

The Martha Mine

Words and Music: Nigel Harbron

The Mar - tha Mine is clo - sing down, its gold and sil - ver spent, Through
cen - tur - ies brave fam - ily men its pre - cious ores have rent. But
now their work is al - most done, they're told to look else - where, But
what will Wai - hi town do then when the mine's no lon - ger there?

The Martha Mine is closing down, its gold and silver spent.
Through centuries brave family men its precious ores have rent.
But now their work is almost done - they're told to look elsewhere,
But what will Waihi town do then when the mine's no longer there?

Two men in 1878, each one with pick and spade,
Found quartz deposits in the ground, and recognised their grade.
The word spread quickly through the land and miners soon were drawn.
With wooden shacks and roofs of tin young Waihi town was born.

In 1912 a strike took place, but not all thought this right.
They forced their way to work each day - their batons won the fight.
At last the strike came to an end and many left the town,
But some stayed loyal to management and went back underground.

Conditions in the Martha Mine soon went from bad to worse,
But miners and their families only had themselves to curse.
It was so bad the destitute were driven to despair,
They even cut their fingers off, the payment cash to share.

The old mine shut some year ago, its shafts deemed all worked out,
But very soon big business came to bring a turnabout.
Huge diggers dug a great big hole with a winding road so deep,
Now gold and silver extraction was once again quite cheap.

The Cornish pump-house works no more, the pit-head stands forlorn.
The tourist bus now winds its way where the diggers have withdrawn.
And very soon floodwaters deep will fill the Martha Mine,
With yachts and boats on top of it, but of miners - not a sign.



Here's a picture of the tourist bus winding its way down to the bottom of the Martha Mine, nearly 300m/900ft below the rim. It's just about impossible to take a photograph showing the depth of the mine, but this one does at least show the scale of it.

In the song, reference is made to 'batons'. The Blacklegs were given sturdy batons by the mine owners, in order to bludgeon their way to work, and I am afraid that it does seem as though miners were willing to sever digits in order to claim compensation. Apparently, the loss of a digit - or two - in an accident was so commonplace that the Superintendent didn't question whether or not the injury had been self-inflicted. Capitalism is such a wonderful system, isn't it?

During its life, the old and new mines have produced 100,000 ounces of gold and 700,000 ounces of silver (most of it for the jewellery trade) at a cost of many lives and limbs.