

## **March 5<sup>th</sup> 2020 – ‘Coal Mining at Colby’ – Steve Whitehead, NT Manager and Head Gardener at Colby**

Steve first explained to us that when we look at the Colby Garden we are looking at a structure that was designed for coal mining. The pathways and water management were developed to facilitate the extraction of coal from the mines in the valley and its movement to the seafront at Amroth from where it was taken to Saundersfoot to be distributed to its customers. Colby was within the confines of the Pembrokeshire coalfield which produced high quality anthracite. But as with all mines in Pembrokeshire, there were two major difficulties. Firstly the coal seams were narrow and difficult to work, and secondly the geology of the coalfield is very fragmented and the seam you were working could suddenly disappear.

It is not clear when mining started in the area. Some seams were visible on the surface and could be worked with no tunnelling. This coal could be dug by families leaving a pit and piles of waste. Steve said there are many of these at Colby and some are still being discovered.

However by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the demand for coal was growing rapidly and landowners wished to exploit this. John Colby bought 123 acres at Colby to start mining. His land was on the eastern side of the stream running down the Colby valley. The western side was owned by Lord Milford who had created an underground water management system which held a head of water that was channelled to the lifting equipment at the various mineshafts. Lord Milford allowed John Colby to link into this. The mineshafts had odd names such as Bedlam, Hall, Engine and Corner. There was also a sawing pit where the pit props were cut. The work in the pits was hard. Shifts were as long as 12 hours. Men did most of the coal cutting but women and children pulled many of the drams(carts) that took the coal from the coal face to the bottom of the mine shaft. Here it was taken to the surface using a windlass, also often operated by women. Children were also used for dram pulling when the tunnels could be three feet or less in height.

There was a hard price to pay for this. The norm for underground workers deaths was 40 to 45. Much of this was caused by lung disease but it was not understood then that the disease was caused by the coal dust. Children also developed deformities. Stunted growth was common and it was commented that anyone could distinguish a collier's child from the children of other working people.

Mining at Colby died down around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The lodge was bought by Samuel Kay in 1873 and restoration of the valley and tree planting began.