

THE RE-OPENING OF GREAT WHEAL CHARLOTTE

I was down for the Easter 1998 break, and had walked round to the Large Wheal Coates "sea cave", actually a worked out stope, in order to attempt to gain the adit at the back.

Unfortunately, changes in the tidal currents had left the adit about 20ft up, and not being a climber, it was inaccessible to me. About two years previous I had started a dig in a stope that I had gained at the extreme end, this was an attempt to reach Water Shaft. However, this is a different story.

While I was there I met Simon Farnell, a fellow member of Carn Brea Mining Society and soon we were exchanging mining info. Later I was to visit his Bungalow at Chapel Porth.

In conversation Simon mentioned some upper adits, now assessable at Great Wheal Charlotte, and we went over for a look. These are driven on the vein at different heights. The upper was merely a trial, the lower ended at a collapse, so having nothing better to do, we decided to mooch about in the cove below.

The conversation turned to the Deep Adit, various people had been looking for it for years. We knew it must be about somewhere, probably buried under tons of rock. A wooden stump then caught my eye. The way it was cut out at the top suggested the right hand post of a "tree", such as would be put into a level to support deadwork or poor ground. Digging about above this produced a hole, and soon, with the aid of a piece of driftwood we were able to make a hole large enough for me to squeeze in, minus my battery cell.

I found myself in a length of passage, which was timbered and driven through bad ground, and was only a few yards to a fall. However, I could see over the fall to further passage.

Time was going on, so I decided to leave the project to the next day. However, Simon advised me that he had to go out, but would leave me some tools and join me later that day. The next day I was back with pick and shovel, and soon had the entrance enlarged. The next collapse was also soon cleared, however, a few metres further in was a total collapse. This had formed a large roof cavity. I managed to climb up into the cavity, and at the back could see the continuation of the passage, down through a narrow gap. However, it would take a major digging project involving a team of people to make a way through. Also, the whole area was quite unstable, requiring a lot of consolidation work.

After covering the entrance, I left the mine with the intention of walking round the headland to reach the car. However, it would seem that this is not now possible, due to shore erosion. I decided then to go back into the mine for another look. Looking at the collapse at the end, I considered the possibility that it may be possible to dig a way through directly. This was successful and gave access to good passage driven through solid rock. There is a noticeable tide mark a few inches from the roof, this indicates that the passage was at one time full of water. Shore erosion has probably allowed the mine to drain. The passage gained went for about 30 metres to a collapse, a gap on the left had a noticeable draught. Before this, a partially backfilled passage on the right ended at a collapse. This was in a timbered section.

A voice calling down to me halted my examination. Retreating outbye, I discovered Simon waiting at the last dig. I was advised that while he waited small amounts of debris were continually falling at the point that I had gone through!

The following may holiday saw me back in action. None of the digs had altered so I consider these areas reasonably safe. The object was to tackle the collapse at the end. This time I was fortunate to have some help from the late Damian McCurdy who was down for a few days holiday. This collapse was quite quickly cleared, however, the way ahead was much too tight to get through, also, there was a large rock above which I didn't like the look of. Removing this rock caused a substantial fall, and I realised with some dismay that this dig would have to be timbered, a time consuming exercise. Eventually, the job took nearly two full days, and at the end the gap was still too small to crawl through. The problem was due to a large timber, which couldn't be removed. There was another buried timber reducing the crawl space. However, the hole produced was large enough to get my head through.

The passage beyond was all in timber, in places the trees were braced at the bottom with cross pieces. At the access point ground movement had reduced the width to about a foot,

and the expression which comes to mind, to describe the timberwork is "tortured". The passage could be seen to end at a collapse at about 10 metres, with a possible rise a few feet in. I'd had enough of the job by now, so re-sealing the entrance I decided to leave the job to the August Holiday, in the meantime the mine could have time to settle.

In August I duly returned to the mine. I expected there to be some collapse at the third dig. I wasn't disappointed. However, the fresh fall was soon cleared. The next task was to enlarge the hole. After a bit of work, I was able to remove the aforementioned buried timber, without compromising the dig. However, entry would require a flat out crawl under rotten timber and loose rock. Decision time! I decided that having come this far I would have to go through with it.

As I have previously described, the passage was about 10 metres to a fall. There was no rise, it was just another roof collapse. The condition of this passage was such as to preclude any possibility of another dig. Any attempt at this would be suicidal!

I have to admit to disappointment after all the work that I had put in. However, what has been discovered is still of considerable interest. The Geological Survey describes the main lode, which trends East, Northeast, being thrown by a slide. The vein below the slide, being thrown to the west, was worked by Engine Shaft. This is probably connected to another adit, which can be seen in the cliffs further to the west along the shore. Unfortunately, this is about 20 ft up the cliffs, and I have been unable to access this.

The workings that I entered are on the vein above the slide. It is interesting to note that on one of my visits the water in the adit smelled of bath water. This must be from the Chapel Coombe Farm. The East Charlotte Engine House being on the same lode. The condition of the ground is unfortunate, as the workings must go for some distance. When the mine was working the nature of the ground must have been a problem even then. About 15-metre inbye, the adit turns to the north. It then makes a semicircle through solid rock to meet the vein at the point of my third dig. A short, partially backfilled crosscut heading south ends at a collapse on the vein.

The adit itself is of interest. In places large pebbles from the beach have been used as packwall. A packwalled cavity to the left has about 2 inches of tallow candle.

The following year, the entrance had collapsed, in any event I am very doubtful if any other ground will ever be gained. However, I would be very interested to hear from anyone who has explored the adit in the cliffs. It would be an easy matter for a good rock climber. I also have information that in a dry period someone was able to enter the adit below the engine house in Chapel Coombe valley and was able to reach a large flooded stope.

Roy Fellows