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THE PENRHYNDEUDRAETH LEAD MINING COMPANY LTD.

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SYNOPSIS

References to mines and mining sometimes crop up in unlikely places and are often scattered far from the original geographical location. Here, the writer adds a little more to the history of a somewhat obscure mining operation which once flourished in the hills of Merioneth.

A volume in the writer's collection records something of the Victorian history of the Merionethshire company's activities in the production of lead and significant quantities of silver, at Bwlch-y-plwm Mine, close to Llanfrothen church. Little has hitherto been known of the mine's story at this period, and there are no references to this company in the Register of Defunct Companies – which suggests it having been a private company – nor in the indexes to *The Times* at the period of its first mention in the volume under consideration. However, the *Mineral Statistics* volume for 1876 records its production in that year of some 29½ tons of lead ore, 22 tons of lead and 110 oz of silver; the mine was then one of only three returning their production figures from Merionethshire, and John Edwards was its Agent. The same *Statistics* volume also lists the company as owning the Penrhyndeudraeth and Llanfrothen mines, of which C. Whitford was the Agent.

The mines are alluded-to in this Society's publication J.R. Foster-Smith's *The Mines of Merioneth*, 1977, in the following terms:-

Llanfrothen Ph.	SH/627415	(Upper workings)
	SH/624412	(Lower workings and new mill)

This is a fairly substantial mine in which seven veins are said to occur, though only two of them have been of any importance. The main vein strikes about east and west, while the other vein of importance strikes about north and south, the veins intersecting in the workings of the mine. The country rocks are slates and volcanic rocks of Ordovician age. The mine was worked primarily for lead ore, but some copper ore is also known to occur, while sphalerite is recorded in the north and south striking vein and occurs widely in the material lying on the dumps by the new mill. The principal gangue mineral in all the veins is quartz, sometimes of a pink colour, while calcite also occurs fairly commonly.

First working seems to have been in 1577 and later in the 1680s.

The mine was at work at various times between 1849 and 1875, during which period the production of 355 tons of lead ore cones. is recorded. In 1874, 2,150 ounces of silver were recovered from 112 tons of lead. The mine was reopened by the Union Zinc Co. Ltd about 1916-7, and a new mill was erected at this time, but the operation did not survive the slump in metal prices in 1921 and has remained inactive since that time.

The Geological Memoir on the lead and zinc ores of North Wales by Bernard Smith, published in 1921, contains much of the above information and comments further (inter alia) on a 600 yard adit. An adit entrance close to the Llanfrothen church can be seen today, and the mine was in fact quite close to the old sea shore line. In an old wall (as against later mine walls) close to the adit, the present writer found what seems possibly to be a used hammers tone, suggesting an early date for working here; David Bick reports in his *The Old Copper Mines of Snowdonia* (new edition, 1985) that the mine, a lead mine, had a part known as Roman Works, and allusion is made below to a reference to "Roman" works in our Victorian ledger.

The "Time Book" which has survived has print-headed pages listing number, name, occupation, days worked, rate per day and total cost for each four-week period of six days each: it begins in 9.1875 and ends in 1.1879. The used portion occupies only a small part of the volume. The employed men's names are arranged under occupational headings: in 9.1875 there were six miners in No 1 shaft (at 3s 10½d a day) and three in No 2 shaft (at 3s 8d), while seventeen more were employed, on Mondays only, in "Pumping Water", a situation which continued until 11.1875. There were eight labourers at from 3s to 3s 6d a day, and on the dressing floors eight men at from 3s to 3s 8d. Absenteeism was low. A joiner joined the staff in 11.1875 and in the following month No 1 shaft was apparently finished, and work was begun on a cross-cut and on an East level, with six miners in each and a further six in the No 2 shaft.

Two of the labourers appear in the new guise of waggoners from the end of 1875, and air pipes were put in and rails unloaded early in 1876, and a tram road laid in 3.1876. But from 1.1876 the number of employees diminished markedly, even though six men were kept at work in the Cross Cut and two men in "Stoping &c". Crusher rollers were got to work in 5.1876 and four men started to sink in the bottom of an old stope. By the end of 1876 the Cross Cut was still being driven, but probably now by contract work, as no wages are entered alongside the names which are listed, while a little work was being done in No 2 winze. Lead was weighed, and taken away in carts, which also brought in coal. M.H. Whitford came as Agent to the mine in 2.1877, at a salary of £7 per four weeks, and more work probably began – certainly there was driving west on the Lower Vein, with two men. In 7.1877, six men as David Jones & Company, "Commenced at the Bar" at daily wages of 4s, driving the Cross Cut, but their pay (or perhaps only that method of payment) disappeared from 9.1877. Trimming, smith work (paid at 30s each four weeks), new air pipes were among the items of expenditure, and at the end of 1877 Edward Price & Company contracted to drive the Cross Cut for two fathoms at £7 per fathom. The Festiniog Railway was paid 2s 3d early

in 1878, probably in connection with the carriage of a ton of coals, which cost £1.

Work on the Cross Cut began again, although only for a fortnight, at day wages, in 5.1878, and David Jones continued tramping at day wages into 1.1879. In that month, Mark Davey & Company (two men) took “air Pipes out from the Romans and putting (sic) the same in X Cut”, and day work was done “Driving on branch” until Monday 6.1.1879, when apparently all work stopped. Subsequently, a note was made of the loose materials about the mine: timber and steel consisted of 42 pieces of old oak, two bars of 7/8 steel, and miners’ tools, shovels, etc.

Doubtless a combination of rising prices in a time of national depression, poor results and the unwillingness of shareholders to invest in such circumstances, combined together to defeat whatever prospects The Pentyndeudraeth Lead Mining Co. Ltd. might ever have possessed.

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