

NEWSLETTER

Cumann Stair na Mianadóireachta

NUMBER 4

SPRING 1997

MINING HISTORY SOCIETY OF IRELAND

MHSI

PROGRAMME 1997

May 3rd-4th (Sat.-Sun.): Weekend workshop in Old Glengowla, Oughterard, Co. Galway on (i) Surveying surface remains; (ii) Clearing mine workings. It is hoped that out of (i) techniques will be developed for surveying other mines and that (ii) will represent the commencement by members of the society in on-going work there. (Details enclosed with this issue).

May 16th (Fri.): Field meet at Newtownards and Conlig mines, Co. Down with Dr. Norman Moles. (Lecture and site visit will precede the joint IAEG and IMM conference on *Europe's major gold deposits*.) Meet at 11.00 a.m. at the Somme Heritage Centre car park in Whitespots County Park on the Bangor road about 2 kms north of Newtownards [J 349 376]

July 11-14th (Fri.-Mon.): NAHMO conference (site/underground visits, lectures, etc.) near Matlock in Derbyshire. Irish members of the MHSI who wish to attend contact Dr. Martin Critchley. (Details enclosed with this issue).

September 7th (Sun.): National Heritage Day. (Details will be notified).

October 4th-5th (Sat.-Sun.): Field meet at Knockmahon and Slievardagh to be conducted by Ken Brown and Des Cowman. with geological commentary by Dan Tietzsch-Tyler. Assemble 10.00 a.m. on Sat. at car park, Bunmahon [X 433 989]. Depart Bunmahon 9.30 a.m. Sunday and reassemble Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary, at 10.30. (Further details will be notified).

18th Oct.; Workshop on the ecology of mining sites. (Invitation to contribute enclosed).

1st November (Sat.): Talk by Ron Callender "*Gold in the Hills*"

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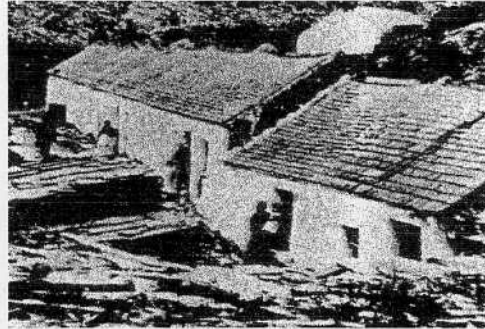
SOCIETY NEWS

FIELD TRIP TO AHENNY SLATE QUARRIES

Led by Dr. John Colthurst.

Spring arrived dramatically on 8th of March and so did members of the MHSI at Ahenny on the Kilkenny/Tipperary border. Backed by the local knowledge of John Meagher and Ned FitzPatrick, John Colthurst led us first to the Ormond Quarries. The spectacle of the dark slate walls along each side of the sun-drenched Lingaun valley was greatly enhanced by the slate sculptures placed there in 1992.

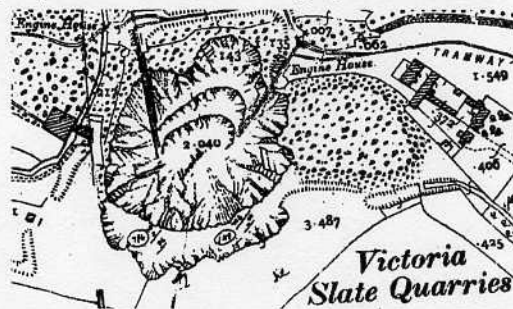
Slate from here was used in roofing Kells Priory in the 14th century, in the building of Carrick on Suir castle in the 16th and in roofing much of the town itself in the 17th century. During this last period and up into the early 19th local families quarried individual sites here under lease from the landowner, the earl of Ormond. By 1848, however they were all taken over by an engineer named William Mercer who began a more systematic development including the application of water power and, as the quarries deepened over the next forty years, steam power. In 1890 Mercer would appear to have set up a limited company and quarrying here continued until 1923. Work resumed in 1927 under the Killaloe Slate Company but this only lasted about nine years until problems with quartz veins forced their abandonment apart from a brief resuscitation in 1944.



Workers' cottages at the Ormond slate quarries c. 1900.

There are few remains of buildings associated with the quarries here. One major reason must have been the flood in March 1947 which swept away the road beside the Lingaun and a concrete bridge over it which still remains at a forty five degree angle. The new and current road would appear to have been driven across the top of the spoil heap ((the tip rails still stick out under the road!) destroying most of the structures along the way as depicted on the 1905 map. John, our guide, provided photocopies of post cards showing some of these including, most spectacularly the hamlet of Farnanaun with people standing on the concrete bridge. The ruined houses remain nearby.

Following a picnic lunch in Delany's pub the party crossed the band of greywacke that that separates the Ormond from the more western Victoria Quarries. There Ned FitzPatrick treated us to a slate-trimming exhibition using a vertically mounted flat iron bar as a platform and a one foot flat blade with a off-set handle, having a spike on the obverse of the cutting side to make nail holes. We all then took our turn timorously - except Paddy Geoghan who turned out a fully trimmed standard slate with nail holes in about thirty seconds.



The number One pit: the water leat and wheel house are on the left.

We then proceed to the Number one pit filled with about 180 feet of water including, we were told, an indeterminate amount of sludge and nastiness dumped there by the now defunct tannery in Carrick. At its western end stands what must have been the water-driven pumphouse with a huge wheel-pit whose axle sockets would appear to be buried in rubbish. The leat for this emerges nearby from a rock-cut tunnel and map evidence shows it to have been about two and a half miles long. At the number 2 quarry pit further east only what must have been a platform for a hoist now stands above the water line.

ITEMS RECEIVED BY SOCIETY

1. From Dr. John Pyne, *The Discoverers. A 50 year History of the Prospectors and Developers Association, some famous prospectors and their discoveries.* 1982. Edited by Hanula, M.R. and Longo, R.M. Published by Pitt Publishing Company, Toronto, Ontario, 1982.

2. From Mr. Brian Moore of Shropshire *Exploring Cornish Mines* by Kenneth Brown and Bob Acton. Published by Landfall Publications, Truro, 1994.

3. From Ms Pat Geoghegan a collection of photocopied material on Glengowla Mine, co. Galway. These comprise [a] the maps (1871 reproductions of which are attached) which were originally obtained by Dr. Billy O'Brien, and [b] notes on the workings obtained and transcribed (mainly in typescript) by Dr. Stephen Moreton. In summary, these comprise, chronologically -

1850 [from National Library of Ireland (NLI) ms 15492]

- Oct & Dec. Letters re assays.
- (?) Undated suggestions from P.J. Foley re Royalties.

1851 Series of bi-weekly reports with gaps from June to October by P.J. Foley on Glengowla with some reference to Drumsnane and Curraghduff Copper Mines (also called Glan) [from NLI ms 20716]. e.g. -

- 25th & 28th June: 40 perches of water course ready. Two existing shafts - Engine and Colonel's. Paul's shaft being "forked" but needing timbering.
- 2nd July: mention of "copper sulphur" and blende.
- 9th July At Drumsnane 13 tons of sulphur undressed; Doone shaft 4 fathoms deep being worked by six men.
- 19th July: Engine shaft at Glengowla 16ft (fathoms?) deep: "water very strong --- top part (10 feet) dangerous". Foley recommends "oak setts" rather than walling as "masons are bad here and dear". He asks where the bob and kingpost are to be placed.
- 23rd July: Number 2 "vein constantly leaking water"; "Whimsey (sic -Whim?) badly needed". Timbering of engine shaft has commenced.
- 30th Aug.: Mention of a "timber slide" for "Whymme barrels"
- 24th Sept.: "Wheel nearly completed; water course getting forward; launders completed for watercourse; the powder that had gone astray will be here this evening".
- 22nd Oct.: mention of Capt. Tracey.
- 25th Oct.: Final letter from P.J. Foley - "Dear sir, I am very sorry to give you this bad report." (There is no more in this letter!)

(Included with this is a brief biography of P.J. Foley by Des Cowman first published in *Decies* 45, 1992).

1853. Two reports on Glengowla (and other mines) in *Mining Journal* From "Galway Correspondent".

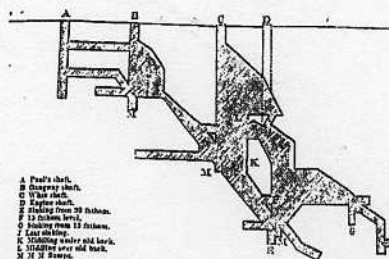
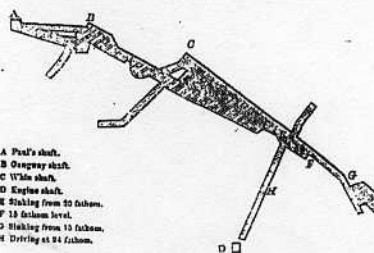
- 15th Jan.: "An excellent discovery at the 16 fathom level"
- 29th Jan.: "Very little doing this week. The deep workings are full of water"

1854 (Mine now apparently being worked by landowner G.F. O'Flaherty with K Lumsden as manager).

- 24th Oct.: Wages sheet
- Nov. & Dec.: Reports from Lumsden.

1870. Geological Survey of Ireland Memoir on the mine. This includes Capt. Tracy's plan and section reproduced here.

Plan of Glengowla Lead Mine, reduced from a map by Capt. Tracey.



Plan and section of Glengowla mine 1851 made by Captain Tracey.

