

The 'John Donald' winding engine

This first-motion winding engine from an unknown manufacturer was sold by Glasgow machinery merchant John Donald Ltd sometime between 1892 and 1908.¹ It has two cylinders with a bore of 15 inches and a stroke of 30 inches and is fitted with air operated brakes.

How it came to be in Australia is lost in the mists of time. We do know that it was at the Virginia South Extended mine in 1934. This mine was a re-working of the flooded Shellback mine (dating from 1869) on the Paddys Gully line of reef at Eaglehawk near Bendigo.² The second-hand winding plant installed in 1934 consisted of the John Donald winder and an air compressor by Ingersoll Rand with in-line steam and air cylinders and twin flywheels (almost certainly the same compressor with which it is preserved today). Steam was provided by two Cornish boilers.³ Unfortunately, the cost of mining consistently outweighed the value of the gold obtained,⁴ and the Company was placed in voluntary liquidation in September 1938. All machinery except the winding engine and associated plant was disposed of.⁵ The latter were eventually sold to the South Costerfield mine for £1375 in May of 1948,⁶ but it is believed the winder was never actually installed at the new site.

The South Costerfield Antimony & Gold Mining Company NL was registered in 1947 to operate on a combined antimony and gold deposit worked by various companies from 1853.⁷ In September 1950 the Company's development work paid off with what appeared to be payable lodes exposed, and the prospects of the mine looked good. However, despite additional government grants of £1324 the mine had accumulated losses amounting to £9699.⁸ It was ripe for takeover. Antimony Mines of Victoria NL was formed in Sydney in 1951 to take over the South Costerfield property and consolidate the leases on the wider area.⁹ It is assumed that any steam plant still on site when the Victorian Antimony mines finally relinquished the mine was completely outdated and would have been abandoned as largely unsaleable except for scrap.

The winding engine and the compressor were retrieved from the abandoned antimony mine in 1973 and 1974. They were in a very derelict condition and many pieces had to be remade by Sovereign Hill or by local Ballarat firms. On the balance of probability, the two engines have now been paired for more than eighty years.

References

¹ *Glasgow Post Office Directories 1845-1905* – the firm became 'John Donald Limited' in 1892. A fitter's mark stamped on the engine in 1908 provides a latest date for the engine.

² *The Argus*, Wednesday 11 October 1933, page 4.

³ Lerk, James A. (1997). *Bendigo's gold mining revival, 1929-1954*. J. & E. Lerk, Bendigo, pages 121-122. Boiler details from PRO, VPRS 9534/P1, unit 1, registrations MDH148 (1934) and MDW89 (1948).

⁴ *The Age*, Wednesday 3 March 1937, page 8.

⁵ *The Age*, Monday 15 August 1938, page 9; *The Argus*, Friday 2 September 1938, page 5.

⁶ *The Argus*, Saturday 15 May 1948, page 23.

⁷ *The Star* (Ballarat), Friday 11 June 1858, page 3; *The Argus*, Wednesday 8 January 1862, page 6; Friday 7 February 1947, page 8.

⁸ *The Age*, Saturday 9 September 1950, page 6; Tuesday 8 May 1951, page 6; *The Argus*, Tuesday 8 May 1951, page 11.

⁹ *The Age*, Saturday 11 August 1951, page 11; Wednesday 16 January 1952, page 6; Tuesday 25 March 1952, page 11.