

# Welsh Mines Society

(Member of the National Association of Mining Historical Organizations)



NEWSLETTER 17

DECEMBER 1987

## 1. DOLGELLAU WEEKEND.

This was well attended in spite of very unsettled weather. On the Saturday morning G.Hall led a party to Glasdir mine. After lunch at the Tyn y groes Hotel we ascended to Cefn Coch and Berthlwyd gold mines, where there was a great deal to see, including an enigmatic hollow or pit which experts identified as a tramroad weighbridge site. An evening quiz kindly organized by G.Hall unfortunately proved beyond all of us. Talks were given by Jeremy Wilkinson. (gold dredging in the Mawddach), Terry Evans (Welsh Colliery headframes), and Trevor Chesters (gold panning). Our thanks are due to them all.

On the Sunday we visited Vigra and Clogau, the latter mine now being considered as a tourist attraction.

## 2. BRYN EGLWYS SLATE QUARRY.

Led by Alan Holmes, this was blessed by fine weather and proved very enjoyable, and included a ride on the Talyllyn railway. Sadly very little of the buildings of this extensive site now stand, though we inspected a large wheelpit in an open working. The mineralogists amongst us had to be content with a few specks of Iron Pyrites.

## 3. BRYN EGLWYS GENERAL MEETING.

Mary Hyde took the minutes of the meeting in Shorthand, which somehow got into my papers, and are, as yet undeciphered. However, as I recall, it was agreed to go ahead with the WMS T-shirt project; a vote of thanks was passed to Alan Holmes; and the party broke up at about 5pm, with a contingent going to Dwyfngwm, near Dylife to rescue a kibble. PS: will members of the contingent please return the rope they borrowed to DEB.

## 4. COPPER HILL, CWMYSTWYTH (LISTED MONUMENT).

Members will recall from NL 15 that Simon Timberlake submitted material for Carbon 14 dating from this site. The results are Middle Bronze Age, and help to confirm that many, if not most, Welsh Copper mines have pre-Christian origins. We hope to visit the site before long. There is great scope for further investigations of this kind.

## 5. WELSH INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY PANEL.

This was set up recently by the Royal Commission on Ancient & Historic Monuments (Wales), and I am serving as a representative of amateur IA and mining interests. The Panel will meet every 3 months, and will bring together interested parties and act as a clearing house for information. It is not a pressure group.

## 6. CLAYS 50 INCH ENGINE HOUSE, VALE OF TOWY MINE.

This magnificent building, near Carmarthen, was recently blown up, though it was, apparently, at one time a scheduled monument. How this came about is not certain, but I am investigating.

## 7. FRONGOCH AND MINERA MINES.

The new owners (if any) of Frongoch are not yet announced, though it seems the District Council's highest ambition is to turn the site into a municipal refuse dump. That such a fate can be openly contemplated for a historic mine with a number of scheduled engine houses is in marked contrast to the imaginative approach of Wrexham Maelor Borough Council. They, in conjunction with the Welsh Development Agency are considering the establishment of an Industrial Heritage Park at Minera. I have been actively involved in the proposals and would be pleased to supply more details. For an interesting account of the Frongoch saga, see the Western Mail 16.12 87. Note: I still have copies of "Frongoch Lead and Zinc mine" for sale, price £5.50.

## 8. MINERALS IN WALES.

I am indebted to Stephen Hughes for pointing out some very fine panels of mineral specimens in the outside walls of the Queen's Hotel, Aberystwyth. This building, near the northern end of the sea front, is now offices. The panels are clearly visible from the road at about eye level or somewhat above, but they are much covered with grime. I seem to recall that the notorious J.B.Balcombe owned the hotel, and the minerals therefore no doubt came from his mines - Bronfloyd and Blaenceulan. This needs further investigation.

## 9. MODEL 50 FT. WATER WHEEL, LEAD MINING EXHIBITION.

The model waterwheel and pumps mentioned in NL 15 are now on show at the Welsh Industrial and Maritime Museum, Cardiff. This very interesting display will be moved to Aberystwyth museum in January, for several weeks - organised by Dafydd James.

## 10. CALIFORNIAN STAMP BATTERY AT SYGUN.

I have manufactured a replica 4-stamp battery on behalf of the Sygun Copper Mining Museum, and it is expected to be in full working order in a few months time. There might even be a limited production of dressed copper ore - the first in Wales for many years.

## 11. SIMON HUGHES CONTRIBUTION.

Our Mid-Wales correspondent has kindly submitted, items 12-24 (inclusive).

## 12. VAN MINE.

The new owners have not commenced work and there is still a legal problem as regards the access to the adit, or, more precisely, the 20 yards of footpath to the mouth of the adit.

## 13. CWM EINON MINE.

The Ceredigion Mines Group has not been active of late. The site of the above mine can be purchased for a nominal sum and the CMG can find sufficient funds to cap the shaft and restore the buildings, using an MSC program. However, no one wants anything to do with the custody of the site thereafter and the CMG has insufficient resources to cater for its permanent maintenance, etc...

## 14. LLYWERNOG MINE.

This has been awarded the Prince of Wales Award for the reconstruction of the wheelpit, the construction of a very fine masonry portal to the adit, substantial repairs to the winding house and pit, and for the "hard work and imagination of Peter Lloyd Harvey".

## 15. CWMYSTWYTH MINE.

Remedial work to the mill and the rest of the site. except Copa Hill, has been sanctioned and it hoped that by next summer there will be considerable improvements. It is sad to note that the water level of Llyn Isaf has been lowered by about a metre in order to comply with the Reservoirs Act of 1985. This legislation has severe implications for all reservoirs of more than 25,000 cubic metres in capacity. This approximates to 20 ft of water over an acre - and very many of our mine reservoirs exceed this volume. Bray's Pool above Llywernog was "adjusted" last week and now looks ridiculous. Reservoirs of more than the prescribed amount are subject to an annual examination, at up to £1,600 per inspection plus an annual insurance premium of £1 per acre per annum. The alternative is to lower them below the limit. Llynoedd Ieuan at Nant y Creiau, Frongoch Pools, Rhosgoch, Melindwr and Syffydryn are likely to suffer the same indignity.

## 16. GEORGE GREEN.

Reprints of S.H.'s recent article in the NMRS "British Mining" No. 34 about George Green of Aberystwyth (Inventor of Green's Economiser and investor in a number of Mid-Wales mines) are available... "50p in stamps will do nicely"... to SH, Lerry Mills, Talybont, Dyfed, SY24 5ED. BM 34 also contains an article by Alan Williams on the mortality of British Slate and Metal miners.

## 17. CWMSEBON MUSEUM.

It has recently emerged that there are proposals to convert the derelict site into a museum. I (S.H.) have reservations regarding the possibilities of doing anything on this site, particularly on account of the location and its condition.

## 18. CLOGAU MINE.

This seems well on the way to becoming a gold mining museum. The new owner, Mr Bill Roberts of Colwyn Bay, has already put proposals before the Bontddu villagers, and they appear to have met with general approval.

## 19. GWYNFYNYDD.

This mine is still (20.11.87) running despite recent rumours to the contrary.

## 20. DYFED OLD MINE SITES.

The Dyfed Planning Department have recently completed a survey into the after use of abandoned metalliferous mines within the county. They now wish to report that they are amenable to a multitude of after uses which include the preservation of the buildings. The increase that it could produce in the tourist trade is viewed in the light of the expansion at Dolaucothi and Llywernog museums. Unfortunately only a précis of the report is publically available.

## 21. DOLAUCOTHI MINE.

Have now erected the steel headframe that once graced the Olwyn Goch Shaft at Halkyn. The workshop, compressors, and corrugated iron buildings have also been moved and look particularly good on site. My only criticism is that they should have given pitched roofs not rounded ones. Well worth a visit.

## 22. BWLCH GLAS MINE.

This has recently had its deep adit reopened by Bernard Moore of Dolybont. A nice adit -very wet- but without considerable expense it is not possible to get to the headframe and cages by this route.

## 23. EAGLEBROOK MINE.

Alas! Much of the cupiferous material -has been transported away for road making. An illegal act but never enforced by prosecution despite a maximum penalty of £20,000 for each offence.

## 24. GOGINAN.

An unsuspected shaft has manifested itself at Goginan. Its timber cover rotted through during the summer. I (SH) was called to the rescue of a dog which had fallen in, and descended to about 100ft where the dog was found sitting in the remains of the cap.

## 25. MINERAL DEPOSITS RESEARCH IN THE UK.

G.Hall and I (DEB) attended this meeting in London on 23 November, organized by the IMM and Mineral Deposits Studies Group. It was a disappointment, largely because we had supposed it meant "research into UK deposits" - which it did not. However we learnt a few illuminating facts, such as that the extent of geological fieldwork worldwide has been so successful that there is, in general, a gross oversupply of base metal ores. Much talk ensued about the poor liaison between academic research and industry - the sort of problem that has blighted engineering for the last 40 years. It is all part of the "British Disease" and shows little signs of a cure.

## 26. MINING BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The British Geological Survey wishes to hear of all new mining publications for their computer records. Please advise MR. M.J. GALLAGHER, MURCHINSON HOUSE, WEST MAINS ROAD, EDINBURGH EH9 3LA. Dr.Burt plense note!

## 27. TOUR TO RIO TINTO &amp; MEDIEVAL STAMPS.

Jamie Thorburn is hoping to organise his first foreign tour ; to Rio Tinto, in May 1988, costing about £300 for 7 nights with mini-bus and air fare included. Those interested, please apply to 27, College Street, Lampeter, Dyfed.

Jamie is also researching into mortar stones as used for the base of medieval stamp mills. Examples have been found at Erglodd and near Bronfloyd. HP would welcome news of finds at lead mines in Wales.

## 28. SAMUEL NICHOLLS

Mrs B Farrell, 7,Shelburne Court, Falmouth, would be interested to hear of anything about S Nicholls who worked in the Goginan area in the mid 19th Century.

## 29. H.M.S. ANNUAL CONFERENCE 18-20 September 1987

The Historical Metallurgy Society is taking an increasing interest in mining history, and this figured largely at its conference at Plas Tan y Bwlch Study Centre. The recent Bronze age datings at Llandudno and Cwmystwyth copper mines are drawing much attention to the probability of very early origins for Celtic metal mining. We visited the Dolfrwnog Turf Copper Works and the underground dressing plant at Gwynfyndd and were enlightened by a variety of interesting lectures. A memorable weekend.

## 30. DIRECTORY OF BRITISH ASSOCIATIONS.

I came across this invaluable source in the local reference library, and found it included NAHMO, but not details of WMS, an omission speedily attended to. Under *specialist groups* I have included The Mines of Mawddwy Research Group... members of this please note. The address for listing is 15, Wickham Road, Beckenham, Kent.

## 31. RE-OPENING OF ESGAIRMWYN MILL, PONTRHYDFENDIGAIID.

The mill was erected just after the war, but has never gone into full-scale production due to sundry problems. Many thousands of tons of jiggling waste running to "x%" lead, await treatment. G Hall is now coaxing the plant into first gear, and we hope to see the mill in full operation during our Mid-Wales weekend in June.

I was there a week or two ago, sorting out an electrical fault, and have never known weather so cold. No one who has worked at Esgairmwyn in winter need fear Siberia.

## 32. BAD AIR AT CWMYSTWYTH MINE.

Aberystwyth Caving Club recently had a close call with bad air at a level in the Cwmystwyth Lead Mines which should be a clear warning to cavers as well as mine explorers.

Taylor's level is at grid reference SN 8088 7499; 320 feet from the entrance is the first junction. 380 feet up the eastern passage a roof fall had sumped the passage since the mid 1970's. This was dug out on 22-23rd August 1987, creating 2'6" of air space and a very slight outward draught from the blind workings. From initial desumping until we entered, 24 hours elapsed. There was a slight sulphurous taste to the air. After 200 feet a small roof fall necessitated a crawl.

The first person entered this, and lapsed into unconsciousness after a minute or two. Distinct apathy was noticed in the two people closest to the fall. The unconscious and spasmodically convulsing caver was dragged out and a rapid retreat made. He recovered in 4 or 5 minutes, but had no memory of the affair. At no point was panting noticed in any member of the group.

Rob Jones surmises (based on information from a number of works on noxious atmospheres, and a talk with a CRO doctor) as follows:-

bacterial action on the iron and organic materials used up all the available oxygen. The resultant carbon dioxide dissolved in the water, leaving only nitrogen behind. The 24 hours between desumping and our entry allowed for atmospheric mixing as far as the constriction caused by the roof fall. When the caver lay in the crawl he was breathing the atmosphere beyond the fall which consisted mainly of nitrogen. It is likely that he would have died in a matter of minutes.

Diggers in both caves and mines should therefore be aware of the dangers of encountering oxygen depletion, which gives no warning - unlike the presence of carbon dioxide which causes panting even at low concentration.

Note from D.E.B. - Presumably those using old fashioned carbide lamps would have had better warning.

## 33. MINES IN THE OLD RED.

Further to Newsletter 16, Item 8, references have been found to iron mines working with profit in the Black Mountains, about 1875. Also a copper mine at Garth near Erwood, selling ore in the 18th Century. This is under investigation.

## 34. TALACHDDU MINE. near BRECON ...RARE LICHEN

This enigmatic working, also in the Old Red, was to have been the object of a joint examination by the Russell Society and the WMS. Unfortunately, clearance from the landowner cannot as yet be obtained and the project is in limbo for the present.

However at a meeting on site, David Roe met Mr. Woods of the Nature Conservancy Council (attending the meeting as defender of Welsh Bats) who amongst his other interests, is studying Micro-lichen, especially those found on mine dumps. One species which is unusually heavy metal resistant is found in only 3 UK locations (Coniston, Parys Mountain and one in Mid-Wales) - the only other World Location is Sweden. He would be very interested for comparative purposes to know of any natural exposures of mineral veins. David Roe will forward any locations.

## 35. NEW BOOKS.

## a) THE MINES OF NEWENT AND ROSS. D.BICK.

This was published in October and 650 copies out of 1000 are already sold. The author has been staggered by the demand for the history of this most esoteric and obscure of all mining regions. Casebound, 88 A5 pages. £7.50 including p & p, from the Pound House, Newent, Glos.

## b) THE GLASDIR EXPERIMENT. PETER JENKINS.

The story of the Glasdir copper mine and the Elmore process, the Elmores being the first to invent a practical form of mineral flotation for ore-dressing. This very interesting 20 page booklet is the harbinger for a more detailed account - "Magic Bubbles" - to be published later. From Dragonwheel Books, Sandcote, Rectory Lane, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 2AD, price £1.50.

## c) HISTORY OF THE CARDIGANSHIRE MINES. ABSALOM FRANCIS. 1874.

This reprint of Francis's share pushing curiosity, said to have been written in the pub at Goginan, is now available for £12 + 50p p&p from Mining Facsimilies, 41 Windsor Walk, South Anston, Sheffield. Included are copies of his maps and a commentary on Francis's life by Simon Hughes.

## d) GOGINAN. SIMON HUGHES.

A NMRS monograph on this mine is to be published in February as British Mining No. 35. Available from NMRS, c/o 41 Windsor Walk, South Anston, Sheffield.

## e) THE HISTORY OF SYGUN COPPER MINE. D.BICK.

This 24 page booklet was compiled in conjunction with the Sygun Copper Mine Museum and is available from there, or the Pound House, Newent, Glos., price £1.75 incl. p&p.

## f) TIN IN ANTIQUITY. R. D. PENHALLURICK.

This title (which I have not seen) has been much praised by reviewers. It is in three sections: Africa and Asia, Europe (excluding SW England), and SW England. Surprisingly it appears to mention tin in Wales, something hitherto unknown to me. If any one has any details, please let me know.

## g) PIONEERS OF FFESTINIOG SLATE. M.J.LEWIS &amp; M.C.WILLIAMS.

At £1.25 this booklet can be thoroughly recommended, and has involved a great deal of painstaking research, available from the S.N.P. Study Centre, Plas Tanybwllch, Maentwrog, Gwynedd.

## 36. SHROPSHIRE LEAD MINES.

Our Border correspondent reports as follows:

WHITEGRIT. The Historic 18th Century engnehouse is now very ruinous and is surrounded by what appears to be a land reclamation scheme - dumps buried or levelled.

ROMAN GRAVELS. Dumps on the west of the road largely levelled, east of the road, little of the buildings remain.

LADYWELL. The brick engnehouse (rotative) is now in a perilous state with its lintels on the point of failure.

SNAILBEACH. Main site now much overgrown. The big enginehouse is surrounded by trees with quite large ones growing out of its walls... it can not long survive.

BOG. Dumps and buildings levelled.

TANKERVILLE. Watsons enginehouse largely enveloped in trees.

Query - are any of the above scheduled? Not, however, that such would prevent their decay - that is the weakness of the system.

## 37. DORETHEA BEAM ENGINE, NANTLLE.

This fine Cornish engine, erected in 1904 for pumping a slate quarry, has been lying idle for years, it has great tourist potential, and there are plans to seek a WDA grant for a work study (Caernarfon Herald 11.9.87).

## 38. CLOGAU GOLD MINE

For good or ill, there is the danger that commercial working at this mine is over. The founder of the Freezrite Frozen Food chain, Mr Bill Roberts, is aiming to re-open the site for tourism (C.H. 14.8.87). This is a £1,500,000 scheme, but according to the Cambrian News 18.9.87., the locals are not much in favour. It would be, in my opinion, a mixed blessing as far as our interests are concerned.

## 39. VAN MINE, LLANIDLOES.

Members may well recall that this mine was bought by the eccentric Oncy Nathan, an Egyptian millionaire. He is now declined into bankruptcy, but the Receiver has valued the site at £250,000. According to the consultant engineer, Simon Hughes, lead and zinc worth about £1,000,000 is present, though how this figure is arrived at is not stated (Dally Post 15.5.87). With the present price of base metals, have the chances of viable mining in Wales ever looked gloomier?

## 40. PARYS MOUNTAIN, ANGLESEY.

Drilling has identified almost 5,300,000 tonne of extractable ore, but it is not clear whether planning permission has been obtained. WMS has made representations regarding the unique nature of the Parys/Mona opencasts and curtilage, all of which ought to be a scheduled monument.

## 41. DRWS Y COED MINE, NANTLLE, etc.

This site is the subject of a study commissioned by the Snowdonia National Park, aimed at turning to account its amenity potential. There is no doubt that the potential of mine sites is at last being appreciated in high places, and they are no longer automatically classed as "scars of industry", to be removed as soon as possible.

## 42. ANCIENT MINING SITES IN WALES.

This subject (see items 4,27,29.) attracts growing attention and calls for a great deal of field work and research. Should we form a Cambrian Ancient Mining Group, (CAMG)? I can think of a number of interested members, myself included. Comments please.

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## 44. SUMMER MEET AT DEVILS BRIDGE, NEAR ABERYSTWYTH.

11-12 th JUNE 1988.

A weekend devoted to the mines around Cwmystwyth and Devils Bridge.

We will be based at The Woodlands Hotel (tel. 0970 085 376)

B/B £10 per head, the adjacent Woodlands Caravan Park can accommodate vans at £3 (tel. 097085 233). The buffet meal on Saturday evening will be around £3. Will members willing to talk, with or without slides, please let me or George Hall (0544 231006) know as soon as possible so a programme can be arranged. Further details in the May Newsletter.

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## 45. SEPTEMBER MEET, Sept. 25th 1988

This is provisionally arranged at Minera Lead mines near Wrexham.

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## 46. NAMHO NOTES.

The main items of interest discussed in this November council meeting of the National Association of Mining History Organisations were:-

- NAMHO has been nominated as sub-contractor in a tender for a D o E contract by Ove Arup and Partners to report on the extent of abandoned mining in Britain.
- The National Radiological Protection Board has agreed to loan personal dosimeters for testing radon levels in old mines.
- Alternatively NAMHO council member John Jones has his own equipment and is willing to come and take readings, especially when sealed passages are opened up.
- Guidelines are being drawn up as to the position taken by the Health and Safety Executive regarding old mines.

Further details on any of the above NAKHO Notes or on any other 'national' topic can be obtained from R.Alan Williams, 5 Longshaw Common, Billinge, Wigan. (0744 892038)

## 47. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful thanks for contributions to this newsletter are extended to Simon Hughes, J. Burman, J. Groucott, Stephen Hughes, G. Hall, Liz Pugh, Rob Jones, J. Thorburn, Alan Williams, Rob Vernon, David Roe, Peter R. Jenkins, Eric Gray-Thomas, and Peter Morgan Jones.

## 48. COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON TO ALL MEMBERS.

Please note that the deadline for the next newsletter is 1st May 1988.

David Bick, Pound House, Newent, Glos. December 1987.

## 49. ATC HELP.

Kevin Nicklin, 1 Charrington Close, Blackpole, Worcester, WMS member and Air Training Corps leader would be grateful for any advice as to safe but energetic underground mine trips for (energetic) novices.

## 50. NEIL DICKENSON.

Wishes it to be known that he is alive, married, with children and living at The White House, Greatworth, Banbury, Oxen. We hope not to have seen the last of him. Query, what has become of the projected Van history?

## 51. GOLD PANNING.

Our correspondent at the first British Gold Panning Convention was Eric Gray-Thomas who reports that it was a busy day with displays of Riffle Boxes, Sluices, Metal Detectors, quite a bit of gold, and a lot of talk of gold hunting.

He also reports that in September there were signs of mining life at Prince Edwards Mine near Trawsfynydd, the entrances being gated.

## 52. BORING ITEM 1 - Insurance.

The insurance policy obtained via NAHMO now covers members for claims against them, whilst on WMS sponsored meetings or projects, up to a maximum of £1,000,000. It also provides a certificate which will be helpful in assisting our access to sites. The disadvantage is that it costs WMS 70p per member per year. The 'insurance fee' for non-members attending field meetings has now been increased to £1.

## 53. BORING AND TEDIOUS ITEM 2 - Membership fee.

The date to which you are paid up to is now graphically shown on the address label (on the envelope which you have just consigned to the fire). It is now, regrettably, becoming too expensive to pay insurance and newsletter costs, for non paying members. Could you please make an extra effort to ensure you are paid up to the end of 1988 as soon as possible? Money or Cheques (made payable to the Welsh Mines Society) for £2 per annum to DAVID ROE, 29 SOMERS ROAD, WORCESTER. WR1 3JJ

## 54. UNBELIEVABLY BORING AND TEDIOUS ITEM 3 - Data Protection Act 1984.

Under this Act I have to inform you that WMS has now put its records on computer. These records are each member's name, address, date joined and paid up to, plus interests, phone number, and any other relevant information. It is envisaged that these records will be used for the publication of a membership list and for insurance purposes solely. If

any member objects to his/her information being kept on computer, please contact David Roe who will delete him/her from the computer record and revive the traditional file card.

## 55. MISTAKES

If any mistakes have been made in transcribing membership information to the computer record and thence to your address label, please blame your all too fallible, one fingered Secretary - not the computer, and kindly advise him (D.Roe) as to the error(s).

## 56. WMS DIRECTORY.

It is intended to produce an updated WMS directory of names, addresses and member's interests to accompany the May 1988 Newsletter. If any members wish to provide details of their (mining) interests - preferably in the following categories

A = Ancient Mining.      H = History.      IA = Industrial Archaeology.  
Ge = Geology, Minerals.      U = Underground exploration.  
R = Restoration.      Mc = Machinery, Railways, Ore Dressing.  
M = Metal.      S = Slate.      C = Coal.  
will they please contact David Roe? A form is included to assist.

56. David Roe has changed his phone No. to Worc. (0905) 612239

DAVID ROE 29, Somers Road, Worcester. 27.12.1987