

## Vieille Montagne : A Hundred Years of Zinc Smelting

La Société des Mines et Fonderies de Zinc de la Vieille Montagne, one of the oldest established and most important of European zinc producers celebrated its centenary in 1937. The Company was formed to take over the mine, smelting plant and rolling mills of J. J. D. Dony, a Liège chemist, who was the first in 1806 to obtain zinc in the pure state on an industrial scale, a process patented by him January 19th, 1810. The mine taken over was at Moresnet, in the Duchy of Limbourg, now part of the kingdom of Belgium. It is from this mine, known as Altenberg or Vieille Montagne, worked since the middle of the fifteenth century, that the Company took its name. This mine yielded calamine, blende and galena. There was a smelting plant and rolling mill, now gone, but the mine is still working. The production of slab zinc in the first year's working of the Company amounted to only 1,833 metric tons. Moresnet has been in the van of technical advance: it was there seventy years ago that compressed air drills were first used and later that dynamite was employed in mining; there Wolf installed his first double cylinder pump and Kley constructed his first rotary pump with variable discharge.

The Company's mining operations have been extended gradually until now they cover nearly every country where zinc ores are to be had: an estate in Sweden acquired 80 years ago produces blende and galena; mines in Sardinia and Bergamo in Italy produce calamine; in Algeria and Tunis calamine and blende is mined; there are the Gard mines in France and the Nenthead mines in Alston Moor acquired in 1896 from the London Lead Company;<sup>1</sup> besides this the Company has controlling interests in Spain, Greece, Norway, Canada, United States, Mexico and Indo-China.

The oldest and most important smelting works are in the Campine region of Belgium, and in the Department of Aveyron, France. They comprise reduction works producing ordinary and special grades of zinc; rolling mills; workshops; zinc oxide plants; lead plants with silver recovery; lead sheet and pipe manufactories; roasting plants with recovery of sulphuric acid, also nitric acid and superphosphates. The Company was the first in Europe to produce electrolytic zinc for which purpose electric power stations were installed at Viviez in France and at Baalen in Belgium. The capacity of the Company is 165,000 metric tons of zinc and lead per annum.

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<sup>1</sup> *c.f. Trans. XIV, 144.*

For 45 years, 1846 to 1890, the Company was under the expert management of M. Louis-Alexandre Saint-Paul de Sincay who was succeeded in the latter year by his son M. Gaston Saint-Paul de Sincay<sup>2</sup> as managing director. The headquarters of the Company are at Angleur near Chenée, Liège, Belgium. In all the Company employs 19,000 persons of whom 700 are technical and commercial staff.

The celebration of the centenary at Nenthead took place there on Saturday, November 20th, 1937, and Mr. Amos Treloar, the local manager, in his address mentioned that the Company since taking over the mines in 1896 had carried out 9 miles of development mainly in the Nentsbury and Rodderup mines at a cost of £90,000, and had spent more than £40,000 in replacing old and worn-out plant. The total amount expended in the district in the 14 years under review, including development charges, was not less than £700,000. The value to the district of the wages paid can be easily visualized.

We are indebted to Mr. Treloar, and to a centenary booklet<sup>3</sup> issued privately, for most of the information here given. A.R.

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<sup>2</sup> He died 19th March, 1938, and was succeeded by M. Joseph Van Oerbeek.

<sup>3</sup> Centenaire de la Société des Mines et Fonderies de Zinc de la Vielle Montagne, 1837-1937, [1937].