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THE RULES OF THE LEADHILLS MINING COMPANY

W.S. Harvey

Leadhills is an isolated moorland village in the south west corner of Lanarkshire, and both it and the neighbouring village of Wanlockhead have a history of lead mining going back at least to the 17th Century.

The Leadhills Mining Company was formed by two Leith merchants who leased a part of the mining grounds in 1828, and who were soon in conflict with the Scots Mining Company, the major operator, over water rights. Some time about 1840 the latter company embarked on litigation that was to last almost 20 years, and was to inhibit any development of the mines during that time. Eventually, the 'Scots Mining Company abandoned their lease, and in 1861 the Leadhills Mining Company took over the whole of the mining operations.¹

The Leadhills Mining Company not only brought fresh capital, but also a fresh enthusiasm to the mines. In a contribution to an account of that part of Lanarkshire, John Raven, the mine manager, wrote that the company intended to pursue the mining with "a vigour hereto unknown in lead mining": that they intended to spend £45,000 on building a tramway through the workings, and would install the biggest water pressure engine in Scotland to enable the deeper veins to be worked.²

It could be expected that such technical innovations would be allied to changes in labour relations, and this may have led to the formal setting out of conditions of contract between the company and the men. It is not known if the previous company, the Scots Mining Company, had any such formal rules. They had started operations in Leadhills in 1739, a time when Scottish miners were bound to their employers for life, so it seems unlikely.³

The Leadhills Mining Company's rules were set out in two columns in a notice measuring 13½ inches wide by 16½ inches long, an example of which has survived to the present time (1971).

Rules of particular interest to the writer are those concerned with the working of bargains. The bargain system of setting the men's earnings was a form of piecework widely used in metalliferous mining, and it had been employed at Leadhills since before 1739, for a bargain book for that year is among the collection in the Leadhills Miners' Library. A bargain was essentially a contract with a group

of miners to do a given amount of work for a given rate of payment and an anonymous Victorian writer described the arrangement as one in which the miner “shared the success or failure of the enterprise with the proprietors”. But, whatever its advantages, the system had the disadvantages common to all forms of piece-working in that there was an incentive to work only for a short term profit, a temptation to work carelessly, and to try to defraud the mining company by being paid for work not done, or by over-valuing ore. Indeed an unknown Cornish Miner is alleged to have claimed that on the whole art of mining is fooling the captains”.⁴

One hundred years before the Leadhills Mining Company had set out their rules, the overseers of the Scots Mining Company had set bargains which exhorted the men to “... work this bargain fair before them and to hide no ore in sight at the end of the bargain” and “... they oblige themselves to do no harm to the level” and again “they are to damnify no principal drifts or waygates ..”.⁵

Nevin clearly had similar problems in mind when he made his rules, for Rule IV requires that the mining shall be properly and securely carried out, and that the ground shall be left open so that the agents could assess the quality of the vein. The penalties for attempting any fraud were severe.

Careless work meant that ore could be left among the deads, but it was not unknown for the miners to deliberately hide ore in the workings, and then bring it up when a better bargain had been obtained.⁶ Rule V shows that While the first offence of this kind would get the benefit of the doubt and receive a fine, the next time it happened the value of the ore left was forfeited.

In the company’s view, it was as serious an offence to take ore from another heap, as it was to take it from another miner. Because there was a considerable delay before the ore was smelted, the heaps could lie on the bank for months on end, and there was then a temptation to move ore from one heap to another rated as of different quality and of a higher value. There had been at least one case of a miner being tried for this as a criminal offence, and Nevin makes it clear that any miners doing this would be severely punished.⁷

While a bargain might be set for clearing deads, Nevin makes it clear that when this was not the case, the miners were expected to clear the ground and thus not hinder the work of those coming after them.

Curiously, the rules make no mention of the times of the miners shifts. James Stirling, the celebrated manager of the Scots Mining

THE RULES OF THE LEADHILLS MINING COMPANY

Company in the mid 18th Century, had introduced a six hour shift, but in 1864 the surface workers at least, had a 10 hour day, and a 56 hour week. And, for some at least, much of their free time of a Saturday would be spent making a return of the work they had done and drawing subsistence money.

One of the worst features of the bargain system was that a partnership might not get paid until the bargain had been wholly completed. In the 18th and early 19th Centuries this could mean that a bargain set per ton of smelted lead would be paid only when the lead was smelted perhaps years hence, the prime result was that the miners got hopelessly into debt.^{5,7}

Nevin wrote² that the men had a “liberal wage of 15/- per week”, presumably an average figure and one that is similar to wages in the Pennine and Welsh mines at that time.^{8,9}

Drunkenness, even in the village, was seen as a relatively serious offence warranting a fine of 5/-, while “uncivil language” – a wide term-incurred immediate dismissal. This points to the strict one might say oppressive, discipline imposed by the mining company. Indeed the paternal influence of the rules might be summed up in a comment made about the miners of the area to the Truck Commission in 1871: “(they) live under the constant impression that to offend the manager would be to commit a very great wrong”.

**General Rules,
binding between the
Leadhills Mining Company and their Workmen,
at
Leadhills Lead Mines.**

There will be held at these mines one or more Bargain Days in each Quarter, and all Men employed shall be subject to the following rules.

- I. Every man, who takes a Bargain, will be required to work it regularly, for the full time specified in his contract, or should he think proper to give up his contract, he shall forfeit all work done in the said Bargain; and every man, who does not commence his work at the time appointed, or leaves it before his specified time is expired, shall be fined 2s 6d for each offence.
- II. One man from each Partnership, shall attend at the Store-houses at or before three o'clock on each Monday afternoon, throughout the bargain, to obtain Candles, Gunpowder, Oil, Grease, Steel, Iron, and such Work-tools as may be required during the ensuing

week; and no materials will be delivered at any other time than as above specified, excepting timber, which will be given out by the agents when required. Any one taking Wood, or other Materials without orders from the Agents, shall be fined 2s 6d for each offence.

- III. All contracts to be per ton of ore, or per fathom of ground, or per a certain sum for the work performed, Levels and Drifts per lineal fathom of 6 feet. Headings and Stopes per fathom of 144 feet, viz; 6 feet in length by 6 feet in height and by vein width or (of) 4 feet. Should it be necessary to work out the vein more than 4 feet in width, the extra width over and above 4 feet to be paid by cubic fathom at the same rate.
- IV. All Levels. must be driven seven feet high by four feet wide, and at a gradient of 1 in 300 unless otherwise specified in the Bargain, and shall be properly secured where timber may be required. All workings for ore shall be carried out in a proper manner, and agreeably to the Agents' directions and every part of the ground where practicable, shall be left open for examination and measurement before the Bargain day. Should the Agents discover that any marks necessary for measurement have been concealed or removed, the takers shall forfeit half the amount of their Bargain for the first offence; and for the second shall be excluded from working in these Mines, and forfeit to the Lessees all monies due to them at the time.
- V. All men working for ore will be required to properly separate the Bouse from the deads, and draw the same separate. Should they neglect to do so, or leave any ore in the workings, they shall forfeit to the Lessees of these mines for the first offence 2s 6d each, and for the second, the full value of the ore either left in the workings or drawn to the bank along with the deads.
- VI. If any man be known to take ore from another person, or from, any other heap or place than where he is working, or has a Bargain, he will be excluded these Mines, and shall forfeit to the Lessees all ores and monies due to him at the time of detection.
- VII. All Takers will be required to clear their ground of ore and deads at the end of every bargain, or whenever directed by the Agents. Should they neglect or refuse to do so, to the injury of the Mines, or inconvenience of others, they shall forfeit to the Lessees double the cost of clearing them out

THE RULES OF THE LEADHILLS MINING COMPANY

- VIII. No shots to be fired at anytime, without proper warning being given, and on the measuring days, no blasting to be allowed in the working of any partnership, until the ground of that partnership is measured off, under a fine for each offence of 2s 6d.
- IX. Any workman, leaving open any of the trapdoors, or wilfully doing any other thing, by which the ventilation of the Mines may be impaired, shall forfeit 2s 6d for the first offence, 5s for the second, and for the third will be discharged these mines, and forfeit all monies due to him.
- X. All partnerships, whose workings are dependant upon the Pumping engines, will be required in their turns to assist the Engineers in changing the buckets, without any remuneration, and also to assist when any repairs or alterations are required, to the Pumping or Drawing engines, or other Machinery in connection with their workings, whenever called upon by the Engineers, under the following conditions, viz: if the time occupied is under three hours, to attend gratis; if three hours and upwards, to be paid at the rote of 4d. per hour. Any one refusing to attend as above when required, will be fined for each offence 2s 6d.
- XI. All Work-Tools and Materials of every description, required by workmen at these mines, shall be paid for by them, excepting timber, Waggon). Hurleys, Kibbles, Barrows, Ropes, and Rails. Any one wilfully or carelessly damaging any of the above excepted articles, shall pay the cost of repairing the same.
- XII. Any man, known to take coals, wood, or materials of any description, to carry to his house for fuel or other purposes without leave, shall be prosecuted as the law directs. And should the wife or children of any of the workmen take coals, wood, or other materials, as above mentioned, the man will be excluded these mines, as though he had done it himself.
- XIII. All surface workmen and Boys shall work as follows:- Joiners, Blacksmiths, and Washers, shall work ten hours per day for five days per week, and six hours on Saturday, commencing at 7 o'clock A.M., with an hour's interval at noon, and leaving at 6 o'clock P.M., on each day, except on Saturday, when they shall work continuously from 7 o'clock A.M., to 1 o'clock P.M. Masons, Surface Labourers, and Carpenters, shall work Ten hours on every day they are employed, commencing at 7 o'clock A.M. with an hour's interval at noon, and leaving at 6 o'clock P.M. Anyone not being ready to commence work when the Bell rings, will lose a quarter day, and if anyone should leave

before the full time is expired, he shall forfeit double the value of the time lost.

- XIV. All Surface Workmen and Boys, as well as those underground working by day or shift, will be required to give in their work weekly, between the hours of 4 and 6 P.M. each Saturday at the Office, when attendance will be given for that purpose. Any one neglecting to give in his work at the above mentioned - time and place, shall forfeit the some.
- XV. Subsistence at the rote of 2s per day or shift will be advanced on the first Saturdays of the last two months of the Quarter, and the balance paid on the second Saturday succeeding the end of the Quarter, between the hours of 1 and 3 o'clock P.M. As a list of the order in which each Partnership or Workman is to come into the Office for payment will be put up for reference, any man not appearing in his proper order, shall wait till all other parties are paid. Those not coming to the Pay-table between the hours of 1 and 3 o'clock P.M. on the day appointed, shall, at the discretion of the Manager, not receive their money until the following pay.
- XVI. Any workman found drunk or disorderly in the village, or coming into the office, Store-houses, Workshops, or Mines, in a state of intoxication, shall be fined 5s for the first offence, 10s for the second, and for the third will be excluded these Mines.
- XVII. Any man using uncivil language to any of the Agents, will be immediately discharged.
- XVIII. All fines will be duely kept in a Box, and handed over at the end of each Quarter to the Treasurer of the Sick Fund, to be applied by the Committee, as they think proper.
- XIX. No workman or any other person will be allowed to enter the Workshops, Wood-yard, Washing-floors, Smelting Works, Sheds, or other erections, except on business, or with leave from the Agents.
- XX. In order to guard against accidents, all workmen will be required to point out to the Agents, any part of the Mines, Way-gates, Shafts, &c, where they are working, or have to pass through to or from their work, that is in a dangerous condition or out of repair, so that the same may be put right with as little delay as possible.

By Order of the Leadhills Mining Company, Leadhills Mines Office,
April 1st 1864.

John Nevin, Manager.

THE RULES OF THE LEADHILLS MINING COMPANY

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