

A World of Copper: Globalising the Industrial Revolution, 1830-1870

Burra Workshop

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Abstracts

Igor Goicovic, University of Santiago de Chile

‘Mining economy and popular models of sociability. Illapel, Chile, 1840-1885’

The Illapel area in the Region of Coquimbo, developed during the nineteenth century a productive dual function: Agriculture and mining. This is a peculiar feature in the context of the regional economies of Chile during this period, since most of the localities structured around one of these areas of production. This productive imbrications led to a very heterogeneous popular sociability, which combined multiple and interlocking cultural practices: Religious festivals, networks of solidarity, interpersonal conflict, social hierarchies, and so on. In this paper we analyze the domains and configuration mechanisms popular sociability Illapel area, taking as a fundamental reference social and cultural practices developed from the local mining world.

Bill Jones, Cardiff University

‘Labour Migration and Cross-Cultural Encounters: Welsh copper workers in Chile during the Swansea moment’

In January 1874 Robert Charles Jones, a Welsh minister of religion, explored the gravestones in the British Cemetery in Guayacan near Coquimbo, Chile, and observed that ‘Swansea and Cwmavon South Wales have sent many a lad to lie quietly in this place’. His words poignantly remind us that Swansea’s multi-dimensional role in the global copper industry in the nineteenth century also included significant though not extensive migration of Welsh skilled labour to Latin America, Australia and elsewhere. Hitherto, historians have largely been content to let these South America-bound migrants rest in peace in contrast to the growing number of studies we now have of Welsh industrial emigrants and industrial communities in the USA and Australia in the same period. This paper seeks to begin to redress this omission by exploring migration and community formation among South Walian copper workers from South Wales in Coquimbo and Guayacan in the nineteenth century. It

focuses in particular on the dynamics of Welsh migration networks and recruitment and of cross-cultural, linguistic and religious encounters between the Welsh and other British workers and Chileans.

Katherine Morrissey, University of Arizona

‘What are the environmental impacts of the Swansea moment?’

Drawing on relevant work in mining environmental history, landscape archaeology and history of science and technology, my paper explores the ways scholars have examined the diverse international ecological imprints of copper mining. These studies include rich analyses of specific copper mining landscapes, from Swansea to Burra, from Anaconda to Norte Chico, to more recent comparative and transborder case studies. The 19th-century diaspora of copper miners and metallurgists reshaped new locales as part of the international copper trade. Cultural, legal, and ecological differences across these locales, in turn, affected the complex processes of ecological globalization. A review of this literature will contribute to our understanding of the global reach and environmental legacies of the Swansea moment.

Luis Ortega, University of Santiago de Chile

‘Copper mining and labour during the industry’s “golden age” and its downfall, 1840-1885’.

The rise of copper mining and metallurgy as from the mid 1840s in the northern Chilean provinces of Atacama and Coquimbo attracted thousands to territories which hitherto had a low population density. People came from the southern provinces, across the Andes from the western Argentinean provinces of Cuyo and San Juan, some from Bolivia and Peru while others travelled from the United States. An important number came from the northern hemisphere: English, Germans, Poles and Welsh, among many. They all contributed to a substantial increase in the region’s population until the late 1860s as well as the growth of cities and the rise of mining villages and also account for an intense process of internal circulation. Yet, during the next two decades population begun to decline, as many mines were abandoned and workers and their families left for the newly acquired “nitrate provinces”. This paper examines the main demographic tendencies, the formation and characteristics of the newly formed communities and the nature and working of the labour market.

Philip Payton, University of Exeter

‘South Australia and the Cornish Transnational Identity’

South Australia has long enjoyed a prominent place in both the historiography and ‘mythology’ of the Cornish transnational identity, from the ‘coppermania’ of Kapunda and Burra Burra in the 1840s to the rise of ‘Australia’s Little Cornwall’ at Moonta and environs in the 1860s and subsequently. This paper asks why this should have been so, and seeks to place South Australia’s Cornish connection within the broader contextual framework of the expansion of the nineteenth-century hard-rock mining frontier and its relationship with the Cornish transnational identity. Here the 1840s and the 1860s are seen to be pivotal decades in the development of both the frontier and the transnational identity, establishing among other things a symbiotic relationship between Cornwall and South Australia at moments of rapid and profound change. This symbiosis was responsible, it will be argued, for the privileged place of South Australia within ‘imaginings’ of the Cornish diaspora, which in turn has captured the sustained attention of historians of the Cornish diaspora (and the Australian mining industry).

Sharron Schwartz, University of Glamorgan

‘Creating the cult of ‘cousin jack’: Cornish miners and the development of copper mining in the Pacific Littoral, Cuba and Venezuela’

It is taken for granted that there is an immense literature on the ‘ubiquitous’ Cornish miner overseas, but this paper challenges that assumption. Little is known about the earliest movements of Cornish mineworkers and how they managed, by the mid-1800s, to work themselves into a seemingly unassailable position as miners *par excellence* within the global metalliferous mining labour market. This paper demonstrates how the process has its roots on the mines of Latin America, with reference to the activities of the Cornish on the copper mines of the Pacific Littoral, the Caribbean and Venezuela. The first part of the paper describes how this process commenced, discusses conflict with other ethnic groups competing for the coveted crown of mining excellence and finally, how the Cornish emerged to dominate the global hard rock mining industry. The second part adopts a methodologically innovative approach by probing the transient, liminal space between the two polarities presented in Cornish migration studies: sending community and receiving community. Using quantitative data to illuminate the point where the regional meets the global, it examines how the social capital of Cornish mining communities became transnational and demonstrates that

the ensuing migration chains between specific copper mining areas in Cornwall and Latin America were surprisingly heterogeneous.

Jason Shute, Flinders University

‘When is a store not a store? When it’s a smelting house’.

Burra could have more of its history on its hands than it presently believes. Its claim that the substantial stone building at the mine’s entrance is the mine store, of 1847 vintage, is impressive enough, but what if it is something more and somewhat older? What if it is none other than the colony’s – indeed Australia’s – earliest smelting house? Any one-hundred-by-thirty-foot building, of masonry construction, being erected in the Burra mine’s vicinity as early as New Year 1846, had necessarily to be one of the more impressive structures in ‘rural’ South Australia of the time. Records show that the South Australian Mining Association (SAMA)’s forlorn hopes for local smelting, over the following couple of years, saw the smelter declared redundant, certainly by June 1848, even before the Patent Copper Company’s smelting initiative of the September. However, one does not throw away such a valuable investment; one utilises it for some other purpose. The presenter suggests that ST Gill’s watercolours of the building bear testimony to the fact that we are perceiving the very same structure, occupying precisely the same spot at the mine’s entrance, through the three-year period which includes its transformation from Smelting House to Store. Gill throws only one spanner in the works of our straight-forward acceptance of the evidence for the transformation as indicated in the SAMA’s records: his depiction of an upper storey of some dimension. Today’s building is very clearly single storey. Can this circle be squared, rendering Burra more significant heritage than it currently knows?