

Laddering Taylors Venture – Castleton - an old shaft
21st August 1909.

The Derbyshire Pennine Club.

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10, Kenwood Park Road, Sheffield,

August 13th, 1909.

Dear Sir,

The next meet of the above Club will be held at **Castleton**, on **Saturday, August 21st.**

It is intended to ladder a deep lead-mine shaft (200 feet deep) between the Peak Cavern and the Speedwell Mine, and, if possible, to establish communication between the workings and the Bottomless Pit. From old records it is evident that a passage once existed. Meet at Mr. Joseph Hall's Cottage, Peak Cavern Road, Castleton, ready for work at 5 p.m.

Members to provide their own cave-lunch and night accommodation. A call of 2/- per head will be made on the ground for cartage of tackle and expenses. Non-members may be invited, in whose case the call will be 3/-.

- If you intend to be present, please let me know on or before **Friday, Aug. 20.**

Please place the following particulars on your list of members :—

Mr. J. W. PERCIVAL, Highfield, Ashford.

Mr. F. H. BRINDLEY, 32, Marriott-Rd., Millhouses, Sheffield (new address).

Yours faithfully,

F. A. WINDER, Hon. Sec.

The Meet Notice.

From the Climbers Club Journal, No. 45, September 1909:

On August 21st an old lead mine at Castleton was examined on the possibility of tapping the Speedwell Level. The shaft (168 feet deep) was laddered, and an artificial cavern about 30 feet in diameter was reached. The floor sloped down a further 20 feet. A great portion of the lining of the shaft had collapsed, and it was evident that the present floor is not the original one, and that any passages there may have been are completely buried. Six men, including Mr. Eyre, junior, of the Speedwell Mine, descended, but the condition of the roof and sides at the bottom was not of a nature to warrant a longer stay than necessary.

From the Diary of W.M. Sissons:

This mine is about 400 yards west of Peak cavern on the hill, which runs on to the Speedwell. According to an old document, there is a shaft somewhere about this hill which communicates with the Bottomless Pit.

We tried several of the shafts about but could not get very far and so decided to try this as a last recourse.

It is an old engine shaft 160 feet deep and the top part (about 15 feet) is built and rather rickety. We had a rope ladder down and a lifeline. At the bottom we came into a large chamber with a great deal of rubbish which had effectively blocked up every passage and so barred us entirely from doing any exploring.

It is a fine chamber, but that is all. The shaft is fairly wide and apart from the nasty top, is all cut out of the solid. We had a beam across one side of the top and fastened the ladders to that and passed the lifeline over it.



W.M.Sissons & M.Burnby - Taylors Venture. (From the Club Archives).

This article has been taken from F.A.Winder's unpublished Manuscript 'A Wanderer in the King's Fields.'

Many shafts were examined by Sissons and the writer on Treak Cliff when endeavouring to locate the lost approach to the Speedwell Mine mentioned by Pilkinton in his book on the district. There appears to be strong evidence that such an entrance was discovered and that it communicated with the lower portion of the Bottomless Pit. Thousands of tons of excavated material were dumped into the cavity when driving the level beyond the platform, and it is quite possible that the mouth of the communication lies buried under the debris.

Pilkinton describes the series of caverns discovered when sinking a shaft situated to the west of Peak's Hole, and it is possible that the mine known as Taylor's Venture, was the one referred to in his description. It is reputed to be a very old mine and one of the first in the district to have been worked by the aid of explosives. It also possessed one of the most beautiful beehive stone covers in Derbyshire, until members of the Derbyshire Pennine Club gave it their kindly attention.

The shaft was not the first point of attack, the commencement of the trouble being caused by the fairy feet of Sissons when we were ferreting on the cliff. The animal was inserted in a hole under an artificial escarpment of rock, but instead of doing its duty by causing rabbits to bolt, it remained in the cavity. Sissons, after endeavouring to wake it up by stamping round like an angry elephant, became impatient and suggested that the creature be left to enjoy the rabbit it had evidently killed, and that a meal would also be acceptable to ourselves. Therefore, after blocking up the exit with a piece of turf to keep the ferret safe until our return, we walked down to Joe Hall's cottage for tea. As we were sleeping at Castleton that night, it was decided to wait at the cottage until the moon rose and then dig the beast out under its light.

The arrangement was altered, for later in the evening the late Mr James Eyre, who leased the land for grazing purposes, walked into the cottage and enquired "whether we had seen the great hole in the cliff?" Enquiries elicited the information that the hole was under the place where the ferret had

been lost. It was evident that the covering had not been able to withstand the impact of Sisson's shooting boots, and had in consequence collapsed!

We investigated the scene of the ferret's decease next morning, and discovered a gaping hole bearing a strong resemblance to the gantry door of a beer cellar. By plumbing with a line, the depth was discovered to be 80 feet, and it was arranged to investigate further on the following Saturday. The event came off according to schedule, but it was similar in character to many others made by members of the Club, and a detailed description would be of little interest.

Two items of interest: the first of them illustrating the inadvisability of attending a Club meet in a hard hat. A certain Frederick Freeman arrived and he was wearing a new 'Lincoln and Bennett' that had cost him half a guinea (pre-war price) that same morning. The act was considered an insult to the apparel worn by other members, and when Freeman placed it carefully on a stone out of harm's way, longing eyes were turned in its direction. Unfortunately, a kink in a rope handled by some jealous individual came into contact with that hat and a careless tug caused it to descend into the depths followed by some hundred weights of dirty limestone rubble. It was recovered later, but in a badly injured state.

The other outstanding feature concerned the shape of the hole. It had been excavated by the ancient miners on the principle adopted by the monks of Kirkstead Abbey Grange, and was shaped like an inverted lime kiln, called by the ironstone miners 'bell pits.' Although only a few feet across at the top, the curved sides widened outwards until it was 50 feet in circumference at the bottom. No timber had been used, the walls being self-supporting. It was the only shaft of its kind that the writer has ever seen in Derbyshire.

There was one level at the bottom-leading west, and indications suggested a communication with the Taylor's Venture mine between the hole then being examined and the Speedwell Mine. This was investigated a month later, and proved to be (with the exception of the cover) one of the most objectionable places it was possible to find.

It was 180 feet deep, the dimensions of the shaft at the surface being 6 feet by 4 feet. The remains of shot holes in the sides proving that it had been sunk after the discovery of gunpowder. The shaft only continued in shape for a few yards down, then (as an old miner described it) the guts had fallen out of its belly. In more polite language, the sides had 'run in' leaving a large cavity shaped like a rugby football placed on end. Below the bulge, the shaft continued downwards beautifully formed in the solid rock.

That shaft never ought to have been descended, for the risk of another 'run in' was imminent. The risk was however taken, long timbers being borrowed from the local builder (Mr Wheat) to distribute the weight of the gear over more stable ground. Several of the party made the descent, including the writer, who was too cowardly to acknowledge being afraid. Fortunately there were no casualties, but there might have been inquests as a sequel to the entertainment.

All the shafts in that area were found to be treacherous, and but for the lesson learned at Taylor's Venture, there might have been trouble in connection with the Upper Odin Mine. The writer was responsible for the meet, possibly on account of the ancient name. He felt that the ancient God must have presented the mine with unusual qualities as a christening gift. (*See April 9th 1910*)