

# The Kilkenny Canal

By Mrs. Montagu Stopford

**I**N the Parliament held in Ireland in the second year of the reign of George I, 1715, an Act was passed "to encourage the draining of bogs and unprofitable low grounds and easing and dispatching the inland carriage and conveyance of goods from one part to another within this Kingdom." The Act then proceeded to appoint certain persons to make the rivers therein named navigable, including the River Nore.

By an Act of George II, 1729, Commissioners were appointed for the several provinces of Ireland and by another Act in 1751 the Commissioners were made into a corporation called "The Corporation for promoting and carrying on an Inland Navigation in Ireland," and in 1755 the sum of £10,000 was granted by the House of Commons for making the River Nore navigable from the City of Kilkenny to the town of Inistioge. There were two further grants of £4,000 each, making a total of £18,000.

William Evans Morres, the Mayor of Kilkenny, held a meeting of the Corporation in what is described as the New Tholsel. The Mayor having had the river surveyed, it was ordered that he should be repaid his expenses. It was also stated that the principal objection to the undertaking may be that the trade of the city on the river will be so small for some years that the duty on boats will not be sufficient to repay the expense of keeping the locks of the works in repair. The Corporation therefore resolved to pay the Trustees the sum of £30 out of the customs of the city for seven years.

The next date in the history of the Canal is 1757. Mr. Ockenden, the Engineer, being come to town a meeting of the Commissioners was held at the house of Mr. John Blunt to consider proper measures to carry the work into execution. Mr. Ockenden was apparently a well-known man, being employed in the formation of the Shannon and other navigations. At this meeting of the Commissioners Alderman

Colles delivered a proposal for supplying stone and other materials for building locks upon the following terms: "hewn stone raised and cut, the faces to be punched, and the beds and ends wrought true to the square, and chiselled six inches in from the face, delivered at the lock where they are to be used and set, and a skilful person to set the said hewn stones, the Commissioners finding labourers for setting the stones, at twenty pence per foot superficial, the faces only to be measured—rough stone for building the backing of the locks, and for raising and carriage to the lock, at one shilling per perch of 21 feet long, 18 inches thick, and one foot high; roche lime at eight pence per barrel, to be measured at the kiln and delivered at the works. The hewn stone to be in the bed eighteen inches or more in some parts, and no part less than twelve inches." This proposal was accepted.

"At a Board held at the New Tholsel, on Thursday, the 4th day of August, 1757 . . . Then it was ordered and agreed, that Mr. Ockenden do view and examine the ground, in the County of the City of Kilkenny, through which the Canal for the navigation is to go, and that he do ascertain the same, and give an account thereof to this Board on Monday, the 15th day of August, so as the same may be properly considered by the several juries that shall or may be empanelled to assess the damages that shall accrue on the cutting and making said Canal; and that Mr. Ockenden do point out two ways for cutting said Canal, and give his reasons for which is most eligible."

"The several proprietors and occupiers of the lands through which said Canal is to be cut having appeared before the Board, and disagreed with the Board about the quantum of the damages they were respectively entitled to, it was ordered that the Clerk do give public notice that the cutting of the Canal will be contracted for on Monday, 5th August and that all persons who have a mind to treat, do previous to that day or on that day, lodge written proposals for cutting the same, sealed up and directed to the Lord Bishop of Ossory."

Mr. Ockenden gives an account of the progress made in the navigation of the River Nore. "There are very near four miles of canal completed, which with two reaches of the

river naturally navigable, that joins them, makes five miles of navigation. There are seven locks besides an aquaduct erected, that is to say one single lock, one rhymer lock and five double locks, four of which are finished, and the other three will be completed in a short time.”

In the Report to the House of Commons 1761, it is stated that “ there is now building, and nearly finished, at the head of the navigation, at the city of Kilkenny, a very convenient quay, with all its slips and landing places, three hundred feet in length and eighty feet in breadth . . . That at the Duke of Ormonde’s meadow there is a stone aquaduct that conveys a brook under the canal . . . that at Crow’s Well (Archer’s Grove) there is a fine stone lock, 200 feet in length and 21 feet in breadth . . . That, on the lands of Kilfera, there are two locks or one tripple lock, both together fall thirteen feet. That at Maddoxtown, there is one stone lock which pens fourteen feet head of water. That on the lands of Dunbell, there is a double lock which falls ten feet into Ballyredding pond . . . That at the town of Ennistearg there is a fine stone bridge 300 feet in length nearly completed.”

“ There are upon the works of this navigation several hundred pounds value in timber, a number of barges (these barges were 50 feet long by 10 feet broad), engines, utensils, which cost considerable sums and are absolutely necessary to the future progress of the work.”

An account of money expended upon the navigation of the Nore: 20 shovel handles, at 3d. each, 5/-; 6 spade handles at 6d. each, 3/-; for 18 rammers, 16/6; for 10 iron crows, weight 3 cwt. 1 qr. 14 lbs., at £1-1-4 per cwt., £3-12-4; 2 hour glasses, 2/2; 11 crows, at 8d., 7/4; to horse hire to Desart Wood, 4/4; to Mr. William Wilkinson, for 360 elms at 3d., £4-10; for 25 hand-barrows, at 1/4, £1-13-4; to carriage of 14 tons, 14 feet of timber from Desart at 4/-, £2-17-2; to 2 barrels of grass seeds to sow the banks of the canal, 7/-; to Messrs. Howard and Merry, ship carpenters, £4-11-0; to expenses in launching boats, 5/5.

I presume these (i.e., at Kilfera) are the original elm trees; canal banks usually have trees to bind the soil and prevent it from falling in. There is an unusual grass grow-

ing round the lock which may be what it was sown with.

Mr. Ockenden died and his work was carried on in 1761 by Mr. George Smith. The money in hand had then all been spent and the Committee resolved that the continuing to carry on the navigation of the River Nore . . . will be expedient and greatly advantageous to the public and requires and deserves the further aid of Parliament. The House of Commons accordingly voted a final £4,000 in November, 1761, making a total of £18,000. The bridge at Inistioge cost £921, but the canal never reached as far as Thomastown, and whether from the failure of funds or disagreements among the Board of Commissioners the project was finally abandoned.

There is a map which shows the communication the Nore would have with other navigable rivers and canals in the country as it would communicate with the Suir and the Barrow : "the first is navigable to Clonmel, the latter for small boats to Monasterevan; these three rivers measure together above 130 miles, but when the Grand Canal is finished, that 130 will be increased to above 320, by going down the Nore and up the Barrow into the Grand Canal, and so turning eastward to Dublin, or by turning westward and going on to the Shannon where boats can go as far as it is navigable, or down to Limerick and the sea."

"The speedy uniting of the Nore to these rivers will be of great use to the Kingdom, as its banks abound with many useful commodities much wanting in other parts, viz., corn in plenty, butter, tallow and beef, great quantities of which are daily sent by land to the seaports for exportation; black marble (the best in Europe), coals, lime, marle, and many other articles on which the land carriage raises the price considerably."

In an article on transport in the Saorstát Éireann Official Handbook 1932, it is stated : "The principal canal company in the State is the Grand Canal Company which serves a large district in the Midlands and also by way of the Shannon and Barrow navigations extends its operations to considerable portions of the West and South. This company not only acts as a carrier itself, but also

collects tolls from private barge owners who use the navigation. The Grand Canal Company when compared with other transport concerns is a prosperous undertaking and has improved its financial position since the substitution of motor for horse drawn barges. The Irish Free State is probably unique in Great Britain and Ireland in having such a successful canal company, the experience of which seems to afford an argument for the continuation and possible extension of Inland Waterways."

However, to go back to the old Kilkenny Canal, in the reign of George III, 25th March, 1786, the funds granted to the Corporation for promoting and carrying on an Inland Navigation in Ireland expired and it was deemed expedient that the said Corporation should be dissolved and that all canals, locks, etc., should be vested in the persons who should happen to be the local Commissioners. It has been suggested that the canal was started at the wrong end. If it had begun at Inistioge every mile completed would have been paying dividends. On the other hand I suppose it was easier and cheaper to transport the materials used downstream.

