

Welsh Mines Society

WELSH MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

No.4 Dec.1981

Numbers in parenthesis refer to items in No.3

1 Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

1a Afforestation According to Rob Vernon our attempts to interest NAMHO in setting up a dialogue on a national basis regarding despoliation of sites appears to be making little headway. NAMHO is currently more concerned with the question of access to sites on Forestry land. (1A)

1b List of Historical Sites At the suggestion of Alan Williams the Craig Rhiwarth and Craigmwyn has been added to the list and brought to the Powys Planning Authority's attention. (1B)

1c Publication Policy Following the N.M.R.S.'s kind offer to consider manuscripts for publication, Richard Bird has requested that any material should be in his hands (41, Windsor Walk, South Anston, Sheffield.) promptly, to meet the next deadline for copy. (1D)

1d New Membership Secretary/Treasurer This role has been filled by Alan Golding, 46 Poplar Road, Healing, South Humberside, DN37 7RD. He is also attending to the duplicating and despatch of the members interests list and Newsletter, and for these activities we are much indebted. Several other members also kindly volunteered for one or other of the duties. (1E, 2B)

1e Report of A.G.F.M. at Cyffty June '81

- i. The balance sheet was accepted and due to anticipated lower costs of printing the £1.00 subscription will stand for 1982.
- ii. R. Alan Williams reported on the NAMHO Ironbridge Meeting at which he raised the question of a dialogue with the Forestry Commission. (See later)
- iii. 3rd Party Insurance Cover A large majority of members voted in favour at a cost of 20p per head and we are now part of the scheme.
- iv. 1982 A.G.F.M. Chris Williams kindly offered to manage this at a venue in N.E.Wales (See later)
- v. The Field trip led by Rob Vernon and John Bennett to several mines in the area was blessed with splendid weather and proved most enjoyable. About 45 members attended.

2 Field Trip to Van 13 September 1981 The leader, Neil Dickinson, has sent in this (somewhat edited) account:

'After the general meeting our tour started at the lower dressing floor by the arched "dead-end" tunnel marking the terminus of the Van railway. From there we moved to the middle floor, pausing at the position of the 50ft water-wheel, the mine yard and the now collapsed main adit. The party then passed the old mine office which at the time of writing is for sale. It would make an ideal base from which to pursue my interests !

We made our way close to where ore was first discovered in a trial adit in 1862 and here noted the quarry from where rock was obtained for filling the stopes, the rock being tipped into a nearly shaft. From there we moved to the upper floor where two chimneys still stand next to the ruins of the pumping and winding engine houses at Seaham's shaft, the latter now filled with a jungle of undergrowth. One of the wooden shear-legs 60ft long is now on the ground and rotting badly. From this vantage point we were able to see the position of Edwards' shaft and Pen-y-clun mine, and discussed the Van ore-deposit in relation to the comparative poorness of the lode at Pen-y-clun and in particular East Van mine. On the way "back four of us fought through the undergrowth, and visited the now sealed-off adit where the original discovery of ore had taken place: not a very impressive sight hut one of some reverence.

David Bick mentioned the recent discovery of a wealth of plans etc. in the attic of the mine office. These have been deposited in the NLW. It only goes to show what remains under our very noses, or above our heads.

We are indebted to Mr. Meyer and Mr. Ingram for allowing access to their property. I would like personally to thank Mr. and Mrs. Ingram for a delicious slice of blackberry tart the Friday prior to the meeting; the Trow family of Llanidloes for their ever kind hospitality, and all who came on our field trip for their enthusiasm and interesting discussions thereby making the day very pleasurable for me. Any information regarding Van, East Van and Pen-y-clun mines and the persons employed there would be gladly received.

On a final note, whilst returning home I looked for the grave of Captain William Williams, manager of Van mine. My search at Caerau Chapel proved a success and I gleaned the following information from his monument. Williams' first wife was 5 years his senior and died in 1856 aged 36. He remarried by two daughters died aged only a few weeks, in 1860 and 1863. Williams himself died in 1879 aged 54 soon after the death of a son aged 27. Despite his success as the "father" of the Van mine, Williams suffered much sorrow in his personal life. Could it be that he had persisted so tenaciously at Van by plunging himself into his work as a result of the grief he must have felt ? We can only speculate and may never know for certain.'

- 3 List of Members Interests This is now completed, see 1d
- 4 Mystery Mine (5) Alasdair Neill has drawn attention to pages 147-149 from Portrait of the Brecon Beacons 1975 by Edmund .J. Mason. Considerable details are given of the silica workings and mineral railway near Pontneddfechan and Craig y Dinas.
- 5 Publicity At the NAMHO Ironbridge Conference in June , Rob Vernon arranged an interesting photo-quiz offering free subscription for correct answers, as a result of which we gained several new members.
- 6 Slag Heap Preservation Society Ivor Brown points out a 'Save our Slagheap Campaign' is trying to preserve Yorkshire's heritage against land reclamation, and at Beamish there are plans for an artificial spoil-heap. I must say this does seem to be going a bit to far; we may expect an artificial lead mine next, with specially imported specimens sprinkled over the artificial tips for artificial mineral collectors to rave over. Perhaps we have seen the best days.
- 7 Slate Various members interested (see list) including Peter Challis who mentions a book **The North Wales Quarrymen** is now in press. Ross Harrison says that a rock drill made by Moses Kellow which he found a few years ago will soon be on display at the Miners Tramway at Quarry Tours. Alasdair Neill has suggested a future W.M.S. meeting at a slate working.
- 8 Slate Nuclear Bunker According to the Observer 25/10/81 a disused slate mine at Manod, North Wales is being prepared for a key role in the event of a Nuclear War. Important people are presumed to be intended to shelter here, and perhaps in view of what would subsequently await them, the longer the better..
- 9 Copper at Craia Rhiwarth Alan Williams reports a spectacular section of the copper lode here, and other interesting remains, at the middle level, recently opened up by the N.Wales Caving Club. How pleasing to note that caving clubs are getting more and more hooked on metal mines - there was a time when they would not touch them with a barge-pole.
- 10 Lechfraith Mine (15) My query about the whereabouts of this mine, supposed to be near Moelwyn, raised considerable speculation, but I have to apologise for the red-herring. Dr.M.J.T.Lewis has produced incontrovertible proof that it is the mine of the same name near Clogau, Bontddu.
- 11 Parys Mountain According to the **Mining Magazine** December 1980, Cominco have revealed, by drilling, a fairly shallow high-grade lead/zinc deposit which probably extends to depth. Elsewhere copper is also reported in quantity west of the old opencasts, so that Anglesey's days may not be over. Less happily I am told all entrances to underground workings have recently been blocked up - a great loss to mine enthusiasts.
- 12 Bronfloyd Marilyn Palmer writes to say their I.A. Group hopes to survey Bronfloyd in 1982. A very worthwhile site near Aberystwyth.
- 13 New Publications
- a/ Simon J.S.Hughes **The Cwmystwyth Mines** BM No.17 N.M.R.S. : The most detailed account yet available.
 - b/ J.R.Foster-Smith **Non-Ferrous Mines of South Wales** BM No.18 N.M.R.S. : The final volume in the series.
 - c/ Roy Shambrook **Caradon & Phoenix Mines** (In press) BM No.19 N.M.R.S. : I am indebted to Roger Shambrook for this information. N.M.R.S. publications are available from Mrs.S.H.Bird, 41 Winsor Walk, South Anston, Sheffield.
 - d/ C.J.Williams **Lead Mines of the Alyn Valley** Journal of the Flintshire Historical Society 1979-80 Pages 51-87
 - e/ C.J.Williams **The Lead Miners of Flintshire & Denbighshire** Journal, Society for the Study of Welsh Labour History Vol.3 No 1
Two valuable and well researched accounts, the former being illustrated.
 - f/ Michael Messenger **North Devon Clay** (In press)
 - g/ David Bick **The Old Copper Mines of Snowdonia** This now promises to run to about 120 pages and barring accidents will definitely be published in 1982, probably late in the year.
- 14 NAMHO Codes of Practice These are available, or under way, concerning removal of objects from sites, mineral collecting and preparation [of] mine plans.
- 15 NAMHO New Members These include the Welsh Miners Museum and the Mining Field Centre of University College, Cardiff. Have they heard of the W.M.S.?
- 16 Collieries Michael Poulter is interested in collieries in the Cynon Valley (Above Abercynon) and would appreciate any information.
- 17 Old Mine Plans Members intending to examine plans of abandoned mines held by the Health & Safety Executive, Chepstow Place, London, will find the privilege, once free, now cost them £9 per hour + V.A.T. Research is getting a very costly business.
- 18 Minerals Roy Shambrook extends a welcome to members at 29 Fairlawn Grove, Chiswick, and has in his collection Millerite on Siderite from Coed Ely mine, Glamorgan, also Erythrite from Afon Union, Dolgellau.
- 19 Swansea Zinc Smelters Rob Vernon is looking for records, especially the English Crown Spelter Co 1883-1930, who operated Pandora Mine, Llanrwst (Try the Public Record Office, D.E.B.)
- 20 Westgarth Forster In trying to trace the papers of W.F. I have been in communication with Zenobia Stockton, a descendent living in South Carolina. She tells me that a great mass of his material was destroyed at her parents home in London during the blitz. This is a sad loss, but a common enough story.
- 21 Mines Abroad Rob Vernon and family have visited Fahlun Copper Mines in Sweden and the Linares Lead District in Spain where some fine Cornish Enginehouses survive. I have temporarily mislaid notes on the latter which he kindly supplied, but hope to publish them next time.

22 Courses

Peter Crew and Merfyn Williams have sent the following notices:

- A Industrial Archaeological Plas Tan y Bwlch. Over the past few years, in varying degrees of detail, have been carried out at the following sites : Prince Edward Gold Mine, Rhiw Bach Quarry, Lliwedd (Cwm Erch) Copper Mine, Cefn Coch/Berth Llwyd Gold Mines and Dolfrwynog Turf Copper Mine. The intention is to eventually publish (most of) these surveys - meanwhile interested parties may consult the records at Plas Tan y Bwlch, the Snowdonia National Park Study Centre, Maentwrog. References to historical material relating to these sites (other than the obvious source) would be welcomed.
- B Slate & Metal Mining at Dolgellau, Kings Youth Hostel, 'phone 422392. Graham Hall the Warden and several members have drawn attention to an I.A. Course from 1-4 January 1982. It sounds very interesting, mainly exploring and surveying slate and metal mines above and below ground. Also 22-24 January, exploring old slate, lead and gold mines. 21-23 May and 18-20 June, Old Mines of Mid-Wales. Geology and Geomorphology courses at other times. Graham is recording Cwm Orthin slate mine near the Blaenau Ffestiniog and could arrange a couple of days working on the survey if anyone is interested. Please contact Mr. Hall directly on all matters relating.

23 Our man in Nicaragua Simon Hughes is there for two years on a mining project. We await news with great interest.

24 Newspaper Items, received from Alasdair Neill:

Clogau **Times** 28.7.'81 - possibilities of raising funds for further developments.

Times 19.8.'81 - Clogau Co. taken to court for non-payment of rates.

Van **Shropshire Journal** 10.4.'81 - Proposals to turn Van into a brickworks, backed by the Welsh Development Authority.

There is at least one good chimney there that could be put to the purpose, though a long flue might be needed.

Big Pit, Blaenafon **Times** 20.8.'81 - Being turned into a Mining Museum, E.E.C. to provide £230,000.

Query ? Are grants available for mining societies ?

25 Henry Francis of Wheal Virgin 1784-1853

The Francis family of mining engineers and agents was well known in Cornwall and Wales (see my Old Metal Mines of Mid-Wales Part 1 for the 'Cardiganshire' family tree). Through the courtesy of Mr. Grenville Francis, I have been enabled to arrange for the National Library of Wales to make a facsimile copy of Henry Francis' Account Book for the years 1837/8. This book chiefly concerns Cornwall and to some extent Wales. There are many references to share dealings, and notes on East Wheal Rose in 1836.

26 The Antiquity of Old Mine Workings I am working on an idea for dating old workings independent of carbon 14 or artefacts, which according to Chris Salter of Oxford University, is at least theoretically feasible. In order to test it, samples from workings of known date are required, and I would be grateful to hear from volunteers. Details will be provided on request. I also need the help of an inorganic chemist, please.

27 Gwynfynydd Gold Mine, Work is proceeding, and underground core drilling has revealed several lodes.

28 New Members since July 1981

T.J.Bowkett 'Lynwood', 53 Ty Glas Road, Llanishen, Cardiff.

B.Dale, 8 Trafalgar Place, Brynmill, Swansea, SA2 0BU

R.Forsey, 91 Heol Gleien, Upper Cwmtwrch, Swansea Valley, West Glamorgan

B.S.Hood, 90 Lan Coed, Winch Wen, Swansea

C.Jones, South Lodge, Stone Cross, Ulverston, Cumbria. LA12 7RX

D.J.Mansell, Min-y-Mor, South Road, Aberystwyth, Dyfed.

I.Ruddock, 9 Sandfield Close, Liverpool. L12 2AD

G.Martin, The Manse, Thornton. Milford Haven, Dyfed.

E.Pestaille, 50 Peascroft Road, Bennetts End, Hemel Hempstead. Herts.

Messrs S & R Pestaille, 170 Denton Crescent, Malden Crescent, London. NW1

D.Wells, 63 Beech Ave, Warton, nr. Preston, Lanes PR4 1BY

D.J.McCurdy, 'Denefield', 111 Barn Lane, Golborne, Warrington. WA3 3PI

New Membership List in preparation, A.G.

29 Annual General Field Meeting 27 June 1982

Meet at Pont Cilcain (Grid Ref. SJ 187652) between Pantymwyn and Cilcain, near Mold, at 12 noon, for A.G.M. After lunch Chris Williams will lead us over the Leete and the Mold Mines. (See his recent paper, item 13D) He writes that the leete is 'the watercourse running down the Alyn Valley built in the 1820s when the Mold lead mines were being operated by John Taylor. The walk is an easy but spectacular one, and various sites of mining interest (wheel pits, shafts, etc.) can be observed en route'. Please note these details in case Newsletter No. 5 is too late.

30 Deadline for next Newsletter 15 May 1982

31 Subscriptions Please note the new membership secretary/treasurer is Alan Golding, see item 1D.

32 Correspondents requiring a reply - Please enclose an S.A.E.

33 Grateful thanks to all who have contributed to this Newsletter, and particularly to Alan Golding for duplicating and distribution.

34 A Merry Xmas and Prosperous New Year to all members.

