

BRITISH MINING No.28

MEMOIRS 1985



Hewer, R.E. 1985
"Birkside Copper Mine, Thirlmere, Cumbria"
British Mining No.28, NMRS, pp.44-45

Published by the

THE NORTHERN MINE RESEARCH SOCIETY
SHEFFIELD U.K.

© N.M.R.S. & The Author(s) 1985.

NB

This publication was originally issued in the A4 format then used by the society. It has now been digitised and reformatted at A5. This has changed the original pagination of articles, which is given in square brackets.

ISSN 0309-2199

BIRKSIDE COPPER MINE

Thirlmere, Cumbria

by R.E. Hewer

SYNOPSIS

A small copper working is described which lies above the main road at Thirlmere, Cumbria. Little more than a trial, the writer suggests that operations were superintended by Captain Barratt, agent of the great Coniston Mines. A brief description and survey is included.

Permission must be obtained from the Water Authority to enter the mine.

As the summer tourists drive along the Ambleside/Keswick road from Dunmail Raise on the east side of Thirlmere, one often wonders whether they are aware of the mining industrial remains hidden a few hundred feet away in the woods; the empty passages, silent stopes and waterfilled sumps, the ruined mill, dam and incline. A great deal of exploration work has been carried out recently in the major mines of the area, however smaller ventures are just as rewarding. Exploration and interpretation of what remains all helps to build an overall picture of the mining industry in this area of the Lake District.

Birkside Mine (NY31.GR 330126) is situated on the lower flank of High Crag 500 feet above the Ambleside/Keswick road. Little is known or has been written about the mine although the workings are associated with the period of activity at Wythburn Mine. There are many small trials in the area, none of which showed any signs of promise. A trial in the gill above Thirlspot appears to have been worked as an open cut with dressing on site.¹ Another previously unknown trial was discovered by our group whilst we were traversing the fell to Helvellyn Mine GR 328133. The trial followed a vein in the bed of the gill, a short trial level tried the vein, consisting of quartz, malachite and chalcopyrite. The side and face of the vein contained small drill holes. A five foot square cutting had been excavated for dressing and tool storage purposes. Moving southwards the Birkside vein is encountered. (Copper vein, the lead veins have been omitted).

The Birkside Vein. Courses E – W to ENE – WSW through the green ashes of the Borrowdale series and fades northwards. Two levels were driven, one by the steam, (now an open stope trial) and the adit fifty yards to the West. It appears that the mine was working in or around 1840,² but Clifton Ward mentions the date 1846.³ However the Mineral Statistics refer to Huel Henry – Copper. Agent J. Barrett. (Jos. Barrett of Coniston?) 1860 -1866.⁴ The latter statement refers to a second period of working.

Approach to the mine is best achieved by way of the footpath from the Wythburn car park, following the Ambleside track through the woods running parallel to the road southwards before slowly ascending to join up with the forest track at the end of the wood. The footpath continues over Birkside Gill but if one turns

eastward, looking towards High Crag with the gill on the right hand side then the area to be explored is directly in front. As one ascends the edge of the wood two trials may be seen following a thin string a few yards to foreheads. To the north, by the side of the forest track was a third level, now lost.¹ After ascending 500 feet from the road, Birkside waterfall is reached, immediately by its side, on the north side, is the long narrow tip of Birkside Mine leading to the miners hut and low adit. Higher up the fell above the adit a small open cut can be found marking the trial of the back of the copper vein.

The Mine - Survey

Access into the adit is awkward for the level is now walled up with a small entrance to one side. The level beyond the entrance which is normally dry is now a foot deep in muddy, cold water at all times. Unfortunately the workers who walled the adit used stone from the old miners hut and this has spoiled the outline of the latter. The adit was driven as a cross cut, slightly east of north for 108 feet to a copper vein; it continued a further 85 feet to a second vein and forward 13 feet to a forehead. The miners followed the second vein for a distance of 163 feet before giving up. Only copper staining and a swelling and pinching sugary quartz string was their reward for the drive.

The first copper vein appeared more promising with copper staining showing in several places. After 98 feet from the crosscut, heading approximately north east the vein was lost, cut off by a fault. The level turns sharply southwards, then south east and yet again turns north east into a fall. The fall appears to coincide with the open stope seen further east up Birkside Gill, where debris has fallen down. The level was driven for approximately 210 feet to the fall.

Having retraced ones steps from the adit a climb of 450 feet up the stream leads to the open stope on the south side of the stream, now covered by a heavy wire mesh mat for safety. Above the stope entrance a small trial can be seen entering the flank of Seat Sandal, perhaps the original trial on the back of the vein. (During our visit earlier in 1984, we rigged a pitch to investigate the section of workings on the south side of the fall.)

A 25 foot pitch was laddered, a descent down the face of the vein led to a rubble slope, in a stope, descending to adit level on the south side of the fall. Ahead was a flooded stope stretching the full width of the level and some twenty feet long, in the distance the level could be seen to continue. Above the flooded section the vein had been stoped out to a height of 25 feet above the level, clearly an indication of a rich pocket of ore. On the right hand side of the flooded stope approximately 18 inches under water there appeared to be a rock ledge. A volunteer was pushed forward and slowly worked his way across. On the wall above this section were the remains of a candle and clay stemming, whilst above, the wall was blackened by soot. We plumbed the flooded section several times and found it to be 40 feet deep. The main level continued a further 250 feet to a forehead having passed through two small stopes, one 20 foot high, packed with stagings and deads. Very little mineralization could be seen. The level was partly back filled a short

BIRKSIDE COPPER MINE

way in from the sump suggesting that the last period [44] of working was in the area of the now flooded stope.

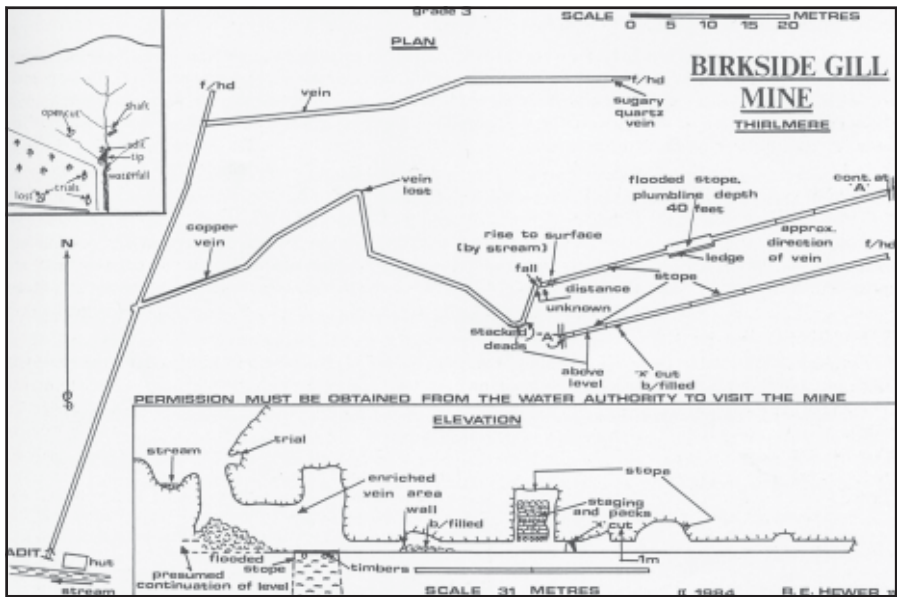
Although the workings were only small, it is interesting to note that the agent was J. Barret, which leaves one wondering whether it was the same J. Barret as the agent for the Coniston mines and was the agent for John Taylor – The Mining Entrepreneur. If one and the same man, then the workings must have shown promise.

References

1. I. Tyler
2. Dewey/Eastwood. *Spec. Reports. Min Res. of G.B. Vol XXX*
3. C. Ward. *Mems. Geol. Survey. Northern part of the Lake District.*
4. Burt/Waite/Burnley. *The Cumberland Mineral Statistics.*

Acknowledgements

North West Water Authority for permission to survey the workings.





Flooded stope and timbers. Candle soot marks may be seen on the wall above the centre person.

R.E. HEWER
36 Benomley Crescent, Almondbury, Huddersfield.