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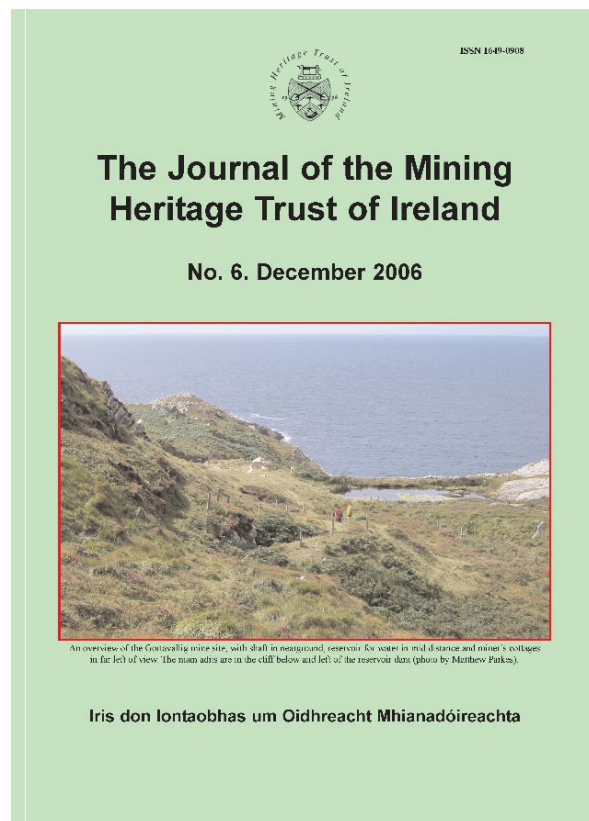
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# GURTAVALDIG MINE, COUNTY CORK

By Diane Hodnett

**Abstract:** This small copper mine on the Sheep's Head Peninsula, north of Kiltrohane, County Cork, was worked from 1845 to 1849. This is the history of the mine, taken from contemporary reports and letters. In all of these, the mine is referred to as 'Gurtavallig'. In Griffith's Land Valuation, c 1845, the area is referred to as Gortavallig, or '*passage field*'. The mine was surveyed recently, in August 2005, by members of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland. Descriptions of the workings were provided at the time by the Cornish mine captain, William Thomas. In addition, various accounts appeared in the *Mining Journal*. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 6, 2006, 3-8.

On **November 15th 1845** an advertisement appeared in the *Mining Journal* for the Southern and Western Mining Company of Ireland, inviting applications for shares in the newly formed Company. The capital was £200,000, in 10,000 shares of £20 each, with a deposit of £2 per share. The provisional committee was a roll-call of prominent Cork city and county business men, including Major N.L. Beamish of the brewing concern. The Secretary was William O'Connell, Esq., 80 South Mall, Cork.

The advertisement praises the opportunities that could be provided by investing in Irish mines in the 'southern and western districts of Ireland, which the most eminent authorities acknowledge to equal, if not exceed, in metalliferous deposits and mineral richness the most favoured mining districts in England'. The marked success of the Berehaven and Knockmahon mines is alluded to, together with Coosheen mine, near Schull. The report continues -

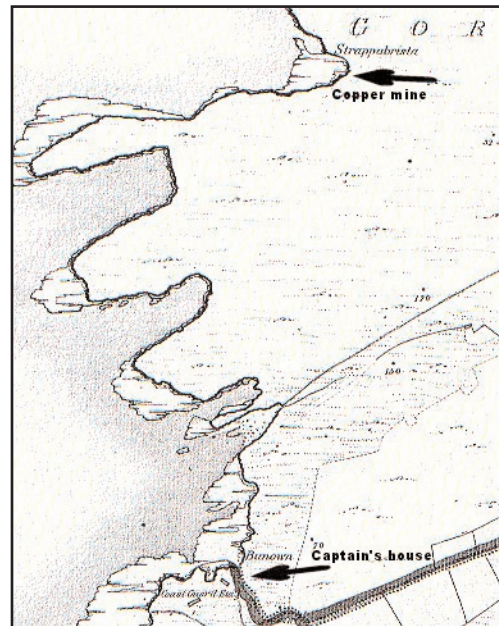
'Since the preliminary announcement of the West Carberry and County of Cork Mining Company, now changed and registered as the 'Southern and West (sic) Mining Company of Ireland' appeared before the public, applications have been received for over 600 shares.'

William O'Connell wrote a full description of the Southern and Western Mining Company enterprise, which the *Mining Journal* printed on **21 February, 1846**, signed *Cork Southern Reporter*. It reads:-

'By the purchase of the Gurtavallig Mine, or by the junction of the proprietary of that mine with the Southern and Western Company, many excellent results are immediately obtained. *In the first place*, even before a single call had been made on the Company, they have a tangible field of enterprise prepared for their most spirited operations, in as much as the works of the mine are in an advanced state of progress, and area this moment yielding a produce without a formal operation, more than equal to the sum expended in clearing away the cliff, running an adit, and making the floor for the future dressing and preparing of the ore. *In the second place*, the company became the owners of the royalties of an estate extending eight miles by four miles, and abounding with the most certain indications of the richest metalliferous deposits.'

The letter continues

'...We are happy to state .....that the Gurtavallig Mine presents one of the richest lodes yet opened in Ireland.



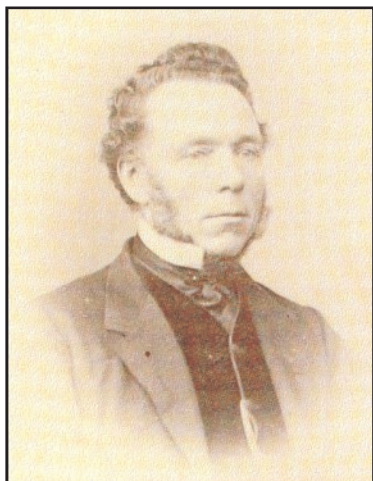
**Figure 1.** Map (1838 survey) showing location of the mine on the Sheep's Head peninsula, at Strappabrista, or 'broken portion'.

Even from the face of the cliff, which it was found necessary to cut away in order to secure against the danger of future workings, there has been obtained sufficient copper ore to double the amount expended in the operations already carried on.' The report continues.... 'While the country gentleman is willing to receive the labour of the poor men at 4d and 5d a day - oft times without a diet - the Mining Company does not pay the labourer less than a shilling a day - frequently more.'

On the **30th of May 1847** William Thomas (Figure 2), then aged 40, sent his first report to the directors of the Company. The Board of Directors, chaired by Major N. Ludlow Beamish printed the report and sent it to the shareholders. The large heading informs shareholders that the Company was incorporated under Royal Charter in 1847, and had Capital £150,000 in 10,000 shares, at £15 per share. It states

'The Charter from the Crown for which they have so long laboured, passed the Great Seal on the 18th of March last; thereby forming this Company into a Corporation, with power to work Mines in the Counties of Cork, Kerry, Limerick and Waterford, and limiting the liability of the Shareholders to the amount of their shares.'<sup>1</sup>

William Thomas' 'First Report of the Gurtavallig Mine' goes into very great detail of the work in progress.



**Figure 2.**  
**Captain William Thomas**

' The Sett which about 3 miles in length (on the run or course of the lodes), and 2 miles in breadth, is situated in the parish of Kilcrohane, West Division of West Carberry, and County of Cork; and held by Lease for 32 years, at a Royalty of 1/18 for the first 6 years, and 1/10 for the remaining 26 years, under JOHN CONGREVE, ESQ., of Mount Congreve, County Waterford. It contains at least 10 large lodes, all of which are seen in the cliffs, from which they run inland, and in many places, intersecting and forming junctions with each other.'

' The Cliff in which we commenced operations, is about 40 fathoms high from high water mark. Several lodes intersect each other in this spot; and the action of the sea having washed out the soft part of the lodes, the whole of the cliff from top to bottom was completely *crushed*.

Our first work therefore, was to clear away all the loose rocks - thousands of tons of which we have rolled into the sea - and with the remainder built two strong and substantial quays, one 73 feet long and 40 feet high, the other 92 feet long and 36 feet high. We have also filled up and made a complete and convenient dressing floor (at the base of the Cliff,) 180 feet long and 50 feet wide; it is well sheltered from every wind, and as the stuff is brought out of the deep adit on the Railway, it is tripped immediately on the spot where it is prepared for market.'

The report goes on to describe the difficulties faced:

'For you can now hear, on our well secured dressing floors (mingled with the roar of the Atlantic) the busy voices of men, women, boys and girls; all engaged in breaking, dressing, and preparing the ore for market.'

'About the latter end of August (1845) we first commenced to clear away the rocky Cliff - winter soon overtook us, and with it came short, wet, and stormy days; the work consequently progress rather slowly until the Spring of 1846. The lodes having a South underlie or dip, and the Cliff sloping gradually from South to North, we had to begin a cross-cut South at the base of the Cliff, for the purpose of intersecting the lodes; it was commenced in January, and the lode intersected in October.

We have in the course of 16 months, with an average of 24 Miners, whose earnings or gettings in the aggregate, ranged from 9s. to 12s. a week; explored 174 fathoms 4 feet 8 inches of ground, we have also employed about 26 surface men, at the rate of 10d and 1s. per day, making a total of 50 men, who (with their families amounting at the lowest calculation to 200 souls), have been afforded the means of earning a livelihood, while their neighbours have perished by thousands from want of food, or the means of purchasing it.

In the shallow adit East, we have driven through a good length of *orey* ground, and when we have communicated with Beamish's shaft, we shall be enabled to stope the ground to a great advantage. The East and West Lode is intersected by an oblique or Caunter-lode, which we intend to cross-cut; we also intend to cross-cut North, in order to intersect the great Caunter-lode, and some branches gone off in that direction. We shall this intersect and lay open (besides ascertaining their value), Three *Champion* lodes, within a distance of 10 fathoms, by the time the deep adit reaches this point of our operations. Beamish's shaft is sunk on the North part of the great Caunter-lode, and we shall have to croos-cut about 3 fathoms South from the East and West lode to effect a communication; after which we shall push the level East on the course of the East and West lode, and also South East on the great Caunter-lode towards Congreve's shaft, in which the lode is about 10 feet wide, and composed of Gossan, Mundic, Blende, Quartz, and strong Yellow Ore. When the shallow adit reached Congreve's shaft, we expect from the porous nature of the lode, it will drain the ground and enable us to sink the shaft to the level, without any cost of water charge. The East and West lode varies in breadth, from 2 to 6 feet, it is regular and well defined, and composed of beautiful Gossan, soft decomposed Quartz, Yellow Ore, and Black Oxide of Copper - the Gossan I am persuaded contains Silver, but I have no time as yet to test it.

In the deep adit East we have hitherto driven, and shall continue to do so (until we communicate with Townsend's winze) on the soft or flucan part of the lode. Our reason for pursuing this course is, that the ground about the Cliff, alluded to in the commencement of this report, is unsettled, and contains no ore, though affording great facilities for sriving. Immediately East, however, of Townsend's winze, we leave the unsettled ground, and meet the ore ground - we are rapidly progressing towards this point, in the deep adit level; and shall reach it, I expect, in the course of another month. Townsend's winze I should have remarked for the same reason, is sunk from the shallow to the deep adit on the flucan part of the lode also.

In the shallow adit West: the lode, "or rather the part on which the end is being driven", is about 3 1/2 feet wide, and contains (though only 7 fathoms under surface) strong Yellow Ore, Carbonate of Copper, Soft friable Quartz, Gossan and Mundic.

We are satisfied however, that we have not yet seen the South or North wall of the lode, and as soon as our new surface shaft is holed to the level, we shall cross-cut the lode, as well as other lodes which we have ascertained are within a short distance. We have just commenced sinking a winze on the course of the lode, from the shallow to the deep adit level, in which the lode is large, strong, and ore.

In the deep adit West, we have a fine lode, composed of Yellow ore, Quartz, Mundic, Chrystallised and Ruby Ore; but not having ascertained its breadth, we are cross-cutting South for that purpose.'

On the **28 August 1847** the Mining Journal carried an article on Gurtavallig Mine extracted from the Cork Constitution, and signed N.L.B., Cork. This presumably was Major N. Ludlow Beamish, chairman of the Board of Directors.

The article generally repeats Thomas' earlier report, but continues;

'The lodes are unusually large, one of them measuring 4 fathoms, or 24 feet across. A considerable quantity of ore has already been collected; and now that the operation of stoping has been commenced, a cargo will probably be ready for shipment before the end of the year.'

The report goes on to say the mine was started in the winter of 1845. It continues:

'A row of small dwelling-houses for the accommodation of the workers is in the course of construction, at a convenient distance from the works, and so favourable has the contract been to the company - good slate and building stone being found on the spot - that they will yield a profit rent of 15 per cent.' (Figure 3).



**Figure 3. The row of miners' cottages. Photo Matthew Parkes.**

On **Monday 6th March, 1848**, the First Ordinary General Meeting was held of the S&WMCI, in at the Committee of Merchant's Room, Commercial Buildings, Cork. Four Directors offered themselves for re-election: N.L. Beamish, H. Townsend, T.S. Reeves and Robert Briscoe, together with the auditors W.C. Logan and Adam Carr.

An abstract of receipts and expenditure from the commencement of mining operations to 31st December 1847 was presented by the auditors, and a report presented from William Thomas, Superintendant (sic) of the mine, and James Bennett, resident mining agent. <sup>2</sup>

The receipts amounted to £25,587 17s 8d, of which £24,250 was the amount of deposits on 9,700 shares at £2 10s each.

The expenditure is itemised on page 6.

The report provided by William Thomas of work at the mine is very detailed, and provides an excellent description of what the mine must have looked like in **February 1848**.

#### **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

*To the Chairman and Directors of the Southern and Western Mining Company of Ireland.*

In the shallow Adit level east we have driven 104 fathoms 5 feet on the course of the Lode or rather on the fluccan part of it, as by driving on the soft part of the Lode, we were enabled to explore a much greater extent of ground than we otherwise could have done, and at a much less expense, especially as Cross-cuts at proper intervals will shew the character and value of the Lode as well as if we had driven at a heavy expense on the hard part. The end is now as far east as Congreve's Shaft, the extreme point of our operations in that direction, and we have just commenced to Cross-cut south, to prove the Lode and unwater the shaft. We shall also shortly commence the Cross-cut midway between Congreve's and Beamish's shafts, and at the latter, thus intersecting the Great Caunter (oblique) Lode at three different points, within a distance of 35 fathoms. The deep adit level is extended east 58 fathoms, 0 feet, 10 inches, and there being several large Lodes, varying from 12 to 20 feet in breadth, within a short distance of the present end, we consider that we have arrived at the proper point for intersecting them, and have just commenced a Cross-cut for the purpose.

The shallow Adit west is driven 46 fathoms, 4 feet, 6 inches; the Lode is from 4 to 10 feet wide, composed of Gossan, Quartz, Red and Black Oxide, Carbonate of Copper, and Yellow Copper ore. In the deep Adit level west we have explored, on the course of the Lode, 50 fathoms, 4 feet, 3 inches; it is from 20 to 24 feet wide, and the level being driven on one part of it, we have now commenced Cross-cutting north and south, to ascertain its size and value, and to intersect two large parallel Lodes, within a distance of 6 fathoms, as also the Great Caunter Lode.

In two Winzes, or internal shafts, sunk from the shallow to the deep Adit level, the Lode is composed of beautiful Gossan, with rich Oxides and Carbonates of Copper and Yellow Ore. We have sunk 6 fathoms below the deep Adit through a very fine Lode. The Lode in the deep Adit east assumes quite a different appearance from that which characterizes it in the western level, owing, it is presumed, to its being intersected by two large Caunter lodes, the ore in the former being yellow and in contact with friable Quartz, Iron Pyrites, &c., Whereas

EXPENDITURE

	Amount paid to Late Proprietors of Gurtavallig Mine for their Interest in said Mines and Royalties, purchased for £20,000, and on account of which is now paid by £7,931 Shares, at £2 10s)	£	s.	d.
		19, 827	10	0
Expenses at the mine since commencement, viz:-	£	s.	d.	
Labour	1538	11	9	
Building	153	7	1	
Salaries	296	0	0	
Smiths	45	14	10	
Sawyers	10	1	9	
Timber	90	7	2	
Iron	64	10	3	
Gunpowder	75	11	8	
Coals	17	11	5	
Candles	113	16	11	
Rent	20	0	0	
Contributions for Making Road	20	0	0	
Horse, Tax -Cart, and Harness	32	5	0	
Sundries in various items	232	0	1	
Manufactured Materials	166	14	0	
Stationery	4	3	1	
Law expenses, obtaining Charter of Incorporation, Deeds of Settlement, and Assignment of the Lease of the Mine, &c., from Gurtavallig Proprietors; also, Expenses of Deputation to London.	1,442	17	4	
Advertising in Newspapers	322	0	5	
		4, 645	12	9
Cash Balance in Provincial Bank		1, 114	14	11
	TOTAL	25, 587	17	8

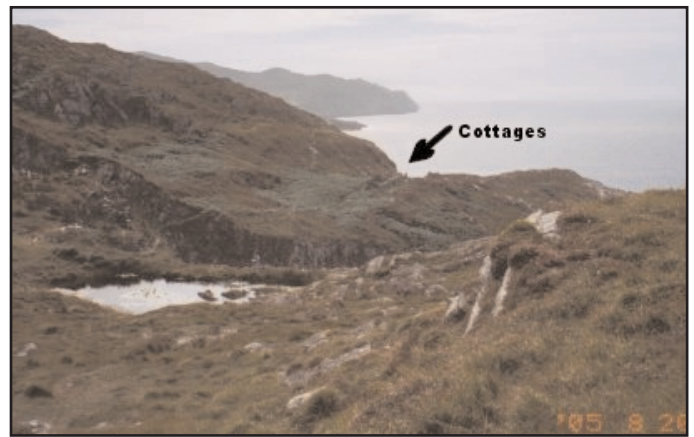
Figure 4. An abstract of receipts and expenditure from the commencement of mining operations to 31st December 1847.

in the westen level it partakes more of the Gossan Oxide, and Carbonate of Copper, in connexion with *elvan* (Porphyritic) and *Killas* (clay slate) formations. Several Winzes have been sunk from the shallow to the deep adit level(east) through very promising and Orey ground, and in a rise immediately at the back of the deep adit end, there is a good Lode; and as we found a similar lode 12 fathoms further east in the shallow level, we have every reason to suppose that the Ore just discovered is a continuation of this deposit.

The following is a summary of the number of fathoms explored in surface Shafts, Winzes, Deep and Shallow Levels and Cross-cuts:-

	Fathoms	Feet	Inches
Deep Adit level east	58	0	10
Deep Adit West	50	4	3
Shallow Adit East	104	5	0
Shallow Adit West	46	4	6
Congreve's Shaft	11	3	6
Beamish's Shaft	8	5	4
Briscoe's Shaft	6	5	6
Reeve's Shaft	5	1	6
New Shaft	3	1	0
Townsend's Winze	14	0	0
Ware's Winze	11	1	0
Carmichael's Winze	8	0	6
Connell's Winze	11	1	4
Maitland's Winze	13	3	6
Tonkin's Winze	5	2	9
Stoped above shallow level	35	2	10
Stoped below shallow level	19	3	6
Cross-cuts	43	2	8
Sundry small Rises and Winzes	16	5	0
TOTAL	475	0	6

From the foregoing you will perceive that the total length of the shallow level is 151 fathoms, 3 feet, 6 inches, and of the deep Adit, 129 fathoms, 5 feet, 1 inch. In each of the ends, irrespective of the intermediate space, the Lode is strong, well defined, and contains good Ore. Although our operations have been hitherto completely of an exploratory character, I consider from the nature and appearance of the Lodes laid open that our prospects are highly encouraging and decidedly good; in fact, if our hopes of success depended upon *one* of the Lodes alone, I consider that either of them would, in the judgement of any practical miner, be deemed worthy of any amount of outlay in its development - more particularly when the great natural advantages and facilities, which we possess for working are taken into account. Our prospect of success are not, however, confined to *one*, *two* or even *three* Lodes, and those neither small nor insignificant. We *know* that we have THREE CHAMPION LODES, only a few fathoms north of the deep Adit west. We know also, that we shall shortly intersect the same Lodes by the Cross-cut south, from the deep Adit end east, for notwithstanding all that we have done, we have only now arrived at the proper position to lay open and develop the resources of the Mine. Our Cross-cuts, north and south, will shortly accomplish this, and if there is any dependance (sic) to be placed on appearances and indications - which assuredly is the case - I do not hesitate to say that we are - in addition to the present remarkable development - on the eve of making important and valuable discoveries. We have a Mine between 60 and 70 fathoms deep, which may be worked a hundred years at that level, without incurring one farthing expense for water charge. The water is all drained from the Mine by deep Adit level, which is also the great thoroughfare - a Railroad having been laid down in it,- for bringing out the Ore. Not a single article has to be drawn to the surface, our workings being so arranged, that all the stuff falls down to the deep level, from whence it is trammed out, and prepared on the spot for market. It may be asked by those who have never visited the Mine (it would afford me great pleasure if every shareholder would make a personal inspection of the Mine, feeling confident that they would be highly gratified by so doing) after all that has been said about it, what is the result of our operations? I will endeavour briefly to answer the question:- We have made convenient and complete dressing floors on a spot that had been for ages exposed to the fury of the Western Ocean. The same is secured by two immense piers or sea walls, inside of which are erected Smiths' and Carpenters' shops, dressing houses, &c. We have cut a road in the solid rock for shipping the Ore and loading materials - made water-courses, and built a reservoir (Figures 5 & 6) which commands the dressing floors - explored in shafts, levels, winzes, &c., 475 fathoms, 0 feet, 6 inches of ground-laid open some valuable Lodes; and during the last four months, notwithstanding short and wet days, and labouring under many disadvantage which are now removed-dressed and prepared for market, from a Mine completely in its infancy, upwards of sixty tons of Ore that will yield from 10 to 12 per cent of Copper, with a prospect



**Figure 5. Looking SW - the reservoir in foreground, and the miners' cottages in background on right.**



**Figure 6. Retaining wall of reservoir, and sluice opening.**

of a regular succession of shipments. These are a few of the things we have done, with an outlay, including all kinds of materials, agencies, &c., of less than £3,000.

The necessary, but unavoidable expense of preparatory operations, is now at an end, and the future expenditure will be confined to the internal workings; finally the result of our operation is, that we have discovered a good Mine, and it now rests with the Shareholders, whether they will have the patience and perseverance, to make it a lasting and profitable one.'

Signed by William Thomas, Superintendant (sic) of the Mine, and James Bennett, Resident Mining Agent. Gortavallig, **February 15th 1848.**

The road built by the Mining Company was 10 miles long, and was completed in eleven weeks. Major Beamish erected a pil-

lar with a commemorative plaque to record his appreciation, on the side of the road near the area known today as the Crimea, about a mile NE of the mine.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that the mine had produced a small quantity of ore at this stage. The chairman of the S&WMCI sent the following communication to the Mining Journal, which published it on the **23 May 1848**, with a heading 'Gurtavallig Mine'. It was from Captain William Thomas, and was dated **May 13th 1848**.

It read:

'The *William and Thomas* arrived here yesterday morning when we commenced discharging her ballast, and by 10 o'clock this morning, we had put on board 88 tons of ore. I should suppose that the fact of our having shipped a cargo of ore in a few hours, besides discharging 30 tons of ballast, will, or ought to, convince the most sceptical that we have not only a mine, but the means of shipping the ore as speedily as if it had been on the quay of Cork.....If the cargo is to be insured, I think the amount should be £600, because the price is at least £2 10s per ton below what it was 12 months since.'

In the issue of **24 June, 1848**, the Mining Journal published the ores for the Irish mines sold at Swansea during the quarter. There is a discrepancy of one ton between Thomas' note, and the actual amount, for Gurtavallig. This was the only ore ever shipped from Gurtavallig.

Mine	Tons	£	s.	d.
Berehaven	1592	9681	0	0
Knockmahon	1251	6342	12	6
Ballymurtagh	412	1338	2	0
Holyford	71	1048	4	6
Gurtavallig	87	269	14	0
Lackamore	37	268	12	6
DerrycMahon	43	180	12	0
Cronebane	46	145	19	0
Tigrony	1	29	5	0
		<b>£19,306</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>

The Mining Journal published a leader on the **14th October 1948**. It was headed S&WMCI, and had clearly been sent by William O'Connell. It expressed regret that the Company had not been successful in their operations at Gurtavallig Mine. It stated that the directors requested Mr. R.W. Townsend, C.E., M.A., M.R.I.A., to examine and report on the appearances and prospects of the mine. He concluded that the mine 'is by no means yet explored ', and that the lode 'affords strong ground for an extensive exploration'.

The Second Ordinary General Meeting of the Southern and Western Mining Company of Ireland was held at the Offices of the Company, 80, South Mall, Cork, on **2nd April 1849**. <sup>1</sup> The Report stated that a call was made on the shareholders for six shillings per share, but that this was not generally responded to. It continued: '...the Directors had no other alternative but to suspend the operations at the Mine'; and it now for the Shareholders to decide, whether they will abandon the undertakings .....or authorize the Directors to dispose of their property to more persevering and enterprising Capitalists.'

A letter was sent from the Secretary to shareholders stating that the Directors 'are ....adverse to impede or injure those who wish to extend the operations', and suggest the transfer to the Secretary of all shares on which half the call of 3 shillings 'is or shall' be paid, discharging existing liabilities.

The Company tried to struggle on. An article appeared in the Mining Journal on **28th April, 1849**, signed 'Anglo-Celt', Mount Gabriel. The article gives a very full description of Gurtavallig Mine. It reads: 'Two large piers or sea walls, were built, and the space thus wrested from the Atlantic Ocean filled with immense rocks from the overhanging cliffs, upon which a convenient dressing floor has been made, and suitable buildings for mining purposes erected against the pier walls. The place is now completely sheltered, and the dressing-floors, immediately at the mouth of the deep adit, where the stuff is trammed by waggons (sic), and the ore prepared for market.' The letter complains about the low price of ore, and states that 'everything is in good working order, with a valuable supply of materials; and the mine could be worked 40 fathoms below the deep adit without any machinery but hand pumps, not even a whim would be required'. It continues: 'this promising concern is being worked by three private individuals; and there is every reasonable prospect that their spirited exertions will be crowned with great success'.

The last reference to the mine occurred in a leader in the Mining Journal on **22nd June 1850**, probably written by William O'Connell, although unsigned. It declared that it was now proposed to issue some of the shares which had been surrendered to the directors at par, £2 10s. per share in order to raise £10,000. The mine is described, with some new details emerging. It states: ' .....all preparatory operations are completed, railways laid down, dressing floors, reservoir, inclined planes for shipping ore, dressing houses, sheds, smiths' and carpenters' shops, and 10 good miners' cottages.' It goes on to say ' the directors in Ireland have no objection to the establishment of a London board, to have the direction and entire control of expenditure.'

Gurtavallig Mine was never worked again.

REFERENCES

1. Cork Archives Institute, Ref. number: U15B/P/A59. The Report also appeared in the Mining Journal, 7th August, 1847, page 369; where it is also signed by James Bennett.  
2. Cork Archives Institute, Ref. number: U15B/P/A59.  
3. Frank O'Mahony (2000) (author and publisher, Bantry) The Story of Kilcrohane

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Charles Thomas, Truro, Cornwall, provided the photograph of William Thomas. It was taken by A. Hunter, 102 Patrick Street, Cork, and was made into a *carte de visite*.

Paddy O'Sullivan, MHTI, who organised and lead the expedition to Gurtavallig Mine, where the above photographs were taken. Thanks are due also to Paddy for suggesting a visit to the Cork Archives Institute.