

# Welsh Mines Society

(Member of the National Association of Mining History Organisations)



## WELSH MINES SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NEWSLETTER 40

June 1999

### 1 1999 PROGRAMME

**Summer Meet. 12/13th June.** Based on the Red Lion Hotel, Llanidloes (01686 412270) - Leader D.Bick. This is our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary meet, and by way of a little celebration a 16 page A4 publication produced by John Bennett and Rob Vernon compiled largely from member's contributions, should accompany this newsletter. Our thanks are due for all their efforts, and no doubt it will become a collector's item. Free of charge too, and all this on only £4 per year. Also available, we expect to have on sale at £2.95, a third and improved edition (limited to 100) of the now long out of stock WMS BONE CHINA MUGS.

As to the programme of events, this is as follows:

**Saturday** Meet at the **Van Mine** 11.45 am prompt (Grid Ref 942878). Either bring your own lunch or there are several pubs in Llanidloes a mile or two away, which we will go through, for a 2.30pm meet at the **Gorn Mine** 1 mile south of Llanidloes up a long hill. Parking there may be a problem - I will give details at Van (not yet been there to review the situation). You can book your evening meal at Van. There will be the usual AGM and slide show - if you have slides taken 10-20 years ago on meets so much the better.

**Sunday** Meet at **Dylife** on the roadside (GR 860940) 10am. There is much to see, including the 60ft wheelpit, deep adit and various things in Engine Dingle, hard at work 200 years ago. Lunch - bring your own, or at the Star Inn nearby. 2.30pm **Geufron** Copper Mine (GR 884856), via a very picturesque route from Dylife. Parking here is a bit of a problem, so the fewer cars the better. (Our meets are getting too popular for the geography).

**Autumn Meet 11/12 September.** Based on the Royal Sportsman Hotel, 131 High Street, Portmadoc, Gwynedd. (01766 512015) Leader George Hall.

**Saturday** Meet at llam at the Old Chapel, Drwsycoed, (GR 54185344) Harold Morris leading. **Please book your evening meal with the enclosed form by 1<sup>st</sup> September.** Slides etc. welcome for Saturday evening.

**Sunday** 10am visit to Sygun Copper Mine Beddgelert for an (optional) underground trip at reduced rates. Then on to Llwyn Ddu and Cwm Buchan, led by Richard Amies.

**Note** Both trips are remote from pubs, so please bring your own refreshments.

### 2 MORE GOLD IN WALES

Headlines in the Cambrian News 4<sup>th</sup> February, announced that Cambrian **Goldfields** has renewed its licence on 154 square kilometres from Dolgellau to Bala. John Mason the mineral expert is involved, along with Simon Hughes. Ken Williamson is the front man, and according to him 'we have found a fair amount of gold in the area'. No doubt, but the question is, can it be made to pay? At any rate, we wish them luck.

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Chairman: DAVID BICK, The Pound House, Newent, Gloucester

Secretary/Treasurer: DAVID ROE, 20 Lutterburn Street, Ugborough, Ivybridge, Devon. PL21 ONG

### **3 LESS GOLD IN WALES**

Another newspaper report, date uncertain, refers to concrete dams being built at Gwynfynydd, now closed, to prevent effluent reaching the River Mawddach. There are also worries about bats, so how the two can be reconciled is indeed an interesting dilemma for the authorities. But presumably there will still be access from the old slopes coming up to daylight, or will these be blocked up as well?

Note Thanks are due to David Seabourne for the above two items.

### **4 OLD GOLD IN WALES**

Someone phoned me recently about a man named SKEY who founded a chemical business over 200 years ago in the Midlands, and is reputed to have been refining Welsh gold. If so, where did it come from? I put him in touch with George Hall who was most interested.

### **5 PLATINUM IN THE HEBRIDES**

According to The Guardian 12<sup>th</sup> February, platinum has been found on the Isle of Run. Researchers from the Camborne School of Mines have found high-grade seams, but only 1cm thick in igneous rocks, not rich enough to pay. Still worth seeing, if not worth going to see.

### **6 MORE RARE MINERALS IN MID-WALES**

The region is getting quite a reputation for rare minerals, though often you need a lens or even a microscope to see them, rendering their appeal to most of us somewhat academic. However Mary Hyde has drawn my attention to a paper by John Mason in the UK Journal of Mines & Minerals, No. 19, with details of Cobalt, Nickel, Antimony, Silver and Gold occurrences. It seems many of the rich silver ores worked in the 17<sup>th</sup> century comprised some tetrahedrite containing up to 20% silver. Tucekite, an extremely rare mineral, has been found at several mines around Eaglebrook, and is a nickel antimony sulphide. And there is Millerite in hair like strands, at Brynrafr and elsewhere to the east. Many of the more exotic Welsh minerals are secondary in nature and are forming all the time, so that the old idea of taxing minerals like a growing crop was not entirely without foundation.

### **7 CWM DWYFOR COPPER MINE (GR 541505)**

This venture was a disaster, as is related in The Old Copper Mines of Snowdonia. The plant came up for sale in 1879, including winching drums and inclined rollers. However, it may not have been sold, as appears from a letter from Williaun Kellow to G J Gray dated 22 d June 1881, as follows (Ref NLW Crosier Slate Quarry letter book Vol. 1).

"I went over to the mine yesterday. There is a large quantity of rubbish to be removed if you only want a small opening, say just enough to allow the water out and a man to get in. It could perhaps be done for 30/-, but I noticed that there was a wagon in the POW machine house and it would no doubt be better to bring it up and take up, say, a few of the rails to the Cwm Dwyfor end of the railway and clear it all out systematically large enough to put a wagon in. If there are rails in the level the value of these would be sufficient to pay for the total cost which would be perhaps £3. Which of these two will you have done?"  
Can anyone throw any light on this? Note From this, it appears the railway went right into the mine - DEB. Thanks **are** due to Adrian Barrell for the reference.

### **8 CERIDIGION DEVELOPMENT PLAN**

Peter Claughton has kindly sent the following report.

"In January/February of last year I made representations on behalf of the society, to Ceredigion County Council in respect of their Local Plan.

The council policy failed to acknowledge the importance of the mining landscape in Special Landscape Areas - Dyfi, Rheidol, Teifi and Ystwyth valleys, and the Cambrian Mountains - and in the Historic Landscape of upland Ceredigion, as registered by CADW//ICOMOS. A primary objection was that the stated aim of the council to 'reclaim' mine sites, as embodied in the upland landscape of Ceredigion in general and mining landscapes in particular. The full text of the objections can be seen on [http://www.exeter.ac.uk/~pfclaugh/mhinf/cered\\_lp.htm](http://www.exeter.ac.uk/~pfclaugh/mhinf/cered_lp.htm) or from Peter Claughton, Blaenpant Morfil, Rosebush, Clynderwen, Pembs. SA66 7RE.

Those representations were accepted for consideration. However on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1999 the council decided to abandon the Local Plan and move directly to formulating their Unitary Development Plan (UDP). The new plan will cover the same issues and we are assured that 'the representations received to the Local Plan will be considered by the Planning Committee and will be used to inform the preparation of the UDP.

The wheels of local government are, as usual, moving slowly but I shall stick with this one in order to put across the society's views. To that end, if any member has any comments to make please contact me."

#### **9 WINSFORD ROCKSALT MINE, CHESHIRE**

Recently I went to the Rocksalt Museum at Winsford with John Bennett - a very interesting visit. Did you know that the first shaft was sunk in 1844, and the last in 1973? The working face is 25 feet high and each blast brings down 1400 tons of salt. Production is 2½ million tons a year, mainly it appears, to be spread on the roads in icy weather. We had hoped to arrange an underground trip for the WMS, but parties are limited to 12, and they are heavily oversubscribed. I can provide more details if you want them.

#### **10 ROMAN AZURITE MINE**

According to Martin Strassburger, the Romans were mining copper ore in Germany not for copper metal, but for blue pigments. This is very interesting because so often it is automatically assumed that any ancient copper mine was solely for copper, and for no other purpose. Historical metallurgists, please note.

#### **11 NEOLITHIC IRON-ORE MINES IN THE BLACKFOREST**

Two sites have been found where hematite was mined, with c14 dates around 5,000BC. There are in fact much older hematite mines in Africa - used for pigments, cosmetics or ritual.

#### **12 THE SOMERSET COALFIELD**

Geoff Fitton writes to say that the Somerset IA Society has published a 68pg booklet on the Somerset collieries by Shane Gould. There are 30 illustrations and a list of sites. Post free at £6.95 from Geoff at Giles Cottage, Hill Lane, Brent Knoll TA9 4DF (Of course, had he sent me a free copy there would have been a more detailed review!)

#### **13 THE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND INDUSTRIAL HISTORY OF SW ENGLAND: A BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Whether this mouthful is worth the £30 purchase price I cannot say, but it runs to 272pages, and is a hardback with nearly 4000 references. But will they produce one on Wales? For more details ring Merton Priory Press 01222 521956

#### **14 OCHRE MINES AT WICK, NEAR BRISTOL**

Mike Breakspear is co-author of a paper on these unusual workings, published in BIAS Journal 31,1998. The ochre beds were extensive but shallow, rather like a coal seam or so it appears. Operations began about 1890 and ended about 1970. Nothing remains to be seen of the mines themselves, and neither is much known of the workings, though there must be old miners still alive who worked there.

#### **15 DELABOLE SLATE QUARRY, CORNWALL**

In a periodical called Stone, October 1996, we learn that Delabole belongs to RTZ, with a turnover of one million pounds annually. The quarry is 435 feet deep and 1½ mile round, and goes back 1000 years. We also learn that weathering extends 200ft deep and material above is no use, prompting the question, how was the good stuff ever found in the first place? (This is not explained in the article). Much of the output however, is not for slate roofs, but for tiles made of slate dust. The dust also serves as a filler in all sorts of products, though whether Delabole dust is better than N Wales dust is not recorded.

#### **16 MINING HISTORY NETWORK HOMEPAGE**

We are grateful to Jeremy Wilkinson for forwarding information on the Mining History Network <http://www.ex.ac.uk/mhn/welcome.html> which contains a wealth of information on (among many things) British and Irish mining, coal mining, various mining history groups, and an index of mining historians.

#### **17 PHENRHOS ENGINEHOUSE, BRYMBO**

This rare survivor, possibly pre-1790's, has been well restored as a result of Welsh Mines Preservation Trust initiatives, the local authority and grants. A plaque illustrated by the well known industrial artist Michael Blackmore is to be erected with details of history and operation, and perhaps before long the WMS will be in the district again, giving opportunity to see the results.

## 18 VALEDICTORY NOTE

This is your editor's last epistle before handing over to Mike Munro. I should like to thank all those who have contributed to these pages over the last 20 years, and hope long to enjoy my successor's offerings. As his first publication will be in January 2000 perhaps we should call him "Millennium Mike". But in any event, please give him your best support - without it the newsletter will be the poorer for us all.  
David Bick May 1999 Pound House, Newent, Glos. GL18 IPS (01531 820650)

## 19 NEW ELECTRONIC EDITOR

Mike Munro can be contacted by audio-electronic technology on Tel. 01446 748 690 or on [mike.munro@cwcom.net](mailto:mike.munro@cwcom.net) from inside your PC.

**Please take some time to fill in the Newsletter Questionnaire and return to Mike** (via post)

## 20 REMINDER OF NAMHO MEETS

- a) **NAMHO 2000** 14/18 July, Truro, Cornwall. Hosted by Carn Brae Mining Society and the Camborne School of Mines this is the first international NAMHO conference and will be on the theme of "Acquire, Record and Display". For details phone Lawrence Holmes 01872 278234
- b) **NAMHO Forest of Dean Meet** 24/27 September. Free Mining in Dean and other Traditional Mining Rights Areas'. Details available from Robin Weare, Brook House, Llandevaud, Newport NP6 2AA

## 21 WMS MEMBERSHIP

Annual membership is £4, (or to ease administration - £8 for 2 years). *The paid up date is shown on your address label - and if you are overdue I attempt to highlight the date in red.* If you are "paid up to DEC 1998" or before then you are overdue and your treasurer would be most grateful if you could pay promptly.

The address for subscription is c/o David Roe 20, Lutterbum Street, Ugborough, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 ONG (01752 896432).

## 22 WMS INSURANCE

In the last Newsletter I set out my concerns over the cost for insurance. The British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) have accepted our membership under the description *"The specific activities include clearing sites, repairs to buildings and other structures, site visits and field trips with up to 80 members in attendance. Additionally a limited number of our members undertake underground exploration of mines "*

***As a layman I interpret the policy as follows, but I emphasise that I am a layman and the following should be read with that fact clearly in mind. If you want further information I can provide the BTCV booklet which gives a more precise explanation.***

*In summary the insurance covers WMS members for Public Liability and Personal Accident while on official WMS activities as follows:*

Public Liability £5,000,000 any one occurrence. Injury, loss or damage to other people or property resulting in legal liability to pay compensation and costs. Members can claim against one another should this arise. Deliberate acts resulting in loss or damage are excluded.

Personal Accident £5,000,000 any one occurrence. Unfortunately this excludes members over 85 years of age. Exclusions also include attempting to commit suicide (this as always been regarded as bad form when on Field Meetings), excessive alcohol, power driven machinery, work in active quarries or mines or below ground, and finally using a bouncy castle.

The above obviously requires proper Health and Safety precautions to be taken at all times - particularly when underground. Members involved in advanced mine exploration involving rock climbing techniques should not hang on to their electron ladders by their teeth in the mistaken belief that they are insured if the 20 WMS members below are crushed when they fall off!

David Roe 26/05/99