LOUGH NEAGH PARTNERSHIP

HERITAGE FUND

Comhairle Ceantair
Lár Uladh
Mid Ulster
District Council

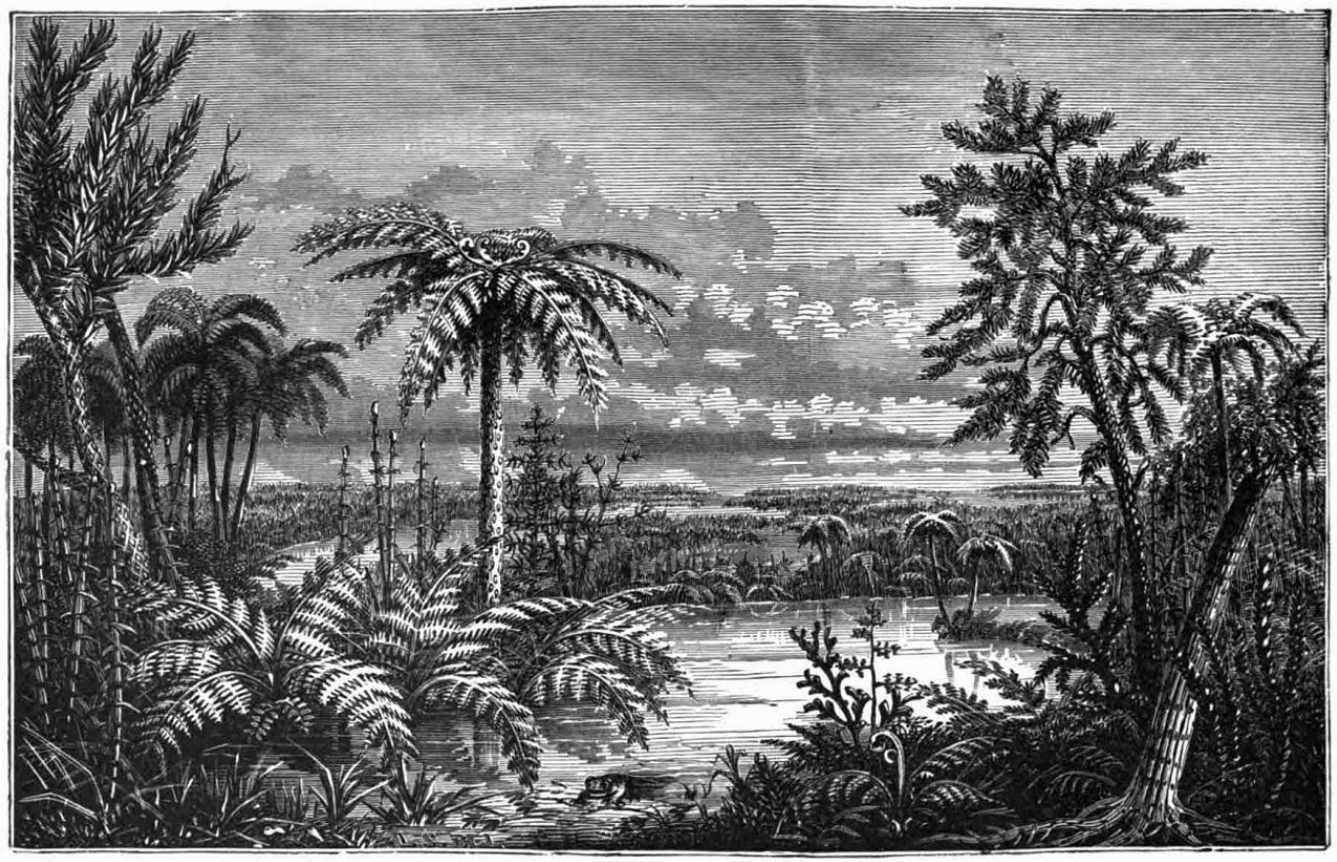
WHAT IS COAL?

During the Carboniferous Period, even before there were dinosaurs, East Tyrone had a tropical climate and this area was a huge swamp.

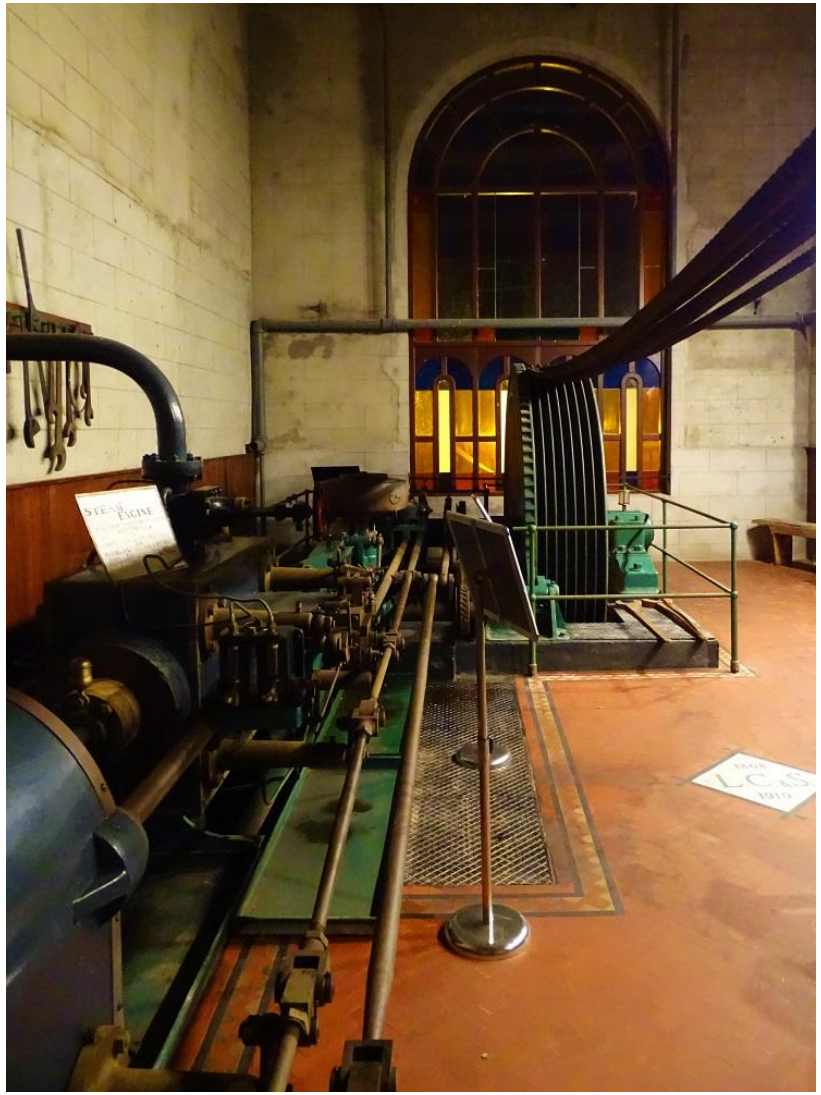
When the trees and plants died in the swamp, the warm and wet climate created special conditions which meant they decayed and rotted very slowly.

Over millions of years, the remains of the vegetation was compressed into layers of hard, black rock beneath the ground.

This is what we call COAL.



Did you know?
Coal is called a ‘fossil’ fuel because of how it was formed. Sometimes, the fossilised remains of plants can be found in coal.



(Above) A coal powered steam engine in the museum at the Old Coalisland Weaving Factory.

HOW DO WE USE COAL?

Coal is a fuel. It is burned to create heat and has been used for a variety of purposes throughout history.
Here are a few examples:

Keeping warm

The first large coal mines in Ireland were opened in the 17th century. After that, it was easier for people to buy coal to heat their homes.

Steam engines

Coal can be used to boil water and create steam. Engineers discovered that steam could power engines which could then be used in many different ways, for example:

- Locomotive trains
- Steam ships
- Machinery in factories and mills

Manufacturing

Some materials are manufactured at a very high temperature and required tonnes of coal to create an intense heat, for example:

- Glass
- Pottery
- Iron

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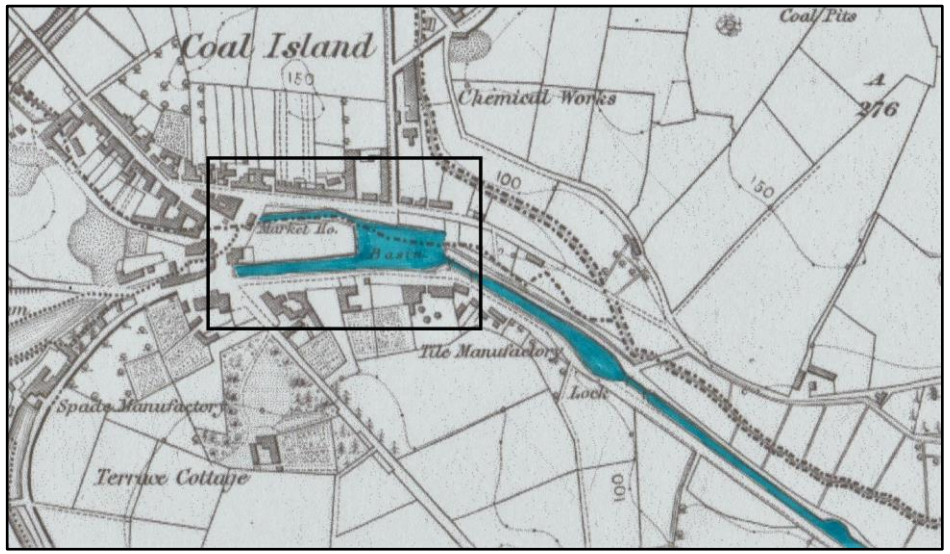
THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

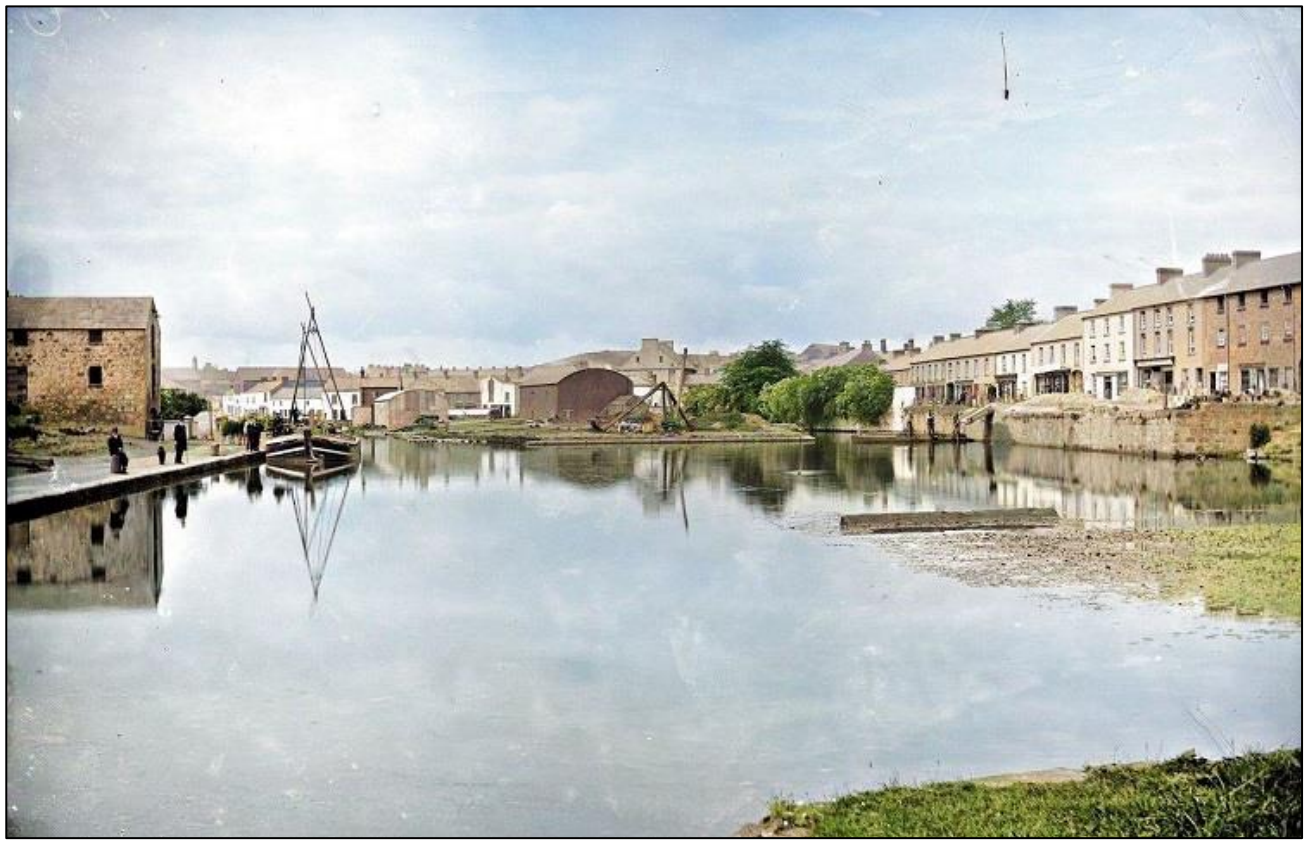
The invention of the steam engine in the 18th century triggered the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. This made coal a vital part of the Industrial Revolution because it was needed to power the steam engines.

In factories and mills, steam engines drove the machines that made cloth or metal work. By using steam engines, the factories could manufacture more goods and employ more people than ever before.

Steam engines also made it possible for coal mines to get bigger. The pits could reach deeper underground and the engines pumped water out of the mines to prevent them flooding. In addition, the engines operated winches which carried the miners up and down the deeper shafts.

Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

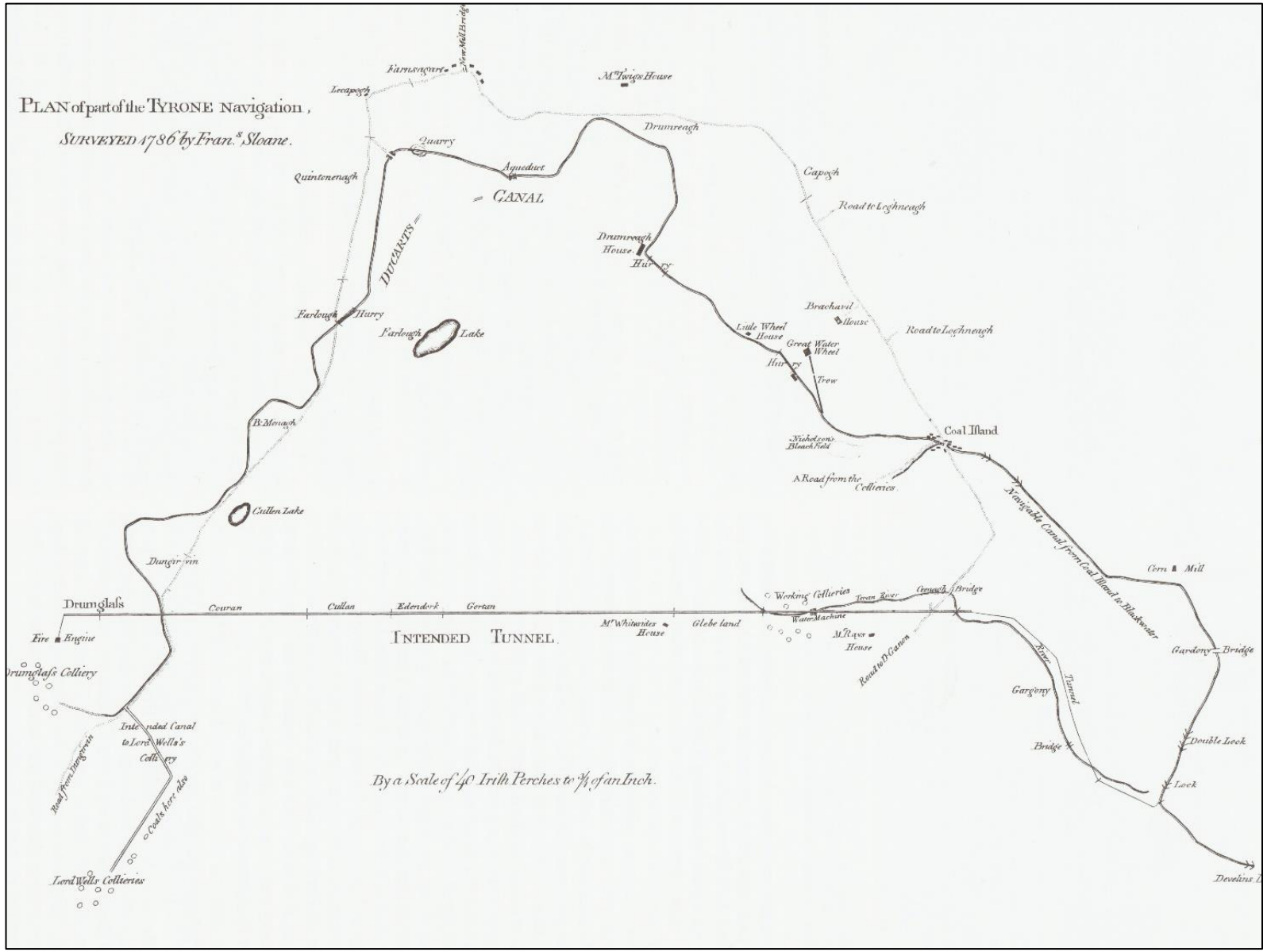




THE BASIN

A harbour was built in the centre of Coalisland. The lighters could dock there when they travelled to the end of the canal. They would load, or unload, cargo at the Lineside. In 1956, the Basin was emptied of water and was filled in. It is now a car park.

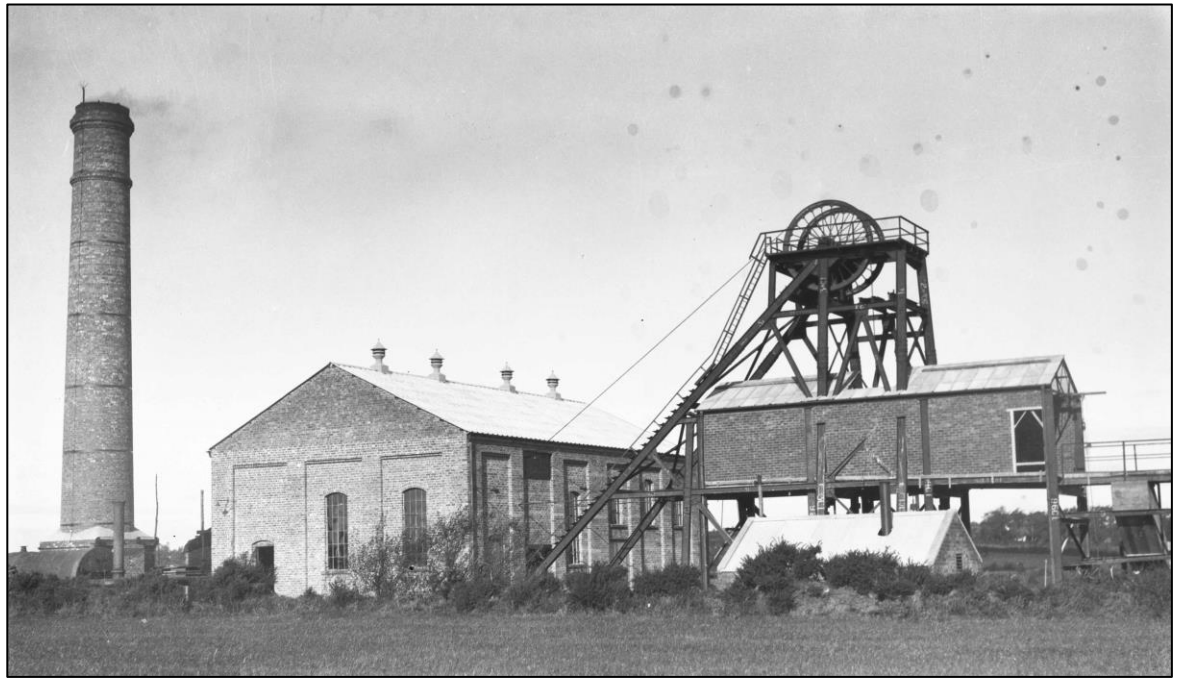
Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.



DUKART'S CANAL

The most challenging section of the Coalisland Canal was to connect the town to the coal fields at Drumglass. The construction was attempted by an Italian engineer called Davis Dukart.

Dukart's Canal included an aqueduct at Newmills (pictured above) which would carry the lighters over the River Torrent.



ANNAGHER COLLIERY

Sir Samuel Kelly opened a new coal mine at Annagher in 1924.

He promised 1,000 jobs, and 100 new homes were built at Gortgonis for the mine workers. The area was re-named Newtownkelly in his honour.

200 miners and their families arrived from Scotland and Cumberland to start digging coal from the mine.

Unfortunately, the mine was a massive failure and within three years it had closed.

The photographs show Annagher Colliery (top left) and the houses at Newtownkelly being built.

Courtesy of the Cumbria Archive Centre.

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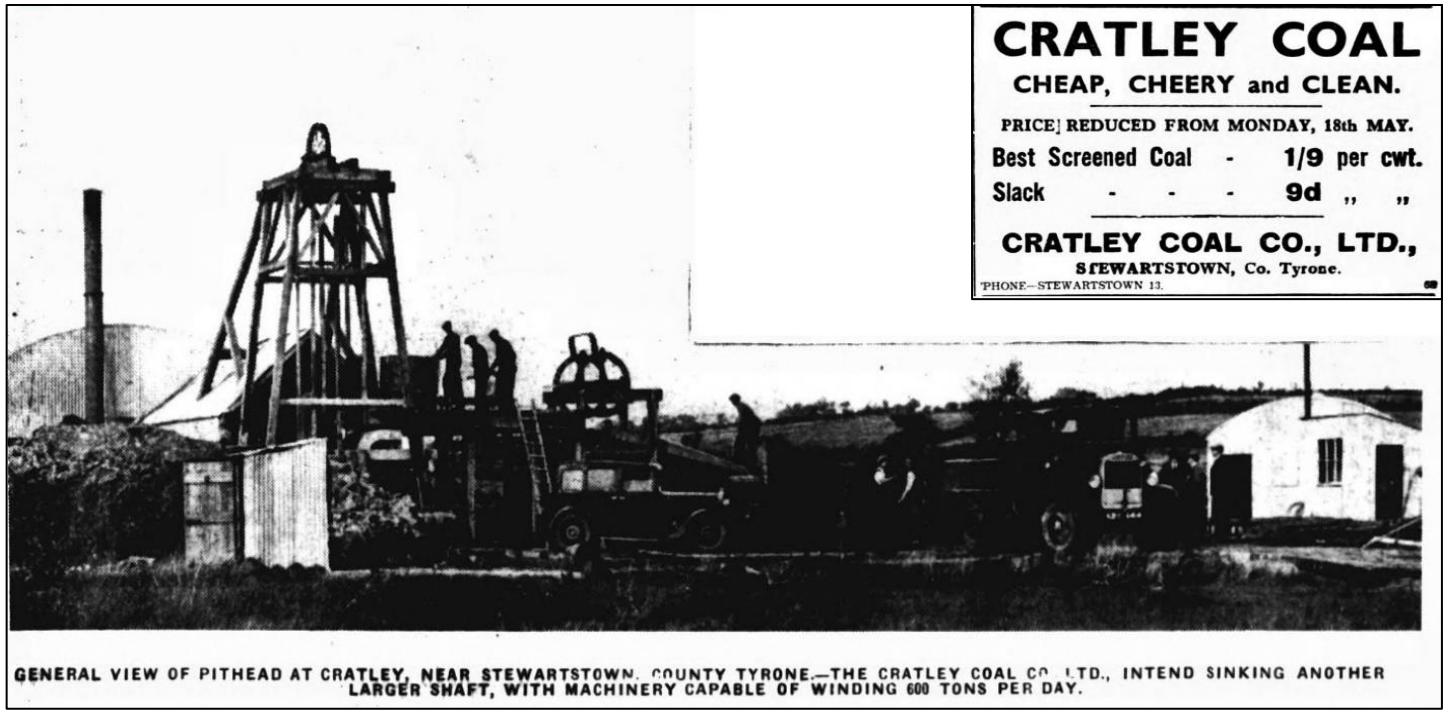
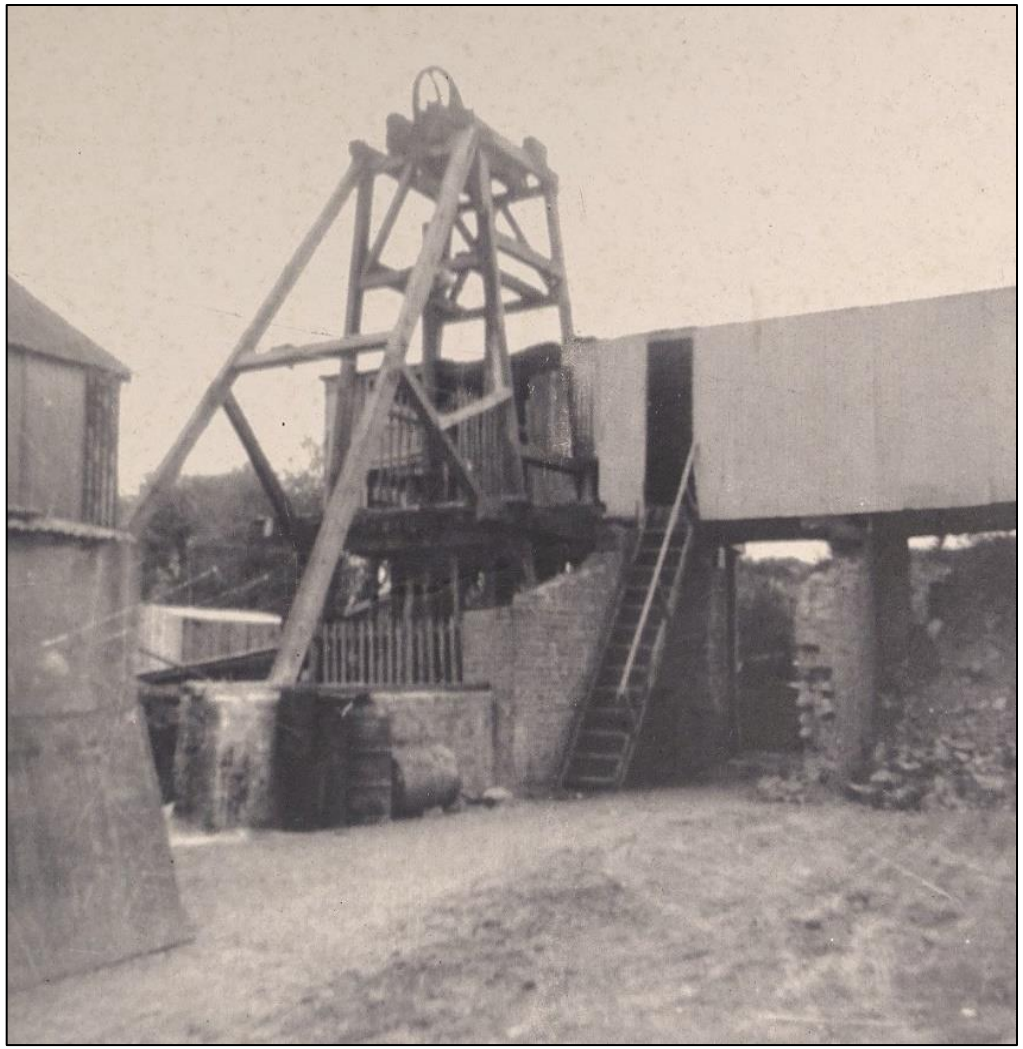


GENERAL VIEW OF PITHEAD AT CRATLEY, NEAR STEWARTSTOWN, COUNTY TYRONE.—THE CRATLEY COAL CO. LTD., INTEND SINKING ANOTHER LARGER SHAFT, WITH MACHINERY CAPABLE OF WINDING 600 TONS PER DAY.

CRATLEY COAL MINE

In 1934, a new mine opened in the townland of Lislea. It was run by the Cratley Coal Company. By July, 60 tonnes of coal was being brought to the surface, with ambitions to increase that to 600 tonnes a day.

At this time, Cratley pit was the only coal mine operating in Northern Ireland but by 1936, coal production had dropped to 25 tonnes a day. It closed in March 1937.



THE DERRY PIT

The last coal mine in Northern Ireland

In 1956, a seam of coal was discovered at a fireclay mine in Gortnaskea. The narrow bed of coal was identified by geologists as the “Derry seam” and this gave the new pit its name.

The Derry Pit regularly produced 80-90 tonnes of coal a week, with up to 40 men working underground at one time.

By 1970, factories were using oil, rather than coal, and the Derry Pit was forced out of business, although the fireclay mining continued for several years.

Photograph courtesy of James Donaghy, Coalisland.