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A GLIMPSE AT CWM BRWYNO MINE

R. Von Arx

SYNOPSIS

Cwm Brwyno mine in Cardiganshire, had a varied and interesting history. This short paper traces the activities of one of the concerns which tried their hand here in the 1860s and which lasted a mere seven years.

Lead ore was discovered on Cwm Brwyno Hill, situated half a mile east of the Aberystwyth-Llanidloes main road in Cardiganshire, around 1840 and the land leased to the London mining engineers John Taylor & Sons by Sir Pryse Pryse of Gogerddan. As the Taylors did not work the mine, the lease was later ceded to two brothers Evans from Llanbadarn Fawr after the latter had made a good discovery near the surface. The Evanses drove an adit and produced several hundred tons of ore in the next years. Their success brought John Taylor & Sons back on the scene, who in turn bought the mine from the two brothers and worked it until 1866. The mine was then acquired by the colourful share dealer John Henry Murchison of 8 Austin Friars, London (the *Mining World* described him as “the Beau Brummel of secretaries ... attired in the latest fashion”). A year later he floated a company under the name of Cefn Brwyno Mining Co. Ltd. with a capital of £15,000. Murchison, who acted as London manager and secretary of the company, was involved in a number of other mining ventures, e.g. in 1871 he jointly held leases for the North Laxey mine in Maughold and the Maughold Head iron mine both in the Isle of Man as well as for a mine in the tenement of Tyn-y-Groes in Llanrochwyn in Caernarvonshire. He also owned or was secretary of the Cwm Sebon/South Darren mine from 1858 to 1881 (J.H. Murchison & Co.), the Alltycrib/Talybont mine from 1859 to 1865 (under the same name), Cardigan Consols, in Esgairhir in 1858 (secretary), all three in Cardiganshire; the Wye Lead Mining Co. Ltd. in 1868 and the Plynlimmon Lead Mining Co. Ltd. from 1871 to 1880 (secretary), both in the Wye Valley of Montgomeryshire; and also the Tankerville Mining Co. Ltd. in 1873 (secretary) near Minsterley in Shropshire.

The new company started work on the hill in February 1868 under Chairman Thomas Staunton and Captain James Paull. At the 1st Ordinary General Meeting in London on 25th February 1869, Staunton presented Paull's report and mentioned that the mine could be worked very cheaply, the costs for the past 12 months having averaged only £135 per month. At this time the liabilities amounted to £758 and 95 shares of £5 each were still unissued. The purchase price for the mine had been £6,000 of which £3,000 in 600 fully paid shares of £5 each. Some of the costs accrued in the past 12 months were: rent of the water course £50, dues on 20 tons of lead ore and 21 tons of blende (the latter sold to Vivian & Sons) £17, preliminary London expenses (printing of share certificates, making of company seal etc.) a whopping £607, Directors' salaries, £98, Secretary and office rent etc. £172.

Captain Paull's report gives an outline of the work carried out so far (1868/9). At the 92 fathom level east of the engine shaft (there is no such level in the mine plan between p.86/7 in *Memoirs of the Geological Survey* Vol. XX and the engine shaft is called "Taylor's Shaft" there) was extended 32 fathoms through a lode worth 1 ton of lead ore per fathom for the first 5 fathoms, with the yield decreasing somewhat afterwards. The same level west of the engine shaft was lengthened by 14 fathoms without meeting anything "very rich". Then a winze was sunk in the 68 fathom level west of the engine shaft to communicate with the 80 fathom level for ventilation and easy stoping (also not in plan). The 80 fathom level was driven eastwards by 25 fathoms in poor ore and westwards by 19 fathoms ending in a yield of 14 cwt per ton of lead ore. The 56 fathom level east of the engine shaft was repaired, cleared and extended 24 fathoms on a "very kindly" lode. A winze was sunk 6 fathoms below this level and a rise put up 3 fathoms above the former workings. Then a communication was effected about 95 fathoms east of the engine shaft, which improved ventilation in the 56 fathom level and made possible the storing of waste stuff in the old workings instead of drawing it to the surface.

The cross-cut north at the 20 fathom level east of the engine shaft was driven 34 fathoms. Even though appearances were generally somewhat disappointing, Paull still thought the mine on the whole offered good prospects and would make "a profitable and lasting concern" when developed properly.

Things soon brightened up to such a point that Paull felt impelled to write to Murchison from Aberystwyth on 27th March 1869. The 92 fathom level east now yielded 15 cwt of lead ore per fathom with every indication of further improvement, the winze sinking below the 80 fathom level east 1 ton, the lode at the 80th west 14 cwt and a great quantity of blende, and the 56th or deep adit east 1½ ton all in virgin ground.

On 11th August 1869 Paull reported on the further progress: the 92nd east extended another 11½ fathoms, a winze sunk from the 80th to communicate with the 92nd and two stopes just started there with one more to be let once the water was out, the 56th extended eastwards into the hill, the 80th west extended 9½ fathoms, the 56th east driven 13 fathoms, the 20th extended west of the cross-cut (on north lode) 13½ fathoms. Most of this work was in good ore and Paull judged the prospects very favourable. Then there was a spot of bad luck caused by a long spell of dry weather rendering the pumping wheel idle. Without this hindrance over a period of two months and the resulting accumulation of water in the bottom of the mine, Paull reckoned the returns would have more than paid cost.

At the 2nd General Meeting of 4th March 1870 Staunton informed the shareholders that total expenses for the year of £2499 stood against returns of £1808. The resulting deficit of £691 was mostly due to the vagaries of weather, long drought in summer and very severe frost in winter. By this time £3 on 2400 shares had been called. Ore sales comprised 144 tons of lead (sold to Burry Port Co. for £1704) and 24 tons of blende (sold to Bagillt Co. for £90) with dues to Sir Pryse Pryse amounting to £120. Paull reported routine progress in all points with no new work started.

In early October of the same year Murchison heard from Captain Paull that the engine shaft had been sunk to 104 fathoms and a cross-cut south would be started soon. At the 92nd west they were passing through a lode worth 1½ to 2 tons of lead ore per fathom over a length of some 30 fathoms with the ore being stoped away. The 80th west yielded some good ore too. The stope over the 56th east was now up 6 fathoms. Nevertheless, it seemed that some lodes became poorer as time went on and the total ore returns were not as good as expected. Paull then mentions a water-wheel being erected. In a letter to Murchison of 6th January 1872 he tells of this new 48 feet wheel being in operation with all necessary appliances for pumping. Its erection had been a very tough job as the wheelpit and most of the “lobby” had to be cut out of the rock and the stones for building were “very small, difficult and expensive to get”. The new line of rods stretched over 215 fathoms and the installation had required a lot of timber for the launders. The water rose to the 80th while the old rods were removed and the bobpit at the shaft built. The engine shaft was timbered down to the 104 fathom level and a new lift fixed.

At the 4th Ordinary General Meeting of 4th April 1872 the death on 3rd September 1871 of one of the company directors, William Tuxford, Merchant, 106 Upper Thames Street, London was announced. Tuxford had other mining interests as well; he had obtained a lease for a mine in the parish of Maughold in the Isle of Man on 14th June 1867, which he assigned to the East Snaefell Mining Co. Ltd on 29th September 1870. Ore sales at Cwm Brwyno had increased for the year to 190 tons of lead and 82½ tons of blende, for a total return of £2508. The dues on the ore amounted to £167. It would appear that there were no regular customers for their ore because this time the lead ore was sold to Sims, Wilyams & Co. and the blende to Delwyn & Co., who presumably paid the best prices. The 48 feet water-wheel, erected under contract by M. Ellis & Son, had cost £210. A further call of £1 had been made on 2400 shares while the call arrears came to a hefty £1183. The yearly cost of running the mine including general expenses was £4230, which resulted in a loss of £1722, the mine still being far from paying for itself.

In 1873 the mine was still hard at work with Paull reporting on 11th March to Murchison that on “Setting-Day Saturday last” the following bargains had been let: the 104th to drive west of winze to six men at 190/- per fathom (1¼ tons of lead ore per fathom); the same level east of engine shaft to 6 men at 165/- (1112 tons); the stope over the 104th east of shaft to 6 men at 67/6 (18 cwt); the stope over the same level 5 fathoms east of the shaft to 4 men at 65/- (12 cwt); the cross-cut to drive south near present end of 92nd west to 6 men at 170/-; the stope over the 80th for 20 fathoms west of the cross-cut north to 4 men at 67/6 (18 cwt); the stope over the same level 55 fathoms west of shaft to 4 men at 100/- (16 cwt); the winze below the 80th west to 4 men at 220/-; the stope over the 56th east to 4 men at 72/6 (18 cwt). Thus, over 40 men worked the bargains at the same time.

While Paull still speaks of improvements and better yields round the corner – just as he did four years previously – it is clear that John Taylor & Sons had taken out all the large and rich ore bodies. Their ore returns were in fact double those of the new owners (314½ tons of ore on average per year against 158½

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tons) and, also very important, Taylors got paid for an average of 466 ounces of silver per year while Murchison's company only had a total silver yield of 400 ounces in its seven years of activity. Thus, the Cefn Brwyno Mining Co. was doomed and its fate sealed with the liquidation in 1875.

(Sources: Company papers; *Memoirs of the Geological Survey Vol XX*; David Bick: *The Old Metal Mines of Mid- Wales*, Parts 2, 3 and 4; *Mineral Statistics of Cardiganshire*; leases and assignments).

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FORM OF APPLICATION FOR SHARES.

TO THE DIRECTORS OF THE CEFN BRWYNO MINING COMPANY, LIMITED.

GENTLEMEN,

Having paid to your credit at the NATIONAL PROVINCIAL BANK, the sum of £ 22 being ~~22~~ 22 10s per Share on _____ Shares in the above Company, I hereby request that you will allot me that number, and I agree to become a Member of the Company in respect of such Shares, or in respect of any less number you may allot me, and to execute the Articles of Association when required; and I request that my name may be placed on the Register of Members for the Shares so allotted.

Name in full _____

Residence _____

Profession or Business _____

Date _____

RECEIPT.

Received this _____ day of _____ 1879, the Sum _____ of _____ Pounds, being a Deposit of 10s. per Share on _____ Shares in "THE CEFN BRWYNO MINING COMPANY, LIMITED."