

NAMHO NEWSLETTER 42 - Winter 2001

NEW MEMBERS OF NAMHO

At the last NAMHO Council meeting the following or-ganisations were elected to full membership of NAMHO.

- Combe Martin Silver Mine Research & Preservation Society:
- Dartmoor Tinworking Research Group.
- Pendeen Community Heritage

MINING HISTORY AND BEYOND

Although it was arranged at the last minute, the North-ern Mine Research Society's conference at Bradford was a great success. Around 50 delegates and speakers met at the Novotel in somewhat more luxurious circumstances than is usual for a NAMHO conference. The food was so good that many did not need to eat again until the middle of the follow-ing week.

The speakers were chosen to fulfil the aim of the confer-ence, which was to demonstrate the wide range of approaches which are relevant to studying and understanding mining and smelting sites. These included detailed archaeological studies of whole landscapes or sites, museum and conservation work, mining personnel, environmental effects, the provision of timber for mining and smelting, and archive-based studies of the late medi?al and early modern periods.

Because of the Foot and Mouth restrictions, the whole weekend was devoted to mining history, with none of the field meet distractions that have become such a dominant feature of other NAMHO Conferences. Perhaps more importantly, however, it showed that mining history events do not have to look like paupers' conventions.

Mike Gill

NAMHO 2002 CONFERENCE

The NAMHO 2002 Conference will be held at Aber-ystwyth on the 5 - 8 July 2002.

The Conference will be hosted by the Welsh Mines So-ciety, assisted by other local mining history societies. There will be a full programme of lectures, surface walks, under-ground trips and social events.

If you have returned the preliminary registration form enclosed with the last Newsletter, then you will shortly be advised of the Conference details. If you haven't pre-registered but want further information, please contact

The Conference Secretary, John Hine, The Grottage, 2 Cullis Lane, Mile End, COLEFORD, GL16 7QF.
Tel: 01594 833217.

NAMHO MEET 2003

It has been confirmed that Ireland Meet, that had to be cancelled due to the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak, will now take place in September 2003. It is expected that the programme will be as that

published for the September 2001 event. Further information will be available later in the year

MUSEUM OF YORKSHIRE DALES LEAD MINING AT EARBY

This museum closed for the winter, as usual, at the end of October, but it will not reopen in the spring. The last few weeks have seen the building almost emptied of exhibits, which are being stored in containers in the grounds. Major work on the shell of the building, beginning early next year, will include stripping the flagstone roof and relaying it with new timbers (where necessary), felt and insulation. The walls are to be repointed and plastered, and the wooden floor replaced with a concrete one. The extent of the work is such that the museum is not likely to reopen until the spring of 2003.

Mike Gill

CLAY COMPANIES GIVE UP OLD PERMITS

Two china clay companies working deposits on the south western edges of Dartmoor in Devon have agreed to forego mineral permits that were granted 50 years ago to extend a pit and waste tips further into the Dartmoor National Park.

The two Companies, Imerys (formerly English China Clays) and Watts Blake & Bearne, were granted permits to work the area in the 1950s before the area was included within the National Park. It was also before it was mandatory to conduct any environmental damage assessment - indeed, well into the 1960s, the nearby River Plym ran white with suspended clay and an extensive area was covered with white dust from the drying plant while 'pyramid' tips of white mica dominated the view. Expansion into the National Park would result in damage to heather moorland, numerous archaeological sites and be visible from a large area of southern Dartmoor. In the 1970's the companies agreed not to develop the area until the first decade of the 21st Century.

As the end of this voluntary agreement approached, a campaign was launched to revoke the mineral rights. The Action Committee was spearheaded by the Dartmoor Preservation Association and supported by the National Parks Authority and Devon County Council. The Companies, both of which had come under new ownership from the Continent in the late 1990s, agreed to carry out an environmental impact assessment, but indicated that they would seek compensation running into several million pounds if they gave up the mineral rights. The members of the Action Committee would have found it impossible to fund such compensation and approached the Government, arguing that it was their responsibility to fund any compensation in the public interest.

Members of the organisations making up the Action Committee were asked to write to the DETR and their local MP's, as well as other interested parties such as English Heritage and the National Trust (who owned adjacent land) to express their concern over the pending development. The government insisted it was the responsibility of the National Park Authority and Devon County Council to solve the problem and the future looked bleak for this area of moorland.

In a most welcome move, in July 2001, the two clay companies had a change of heart and agreed to give up their old mineral rights without compensation. This is a most welcome move and illustrates how mineral developers can heed the sustained pressure of public opinion.

While some may argue that mining the area would have created jobs, careful analysis of the situation had already shown that the net impact would have been a loss of jobs due to an anticipated reduction in tourism. China Clay is not a scarce commodity and credit is due to the two companies who have accepted that their responsibilities extend beyond their immediate financial gain.

Tim Smith

VIDEO REVIEW

"The Shropshire Caving and Mining Club in Cornwall"

This is one of a series of some 50 titles available from IA Recordings of which about half are related to mineral mining, coal mining or quarrying. Cost ?16-45. Available from IA Recordings, PO Box 476, Telford, Shropshire, TF7 4RB. E-mail info@iarecordings.org

This video is a compilation of underground, surface and working tin mines visited by the Shropshire Caving and Mining Club over a decade from 1983 and provides 144 minutes of fascinating viewing.

The use of a helmet mounted camera in several of the underground excursions, and the lack of any dubbed commentary, relying solely on ambient sounds, frequently gives the impression that you are present in the party. While a person unfamiliar with mining may consider the lack of a commentary somewhat bewildering, for those familiar with the sights and sounds underground will find the 'realism' produced by the splash of boots, the odd crack on the head and muffled curse, fascinating.

Forty-six sites are visited, in some cases the footage lasting for 15minutes or so, in others a minute or less. Most of the visits were recorded in 1993 and include visits to South Crofty and Wheal Jane when they were both working mines that had been revived by the tin price bubble of the late 80s. Both underground visits and a tour of the concentrators are included as well as visits to the Cambourne School of Mines training mines.

Visits to preserved sites include the Levant whim in steam, the Goonvean beam engine, the Tolgus streaming plant, stamps and calciner and the mining museums at Geevor and Cambourne School of Mines.

In addition to live footage, stills are also included. Each new site is well flagged at the start of a new visit by means of a map and the name of the location scrolling across the frame.

Tim Smith

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

"Family History"

I am researching my family history and some members of my family moved to Derbyshire in 1891. I know they lived in Somercotes and Alfreton and worked in the mines. I am intrigued as to the conditions they had to work in and in what kind of mine they would be working.

One relation I am particularly interested in is Thomas Olney, also known as David Olney, who died in 1897, at the age of 48 years, of Phthisis Pulmonalis Haemoptysis and his occupation was described as Colliery Banksman.

Are there such things as lists of workers? I would like to find out which mine he and other members of the family would be working.

Any information, or any direction to which I may be pointed, would be appreciated.

Mrs A A Fountaine, 19 Metcalfe Grove, Blakelands, MILTON KEYNES, MK14 5JY.

ENERGY NOTES

- 1. "Coal-fired power station proposal"
Richard Budge, who saved Yorkshire's Hatfield Colliery, has expressed an interest in constructing

a 500 mega-watt coal-fired power station next to the pit, while the government has been called upon to aid the development of clean coal power stations. (15 Oct FT 9)

- 2. " Labour wants to build 15 new nuclear power plants"
In direct contradiction to both the Labour party's election manifesto of 1997, and the demands of environmentalists, the UK government's energy review is planning to recommend that its 15 nuclear reactors should be replaced rather than decommissioned. The review is also to recommend that the nuclear power industry be exempt from a 'green' energy tax, making nuclear fuel more competitive than both coal and gas. (5 Nov Sunday Times 2, Observer 1)
- 3. "Clean coal is the key, say miners"
The coal industry has launched a fight for its survival after leaked Government proposals for 15 new nuclear power stations were widely interpreted as its death sentence. The British Association Colliery Management has called on the Government to invest in coal power stations instead. (26 Nov Sun Exp 2, Guard 20)
- 4. " Coal output alert sparks pits fear Britain's largest coal producer"
UK Coal, is facing the prospect of closing its 13 remaining operations because production is 1m tons below expectations. (27 Nov Times 24, Guard 21, D Mail 57,

Roger Gosling

SLATE INCLINED

- Llechwedd Slate Quarry - The tourist operation is vital to the working company as more money is generated from this than slate sales. The Deep Miners Tour was closed during part of July after heavy rain knocked out the electrics. There are 20 men employed on slate production.
- Maenofferen Slate Quarry - The old Cooke's Level bore visible from around the old Tuxford workings has been shortened through blasting. The gate and the first 25 yards approx have now gone. There is no working at this quarry at present (source Llechwedd employee), although there appears to have been some work since my last visit in the old "2 and a half" quarry.
- Rhiwbach Tramway - Since my last visit the breached bridge section has been infilled and skirting around through the boggy land, and trench foot, can now be avoided. There still are a number of areas along the tramway that are very wet but it is well worth the visit.
- Dinorwic Slate Quarry - There has been a 'recent' fall at the quarry and a section of track on the Braich side is now suspended in mid air. I am unsure of the exact level but it is thought to be Bonc Roller.
- Chwarel Fawr - It appears that part of the retaining wall off the 'new road' has collapsed.
- Glifach Ddu Workshops - Admission to this excellent working museum is now free of charge.
- Cambria Wynne Slate Quarry - There has been a large fall underground in recent months and much of the area is unsafe according to a local source.
- Dorothea Slate Quarry - The asbestos removal has been completed on the beam engine house, work is in progress on waterproofing.

John A. Knight

TREVITHICK TRUST

The Trevithick Trust is pleased to announce that they have now opened the King Edward Training Mine near Camborne to the public. It will be fully open to visitors in 2002. There will almost certainly be an underground experience for visitors to the mine.

Stuart B Smith, The Trevithick Trust, Chygarth, 5 Beacon Terrace, CAMBORNE, TR14 7BU. Tel: 01209 612142

GEEVOR TIN MINE HERITAGE CENTRE, PENDEEN, CORNWALL

Cornwall County Council has awarded the management contract for the Geevor Tin Mine Heritage Centre to Pendeen Community Heritage for a three year period. Pendeen Community Heritage is a group of local people with connections with Geevor Tin Mine who are committed to the development of the Geevor site - the largest heritage mining site in Britain - as a world class mining museum.

The contract began on 1 October 2001.

Bill Lakin, The Pendeen Community Heritage, , Bojewyan House, PENDEEN, Cornwall, TR19 7TR. Tel: 01736 787312

ROY'S NOTES

- 1. "Potential for interesting correspondence"
The extract below, from the "Telegraph Property 30/6/01" shows how some interesting correspondence could be generated by the slight slip of a pen.
".....the NHBC's fitness to perform this function is being challenged by the National Association of New Owners (NANHO), the consumer body that represents those at the sharp end of the builders failures...."
The NAMHO Secretary could find himself in the thick of disputes between builders and their customers.
- 2. "Rope access work"
A draft European Union Directive has been identified which requires the mandatory use of 2 ropes when undertaking rope access work. There are implications for SRT since the Directive would set a standard which could be argued to equally apply to non-work situations. The topic is being followed up.
- 3. "Involuntary Manslaughter"
The Government has recently published a White Paper on changes to the law on manslaughter. If implemented in the form as published, there would be implications for a number of clubs and societies.
A new offence, corporate killing, is proposed and will apply to incorporated bodies which would include clubs and societies. A death would be regarded as being caused by the conduct of the incorporated body if it is caused by a management failure or if the way in which its activities are managed fails to ensure the health and safety of the people involved.
This is a proposal that will require careful study.
- 4. "Corporate vandalism"
The standing remains of Nickalum Mine, a photo of which is to be found on page 171 of "Lead Mines of the Peak District", were knocked down and all the large stones removed over the Christmas period

Roy Paulson

EXTRACTION OF METHANE GAS FROM COAL SEAMS

There are currently two proposals to extract methane gas for commercial use in the North Staffordshire area.

- 1. StrataGas has submitted a planning application to drill four exploratory boreholes in the area between Sea-bridge and Whitmoor. They will be used to evaluate the value of the methane that is available from the coal seams lying below Baldwins Gate and Seabridge.
- 2. Edinbough Oil & Gas has submitted a planning application to extract methane at the former Hem Heath Colliery. Recent tests have shown that 1000 litres per second of 85% pure methane is being

emitted into the atmosphere from one of the disused shafts. If the application is successful a subsidiary company, Cogen, is proposing to build a small power station that would be powered by the methane.

NSGAG

LOOKING FOR BOOKS

Take the hard work out of looking for books. The website is Britain's leading web-site set up in co-operation with to help members of literary and historical societies find old, rare and out-of-print books for sale in Britain in their own areas of interest.

This special website holds a selection changing each day of over half-a-million books published between 1600 and 1990 offered for sale between ?5 and ?5,000 by some 600 British booksellers in just about any subject you can think of.

The Clique, founded in 1890 and the world's longest, es-tablished specialist publisher of information on old, rare and out-of-print books, have now started issuing an annual cd-rom series of price-guides in this field. The new 2001 edition contains the current catalogue prices of 420,000 old books in all subjects published between 1600 and 1990.

Members can now obtain copies of this invaluable UKBW 2001 Windows cd-rom for ?48. Further details are available from The Clique, 7 Pulleyn Drive, York YO24 IDY. Tel: 01904 631752 or from their website at www.clique.co.uk.

FLOODS BRING LEAD CONTAMINATION

Prof Macklin of the Institute of Sciences and Geography at Aberystwyth University has stated that agricultural land in the Vale of Yorkshire has been contaminated by high levels of lead following recent heavy flooding. He states that the contamination could take 50-100 years to clear.

The research showed that 75% of the flood sediment samples taken along a 110km length of the River Swale exceeded Government guidelines for the maximum permitted lead concentrations in land upon which livestock grazes. The contamination comes from waste tips in former upland mining areas. Simulations of lead movement in the River Swale up to 2060 show that flooding in Swaledale and the Vale of York will continue to deliver contaminates to ag-ricultural land.

At the moment, it is not known how much of this contamination could possibly get into the food chain. Is the con-tamination relevant if it does not get into the food chain?

The Rivers Clyde, Tyne and Aire systems are also contaminated in a similar manner.

Chris Irwin (Farmers Guardian- Sept 2001)

CHINESE MINE ACCIDENTS

- 1. "Tourist mine accident in Shaanxi Province"
On 8 April 2001, 17 persons died when "squeezed and suffocated" in a tunnel that is one of China's most famous at-tractions (Huashan, Hua Mountain). Five other tourists were also injured in the accident.
- 2. "High level of accidents"
In the year 2000 the fatality rate in Chinese Mines was 10 times that of India and 200 times that of the USA.

A major cause of explosions is the re-cycling of old miners lamps, sold "as new" lamps and of sale of sub-standard new products. A survey in 1996 of 25 lamps, made by 21 manufacturers, showed that only 40% passed safety standards

Ivor Brown

THE 5th INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON SOUTERRAINS AT LIVERPOOL

Following a successful presentation at the 2000 International Symposium on Souterrains in Croatia, the Friends of Williamson's Tunnels were invited to host the event on our own shores in 2002. The 5th International Congress on Souterrains, otherwise known as 'Souterrain2K2', will take place from 8th to 12th August this year in Liverpool.

The friendly gathering of underground enthusiasts from around Europe is a growing event and offers discussions, presentations of papers and visits to subterranean features around the conference location. This year's Liverpool event will include visits to the likes of an old (underground!) Over-head Railway station and tunnel, the working Cheshire Salt Mines, the hidden workings of the road tunnel under the Mersey and, the hosts' pet favourite, the strange 19th century Williamson's Tunnels. There is a daily charge of about £20 which covers meals, transport, facilities, etc. and delegates can join in for as many of the four days as they like.

Enthusiasts from NAMHO member organisations are invited to attend this congress, - even make a presentation or present a paper (all AV equipment is provided). Booking (as early as possible) is essential and details are available on the event web site: www.souterrain2k2.co.uk.

Otherwise, please contact the organiser, Chris Iles, tel: 07976 848 458.

Bill Douglas

BOOK REVIEWS

1. "Tarmac Papers Vol IV", edited by R W D Fenn. Published in 2000 by Tarmac Ltd, Millfields Road, Etting-shall, Wolverhampton, WV4 6JP - Cost unknown. A5 soft covers, 343 pages - many diagrams and photos, some col-oured. The production of these volumes has made available much detail on the history and archaeology of quarry sites and it is unfortunate that this volume is said to be the "last of the series". This volume maintains the high standard of the earlier volumes and in about 15 chapters covers such topics as Bronze Age Mines (West Sussex), Anglo Saxon settle-ments (Lincolnshire), the discovery of a Mammoth at Hover-ingham and limekilns in Camarthenshire. There are also chapters on the "Cistercians and quarrying", the "Worshipful Company of Pavors" and "Nash Rocks" on the Welsh Bor-ders.

Dr I J Brown

2. "Colossal Earthmovers" by K Haddock. Published in 2000 by MBI Publishing Company, USA. Available from Classic Tractors, Low Green Farm, Hutton, Driffield, YO25 9PX. Cost £9.99 post free. 996 pages, 21cm x 23cm, hard-back. The large machines once so familiar in the UK surface mines are now a dying breed, as is their variety for they are now being replaced by hydraulic shovels and dump trucks. Very few examples of the earlier machines are likely to be preserved but fortunately several new books have become available specialising in photographs supported by captions. One such book is Colossal Earthmovers and, although it only shows one machine in Britain (the only preserved "Walking Dragline" in the world at St Aidans opencast site at Leeds) with over 90 colour photos, it is excellent value. If action is not taken soon, photos and models will be all that can be seen in the UK of any large cable excavators, stripping shovels, bucket wheels and continuous planing ma-chines. Take the opportunity now to study them before all is lost!

Dr I J Brown

3. "Mining in Cornwall - Vol 4, Hayle, Kerrier & Car-rick" by L J Bullen. Published 2001 by Tempus in their Images of England series. 126 pages, about 210 photos. ISBN 07524 2133 6. Cost ?10.99. This is the 4th book on Cornish Mines in this series, and more are expected. Each photo is captioned and, considering the age of some of the photos, are surprisingly clear. There is very little "introduction" or "preamble" in this volume, it being assumed that the reader is familiar with the introduction in the previous volumes in the series. The photos show a great variety of plant and equipment. Some are most unusual, such as an old Cornish Engine House being used as an orebin and the manufacture of Cornish shovels using tilthammers. Cornwall has been fortunate to have so many persons roving around the area with cameras and it must be unique in that so many photographs were taken of structures and equipment without people! Whilst many of the photos are from the early years of the 20th Century, a good number are from the period 1960 to 1985 when so many of the mines were reopened for prospecting. This is a fine reminder of those days when Britain produced much of its own requirements of tin.

DR I J Brown

4. "West Shropshire Mining Fields" by Ivor J Brown. 2001. Tempus Publications Ltd., The Mill, Brimscombe Port, Stroud, Glos. GL5 2QG. 128 pages. ISBN 0 7524 23263 0. Cost ?10.99. This little book is largely a collection of some 200 old photographs (black & white) of the western half of the Shropshire mining fields. These cover the Snailbeach, Tankerville, Pennerley, Bog, Roman Gravels and several other lesser lead mines, as well as barytes and copper mines, together with associated mills, smelt houses and railways. A short chapter on the Shrewsbury and northwest Shropshire coal mines is included. The photos provide a valuable record of a defunct industry, many showing installations which have now disappeared. There are many groups of miners whose descendants probably still live in the area. The book starts with a short introduction to the area, but the sketch of the geological setting is very brief with little said on the vein pattern or on the gangue minerals. Each photograph has a full caption and each mine or group has about one page of introductory historical text. These all make a useful summary of the mining activity of the region, but it is a pity that plans of the mineral veins, mine workings and mine building layouts are confined to a few small sketch-maps. There is no plan at all of the largest mine complex, Snailbeach, and as one not so familiar with the area, I found placing some of the photos difficult. There is a comprehensive bibliography, but some of the entries are incomplete, lacking details of volume numbers or publishers.

Dr T Ford

FUTURE OF THE DEEPEST MINE IN THE USA

The deepest mine in the USA is likely to become a physics laboratory. Homestake Gold Mine at Lead, South Dakota, is one of the country's oldest mines and will shortly be closed. It is now over 2200m deep and the cost of conversion to a physics laboratory is likely to cost \$280m. Part of the mine is already being used as a laboratory and it is intended to convert another part into an underground visitor centre to promote local tourism and ease the unemployment situation.

I J Brown (World Tunnelling Dec 2001)

PROGRESS WITH THE EXCAVATION OF WILLIAMSON'S TUNNELS, LIVERPOOL

NAMHO members who are aware of the Williamson's Tunnels in Liverpool will be interested to know that further major excavation work has taken place over recent months.

The Friends of Williamson's Tunnels joined forces with their colleagues at the Joseph Williamson Society to dig tons of rubble out of one section of the Georgian philanthropist's labyrinth, in order to open that section as a permanent visitor attraction from April this year. These excavations have exposed even more striking features of the labyrinth.

Currently the Friends of Williamson's Tunnels are pre-paring plans for submission to the local council to begin similar clearance work at another section of the tunnels, in-cluding the underground 'Banqueting Hall'. Details and pho-tos are available at the web site: www.williamsontunnels.com.

Bill Douglas

BEACONSFIELD GOLD MINE

The Beaconsfield Gold Mine in Tasmania was worked from 1877-1914. During that time over 1m tons of rock was hoisted and crushed to produce some 854,000 ounces of gold.

Gold mining started as the mining of alluvial gold in 1877 but a rich 400 yard reef was soon discovered. The three mines which worked this reef were very wet despite the in-stallation of much expensive pumping equipment. The mines were consolidated in 1888 but eventually the water beat the miners. The cost of pumping became prohibitive and the mine was closed in 1914.

The Grubb Shaft site has been converted into the Grubb Shaft Gold & Heritage Museum.

This well established museum has become a major tour-ist attraction. It features a 3D model of the mine workings at the time of closure in 1914, a working model of the historical water pumps, a working 12 head stamp battery driven by a waterwheel, a complete shaft set from the Hart Shaft and old pumping equipment together with extensive photographic and other records of the old mine.

The Hart Shaft area is the New Gold Mine at which a drilling programme has indicated that the ore body will yield as much gold as the old mine. Following an extensive pump-ing programme, the first gold ingots from this mine were poured in 1999.

Dave Penny

FATAL COAL MINING ACCIDENT IN MEXICO

The bodies of three Mexican miners were recovered and 10 were missing, presumed dead, after an accident flooded a small coal mine in northern Mexico, trapping the miners 200 feet below ground.

Four divers and about 150 other rescue workers battled against black water and collapsed tunnels in an attempt to re-cover the bodies from La Espuelita Coal Mine in Barroteran, about 90 miles southwest of the Texas border city of Eagle Pass.

The accident occurred Wednesday 23 January 2002. The mine is a privately owned operation known as a "po-cito", where thin seams of coal are mined using methods of work that generally violate Mexican safety standards. The mine has only one vertical shaft which is used for access and coal drawing. Mines with single vertical shafts are illegal in most countries, including Mexico, because they offer no es-cape route if the shaft becomes blocked.

The Authorities have not determined the cause of the ac-cident, but rescuers and mine veterans said miners digging for coal likely broke through to an adjacent abandoned tunnel that had flooded.

The disaster in Barroteran is the second in Coahuila's coal-mining region in four months. In September, a dozen miners died when a mine exploded in the village of Santa Mara, about 30 miles north of La Espuelita.

Roger Gosling (San Antonio Express-News)

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