

NORTHERN MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 1991

FUTURE MEETS

14th & 15th
Sep. 1991. Teesdale. Leader: D.J.McCurdy. Tel.0942 718192. Meet each day at the fountain in Middleton-in-Teesdale at 10.30am. NGR NY948254.
Sat: Underground. No ladder pitches.
Sun: Mainly surface with short underground trips.

***** There are access problems with this meet. It is essential *****
***** to check with the meet leader during the week prior to the*****
***** meet. It may even have to be cancelled, so please check. *****

19th & 20th
Oct. 1991. Nenthead, Cumbria. Leader D.J.McCurdy. Tel.0942 718192.
Meet each day in the car park at Nenthead at 10.30am. NGR NY781437.
Sat: Smallcleugh Mine. Underground. No ladder pitches.
Sun: Brownley Hill Mine. Underground. No ladder pitches.

9th Nov.1991 General Meeting. Sicklinghall Village Hall, NGR SE364484, at 2.00pm.
to be followed by Presidents "Talk-In", and Pie & Pea Supper

SOCIETY BUSINESS

Dr. ARTHUR RAISTRICK

The Society regrets to announce the death of Dr. Arthur Raistrick on April 19th 1991. Dr. Raistrick supported the Society from its foundation and was made an Honorary Member in recognition of his work on the lead mining industry of the Dales. Many members will be familiar with his work, especially his well received "Life and Work of the Northern Lead Miner" which was published to mark the Society's 25th Year.

Dr. Raistrick was born in Saltaire, Yorkshire in 1896, and was educated at Bradford Grammar School. He was an apprentice engineer before going to Leeds University where he graduated in Civil Engineering and went on to gain a PhD in geology applied to mining. He spent five years in research on Coal Technology and Abnormalities of Coal Seams and, in 1928, he was appointed to Armstrong, later Kings College, now the University of Newcastle. He continued coal research until 1950 and retired in 1956.

He continued his main interests, archaeology, mining and industrial history of the North Pennines and the Lake District until his death. He was a member of the Society of Friends and of the Workers Educational Association and of many outdoor societies. He was a past President of the Ramblers' Association, the Holiday Fellowship, Craven Pothole Club and the Fellowship of Fell Walkers.

MEET REPORTS

Mines in Via Gellia, Derbyshire.

Judging by recent poor attendances at field meetings, there is perhaps much to be said for the premise that if members do not bother to turn up they are voting with their feet and, by this apparent lack of interest, it follows that reporting these events in the Newsletter is a waste of space.

However, on this occasion, more than half a dozen arrived (is this a recent record, I ask myself?) so I forward a brief note on the day's activities.

Most of those who gathered in Via Gellia were Committee members but there were a few new faces. The first objective was the Hermitage or Ruggs Hall entrance to Ball Eye Mine, gained by a very stiff climb from the road.

It was somewhere near the Hermitage that the skull of a mammoth or elephant was unearthed in 1663; the site has subsequently been lost. There then followed a session of thrutching and squeezing down dip into the mine, here part natural and evidenced by water-worn roof. Well past its "sell by" date, Mr. Houghton's cap lamp managed to last at least 5 minutes or so on this occasion; surely this IS a record, I tell myself! Soon daylight was encountered where the workings had been broken into from the adjacent Ball Eye quarry. Quarrying has now ceased on this face due to local objections. Ball Eye quarry is the scene of a recent bore hole which has encountered a sizeable mineral spring and it has been suggested that a bottling plant be set up here to sell the water on a commercial basis like Ashbourne Water, Buxton Water etc., but the scheme is still in the planning stage.

Further thrutchings led to a winze down to Founterabbey Sough, a superb example of a coffin level which was driven sometime before 1724. The party made their way out via Van Trav (or Van Traverse), a large pipe working and scene of rich pickings during the mine's early life. The latter is lost in the mists of time, as they say.

Following a brief sojourn into the nearby Pig o' Lead P.H. for refreshments, the party moved up the "Via" to Goodluck Mine, now in the hands of Ron Amner and colleagues and operated as a show mine. With his kind permission, all but the leader and son explored the workings, some members making their way out via the 130 foot deep escape shaft on Silver Eye Vein.

Leader and son had got a roaring fire going in the iron stove in the coe outside the level portal and awaited the party's exit in some comfort. Many complained of smoke in the level, this being a special feature laid on to illustrate the ancient problems associated with fire setting!

It was intended to finish the day at Devonshire Cavern in Matlock Bath but time did not permit (this cavern really does exhibit some ancient fire setting!) and the "multitude" dispersed at four o'clock, sadder, and hopefully, wiser mortals.

Thanks to all concerned for your support.

Dick Bird.

Llanfrynach area, South Wales.

With a turn-out of only two members, plus the meet leader and his wife, the day started at the Llanfrynach Silver-Lead Mine site under overcast skies. The occasional heavy shower did not dampen our determination to make full use of the day, and we were fortunate that the members present, Steve Plant and John Lawrence, are keen mineralogists thus supplying an angle on the site not normally available to the leader.

Commencing on the Llwynycelyn section, the site was examined in detail. The spoil heaps gave up a few samples including sphalerite and galena. Summer is not the best time to see this site - the vegetation is too thick - but it was possible to trace the various tramway routes to and from the dressing floor and the winding shafts. On the floors themselves vegetation is not a problem and the overall layout is clearly visible.

A break was taken for a pint and a sandwich in the Butchers Arms, Tegryn, where there was the opportunity to look at the mine plans and exchange notes in comfort. From there we moved on to the Carmarthen United Mine, at Trelech.

The Trelech site is again very overgrown, but the dumps have recently been disturbed in cutting a new access track and provided some interesting specimens, including aragonite showing fine clusters of crystals. The double water-wheel pits below Engine Shaft have deteriorated a little more, with a collapse of walling along the upper north wall of the lower wheel, but they are still a spectacular sight.

Despite the low turn-out the meet was a success, particularly the exchange of ideas and a mineralogists view of the sites. My thanks to all concerned.

Peter F. Cloughton

LETTERS

Lea Hall Colliery

With the closure during January 1991 of the Lea Hall Colliery near Rugeley Staffordshire, a chapter in the history of the National Coal Board drew to a close. Lea Hall was the first colliery planned, sunk and exploited by the Board.

Worked started in the area in the late 1940's in the belief that workable seams of coal existed over the supposed Eastern boundary fault of the Carnock Coalfield. This was confirmed by a borehole put down in 1949. A series of boreholes totalling over 6½ miles in length were drilled in the area and located over 148 million tons of workable coal spread over eleven seams with a total thickness of 15.5 metres. With reserves of this magnitude the planning of the new colliery went ahead.

Work on the site began in 1951, while the actual shaft sinking did not commence until 1954. Because of known water bearing strata the ground was frozen to a depth of 65 metres to permit sinking to reach drier rocks beneath. Sinking was then continued to a depth of 397 metres. In the construction of the shaft lining and infilling of the surrounding strata 47,800 tonnes of concrete were used.

Coal production commenced in 1960 and reached the magic figure of one million tons three and a half years later. During 1965 it was the first British colliery to produce one and a half million tons per annum.

The underground workings were driven on the "horizon" mining principle, which required the driving of large roadways through the strata connected by small shafts known as "staple" shafts. These roadways intersected the coal seams at various points and provided access to the workings. At Lea Hall the horizons chosen were at the 268 metre and 365 metre levels. The deeper roadway system was used for coal haulage and ventilation, while the upper roadways were for ventilation and the transport of men.

The two shafts of 6 metres diameter were fitted to handle four cages per shaft, capable of raising 600 tons of coal per hour. The upcast shaft only had two cages fitted, mainly for winding men and materials.

The output of the colliery after passing through the coal preparation plant was taken directly into the power station built adjacent at the time of the sinking.

It appears that prior to the decision to mine these reserves the Central Electricity Generating Board had been planning a new power station in the area. Once the N.C.B. plans were announced the C.E.G.B. decided to become involved and a joint scheme was produced.

During 1977 an extensive scheme was announced to maintain the output at 1.5 million tons per year with a capital cost of £10 million. This involved the driving of new access roadways to a further 50 million tons of reserves in the Armitage area.

In more recent years the presence of faults and geological problems led to the decision to close the colliery.

This leaves only one colliery on the Cannock Chase coalfield, the Littleton Colliery at Huntingdon, to the north of Cannock.

Nigel A. Chapman.

Extracts from The Marlborough Times & Hungerford Weekly Advertiser.

I have been sent the following extracts by Peter Donovan which I include for your interest. I was somewhat amused to see the name of the Company Secretary!

Saturday 5th May 1860.

North Devon Silver & Lead Mining Company - Combmartin (Limited)

Capital £20,000 in 20,000 shares of £1 each.

Five shillings per share to be paid on application, and 5 shillings on allotment.

No shareholders will be responsible for a larger sum than 20 shillings a share, as the Company is incorporated under the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1856-7, with limited liability.

DIRECTORS - to be elected by the Shareholders at an early meeting.

BANKERS - London and County Bank London.

SOLICITORS - Frederick Talbot Esq. Newbury.

CONSULTING MINING ENGINEER - Jehu Hitchens Esq. 8, Finch Lane, London.

SECRETARY - (pro.tem) Mr. Thomas Fidler, Newbury.

OFFICES - 8, Finch Lane, London.

This company is established for the purpose of raising the rich Silver Lead ore, which abounds in this highly mineralized locality.

A Sett, comprising 1,200 acres has been granted by Sir Charles Watson, for a term of twenty one years from the present time, at the low Royalty of 1/15th without sleeping rent of any kind beyond a guinea a year. A powerful steam engine has been erected, and the mine opened up to a considerable extent; four Silver Lead Lodes and one Copper Lode have been discovered, and many tons of Silver Lead Ore are raised in blocks of from 50lbs to 800lbs each, specimens of which can be seen at this office.

The present workings are within a few fathoms of the Great North Lode, and it is not improbable that the outlay of so small a sum of £300 to £400 may, within a month or two, open a mine of wealth to the adventurers.

Many thousand shares have been disposed of, and but a small number remain to be allotted.

Prospectuses and forms of applications for Shares may be obtained with any further information that may be required, on application to JEHU HITCHINS Esq, 8, Finch Lane, London; or to the Secretary, Mr.T.Fidler, Newbury.

Saturday May 5th, 1860.

NORTH DEVON SILVER AND LEAD MINES.

As many of our neighbours feel a good deal of interest in the proceedings of this company, and as we understand nearly one hundred of the shareholders are resident in Newbury and the immediate neighbourhood, we copy the following article from the Mining Journal of the present month which we doubt not will be highly gratifying to those who have either already joined or intend to join the Company.

"It is not always that large and successful operations in the mining world are those that are made most public. I was deeply impressed with this truth the other day when visiting the neighbourhood of Ilfracombe. The Watermouth Silver and Lead Mining Company has, in this locality, perhaps one of the richest loads of silver lead ore that has ever come before the public; and a mine, if I do not greatly mistake, destined to make no small stir amongst the mining community. To visit it as I did, and actually see the large stones of silver lead brought to the surface, confirms my opinions that in a very short time, an announcement, as wonderful as sudden, will be made from this district.

Saturday May 5th, 1860.

NOTICE OF MEETING

A meeting will be held in the TOWN-HALL, MARLBOROUGH, by permission of the Mayor, on Wednesday evening next, at eight o'clock when the Secretary, Mr.T.Fidler of Newbury, will attend for the purpose of affording information as to the prospects of the Company &c.

Saturday 12th May. 1860.

NORTH DEVON SILVER & LEAD MINING COMPANY

At the meeting on Wednesday evening last, Mr.T.Fidler, of Newbury, attended, and gave a very cheering and satisfactory statement as to the prospects of the Company, and although attendance was very limited, between three and four hundred shares have since been taken by inhabitants of this town.

Saturday 2nd June. 1861.
NEWBURY

Our attention has been called to the circular issued by the North

Devon Silver Lead Mining Company, which says -

"The mines have been in operation for a few months, and promise great a success, as the ground in which the works are progressing afford strong indications of great mineral wealth. There are some shares for disposal at the original price, seven shillings each, the liability being limited to £1. Mr.Fidler, the secretary, is a gentleman well known in Newbury, and persons wishing to obtain shares should apply to him without delay."

BOOK REVIEWS

The Slate Industry. by Merfyn Williams. No.268 in the Shire Album Series. Published by Shire Publications Lt. Cromwell St., Princes Risborough, Bucks. HP17 9AJ. £1.95. 1991.

This is an excellent addition to this well known series (which has already covered subjects such as tin, copper, coal, quarrying and bricks). The main chapters cover slate extraction, processing, transportation and the people involved. It includes over 50 illustrations, many of which are historic photographs in its 32 pages and provides a list for further reading and of sites to visit.

Although as can be expected Welsh examples provide the backbone to the book, Cornwall, Cumbria and Scotland are not forgotten. It contains some surprising facts, for example in 1880 over half the slates produced in Wales came from just two sites, while in 1900, despite its popularity and ease of transport through the railway system slate accounted for only 5% of the British roofing material industry.

While the book understandably concentrates on true slate, there is mention of the Collyweston slates of Northamptonshire, but there were many other important slating materials not mentioned including the widely used stone slates of Yorkshire. This, like all the other books on the extractive industries in this series would make a useful addition to even the most specialist mining library. It is a book which not only provides an authoritative introduction but also gives a good indication of the wealth of material available on the subject.

I. J. Brown.

Mining History Handbook 1991. Edited by J.Bennett and A.Pearce. Published by National Association of Mining History Organisations (NAMHO). 70pp. A5. £3.50.

This gazetteer type publication by NAMHO gives information which can be of use to mining historians. It contains a list of useful addresses, details of where grant aid awards may be obtained, and an interesting chapter on the sources of archival material for mines.

These sections are then followed by gazetteers of Mining History Societies, Mining Museums and other NAMHO member organisations. This is followed up by an index of the 58 members of NAMHO.

An interesting little publication which puts some flesh on the bones of what NAMHO is and what it is trying to achieve, and also putting the organisation in the public view. Many of the pages also carry anecdotes on miscellaneous items such as access and various codes of practice for mineral collecting, safety etc. Individuals new to the world of mining history will find this book very useful.

The book is available from NAMHO, 72 Hopkins Heath, Shawbridge, Telford, Shropshire. TF5 0LZ. Price £3.50 incl. postage.

D. J. McCurdy

GENERAL NEWS ROUND UP

Mining History Association of America

At the Thirteenth Annual Conference of the Western History Association, held in Reno-Sparks, Nevada, U.S.A., in October 1990, American mining historians formed The Mining History Association. Over 100 members had already paid their \$10 dues and were eligible for "Founders" membership certificates. NAMHO was represented at the inaugural meeting by Mike Gill and Roger Burt, the latter of whom gave a paper on the opportunities for researching Western U.S. mining history in England.

Besides three papers on aspects of American coal mining, there was a session called "The Big Bonanza: Mining Historians look at their Profession". At this, Clarke Spence, William Greever, Russell Elliot and Otis Young, truly a panel of doyens, discussed their work and highlighted areas of study for the future. The differences in the American and British approaches also became apparent. The former tends to concentrate on social aspects of the mining settlements, which the latter usually ignores. Conversely, British mining historians are better versed in the technological aspects of mining and ore preparation. Both are deficient in their knowledge of smelting but, unlike the British, the Americans felt that it was too technical to be made readily available to the majority. Clearly, we have much to learn from each other.

The Association will host the 3rd International Mining History Congress, at Denver, Colorado, later in 1991.

Mike Gill.

New Coal Mining Museum for Scotland

Ten years after the last coal was mined, a late 19th century colliery - "The Lady" at Newtongrange near Edinburgh - is to be restored to its former glory and developed as a tourist attraction.

A £5 million project will transform the listed buildings into a living museum showing how miners worked during the colliery's 90-year life.

The Lady Victoria colliery, named after the Marchioness of Lothian whose family owned the pit, was built between 1890 and 1895. From then until it closed in 1981, the mine produced 40 million tons of coal, an unequalled Scottish record.

In its heyday the mine employed 1,800 men and exported high quality coal across the globe. Today, the mining village of Newtongrange which was home to most of the miners is a conservation area and, with the colliery which houses the Scottish Mining Museum, the area is redolent of Scotland's industrial past.

Mr. John Hume, Principal Inspector of Historic Buildings and Monuments to the Scottish Office, describes The Lady as "without question the finest surviving late 19th century colliery in Britain and quite possibly Europe".

"It is still largely as it was first conceived in the early 1890's and it has lost no important features," he said.

Once the project is completed in five years time, visitors will be able to follow the route taken by miners as they started their shifts. They will be taken first to the lamp room to don cap lamps and self-rescuers before handing in safety tokens and travelling in the cage to the "pit bottom". They will be transported in old man-riding trains from Monktonhall colliery, to simulated faces.

Visitors will see a modern face with mechanised coal cutting equipment and powered supports. Then they will go back 100 years to a time of pit ponies, timber

props and hand wrought faces.

The "underground experience" will not be below ground as this would have meant sinking a new shaft and the museum director Mr. Colin McLean believes that the atmosphere can be recreated without that.

For the past seven years, as Scottish pits shut down, Mr. McLean has rescued pieces of equipment and machinery which he will now be able to put to use. Restoration of the colliery buildings will be the responsibility of the architect Prof. James Dunbar-Naismith. He is relishing the challenge of restoring the buildings while retaining their historical significance.

Mr. McLean estimates that the number of visitors coming to see the new facility will rise from the current 30,000 a year to 140,000.

Daily Telegraph 17/4/91.

Research into old U.K. Metal Mines.

British Government bodies have commissioned two major research projects to help tackle pollution from Britain's disused metalliferous mines and give many sites a new future. Richards Moorehead & Laing, which specializes in applying a combination of engineering, environmental and landscape disciplines to projects, has been appointed by both the Department of the Environment and the Welsh Office in separate projects dealing with the problems caused by metalliferous mine workings.

In the Welsh Office project, RML have been commissioned to prepare a report concentrating on the feasibility of recovering heavy metals, particularly lead and zinc, from spoil. The primary objective is to decontaminate the old mine sites and spoil tips by removing and/or immobilising the metal, but the company will also report on the commercial viability of processing and selling the metal recovered. This is one of the first projects to look at metal reclamation from an environmental viewpoint rather than primarily with the intention of commercial extraction.

In the project for the DOE, RML will look at ways of treating former and current metalliferous mine sites so they can be re-used for amenity purposes. The end result of the project will be an HMSO publication from the DOE which will help local authorities and other organizations with the treatment of metalliferous mine sites.

Mining Magazine-May 1991.

Weil's Disease.

The National Caving Association has just published an information leaflet on Weil's Disease. For those who have never heard of this, it is a disease better known to "water users" such as canoeing enthusiasts and is contracted from the presence of rats urine in water which can enter the body through breaks in the skin such as cuts, blisters and abrasions.

Very briefly, the early symptoms are a 7-13 day incubation period, fever, muscular aches and pains, loss of appetite and vomiting with prostration. The fever lasts for about five days and may be followed by significant deterioration of the patient. In 1989 there were 19 deaths of which 13 were related to water users. The possibility of contracting this unpleasant disease will not be lost on mine explorers. Write for a free leaflet to National Caving Association, Monomark House, 27 Old Gloucester Street, London. WC1N 3XX. Please send a stamped addressed envelope.

Sweden.

Stora the Swedish forestry company is to close its 1,000 year old mine at Falun in central Sweden. This will mark the end of the original activity for Stora which is reputed to be the world's oldest company.

The closure of the mine will mark the end of a part of Europe's industrial heritage. Copper has been mined at Falun since it was first begun by peasant farmers near the end of the Viking age.

The company says that the mine is now exhausted and 160 workers will be affected by the closure.

A document dated 1288 shows that the mine was run as a co-operative with shares being bought and sold and thus making it the worlds oldest joint-stock company.

In 1347 it was granted a charter by the Swedish monarchy and by the 17th century the mine supplied two thirds of the European copper market and had become a symbol of Sweden's power.

In 1708, an Englishman J.F. Leopold on visiting Falun wrote that he was seized by terror, even from afar by the dark and heavy smoke which the city spews forth in such quantities that the stranger is inclined to believe that he has come to the cave of the Cyclops rather than to a city.

Stora became involved in the forestry industry because of the need to have plentiful supplies of timber for the mining operation. The mine will cut its current production of ore from 100,000 tonnes per annum to 50,000 tonnes by April 1992 and will then close down completely at the end of the year. There is the possibility of keeping open the dressing plant.

Wales.

Ystrad Einion the well known site of the underground water-wheel is to be preserved by Dyfed County Council. Also they have agreed to preserve parts of Esgair Hir and Nantymwyn. It is not yet clear what is involved and one can only hope that it will be to the benefit of the sites involved by sympathetic preservation where appropriate.

Yorkshire.

NRA Yorkshire and the BOC Foundation have agreed funding for a two-year £70,000 study into preventing discharges from abandoned mines into streams.

There are 36 old mines which cause pollution in the Pennine area of the region but the study will concentrate on Sheephouse Wood workings which go into the Little Don at Stocksbridge. The project will examine the effectiveness and costs of such simple methods of treatment as aeration and sedimentation.

"These acidic discharges from old mines contain high concentrations of dissolved iron, particularly in the form of ferrous sulphate and they have a dramatic effect on the watercourse" says NRA Yorkshire's environment manager Dr. Tony Edwards. "A sparkling clear stream can turn into a highly ochreous one, with the bed coated with iron oxides stifling invertebrate life and rendering it almost fishless".

The BOC Foundation was set up last year by the BOC Group to sponsor projects aimed at cleaning up pollution of air, water and earth in the U.K. The new study will run in tandem with a similar research project in the Welsh region on the River Pelena near Swansea.

Surveyor, 20 June 1991

Cornwall.

The mining magazine dated May 1991 carried a half page advert announcing the

sale by auction of mining plant and equipment due to the closure of the Wheal Jane Tin Mine to be held on Thursday 6th June 1991 at eleven a.m. The inventory included Tunnelling and drilling jumbos, winders, scrapers, borers, 22 inch gauge locos and rail mounted equipment and so on.....the final demise!

Further to the above it has just been reported that outline planning permission has been granted for a £35 million leisure centre on the site of Wheal Jane. Carnon Holdings, which owns Wheal Jane, said the leisure centre would provide it with the financial stability to help continue mining at its other mine, South Crofty. The project will include a mining heritage centre, an 18-hole golf course and a seven year phased development of 230 golf and holiday lodges.

Derbyshire.

A caver was crushed to death by a boulder fall in Hopping Mine, Matlock Bath, on Tuesday 2nd July 1991. The incident was reported in the press and it is to be hoped that this does not lead to an over reaction by the powers that be and trigger off wholesale closing of mine entrances.

EDITORS COMMENTS

Thanks. Thanks to all the contributors to this newsletter both those named after certain articles and the following who have also sent in information which has been used: John McNeill, Mike Gill, Dave Blundell, Dick Bird.

The next Newsletter will be published in November 1991. Please send any material for inclusion to the Newsletter Editor, at the address below before 30th September 1991.

Damian J. McCurdy, "Denefield", 111 Barn Lane, Golborne, Warrington. WA3 3PR.

Tel:- 0942 718192.

The views and opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the correspondents and are not necessarily agreed with or shared by N.M.R.S. its officers or the Editor.

The accuracy of submissions is the responsibility of the authors and will not always be checked for validity by the Editor.

Some time ago the Newsletter informed members that the members names and addresses were to be stored in a computer data file. As the Society is an "unincorporated body" we are able to do this without registration under the Data Protection Act 1984 for those members who are happy for this arrangement. The guide-lines from the Data Protection Registrar tell us that we need to publicise this to our members from time to time and anyone who objects can have their records kept in a manual form.

The information we hold at present on computer is: Name, Address, Telephone number and date of Covenant, type of member and date of joining. The information is used to produce the List of Members which is only circulated to members and to produce the labels for the mailing of the Newsletter and publications. It is never given to any third party. If you are happy to have the above information to be held on computer then you have to do absolutely nothing. Any queries should be addressed to the Secretary.

We thank you in anticipation for your co-operation in making our task easier.