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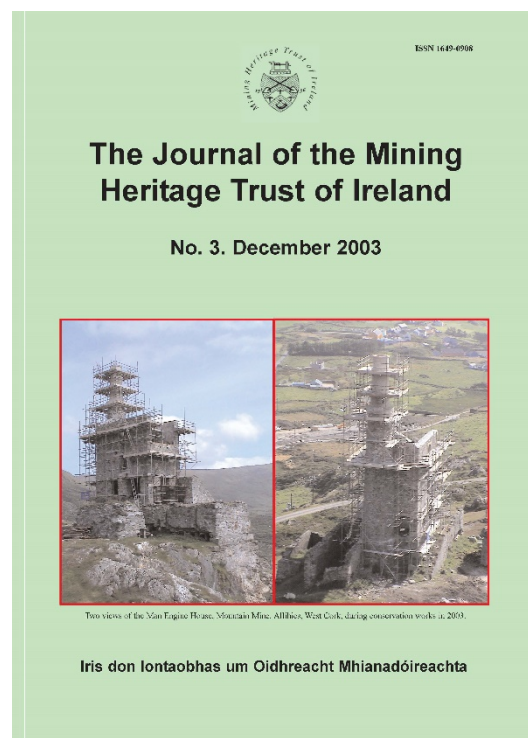
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CHARLES STEWART PARNELL'S MINING INHERITANCE AND INTERESTS

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Abstract: Not only until nearly the end of his life did the public learn anything about the private life of Nationalist leader and icon, C.S. Parnell - his relationship with Mrs. O'Shea. Very few knew anything about his obsession with mining, nor how he shared this with his grandfather's generation, with his father and brother. This is an investigation of their stories. It was therefore appropriate that the Mining Heritage Trust choose Avondale House, the home of the Parnell's, as the venue for the 2003 NAMHO meeting. It would particularly have been a subject near and dear to the heart of Ireland's 'Uncrowned King'. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 3, 2003, 55-59.

C.S.'S GRANDFATHER'S MINING INTERESTS

Charles Stewart's granduncle was Sir John Parnell, one time Chancellor of the Exchequer of Ireland. Sir John's cousin, Captain Samuel Hayes, was an architect and the builder of Avondale House. He had some mining interests as a shareholder in Glenmalure's mines and also at Avoca. (McCracken 1968) Though not actively involved in the actual mining himself, Hayes was nonetheless very familiar with the mining speculation that was then rampant among the gentry of Wicklow. As a man of science and education he was cited in various records as a 'reference' person, a guru to be consulted in mineralogical affairs by those of enquiring mind who often travelled to darkest Wicklow to see for themselves one of the few manifestations of the Industrial Revolution in Ireland.

On his inheriting Avondale from his cousin, Sir John Parnell, continued the interest in mining and especially in the Cronebane and Ballymurtagh mines. (NA 620/18a/6) This was as much out of political concern as out of economic aspirations. Sir John as part of his Avondale inheritance, now owned land in Ballymurtagh and this abutted on to the rich mineral land of Tigroney, Cronebane and Connary in the Avoca valley. He also had land adjoining the productive lead region of Glenmalure. These mines were then in full production under the aegis of the Associated Mining Company of Ireland and its long-standing rival across the Avoca's then polluted river, the patriotically

named Hibernian Mining Company. It does not appear that Parnell took an active part in the mining process itself but he did keep a watchful eye on the fortunes of the Avoca mine masters and invited speculators on his land to assess its potential (Foster 1976).

One of the things that might have deterred him becoming yet another active Wicklow gentleman speculator, was a fear of the mining community itself. Sir John Parnell's letters to the authorities in Dublin on the eve of the 1798 Rebellion are filled with his apprehensions about the loyalty of the miners and their attachment to the subversive doctrines of the United Irishmen. (NA 620/3/32/6) Another stimulus to feed the Parnell family's mineral interest was the famed Croghan Gold Rush of 1794. The impoverished peasantry of the area, along with opportunistic outsiders, invaded the upper reaches of the Goldmines river at Ballinasillogue and there, in a six week long frenzy of sluicing and panning cleaned out most of the placer gold before the authorities moved in to establish royal rights over the gold. (Kirwan 1801 and McArdle, this issue) Such events created their own local legends and folklore. On fireside tales of 'mother lodes', undisclosed nugget finds, and hidden underground gold seams was the young Charles Stewart Parnell reared (Gaffney reminiscences).

William Parnell (1780-1821), Sir John's brother (and C.S.'s grandfather), inherited Avondale in 1801, along with other property in County Armagh, held on a long lease from Trinity College Dublin. He was a man with a social conscious although he lived the life of an Irish country gentleman. Following the Act of Union he served as a Member of Parliament in Westminster spending long periods away from Avondale. William married a daughter of Col. Hugh Howard of Shelton Abbey who resided later in Castle Howard overlooking the Meetings of the Waters. This union, especially with his Howard in-laws, probably helped to further reinforce the interest in mining, for Castle Howard was built on the ruins of the former Cronebane Fort that was set in the very heart of mining country (Power 2000).



Figure 1. Avondale House

More influential however was William Parnell's adjoining neighbour, Thomas Mills-King of Kingston House. He was a cultivated individual much given to the work of the Dublin Society, and especially in its furthering of national mining interests. In promoting this Mills-King became very knowledgeable in local geology and mineralogy and his advice in these matters was widely sought both publicly and privately. From Kingston the 'Doctor' as he was known, directed gold finding searches in Ballinasillogh on Croghan Mountain as well as acting as consultant on various scientific papers on the Avoca geology (Kirwan 1801). Doctor Mills-King and William Parnell kept up a close neighbourly friendship where the mutual interest in mining fed from one to the other. During William Parnell's tenure at Avondale the house library became well stocked with books concerning mining, minerals and the then infant science of geology (Parnell 1916).

It was this stock of scientific literature that Charles Stewart later became familiar with and from which he would derive much of his considerable knowledge on technical subjects. William also tried direct mining speculation himself by sinking a number of test shafts on his Glenmalure property looking for lead and silver, but apparently without success. Like many of the Parnell family, William died at the early age of forty-one in 1821.

MINING INHERITANCE FROM HIS FATHER

The second of William's two children, John Henry Parnell (C.S.'s father, 1811-1859), now inherited Avondale. At the age of 24 he set out for a visit to the United States in company with his cousin Lord Powerscourt. One specific part of their itinerary was a detour to Mexico City and a dangerous trip into its lawless interior. This was so that Parnell could inspect a silver mine run by an English company which he states in his journal '*reminded him so much of Wicklow*'. The plight of its half naked Indian underground workers however hardly merited a mention at all. This visit to the mine, at some personal danger and inconvenience, shows that Parnell was taking an active interest in the subject and he may have nurtured plans for his own property in Glenmalure where small quantities of silver were raised in tandem with lead in the more productive mines there. While in America John Henry Parnell carried out a lightning courtship and marriage to the daughter of an American navy hero Admiral Charles Stewart of Bordentown, New Jersey. After returning to Avondale with his new bride Parnell resumed the life of a country gentleman running the Avondale estate economically and efficiently and fathering eleven children of which Charles Stewart was the seventh.

Money became a growing concern to John Henry. Heavy annuities were laid aside for the provision of his sister Catherine to the amount of £10,000, a huge figure, but made over at the time of Avondale's prosperity and without the foresight that by the time its payment fell due there could be numerous mouths to feed out of the limited resources of the estate. In the scheme of things in 19th century Ireland, Avondale was only a middle ranking property and a levy of ten thousand pounds could not be sustained. In the year before he died J.H. Parnell also bought for £65,500 a sizable property in Co. Carlow from his uncle-in-law Sir Ralph Howard. He was another mining enthusiast. This was to be an investment for his second son Henry Tudor

Parnell. This immense outlay only added to the encumbrances on Avondale's income where their cumulative effect would later drive Charles Stewart relentlessly to exploit all the resources of the estate, including its mineral potential (Parnell, J.H. *Memoir*). Mining was just one aspect of John Henry's affairs, and while he had some shares, royalties and 'dead' workings on his land he could not be counted as a mining entrepreneur.



Figure 3 Parnell's Mother

Yet the background of mineralogy ran deep in his male children and the proximity of the Avoca workings to Avondale became, to the young Charles Stewart and his elder brother John Howard, a backdrop to their lives. This is instanced in John Howard's memoir on his brother Charles Stewart when, as children they lost a dog in an old mine shaft near Castle Howard. And what was certainly to influence the national leader in later life, their boyhood activity of sluicing for gold in the Aughrim River. It would appear that '*Charley*' (as his brother called him) had some success at this. According to the memoir, Parnell kept his little gold finds from the river as keepsakes for the remainder of his life (Parnell 1916). Inculcated since a child with stories of the Croghan gold rush, and familiar since a baby with the stacks and plumes from the mine workings on Connary Hill, which were always visible from his nursery window, Parnell may have forged a deep unshakable belief in a possible El Dorado of gold in his immediate vicinity and most importantly that he alone would be its discoverer (Gaffney reminiscences).

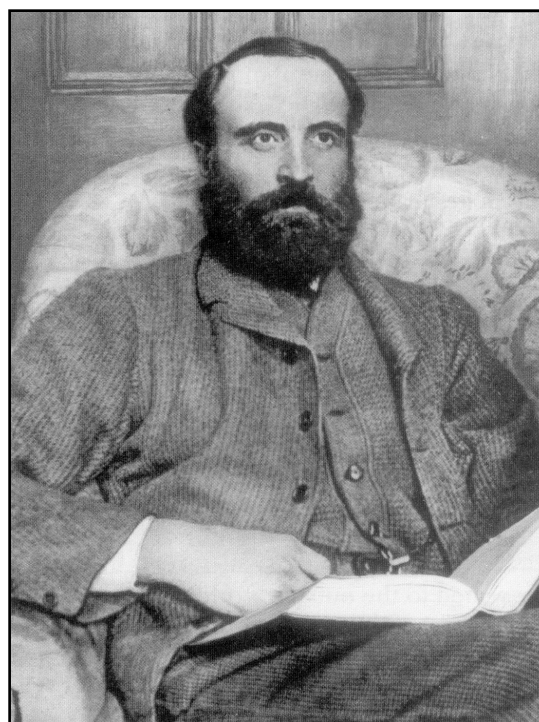


Figure 2. Charles Stewart Parnell

As was the fate of the other Parnells, John Henry died suddenly aged 48. He expired in Dublin's Gresham Hotel following a cricket match in the Phoenix Park. His demise brought the already confused financial affairs of Avondale to the brink of bankruptcy. Still not in his legal majority Charles Stewart Parnell inherited the home estate while his elder brother received the already heavily mortgaged Armagh property. Because they were minors the Parnell boys were made Wards of Court and so were not allowed to administer any part of their inheritance. This legal constraint further burdened the economic potential of Avondale, for in the hands of outside agents there was financial incompetence if not downright malpractice which would come to haunt Charles Stewart Parnell when he eventually took over its running (White 200).

C.S. PARNELL'S AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

While the young Parnell readied himself to run the family estate, his brother John Howard attended the School of Mines in Stephens Green, Dublin, where he received certification in geology and mining. Parnell himself did not attend the Mining School. In fact all his education from elementary to university level was unimpressive, and he left the education system without qualifications in anything. The one thing he did excel in however, outside of the political arena, was technical ability. Mechanical engineering and its practical applications he loved, and if a mechanical project gained his interest he was indefatigable in following it up. For instance, he copied the plan of the Warrior River Bridge in Alabama so he could build a replica of its roof for his sawmill in Avondale (Parnell 1916 and Cobb Memorial Archive, Alabama). Likewise in later days he spent hours studying the architecture of the Brighton Railway Station so he could use its design to build a state of the art cow-house at Avondale. Unfortunately that building is now in need of reconstruction.

Charles Stewart Parnell got his first real taste of commercial mining fever in 1871 while in the United States. He had gone there while still a young impressionable man to visit his brother John Howard Parnell who had emigrated to become a cotton and peach farmer in Alabama. The reconstruction of the South following the Civil War was in full spate and both young men were on the lookout for speculative opportunity. In pursuit of this Charles Stewart journeyed to Birmingham, Alabama and looked over the coalfields there. He was on the point of investing £3000 in the Warrior Coal Mine but when he would not be guaranteed full control over the enterprise he withdrew from the scheme. Despite the rebuff he still bubbled over with commercial ideas, especially of mining coal and using it to smelt the iron ores which were found in abundance in the Birmingham area of the state, options that were picked up later by other men and whom made vast fortunes from them.

He also visited a mine in West Virginia called Clover Hill Mine. There was already a connection with Clover Hill and the Stewart side of his family through Parnell's mother and uncle Charles who owned shares in it. As was Charles Stewart's habit, he wished to see all aspects of the workings, both over and under the ground. While in a cage travelling down one of the main shafts Ireland's future leader was almost lost when he very

narrowly escaped decapitation while looking out of the cage on its descent. Later he described from memory the geological formations of the lower galleries of the mine. His brother John Howard pronounced that such a profile did not augur well for its productivity and foretold its probable failure and closure. That soon came to pass and Parnell was very impressed by the prediction, so much so that he now immersed himself in reading and studying geology, an interest which never left him and which was to become a solace for him in his many political times of crisis (Parnell 1916).

PURSuing THE MINERAL WEALTH AROUND AVONDALE

As master of Avondale Parnell tried several different enterprises to make the estate solvent besides the more traditional revenue raisers of rents and leases from tenants. He opened a saw mill, and with his practical head and artisan's attitude, he mucked in at all levels of production, not disdaining to take his coat off and lend a hand with the cutting and planing, or if required becoming the mill mechanic. But this idyllic time was short before his true destiny arrived in 1875 and Parnell entered Parliament. Despite a hectic and crammed public life, he was never to lose sight of his hopes and endeavours to become a commercially successful mine owner. When he could attend to private affairs in Avondale he was forever looking at the business factor, driven on not only by ambition to be a success, but also out of the necessity to relieve the estate of its crushing financial burdens. Commercial timber was the main money maker until in 1882 Parnell turned to quarrying.

Here he found a ready market manufacturing paving stones for the Dublin tramline companies. From then to the end of his life in 1891 he had several quarry ventures in the area of Avondale and Arklow. Two of these industries still survive. One is located just across the river from Avondale House and, having passed through many owners, is now operated as *Dan Morrissey's Ballee Quarry*. The other major quarry founded by him is the *Roadstone Quarry* at Arklow Rock. From its opening in 1885 Parnell took an abiding interest and brought the quarry to a peak of technical perfection for its day with the most modern of equipment and its own light railway system.

Despite assuming full leadership of the Irish Home Rule Party, exhausting fund-raising visits to America, incarceration in Kilmainham Jail, countless meetings and rallies, domestic visits to France and England and possibly the most distracting issue of all, his secret domestic life with Mrs O'Shea at Womersley Lodge Eltham in London, Parnell's mining hopes were never neglected. Strangely it was in Eltham, that Parnell for the first time in his life could devote many uninterrupted hours and days to planning the mining of those ores that he firmly believed lay under his home place on the Avondale estate. He had a small laboratory installed in the house and almost daily through the post came samples of various rocks from his Wicklow property that he would test for mineral ores. So engrossed would he become in this activity that all political matters, no matter how urgent, had to wait (O'Shea 1914).

There are only a few private photographs known of Parnell in a

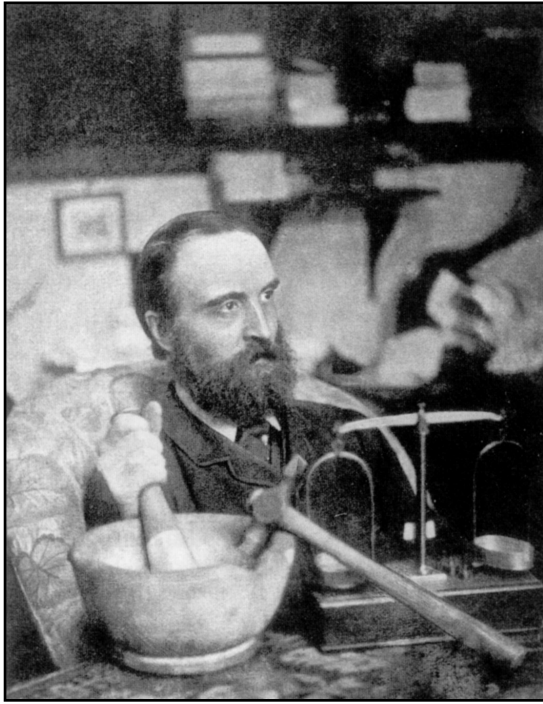


Figure 4. Parnell in his laboratory.

domestic setting. But of that few his own favourite pose is one where he has a mortar and pestle and a precision gold balance by his side. This instrument was so precious that he allowed none but himself ever to handle it. During the last years of his life, Parnell transferred the mineral lab and its assaying tools to his Brighton residence where again, no matter how turbulent the political waters had become, he would devote himself single mindedly to mineral analysis (O'Shea 1914). Even on the benches of the House of Commons he could detach himself from the debates and enter some inner mental labyrinth of mines as he fondled and examined small pieces of ore which he invariably carried in his pockets, to the amusement and perhaps perplexity, of his party colleagues (O'Brien 1915).

Back in Avondale Parnell gave practical application to mining ideas and hopes by driving levels and sinking shafts in places he believed held potential wealth. His hopes that copper, silver and lead would be found never faltered. There were already several shafts sunk on the Avondale estate lands that adjoined the Glenmalure lead workings dating probably from grandfather's time. His expectation of a significant silver find he expressed to Mrs O'Shea in a letter in 1881 (O'Shea 1914).

The most important of all his trial mines, and the most expensive for him to operate was on land once owned by Dr Mills-King that adjoined Avondale. Parnell acquired its mineral rights by stealth, and at great expense, as he believed it would be the answer to all his economic difficulties to discover the copper and sulphur he was convinced lay under Kingston. This conviction grew from an examination of the ground when a railway cutting was made through the rock while constructing the bridge below Kingston House. In the exposed strata Parnell believed he saw a continuation of the valuable Connary copper lodes. Around five or six persons were employed creating the trial level (see photograph). This was partially mechanised with typical Parnell innovation, by a long steel cable used to operate



Figure 5 Spoil heap remaining at one of Parnell's trials.

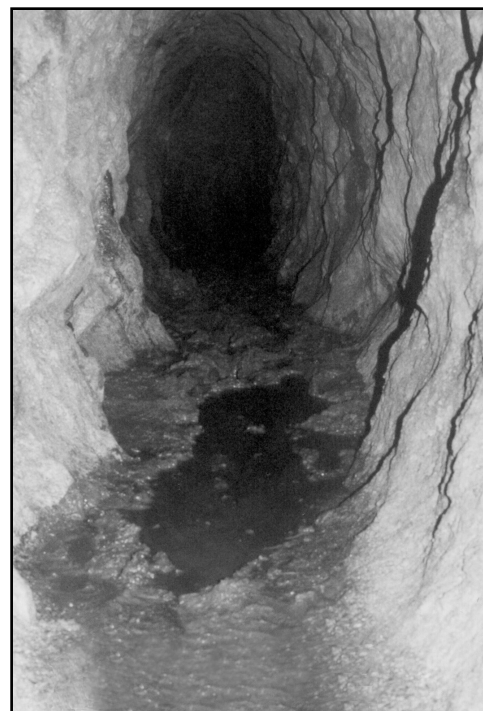


Figure 6. Inside an adit, one of Parnell's Avondale trials.

a water pump, powered from the Avondale sawmill located nearby (*The Sphere* 1888). Yet despite the technical appliances and all his knowledge, Kingston Mine turned out to be yet another money-pit swallowing Avondale's stretched resources. Parnell may have realised this. There is a local tradition that on several occasions when he spoke of closing it up, new ore samples rich in copper would arrive at wherever he was living, supposedly from Kingston, and this would send his hopes rising again! (oral tradition). Memories of the great Avoca Sulphur boom probably influenced his decision to have a trial shaft and level driven into a volcanic dyke at Clogga Beach just south of Arklow Rock. The short level, now almost wave washed, remains to this day a delight to adventuring children who believe it a '*smugglers cave*'.

In Parnell's time the Avondale estate covered about 4500 acres and some of this land abutted the lead country in Glenmalure. Parnell and his brother John Howard spent many fruitless hours

surveying, trying to ascertain whether the lead veins crossed into their own land. Whether they actually sank any new trial shafts, the fragmented Avondale estate records do not say, but they certainly investigated old workings (Parnell 1916). On the land of his tenant Nicholas Devereux, Parnell had a shaft sunk to search for his favourite obsession, gold. As he confided to Michael Davitt in 1888, he was looking for the elusive Wicklow gold for "fourteen years and felt he was on the point of breakthrough" (Lyons 1977). Samples he had obtained from this particular trial convinced him that there was gold on the land, but this may have been just another 'salting' by his workforce to create, or to keep, existing employment.

In 1888 Parnell applied for a licence from the Commissioners of Woods and Forests to hydraulically wash the riverbanks of the Avonmore and Avonbeg in areas of 'wild mountain and valleys'. To the end of his all too short life Parnell was the miner. In the throes of his bitterest political fight, and even within days of his death, aged forty-five, Parnell was making cross country inspections of his mining interests, fully convinced he was about to strike mother lodes of copper, gold or iron ore (O'Shea 1914).

Whether Charles Stewart Parnell was, as they say in County Wicklow 'easily coddled' or not, he was a passionate believer that Ireland abounded in mineral wealth. He stated on more than one occasion that if this could only be tapped it would go a long way to solving the country's (and presumably his) economic difficulties. A case in point for this optimism was the mining trials on the Devereux land. He was looking primarily for gold, but he also hoped to find yellow ochre and this would lead to the discovery of copper and sulphur, and all in the one piece of ground.

Out of his conviction grew a grand design for revitalising, not only the fortunes of County Wicklow but southern Leinster, a project worthy of Parnell's industrial hero the great Cecil Rhodes. Parnell's vision, as he expressed it to his brother John Howard "was of the Dublin, Wicklow and Wexford Railway, in conjunction with the Great Southern Railway, to build a line from the Meetings of the Waters right through Glenmalure to the Kilkenny coalfields, tapping the lead and iron mines all along the way" (Parnell 1916). Here was Parnell trying to emulate a vision he had seen years before in Alabama during the reconstruction of the deep South following the war between the states. And Parnell's mining dreams poses the question, what if he never took the fatal step on the political stage and could have devoted most of his boundless energy and drive to fulfilling his ambition of becoming a mining entrepreneur? Is it perhaps possible that the 2003 Avondale function of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland might have been hosted by the Parnell Group of Industries, one of the United Kingdom's largest Irish employers, perhaps under a Home Rule government?

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