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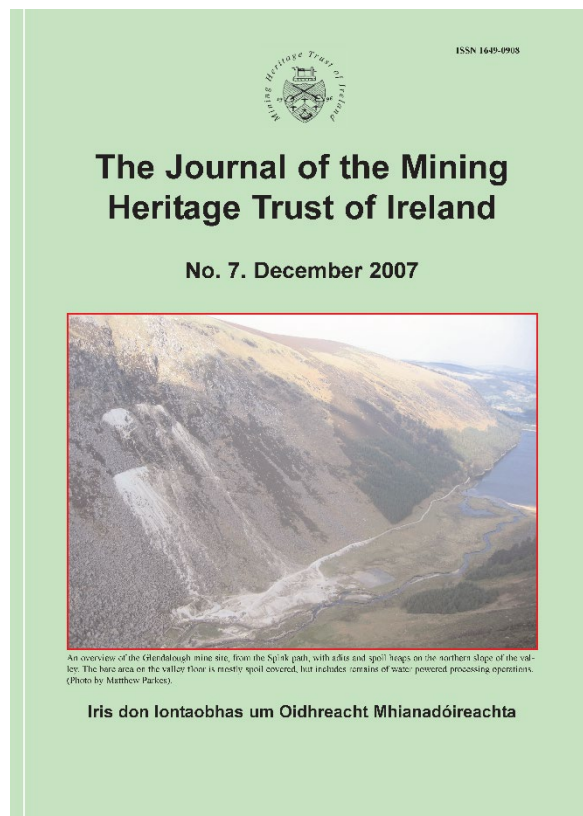
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Cowman, D. (2007) 'The Mining Company of Ireland's Operations at Glendasan-Glendalough 1825-1895' *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 7, pp. 45-49

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An overview of the Glendalough mine site, from the Spink path, with adits and spoil heaps on the northern slope of the valley. The bare area or the valley floor is mostly spoil covered, but includes remains of waste-powered processing operations. (Photo by Matthew Parkes).

Iris don Iontaobhas um Oidhreacht Mhianadóireachta



THE MINING COMPANY OF IRELAND'S OPERATIONS AT GLENDASAN-GLENDALOUGH 1825-1895

by Des Cowman

Abstract: Camaderry Mountain separates these valleys with one rich lead vein going through it and other shorter veins on each side. The Mining Company of Ireland (MCI) generally referred to their entire operation here as Luganure from the area where the original discovery had been made. As the maps indicate, the richest section was Glendasan where five separate named lodes occur. The entire area was mined with varying degrees of success for about a century. When they started, this was a remote isolated area and they had to build an entire transport and social infrastructure. One incentive for them to do so was that they had a smelter in Ballycorus only 30 kms away as the notional crow flies and Luganure wound up being the main feeder of that. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 7, 2007, 45-49.

THE EARLY YEARS

The first mention of mining here is of a "small trial of lead ore" in 1800 (Steward 1800, p. 122). More extensive work seems to have been done in the five years before 1812 - "*veins of lead ore of considerable value have been opened in the vicinity of Glendalough*" (Fitton and Stephens 1812, p. 9). In 1919 Thomas Weaver of Anglesea, late of Cronebane/Tigronev reported on adits he had driven to the north and east of Camaderry Mountain (spelt as Comaderry on older references) and on the geology he had observed (Weaver 1819). While he does not mention a company in relation to this, in 1825 the Mining Company of Ireland bought out an unnamed company mining there in a "confined and almost inaccessible" lead showing in the wilds of Wicklow, offering them £826 cash and 798 shares in the their company. MCI says of this company that the area was "*under lease to a gentleman who, having expended a considerable sum in carrying forward the level at Luganure, formed a company of four hundred shares, on which a deposit of £2-10 shillings per share was subscribed with a view to working the mine*" (MCI 1st Report 1825). However, a later report said that they paid £7000 for the mineral rights of the area (Anon 1856). Either way, it turned out to be good value. Thus through luck or superior judgement they acquired what proved to be Ireland's most substantial 19th century lead deposit.

From the outset it looked destined to be profitable yielding a surplus of nearly £4700 of sales income over production costs as well as over the considerable expenses of exploration and development work over the 12 months from mid-1825 (MCI Reports 2nd 1825 & 1st '26). While MCI had their own smelter and financial resources (Cowman 2001) they do mention the difficulty in trying to get equipment into Glendalough and ore out, all of which had to be manhandled along a rough track for over a mile until they reached the road at Seven Churches. They had to build a new road here immediately at their own expense and in 1829 contracted with the Grand Jury to build another road up into Glendasan (spelt as

Glendesane in older references) which would have been the first stage in a projected egress road for them over the Wicklow Gap (MCI 2nd Report 1828 and 1st 1829). All the company's reports to their shareholder are positive up to 1830 with profits being made from readily accessible ore despite ongoing investment. They give the example of Luganure's profitability at that stage: ore was extracted for £1-5 shillings per ton even though lead prices were at a low of £9 per ton (MCI 1st report 1827).

However, by 1830 there were problems. Following the heavy expenditure on development, there was a serious but unspecified drop in the price of lead. In 1831 and '32 the company were making a loss on their Wicklow lead mines and they stopped all development work by the end of the latter year (MCI reports 1831 & '32). They then commissioned a report on the potential of the area from John Petherick, their captain at Knockmahon. He reported favourably and at the same time the company got a very good deal from a landlord, the archbishop of Dublin, by which a fixed rent of £92 per annum would be paid rather than a royalty of 10% of the produce of the mines (which mines is

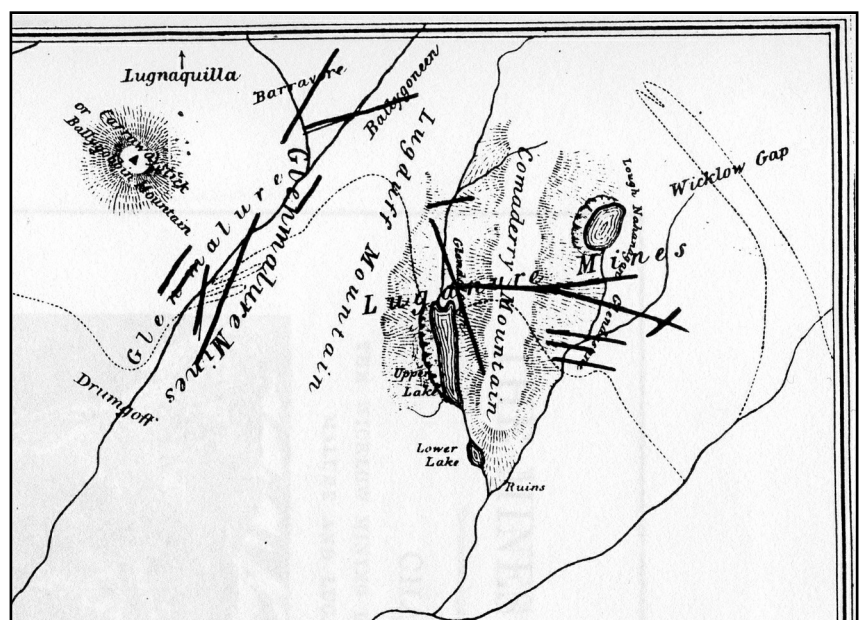


Figure 1. Relationship between the two river valleys separated by Camaderry Mountain (Anon 1856).

not stated). This encouraged them to transfer the waterwheel and pumps from their failed mine at Keeldrom in Donegal and to pump out the Hero lode. This was done in 1834 and was to prove disappointing. Investment was also being made in Glendalough so that by the end of 1834 for instance, £2048 had been spent on the mines in six months to produce £1750 worth of ore. (MCI reports 1830-'35). Therefore it was not until post 1835 that the Luganure group of mines was again to prove profitable for the company.

two valleys"- Anon 1856, p. 24). Possibly as a result, in 1854-'55 they bought Glendalough from G. and N. Byrnes in four instalments for an odd £18, 222 (MCI Reports 1854 & '85). In the good years from 1856 (Table 2) they invested in infrastructure, building new dressing floors plus stamps and a waterwheel at Glendalough. They also built miners' houses, reclaimed land and told their shareholders they had planted an incredible 150,000 trees (MCI, 1st 1857). More miners' cottages were built in 1865-'66 plus new housing for a mine-captain and school master (MCI 2nd '65 & 1st '66).

Table 1: (Compiled from Anon 1856 to 1840 and MCI's half-annual reports 1840-'50)																	
LUGANURE	1835	1836	1837	1838	1839	1840	1841	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848	1849	1850	
Expenditure £							5724	6980	5479	4243	4911	5195	4744	4531	4879	5261	
Tons lead sold	536	820	1107	1045	760	754	675	759	732	418	448	440	443	393	471	492	
Price £	5840	11507	11060	10,965	7531	7642	6962	7463	5286	4626	3401	4671	4468	3833	4203	5434	
Profit/loss £						1408	1604	537	-53	-194	-842	-299	-246	-687	-676	173	
(Employed in 1845 -100)																	

MIXED YEARS 1835-50

A MCI lease was due to expire in 1835 (which is not stated) and they negotiated very good terms for thirty one years at, oddly £96-6sh-2d p.a. with no royalty (MJ 1836, p.9, article by co. sec. Purdy). This led to three years of rapid growth followed by a fluctuating decline. Table 1 shows these mines working at a loss from 1843 to 1849 (MCI's figures seldom add up; profit/loss should be the difference between total expenditure and price received). What exactly was happening is not reported apart from the consequences of a result of the dry summer in 1844. There was not enough water to turn the wheel that pumped the rich Ruplagh lode which therefore flooded. The rains of Autumn turned the water-wheels again but it was then discovered that the flooding had so softened the granite to make it treacherous and after several accidents Ruplagh had to be abandoned (Smith, 1852, p. 354-7; abandonment plan GSI; MCI 2nd report 1844). As the mathematics of table 2 indicates this coincides with a drop in the price receive for their lead from over £11 per to in 1841 to under £9 in 1844. Over the following six years prices hovered around the £9.

Despite investment in exploration and development work "no valuable discovery made" as they admitted to the shareholders in early 1848 in the midst of their attempts to sustain optimism. Admissions that the mines there were not doing well provided no explanation to shareholders and are sometimes contradictory. For instance, *"Your board has been disappointed by the workings of Glandelough (sic) Lead Mines, nor is the present prospect so favourable --- (though) your Board continues to entertain favourable expectations of more extensive profit from it than has been realized for some years past"* (MCI 1st report 1846). Then, without explanation, they were investing again in 1850 with a new deep level and a new stamping mill (MCI 2nd report 1850 & 1st 1851).

RECOVERY 1850-1880

Table 2 shows the dramatic recovery, particularly in the three years after 1850. In 1853 seemingly they broke through from Glendasan to Glendalough (*"the workings on the Luganure lode had reached, in a southern direction the watershed of the*

One possible reason for this recovery was that significant quantities of silver began to be found in the lead. This began to be recorded in 1852 but only reached significant proportions between 1858 an 1868 usually just under 12,000 ounces on average per annum. No silver is recorded between 1868 and 1872 and when it is resumed again from 1873 the quantities of silver average only half the earlier output (Min. Stats.).

A change of captain took place in 1865. John Clemes left for Mexico, being replaced by a Capt. Crane (MJ 1966 p. 29). He conducted a search for new veins along the vast upland stretches on either side of Camaderry Mountain in 1868 (MCI 1st report 1868). This led to a discovery at Foxrock that the company enthused would last thirty to forty years (MJ 1868 p. 496) - it did survive, just, for thirty five years (see below). Possibly this also led to a new discovery at Ruplagh where a new shaft was sunk the following year with accompanying surface works. Also, across the mountain an incline railway was constructed to facilitate the ore being carried from the heights of Van Dieman's Land to the crushers at Glendalough (MJ 1870 p.577). A total of £2,658 was invested in Luganure in 1869

Table 2: Production 1850-'80 (MCI reports and Min. Stats.)					
YEAR	TONS	£PROFIT	YEAR	TONS	£PROFIT
1850	522	£173	1866	1556	
1851	740	£1,751	1867	1694	
1852	1057	£2,764	1868	1766	
1853	909	£5,546	1869	1799	
1854	1095	£3,811	1879	1366	
1855	1277	£1,277	1871	1085	
1556	1520	£8,102	1872	925	
1857	1495		1873	1800	£1263
1858	1897	£7,564	1874	1749	£5176
1859	1976	£7,019	1875	1850	£5892
1860	1846	£5,335	1876	1825	£6492
1861	1825		1877	1656	£2589
1862	1813	£5,479	1878	1526	-£564
1863	1802	£5,336	1879	1124	-£2875
1864	1642	£5,135	1880	898	-£2929
1865	1489	£3,471	1881	822	

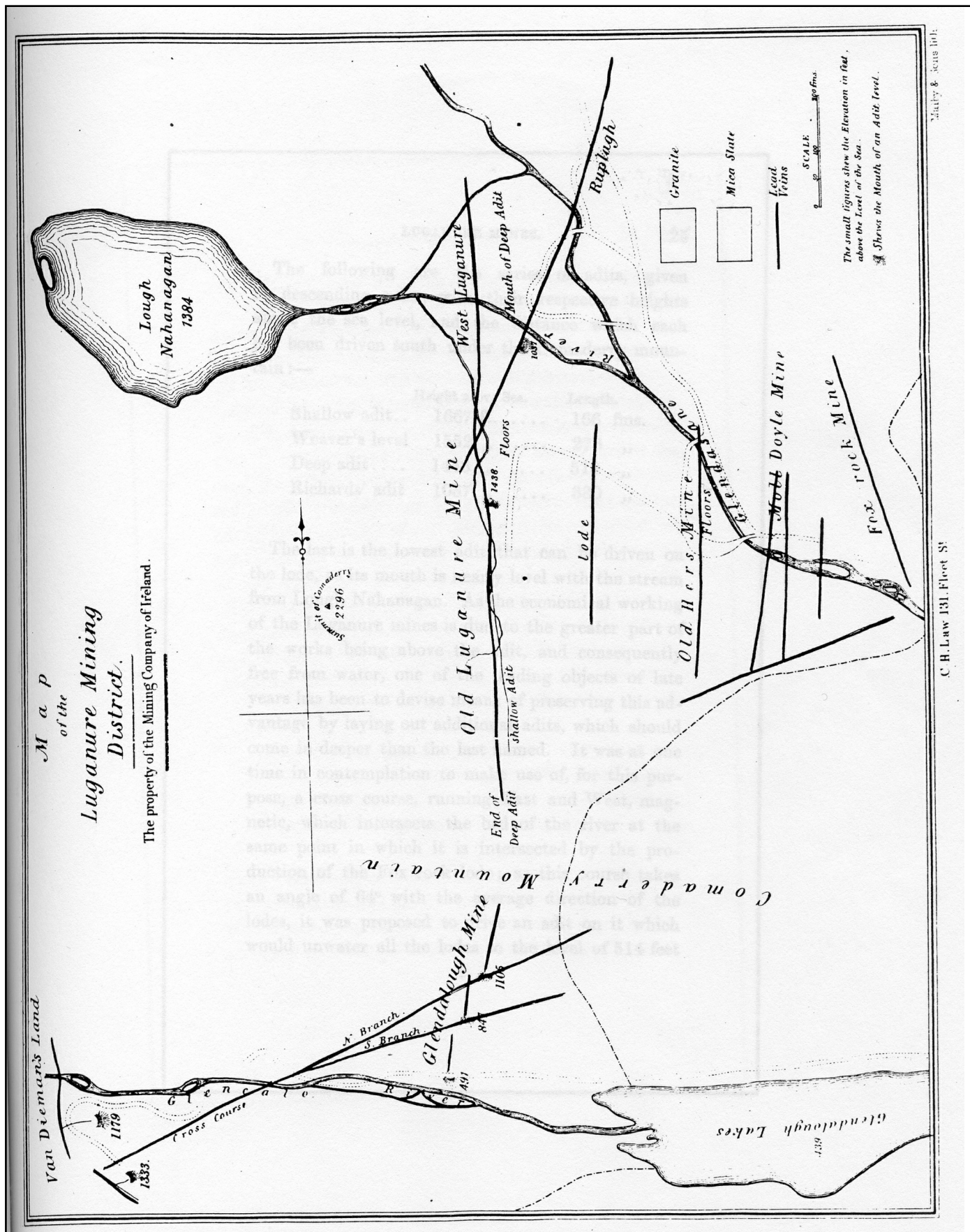


Figure 2. Names of the veins worked by the mid 19th century (Anon 1856).

(MCI 1st report 1869). Ruplagh was said to be "promising" in 1870 and there was optimism about the future once the juncture of the Hero and Foxrock lodes was reached in 1873 (MCI 2nd report 1869; 1st & 2nd 1873). Scepticism was meanwhile being expressed about this in that shareholders were not being given enough objective information (MJ 1869, p. 74).

Nevertheless, optimism seems to have been sustained with further investment in Luganure for about five years. In 1875 two new shafts were sunk at New Hero and a horse whim there was replaced by a new waterwheel for lifting and pumping. New dressing floors and a forge were also laid out there (MCI 1st report 1875). In 1877-'78 they improved the road into Glendalough, added a new crushing house and jigging machinery as well as extending the mine doctor's house (MCI 1st report 1878). In 1879 a new waterwheel was added at north Luganure (MCI 2nd report 1879). That year the company made its first operating loss for nearly thirty years (table 2) - losses which continued and doomed the mine.

ATTEMPTS AT SURVIVAL

Later that year, 1879, there was reported to be a drop in "productiveness of the stopes" with cut-backs beginning in 1881. A report on Luganure was commissioned and conducted by Captain William Kitto who made a number of recommendations (MCI 1st report 1880 & 1st report 1881). Possibly as a result a new waterwheel was erected at Ruplagh and there was a short-term improvement in the quality of the ore although this was reported by the end of '82 to be "deceptive". The company may have had labour difficulties as well, referred to as "disorganisation of the labour market (MCI 1st report 1882). This apparently led to sackings in pursuit of "business retrenchments and economies". Meanwhile by the end of '83 the price of lead had dropped to what was said to be the lowest price for fifty years and continued to fall to a low of 25/- per ton. Realistically, they did admit that there were not any "*over sanguine prospects*" but contradicted this again this by saying "*they are inclined to take a cheerful view of the future*" (MCI 2nd report 1882).

Further cut-backs followed in 1883 and '84. The order was given that only the ore in sight should be worked. It transpired that a new shaft was needed to get at it so a final £600 was invested in Luganure. Meanwhile, there is mention of sheep being brought in to graze the company's property there (MCI 1st report 1883 & 1st 1884). At the same time the workforce was being reduced to less than one third over these two years. Total output dropped even more drastically in 1885 to one eighth of what it had been three years earlier (see Table 3). The smelter had meanwhile been operating largely on imported lead, the Isle of Man being the most likely source. It therefore made more sense, as Luganure declined, to move the smelter to a quayside site rather than carting imported ore to Ballycorus. Early in 1886 they chose Ringsend and over the following 18 months began developing it and transferring plant (MCI 1st & 2nd reports 1885; 1st 87). By the end of 1887 the offices had been moved to Ringsend which was described as being "in full working order" by mid-1888. What difficulties accompanied this move go unrecorded though there is retrospective reference

Table 3: LUGANURE 1882-'92 (From Min. Stats)

YEAR	TOTAL OZ.	SILV	VALUE £s	WORKERS
1880	898	3360	10,147	
1881	822	4932	6268	
1882	978	4988	7092	?
1883	461	2910	3397	125
1884	454	1832	2596	64
1885	117	468	?	39
1886	241	920	1928	43
1887	313	920	2504	45
1888	266	749	2403	?
1889	218	832	1853	?
1890	7	?	41	?
1891	10	48	61	?
1892	114	570	536	?
1893	0	0	0	0
1894	0	0	0	0
1895	114	570	536	
1896	82	404	428	
1897	58	281	332	
1898	31	147	178	
1899	11	0	86	7
1900	8	36	76	6
1901	?	?	?	3
1902	?	?	?	3
1903	0	0	0	0

The question marks indicate statistics not provided

to "the severe crisis through which the company has passed" as well as there having been "convulsions in the metal market" (MCI 2nd report 1888)

Meanwhile, a modest recovery in the lead market in 1885 had encouraged the company to sink a further shaft at an unspecified location and this was completed the following year (MCI 1st report 1884; 1st & 2nd'85). However, most of the workings were abandoned in 1887 with Ruplagh continuing for another two and half years closing at the end of 1889 (GSI Abandonment plans). The meagre production (see table 3) of the early 1890s may have come from reworking old waste tips. Meanwhile, following the move to Ringsend the company tried to sell Luganure as a going concern along with their only other surviving mine at Slievardagh, it being "*obviously to the advantage of all concerned that they should be sold*". They failed to sell either (MCI 1st report 1898). The following year the sale of their lease of the surface area for forestry, sheep and rabbits realised £3094 after expenses (MCI report 1st 1890). The forestry element may have included mature woodland as they had been planting trees at Glendalough since 1868 (MJ 1868 p.496). Sale of their remaining stocks of coal and lead between mid 1889 and the end of 1890 brought in a suspiciously round figure of £10,000. All this money was invested in government stocks (MCI 1st report 1889 & 1st '90).

Following a "somewhat protracted" (and presumably highly emotional) EGM in March 1891 the decision was made to wind up the Mining Company of Ireland (MJ 1891 p. 218, and 305). The sequel is not clear. The assets that MCI had at the end of

1891 were its name, the buildings at Ballycorus, the works at Ringsend, and Luganure, with about £10,000 in government bonds. At the end of that year they made an agreement with a subsidiary of Mssrs. Williams and Woods (general merchants) called Strachan Brothers who were "in the business of lead manufacturing and marketing" at Loftus Lane, Dublin. Details of the shareholding agreement have not survived but MCI may have been the senior partner to judge from the new name, *MCI and Strachan Brothers*, and the fact that Ringsend became the headquarters of the new company with manufacturing continuing at Ballycorus (CRO).

The new amalgam possibly set up a subsidiary company to reopen Luganure: by 1895 it was back in production and over the next five years it yielded the very modest output shown in Table 3. This operation continued at Foxrock (i.e. just three workers employed underground in 1901 & 1902 strangely, with none on the surface) until recorded as "discontinued" in 1903 (Min. Stats., Luganure and Foxrock). A subsidiary was certainly nominally in existence by 1922 with Frederick William Maguire, secretary of MCI/Strachan, being a director of Glendalough Mines. Shareholder A.A. Wynne, Civ.Eng. had as his address the Estate Office, Glendalough. He and W.H. Wynne were recorded as "owners of Foxrock 1899-1913 and a shareholding spinster named Gladys Wynne was also living at Glendalough in 1922 (CRO).

The story of the later revival of Glendalough must await another chronicler as must the social history of the families that moved into an area so remote and wild that part of the Luganure mining area was known as Van Dieman's Land.

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 Min Stats - The Mineral statistics published annually by HMSO. That these often vary from the MCI figures is probably due to different ways of calculating production over twelve months. Nevertheless the trends are the same.
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