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VIGNETTE ON DRUID MINE IN DEVON

by Rolf von Arx

The old Druid Mine is situated 1¼ miles NW of Ashburton (Devon OS 108SE) near the eastern corner of Ausewell Wood, adjoining the road from Ashburton to Ausewell Cross. The origin of Druid Mine is unknown, but, for its apparent total failure, it had a rather chequered life. The first news stems from the *Mining Journal*. It seems that Druid Mine was leased to J.H. Arundell in 1853 by the owner of the Druid Estate, John Sparke Amery, and then renamed Arundell Mine. The company was called Arundell United Copper Mines and worked on the costbook principle (in 10,000 parts or shares of £1 each). Arundell acted as secretary and purser and maintained a London office at 26 New Bridge Street, Blackfriars. He was also the driving force behind the Devon Tin Mines, formed in January 1853, which was working the Old Brimpts Mines on Dartmoor. It appears that he was well ahead of his time in his social attitude towards his miners as he instituted a benevolent fund and a library for them and had plans for miners' housing. When there had been no serious accidents during the year, a portion of the fund was distributed "*in a genial way*" to the workmen at the regular Christmas suppers in the hall of Druid Manor, to which the adventurers of the Company contributed the food together with warm clothing for the men.

By September 1854 an engine house had been built on Druid Hill, forming a prominent feature of the landscape. Two shafts, Williams' and Watson's, were being sunk and the new Queen Victoria Shaft had just been started. This event was celebrated with a two shillings' gift to each miner and a goodly flow of strong ale. Not surprisingly, "*the toasts were drunk with loud cheering*". Only a year later, however, the cheers came to an abrupt end with the failure of the company's bankers Strahan, Paul & Co. in The Strand. One of the bank's three partners, Robert Makin Bates, was a shareholder in Devon Tin Mines and possibly also in Arundell United Copper Mines. Operations were suspended in autumn 1855. A year later, the company had already been reorganised under the name of Arundell Copper Mining Co. Ltd, but the closing years of the decade saw J.H. Arundell at the end of his tether and he disappeared from the scene.

A new company soon was in the offing. Landowner Amery had entered into negotiations with the Devon New Copper Mining Co. Ltd, which had been incorporated on November 9th 1858. A lease was drawn up, dated June 4th 1860, encompassing the Druid Estate and the fields near Borough Wood, but specially excepting the Borough Wood Estate, the Lower Bradley Estate and also Druid House, Druid Cottage "*with the courtlages, outhouses, shrubberies, gardens, farm buildings and appurtenances belonging thereto*" respectively belonging to the plantation behind Druid House as far as the top of Kitty Park. Also excepted were the six fields called the Paddock in front of the house, Lower Moor Cottage Meadow, Higher Moor, Water Turn, Kings

VIGNETTE ON DRUID MINE IN DEVON

THE ARUNDELL UNITED COPPER MINES,
IN THE
PARISH OF ASHBURTON, DEVONSHIRE.

On the Cost Book Principle.

In Ten Thousand Parts or Shares of One Pound each

CERTIFICATE OF SHARES.

No. ~~5924~~ ¹/₁₀ to No. ~~5945~~ ¹/₁₀ Inclusive.
of 3651 to 3654

London, 17th March 1854

This is to Certify that Twenty nine Shares
numbered as above have been duly transferred to Robert
Brown Younger Esq and registered,
To be subject to the Rules and Regulations which are entered in the Cost Book.

Witness to the Signature of
the Secretary and Purser:
C. Edwards

J. H. Arundell

Secretary,
and
Purser.

OFFICES, NO. 28, NEW BRIDGE STREET, BLACKFRIARS, LONDON

Close and Kitty Park, and the orchards, meadows and pasture fields on the estate which were not to be used at surface for mining operations without consent of J.S. Amery. The lease was for 21 years, with covenant of further seven years, at a yearly rent of £40 in quarterly payments on Michaelmas Day, Christmas Day, Lady Day and Midsummer Day, or - whichever amounted to more - 1/20 of mine proceeds. No buildings were allowed which would intercept the views and prospect from the Mansion. The mine was to be worked by a minimum force of one manager and six miners.

The property had been acquired for £15,000 in fully-paid shares, plus a cash sum of £1000 for the engine. Owing to financial straits, work was briefly suspended in October 1860, but resumed next spring. The Great North Lode assayed 9 ounces per ton of silver, 3 1/8% nickel, 3/4% cobalt and 1 1/2% bismuth at the 58 Fathom Level, but no copper. By summer 1861 the Engine Shaft was down to the 78 Fathom Level where spots of yellow copper ore were encountered. At this time 36 miners were employed, but no sales of ore were recorded. The considerable outlay of £15,000 had soon exhausted the Company's finances and it went into liquidation in 1863.

The mine then lay idle until 1866, when it was bought by the Druid Mining Co. Ltd for £4000. This company soon started negotiations for a new lease with J.S. Amery. It was represented by the solicitors Loxley & Morley of 80 Cheapside, London E.C. who, on January 25th 1867, suggested to Amery's

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solicitor and nephew, Thomas Y. Windrall of Totnes, that the Druid Mining Co. should be the lessees. A few days later they sent Windrall a list of the Company's share holders:-

- James Henry Morley, 11 Friday St., London, Merchant
- James Morley, Greenstreet House, East Ham, Essex, Gentleman
- John Lee Morley, 5 Tokenhouse Yard, London, Stock Broker
- Philip Wanostrocht, Lancaster Place, Strand, London, Gentleman
- William Chenhall
- Henry Barton, Highfield, Rock Ferry, Cheshire
"the present manager of the mine"
- Reginald Piper, Woodford, Essex, Gentleman.

Amery informed his nephew on February 4th 1867 that the draft lease was at hand and the lessees were *"very sanguine about the affair and I hope they will continue to be so"*. At the end of the month he sent the draft to Windrall, observing that a few minor alterations had been made and that, if requested, the lease could be extended to a full 21 years (the term was presumably based on the date of June 24th 1860 from the last lessees). The negotiations continued and, on November 14th 1867, Amery wrote to Windrall that *"John"* had given him a sketch of the setts with the pink coloured parts excepted. The starting term of Christmas 1866, as proposed by the lessees,

NEW VICTORIA SOUTH DEVON MINING COMPANY LIMITED
 CAPITAL, £20,000.
 IN TWENTY THOUSAND SHARES OF ONE POUND EACH

Nº 171

This is to Certify that *Charles Stanley Osborne*
of *Great Garden St. White Chapel* is the Proprietor of
~~*171798 to 171799*~~ Shares of ONE POUND each
fully paid up. Numbered ~~*171798 to 171799*~~
in the *New Victoria (South Devon) Mining Company Limited*, subject to the
Articles of Association, and the Rules and Regulations of the said Company.

Given under the Common Seal of the said Company,
this *16th* day of *March* 18*71*

William Booth
John Thomas
John

SECRETARY

DIRECTORS

WINDRALL & CO. SOLICITORS
 4, MARKET STREET, TOTNES

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was acceptable and the (complicated) water clauses could be omitted as objections had been raised. Arguments were then made by Loxley & Morley about the sett sketch concerning surface mining and areas restricted to underground work, which did not agree with the old lease. One case in point was sett 6 in the Rew Estate. On November 18th 1867, Amery reported to his nephew that he had dropped some fields situated at a distance from the setts and put in others adjoining which he had recently purchased. The mining cottage was also taken by the company at £20 p.a. and this could be included in the lease. After some more matters had been ironed out, Amery sent the signed lease to Windrall on February 22nd 1868, with the remark that the “*workings at the mine do not appear very flourishing*”. He expressed fear that the company would not carry out its engagement and complained that some important parts of the mine were not worked at all. The company seal was annexed to the lease on February 24th 1868. The Druid Mining Co. was no more successful than its predecessors, however, and, after having spent £6500 in developing the shallower parts of the mine, stopped operations after barely three years.

Although no ore from the mine had been sold in over 15 years of activity, there were still those who believed that, with the right kind of strategy, success was just round the corner. In 1869 the New Victoria (South Devon) Mining Co. Ltd was constituted with a capital of £20,000. Among the directors were William Cobbett and William Simons, with John G. Barry as secretary. They replaced the unsatisfactory engine with a stronger one and explored the deeper levels. However, the company must have thrown in the towel soon afterwards as all news of the mine ceased and its shares were no longer listed in the *Mining Journal* by 1870.

SOURCES

Jenkin, A.K.H. *Mines of Devon: North & East of Dartmoor* (Exeter: Devon Library Services, 1981) pp.111-116 (The writer believes AKHJ was in error by implying that J.S. Amery was the driving force behind the social attitude towards the miners. He obviously was not aware that there was a Mr Arundell - he did not question why the mine name was changed - who gave the name to the Company. If Amery had been the major shareholder the name would hardly have been changed to Arundell while he was the master of the Druid Estate. That is not to say that the miners' supper for reasons of space could not have taken place in the hall of the Manor House.).

Dines, H.G. *The Metalliferous Mining Region of South West England* (HMSO, 1956) p.736f plus XXXV/XXXVI.

Bird R. & Hirst, P. “The Brimpts Tin Mines” *DTRG Newsletter* No.8 (1995), pp.8-11.

Draft Lease dated June 4th 1860.

Private Correspondence (Amery's letterhead shows the single embossed word Druid. There is some doubt about the correct spelling of “Windrall”. It variously looks like Windratt, Windeate, and Windeatt.)

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