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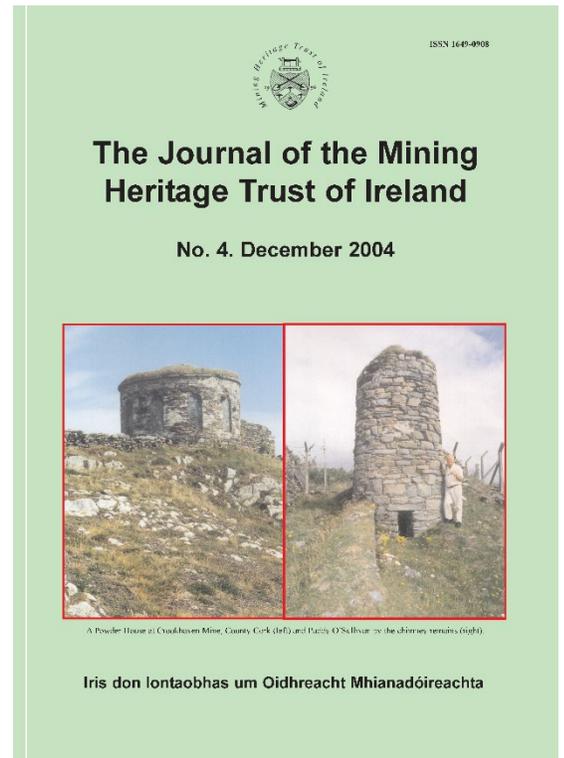
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Cowman, D. (2004) 'Documents on Mining History' *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 4, pp. 41-47

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# DOCUMENTS ON MINING HISTORY

By Des Cowman

**Abstract:** These four documents come from sources not readily available to those interested in mine history or heritage. 1. A copy of a manuscript report on Slievardagh. It has been heavily edited to collate the scattered references to the four main coal-fields there and to organise the information on them. A sequel has been added from the bi-annual Reports of the Mining Company of Ireland to enhance the context. 2. The second is the 1873 prospectus of the Glenariff Iron Ore and Harbour Company in Antrim. 3. A letter from Arthur Cave of West Carbery Mines to Leigh and Naish, London, 1903. 4. A letter from Edward Key to George Moore, 1724. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 4, 2004, 41-47.

## INTRODUCTION

These four documents come from sources not readily available to those interested in mine history or heritage.

1. The provenance of the first has been lost but a photocopy of the manuscript report on Slievardagh has been kept in the Heritage Centre in Killenaule and we would like to thank Sean Watts for making it available. It has been most heavily edited to collate the scattered references to the four main coal-fields there and to organise the information on them. A sequel has been added from the bi-annual Reports of the Mining Company of Ireland to enhance the context.

2. The second is the 1873 prospectus of the *Glenariff Iron Ore and Harbour Company* in Antrim. This is on microfiche in the Guildhall Library, London under Company Propectuses (no specific reference number). Such prospectuses tended to be aspirational rather than factual, their main purpose being to sell shares. However, the railway and harbour were built, as MHTI members saw for themselves on a visit there in Spring 2004. Nevertheless, the tonnages never came near the projected 300,000 per year as the following collation from the *Mineral Statistics* indicate. While the anticipation of this selling for 15 shilling per ton was more than realised in the first year, thereafter its value averaged just over 10 shilling per ton. Presumably, those innocent enough to invest on the basis of the Prospectus lost their money by closure in 1881 or '82.

	Iron Ore(tons)	Value(£)
1874	12,000.00	10,800.00
1875	18,987.00	9,493.50
1876	12,291.00	6,760.10
1877	17,857.00	9,821.40
1878	25,527.00	14,039.80
1879	6,973.00	3,486.50
1880	15,862.00	7,931.00
1881	9,411.00	3,764.00

3. The provenance of the third document is lost but the context of the letter is apparent. Thomas Saunders Cave, Arthur's father had come to Ireland about 1852 having spent time in Dover prison in connection with a fraudulent investment scheme in Cornish mines, He had bought Cappagh mine, the scene of an

earlier investment scandal, and either through prescience or luck made it profitable. Through this he had taken an interest in other West Carbery mining ventures. His son would have seen the decline in cooper mining locally and nationally in the 1870s, sporadic attempted revivals in the 1890s and potential revivals in the early 20th century. Meanwhile, barytes continued to have possibilities which, as he mentions, he had explored.

The exact interest Arthur Cave had in local mines by 1903 is not known but here he is clearly promoting investment by Leigh and Nash. Such Londoners would have heard a great deal of bad publicity about investment in Ireland since about 1880. There had been the "Land War", the "Plan of Campaign" the various scandals surrounding Charles Stewart Parnell plus the growth of Irish nationalism strengthening into the early 20th century. Cave, seeking support for an unknown local mining venture from London capital is endeavouring is play down these trends and emphasise the "traditional" deferential aspects of Irish life. No doubt aspects of these still survived in west Cork, but it is a one-sided picture.

The fact that Cave writes from a Bloomsbury address suggests the centre from which his interpretation of Irish life comes. He is benevolently disposed, certainly, but has no questions about the assumptions that arise from patronage. The letter is given verbatim with slight corrections in punctuation and paragraphing. A numbered footnote to each paragraph here attempts to put a context on A. Cave's reassurances.

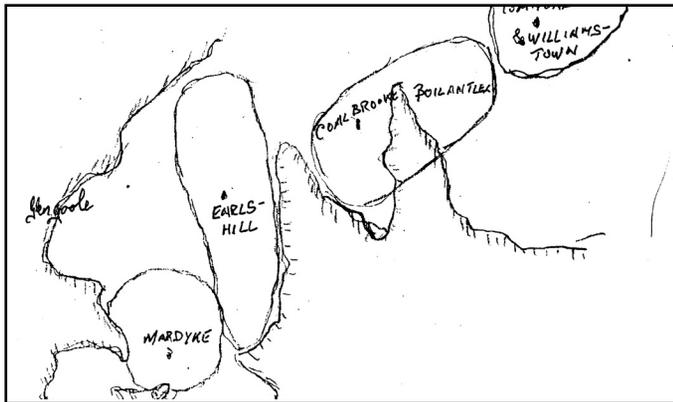
4. A letter from 1724 was spotted for sale on the internet by Martin Critchley. Contact with the purchaser, resulted in a photocopy being made available to the MHTI, which is both transcribed and commented upon here. Little is known of the precise context of the letter, but something of the difficulties of smelting and marketing lead at that time emerges from the document.

# 1. EDITED REPORT FOR THE MINING COMPANY OF IRELAND ON THE SLIEVARDAGH COALFIELD, COUNTY TIPPERARY, 1854.

## Background

As indicated in the adjoining rough sketch there were four coal basins on the Slieveardagh. The Mining Company of Ireland (MCI) had held Mardyke in the south east since 1825 and acquired some of Earlshill possibly about 1845. In the post famine recovery they wished to acquire the other two coal basins, partly to eliminate competition and partly to rationalise the dewatering process. In 1850 it had been proposed that one deep adit would unwater all the collieries.<sup>1</sup>

By 1854 the company had started eliminating competition and coordinating the development of the four the coal basins at great expense. Almost £15,500 is shown in the company's balance sheets as being paid out for "securities" in 1853-'54 to the Langely family who had been mining at Coalbrook for four generations.<sup>2</sup> Another local landowner, Byrne, got over £8,500<sup>3</sup>. This is not deducted from the notional profit shown in the table below nor did it transpire that it eliminated competition.



*The four coal basins on Slieveardagh Plateau*

Before embarking fully on this, however, the company sensibly commissioned a report on the entire colliery area to enable long-term planning to take place. In July and August 1854 a Scottish engineer named Lansdale visited Slieveardagh along with company secretary Purdy Allen. Together with the colliery manager named Cullen they drew up a report which gives great insight into how the various workings here were operated at that time. For convenience the report has been edited here to reflect a) Current state b) Working practice c) The Social dimension.

The report makes clear the complexity of this coalfield. Seemingly, nine seams of coal had originally been laid down. Tectonic forces then warped these into a series of both lateral and longitudinal undulations. Erosion then removed most of the coal leaving only a series of basin shaped seams. The report

identifies three groupings of these - at Mardyke (four small basins), Earlshill (one basin over five miles long with nine seams), Coalbrook and Boilantlea (four small basins) and Commons-Williamstown (one basin apparently with two seams).

## Mardyke:

a) *Current state*: There were four small basin shaped seams of coal in this area three of which were either useless or worked out. The most important was at Mardyke itself comprising two seams, one 125 foot deep at centre and the other 300 feet. The top one "was all worked out many years ago at reasonable profit to the company" The lower seam was then being worked from the upper but this caused severe water problems While the 56 inch Cornish engine could cope with this using 16 diameter pipes, the seam proved not to be consistent, thinning to a few inches and disappearing entirely at places.

b) *Working practice*: The wider parts of this were being worked for culm from where they outcropped by 13 men, each producing about a ton per day being paid 2/3d per ton plus a shilling a yard for creating roads. There were also two men permanently employed creating roads to extract the coal, these being four feet high yard 20 yards apart. They earned 2/- and 1/6d per day. Also employed was a "trapper boy" at 5d per day and three men over-ground that included the driver of the gin-horse. These nineteen people between them produced 4260 tons of culm a year which Lansdale regarded as a loss-making situation "and I do not see how the place can be improved", adding that it would "never return any money nor make any profit".

c) *Social considerations*: The only consideration against abandoning the lease here was "Mardyke village and houses ---33 in number besides the school and police barracks -" as well as to keep it out of the hands of others. Presumably therefore Mardyke was abandoned shortly after this 1854 report although this area still contains the most extensive remains of MCI activity in Slieveardagh. The report then deals with Earlshill, where mining remains are now far scander.

## Earlshill

a) *Current state*: By 1854 nine basin-shaped coal seams had been identified in a "long irregular elliptical trough" over five miles long. The top three seams were either worked out or unworkable. The fourth (the Clasaconel Vein) had good potential for producing low value culm. The fifth, "Crow coal", had very limited potential. The sixth or "Main Coal is very much the best in the basin producing a full third of very good anthracite - and the other two thirds of which is best culm". It was two feet high. The problem however was that this sixth seam had a bad roof and worse floor making it very expensive to extract from. The seventh and very sulphurous ninth ("the stinking seam") were also unworkable while the eighth ("the Glangool vein " 19 inches thick) showed potential.

<sup>1</sup> MCI Reports 1/'49 &1/'50

<sup>2</sup> They had been mining for three generations in 1817 according to copy of Griffiths report in NLI ms. 657 (Hibernian Mining Company Reports)

<sup>3</sup> MCI Reports 1853-'54

b) *Working practice*: The Main Coal and Glangool Vein were being worked from different points on the long basin. The former (rather confusingly) was worked by an incline of 32 degrees from Glangool townland down which a railway had been laid. The loaded wagons were pulled up by chain using a two horse gin. The amount of coal, culm and waste that could be extracted this way was limited so that only ten colliers could be employed here. However, underground, "it is well and economically conducted by longwall and every bit of the seam is got out". The seam needed few props but two men were permanently employed blasting the roof to make roads. These were paid 1/2d and 1/6d per day while the ten colliers earned 1/- to 1/2d per ton of culm and 3/- per ton of anthracite. They averaged twenty tons per day. Also to be paid out of that, however were the gin driver, a receiver, two banksmen and a salesman who could, the report says, have handled triple that output. Glangool Vein was not worked from Glangool but from Lickfin where the 180 yard incline led to a similar type working as the previous with 22 underground and presumably five likewise above ground.

There were also three pits sunk on the veins towards the centre of the basin. Number one pit was 90 yards deep and from it five men were working the fourth vein and another five working the fifth with apparently a road maker employed between the two. Only culm came out of this pit. Pit number two was down to the Main Coal (the sixth seam) which employed 18 colliers. There were difficulties in working this seam: "*the roof is exceedingly bad being composed of soft, slippery shale most difficult to keep up. The pavement also swells up ---*". Props had to be placed four feet apart but such was the pressure on them that they often broke and had to be replaced and the roads deepened again. This and the constant removal of broken props and new rubbish made it expensive to work, but "it is well conducted in the circumstances". Pit number three had a horse gin on the surface which raised culm (being extracted by nine men) to Goings Level. This was a temporarily expedient at the time as that level was to eventually to connect with the other two pits "after which it will be given up".

There was also an engine for pumping and winding. It is not clear from the report where it was pumping from or where the water exited (the Going Level?). It is described as "*an old fashioned condensing one of about thirty horse power but in very good order only one cwt of coal being used per hour. The engine works continually on the pumps and winding is done by double level wheels and clutch, raising about a box in two minutes---*". A special man had to be employed to operate the winder which the report calls "a very crude apparatus". He recommends that a governor should be installed so that the engine man could control the entire operation and avoid extra steam being used for raising.

c) *Social considerations*: Also working the Main Vein on the company's property were "*contractors, or rather squatters of the name of St. John without any legal right or title to possession have worked --- another outcrop in south Ballynastick townland --- for many years worked by trifling windlass pits of little depth*". The report says they did pay royalties to the com-

pany but the amount raised barely made it profitable to collect it, adding "*they set the company at defiance and the sooner such a state of things is put to an end the better*". The company did not own the south eastern section of Earlshill, the mining lease there being held by a Mr. Crawley who had "half a dozen colliers at work with a windlass" on two pits, 36 and 72 feet deep. Both were pumped "*by a small high-pressure engine working two eight inch pumps --- (but) the apparatus is constantly breaking down*". The report anticipates "next winter will finish them". There was also one McCarthy working with another six men near Ballingarry "with not a shadow of success ---he must soon give it up"

It was suggested that once these operations finished, the company should procure the lease to prevent anyone else working there. Unless prevented, such private workings "*would be sure to reduce prices and raise wages*". Part of the concern apparently was that an old adit from Lickfin "in bad repair and abandoned 25 or 30 years ago" could be reopened and extended into good coal which would enable "*these people to absorb a considerable share of the local market to the detriment of the company*".

### Coalbrooke and Boulantlea

a) *Current state*: Only two of the four basins in this area were worked - one in each townland. Coalbrooke was partly unwatered by an adit strangely called The Boula Reform Level (there was also a Knockalonga level though it is not clear whether they were both the same). The sides of the basin were very steep, almost vertical in places, but it could be worked without props. A pumping engine had been installed here in November 1853 and the coal was raised by a two-horse gin.

b) *Working practice*: There were 24 colliers raising 38cwt. per day each, one third coal (for which they got 2/6d per ton) and the rest culm (1/8d per ton). This left them better off than their Earlshill colleagues at between 2/9d and 3/- per day each. There was also six drawers underground while only the gin operator and steward are mentioned over-ground.

Another 12 colliers could have been employed underground except that the horse gin could not raise the increased output. As the life of this pit was less than seven years it did not warrant a winding engine. However, the report suggested the purchase of a portable steam engine such as Medwin and Halls which could then be move from pit to pit as the need arose. Otherwise, at Coalbrook "*the work is done in good style, good roads, water levels and air courses and all economically done and few better specimens of long wall can be seen anywhere*".

The other basin at Boulantlea was drained by the same Reform Level but flooded in winter. Normally there were 18 colliers here averaging 3/- per day with six drawers and six roadsmen. These last were required as, even at the bottom, the seam undulated. However, it was 20 inches thick and produced largely "clean coal". This was raised by a horse gin and fifteen men were employed on the surface. There was no question of further investment here as the remaining life of the basin was only two years.

## Commons & Williamstown

a) *Current state*: The report gives little detail of these and is enigmatic in places. For instance, though "no coal is being wrought at Commons at present", there was a winding engine there which could wind from either of two pits. However, the lease for this basin was to be kept "*not so much for the value of the coal expected to be got from it (but) to prevent anyone else getting possession, for in a few years they could from this small place unwater large tracts --- now effectually drowned and kept from injuring the market*". (This begs a major question - if others could make profit from. unwatering Commons colliery, why not MCI?)

b) *Working practice*: Williamstown was being worked mainly for culm. There were sixteen colliers here raising about two tons per day which would earn them a substantial 3/4d per day each. There was also 8 drawers and two roadmen underground while the only overground worker mentioned in the gins man. The production here is given as 7,200 tons per year and there was a large stock of this on the surface. No suggestions are made about this.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SEQUELS

The total workforce given in the report is 189 - presumably a fraction of the pre-famine figure. There was still an accumulation of surface coal but it was nearly cleared by then and "every practical effort" was being made to sell coal more widely mainly through arranging cheaper transport with the railway companies to get coal to the major cities and through securing a contract with Guinness', despite Welsh competition.<sup>4</sup> By early 1856 the directors were able to refer to "the improved feeling in the country generally" to express optimism about selling culm to local farmers.<sup>5</sup>

SLIEVARDAGH				
Year	Tons raised	Cost Of raising	Tons sold	Profit
1850	15034	£ 4,326.00	?	£1,046
1851	17261	£ 4,673.00	26,382	£ 891
1852	29547	£ 6,795.00	57,132	£1,491
1853	32457	£ 9,911.00	36,929	£5,298
1854	48115	£12,507.00	54,497	£7,196
1855	52562	£15,510.00		£3,493
1556	51082	£ 1,299.00		£7,365
1857				£7,180
1858				£4,720
1859				£1,921
1860				£6,387
1861				£5,212
1862				£2,441
1863				£3,115
1864				£4,631
1865				£2,867
TOTAL PROFIT				£65,254

As the table shows, however, profits were somewhat unreliable. Nevertheless the company were apparently buying out as recommended the leases of the competitor mines - a further £17,000 was paid to Henry Langley in 1855-'56 for Coalbrookdale and £6,300 for Glancoole colliery. Another £1150 paid for premises in Thurles brought such expenditure at Slievardagh to nearly £13,500 in these two years - considerably more than the notional profit made there.<sup>6</sup> A drop in 1858-'59 is attributed to an unaccounted for "increased competition in the locality". How that competition was seen off is not explained nor why the price of culm dropped again in 1861. The shareholders are favoured with no explanation of the declining profits in the following years to 1865<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> MCI Reports. 1&2nd '50

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, 1st '51.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 1855-'56, balance sheets.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* per years mentioned.

## 2 1873 PROSPECTUS OF THE GLENARIFF IRON ORE AND HARBOUR COMPANY

**THE GLENARIFF  
IRON ORE & HARBOUR COMPANY, LIMITED.  
INCORPORATED UNDER THE COMPANIES ACTS, 1862, AND 1867.**

**Capital £130,000, in 13,000 Shares of £10 each; £1 to be paid on Application,  
£1 on Allotment, and the remainder by Calls of £1 each at intervals of  
not less than One Month.**

**Of which the Vendors are entitled to 6,000, and 4,000 will be taken by the  
Directors and their Friends, leaving 3,000 now offered for Subscription.**

[ then follows names of 4 directors, Bankers, solicitors auditors and office (all London) plus secretary, John Ham]

I

**PR O S P E C T U S .**

This company is formed for the purpose of acquiring two leases granted by the Earl of Antrim, and for the purpose of constructing a railway and harbour in connection therewith and for working and shipping ore. [ *legal details on leases and royalties follow*].

The ore is the pisolithic hematite, or red and black nodular ore and from its richness and purity ----. The outcrop of the ores has been proved over a distance of five miles and the quantity obtained in the royalties estimated at millions of tons. [ *six lines of projected detail follow mainly based on local acreages*]

In order to ensure the regular and economic shipment of the ore in large quantities it is proposed to construct a harbour and a railway (to be worked by locomotive power) connecting the harbour with the mines.

The harbour ---[will] enable 1000 tons of ore per day, or 300,000 tons per annum to be shipped -- [ *details of this and rail follow*]

The price for the lease is £60,000 in fully paid-up shares.

The cost of the best description of ore, free on board at the company's harbour will be about 5sh-6d per ton, and the present selling price for this quality is fully 15 shillings per ton, leaving an estimated net profit of say 9 shillings per ton, which, on 100,000 tons per annum would produce £45,000 or nearly 35% on the capital of the company ---.

Application for shares, accompanied by a deposit of £1 per share, on the number applied for to be made to the bankers on or before 9th April when the Subscription List will be closed.

## 3. ARTHUR CAVE OF WEST CARBERY MINES TO LEIGH AND NAISH, LONDON 1903.

24 Little Russell St.  
Bloomsbury W.C  
25 February 1903

Messrs Leigh & Naish  
10, Norfolk St.. Strand, London.

Dear Sirs,

In reply to your question regarding mining labour in the South West of the Co. Cork I am pleased to be able to assure you, that nothing could be more satisfactory than its condition. Mining operations having commenced in that district over 100 years ago and under the tuition or skilled Cornish miners, the natives became themselves very skilled and Engineers and Mine Captains have continually testified to the ability and willingness of the native labour. It appears that at all times, the native labour has worked in perfect harmony with Cornishmen or other strangers and I am fully persuaded, that the native labour prefers their overseers to be strangers in preference to any local person being raised to that position <sup>8</sup>.

I am also aware that when working upon contract, breaking rock, the native labour was even more successful than strangers in the amount they earned, proving both ability and endurance. Recently a Capt. Moyle from Cornwall, who was in my employment, told me, that he never had better workmen under him than in the district referred to, though he had very large experience in Mexico, Australia, Africa, etc., and this opinion of our labourers I have continually had confirmed by expert miners. <sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> This assures the potential investors that Irish mine workers are skilled and hard-working but deferential to English overseers and content to remain as labourers.

My experience of over 40 years in the district, is that the labourers are always ready and willing to do anything in their power to advance the work and make it successful and. that they will at all times that any occasion requires it, give a good deal of overtime free of charge. The wages of a skilled Miner is about 15/- per week and an under labourer about 12/ per week, surface labour from 9/ to 12/ per week. There is an ample supply of men in the neighbourhood and many come from some little distance, lodging with small farmers near the work they may be employed at.<sup>10</sup>

Being an old mining district, they apparently like the work and nothing gives them greater pleasure than the opportunity of obtaining work in a mine. They are [an] extremely intelligent race and being fond of the work, no difficulty is ever found in teaching any of them skilled work, such as timbering a mine. For many years past, I have had as many as 150 men working at barytes mines and very rarely has it been found necessary, to find fault with any of the labour.<sup>11</sup>

In the old Ballycumisk Copper Mine, which was sunk to a depth of over 1500 feet from surface it was necessary for the men to walk up and down to and from their work, upon ladders and this they always did most cheerfully, after working the usual number of hours, as in those days there was no appliances at the Mine for the men to ascend or descend the Mine and this walk up and down was really harder than the work of breaking the rock.<sup>12</sup>

Many English people are under the impression, that because it is a Roman Catholic district, that the Priest would not assist foreign capital but would deter the men from doing a good and fair days work for their wages but I can assure you most emphatically, that this is not so, but that it is quite the contrary and this I am aware was the case, even before my time. I have known the Parish Priest at all times and upon every occasion to do all in his power to point, out to the, labour of the district that it was their duty as well as to their interest, to work hard as ever they can to make all mines successful to the capitalist as otherwise a poor district like ours would suffer much from want of employment.<sup>13</sup>

Is customary for the priests to address his congregations continually on this subject and at all times that he may pass through a Mine, he will speak to all he can, encouraging them to work well and willingly and to use judgement at all times for the benefit of their employers. On two occasions only have I had the experience of men talking of demanding a general rise of wages and this was started by utter strangers to the neighbourhood but the Parish priest, at once quelled the outcry pointing out to them that such a move might risk unemployment altogether and that work at home in the Mine is much better for them than higher wages away from home and then your Mr. Leigh was once present when the Parish priest spoke upon this subject and very strongly, urged the men to all work to the best of their ability and to observe thrift.<sup>14</sup>

I can safely promise you that all in undertakings in that district will meet with the hearty cooperation of the Roman Catholic clergy and that all Englishmen or other strangers brought there will always meet with the greatest kindness etc.. I have also only twice met with trouble in the way of theft and upon each occasion the Priest begged me to leave the matter in his hands and the goods were at once returned and he spoke from the pulpit of his church, in such terms that a recurrence would not be likely to occur.<sup>15</sup>

There are many other important details, which, I shall not attempt to dwell upon but which I shall merely say that many arrangements which strangers would ask, for and which are costly in working a mine, are not demanded by the native labour; this refers principally to comforts etc which the Cornish Miner is accustomed to. It is indeed a fortunate matter that we have such good labour for the mines in the district and you can assure your friends that I speak from good authority and with a large experience and that the introduction of capital for mining labour will always meet with kind feelings and a hearty desire to make the work successful.<sup>16</sup>

Yours very truly,  
ARTHUR CAVE.

<sup>9</sup> Re-emphasising the same point, presumably as necessary to dispel the conflicting view.

<sup>10</sup> Same as the above, plus willingness to do "overtime free of charge". That the investors might benefit financially for this without any return to those who produced the profit goes unquestioned.. However, there is some interesting social detail here.

<sup>11</sup> Re-emphasising the skill of the workmen but Cave's interpretation of what gave them pleasure was probably not tempered by direct discussion with them.

<sup>12</sup> Apart from the word "cheerfully", this is probably a description of mining realities.

<sup>13</sup> The first of three paragraphs giving assurance that should there be a breakdown in any of the innocent good-will of the local miners the Catholic Church would re-impose subservience.

<sup>14</sup> There had been movements for better pay and conditions but these had had been provoked by "utter strangers". The Parish Priest could take care of that too. Also, pay elsewhere was higher.

<sup>15</sup> The priest could also take care of any anti-English feeling and towards any temptation towards misappropriation such as happened in the past.

<sup>16</sup> That the natives do not require the same standard of "comfort" as Cornish miners means that they can be paid less with more profits for shareholders who will nevertheless be met not only with "kind feelings but a "hearty desire" by the workers to increase such profits.

#### 4. LETTER, EDWARD KEY TO GEORGE MOORE, 1724 - TRANSCRIPTION

4. Dr. Martin Critchley spotted the letter of 1724 for sale on E-Bay. The buyer, S.D. Challis in Guernsey, was interested in the inscriptions and stampings on the addressee page rather than in its contents. Contacted by Martin he made a photocopy available. On the addressee page strangely three senders are noted: along with the signer, Edward Key (or Koy) are the names Reed and Answard. The letter is addressed to a George Moore, [illeg.], London. The letter seems to have been sent by means of some sort of courier system (the post office was still well into the future), strangely via Rathkeel.

As an isolated document without wider context it is only of limited use. However, as it is unique, it may form an otherwise unavailable part of jig-saw for someone. The handwriting is illegible in places (some of them crucial!) as indicated by [-], the stroke being for each indecipherable word although some others have been guessed at from context. Spelling is variable and punctuation almost non-existent. These have been modernised for readability. The writer, Edward Key, is obviously

not a well-educated man; his phraseology is awkward and it is sometimes difficult to gather what he is trying to convey. However, something of the difficulties of smelting and marketing lead emerges from the document.

Very little is known of the background to this. By the early 1720s legislation allowed private individuals to mine for argenteriferous lead without royal permission. Joseph Baker (mentioned in second sentence) had opened mines both at Killarney and Kenmare, the latter being the more likely source for the lead. Mr. Gadard must have been some sort of agent in Cork and Key must have been in charge of the smelting.. Possible Larne was a rival of his. The post-script on Constable (?) Ward's opinion goes unexplained. The role of Moore in London is unknown although Key is clearly apologetic about his failures and although he tries to indicate mutual interest, his tone is deferential.

Killarney: September 27<sup>th</sup> 1724

Sir,

(At) last I write from Corke which was so against [-] of the burning the bones (sic -?) which does answer very well and I have refined seven tons and nine hundred-weight of lead and I find it to have full 18 ozs. of silver per ton. I was with Mr Bacon at Cork last week with the silver which was 131 ozs. 13 pennyweight. It was left in Mr Gadard's hands and two ton, three hundred (weight) of lead which found shift to reduce on a [-] lest any furnace lining of common bricks it was ready to fall and so made shift to reduce it much and this week I have been making my furnace up again and shall be given to refine the remainder part of the lead Thursday next. I have lead I found [-] to one of my smelting furnaces for this week we got bricks burned. I have found a clay which will do as well as any we have in England which cost but six shillings tons per ton delivered at the works. I hope to have metal in the smelting furnace very soon: as soon as I have done refining.

The lead which I reduced was pretty good and it was not the very softest of lead but it was not to be complained of, but the next shall be as good as any at all for I shall have my one furnace up. Lead is in Cork at £19 per ton which makes me go all the haste I can to get the works off and we were proffered five shillings eleven pence per ounce but we would not under six [shillings] so it was left in Gadard's hands to be (in) line(?) when I shall have six for it. A gold smith had one of the pieces to try and he never tried better in his life, As far as the rest of the assays I cannot say anything for it yet for I had no time to make a throw trial as yet and I wish it may be a mistake (?) but whatever is in it I will have it out, both lead and silver, and I can say no more concerning the matter now.

I hope to get all things in ample manner done and I don't doubt but to bring all things to answer your desire. I hope I shall have the privilege of your work here as long as I have myself honest and free and diligent: but if I must know James H. Larne's men to work for, it is impossible for me to do other ways and I am afraid of some [-]. I think I proper to [-] of it [-] I shall pursue all endeavours as if it was my own: [-]: once [-] being and are to the fore of and it is now the first time I have been [-] so I desire no faces from no man for I have been early and least it is to get things forward knowing I have a deal of money lying dead.

I think it proper if you think fit that I should have the choosing of the men which works at fire and let him and I agree as cheap with them as we can. Workmanship will be pretty cheap here and turf here is very good and will answer very well. I don't fear I would have to consider this for I mean nothing but what is honest and fair and you shall find me to be your ever true and faithful servant.

Edward Key

(P.S.) I long to hear what Contb. Ward says.

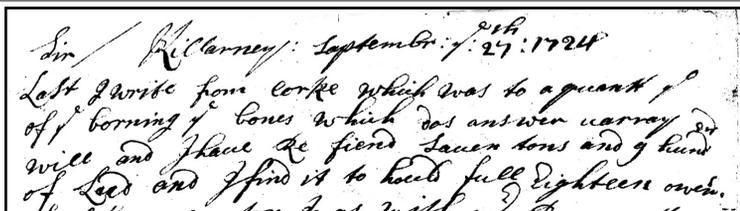


Figure 1. Sample of letter: Sir/ Last I write from Corke which was so against [-] of the (abbreviated) burning the (abbreviated) bones which dos answer varray will and I have re fiend seven tons and 9 hundredweighth (abbreviated) of laed ---