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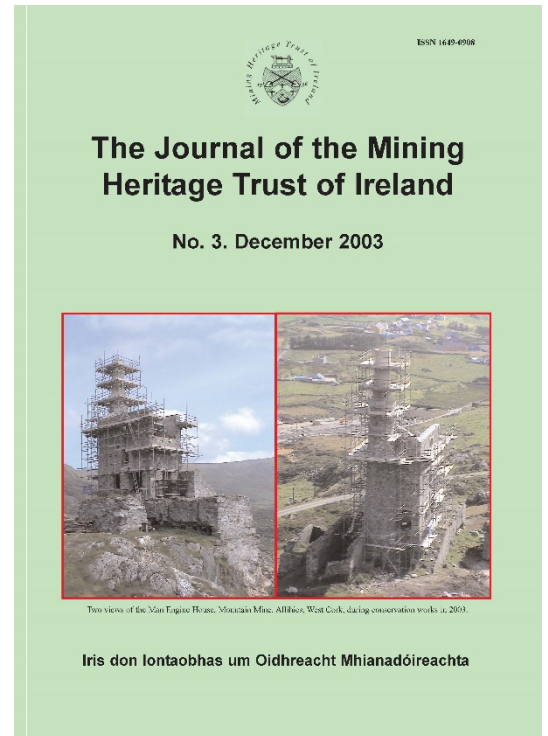
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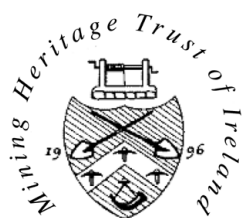
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MINING SCAMS? THREE EXAMPLES FROM WICKLOW

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Abstract: Scams? Arguably, the Victorians were more prone to accept received "truths" with less critical analysis than ourselves. Furthermore, the historian has the advantage of an hindsight, not available to the promoters and shareholders of these three companies. Furthermore, we cannot know the motives of the directors/promoters. Were some cynically trying to deceive shareholders or did they actually believe they were acting in the interest of their shareholders (the interests of the mine employees would not have been a factor!)? Readers can decide for themselves whether these really were scams.

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A scam can take two forms. First, it can be a deliberate attempt by promoters to trick the public into buying shares by making false, exaggerated or unproven claims about a mineral property. Secondly, even if a company is honestly established, its directors can mislead shareholders by withholding or distorting information about the actual state of affairs at the mine in order to maintain share prices (see Cowman and Reilly, 1988, "Anatomy of a Bubble Company"). The first seems to have been the case for the earlier mine, Ballymoneen, although surviving evidence on this mine is very thin. For Connaree there is overwhelming evidence of the second form of scam. Carysfort was more difficult in that it started dubiously and appears to have been dishonest at times thereafter but the evidence is incomplete and it can only be called a suspect scam.

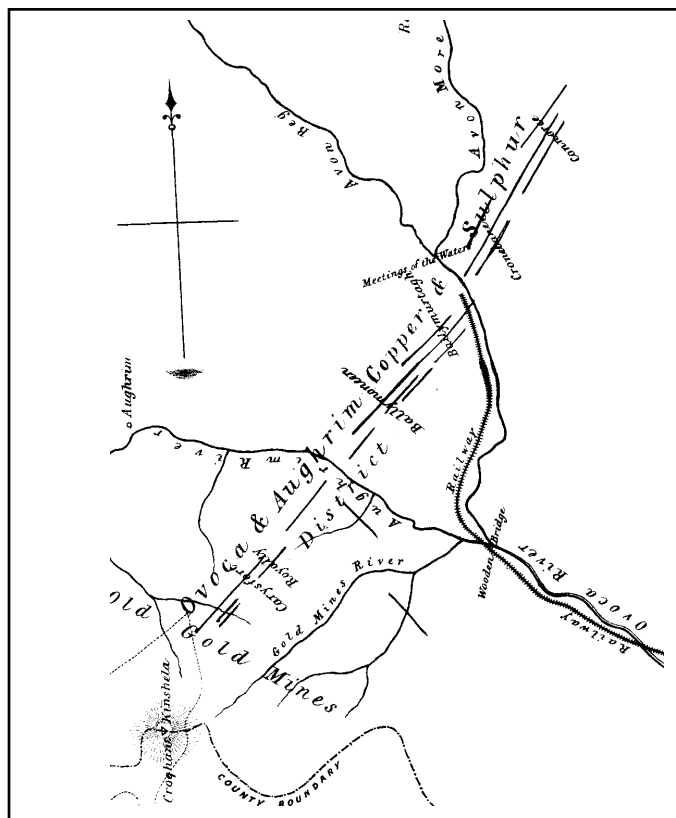
The usual way that scam-type mining companies were set up in Ireland in the 19th century was for a promoter or promoters (speculators in modern parlance) to make an arrangement with the landlords of supposed extensions of profitable mines such as Connoree being an south-eastward extension of Tigroney and Cronebane, with Ballymoneen and Carysfort running north west from Ballymurtagh and Ballygahan. These promoters would in due course establish a company and issue a prospectus (example Fig. 2) designed to attract people to buy shares, paying first about a quarter of the full price with calls thereafter as investment was needed, up to the nominal price.

Out of the money invested, the promoters would recoup the expenses entailed in setting up the company plus some reward for the gamble they had taken. If the sum involved was not stated in the prospectus, then there was at least the possibility of a scam. Hence Carysfort has been included and the same applies in a different way to Connaree which was exceptional in that the promoter, Markham Brown, worked the mine himself for over three years before launching the company. Ballymoneen's prospectus has not survived, but it is very much part of a pattern, particularly as one of the promoters, John Salmon was involved in a number of other scams.

Figure 1. To the south west is Carysfort, then Ballymoneen and in the north-east, on the other side of the main Avoca mines, is Connoree.

CARYSFORT (1858-1868)

The mineralised area between the main Avoca lodes and the Croughan Kinsella gold finds of the 1790s (see Figs 1 and 5) had scarcely been tested; by the mid 1850s therefore it was an obvious target for exploratory work. About 1855 a Cornish mining engineer, Josiah H. Hitchens, drew up a preliminary report on the area which asserted it was an extension of the main Avoca lodes and intimated that it had the same potential for profitability (Hitchens, n.d.). This was given wider circulation when the Mining Journal promoted the *The Mines of Wicklow* (Fig. 3) in 1856 which quoted substantial parts of Hitchens' report while its anonymous author commented that "there seems no reasonable doubt" that the sulphur alone would be worth £25,000 p.a. plus the value of copper and lead from various parts of the three mile length of the Carysfort royalty (Anon 1856, PP 100-106).



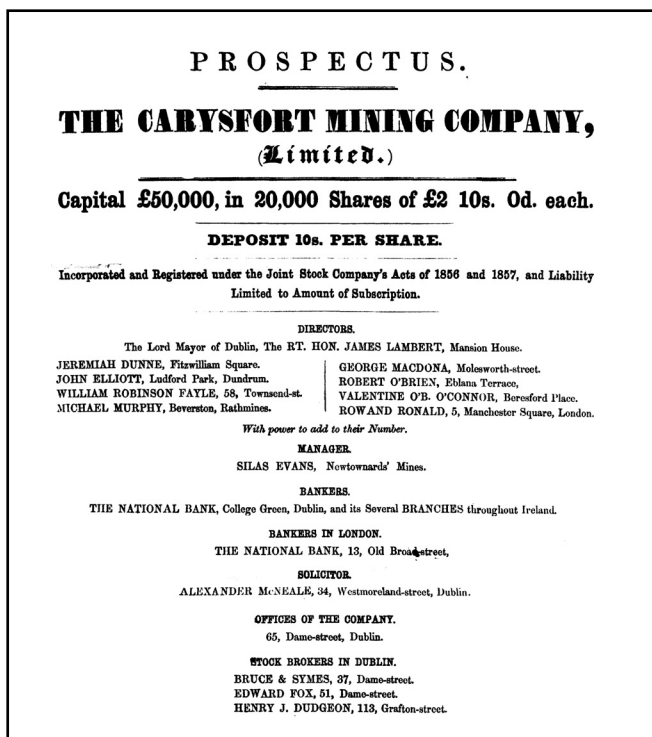


Figure 2. This is the source of Figures 5, 7 and 8.

The following year, not unexpectedly, 1857 a group of Dublin businessmen headed by Lord Mayor James Lambert, began testing there and, according to themselves, hit a lode of unspecified mineral which "has more than equalled the most sanguine expectations". Sulphur was also found near the surface and "it may safely be presumed that it will speedily pay for working". On that basis they negotiated a lease of the area from Lord Carysfort and set up the respectably named Carysfort Mining Company (Prospectus 1858). The public were offered £50,000 worth of shares; the promoters were to be rewarded with £8,000 worth of these (MJ 1859, p. 154 ad).

Probably there was little uptake on these shares as the company belatedly commissioned two mining engineers to inspect the area and in December 1858 they predictably produced glowing accounts: - "It will be one of the most important and remunerative mines I have ever seen" (Barkla 1858) although Silas Evans who was mine captain there, having praised the features, circumspectly added, "These indications may be deceptive and illusionary" (Evans 1858). Further laudatory accounts appeared in the Mining Journal over the next six months (MJ 1859, pp 207, 226, 292, 348, 489 & 499, letters). The next "discovery"

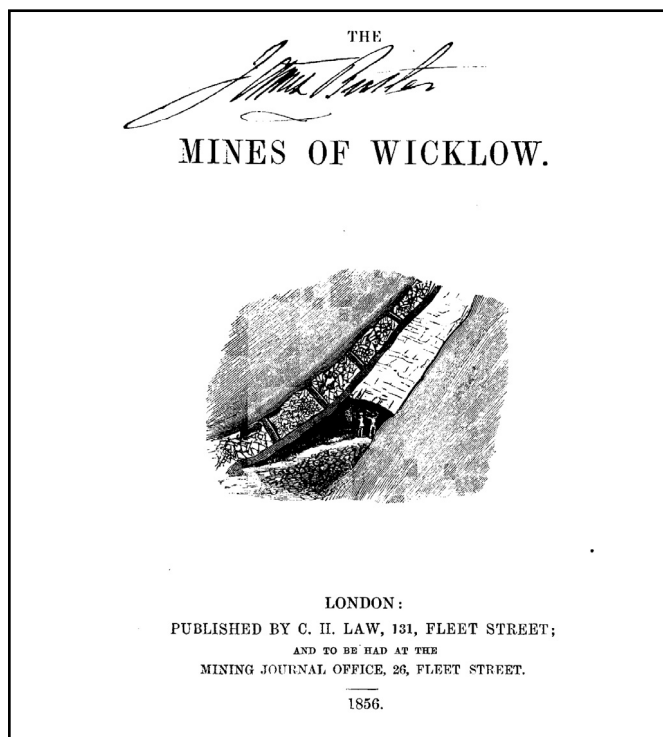


Figure 3. Title page of this anonymous book which is the source of figs. 1, 4, 6 and 9.

was that the area was rich in manganese, on which basis, apparently, the Lord Mayor entertained his fellow directors. This evoked a certain amount of cynicism in one observer (MJ 1859, Dublin Correspondent, pp 654 and 708) while another suggested that not only were the directors being overpaid and had awarded themselves an "enhanced" dividend (MJ 1859, letter "A English Investigator", p. 663).

In late 1859 and early 1860 shareholders were told of wide-ranging exploration and development work, with roads being made across "trackless wastes" and that "time, patience and the judicious outlay of capital" would make the company profitable (MJ 1860, reports half-AGMs, p. 4 & 441 with comment p. 461). There was no further mention of manganese. Not until 1861 was any ore sold, £281 worth of lead. The cost of so doing was £3097 (MJ 1861. Report half-AGM, p. 431). However, gold was at hand!

Strangely, the company had ignored this potential for three years, probably because Captain Evans specifically advised against gold prospecting (Evans 1858). However, nuggets of gold had been found here in 1856 (MJ 1856, p. 585 & 658

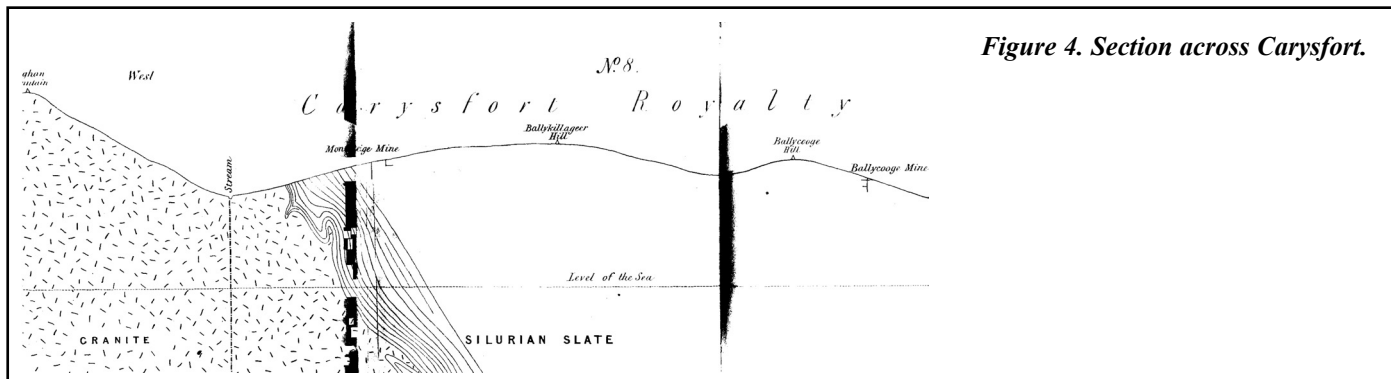


Figure 4. Section across Carysfort.

"Mining Notabilia"). It had been originally assumed that this was what they were really after (MJ 1858, p. 561, 822 & 825 anon items & p. 857 Ed). Furthermore, there were rumours from 1860 on that that gold had been found near Ballymurtagh (NA QRO 2B 45 35 /2000 and 2B 46 31 /820). In fact the Carysfort Mining Company did not even have the necessary licence to prospect for gold and only applied for one in July 1860 because, as they claimed, they found their works besieged by "idlers and persons of low character together with the surrounding peasantry". They found it difficult to maintain operations while being harassed by "a class of men so entirely lawless as the miners of this country are".

Possession of a licence would allow the company to keep them at bay even though the directors specifically stated that they did not believe there was gold there.. It took a year and a half for the formalities to be complete (February 1862) and the licence was granted for just one year provided they actually did look for gold. Share prices shot up at this prospect (MJ 1862, p212 & 717 IMSM). Nevertheless, they did not start to do so until that November (QRO 2B 46 31 /826). Immediately, they found gold!

Admittedly it was "a very small quantity", worth £120 (MJ 1863, IMSM, p. 484). Presumably it increased the sense of excitement in the area and caused the directors to reapply for gold licences over the following years. However, the initial find was literally a flash in the pan as only another £46 worth was found over the following year (QRO 2B 46 31 /8260). During 1864-5 they concentrated on trying to find the mother lode on Croghan Kinsela and uncovered two nuggets weighing 24 and thirty ounces, plus some grains (MJ 1865, report half-AGM, p. 28 and IMSM, p. 141). The potential of this presumably sustained investment in the company which was unlikely otherwise to have survived as their search for more prosaic minerals proved even less profitable.

A promising vein (of lead?) fizzled out and was abandoned in late 1860 (DB 1861, Vol. III, no 26, Jan. 15th). The sulphur lode at Ballintemple had to be "temporarily suspended" in 1862 but a steam engine was purchased to pump an even more promising lode at Ballysillogue (Fig 5). This much the shareholders were told in late 1862 (Report directors to half-AGM enclosed in QRO 2B 46 31 /826). However, there were notes of disquiet and the company's share prices began to fall. Captain Evans was sacked and replaced by Joseph Hodge from Cornwall (MJ 1862, IMSM, pp 521 and 573). There is little reportage of the company's activities over the next three years and it is difficult to know how it survived. Shareholders themselves apparently did not know what was happening and they were "discouraged" from visiting Carysfort even though some of them came from a mining background. Their main anger, however, was directed against Hitchens who was stated to have drawn up a new report predicting, "a string lode will make mineral at 25-30 fathoms". "What kind of a mineral not mining man can tell" was the riposte of one shareholder, pointing out the unreliability of making predictions about levels not reached (MJ 1865 ii, Report half-AGM, p. 15).

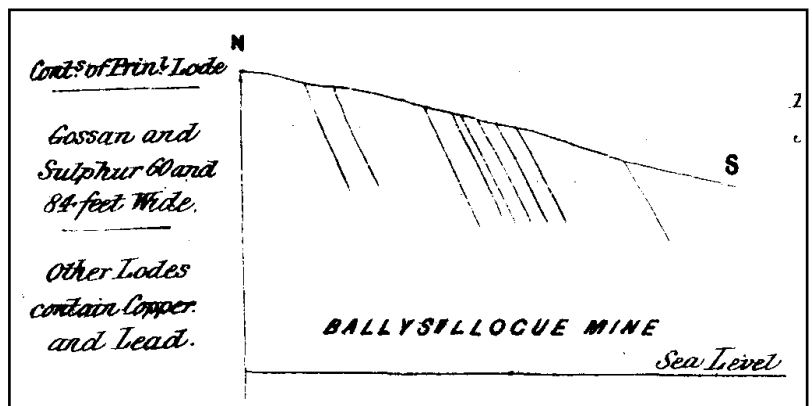


Figure 5. The "principal lode" at the Ballysillogue section of Carysfort.

A revolt of shareholders took place, the resignation of the directors was called for and when they refused the shareholders held their own meeting. There was "much angry discussion" but a compromise was reached and four of the rebel shareholders soon afterwards joined the Board. No salaries were to be paid until a profit was made (MJ 1865, i, IMSM, p. 289, 404 & 854). Hitchens dissociated himself from the excesses of the old directors, referring to their professed ambitions as "a groundless illusion", but was in turn was attacked as having drawn up a misleading report on the area back in 1849. He denied it and said that the report could have been drawn up by his late brother (MJ 1865, series of letters Hitchens, pp 466, 483, 534, 551, 598, 615, 631, 647).

However, relative harmony was restored and the company apparently continued its search for gold. A rumour that it had struck rich caused its £2 shares to rise from three shillings to eleven but quickly fell back to nine shillings (MJ 1866 IMSM p. 428). They kept hopes alive by the announcement of sulphur at Arklow Head which was to be developed through a bank loan of £1,000 in 1867. This came to nothing. Moreover, the financial situation of the company was so bad by the end of 1867 that the company had to abandon their main mine at Ballinavalla because they could not afford to transport coal to the engine. They also had to let go Capt. Bishop, the Cornish agent shared with the Carysfort Company (MJ 1857, p 892, report meeting). £471 worth of lead was meanwhile raised at Ballintemple but at a cost of £1365! (MJ 1867 IMSM pp. 448 and 892).

Failure to find viable gold, sulphur or lead doomed the company. The directors asked an independent assessor, one Professor Sullivan to report on the company's prospects, which he presented to the shareholders in April 1868. As a result, by majority decision they decided to wind up the company (MJ 1868, IMSM, p. 289). An attempt was made to sell the lease, steam engine and other assets through the Landed Estate Court but there were no takers (MJ 1868 IMSM, p. 289 & 653). The whole lot was put up for auction the following year under the grandiosely aspirational title "Carysfort Copper, Sulphur, Iron, Lead and Silver-lead Ore Mines", with seemingly a shamefaced silence about gold. It went to an unknown buyer for a mere £750 (MJ 1869, ad p. 69 & news item p. 173). Possible he want-

ed only the steam engine which up to 1865 had been unused and probably was never started up thereafter (MJ 1865 report half AGM, p.28)

Was it a scam? Its origins were certainly dubious but the chimera of gold seems to have focused minds on the actual potential of the area. They do seem to have made a genuine attempt to find what had eluded government officials some sixty years earlier, the source of the alluvial gold in the streams found then on Croghan Kinsella. They "costeamed the surface of the mountain to a considerable extent while they collected, crushed and examined the gold of the district" it was later reported (Kinahan, 1889). Shareholders must have had confidence enough in the potential of the area to keep the company going for nine years, which included the shareholders' revolt of 1865. The area was worth investigating, if only to prove it barren.

CONNOREE (1859-1868)

Connoree (variously spelled) had been worked sporadically in the 18th century and apparently then lay dormant until 1832 when continuous copper production is recorded up to 1845 (MS). An account of 1853 refers to this operation as, "subject to disgracefully bad management by which the ore was removed without any to system of future consequences". (Smyth 1853). It was said to have been rescued from "dilapidation" by "the present energetic proprietor, Mr. Markham Brown" so that "Connoree may now be considered in as complete and perfect working order as any of the Ovoca mines". This was part of an overtly promotional account buried within a more analytical account of the major mines in Avoca (including neighbouring Cronebane to its west) and refers to profits at an unspecified earlier date of £10,000 pa (Anon 1856, p. 62). Why it took Mr. Brown three years to cash in on this 1856 encomium has not emerged. At that stage Brown had two engines on the site (see Fig. 6) - a 30" pumping and 18" winding (MJ 1856, p. 841, anon item).

In June 1859 the public were offered the opportunity of purchasing 50,000 £1 shares in an already successful mine that claimed to have raised £20,000 worth of sulphur, copper and silver over the previous three years with a likelihood of zinc (MJ 1859, Prospectus, p.474). While this is not recorded direct-

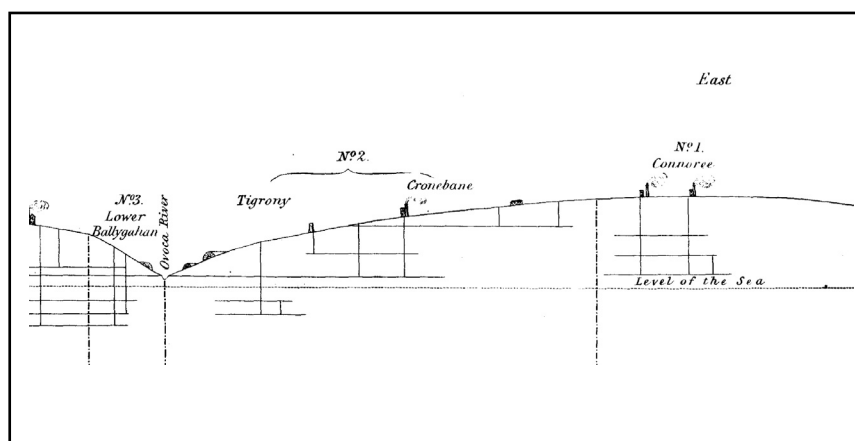


Figure 6. Connoree in relation to its neighbouring mines.

ly in the Mineral Statistics for these years, a retrospective 17,344 tons of sulphur from Connoree is recorded for those years in a footnote to the 1858 statistics. This is typical of the operations of Connoree Mining Company over the following nine years. On one level it seems to be doing well but there are always unanswered questions. The directors successfully controlled the amount of information going to shareholders, but could not hide the disquiet of the shareholders about this. Ownership remained registered in Brown's name until 1861 (Min. Stats.). He apparently regarded the mine as his fiefdom, and conflict with the shareholders was inevitable.

Shareholders failed to establish at the outset how many of the 50,000 shares had been sold (MJ 1859, reps. Meetings, p. 724 & 801) Questions were asked at the start about the competence of Markham Brown who had appointed himself manager of the mine (MJ 1859, Rep. Meeting, question Webb, p.724; 1860, anon item, p. 670). Serious questions were also asked about why £1 share prices unexplainably but briefly shot up to almost £3 in November 1861 (MJ 1860, letters pp. 19, 35, 40, 51). That the company's registered office remained in London when the majority of the shareholders were Irish perplexed some and not until 1863 was this rectified (MJ 1859, ed p.654, letter p. 699; rep. Half-AGM in London p. 724; MJ 1860 anon item p.331;1863 177 rep. meeting). Then there was the resignation of one of the directors over some unspecified "capers" (MJ 1861, anon, p. 123). Why was only £76 left in mid 1862 and how did the company continue thereafter? (MJ 1862, p. 553 IMSM)

In 1863 the shareholders rejected the report of the directors (MJ 1863, p. 632 IMSM) presumably because the books showed that the difference between ore sales and expenditure indicated a loss of almost £8,000 (MJ 1865, p 76 IMSM). Brown was eventually forced out as mine manager and a professional named Bishop from Cornwall brought in to replace him on a part-time basis (he also supervised Carysfort) (MJ 1863, p. 181 IMSM). In August of 1863 the shareholders refused to accept the accounts. One protested against the paucity of information and the fact that they were being prevented from visiting their mine for themselves to find out what was going on (MJ 1863 p. 632 & 705 IMSM, p 811-2 letter from shareholder)

However, sulphur was being raised, though the Mineral Statistics can only supply estimates - 5000 tons in 1859 and 1860, 3000 tons in 1862 and 1863. On this basis shareholders were kept happy with a 5% dividend and acquiesced in the directors doubling their stipends to £300 pa (MJ 1860 ad and report gen. Meeting, p. 514). Apprehensions about what the directors were up to grew over the following half year and the shareholders actually rejected a proposals for a dividend (MJ 861, rep. Gen meeting, p.105). The tensions that lead to that, and resulted from it, are not reported. All that appeared publicly was obviously controlled by the directors and lauded their role (MJ 1863, IMSM p. 653 and MJ 1864 ad, p. 97,IMS M p.665, MJ 1865 IMSM p.60).

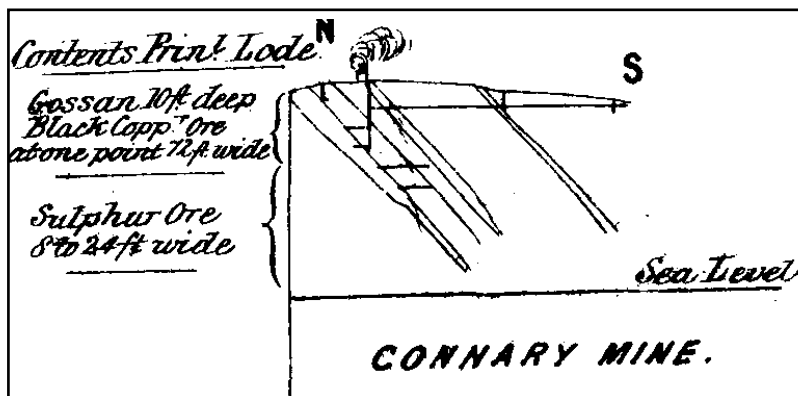


Figure 7, Section of workings.

Over the next two years only echoes of the battles going on appear in the Mining Journal (MJ 1865 IMSM re resignation of chairman, p.388; MJ 1866 IMSM accounts questioned; MJ 1867, IMSM re sales, p. 245), until eventually in late 1867 the shareholders forced an EGM to wind up the company before its liabilities grew too high. The result at that meeting was stalemate but they got the meeting adjourned, to be resumed in early 1868 (MJ 1867, report EGM p. 716 and IMSM p. 721). The shareholders were obviously more tightly organised for the resumed meeting, "of a somewhat stormy character", and forced through a motion that a committee of them get access to the company's books (MJ 1868 BM, p. 156-7).

They discovered that the full original £50,000 had in fact been raised but immediately plundered by the promoters. Markham Brown (who had died sometime previously) had appropriated nearly half of it, £24,000; other directors got over £7000 the main beneficiary being company chairman Mackey. "Overcharge and plunder" accounted for about £10,000 and over £13,000 had been "wasted" on the mine (MJ 1868 IMSM, p. 289-90). There were worse revelations: "we found the affairs of the company in a sad and lamentable state as regards the books, there being no cash book ---(and) open fraud in the cost sheets" which had been "self-evidently tampered with". Over £5000 worth of cheques were unaccounted for and cash was missing from the safe. The mine itself was "in a deplorable state --- machinery neglected --- much useless material bought". The only "well-ordered" arrangements were those "for the benefit of the directors" (MJ 1868, Report Shareholders Committee, p. 192-3).

Who was to blame for this state of affairs? Firstly, the Board of Directors under Mackey who quickly skipped to New Zealand (MJ 1868 IMSM, p. 604). Collectively the shareholders accused them of "extra-ordinary dereliction of duty and flagrant abuse of confidence". The auditors were equally culpable as they had given their blessing to incomplete accounts without receipts. However, the actual larceny of the cheques and cash from the safe was done by the company secretary, one Debrickson although he was considered only the "dupe" of Mackey (MJ 1868, Report Shareholders Committee, p. 192-3). They traced Debrickson's plunder of the company assets back five years. Apparently more ore had in fact been produced than the official figures showed allowing appropriation along the

way. However, there was no way of knowing how much ore had actually been sold and how much therefore lost to the company (MJ 1868 IMSM p 289-90).

A liquidator was immediately called in and paid the miners £120 of the £250 due to them (MJ 1868, p. 361 IMSM). Following his report a shareholders' committee of five was appointed to recover "the loss sustained in consequence of the former directors' neglect of the affairs of the company" (MJ 1869, p. 45, IMSM) They claimed £6000 but were offered £1000 (not clear by whom). Meanwhile all operations had ceased apart from harvesting precipitate from the mine waters (MJ 1870, p. 381 IMSM). These matters should have finished as the slow legal procedures of winding up the company took place. In the meanwhile, there was an unexplained resuscitation in 1871.

There was a "rearranged capital structure" which allowed for the appointment of two new captains, the purchase of a stone crusher (probably from Carysfort), consideration of purchasing a steam road-engine, and clearing the old shaft down to 57 fathoms ((342 feet) (MJ 1871, 356, rep. Meeting). One shareholder expressed perplexed puzzlement at this (MJ 1871, p 370 anon item). This reworking quickly got into trouble for encroaching on the abandoned neighbouring Cronebane mine (MJ 1872, p. 175 anon item, 206 letter, 403 meeting Cronebane Co.). This may have caused them to consider in 1872 roasting the sulphur to extract copper and silver (MJ 1872 p. 864 & 911 anon items). The only record of sales for the period, however was £622 worth of copper in 1872 (Min. Stats.). The following year the winding up began in the Court of Chancery though creditors had to go through the Court of Rolls (MJ 1873, p. 141 Dub. Corr. & 1392 ad.). However, the company is still recorded as owning Connoree up to 1877 when it was taken over by a W.G. Du Bedat (Min. Stats.)

Was Connoree Mining Company set up to scam the public? Yes, in that they did not apply the resources raised to the mine and engaged in a sustained cover-up. However, the fact that it was actually a commercially viable mine makes it different from the normal scam which was usually on worthless property with various covers up of that reality. However, the end result was the same - the directors enriched themselves at the expense of the shareholders.

BALLYMONEEN (1856-1859)

That there was considerable interest among certain mining circles in the economic potential of Ballymoneen is attested by the survival of a series of deeds showing a series of leaseings from 1841 (NLI D 19481-'94). involving figures such as Henry English, editor of the mining Journal, William Crockford (mines in Clare), John Salmon (Silvermines), The interest of the first in indiscriminately promoting Irish mining enterprises transcended gullibility. Crockford of the gambling family was involved in a series of other dubious mining enterprises; and whenever anything distinctly "fishy" was going on in contemporary Irish mines, John Salmon was lurking in the background (see Cowman, 1988, p. 103-4)

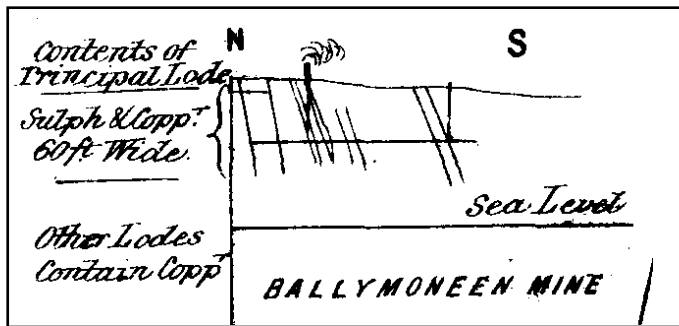


Figure 8. Section showing shafts and levels.

They took a lease on the area and in 1854 employed one Captain Backhouse to inspect undated earlier workings comprising an adit and shaft (MJ 1854, p. 413 report) His report has not survived but a comment on the consequences of his efforts has - Ballymoneen was "unlikely to pay its way" (MJ 1854, p. 564, Dub. Cor.). However, the mine promoters apparently distorted Backhouse's report to them in a promotional prospectus to judge from Backhouse's indignant letter to the Mining Journal from a London address. He accuses them of wrongly locating mineral potential in the accompanying prospectus map and inventing a "Great Kyan Lode". He also implies some collusion with the dubious Markham Brown of Connoree in the purchase of an engine and that in any case it was being wrongly sited (MJ 1854, p. 596, letter Backhouse).

Presumably this upset the plans of the promoters and seemingly English and Crockford backed down but Salmon remained, bringing in new partners - Arundel, Barrow, and Bedow. These leased the area and two years later set up the Ballymoneen Sulphur and Copper Mining Company (NLI D 19494). The initial prospectus contained a useful "misprint" stating that one thousand £2 shares were available (i.e. capital £2000) of which 780 had already been sold leaving 220 for the lucky few. Farther down it was apparent that ten times that number of shares were available (i.e. aspirant capital £20,000). (MJ 1856, p. 217, ad. with excerpt from prospectus)

Also published that year (1856) was an exaggeratedly laudatory account of Ballymoneen's potential, intimating that it was "the most valuable of the Wicklow mines" it being "virgin ground, its treasure untouched". However, it seems that much exploratory work had already been done, including the driving of a deep level (Anon 1856, p. 65-70 and Fig. 9). Operations began in early 1857 under Captain Barkla who obligingly submitted almost weekly reports to the Mining Journal over a period of twenty two months. The were mainly a catalogue of difficulties range from inability to get horses (had travelled "hundreds of miles" to get some) to hard rock, foul air and more generally "not looking so good today" (MJ 1857, British Mining, pp 189, 277, etc. & 1858, p.p 185, 337 & 446, etc.). Reportedly some sulphur was raised but whether any was sold goes unreported. At some stage an engine was put on the site (see Fig. 8) Not unexpectedly, by early 1859 the company was

almost out of money with only £237 left of whatever capital had been originally raised, and a call of 6/- was made on each share (MJ 1859, report meeting, p. 141). The operation kept going until June after which Captain Barkla's reports cease, but they resume again in September before finishing completely in November 1859 (MJ 1859, passim)

While it is possible that this was a genuine attempt on the part of some to test the north-westward extension of the Avoca lodes, the evidence of the promoters seems mainly cynical. The implications of this for miners, shareholders and directors go unreported. However, during the course of that final year (1859) the Carysfort and Connoree companies were set up to work adjoining areas but neither of them cited Ballymoneen as an indicator of the mineral potential of the area.

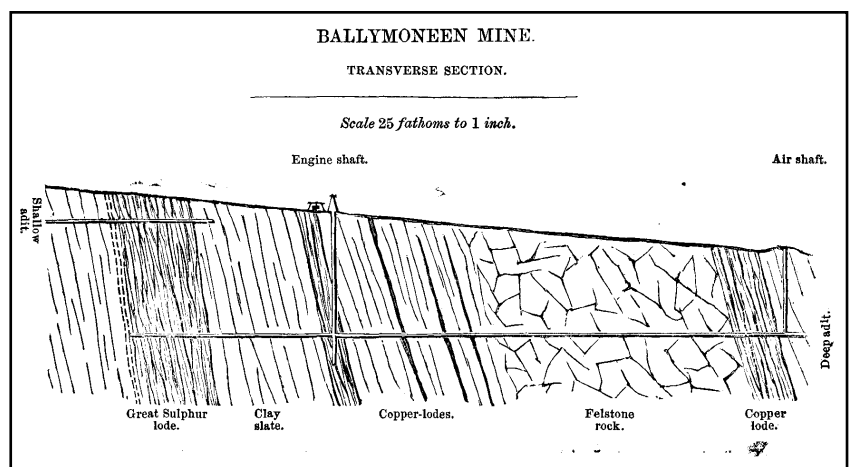


Figure 9. Section showing geology.

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