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KIRK MICHAEL MINE IN THE ISLE OF MAN

by Rolf von Arx

Considering that lead mining in the Isle of Man can be traced back to the 13th century, Kirk Michael is a bit of a latecomer. Prospecting in the area started only in 1858 and serious mining ten years after.

Kirk Michael Mine (SC3335589325) is situated in the deep glen which lies between Slieau Curn and Slieau Freoaghane (*Slieuna Fraughane* in the lease) about 1½ miles southeast of Kirk Michael town. It is the only metalliferous mine in the northwest of the island and we owe the first news of exploratory operations to Sir Warrington W. Smyth, the Government Inspector of Mines, who reported on Kirk Michael from 1858 to 1861. Most regrettably it was not possible – in spite of many efforts – to get copies of these reports which were in the hands of the Woods and Forests Office in 1903. For this reason, we have no way of knowing what was done and by whom at that early date.

There is no information for the next half dozen years. However, a puzzling prospectus has come to hand promoting the flotation of a new company called Lezayre & Michael Amalgamated Mining Co. Ltd, with a capital of £42,000. The directors included mostly Belfast adventurers, among them W.R. Anketell, chairman of the Belfast and County Down Railway, as well as G.W. Dumbell, chairman of the Great Laxey Mining Co. Ltd, and J. Spittall, director of the same. The property comprised the Kerro-Moar Mines and the Michael Mine. In the text the latter is called “*Kirk Michael Sett*” and encompasses three lodes of promise that have been partly opened out and in which ore has been found. Two reports of this mine are reproduced in the prospectus, one by Captain Richard Rowe, consulting engineer of the new Company (and later manager of Kirk Michael Mine), and Captain Edward Bawden, manager of North Foxdale Mines. Rowe speaks of this Mine, “*in the neighbourhood of Kirk-Michael*”, and Bawden of “*your Mining trial, situated in the Parish of Kirk-Michael*”. In Rowe’s report we read about three principal lodes: (1) “*one in a narrow glen, at Barregarow,*” running about northwest and southwest with a dip to the north; (2) one bearing southwest and northeast and forming a junction with (1) near the farm house of Ballyaskyr; and (3) a “*large east and west hole opened out principally in the high land*”. It appears that (2) was large and being proved in a small glen to the southwest, while (3) was tested by a shaft at the bottom of which Rowe saw “*very promising quartz containing copper and lead*”. Bawden reports the shaft as five fathoms deep with the vein “*large and powerful, of a masterly character, being upwards of five feet wide, and strongly mineralized, being composed of beautiful blue clay or flookan, some quartz, sulphur, a little blende, and also some small pieces of lead ore*”.

Now, the localities of Barregarow and Ballyaskyr, both on the TT Course about two miles south of Kirk Michael, are well outside the later lease

territory. These two workings are not mentioned by either Lamplugh (1903) or Mackay & Schnellmann (1963), although traces of prospecting should still have been visible by the turn of the century. On the other hand, the “*hole in the high land*” might well refer to Kirk Michael Mine. The property of the Michael Mine was held by renewable yearly licence. The prospectus probably dates from 1866/7. None of the directors’ names appear in the later documents referring to Kirk Michael Mine. It is possible that Barregarow and Ballyaskyr were originally comprised in a general take-note for the Kirk Michael region, but not included when the lease was drawn up a few years later. All these workings must not be confused with Wheal Michael which was a different mine. Unless more details come to light, this exploration will remain a bit of a mystery and it is more than possible that the Company was never officially incorporated.

Things moved to a somewhat more intensive level at Kirk Michael with the signing of a lease, on February 29th 1868, between the Honourable James Kenneth Howard, commissioner of Her Majesty’s Woods Forests and Land Revenues, of the first part, and Charles Tetley, Kirk Michael/Douglas, John Stanway Jackson, Douglas, and James McWhannell, Sulby, Parish of Lezayre, of the second part, the occupation of all three being given as Gentleman. The lease covered all minerals on the tract of land as delineated on the plan (see illustration) containing about 500 acres. The period of validity was fixed at 21 years from April 5th 1867. The yearly rent amounted to £1 to be paid by equal half-yearly payments (!), and the royalty amounted to 1/12th in value of all mineral substances raised. If the royalty did not amount to £10 per year in the first two years, an additional rent of £10 was to be paid, increasing to £25 for the remaining years. In case of default in payment of rent or royalty for the space of 21 days, the Crown had the right “*to distrain any machinery, engines, implements, utensils, carts, carriages, horses or other live or dead stock and all the mineral substance*”. At least six good and able-bodied miners and workmen were to be employed in the mine at all times. In view of the very low rent, expectations for Kirk Michael Mine on the part of the Crown must have been low indeed.

The first mention of Kirk Michael Mine in the *Mining Journal* appears in mid-1869. In a small note, the editors refer to a dispute in the mine and hope that “*this will not lead to legal proceedings*”. No names are indicated. A new player entered the scene 21 months later in the shape of the Kirk Michael Lead & Copper Mining Co. Ltd. In an indenture dated November 30th 1869, Tetley, Jackson (now of Ramsey) and McWhannell assigned the lease of February 29th 1868 to Anthony Wigham Chalmers, Liverpool, Gentleman; Charles Edward Webb, London, Gentleman; George Greenwood Tetley, Bradford, Merchant; and the old partner Charles Tetley. All the latter acted as trustees of the Kirk Michael Lead & Copper Co. It becomes evident from further text that Charles Tetley had carried out mining operations in Kirk Michael Mine previous to the date of the lease, with Jackson and McWhannell as grantees. The new company had been registered with a

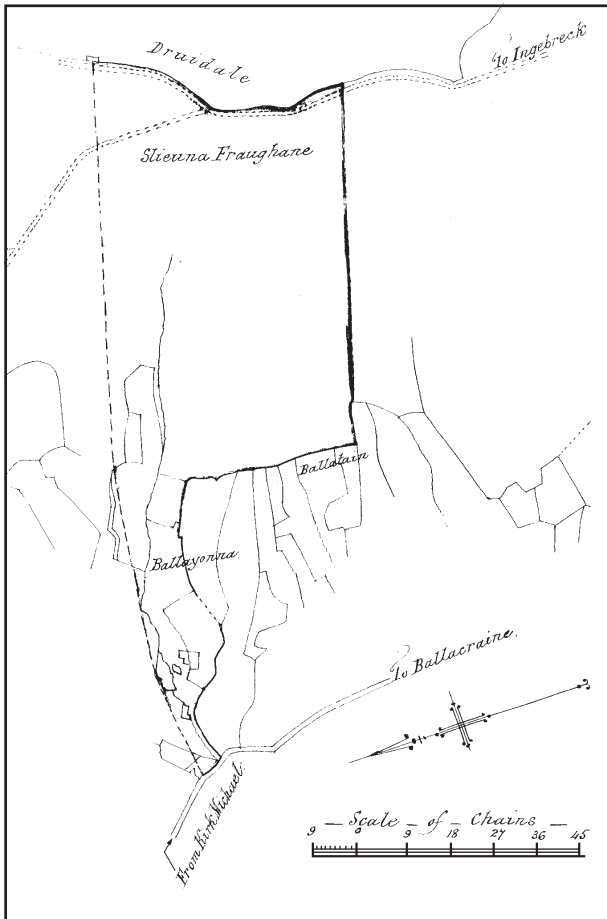


Fig.1 The Kirk Michael Mining Sett.

capital of £30,000 in £1 shares, 2s 6d per share being payable on allotment. The shares were to be offered to the public in five issues of 6000 each. The trustees for the company had signed an agreement with the assignors on June 22nd 1868 for the sale of all "*premises demised by the said Lease and the fixed plant on the terms that the Company should allot one third of each issue of shares amounting in the whole to Ten thousand free shares of One pound each to the said Charles Tetley*".

We go back to the *Mining Journal* for the next reference which is the shareholders' meeting of the Kirk Michael Lead & Copper Mining Co. held in Ramsey on March 4th 1874, with Orlando Webb in the chair. According to the directors' report "*the shaft has now been sunk two fathoms four feet and has a rib of brangled ore on the hanging cheek of about eight inches in*

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width, and a small rib also on the lying cheek”. After the usual promises of riches “as the shaft progresses in depth”, the directors regretted to say that no further shares had been placed in the previous 12 months, 16 shares only of the third issue having been applied for and allotted. Therefore, a further call of 2s 6d per share had had to be made the previous October to meet current expenses of the mine. Apart from a heated discussion with Charles Tetley as to who had the right to make calls and when, we also learn that, prior to the formation of the present Company, a prospectus had been issued of a company proposed to be called the Kirk Michael Mining Co. Ltd, which stated that the licence for making trials was originally granted to Charles Tetley, “who had devoted several years to his researches at a considerable outlay”. Subsequent to the formation of the new Company, however, it was discovered “that a very small portion only of this alleged outlay had been in fact expended on this property”. Nevertheless, the appearance of the mine was judged favourable.



Fig.2 Seal of Assignment
November 30th 1869.

In 1875 the *Mining Journal* refers to an extraordinary general meeting of the Kirk Michael Mining Co. (obviously an error as such a company did not exist then) in Ramsey on February 18th. Webb was still in the chair, but the vendor (Tetley) and friends had declined to enter the room to form a quorum until one hour had elapsed from the time fixed, rendering the proceedings informal. The object of the meeting was to wind-up the company, apparently with a view to reconstitution. The mine seemed not to have proved as satisfactory as

anticipated. A letter from a large London shareholder, named Ridgway, was read out, ending with the sentence: “*Personally, I have no faith whatever in the success of this concern and heartily desire to be quit of it*”. The time really appeared to have come to liquidate the undertaking.

So far 15 shillings per share had been raised and all money expended. The chairman and Chalmers had, during the last three months, advanced £227 6s 9d in order to pay the men. The Company was by then £457 in debt and had accruing liabilities for rents etc., while the assets, consisting principally of 31 tons of ore and arrears of call, amounted to £436, leaving a £21 debit balance. All those who had inspected the mine agreed that the Company had a “good paying lode”, but the funds were too small to enable them to “get at it”. The chairman then announced that he had been told that, “*Mr Tetley had expressed a strong opinion to the effect that he knows where a very large quantity of lead - £5000 worth or 5000 tons (a factor 10 discrepancy as lead ore was about £10 per ton!) – was to be met with in the mine, but he had not*

told the directors". Webb reminded the shareholders that, in the light of the fact that Tetley had received one-third of the total capital in free shares, he should render every assistance to the directors to develop the resources of the mine. It appears that there had been some power play in the Company, as, in his reply, Tetley complained that he had not been permitted "*to put in his own friends as directors*". He also pointed out that "*proper efforts had not been made to find the lode lost on the right hand side of the adit*". In addition, he had found out that the east and west lode, which he had discovered, had been walled up. "*Why, he would like to know, was this not being worked now?*" Finally, he admitted that he had made the statement that he could get £5000's worth of ore in two months "*if the mine were placed in his hands*". At this point he also read out the 221st clause of the Manx Criminal Code, which makes the publication of false statements by companies' officers a misdemeanor. To this the chairman answered coolly that this Code dated from 1872 and was, therefore, not in force at the time the prospectus was issued. Tetley, however, was much more bothered by the report of the previous annual meeting to the shareholders. He and his friends had wanted a majority on the board, but had only been offered two seats out of five (one for himself and one for his crony Pritchard), which he had declined.

Asked by a shareholder if he could not work in harmony with Captain Woolcock for two months until they got the £5000 is worth of lead, Tetley said: "*Impossible*". Another shareholder mentioned that perhaps Captain Woolcock had not found this ore because it was not there, and was blamed for it. In reply Tetley stated that by driving "*under the hill a rich lode would be found there*". Captain Woolcock then explained the various work carried out so far and pointed out that "*every step taken had not been at his suggestion, but some had been on the advice of the mining captains who had from time to time inspected the mine*". As to the walling up of the lode, all that had been walled up was the Great Dowk Vein, and that was done to keep it from falling in.

Managing director Jackson denied having written the text of the prospectus and said it had been drawn up or approved by Tetley, "*and a personal dispute having arisen between Mr Tetley and Captain Woolcock, Mrs Cubbon, the woman who minds the office, was called in as arbitrator. She said that upon a certain day Captain Woolcock did call her upstairs to see the state the office was in, the drawers opened, and papers strewed about, but did not tell her that it had been done by Mr Tetley, as Mr Tetley had supposed. When Mrs Cubbon had been induced to withdraw, and the excitement had somewhat subsided.*"

The chairman, while regretting the lack of any return from the mine, offered to work with Tetley as far as possible. However, he was not disposed to spend a very large amount in searching for this prospect. Tetley was unfazed and strongly urged the discharge of Captain Woolcock "*because he had found*

nothing". Nevertheless, Woolcock had the support of the majority of the meeting, and it was stressed that "*he had been cruelly treated by Mr Tetley, who had actually laid a criminal information against him, and now finding that he had made a mistake, had left Mr Woolcock to pay the expenses*". At a directors' meeting afterwards, a call of one shilling per share was agreed.

The next annual meeting of the shareholders took place on March 9th 1876. Webb, still in the chair, revealed that the credit balance was £7 18s 3d, with the liabilities over assets at £567 7s 8d. The meeting then was declared adjourned for a week as the quorum of 20 was not reached by one. The bickering was picked up from where it had been left off the year before, this time by shareholder La Mothe's suggestion that the captain had stayed away at the urging of managing director, Jackson, who in turn said that "*he did not tell either the captain, who had gone to dinner, or Mr Kelly to stay away*". Pritchard, from the Tetley camp, called attention to "*the suspicious circumstances of a great many shares being registered on the same day in May 1874 and complained that the shares had been transferred to certain persons for certain objects and not paid for*". Shareholder Chrystal thought the chairman "*had colluded to prevent the quorum being present*". The latter assured the meeting that he had done nothing to keep anyone away. Having spent much time and money on the mine, he was very sorry to say that his early confidence in it had eroded as all money was expended with nothing to show for. He felt inclined to retire from the undertaking and hoped they would find a way to wind up the company. Yet, his basic belief that Kirk Michael Mine was a good property was unshaken and he wished that La Mothe and his friends would buy his party out. La Mothe declined and made clear that £1600 remained to be called up and "*should be called*". Pritchard seconded him by adding that there was also a large number of shares to be issued "*and believed they could be very easily placed if the management were in different hands*".

A fortnight later there again was no quorum present and the meeting had to be adjourned. On this occasion, chairman Orlando Webb resigned and was replaced by J.S. Jackson. It seems clear that at this point the Tetley clan had taken over as C.R. Tetley, C. Tetley Jnr, Samuel Tetley and H.G. Earnshaw were appointed directors in the place of O. Webb, C.E. Webb, Chalmers and Kelly. At the end of the meeting, shareholder Corjeag – not realizing from where the wind was now blowing – still expressed full confidence in Woolcock's management and energy but, most probably, Tetley would get rid of the captain soonest possible.

Charles Tetley's dream of the £5000's worth of ore must have been just that! Once his crew was in power, the first move would have been to start work under the hill. No information of their respective efforts has come to light, however, and less than three years later the Kirk Michael Lead & Copper Mining Co. was in liquidation. The *Mining Journal* of January 25th 1879 carries the announcement that the lease and plant of the Company were to be

sold by public auction without reserve by Thomas Callow on February 5th at the Peveril Hotel, Douglas. The property to be sold is described as follows: *“Five separate lodes are known to exist in this area, two of which are dowke veins, unexplored, although one of them has been cut, and nice samples of ore got from it. Three adits have been driven each over 35 fathoms and lead ore out of them to the value of £2878 has been realised. There is a good supply of water for washing purposes on the ground. The plant consists of a substantial water wheel, 22 feet diameter by 3 feet wide; a powerful crusher; four washing tubs with stangs; wagons; water barrels; blacksmith’s bellows; anvil; rails; picks; hammers; Jumpers and other tools. A good office, a blacksmith’s shop, and a powder house have been erected on the ground.”* The liquidators were C.R. Tetley, S. Hopper and R. Hinds Teare. Hopper resided at the Company’s registered office in Kirk Michael and was possibly its secretary.

The next information on Kirk Michael Mine is contained in the Watson Brothers’ Mining Circular regularly published in the *Mining Journal* by these prestigious mine-owners and share dealers of 1 St. Michael’s Alley, Cornhill, London. The issue of November 13th 1880 tries to bring the mine to the attention of a wider public, but not without ulterior motive as we shall see. *“Kirk Michael Mine in the Isle of Man has sampled this week 25 tons of lead ore, all got from one stope during preliminary works at surface and underground, and the mine bids fair to become very productive.”*

A more ample description follows a week later, on November 20th 1880. Referring to the previous week’s announcement, Watson Brothers let it be known that the Kirk Michael Mine had already sold lead ore for about £3000, all raised above the adits. The shaft was 10 fathoms below adit and in a good lode. A considerable sum of money had been expended on the mine in the past year in opening out and *“all necessary pumping and dressing machinery erected”*. Apart from the fact that Kirk Michael was now in a position to make regular returns, *“there is in it also the element of one of the greatest speculations of the day, similar to that which at a neighbouring mine – Foxdale – gave profit of about £300,000 some years ago”*. More details were promised for the following week *“as the five proprietors of the mine may form it into a limited company with a working capital of £5000, of which £2000 would be held in reserve, and 3000 shares of £1 each fully paid up, issued at par. The vendors will take the whole of the purchase money in fully paid-up shares.”* Among the directors would be J. Macfarlane and Orlando Webb, both directors of Wheal Crebor in Cornwall, as well as Joseph Yelloly Watson, who was active in a number of mines in Cornwall and Wales. To whet the public’s appetite, Watson Brothers proudly announced that *“one gentleman has taken 1000 of the 3000 shares and joined the directors, while a large number of others have been privately applied for, but we shall endeavour, when the time comes, to remember any of our friends and readers in the allotment”* (much to their chagrin as the favoured ones would find out later).

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From the few details at hand, we can assume that Kirk Michael Mine had been bought lock, stock and barrel by mine captain Richard Rowe of Minadon, Douglas, previously manager of Great Laxey Mines and consulting engineer to the mysterious Lezayre & Michael Amalgamated Mining Co. in the late 1860s. On November 22nd 1880, a contract of sale and purchase of the lease of February 29th 1868 was signed by Rowe of the first part, and Joseph Yelloly Watson, St. Michael's Alley, Cornhill, London, esquire; Orlando Webb, Calverton Limes, Stony Stratford, Buckinghamshire, esquire; James Macfarlane, Gresham Buildings, Basinghall Street, London, esquire; and Charles Brougham Parry, Gracechurch Street Buildings, London, mining agent, of the second part and William Hudson Howard Watson, at the same address as his brother Yelloly, mining secretary, of the third part. Rowe had spent a substantial amount of money "*sinking and opening out the veins and beds of lead ore. ... The chief part of which monies has been found and provided by the said parties hereto of the second part upon the understanding and arrangement that Richard Rowe and the several parties hereto of the second part shall each have one fifth part of the beneficial interest in the said Mine and leasehold premises.*" W.H.H. Watson had proposed to form a company with the registered office in England and with a nominal capital of £20,000 in shares of £1 each, to be called the Kirk Michael Mining Co. Ltd. Watson was to register the company within a fortnight. Excepted from the sale were the recently sampled 25 tons of ore. The purchase price consisted of 15,000 paid-up shares of the new undertaking to be allotted to the five owners in equal proportion. The latter were not bound to accept the allotted shares unless at least 3000 shares, upon which a minimum of five shillings had been paid in cash, were sold. Actually, Kirk Michael Mining Co. Ltd was officially registered on November 24th 1880.

From here on, Watson Brothers, being financially committed in the mine, started a campaign in the *Mining Journal* to foist the shares of Kirk Michael onto an unsuspecting public. Whether they actually believed in the mine themselves - perhaps because of the vicinity to Foxdale - remains subject to speculation.

Be that as it may, their Mining Circular in the *Mining Journal* of November 27th 1880 contains a lengthy description of the mine. It starts off by saying that Kirk Michael "*was first discovered eight or ten years ago*". Unless the date of the lease (1868) is taken as a reference, this information would clearly be wrong. It appears that only one lode was worked, resulting in a return of lead ore to the value of £2878 11s 11d, raised from the shallow levels Nos.1 and 2. The principal proprietors then died, disputes and chancery proceedings followed, the mine was sold in one lot and "*it has been carried on from that time at a considerable outlay*". The *Mining Journal* mentions legal problems in 1869, which could also point to the reason for the liquidation in 1879. The plant - apart from a newly acquired steam engine as an auxiliary - was already in place from the previous company.

We also learn from Watson Brothers that the course of ore so far worked was 50 fathoms long and almost continuous. The “late” manager had reported that the lode would be more productive at depth, but even supposing it to be only as rich as in level No.2, it would yield about one ton per fathom for a distance of 50 fathoms, “*and if this is multiplied by 15, which is the depth in fathoms between Nos.1 and 2, it follows that 750 tons of ore may be relied on being obtained*”. At the going price, this represented about £8500, subject to the cost of raising it on tribute, royalty, cartage and other general expenses. In the previous 12 months, levels had been linked to facilitate working and a sump sunk 9½ fathoms below No.2. During this preliminary work, 30 tons of lead ore were raised from the sump and one stope.

But what may have attracted the Watsons at the outset, and what they used now as the major trump card, was the similarity of the conditions at, and the proximity, to the fabulous Foxdale lode. This is described in all details and Captain Rowe, who had inspected the great discovery in 1845 and witnessed a course of ore worth 15 to 20 tons per fathom, wrote to the Watsons on Kirk Michael Mine: “*The case is nearly the same as two eggs can be; the lode now working on is a north and south lode with a regular leader of ore quite as good as the one at Foxdale and here also is a similar and immense east and west lode (only larger) which the north and south lode will drop into at no great distance between us. Where this great lode or slide has been seen in the adit which is close to the surface, it is impregnated throughout with mineral – lead, blende and copper. I am sure some such result will follow below and it will not take much time or capital to get at it.*” Rowe reckoned about 12 months would do it, a prediction that must have haunted him.

We learn at this point that J. Yelloly Watson was now also a director of Wheal Crebor. This is the reason why a certain number of shares were reserved to the (hapless) Wheal Crebor and West Crebor shareholders. For other interested parties, early application was deemed absolutely necessary in order to have a chance at some of the shares.

In his report to the future directors, dated October 7th 1880, Minydon, Isle of Man, Captain Rowe puts the mine “*on the western slope of the hills which divide it from the Laxey district and about seven miles from Foxdale*”. The works were in good clay-slate rock, traversed with courses of elvan and “*containing several powerful lodes*”. He compares the lode they were developing to the great Laxey lode. The mine was in the side of a mountain at 1600 feet above sea level and so far had been explored by two adits, or day levels, on the north and south lode which showed a width of four to five feet with a tendency to increase in depth. “*All old levels and shafts*” had been cleared and the sump sunk into new ground where the lode was found to be strong. A small piece of ground had been stoped away northwards from the top of the sump to prove the lode, and from sump and stope 25 tons of ore had been broken. “*But the grand feature of the mine is a large east*

and west lode over 40 feet wide.” The junction of these two lodes was expected to be met after sinking 25 fathoms, and then the bonanza would be at their feet. The ground for sinking was favourable at about £15 per fathom and the lode could be stoped for £3 10s 0d per fathom. The ground required little or no timber to keep it open, which was another important factor.

Starting on December 4th 1880, the shares of the Kirk Michael Mining Co. were quoted in the *Mining Journal* at 1 – 1/8 and 1/2 with the observation that 2000 were unissued (this is the case until the end of 1881). The first directors of the new Company were O. Webb, J.Y. Watson, J. Macfarlane, plus J. Thorne, 85 Gracechurch Street, London, merchant, and R.M. Longmore. The latter was probably the trumpeted purchaser of the 1000 shares. According to the Watson Brothers’ Circular in the *Mining Journal* of December 4th 1880, Kirk Michael Mine would “*commence by paying its current cost of working and soon make a profit*”. In the same issue, Captain Rowe begins his regular weekly progress reports of the mine, always dated from a few days before. The top stope towards the shaft was passing through poor ground, “*but is now in a nice lode that will turn out from 10 to 15 cwts of lead per fathom. The under stope showed the lode at five feet wide with a rich rib of ore about six inches wide on the footwall.*”

The Watson Brothers’ hype had obviously paid off as they reported in the *Mining Journal* of December 11th 1880 that “*the whole of the 3000 Kirk Michael shares to be issued have been allotted to good holders and no more can be had at par. No doubt early in the coming year they will be sold at a good premium through the merits of the mine itself.*” Rowe speaks of routine work being carried out, e.g. casing of the shaft above. On December 18th, Watson Brothers mention stopes worth two tons per fathom, while Rowe refers to the resumption of sump sinking. They had also started “*to get the north shaft upon the line of the lode by cutting away the ground between it and the lode left standing off to the east.*” The drawing arrangements at surface and underground were being completed “*for taking away the increased quantity of stuff that will now be broken without hindrance to the men stoping and sinking.*” Already early on Rowe had the disconcerting habit of dwelling on routine and repetitive non-information, coupled with great expectations “*around the corner*”. One can only surmise at the *Mining Journal*’s continued printing of these mostly boring reports week for week, the reason for this probably being the insistence of Watson Brothers who were no doubt a good advertiser of long standing.

A week later the Watsons assured readers that the mine paid its cost the very first month of working under the new company, and “*few mines have ever done that*”. Timbering in the north shaft was under way, so that “*we shall then be in a position to draw the stuff with the machine from the shaft as well as from the sump.*” By mid January 1881, the “*arrangements for drawing from both parts of the mine are now finished and working very satisfactorily. We shall now attach the engine, to be an auxiliary to all the work – pumping,*

drawing and crushing – when the water power fails, which at certain seasons it will do.” While all the lodes were said to be “*improving a little*”, there was no real change. Rowe was “*pushing on the work for connecting the engine to the wheel*”. The weather had suddenly deteriorated. “*We have had severe frost this week (12/01/1881) and have now a heavy fall of snow which impedes surface work.*” Among progressive mines beyond the region of mere speculation, Watson Brothers now also counted Kirk Michael Mine.

At the end of January, the long expected thaw had not materialized and Rowe complained that “*we have been quite frozen up at the mine and unable to do anything in the sump or stopes. In spite of all attempts to keep the mine going, the severe frost has quite beaten us and today (26/01/1881) is worse than we have had it at all. Such a continuance of frost and snow has not been remembered here.*” By early February the frost had finally given way. The “*north shaftmen*” were finishing up their bargain and Rowe planned to “*sink below the 12 in new ground*”. The Watsons reported the sump in rich ground and nearly down to another level. “*Before the statutory meeting we hope to have a good sale of ore.*” In fact, the main shaft was only down for a 14 fathom level at the end of the month “*with a good lode to start out the ends with*”. The pumps had to be stopped for three days for the collar to be “*fixed around the lift*”. At the same time, Watson Brothers announced that “*Kirk Michael has about the best prospects of any young lead mine of the day and at par only stands at £18,000*”.

However, winter had not given up its reign yet and Rowe reported on March 1st 1881: “*We continue to have hard frost and there is now six inches of snow at the mine.*” Despite this, work underground went on this time, so that by mid-March six feet each way had been driven in the sump in a lode worth about one ton of lead ore per fathom. The men were about to line the shaft down to the bottom “*for draining with the machine*”. The driving in the north shaft was done in “*a oblique direction to the lode in order to catch it about two fathoms north of the shaft*”.

The first general meeting of the new company was held, probably in London, on March 24th 1881 with Orlando Webb in the chair. The directors informed the gathering that, since operations started, £624 11s 4d had been expended in explorations and “*on capital account*”. Twenty tons of lead ore had been raised and the cash balance in hand was £2382 8s 8d with 2000 shares in reserve. E. Ashmead was elected auditor. Richard Rowe submitted his report which dwells first of all on the difficulties occasioned by the extreme winter when they were often unable to pump because “*the wheel and water courses were all frozen up together*”. As soon as the thaw had set in, new problems arose, “*owing to the steep incline of the mountain, water and snow coming down filling the shafts, and creating no end of work and delays on this account*”. The north shaft was down 10 fathoms, secured with timber and ready for drawing through from surface to bottom, a distance of 25 fathoms, and a cross-cut in the bottom was driven three fathoms. At all work points

the ore ground had become poorer, in spite of Rowe's continuing promises, so that at some ends the value was down to 10 cwts and the price of driving up to £4 per fathom. The overriding object remained the reaching of the presumed junction with the large east and west lode "*for which the company was inaugurated*". As ever, Rowe felt they were "*in a much better position now to break stuff and raise lead faster*".

A week later, a good deal of water was coming from the end in the cross-cut at the 12 fathom level in the bottom of north shaft, which Rowe – not surprisingly – interpreted to mean that "*we must be close upon the lode*". Only days afterwards, the ground became "*confused and scattered into branches with lead content too low to save*". From the adit, however, Rowe knew that this disturbed ground would not extend more than five fathoms north of the shaft. The weekly report of April 12th was handed in by John Corbett, obviously the second in command at the mine, but it contains nothing useful. The flood from the thaw was hardly over when late April saw the water level so low that "*the wheel can just keep the water out and no more; the auxiliary engine is being joined to the wheel*". In the 20 fathom level of the main shaft, a lodge was being cut as a first step to further sinking.

Rowe continued to report about unchanging – in effect, negative – conditions at the mine with his usual remarks, such as, "*we expect to see better results in a few days,*" or, "*as we get deeper the lode is bound to widen,*" etc. By far the best return of all working points was just one ton of ore per fathom, not nearly sufficient to get the mine on its own feet. On July 6th 1881 he spoke of stoping the roof of the 20 fathom level and beginning to send lead ore to Douglas for sampling, while Watson Brothers announced on July 16th that Kirk Michael was sampling 40 tons of lead ore and "*if the price of lead would improve many pitches would be set*". At the end of July they reported that, "*we find the shaftmen putting the cistern below the 20 to take the standing lift and preparing a new one to go below*". While the lodes were seemingly "*improving all the time*", the ore content often went from bad to worse. There also was a delay due to "*a slight breakage of the rods*". The 40 tons of ore were finally sold on August 13th 1881.

The sinking in the sump was disrupted on September 14th by "*an accident to the working barrel, a stray piece of rock from a blast having broken it*". By November, Rowe thought they had cut a lode not seen in the mine before in the 20 fathom north, which was open three to four fathoms and showed ore in places worth about two tons. In the 20 fathom south they had moved from the usual country rock into "*a sort of conglomerate of rock and quartz intermixed with lead*". Rowe was convinced that there would be an ore body somewhere in that direction. The main shaft was down to a new level, the 30 fathom, at the end of November, but the lode had not improved. In the 20 fathom north they were driving past all former workings and into new ground with the lode divided into three parts. After all the work carried out, they had just another 15 tons of lead ore at the end of 1881.

In January 1882 the south end of the 30 fathom level was in poor ground and the 20 fathom north had come up to a slide which had disordered the lode and split it up into branches. Watsons had some news on February 25th: "*Owing to the sudden death of a large speculator – one who bought by the 'thousands' where others bought by the 'tens' – and who had at his death an enormous holding in several speculative mines, the market has been completely upset and several shares seriously affected in price. Until the market is cleared things will hardly right themselves. At the same time this does not affect the prospects or the bona fide value of the mines. Among the mines most affected are and Kirk Michael*". Was this a harbinger for bailing out? No one in his right mind could still have confidence in Kirk Michael after reading Rowe's depressing reports in the *Mining Journal*.

A further sampling, this time of 20 tons, took place in late February 1882. Watsons followed up their bulletin of a fortnight earlier with the news that the man who had died was "*one of largest holders of speculative mining shares ever known in the London market*". In Kirk Michael Mine he had been a director with a holding of £10,000. Some time later, the 20 tons of ore were sold to Nevill, Druce & Co. of Llanelli at £9 1s 0d per ton.

The first hint of serious trouble was published in Watsons' Circular of April 22nd 1882 as follows: "*We are disappointed so far at Kirk Michael as we were led to expect extraordinary results in depth - not yet attained – and to make fair returns of lead from ground already laid open and above which many thousand pounds worth of lead had been taken away down to the 30. The returns, however, have not been equal to our expectations so far. The mine is in 20,000 shares of which 2000 are held in reserve. The directors, secretary, ourselves and agent hold between us 15,779 shares and there are very few shareholders besides. We hold ourselves close upon 3000, never having cared to sell.*" It is more likely that, even with the early fanfare, the general public never warmed to this undertaking as otherwise the Watsons would surely have sold at a profit.

Nevill, Druce & Co. had committed themselves to purchase more ore from Kirk Michael Mine at the same price – which speaks for the quality – and another 24 tons were "*waiting for a vessel to ship it by, which may turn up any day*". The end of May 1882 saw the ends driven in the 20 fathom at 16 fathoms south and seven fathoms north and, Rowe says, "*we are daily expecting to cut the lode*". That things were not going as they should also shows in the gap of weekly reports after June 3rd, the contents probably being too depressive for publication. In fact, there is just one more, in the *Mining Journal* of July 15th. Rowe had not yet intersected the lode, but announced: "*Last week I put some of the men to open out a line of costean pits in the side of the mountain, south of the present workings altogether and we have come upon a large promising lode; I have no doubt it is the main lode of the mine and of considerably increased strength to what we have hitherto had.*" It is not without a certain irony that Rowe's reports

should break off on such a positive note. On the other hand, one may indeed wonder why this last job had not already been undertaken in the exploratory phase of the working.

The 1882 annual meeting of the shareholders was held at the company's offices in Gracechurch Street, London, on September 1st. J.Y. Watson was in the chair, with C.B. Parry as secretary. The chairman said that the meeting would have been called earlier, but, as it was realized in February that the returns were insufficient and some ore could not be extracted due to the low price of lead (down from £13 to £8 or £9 per ton), the directors had the mine specially inspected. Certain works were then recommended and it was hoped good results would follow. However, the work had not been finished and could not now be carried further without funds. After detailing the reasons for the formation of the company, he remarked that Captain Rowe himself was holding 2945 shares. Only a total of 60 tons had been sold, at a value of £561 19s 9d, and the balance was £129 17s 6d. The question at this point was how to raise money. An issue of 400 £5 debentures was a possibility, with £1 down, £1 at two months, £1 at three months and £2 at four months, a preference interest of 10% and each holder of a £5 debenture to have the option for 12 months of claiming five of the unissued shares at 10 shillings for each £1 paid. Captain Rowe estimated that about 300 to 400 tons of ore was opened in the mine, at a value of ½ ton per fathom. If the price of lead would go up to £10 again, this could be raised at a profit. He also judged the junction of the great slide, "*where such grand results are anticipated*", to require 10 fathoms more of sinking. There was a valuable lode in another part of the sett, which could be got by driving an adit, but it was better for the moment to concentrate on sinking to the junction. In a discussion on this point, Orlando Webb said he had been down the "*original mine*" at Kirk Michael when Warrington Smyth made his inspection and heard him say that the mine bore the character of Foxdale.

Rowe then stated that, when the present company took over the mine in November 1880, the principal shaft was down to the 20 fathom level on the lode. Since then, levels had been driven north (35 fathoms) and south (33 fathoms) and later for 13 fathoms north and south at 30 fathoms. In sinking from the 20 fathom to the 30 fathom level, the value of the lode fell in size and produce, which was completely against his long-held opinion and those of others. From the way things looked, it would seem more like 15 fathoms to the junction. Work in the 30 fathom was suspended and the men put to driving the 20 fathom level south with a view of finding the lode on the other side of the slide. This had been "*the primary object of former workers, who spent much time and money over the search; it being the opinion of all mining men, that if the lode could be found in this mountain, it could scarcely fail to be a prize.*" The barrier that cut off the lode was 27 fathoms thick, the slide seven fathoms wide, and accompanied by a run of conglomerate rock 20 fathoms wide. In consequence of this, a surface search had been instituted some time back on the mountainside and the lode was discovered

in five different pits, very regular and varying from two to four feet wide for a length of 73 fathoms. The lode's size and character were such as to give the most sanguine expectations that a "*permanent and producing mine*" was lying under this ground. To obtain it, the 20 fathom level should be driven south through the conglomerate rock under the costean pits with utmost speed. The distance to the first pit was 75 fathoms and the cover would be over 70 fathoms from surface and rapidly increasing till it would reach a height of fully 100 fathoms further south. Rowe opined that, without further sinking, a mine of considerable duration would soon be laid open.

All directors were re-elected, including James Thorne and Robert Spence. Rowe, in drawing a comparison with Great Laxey Mine, was so optimistic that he offered to take a portion of the reserve shares "*and had no doubt other shareholders in the Isle of Man would do the same*". To shareholder Latreille's question as to what they were spending at the moment, the chairman replied that everything had been stopped, pending the decision on raising money, in order to avoid getting into debt. Rowe said that sinking the shaft 10 fathoms would cost about £300. Finally, a resolution to adopt the plan to issue 400 debentures of £5 was passed unanimously. The faith of the major shareholders in Kirk Michael Mine was obviously unbroken.

Three months later, the Watson Brothers' Circular of November 25th 1882 surprisingly refers to a meeting (no details given) and states that a proposal to issue 5000 shares at five shillings per share (£1 fully paid) was under consideration, which seems a rather desperate measure. Only one week afterwards, they speak of having already received several applications, even though the proposal had only been under consideration the previous week. The Circular of December 9th informs the public that 5000 shares of five shillings would be given up by the vendors who had taken them instead of cash, it having been deemed impossible to place the 2000 reserve shares of £1 each at this time. "*The 5000 now offered are a sort of bonus to old holders and to save the mine, but not a new issue.*" From this development it can be inferred that the debenture issue never saw the light of day.

There is then a gap of nearly a year for which no information on Kirk Michael Mine is available. From what follows, however, we can deduce that all work at the mine had been stopped, although it is still mentioned in the 1883 list reproduced on the back page of statistics, but, with no staff. In this year we find Captain Richard Rowe as agent at Bradda Mines (near Port Erin) and at North Laxey Mine (near Maughold). He seems soon to have found new jobs, despite his lack of success at Kirk Michael. At this time the directors of the Kirk Michael Mining Company were Spence, Thorne, J.Y. Watson and O. Webb, with Parry still acting as secretary. According to the *Stock Exchange Year-Book* of 1884 (covering 1883), the receipts of Kirk Michael since the start of operations of the company to June 10th 1882 amounted to £561, while the expenditure at the mine and in London was £3439.

KIRK MICHAEL MINE IN THE ISLE OF MAN

The end of the mine was intimated in Watson Brothers' Circular of November 24th 1883, where they indicate: "*Thus many legitimate concerns are wound up just when they appear most promising and likely to succeed. This has been particularly the case in and Kirk Michael, in which we held, ourselves, many 1000s of shares at great cost and were ready and willing to take our proportion of the new issues proposed. The mines will now be sold as going concerns.*" In another paragraph they state: "*The same applies to Kirk Michael where the directors hold nearly 10,000 shares out of 18,000. There was no response for the unissued shares on the part of the shareholders and the directors decline to get it into debt.*"

The non-response to the share issue sounded the death-knell for Kirk Michael Mine. But it is easy to understand that the shareholders got cold feet and were unwilling to throw good money after bad. For all the work done and money spent at the mine, the directors had nothing more to show than the need for another very substantial injection of funds simply on the vague hope of a grand promise. The end finally came with the following two announcements in the *Mining Journal* of March 29th 1884:

MINING PROPERTY AND PLANT FOR SALE.

TO BE SOLD, BY TENDER, as a GOING CONCERN, the
KIRK MICHAEL MINE.

The leasehold premises known as the Kirk Michael Mining Company (Limited), situate in the parish of Michael, in the Isle of Man, including the PLANT and MACHINERY, is offered FOR SALE BY TENDER. The property is held under lease for a term of 21 years from the 5th April, 1887, at a dead rent of £26 per annum, merging into a royalty.

Particulars and conditions of sale can be seen at the offices of Messrs. STACPOOLE and SON, Plinner's Hall, Old Broad-street, London, E.C.; and of Mr. EDWARD ASHMEAD, the Liquidator of the said company, 2, Drapers' Gardens, London, E.C., where an inventory of the plant and machinery can be inspected.

All persons tendering shall be taken to have full knowledge of the aforesaid particulars and conditions of sale, and to have their tender subject thereto, and shall be bound thereby.

Tenders to be sent to Mr. EDWARD ASHMEAD, 2, Drapers' Gardens, London, E.C., on or before the 14th day of April, 1884.

The second is erroneously dated 1882, a mistake corrected when the advertisement was repeated in the *Mining Journal* of May 24th 1884. The company was removed from the Register in 1905.

According to statistics, there were 26 workmen at Kirk Michael in 1880 (22 underground and 4 at surface), 31 in 1881 (25 & 6) and 25 in 1882 (20 & 5). In the periods from 1875 to 1877 and 1880 to 1882, a total of 173 tons of ore was officially recorded as sold, containing 133 tons of lead and 847 ounces of silver (silver or silver content was never mentioned in the proceedings), for an overall value of £1753. Mackay and Schnellmann indicate 222 tons of lead concentrates to the value of £3000, source unknown. Lamplugh wrote in 1903 that the mine was worked by three levels driven into the hill and by a shaft, and that other trials were made on the steep slopes on both sides of the glen, but with no results. He also quotes Warrington Smyth as reporting in 1875 that in the No.2 level, south of the cross-cut, a shaft had been put down six fathoms, and he closes the Kirk Michael entry with the sentence: "*We are informed that over £10,000 was expended on this property*". Mackay and Schnellmann thought that the ore-body at Kirk Michael had not been examined "*as persistently as was usual on the Isle of Man*".

THE KIRK MICHAEL MINING COMPANY (LIMITED). IN LIQUIDATION.

ALL PERSONS claiming to be CREDITORS of the ABOVE COMPANY are required, on or before the 14th day of April prox., to SEND in their NAMES and ADDRESSES and PARTICULARS of their CLAIMS, addressed to Mr. EDWARD ASHMEAD, the Liquidator of the Kirk Michael Mining Company (Limited), 2, Drapers' Gardens, London, E.C.; or, in default thereof, will be EXCLUDED from the BENEFIT of ANY DISTRIBUTION made before such debts are proved.
Dated the 28th March, 1884. EDWARD ASHMEAD, Liquidator.

Kirk Michael Mine is not listed in *The Industrial Archeology of the Isle of Man* (1972), and we are informed that no mining remains are visible anymore at the site, which may be due to heavy overgrowth on the river bank. The 1/25,000 map of the Isle of Man shows a small reservoir which, however, seems to be hard to find as it is hidden in the trees. In the light of Captain Richard Rowe's reports, both Lamplugh and Mackay and Schnellmann's mine descriptions are incorrect as there were clearly two shafts to surface of some 35 and 25 fathoms (M&S indicate only one shaft of 36 feet!) and several deep levels apart from the day-levels.

The story of Kirk Michael Mine is one of great disappointments, as is the case with many mines. Yet, who knows, the marvellous bonanza may still lie in them thar hills of Kirk Michael!

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