

NAMHO so far - What has it Achieved?

Ivor J. Brown

This paper will discuss the origins of NAMHO, its early aims and their development, and how the association has grown from six members to over eighty. A few members have come and gone and several of these, especially the museum members, will be considered. Could NAMHO have done more? A few museum members have expanded against considerable odds, how did they do it?

The association has got itself into several tangles with authority but sorted them out by producing codes and guidelines, by commenting on research papers or sending representatives to working parties. Doing all this has often been difficult because NAMHO has no individual members, all its officers and representatives owe first allegiance to their organizations, but volunteers have been found to lead the way. Will this system have to change in the future?

It is hoped also to produce a brief history covering the past thirty years.

The Background

NAMHO is the National Association of Mining History Organisations - it is not an association of individuals. The Association is entirely dependent on individuals from each organisation who spare some time away from their own special interest for the common good. This must never be forgotten. The Association does not have any paid officers or any individuals who have a sole interest in it.

But, what of the organisations or groups of individual historians who make up NAMHO? They all have an interest in a special geographical area or technical field. Something happened about fifty years ago to bring the individuals together to form the larger societies - and also, thirty years ago, to get these societies to form an Association to further their activities.

Mining societies are not new, the professionals have been forming them for over 150 years. Perhaps the first in Britain was the North of England Institute of Mining Engineers founded in 1852 and now a NAMHO member. In 1859 the Miners' Association of Cornwall and Devon was also founded, their main object seems to have been educational. Their idea was developed over the next few years and soon covered most other mining areas. The writer became involved as a mining student of the South Staffordshire Institute in 1957 just 90 years after that Institute was formed.

The South Staffs Institute was formed in 1867 as 'an association of mine agents' mainly to seek ways to protect themselves against the new legislation that was coming in and, some say, the Mining Inspectors who had the job of enforcing it. Very quickly, however, 'protection' was given less prominence and the group began to organise lectures and educational visits. They rented rooms belonging to the Dudley Geological Society and became very interested in geology. They also began to collect books and old mining plans and 12 years later they took over the Council Chamber of Dudley Mechanics' Institute to form their own 'Mining Museum' and venue for meetings.

The early meetings took the form of a talk on a mining topic, sometimes historical or more often a talk on a new mining machine or method. These were usually illustrated by a wooden model which would often be presented to the museum together with papers or artefacts brought in by members. A discussion on all this would follow. On 18th February 1878, for example, Henry Johnson brought in a wooden shovel and pick found in

old workings near Dudley. At another meeting Elijah Davies brought in an old wooden skip or basket, as used in a winding shaft. Others brought in a wide range of artefacts, mine plans, old mining papers and geological specimens. They also visited old and new workings and prepared papers on them. This Institute's collection went eventually to Birmingham University where it was last heard of as being 'in boxes in a store'.

There were also the student mining societies of universities and technical colleges which continued until recent years. One of the earliest was the British Society of Mining Students who produced intriguing transactions from 1876 until 1910. Another form of society was the local mining society for miners and the public at large often based at Mechanics Institutes, colleges. Miners' Welfare Halls or even collieries. The writer has been involved in several of these, such as that at Cannock Chase in the 1950s, North Nottinghamshire and then Doncaster and District in the 1960s, Huddersfield and District and also the North Yorkshire Mining Society in the 1970s and 80s. All of these had closed down by about 1990. Many of these societies produced transactions or proceedings but copies of these are a rare find today.

Then there were the less specialised public interest groups such as the Field Clubs of the 19th and early 20th centuries. These had a great fascination for mining history and 'things underground'. The writer was searching for Shropshire mining history in the 1950s and found a set of transactions of the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club (who appeared to be mainly clergymen, doctors, tradespeople and the generally wealthy). They had some amazing adventures in old limestone workings underground, in lead and barytes mines on the Stiperstones and in quarries and coalpits. In 1896 a large party nearly got injured when entering Stafford Colliery (near Oakengates) and they met head-on 200 colliers ending their shift! By the 1950s however these clubs had lost their enthusiasm for things industrial and only went on annual excursions to study stately homes, church windows and tombstones!

In his search for fellow mining 'historians' in the 1950s the writer did find two societies of possible interest, the Newcomen Society formed 1920 and the Trevithick Society formed in 1935 (now a member of NAMHO). He joined the Newcomen Society (Midland's Branch) and enjoyed many trips and lectures of mining historical interest. Both societies have published proceedings, the Newcomen Society 1932 issue, for example, contains an excellent paper on roman mining in Britain.

By 1960 industrial archaeology, and for some 'mining archaeology', had really taken off and the oldest specific interests groups were formed at this time. Of particular interest are the PDMHS formed 1959 and NMRS formed 1960. The Shropshire Mining Club published their first report in 1960 and although active, to the writer's knowledge, from 1959, left it to 1961 to become 'established'. Other regional groups quickly followed.

There were some special groups operating from earlier dates but each of these had a narrower view of mining history such as the Earby Mines' Group formed 1945 and some of the caving groups such as Derbyshire, Gloucestershire and the Grampian, all were formed before 1960.

There are now over 50 mining society members in NAMHO as well as 15 museums and 10 other groups who have a special interest in mining history.



*Shropshire Caving and Mining Club Organisers of the 1981 Conference held at Coalport
(Photo: Harry Parker © Copyright, all Rights Reserved).*

The Formative Years

There has always been a good liaison between the mining history groups who are now part of NAMHO probably because there were many individuals who were members of several, just as there are today. In early 1979 some volunteers from the organisations with newly developing 'mining' museums thought it would be a good idea to put this relationship on a formal footing to avoid duplication of effort and to widen the understanding of the interests of mining historians among organisations who then did not appreciate them. Accommodation for a weekend

conference was kindly offered by the Beamish Museum and the format of that weekend remains much the same in the present conferences.

The conference involved the cooperation of all the local mining history groups; papers being prepared and given by specialists, a nearby field being made available for those who preferred to camp overnight, a Saturday evening event, a trade stand area and organised visits to sites of mining interest. The first conference (on 23rd and 24th June 1979) was attended by about 40 members

Society Representatives at the NAMHO Council Meeting held at Cononley 19th March 2006



of the various groups and was opened by Dr A Raistrick, a well known writer and enthusiast for mining history.

Talks followed on the then developing mining museums at Beamish (by Frank Atkinson), Peak District, Wanlockhead, Mid Wales, Earby and Ironbridge Gorge with other short talks on mining localities. These included the Northern Pennines, the Peak District, Cardiganshire, North Wales, South Shropshire and the Lake District. There was also a discussion session on mine access and insurance problems and, at the end of the Conference, came the setting up an "Association".

The last session involved the gathering of a representative of each group present in the room above the 'grocer's shop' at Beamish. After some discussion it was agreed:

- (1) to set up a Standing Council of Representatives of mining history groups;
- (2) to meet again in Matlock in September 1979;
- (3) to arrange biennial conferences;
- (4) to accept that the Ironbridge Gorge Museum/Shropshire Mining Club would organise the next conference in June 1981. (I.J. Brown agreed to liaise on this). It was suggested that a small fee of say £5 should be paid by all attending;
- (5) It was agreed that the Conference should include trips on the Friday before and Monday after the main event and that there should be talks and discussion on insurance matters.

Ivor Brown was elected treasurer and collected £5 each from 'Launching Contributors'; individuals representing (in order of contribution) Earby Mines, PDMHS, NMRS, Alston Moor, North Cardiganshire, Cumbria and Shropshire Clubs. By the end of 1979 the following organisations had also paid; Clearwell, Chatterley Whitfield, Beamish, Plymouth, Carn Brea, Ironbridge Gorge and North Wales.

The first meeting of representatives was held at Matlock on Sunday, 16th September 1979 and it was agreed that Dave Carlisle would be Chairman. Adrian Pearce to be Secretary and Ivor Brown continue as treasurer. It was decided that the "Association" should be called the National Association of Mining History Organisations and that there should be a regular newsletter established and that meetings of representatives should take place 3 or 4 times each year, for which PDHMS kindly offered accommodation and a base at Matlock.

The earliest meetings involved the discussion of various "Codes and Guidelines" drafted by volunteers on specific aspects which it was thought would lead to a better understanding and acceptance of mining history and preservation of mining artefacts, and to the greater safety of all involved in mining exploration activities. These included exploration, photography, understanding of techniques and artefacts, report writing and research into underground life including bats.

These 'Codes' included ones on Mineral Collection, Artefact Removal and Mine Exploration. 'Guidelines' were also prepared on Exploration of Old Mines and Leadership, Archival Research and Publication, Recording Old Mines, the Production of a Register of Mine Sites and the Organisation of Conferences on Mining History.

Further guidelines were prepared on 'Surveying Practice', 'The Use of Winches' and the 'Protection of Bats' but the production of these was overtaken by the work of more specialist organisations. Similarly NAMHO has supported work done by other groups including such topics as Codes of Practice for Geological Visits to Quarries, Mines and Caves (published by the Sports Council).

More recently 'Advice' notes have been produced on the 'Archaeology of Mine Sites' and the 'Leisure Use of Mines' (with the Health and Safety Inspectorate).

One of the earliest topics discussed was insurance covering mine exploration and damage caused to third parties. Eventually such insurance was obtained by joining with the British Cave Research Association and this arrangement has worked well. Cave and mine exploration training has also been under discussion since the earliest days and eventually NAMHO combined with the National Caving Association to operate a joint scheme. Publicity leaflets and short articles on NAMHO's interests have also been an important product and these have brought attention to our activities in many areas of influence particularly government. Another way in which publicity has been obtained is through the production of a regular hand book of members (1991, 1997, 2000 and 2006) and a Web Site.

During the 1980s and 90s NAMHO, through its Chairman and Secretary, became a consultee for several Government agencies. At this time the Government (through its Department of the Environment) commissioned a series of 'national reviews' which considered land slipping, foundation conditions, natural underground cavities, natural contamination and mining stability. NAMHO and some of its member organisations were involved in three of these as consultees and as members of the 'Steering Group'. Five reports have been published: 'Treatment of Mineshafts and Adits' (1988); 'Methods of Compilation, Storage and Retrieval of Data on Disused Mine Workings' (1988); 'Review of Mining Instability in Great Britain' (1990); 'Review of the Significance of Natural Contamination to Planning and Development' (Heavy metals, oil and gases etc.) (1996) and 'Problems relating to Natural Underground Cavities'. Based on the above the Department also produced four books in 1998 in a series 'Environmental Geology in Land Use Planning'.

There has also been consultations with NAMHO by the Department of the Environment on most of the Mineral Policy Guidance Notes produced for local authority planners since 1988 including: 'No. 4 Review of Mineral Site Permissions' (1988); 'No. 7 Reclamation' (1989); 'No. 12 Treatment of Disused Mine Openings' (1994) and with their more general Planning Policy Guidance Notes. These latter included 'No. 14 Development on Unstable Ground' (1988), 'No. 16 Archaeology and Planning' (1991) and 'No. 25 Planning and Pollution Control' (1991).

The English Heritage Monuments Protection Programme has also involved NAMHO members as a consultee. These reports consider the types of site and artefact which may be worthy of protection with regards to each industry and puts forward suggestions for consideration for scheduling. The industries involved have included Coal, Iron, Lead, Zinc, Copper, Minor Metals, Lime, Cement and Plaster. Stone Industry and Quarrying. More recently, the Clay Industries and the Chemical Industry (pyrites, salt, copralites, potash, limestones and shales) have been produced in draft form.

The Health and Safety Executive through its Mines Inspectorate, has also had involvement with NAMHO and its members. The Inspectorate normally visit the 'show mines' of members regularly but also consult NAMHO on other matters, for example, accidents at disused mines, and they have cooperated in the publication of the NAMHO advice note on 'the Leisure Use of Mines'.

NAMHO has also worked with English Heritage on the subject of scheduling of underground sites as distinct from surface sites. It has also provided statements for Inquiries and Appeals, where scheduled or listed sites have been at risk: examples include The Walls of Jericho (Bradford), Sygun Mine (Wales) and Coniston Copper Works (Lake District). There has also been cooperation with the Association of Industrial Archaeological (IRIS - Index Record of Industrial Sites), the Council of British Industry's 'National Mineral Weeks' and the Civic Society's 'Heritage Weekends'.

Consolidation - and the Future

In Britain NAMHO members have supported and organised one day seminars on single topics such as 'The Closure of Coal

Mines' and another on 'The History of Coal and its Archives'. Two more have been held on 'Pennine Silver' at Nenthead and 'Mining in Southwest England' at Exeter. These were held in order to develop new areas of research and adapt new interest particularly from a younger generation. All were well received and very successful.

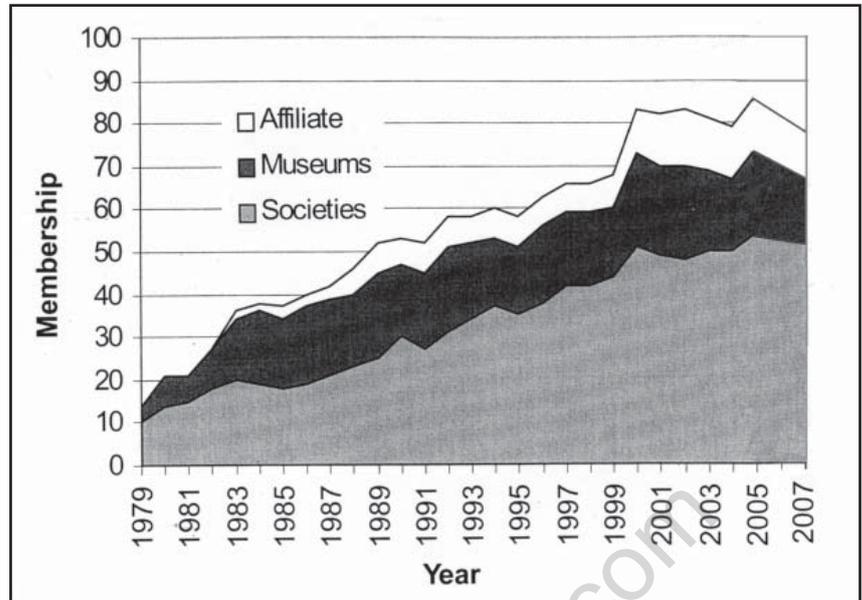
NAMHO also offers support to the organisers of similar seminars by financially underwriting them and providing the necessary finance to get things started. NAMHO has always seen its principal function as being an 'enabler' giving maximum support to even the smallest organisation. All monies so far forwarded have been returned as all events have been successful.

A further series of seminars is planned in conjunction with the proposed archaeological research framework project for the extractive industries. This, it is hoped, will provide NAMHO with an opportunity, to broaden its interests and to take on board new skills and in doing so bring in new people. In particular it has the potential to attract those elements within NAMHO whose primary interests are in mine exploration and channel their activity towards recording and interpreting the underground archaeology. Attracting younger people to 'mining history' remains a problem and it is hoped that a change of focus onto the archaeological aspects of mining might provide a remedy in addition to providing for a broader view of the subject.

NAMHO has also tried to move forward with the times and as well as having an informative web site has tried moving towards electronic communication. This now plays a major part in the organisation of every Conference. The 'Conference' is now seen as the key to NAMHO's activities and success and for this reason has become an annual event. The biennial field meets have been dropped but the field activities part of the Conference programme has been extended.

Membership of mining history groups, mining museums, libraries, bookshops institutions and organisations involved in land remediation of past mining problems has increased steadily from 14 in 1979 to about 80 today. The history groups cover the whole of the British mainland, Ireland and the Isle of Man, the two largest groups alone represent about 800 individual members. While most groups have over 30 members a few have less. NAMHO does not accept membership of individual mining historians but in total must represent well over 2,000 despite the fact that most similar organisations are falling in number. Many individuals choose to be members of more than one group so that the actual number of individuals is not easy to determine.

NAMHO is organised by a Council of Representatives, one from each group, whatever their membership number, and holds about three meetings per year. The work of a council member is not particularly onerous because NAMHO depends so much on the individual groups and on specialist volunteers from these groups to do the actual tasks involved. Over the last 25 years the system has worked, new groups have joined and few groups have left. Where they have this is usually because of a group's change of interest or by merger with other groups. The groups have supported the various Codes prepared by NAMHO well and there have been very few complaints. The officers elected by the Council Members have all been hardworking and brought their experience to bear as necessary and their varied backgrounds and interests have helped to keep the organisation up to date. In common with other organisations NAMHO is now experiencing difficulty in finding individuals to take on the roll of an officer and much thought will be necessary to see how this can be overcome.



NAMHO membership to 2007

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Discussion

After the talk discussion was invited on the following subjects;

- How to attract younger representatives to attend NAMHO meetings.
- How to encourage persons to become officers; Chairman, Treasurer, Secretary etc.
- How to obtain Newsletter Editors and to get contributions from the members for the newsletters.
- Should newsletters be paper copies or electronic, or both.
- Is electronic communication sufficient to keep members informed.
- Who in member societies should receive communications.
- Future direction.

The Author

Ivor Brown started work at NCB Madeley Wood Colliery in 1952 and obtained his Colliery Manager's Certificate in 1962. He then became a lecturer in mining and quarrying in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. From 1972 he was employed as Group Mining Engineer with a Development Corporation and was awarded a Ph.D. for a study on his work in opencast mining and other land reclamation schemes. From 1977 he was employed in the planning and development of mines (thirty one) and quarries (fifty five) in West Yorkshire and later in Staffordshire. Since the 1980s he has acted as a Mining Consultant, paid or as a volunteer, in mines in Britain, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Far East. He was closely involved with the early development of the Ironbridge Gorge (from 1966), and the Yorkshire (now National) Coal Mining Museums from 1979 and has continued his involvement with these and other mining museums until the present time. He was elected Honorary Treasurer of NAMHO at its inaugural meeting in 1979, then Deputy Chairman and Chairman until 2002. He remains as a representative of several societies and museums.

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