

Old Gang and Surrender Mines

The Old Gang mines worked the great Friarfold complex of veins. The name Old Gang is thought to have an Anglican origin, the Wharton's worked the principle vein in the seventeenth century. After the Wharton estates were held by trustees, they were then inherited, through marriage, by Lord Pomfret 2nd in 1764. Lord Pomfret and his son-in-law, Peter Denys, undertook intensive development of the mining area that became known as the Old Gang complex.



The Old Gang Complex

The Surrender mill was built in 1839 to replace two very old mills, the Low Mills, belonging to Lord Philip Wharton and Sir Thomas Wharton which had been in constant use from 1669. These two old mills had smelted ore from many mines in the area; from Lowanthwaite, all along the Friarfold complex, through to Arkengarthdale. Half a mile up the gill was the site of the Wharton High Mills (Raygill Mills) but there is now hardly any trace of these buildings. When Thomas Smith bought the manor of Muker and Healaugh from the Wharton trustees, he either rented or bought the old High Mill and this became known as Smith's Mill and was the scene of many acts of vandalism during the Beldi Hill Trial by Pomfret's men. A short distance up the gill was Lord Pomfret's mill, for thirty years this was used in conjunction with the New Mill nearby, which was built in 1805.

In 1828 a partnership leased all mines on Healaugh common and began to wall and arch all the principle levels being worked at the time, this was completed in 1831 when the New Mill was expanded. The mill had four ore hearths and a separate roasting furnace. Five flues left the mill and converged to form a main flue that ran straight up to Healaugh Crag, over 500 ft. above the mill. The average ore hearth at the time was smelting around 8 tons per week; the London Lead Company made further improvements to the hearths that resulted in an output of 10 tons in some weeks. The Old Gang mill occasionally exceeded 2000 tons per year, but it dropped to less than 500 tons in 1880 and had stopped regular smelting by 1885.

The Old Gang site contains the ruins of the furnace house, blacksmiths, many buildings, stores and the flue system rising to the moor above. The mill's ore hearth arches are still visible although the stone used to build them was taken to build the Methodist Chapel in Muker.

The peat store is situated on the moor above the site and is 390 ft. long and 21 ft. wide and consists of a row of stone pillars with open spaces which allowed the peat to dry through. Originally the building was thatched and could hold enough peat for a full years work at the mill. The peat was used in conjunction with coal brought from the Tan Hill pits.



Old Gang Peat Store

Near the smelt mill ruins is the entrance to Hard Level, near the beck side and the remains of the dressing floor. This level was driven by Lord Pomfret in 1785 and was the main entry point to the Old Rake and Friarfold veins and it connects up to the Bunton Level, in Gunnerside gill. New dressing floors were installed near the entrance and these replaced those of the Merryfield mines further up on the moor top.

The ruins of Level House can still be seen when turning up Hard Level Gill, this was occupied by Adam Barker, the partner of Philip Swale and Lord Wharton in the late seventeenth century. In 1715 it provided lodgings for the miners.

The Brandy Bottle Inclines can be found further up this side gill, driven in 1814 they are two levels that are adjacent to each other and slope sharply down for 100 fathoms. At the intersection main levels were driven east and west, joining the Surrender mines and Moulds mines. Due to this it was possible at one time to enter Sir Francis Level in Gunnerside Gill, and then travel through the workings of various mines to emerge back into daylight through the Moulds Level in Arkengarthdale.

The Old Gang mines finally closed in 1907 after which the spoil tips were reworked to recover minerals (e.g. barytes) which had been originally discarded.

(References: Raistrick, A (1975) Lead Industry of Wensleydale & Swaledale: Vol 1, Moorland Publishing. Fawcett, E (1939) Lead Mines in Swaledale MS, North Yorkshire County Records Office)