

Somewhere I've never visited before?! A hard one but then... having heard from a neighbour Ross Flett about an old Leadmine in 'the Lime Banks' along the shoreline and a seam of lead running into the hill not far away from our house on Eastside, I went in search and was very excited to find the entrance and tunnel leading to the old mine. It is just down an old track and along the rocky shore from the Manse. Having passed by this area several times on the coastal path above Manse Bay I had been entirely unaware of these old workings below. They have remained hidden and entirely unobserved by me or many a passer by for years. How exciting- definitely this was a first visit for me!

Speaking to Billy Daas from the Bu in Burray I learned more. Billy was brought up in the croft of Brain- no longer in existence - near Cauldhame which is on the hill above these banks. In the early 40's he remembers crawling up into the mine from the cave entrance and coming out through the shaft. During the war they were not allowed near the shore, due to land mines and coastal defences.

The mine shaft was filled up with stones and rubbish and coils and can no longer be accessed from the tunnel in the low cliff and the old entrance. Billy's information on the origins of the mine had been passed down to him from his father, grandfather and great grandfather before him. According to Billy, seven Norwegians (reminiscent of the seven dwarves?!) had come over and started working the mine. They also mined a shaft off Grimness Head where they found silver. After some years they returned home and were shipwrecked on the way and so never returned to the mine and it fell into decay.

I also sought the help of Herbert McKenzie from the Hope. He is a "mine" of information. His wife gave me a geological map from 17th C survey confirming three lead seams and a photocopy from the library records of an extract from George Low's book on Orkney and Schetland -spelt like this. On May 11th 1774 he passed round Grimness headland and on his way towards the Minister's house he saw several deep holes which had been sunk in search of lead ore. This ore was apparently found in only small quantities and the charge of the working could not be met so the mining finally fell into disuse.

Lead Ore and Lead Mines

Extract from British Regional Geology Orkney and Shetland :

p14 The earliest geological records of Orkney deal with the presence of lead ore.

p118 Other old lead mines are situated at Manse Bay (477 921) on the east coast of South Ronaldsay. (Worked in the latter half of the 18th century).

Extract from George Low's Orkney and Schetland 1774 :

Wedy., May 11th, --- Passed round Grimness, a rocky headland not remarkable for any but the common kinds of cliff birds; the fields round tolerably well cultivated in the common country way, and sown with common oats and bear, as also larger fields of potatoes, which the island produces in large quantities, the greater part of it being dry and sandy ground, and excellent for this kind of root. In my way towards the Minister's house saw several deep holes which I was informed were sunk in search of Lead ore, but tho' this was found in small quantities here and at Sandhill in the same island, it was found it could not bear the charge of working, and therefore dropt.

