

spoil heaps, and the stone containing ore which would be sent by conveyor belt to the large iron rollers for crushing. The material arriving at the sorting tables would consist of some clean ore, some ore inside barren veinstone and smallish pieces of useless rock. It was usually more complicated than this as lead, zinc and copper were all liable to appear. Typical workings hours on the washing floors were from 7 am to 6 pm with three quarters of an hour lunch break. Work went on in all weathers with little cover from the rain in earlier times. Boys also did much of the barrow work such as moving the *stuff* from the crushers to the *jiggers*. The *jiggers* were vibrating machines in which the material was washed and sifted. The heavier parts passed through the lower part of the sieves; the lighter portion remained in the upper part for further treatment.

The surface working area contained quite elaborate apparatus for separating ores from the surrounding rock. As techniques improved greater and greater proportions of the ore contained in the mud, or *slime*, at the end of the process could be recovered. The aim of most of the machines used in dressing the ore was to separate the heavy ore from the lighter waste by the action of gravity and the effect of gravity was assisted by having the mixture suspended in water. The final operation was carried out in machines known as *buddles* (locally known as 'boodles') when a thin mud was passed over a circular table, highest in the centre, and sloping outwards in all directions. Ore would be passed repeatedly through the *jiggers* and *buddles* to get it clean enough for shipping away. The dressing floors were networks of pits and water courses. The light sandy waste from the processes was discharged into the rivers.

From the washing floors at Laxey the boys moved on to work on the mine railway or the horse-drawn trucks taking ore down to the quay. Boys were required to operate the brake on the trucks as the horse pulled them along rails to the weighbridge at the quay. On the small gauge railway they worked as brake-boys or points-boys as ore was transported via the adit to the washing floors. At eighteen those who wanted to work underground were in the charge of an experienced man and were known as the older man's 'partner'. When a young man could "do his quack" - work like a man, he was paid like a man.

### THE WORKSHOPS

The operation of a mine required the skills of many trades including those of blacksmiths, fitters and carpenters.

Blacksmiths' work included the daily sharpening of picks and *jumpers*, or rock drills. A large mine like Laxey could employ six to eight blacksmiths at periods of peak activity. The repair of kibbles was one of the blacksmith's constant tasks since these were bound with metal hoops.

There was much timber in use in the mines and the skills of carpenters were in constant demand. The trunks of larch and pine trees delivered to the mines had to be sawn and the bark removed to make them last longer. Wood for ladders and

for lining the shafts up which the kibbles of ore were hoisted was also frequently required. Wooden channels for water (*launders*) had to be renewed. New shafts for picks and hammers had to be supplied and wheelbarrows repaired. Pit timbers were soaked in tanks of preservatives before use.

Engineers, pattern-makers and fitters all had their part to play. The engineers' shop at Laxey with its lathe drill, planing machine, and steam hammer (installed in 1876) was vital to the activities of the Great Laxey Mining Company which claimed to be able to do all its own renewals and to make almost any ironwork required. By 1878 this Company was making its own power rock drills.

### WATERCOURSES

A feature of the countryside around the mines in areas such as Glen Rushen, Foxdale, Snaefell and Laxey were the systems of watercourses known as *lades* or *races*. Since the Isle of Man lacks both large rivers and coal, the fullest use had to be made of every stream and spring over wide areas around mines to collect all possible water to turn waterwheels which operated pumps and hauling gear and also to supply water for the washing floors in dry summers.

Particularly fine systems of lades were found in the Laxey valley. The Laxey mines were served by over eight miles of these man-made channels. One system ran from Glen Roy river over Baldhoon and Baljean and across the river at Laggan and finally to a cistern near Dumbell's Shaft. The second system brought water from Laxey River near Snaefell Mine to a reservoir at Ballacregga above Agneash. Remains of the Snaefell lades can be seen on the hillside above the old mine, feeding into dams.

The lades bringing water along the hillside above Foxdale were long remembered. These were always cleared out in the autumn before the winter floods. Wooden troughs were recalled at Glen Rushen as coming down from the mountain where dams had been constructed to trap springs.

The systems of zigzagging lades along the hillsides followed the contour lines. Their construction required skill and they were checked daily.

### TRANSPORT AT THE MINES

After ore has been dressed at the mines it has to be reduced to pure metal by means of fire. This process is called smelting. Back in the eighteenth century lead and copper were smelted on the Island at Derbyhaven and Port St. Mary. In the chief period of Manx mining in the nineteenth century ore for smelting was sent to either Cumbria or South Wales. Great Laxey Mining Company eventually had their own ship for exporting the ore. There were busy scenes at Laxey harbour with men hauling the wagons by rope, others pushing from behind, and then

another great effort to tip the wagons into the boat.

Laxey Mine was very conveniently situated for shipping ore, but elsewhere long journeys by cart were required. Lead ore from the Ballacorkish and Scollaby Mines was taken in small bags to Port St. Mary for shipping. Wooden brakes controlled the carts on the downhill journey; two horses were required on the way back with coal. These southern mines lacked water power, so all power had to be from steam. A journey to Douglas from Glen Rushen with ore and back with coal or timber took a day.

### MINING AND OTHER WORK

Mining wages were not always sufficient to support a large family and sometimes underground workings had to be stopped in a dry summer because of lack of water power. Some miners had small farms, or 'crofts'. Keeping a pig or two and a cow was widespread around Foxdale and Glen Rushen. Others eked out their pay by doing some fishing after coming off the shift ending in the early afternoon. Miners with a few fields would generally not have any implements; they would get a farmer to plough their land in return for helping him with weeding or harvesting. Miners were quite prepared to help at harvest time because it gave them the opportunity to choose and cut the straws used before fuses came into general use for blasting. In those times it was a familiar sight in a miner's home to see four or more bundles of straws drying and seasoning on the laths of the joists. A



A Foxdale miner's cottage, built about 1835

miner would take four or five straws to work and these were filled with gunpowder to set off the charges in the drilled holes in the rock.

### HOBBIES AND RECREATION

The only holidays at the mines during the peak years were Sundays, Christmas Day and Good Friday. Favourite outside interests of the Laxey and Snaefell miners were looking after their gardens, fishing from boats or off the rocks, or attending to sheep on the mountain. Hunting and poaching were popular activities with the Foxdale men.

Winter activities included going to the Working

Men's Institute or the Reading Room where there were games such as dominoes and chess, newspapers, a library and also educational classes for those who had missed out on schooling. Others belonged to the village bands of which there were two in both Foxdale and Laxey at one period. Attendance at churches and chapels was high and extensions to older chapels or the building of new ones accompanied the growth of mining communities. Concerts and tea-parties organised by the various places of worship provided entertainment in the winter months. A great event a Laxey was the Miners' Harvest Festival. The village would be decked out in flags and there would be an open-air tea followed by a concert. Money raised on the occasion was used to help poor mining families.

There were clubs where members paid to insure against loss of work due to illness or injury and to help the families of those killed at work. The two chief clubs were the Oddfellows and the Rechabites. Members of the clubs would have an annual parade through the village wearing top hats and full club regalia. Occasions were recalled at Laxey when about three hundred men walked in the Oddfellows' procession with two Lancashire bands as well as a village band. The Foxdale clubs marched round the district on their procession day, always calling at Captain Kitto's house, then heading off to the Drill Shed by the Mines for a good dinner and public meeting with speeches and brass band items alternating.

Sports and team games were another feature of life in the mining villages. Both football and rugby were popular and it was a sign of the decline of mining when rugby teams of fifteen members became harder to raise and so football came to dominate. Many young men emigrated to South Africa and America as work slackened at the mines.

Activities were closely linked with the work places. Concerts at Laxey were often held in the lead warehouse. At Foxdale the Assay House was a popular meeting place. Here samples of smelted lead were prepared for sending away for pricing. It was interesting to see the ore heated in a fireclay pot and the dross skimmed off leaving eventually the perfectly blue molten metal.

### PAY DAY

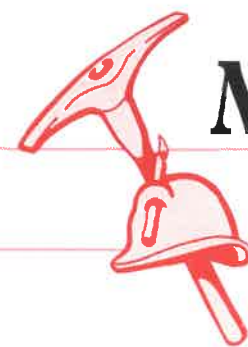
Miners were paid on the last Saturday in the month and the payday scene was often recalled by ex-miners. At Laxey men gathered in their holiday clothes near the washing floors and the names of the gangers or *pitch bosses* were called to receive the pay for their particular *bargain*. It was remembered that groups of men would sit in the Parson's Glebe holding out their hats for their share of the bargain payment. Sometimes there was great disappointment at the end of the month if the *pitch* the group had worked on had turned out a bad one. On some occasions the leader was even forced to pay up with some of his own money. Fights were known to break out over a disputed halfpenny! At Foxdale the pay-room was opposite the village clock. Because





Foxdale was an isolated place in those days, traders of all kinds would arrive on payday to sell their wares. "They were going as good as Douglas Market here selling their wares - jewellery, watches and china, on payday", recalled an old Foxdale man.

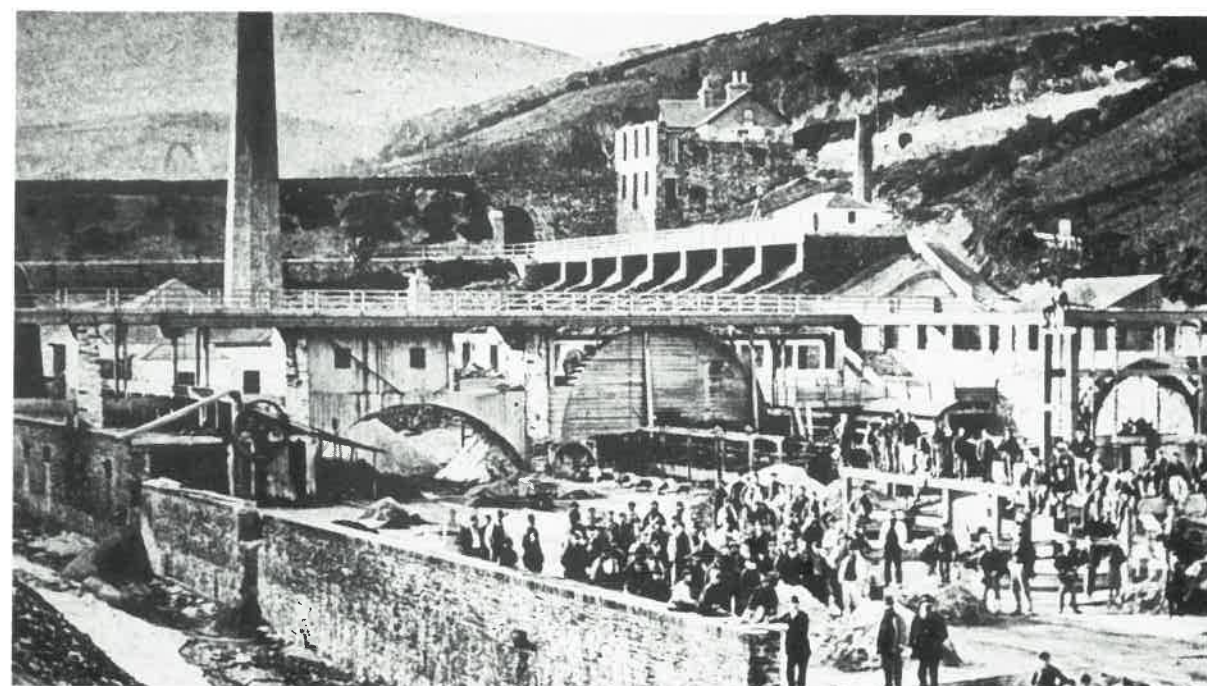
Pay day was the day to visit the village Co-ops. There were two of these in both Laxey and Foxdale, supplying groceries, bread and meat. Some had debts to pay, other spent freely at the village inns, and the newly established village policemen soon found their presence required on paydays.



# MANX MINES ROCKS AND MINERALS

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LIFE AROUND THE MINES



Laxey washing floors

## THE WASHING FLOORS

**T**HE washing floors at Laxey were the busiest scene on the Island in the heyday of Manx mining in the 1870s and were very popular with the tourists of those days, who liked to take away with them mineral specimens. Here the stone was broken, ground by machinery, sorted and washed and the metal ores separated from the surrounding rock. It was to the washing floors that boys went to begin work and here also men too old to work below ground, or disabled, would return. In the early days of Manx mining boys as young as eight years were "sent to the wash", but later on, twelve was the age at which they began. Some women, often smoking clay pipes, would also be seen working with spades and barrows.

A boy's first job was usually sitting at a revolving table 'picking chats' - picking out the smaller stones which contained no ore. It was well-



Laxey - notice the 'Deads'.

known that keen-eyed boys at the surface would do a much better job of hand-picking than miners past middle age whose sight was less good. The materials brought out from the mine had to be sorted into waste stone for the *deads* or mine