



# MHSI FIELD EXCURSION

OCTOBER 11<sup>TH</sup>, 1998

## THE MINES OF EAST CLARE:

KILBRICKEN

BALLYHICKEY

CARRAHIN

MILLTOWN

DES COWMAN & JOHN MORRIS

The notes on each of these sites are derived largely from the only published account of the history of these (and other) mines in east Co. Clare by Des Cowman (Cowman, D. 1992. The Mid-Nineteenth Century Lead Mines of County Clare. *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 24, 67 - 78). Sources of other information are cited in the notes for each site in the following sections.

Copies of GSI 6" geological field sheets, dated 1859, are attached to each site description. In each instance, the OS base maps dates from 1840 and the copper-plate style hand-written notes from 1859. Additional, darker shade notes date from 1953 and are almost certainly the observations of M.V.O'Brien, the then Director of GSI, and the "grandfather" of the mid-late 20<sup>th</sup> Century renaissance of Irish Mining. Further, rather faint notes, in pencil, date from 1959.

## KILBRICKEN

**1833.** Deposit discovered by chance during the course of road construction. "Tumblers" of lead noted and more discovered during drainage works. Specimens sent to John Taylor & Co. in London: his agents sent to investigate. Other deposits discovered - Ballyhickey, Ballyvergin (late 1850s), Crowhill (1860s) and (re-) discovery of Carrahin.

**1834.** Trials by John Taylor. 25 tons lead, rich in silver (120 ozs/ton)

**1837.** Steam pumping engine erected, cost £800 + £140 transport. Water logged site; engine inadequate.

**1840.** Deficit £1,500. Site of various mine buildings, including still visible Magazine, engraved on **1840 edition of OS 6" map (copy attached)**. Bought by Henry Crockford Snr for £5,500.

**1846.** Henry Crockford Snr dies. £13,000 worth of ore said to have been extracted in the previous 6 year period. Rich vein discovered.

*Kilbricken Silver and Lead Company.* Established by Crockford, 1,300 £10 shares.

**1847.** 66" engine purchased for £900 and installed, but lode ran out. Only £300 capital left, calls of 30/- per share to refinance and sell onward as a going concern. Debts of £2,200 by Nov. Mine sold for £2,312 - to Henry Crockford Jr! Winding up processed through the Court of Chancery.

**1850.** *Clare United Silver-Lead Mines* established by Crockford. Sold within 1 year for £1,500, although Crockford reportedly shows a £9,000 profit on all these dealings. Suspicions about the transactions voiced by the Editor of the *Mining Journal*.

**Mine Plan, c. 1850 (copy attached). Compare scale of mine building development in the 10 year period between 1840 and 1850.**

**1851.** New Company, 3,300 shares, bought mine for £1,500 - vigorous working.

**1852 - 1853.** 280 tons of lead + 6712 ozs silver produced, worth £5,500. But financings to a total of £18,500. Shares trading at £6-10-0 in Jan 1853. Recurrent water problems from early 1853 onward.

**1854.** Mine abandoned, but pumping resumed late that year after a very dry summer. 120 tons lead produced + 6,650 ozs silver.

**1855.** Ore sales (66 tons lead, no silver) of £1,500, though overall deficit of £1,261. November - meeting of directors, with decision to recommend mine abandonment at the half-AGM in Dec. Chairman, Mr. Librii, indirectly sells 500 shares, nominal value £5-10-0, at 1/- to 1/6 each, thus avoiding call on shares.

**1856.** Half-AGM in Jan. Outrage at Librii's action. Approval to wind-up Company, liabilities £1,700. Sold in Feb for £825 to a Mr. Mitchell.

**1878.** General promotion of mines by John Ryan.



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Kilbreckan Silver Mine

86

Shaft & Engine Ho.

86

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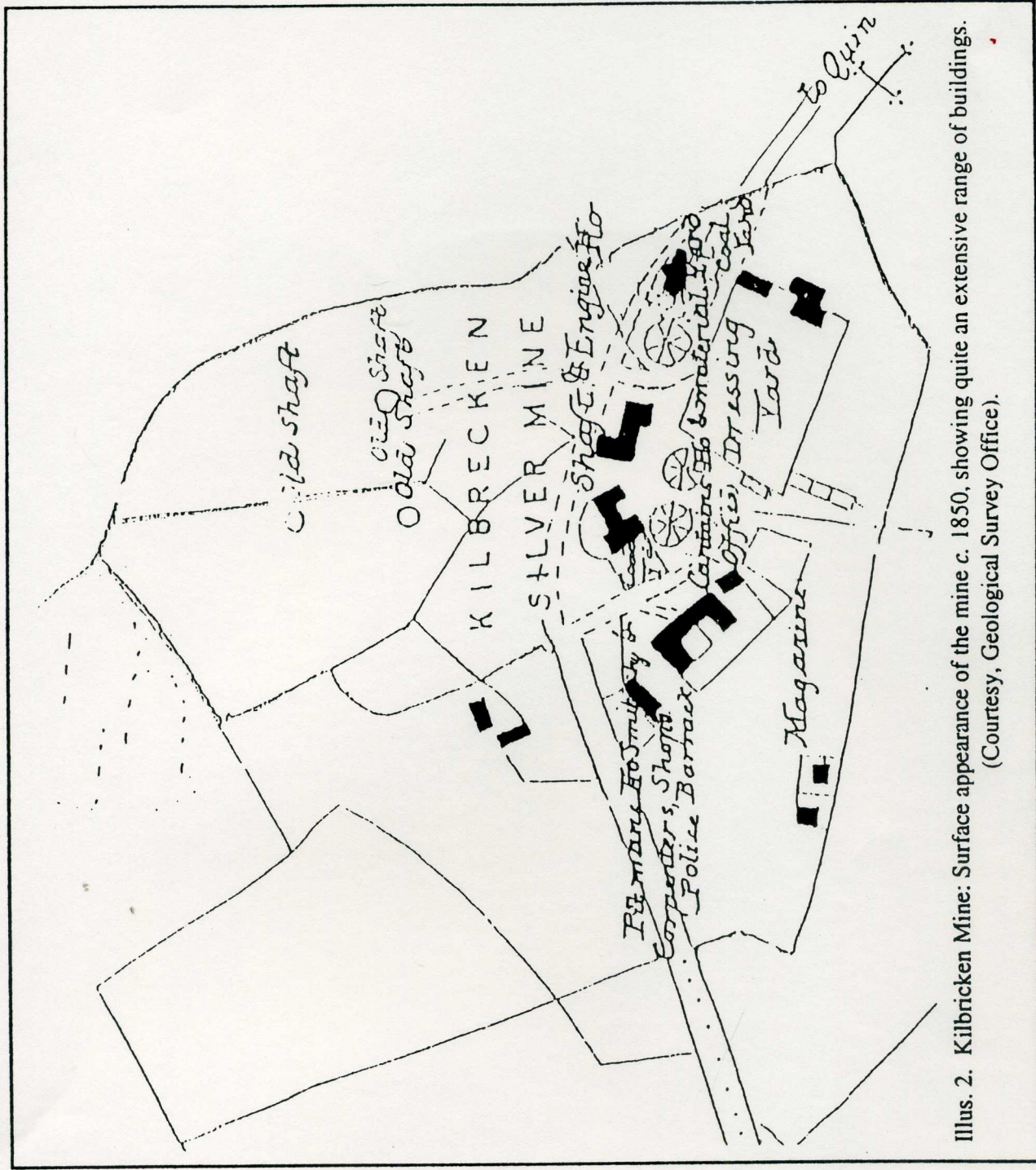
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engines standing there, two powder magazines, three winches for raising the ore, a dressing  
yard plus various workshops and houses. In their midst, ensuring good order, stood a police  
barracks (Illus. 2)<sup>62</sup>.



Illus. 2. Kilbricken Mine: Surface appearance of the mine c. 1850, showing quite an extensive range of buildings.  
(Courtesy, Geological Survey Office).

Whatever about its origins, the new company did apply itself to vigorous working of the mine and sent regular reports of its progress to the *Mining Journal* in the Autumn and Winter of 1851<sup>63</sup>. An unspecified amount of ore reported to have been sold that December although there is no further mention of the £800 worth. Over the next two years (1852-'53) they did

2.028

1.356

UND.

4.884

.560

4.468

.290

.184 Shaft

C.F.

.785

.240

1.306

KL 10

F.F.

.724

.216

WINDY Shaft

Chimney

old engine Shaft

Kilbreckan Silver Mine (Disused)

.650

.254

C.F.

.541

.728

C.F.

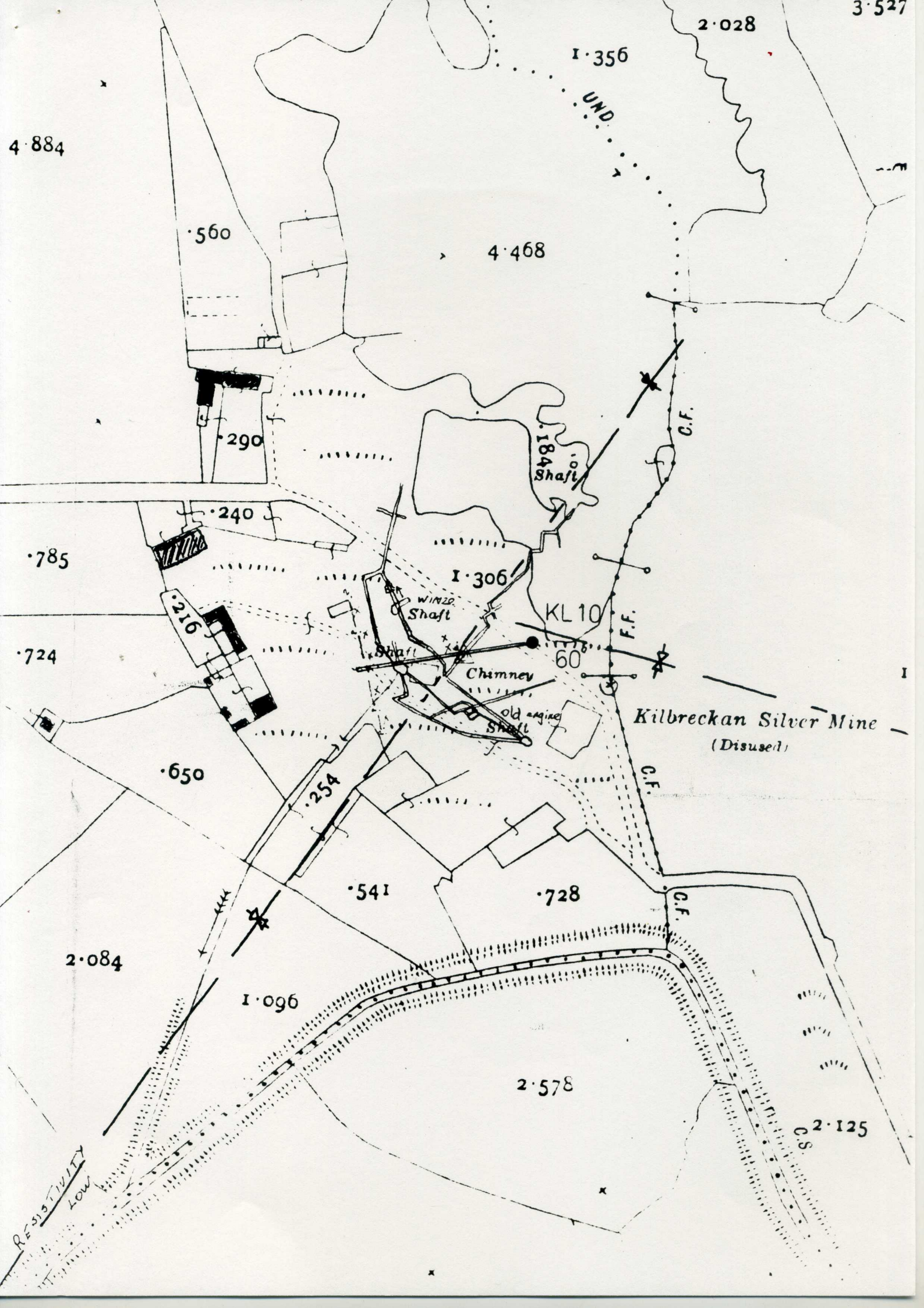
2.084

1.096

2.578

CS 2.125

RESISTIVITY Low



## Notes on the Engines

1. Ken Brown, 1996. (MHSI, Newsletter, 2, p.5).
  - Surviving 50" Engine House and stack; cinder patch may indicate site of whim or crusher engine.
  - 1840. A 20" engine noted for sale in the *West Briton* in September 1840
  - 1847. July 9<sup>th</sup>. 8.5 tons of old mine machinery shipped by Harveys from the Godolphin mine.
  - 1848. A single acting, single draught engine noted on site, along with a 66" draught engine and boiler; a 27" double acting rotary pumping and winding engine.
  - 1853 - 1854. Numerous reports on two engines by Capt. Paul in the *Mining Journal*
  - 1854. Sale of an engine and spare materials for £350 noted in October, with £300 paid to Harveys (of Hayle, Cornwall) for unspecified purposes (possibly for engine refurbishment).
  - 1854. February. 20" engine removed from Kilbricken to Crow Hill
  - 1855. March 17<sup>th</sup>. Large Cornish boiler, engine pieces and pitwork supplied by Harveys
  
2. Discussion by Mr. Nigel Barnes, 1996. (MHSI Newsletter, 3, p.3)
  - Extant engine house. V. poor construction, particularly the bob-wall. This constructed of rubble (rather than cut-stone), contributing to the collapse of the wall.
  - Engine size 48" rather than 50".
  - Stack. Leans very markedly to the SW. Construction skimped, normal practice of parallel sided internal bore, with external taper, not followed. Lower stack walls too thin for thermal efficiency. Surmises that construction may have been undertaken by contractors unskilled in Cornish Engine House design.

## BALLYHICKEY

- 1834.** Discovered by John Taylor during the course of exploration to discover an extension of the Kilbricken deposit. Rich lead lodes, to 20' in width.
- 1838.** Steam engine, and other buildings, erected in period 1834-8. 2,500 tons of silver rich (15 ozs/ton) ore extracted. Pit to 100' deep, 200' long. No records 1840 - 1852
- 1840.** OS 6" map, showing layout of mine, the open pit, engine house, entrance and presumed office building (copy attached).
- 1852.** Company formed to re-open mine.
- 1853.** Old workings cleared out. Testing finished by early 1854.
- 1861.** Description of worked out "mineral pocket".
- 1961.** Geochemical anomalies discovered by old bog road; surmised that this might reflect lead ore dumped by hauliers to lighten loads.

### NOTES.

Ore hauled by cart to Clarecastle for export (Mr. Frank Brown *pers. comm.*)

The current site owner (Mr. Frank Brown) has been given to understand that the chimney is of Scottish design. Remains of what was probably the engine house, boiler, flue and possible dressing floor are discernible.

Very prominent tapered chimney in an excellent state of preservation, notwithstanding it having stood derelict since abandonment of the mine in 1840. This might well be one of the oldest Mine Engine House chimneys still standing in Ireland (JHM)

See attached maps of open cast prepared by divers for Irish Base Metals Ltd in 1978. This shows that the pit is about 24m deep, bifurcating towards the west, where remains of 2 adits were encountered below water level. Very prominent hoisting machinery foundations on 2 sides of the pit, in remarkably good condition. How did this operate - by overhead cables and tackle blocks as at Killaloe slate Quarry (see 1854 engraving) or by tower and cable wound from engine house?

Notes on Engine. Remains of a 20" Engine House. A 7" engine listed for sale in 1840. A note in the *Mining Journal* of May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1854, notes that a 20" engine had been sold to John Taylor & Co. "for use overseas" (Ken Brown, 1996. MHSI Newsletter, 2, p.5)

Old dumps show USC.  
Coarse calcite, arena blend

Ballyhackey Lead & Silver Mines  
Vixque Ho.  
153

L-5C. exposed NH  
all found old excavation.

Fossiliferous leached mass  
in situ near old chimney  
very conspicuous calcite  
calcite granules  
in dump.

Chalcopyrite & anseropyrite

Fossiliferous pyrite

Pale gray fine grained

lightish fine grained

gray or whitish

compact

F1

base of

Calc

Pale gray compact

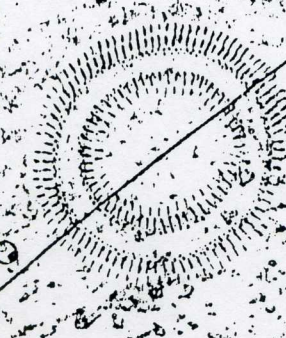
14172  
17552

14

III

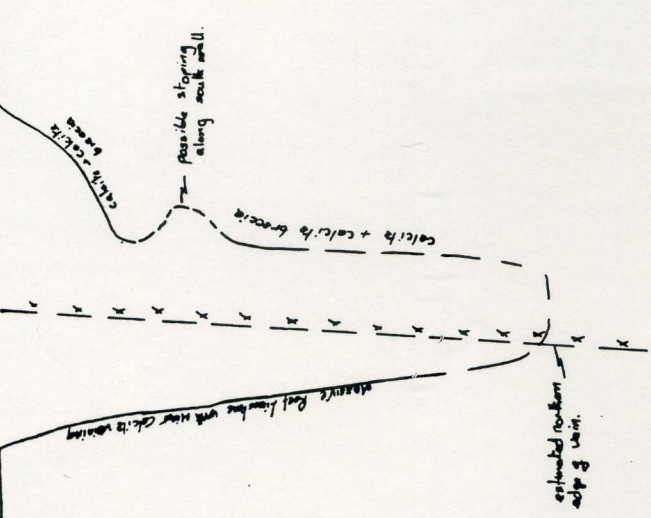
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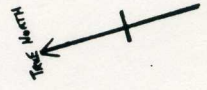


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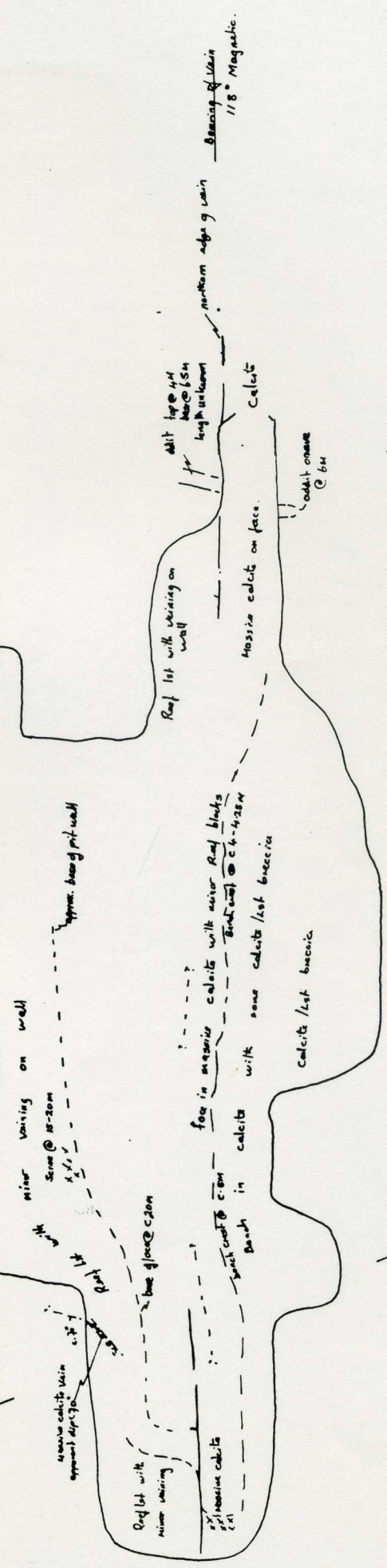


Bearing of vein 118° Magnetic.

A



East of pit.



A

# CARRAHIN

**18thC (late).** Site of the reference to an old mine “worked many years ago by a company” at Clasagh, near Tulla (= Classagh House?). “ Many years ago, great quantities of ore were got” and difficulties of draining such a lowlying place noted - early 18<sup>th</sup>C mining?

**1840.** Site of “**Silver Mine**” engraved on 1840 edition of OS map.

**1851.** Site lease acquired by Henry Crockford Jr, as part of the *Clare United Silver-Lead Mines*. See also under Kilbricken above.

**1859.** “Carrahin Mine” noted on GSI field sheet, but at different site to the workings noted beside Classagh House. 1953 notes describe the latter workings, presumably reflecting workings developed in either 1863 or more likely 1878 (see below).

**1863.** 2 owners noted who sold 15 tons of lead ore. Operation ceased on death of one of the partners.

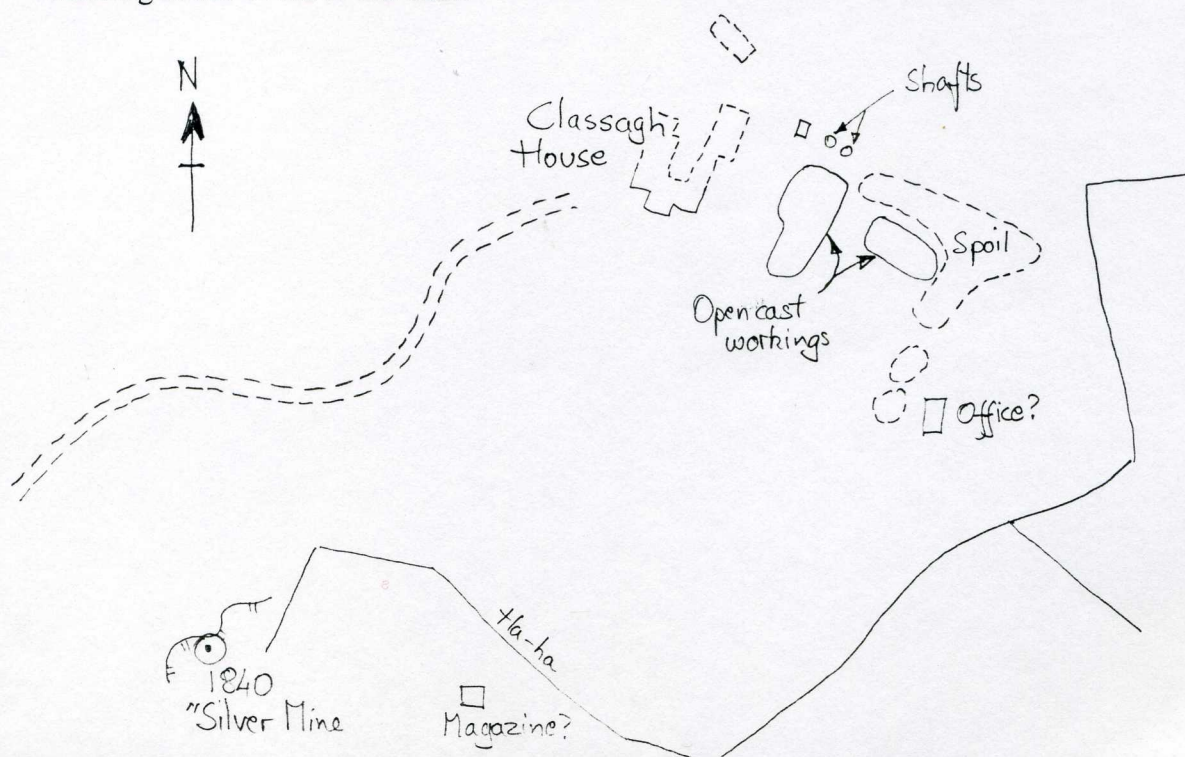
**1878.** Reworked by an un-named Company. 470 tons lead ore extracted in 1879-80. Deposit exhausted?

## NOTES.

Disused road from this site to Ballyvergin: the only road to the latter prior to the construction of the present road. Mineralised material has been found in the walls along this road and adjacent to the school, and coincides with a geochemical anomaly. Half way between the two, there is the ruin of what might be a mine manager’s house. It is speculated that the two deposits were operated, at some stage, in conjunction with each other (John Colthurst, *pers. comm.*).

Lead-zinc-calcite-pyrite is the principal mineralisation. Primary locus in the base reef horizon and in the immediate sub-reef.

2 open cast pits and two shafts visible at the site (see sketch plan). Both open casts in base reef and immediate sub-reef. Extensive spoil heaps here and towards a ruined building about 150m to the SSE.



Standing Stones:

Old Lead Mine  
Bessagh Ho.

Quarries in 185 N.  
with calcite, pyrite  
galena, blende, + pynt  
Tr. cobalt bloom on

Carrabin Mine

Siber Mine

37  
No 70de

Pale gray

compact and

dark blende

gray shaly

limestone



Prominent rusty weathering pyritic blocks used in the construction of the walls of the latter building. No obvious windows, no firebreasts and a prominent, very thick internal wall. Purpose of this building uncertain, but probably related to mine development: office, supply store? 1878 phase of operation?

Some 200m further SSW, across a ha-ha, there is a heavily overgrown, thick walled, windowless building. Possibly a magazine? 1878 phase of operation?

## MILLTOWN

1497. One of several unspecified lead showings noted in Co. Clare?
- 18thC. Definite records of the existence of the deposit, with further definition in the early 19<sup>th</sup>C.
- 1820s. Tested during mining boom.
1826. Tested by Royal Irish Mining Co., 11 tons lead ore raised. Idle for next 10 years.
- 1836 - 38. Workings re-examined by John Taylor's surveyors: but "after considerable labour and expense - were disappointed".
1837. "Some rude tools discovered, such as oak shovels and iron picks of an extraordinary size and weight", as well as remains of firesetting. "Probably one of the oldest mines in Ireland - the ancient excavations being very extensive" - an allusion to 17<sup>th</sup> C or medieval mining?.
1840. "**Silver Mine**" engraved on 1840 edition OS map. Small extant building also engraved and 2 pit/quarry sites. Mine abandoned.
1853. Re-examined yet again by John Taylor's surveyors. Vein 14' - 18' wide, silver, lead and zinc. Recommended to sell zinc to fund exploration costs. **The first zinc production in Ireland, in the mid-1850s.** [Ballyhickey 20" engine moved here after purchase by John Taylor & Co. in 1854 ??? - JHM speculation].
1857. Mine purchased by an Englishman who sought investment of £4,000. Sold on within 3 months for £1,500 as purchaser couldn't personally supervise development.
1857. Purchased by Mr. Lisabe. *Milltown Silver Lead Mining Company (Ltd)* formed and sought to raise £15,000 in £5 shares. 90 tons of lead and 70 tons of zinc sold 1858 - 1860.
1859. GSI field sheet notes. "Large veins or pockets of carbonate of lime, with veins of galena, blende and mundick".
- 1860s. *The Bullion Mining Company*. Re-worked or spoil heaps only re-worked? 12.5 tons of lead produced in 1861 - 62. Ore body described in 1861 as a "large irregular mass - in patches and pockets". Open cast workings in "a wide, deep irregular hole" (= presently visible open cast, c. 110' deep).
1953. "Blende in calcite"
1959. Calcite quarry
- 1990s Active exploration, drilling and geophysical surveys. Indications of underground workings to S of main pit.

Bag

Grave Yard

Hermot & Grania's

P. 31

HSC. N.H.  
Blende in calcite

Bag

152  
Large piece of pocket

Silver Mine

156

Hermot & Grania's Bed

XI

R 2

Large pieces of Carb of Galena

Blende & Manganese

Craters  
1955

L

A 465

with veins of 160

157

Lower  
part  
of  
bag

Large  
pieces  
of  
Carb  
of  
Galena

156

154