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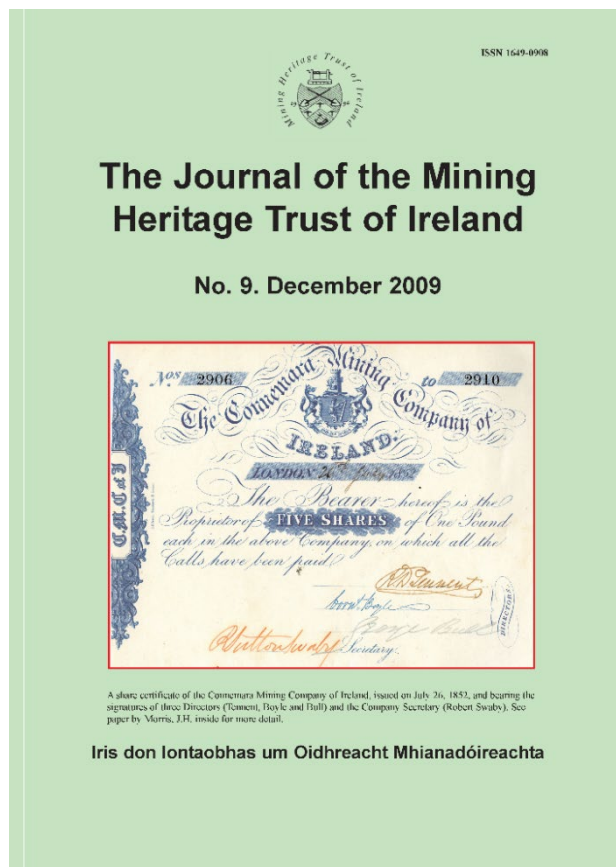
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THE CASHEL SILVER LEAD MINE, COUNTY MONAGHAN

by Alastair Lings

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Abstract: This small mine was promoted by George Henwood of the Mining Journal, during the heyday of the nearby Tassan Mine. It was worked from 1863-1865, producing 9 tons of lead. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 9, 2009, 33-35.

LOCATION

Cashel (Irish: Caiseal) means a circular stone fort (Joyce, p38). There are 42 townlands with the name in Ireland (Placenames Database of Ireland). The location of Cashel Mine was previously given as being in County Tyrone (Jeffcock *et al.* 1989), however there are no mine workings in the Cashel townland of that county (Legg 1980). Fortunately Cundick (2002, p19) and an article in the *Irish Times* (Anon 1863) identify the mine as being in County Monaghan. Local enquiries have established that a mine 'opening' lay in McQuaid(e)s Field, on Johnny Atkinson's land in Cashel townland (Donaldson *pers. comm.* 2009).

GEOLOGY

The mine worked a lead bearing vein, running roughly north-south (Anon 1863). The nearby Tassan vein contained 'galena (lead sulphide) and zinc blende (zinc sulphide) in a matrix chiefly of quartz with some carbonate of calcium' (Hallissy 1914, p.20): it likely that the vein worked at Cashel had a similar mineralogy.

The country rock is massive sandstone and microconglomerates of the Lough Avaghon Formation of the Llandovery Series in the Silurian period (Geraghty 1996), roughly 430 million years old. These rocks are poor aquifers and wells typically yield water at a rate of 0.2 - 0.5 litres/second; more in major fracture zones (Geraghty 1997).

MINING

The mine was worked from July 1863 (Anon 1863) until November 1865, or later. The last report on the workings described them as being 'no more than 10 fms. deep from the surface', with a total production of '9 tons of lead' (Anon 1865).

SURFACE REMAINS

In McQuaid(e)s Field, the Ordnance Survey 25 inch to 1 mile scale map shows two adjoining buildings, a pond and a spring at national grid reference H 7761 2676 (Ordnance Survey Ireland). These features no longer exist. The only visible evidence of mining near the site may be a shallow (0.3 m deep) gully which started subsiding around 1999.

This is in the Alley Field, immediately to the west of McQuaid(e)s Field, on Nigel Donaldson's farm (Donaldson *pers. comm.* 2009), H 7756 2680.

HISTORY

An article in the *Irish Times* of 17 September 1863 on the 'Silver Lead Mines, County Monaghan' describes Cashel Mine:

'The Cashel Silver Lead Mine adjoins the Tassan, and promises to be equally successful; although only set to work as recently as two months since, the fortunate adventurers have met with a lode or vein of unusual richness, the best evidence of which is afforded by the fact that having only reached the depth of thirty feet from the surface, they have upwards of seven tons of lead ore in the house from the shaft only. The lode has been proved valuable from only a few feet beneath the surface

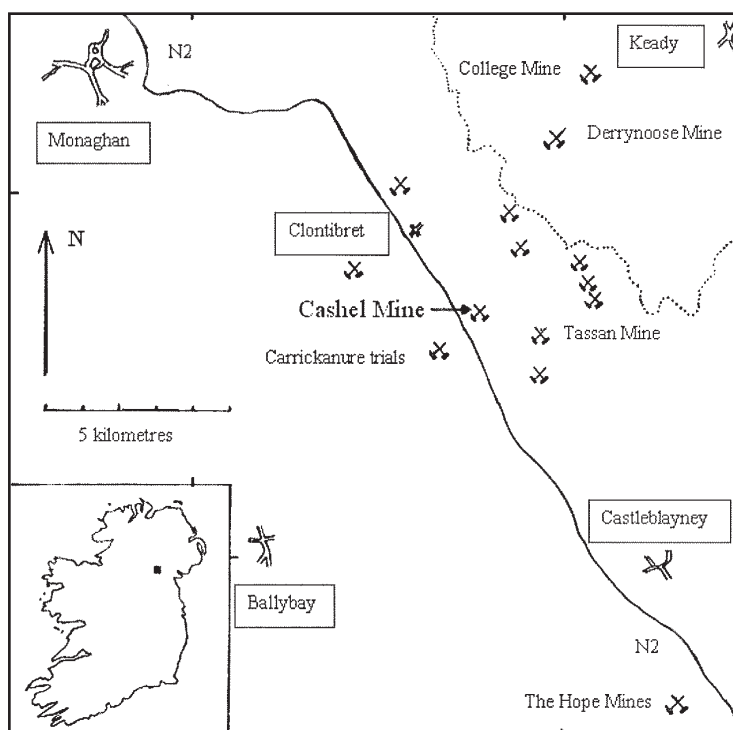


Figure 1. A locality map of Cashel Mine and adjacent mines in the area.



Figure 2. Subsidence in the ground near the site of Cashel Mine.

to this depth, with a very rich lode gone down in the bottom the whole length of the shaft, twelve feet. As soon as the 10 per level or sixty feet perpendicular be reached, it is intended to "stope the lode" North and South, when the amount of ore may be expected to be very great. The Tassan Mine adjoining being rich at the 80 fathom level (480 feet), is a fair presumptive evidence of the Cashel being too. Who after this shall say Ireland's mineral wealth is evanescent or superficial?

'The mine was introduced by, and is under the management of, Mr. George Henwood, of Lochhead House, Scotland, the well-known correspondent of the London Mining Journal; and the majority of the proprietors are Manchester gentlemen. Buildings are being rapidly erected, and a spirit manifested to give the undertaking (?some text missing?) now putting down at these works is nearly completed. Four fitters are busily engaged on it; the whole plant is erected. It is expected the ceremony of "opening the engine" will take place in about ten days. We hope to be able to give a detailed account of so interesting a ceremony, as it shows a will and a way to prove Ireland's mineral resources; and we trust that the county of Monaghan will be found sufficiently productive to warrant the title applied to it by experienced miners - "The Cornwall of Erin" (Anon 1863).

An 'engine opening day' in Cornwall has been described by Henwood. It involved the ringing of church bells, a small band, a reception by the lord of the manor and the local clergyman, a champagne toast to the mine, examination and explanation of the engine, naming of the engine and allocation of a 'godfather', starting of the engine, and christening of the engine with a bottle of port wine. The dignitaries, mine owners and managers would then enjoy a feast on site, with the 'usual loyal and patriotic toasts'. The miners, drivers and band ate separately, with beer and cider 'provided ad libitum by the proprietors' (Burt 1972, p14-19).

In November 1863 Harvey & Co., of Hayle in Cornwall, supplied the mine with miners' sieves, sent by steamer to Dublin and then rail to Castleblayney (Cundick 2002). By April 1864 the *Mining Journal* reported that the 'Cashel Mines are now being wrought on tribute, at a depth of only 3 fathoms from surface: the men are doing well. On the mine is a parcel of between 3 and 4 tons dressed; the ore is of superior quality' (Anon 1864).

The final report in the *Mining Journal* was in November 1865.

'Cashel Mine is now being resumed, and will be properly wrought. The water is being pumped out previously to commencing to stope, when the theory of flat lodes will receive a further elucidation. Although this mine is no more than 10 fms. deep from the surface, 9 tons of lead have been raised and sold, the produce of merely sinking the shaft. When the water is forked there will be pitches set on tribute, as well as the lode be set to sink on, so that ore returns may be made in a very short time. At present the mines are in the hands of a few gentlemen, who have determined to try whether the mine is really worth developing before undertaking the responsibility of forming a large company on the limited liability principle' (Anon 1865).

For a period during the life of the mine, the Mine Captain lived in a lean-to at the end of a row of sheds, at the place now occupied by the Donaldson family home (Donaldson pers. comm. 2009), H 7759 2638.

DISCUSSION

Several questions arise. If an engine was installed, where are the remains? Why is the mine not recorded on the Ordnance Survey and Geological Survey Maps? Why did the mine close?

Given the exploratory nature of the venture it is probable that the engine used was horse-drawn or portable.

Cashel Mine lies on the same Ordnance Survey 6 inch to 1 mile scale map as Tassan Mine, Monaghan sheet 14. Morris *et al.* (2002) give the dates for the various editions as 1836, 1857 and 1905. The first two editions predate Cashel Mine. Presumably by the time of the later edition any distinctive surface features, such as the shaft, had disappeared. For comparison, the shafts that are shown at Tassan Mine on the second edition map, are not shown on the third edition.

The lack of any mention in the records of the Geological Survey is surprising. The manuscript copy of the 6" to 1 mile Monaghan sheet 14/4 (Cruise 1879) shows workings on the Tassan vein, and other test pits and trial workings such as at Carrickanure, 1.5 kilometres to the southwest of Cashel, H 7650 2576. There is a minimal description of mines and minerals in the first edition of the appropriate Explanatory Memoir, for 1" to 1 mile scale map, sheet 58 (Cruise 1885). The second edition provides more comprehensive information, for example stating that the most southerly shaft at Carrickanure was 'sunk about the year 1848' and was '7 fathoms deep' (Hallissy, p20, after Cruise 1879).

The absence of a record for Cashel Mine may have been due to poor communication between the geological surveyor and the land owner/occupier, perhaps due to a temporary absence (e.g. migration), or a change of ownership (e.g. after a bereavement).

The reasons for closure of the mine are unknown. During its period of operation the price of pig lead showed a slight decline from £21 to £20/ton (Smith 1923, plate 3), so poor metal prices were not the reason the mine shut.

FUTURE RESEARCH

It would be useful to verify the location of the shaft and any spoil heaps, for example by augering or deep overburden sampling. It may be worthwhile examining any local newspapers for contemporary reports on the mine.

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