A Galloway Ghost Town: the social dimension of a 19th Century lead-mining community in south-west Scotland

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Abstract
The site of Woodhead lead-mines near Carsphairn, Galloway, south-west Scotland was operational from 1838 till 1873 under the personal control of a reputedly philanthropic landowner. The site developed into a total production unit, one of only two in Scotland, carrying out all the processes from mining the ore to the exporting of high quality lead and some silver. By 1851 over 300 people lived in this ‘isolated’ (by the standards of contemporary commentators) mountainside village situated at a height of 1000 feet in the Galloway uplands, in company-built accommodation with a school, a library and a church already established. By 1873 it had ended.

That the community suffered from isolation - physical, conceptual or cultural - can be called into question, as can the philanthropic motives of the landowner.

An analysis of the decayed and decaying archaeology of the site – in terms of the aspects of economic background, management and organisation, housing conditions, social relations, working conditions, health and safety issues, education, leisure and religious observance – leads to a consideration of the levels of isolation experienced by the community and of the owner’s philanthropic views and actions.

There is a pressing need for this unique site to benefit from further archaeological investigation so that both the technological and community aspects can be further understood. And while there has been research into the economic and social aspects of the site, this area is by no means exhausted.