**Mervyn Fox, freeminer**

Recorded: 30th October 2015

Interviewer: Jonathan Wright, secretary Freeminers Association, proprietor Clearwell Caves Ancient Iron Mines.

Sound Engineer: Jason Griffiths

0:0088yrs of age. Started in iron mines at 14 in Robin Hood Iron Mine between Coleford and Staunton in 1940. Approx. 50 people working there, working for the Ministry. Robin Hood was a double shaft.

1:45 Approx 1942 we had Canadian soldiers there. They were billeted at The Britannia Inn, Coalway. Normally we bored off the shoulder. They showed us how to do it on a tripod. We did it off the shoulder – it was dry boring, no water. There was a lot of dust. It affected me in later years.

2:52 About 200 yards left to Robin Hood, the Canadians came on the afternoon shift after the pub and they was drunk. They had rifles and was going to shoot the Italian prisoners of war. We could hear the women screaming.

All the ay down from the sawmills was a ride all the way down top of Highmeadow Woods. There was charcoal burners down there and we came by one night and the Germans were dropping incendiary bombs down there because of the lights.

4:25 We mined iron ore, yellow ochre and ‘brush’ they used to call it. It wasn’t very productive. 1942 we were transferred New Dunn mine

5:20 Bb Brown, Ron Brown I worked with. The manager Mr Moore gave me the job of finding accommodation for Bevan Boys – though we didn’t call them that then.

6:18 George Hall used to lodge at The Vicarage at Newland. His mum and dad had a bike shop in Gloucester – he used to bike back there on a Sunday lunchtime. He ended up

7:15 At New Dunn there was 2000 ton of iron ore. Not sure why Fred Watkins ever sold it. It was all stacked up there. Mr Moore asked us to load it onto trucks, me and Jack Edmunds, four truckloads a day. It went to Goldsmiths [a goldsmiths??], Salop in Shropshire.

[BREAK]

9:00 Dennis Gethin was working with Dennis Barrow. One day holes had been bored but didn’t have time to shot fire it, left it for the day shift. When they come in they lit the short fuses first – it went off and he had stones in him, and ripped off his trousers. He survived.

10:45 In a coal mine you have to put timber up. In Princess Royal was The Bailey. There was a bell shape come out it killed 7 people.

11:50 My first pay was £1 for a week, flat rate as I was a boy. The old one were I imagine on piece work. They put me on with an old man working on a heading

13:00 Bread, cheese and onion for lunch. They called that ‘miner’s ham’

13:25 One day in Old Ham the water came half way up the shaft. I was stoking f or the engine house then – steam to bring the cage up.

14:25 During war (WWII) we put up tin to cut the light out. I worried a bomber would see us.

Jonathan: kids ask me where you went to the toilet

15:00 Never heard of anyone doing that down there.

15:35 It closed in approx. 1944. I went to Gloucester for a medical but they said I had to work in the colliery. I went to Princess Royal. About a 1,000 people working there. I started off tramming then went on the coal face.

16:50 I got buried on the coal face. I was doing a favour as he wanted to go to a funeral. It came in and I got buried. I was in hospital for ages. I couldn’t kneel no more.

17:50 Once in the pit I asked a surveyor were we was and he said underneath the pub at Mosley Green.

18:15 The medical men came through and injected me. I was in agony. I was glad to get to Gloucester hospital. I got hurt on the Tuesday. On the Monday an Indian had come around trying to sell stuff. I bought a silk scarf and he gave me a lucky charm. I nearly got killed the next day!

19:50 Mr Wicks did his job and hung his bag up. A rat ate his cheese bu left the bread.

21:20 In Princess Royal the full ones pulled the empties on the ginny.

21:55 Years ago there was no baths at Princess Royal. Most families in Clearwell had med working there. They walked. My dad said there was a man from Trelleck walked to New Fancy every day. He could be at Parkend and hear the hooter meaning no work today.

23:30 Dennis was a welder learning his trade at Fred Watkins. When I left school I was there but I hated every minute of it. That’s how I come to go to Robin Hood mine. I hated the work, it was cold inside those boilers.

25:20 There was a lot from St Briavels who workd at New Dunn e.g.. Thomas’s Cresicks. Dennis only worked at New Dunn.

27:00 Jonathan: boy in front with man behind drilling. I heard it said that when they finished it was like being dipped in flour

27:40 My dad worked in Princess Royal – they called him a hatchet man. He lost his breath. There was no face protection or ears in them days. Albert Baker from High Nash and Bo Gwilliam – they was boring driving a heading by hand. One hit the other with a sledge on the ear – he was deaf after that.

29:20 I worked with a man…he kept the pub at Shortstanding. We had to cut something off it took two days.

30:00 They used to start boring with a drill in the middle then all the way around. Every time it was knocked you twist it.

[BREAK]

31:00 They shouldn’t have left that for the other shift. They lit the wrong fuse.

32:09 Mr Moore was a Welsh man. It was fuses – no shot firers in those days you lit it yourself.

33:00 They had a good clear out at Fred Watkins. Howard Parry was the deputy and at Robin Hood as well.

33:55 Coal seams run level. Iron ore runs everywhere. You have to follow the lead. You kept going and it would open up.

34:40 Worked with Jack Baker. He went in the Army and he was in Scots Guards.

35:07 Georgie Yuroth was another deputy he lived in Redbrook.

35:45 Iron ore was heavy stuff. Lumps would take two of us. One day it smashed my finger.

36:30 We used carbide lights. You had to buy your own. Lamp cost about 40p. I had electric in the coal mine.

37:30 When it flooded there was people there 24hrs trying to save it. Second way out was down in the field where Jack Baynham had.

38:16 On the top there is a big pool The British they call it. I had to go up there and dig clay out for firing to ram in. Just past the Clearwell road when you leave The Lambsquay was a house were they kept all the powder.

39:50 Once the engineer asked me to pinch a rail in exchange for going home early. He had this little drift mine down by Clements End

40:50 I worked 6 or 7 O’clock ‘til 3. They worked 24hrs. 50 people worked under ground. Vaughns, Gwilliams.

42:00 Our VC married a widow. Tom Taylor got killed in Princess Royal. His wife was having a baby at the time. There was about 10 in the family that got killed. The VC married her. Chris was an awkward customer.

43:30 Working in the pit was all there was at the time. There was better men, better comradeship in the coal mines. I started in Princess Royal worked in Norchard, then Northern – totally different people there. In 1961 we moved to Bristol, but my wife hated it so we came back. We hadn’t given up the house. We lived at Bishopston then Westbury on Trim next to the Lord mayor of Bristol.

45:45 Clearwell has changed a lot but its good for sticking together. We pensioners get invited up the Castle for Christmas lunch. I was on the parish council for 15yrs.

46:30 I worked at Watts Boilers as stock control manager.

47:40 Better comradeship in a coal mine. Once you went down that shaft you didn’t know if you’d come back up. My cousin Gerald Baldwin - we was down there and the seam was thin. Me and Gordon Hale was playing noughts and crosses. I come home next day, got up to have a pint as it was my birthday. The exact spot where we had been Gerald Baldwin had been killed, 23yrs of age. When I was in hospital there was a lot of injuries in there.

49:40 There was a bloke with no legs from a motorcycle accident – Ray Lusty.

51:00 [taking photos, recording continues…]

52:00 8th June 1927…8th June is the date my wife died. She was knocked down by a car at The Miners Arms in Sling. We had a bed downstairs first, then Colliers Court in Cinderford.

54:00 We used picks and wedges sometimes to get the big stuff. They were thin and sharp. When blunt we’d take them to the blacksmiths shop…

55:00 In iron mines there was room…

55:45 Mostyn Watkins…you got Puzzle Wood now making thousands – it used to be free with a collection for Clearwell Church. He was a typical Forester. Ow bist and all that. This one day Frank Jones in winter…

1:0:00 Bayden’s wife was a nurse – she used to check for nits.

1:0:44 Bob Brookes, Redge Thomas…

1:2:00 I wore a plastic helmet. Later we had battery lamps. We bought carbide from Himmins at Coalway. Sunday night shift it was awful and half people got sent home. We two had to go with the Deputy. We three did smoke and no one had a match. A German ex- prisoner got two stones and some carbine and rubbed it together for a light. Taking The bridge away at the entrance to the village. This bathing pool was 10ft in the deep end. The water came from the well. With this quarrying they will hit this water.