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## WHO DISCOVERED DEVON GREAT CONSOLS?

Justin Brooke

It is generally accepted that Josiah Hugo Hitchins was the moving force behind the attempt to find copper ore at North Bedford Mines in 1844. This note seeks to record the attempts made after his death to take the credit for the discovery. As is well known, the mine was later named Wheal Maria as a compliment to Mrs. Hitchins, then Great Wheal Maria, and shortly after this the whole property became known as Devonshire Great Consolidated. After a reorganisation of the company in 1872 it adopted the title by which the mine is now known, Devon Great Consols.

Josiah Hugo Hitchins was born in 1807, the son of Jedu Hitchins senior, at one time mineral agent to the Duke of Bedford and to the Buller family of Morval. In a letter to the Mining Journal in 1876 he stated that he had discovered the mine, and that 'the lease was obtained for the Messrs. Thomas, Morris and Gard, gentlemen of high standing in London ..... two of whom are yet living.' No one came forward to dispute this statement.

'The Columbus of Mining', Josiah Hugo Hitchins died in April 1892. In an editorial published in December 1893 the Mining World stated it had been claimed by the company that the discovery of the mine was due to 'Captain Clemo and his brother'. This could have been a reference to Captains William and John Clemo, who were employed as agents at the mine from about 1860, the former as underground manager and the latter in charge of timber and pitwork. A Silas Clemo worked at North Bedford Mines in its early stages, and on 19th August 1844, less than a fortnight after work had started on deepening the old shaft, he borrowed candles from the adjoining Bedford United Mines. In October 1899 the Mining World reported that Captain William Clemo (the manager of the mine from 1891) claimed he had worked on the mine since the age of seven, having started work there exactly fifty-five years earlier, and that in company with his brother (in 1899 head pitman) and a cousin made the first discovery that made the mine famous.

On the occasion of the formal closure of the mine in December 1901, Edward Horswill claimed in a newspaper interview that his brother, the late Henry Horswill, who as accountant had attended a pay-day at Holmbush Mine (at Kelly Bray, near Callington), 'was walking over Hingston Down with Captain Frank Phillips, chief agent of Holmbush Mine, when Mr. Horswill observed to Captain Phillips, pointing in the direction where Devon Great Consols was subsequently discovered, 'There's a great mine over there unworked'. Mr. Henry Horswill, his brother, the late Mr. Thomas Horswill (then purser at Bedford United Mines) and Captain James Phillips, the resident agent at Bedford United, talked the matter over, and decided to apply for the sett. They did so, and obtained it. Then they offered it to Captain Josiah Hitchens (sic), who started the mine.'

How much of this is true? As early as January 1844 Josiah Hugo Hitchins reported on the North Bedford Mines in glowing terms: 'It is my firm conviction that it is

## WHO DISCOVERED DEVON GREAT CONSOLS?

abounding, to a dead certainty, in metalliferous mineral deposits and resources - more so by far than any other in this great mining district ....' He then joined with William Alexander Thomas and four of the latter's London colleagues to obtain a lease of the property. They formed a cost-book company to which Hitchins became managing director. About 1844 Hitchins abandoned the post of manager of Holmbush [21] Mine, which he had held from 1838. At that mine he was assisted from about 1838 to 1843 by an agent named Captain Francis Phillips. Thomas Horswill became clerk at Bedford United about 1849, and did not become purser there until 1864. Captain Henry Horswill was agent at Gawton Mine in 1852, and the writer has no trace of any other Henry Horswill who included among his activities those of an accountant, a term then used in the mining industry to mean a clerk who kept the company's books. Captain James Phillips, manager of Bedford United Mines from 1842 to 1871 applied unsuccessfully in February 1843 for the sett (lease) of Wheal Fremator, or roughly the southern half of what later became Devon Great Consols. His application was sent to John Hitchins, Josiah Hugo's elder brother, who had succeeded his father Jehu as mineral agent to the Duke of Bedford, the mineral lord of Bedford United and other adjoining properties. Lastly, what professional man would have braved the elements to walk the eight miles from Holmbush Mine to Tavistock, when a horse, or a carrier's cart, or a stage coach, would have made the journey more rapidly and in greater comfort?

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