



This document is with a copy of the following article published by the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland. It is provided for non-commercial research and educational use.

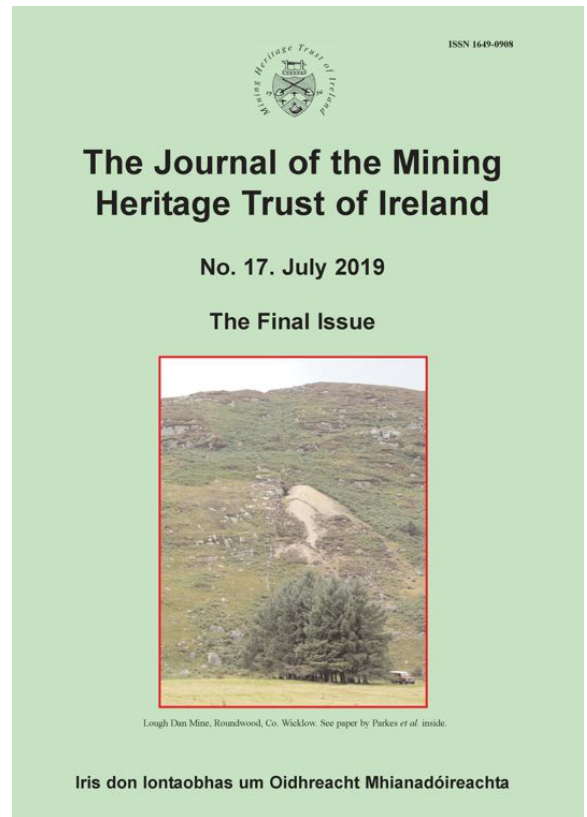
The Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland formally ceased its existence in 2019 but has provided a continuing website of resources with free access for those interested in the activities of the organisation in its various formats from 1996-2019, and in Irish mining heritage in a broader sense.

Parkes, M. (2019) "Land clearance at Caherglassaun silver mine, Co. Galway" *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, **17**, pp. 47-48

Copyright of this article remains with the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland whose archives, intellectual assets and library have been transferred to the Natural History Division of the National Museum of Ireland. Please contact [naturalhistory@museum.ie](mailto:naturalhistory@museum.ie) for any enquiries relating to the MHTI.

This cover page must be included as an integral part of any copies of this document.

Please visit [www.mhti.com](http://www.mhti.com) for more information.





# LAND CLEARANCE AT CAHERGLASSAUN SILVER MINE, CO. GALWAY

by Matthew Parkes

**Abstract:** A brief description is given of physical evidence of spoil heaps at an historic silver mine west of Caherglassaun Lough, between Gort and Kinvara in Co. Galway. Recent field clearance work by the landowner has exposed extensive evidence of calcite spoil heaps in the area. This short time window of exposed features demonstrates how easily mining heritage features can be modified and then lost to future appraisal. Comparison with fieldwork in 2004 (Morris 2009) indicates that many documented features have also been removed by the present works. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 17, 2019, 47-48.

## INTRODUCTION

In the course of a geological heritage audit visit to Caherglassaun Lough [also known as Caherglassaun Turlough] and its associated karst features the historic silver mine to the north west of the turlough was visited. Land clearance work, presumed to have taken place in Spring of 2019, reseeding of pasture and wall construction have freshly exposed evidence of the mine and particularly the extent of spoil heaps spread around the mine.

## HISTORY

The working mine at Caherglassaun dates to before 1840 (see Morris 2009, p17), and evidence exists of medieval working (Claughton and Rondelez 2013). Under 'Lead' Cole (1922, MHTI reprint 1998) summarises what is known, referencing the GSI Memoir for sheets 115 and 116 (Kinahan 1865) describing the ore here as occurring in bunches in calcite and with no definite vein of metal ore. Griffith (1861, 146) listed it as mined by the Connemara Mining Company. The official Mineral Statistics for 1862-1865 give F.M.S. Taylor as the proprietor, so presumably it was in production during this period. The main published detailed study of both the mine site and the Connemara Mining Company of Ireland is by Morris (2009). He charts the documented history of activity by that company between 1852 and 1854 at Caherglassaun.

## THE SITE TODAY

The dominant land feature when approaching the mine is actually a karstic collapse with steep rock walls, filled with brown water and named as Pollnamona. The mine site, to the right (west) of the breen approaching Pollnamona, would appear to be a heavily vegetated open cast mine, and without historic data and map information, it could easily be mistaken for an overgrown disused limestone quarry. However, the very recent land clearance work has exposed what is immediately below the vegetation in many patches in the vicinity. A bright white colour is evident in these freshly exposed patches, with numerous lumps of calcite present. Aside from the immediate area of the silver mine, the field to the east of the newly built wall (of massive limestone boulders) shows extensive calcite spoil material. The writer initially thought some limestone blocky exposures in this field along with different coloured grass patches were part of some karstic sinks and risings associated with Pollnamona and the equally large Polldalagha collapse doline to the south east. However, closer examination showed that the landowner

had cleared some large blocks into piles and graded some calcite spoil heaps into low mounds. Covered with a very thin soil layer, these mounds were already showing reseeded grass growth which partially hid the nature of the subsurface material. Many of the features identified and described by Morris (2009) are no longer recognisable due to the works on the former mine site. In particular, features 1-4 (shaft depressions and an unknown structure) are heavily altered. Features 5-8 were not searched for, and such features as 5 - a gable wall section and pillars) may now simply be obscured by vegetation.

## CONCLUSION

The recent land clearance work at Caherglassaun silver mine has shown up evidence of dispersed and widespread calcite spoil, which reinforces the historical description of the galena ore occurring in bunches in calcite and no definite vein of metallic ore. The essential point of this short note is however to show how ephemeral such opportunities may be, and how easy it is for evidence of former activity to be modified and obscured by subsequent activity. At Caherglassaun, it is likely that within a year the growth of new grass on the reworked spoil mounds will make them invisible as former spoil heaps, and very little mineral material will be easily found by a casual visitor.

## REFERENCES

- Claughton, P. and Rondelez, P. 2013. Early silver mining in Western Europe: an Irish perspective. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland* 13, 1-8.
- Cole, G.A.J. 1922. Memoir of Localities of Minerals of Economic Importance and Metalliferous Mines in Ireland. *Memoir of the Geological Survey of Ireland*, Stationery Office, Dublin. pp.116.
- Griffith, R. 1861. Catalogue of the several localities in Ireland where mines or metalliferous indications have hitherto been discovered. *Journal Geological Society of Dublin* 9, 141.
- Kinahan, G.H. 1865. Explanation to accompany Sheets 115 and 116 of the maps, illustrating a portion of the Counties of Galway, Clare and Tipperary. *Memoirs Geological Survey of Ireland*.
- Morris, J.H. 2009. A history of the Caherglassaun silver-lead mine, near Gort, Co. Galway, with a particular emphasis upon the operations of the Connemara Mining Company of Ireland, 1852-1855. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland* 9, 13-26

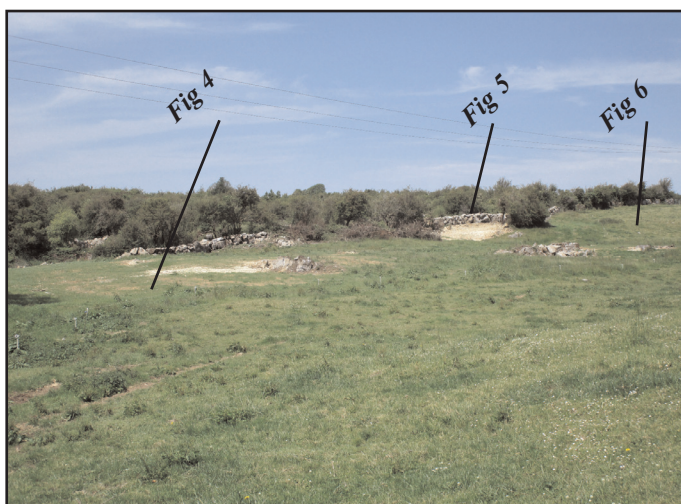




**Figure 1.** A view across the mine site with the main access area in mid distance.



**Figure 2.** The lower end of the mine road approaching Pollnamona, showing extensive landscaping and alteration.



**Figure 3.** A view of the main reworked and reseeded spoil heaps looking from near Polldalagha. The reseeded area on the left is shown in Figure 4. The large bare patch near the large block wall is shown in Figure 5. The reseeded spoil behind the rock boulder cluster is seen in Figure 6.



**Figure 4.** The reseeded area seen on the left in Figure 3.



**Figure 5.** The large bare patch near the large block wall as shown in Figure 3 is principally calcite spoil.



**Figure 6.** The reseeded area shown on the right in Figure 3, seen from near the new large block wall.