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The cover page of the journal is green. At the top right is the ISSN number. Below it is the journal title "The Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland" and the issue details "No. 17. July 2019" and "The Final Issue". In the center is a photograph of a landscape with a long, low stone wall running across a grassy hillside. A small cluster of trees is visible in the foreground. Below the photo is a caption in Irish: "Iris don lontaobhas um Oidhreacht Mhianadóireachta".



# A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE LOCAL IMPACT OF TYNAGH

by Dan Shields

**Abstract:** Tynagh Mines, it can be argued, encapsulates and illustrates the history of mining in Ireland in the 20th century. Despite its relatively short-term nature, it was hugely significant both in terms of its impact on the development of the mining industry from 1960 onwards and in generating much of the political controversy and opposition which arose since the late 1960s. Some of the central figures in the Tynagh story also featured in other mining issues, most notably in Tara. Many of the people who ended up working in Tara and other mines in Ireland either started their careers at Tynagh or first came to Ireland to work there.

For these reasons alone, Tynagh's place in Irish Mining heritage is ripe for examination. I would suggest that some of the issues identified relating to how mine workers perceived their position have broader implications. This paper is based on the research which I carried out in the years 1983 and 1984. As the central element of that research was the series of interviews carried out with 64 people who had been employed in the mines and another twenty interviews with various local people, it offers a fairly immediate snapshot of the 'lived experience' of Tynagh in the immediate aftermath of its closure in 1980. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes in the text are from interviews with the former workers at Tynagh who participated in the survey. *Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, 17, 2019, 21-29.

## OVERVIEW

The title of the thesis which I submitted to the Sociology Department of University College Galway (as it then was) "Tynagh Mines: Short term mining and local interest groups in the West of Ireland" sets out squarely one of the most salient facts about Tynagh. This was the relatively temporary nature of the operation. Production there lasted a mere 15 years and even taking the exploration, discovery and post production phases into account, the entire history encompasses little over 25 years. Nevertheless for many 'the mines' has a continuing significance which reflects in part the extent to which it mirrored the Ireland of its era.

The discovery of the ore body, the construction and development phase and its initial production occurred during the 'Lemass Era'. This was the period of Sean Lemass holding the office of Taoiseach when a Programme for Economic Development and the introduction of the initial phase of Foreign Direct Investment led to the first period of economic prosperity after the gloom of 1940's and 1950's. The height of the Mines profitability overlapped the period of the young men in Mohair suits and Taca and perhaps unsurprisingly Tynagh featured largely in the debate over natural resources and taxation which dominated the early 1970s. As the 1970s wore on, Tynagh began to feature in the news more as a source of industrial disputes and tension. After its closure, much of the debate about the mine has focused on the issue of environmental risks which prefigured several more recent controversies.

The theoretical framework within which I worked on my thesis characterised Tynagh as an example of dependent development. While not intending to labour on issues of sociological theory in this paper, it remains a valid structure for the narrative of Tynagh's impact on the local economy and society. Thus taking

the maxim that 'information is power', we can see the local experience of the exploration and development phase as being characterised by confusion and lack of clear knowledge. Classic sociological and social history accounts of mining communities (admittedly largely based on long established mining locations) describe an experience of class consciousness and solidarity which only fractures and fragments in the context of sustained de-industrialisation, whereas the Tynagh experience is of a number of interest groups negotiating the production phase in pursuit of a variety of short term interests from a position of powerlessness.

Debates which were ongoing at a national level with regard to the proper role of the State in mineral development and the control of the same appear at best to have had a peripheral impact on the local scene. It is also noteworthy that among the ex-mine workers interviewed there was a negative view of the performance of the Unions in representing the workers. This also had substantial implications for the articulation of the worker's common interests in a situation in which the perception of where power lay was crucial. It is also interesting that in describing their own perception of the history of the mine or the environmental situation in the mine's aftermath that many interviewees described the situations in terms of the power imbalances that existed.

The national and local contexts in which the mine operated should be remembered as people's understanding of their situation is determined firstly by the information they bring with them. Thus there was a widespread, although erroneous, belief at the time that Ireland was largely devoid of mineral resources. At various times, when spikes in world mineral prices or other crises necessitated it, efforts were made to revive an Irish min-

ing industry which had a long, if patchy, history. Indeed, the relevant primary legislation which applied at the time of the Tynagh discovery was the Minerals Development Act 1940 which coincided with the 'Emergency'. Although enacted when Ireland was dominated by an ideology of autonomous economic development with a strong element of State involvement, it proved adaptable to the context of foreign direct investment promoted during the Lemass era. While the 'winds of change' had begun to make much of the post-colonial world less attractive for international mining companies, Ireland's change of approach did not go unnoticed. Fortunately for Tynagh, a tax exemption first introduced in 1956 was extended in 1967 to 20 years. Other mines at Gortdrum, Silvermines and later Tara were also associated with this phase. Throughout the 1960s, therefore, the national policies would have been strongly favourable to Tynagh and that perception would not have been significantly challenged for most of the mine's history.

At a local level it may now seem to have been inevitable that the mine development would use Loughrea as its main base for the workers and other services but in fact at the time that was not the perception. The records of the Loughrea Development Association (The precursor to the Chamber of Commerce) show that a delegation, led by the Parish Administrator, called to the Mine Management during the initial phase to press Loughrea's case particularly over Ballinasloe. Essentially, this delegation was making the case for Loughrea to be the 'dormitory town' for the mine development at Tynagh and to obtain the benefit for local retail and other outlets from the employment generated by the development and production phases at the mine. The context for this was the lack of any significant industrial base in the town where the only factories were a number of small to medium-sized enterprises which had been attracted there over the previous decades. While the town itself had experienced sustained population growth over the century, this was in a context where the surrounding rural district had suffered considerable decline over the same period. As a market town with little industry, the retail and service sectors of the town were largely dependent on the farming sector which was characterised by small to medium farms engaged in cattle and sheep farming. Much of the coverage of Tynagh in the early years was dominated by this picture of the incongruity of this thrusting modern industry in a sleepy West of Ireland backwater.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

The main evidence for the existence of earlier mining at Tynagh comes from the Geological Survey of Ireland 1865 which refers to the existence of old shafts and spillbanks in the vicinity of Carhoon. Despite this and anecdotal evidence of fowl being poisoned in the area after tilling, no mining or exploration had been carried out up to the mid-twentieth century.

A group of four Irish emigrants to Canada who became involved in mining and mineral exploration decided to apply the expertise and resources they had gained to developing a mining industry in Ireland. The four were Pat Hughes, Joe McParland, Matt Gilroy and Mike McCarthy and together they acquired control of a listed Canadian Company which they renamed Northgate Exploration Limited. Within a year, in 1959, a subsidiary named Irish Base Metals Limited was incorporated in Ireland and that Company immediately began intensive

drilling in the Tynagh area based on recommendations from the Irish Geological Survey and earlier initial prospecting on behalf of Mr. Hughes. In the years following, further drilling produced samples of major lead and zinc concentrates and eventually located the main Tynagh deposit.

Once the exploration and construction phases were completed, the mine was officially opened for production by the then Taoiseach Sean Lemass on the 22nd of October 1965. The development at that stage comprised the opencast mine, the concentrator and the construction of the concentrates shed at Galway Docks and the estimated total spend was £4,000,000. The opencast mining continued up to 1973 and for the first 3 years a substantial amount of the ore was of such high concentration that it was shipped directly without any processing. As a result, the Senior Debt on the Mine Development was paid off within two years and Tynagh became a major tax free profit source for Tynagh. From 1970 to 1973, development of the underground mine proceeded in tandem with the opencast and was producing 50% of the total ore production by 1972. Subsequently, in 1981, there was an operation to recover silver from a portion of the surface stockpile and this ceased in December 1981.

After 1973, production was exclusively from the underground and this ceased in July 1980 when the Company stated that the ore body was exhausted. While this view was disputed by some of the workers I interviewed, and although there was apparently some exploration in the vicinity when metal prices increased, there has never been any attempt to recommence mining at Tynagh. During the course of its operations, almost 9 million tons of ore were mined producing 1 billion pounds of lead, 620 million pounds of zinc, 44 million pounds of copper and 17 million ounces of silver. This was all exported as concentrate through Galway Docks to European markets.

With the benefit of its success at Tynagh, Northgate became a major shareholder in Gortdrum copper mine in Tipperary. It was also centrally involved in the discovery of the Tara ore body but this became mired in controversy and litigation which eventually led to the sale of its interests. As for Tynagh Mine itself, there was considerable controversy in the local area in the years after closure as claims were made of ongoing pollution. The site was investigated by the EPA but no further action was taken.

Subsequently, a portion of the original site was acquired for the construction of a combined cycle power plant and a number of other small businesses operate in the area where the buildings were located. The tailings pond, some stockpiles and the original mine remain and some conservation measures were undertaken after the closure.

The remainder of this article is based on the research from 1983/84. After an initial literature research, examination of contemporary newspapers and magazine archives and the minute books of the local Chamber of Commerce a detailed questionnaire was prepared. A staff roster was obtained from the late period of the mines operation and an attempt was made to interview as many as possible of the ex mine employees still living within a 10 mile radius of Loughrea. In total 64 employees were interviewed using the Survey Questionnaire and all the

interviews were conducted by the writer. The structured part of the interview was designed to obtain the basic information on the workers history in the mine, pay rates and current post mine economic condition. There was some resentment about the intrusiveness of these questions but apart from being chased out of one farmyard on suspicion of being a Social Welfare spy the level of cooperation was remarkable. The Questionnaire was designed to give the opportunity to interviewees to expand on their answers and this is where most of the quotes come from. The number of interviewees would equate to more than 20% of the workforce. Given that many mineworkers would have left the area and that a sizeable number would have resided outside the radius chosen it seems likely that the 64 interviewees represents more than 50% of the potential available mineworkers. One caveat is that because the people who had already left were more mobile and perhaps more committed to mining as a career that this may skew some of the results and the views expressed by interviewees. The other interviewees were selected on the basis of their prominence in the various materials consulted and those interviewees were more unstructured.

## EXPLORATION AND DEVELOPMENT PHASE

Hyperbole is not an unusual feature of the exploration phase of mining when the generation of interest and excitement can be crucial for financing and sometimes share prices. However, many in the local area would not have been familiar with this feature and may therefore have accepted at face value statements like:

"This thing is so big it may change the whole economy of the West"

Pat Hughes - *Connacht Tribune* 16/12/1961

This was backed up by other extravagant claims such as

"Citing the example of a somewhat similar mine in Gunner, Canada, he said that 2,000 men were now employed there. He went on to point out that his company only did the actual mining of the ores and that large numbers of men would also be employed in the industries which would spring from the raw materials mined."

Harry Collins PRO Irish Base Metals quoted in the same paper. The local business elite reacted with enthusiasm to these predictions;

"Everybody was delighted. Boom period. All looking forward to building and employment. It all happened."

"I thought it was super, a huge bonanza."

"It appeared to be the greatest godsend ever and that it was going to save the town, which it did."

"Joy! I was proved correct because I earned thousands of pounds out of it and they were a wonderful crowd to work with". Interviews with Loughrea Business elite Shields 1984

While the flavour of these responses is undoubtedly entirely positive and optimistic, it should be borne in mind that this reaction came from the business sector in Loughrea and that the reaction in the immediate area was coloured by issues relating to the acquisition of the land. I will touch on this later in tandem with some environmental issues but while it did form some part of the background to the confusion and misinformation, it is fair

to say that it didn't strike a significant chord with people in Loughrea at the time. Nevertheless a selection of headlines from the *Connacht Tribune* of the period will illustrate the extent of conflicting information which the community struggled to absorb during the initial phase:

- "Bonanza for Tynagh District- Mining Company have found deposits of Silver and Lead" 16/12/1961
- "The English Sneer" 13/1/1962
- "British T.V. shows 'Pigs in the Parlour' story of Tynagh 27/1/1962
- "The Donkeys and Morasses the BBC found in Tynagh" 3/2/1962
- "No Panic in Loughrea or Tynagh" 10/2/1962
- "Government Decision on Tynagh Mineral Rights to involve 90 farms" 10/3/1962
- "Farmer O'Reilly joins Tynagh 'Treasure Hunt'" 17/3/1962
- "Tynagh Pipeline to Galway Bay" 24/3/1962
- "Tynagh Farmers challenge Mining Company" 5/5/1962
- "Tynagh Trouble" 12/5/1962
- "Committee formed at Tynagh Farmers Rally" 19/5/1962
- "Land Sale" 26/5/1962
- "Production at Tynagh next Year" 7/7/1962
- "Another Mine at Tulla, Clare" 29/12/1962
- "Rumours to the effect that the Tynagh Mines Project is closing down are strongly discounted" 4/4/1964

Amidst this welter of confusion and discounting the effect of an article in *The Economist* of 14/7/1962 entitled "A Crock of Mud" it is scarcely surprising that there were doubts about the viability of the mine.

"People did not appreciate the thing. First major find in the country for so long---No guidelines at all". "Bank managers advising people that it was a hoax and a pipe dream and to get what they could out of it". Eamon O'Reilly

"---people were confused because the banks were saying the shares (in Tynagh) were speculative and dangerous and discouraged investment in the mine." Frank O'Brien

While this reaction at local level was to be expected, the reality was that, at national level, there was a serious deficit both in terms of expertise and structures which meant that there was very little real engagement or debate about the regulation of the development.

"Apart from the continuing reports supplied to me by the holder of the prospecting licence at Tynagh, I have no information as to the mineral deposits in that area other than the information which has been accumulated by the Geological Survey over the years and which has been available for inspection by the public at that office." Jack Lynch P.D.D.E. 14/3/1962

In the absence of any coherent national policy, other than the new desire to attract Foreign Direct Investment, the attention locally focused on coping with the effects of the boom and the need to accommodate up to 550 construction workers.

"Very busy. On a Saturday night with the crack that went on, it was a bit like Grafton Street. There was no room on the footpaths."

Following on from the construction work at the mine, there was the construction of housing in Loughrea for the accommodation of those working at the mine. In addition to prolonging the construction boom, this had the effect of copper-fastening Loughrea's position as the 'mine town'. At this remove, and particularly after recent experiences with construction booms in Ireland, the impact of this phase may be difficult to appreciate but it was undoubtedly very significant at the time. Other than small local authority schemes and one-off houses, there had been very little house building in Loughrea for many years. The construction of 52 houses for workers at Coscorrig and additional houses at Mountpleasant for management dramatically altered the town in a manner that other towns of similar size did not experience. Some mine workers had their own perceptions.

"A lot of keeping up with the Joneses. Coscarraig noted for that."

"A case in point are the houses built in the 70s, Coscarraig View, which were originally intended for supervisors but because of Union pressure very few in fact were given to supervisors." Interviews with Mine workers Shields 1984.

Although there was a brief flurry of speculation about the possibility of a smelter being established, with the benefit of hindsight, that would always have been unlikely. Most of the coverage on this topic was focused on the rivalry between possible rival sites rather than anything else and as it subsided the judgement of one local sums up the situation. :

"---they were satisfied with the fringe benefits of being a dormitory town."

## THE MINE WORKFORCE

One note of caution is appropriate in respect of the sample of Tynagh workers which I interviewed as it necessarily excluded those members of the workforce who no longer resided in the Loughrea area. It is likely therefore that a significant segment of the workforce is underrepresented in the sample and that their response to many of the issues raised might have been different. Of the sample that I used, 47% lived in Coscorraig, 20% lived elsewhere in the town and 33% lived in rural areas. The sample is clearly somewhat skewed as when the staff roster is examined it shows that only 25% of the mine workforce lived in the town of Loughrea which is justified by the focus of my

research. Bearing these qualifications in mind, the following tables give some indication of the role of Tynagh in attracting a heterogeneous, skilled and fairly mobile group of workers to the town, a fair proportion of whom remained several years after the closure.

It is probably also worth remarking that the time period when the interviews took place was also a time of particularly bleak outlook in terms of Irish economy and society when the experience of the closure was still quite raw. Of the sample, 29% felt their incomes had been affected drastically while 47% felt its impact was very bad. A few quotes from those who remained unemployed will suffice:

"Having half the life. Only that I had the house furnished, etc. it would be even worse."

"Not living at all. Very bad. Cut down on everything, especially big expenditures---"

The bitterness of this is possibly reflected in some of the quotes which follow but it does encapsulate the experience as reported at that time.

"People were taken in off the road and trained as miners, but that's of very little use to them after Tynagh. They're victims of modern society like the Rolls Royce Turbine Balancers in Derby. Once the work is gone the skill is useless."

As I have indicated above, a proportion of the Tynagh workforce who had the relevant skills and moved elsewhere to use them are not represented in this sample and therefore there may be a lack of dissenting voices in this account.

I have not seen any accounts which deal with the recruitment process during the development and initial production phases but anecdotal evidence would suggest that for much of this period that it was fairly haphazard. Many people have indicated that they turned up on site and were engaged by subcontractors when there was demand and afterwards if their work proved satisfactory this provided an entree to permanent work in the mine when production started.

"I started on the drilling. There were 25 workers at that.

Nearly all local except for the actual drillers. The drilling finished and I came home to build a house for a year. All let go at that time. I came back for the pile-dri-

Farmer	Manual Unskilled	Manual Skilled	Clerical	Mining	Self Employed	No Work Experience	Total
2	24	18	5	4	1	10	64
3.125%	37.5%	28.125%	7.8125%	6.25%	1.5625%	15.625%	100%

**Previous Work Experience**

None	1	2	3 - 5	6 - 10	10+	Total
10	15	14	21	3	1	64
15.62%	23.4%	21.9%	32.8%	4.6%	1.56%	99.88%

**Previous Jobs**

Office etc.	Garage	Heading Mill	Construction	Surface	Underground
5	9	10	8	9	23
7.8%	14.1%	15.5%	12.5%	14.1%	36.0%

**Area of Mine Worked In**

ving with Cementation Ireland. Came home after that - didn't look for work there. Then the pilot plant started and I went sinking trenches for the ore for that."

"The Company wanted all farmers, and didn't want anybody from the town. I'd never have got in except for Kilpatrick's (Independent Electrical Contractors). They thought the people of the town were too unionised, and reckoned the farmers were greenhorns."

While this points to one of the enduring divisions among the workers at Tynagh it should be pointed out that any management figures spoken to denied the existence of such a policy, although approximately 80% of the manual unskilled staff recruited during initial production were farmers or from a farming background. Unlike the unskilled workers, the skilled positions and junior staff positions tended to be drawn from across the island of Ireland while Senior Management and specialised positions were in the initial period almost exclusively occupied by Canadians. Over time with the change from development to production and then from opencast to underground mining some people moved on and there were internal promotions which changed this picture. It is also the case that many of the employees taken on as unskilled manual workers acquired skills during the course of their employment. Just one example of this would be the workers from the opencast who were trained by Swedish miners to work in the underground. Apart from this, there were issues relating to securing and retaining suitable shift bosses and also when the Company ceased to employ people to transport the ore, but otherwise the labour force seems to have been quite stable over the years. This would appear to indicate general satisfaction with pay and conditions but may also be related to the lack of other suitable employment locally.

As I indicated earlier, the classic accounts of mining communities describe long established homogeneous groups with strong identities and traditions forged through common experiences. It is clear that the extent to which workers at Tynagh established such common bonds was strictly limited and depended to a great extent on the nature of the work which was done:

"One gang of us on shift together all the time. We were like brothers. Everything usually went alright, but always ready to help if needed."

"Underground workers very loyal to each other. You'd find no lads as loyal."

The corollary of such close identification with a relatively small group of co-workers appears to be a limit on the extent of the commitment to other workers. This led to a perception of factionalism within the workforce which persisted for a considerable part of the mines lifespan:

"Power factions evolved within the workforce, i.e. electricians, fitters and miners all formed themselves into cells in order to squeeze more concessions from the Company. In those days, a man's value was not measured by his work output but rather by his ability to stop production."

"Too many groups in the mine didn't get any bonus while other got more or less. Management paid some very well, and others much less, even if they were working in the same conditions."

"The problem in getting anything for fitters was that

Dave Fitzgerald (General Manager) considered maintenance staff a 'necessary evil'."

As each of these quotes comes from different interviews, it would seem that this perception was widely shared among the workers and fed into the belief that these situations were manipulated by Management.

"We were doing what the Company wanted. All the pulling against each other. It took a few years to get the workers to unite."

This view of the asymmetry of information between the Mine Management and the workers mirrors the perceptions of the local community and the farmers during the exploration and development phases. It may very well be that there is a tendency to exaggerate the extent of the Company's knowledge and power in these situations but the fact that this belief existed is undeniable and influenced behaviour and attitudes.

"The trouble with strikes there was that they suited the mine more than it suited the men. There were a number of very long strikes there, and on each occasion the price of ore was down or going to fall. Whenever the price was up, if you'd strike or threatened it, it'd be settled very fast."

"I couldn't assess what was in it. It's hard to know what these multinationals have up their sleeve."

The picture that emerges is that of a workforce internally divided and with a view that Management had a monopoly of information and at least partially was operating a divide and rule strategy.

As I have already touched on, one other perceived source of division among the workers relates to the divide between farmers and non-farmers. While the survey found that 56% of respondents did see themselves as a separate group in the local community, the relatively small size of that majority would be unusual in mining communities generally. Differences between the miners and others were ascribed to better lifestyles, origins outside the locality or living in Coscorraig rather than any identification with mine work per se. This carries through in the attitude to farmer/miners:

"Sometimes they went on strike when they shouldn't have. When the weather was fine they wouldn't go near the management before going out. There were too many farmers."

"A lot didn't mind closure because they had farms well stocked from mine money."

"It (Union) ruins any company. I don't approve of unions. The long strike there, there was a lot of us didn't want it. Of those who wanted to go out, many were well-off farmers."

It was also apparent that some of this perception of differing interests was based on an assumed cultural difference between those from a farming background and the rest of the workforce:

"A good percentage were from farming and their attitude was that it was secondary to their position as farmers. The rest were mostly prepared to move on."

"A lot of keeping up with the Jones... 'Mines don't last that long' I told them and that they should be careful. But I was only a big mouth to them."

"I was working here and had a bit of savings to fall back

on, but some of them lads in the town thought there was no tomorrow. Some of them were no better off than when it started."

It will be seen that eventually the workers did find an issue over which they could unify but it is striking that a few short years later these issues were raised by a significant number of workers again.

Once again, by way of contrast with accounts of traditional mining communities, the role of unions at Tynagh does not appear generally to have been conducive to the development of solidarity among the mineworkers. From the information available, it does not appear that there was any significant resistance from management to the unionisation of the workforce even if it was not regarded favourably. There was a significant spread of different unions across a relatively small number of workers and this, together with the diffusion across different areas of the complex, appeared to contribute to a sense of division

"People were working in different areas, so with shift bosses covering those distances when moving around to them you were your own boss for most of the time."

"Everybody thought everybody else was doing better than they were. There was a lot of demarcation disputes there."

It should also be remembered that for a significant proportion of the workforce this was their first experience of trade unions. When asked directly for their opinion of the performance of trade unions at Tynagh over 50% had either no opinion or no strong views. Of the remainder, 19% thought they had done a good or very good job while 30% felt they had done badly or very badly. A few quotes will illustrate the attitudes expressed:

"I found that the Trade Union officials did not have a proper grasp of what mining entailed, and therefore were not in a proper position to understand the grievances of their members. They didn't have the first-hand experience of the kinds of conditions their members were working in and the health and safety aspects of mining."

"The local lads didn't realise what the unions could do for them. We worked in very bad conditions because we didn't realise that we didn't have to if we reported to the Union. There were extremely bad conditions in the early stages, with dust, lack of ventilation and diesel fumes."

"AUEW(TASS) at all times did a (good job)"

"They never did anything for the workers. I generally don't think a lot of unions. The Union is the workers. There was too much disagreement. Solidarity disappeared at the crunch. That's the Irish nature but it was particularly true of Tynagh."

It would seem therefore that far from contributing to a sense of common identity, the experience of trade unions at Tynagh was for a large part of the mine's life yet another source of divisiveness. Despite these factors, the workforce did make common cause at the latter end of the mine's life and it is to this controversial topic that I will now turn.

## INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS AT TYNAGH

As I have indicated, there doesn't seem to have been an unusual level of industrial strife at Tynagh apart from a dispute over

'conditions money' which ran from June to October 1969. There were also some issues at the time of the phasing out of the open cast mining and subsequently the changeover to outside hauliers to transport the ore to Galway but these never caused significant disruption to production at the mine. The other major issue that seemed to cause some dissension was when junior staff members sought to bring in a union to represent their interests and this was clearly seen by many to relate both to the perception of the lifespan of the orebody and the differential treatment of different groups of workers at the mine. I propose therefore to set out the broader context and then discuss the workers reaction to that and their views of the redundancy dispute.

It is helpful at this stage to examine the various perceptions of the lifespan of the mine. In the local community a significant element had a very definite perception when questioned:

"Everybody who had an interest knew it had a life of 10-15 years. It was a fact and had to be accepted."

"It was more or less accepted that the mine had a lifespan of 20 years. Those that were interested accepted it." This was allied to a view that others had indulged in wishful thinking:

"Never anticipated it. Never really hit them. There was rumour but they never accepted it. ... people wouldn't believe in closure. They realised eventually that they should have been preparing for it."

Only one of the non-workers interviewed dissented from this view but as it was expressed so forcefully I will quote it on the basis that it was a view held by others:

"My personal opinion is that it had a longer lifespan at time of closure. When the multinational company had looted Irish resources with the unsuspecting cooperation of its local workforce, Irish Base Metals counted their huge profits and simply closed the mine."

Interestingly, at a national level and in a much more diplomatic way, the then Minister for Industry & Commerce during the course of the dispute voiced substantially the same idea :

"This mine at certain periods of its life was definitely profitable and I would hope that the Company would continue to work it for as long as there is ore there. It would certainly be my hope that the profits that they did make would help to keep it open now."

While this could be considered as just political posturing it certainly contrasts with the fatalism among the more influential sectors in Loughrea itself.

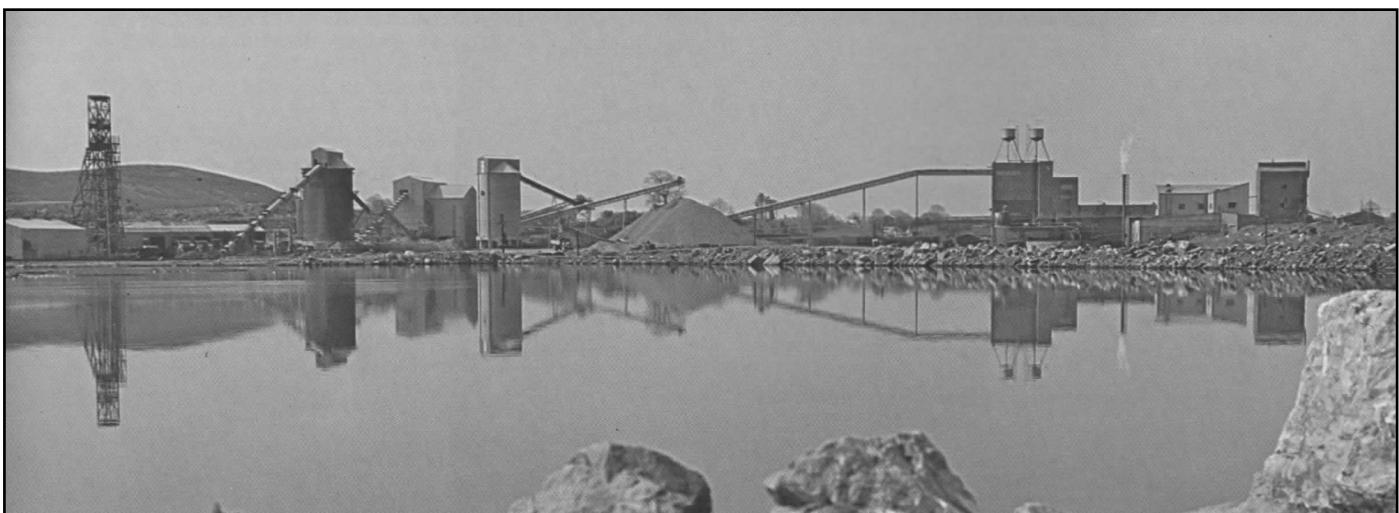
Looking back a few years after the closure this was clearly an issue that evoked strong reactions from the workers interviewed. There was at that stage a sense that they had been induced to cooperate in 'digging up their jobs' and this tended to be related to the payment systems operated and also the disparity of knowledge and information between rival interests.

"Anyone will work extra for money even if it is killing the job. It was better for Irish Base Metals but bad for the workers."

"At one stage we were dry crushing copper straight from the ground and putting it into lorries. It was really high grade stuff and went abroad as concentrates. Didn't

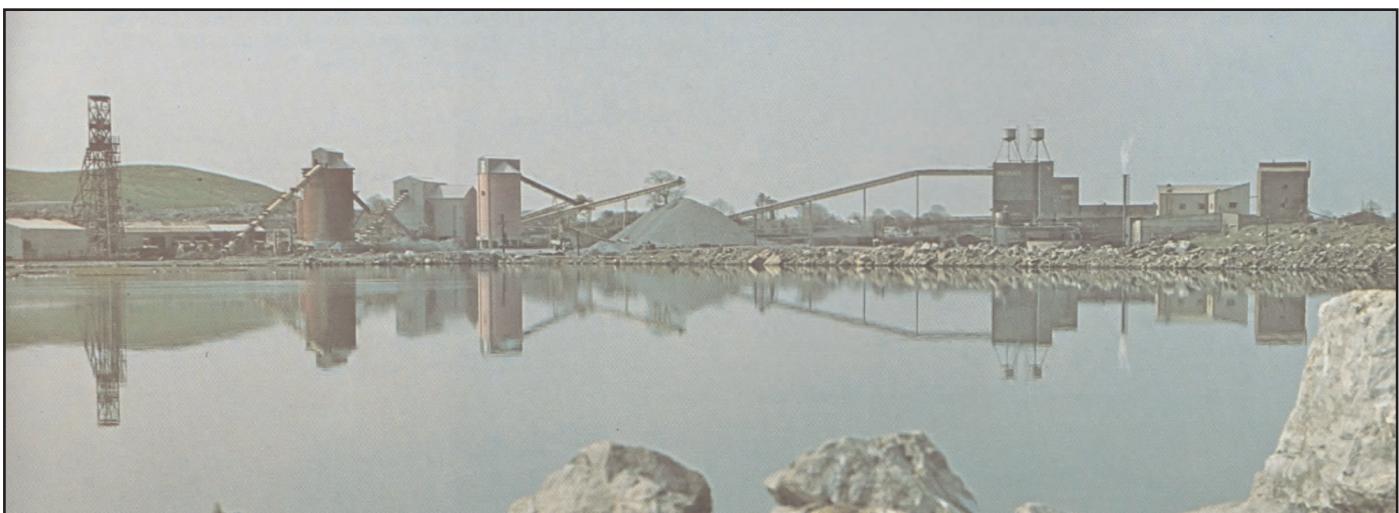


*The contemporary pictures here were provided by Nick Coy from his personal collection, given to him by Pat Hughes.*  
*Clockwise from Top left:*  
*Pat Hughes and Sean Lemass.*  
*Tynagh truck and staff.*  
*Tynagh trucks.*  
*The Tynagh mine.*  
*Pat meets Patsy.*





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*Pat Hughes and Sean Lemass.*  
*Tynagh truck and staff.*  
*Tynagh trucks.*  
*The Tynagh mine.*  
*Pat meets Patsy.*



even go into the mill because they couldn't do anymore with it."

"They were mining better grade ore at the start. Towards the end they were lifting 50-55,000 tonnes and only getting 3-5% out of that, so you can imagine the ore grades involved."

"If every lad had done their 40 hour, 5 day week and never minded overtime the mine would have lasted another few years."

"The open pit was mined too fast. Outside contractors were brought in to remove the overburden and the open pit was the biggest money spinner. They shoved machinery in at any cost to get the stuff out. If it was to be opened again, a lifetime should be put on it by the Government. But at the time it was very new and the Company was very Fianna Fail orientated."

"Never the likes of that job will come back again. Some years I'd have an extra shift per week. I'd work an awful lot but it would make a great job of the week's pay."

"The basic pay there was very bad. It was only overtime and bonus plus the danger money rates that made a good job of it."

"We were doing what the Company wanted. All the pulling against each other. It took a few years to get the workers to unite."

One of the key elements in this phase was the decision of junior staff to unionise in the early 1970's which while it was greeted with some mixed views seemed to redress the perception of information imbalance:

"Very foolish that we didn't have some means of finding out about ore prices etc. We were unfortunate in that there were some people who'd know but wouldn't talk except for the last few years. That was the time when they joined the staff union and they were going to be fired out. Then they needed us as well."

As will have been seen earlier there seemed to be a higher level of satisfaction among the staff with their union than the rest of the workforce:

"Other unions had to refer back to Dublin or Galway for anything. Once we had the go-ahead from our members we influenced the Divisional Secretary. We never went overboard because we were fairly conservative."

Despite this, there was no unanimity on the prospects. Two workers' responses to the question on keeping the mine open illustrate the divergence of views:

"Don't think so, not once the stuff was gone. It's like a turf bank."

"We were working on a new heading (post 1978) and we were told to stop when there was better ore left than the first stuff."

Notwithstanding the assistance that having the staff union involved, it is quite clear that, heading into the second half of the 70s, the workers felt that their negotiating position was undermined:

"If there was ever a dispute there was always a closure threatened. It wasn't until 1978- 79 that we got to grips with it. people too used to hearing it was going to close."

"It was closing every week. The popular attitude was

that it was always in danger. That was a psychological ploy. It didn't bother me, I'm in a good position to get on without it."

This sets the scene for the most significant dispute in Tynagh's history and all too typical of Industrial relations in the 70s and 80s (and reprised to an extent during our recent recession) being essentially about redundancy.

From a preliminary point of view, the most striking things about this industrial dispute are, firstly, that there was never any significant attempt to keep Tynagh open and, secondly, that there was no universal agreement as to the nature of the industrial action involved (33% of interviewees described it as a strike). Again, a selection of headlines from the *Connacht Tribune* indicates the extent to which the Company dictated the media coverage of events:

" Likely end to Tynagh Exports "

23/9/1977

" Tynagh Mine to Close by 1980 "

24/2/1978

" Action soon on Tynagh Crisis "

21/4/1978

" Tynagh Worries "

ditto

" Increased Productivity gives Tynagh New Hope "

12/5/1978

" Tynagh Mines Closure Date Still in Doubt "

19/5/1978

The Company was seeking an increase in productivity and the workers were worried about the future so the stage was set for confrontation :

" If we waited until the mine was ready to close we felt there mightn't be anything for us to get. "

" They had taken millions and wanted to give the workers damn all. "

" If we waited until the mine was ready to close we felt there mightn't be anything for us to get. "

" From the workers point of view, we felt that our only leverage at the time was a full shed of ore in Galway. The only pressure we could bring on the Company at that time was to stop that going out. Time was against us. In particular, we felt that the Unions were not putting in enough effort at all."

These quotes indicate two significant themes: the broad acceptance of the Company's narrative of an orebody nearing exhaustion and a distrust of the unions.

The workers formed a committee which comprised representatives from all sectors and essentially throughout the period of the dispute it was the Committee that was seen as the main mouthpiece of the workers:

" The union weren't well informed in my opinion. They were doing a lot of pussyfooting around, people were frustrated and time was running out. Wheels would have to turn so they were blamed for what was not happening."

" Unions backed down. They didn't want to make it official because it would cost them money."

" The Union didn't want the strike because they knew it was orchestrated. "

" Left us on the road for 6 months. Unions didn't do much for us. They wouldn't back us. Only what the men did for themselves. Only for the workers' committee we were sunk. "

A somewhat different view was expressed but it may be less contradictory than it looks:

"The Union was fully involved in the dispute. The Workers Committee took an active part in negotiations advised by union officials. None of the unions made the dispute official and I was aggrieved at this."

" We found from our meetings with Union and Congress official that we were getting no place so as a Committee without Union consultation we embarked on a scheme of protest aimed at achieving a redundancy scheme covering everybody. "

In addition to the dissatisfaction with the unions, the workers felt a lack of support from the local community and indeed sensed that state agencies were not helpful either:

" We had paraded during the 1978 strike. A local shopkeeper said, ' Them shower of bastards should be shot'. We were doing a dangerous job for a bunch of multinationals who could leave at any time. That when we were on strike it wasn't understood. "

" We sat down in Main Street and some traders didn't like it. Weren't getting any money at all, but had to sign in at the labour exchange once a week. The man at the Labour advised me to get a letter for ...for relief .... It was August or September before I got that. We were out since June."

Given these perceptions, it is scarcely surprising that many of the workers felt embattled and isolated as the dispute wore on from June to December of 1978.

I do not propose in this article to give a detailed narration of the events during the dispute but I believe that this account of the context is important in understanding the overall impact of Tynagh. The dispute commenced when the workers at Galway Docks implementing a decision from a general meeting of the workforce, refused to load a shipment at the end of June leading to their suspension. After protective notice was issued, the gates of the mine were closed on the 10th of July 1978 and remained shut until the 18th of December. There were various escalations during this period but eventually the dispute was settled quite quickly once serious negotiations finally commenced. While many of the workers claimed victory, the speed of those talks led to suspicion:

" Price of ore was very low at that stage. I think we were just manipulated into justifying the closure. During the

six months the price of ore went way up. Stockpiling the ore made enough money to pay the redundancy."

" Closure suited them because the price of ore was very low at the time."

" There was £4 million of ore between Tynagh and Galway and when we came back it was worth £8 million. "

Once again there is the perception that even when the workforce had united in pursuit of a common goal that they couldn't win although one interviewee took a different view:

" Workers got what they wanted and Company got what it wanted. Company closed up with a clean shop without any trouble."

## CONCLUSION

I have focused in this paper on the direct quotation of interviewees' responses at the time of my research as I believe it provides a useful corrective to the rose tinted spectacles which often colour recollection. It is clear that the economic impact of Tynagh was limited in that little downstream industry was created and that a significant proportion of the capital generated left the local and indeed the national economy. Nevertheless, some businesses in the retail and services sector did utilise the earnings during the boom period to develop those and other businesses. Similarly, a segment of the workforce used their earnings to modernise and improve farms and businesses and this may have been a contributing factor to rapid extraction to earn bonuses etc. There was a major boost to the housing stock in the town and the clustering of these developments, on what was then the outskirts, was a major change. The influx of workers, both from other parts of Ireland and from abroad, into a sleepy rural town until then characterised by emigration was perhaps the most visible impact of Tynagh. At the time of my survey in 1983, a sizeable proportion of that group remained indicating that they had put down permanent roots.

While acknowledging that the role of Tynagh eventually was to accelerate developments which hit other similar towns after accession to the E.E.C., I believe that the research shows the difficulties of trying to shoe-horn the analysis to fit theories or paradigms developed elsewhere. The quotations illustrate that perspectives on Tynagh do not fit a class-based analysis and that even the experience of being employed together for 20 years in a mining situation will not necessarily lead to common views. The sample did not permit the kind of breakdown of the figures to permit an analysis of the reasons for this but it is not unreasonable to suggest that a farming involvement or background may have some role in this.

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