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THE BRIEF LIFE OF THE MELLINGLOCH LEAD MINE

R. Von Arx

SYNOPSIS

Ancient mine workings at Mellingloch (Melin-y-Gloch) are reported and a possible connection made with the Roman Station at nearby Caersws. Nothing is known of any activity in between but in the late 1860s the local miner Robert John Ellis took out a Take-Note to explore the workings situated by the Bwlchyffridd Aberhafesp road about 3 miles north-west of Newtown in Montgomeryshire. N.G.R. SO 067945. He was financed by the well-to-do Honourable Henry Hanbury Tracy, who was also Agent for the Right Honourable Lord Sudeley, on the basis of an agreement dated 23rd August 1870.

All was off to an auspicious start – what with one of the prominent local families and many well-known outsiders taking part! High hopes and great expectations marked the establishment of the Memorandum of Association on 3rd February 1871 listing the following shareholders in the Mellingloch Lead Mining Co. Ltd. to be formed:

Henry Hanbury Tracy, D.L., J.P.,	Gregynog, Newtown	200 shares
Charles Magniac, M.P.,	3 Lombard Street, London	100
O.M. Crewe-Read, Capt. R.N., D.L., J.P.,	Llandinam	100
C.E. Webber, Capt. RE.,	Charles Street, St. James	100
Henrietta S. Hanbury Tracy, Spinster,	Gregynog, Newtown	100
Rosa M. Hanbury Tracy, Spinster,	Gregynog, Newtown	100
Frederick James Tollemache, M.P.,	Ham House, Richmond, Surrey	100
M. Biddulph, M.P.M.	Ledbury, Herefordshire	60
Augustus K. Stephenson, Solicitor,	Whitehall	30
R.W. Hamilton, Col.,	108 Eaton Square, London	50
George Clive, Esq.,	Perrystone Court, Ross, Herefordshire	60
Robert John Ellis, Miner	Mellingloch, nr. Newtown	67
Charles Douglas R Hanbury Tracy, M.P.,	68 Eccleston Square, London	100
Charles Henry T. Hanbury Tracy, Esq.,	Gregynog Newtown	100

(The signatures of Henry Hanbury Tracy and the Misses Hanbury Tracy were witnessed by their butler, and the ones of Charles D.R and Charles H.T. Hanbury Tracy by their footman.)

The first Directors' Meeting of the Company took place at 43 Charing Cross, London, on 6th February 1871. Present were Henry Hanbury Tracy and Capt. Crewe-Read. At the latter's proposal the "meeting" appointed Henry H. Tracy chairman, Charles Magniac vice chairman and Richard Tilsley of White gates, Newtown, secretary. Nine other decisions were taken, e.g. to make an immediate call of £2 per share, the sum of money expended by Henry H. Tracy on behalf of the Company in proving the mine to be



repaid as sufficient funds be available, all contracts entered by Henry H. Tracy to be recognized and R.J Ellis allotted 67 fully paid up shares (of £5) for the purchase of his Take-Note and the monies expended by him.

The next board meeting was held at the home of Charles Magniac at 3 Lombard St. on 6th April 1871, with only Magniac and Webber present. Again nine resolutions were framed, e.g. a request for a “plan of section through vein and shaft” on the scale of 25 feet to the inch and a copy of the contract of 7th January 1871 with Ellis for shaft sinking, and the share certificates which had been signed during the meeting to be sent out to the shareholders. The same participants took part in another meeting on 20th April 1871 at the same venue. The Secretary was taken to task for omitting the measurements of the work done in the mine in the papers sent to London. At the recommendation of the outside consulting engineer McDougal Smith a cross-cut level from a point 50 yards 1 foot from the top of the existing shaft had been started at a cost of £4 per yard. It was agreed not to sink the shaft beyond a depth of 59 yards 1 foot. Once again, the Secretary was reminded to send in all the requested paperwork; in fact, no less than seven resolutions are dealing with his job!

The meeting of 19th May 1871 saw Henry Hanbury Tracy, Magniac and Webber attending in addition to the shareholders J.R. McClean, M.P., F.J Tollemache and Charles D.H. Hanbury Tracy as well as engineer McDougal Smith. The latter made the following suggestions:

- The cross-cut should be continued to a point 60 yards from the shaft.
- Driving left and right should be discontinued.

- Sinking of the shaft should be continued as lead could not be expected until 30 or 40 fathoms below the valley.
- After the ground is proved in the cross-cut an attempt should be made in Glanrhyd.

All these were adopted, as was the proposal of Henry H. Tracy to build a miners' hut and a smithy at a total cost of £60. The contracts with Ellis for shaft sinking to 24 yards at £8 per yard and driving the cross-cut to 60 yards at £4 per yard were confirmed.

On 5th June 1871 Magniac welcomed the first Meeting of the Shareholders to his home. The costs of the mine so far amounted to £1640 including £360 for driving levels, £579 for sinking shafts and £501 for machinery and timber. By the end of March 1872 the costs had increased to £2754. Among the liabilities were bills from Jones Griffiths for timber, Woosnam the solicitor, Lord Sudeley for timber and Thomas for an iron founder. In order to prosecute the work in the mode and manner recommended by the confidential engineer a call of 10/- was made. At the 2nd Meeting of the Shareholders in mid July 1872 the report of McDougal Smith and Captain Williams (presumably another outside expert) was read. It was much in favour of continuing operations in consequence of the appearance of the ground and the opinion that lead could not be far distant in the new adit level. A further call of 10/- was agreed upon, but the work to be limited to the adit level. The engine in the Mellingloch shaft was to be kept in operation for the next six weeks after which time the Directors would decide whether to continue or not.

There is no more information for nearly a year, until the 3rd Shareholders Meeting of 20th June 1873 at which reports of McDougal Smith, Captain Williams, William Lefeaux and Captain Eddy were presented. Even though the trials made so far had not produced any results, there "is good ground for believing that if the work of exploration" was carried further, the object aimed at would be obtained. McDougal had suggested in his report to discontinue the level. He believed that the vein crossing the brook at Rhydlydan bore strong indications of being lead-bearing at greater depth. It was found desirable to test the correctness of this opinion by sinking a shaft at such a distance from that vein to reach it at a depth of 30 yards. Once the depth was arrived at, the vein should be further explored by driving levels left and right to the extent of 30 yards each way. Another call of 5/- was decided on.

The next news we have is the resignation of Charles Magniac a year later in August 1874, to be replaced by Charles D.R. Hanbury Tracy. Henry H. Tracy was authorized to negotiate the terms for certain Take-Notes for minerals under the farms called Gwerngawr, Esgairgawr as well as Dolddenli in the property of John Vaughn, and under the farm called Caecoch on Llwyn in the property of Humphrey Williams. But the end was in sight! Henry Hanbury Tracy was also empowered to arrange the terms of sale of all the Company property including interest in the Take-notes to a trustee on behalf of a Company to be formed.

BRIEF LIFE OF THE MELLINGLOCH LEAD MINE

At the Meeting of the Shareholders at the Company offices at Whitegates, Newtown on 18th August 1874 the Misses Hanbury Tracy and Robert Ellis were present in addition to Henry H. Tracy and Capt. Crewe-Read. In a report to the shareholders there is mention of a new Company with a capital of £6000 in 1200 shares. A further Take-Note, this one for Nannan, was purchased from Ellis. One Major Bolton proposed on behalf of a new Company to buy the Company property. Henry Hanbury Tracy was appointed a Trustee of the Mellingloch Lead Mining Co. Ltd. to negotiate with Major Bolton.

The holders of 1127 shares were present, either in person or by proxy, at the Extraordinary General Meeting of 15th November 1876 at 26 Essex St., Strand, London, when the decision to wind up the Company voluntarily was taken. Henry Hanbury Tracy was appointed Liquidator. The final act took place on 25th April 1884 with only Henry H. Tracy attending. The accounts were produced, showing in which manner the Company had been wound up and the property disposed of.

There is no information that a follow-up company actually came into being.

The remains of the mining activity at Mellingloch are quite extensive. There are three levels in a north-easterly direction, the most southerly is now used as a water supply. The middle level is blocked and the third connects with a shaft on the hillside above. The venture was an attempt to find the easterly continuation of the Van Lode.

It appears that the Hanbury Tracy Family was deceived into investing in the mine. Two independent sources have confirmed (having been told by their fathers, who worked in the Van Mine) that whenever Henry Hanbury Tracy was scheduled to visit the Mellingloch Mine, the miners would buy lead ore from the Van Mine, put it into the head of the level before blasting. After the blasting the lead ore would be mixed with the natural rock and Hanbury Tracy would be induced to put up more money. However, the miners were eventually found out and jailed.

(Thanks for invaluable help to David Bick. Sources: Memorandum of Association; Minute Book; Trevor Morris: Montgomeryshire Collections, Vol.67, 1979, p.114)

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