

## Millstones at Devon Great Consols

*Andy Fish*

I recently went on a field trip down to Devon Great Consols mine site near Gunnislake on the Devon-Cornwall Border.

Whilst walking around the 67 hectare site I came across a five-foot diameter millstone perched high up on a wooden hursting, this formed part of the stone floor in the 1920s arsenic grinding mill. The hursting supporting the grinding stones is thought to incorporate elements of the earlier roller crusher which was sited here in the 1850s-60s. These stones are similar to those used to grind corn into flour, the crystalline purified arsenic was ground to a fine flour before being put into barrels for export all around the world.



*Maryann Soper*

In 1844, one of the greatest copper deposits in Europe was discovered near Morwellham. To extract the ore a new company which became known as Devon Great Consols was formed to mine the ore. The mine was only 4 miles from Morwellham Quay which meant that transportation was relatively easy. At its peak in the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Devon Great Consols was both the largest copper and arsenic producer in the world and was at the cutting edge of ore recovery technology. As copper began to run out, arsenic ore was mined instead. This provided the deadly poison which was used in insecticides and weed killers. It was once said that there was enough arsenic stored on the quayside at Morwellham to kill every man, woman, and child in the world.

When Devon Great Consols eventually ceased production in 1901 and was abandoned, thousands of miners were forced to emigrate in order to find work. The quays fell into disrepair, the docks silted up and the place became almost forgotten. Despite brief reworking in 1915 when the mine was worked on a much smaller scale for a number of minerals including copper, arsenic, tin, and wolfram, the mine closed for good in 1925

**Source :** <http://www.cornishmining.net/sites/dgc.htm>