

# NAMHO Newsletter June 2011

## A word from the Editor

Well, here's my second newsletter and once again I have to say thanks to Don Borthwick for his sterling work at providing material for inclusion. I must also express my gratitude to Alastair Cameron for allowing use of his obituary to Mark Weir and also to Peter Claughton for his input. Once again I would like to remind all NAMHO representatives and their newsletter editors to provide news, stories, events, etc., for inclusion in the next and subsequent NAMHO newsletters. The next edition is "pencilled in" for mid- September, and would ask that any contributions be forwarded by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011.

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## Obituary- Mark Weir

Late in 1997 on a very wet and dark Sunday afternoon in November I was walking down from Honister Crag to the Hause after a few hours of surveying and exploring the old workings, completing work for the re-publishing of a book.

The cold easterly wind complemented the driving rain. The cloud base was much lower than it had been earlier and I was soaked through. I decided to call it a day, head back to Coniston, light the fire and have a relaxing evening

As I came down I noticed a vehicle parked within the Honister compound, an unusual thing at that time. Then I also noticed a person striding up the track towards me. He was dressed in ordinary clothing, plus an old sheepskin jacket, which was wet-through, and a pair of chukka boots.

We halted and greeted and he introduced himself as Mark Weir. He asked what I had been doing and I explained. He told me he had been trying to get a copy of the previous edition of the book - and then he came out with an absolute bombshell. *'By the way, I've just bought the mine'*.

I must have looked aghast because he repeated *'yes – I have just bought the mine. Come and see'*. All thoughts of heading home were forgotten and I followed him back up to Kimberley Top Level.

It was at least a month since I had last been in Top Level and it was quite clear that the re-opening of the mine was well under-way. An electric loco was on the track. Tools and equipment lay around. In Margaret's Level a temporary scaffolding structure allowed access to the closehead roof. Mark never stopped talking. His enthusiasm and charisma were infectious and we walked back down the track in the dark as if we had known each other for years.

His parting shot, as I headed for the National Trust car park at the Hause was *'...and don't park there, they'll fleece-you. I'll give you a key to my gate. You can always park in there whenever you like'*.

During the next few months Mark and his two uncles put an enormous amount of work into developing the mine and repairing the buildings at the Hause. He and I met up several times. On each occasion Mark would down-tools and take me up to the mine or into the sheds. It was at these early meetings that we started to develop plans for the historic interpretation of Honister.

Mark was a Borrowdale lad, born at High Lodore Farm. But what is not generally known is that his family originated from Coniston and were well known in their own right in that village.

Mark's mother and brothers were born on Bank Terrace, Coniston. Their father, John, worked at The Old Man Quarries for much of his career. In 1945 the family had outgrown the dwelling and so moved up to the Coniston Coppermines, living at Coppermines House, now the Barrow Mountaineering Club climbing cottage.

In 1948 their father was offered a better prospect at the Honister Mine and the whole family moved from Coniston to Seatoller, setting up home in one of the quarry worker's terraced cottages, now sadly all holiday homes, at the foot of the Honister Pass road.

Celia married Joe Weir of High Lodore Farm and Mark was born in January 1966. By his mid-teens Mark had decided that becoming 'educated' was not on his agenda. He left school, did some work round the farm, dug graves, started his own contracting business, ran a pub and eventually obtained his helicopter pilots licence.

Mark was extremely fond and close to his grandfather. Mark's outlook and career took a major turn on the day he offered to fly 'the Boss' on a tour of the sites in the district where he had worked. The trip started off at Gawthwaite in Low Furness and then proceeded to Coniston Old Man. The helicopter hovered for some time over Colt Crag allowing the old chap to view all the workings of Old Man Quarries.

They then flew on over the fells to Honister. At this time the Honister Quarries had been closed down by MacAlpines. The buildings were derelict and the roads partially washed away. Mark's grandfather could not believe the scene he saw and kept asking his grandson why they had closed. Mark was not sure either but felt, in deference to the old chap, he should find out. His investigations ultimately led to a meeting in a hotel room in Manchester where Mark signed a document allowing the lease for Honister to pass to himself. He has always accepted that it was a mad thing to do but at least he was able then to tell his grandfather not long before he died that the Honister Mine would soon be opening again.

Since these early days Honister has grown from strength to strength. The tourist side of the mine is now the foremost attraction in the Northern Lakes. But Mark has never allowed Honister to become just another tourist trap. Most of his time and effort has been put into the mine itself. He recommissioned the Kimberley Internal Incline, replacing the DC electric motor with a hydraulic power unit. He has developed novel ways of working the faces. He also developed a new market for slate waste so that the quantity of rid discarded is now less than 4%. He has refused to abandon slate processing at the Hause, wanting the whole production to stay on one site. He was the first in the region to install automatic engraving equipment, allowing a design to be cut automatically onto slate from a computer scanned image and Honister is now the only reliable source of 'greenslate' (volcanic riving slate) in the country.

The re-opening of Honister was also exceptionally good news for Borrowdale. By the late 1990's outdoor pursuit tourism was expanding out of control. Local people were becoming 'beggars in their own land'. Mark was soon to become a leading figure in the valley, helping to establish a careful balance between tourism and the community.

On the evening of 8<sup>th</sup> March Mark had been working late up at Honister. A quick phone call from his partner, Jan, reminded him of the evening's plans. Later, when he hadn't arrived two of the team, Leah and Shelly, went back up to Honister. They noticed the helicopter wasn't there so checked the CCTV system which showed him taking off, as normal, to head down Gatesgarthdale. They then saw for some reason that he had returned and flown in the opposite direction. The girls then descended the fell towards Seatoller with torches. They were within feet of the wreckage when they decided to abandon the search and return. The Cockermouth Team located him several hours later.

Mark was buried on 21<sup>st</sup> March at Borrowdale Church, Stonethwaite. Even before the funeral it had been decided that Honister would continue under the control of his partner, Jan. As the summer season commences it is pleasing to relate that visitor numbers are above expectation, the mine is producing well and product order books are full.

*Alastair Cameron, CATMHS  
20<sup>th</sup> April 2011*

## **News and events**

### **Industrial Heritage at Risk- English Heritage investigates our industrial past**

English Heritage has embarked on a project to reveal how much of the country's industrial heritage is at risk of neglect, decay or demolition. The aim is to get owners, local people, voluntary bodies, professionals and politicians debating the future of industrial heritage before it's too late. The public is invited to participate by posting photographs and comments on a Flickr group run in conjunction with the Council for British Archaeology and the Association for Industrial Archaeology.

Speaking of mills, mines, railways, canals and other remains of the Industrial Revolution Dr. Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage said "But much of this heritage is now at risk and the current economic climate isn't helping. Owners are finding it hard to look after their buildings as well as their businesses. Developers are cautious about taking on vacant buildings and public bodies and regeneration agencies are less able to support schemes for re-use. There are no easy answers but we're determined to see what can be done to help. Our industrial past is too important to ignore."

To get involved or for more information visit:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/caring/heritage-at-risk/industrial-heritage-at-risk/> or  
<http://www.flickr.com/groups/industrialheritageatrisk>

### **Wrexham Mines Rescue Centre demolition**

Following the partial demolition of the Wrexham Mines Rescue Centre in last year, a local businessman has been fined £2,000 and ordered to pay £1,700 costs by magistrates. Work to demolish the training centre, built in 1913, was stopped when Cadw, the Welsh Heritage organisation, gave it Grade II listed status, but further work to make the building structurally sound resulted in part of the roof collapsing. The court was told that work has now started to restore the centre.

### **The UK Coal industry**

After posting losses of £124.6million last year, on top of losses of £129.1million in 2009 & £15.6million in 2008, the new chairman of UK Coal is looking at ways of turning around the company's fortunes. Possible solutions include changing the way company is run, introducing more flexible working practices and shift patterns, and looking at the pay and perks of the 2,600 employees.

Meanwhile Administrators of Powerfuel Mining have announced that Hatfield Colliery, near Doncaster, has been sold to a Dutch holding company Entero BV. The colliery and employees were transferred into a new firm, Hatfield Colliery Ltd., last year when Powerfuel plc was unable to find funding to carry out work at the pit and the "clean" coal power station being developed on the site. Whilst the future of the colliery looks secure, talks are still on going over the future of the pioneering green energy power station.

Steel giants Tata are currently looking at reducing the raw material costs of its steel works in Port Talbot by opening a new coal mine close to the plant. If the project proves economically viable, then locally produced coking coal would prove cheaper than that shipped from Australia.

### **Extensions to two Mining World Heritage Sites**

Mines of Rammelsberg and Historic Town of Goslar extended to include the Upper Harz Water Management System.

The historic mining network of the Mines of Rammelsberg, the Historic Town of Goslar and the Upper Harz Water-Management System constitutes one of the largest mining and metallurgical complexes for non-ferrous metals in Europe. Known to have existed since ancient times, it has been in continuous use since the Middle Age...

Røros Mining Town to include the Circumference and to become Røros Mining Town and the Circumference, Norway.

Røros Mining Town and the Circumference consist of three sites within the Circumference, i.e. the area of privileges awarded by the Danish-Norwegian King to Røros Copper Works in 1646. The town and the cultural landscapes cover a large continuous area which includes the landscape surrounding the mining town, the urban agricultural areas, and the most important mining landscapes where agricultural practices and copper work operations were carried out...

Two other mining related applications for inscription: Major Mining Sites of Wallonia, Belgium, and Mercury and Silver Binomial. Almadén and Idrija with San Luis Potosí, Spain

/ Mexico / Slovenia have been deferred. Current or potential mining is a common reason for rejecting or deferring inscriptions, e.g. 'Reiterates its position that mining is incompatible with World Heritage status'.

For further information see: <http://whc.unesco.org/>

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## **Publications**

### **From PDMHS**

Mining History - Volume 17, No. 6. Winter 2010

Barytes Mining at Grin Low- Chris Heathcote

John Barratt and the Grassington Mines- M.C. Gill

A Model of Beever Mine at Grassington- M.C. Gill

The North Yorkshire Moors Coalfield- M.C. Gill

Railway Subsidence at Whaley Bridge- Chris Heathcote

Index to Volume 17- David Williams

### **From NMRS**

British Mining No.91, Mines of the West Pennines- **Richard Smith and Sam Murphy**

ISBN 978-0-901450-67-8 A5, 216pp, £15

**This monograph is the result of over 15 years research by the authors and covers the mines of the West Pennine escarpment from its northernmost extremity at Tindale Fell to Mallerstang and Garsdale in the south. The monograph includes many tables and 76 illustrations.**

### **County Durham**

Industrial Railways & Locomotives of County Durham (Part 2) –Industrial Railway Society, ISBN 978 1 901556 56 5, £22 (hard bound)

This second edition deals with the NCB/ British Coal in County Durham, between 1947 and 1993. After an introductory history of the NCB over those years, the book lists every colliery, drift, NCB railway, coking ovens and coking plant, brickworks, workshops and opencast disposal points in Durham, including non-loco lines and much detail of rail workings underground. There are 416 pages, 18 colour maps, 28 diagrams and 271 photographs, including sections specifically covering NCB wagons, wagon tickets and man-riding vehicles.

### **Kent Coalfield**

'Those Dirty Miners': A History of the Kent Coalfield by *J. P. Hollingsworth*. Published in 2010 by Stenlake Publishing, ISBN 9781840335088, 112 pages, £16 soft bound.

A painstakingly researched history of this small, but fascinating coalfield. The material covers the period from the late 19th century to its final closure and encompasses the colliery of Shakespeare at Dover, several lost collieries such as Wingham and the four productive collieries of Tilmanstone, Snowdown, Chislet and Betteshanger. Also contains a fully illustrated chapter by Tom Heavyside on Kent's Last Days of Colliery Steam. Full of informative detail and with many previously unpublished photographs.

## Northumberland

Coal Mining West of Wittonstall 1266-1966 by (R.W.) *Bill Stokoe*. Paperback 124 pages costs about £9, no ISBN. A rather specialised book privately published.

## Scotland

Shale Oil: A history of the industry in the Lothians by *Guthrie Hutton*. 56 pages ISBN : 9781840335026

Old Wanlockhead by *Alex F Young*. Published in 2010 by Stenlake Publishing at £7.99, paperback 48 pages ISBN : 978184033492

I am indebted to Dr R.M. Callender writing in the February NMRS Newsletter for these two items.

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## Ireland

The Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland (MHTI) Editorial by Matthew Parkes

The baryte mines of West Cork by Des Cowman

A re-assessing a "scam": Connaree Mining Company 1859-1872 by Des Cowman

Irish miners in the USA: social backgrounds by Des Cowman

Douglas Wallace Bishopp - seventh Director of the Geological Survey of Ireland: his appointment 1940 and resignation 1950 by Colin B. Wilson

Evidence for early Bronze Age tin and gold extraction in the Mourne Mountains, County Down by Richard Warner, Norman Moles and Rob Chapman

A Register of share certificates, and other fiscal ephemera of mining companies which operated in Ireland during the 19th and early 20th centuries by John H. Morris

John Mackay: Silver King in the Gilded Cage by *Michael J. Makley* Published by the University of Nevada Press at \$34.95 ISBN: 978-0-87417-770-1 Hardcover, Pages: 296  
From the early 1870s until his death in 1902, John Mackay was among the richest men in the world, and he was without doubt the wealthiest man to emerge from Nevada's fabulous Comstock Lode. *Beginning life as a poor Irish immigrant, he early developed a strong work ethic that distinguished him for the rest of his life.* He came west to seek his fortune in the California Gold Rush, then moved on to Virginia City, Nevada, where he operated silver mines and discovered the "Big Bonanza" that was three times as rich as any other Comstock strike...

## Proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> International Mining Congress 2009

Mining Perspectives- Edited by Peter Cloughton and Catherine Mills. Published by Cornwall and West Devon Mining Landscape Worlds Heritage Site, Cornwall Council, Truro (2011) ISBN 978-1-903798-77-5, £12.50 excluding postage (To order contact Peter Cloughton [p.f.cloughton@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:p.f.cloughton@exeter.ac.uk) or Catherine Mills [c.j.mills@stir.ac.uk](mailto:c.j.mills@stir.ac.uk) School of Arts and Humanities, Division of History and Politics, University of Stirling, Scotland, FK9 4LA)

Mining Perspectives is a peer reviewed edited volume containing a selection of papers presented at the Eight International Mining History Congress held in June 2009. The Congress is a continuing series of triennial international meetings that began in Australia in 1985, aiming to bring together practitioners of mining history across all disciplines, to exchange recent research findings, and to consider how the subject area might be developed to satisfy new interests and demands.

The volume contains a selection of 22 primary research based studies, sub-divided into six section headings: Technology, Conflict and Labour Relations, Mining Archaeology, Heritage and Interpretation, Mining Personalities, Mineral Exploitation and Mining Society. The individual contributions are drawn from a variety of academic disciplines, with a particular focus on early career researchers, industry, the public sector, heritage charities, independent scholars and interested amateurs, and showcases international and interdisciplinary knowledge exchange in action. The traditional strengths of economic, technological and labour histories are combined with new agendas in heritage and archaeological interpretation of the post mining landscape; new directions that will ensure that the historical study of the extractive industries remains a vibrant sub-discipline of history well into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **Dates for your diary**

### **2011**

29<sup>th</sup> July- 1<sup>st</sup> August: 2011 NAMHO Conference, Shrewsbury

8<sup>th</sup>- 11<sup>th</sup> September: Heritage Open Days. For more details see [www.heritageopendays.org](http://www.heritageopendays.org)

12<sup>th</sup> November: NAMHO Autumn Meeting, Mendip area with possible underground trip after, details to be confirmed.

### **2012**

17<sup>th</sup> March: NAMHO AGM & Spring Meeting, North East England, details to be confirmed.

25<sup>th</sup>- 27<sup>th</sup> May: 2012 NAMHO Conference, Nenthead, Cumbria.

### ***Contact details***

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