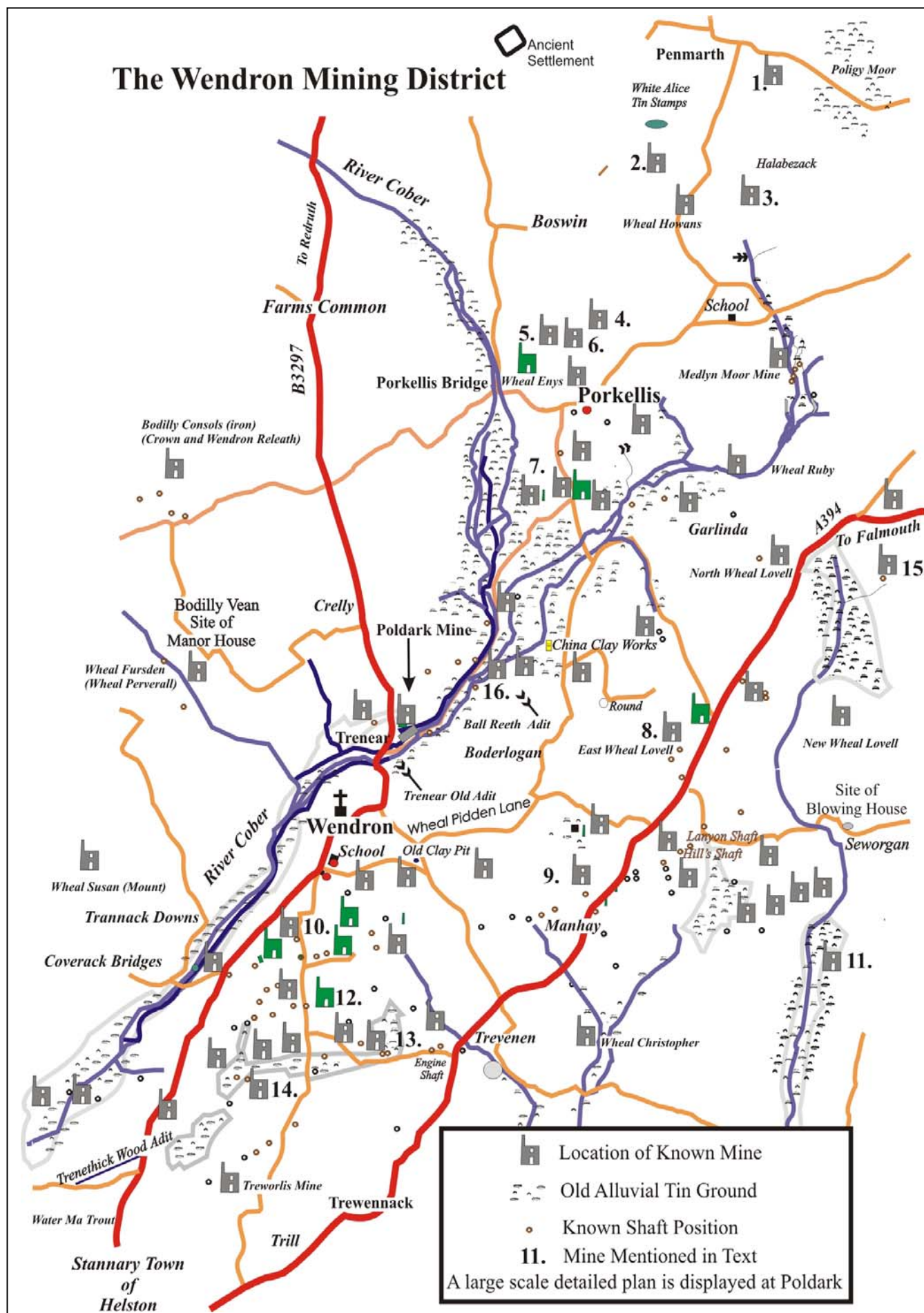


Poldark Mine

The Wendron Mining District – Overview and notes

This file is in the process of being enlarged and update



The Wendron Mining District

Today the parish of Wendron is a rolling landscape of green fields and moor land cut through by the wooded Cober Valley, a tranquil country scene apparently unspoilt by industrial activity. If we could travel back in time then a completely different scene would unfold for the Parish is one of the oldest mining districts in Cornwall and the Cober Valley was the most important source of alluvial tin in west Cornwall from prehistory until medieval times.

Rich in the rounded pebbles of heavy black cassiterite, the main ore of tin, the alluvials of the River Cober were the scene of intense industrial activity which continued until the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1779 Wendron Parish was the most populated mining district with 9,000 inhabitants - Camborne, Redruth and Illogan had a combined population of 4,400 demonstrating that Wendron was still an important mining district.

The fact that it was an active mining district at a relatively early period with little in the way of published material makes research more difficult than most other districts. Only two books have been written about this mining district: A. K. Hamilton Jenkin's 'Wendron Tin' (commissioned by Poldark) and Justin Brooke's 'Tin Streamers of Wendron'. The mines of the district were noticeably omitted from AKH's earlier works.

Recently acquired records of the District, the account book of Tin Dues Received in the Parish of Wendron by Henry Crease Esq. 1837 – 1845 and the Tribute Setting Book for Wendron Consols Mine 1857 – 1860, are giving an invaluable insight into mining activities within it. Both documents give an account of mining activity in the district at that time and clearly show that it was a hive of activity. It had been thought that by the middle of the nineteenth century working for alluvial tin in Wendron had all but finished however we now know that there were some 40 operations still working and paying dues for the tin recovered from the moors to Henry Crease.

Entries in Henry's records give an invaluable insight into activity in the district with hundreds of entries such as:

July 16th 1839, Received of Zackarias Penaluna of Trenear tin returned from Trenear Moors @ 1/15 on one bill, 7/6

January 28th 1840, Received of Edward Moyle of Buswin tin returned from Porkellis Moor on 3 bills @ 1/15, £1-18-3

July 3rd 1841, Received of William Johns of Penmarth tin returned from Yalow Work Common @ 1/15 on bill, 11/6

The rich alluvials of the moors either side of the hamlet of Trenear, where Poldark is situated, were being worked by four different tin streamers: Zackarious Penaluna of Trenear; Edward Moyle of Buswden; John Penaluna of Trenear and William Pryor of Trenear. At the same time there were tin stamps operating both at Poldark, the Trenear Tin Stamping Mills, and just below Trenear at Selina Stamps.

On Porkellis Moor, where the valley widens on the road from Poldark to Porkellis, the following tin streamers were paying dues to Henry Crease in 1838 for tin recovered from land on that moor: James Moyle of Lezarea, Edward Moyle Jnr. of Porkellis, Peter Moyle of Hendra, Stephen Moyle of Lezarea, John Moyle of Lezarea, Bennett Moyle of Lezarea, Samuel Prisk of Calvadnack, Edward Moyle of Porkellis, Edward Moyle of Buswen, John Grigg of Porkellis, Bennet Moyle of Porkellis, William Bolitho of Porkellis, James Harris of Tremenhear, and William Moyle of Lezarea. With, in addition, mines and tin stamping mills working around the Moor it must have been a hive of activity at a time when many assumed tin production in the district had all but ceased. In all twenty moors in the District were being worked for tin.

Mining activity was also much higher than previously thought. In addition to those mines known to be working at the time long forgotten mines were also working: the Royal Duchy Mine on Halebezack Estate, the only previous record of which was that it sold 3.5 tons of black tin for £169 in 1837 however its location is unknown; Carnkye Mine and Cornwall Great United Mine, neither of which have been previously recorded in published literature; Balcoath Mine, previously recorded as an ancient mine working in 1800, we now know that the mine was still working in 1843, see below; Wheal Ruby Mine, already an ancient mine in 1758, recommenced working in 1843. On 3rd September the Adventurers of the mine sold black tin to the value of £727-10-0 upon which they paid Henry Crease 1/18th dues of £40-8-3; Balmynheer (Balmynea) is recorded as a very ancient mine which reopened in 1864 but was in fact being worked in 1837 when it made payments of dues for tin being produced.

June 3rd 1839 Received of William Lefeaux for tin returned from Balmynea Mine £21-6-2

April 18th 1843 Received from the Tributers of Balcoath (mine) as per account, £24-3-3

It is not possible here to record the many mines of the District and therefore the following are notes on a few.

1. Poligey Moor Mine is described as working from 'time immemorial' by streaming and shallow lode mining.
2. Calvadnack Mine was reopened in 1850 having been worked 100 years earlier.



A tin worker at the Glebe Stamps, a small four headed set situated in the valley below Poldark

3. Balmynheer is recorded as a very ancient mine which was working in 1676.

4. Balcoath or Ballcoath was recorded as already working in 1644. It is said to have had the first Newcomen engine in the County C1710-1720. Fueled by turf the engine was later moved to Tregonebris Mine and later to Trevenen Mine. The mine was still working in 1840 for in May of that year Henry Crease paid a bill for timber for the mine of £11-15-0 which had been landed by ship at the small port of Gweek and no doubt came from Norway. He paid Bennet Johns 12 shillings and 10 pence to transport the 175 (cubic) feet of timber to the mine.

Three years later the mine appears to have been worked on tribute as on April 18th 1843 Henry received the first of several payments entered in his records as '*Received from the Tributers of Balcoath as per account £24-3-3*', the following month '*Received from the Tributers at Balcoath as per account £7-18*'.

Balcoath later became part of the Wendron United Mines which also included the setts of Wheal Puffet, Wheal Enys and Boswin Mine. It was here in 1908 when reopening part of the old mine workings that the site of lime setting and a pipe dated 1650 were found. An important discovery which was recorded in the Mining Journal of the time. This is the only evidence found in the County of the practice of Lime Setting in mines. Lime setting predates the use of explosives, a hole is drilled into the rock which is then filled with lime and water added. The hole is sealed and as the lime heats and expands the rock is cracked enabling the miners to break it away. Also discovered were timber supports made of oak, normally never used underground for two reasons. First it was expensive and secondly, when under stress and about to break, unlike pine it gives no warning. Pine is used underground because it has good strength and when about to break gives warning by splintering prior to breaking. There was a tradition and recorded instances of the Wendron miners 'wrecking', recovering items from shipwrecks mainly around the Lizard. It is believed that the timbers were from such a wrecking expedition.

5. Wheal Puffet was described as an ancient mine worked by the old men centuries before when reopened in 1933 as part of the Porkellis Tin Mines. According to Mike Lawrence local people still referred to it as Puffet.

6. Boswin Mine was reopened in 1907 and was one of the first mines in the County to install electricity to supply power. The electricity was supplied by a gas engine using anthracite fuel.

7. The working of Basset and Grylls Mine go back to at least 1574 as the Redde Worke later turned into the Cornish Ball Reeth. It was at this mine on 24th August 1858 that 7 miners were killed when a surface slimes pond collapse into the mine flooding it. This was the worse mining accident recorded in the district.

8. When the Tregonibris Mine was reopened in 1850 a shaft sunk by 'the old men' and worked by means of a water wheel was opened up in the bottom of which were discovered the remains of tools and a wooden lift of pumps.

9. As trading in mining shares developed so did the opportunity for some to gain easy money. It was common, when a mine became rich and was making high returns, for other mines to either change name or for new mines to spring up around them with similar names. Out of County speculators often assumed that a mine named after a successful mine paying high dividends would also strike it rich. The Lovell group of mines is a typical example of this with Wheal Lovell, New Lovell, Great Lovell, East Lovell and Great East Lovell. Great East Lovell was described as 'a swindle got up professedly to work the ground east of East Lovell at the time the Fatwork Mine section of that mine was rich'. Like numerous Wendron mines it was worked by a Helston company formed by Henry Rogers, a solicitor. No lode was ever found but selling its shares Mr. Rogers had struck gold!

10. Another mine working principally for copper at the time was Wheal Franchise. An old mine which was working in 1670 when it was known as Franchus. In 1723 employing 40 miners and selling 18.5 tons of copper ore which sold for £23 per ton plus 3,000 sacks of tin ore, two of which made a 'seam' (horse load). The mine was pumped at one time by a Bull engine.

11. Ninnis Mine was worked by a water wheel, the lode was very flat and easy to walk up and down. Numerous tin veins have been worked in the valleys of this district by ancient tin miners. Cunnack, writing in 1900, stated that 'old miners still speak strongly of the potential, their opinion strengthened by the prevalence of 'ignis fatuus' here known as 'tin lanterns'.

12. Wheal Valls, an ancient mine reopened in 1848 when the lode was for many years the principal support of Trumpet Consols group. It was worked by a 48" engine with wooden beam which previously worked at the nearby Wheal Ann, the engine was not removed until 1889, the very last of its type in Cornwall.

13. Trevenen Mine was described in 1810 as anciently worked by flat rods from a water wheel in the Cober Valley, the mine being described as very rich and working to the 130 fathom level.

14. Ask anyone who claims to know about the mining districts of Cornwall and they will no doubt tell you that the Wendron District did not produce copper. This is certainly not the case as can be seen from the following accounts. Trenethick Wood Mine was described in 1724 as '*an old mine considerably developed, anciently worked for tin which is still found in the upper levels*'. It was being worked at the time for copper which was selling for £15 per ton. 40 tons of ore were recovered

in 6 months and transported to Warrington via Hayle for smelting'. It was at this mine in 1799 that the celebrated Cornish engineer Richard Trevithick installed a plunger pole pump worked by water pressure. Trevithick built the world's first successful steam road locomotive in 1801 and in 1804 the world's first railway, a fact celebrated on the 2004 £2 coin.

15. Great Wheal Lovell has a unique claim to fame as it was the only mine in Cornwall ever to be managed by a woman. Between 1840 and 1845 a Mrs. Lydia Taylor was the Manager, she must have been a formidable lady working in a male environment at a time when women in management were almost unknown.

16. Wendron Consols mentioned in the text above and adjoining and to the east of the Poldark Mine.

The map of the district shows the location of the more important mines. For a more detailed description of the mines of the district see A. K. Hamilton Jenkin's 'Wendron Tin' and for the surface tin stream works Justin Brooke's 'Tin Streamers of Wendron'.

Whilst the miners life was one of hard dangerous work, often in very unpleasant conditions, it was not without 'play time', whilst holidays as we know them did not exist the miners and tin streamers had a tradition of 'feast days' in addition to Christmas and Good Friday. A normal working week was from Monday to Friday with a half day on Saturday. Feast Days varied through the mining districts and included Midsummer Day, St. Peter's Fair, Whit Monday Fair (in later years preceded by a prayer meeting at Gwennap Pit), Feasten Tide, Paul's Tide (January 24th, said to be in celebration of when tin was first turned into the metal), Friday in Lide (the first Friday in March), St. Piran's Day (the Patron Saint of tin miners, March 5th) and numerous others one of which, St. Just Feast continues to be celebrated to this day. In addition few Tributers worked on 'Maze Monday', the Monday after their Saturday pay day. A description of the Wendron Consols Feast, recorded in the pages of the West Briton of 2nd September 1859, being a romantic but good example.

WENDRON CONSOLS FESTIVAL

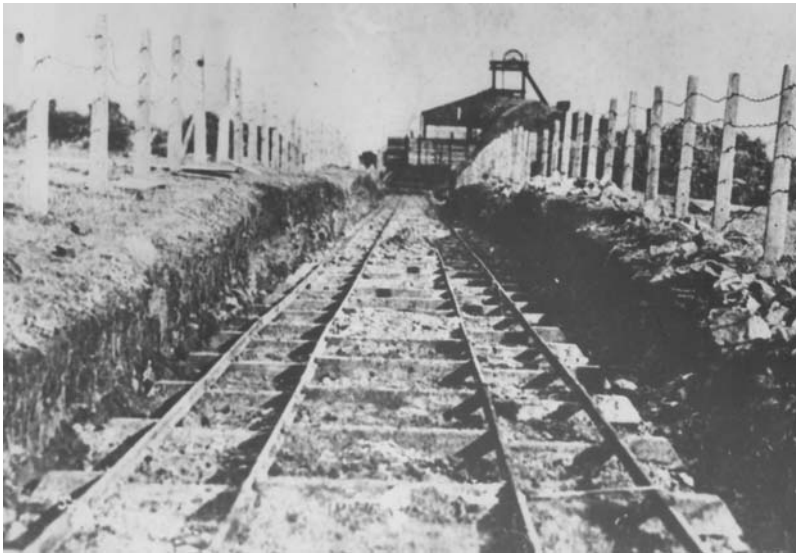
From the church a procession was formed, comprising the agents and persons employed in the mine, with their families and, preceded by the Porkellis Band, they marched to the Account House, where tables were laid and nearly 700 persons sat down. A happier party can scarcely be imagined – there sat the miner with his goodly wife and healthy children – the fine muscular sumpman – the intelligent tributor, and the bold tut-worker, with many a fair bal maiden and those who constitute the stamps pare – all looked grateful and pleased, and even the babe seemed to enjoy the festival by crowing in its mother's arms. After partaking of excellent cake and tea, the grace and doxology were sung, and the band played for some time. The festival concluded with the Flora Dance, when a party comprising many of the youth and beauty of Wendron and Helston danced around the mine. A bonfire and tar barrels lit up the barren moor, and thus terminated a day which afforded great delight to the interested assembly. Refreshments were prepared in the Account House for the wives and daughters of the adventurers and their families.

Wendron Consols was situated to the west of the Poldark site and immediately adjoining it. In 1864 the mine sold 117 tons of Black Tin for £7,153 17 shillings and 6 pence. 184 men, 61 women and 50 boys were employed. The mine was 72 fathoms (150 metres) deep. Its machinery included a 60inch cylinder Cornish Pumping Engine and a 20 inch cylinder winding engine. The tin ores were brought to the Poldark site where they were treated ready for sale to the smelters. All the women were employed above ground in dressing the tin ores. It was not until the 1980's that a woman was employed underground in a Cornish mine, Karla Riekstins a mining graduate of the Camborne School of Mines.

It was not unusual for miners to hold shares in mines, often mines were started by groups of miners and local merchants. Occasionally the shares would become of great value. Starting as a small mine East Wheal Rose at Newlyn East grew into one of the most important and successful silver lead mines in Cornwall. 16 shares had been purchased by William Penrose, a miner, on his death the shares descended to his widow, Juliana, who in one year, 1845, received £6,616 in dividends from them. The average monthly wage for a man at this time was £2 18 shillings and 2 pence (£2.91), Juliana received the equivalent of almost £4 million today!



Boswin Mine circa 1920



Basset and Grylls Mine decline to the dressing floors on Porkellis Moor



Polighey Mine with the aerial ropeway taking ore to the mill



The Whim Engine House of Trumpet Consols with the Pumping Engine House of Wheal Ann in the background