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VEHICULAR MEANS OF TRANSPORT IN THE MINE, MAJOR TOPICS

Abstract

In the initial period of operation of the Wieliczka Salt Mine, simple means of transport, such as trays or baskets were used for horizontal transport from the place of underground extraction to the shaft. In the course of time, growing distance from the shaft and the necessity of increasing efficiency led to a search for more appropriate means of transport, which would simultaneously consume less energy, produced directly by the power of human muscles. One of such new solutions whose beginnings are hidden in the murkiness of history, are the so-called “mine dogs.” It may be assumed that such carts were used already in the 2nd half of the 16th century in German mines, as at that time the name appeared for the first time in the work of G. Agricola, “De Re Metallica” of 1556. The author notes that during transport (especially on turns), the carts produced sounds that resembled dog barking. However, there is also a theory according to which the name, in German sounding as “Hund”, was pronounced and written with “t” at the end in the mining dialect for the purpose of its differentiation from the house animal, derives from the Slovakian word “hyntow” which denotes a cart; nevertheless, the accurate meaning of “hyntow” is a carriage or a coach. This hypothesis seems to be much less probable.

Irrespective of the fact which theory of origin of the cart is deemed true, these were mainly means of horizontal transport, used to move the output from the place of extraction to the extraction shaft. In the course of time, the distances underground were greater and thence the need of applying more modern means, enabling transport of greater loads with the use of lesser power. Such carts were used in shaft transport to bring powder salt and smaller blocks of salt (which could fit in the loading chest) to the surface.

It turns out that not only the origin of the name of this means of transport is a certain oddity and an mystery. The structure of carts has also not been fully explained. In his flagship work Agricola indicates that a “dog” is a cart in the shape of a chest on a chassis with two pairs of wheels. He overlooks a “minor detail”, i.e. the fact that the wheels had to be larger at the back and smaller at the front, so that the inclination of the cart to the front

offered a possibility of moving it with the use of lesser force. It also has to be noted that the description features a clear determination that the cart was in the form of a chest. Such a structure of the carts known as “dogs” is also confirmed by other authors of former mining dictionaries or studies devoted to the history of mining and mining technology. Several modern studies or Internet publications feature an abbreviated version of the definition of the “dog” as a cart consisting of a transport platform on a four-wheel chassis. This name is currently also applied to the carts used to transport furniture, large musical instruments or goods in warehouses. This is the situation today, yet what is its reference to the carts used in the Wieliczka mines at the end of the 18th or throughout the 19th century?

The display of Cracow Saltworks Museum Wieliczka features chest carts known as “dogs” according to the original definition and carts... well, what name should be used for carts consisting of a transport platform typical for “dog” carts on a four-wheel chassis, yet without a chest, having only wooden stops preventing the load from falling off? In the Polish literature, there is a skillful differentiation between a “chest-cart” and a “dog-cart.” However, taking into account the fact that the “chest-cart” means a “dog”, we are dealing with a reversal of terms, as a chest on a four-wheel chassis may be called a dog, and a cart without a chest would have to be called “a cart on a dog chassis.”

The objective of this article is to elaborate on and to clarify issue related to the exhibits known as “mine dogs” or “Hungarian dogs” featured in the collections of the Cracow Saltworks Museum Wieliczka. Has the issue been explained or just the opposite, has it been made even more muddled? This should be evaluated by the readers, especially those who are interested in this subject matter.