
56 Saltom Pit

Theme: Heritage and mining

Location

56 Saltom Pit. Whitehaven has rail and bus connections or you can park beside Haig Pit. The path to Saltom pit is currently closed [NX 964 174].

Description

Saltom Pit shaft was sunk in 1729, it was the first mine in England to take coal from under the sea. Barely 300 metres away is Haig colliery; it closed in 1984 and was the last pit to mine coal under the sea in Cumbria.

Saltom Pit's first engineer, Carlisle Spedding, was as creative and practical as Brunel and Stephenson. He designed a novel method of dividing the single shaft into two to ventilate the mine. He employed early atmospheric pumping engines to deal with the water that was inevitable at 130 metres beneath the sea bed. He invented a way of lighting the coal face using a flint and steel 'mill' to produce sparks which were less likely to ignite the large quantity of methane in the pit. He even had the methane piped to the surface and offered it to Whitehaven as a source of illumination. Saltom Pit closed in 1848 and only the ruins of the engine and winding house remains; recent landslides make their future uncertain.

Coal bearing rocks (Carboniferous 'Coal Measures') stretch from Whitehaven north and eastwards to Maryport and Aspatria. Over 30 seams have been mined, some reaching 4.5 metres in thickness. Coal and very large deposits of iron ore were the basis for the heavy industrial economy, and thus employment, in West Cumbria. Coal's heyday was in the last part of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries and in recent years it has only been extracted from a few opencast mines. Coal and other fossil fuels are recognised as the major contributors to our changing climate. Given this and a stubborn legacy of high unemployment, it is not surprising a recent application to re-open sub-sea deep mining for coal a stone's throw from Saltom Pit is the subject of heated debate.

Photographs

(Photo 56-1) 56 Saltom Pit and St Bees Head.

(Photo 56-2) 56 Saltom Pit.



(Photo 56-1) Saltom Pit and St Bees Head.



(Photo 56-2) Saltom Pit.