

---

## David Bick

I first met David on the afternoon of Sunday the 24<sup>th</sup> of May in 1970 at Llechwedd Ddu, Dylife. I was only 17 at the time, and working as a prospector for Cambrian Exploration of Vancouver, but even then knew of his long-term interest in old mines through our common friendship with the late David Morgan-Rees (*Mines, Mills & Furnaces*, 1969) and by virtue of his already well known portrait in front of the Llywernog wheel taken in 1948.

Early in 1973, he became involved with Llywernog again and was originally cited as a director of the proposed museum. However, when the company was eventually registered, David was excluded; he seldom spoke of this and never received a satisfactory explanation.

In 1974 we commenced a regular correspondence that was to last for 32 years, I have every one of these letters filed away and have not counted how many of these exchanges took place during that time, hundreds rather than tens. 1974 also saw the foundation of his beloved The Pound House Press, to publish Part One of his series *The Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales*. This was quickly followed by parts two, three, four and five and subsequent reprints and various combined editions.

His monograph on Dylife first appeared in July 1975 with a revision in 1985. David was absolutely furious that his name was recently used to promote yet another Dylife book and the glowing endorsement on the back cover was no more than a 'pick and mix' of what was said to the publisher. I never saw him more cross.

Hundreds of these *Old Metal Mines* and *Dylife* books were sold through our family shop at Talybont in the 70s. David recently told me that he thought that he had sold somewhere about 25,000 copies of *The Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales* over the years. I was never told how many copies of *Dylife* were sold; I would think that four or five thousand would be close to the mark. His works on the Forest of Dean were also popular and it is possible that sales of David's books exceeded the sales of any other author of mining books, certainly in Wales and possibly even in the UK. I have heard some delightful stories of people travelling miles to try and buy "an antique mining book" nestling on some old fellow's shelf, only to find that it was Part One in poor condition.

Before David's books, there were only the works of W.J. Lewis and D. Morgan Rees to satisfy those with a lust for old mines. O.T. Jones was long out of print and there were passing references in industrial archaeology or geological books. Anyone who showed any sort of interest in abandoned mines was thought to be something of an oddity. There were a few of us who persisted and it was David who later unified us.

Late in 1977 finance was made available for the reclamation of old mines, through the Welsh Development Agency. There was a meeting of interested parties firstly on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1978 and David was one of those who tried to guide us all in the right direction. We adopted 'The Cambrian Mining Association' as an interim name, with Gerrard Noel acting as secretary, but it was short-lived and soon replaced by a more effective organisation.

Whilst we tried our best, we soon realised that half a dozen interested people simply lacked the necessary gravitas to alter the possibility that these sites would simply become another commodity. David thought that he could distribute some slips through his outlets to identify those with more than a passing interest in conserving and preserving what remained. This precipitated the first Dylife meeting.

In the July of 1978 we met again, most appropriately at Dylife, but with a host of people having a common interest in various aspects of old mines. I have a communiqué dated July 1978 that states "At a recent well attended meeting at Dylife, I offered to compile a list of all those with interests in the old mines of Wales". This was the preliminary meeting that led to the formation of the Welsh Mines Society in the following year.

---

To cater for the growing bibliophile market in 1979, The Pound House also hardbound 250 copies of the five-part edition in navy blue with an index. These copies appeared after I had asked David to sign my copies of I, II and III bound together in a hard black case; this impressed him and quite possibly influenced him into following this course.

The first WMS Newsletter came out in April 1980 and I returned from Manchester to address the first meeting at Cwmystwyth 'On the prehistoric workings on Copper Hill' and thus the die was cast. Regular WMS meetings took place under his guidance for the next quarter century and we are currently awaiting Newsletter number 54.

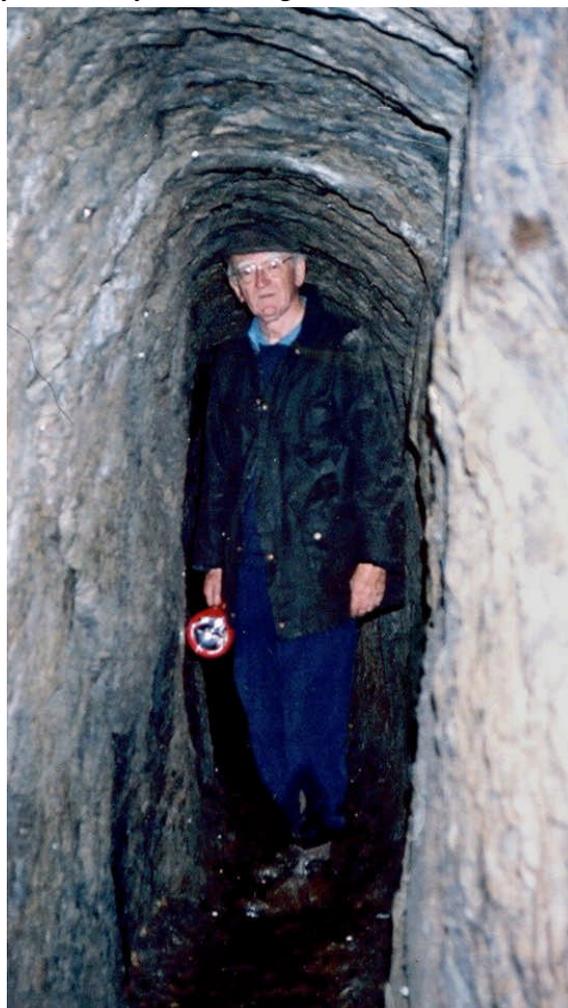
His volume *The Old Copper Mines of Snowdonia* was compiled from notes that he started collecting in the 1950s and supplemented with later literary research and field work. This was published by The Pound House in May 1982 and an updated and enlarged edition, published by the Landmark Press in 2003, met with his full approval.

The original publication virtually coincided with the purchase of the Sygyn Copper Mine by Phillip Aimies; David not only wrote their guide book but also designed the waterwheel and stampmill for them. Regrettably, the water supply was not quite as it should have been and as a result the mill never operated properly, but this was beyond his control.

David decided in 1988 that sufficient new material had turned up to run to a sixth part of *The Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales*, the miscellany. I frequently told him that, of the six volumes, number six was, without doubt, my favourite and formed a model upon which I thought a WMS Journal ought to be based. David felt that it was a little more complicated and could take the Society down a road that was fraught with problems.

From the mid 1980s to the mid 90s, we frequently worked together on various land reclamation schemes. The survey work prior to reclamation of Van Mine bought us together yet again and we spent many balmy days not only discussing mines but a whole variety of matters relating to life, the universe and everything else. We shared the view that it was an "absolute disgrace" that the Welsh Development Agency, through County and District Councils, had paid us handsomely for our advice that was then ignored in favour of the lowest competitive tender. This became something of a catchword and there was never any middle ground; sites were deemed to be either "splendid" or an "absolute disgrace". Unfortunately the latter predominated throughout this period. The example that David frequently used to illustrate the worst of these practices was Dyfed County Council's attempt to rejuvenate the Ystrad Einion Mine.

During these years David retired from his job as a mechanical engineer with Dowty Mecco of Cheltenham where he was responsible for the design of railway signalling, buffers and other hydraulic equipment. Prior to this he had designed landing gear for Douglas Aeroplanes near Bristol. Whilst he was interested in most aspects of mining, it was the mechanical devices that enthralled him most. Slowly reciprocating flat rods with a huge mass coupled to plunger pole pumps simply enchanted him.



---

Following his retirement, he used to call upon me at Talybont to consult papers and exchange opinions. He frequently punctuated the conversation, drawing breath sharply between his teeth whilst pulling his glasses down his nose and fixing a beady eye on me, by quietly proclaiming “I hope that these are going to a good home.”

Having now been involved with mines and mining for over forty years, David had a flutter, and bought some shares in Anglesey Mining plc, who were re-examining Parys Mountain by sinking Morris’s Shaft. Some time later, he spent many hours telling me how he should have known better. He felt that he might have done better at a bookmaker’s. This simply re-affirmed his feelings that only stockbrokers and solicitors made any money from mines.

We were also thrown together regularly by the formation of the WMPT in 1991 but due to personal circumstances, and my failing health, I resigned my directorship in 1994.

In 1993 The Pound House published 500 hard bound copies of the combined editions of Parts 1–6 plus an index in light blue cloth with a white dust jacket: a most handsome volume that finally dispelled any notion that it was simply a ‘booklet’. I looked at my copy whilst writing this memorial text: I had forgotten that David took great delight in the poetry of W.H. Auden, in whose Eden they had a few beam-engines. Curiously, and with a strange synchronicity, Auden has been quoted to me several times during the past week.

*Lewis Morris and the Cardiganshire Mines* was published in 1994 by the National Library of Wales with Phillip Wyn Davies as co-author. Following its publication, David confided to me that he greatly lamented the loss of editorial control and felt that the book had deviated away from his original idea of being a ‘then and now’ mixture of the Morris manuscript and David’s observations and commentary.

He also lamented being unable to understand the Welsh language or the culture or why the Welsh generally hated Winston Churchill, who was a great favourite of his.

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Welsh Mines Society in 1999, John Bennett and Rob Vernon assembled a wonderful vignette of not only how the Society had developed over the previous twenty years, but also of David as we will remember him.

Of recent years, two excursions with David that stood out above others were, firstly, to the Coffin Level at Grogwynion [picture prev. page] with the WMS in September 2000 and, a little later, to Esgair Hir on a wonderfully clear and sunny March afternoon in 2004 with his son William, and others. We were in regular contact during the production of his book *William Waller and the Cardiganshire Mines* and I was delighted to be set several small research assignments towards its production.

Since about 2002, David, myself and others collaborated towards assembling a volume devoted to the lesser workings, largely those that had escaped his attention in earlier writings. Provisionally entitled *The Lost Mines of Mid-Wales*, David submitted his contributions in 2005 and it will appear in due course.

We ate dinner together in the bar of the *Miners Arms* late last August and he sold me three antique mine plans only on the condition that I did not hide them away. He knew then that his time was coming and was trying to put his affairs in order.

The last time that I met David was in October 2005 when he and William came to Talybont for a working lunch and to discuss the new edition of *The Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales*. I wrote to him on October the 5<sup>th</sup> 2005 regarding the Alltycrib Mine at Talybont; he had become quite frail when we spoke over the telephone at the end of November, but was soldiering on. We always exchanged Christmas cards despite us both being devout followers of Darwin and 2005 was no exception, but the last.

---

In 36 years we never had a cross word or any major disagreement and he gave me much encouragement and support at all times, particularly when I was suffering ill health or domestic disputes. A man could not have wished for a better companion amongst these hills.

*Simon J.S. Hughes*

**David Ewart Bick**  
B.Sc., C.Eng., M.I.Mech.E., F.S.A.  
**1929–2006**

---

As originally published in the *Welsh Mines Society* Newsletter, No.54, Spring 2006, Item 4., pages 4 to7.