

Welsh Mines Society

(Member of the National Association of Mining Historical Organisations)



WELSH MINES SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER 23

DECEMBER 1990

1 PROGRAMME FOR 1991

a) 31 March (Sunday) llam LADYWELL to replace the iron tie-bars in engine house to prevent collapse. George Hall is project co-ordinator, phone 0544 231006.

b) 27/28 April (Saturday/Sunday) RED DRAGON to complete the I.A. dig Simon Harris is co-ordinator, phone 0794 66337. The farmer is Mr Wyn Jones, Fferm Tynybraish, Dinas Mawddwy, Machynlleth, Powys. Phone 06504379. He has limited accommodation, or there are local pubs such as the Brigand's Inn, Mallwyd. Please tell Simon if you are coming - spades crowbars, wheelbarrows, rubber gloves etc. welcome.

c) 3/6 May NAHMO CONFERENCE, hosted by WMS at Llechwedd Slate Caverns, Blaenau Ffestiniog. Lectures will cover from Bronze age to modern mining from Wales to Shropshire and elsewhere, and there will be various field trips. The whole programme looks very exciting, with a Saturday night social to be held underground in a slate cavern, complete with food and wine. Get there if you can. Further details from Boo Vernon, 78, Oakenshawe Lane, Walton, Wakefield, West Yorks. Phone 0924 257017. Note speakers are needed for one or two gaps in the lecture programme.

d) 17-27 May RIO TINTO AND THE IBERIAN PYRITE BELT (SPAIN) Though not an official WMS trip it is organised by our member Jamie Thornburn, and previous similar trips have had an enthusiastic reception. Apply Atalaya Tours, Ceiniorfa, Penglais Terrace, Aberystwyth SY23 2BT Phone 0790 625077 or 625137 (evenings)

e) 22/23 June FLINT - DENBIGH MEET. Leader: Trevor Chesters. Details in the next N/L. Please bring slides for the evening.

2 REPORTS OF MEETINGS

a) Saundersfoot 16-17 June 1990
Our thanks are due to Chris Chambers and Peter Claughton for a very successful weekend, PC provided detailed notes of local mines and hopes to examine the walled enclosure at Chain Shaft, Llanfyrnach to ascertain its meaning. Harold Morris gave a talk on Tyllau Duon mine, Anglesey (see item 31), and several of us will not forget the delicious rubarb - or was it gooseberry-pie we had at the local pub.

b) Rhayader 29-30 September.
50 members attended this enjoyable if damp weekend, including visits to Dalrhiw, Nantycar and the Wye Valley mines, also the the Bronze age mine

of Nantyreira. Rob Vernon talked on Swedish mines, Simon Hughes showed old photos, and Ron Fullagher conducted an enginehouse quiz. Our thanks are due to them all, and consolations to Jim Groucott who has an injured leg.

3 MATTERS RAISED AT THE MEETINGS

- a) WMS Finances: according to David Roe we are about £450 in hand.
- b) WMS Bone China Mug: by popular request a new edition will soon be available, limited to 50 only, each numbered, at the old price of £2.50 to help keep down inflation. Order now, to avoid disappointment.
- c) Mines Royal Tri-Centenary: Your editor's suggestion of a meeting or conference based on Esgairhir where the Crown monopoly of mining was broken in 1693 has been agreed and Dr Marilyn Palmer has kindly consented to become involved in the project. Details in due course.

4 COURSES

- a) 22-24 February 1991 METALS IN WALES at Gregynog, near Newtown. Includes talks by Philip Riden, C.J. Williams, Steven Hughes, Professor J.R. Harris and D.Bick - should be worth coming to and there is also a field trip. £50 for full weekend and cheap at the price. Apply Dept. of E M Studies, 38 Park Place, Cardiff. CF1 3BB.
- b) 1991 Minerals and Mining In Wales. Various courses at various dates, including one on ancient mining by Jamie Thorburn. Based on the Plas Tan y Bwlch, Snowdonia National Park Study Centre, Maentwrog, Gwynedd. Write or phone for details (0766 85324)

5 MINERA RECLAMATION. Bill Slater is the resident industrial archaeologist and Phase 2 is proceeding apace. Several buildings, buddles etc. have been revealed under the waste tips. At the centre of the site, Taylor's Shaft has been uncovered and seems to be in good condition. It is hoped that it can remain open. Meadow's enginehouse has been re-pointed and re-roofed and looks very well.

6 MONSTER WHEEL IN PEMBROKESHIRE. I came across a reference in the 1839 Mining Journal p195 to a huge water wheel of 75 hp at Merriton near Stepaside and set to work on the 7th December for the Kilgetty Colliery Co., pumping two shafts via eccentrics - a very unusual arrangement. Water came 2 miles and crossed an aquaduct 30 or 40 foot high. Does anything remain of these creations?

7 DREADFUL ACCIDENT TO THE EXETER MAIL. In the same issue, p45, is recorded how Henry English, editor of the MJ, narrowly escaping with his life, consequent upon the coach, upsetting on Deep-Hatches Hill near Jamaica Inn. The drunken driver had failed to stop to put on the drags, the speed of descent being wonderful to behold. English broke several ribs but eventually made a good recovery. Nothing was said of the poor horses.

8 MERIONETH LEAD MINE. The fact that people actually read the WMS Newsletter is now established, judging from the numbers that have journeyed to the site only to find nothing at all.

9 COPA HILL DIG AND THE WMS GOOD FOOD GUIDE. The Early Mines Research Group dig at Cwmystwyth proceeded well this summer, (see also item 30).

We took a few hours off to visit Esgairmwyn to see the ancient opencast etc., and finished off with an excellent meal at the pub at Flair Rhos, the place where the engineer Francis Thompson dined in 1788. To perpetuate his memory, we also toasted all the mines and all absent friends in England, and wondered if WMS members will be doing the same 200 years hence. I shall be saying more about Thompson and his experiences in OMMMW Part 6.

Another good place is the old School House, Gauro, a mile or two east of Rhayader, where I had the best steak and kidney pie I ever tasted.

Note. We have to thank Simon Hughes our Mid-Vales correspondent for items 10-24

10 DOUGLAS B HAGUE. Sadly, Douglas died on Wednesday, 12th September at Bronglais Hospital, Aberystwyth. Douglas was one of the first to realise the value of the industrial heritage of Vales and never ceased to encourage the preservation of industrial monuments. His flamboyant character and ceaseless support will never be forgotten.

11 BRYN YR ARIAN MINE, TALIESEN. Following the earth tremor of the 2nd April several large slabs have become detached from the hanging wall of the slopes.

12 LLYWERNOG MINE, PONTERWYD. The new buildings will provide more display area as well as exhibiting a large horizontal and vintage air compressor, the open stope is to be excavated to adit level and then fitted with a concrete cap. This will result in more of the old workings being on show.

13 MINES OF CARDIGANSHIRE, MONTGOMERY AND SHROPSHIRE BY LIPSCOKBE & CO. Shortly after reprinting it was realized that its prime purpose was to promote the Aberdovey mines and that its date of publication must have been March or April 1870. A contemporary issue of the Mining Journal carries a prospectus with a section, plans and a drawing of the works (also reproduced in OMMMV Part 5 p.9). For copies of this supplement please send a 50p stamp to Simon Hughes. Further reprints will include this material. My thanks to George Hall for drawing attention to this.

14 ZINC. Despite the price of Zinc having fallen, and due to a weakening of the dollar, there are undoubtedly economic reserves of blende in Mid-Vales. During the summer at least six companies were examining the potential.

15 VAN MINE. A small comment on the revised OMMMV part 5. Attempts to open the mine have not failed, the project is very much alive and well. The attempts to reprocess the dumps have dragged on for five years due to misrepresentation, fraud, and complex ownership. Powys County council are currently seeking tenders for a feasibility report that will lead to a WDA land reclamation grant. The dumps and mine are not under the same ownership. It hoped that the present licencees of the mine will initiate a drilling programme during 1991. A fuller account of the last five years development will appear in the UKJ of M&M in April 1991 No.9. [Query :what is the UKJ of M&M? (Ed.) Oh! see 23]

16 PARYS MOUNTAIN, AMLWCH. Another mine which was thought to be completely worked out is now coming back to life after a 35 year exploration. The trial shaft and drift are completed and some stoping has taken place to evaluate the ore (see item 38).

17 COWARCH MINE, DINAS MAWDDWY. I was fortunate enough to acquire a cost sheet and brief report for 1852 which is now deposited in the National Library.

18 GOLD. I recently saw Welsh Gold medallions on sale at Aberystwyth for £340 which equated to £1400 per Troy Ounce. This is nearly seven times the price of non-indigenous bullion, such is the price of sentiment!

19 PUBLICATIONS. Those containing recent articles of relevance to the Welsh metalliferous mining are:-

Mineral Reconnaissance Programme Report 114		BGS
Exploration for Metalliferous Minerals: a Guide		BGS
Copper from Parys		
Planet Magazine No.79		
The Darren Mines.	BM No.40	NMRS 1990
The Cwmbrwyno Mines.	BM No 41	NMRS 1990
Geology of Drws y Coed Mine.	BM No.41	NMRS 1990
Bwlch Glas, Llywernog and Articles on minerals.		UK Journal of Mines & Minerals.
Atgofion am Ystumtuen. J H Griffiths	Bro Annwyl y Bryniau	

Forthcoming articles will be:

The Castell and Nant y Creiau Mines.	BM No.43	NMRS 1991
The Van Mine . UKJ of M&M. No.9		1991

20 RUBBISH. I was disgusted to discover that someone had taken the trouble to drive up to Nant y Creiau to dump various bits of scrap washing machines and domestic rubbish into the wheel pit. A sad reflection upon the times.

21 EAST DARREN MINE. Since the collapse of the plug in Pryse's Shaft in December 1989, the plug of agricultural refuse gave way in July. Tom Price braved the aroma of mutton beyond the 'sell by date', and descended about 120 feet but found that there was no way into the old workings. Congratulations are also in order for Tom and Martina who were married on the 27th October.

22 NATIONAL LIBRARY OF VALES. WMS members will be shocked by the economic reforms proposed for the library:- charges for reader's tickets, entry charges for exhibitions, higher reprographic fees, shorter hours, maps and prints department closed on Saturdays, charges for reader's inquiries and a reduction in staff to answer reader's queries.

23 NEWLY IDENTIFIED MINERALS. Those which have been recognised in the last few months are Mattheddliete at Darren Mine, Susanite and Sulphatian Schmeiderite at Llechweddhylyg, Ullmanite from Hendrefelen and several other mines, Anhydrite from Nant y Creiau (though this has yet to be absolutely confirmed). The UK Journal of Mines and Minerals is well worth a subscription if you have an interest in minerals and devotes a regular column to new occurrences.

24 DYFED COUNTY COUNCIL have recently announced that they intend to preserve parts of Ystrad Einon, Esgair Hir, and Nant y Mywn using WDA financial aid. Other schemes are in the pipeline but they have not been made public as yet.

NB: above items 10-24 contributed by Simon Hughes.

25 FIELD WORK IN NORTH VALES. Peter Hays has kindly sent the following report.

'The newsletter often refers to courses at the Snowdonia National Park Study Centre, Plas Tan y Bwlch, (see item 4) and members might be interested to learn of the Practical Industrial Archaeology course in August. The course was led by Dr M.J.T.Lewis and our member Merfyn Williams. The sites studied were slate mines at Penrhyn-gwyn above Dolgellau (704149), Hen-ddol above Fairbourne (619123), a slate mine above Hen-ddol called Goleuwern, and the lead /slate mine at Cyfannedd east of Goleuwern (627124). Full surface and underground surveys were made. I was only concerned with what was underground, although I did spot a 15 hole rock cavern at Hen-ddol, while on the way to lunch! Unexpectedly Penrhyn-gwyn proved to have three floors underground, and a survey proved where the adit entrances had been. Hen-ddol required much laddering to reach the levels where the adit is blocked, there being four floors underground, but only two open adits.

At Cyfannedd the level was explored to the point where it was blocked by material washed in from a shaft. Only one half hearted drive on the lead lode was found. Although there is a slate tip, very little slate can have been mined, and there was a complete absence of cut ends of slate. This would seem to indicate that there was no slate mill and little, if any, production.

Although slate mines seem to be the 'poor relations' compared with the classic metal mines, they often seem to have left more remains for study - and puzzlement - and if you have often wondered about them but were afraid to ask, join the course next year.

The opportunity was taken to visit the adit workings of the Manganese mine at Llanfaelrhys (209265), where there were found remains underground to equal those of a small slate mine, including a (flooded) incline. Barmouth Consols (610119) in the cliffs below the railway line west of Fairbourne was also visited. The bottom adit is blocked by shingle, but it would be easy to ladder down from above. The nearby Anna Maria mine eluded us.' [SH 603 113 - Ref J.Wilkinsons Index]

26 ARMFIELD PUGH & Co. After a whirlwind romance, rumour has it they first embraced in a deep adit - Colin and Liz Pugh are now sharing a roof at 'the Old Chapel', The Bank, Pontesbury Hill, Pontesbury, Salop. Phone 0743 791955. Visitors welcome.

27 AIR PHOTOS. Peter Claughton advises that good photos of Vales can be obtained from the Central Register of Air Photography in Cardiff. Phone 0222 823815. I have found them very helpful.

28 ANTHRACITE IN LEAD SMELTING. Peter has come across a reference to trials using 'culm' from Kidivelylly at the Anchor Smelting Co., Aberystwyth. Were the trials a success or was anthracite ever tried in the North Wales lead smelters? Please advise PC.

29 INSTITUTE OF MINING HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY. The embryo body agreed on its new title at its meeting in Ironbridge in November. Hon. Sec. Is Lynn Willies, Matlock Mining Museum. Bi-annual meetings are proposed in the future.

30 COPA HILL DIG. (We are grateful to Simon Timberlake for the following report).

'A further season by the Early Mines Research Group concentrated on the North wall of the opencast. Excavation here in, 1989 had revealed the top of a small fire-set gallery with stone tool marks in the roof.

Deep excavation revealed an interesting section through 18/19th century mined waste, sterile shale, and at about 4m depth a broken up peat layer, beneath which lay banks of fire set waste with much charcoal, worked wood (mine timber), and some stone tools. The opencast workings were not bottomed but numerous further worked pockets, ledges, and in one section a cross section across the vein was exposed. The mine walls showed up numerous areas of stone tool impressions plus shallow holes produced by sharper, perhaps metal, instruments. The mine gallery was excavated revealing a hollow, little more than 1m deep by 2 m wide, worked into a productive pocket of the lode. The shape of the working and its characteristics were quite unlike any observed in historical period workings. Of greatest interest for the archaeological dating was an in situ peat layer on the floor of the gallery. This was overlain and sealed by run-in eroded shale and under lain by a very thin layer of stamped in charcoal, crushed quartz, clay, and one or two stone tools. The peat layer contained birch branchwood, various twig horizons and thick compressed layers of leaves such as hazel and willow. The radiocarbon dating should provide a reliable latest date.

The excavation team (1990) consisted of ST, Brenda and Paul Craddock, Phil Newman, Phil Andrews, Anthony Gilmour, and David Bick. Thanks to the last for the design and supply of the famous EMRG winch.'

31 TYLLAU DUON MYSTERY MINE. Harold Morris has kindly sent a plan and details of the curious Anglesey mine of uncertain purpose. You get there down steps cut in the cliff (483925). Features include levels and a shaft that is blocked by an old tram.

32 NEW BOOKS AND ARTICLES. (See also item 19).

a) Bennett & Vernon. Mines of Glyder Forest Part 2: Hafna and vicinity, 95 pages, £6.25. Well produced and illustrated, and essential reading for all interested in N. Wales mining. We are promised in the fullness of time a hardback omnibus edition of all 7 parts, that will prove a real collectors item.

b) Ian Taylor. Force Crag. 120 pgs, £7.99 including postage (from 140, Botchergate, Carisle). The history of this Lake District mine - Mr Taylor also leads trips to local mines.

c) British Mining No.41. NMRS Memoirs. Contains papers by T B, Colman on mineralisation of Snowdonia, by R von Arx on Cwmbwyno, and Mellingloch near Newton where Roger Shambook reports 3 levels and a shaft (GR 067943)

d) Simon Hughes. The Darren Mines. B.M. No 40 NMRS. 153 pgs, price uncertain. Well produced and packed with information.

e) John Taylor. Iron in the Soul. 72 pgs. The story of the Garth hematite mines near Taff's Well, now threatened by quarrying. Tony Oldham tells me the book is already out of print.

f) Various authors Early Mining in the British Isles. Plas Tan y Bwlch Occasional Papers No.1 80 pgs A4, £10. A valuable set of papers including several by our members mainly about Wales. Not to be missed, such publications go out of print very quickly.

g) David Bick. Early Iron Ore Production in the Forest of Dean. Journal of the Historical Metallurgical Society 1990 Vol 24 No.1. Indicates that pre-16th century production exceeded 2,000,000 tons. Off-prints from D Bick provided you promise to buy me a drink.

h) T B Colman. Exploration for Metalliferous Minerals in Britain. 52 pgs, £15 from HMSO bookshops. We learn *inter alia* that there are 200 million tons of 0.3% copper ore near Dolgellau. I am told the book is well worth the money.

33 SOUTH WALES MINES. We are obliged to Roger Shambrook for the following news:

a) Nant Mine (Vale of Towy). Treharne's Barytes mine now much overgrown; whether the workings are still open is not stated.

b) Cystanog. 2 levels still open, one very interesting.

c) Pontrhwnws. RS could find nothing of this at all.

d) Caesara. Enginehouse still just about standing. Deep adit - water too deep for our intrepid adventurers, but I can tell them there is nothing inside worth seeing. There is another adit lower down - did they see that? Various shafts and open cuts were bulldozed 30 years ago, and now all to be seen is a field.

34 RIO TINTO VISIT See item 1d, book now to avoid disappointment.

35 UNION ZINC MINING CO., Ffestiniog, working 1922. Dr Hugh Torrens, Keele University, Keele, Staffs is anxious for anything on this mine or company.

36 IRONWORK AT ESGAIR HIS AND SIGLENLAS. Rob Vernon has noted narrow iron flanges in pairs about 6 or 7 feet diameter and held apart by iron tie bolts at these mines, one being around a shaft at Esgairhir. What were they?

37 15th CENTURY RECORDS. Very recently very old manuscripts relating to the Court of Mine Law in the Forest of Dean were bought by Gloucester Records office. They came on the open market - one wonders where from!

38 ANGLESEY MINING PLC Eric Gray-Thomas has sent various cuttings on the progress of the mine said to have a golden future. Well, we have heard that before, though having invested some cash in the enterprise I have more than a passing interest in its future. The Morris Shaft is now 300m deep, and they are coring to 500m. The question is, not whether the ore is there, but whether in view of the very heavy capital outlay, the mine can ever pay a decent return.

39 BRONZE AGE MINE AT LLANDUDNO. According to a brief note sent by Eric this mine is 3,500 years old and is the deepest ancient copper mine in Europe (over 100ft). The site is being excavated by the Gwynedd Archaeological Trust, funded by Cadw.

