

FIRESETTING AT HOPE MINE, BUT WHERE IS IT?

Trevor D. Ford, Roy Paulson and Lynn Willies

The Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow, through the Society Librarian, Roy Paulson, have asked if we can identify the site depicted on the accompanying reproduction. The original painting is 55.4 x 41.3 cms, in water colour over pencil, and is regarded by them as of the 19th century British School, possibly around 1820. The margin has the words "*Hope Mine*" and the initials "*OCW*" which are presumably the unknown artist.

The painting shows what appears to be firesetting in a stope with openings to daylight "protected" by a rather flimsy-looking brattice. A gentleman with a dog is rather close to the fire for comfort, and workmen are either standing around or wheelbarrowing ore. The rocks have a steep inclination, and there is an opening to surface.

Firesetting was not common in this country in the 18th century, let alone the 19th, though coal fires were apparently used in the Forest of Dean ironstone mines. For wood to be used argues a plentiful supply, since it had many competing uses in and at the mines, for smelting, and other industries, and suggests an area remote from too much competition. In Norway, for example, it was still in use in the 1890s, in driving a large section level at the Kongsberg Silver Mines. According to Hooson, in his 1749 *Miners Dictionary*, it was the easiest work in mining, which the casualness of this picture tends to illustrate. Firesetting was very effective however.

Several suggestions have been made as to its possible location, but readers may have better ideas. Please let us know your opinion. Hope Mine, or variations such as Wheal Hope, Hope Level, or Good Hope, is a common mine name, and examples are known at St. Agnes, Cornwall, in Shropshire, and at Cromford in Derbyshire respectively. It might also refer to a place, Hope in Derbyshire for example, or it may be part of the full name - Rookhope, Stanhope in the North Pennines. Although one can fancifully suggest locations in these areas, there is no actual evidence.

The Glasgow connection might provide a clue: Lord Hopetown had mines at Leadhills where there is a Hope Mine, and four paintings showing dressing and smelting of ores survive from there (James Hunter Blair Collection, Blairquhan, Ayrshire), but of a rather earlier date. Possibly these stimulated the idea of an underground equivalent. The area seems to be one of the most likely to have had ready supplies of cheap timber.

The painting is reproduced by kind permission of the Hunterian, using laser printing technology from a colour diapositive supplied by the Gallery.

So, let us have your ideas please - replies to the editor.

