

By Gordon Tucker

Llanfyrnach was the only metal mine of any importance in Pembrokeshire, and its history and workings have been well-described by G.W.Hall⁽¹⁾. W.J.Lewis⁽²⁾ also gives some historical information which to some extent supplements that given by Hall. An outline of the mine's history is given in Table 1.

My main object here is to show the interest and relevance of the manuscript Census Enumerations, which were made every ten years, and microfilm copies of which, for the censuses of 1841, 1851, 1861 and 1871, are available in the appropriate County Record Offices. These recorded name, age, family relationship, occupation, place of birth, and place of residence, for all people in each parish.

For Llanfyrnach, I have assumed that all workers at the mine resided in the contiguous parishes of Llanfyrnach, Clydau or Penrydd. It is very unlikely that any would reside further away than this. The number of mine workers on this basis is shown for the four censuses in Table 2. It will be seen that in 1841 and 1851 the mine must have been practically idle. Hall suggests the mine was working in between these censuses, but if the level of its activity had been significant, there would surely have been some miners left in the area in 1851.

For the following period, i.e. after 1853, Table 1 indicates a fairly continuous activity, and this is supported by Lewis who states:-

"The most productive period in Llanfyrnach began in 1860 when 230 tons were raised. This was about the time when the mine came into the hands of Thomas Turner, who engaged two very able managers, Captains Patrick and Paull (N.B. Patrick appears in the 1871 Census; he was born in Wolverhampton like his boss Thomas Turner), to develop the underground workings. For about ten years the work produced an average of approximately 300 tons a year; Turner then disposed of the greater part of his holding for £5100 to a London Co. which formed the Llanfyrnach Silver Lead Mining Co. and put Captain Roberts in charge. The mine was then equipped with up to date machinery and the underground galleries greatly improved.

Llanfyrnach continued to do well, with the miners working in three shifts and earning very high wages of 25 shillings a week in the early 70s".

In the light of this it is not surprising to find more mine-workers in the census enumerations of 1861 and 1871. Indeed, the expansion had been very considerable, with 62 workers by 1871 - and it should be borne in mind that these figures are only of those people shown as working at the mine. Many others, such as blacksmiths, labourers, carters, etc, may well have worked there although not stating this in describing their occupation. These returns add very considerably to our understanding of the scale of operation at the mine. The distribution of numbers among the various categories of workers is shown in Table 4; the only point of note is perhaps that there were no female workers in 1861 and only 7 in 1871. The age distribution shown in Table 2 indicates that there was no exploitation of juveniles as cheap labour.

What is very puzzling is where the large extra numbers of mine workers could have come from. In the expansion around 1861 almost half the mine workers, including the two Agents, had come from Cornwall (only one man from Devon). No doubt they injected some skills, but they had all gone away by 1871. Of the 62 workers in 1871 all except one (the Manager) were effectively local; the other one shown as borne elsewhere was merely a young man born in Margam (Glamorgan) while his parents were temporarily there. How were they all recruited and trained? Only four men appear in both 1861 and 1871 lists. I have shown the seven workers who came from Trelech separately, as although this parish is only some four miles from Llanfyrnach, it was also the scene of some lead mining, and probably the seven moved to Llanfyrnach as being a better prospect for already-skilled people. Hall gives a good account of the mining at Trelech⁽³⁾, and suggests it had practically ceased by 1864; this, no doubt, explains the emigration. It is only fair to say that Lewis⁽⁴⁾ gives an entirely different picture of the mining scene at Trelech, but it is not worth discussing the discrepancy here.

In 1981, under the 100 year rule, the Census Enumerations for 1881 will become available. It will be very interesting to see what light these shed on the mining developments.

Quite independently of the Census Enumerations, I have come across another puzzle in the history of Llanfyrnach Mine. In 1855 the machinery at the mine was advertised for sale⁽⁵⁾; the list is given in Table 5. Now Hall states (as I have included in Table 1) that the new Company which took over in 1855 installed a steam engine "which proved totally incapable of coping with the water". The advertisement states that the Sale was because the new Company were going to work by steam. But would any responsible company sell their water wheel before trying out their steam engine? And in any case, why sell all the other equipment, including office furniture? What has that to do with steam pumping? This is indeed a puzzle.

Perhaps I could add another minor discovery, nothing to do with the Llanfyrnach mine, but still in the same district. In an estate advertisement of 1849⁽⁶⁾ I came across the following reference to a Copper mine which Hall does not mention:-

"The Proprietor, a few years ago, discovered a rich lode of Copper Ore on Rhydwen (grid ref. approximately SN143218), which he has partially worked; and a purchaser may, at moderate expense, pursue the undertaking and find it a source of great profit".

I do not know if the workings are now detectable.

My thanks are due to Jonathan Pepler, John Owen, and others at the County Record Office at Haverfordwest for their usual courtesy and help, and also to the staff of the Newspaper Library at Colindale, London.

References

1. G.W.Hall, "Metal Mines of Southern Wales", Westbury-on-Severn, 1971, pp.3-7.
2. W.J.Lewis, "Lead Mining in Wales", Cardiff, 1967, pp.165 and 251.
3. Hall, op.cit., pp.9-12.
4. Lewis, op.cit., p.249.
5. Pembs.Herald., 26 Jan. 1855.
6. Pembs.Herald., 5 Jan. 1849.

TABLE 1

OUTLINE OF HISTORY OF LLANFYRNACH LEAD MINE *

Already working by 1764

Worked by Oliver Lloyd 1844-1851

To let in 1851

Worked by Henry Gibson 1853 - 1855

Worked by a Gravesend Company 1855 - 1858

(who installed inadequate steam engine for pumping)

Worked by another company 1858 - 1861

(who installed Cornish Pumping engine 1860)

Worked by Thomas Turner of Wolverhampton 1861 - 1871

Worked by Lawson and Evans 1871 onwards for many years

* Based on the account given by G.W.Hall, "Metal Mines of Southern Wales", Westbury-on-Severn, 1971, pp.3 - 7.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF MINE WORKERS IN LLANFYRNACH AREA *

(taken to be the parishes of Llanfyrnach, Clydau and Penrydd)

	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>AGE 10-19</u>	<u>20-29</u>	<u>30-39</u>	<u>40-49</u>	<u>Over 50</u>
1841	1	-	-	-	1	-
1851	0	-	-	-	-	-
1861	21	7	4	5	4	1
1871	62	9	16	17	13	7

TABLE 3

ORIGINS OF MINE WORKERS *

	<u>Llanfyrnach Area</u>	<u>Trelech (Carms)</u>	<u>Other local areas</u>	<u>Cornwall & Devon</u>	<u>Elsewhere</u>
1861	6	0	6	9	0
1871	36	7	17	0	2

TABLE 4

OCCUPATIONS OF MINE WORKERS *

	<u>1861</u>	<u>1871</u>
Lead Miner	12	42
Ore Dresser/Washer	4 (male)	12 (5 male, 7 female)
Shaftsman/Pitman	2	1
Agent/Manager	2	1
Mine Engineer/Fitter	0	3
Watchman/Postboy/Labourer	1	2
Carpenter	0	1

* All based on Census Enumerations

TABLE 5

MACHINERY AT LLANFYRNACH LEAD MINE 1855 Ø

25ft water wheel, 6 ft breast, with iron shrouding and buckets 15 inches deep.
Pumping gear, 23 fathoms, viz. 12 inch and 8 inch pipes, with various
spare ones.

Lifting machine, capable of lifting 8 cwt every 3 minutes.

Wrought iron Buckets.

Crushing rolls and jiggers.

Stone flags.

Large Capstan and shears, with horse whim chains.

Ropes (wire and hemp)

Wheelbarrows.

Picks and Shovels.

Two large moveable forges.

Anvils and Smiths' tools, taps and dies.

Carpenters' benches.

Turning lathe.

Timber.

Crowbars.

Several barrels of rock powder.

Boxes of candles.

Quantity of mill grease, clack leather, spikes and nails, bar and rod iron,
bags.

Office furniture.

Various other articles "too numerous to particularize".

Ø Based on advertisement for sale in Pembrokeshire Herald, 26 Jan. 1855.

The Sale was to be of "all the valuable machinery of this mine.....
in consequence of the new Company being about to work by steam".

Little Norton,
26 Twatling Road,
Barnt Green,
Birmingham,
B45 8HT.