

The Arigna iron and coal works during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century

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The Arigna iron and coal works, which straddle the counties of Leitrim and Roscommon, have been the subject of intensive mineral exploitations since the eighteenth century. The story of the exploitation of these resources in the early nineteenth century is complex, and involves more than a few personalities, schemes, and just a small number of slightly (or not-so-slightly) illegal activities. Describing the area in the early 1840s, Robert Kane wrote:

As I walked on, there lay around my path masses of iron ore, equally rich with the best employed in England. I knew that in those hills, whose desolate aspect weighted upon my mind, there were concealed all the materials for successful industry. A population starving, and eager to be employed at any price; a district capable of setting them at work, if its resources were directed by honesty and common sense; but all sacrificed to the stock-jobbing speculations of a few men acting on the gross ignorance and credulity of some others. If the industrial circumstances of this country were really known, such events as the jobbing of the Arigna Company could not have occurred.¹

This paper will explore some aspects of the history of the Arigna mines, and will focus on the early part of the nineteenth century, a time when Ireland was endeavouring to develop an industrial capacity and was searching for natural resources to fuel this industry.

Early development

The iron industry during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was heavily dependent on fuel to power the furnaces required for smelting the iron. At the inception of the industry, this fuel was the seemingly endless supply of wood and charcoal from

¹ Robert Kane, *Industrial resources of Ireland* (Dublin, 1845, 2nd ed), pp 16-17.

the forests of Ireland. The ironworks were located close to the source of the fuel, as charcoal is difficult to transport. However, by the late eighteenth century, the Irish woodlands were becoming depleted, and with the disappearance of the energy source, the iron industry also began to suffer. Only in areas where there was a supply of coal in close proximity to the iron ores would the iron industry survive. Blast furnaces also required limestone to be added to remove the silicon dioxide impurities within the iron ores. The area of Arigna had a perfect mixture of these three elements, with coal and iron in the upland areas and limestone around Lough Allen.

The smelting of iron ore using charcoal around Drumshanbo last occurred in 1765, although this probably used iron from the eastern side of the Lough Allen.² The land in the west of the lake on which iron was found, in the area around Arigna, was owned by Col. Thomas Tenison of Castle Tenison (now Kilronan Castle), County Roscommon, who wished to exploit the natural resources of coal and iron on his land. With the planned expansion of a canal from the Liffey to the Shannon in the late eighteenth century, the resources of Lough Allen would potentially be opened up to the major markets both east of the island and overseas.³ Tenison had encouraged the O'Reilly family of Dublin to become involved in the business, and in 1784 had leased on lives 'renewable forever' land in the townland of Aughabehy, County Roscommon, just to the northwest of Arigna, to Mrs Mary O'Reilly for the purpose of erecting an iron manufactory. Tenison retained an interest in the resource, as he had to be paid a royalty of 2s. per ton of coal, which was only to be used in the iron smelting.⁴

Mary O'Reilly was a wealthy widow from Thomas Street in Dublin. Her son, Thomas, was an iron merchant and evidently had some previous experience in iron works, as in 1781 he had petitioned the House of Commons for financial aid for 'a mill for drawing wire and another mill for tilting and drawing down steel to various sizes [which] would be of the greatest utility to this Kingdom' in the area of New Holland, near Lucan, County Dublin. The House resolved to offer him £500 for his enterprise at that point.⁵ In 1786, he returned to petition the House of Commons for financial aid for the iron

² John Grieve, *Report of the Arigna Iron Works etc.* 1800, p. 2; G.H Kinahan, *Economic geology of Ireland* (Dublin, 1889), viii, p. 72.

³ Letter of Charles O'Connor to Joseph Walker, 15 August 1786 in Ward, Robert E., and Robert E. Ward, *The letters of Charles O'Connor of Belanagare*. Ann Arbor: Univ. Microfilms International, for Irish American Cultural Institute (Dublin, 1980), p. 251.

⁴ Jane Donovan, 'Henry Foxall and the Arigna Ironworks' in *Breifne*, 38 (2002), p. 499.

⁵ *The Journals of the House of Commons for the Kingdom of Ireland, 1781-82*, xx, pp 125, 177.

works in Roscommon. The argument employed was to provide Ireland with a domestic supply of wrought iron, to lessen the dependence on the import of worked iron from Russia, Sweden and England.⁶ The hope was that the parliament would further support the effort in Roscommon 'as an earnest of the great future work of a canal through the level country between the Shannon and Liffey'.⁷ Their first petition for £10,000 to Parliament in 1786, which included a commitment to bring 2000 tonnes of Irish-manufactured iron to market by 1788, was not successful.⁸

In 1789, Thomas O'Reilly, with his brothers Patrick and Andrew, again requested assistance from the House of Commons in the form of £10,000 'so as to render the work of still greater national advantage'.⁹ The money was never forthcoming, although the Houses of Parliament set up a committee to investigate the matter further. Indeed, Sir E. Crofton, in his report to parliament in 1790, suggested that £3,000 be offered to the brothers, but expressed his dismay that 'two right Honourable gentlemen, in high office, had set their faces against aiding this undertaking'.¹⁰ Parliament instead focused on placing tariffs on imported iron. Nevertheless, the O'Reillys continued to invest in the industry, although there was no guaranteed return. By 1790, they had already invested £21,000 of their own money in the enterprise, building dwelling houses, offices and other buildings on the site.¹¹ They recruited Englishmen with some experience of working iron to the Arigna works, including Henry Foxall, who had learned the art of puddling from Henry Cort, an engineer who had invented the process in Britain in 1784. Puddling was an important step in advancing the fortunes of the Arigna foundry, as it could be used to transform pig iron into bar iron without the use of charcoal. With Foxall's experience, the O'Reillys expanded the business into pig iron, bar iron as well as castings, an expansion that would put pressure on the finances of the business. By 1790, the works employed over 300 people, and the lot of the people around the area had improved, as locals were involved in the search for ironstone, carting coal and other ancillary duties, thus creating an industrial village in

⁶ *The Journals of the House of Commons for the Kingdom of Ireland*, Jan.-May 1786, vi, pp 76-7.

⁷ Letter of Charles O'Connor to Joseph Walker, 15 August 1786, in *The Letters of Charles O'Connor of Belanagare*, p. 251.

⁸ *The Parliamentary Register or Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons of Ireland*, Jan. - May 1786, vi, p. 77

⁹ *The Journals of the House of Commons for the Kingdom of Ireland*, 1789-90, ix, p. 178.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1791, xi, p. 130; UK National Archives, Deed of Indenture of Arigna Iron and Coal Company, MS C101/4777/56/2.

this rural part of Roscommon.¹² The iron foundries also were continually used in the debates by the House of Commons to justify the completion of the Royal Canal to the Shannon. The O'Reillys borrowed money from the La Touche bank in Dublin, in the hope of keeping the business afloat.¹³ However, by 1793 they were forced to admit defeat, were declared bankrupt and were forced to sell the enterprise after defaulting on a £10,000 loan from La Touche.

The business was purchased by Peter La Touche around 1793 from the court of chancery, paying around £25,000 for his investment. La Touche was familiar with the business through the family's bank. His purchase of the ailing enterprise was also a further means of gaining a foothold in Counties Roscommon and Leitrim, a county he had been representing as an MP since 1780 until losing his seat in 1790.¹⁴ Nonetheless, he also failed to turn around the fortunes of the business.

In mid-June 1795, rebellion would again bring disaster to the Arigna ironworks. O'Reilly, who knew the works well and was by now a United Irishman, took siege of Arigna ironworks along with the men of the Defenders - agrarian rioters and conspirators who used violence to fight for the abolition of tithes and higher wages for agricultural labourers. The Defenders needed weapons, and O'Reilly knew a ready-source of iron. From Arigna, O'Reilly and his men manufactured 600 pikes in a day with which to fight the enemy.¹⁵ The Defenders apparently benefitted more from the Arigna ironworks than La Touche himself, who is quoted as saying that the only thing he got out of the ironworks was the gates to his house at Bellevue in Wicklow, iron gates which cost him to the tune of £80,000.¹⁶

In an effort to turn the fortunes of the business around, Thomas Guest, the director of the Dowlais Iron Company in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales, was asked by La Touche to create a report on the viability of the Arigna Iron works in 1804. The choice of Guest was no accident. The physiographical situation of the Dowlais iron works was very similar to that of Arigna - a remote hillside location which had coal, ironstone and limestone all in close proximity. Nonetheless, through innovation, Guest had managed to turn the

¹² Donovan, 'Henry Foxall and the Arigna Ironworks', p. 500.

¹³ Isaac Weld, *Statistical survey of the county of Roscommon* (Dublin, 1832), p. 38.

¹⁴ Michael McGinley, *The La Touche Family in Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), pp 171-2.

¹⁵ Liam Kelly, *A flame now quenched* (Dublin, 1998), pp 60-1.

¹⁶ Turlough O'Riordan, 'La Touche, Peter' in James McGuire & James Quinn (eds), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge, 2009).
(<http://dib.cambridge.org.dcu.idm.oclc.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a4625>)

Dowlais Iron Company into a prosperous business. Now he was asked for suggestions to make the Arigna company profitable. After outlining the current infrastructure at the works, Guest suggested investing considerable sums of money into creating a house for the manager, workers, and new infrastructure - a sum that he estimated at £20,000. He counselled that the works could turn a profit (he suggested transporting the iron to Sligo by horse and cart, and from there by boat to market).¹⁷ The advice appears never to have been followed, perhaps due to the initial outlay required by Guest's suggestion, particularly as investors had already pumped a considerable amount into the works. By the early nineteenth century, the perception was that the Arigna iron works failed because of the cost of transport of the iron to Dublin. However, in a report on the Connaught coal field in 1818, Richard Griffith points out that, in fact, no iron was ever transported to Dublin, with all iron being sold on the spot, either as bar iron or cast into smaller, domestic items. Griffith instead put the failure of the business on the initial outlay, and the frequent change of managers at the works.¹⁸

In spite of La Touche's efforts to rescue the business, it never made the return merited by his investment and was subsequently abandoned in 1808.¹⁹ According to the statement of John Schneider, a businessman in London and one of the subsequent members of the board of directors of the Arigna Mining Company, to the parliamentary enquiry into the Arigna Mining Company in 1826, by the early 1820s the La Touches 'were worn out, and they were glad to get it into the hands of any person'.²⁰ After an initial approach by William Stephens, a Dubliner who was then living at Rose Lodge, just outside of Drumshanbo, who wished to look after the premises on the condition that he could live in the agent's house and raise coal from the adjacent pits, the property was granted by deed to Roger Flattery. Flattery was variously titled a Dublin architect, or a civil engineer who had been a civil servant, in early 1824.²¹ Flattery was conscious of the need for capital if the business was to make a return.

The Arigna Iron and Coal Company and Roger Flattery

¹⁷ Thomas Guest, Report on the Arigna Iron Works, Dublin: 1804.

¹⁸ Richard Griffith, *Geology and Mining Survey of the Connaught Coal District in Ireland*, Dublin: 1818, p. 61.

¹⁹ Weld, *Statistical Survey of Roscommon*, 39.

²⁰ House of Commons Select Committee on the Arigna Mining Company 1826-27, p. 295. Available on EPPI at <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/epi/documents/9954/page/218871>.

²¹ *Coventry Herald*, 1 Dec. 1826, 2; Weld, *Statistical survey of the county of Roscommon*, appendix. This appendix contains a succinct account of the origins of the parliamentary inquiry into the Arigna Iron and Coal Company.

After the return to the domestic gold standard in 1821, the British economy was booming.²² This turned the economic atmosphere heady with the idea of joint stock companies. Early 1824 had seen a number of mining companies being created in London (the Real del Monte, United Mexican and Anglo-American in Mexico, among others) and the idea of creating a mining company using English capital to exploit Irish resources was in the air.²³ With this in mind, and possibly with a view to making a quick buck, Flattery travelled to London and approached Sir William Congreve (1772-1828) in June 1824, to propose the formation of a company which would run the mines. Congreve was an MP for Plymouth, and had interests in the Peruvian Mining Company, as well as inventing iron rockets for use in the Napoleonic wars. Flattery maintained that the mines were worth £100,000 - a sum which was somewhat inflated, although the recent reports of Griffith and others had raised the hopes of the profitability of the mines.²⁴ Congreve, in turn, approached two brothers named Henry and Joseph Clarke, and together they decided to purchase the Arigna property for £10,000, agreeing the sum with Flattery on 30 October 1824. In evidence before the parliamentary commission set up to investigate the Arigna Iron and Coal Company in 1827, Schneider (somewhat naively) says of Flattery, '£10,000 was a fortune for him. He was a man of straw, a man who had nothing. He was, of course, extremely urgent to get this thing forwarded - to get money into his pocket - it was a windfall'.²⁵ Flattery was to retain an interest in the business, as he was to receive one-fifteenth of the profits as well as one thousand shares which he was to dispose of in Ireland in three months.²⁶ He was also to be recommended for employment in the works by the board.²⁷ The three trustees of the company were to be Peter Moore MP, Samuel Barrett Moulton Barrett MP and Thomas Dunston, all well-known businessmen within the City of London, and therefore capable of attracting sufficient shareholders to the project. An Act of Parliament was drawn up, but the act of parliament included a clause (clause 56) which stated:

²² James Earle, *Commodore squib: the life, times and secretive wars of England's first rocket man, Sir William Congreve, 1772-1828* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 215.

²³ B.C. Hunt, 'The Joint-Stock Company in England, 1800-1825' in *Journal of Political Economy*, 43:1 (Feb., 1935), p. 18.

²⁴ Richard Griffith, Survey of the Connaught coal district. BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS

²⁵ House of Commons Select Committee on the Arigna Mining Company 1826-27, p. 295. Available on EPPI at <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/eppi/documents/9954/page/218871>.

²⁶ House of Commons Select Committee on the Arigna Mining Company 1826-27, p. 5. Available on EPPI at <http://www.dippam.ac.uk/eppi/documents/9954/page/218580>.

²⁷ *House of Commons Select Committee on the Arigna Mining Company 1826-27*, p. 6.

nothing in this act contained shall extend or be construed to extend to change, vary, alter, annul, or make void any Right, Claim, or Demand whatsoever, to which Roger Flattery may be and now is entitled under and by virtue of any Indenture or Indentures of demise of any Iron or Coal mine or Mines situate and being in the said counties of Roscommon and Leitrim, or any agreement or agreements relating thereto.²⁸

This proved to be a major feather in Flattery's cap, and a rephrase to all those who had hoped to invest in the mines.

It is from this time that the 'jobbing' referred to by Kane above became evident. Later that day, a memorandum of agreement was drawn up between Congreve (represented by his solicitor) and the Clarkes which would see Congreve becoming the director of a stock company which would purchase the mines for £25,000, rather than the £10,000 that Flattery was expecting. Along with Congreve, the Clarkes, with eight others, formed the board of directors. The £15,000 made on the transaction was to be split between the directors of the company, although there was some dispute later as to how the money would be split. The flotation of the company was eagerly awaited, and all shares were sold by mid-November 1824, without any need to publicise the company.²⁹ 174 shareholders in total bought shares. These were mostly English businessmen and stockbrokers mainly from London, such as Robert and William Hichens of Threadneedle Street and John Easthope of Lothbury.³⁰

The first meeting of the board of directors did not occur until 1 January 1825, when a cheque was allegedly written to Flattery for the £25,000, as well as other sums for machinery and materials, although this cheque was never received.³¹ The deeds vesting the property in the company were also produced at this meeting. These had been drawn up in November but were backdated to the date in October when Flattery had entered into the agreement with Congreve and the Clarke brothers. In subsequent rewriting of the deeds, the property was passed not to the company, but to four of the

²⁸ 6 Geo. IV, cap. Clxxxi, p. 5525.

²⁹ *Freemans Journal*, 23 November 1824, p. 4

³⁰ *House of Commons Select Committee on the Arigna Mining Company 1826-27*, p. 414-5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

directors (the minor players in the scheme), as the waters around the scheme were muddied.

At the second board meeting, when the directors entered the room they were faced with packets for each on the table. On opening them, they discovered that each packet contained £1047 in bank notes and sovereigns. While some questioned the provenance of the money, many took it without comment. They did agree, however, that £47 from each director should be set aside for a plate for the Clarkes as a token of appreciation. The Clarkes stated that they money was an acknowledgement to the services of the directors in forming and organising the company.³² The money, it later turned out, was the result of the £15,000 made by the Clarke brothers from selling the Arigna property to the company for £25,000, with Flattery only receiving the £10,000 originally agreed. News of the scam soon reached the shareholders, and the price of shares plummeted. After some tension, all the original directors of the company were removed by the shareholders in May 1826. Henry Clarke was later to tell the jury at the proceedings of the winding up of the company that 'if I were to go into details [about the actions of the directors] it would probably fill a newspaper and I do not wish to make myself a martyr to any newspaper'.³³ As there were a number of Members of Parliament involved in the company, later that year a select committee was set up by parliament to investigate the 'origin, management and present state of the Arigna Iron and Coal Company and to report the same, with any special matter touching the conduct of any members of this House'.³⁴ At the same time, a bill was introduced to Chancery by the shareholders in an attempt to claw back the £15,000 with interest. Sir William Congreve fled for France and was found guilty (in his absence) of fraudulent activity in May 1828 by the Lord Chancellor, just before his death in Toulouse.³⁵ Eventually, in September 1831, chancery found in the company's favour, and the Clarke brothers and others were ordered to repay the money to the Arigna Iron and Coal Company.

During this time, the company still attempted to work the mines and Flattery was on the ground, with more than a passing interest in the works. The condition that the coal

³² Ibid., p. 9.

³³ National Archives, MS C101/4777/55/17.

³⁴ *House of Commons Select Committee on the Arigna Mining Company 1826-27*, p. 3.

³⁵ Roger T. Stearn, 'Congreve, Sir William, second baronet (1772-1828)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com.dcu.idm.oclc.org/view/article/6070>, accessed 5 Feb 2017]

was to be used only in the furnaces of the iron works remained part of the contract, while Flattery was permitted to use some coal for his own, domestic, use. While the commission of inquiry was ongoing, various captains were put in charge of the mine by the Company. These were invariably British, with some experience of mining either in England or Wales. The presence of British authority was not always welcomed in this small valley. One such example is the case of Captain Cox.

Captain Cox was the resident manager of the mine in 1828, having been employed by the Arigna Iron and Coal Company.³⁶ On the night of 23 February 1828, three men (Silvester and Michael Grogan and John Birchall) appeared at the house of the mine caretaker, and told him that they were bringing material from Drumshanbo for the mines. The caretaker let them in, whereupon they struck him in the face with a pistol, blinding him, took the firearms from the property, and left for Cox's house. Upon arrival they broke panes of glass in the door, in an attempt to gain entry. This woke Cox, who looked out through his bedroom window. One of the group shot at him with 'swan drops' (small pellets). These lodged in his face and neck, and one entered his eye socket, penetrating his brain, causing instant death.³⁷ The gang then entered the house, interfered with the corpse and threatened Cox's sister before leaving with items from the house. Possible causes for the murder, as stated at the time, included Cox's desire to gain possession of the Catholic Church which had been erected at the mines, or a case of mistaken identity, with the gang thinking that it was the Captain Cox that Daniel O'Connell had referenced in relation to a conspiracy against Father Thomas Maguire, who had been accused of assaulting the daughter of an innkeeper in December the previous year.³⁸ O'Connell had defended Fr Maguire in court, and Maguire's acquittal in the courts was seen as a victory by catholics, resulting in the threatening of local protestants in Leitrim.³⁹ Irish newspapers at the time linked the murder to a rise in Ribbonism, although the incident may also have been over a wage dispute, with the *Times* reporting that the incident was a burglary gone wrong.⁴⁰ Regardless of whether the Ribbonism claim was accurate or not as an assessment of the root cause of the murder, it is interesting that this is what was being reported.

³⁶ *The Times*, 4 Mar., 1828, p. 3.

³⁷ *Sligo Journal*, 4 Mar. 1828, p. 4.

³⁸ *Sligo Journal*, 4 Mar. 1828, p. 4.

³⁹ C. J. Woods, 'Maguire, Thomas', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed), *Dictionary of Irish Biography*. (Cambridge, 2009). (<http://dib.cambridge.org/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a5366>)

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 4 Mar. 1828, p. 3.

Following the removal of the board of directors and the instalment of a new board, the company was nervous regarding the true value of the business. In 1830, therefore, it appointed J.A. Twigg, a mining surveyor of Chesterfield, to examine their holdings. While the reports of Twigg were favourable, he was also cautious to mention the need for careful management of the company.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the company still failed in 1831, although it could not be wound up until over twenty years later.

Flattery's fate was better than that of Congreve or the Clarkes. Chancery found in his favour, saying that he had a right to remain on the land and work it, due to the clause in the Act which had set up the company. So in 1836, Flattery restarted the iron works around Lough Allen in 1836, acting as the manager.⁴² In 1837, Thomas Rhodes' report on the ironworks valued the works at £33,000. Flattery was also making firebricks, as well as working the iron ore in the area. Rhodes suggested that Flattery 'manufacture the iron in to pig and send it off to market', potentially in Limerick, 'as there is a foundry lately erected there'.⁴³ However, the works never prospered as the lack of suitable transport still dogged the ironworks. Also, Flattery had discovered that there was more of a market for coal than there was for iron. His lease, however, only allowed him to raise coal for his personal use. Nonetheless, the amount of coal that he was raising 'for his personal use' was far more than his cottage would use. In subsequent years, people would testify that they had bought coal, and indeed had transported it for sale.⁴⁴ Three colliers testified in 1842 that, over the previous twenty years, they raised 100 buckets of coal a day, each averaging 2 ct, 1, 11 lbs.⁴⁵ All the while, the Arigna Iron and Coal Company still existed, because on the failing of the company, Flattery had brought a suit against them 'for the recovery of certain enormous claims set up by him against the company'.⁴⁶ The act for dissolution, however, required 100 shareholders to be present, and by the end of the 1830s the original company had only fifty who were still alive. Therefore, the original Arigna Iron and Coal Company had to wait until

⁴¹ Weld, *Statistical survey of the county of Roscommon*, appendix.

⁴² Kinahan, *Economic geology of Ireland*, p. 73.

⁴³ Thomas Rhodes report of the Arigna iron works to N.J. Price esq, NLI, MS 8841/6.

⁴⁴ NLI, White papers, MS 8845/1.

⁴⁵ NLI, White papers, MS 8845/1b/2.

⁴⁶ National Archives, MS C101 4776, 1.

a new Winding Up Act, which was promulgated under Queen Victoria, to be finally closed. This did not occur until the 1850s.

Robert White and the Arigna mines

1841 saw another chapter begin for the Arigna Iron and Coal works. In June 1841, Robert White and a consortium attempted to purchase the Arigna works from the Arigna Iron and Coal Company for £2000, under a new company called The Arigna Company. White had married the wealthy widow of Terence O'Donnell, and had already at this point invested in a French mining company.⁴⁷ He was joined in this venture in Arigna by John Salmon (the former secretary of the Mining Company of Ireland, based in London), John and James Houlditch (two London coachmakers who had a single share between them), Thomas Radcliffe Symes, a solicitor in Dublin. Each of the investors were to pay £500, plus an extra £75 as a 'handling fee' to the solicitors. White later claimed that John Morgan was also involved in aiding John Salmon purchase his share of the company. Salmon had been secretary to the Mining Company of Ireland and had been in charge of Tullynaha colliery.⁴⁸ Similar to the previous company, the objective was 'to raise a company with sufficient capital to ensure the effectual working of the concern and to sell all the property to such company at a fair valuation'. Upon the sale of the property, it was decreed that 'the purchasers are to be first repaid their money with interest and the surplus is to be divided into six parts of which each subscriber is to receive one part, and Mr Salmon form himself and friends who assisted him in all the proceedings and in getting up the company to have two parts'. The deal also included a reference to Flattery, in that 'any compromise to Flattery, Parker or others is to come out of Mr Salmon's free shares'.⁴⁹ The hope was to sell the company for at least £20,000, with each of the parties making £3000. Salmon was a speculator, with experience in buying and selling mining shares, so he earned the trust of the other men on the consortium with the promise of a good return. As time went on, however, the deal became less agreeable to White, who questioned why the sale was being divided in six when there were four shareholders. One sixth was to be given to each of the Houlditches, Symes, White, Salmon was to get two sixths, and John Morgan to get a further sixth. Salmon had the term 'free

⁴⁷ NLI, White papers, MS 8845/1b.

⁴⁸ *Dublin Mercantile Advertiser, and Weekly Price Current*, 24 Dec. 1827, 1.

⁴⁹ NLI, White papers, MS 8845_1.

shares' put into the memorandum, these free shares being the two of the sixth-parts, one of which Salmon was to get from the deal, out of which he would pay off Flattery and others. However, Symes and Salmon defaulted on their payments.⁵⁰ On seeing this, the Houlditches lost confidence in the entire endeavour, and attempted to leave the deal. Although they had paid £350, they wanted to pull out of further payments to protect themselves, probably suspecting that the deal (and the company) was going to go the way of the previous Joint Stock company. Although they eventually did pay, along with Symes, they did not do so on time, thus placing extra financial pressure on White.⁵¹ As the saga unfolded, White believed that this was part of a conspiracy against him. Nonetheless, White had put money on the table, and now wanted to see a return on it, and so proceeded with the deal.

The principal worry of the new consortium was the state of the mines (there had been reports of the mines being left unattended, and Flattery's conduct at the mines was not that of an ideal manager) and the fact that Flattery was still in place. The decision was obvious - Flattery had to be removed from the land. At the time of the contract, the mines and premises were:

in the actual possession of Roger Flattery in the original bill particularly named and the said Roger Flattery being so in possession thereof and in a state of litigation with the said company was committing great waste damage and injury upon and to the said mines and premises.⁵²

A writ of *Habere Facias Possessionem* (a legal document of ejection) was introduced by the Houlditches, Symes, Salmon and White to stop the waste and force Flattery off the land and was heard on 12 August 1841. Flattery resisted the bill on various grounds - the full amount had not been paid by the parties involved,⁵³ and more importantly, he had a document that gave him rights to be there. The court ruled in Flattery's favour and with costs, and also ruled that only the lessors (i.e., Flattery) could enter the lands, 'and thus by reason of this bundling lease was the tenant enabled to laugh at his assailants'.⁵⁴ The result was that Flattery had 'the commission

⁵⁰ Ibid., MS 8845_1/12.

⁵¹ Ibid., MS 8845_1/17.

⁵² Ibid., MS 8845_1/17.

⁵³ Ibid., MS 8845_1/20.

⁵⁴ Ibid., MS 8834_4.

of waste upon the said mines and properties, and continued such waste and devastation thereupon as to render the said properties of less value to the extent of several thousand pounds as defendant believes they were at the time'.⁵⁵

As noted in a report prepared for Chancery in 1843, Flattery:

was a most vexatious and litigious character, who tho he did use [the lands of the Arigna Company] and possess himself of their subrents, and sell their coal to the publick in violation of the covenants of his lease and for his own use and benefit [...] He had even the baseness to dilapidate the noble concern that he found placed at his mercy and to sell and otherwise dispose of a vast deal of the moveable property on the surface.⁵⁶

After one failed attempt, in November of the same year the Arigna Company tried again to remove Flattery and gain access to the lands. This was again turned down, as the company had said in their evidence that the full amount had been paid to purchase the premises, which was not actually the case.⁵⁷ Due to these cases, the company ended up expending a great deal of money in the proceedings, and also paid Flattery a 'considerable sum'.⁵⁸ All the while, Flattery's legal position was being strengthened with each case that ruled in his favour, as he worked the coal and iron mines for his own profit. By this stage, Flattery had earned himself the nickname of 'The Invincible' in the Arigna valley.⁵⁹

Robert White decided to take matters into his own hands, and in June 1842 vowed to go to Arigna himself, 'in order to prevent as much as he could the waste which the said R. Flattery was committing on the said mines and premises and with a view him becoming and acting as the resident manager of the said mines and premises whenever they should come into the actual possession of this defendant and his co-tenants'.⁶⁰ The situation and how the decision was arrived at was described thus in an affidavit prepared for Chancery:

⁵⁵ Ibid, MS 8845_1/20.

⁵⁶ Ibid., MS 8845_4/2.

⁵⁷ Ibid., MS 8845_4.

⁵⁸ Ibid., MS 8845_1/21.

⁵⁹ Ibid., MS 8845_4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., MS 8845_1/25.

The question then arose what was to be done? Mr Houlditch was a feeble old gentleman resigned to do what he had done, namely to send his money to Mr Symes. Then followed Mr Symes doing what he could in the way of his profession and whether wisely considered or not it is undeniable that nothing to the purpose resulted. Then on the other hand it must be admitted that Flattery had quasi grounds of litigation both at law and in equity that possibly might last the ordinary term of a man's life. His lease was almost insuperable. The alleged equities still existed. It is therefore a fact capable of demonstration that the only way left open open [sic] thro which Flattery could be assailed successful and within reasonable time was thro the medium of his purse. To dry up the fountain from which sprung his resources was the last move upon the table. Then came the question – how was it to be done and by whom? The answer was by Mr White. He being the most likely to strenuously exert himself as being personally interested in the matter.⁶¹

White arrived in Arigna in the autumn of 1842, and lived in the area observing Flattery and his movements in relation to the mines. He also visited the tenants, and encouraged them not to pay the 1 shilling rent to Flattery, or assist him in any other way, and discouraged them from purchasing coal from the mine – an action that was successful, after some initial uneasiness on the part of the tenants, and with Flattery bringing some of the tenants before the petty courts on a charge of non-payment of rent.⁶² The tactic of attacking Flattery through his purse was beginning to pay off.

By October, tensions between the two factions were at boiling point. On the morning of 7 October 1842, White went to the iron works, where he came across Thomas Flattery, Roger Flattery's son, and others. Another worker, Philip Murphy, had a hatchet over his shoulder. Flattery asked on what authority White was there, and when White refused to answer, Flattery refused him access to the works. White asked if Flattery was going to assault him, and mentioned that he had been in the works twice already, at which, according to White's report, Flattery struck him twice. Murphy handed the hatchet over to Thomas Flattery, upon which Flattery swore he would 'chop off his head or his limbs and rip out his guts with the hatchet'.⁶³ With this, White

⁶¹ Ibid., MS 8845_4.

⁶² Ibid., MS 8845_4.

⁶³ *Roscommon & Leitrim Gazette*, 8 Apr. 1843, p. 2.

retreated. As a result of this assault, White brought charges of assault against Thomas Flattery and Murphy. Only Thomas Flattery was convicted of the assault, and he was sentenced to four months in prison. The judge is reported as having commented 'No wonder that the lower orders should be misled, when respectable people, like Mr Flattery, set them an example by breaking the law'.⁶⁴

However, White was not satisfied that Murphy (and up to forty others who were at the scene) had not been prosecuted. However, soon Murphy was accused of stealing 'two large planks of timber and some hinges off doors' at the time of the assault on White. The details of the theft were mentioned to White on 27 April 1843, and Murphy's house searched a few days later.⁶⁵ One plank of wood was recovered, and the hinges were found hidden in the wall of the house. Hinges were taken and fitted to the place from where they were allegedly taken, where they fitted exactly. The affidavit for this case states:

The quantity of property found in his possession is very trifling in amount. But the result of this investigation is of the utmost importance to the present owners with a view to shew the people about the concern and the public of the locality generally that the obstruction of any the least portion of it is punishable by law. It is notorious that this property is owned by a public company for many years and is particularly the subject of litigation for the last five or six years. It was leased to Mr Flattery in the year 1837, and owing to some blunder of the conveyancer who engrossed the lease, he has been enabled to keep this property on despite of all efforts to remove him up to this present time. He neither pays rent or royalties for it. In fact it is better than a fee simple to him. The result is unfortunately for the present proprietors that what was once a noble concern and a credit to the country (it being the only thing of its kind in all Ireland) is now a heap of ruins – houses depilated, machinery tumbled about in endless confusion.⁶⁶

The state of the works and the lack of a financial contribution to the zone was also unfortunate due to the poverty of the surrounding areas. The constant refrain regarding

⁶⁴ *Roscommon Journal, and Western Impartial Reporter*, 15 April 1843, p. 3.

⁶⁵ NLI, White papers, MS 8845_1b/3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, MS 8845_1b/3.

the presence of iron and coal in this remote part of Roscommon was that having such industry would aid the fortunes of the area. However, only Flattery and those around him profited from the works. White was determined to gain control of the mines and works for the Arigna Company, and thus allow the works to reach what he saw as their full potential. As far as he saw it, the only way to do this was 'to indict every man against whom he can get sufficient evidence to enable him to do so, and particularly Flattery himself', with the objective of making 'an example with a view to deter others from taking away more property'.⁶⁷ At the time, Thomas Flattery was working at the iron works with Murphy. Murphy said he had taken the objects (allegedly worth £100), but insisted that Thomas Flattery had told him to do so. For the defence, Murphy called on a number of characters, who, according to White's solicitor, were of questionable moral standing. One, Michael Sweeney, who had been working with Murphy as a watchman while Benson and Flattery were in gaol for conspiracy to murder White, had allegedly taken a pitch fork and a bedstead from the premises during his time there. Of another, William Smith, a publican in Keadue, was described in the brief prepared by White's solicitor as being 'the son of one James Smith of Attimanes Parish of Mohill, a notorious coiner. In fact this character of any man is not worth one farthing.'⁶⁸ All of this created more animosity between White and those at Arigna. Twenty-two days after the first assault, White was handed the opportunity to bankrupt Flattery through a further assault through the courts.

"The original lawless and dangerous character of this place was now evoked in right earnest. There was nothing henceforward but factions. Mr White in self-defence endeavouring to secure as many friends as possible but he had fearful odds against him. The clergyman of the parish and his curate, sympathised with by all the neighbouring clergymen, took the lead against him. His life was in truly imminent danger. In proof of which, on the 29th October, just 22 days after the assault before mentioned, a conspiracy was entered into to take his life. The conspirators were – Thomas Flattery (the person concerned in the assault) and his clerk James Benson. One Owen McGowan, the man they employed to shoot Mr White, fortunately turned approver after some time – the matter was taken up by the crown. At the trial the witnesses fully sustained their informations and tho'

⁶⁷ Ibid., MS 8845/1b/3

⁶⁸ Ibid., MS 8845/1b/3.

there was now a single break down (with the exception of a little boy who did not understand the nature of an oath) the jury after three hours deliberation thought fit to acquit the parties – but tho' they were acquitted the agitation and alarm consequent upon the whole affair, their imprisonment, the great number of witnesses they had to take to the county town, their expenses, the harassing before the magistrates both before and pending this prosecution actually made bankrupt the Flattery party one [sic] and for all. They had not a shilling left – and this was Mr White's original plan of closing up their sources of income and gradual exhaustion, pretty nearly accomplished.⁶⁹

With Flattery no longer in a position to work the mines, White was granted full possession of the houses and interests of Arigna. He was still involved in the area in 1847, as he sent a recipe for a soup to an associate entitled 'M. Soyer's soup receipts for the use of the Irish poor, copied with a view, should the opportunity offer, of their being used for the benefit of the poor labourers at and about the Arigna mines, county Roscommon'.⁷⁰ However, by 1851 the Arigna Company had come by the same fate as its predecessor, and proceedings began for it to be wound up, with the company £1,000 in debt.⁷¹ The amount of money that the mines required was never matched by the output during the nineteenth century. The twentieth century was to see a better fate for the mines, and this legacy continues up to today in the Arigna Mining Experience – a far cry from the violence and intrigue there in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

⁶⁹ Ibid., MS 8845_4.

⁷⁰ Ruth Cowen, *Relish: the extraordinary life of Alexis Soyer, Victorian celebrity chef*. UK, 2010.

⁷¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 15 December 1851, 4