



# NEWSLETTER

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Iontaobhas Oidhreachta Mianadóireachta na hEireann

Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland

## CONTENTS NEWSLETTER 30

2. REPORT ON A.G.M. HELD IN CASTLECOMER 16 April 2005
2. ARISING FROM JOURNAL 4 (Crookhaven and Mount Gabriel)
3. QUERIES (American mine researcher, James Walsh: Ironworks and forest destruction).
4. DONATED TO MHTI (one example, re reported Bronze Age Smelter at Lough Swilly)

## MHTI PROGRAMME OF EVENTS 2005

(**Bold print** indicates finalised programmes; further details will be sent to members of events in ordinary print; *italics* indicates non-MHTI activities)

**8-11 June Conference** "The promotion of geotourism in NW Europe, with examples from other European areas" Copper Coast. Full programme from Des Cowman 051-396157)

**2/3 July Arigna.** (2nd) and nearby sites (3rd). Contact Ewan Duffy 086 3605008 if attending. Meet 12.00 Arigna Pub for lunch. Show Mine visit at 16.00, cost €8.00

**24/25 September. North Wales, Halkyn Copper mine** with Richard Shaw (Saturday) and other mines in North Wales (Sunday). Contact Martin Critchley 01-6330516, (086) 8146956 or [mcritchley@era.ie](mailto:mcritchley@era.ie)

**29/30 or 5/6/ November.** Europamines trip to North Pennines, visiting Kilhope Mine, Durham. Contact John Morris for updates 01-6782871

**end July Europamines trip to Fundao, Portugal**

**August.** Martin Critchley speaking in **Glendalough** and organising survey work around the area. Anyone interested contact Martin directly (see above for details)

July(?) **Derrylea, Co. Galway** - survey for Galway Co Council. Contact Matthew Parkes 01-6782858

Next MHTI Board meeting on Thursday 14th July in GSI

## EDITORIAL

The health of any voluntary organisation may be evaluated in two ways. First are the activities it generates as an organisation. A most impressive listing of these was presented by Martin Critchley at the AGM and have been referred to in previous Newsletters. Second are the initiatives taken by individual members and MHTI have been particularly fortunate here. A great deal of research is either under way or being brought to light and will appear in future MHTI publications.

Further donations have also been made to MHTI's archive as indicated within. A first, however, has been the presentation of two Cronebane half-penny tokens by Lynne Mayers (of *Balmoidens*, reviewed in Newsletter 28). Lynne, per Diane Hodnett, has also provided a list of 42 Irish-born Balmoidens in Cornwall – a phenomenon that most of us did not even suspect. Once a context for these is investigated, they will appear in print.

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## AGM REPORT CASTLECOMER 16 April 2005

About thirty people were present in the Community Hall in Castlecomer as Harry Everard outlined plans for the Castlecomer Mining Museum and for the development of the Demesne around it. This was followed by Maire Downey's overview of the development of the coal mining industry in the Castlecomer area.



The business of the AGM then followed with Chairman Martin Critchley outlining the not inconsiderable achievements of MHTI over the previous twelve months. Ewan Duffy then led us through the financial statement. The procedures involved in the election of directors were explained and the Board for 2005-'06 is as follows (with their roles over the previous twelve months):- M.F.Critchley (chair), N. Monaghan (secretary), E. Duffy (treasurer), M. Parkes (publications), D. Cowman (editor), B. Jones (web-site), W. Cox (membership) with J. Morris, E. De Stafort and S. Walsh.

Following an humorous introduction by Martin Critchley and an evaluation of the enormous contribution John Morris had made to MHTI since his initiation of it, John was presented with a certificate of life membership to widespread acclaim. Discussion from the floor then followed with contributions from Peter Claughton (Chair of NAMHO) as well as from our friends from Shropshire Caving and Mining Club whom we were very pleased to welcome.



Following lunch the group visited what was previously Coolbawn colliery where Errol Delaney explained how the overlying and interbedded shale was now being quarried as the raw material for brick-making at the Ormond works in Castlecomer. While they often come across the coal galleries and their pillars, all that was on view during our visit was the remains of a shaft. Nevertheless, people collected nice specimens of anthracite as well as iron nodules.



*Errol Delaney and a box of tricks – various mining artifacts he displayed prior to visiting the quarry.*



*Brian Jones next to a shaft which was exposed in the brick shale quarry face.*

The next visit was to the Demesne where we were shown the site of the intended museum as well as visiting the ornamental lakes which are being refurbished. Errol explained the water-control problems as well as other aspects of local development.

## ARISING FROM JOURNAL 4

### 1) Crookhaven. Ken Brown writes –

Almost certainly the Crookhaven engine had come from Barristown silver-lead mine in Co Wexford. The Barristown engine with 26-inch cylinder was for sale in May 1851 and a similar engine was erected at Crookhaven in October that year. Barristown being close to an estuary it would easily have been transported by sea. Also 26-inch is a "non-standard" size.

I have always assumed the engine to be non-rotative as it appears in the drawing on page 15 of Journal No 4 but this begs the question, how was the crusher driven? A common arrangement in Cornwall at that time was to couple a waterwheel to the crusher rolls and pass water pumped by the engine over it. The alternative would have been a sweep rod and crankshaft added to the engine beam inboard of the pump rod but this would have required a flywheel and gearing but there hardly seems room for this between the crusher and engine shaft. No waterwheel is shown on the plans but it could have been inside the crusher house. The present rudimentary remains on site do not help.

Ads in the *Mining Journal* indicate that the mine was for sale on October 1855 when the crusher was stated to be capable of 40 tons a day. It was purchased by a new company in February 1856 for £2,500 and the engine restarted in November 1859. It must have been in an unfinished state for the cylinder and steam pipes weren't lagged until five months later. Even then they had trouble with it. We learn from the *Mining Journal* that in May 1863 after more attention by the engineer

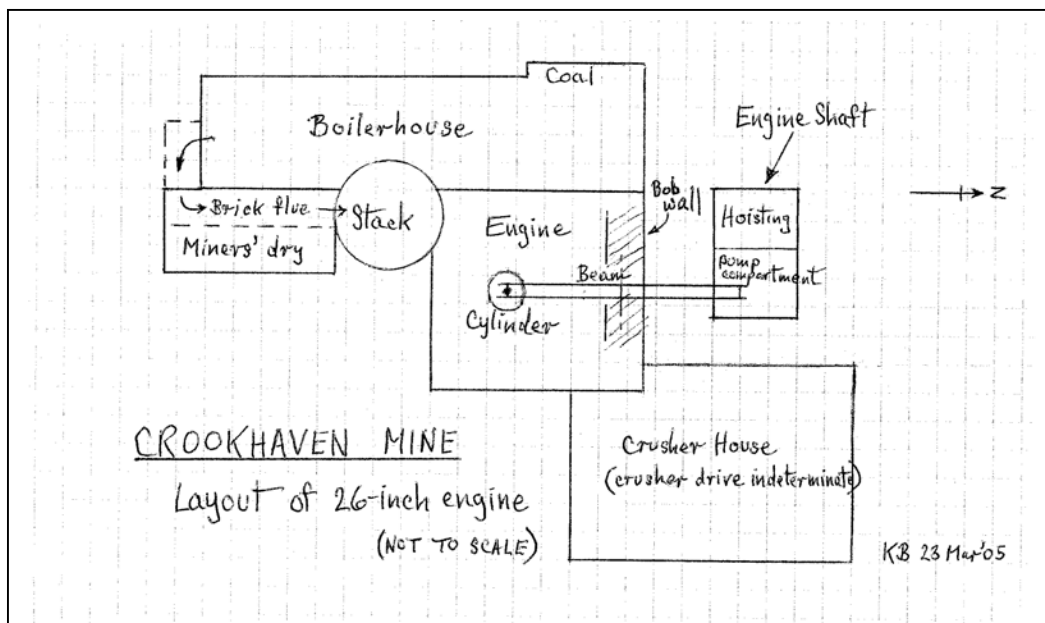
the coal consumption had been reduced to 7 cwt per day. However in less than a year the mine was again for sale, the engine being stated to have an 8 ton boiler and the engine shaft down to somewhere below 70 fathoms from surface. Presumably the plant was then scrapped.

In the right hand photo on the journal cover Paddy O'Sullivan is standing in the miner's dry, probably a wooden structure (see page 15) heated by the flue from the rear of the boilerhouse whose entry into the stack can be seen. In the accompanying sketch I have included more detail than appears in the Journal illustrations. The engine-house at Barristown, incidentally, still stands in an abortive attempt to create a golf course

### 2) Mount Gabriel

Alastair Lings has sent from Scotland a number of photocopied items for the MHTI archive. Among them is an article from *The Journal of the Whitehaven Scientific Institute* (exact title uncertain) of 1905 (?) entitled "Copper Mining in the South of Ireland", pages 15-17. It comprises a lecture given by Mr. R. Blair in the lecture rooms of that Institute on November 20<sup>th</sup> 1904 and was "illustrated by lantern slides and specimens of the ores referred to".

The lecture dealt solely with the West Carbery area of Cork with particular emphasis on Mount Gabriel. A story is told about a mythical Gabriel and his horse with the very un-Irish name of Haizun, "said to have the power of shedding gold and yellow dust from its hooves – be that as it may, copper ores containing gold and silver traverse Mount Gabriel". He implies a Bronze Age date for the mines "back two to three thousand years" but ascribes them to "Phoenicians or Danes". He describes what was found on the north side (recte, south side?) of the mountain: "about 1000 feet up some ancient workings are still traceable in which have been found stone and other mining tools --- and the old levels can be followed on close inspection".



Unfortunately he does not make clear whether he inspected them himself or relied on hear-say.

Mr. Blair also describes the finds at Derrycarhoon (which he does not name) where he says the old openings “*were smothered up by a growth of peat fourteen feet deep*”. Returning to “*the foot of Mount Gabriel, on the north side of the little village of Glann*”, he describes what may be a previously unrecorded possible smelting site, discovered “a few years ago” when digging drains. “*A great number of large flat stones of a curious shape were found, and it is supposed that these were the smelting furnaces of these skilful people. But of their methods, how they treated and smelted the ores they mined, we know not*”. How the conclusion was drawn that these were part of the smelting process for early mining is not stated although he may have been projecting from the possibility that this could have been a cobbing floor.

The lecturer went on to give conventional summaries of the role of Col. Hall, of copper veins on the islands and on Ballycummisk which he said was being re-opened. Returning to the north side of Mount Gabriel he describes the barites which he said was 97.5% pure at best. “*We [?] proposed to drive an adit, beginning in the valley, right into the hillside, this being a cheap means of proving the copper lodes at depth*”. He then produces an assay done “since the paper was written”, implying that it was from this adit, but not clarifying. The values he gives are copper (7.87%), sulphur (28.8%), iron (7.26%) with traces of gold, silver, lead, alumina, bismuth and “silicate etc.”. He finishes by referring to umber “*over hundreds of acres --- all it requires is filling into carts*”. Wage rates locally he gives at ten to fifteen shillings per week and he advocates the reopening of the mines as the antidote to local poverty.

## QUERIES

*How to contact James Walsh, researcher into Irish miners in America?*

Looking through the list of talks at this year’s American Mining History Association conference I noticed – “The Leadville Irish by James Walsh”. He may possibly have been a contributor to Doyle & Edwards -*America and Ireland 1776-1976* (Walsh, James P. "The Irish in New America: Way Out West"). He is not in the latest AMHA membership list. His research could be of Irish interest if anyone has his contact details.

Don Borthwick

*Did (Irish) areas with ironworks lose their woodland more completely than those without?*

An answer is provided by Rackham, Oliver. *The History of the Countryside* (Phoenix Press 2000). page 116. “In all Ireland there was only one big wooded area which was just as extensive in 1840 as it had been in

1650, namely western Co. Waterford. This had supplied at least five ironworks, two for over a century. Other seats of the iron industry, eg. Wicklow, Wexford, eastern Clare, kept some ancient woodland into the nineteenth century; non-industrial Limerick, Tipperary and northern Clare lost almost every scrap. The myth of the destructive ironmasters fails the same test as it fails in England, Wales and Scotland.

“The real destroyer of the woods was agriculture. From 1700 to 1840 Ireland combined long periods of peace and modest prosperity with a fourfold rise in population. Every inch of possible land (and much that was impossible) was tilled or grazed. With the ironworks in decline, wattle building unfashionable, and plenty of peat for domestic fuel, there was no obstacle to reducing the whole country to the woodless state of the Irish Midlands. Even the last of the derries, with very rare exceptions, were grubbed out and farmed. The 6-inch Ordnance Survey of Ireland, dating from just before the Great Famine, shows many little farms with “derry” names in the wilds of Roscommon: the homes of people driven by overpopulation to wrest a living even from morainic islands in bogs.

“Some woods may have been preserved for the time being by being incorporated into demesne, but here they were jeopardised by the loss of the woodmanship tradition. Anglo-Irish landowners took to forestry plantations earlier and more completely than in England, and the last native woods may have been the victims of replanting. The idea that trees have a life of their own and are not mere artefacts has been forgotten even more thoroughly in Ireland than in England.”

Dominic Berridge

## DONATED TO MHTI

- By Alastair Lings, five items in all including Crookhaven article above. Space permits inclusion of just one other in this issue.

Pages 7-9 from *Dunree, Guardian of Lough Swilly* by Vera McFadden (Omagh 1986). She states that “the late Hugh McGrory as a boy “*found several bronze pins while out herding cattle near the bay --- (which) were revealed after sand had been blown back by the wind*”. He described them as being “like a woman’s hat pins”. She puts this in the context of a bronze-age cist excavated close by in the 1930s, adding “There are a few other long cists nearby”. McGrory, she states, “*found traces of their smelting at Cruinneora Buidhe which is situated on the north-west slope of Dunree Hill*”. A hand-draw map shows the locations.

- Photographs of the Cronebane tokens donated by Lynne Mayers, mentioned in the editorial, will appear in the next Newsletter