

Welsh Mines Society

(Member of the National Association of Mining Historical Organizations)



NEWSLETTER Number 14 - MAY 1986

1 W M S MEMBERS CUP

These splendid bone-china drinking cups, each numbered and produced exclusively for WMS has met with a good demand. Collect yours at the Anglesey Meet, price £2.50.

2 VAN MINE

The wealthy Egyptian hoping (in spite of rock-bottom metal prices) to re-open Van is employing Simon Hughes as local agent. Simon informs us some work has been done underground and that blende is the main objective. "There is every indication that the project will continue and at the moment the mine is closer to being re-worked than any other in mid-Wales since the last war." Queries, objections and support can be forwarded via Simon.

3 MEMBERS' ADDRESSES AND INTERESTS

Our thanks are due to David Roe for the comprehensive list recently circulated, even if you need a magnifying glass to read it. Incidentally, how is it that some Members are graced with the title Esquire, others plain Mr, and some no handle at all!

4 FRONGOCH

After long delays the manuscript will be forwarded to N M R S at the end of May for publication. In promoting this title our main purpose was to draw attention to this prime site as part of the industrial heritage of Wales. Tragically, in the past four weeks, the oldest (1841) of the three engine houses has been wantonly attacked and largely demolished which has occasioned the Police visiting a nearby inhabitant. However, on the credit side, Frongoch together with Cwmrheidol and Grogwinion has come on the market. After much activity by certain WMS Members there are good hopes that the Local Authority will acquire the mine. Thus, in some degree we have been over-taken by events.

There is no doubt that the potential of old mine sites is at last being recognised in various official circles and we cannot do too much to accelerate this change of heart whilst time remains.

5 RED DRAGON

After burning much midnight oil, the Mines of Mawddwy Research Group's first fruit is an account of Red Dragon and its remains. Hopefully it will accompany Newsletter and is appropriately timed for our visit there on 21st September.

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6 PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Tina Carr of Pontsian, Llandysul, Dyfed, is surveying mines in mid-Wales. In this context Peter Harvey tells us the corrugated-iron mill at Cwmstwyth has been vandalized and is in imminent danger of demolition. It is, I think, an eyesore, but one that I should be sorry to see go.

7 VALE OF NEATH HERITAGE WEEKENDS

There are two of these on 27th / 29th June and 4th / 6th. July, and appear good value at £39.50 each. Sites to be visited include the Dinas Silica mines, Gunpowder Works and Cefn Coed Colliery Museum. For details and bookings ring 0639 56674.

8 SNOWOONIA STUDY CENTRE COURSES (Maentwrog 324)

30th June - 5th July, exploring metal mines and quarries.

9th - 16th August, surveying a slate quarry with Michael Lewis.

These courses can be recommended as good value, approximately £16 per day.

9 ARCHIVAL DISCOVERY

According to the Western Mail 11th December 1985, the Hugh Owen Library Staff at University College, Aberystwyth have found, in an old store, some 700 maps and plans railway lines and mines, 1826 - 1877. We await further details of this interesting discovery.

10 N A M H O MATTERS

a. The 1987 Conference is at Camborne School of Mines, 3rd - 6th July.

b. N A M H O have recently published a Code of Practice for mine exploration available from Alan Williams, free of charge with S A E. Rule Eleven states "do not leave graffiti", a point on which nowadays we all agree. However, Mrs S E Cowdry tells me she recently discovered in an adit near Llandoverly an inscription "D Bick, G Hall 7 June 1959" which 'quite made my day'. Hopefully, therefore, such follies of mis-spent youth may be excused if they have not indeed, already passed into the realm of archaeology. There were, of course, in those days no such things as mining societies, far less Codes of Practice.

c. Third Party Insurance has given rise to problems as to exactly what is covered, to the point where N A M H O may consider withdrawing. Since the 'access liability' laws have changed some Groups are questioning the need to insure. Comments please to Alan Williams.

d. The S W England Mining History Federation has been formed and may join N A M H O.

e. International Mining History Review edited by Roger Burt is to be published by N A M H O. It will contain articles not normally covered in other journals.

f. N A M H O Field Weekend 7th / 8th June 1986

This is based at Aysgorth [sic.] Youth Hostel in Wensleydale. For details ring Aysgorth 260. Unfortunately, it coincides with our Anglesey Meet, and perhaps N A M H O Societies should get together to avoid as far as possible clashes of this kind.

11 BATS IN MINES

Marie Rackwood, Bryn Mel, Old Barn Field, Newtown, Powys, wants to hear of bats in mines in Montgomeryshire and the borders. However, with respect, it should be noted that some of the pro-bat brigade are perhaps over enthusiastic and in wishing to close habitats completely to the likes of mine explorers, run counter to our own interests. Perhaps N A M H O could watch this aspect.

12 MINES IN SOUTH WALES

Dr R J King, National Museum of Wales, Cardiff, is anxious to trace Calamine and lead workings near St Athan, and on the side of Newtown Down near Pyle. Please contact him directly if you can help. Old workings have been revealed recently in limestone in a quarry, at Machen. According to George Hall some of these limestone mines are of great antiquity. At least one is Roman.

13 LLANDUDNO COPPER MINES

Andrew Lewis writes to say they are still uncovering artifacts, each being photographed and recorded. At Ty Gwyn they are able to begin the proposed new access shaft to the adit, the Local Council offering £500 in support. We await results with interest. It may be remembered that Ty Gwyn was very rich for copper, till drowned out in 1843.

14 LECTURE ON EARLY MINING

A day school on Roman archaeology on 21st June at Colwyn Bag includes a lecture by Prof G D B Jones on Aspects of Roman Mining in North Wales. The fee is only £2.25. Details from Mrs Hague, Department of E M Studies, U C N W, Bangor. In this connection, copper workings at Llandudno have been recently dated as Bronze Age by Carbon 14 methods, and there is little doubt in my mind that various other copper mines around the coast are of like antiquity.

15 HALKYN MINES

Damian McCurdy is aiding preservation of Halkyn records and possibly conservation of the Hendre site. It appears such papers would be held by Clwyd Record Office.

16 OUR MAN IN POTOSI

Simon Timberlake will hopefully be recounting his experiences at the Anglesey Meet. He has also taken splendid photographs in the Frongoch adit, and reports that Taylor's level at Copper Hill, Cwmystwyth has been dug out. He is hoping to make a trial excavation in the Comet open-cast for dating purposes.

17 SLATE STRIKE

Whether the strike at Blaenan Ffestiniog, occasioned by an outbreak of Victorian mill-owner philosophy (Guardian 15th February 1986), has been settled I am not sure. Regrettably, great opportunities are being lost, for trade is booming in adjacent quarries.

18 SLATE RELICS

According to the Caernarfon Herald, 3rd January 1986, various old wagons, wheelbarrows, etc, from Dinorwig are going to the Surrey Light Railway for exhibition.

19 SYGUN COPPER MINE

This is now open, and you can go on a 40 minute underground trip, seeing spectacular stalagmites en route. The Daily Post records the site employs 15 local people, and we must congratulate Philip Amies and his wife for their determination in bringing the venture to success, as well as providing a considerable boost for trade in the area.

20 GOLD IN GWYNEDD

The threatened closure of Gwynfynydd has been lifted and the mine is still hard at work. The gold is there, and success (if the mine is run on a modest scale) would be virtually assured. As for Clogau, we learn that 'operations are being scaled down to make the finances last over a longer period'. Thus is coming to an end a venture very lucrative for some, but disastrous for the average investor. Such top heavy promotions cannot possibly succeed and simply bring discredit to British mining. We have seen it all before.

21 GEORGE HALL

George Hall is now temporarily living in Cheltenham and still very active in mining matters he aims to take up permanent residence in Ludlow.

22 MID WALES MINING MUSEUM

Peter Harvey hopes before long to begin erection of the 50 ft waterwheel which has been on site in pieces for some years. This would be a magnificent accomplishment rivalling the Laxey wheel as an attraction, and a wonderful sight on the high road to Aberystwyth. We look forward to its completion.

23 FINANCES

In spite of a minimal subscription, the WMS remains well in the black thanks to various fund raising activities and good house-keeping. Prompt payment of subscriptions and a 's.a.e.' with any correspondence is appreciated. A RED STICKER on your ENVELOPE MEANS YOU ARE TWO YEARS BEHIND IN YOUR SUBSCRIPTION. Non payment will mean this is the last Newsletter you receive. One pound per year to D M Roe, 29 Somers Road, Worcester.

24 PARYS MOUNTAIN

Derek James worked there in 1980 / 1981 and is trying to locate various old papers and a map showing all the shafts and adits that were plugged. He has retrieved remains of the flat-rods and pumping beam at the shaft served by the windmill.

25 ANGLESEY MEET Saturday 7th June / Sunday 8th June 1986

This promises to be heavily subscribed. Thanks are due in particular to Jeremy Wilkinson and John Bennet, and details are enclosed with the News Letter.

26 STRAITENED CIRCUMSTANCES

Your editor has opted for voluntary redundancy after 35 years in engineering design. He hopes to augment resources by consultancy, lecturing, etc, in engineering, mining history and industrial archaeology. There will also be more time for writing.

27 THE NEWENT COALFIELD

My book on this subject is shortly going to press. (28 - 33 These items have been contributed by S J S Hughes).

28 OLD SITES REDISCOVERED

The remains of what is thought to be two smelting mills have been discovered north of the Rheidol. The initial evidence suggests an early 'Mines Royal Society' dating. S J S H has strong suspicions that one may pre-date this era considerably, particularly as it straddles Sarn Helen, the main Roman road through the county, but more work is required on site. Also, in close proximity to the latter there are two stamp mills which were used until the mid 18th Century.

29 GOLD IN MONTGOMERYSHIRE

Without committing any indiscretions S J S H can state that a commercially viable concentration of gold has been found in samples of rock from the Nant y Rickets area. There are no plans for immediate exploitation.

30 NEW BOOKS

Sometime in 1986 it is hoped that the N M R S will publish the Mines of Goginan by S J S Hughes. This will cover various aspects of mining, metallurgy, geology and history of West Goginan, Melindwr, Ty'n y Pwll, Goginan, Bryn Pica, Bwlch, Bwlch yr Ennaid, Level Newydd, Pencraigddu and Ceunant Mines and will include a considerable amount of new information on these workings. Sadly, no contemporary photographs are available but a rare print, supplied by Peter Challis, is reproduced along with many previously unavailable plans and sections.

Still in manuscript form is a volume on the Darren Mines by the same author for the N M R S. This will be much in the same format on the same aspects but covering the South, East and Great Darren Mines predominantly, but giving attention to the smaller surrounding mines. Plenty of plans and sections are available and a few contemporary photographs and prints.

Both will probably be about 70 pages on the standard N M R S format.

31 NEW MINERAL LOCATION

Barytes has been identified in dump material at the Blaenceulan Mine near Talybont. It is hoped that the adit can be dug out to view the lode before too long.

32 NEW OLD MINES

During aerial photography during the summer of 1985 an unknown mine of some antiquity was discovered in the hills above Cwmystwyth. Further details will be given once some surveying and recording work has taken place.

Also another mineral working / prospect was examined briefly which lies about three miles west of Dalrhiw. Two adits have been driven a short distance into a narrow lead / zinc lode but both have now slumped at the mouths. What is of great interest is a very old system of leats and rock cuttings leading to various hushes. A very low concentration of gold has been found in streams in the area downstream of the outcrop.

33 NEW LODE

A new lode was cut during the working of a quarry for roadstone about half a mile north of the Bryn Dyfi Mine. The maximum mineralised width is limited to less than 12 inches of massive crystalline cubic galena with some quartz and gossan. Strike is SW / NE and dip appears to be 65° - 80° NW.

34 OLD BOOKS

Various old books, etc, on Colonial and Empire mining and geology are for sale. Apply D Bick.

35 WMS REGIONAL SECTION

Simon Hughes has proposed a W M S Branch, based on Aberystwyth and this will be discussed at the Anglesey Meet. Simon's telephone number is (0970) 86235.

36 METALLURGY

Yet another Society potentially of interest to Members is the 'Historical Metallurgy Society' whose publications range from 'Copper Smelting in Bronze Age Jericho' to 'Non Ferrous Industrial Complex at Tintern Abbey'. Membership is £8.00 per annum from Diana Court, Rock House, Bowen's Hill, Coleford, Gloucestershire.

37 SLATE COMPANIES

New member A C Bowman, 4 Jubilee Street, Taunton Somerset is preparing a list of Joint Stock Slate Quarry Companies.

38 WMS CAR STICKERS and Lapel badges - 50 p each.

Collected Newsletter 1-10 - £1.50, available from D Roe.

39 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contributions of the many Members for this issue have been gratefully received and their enthusiasm is reflected in the growing size of the newsletter.

Contributions for the next issue to D Bick by 15th November. Thank you!

40 AUTUMN MEETING - THE RED DRAGON

12.00 am Sunday 21st September 1986
(Please note change of date due to clash with I A A Meeting)

Meet at Grid Ref 846.156 on the wide grass verge on the South side of the A 470 Dinas Mawddwy Dolgellau Road (about 2 km outside Dinas). Leave at around 1.30 for the gentle 45 minutes walk to the mine. Afterwards there will be an opportunity to visit the nearby Minllyn slate quarries.

David Bick
Pound House, Newent, Gloucestershire

0531 - 820650