

A HITHERTO-UNRECORDED LEAD MINE AT GARPLE BRIDGE,  
NEAR BALMACLELLAN, KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE

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We recently discovered an old map, dating from 1848-9, showing two levels and a shaft by the River Garple. A copy of this map, as nearly exact as we can make it, is shown in Fig. 5. The original is far too faded for reproduction. The locality concerned was identified from the reference to Carsphairn on Spalding's Lode, and from the name Holme Mill, as being between Balmaclellan and St. John's Town of Dalry in Kirkcudbrightshire. The O.S. grid reference of the road bridge over the Garple ("Garple Bridge") is NX 646 809. As far as we can discover, there has been no published reference to any mine at this place; we have searched the Old and New Statistical Accounts of Scotland,<sup>1,2</sup> and all references given by Donnachie,<sup>3</sup> to metal mining in Galloway, and also all the relevant O.S. and Geological Survey maps. Moreover, we could find no documents or plans in the Scottish Record Office relating to the estates concerned. The nearest relevant items are a mention in the Old Statistical Account that lead ore occurred near Kenmore in the parish of Kells (just south of New Galloway) and a statement by Wilson and Flett, that "a lead mine is said to have been worked at a point about two miles further to the north" of Kenmore. As Garple Bridge is about 3 miles N.N.E. of Kenmore, it is possible that the reference is to the Garple Bridge mine, in which case it may have been worked before about 1790, although Wilson and Flett's reference may have been to the operation indicated by our map. In any case, the statement in the Old Statistical Account gives some support for the existence of the lode shown as Spalding's Lode on our map.

The map, together with one or two related letters, was found in a vast uncatalogued

1. Sir John Sinclair (ed.), "The Statistical Account of Scotland", Edinburgh; Parish of Kells, vol. 4, 1792, p. 263; Parish of Balmaclellan, vol. 7, 1793, P. 223; Parish of Dalry, vol. 13, 1794, p. 45.
2. "The New Statistical Account of Scotland", vol. 4, Kirkcudbrightshire, c1843.
3. I. Donnachie, "Industrial Archaeology of Galloway", David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1971.
4. G. V. Wilson and J. S. Flett, "The Lead, Zinc, Copper and Nickel Ores of Scotland", Mem. Geol. Survey Scot., H.M.S.O., 1921, p. 56.

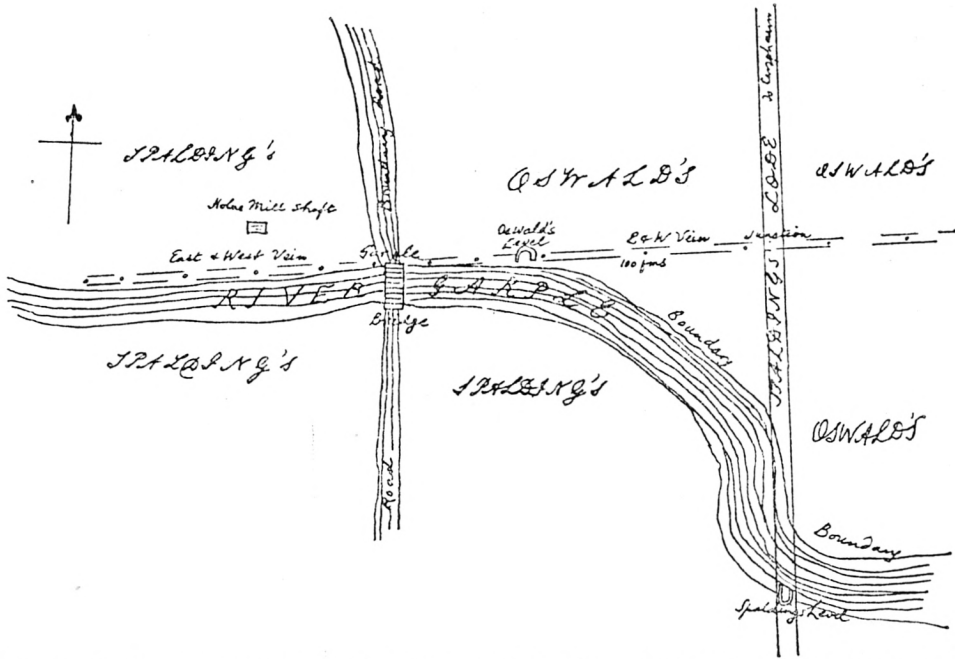


Fig. 5. Sketch map of Garple Bridge Mine made by Henry Francis (junior) in 1848-9. It is a rough map only, the river being in reality very much narrower than indicated. The scale can be judged from the distance of 100 fms (200 yards) shown between Oswald's Level and Spalding's Lode.

collection of papers, all relating to the business and family affairs of the Francis family, who operated as mining engineers and agents (and later as speculators) chiefly in Cornwall and Wales. They did have one or two excursions to Scotland, however.

On 27 May 1847, James Bullock of London wrote to Henry Francis (senior) to confirm arrangements for a visit they were to make together to Mr J. E. Spalding at the Holme (a house less than a mile from Garple Bridge) with the purpose of inspecting and reporting on the works of a small mining company which Bullock had formed. Apart from travel instructions, Bullock also appended an instruction as follows:—

“Our Capt. at the mine is H. T. Gripe the son of Capt. James Gripe who was in Spain.

We want an opinion on the part of the Company without affection to the Lessees or fear of the Landlord as to what has been done and ought to be done for the future if the property is worth exploring and working. There is a good deal of Iron ore on the Estate — but we want your opinion as to the other minerals — lead and copper — I have told my friends that Henry Francis, Mr Hawkins' agent and an experienced miner, will give them an honest and straightforward opinion. I want to do justice to my clients and to get the best for them.”

Apparently the inspection was satisfactory, for Bullock wrote again to Francis on 17 June 1847:—

5. The Druid Inn papers, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.
6. For some details of the Francis family see D. E. Bick, "The Metal Mines of Mid-Wales, Part 1", The Pound House, Newent, Glos., 1974, pp. 48-9. For greater detail of Henry Francis (senior) see D. G. and M. Tucker, "The story of Wheal Guskus in the parish of Saint Hilary", J. Trewithick Soc., vol. 1, 1975, pp. 49-62.

"I was very glad to meet you again and I hope our prosperity in the north will be such as to make another meeting at no distant day desirable and necessary . . . We are going to form our little lead mine company adjoining Mr Spalding's land — I shall put you down for  $2/64$  parts — H. Gripe takes  $2/64$  and I take  $6/64$ ."

It is doubtful if Henry Francis (senior) went to the site again, but his son Henry Francis (junior) spent much time during 1848-9 at Carwinning mines in Ayrshire, and at some time during this period sent his father the map we have already shown in Fig. 1. Although it is not signed and the accompanying letter cannot be found, there is no doubt that the writing on the map is Henry junior's, for we are familiar with it from other material. The map makes it clear that two landlords were involved; the shaft and one level were on Spalding's land, and one level was on Oswald's land. Presumably the introduction of Oswald into the concern came after operations had been begun.

We have no further documentation, and we can only guess that the mine quickly failed. There was never a report, as far as we can detect, in the *Mining Journal*.

We have visited the site to see what can be learned there. It is a beautiful place, with the little river running in a deep narrow valley, well-wooded on the northern bank to the east of the bridge. We found the entrance to Oswald's Level without difficulty, 100 yards east of the bridge. It is now blocked, but unmistakably a mine. However, there is no sign of spoil, and this confirms our guess that the mine did not work for long. We could not find Spalding's Level, but this, of course, does not mean that it did not exist at one time, or indeed, even now behind a fall of rock or under vegetation. On the north-west of the bridge, beyond where the little Trolane Burn flows into the Garple by a rocky waterfall, there is now a ploughed field. The 25-inch O.S. map of 1895, shows this as marshy where the mine shaft was supposed to be; but there is now no sign of marsh, and the only possible suggestion of where the shaft was is a squarish darker patch in the field.

We conclude that there was undoubtedly a mine here, that it was probably worked by Bullock's company for a very short while, but proved unsuccessful.

7. 25-inch O.S. map, Kirkcudbrightshire Sheet 18.11, resurveyed 1893, published 1895.