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Dromineer: the port of North-West Tipperary

by Daniel Grace

The introduction of steam navigation to the Shannon in 1827 opened a new era of trade between North-West Tipperary and the coastal ports of Limerick and, more especially, Dublin.¹ A variety of goods (often newly arrived by steamship from Liverpool) could now be loaded on barges at Dublin, carried *via* the Grand Canal to Shannon Harbour, and transferred to more powerful lake steamers for transportation down the Shannon to the quay at Dromineer.

From Dromineer the goods were carted by horse and dray to Nenagh and other local destinations. But it was a two-way traffic, and much of the agricultural produce of the Nenagh hinterland found its way to Dromineer for export *via* lake, river and canal (and later by rail from Athlone) to markets in Limerick, Dublin, or often further afield in Liverpool, Bradford or Glasgow.

Dromineer in the nineteenth century - especially before the coming of the railway to Nenagh in 1862 - was in a real sense the port of North-West Tipperary. The County Surveyor, appealing for funds in 1838 to repair the quay at Dromineer, reminded the Grand Jury that "at this quay is landed from on board vessels plying to it and from it, to Dublin and to Limerick, the greater part of the goods and merchandise consumed in the northern part of this county; and it is also the place out of which is shipped the agricultural and other produce of the same district, for exportation".²

There is still physical evidence at Dromineer of those days when the steamers used call. The *Sail Inn Hotel* was originally the residence of the Shannon Navigation Company's Dromineer agent. A manuscript map of 1831 shows this dwelling, and at the rear, an enclosed yard with two stores.³ One of the stores, running parallel to the shore-line, is still standing; the other is long demolished.

The original quay lay between the ruins of Dromineer castle and the present Yacht Club premises, and came right up to the storage facilities. The map of 1831, incidentally, refers to this quay as the "New Quay". The Dock and Goods Shed, a short distance away, known as "The Black Jetty", were erected in the early 1850s, when traffic on the Shannon was at its height.⁴

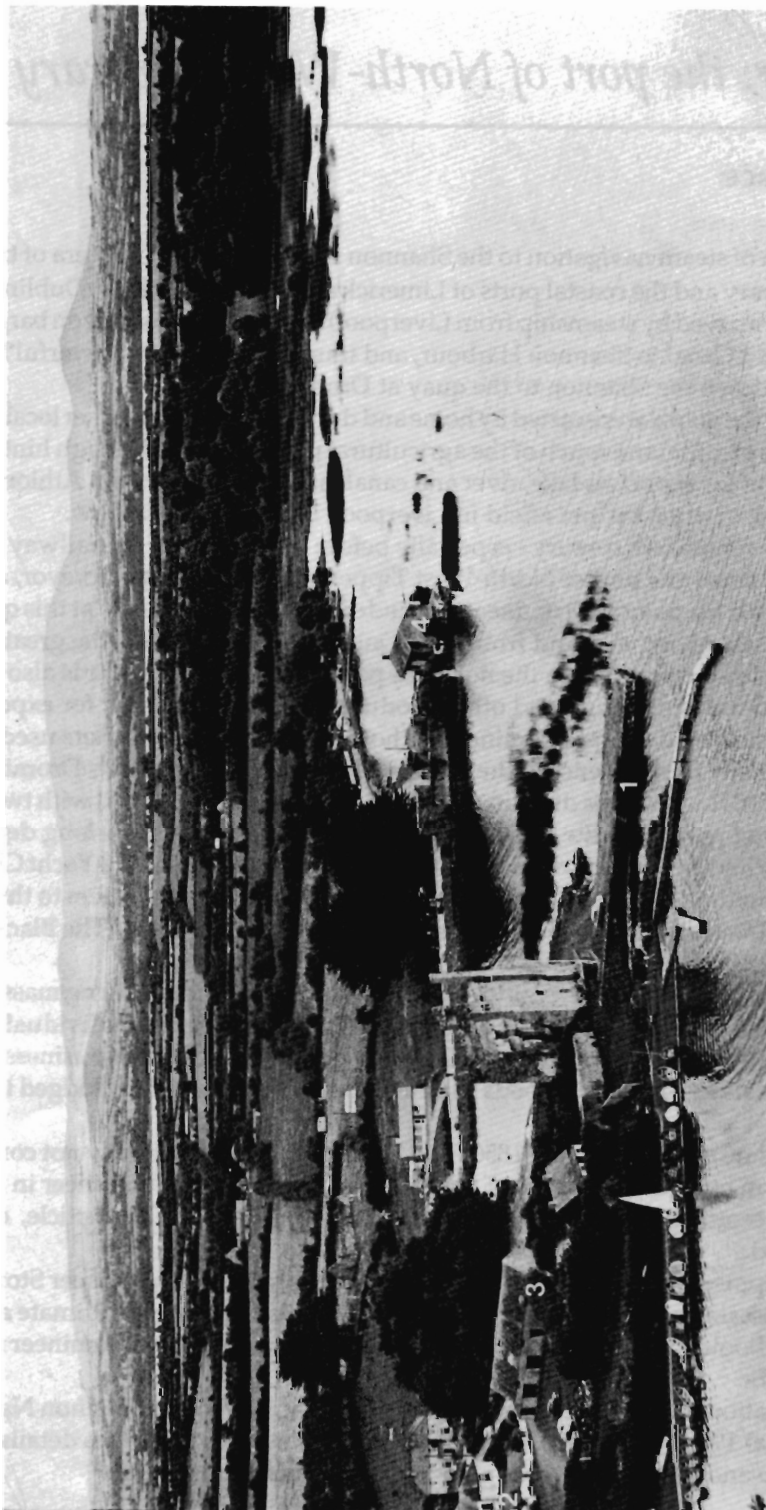
A much more tangible link with Dromineer's commercial past is the surviving mass of documentation belonging to the Navigation Company's local agents. Over 500 individual items - boat manifests, delivery docketts, orders, traders' bill-heads and an abundance of business letters - were discovered some years ago in the old goods shed at Dromineer, and are now lodged in the Nenagh Heritage Centre.

The documents date mainly from the 1850s and 1890s and, although clearly not comprehensive, nevertheless offer an intriguing glimpse of the commercial activity at Dromineer in the latter half of the nineteenth century. This valuable collection is the source for this article, except where otherwise indicated.

An important supplementary source is the Navigation Company's Dromineer Store Book 1921-25, now in the possession of Mr. Mark Grace of Carrig, grandson of the penultimate agent, George Burgess. The Store Book records the type and volume of goods arriving at Dromineer in the waning years of water traffic.

Valuable information has also been gleaned from the Board of Works Shannon Navigation Toll Register (Portumna) 1913-16, also in Nenagh Heritage Centre. This preserves details of crafts and cargoes passing up and down river through Portumna, during those years.





Aerial View of Dromineer:

1. The original quay, known in 1831 as 'The New Quay'.
2. The Canal Agent's residence, now the 'Sail Inn' Hotel.
3. Original Canal Company Store.
4. Storage facilities and Dock ('The Black Jetty') erected in 1850s.

(PHOTO: KEVIN O'C. BERNAL, 'THE NENAGH GUARDIAN')

Canal Company Agents

The extensive network of lake, river and canal gave Dromineer a direct link to more than 20 important Irish towns: down river to Killaloe and Limerick, across Lough Derg to Williamstown in Clare, upstream to Portumna, Banagher, Ballinasloe and Athlone, and along the Grand Canal *via* Shannon Harbour to Tullamore, Edenderry, Naas and the terminus at Dublin.

There was even a link to Bagnalstown and Carlow through the Grand Canal and River Barrow system. Each stop or "station" *en route* to Dublin (there were 34 in all) had its berthing facilities, stores and offices, managed by a Canal Company Agent.

Michael Shaw appears to have been the first Canal Company Agent at Dromineer. Little is known of him, except that he died in 1847 at the young age of 30 years. His widow Margaret continued to hold the agency up to 1854, when she was succeeded by John Lawlor (1820-70).

Francis A. Waller, Prior Park, Borrisokane, was agent at both Banagher and Dromineer during the 1880s. John F. Tumpane, the Nenagh merchant and William T. Webb, Ballycraggan, Puckaun, both held the position for brief periods during the 1890s. Towards the end of that decade George Burgess, Finnoe, Borrisokane, purchased the *Lough Derg Hotel* (the present *Sail Inn*) and also became the Canal Company representative. Burgess sold his interest in 1937; the purchaser, Jack Flynn, acted as Agent until the Canal Company amalgamated with C.I.E. in 1950.

The 1850s were certainly the most lucrative period to hold the agency; after that decade traffic through Dromineer began to wane. John Lawlor had a salary of £26, but the commission paid to him by the Company far exceeded that: it amounted to over £102 in 1854. Lawlor also carried on an extensive private trade in corn, coal and herrings. Each year he imported numerous barrels of herring (13.5 tons in 1854, 12.5 tons in 1856) from Gunn & Co., 51 Poolbeg St. Dublin, and sold them at profit to local shopkeepers.

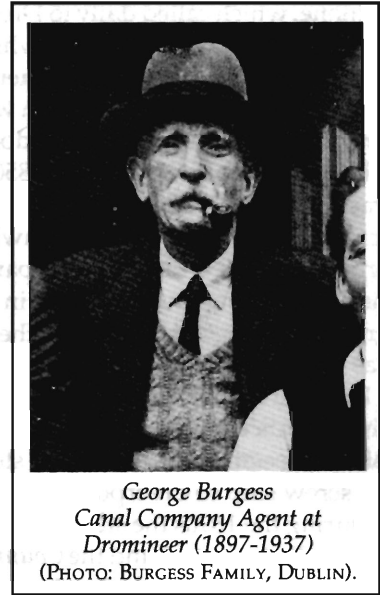
Lawlor was a prosperous man. Perhaps he was financially shaken by the crash of John Sadlier's Tipperary Bank in 1856, despite the reassurances of his friend, Edward Murphy of Mountmellick: "From every information I can learn, you will not be so badly off as you think in the Tipperary Bank".

Boats and Steamers

The first successful steamer on the Shannon seems to have been the *Lady Landsdowne*, a 90 h.p. craft built by William Laird of Birkenhead in 1831.⁵ In 1834 it was said that nothing smaller could successfully navigate the waters because "Lough Derg is exposed to heavy gales, almost hurricanes, and requires a powerful steamer".⁶ Most of the early steamers on Lough Derg were towing crafts, which pulled three or four laden trade boats behind them.

This system allowed the carriage of greater tonnage and expedited the passage time. For instance, a steamer towing a boat-load of coal down to Dromineer (usually 40 tons) simply pulled into the quay, berthed the coal-boat and steamed on to Killaloe with the rest of the cargo. The emptied coal-boat was picked up on the return journey up the Shannon.

The *Artizan* and *Duchess Argyle* were two passenger steamers operating between Killaloe and



Athlone, which called daily to Dromineer during the 1850s and 1860s. Passengers for Dublin could take O'Meara's "covered car", which left Nenagh each morning at 9.45 a.m., to meet the steamer at Dromineer. The steamer (weather permitting) reached Athlone in time to catch the Dublin train. The fare from Nenagh to Dublin was 7/6 (37.5 p) Third Class, 11/6 (57.5 p) second class; first class fare is not quoted in surviving documents.

Passenger traffic during the 1850s seems to have been very much one way - outwards - since this was the great decade of emigration. No fewer than 83,594 persons left Co. Tipperary for a new life abroad during 1851-61.⁷ John Lawlor advertised the services and fares of the *Artizan* and *Duchess Argyle* in the local newspapers, particularly the *Tipperary Advocate*. He explained to William Healy, the Canal Company Manager in Dublin: "The *Tipperary Advocate* is published in Nenagh and circulates extensively amongst the small farmers, whose families mostly emigrate and are the chief class of passengers we get".

Healy in turn advised him: "Be careful that the passengers come on the days that the Dublin and Liverpool Screw Company's steamers sail." The well-worn emigrant path from this district during the 1850s seems to have been the steamer from Dromineer to Athlone, the train from there to Dublin, the screw ship to Liverpool, then off on the long and hazardous voyage to the New World.

During the 1890s the steamers *Owl*, *Bee*, *Emu*, *Fly*, *Dublin*, *Limerick*, *Athlone*, *Portumna*, *Killaloe*, *St. Patrick*, *Ballymurtagh* and the *Countess Cadogan*, called frequently to Dromineer. The 'Owl', 'Bee', and 'Fly' were tug steamers, but later they had their engines removed and were converted into trade-boats. *Dublin*, *Limerick* and *Athlone*, built by Grendons of Drogheda in 1862/3, were sold off between 1910 and 1917.

The *Killaloe* was built in 1897 by D.M. Cumming of Glasgow for £1,034 and the *Portumna* three years later at Queenstown (Cobh). The *Portumna* and *Ballymurtagh*, which had been purchased by the Canal Company in 1868 for £680 from the Wicklow Mining Company, were both sold off in 1936.⁸

There were over 60 boats plying on Lough Derg during the years 1913-16, about 50 of them owned by the Grand Canal Company.⁹ Most of these were in the M series (e.g. 6M and 23M), former horse-drawn barges now fitted with engines. These carried general merchandise, but especially ale and porter, from Dublin to Limerick and the intermediary stations on Lough Derg, including Dromineer.

During the summer months the Shannon Development Company ran a daily passenger service between Killaloe and Banagher. The steamer left Killaloe early each morning, called to the various stations on its upward journey, and passed through Portumna at approximately 10.45 a.m. It returned through Portumna at approximately 2.45 p.m. that same afternoon.

But the service was hardly profitable, if we judge by the number of passengers boarding and disembarking at Portumna. During the month of July 1914 the steamer made 26 trips up the Shannon; yet only a total of 21 passengers alighted and 34 boarded at Portumna.

Then there were the turf boats ferrying fuel from the Midland bogs for sale at Kilgarvan, Dromineer, Garrykennedy and other quays further down the Shannon. Many an older inhabitant of the district still recalls going to Dromineer with horses to cart home turf from the boats.

In 1915 a total of 48 boat-loads of turf, weighing 1,463 tons, passed through Portumna for various destinations down-river. Four boats - owned by Martin and James McGrath, James Dunne and Tim Lynch, all of Garrykennedy - carried the entire tonnage. Usually they went up-river empty; but sometimes they carried a consignment of slates from the quarries to Portumna or other destinations on the Upper Shannon.

Dromineer to Nenagh

A perplexing problem during the nineteenth century was the carriage of the large tonnage of goods and merchandise from Dromineer to the town of Nenagh, some six miles distant. A number



of solutions were suggested, notably the construction of a canal between the two places.

John Grantham surveyed the ground in 1831 and proposed a canal along the course of the Nenagh River. Since Nenagh was 70 feet higher than Lough Derg, he calculated that the canal would require an entrance lock of 14 feet at Dromineer, together with seven other locks of 7 feet each along its 6.5 mile course.

He further proposed that the locks be the same width as those on the Grand Canal to allow the canal barges come directly to Nenagh. Grantham estimated that the total cost of the scheme would be slightly over £18,000.¹⁰

In 1838 a committee was formed to advance the idea of linking Nenagh with Lough Derg. All its members concurred that the project would be most advantageous: but there was disagreement on the actual details. Many favoured the shorter four-mile route to Youghal Bay, despite Grantham's warning that the terrain was hillier and that it would then be necessary to bring the canal water from the Silvermines river, some six miles away.

Some questioned the accuracy of the estimated cost. The *Nenagh Guardian* put it at £36,000, while William Hughes C.E. put it as high as £58,927. Hughes admitted that his estimate was "a hasty opinion", and it was dismissed by the secretary of the committee, O'Brien Dillon, as "a mere bird's eye view without a knowledge of the country".

Dillon accepted Grantham's estimate, but favoured the route to Youghal Bay. He was quite sanguine that the tolls would be in excess of £1,500 annually, and that the canal would soon pay for itself and return a dividend to the investors. He estimated that imports each year would amount to 25,000 tons and exports to 14,500 tons, plus 20,000 pigs, 5,000 sheep and 1,000 cattle.¹¹

Dillon's figures, however, appear to have been unduly optimistic. In 1859, for instance, total traffic through Dromineer was 1,020 tons of imports and 1,665 tons of exports.¹² The proposed canal never advanced beyond the initial stage; a number of attempts later to revitalise the idea all failed.

It was also proposed in 1838 to build a tramway from Nenagh to Dromineer. It was agreed that it would be much cheaper than a canal, but would add greatly to the handling costs of goods because they would have to be unloaded and loaded from boat to train. So the scheme was rejected.

The idea of a light railway was resurrected in 1897, at a time when the Shannon was being opened up to tourism.¹³ In that year the Shannon Development Company put three steamers on the lake, the *Fairy Queen*, *Countess of Mayo* and *Countess Cadogan*. These steamers continued to ply up to the end of World War I, but were not, as I have suggested already, economically viable. The light railway never materialised, and horse-drawn transport remained the only means of ferrying goods (and people) from Dromineer, until the advent of motorised transport in this century.

Most Nenagh shopkeepers received their merchandise from Dublin by steamer during the 1850s. The goods arriving at Dromineer ranged from candles, cement and cord to soap, scythes and sugar with every conceivable retail item - including plenty of porter - in between.

The merchandise was unloaded into the stores and later carted by draymen to the various shops in the town. Since most goods arrived in returnable barrels, bottles, casks and kegs, the carters always had a full load of empties on their downward journey to the Shannon.

The two leading merchants in Nenagh in the 1850s were Jas. B. Roche & Co. "Tea, Coffee and Spice Dealers, Wine, Spirit and Seed Merchants",¹⁴ 18 Castle Street and a few doors down at No. 11, J.B. Corneille, where the customer could purchase, "French Brandy, Rum, Holland Gin, Guinness XX Porter, Drogheda and Bass Pale Bitter Ale, Castlebellingham Ales, Devonshire Cider, Wax, Sperm and Dipt Candles, Pickles, Sauces, Fruits, Cheese etc.

Sandwiched between them at No. 15 was Martin Hayden, "Wholesale Grocer", while down the street at No. 60, was another important grocer, Michael Dwyer. Bridget Corbett at 82 Castle Street and Murray Bros. at No. 4 were important importers of hats and other items of drapery. John



Cunneen, 58 Castle Street, was Nenagh's leading hardware merchant, and numerous items ranging from brooms to scythes, building materials to shot, arrived for him by steamer at Dromineer.

By the 1890s some new names had appeared on Nenagh's shopfronts: Michael McMahon, "Family Grocer", had an extensive trade at 28 Queen Street; M.J. Moloney 'Ironmonger and Seed Merchant' was at 66/67 Castle Street; while Richard Lewis 'Wholesale and Family Grocer' traded at 19 Castle Street. Hodgins & Co. 53 Castle Street, Mortshed Bros. at No. 59 and P.Rohan at No. 61 were other important retailers in the town.

All of these traders received part of their merchandise by Dromineer steamer, although an ever-increasing portion of it was arriving now by rail. A *Nenagh Guardian* correspondent (14 December 1908) noted that "the traffic on the lake is not very busy; the transit, of course, is rather slow, and wherever possible, the traders in the surrounding districts procure their goods, I understand, by rail".

Coal and Guano

Coal and guano were the bulkiest items arriving at Dromineer during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Both products came almost exclusively from the port of Liverpool. Upwards of 1,000 tons of coal arrived at Dromineer each year during the 1850s; John Lawlor imported most of it and retailed it at profit to various local outlets. During July/August 1855 he received seven boat-loads weighing a total of 269 tons, and during the months of August/September 1856, 235 tons.

While most of the coal came between July and September (for winter fuel), smaller quantities arrived at other times: between January and May 1856 Lawlor received 143 tons. A large tonnage of coal (independent of Lawlor) arrived each year for the Nenagh Gas Works, and a lesser quantity for the Military Barracks at Summerhill.

John Lawlor had contracts to supply the Workhouse at Nenagh, the various dispensaries in the Union and Nenagh Gaol. He also sold to various Nenagh shopkeepers. The majority of the 'big houses' in the district purchased directly from him, and there were frequent orders from such establishments as Minnitt of Annabeg, Bayly of Debsborough, Dunally of Kilboy and Otway-Cave of Castle Otway.

Best coal retailed at 26/- (£1.30) to 28/- (1.40) per ton at Dromineer during the 1850s. Thomas Green (Mr. Bayly's 'man') inquired the price of '10 to 12 tons of good coal' for the Debsborough household on 31 March 1855, and was quoted 28/- per ton at Dromineer. On 31 July of that year Lawlor quoted a Dromineer price of 26/- per ton and 31/- per ton delivered to Castle Otway, Templeberry, a distance of some 15 miles.

A large tonnage of coal was still arriving at Dromineer during the 1880s; the price had now fallen. W.T. Webb, the then agent, was selling good coal at 22/6 (1.12¹/₂) per ton in 1887 - a decrease of almost 20% on the highest 1855 price. At that price - as he pointed out in a memorandum to Martin Kennedy, the clerk at Dromineer - he was making a profit of 4/- (20p) per ton.

A freight rates war broke out between the Canal Company and the G.S. and W. Railway during the 1890s, and an attack was made on the Railway's monopoly on places not directly on the canal system. An attempt was made by the Canal Company to capture the coal trade in Nenagh by providing road transport from Dromineer to the town.¹⁵ But the venture proved uneconomical, and in 1900 the carriage of coal to Nenagh by water ceased and Dromineer lost one of its bulkiest imports.

One of the most significant changes in post-Famine Irish agriculture was the widespread use of imported guano as fertiliser. Guano (mainly from Bolivia and Peru) was little used before the Famine, except by extensive demesne farmers. Joshua Minnitt of Annaghbeg House, Dromineer,



for instance, purchased guano in 1844 at £7.35 per ton and paid 8/4^d (42p) per ton carriage on it from Dublin to Dromineer.¹⁶

Ordinary farmers, however, seem to have settled for bog mould, farmyard manure, and lime burnt in local kilns. Some resorted to the old practice of paring and burning, although this was strongly disapproved of by improving landlords. It was a dispute over this practice that led to the murder of the Borrisokane landlord, Robert Hall, in 1841.¹⁷

Several witnesses from this district gave evidence to the Devon Commission in 1844 on the types of manure used in the locality. John Meagher of Monsea, near Nenagh - a farmer of 40 acres - gave the fullest reply: "What manure we make from the cattle in the yard, and we draw turf mould and mix it in the yard and draw in some earth and let the cattle trample upon it; and what we can collect from the ditches". Two other witnesses - John Kennedy P.L.G., Nenagh and Rev. William Minchin, Moneygall - deplored the lack of proper manures.¹⁸

By 1855, a mere six years after the Famine, guano was widely used in local farming. J.B. Corneille, Jas. B. Roche (both of Nenagh) and William R. Hodgins (Cloughjordan) were the chief local importers. In the Spring of 1856 six boatloads of guano arrived at Dromineer from Dublin for Roche: 16 March, 470 bags; 9 April, 490 bags; 22 May, 320 bags; 24 May, 310 bags; 18 June, 301 bags and 169 bags - a total of 2,060 bags, or approximately 145 tons.

Competition between the various traders was keen, and each extensively advertised his "Peruvian, Bolivian and Patagonian guano" in the columns of the two local newspapers. At the turn of the century Corneille and Co. were importing manure *via* Dromineer, now mainly from Lawes Chemical Manure Co. Ltd., 22 Eden Quay Dublin.

John F. Tumpane, and J. Harty, 68 Castle Street, Nenagh, also used the Dromineer steamers to ferry their manures from Dublin. During the late 1890s newly-formed co-operative societies like that at Ballywilliam were importing their own manures *via* Dromineer and challenging the monopoly of the established merchants.

Manure continued to arrive at Dromineer during the 1920s, albeit in decreasing tonnage. During that decade local farmers arrived at the Stores each Spring to cart home Kanit, Semsol, Super XXX and Potash. In the Spring of 1925 a total of 1,261 bags were drawn from the Canal Company store. Much of this had come from Paul and Vincent of Dublin for an extensive dealer in the commodity, James Kennedy of Puckaun.¹⁹ But the tonnage drawn from Dromineer during the 1920s represented only a fraction of that used in the Nenagh district. Most of the manure now came directly to Nenagh by rail.

Flour and Grain

North-West Tipperary, especially the barony of Lower Ormond, was an important corn-growing district in the nineteenth century. Some of the grain was ground into flour and meal in the 32 mills which operated in the Ormonds in the year 1850.²⁰ Twenty-one of the mills ground meal, while the remainder produced flour of varying quality. Most of the mills were small and served only a local district, but a number were extensive manufactories, producing large quantities of flour and meal for export.

The four largest were the flour mills at Tyone and Islandbawn (both owned by Malachi Ryan), Clarianna (James McDonnell) and Ballyartella (Philip Lyster). The figures below show the tonnage of flour exported by Tyone Mills through Dromineer during the 1850s, to two Dublin merchants, McMullen, Shaw and Co., and James C. Conville:



Year	Sacks	Tons
1853	3,448	397
1854	3,130	360
1855	2,424	280
1856	2,520	290
1857	2,210	255

Ballyartella and Clarianna Mills shipped large quantities of flour through Dromineer to John Robinson, 20 Gt. Strand St., Dublin, during that decade. Lyster's flour - mainly milled from imported American wheat - was graded Prime First Class, while that of McDonnell and Ryan was largely Prime Second Class. James Montgomery of Victoria Mills, Moneygall, produced prime oatmeal, some of which he sent to Edward Lalor and Sons and James Pim and Co., both of Dublin, and more by steam-ship from Dublin to Daniel Powell and Edward Browne, both of Liverpool.

By the 1890s local flour milling had ceased, and flour was now being imported through Dromineer from Limerick and Dublin. Mrs. Bridget Slattery, the Puckaun grocer, wrote to George Burgess a number of times during 1898 inquiring about consignments of flour from Liverpool which had gone astray.

The Store Book for the 1920s clearly confirms the turnabout that had come in the flour and meal trade. In 1922 a total of 1,827 large and 2,318 half sacks of flour arrived at Dromineer for various local traders. 'Sunshine' was the most popular brand, while others boasted such names as 'Prolific', 'Portia', 'Eclipse', 'Snow White' and 'Brown's Best'. M. Fleming, J.M. Ryan, Mrs. Acres, Ml. MacMahon and Alphonsus Clerihan were the Nenagh retailers with the largest trade in flour. During 1922 there also arrived at Dromineer 506 bags of bran, 1,085 sacks of meal (each 20 stone) and 2,088 sacks of pollard.

The greater portion of the grain was not milled locally, but purchased on commission by local buyers for Dublin and Limerick grain merchants and then sent there by steamer from Dromineer. In the year 1856 James McDonnell forwarded to Jas. Tyrell of Dublin 3,098 barrels of wheat, 1,134 of oats and 116 of barley, totalling approximately 500 tons. But McDonnell was only one of a number of local buyers during the 1850s, and by no means the largest.

Samuel Brindley of Happy Grove Mills, Dolla, also purchased wheat, oats and barley for Tyrell and for C. Egan & Co., 27 Bachelor's Walk, Dublin. R. Barry and E. Moore bought extensively for J.N. Russell & Sons of Limerick, while Patrick Fitzpatrick was buyer for Laurence McCourt of 60 Bolton Street, Dublin.

The most extensive local buyer appears to have been John Ryan (1808-95) of Nenagh, who shipped a vast tonnage of red and white wheat, and black and white oats each year to Messrs. Brangan and Bryson, 68 Queen Street, Dublin. John Lawlor, the Dromineer Agent, also purchased wheat on commission for Edward Murphy of Mountmellick, which was sent there by steamer.

A letter from Murphy to Lawlor, dated 7 January 1856, inquired "at what price you could get 100 or 200 barrels of good red wheat at, or if you would purchase such on commission?" A further letter of 10 January agreed that "Your terms are fair enough", and advised "any good wheat you get at 41/6 take it, 42/- would be high on us". He also reminded Lawlor that "20 st. 4lbs. is our barrel, with weight of the sack".

By the 1890s barley, not wheat, was the chief grain grown in this district. Three important Nenagh buyers were R.J. Waller, (The Maltings) John F. Tumpane, and F.G. Morteshed "Auctioneer, Valuer and Commission Agent". One delivery docket of 1898 shows Tumpane sending 600 barrels of



barley from Dromineer to Belfast via Dublin.

But most of the barley was forwarded to Jas. Plunkett and Co., 15 Portland St. West, John Ryan, Pimlico Maltings, Watkins & Co. Ardee Street Brewery (all of Dublin) and the Distillery at Banagher. Another important buyer was John Burgess of Finnoe, brother to George Burgess the Agent, who purchased extensively amongst the local farmers for Arthur Guinness, Son & Co. The freight per ton from Dromineer to Banagher was 4/- (20p) and 9/- (45p) per ton from Dromineer to Dublin.

Dromineer, however, was now being superseded by Kilgarvan Quay, further up the Shannon, as the chief point of dispatch for grain. Most of the barley was grown in the Borrisokane/Terryglass district and Kilgarvan was closer than Dromineer.

Grain shipped from two Quays 1913-15 (in tons) ²¹			
Quay	1913	1914	1915
Dromineer	343	534	320
Kilgarvan	861	887	1110

Livestock and Wool

“Edward Jones begs to inform you that he will have half a score of cattle at Dromineer on Monday morning”. (20 May, 1853)

“I am sending forty sheep to Dublin and want to know can I ship them at Dromineer? If so please have a boat ready. The sheep will want to be in Dublin for the market of tomorrow week. Let me know when I will be obliged to have them at Dromineer and also the rate per head”. (Ned Fawcett, Ballycolliton, 7 March 1855).

“A gentleman of the name of O’Callaghan will have a lot of cattle, cows, horses etc. to take across to Williamstown from your station on Wednesday next. He is a very respectable person and a customer of this Company and we would be desirous of obliging him in every way possible” (Samuel Healy, Manager of Grand Canal Co. 3 August 1855).

“I wish to send 6 or 8 rams to Banagher on Monday next 14th by boat and will thank you to let me know what time the boat starts from Dromineer and the hour it will probably arrive at Banagher” (Captain William Carroll, Tulla House, 8 September 1857).

These extracts from letters addressed to the Dromineer Agent give some indication of the traffic of livestock on the Shannon during the 1850s. Yet, despite an increase in the number of cattle from 129,231 to 197,216 and sheep from 96,136 to 251,202 in Co. Tipperary between 1849 and 1901,²² it was the faster and more efficient railway system which captured the bulk of the livestock-carrying trade.

The transportation of livestock by water virtually disappeared after the arrival of the railway in Nenagh. This is confirmed by a report in the *Nenagh Guardian* of 15 August 1873: “Two hundred and forty-four trucks full of cattle left the Nenagh railway station immediately after the fair of Thursday last. Averaging these trucks at eight beasts each would give over 1,950 head of cattle”.

During the 1850s James Dunne of Mountrath purchased wool extensively in the Nenagh area for Messrs. Greame and Dunnill, Wool Stores, 151 Thomas Street, Dublin. Dunne and two local buyers - Patrick Fitzpatrick and James Hanly, both of Nenagh - sent their wool packs to Dublin by steamer from Dromineer.

Although one surviving delivery docket dated 19 December 1891 shows M.A. Gubbins of Nenagh sending 6 bags of wool, weighing 1 ton 12 cwt. 1 qr. 20 lbs. to G.&W. Townsend, 9 Usher’s Island,



Dublin, the majority of buyers in the 1890s seem to have preferred the faster railway system. A letter dated 21 October 1896 from Thomas Jeffs, the Limerick Agent, to George Burgess at Dromineer seems to confirm this.

"I am getting about 60 packs of wool today from a Mr. J.A. Clough, Bradford (England). He usually gets by rail owing to slowness of our route but has given us this trial turn on your account. It was through sender, a Mr. Carroll, I heard wool was being shipped and I waited on Mr. Clough. He may give us another 60 packs next week".

Provisions

The export of provisions to Dublin, Liverpool and Glasgow markets was a thriving trade during the 1850s. Although its exact volume cannot be measured because of the incompleteness of the surviving documentation, it is clear that large quantities of bacon, butter and eggs left the harbour at Dromineer each year.

Edward McKenna & Co., Bacon Merchants, Chapel Lane, Nenagh, were the major shippers of hams, sides, cheeks, pork and lard, by steamer to Athlone and from there by rail to Dublin. The opening of the Athlone/Dublin railway link in 1851 was particularly important for the provisions trade, as it enabled more perishable produce to reach the market faster. McKenna and Co. shipped 47 tons of bacon produce from Dromineer in the year 1855. Most of this was sent to E. Lalor & Sons, Provision Agents, 1 Spitalfields, Dublin, and a lesser amount by Dublin screw ship to John Bristow Esq., of Liverpool.

J.B. Roche & Co., 18 Castle Street, were not only one of Nenagh's largest wholesale and retail outlets, but also exported bacon produce to Patrick Kehoe, 103 Francis Street, Dublin. One delivery docket shows that on 5 February 1855 Roche & Co. sent 310 sides of bacon from Dromineer to Kehoe. Power & Son, Victuallers, 75 Castle Street, Nenagh also shipped large quantities of bacon to Kehoe in Dublin.

Darius Whelan of Summerhill was Nenagh's largest butter and egg merchant. Some of his merchandise went to John Quinn, Little Green Market, Dublin; but most of it went to Messrs. Owen McGuirk of Glasgow. A typical Whelan delivery docket dated 25 January 1855 reads: '4 boxes butter, weight 11 cwt - 2 qr - 0 lb, to Messrs. Owen McGuirk, Glasgow from D. Whelan, Nenagh'.

Denis Carroll, 12 Barrack Street, Nenagh, was also in the butter and egg export trade. He shipped mainly to James O'Hanlon, 11 Scotland Place and Edward Kelly & Co. 1 Upper Dawson Street, both of Liverpool.

By the 1890s the export of provisions appears to have waned. Where previously large quantities of bacon was exported, local retailers were not importing it for sale in their shops. This was clearly the case by the 1920s. During 1922 bags and boxes of bacon arrived at Dromineer from Limerick for local retailers, McCormack and Swanton, both of Nenagh, McGrath of Newtown, Kelly of Toomevara and Kennedy of Puckaun. The quantities were small because most farmers preferred to kill and salt their own pigs.

Port's Final Years

In the early hours of Wednesday 1 November 1922 the Canal Stores at Dromineer were attacked by Republican sympathisers. One store and its contents were totally gutted by fire; but the main store escaped with only slight damage.

"The shed had apparently been broken open, oil thrown about and the goods set on fire. There was over a ton of timber consigned to the contractor for the Ex-Servicemen's houses in Nenagh, and when the timber took fire it was evident that the whole place was beyond saving. Nothing now remains but the blackened walls and twisted corrugated iron covering", wrote the *Nenagh Guardian*



of 4 November 1922, condemning what it called "one of the most dastardly and inexplicable outrages that has ever occurred in this district".

River traffic was then enjoying a temporary revival because of the disruption of the railway system by the Republicans, and the Store A/C Book shows that 1922 was a boom year for goods arriving at Dromineer. "Great quantities of goods are arriving by canal to Dromineer and traders in Templemore, Thurles and other districts have been getting supplies of goods through Dromineer", according to the *Nenagh Guardian* of 4 November 1922.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the destruction of the Stores was that the Free State Army was using the canal to ferry supplies to the Military Barracks at Nenagh. In July 1922 a large consignment of flour, bacon, sugar, and wood was signed out of the Dromineer Store by J.P. Gleeson, Nenagh Barrack Quartermaster.

However, with the restoration of peace and the re-opening of the railway network, water transport continued on its inexorable decline. In the late 1920s manure, porter and building material for the reconstruction of houses burnt during the "Troubles" were the only commodities of importance arriving at Dromineer.

All the material for the re-building of Kilboy House, burned down in 1922, arrived at Dromineer during 1925/26, mainly from Brooks Thomas of Dublin. In 1934 the total freight (excluding ale and porter) landed at Dromineer, consisted of only 312 bags of manure from Dublin and 38 lengths of timber from Spaight's of Limerick.

The Guinness boats continued to call up to about 1950. Then the long chapter of Dromineer as the port of North-West Tipperary finally closed.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Minutes of evidence before Select Committee on Shannon Navigation* P.P. (1834) Vol XVII, p. 28, states: "In the year 1827 the first steamer was brought to the Shannon above Limerick". The memorial to John Grantham in Killaloe Cathedral, who died in 1833 aged 58, claims, however, that "he made first survey of River Shannon with a view to improving it and was first to introduce steam navigation on its waters in the year 1825". O.S. Name Books Co. Tipperary No. 121 (1840) p. 226 states that "Lieutenant Bayly R.N. (of Hazel Point Cottage, Dromineer) was the first who navigated the Shannon with steam".
2. *Tipperary Constitution*, 3 March 1838.
3. Minnitt, Annaghbeg, Dromineer, Papers, (hereafter Minnitt): Tracing of map attached to copy of lease: Lady Farnham to City of Dublin Company, 1831.
4. Minnitt: Lease: Lady Farnham to Grand Canal Co. 1851, land for erection of new store. (Presumable the store was erected soon afterwards).
5. V.T.H. Delany: "The development of the River Shannon navigation" (in *Journal of Transport History*, Vol. III No. 4, 1958, p. 190), states that the *Lady Landsdowne* was of 300 ton burden, and being too large to pass through the Canal from Limerick to Killaloe, was prefabricated by Lairds, shipped in sections to Limerick, carried to Killaloe by barge and assembled there. In 1957 Delaney located a sunken wreck, 136 feet long in shallow water near Killaloe, and believed it to be the *Lady Landsdowne*.
6. Select Committee (1834) note 1 above, p. 32.
7. Census of Ireland 1901, Pt. 1, Vol. II. No. 5 p. 237.
8. Ruth Delany: *The Grand Canal of Ireland* (1973), p. 201.
9. Details on boats in this and following paragraphs from Toll Register (Portumna) 1913/16.
10. *Nenagh Guardian*, 12 December 1838.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Limerick Reporter*, 7 June 1859.



13. *Nenagh News*, 10 July, 1897: see also 28 May 1898.
14. Descriptions of merchants in these paragraphs are from their own bill-heads, a fine collection of which is among the Canal Company Papers.
15. Delany (1973), p. 233.
16. Minnitt: Annaghbeg Farm Accounts.
17. Daniel Grace, "The murder of Robert Hall at Uskane, Borrisokane in 1841", in *Nenagh Guardian*; 7 August 1982.
18. Devon Commission Report 1845: Evidence of Meagher p. 616 -7; Rev. W. Minchin p. 597; Kennedy p. 625.
19. Based on details in Dromineer Store Book.
20. Primary Valuation of Tenements 1850 - Baronies of Ormond Upper and Lower, Co. Tipperary.
21. Based on returns in Toll Register (Portumna).
22. Thom's "*Irish Almanac and Official Directory*", 1850 and 1901.

