

This 'unknown' Derbyshire industry

Sheila McGregor digs out some facts on fluorspar, for which the Government are giving a £42,000 research grant

YESTERDAY, the Government announced a £42,000 grant for research into the uses of fluorspar and suddenly an unknown industry is in the news.

The mining of fluorspar is a thriving business right on Sheffield's doorstep but the first reaction of the average city dweller is to ask "What is it?"

DECORATIVE

Fluorspar is a mineral widely used in the steel industry. It is also a basic raw material for fluorine chemistry.

There are large deposits in Derbyshire, particularly in the Eyam, Hope and Ashover areas.

Fluorspar has been known for centuries. The Romans

times, left it lying around in dumps.

In the middle of the 18th century it began to be mined in what are now known as the Blue John mines in Treak Cliff Hill at Castleton.

Other mines also started up in the north of England, in Derbyshire, Durham and North Yorkshire.

At first it was used mainly for decorative work - for walls, vases, ornaments and jewellery.

A small quantity of the unique type of Fluorspar known as Blue John is still dug out from the Treak Cliff cavern and used for making ornaments and jewellery, but the supply is now almost exhausted.

It was not until 1900 that fluorspar assumed an economic importance. That happened after it was introduced as a flux in the steel industry and it is widely used today by the Sheffield steel industry.

TRIBUTERS

Today, although it is an



Mr. Frank Robinson, Director and General Manager of Glebe Mines, looks at the Cupola plant near Eyam, where the fluorspar is mined, and for which new developments are planned.

Longstone Edge which has one of the largest deposits in Britain.

But the Romans weren't particular where they left their dumps. From time to time enterprising individuals stumble on these. They burrow for fluorspar and sell it to the processing mills.

when they have left the mine they enjoy a countryman's life.

In the local, in the evenings they are knowledgeable on the news of the countryside. They have their own cricket teams and have an impressive list of fixtures with clubs in Sheffield and the surrounding countryside.

with other mineral miners. This is the Barmote Court.

It was set up in the old days when the mineral miners made their own laws to govern disputes in their industry. Its powers are much weaker nowadays, but there is less need for a lot of the old authority.

The fluorspar miners are

tolerant, good-humoured and friendly men.

If the Government's research grant leads to important new uses for fluorspar, they will not be afraid of working even harder to provide the country with this most valuable, but little-heard of, mineral.

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Fluorspar has been known for centuries. The Romans knew it but they tossed it aside as being unimportant.

They dug it out of the Blue John mines and the lead mines, but apart from using it to make a few utensils, had little opinion of its value.

Both they, and lead-miners until quite recent

It was not until 1906 that fluorspar assumed an economic importance. That happened after it was introduced as a flux in the steel industry and it is widely used today by the Sheffield steel industry.

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Today, although it is an important industry, the mining of fluorspar is an odd mixture of 20th century mechanisation and one man private enterprise.

In Derbyshire some of it comes from the mines, and some from open cast seams like the Glebe Mine Company's five mile vein at

Longstone Edge which has one of the largest deposits in Britain.

But the Romans weren't particular where they left their dumps. From time to time enterprising individuals stumble on these. They burrow for fluorspar and sell it to the processing mills.

In Derbyshire there are a fair number of these private operators, or tributers, as they are known, working within a 12-miles radius of Eyam.

Some find it profitable to work in organised groups of ten or 20 men who band together with their own lorries and excavators.

Sometimes the operator is simply one man with a shovel.

CHOICE

A number of these Roman dumps are in farm fields. The fluorspar is dug out by farmers levelling their ground and some of them look on it as a useful source of pin money.

The lone man with a shovel is the amateur.

The real professionals are the fluorspar miners.

In the early years of the century the new importance of fluorspar was a happy turn of events.

It brought new employment in country districts where till then the only choice had been between agricultural work and quarrying.

Some have left the quarries to do this type of mining. Others left the land.

FOREMOST

Their work is hard but the accident rate is low. The work is cleaner than

when they have left the mine they enjoy a countryman's life.

In the local, in the evenings they are knowledgeable on the news of the countryside. They have their own cricket teams and have an impressive list of fixtures with clubs in Sheffield and the surrounding countryside.

SNUFF

If anything distinguishes them from their fellow villagers, it is their habit of taking snuff. Dust is a nuisance in the Fluorspar mines. Taxed with sniffing up more dust they grin and tell you "one dust chases out t'other."

They have one unique institution which they share



FRANK BAGSHAW, Mill Manager at the Glebe Mine



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BACKGROUND TO THE NEWS

Conferring about our coloured workers

By OUR LONDON STAFF

SENIOR representatives of British firms, and other industrial experts are holding a two-day conference in London to discuss some of the problems in the employment of coloured workers in Britain.

They have gathered from all over the country — Mr. F. K. Girling, of the department of sociological studies, Sheffield University, is one of the delegates — on the initiative of the industrial welfare society.

An official of the society told me: "This is the first conference on the subject that we have held, and as far as I know it is the first ever held in this country."

"We are alive to all new legislation and we decided to run this conference in view of the Immigration Bill, but the conference is designed to cover a wide

wealth citizens of the United Kingdom is governed by new legislation taking effect from July 1. Visitors and students may still freely enter, but if someone from the Commonwealth wants to come to work for an employer, he must obtain a voucher from the British Ministry of Labour.

Vouchers

This requirement applies also to professional people coming for employment, but not to businessmen or self-employed persons.

Vouchers are issued to people who have definite jobs to come to, to those who have qualifications or skills of particular value to Great Britain, and, subject to a numerical limit which will be reviewed from time to time, to others who want to come and look for work.

It is impossible to deny that, but for the agitation against coloured immigrants, this legislation would not have been introduced. As there is no official colour bar in this country, the legislation has to apply to all Commonwealth citizens, both white and coloured.

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FOREMOST

Their work is hard but the accident rate is low. The work is cleaner than in the coal mines and they are spared the menace of gas.

They are not, like the coal miners, a community apart with their own traditions.

They are first and foremost countrymen and

man's life.

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"We are alive to all new legislation and we decided to run this conference in view of the Immigration Bill, but the conference is designed to cover a wide range of topics beyond recruitment and induction. We are the catalyst."

Lively

The conference continues today, but it has produced lively views.

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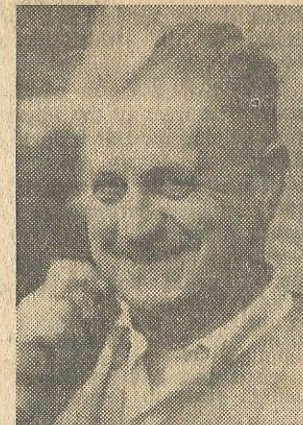
**Whitworth
looks at
Smoke
rings**



After blasting . . . a typical scene inside a fluorspar mine.



FRANK BAGSHAW, Mill Manager at the Glebe Mine



BOB DALE—Mining for more than 25 years.