

# Monah's Herald,

AND FARGHER'S ISLE OF MAN ADVERTISER

DOUGLAS, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 1872

## TO THE EDITOR OF THE MONA'S HERALD'

Sir,

Will you allow me on behalf of the Laxey Miners' Committee to correct some mistakes which appear in a statement made public in the 'Isle of Man Times' of Saturday last, respecting the then contemplated strike for wages by the Laxey miners.

With regard to the first paragraph in that statement we all regret, equally with the writer, the "loss to all concerned" which our present conduct may occasion; but we think that we are only standing up for our rights, and that it would be, in the end, to the benefit of the company if those rights were fully met. And this course is only used by us when all other means have failed. We have several times petitioned the captains, and through them the directors, to raise our wages, on the ground that the cost of living has greatly increased also, but in reality we never were paid so little. We have had less money to come in, while more has necessarily had to go out, and this too in the time when the mines were in the greatest prosperity; and we neither think that such treatment is fair, or that, in the end, it will be to the advantage of our employers, or that if our demands were met they would occasion to them "immense loss".

The writer has also given a statement respecting Mr. Warrington Smyth's opinion about our receiving the same wages as the Cornish men, which needs some correction, as it contains "the truth, but not the whole truth." Mr. Smyth in the presence of our agents, also said that the miners in the midland counties received more, being paid from 25s to 30s per week. We never heard him say "that he considered us to be very well off".

How our having to travel up and down ladders for two hours can be given as a reason for our claims not being met, we cannot understand. Perhaps the writer had better try this part of our work, and thereby satisfy himself as to whether men ought to be paid for doing it. And if our hours, as stated, be short compared with those of the men on the surface, we hold the labour is fairly balanced by the nature of our work, and its greater risk, even in the Laxey mines. But we are not afraid of work, if only we have fair play. But we are said to have been "paid a higher rate of wages than any other

miners in the kingdom." We more than doubt the accuracy of this statement, and if necessary may make more positive statements in contradiction to it. We do not wish to do so at present, but are ready, if necessary. We also for the present reserve our reply about those occasions when we are said to make considerably more than our usual wages. We only now say there are two sides to that question.

We are now told of the difficulties which the directors have recently had to meet. But what of the past prosperity, during which time our wages were kept cut down with unyielding severity and our petitions rejected? Might we not also be told of the rise in the value of metals, and of the higher rate of wages now being paid everywhere? But perhaps the dark side only belongs to us; only the evil, never the good! Oh, dear, no.

In face of these and other things which we may name, we think the directors would do better justice to us, to themselves and to the shareholders, by agreeing to our terms than by attempting to bring men over to work the mine. They may find it not such an easy matter as they think.

One word more for our labourers, many of whom deserve to have been miners years ago. They have faithfully served the company from boyhood, have passed through the floors, and worked steadily on, hoping to become miners. They are miners in ability, men in the prime of life, many of them married, and some with large families, and men who are the working life of the mines; and yet their pay (too little to give food to their families) is 15s. And they are to be content! But we won't say what we all think here about this at present, -

We are, sir, yours &c.

## **Footnotes**

### **LAXEY STRIKERS SEEK WORK IN ENGLAND**

*Mona's Herald*, 19th June 1872

- "A batch of Laxey miners left Douglas yesterday for Barrow, where hands are much wanted in the local iron mines".

### **A LAXEY MINER'S DESCRIPTION OF THE TERMS OF SETTLEMENT OF THE 1872 STRIKE**

*Mona's Herald*, 12th November 1873

"When the strike ended the men started work on the conditions that the wages were to be 15 shillings for labourers and 27 shillings for miners; the miners were to pay 4 shillings each to the labourers, making the wages 19 shillings and 23 shillings. It was understood that if you saw the 'bargains' could not bring these prices the work should not be gone on with. There was no rule drawn up but it was understood between us and the directors that that was to be the basis of our bargains."

### **MINERS' PAY 1876**

Records of labourers' pay at Great Laxey for December 1876 show a labourers' rate averaging 2s 6d per day. Two shillings was deducted each month from all workers as a contribution to the Mines Club, a benefit society. This left an average take-home pay for a labourer of £2 18s.

## **Explanations**

'employment on the railway': The Douglas-Peel line was being laid at this time.

'a severe struggle with the Woods and Forests': The mines and minerals of the Isle of Man belonged to the Crown from 1830 to 1849. Rents and royalties were paid yearly to the Commissioners for the King's Woods and Forests. From 1830 to 1863 the royalty on lead was 1/12. This had been reduced to 1/15 in 1863. A new lease was to be drawn up in 1873 and the royalty was to be increased to 1/12 again. The Great Laxey Company was fighting this proposal.