

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

Fascinating History Of Ireland's Waterways

Originally published in 1985, this new edition of what is unquestionably the definitive study of Ireland's inland waterways takes account of the progress that has been made in saving and restoring the many fine and still operable canals that were built in Ireland from the 1730's up to the end of the 19th century.

Once forming a major dimension of Ireland's industrial and economic infrastructure, with the coming of the railways the canals gradually declined in importance, silting up and turning into little more than smelly pools of stagnant water. In her final chapter Ms. Delany highlights the work of the Inland Waterways Association and the excellent work done by the OPW who acquired responsibility for Ireland's canals in 1985.

PART OF IRELAND'S HERITAGE

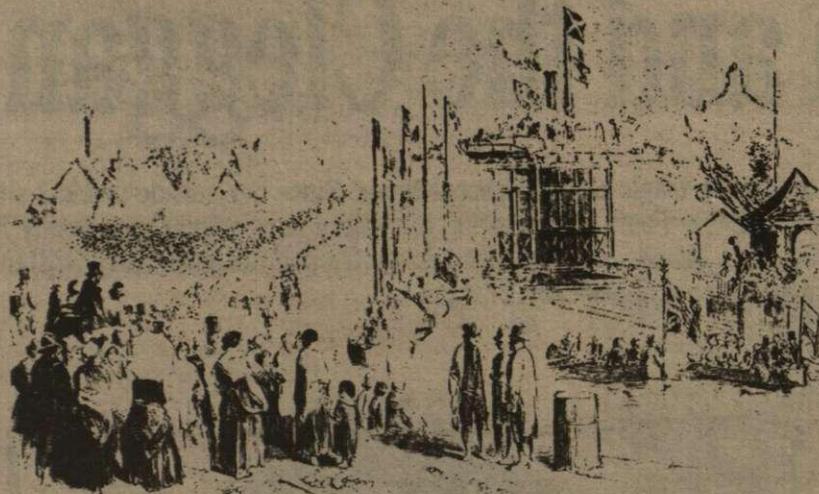
With the increasing recognition of the importance of heritage, and a widening of the area that term describes, Ireland's industrial archaeology, of which the canals form an integral part, has attracted much attention. To take just one example, the energy, enthusiasm and dedication of Dr. Ian Bath, who set up in 1974 the Royal Canal Amenity Group, has resulted in the be-birth, through AnCO and other schemes, of this very extensive canal. Sadly, the country's other major inland waterway, the Grand Canal, has not fared so well.

Galway readers will find particularly interesting the way the author provides a social and historical context for the Corrib Navigation scheme. Here the major aim was to link Lough Corrib to the sea, and Ms. Delany tells us that as early as the 15th century an attempt had been made from the east of the city through Lough Atalia. This abortive cutting, known as Lynch's Folly, was made in 1498 and Hardimanm writing in 1820, stated that the remains of it were still visible. Using Logan's map of 1818, it can be seen that this cutting would have extended from the first bend of the Sandy River, close to the Headford Road Shopping Centre, to Lough Atalia at Wellpark.

The next attempt came in 1715 when Parliament passed an ambitious act that aimed at opening a waterway from the sea at Galway through loughs Corrib, Mask and Moy to Killala. But like many similar ambitious plans, in the end nothing came of it.

NIMMO'S ORIGINAL PLAN FOR CORRIB LINK

The man who finally made the first practical steps for a canal link with Lough Corrib was the remarkable engineer Alexander Nimmo who drew up plans for a floating basin and canal in the 1820's. The basin, redesigned by John Killaly, was completed, but the all-important canal, which Nimmo had envisaged running between Wood Quay and the Commerical Docks area along the route now



The opening of the Eglinton Canal by the Lord Lieutenant in 1852 portrayed in the illustrated London News.

followed by Eglinton Street, was not.

Over the next ten years sporadic efforts were made to resurrect the plan, but it wasn't until the Parliament Act of 1842, authorising the Board of Works to carry out drainage and navigation works. Under the direction of engineer John McMahon, the line of the canal was this time laid to the west of the City. The Claddagh Basin and quays were built at the sea entrance, and the cutting was made along the route which many Galwegians still use today for a quiet walk. Opened on August 28, 1852 by the Earl of Eglinton - the canal was named in his honour - the canal finally linked the Bay with Lough Corrib.

The festive scene was vividly described by the Illustrated London News, accompanied by a fine drawing showing the Lord

Lieutenant and his wife being borne along aboard the paddle-steamer "O'Connell" through the large sea lock:

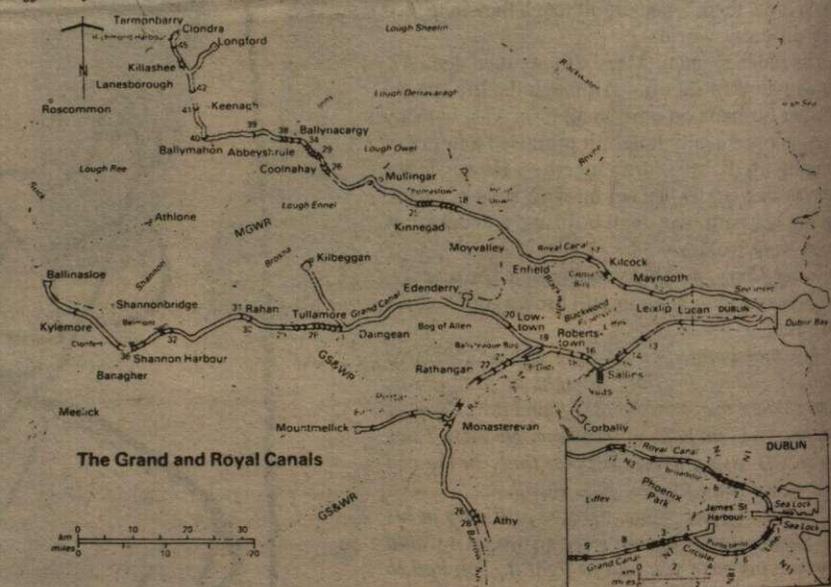
"A portion of the route from the landing pier to the basin wherein this tiny craft lay i.e. the 'O'Connell', chanced to be the fish marker; and through this not very oderiferous locale their Excellencies had to be driven - nay, even to walk a portion...Having gone aboard the 'O'Connell', amidst the sounds of music and cheers of the people, deputations and addresses were presented from the Claddagh, as also from the other societies connected with that side of the town...the steamer entered the dock for the first time amidst the cheers of thousands."

PLEASURE TRIPS ON CORRIB

In the decades that followed the "O'Connell" was joined by many other boats such as the "Enterprise", the "Father Daly", the "Lioness" (which could accommodate up to 100 people comfortably), and the "Lady Eglinton" which operated a daily service between Galway and Cong. Mr. J. Grey described a trip he took aboard her in the 1880's:

"The journey takes about three hours; the little steamer Eglinton having to twist and twine her way warily through between those many shoals and shallows that intercept a long part of her course, and which render the navigation

of this lake one of extreme difficulty."



The Grand and Royal Canals

Despite the coming of the railway, the canal service continued to flourish, thanks in part to the generous financial backing of Arthur Guinness, Lord Ardilaun, whose memorial obelisk can still be seen along the north shore of Lough Corrib. A new steamer, the "St. Patrick", built in Galway, was introduced at the end of the 19th century, and other ships, like the "Widgeon", the Shannon Development Company's "Fairy Queen", and the "Countess of Cadogan", operated right up to the outbreak of the First World War.

PIONEER WORK OF MAURICE SEMPLE

Ms. Delany rightly pays tribute to Maurice Semple, whose wonderful illustrated

contributions to scholarship as well as being labours of love - have provided the most comprehensive account of the Lough Corrib Navigation project.

The author also reminds Galway readers of Mr. Semple's lonely battle, almost forty years ago, to stop the opening bridges over the Eglinton Canal being replaced by fixed, permanent bridges. Unfortunately, his appeals fell on deaf ears, and what would now be a major tourist amenity, allowing boats free and open access between Galway Bay and Lough Corrib, was shortsightedly scuppered.

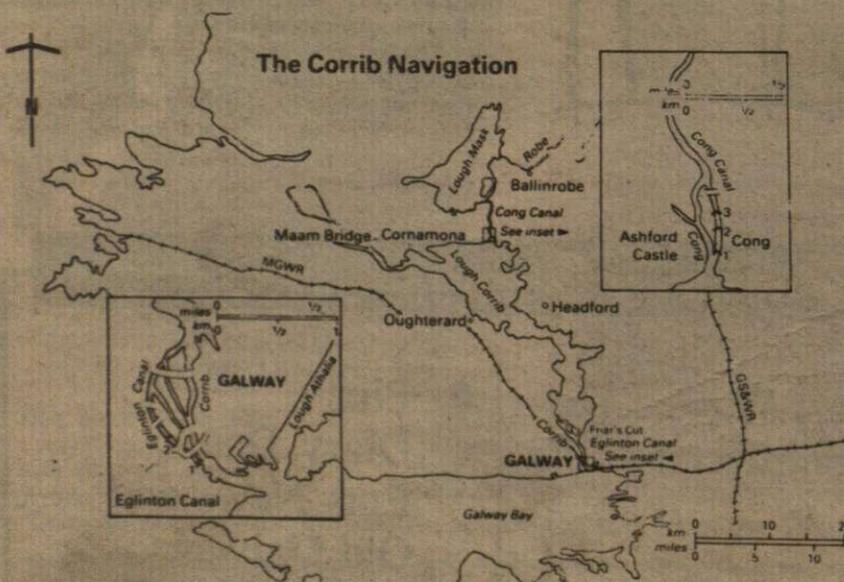
"Ireland's Inland Waterways" is a superb history of an important social and economic development in Irish history. Combining detailed information about

also written in a way that makes it accessible to the general reader. Today, as she points out, the future of the Irish waterways is secure since their value as recreational and tourist amenities has been recognised, and she praises the work of the OPW in restoring them:

"The future is bright, but let us not forget how close we came to losing this important national heritage, so rich in history and lore; let us not forget the men who built them, the canal communities of the past and the people of vision, Harry Rice, Vincent Delany, Ian Bath and those who rallied to their call to save this heritage for future generations."

books like "Reflections of Lough Corrib" - genuine the people who built the canals and waterways, and the communities that grew

up depending on them, it is "Ireland's Inland Waterways" by Ruth Delany (Appletree Press - £7.99 paperback).



The Corrib Navigation System in 1852

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