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Copper-Mining at Allihies, Co. Cork

By COLMAN O MAHONY

In or around 1812 copper was discovered in the Allihies area of west Cork and within a few years 'about 600 persons, of both sexes, and of all ages from ten years upwards' were employed there. By 1822 the monthly expenditure at the mines was about £1,000 and between 150 and 200 tons of ore were being produced. This development provided valuable and badly-needed employment in an area which heretofore 'could scarcely sustain the lives of a few half-starving sheep'.[1] The early years saw little true 'mining' and the deposits were extracted by the open-cast system.[2]

Because of the remoteness of the mines and the primitive road network, boats constituted the principal mode of supply. The ore from the mines was exported directly from Ballydonegan Bay, just adjacent to the mines, and essential items like timber, tools and food also arrived by ship. Another disadvantage of the local terrain was the absence of a ready fall of water to power the equipment, so the machinery for crushing and dressing the ore was driven by steam-engines[3] — this in turn made it necessary to import large quantities of coal.

Lady Chatterton, recounting a visit to the area in 1838, tells us that the productivity of the mines had decreased and that the owners were searching for a new vein of copper.[4] Nonetheless 1,000 people worked at the mines and Lady Chatterton's account gives some interesting details of conditions; she tells us that the miners were employed on a task-work basis — a gang undertook to do a set piece of work at an agreed price per ton. An assay office at the works valued the ore and workers were paid 1s. per day; those who handled gunpowder received 4d. extra. Young girls who washed the ore earned 3½d. and boys got 6d. There were four 'captains' at the mines, with the head-captain's salary being £300 per annum:

> The mine is now about 110 fathoms deep, and they are working it deeper, the vein occupying a narrow space. Five steam-engines are employed; the first we visited works the crushing machine and the pounders. Over the pounded ore water is passed, the ore is then sifted, and after a number of successive washings, the dross is separated . . . After having inspected the first works, we ascended to another engine, which is much higher up the mountain; and on our way we saw some curious clefts in the rock, which had been made by former excavations, and travelled over heaps of ore, the refuse of former work . . . The upper engine is used for pumping water out of the excavations; near it is the vent for the escape of the smoke from another engine, which is at work in the mine, about 160 fathoms below the surface. To pay this engine a visit, and thus to see something of the interior, was our next object; for which purpose we re-descended. The passage by which we entered has a rail for bringing out the ore, and it also serves as a channel for the exit of the water pumped up. We had a wet and dirty walk. Stooping low, and creeping along the side, to avoid the water, we advanced to the steam-engine; we then diverged into a side gallery, to see the men at work. By means of ladders, the lower levels are attained; but as we were not properly equipped, none of my party attempted to descend. On our return, we visited some of the cottages and with all my partiality for Irish peasants, I could not but see the striking superiority in point of cleanliness of the cottages belonging to the English miners.[5]

A number of families from Cornwall had settled in the area by that time.

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ALLIHIES MINES IN THE 1830s
(*From Lady Chatterton's 'South of Ireland'*)

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In his submission to the 1842 Children's Employment Commission, Frederick Roper noted that, even though the people at the mines were poorly clad and lived principally on potatoes and milk, they all looked well and healthy. The local day-school was attended only by 'the children of the mechanics and better class of miners'; many of the children interviewed by Roper had never been to school and could neither read nor write. In his published evidence[6] Roper gave details of interviews with three male and three female workers. Thirty-year-old Joan Tobin had been employed at the mines for 18 years and was being paid 4d. a day for buddling, or washing, the ore. She worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. with a half-hour break for breakfast and a one-hour dinner break. She could neither read nor write. Catherine Leahy stated:

> I am 16 years old, and live with my parents close by here; I have been four years at work here; I am now working at trunking — I always worked at trunking — which is one of the washings; I have always been in very good health; I sometimes go home to my meals, and sometimes bring one meal with me, and have no more 'till I go home after work; many of us do the same; I only get two meals a day; I have never been to school; I can neither read or write; I can sew a little, but very little; we make but very little difference between our clothes winter and summer; I have some better clothes that I keep for Sundays; I like my work very well; it is not very hard work; I get 4d. a day.

Mary Reen, an 18-year-old girl who had worked at the mines for five years told a similar story and 16-year-old Philip Donovan who worked at wheeling and jigging received a daily wage of 6d. Fifteen-year-old Cornelius Kelly had worked at the mines for four years and received 6d. per day for moving ore by wheelbarrow; his hours were 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Eleven-year-old John Frewhella who worked as a blacksmith's assistant was the youngest of those interviewed. Frewhella, who was able to read and write had worked at the mines for 14 months and earned 5½d. per day.[7]

Very few of the 800 people employed at the mines were children as Captain Reed believed they were 'more trouble than they are worth'. Nonetheless the wages they earned must have been an important source of revenue for their families.

From the opening of the mines to 1842 some 88,636 tons of ore were raised, the annual average being 3,300 tons.[8] The principal veins in the early 1840s were the Mountain, situated 450 feet above sea level, and the Caminches vein which ran in a north-eastern direction. The Mountain mine yielded about 200 tons of copper ore per month, which produced about 10% pure copper. The Caminches mine was also very productive and yielded a cleaner ore. The mines employed about 1,000 people in 1845; i.e., 400 miners, 30 smiths and joiners, 25 helpers, 245 labourers, 170 boys and 130 girls.[9]

In April 1846 J.R. Reed, captain of the mines, advertised for 100 additional men to work at the mines.[10] By January 1847 there were 1,500 people employed there.[11] In all some 5,000 people were dependent on the mines for their daily existence.[12] In January 1847 John L. Puxley sent an urgent communication to the Chief Secretary in Dublin Castle requesting that 20 tons of Indian meal be sent to Ballydonegan by naval steamer. Puxley, writing from the comparative comfort of his home at Tenby in Wales, was concerned that his own shipment of meal would be delayed by the continuing gale and he guaranteed that the government meal would be paid for on the spot at Allihies.[13] The matter was given immediate attention by the authorities.[14] Later that year Puxley complained that men had forsaken 1s. a day jobs at the mines for the local Relief and Board of Works schemes. 'Those able-bodied men would not work while they could get stirabout at those [soup-] kitchens', he lamented.[15]

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Work on the relief schemes gave little more than the promise of survival. Nothing extra was guaranteed for those employed at the mines where work was allocated on a contract basis with teams of workers bidding against each other for particular jobs. Wages, which were paid monthly, were based on the quantity of ore mined by the team, with deductions being made for tools, candles, gunpowder, etc., which had been supplied by the company. The mine workers were expected to purchase food and clothing from certain suppliers — to do otherwise meant instant dismissal. This corruption extended outside the immediate work-force and it was well known that one method of gaining employment at the mines was to purchase clothing on credit at certain shops in Castletownbere. The purchaser would subsequently be given a job at the mines which enabled him to pay for the clothes — the intermediatory in turn received a reward from the shopkeeper.[16] Safe working conditions were not a priority and on 10 November 1856 John Owney was killed in a blasting accident. Death by accident was recorded but the coroner observed that 'greater care and caution ought to be used by the proprietors and managers of said mines to prevent the frequent loss of life occurring in said mines'.[17]

An account of a visit to the Berehaven mines in the mid-1850s[18] provides an interesting record of contemporary mining conditions. Prior to descending into the mine a tallow candle and candle-stick were provided, and suitable clothing and a hard hat donned. Entry was gained via a confined shaft which was 'plumb down':

> the ladders had no inclination, but were straight up and down the face of the stone, with scanty room for the foot to rest upon. Some of the rungs were iron, some wood, some broken, some entire — all more or less slippery . . . There are some working at a depth of 200 fathoms; and we were told that some of the workmen when descending, perform this great distance in from three to four minutes . . .[19]

Having descended 80 fathoms (i.e., 480 feet) by a series of 24-foot ladders, the visitor and a companion groped their way along a confined wet passage, through which waggons of ore were constantly passing on a narrow tramway, until they reached the main work area where preparations had just been made for blasting.[20] The workers ran for cover and soon after the blast:

> . . . we followed the miners to the scene of the explosion. Here we at last were enabled again to bring our bodies to the perpendicular, and to gaze around us. As far as the ineffectual light of about half-a-dozen wretched candles similar to those in our hands would permit, we saw that we were now in a dome-shaped apartment, which might have served for an ante-chamber of the hall of Eblis . . . on the ground, all about, lay the debris of the late explosion, and men were busily employed in filling the waggons and expediting them to the ore-shaft . . .[21]

Following a short stay with the miners, the visitors climbed back to the surface — a near fatal accident on a faulty ladder made this a memorable climb.

Our anonymous correspondent has left us an account of the ore's progress after its arrival on the surface. From the bucket it was emptied into carts by boys and conveyed to a yard where workers smashed it into manageable lumps. Teams of strapping ladies barrowed the ore to a platform where pickers sorted it into good, medium and useless lots. The assorted ore was next taken to the crushing house where a series of machine-driven iron rollers reduced it to the size of peas. A process of washing and agitating, called jigging, was next used to dislodge tiny particles of copper and waste. The larger pieces were then taken to the stamping-mill, pounded by heavy weights, and a fast-flowing stream carried fine particles through a perforated screen. The granules from the

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jigging and stamping operations were finally sorted into copper and waste sand by a process called 'buddling'. Troughs in a stream were used to trap the copper granules and the waste sand flowed away to the sea-shore.[22] The pleasant strand at Ballydonegan was formed by this sand accumulating on the sea-shore. There were about 1,200 workers employed at the Allihies mine in the mid-1850s;[23] according to local tradition many poor and destitute people eked out a living by gathering grains of copper which had been trapped in pools and crevices during the journey to the sea-shore.

In July 1861 it was reported that 100 miners had struck for a wage increase at Allihies.[24] Within days the report was contradicted — unsafe working conditions, which had caused one death, had necessitated the stoppage.[25] Though safety precautions were taken, further fatalities were reported. A rock fall killed a man named Neill and another man, McCarthy Rohan, was killed when a new personnel lift collapsed at a mine shaft.[26] Early in 1862 scenes of general hardship were seen in the Berehaven area and it was alleged that H.L. Puxley, the proprietor of the mines, had discouraged government relief schemes. The mine-workers were not content with their £2.9s. per month, particularly as it was known that fellow-miners from Cornwall were receiving between £6 and £9. The local RC curate wrote that 'Paddy considers himself as active, intelligent, hard-working, as good in every sense as the stranger from Wales.' Puxley's discouragement of the relief schemes was seen as a ploy to ensure that an alternative source of income was not made available to his mine-workers.[27]

In the early 1860s regulations and conditions of employment in the southern Kealoge workings differed from those in the older Mountain mine on the northern side of the valley. In 1864 Capt. Henry Pascoe attempted to standardize matters and introduced the Mountain mine conditions to Kealoge. The change in hours and conditions was opposed by the Kealoge men and on Saturday, 1 October, they refused to take out any new contracts and threatened to attack the Mountain miners if they continued to work. Early on the following Monday a large force of police and supporters waited at the Mountain mine. No trouble was evident and at around mid-day miners began to protest at the Kealoge office. The police intervened and, having been addressed by Mr Puxley and Capt. Pascoe, some of Puxley's tenants agreed to take mining contracts. Before the end of the day all contracts had been taken and work at Kealoge resumed on 4 October.[28]

Discontent remained and because of an unwillingness or inability to compete with the favouritism shown to foreign workers, a group of 300 local miners marched into Castletownbere on 30 January 1868 and 150 of them sought admission to the workhouse. Their approach led to fears of a Fenian attack but as they reached the town this notion was dispelled by a 'gaze on the downcast eye and the famine-stricken cheek [and] . . . the sad, silent resolve of the melancholy throng'. Despite the intervention of some mining overseers who claimed that the miners had struck for higher wages, a number of the men were interviewed by the guardians. Daniel Sullivan, a miner with a family of seven, had earned £1.17s. in the previous five weeks but because he owed the mining company for flour and Indian meal he received just 3s. in cash with which he was expected to pay for rent, clothing, fuel, milk, etc. John Sullivan had earned £1.4s. but had received just 1s.6d. for himself and a family of six. Paddy Kelly, with a family of seven, had earned 15s. and received 2s.6d. cash. Timothy Kelly, with a family of eight earned £1.10s. and had received just 8d. in cash! Having considered the men's plight, the guardians decided that any of the miners who did not have land would be eligible for admission.[29] At a special meeting on 3

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February, 108 workers were admitted to the workhouse.[30]

On 7 February 1868 a reporter set off from Castletownbere to visit the mines. Before journeying west he paid a visit to Dunboy Castle, the home of Henry Llavallan Puxley, DL, the proprietor of the mines. A huge extension was then being added to the southern end of the mansion:

> The effect is a total change of aspect; and when the work shall have been completed, there will stand on the site of the plain, square-built, old castle, a mansion of palatial magnificence. The gothic entrance porch of the southern end is particularly grand; it gives access to a vestibule some fifty feet long by forty wide, the roof of which will be supported by several series of arches in Bath stone, the greatest of which has a pitch of nearly forty feet from the floor; and these are supported by rows of triple columns in red Cork marble, with richly carved capitals . . .

There were about 100 men working on the mansion, which it was estimated would cost in the region of £100,000. The artisans received between £1.4s. and £1.13s. per week and the labourers earned 2s. per day.[31]

Continuing his journey, the reporter duly arrived at the mines to find that the little work being carried out was mainly on the surface. A few artisans were working in the carpenters' and smiths' workshops, and some boys and girls were picking, washing and dressing ore which was being brought up by bucket from the 190 fathom level. 'The poor boys and girls who worked in bare feet, in pools of water where the copper was being washed and screened were objects of commiseration, though they worked cheerfully and rapidly at their freezing work . . .'[32] The work-force at the mines was drawn from about 350 families; on average each family had two members employed there.

The visit provided an opportunity to investigate the living conditions of families in the mining community. The hamlet of Ballydonegan was first visited:

> Had I not satisfied myself that they were tenanted, I should have concluded the wretched tumble-down mud hovels, which were there scattered, at every conceivable angle with one another, and no three on the same elevation, were the remains of a hamlet whose inhabitants had long since gone across the waves that almost wash their thresholds, and that its 'streets' had been for years the channels through which torrents had swept from the mountains above . . . one felt glad to enter the open door of the nearest cabin, uninviting even though that was . . . Looking I saw an aged woman, crouching towards the embers, with barely as much covering upon her as made it impossible to say she was nude, though from the colour of her attenuated limbs and haggard face, it was scarce possible to recognise the revolting heap as human . . . She had been left there, I was told, by those who had been sharers in her misery, but who, going with the rest to the workhouse had thought it useless to attempt to carry her with them . . .[33]

Having visited some other dwellings the reporter made his way up the hill to the village of Clouin (the modern Allihies) where the houses were somewhat better. Many had slate roofs and were whitewashed; most were occupied by several families. The village had three or four small shops and one large store which had a very miscellaneous stock. This store was noted for giving the miners credit — the miners' wives often exchanged quantities of meal paid to their husbands for other items at the store. The single butcher's shop was also noted for the generous credit it gave. There were two public-houses 'but their forlorn condition answers the imputation of intemperance, which has sometimes been cast upon the miner, if indeed, his own rejoinder did not sufficiently vindicate him — 'I'd like to know, sir, where I'd get the money to drink it.' Nearly 100 children were being educated at the local school — a 'wretched poorly-furnished, two-storey building'. Extreme poverty affected the children's education and parents were often forced to take them out of school and put them to work in the mines.

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ALLIHIES IN THE 1920s
(*Courtesy Nat. Lib. Ire.*)

On the hill above the village stood a group of miserable cabins. One housed a miner, his wife and five children; the miner had but one set of clothes and had been without a coat for five years. Other poor families occupied the remaining cabins, one of which was subdivided to house four families. Further up the hill were the residences of the Cornish miners — a neat, snug row of cottages, some of them having two storeys. 'Without all is cheerful and pleasant to look at, and within there is abundant space — the well-ventilated, boarded rooms, and walls white as snow, the floors carefully sanded, and the cheery heat of a good fire reflected in the bright culinary utensils ranged upon the comfortable dresser . . .' As well as having these houses rent-free, the Cornish miners were also provided with free fuel and candles.[34]

The contrasts in the conditions under which the local miners and the Cornish miners lived was similarly reflected in the place of employment. Work at the mines was supervised by the manager, Capt. Pascoe, a Cornishman, who had a number of clerks and five captains under him. The captains inspected the mines and marked out different lots of work which they priced in accordance with the difficulty of the lot. On one day each month, i.e., *cant* day, which was also the monthly pay-day, the miners assembled outside the mining office. The lots were offered for contract and most found a purchaser who then recruited a team of between four and eight miners who all became equal partners. The work party then purchased powder at 1s. per pound, fuse at 1s. per coil, candles at 8d. per pound, drills at 1s. per pound, hammers and picks 6d. each, shovels

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2s.6d. each and replacement handles at 4d. and 6d. — the mining authorities claimed that these costs were necessary to ensure that equipment was taken care of. Details of the work-party's progress and all financial transactions were shown on an account docket which was given to the miners on the next cant day. Having purchased the equipment, the work party organized itself into two or three teams so as to work round the clock on an eight or twelve-hour shift system.

> When the hour for changing arrives the miner dons his canvas working dress, and with his candle stuck in his hat descends the iron ladder of the shaft to the level in which his business lies. This is sometimes 170, sometimes 220 fathoms below the surface, and the mere labour of ascent or descent is often extremely laborious. Once below he bores and blasts with increasing industry in an atmosphere the most offensive and unwholesome, and when at the end of his turn he emerges again he is in a condition the most wretched, his frame thoroughly exhausted, and shivering under the canvas clothes that are now saturated by the dripping from the rocks . . . While at work he is liable to many accidents, and the appearance which a body of elderly miners presents is sometimes very curious, comprising many maimed hands, scarred faces, and even sightless eyes . . .

In addition to giving the contract price, plus the number of feet and inches excavated, the docket itemized all deductions. The latter included the cost of buying and repairing equipment; a charge of 13s. for each 100 buckets of ore transported and raised to the surface; a 1s. per month subscription to a medical fund for each team member, and 2d. each for water supplied in the mine. The miners normally purchased their Indian meal and flour from their employer; this also was paid for on cant day. An allowance of 6d. per lb. was given to the miners for any used steel implements returned to the authorities. A sample docket for a group of eight men who had worked for £4 per fathom, showed that, after an allowance of 5s. for returned steel, their account left them £19.19s.8d. in credit. The miners' equipment cost £9.18s.3d., they owed £9.0s.3d. for flour etc., the medical fund cost 8s. and water 1s.4d. When these costs were taken into account the miners were left with a debt of 13s.2d. to the authorities! So as not to be left totally destitute the men were given a loan of 11s.10d. with which to purchase candles, groceries etc. and pay rent.

The ten Cornish miners at Allihies were treated in a totally different fashion to the locals. They were provided with good rent-free houses and free fuel and candles. Their work consisted principally of shaft-sinking. On cant day they did not have to wait outside the office for details of particular jobs but were admitted and given pre-arranged tasks. Their monthly rate of between £4.10s. and £5.10s. was well above the average of 1s.6d. per day that it was calculated the Irish received.

These were the conditions that prevailed when the local miners declared that they would no longer 'condemn themselves to a labour the most exhausting, for a hire which did not suffice, in many instances, to buy them food'. Capt. Pascoe claimed he had no authority to revise the mining rates while H.L. Puxley was abroad. He offered some of the miners extra 'cist', and certain individuals were offered similar work and wages to those which the Cornishmen enjoyed. These offers were declined. Lord Bantry's agent, Mr J.W. Payne JP, also had some unsuccessful negotiations with the men. Discussion was finally abandoned and, as we have seen, the miners sought relief in the Castletownbere workhouse on 30 January 1868.[35]

Three weeks later, on 20 February, a number of miners sought admission to the workhouse. They were questioned in detail about their earnings — with most of the questions being asked by J.W. Payne JP, who, we are told, handled the business with the dexterity of a cross-examining counsel.[36] By basing

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his questions on the wages of an exceptional month he created the impression that the miners had no reason to complain about their employment. Rev. Arthur Moynahan, RCC, who attended the meeting and made some attempts to speak on behalf of the miners, was ordered to leave the room. None of that day's applicants succeeded in gaining admission to the workhouse.[37]

A couple of days later the *Cork Examiner* carried two letters on the dispute — one from Rev. G.T. Stoney AM, the Protestant curate at the mines, the other from Rev. A. Moynahan. Rev. Moynahan complained of the manner in which J.W. Payne had rejected the miners' applications for admission to the workhouse.[38] Rev. Stoney commenced his letter by disclaiming any part in fomenting the mining dispute. He expressed sympathy with the miners and said that because of the remoteness of the area and the expense of provisions it was impossible for a miner to support his family on less than 15s. per week. He himself could not afford to purchase food locally, but had to have it supplied from another area. Of the miners' living conditions he said:

> I have frequently visited the log shanty of the slave on the cotton plantations in south Carolina, and chatted with the inmates. I have knelt on the mud cabins on the mountains of Connemara and the bogs of Roscommon, but never 'till I came to Berehaven mines did I witness such wretchedness or eye-revolting poverty . . .[39]

Comparing the miner's occupation with that of the farm labourer who enjoyed the benefits of fresh air, varied work and pleasant conditions, he lamented that the miners had to contend with cold, dark and uncomfortable conditions where they were exposed to many dangers and had to work unsocial hours.[40]

Rev. Stoney concluded his letter by expressing the hope that the problems at the mines would be resolved in the near future.

The dispute at the mines was resolved within a few weeks and the miners were given 'Mr Puxley's promise for fair wages, and fair treatment for the future'. Before the end of March it became known that Rev. Stoney was being relieved of his position as curate of the mines (which H.L. Puxley assisted with a £40 donation towards the annual salary plus 'coals, candles and the best house at the mines'). This was seen as a reprisal for Rev. Stoney's outspoken defence of the workers and on Thursday 19 March they stopped work and marched as a body to his house. The curate was leaving the area that day, and many enthusiastic speeches were made before the miners allowed him proceed on his journey. With him he took the sincere best wishes of the Allihies miners.[41]

Little improvement was noted in the miners' lot in the months after the work stoppage. Pass-books were issued to all workers and coal was also supplied but the average wage had not really increased. Rev. Stoney was not the only victim of reprisals; when Cornelius Harrington returned to the mines after a bout of fever he was refused employment. Another miner, James Canpy, was out of work for some time before he applied for his sick fund allowance. Capt. Pascoe refused to hand over the money and said that, for as long as he was captain, Canpy would not get work. During the dispute both Canpy and Harrington had spoken out against the misery and persecution experienced by the miners.[42] News of a change of ownership became public soon afterwards.[43]

In March 1868 the Mining Company of Ireland became aware that H.L. Puxley was interested in disposing of the Allihies mines and it sent three representatives to Allihies to draw up a report. Their findings convinced the board that the mines should be purchased if at all possible, but Puxley's asking price of £100,000 was seen as a major burden for the company. It was decided that a group of shareholders would purchase the mines on the company's behalf. Later that year it became clear that the mines had been purchased privately

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by these shareholders. Legal proceedings were commenced[44] and the company sought to have the mines made over to it. Towards the end of 1869 terms to settle the impasse were put forward — the principal being that a new company, to be called the Berehaven Mining Company, with a capital of 60,000 shares of £5 each, be formed; shareholders of the Mining Company of Ireland were to have 26,000 shares and the new Berehaven Mining Co., was to have 34,000 shares.[45] At an extraordinary general meeting of the Mining Company of Ireland on 30 December 1869 it was agreed that the new company be formed.[46]

By the Summer of 1870 men were being laid off at the mines and families were emigrating;[47] nonetheless, two years later the company's report showed that the mines were yielding favourable quantities of ore. James W. Crease, the compiler of the 1872 report, said that the mines were looking better than at any former period since he had known them.[48] The company's next report gave details of the five mines in the Allihies area. At Dooneen and Coom new machinery had been erected and ore was being raised from the mines. The Mountain mine had produced 2,988 tons; this was 819 tons above the previous year's figure. Kealogue had yielded 1,299 tons, a reduction of 174 tons on its previous figure — a machinery malfunction, coupled with a general sickness among the Kealoge miners took most of the blame for the decrease. Work at the Commanmoor (Commons) mine had been suspended. The 4,122 tons of Berehaven ore sold at Swansea had realized £29,792. 16s. 11d.; the market value of the ore was being undermined by competition from foreign mines. In addition to its many overheads, the company had another bill when one of its vessels was dashed to pieces during a storm at Ballydonegan; also lost was her cargo of 150 tons of coal plus the cast-iron jetty to which she was moored.[49]

During the next couple of years cost-saving measures were introduced; staff was laid off and, to cut down on the use of coal, water-powered machinery was installed to stamp the ore; as well as saving 1,100 tons of coal this would dispense with 60 jobs. These measures were necessary because competition with Chilean ore had reduced the value of the Allihies product to £5.6s. per ton. Difficulty was being experienced in getting shareholders to pay up on call; bank debts had to be paid; money was due to H.L. Puxley and royalties had to be paid to Lord Bantry, the local landlord.[50] The August 1875 report showed a loss of £2,799 as against the previous half-year's figure. Because of the unusually dry weather almost 200 tons of ore lay waiting to be stamped and shipped to market. Pending an improvement in the market, work was suspended at Coom and mining was concentrated at the Mountain and Dooneen mines.[51]

The next report showed a further loss. Water power had proved unreliable and the machines had failed on many occasions. Excavations at Dooneen were disappointing but the Mountain mine was producing a marketable ore of a high quality. The directors were optimistic about some new discoveries, one of which was high up on the mountain, but because of its inaccessible position the company proposed to let it out for three months on 'tribute' to local miners who would work the lode for 13s. in the pound and bring the ore to Dooneen on mules. If the lode proved profitable it was proposed to construct a slide for conveying the ore down the slope. The company's debts included £10,000 still owed to Puxley for the purchase of the mines; assets included £6,834 worth of ore on hand plus £1,741 due from previous sales. Just days before the 1876 meeting another of the company's vessels was wrecked in Ballydonegan bay. The Autumn report and its two preceding half-yearly reports showed that no profit was being made by the company.[52]

At the February 1878 meeting it was

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decided that, in view of the huge expenditure and the poor returns shown since 1869, the company should be either wound up or sold. The cost of boring new shafts and extending existing ones had not been justified and many shareholders suspected that the mines were nearly exhausted.[53] Nonetheless it was decided to keep the mines in working order and investigate the possibility of finding a purchaser. A sale did not materialize and in August 1879 it was reported that plans to develop a new shaft had been discontinued when ore had not been discovered after 30 fathoms. Work was concentrated at the Mountain mine and 'halvens' (previously disregarded ore) collected at Dooneen produced 2,000 tons of ore. About 400 workers were employed at the mines, their earnings amounting to £150 per week. The market price of copper remained low but in the twelve months to 30 June 1879 the Berehaven Mining Company's profit was £611.[54]

The next few years saw little change in the fortunes of the company.[55] A tragic accident occurred at the mines in January 1881. Prior to descending to work, a party of miners, whose dynamite had been affected by frost, decided to thaw it out. The explosive was placed in a boiler and covered with a coat; within minutes a blast demolished the hut in which the five men were sheltering. Jeremiah Murphy and Denis Twomey, married men with large families, died instantly; Jeremiah Cumbaw and James Sullivan suffered minor injuries, but their companion Daniel Sullivan had an arm amputated as a result of the explosion.[56] In August 1882 it was said of the mines that they 'formerly gave considerable employment; but this employment is now, except to a small extent, discontinued, and although it may be revived, it cannot with any certainty be counted on as an element in the resources of the district'.[57] At the company's meeting in the following Spring an optimistic report on a new lode at the seashore just south-west of the Kealoge mine brought new hope. Despite a loss of £12,000, the chairman assured the shareholders that the company had a most hopeful future.[58] His optimism was not realized; by the autumn of 1884 the company had been wound up and workers' houses were being pulled down. Calls were made for further exploratory work to assess the mines' potential. Among those who believed that copper was still present were the former workers who 'have had troublesome yet pleasant days, and, poor fellows they are, no doubt anxious to again submit themselves to the same drudgery to secure a quasi-comfort and pleasantness at home, which alas, is for the present at least, beyond their reach'.[59] An auction of plant equipment on 6 August 1885 included such items as pumping, crushing and winding engines plus twenty boilers and four water-wheels.

By early 1888 it became known that a new mining company had been formed.[60] The head of the new concern was R.C. Foster of London whose company had leased eleven square miles of land in Berehaven; this included the Allihies mines, which, to that date had 'produced copper ore to the value of two and a half millions sterling'.[61] Once news of the new venture became public, property prices soared and a block of three houses in Allihies fetched £1,570, which was considered a very large price. In the village also new buildings were being erected and business houses were being renovated.[62] Again, the promise of success was not realized and by the early 1890s the mines were idle.

They remained idle during the 1890s and just after the turn of the century the rights were secured by Wm Lewis Boyle of Dereham. By September 1901 about 70 men were employed at drilling two new tunnels into the mountain. Labourers were receiving between 3s. 6d. and 4s. 6d. for an eight-hour day; experienced men were being paid more. Because many of the local men were employed at fishing, some difficulty was experienced in getting

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workers. To speed up the tunnelling new electric drilling equipment was being installed, a new hand-operated pump provided fresh air to the mining face. All the excavated ore was being shipped directly to Swansea and Mr Blenkinsop, the engineer, decided against erecting machinery until the profitability of the mines was guaranteed. To assist transportation, it was planned to erect a new railway between the mines and Ballydonegan pier.[63]

The mines closed in March 1908[64] and were subsequently re-opened by Messrs J. and J. Kelly in 1918. Mining ceased in 1920 but was resumed once again in March 1927.[65] By June, 50 men were at work.[66] In November 1928 two men named O'Brien and O'Malley died at the mines.[67] The mining rights were sold in 1928[68] and the new owners shipped their first load of 100 tons of copper concentrate to Swansea in March 1929.[69] Further shipments were made and over 200 men were employed at the mines by mid-1930.[70] The low price of copper and poor returns at the mines forced their closure in June 1930.[71]

Early in 1956 the Can-Erin Mining Company acquired the mining concessions in the Allihies area and a new company, the Emerald Isle Mining Corporation, was formed to drain the old workings and carry out test boring.[72] By December, daily yields of up to 10,000 tons of ore were being forecast by the Corporation.[73] The first stage of the exploratory work consisted of de-watering the Mountain mine — this was occasionally delayed by the necessity to clear debris left by previous mining.[74] In 1961 the drilling activity was expanded and two new deep-drilling stations were set up. If favourable results were achieved, it was anticipated that 'big developments' would follow.[75]

Work at the mines ceased in 1962 but in the mid-1970s exploratory work by the Argosy Mining Corporation of Canada revealed traces of uranium in the area.[76] Further exploratory work was carried out by Minerex Ltd. to ascertain the extent of the deposits.[77] The results of this work is not known, but it is estimated that the mines still contain 1·6% copper. This reserve is regarded as uneconomic, so at present there are no plans to reopen the mines.[78]

REMAINS OF OLD ENGINE HOUSE AT ALLIHIES

The old shafts around Allihies provide a tangible link with the area's mining past as does the splendid beach at Ballydonegan which was formed from mining waste. The village of Allihies is dominated by the two surviving engine-houses with their towering chimney stacks, a stark reminder of the days when Allihies was an important and thriving copper mining centre.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

CC: Cork Constitution; *CE:* Cork Examiner; CSORP: Chief Secretary's Office, Registered Papers, State Papers Office, Dublin; *CWE:* Cork Weekly Examiner.

1 Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the South of Ireland.* (Shannon, 1969) p. 314.

2 *CC* 11.1.1853.

3 Robert Kane *The Industrial Resources of Ireland.* (Shannon, 1971) p. 196. Writing from Allihies in December 1832, J.R. Reed, the captain of the mines, asked J.L. Puxley to send canvas and shovels from Swansea. (Letter from Reed to Puxley 8.12.1832, in possession of Mr Oliver Murphy, Cork).

4 Lady Chatterton, *Rambles in the South of Ireland during the year 1838.* (London, 1839) Vol. 1, p. 75.

5 Ibid. pp 77-9.

6 Frederick Roper, 'The Allihies Copper Mines' in *British Parliamentary Papers; Children's Employment Commission; Appendix to 1st Report of Commissioners' Mines.* Part I. (Report from Commissioners Vol. xvi [1842], (I.U.P. 1968) pp 865-7).

7 Ibid. p. 867.

8 G.A.J. Cole, *Memoir and map of localities of minerals of economic importance and metalliferous mines in Ireland.* (Dublin, 1956) p. 45.

9 Kane, op. cit., p. 195.

10 *CC* 10.4.1846.

11 *Southern Reporter* 28.1.1847.

12 British Parliamentary Papers, *Famine Ireland.* (Shannon 1969) Vol. 5, p. 924.

13 CSORP 1847, Z 539.

14 Ibid.

15 CSORP 1847, A 10793.

16 *CC* 11.1 and 18.1.1853.

17 *CC* 25.11.1856.

18 Anon., 'A Yacht Visit to the Irish Diggings', *Irish Metropolitan Magazine*, Vol. 1, 1857, pp 627-41.

19 Ibid. p. 638.

20 Ibid. p. 639.

21 Ibid. pp 639-44.

22 Ibid. pp 636-7.

23 John Sproule ed., *The Irish Industrial Exhibition of 1853.* (Dublin, 1854) p. 50.

24 *CE* 20.7.1861. A strike of the Allihies miners had taken place in 1835. Because of the combination, Major Gallwey, the magistrate of the county, was ordered to take a force of police to Allihies 'to restrain the miners from illegal acts'. (*Cork Evening Herald* 21.8.1835; see also CSORP 1835, 1816.)

25 *CE* 27.7.1861.

26 *CE* 16.10.1865.

27 *CE* 10.4.1862.

28 *Skibbereen Eagle* 8.10.1864 and *CC* 10.10.1864.

29 *CE* 3.2. and 5.3.1868. See also *Minute Book of Castletown Board of Guardians*, 25.1.1868, pp 9-10 (Cork Archives Intitute, Christ Church, Cork. *Note:* an incorrect date is given in this minute).

30 *Castletown Board of Guardians Minutes,* 3.2.1868. See also CSORP 1868, 1660.

31 *CE* 11.2.1868. In 1871 a disagreement between Puxley and the building contractors, Messrs T. and G. Cockburn, was referred to arbitration by the Court of Queen's Bench. (See *CE* 17.2 and 20.2.1871). The castle was not subsequently completed. A visitor noted in 1880 that 'the front door of ecclesiastical design, set in limestone, remains unpainted, and the building has never been inhabited.' (*CE* 14.2.1880). The castle was burned down by the Irish Republican Army in June 1921. See also, Jeremy Williams, 'Dunboy Castle' in *Architectural Review,* August 1974, pp 121-4.

32 *CE* 13.2.1868.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid.

36 *CE* 4.3.1868.

37 *CE* 22.2.1868.

38 *CE* 4.3.1868; see also *CE* 11.3.1868.

39 *CE* 4.3.1868.

40 Ibid.

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41 *CE* 24.3.1868; see also *The Nation*, 14.3, 28.3, 2.5 and 16.5.1868.

42 *CE* 19.5.1868.

43 *CE* 3.12.1867 and 4.8.1868.

44 *CE* 9.1 and 4.3.1869. See also correspondence in Public Record Office, Dublin, File M. 3676.

45 *CE* 2.11 and 21.12.1869.

46 *CE* 1.1 and 13.6.1869.

47 *CE* 17.5.1870.

48 *CE* 13.8.1872.

49 *CE* 5.2.1873.

50 *CE* 2.9.1874.

51 *CE* 4.8.1875.

52 *CC* 10.8.1876; 7.2 and 8.8.1877.

53 *CE* 6.2.1878.

54 *CE* 13.8.1879.

55 *CC* 3.2.1880; *CC* 2.2.1882; *CE* 7.2.1882.

56 *CE* 21.1.1881.

57 *CC* 18.8.1882.

58 *CE* 6.2.1883.

59 *CE* 20.11, 4.8, 5.9 and 23.9.1884. On the night of 31.12.1884 Sergeant Michael Blake of the Allihies RIC fell into the disused Kealoge mine shaft. He landed on a projecting shelf some twelve fathoms from the surface and suffered numerous internal injuries plus a broken ankle and fractured jaw. He was rescued from his precarious position on the following day. (*CE* 5.1, 6.1, 8.1.1885. See also CSORP 1885, 18548).

60 *CE* 2.3. and 8.3.1888.

61 *CE* 19.11.1888.

62 *CE* 11.12.1888.

63 *Cork County Eagle* 28.9.1901. J.H. Blenkinsop, in his report on the mines (5pp), says that a shipment of ore was dispatched on 1.9.1901. This report can be found among a short collection of papers and documents dealing with the Berehaven mines. (National Library of Ireland, Microfilm No. Neg. 1,929/ Pos. 1,461).

64 G.A.J. Cole, op. cit. p. 46 and *CC* 2.4.1908.

65 *CE* 2.3.1927.

66 *CC* 29.6.1927.

67 *CE* 17.11.1928.

68 *CE* 22.5.1929.

69 *CE* 6.3.1929.

70 *CE* 19.6.1930.

71 *CE* 24.6 and 3.7.1930.

72 *CWE* 2.6 and 9.6.1956.

73 *CWE* 1.12.1956.

74 *CWE* 13.7.1957.

75 *CWE* 8.6.1961.

76 *Irish Times* 12.8.1977; *Sunday Independent* 14.8.1977.

77 *CE* 13.7.1978.

78 *Irish Times* 12.8.1977.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Des Cowman, 'Life and Labour in three Irish Mining Communities', *Saothar*, Vol. 9, 1983, pp 10-19.

CSORP 1891, 15621. This is a large file dealing with mining in west Cork. It concentrates principally on the Bantry/Kilcrohane areas.

Denis Madison O'Brien: Collection of documents and papers relating to the Castletownbere area deposited in Cork County Library; includes file on mining at Allihies.

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