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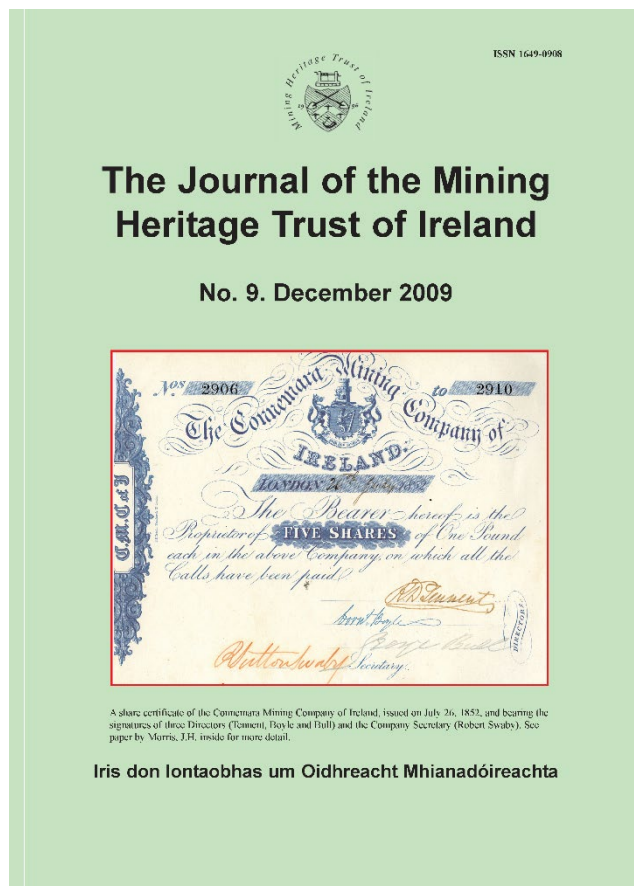
The Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland formally ceased its existence in 2019 but has provided a continuing website of resources with free access for those interested in the activities of the organisation in its various formats from 1996-2019, and in Irish mining heritage in a broader sense.

Rondelez, P. (2009) 'The Internet: A Mine of Information' *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, **9**, pp. 41-42

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THE INTERNET: A MINE OF INFORMATION

by Paul Rondelez

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Abstract: This short paper is based on preliminary work done for a PhD thesis on Late Medieval Ironworking in Ireland at UCC. It aims to show the potentials and pitfalls of online historical research. To date, more than 230 references have been found online to the mining of silver, gold, copper, lead and iron in Ireland between 1200 and 1600 AD. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 9, 2009, 41-42.

A CHANGED RESEARCH WORLD

Except for the material remains of history, we have to rely on written documents for the interpretation of our past. From the nineteenth century onwards, a lot of the manuscript sources were described and catalogued in calendars of various sorts. Some groups of manuscripts were published in their entirety and, occasionally, a researcher would transcribe an original document in his or her work. Other documents, such as personal or commercial papers, sometimes survived inside family archives. This information was subsequently interpreted, re-interpreted and put into different perspectives. Additionally, the sources used were often only partially, and occasionally even incorrectly, quoted.

In the past, the dedicated student of history was expected to invest huge amounts of time in locating, and ploughing through, numerous volumes of calendars, periodicals and books. Partially or completely transcribed manuscripts, when published in obscure periodicals or rare books, would sometimes reappear from oblivion only by a chance find, sometimes they would not. But now, thanks to recent developments on the Internet, this is starting to change. At the touch of a fingertip, word-searchable calendars, magazines and entire books are becoming available in huge quantities.

SEARCH PROCEDURES

The most straightforward way of online research is based on googling. But it will quickly become obvious that even entering specialised terminology or multiple words will result in a vast amount of 'hits'. Narrowing down the search can be done by combining words using quotation marks, i.e. googling "Irish Mining Company" instead of all words separately. Alternatively, words can be excluded from the search results by putting a minus character before the unwanted word, i.e. typing "Irish miners" -Butte, will greatly reduce unwanted references to North America when only researching Irish mining. The amount of 'hits' can also be reduced by including a term specific for the period or region in question. Adding the words 'earl' or 'lord' while googling, for example, has proven to be very effective in filtering out only older references. When looking for information going back further than the last few centuries, alternative spelling should also be used (mynes, steele, fordge etc.). Because some browsers auto-correct, unusual spelling should be entered in quotation marks ("mynes", "steele", etc.)

The googling of names of people, places, companies, etc. has proven particularly fertile, especially for finding information indirectly related to the subject. Checking all possible spelling variations, especially when dealing with older data, can be very time consuming, but potentially rewarding. Looking for names of people and places will invariably lead to genealogical websites. While these websites do regularly contain the results of archive research, the information is rarely referenced. Often though, the website is actually aimed at sharing information, so contacting the author of the site could produce the necessary data.

ONLINE RESOURCES

Some organisations are building up vast online libraries which can be more effectively searched internally. The most advanced of these is 'Google books', accessible through the Google browser. This site had over 7 million books available by November 2008, over 1 million of which can be viewed and downloaded in full. Searching within this site will produce books with three levels of accessibility: full view, partial view and snippet view. The first two categories will yield the best information, both for older and very recent works, but with perseverance and creativity even the snippet view can produce invaluable data.

Another important site is Archive.org, a non-profit organisation building a virtual library solely made up of fully downloadable media, including over 1.7 million books. The most efficient way to access this site is by opening up the 'advanced search' mode in the browser and entering 'archive.org' in the 'browse within a site or domain' option. The Archive.org site itself only allows searching on title, but this does prove handy when searching for calendars, periodicals etc. The appearance of the site is dependent on the browser used and the following only applies to moderately recent browser versions. When encountering a book, be it via the Archive.org site or otherwise, several versions of the book are available. The book can be downloaded as plain text (small format) or as PDF (can be very large). Alternatively the book can be read and word-searched online. One thing to remember when doing online word searches in an Archive.org book is that only one 'hit' per page will be displayed. This means that if the word 'mine' is searched within the publication, the search result 'determine' might mask 'silver mine' on the same page. Trying varieties of the same word (i.e. mines, miner etc.) and checking the index of the book are

alternatives to checking every page found. The only downside to this site is the mistakes in title, year, volume, etc. of the works when searching via the site.

British-history.ac.uk has large sections of freely accessible data containing a lot of indexes to State Papers. Because this site is easily searchable, it allows for the fast checking of calendar series which would otherwise seem irrelevant to the subject. The websites of the national and regional archives, both of the UK and Ireland, contain a wide variety of information, including indexes to family archives with information relevant to Irish mining. Access to University libraries can provide a portal into sites such as JSTOR or Wiley Interscience which have online versions of a vast array of periodicals, from the 19th century up to the latest volume of current works.

Over the last few years the Internet has also incorporated invaluable tools for the historical researcher. The sites of the Ordnance Survey and the Geological Survey of Ireland both

provide user-friendly interactive maps; the GSI also contains extensive downloadable databases. The online Placenames Database of Ireland is the obvious help for checking localities, but the IreAtlas, for example, also allows searching for townland names when only a variation of the current spelling is available. Other tools range from online dictionaries of languages past and current, programs and sites for converting old measurements and currencies, to free online palaeography courses.

Using the Internet for historical research has only in the last few years been a serious option, and the volume of data is increasing rapidly. Even while checking sites for this article, some of them had added new relevant information over the last few weeks and months. The combined advantages of speed and accessibility, together with the reduction of use of the actual documents, will undoubtedly lead to online research becoming an integral tool in collecting historical data in the future.

