in west Cumbria commonly forms bizarre organic shapes and is sometimes called kidney ore because of its 'botryoidal' crystal structure. The mine is famous for the spectacular minerals it has provided to museums around the world and it is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

Anyone who has visited a hematite mine will know just how red and mucky they are so working in these mines was not a subject for the Romantic Cumbrian poets. But the poet Norman Nicholson, thought differently. Nicholson lived all his life in south Cumbria amongst the iron mines and fells. He had a deep appreciation of industry, geology and the environment. His poems about them are as apposite as they are eloquent and down to Earth.

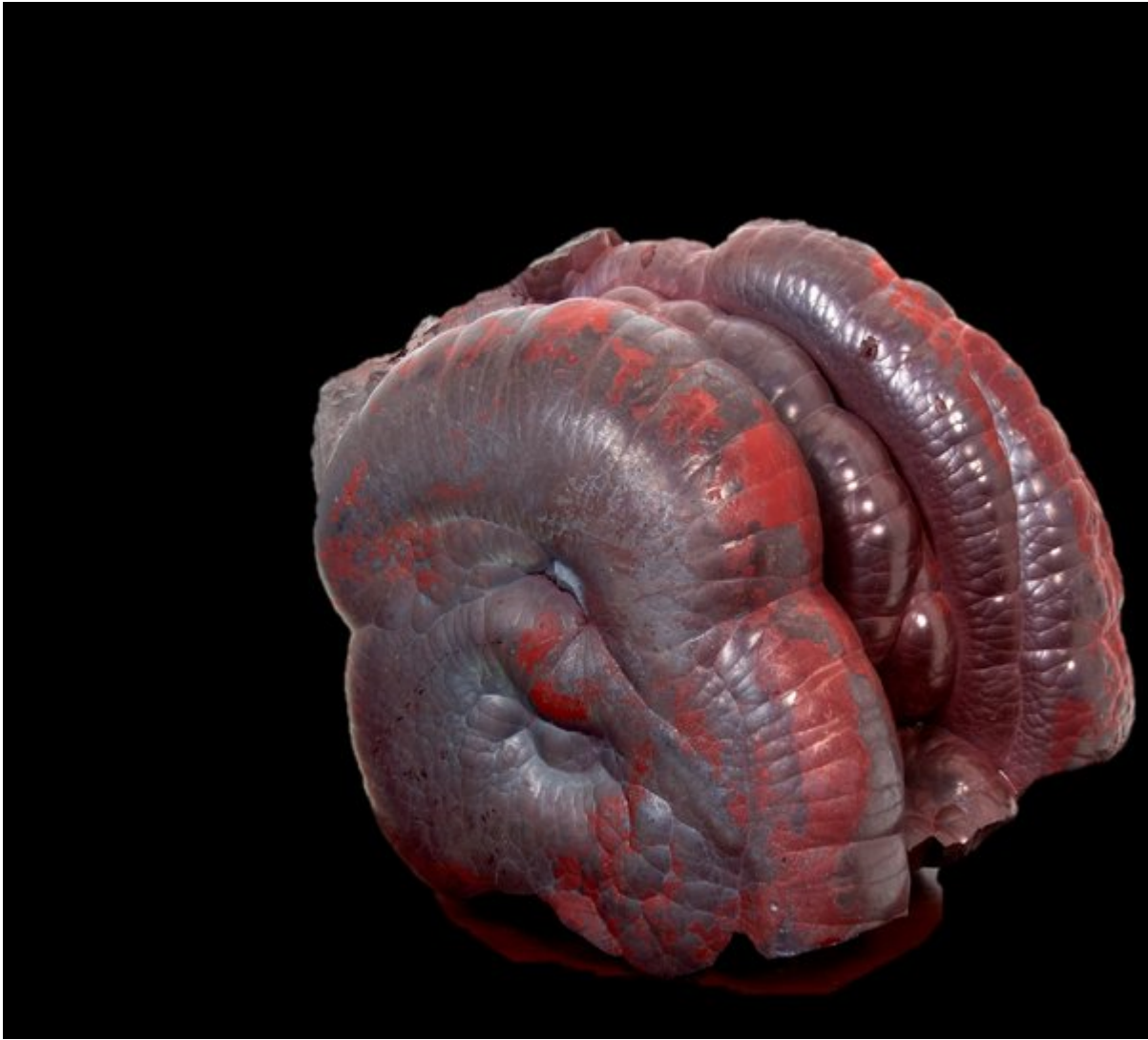
Photographs

(Photo 46-1) 46 Old buildings and shaft at Florence Mine.

(Photo 46-2) 46 Haematite. Florence Mine.



(Photo 46-1) Old buildings and shaft at Florence Mine.



(Photo 46-2) Haematite from Florence Mine image by kind permission of the Natural History Museum, London.