

Cornish Miners Association



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WHAT'S BEEN HAPPENING?

The Cornish Miners Association carries on much as usual. As time passes we see the demise of many old work-mates and our community is a diminishing one. However, if the plans for South Crofty bear fruit, then we will shortly be seeing a new generation of Cornish miners in our midst. Presently, apart from the completion of the drive through to an old shaft to improve ventilation, most of the activity is with diamond drilling. There are three 3-man drilling crews working round the clock with the diamond drilling rig, and shortly there will (hopefully) be drilling rigs at surface, identifying lodes throughout the mine's mineral lease area. It is interesting that the management claim that the 'new' mine will be a polymetallic mine, as opposed to a 'single metal mine', as formerly. Over the centuries South Crofty and its various constituent parts have mined and sold over a dozen different metallic ores. Tin, copper, lead, silver, arsenic, wolfram, iron, cobalt and zinc are just some of the materials on which dues have been paid to the mineral lords here. We applaud the efforts of the men at South Crofty who are working for a long-term mine. The 60 or so employees are a significant group in the local employment situation. Their wages help the local economy as well as putting food in the mouths of their families. For over a decade they have striven against great odds, often in the shape of local councillors and officials and the RDA. That they have stuck to the task of restarting mining in Camborne is greatly to their credit and we should support them in their efforts.

Let us hope that the position at South Crofty soon clarifies and real mining can resume for the great number of metallic minerals, which undoubtedly lie beneath the surface at Dolcoath, South Crofty and Roskear. Let us also hope that the authorities will give total pro-active cooperation to the project. The negativity of the past has helped no one.

OBITUARIES

Henry Kaczmarek (1931-2010)

Henry Frank Kaczmarek, who died on Monday 22ⁿ March, was a man who had led an extraordinary life by any standards. He was born on his family's farm in 1931. The farm lay in Poland, close to the border with the Ukraine, in an area dominated by its proximity to Soviet Russia. In 1939, when Germany and Russia divided Poland between themselves, local Communist officials forced the Kaczmarek family from their home and transported them many hundred miles to the north of Russia, to an isolated forest area near Archangel. The journey to the wilds of northern Russia was horrific, with people nearly starving to death and being almost frozen. During the next couple of years the family barely survived the harsh conditions in which they were forced to live, despite being told by their Communist masters that they were 'now free'. Partial salvation came in 1941, when Germany suddenly turned on her erstwhile 'ally' and invaded Russia. All at once Russia needed all the help it could get to survive the onslaught, and the Poles who had been enslaved by the Russians were appealed to. They demanded that the Poles form a 'Polish' army and help fight the invaders. Henry's father agreed to go, on the understanding that his family could follow him to Persia, where the 'Polish' army was located. After he had left there

began the worst part of Henry's story. The women and children made forced marches for several hundred miles in atrocious conditions to get to Persia. They were forced to stay in several different countries on the way and stopped well short of their target. Henry lost two little sisters - buried beside the road - and as a ten year old helped to bury many other neighbours and friends on that terrible journey. Eventually the family was split up and he was sent to an institution for homeless children. He lost contact with his step-mother, who had shown extreme courage and resilience in looking after Henry and the rest of the family under truly dreadful condition. Eventually, the home was closed and Henry was transported to Persia, where the British army was setting up supply lines to help the hard-pressed Russian army. The British and American servicemen treated Henry and the other refugees quite differently from the Russians, and Henry was taken by the British first to Bombay, on the west coast of India and then to Mombassa, on the east coast of Africa. He was then sent to a boys' home in Tanganyika, where he stayed until the Second World War ended in 1945. When the British began moves to send Henry back to Poland, he realised the danger, and fled to the bush. For three months he used the techniques taught him by the local natives to survive. Eventually, when he came out of the bush, the British realised he would not go back to Poland, and sent him instead to England. He went first to Dagenham and then to Newquay, where he worked as a kitchen assistant in a hotel. Then, at the suggestion of a friend from East Africa, he went to Pool and obtained a job at South Crofty Mine. This was in 1948. For a few months he did general underground work, as we all did

when first going underground, then he went with Leslie Matthews Senior as a 'machinernan's mate'. Leslie and Henry worked together for some years as the youngster learned his trade. Eventually, Henry decided he wanted to earn more money and have his own contract. In 1959, after working with several miners, he began a long association with Max Sawiz. They worked together until 1977, when Max gave up mining. Thereafter, Henry had a series of mates, and none of us who worked with him will ever forget the experience of working with one of the finest miners of his generation. He drove crosscuts and lode drives all over the mine on most levels. He stoped narrow lodes and wide lodes and put up raises at record speeds. He was the perfect miner. There was nothing Henry could not do as a hard rock miner. He could be a stern task-master, but he was always fair and he never shirked his responsibility in giving 100% at all times. After work, no matter how short his temper at work, he was always the first to buy you a drink and have a laugh with you. Henry Kaczmarek was a 'one off, a man who as a boy had led a life few of us can imagine, but who survived to become one of the best hard-rock miners South Crofty has seen. He will be long remembered for his skill, his humour, his basic humanity and for that dreadful Polish spirit he forced us all to drink. The attendance at his funeral demonstrated the respect and affection felt for him by his fellow miners. We will miss him.

Jack Jervis (1916-2010)

William Alvin John Jervis died on Wednesday April 14th at the Camborne-Redruth Community Hospital. He was born during the Great War into a mining family. His father was a decorated

soldier in that conflict and when the war was over he returned to find little work in Cornish mining and so headed for South Wales, where he found employment. He soon returned to Cornwall with the Welsh company given the task of sinking New Dolcoath's Roskear Shaft. When he was still a teenager Jack followed his father into mining, starting at South Crofty in 1933. In 1934, when he was just 17 years old, he suffered a horrific accident when falling down an underhand stope into a boxhole. Mark Hosking, the contractor and Jack were clearing the loose ore from the point-bench they were about to drill, when Captain Arthur Stephens arrived and borrowed Jack's life-line. Jack was asked to pass Stephens a long drill steel and as he did so the youngster slipped and fell about 23 feet into the boxhole at the bottom the of the stope. He was seriously injured with a piece of rock stuck into his skull and several other serious injuries to his legs and lower body. He was half buried with tons of recently blasted rock hanging over him. There followed a heroic rescue of the young miner. Within 6 months Jack was back at Crofty, working in the tynyard and within another year he was back underground.

Between 1936 and 1939 Jack learned his trade as a skilled hard-rock miner. During the long and bitter strike for more money and better working conditions, which broke out in 1939, he was one of its most solid supporters. The battles between the strikers and the police and the strikers and the New Cooks men who wouldn't join them, are legendary. The strike ended with the outbreak of war, and Jack gave up mining to assist in reconstruction work up-country. Millions of homes needed repair and the country had to be kept going.

At the end of the conflict Jack returned to Crofty, but after a while he decided to try his hand in Africa and he worked as a miner in Central and West Africa for several years. Once again he worked hard to develop new skills and better techniques.

When he returned to Crofty he was credited with introducing new methods to the old mine. In 1970 Jack became a shift-boss on 360fm level, and it was in that capacity that most of us remember him. He remained as Shift-boss till his retirement in 1980. Jack was held in high esteem by his fellow miners. They not only respected him as a miner and shift-boss, but also as a friend and one who showed great kindness and understanding to his men. Jack Jervis will be sorely missed by his family and friends and also by his many former work mates. The 93 years he lived saw extraordinary changes in the world, in mining and in the way we live. His life was also extraordinary for he worked in many places and experienced far more than most. He was a strong man and a great survivor.

BOOK REVIEWS

Tin and Diamonds: A Fortune in the Making (The life of Francis Oats) by Claire Leith. Published by the Trevithick Society. 106 pages; Comprehensive Index; Pedigrees; 27 photographs; Maps. Paperback. £4.99

Within a few pages I was hooked into the life and times of a man, of humble birth, who was destined to rub shoulders with, and ultimately to become one of, the movers and shakers in the development of the modern South Africa and its world famous mining industry during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The author's style of placing anecdotes and asides into the life history of Francis Oats, who began life as the son of a farmer in mid-Cornwall, makes for a compelling and interesting read. He went as a small child to live in St Just-in-Penwith, then began, working in the surrounding mines, much to his parents' dismay. By taking advantage of whatever means were available to him he educated himself and rose within the

local mining community to become a 'captain' at Botallack Mine. At one of the down-turns in the fortunes of Cornish mining he, with many others before and after him, went abroad to work. He took passage to South Africa in 1874 and what followed is an example of how anyone with drive, ambition and a positive work ethic could, and can, enjoy a successful career in their chosen occupation. From being a mining engineer in the Colonial Office to becoming Chairman of De Beers (and still returning periodically to Cornwall) makes for a fascinating story.

The author is to be congratulated on her research into the history of her grandfather, his family and the events surrounding him. The book of just over one-hundred pages has photographs which in many cases illustrate a life and time that appears almost mythical to our twentieth century eyes. All in all, this book is well worth reading.

Peter Hughes.

Cornish Bal Maidens by Allen Buckley.

Published by Tor Mark. There are 48 pages and many fine photographs. Paperback. Price £3.99

Cornish Bal Maidens is a window into the world of the women who worked at the Cornish mines from the thirteenth century through to the end of the Second World War. This book is aimed at a broad readership, from those with a general interest to scholars of mining history. As usual with the author's books, this is achieved by exhaustive research into original source material. The book is organised chronologically, beginning with the medieval bal maidens working on silver-lead ores at Calstock, through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until the 'End of the Era' with the bal maidens working at Geevor Tin Mine in 1946.

Each chapter is full of anecdotes allowing the reader to

appreciate the daily lives of these hard-working and often colourful characters. Many of these women and girls gave as 'good as they got' with the mine management. They were often a match for the men around them and they were sometimes even a challenge to the tough old mine captains.

The book neither glorifies nor reviles the Cornish bal maidens as some previous books have been wont to do. Nor does it portray them as victims. It simply gives a clear account of who those women were, what they did and how they lived, allowing the readers to draw their own conclusions, and avoiding stereotyping.

Priced at £3.99 and available in most book shops, this is an easy yet informative read that is well worth the money.

Derek Morgan

TREVITHICK DAY

As usual the Association had a stall on Trelowarren Street for the day, Geoff Sullivan loaned it to us as he always does. The weather was good, as it usually is on Trevithick Day, and all the events passed off well. The music was great - we have two of the best bands in the country in Camborne - with the Youth Band normally defeating all-comers in competitions. The thirty big steam engines were impressive as always, and the truly massive crowds really enjoyed the spectacle of the parades. The school children dancing and the adult dancers all helped make the day memorable. Our stall was particularly busy again, and we sold lots of books, had several memberships renewed and had many interesting conversations with people fascinated by Cornish mining history. Due to illness and other unforeseen circumstances those on the stall were a bit stretched, but despite being exhausted by the end of the day, our volunteers were happy with the success of the day. We look forward to Murdock Day in Redruth, in June.

THE LAST FRIDAY OF THE MONTH

We still meet on the last Friday of every month in the lounge bar of Tyacks Hotel, Camborne. Due to illness, death and men working abroad, the numbers of late have diminished somewhat. However, sometimes people turn up who we haven't seen for years and even decades. Jimmy Clemence, Peter Hughes, David Busby, Allen Buckley, Paul MacDonald are usually there for a chat, and sometimes others join us. Alan and Sheila Beattie come when they are in Cornwall, and Malcolm Harris comes when he is home from abroad. Tony Giles, Vivian Thomas and Nigel MacDonald have all recently joined us for a drink. Others drop in from time to time and they all enjoy a bit of nostalgia. Why not join us for the occasional drink and chat? It's good to see old friends and remind ourselves of the 'delights' of mining at Wheal Jane, South Crofty, Geevor, Wheal Pendarves, Mount Wellington and Wheal Concord.

Membership

All well-wishers are encouraged to become associate members. Let us unite to remember the past, celebrate our friends and work mates who have gone, and look forward to a future for a great industry. *Fortun da than bal*

MEMBERSHIP AND EVENTS: Full members of the CMA must be people who have been employed in a metalliferous mine in Cornwall.

Associate Membership is open to Mining Students and **anyone** who wishes to support the group, and participate in the various activities and functions that the CMA organises. The CMA organises get-togethers for former and current employees of Cornwall's mines. Talks will also be given on all aspects of mining around Cornwall. The CMA will, when ever possible, produce a newsletter to inform members and associate members of forth coming events and to let them know what the CMA is currently doing. Local press will also carry details of any planned events, such as miner's re-unions, the AGM (for members) and talks (open to all). The annual membership fee for the CMA is £5.00, with family membership available for £10.00 (one per household). This is payable on the 1st of April each year. OVERSEAS membership is £7.00 per year for a single person, or £12.00 for a family (one per household). If you would like to join the CMA you can use the internet at

www.cornishminers.com/membership.htm or call the Membership Secretary on **01209 218831**.

PLEASE REMEMBER TO PAY YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE CORNISH MINERS ASSOCIATION

This year the AGM of the CMA will be held at **Camborne Rugby Club at 7.30pm on Thursday 20th May**. We urge all who are able to attend & show their support for the Association, which seeks to keep the memory of Cornish mining alive in the area. Last year some 30 members were able to come to the AGM and we all had a most enjoyable time. We normally have a film show to watch, which gives us the chance to see old faces some, long-forgotten.

CMA Website: www.cornishminers.com

Mike Davis continues to run the website for the CMA. He encourages all the membership to send him information which can be loaded onto the website. Mike's email is:

cornishminer@homecall.co.uk Many interested people have contacted the website and Mike reports some fascinating chats with miners and former miners there. Please, take advantage of Mike's Message Board and talk about the subject which turns so many people on - Cornish mining!

Don't forget to sign the Guestbook when you are there and browse through it to see comments and news from old workmates at home and abroad.