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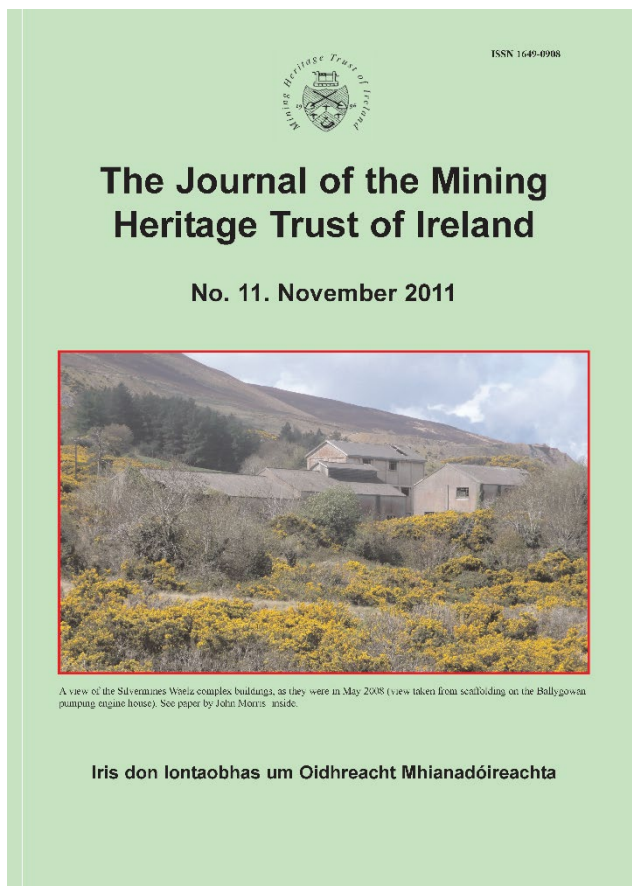
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# COPPER MINING NEAR BELDERRIG, COUNTY MAYO, WITH A NOTE ON MARTIN BOUNDY

by Alastair Lings

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**Abstract:** Three copper mines were worked between 1856 and 1892 near Belderrig in north County Mayo. First to be worked was Geevraun mine, followed by Lachtmurragha Mine and Srahlaghy Mine. Cornishman Martin Boundy was associated with all three workings. There has been some prospecting in the area since the mines closed. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 11, 2011, 19-23.

## NORTH MAYO

The north coast of County Mayo displays "some of the finest cliff scenery in Ireland". West of Belderrig an impressive feature is the Moista Sound "a narrow chasm enclosed by vertical cliff-faces which seem to touch". South west of Belderrig the R314 Belmullet-Ballina road runs through "the desolate moors of the Barony of Erris, one of the loneliest regions in Ireland" (Anon 1976, p151). Mineralization in the area has been described by Max (1970).

## GEEVRAUN (HORSE ISLAND) MINE

In 1854 this locality was noted as only showing "metal-liferous indications" in a catalogue attributed to Richard Griffith (Morris 2001, p34).

In March 1856 Richard Tabb started work at the mine. He wrote "This mine is worked by a small party of gentlemen, who have ample means at their disposal, and who are fully prepared to carry on this undertaking with vigour and perseverance" (Tabb 1857). According to a miner, Michael McHale of Belderrig, the investors included Sir James Dunbrane and a Mr Townsend (Godfrey 1918). The latter was probably the R.W. Townsend, Esq., M.A. who submitted the entry to Griffiths Catalogue.

In November 1856 the *Mining Journal* published three reports on the mine by R. Tabb. These were followed by an enthusiastic letter from "D.J." of Castlebar, who reported that the mine was already working to a depth of 5 or 6 fathoms (Anon 1856). The author may have been James Dombrain.

Remarks in the *Mining Journal* of 3rd January 1857 that described mining in Mayo as "futile attempts" prompted Tabb to write from the Gieevraunn Mine that "I do not believe that, in any part of Ireland, and, indeed at very few places in Cornwall, would it be possible to show finer prospects than this mine presents" (Tabb 1857).

In August 1857 an advertisement appeared in the *Mining*



Figure 1. Geevraun Mine: vein on Horse Island. (Alastair Lings)

*Journal* inviting investors to buy shares in the Gieevraunn Copper Mine (Limited). Captain Boundy, Mr Petherick and Mr Clements had been employed to direct and inspect mining oper-





**Figure 2. Geevraun Mine: adit and shafts. Tawnabeg (hill) in the distance. (Alastair Lings)**

ations, and £1400 had been spent on the mine (Anon 1857). The outcome of the company's flotation is not known.

According to McHale, by 1859 Dombraun and Townsend had spent £3500 on the mine. Transport problems and lack of capital caused the closure of the mine in 1859 (Godfrey 1918). Dombraun had previously worked with Tabb at Crookhaven Mine in County Cork (Hodnett 2010), and was clearly impressed by him, because they subsequently continued their association at Castleward Mine in County Down (Anon 1861).

In 1910 Mr James Caulfield, the teacher in Belderrig, recorded that during the working of Geevraun Mine, 10 miners were employed, producing ore yielding a large percentage of copper, and a small percentage of gold (Godfrey 1918). In 1898 G.Haycraft of London requested a "take note" (prospecting licence) for the area around Horse Island and Glinsk which contained "gold ore". The outcome of his application is unknown, but the Crown were not prepared to grant a take note for base metals on Horse Island (Office of Woods 1898).

Prompted by the record of gold, Rio Tinto Finance & Exploration carried out prospecting in the Belderrig area in the early 1990s, with disappointing results (Milneoir and Fox 1991).

## LACHTMURRAGHA MINE

The vein at this mine was probably being alluded to by Richard Tabb in the Mining Journal of January 1857: "...a few miles west of this place, a lode exists fully 30 feet wide" (Tabb 1857).

Michael McHale worked at the mine in 1861 and reported that the vein was very thick, but the ore was poor (Godfrey 1918). The vein was visible in the cliffs, and had been accessed by wooden ladders. By 1918 these ladders had rotted away, and the cliff was only accessible by sea in calm weather (Godfrey 1918).

When Thomas Garvin of Liverpool "discovered a rock bearing gold, townland of Lough Murra" he wrote to the Quit Rent Office in November 1922, requesting a take note. They approved a licence at £25 per year (Quit Rent Office 1923).



**Figure 3. Lachtmurragha Mine: trial pit on plateau, with Brian Jones and Seamas Caulfield. (Alastair Lings)**



**Figure 4. Lachtmurragha Mine: access path and retaining walls. Further access down the cliffs was by wooden ladders. (Seamas Caulfield)**





**Figure 5. Vein at Lachmurragha Mine. (Brian Jones)**



**Figure 6. Laghtmurragha Mine: lower section of path, with retaining wall. (Brian Jones)**

## **SRAHLAGHY MINE**

In 1870 William Walsh granted Martin Boundy and William Henry Outram the right to prospect and mine in the "Townland of Shroglahy or Srahlaghy" for 30 years from 1st January 1869 (Boundy and Drew, p1)

Some work must have been carried out because in January 1884 The Connaught Copper Mining Company Limited was formed, with an objective to "purchase "the mines...with the buildings erected...and the plant machinery, stock implements and effects used in or about or belonging to the said mines..." (Boundy and Drew, p5).



**Figure 7. Srahlaghy Mine: spoil heap at stream junction. (Alastair Lings)**



**Figure 8. Srahlaghy Mine: portal of adit, leading to flooded shaft. (Alastair Lings)**

By 1889 the company was being liquidated (McLean 1889) and the mines were taken over by Messrs Thomas Mussau and Grenfell of Liverpool. The mine closed in 1892 (Godfrey 1918).

Mr John Healy of Glencalry was employed at the mine during



its last phase of working. He described the mine as follows

"The shaft goes down to a depth of 130 feet following the dip. At the bottom is an east-west gallery whose eastern branch is to the best of my memory 360 feet long and whose western is 600 feet long. The ore was more abundant at depth than it is now at surface. We worked the whole thing by hand breaking the rock with chisels, drills and dynamite. The ore and gangue was hauled to the surface by hand winches, there sorted, and taken on horseback to Glen Calry: thence by cart to Killala and Ballina whence it was shipped. At depth the pyrites was in veins often 2 to 3 inches thick.

"I believe the mine paid at first but had finally to stop owing to water logging, lack of machinery and appliances, difficulty and expense of cartage and competition from America.

"No crushing of the quartz was attempted, simply the best samples were taken and loaded on to the horses, gangue and all.

"The whole working was very primitive and desultory" (Godfrey 1918, p2). Caulfield noted that the ore yielded a large percentage of copper, and also a percentage of gold (Godfrey 1918).

During the 1950s and early 1960s a prospecting company carried out work in the area, and one of the adits was drained of water by local people (Personal communication, Eamon McDonnell, 21/08/2008).

## TRENCH A' MHIANAGH

This large exploration trench runs for about 600 metres diagonally across the slopes of Tawnabeg, 2.5 kilometres west of Belderrig. "This trench was sited in light of the belief that the vein deposits of the area had a common origin and that the mineralisation increased towards this point. Local knowledge has it that no mineralisation was discovered in the trench" (Milneoir and Fox 1991, p3).

The trench was probably dug sometime after "D.J." wrote that he believed that the vein at Belderrig was "part and parcel of the same lode at Benderg, although 30 miles distant, as the existence of a lode has been traced by the exact bearings on several intermediate joints" (Anon 1856).

## SURFACE REMAINS

At Geevraun Mine there are the remains of shafts, levels, a water leat, reservoir and wheelpit.

On the plateau to the north of Glinsk are the remains of a trial shaft, associated with the Lachtmurragha Mine. Part of the path to the mine, and associated retaining walls, remain on the precipitous slopes to the north-east of the trial. Due to the loose state of the cliffs access to the main Lachtmurragha site is probably only possible from the sea.

At Srahlaghy Mine there are the remains of a short adit providing access to a flooded shaft, and various trial pits and levels. There are also miners cottages and a magazine (Personal communication, Eamon McDonnell, 21/08/2008).

Trench a' Mhianach is visible from the R314 road, about a mile south-west of Belderrig. It appears as a nick on the hillside of Tawnabeg.

## MARTIN BOUNDY

Martin Boundy was associated with all three mining ventures. He was born near Tavistock in Devon about 1824 and married in 1843. In the 1851 census his occupation was listed as "miner". In 1871 he was working as a mine agent and engineer, and living with his wife and family at 23 Woodville Terrace, Everton, Liverpool. By the time of the 1891 Census he was a mining engineer and Chartered Engineer. He died in Hackney, London in 1892 ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)).

From 1862 to 1882 Boundy was engaged in iron mining in West Cumberland (Hewer 1988). A useful description of Boundy appears in a book about the English Lake District, written by someone who had visited Lachtmurragha.

"The well-known mines at Ennerdale were discovered by one Martin Boundy a Cornishman, whose kin had been bred to mining from far-back times. He it was who discovered the copper on the estate of the Parnell family at Avondale in Ireland. In fact, Mr Boundy was a genius at finding riches in the earth and should have had a professorship at a university so great were his scientific gifts and his wide knowledge. He had also, other high qualities-splendid personal courage, a very kind heart, and that gift that we all covet-a handsome presence. His eye could flash like a scimitar and he had a complexion like a milkmaid's. His faults were a very independent and fiery spirit, and a not too well-filled pocket, this perhaps because he would not, could not fawn upon the wealthy and arrogant. He it was who was lowered down with a rope round his waist to examine the lode of copper which he had discovered in the great cliffs at Lough Murragha on the coast of Mayo. He had a lease of the mines and showed his skill in tunnelling and scaffolding on the face of the 1200-feet cliffs. Down these I once went to the little green space beside the ocean far below.

Mr Boundy was the lessee also, of the copper mines at Srahlaghy some seven miles further inland, across the great bog. There as everywhere he went, he was the wise father of the village-employer, counsellor, medical adviser and sick nurse. Despite the fact that he was ultra-English and ultra-Protestant, among the wholly Irish and Catholic people he was immensely popular in Ireland as he was in Ennerdale" (MacBride, p214-5).

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Old issues of local newspapers should be searched for information on these workings.



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