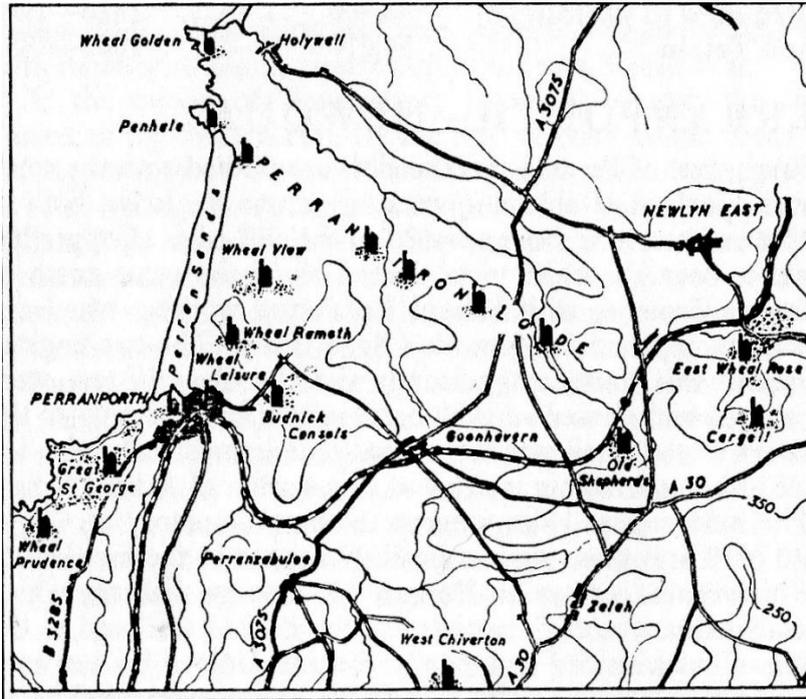


Some Nineteenth Century Lead Mines of Cornwall

Peter Gardner



(map Barton)

Following my piece in the CAV Newsletter No 141 on the movement of Cornish lead miners to the Daylesford district it occurred to me that there were a number of other lead mines in Cornwall in the nineteenth century that deserved a mention. The critical point about the East Wheel Rose being that its decline and closure coincided with the gold rushes in Australia. But with a few short gaps there were lead mines, almost all in the Perranzabuloe district, for most of the century.

In his history of the East Wheel Rose HL Douch wrote “lead was discovered before 1811 when Sir Christopher (Hawkins) granted Richard Oxnam a sett to search for lead, tin and copper in a spot ‘near a field called the Deer Park on Treludda Barton’ and to take up Wheal Mexico adit and carry it to Wheal Deer Park former workings.” Douch noted that much of this land was barren and in 1814 a rich lode was struck near the surface by drainer Anthony Rose on Sir Christopher’s land. He then took the unusual course of developing this mine privately as sole proprietor, which he did for ten years, including constructing and running a lead smelter. The Wheal Rose was also known as ‘Shepherds’ and managed by Samuel Grose* for four years prior to Hawkins letting the mine to adventurers in 1824. Wheal Rose closed in 1832.

The East Wheel Rose was discovered about 1834 and a company, formed about that time, was made up of 128 holders of £50 shares**. The ore body appears to have been an extension of the old Wheal Rose line running east-west. Around 1840 substantial north-south reefs were discovered on which the wealth and fabulous profits of the company were founded; dividends of £20 per share were issued on a quarterly basis and in 1845 the market value of each share was £1500. Throughout the 1840s the East Wheel Rose was the leading lead mine in Britain averaging about 5000 tons of lead ore per annum, worth approximately £60,000. Production fell below 2000 tons in 1851 and the mine closed in 1857. In the 1880s an attempt to reopen

the mine failed, during which the fabulous engine house was built – now at the end of the tourist Lappa Valley Railway.

Overlapping with the East Wheal Rose were the nearby mines of Cargoll and South Cargoll. D.B Barton in his *Guide to the Mines of West Cornwall* noted that “Cargoll and South Cargoll were... worked in the hollow of the downs above East Wheal Rose in the period 1845-1885. Cargoll was originally an unworked section of the East (Wheal) Rose and was at its most prosperous in 1860s after the latter had closed. During this period Cargoll produced approximately 14,000 tons of lead ore.

Besides the East Wheal Rose the other major mine was West Chiverton which operated from 1859 to 1886. Barton noted that the mine was “inland from Perranporth... once (the) important Chiverton lead-mining district, centred about a mile west of Zelah. No less than eight separate mines included the word Chiverton in their names, most of them brief ventures that came into being in the 1860s in a wave of local speculation subsequent upon the richness of West Chiverton.” The total production of West Chiverton over its lifetime was close to that of the East Wheal Rose and some internet sources suggest that it was greater, due primarily to the high silver content of their ore. However as this mine had no smelter they were forced to sell their ore at market prices which declined though the 1870s. The Cornwall Calling website noted that in “1873 West Chiverton sold 2,224 tons of lead ore with an estimated lead content of 1,668 tons of lead and 70,056 oz. of silver. The market value for the metals was £43,201. However, the mine received only £29,929, with the other third of market value going to the merchants and manufacturers. [In the] 1880s a further fall in lead prices virtually finished the industry off in Cornwall.”

Sir Christopher Hawkins was well aware that selling the lead ore involved substantial losses to the mine. His smelter worked for at least five years from 1819 to 1823. During that time the Wheal Rose smelter refined about 3000 tons of lead and more than 120,000 oz of silver, the value of the latter alone was over £30,000. When the mine was let to Adventurers in 1824 they closed the smelter thus becoming dependant on a fluctuating open market with prices of around £12 dropping to £6 16s 6d in 1832 when the mine closed. Aside from the Wheal Rose I am unaware of any other lead smelter operating in conjunction with any of these mines including the large producers.

*a relation of the author – three generations of his family worked in the Wheal Rose and East Wheal Rose.

** John Giddy, former lead smelter at Wheal Rose and brother-in-law to Sam Grose, originally had 33 shares, but he died in 1835 before the rich north-south lodes were discovered.

HL Douch. *East Wheal Rose*, D. Bradford Barton, Truro, 1979

D.B Barton. *Guide to the Mines of West Cornwall* D. Bradford Barton, Truro, 1973

<https://www.cornwall-calling.co.uk/mines/north-cornwall-perranzabuloe/west-chiverton.htm>

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