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The Limerick Navigation Company, 1697-1836

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The Limerick to Killaloe canal ceased to operate in 1929 because the hydro-electric station at Ardnacrusha required the flooding of part of the navigation from below Killaloe to Parteen. This seems, therefore, a fitting time, fifty years later, to look at the history of this short stretch of waterway and to consider something of its rise and its difficulties.

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the officials of Heuston Station, Dublin, where the Minute Books of the Grand Canal Company are kept, and the officials of the Public Records Office, Dublin, who facilitated access to the documents of the Directors-General of Inland Navigation.

The Beginning (1697-1799)

The history of the section of inland navigation from Limerick to Killaloe is a long and a complicated one; there were many false starts before the first sod was finally turned to begin the construction. Even then its life was one of crisis upon crisis and somehow it never seemed to be a successful venture, both merchants and engineers always considered it inadequate. It was not merely part of the Grand Canal, as most people seem to assume; much of its life was as a completely independent and local project.

On 9th September, 1697, a report was returned to the Irish House of Commons from a committee appointed to consider the petition of 'the Grand Jury, Justices of the Peace, Gentlemen and Freeholders of the County Galway'¹ to make the river Shannon navigable from Limerick to Co. Leitrim. In the opinion of the committee, making the Shannon navigable 'will be an Advantage to this Kingdom',² and it was estimated that the cost would not exceed £14,000. Nothing further was done until 29th September, 1703, when it was ordered that a committee be appointed to meet in the Speaker's Chamber at 4 o'clock that same day and prepare and bring in the heads of a bill to make the Shannon navigable from the city of Limerick to Jamestown, Co. Leitrim, at 'the Charge of the adjoining Counties'.³ However, there was another time lapse and the matter resumed on 20th May, 1709, when a committee, this time set up to take into consideration the petition of one Mortimer Heylen and Stephen Costiloe, for making the Shannon navigable, comes to the following conclusions:

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, that the making the River Shannon navigable from Carrick, in the County Leitrim, to the Quay of Limerick, will very much conduce to the increase of Trade in this Kingdom.

Resolved, That it is the Opinion of this Committee, that it is practicable to make the River Shannon navigable for Boats of twenty Tons Burthen, from Carrick to the Quay of Limerick.

To which Resolutions, the Question being severally put, the House did agree.⁴

The year 1721, saw an Act of Parliament 'for the further amendment of the law, and

¹ *Irish Commons Journal*, 9th September, 1697, II, p. 190.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 29th September, 1703, II, p. 322.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20th May, 1709, II, p. 586.

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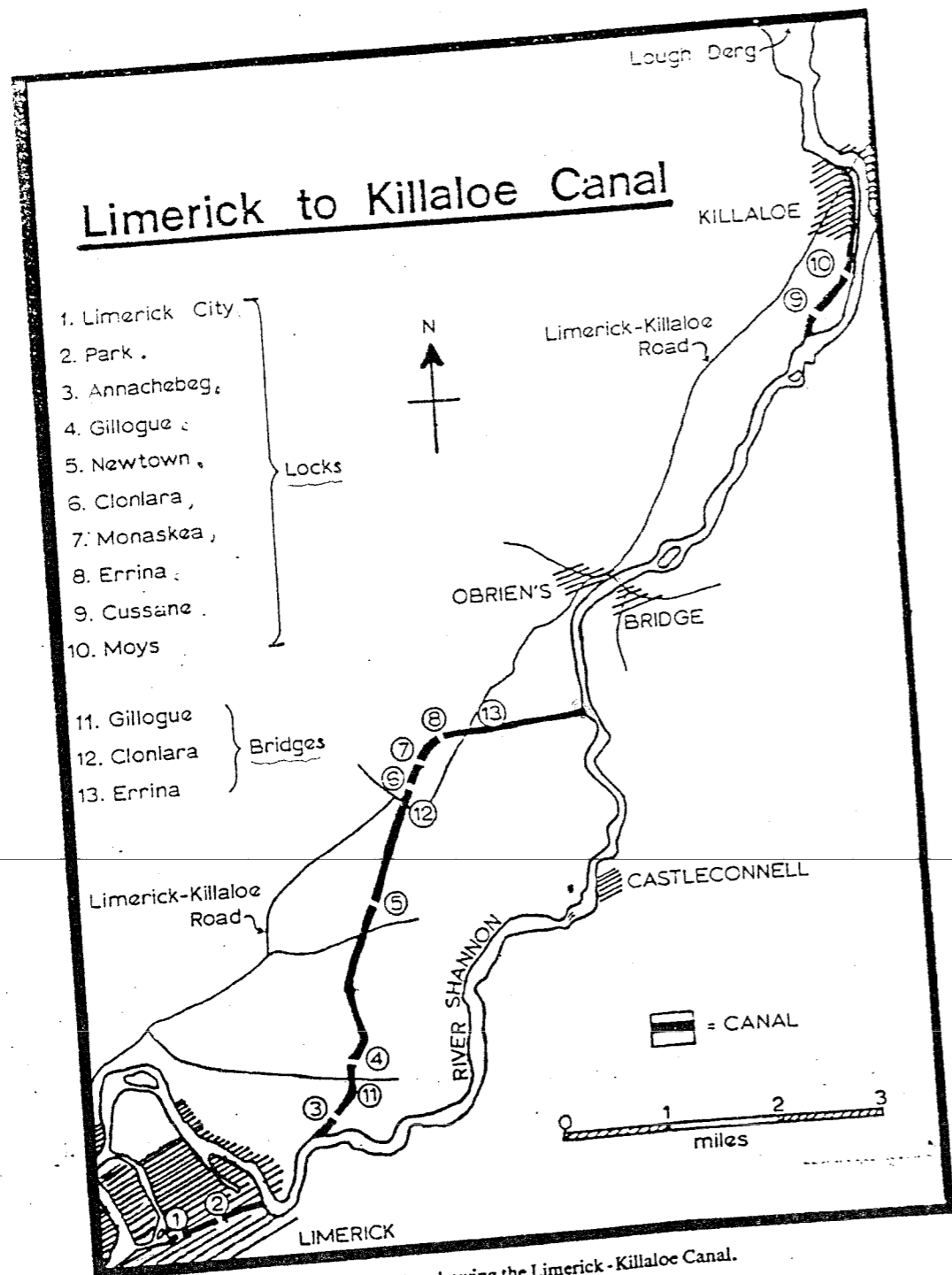


Fig. 1. Map showing the Limerick - Killaloe Canal.

for continuing and amending several acts near expiring'.⁵ Now one such expiring piece of legislation was entitled 'An Act to Encourage the Draining and Improving of the Boggs and Unprofitable Low Grounds, and for easing and dispatching the Inland Carriage of Goods from one part to another within this Kingdom'.⁶ This Act, passed in 1715, was later found defective for the purpose of administering the setting up of a canal system and so some alternatives were introduced in 1721. These stated that any member of Parliament or justice of the peace from the counties bordering the proposed navigation, were automatically canal commissioners. Any five such commissioners, acting together, had the power to purchase land or enter into contracts in order to have construction work done on a canal. A further Act of 1729, divided the commissioners into four bodies, one body for each province of the country. Financial means were provided for them by laying duties on 'coaches, berlins, chariots, calashes, chaises and chairs, and upon cards and dice and upon wrought and manufactured gold and silver plate'.⁷ This means of providing money for inland navigation was renewed in 1751, for a further period of twenty-one years and by the same Act all of the four bodies of canal commissioners were united and became 'one company or body corporate'.⁸

Few advances were made in the building of canals in Ireland until the middle of the eighteenth century. The construction of the Grand Canal began in 1756, and in 1759 the Barrow and the Boyne navigation commenced. 'On the 13th June, 1757, the workmen began to cut the canal at Bartlett's Bog'.⁹ In this manner Lenihan, in his history of Limerick, described the physical beginning of making navigable the twelve miles of river between the city and Killaloe. Work had begun on making the upper part of the Shannon navigable in 1755.

In November, 1761, a committee was appointed by the House of Commons to enquire into the application of £4,000 (part of a sum allocated by Parliament to make the Shannon navigable from Limerick to Killaloe) and to examine the state of the work on the navigation. The accounts were found to be true and accurate; the opinion was also expressed that the sum of £401,290 would complete the section from Limerick to Rhebog.

The quay from the east side of Baal's Bridge was finished and joined the bank of the canal in 1764. 'This year also was finished the famous mill on the north side of the canal above the lock nearest the city; therein six pair of mill-stones for corn, four boulting mills, four tucking mills, and all loads are raised to the top of the house, and all that performed by two water-wheels and at the same time. Famous stores are likewise built for the reception of corn over the mill dam.'¹⁰

An advertisement in the *Munster Journal* of 4th September, 1766, gives some idea of the products of the mill:

For the accommodation of the public First Flour, equal to any imported from abroad; also Seconds and Thirds, will be sold at the Limerick Lock Mills, by the Half Hundred or Quarter, on the most reasonable terms—household flour, and Wheat Meal are sold at said Mills at the usual prices, to the Poor only by the Stone, half Stone, or Quarter, every Day, Sunday excepted, from the hours of seven to Eleven o'Clock in the Morning.¹¹

⁵ 8 Geo. I, c. 6(Ir.) 1721.

⁶ 2 Geo. I, c. 12(Ir.) 1751.

⁷ 3 Geo. II, c. 3(Ir.) 1729.

⁸ 25 Geo. II, c. 10(Ir.) 1751.

⁹ Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; Its History and Antiquities*, Limerick 1866 (reprinted, Cork 1967), p. 346.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

¹¹ *Munster Journal*, 4th September, 1766.

However, the same paper carried a notice that the mill itself was for sale, as Andrew Walsh and Edward Uzuld were about to dissolve their partnership in the business. An addition to the notice stated also that the Canal Commissioners had just agreed to the building of a bridge over the first lock.

Another parliamentary report in November, 1767, accounted for the spending of £3,000, granted in the previous session of Parliament, in order to make the Shannon navigable from Rhebogoe to Killaloe. A prime figure in the obtaining of parliamentary grants for the new canal was Edmond Sexton Pery. He was born in 1719 and died in 1806; he sat in the Irish House of Commons from 1751 to 1785, and was on three occasions elected to the position of Speaker. One of the principal parts of his property was Newtown Pery, an area on which almost all of the eighteenth century development of Limerick took place; therefore helping in Limerick's progress was very much to his own advantage.¹²

The Limerick Navigation Company was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1767: it was entitled 'An Act for applying the Sum of Six Thousand Pounds, granted by Parliament to the Corporation promoting an inland Navigation in this Kingdom, to be by them applied in carrying on a Navigation from the City of Limerick to the deep navigable Water above the Town of Killaloe and for encouraging other Persons to subscribe for carrying on and completing the said Work at their own Expense.'¹³ The sum of ten thousand pounds was sought from the public and the sum of fifty pounds was the lowest amount acceptable from any one individual. The Act also laid down that there was to be eight days notice of a meeting of the Company and five shares entitled a person 'to vote or meddle.'¹⁴ Between Limerick and O'Brien's Bridge the Company could levy a toll of fifteen pence for every ton of the burden of the boat and each passenger could be charged two pence. However, from O'Brien's Bridge to Killaloe the costs went up and the Company could charge two shillings and six pence on the tonnage of the boat and the passengers would have to pay four pence each.

Further improvements were projected in the year 1768, and a spirited subscription was raised by 'a Company of Undertakers' to make the Shannon navigable.

This Company was incorporated by Act of Parliament, and a sum of £10,000 in pursuance of the Act, was described as follows:—¹⁵

	£
Sir Henry Hartstonge, Bart.	1,000
Sir Lucius O'Brien, Bart.	500
Edmond Sexton Pery, Esq.	500
R. William Pery, Esq.	500
Hugh Dillon Massy, Esq.	500
Anthony Parker, Esq.	500
William Maunsell, Esq.	500
Thomas Maunsell, Jun., Esq.	500
Richard Maunsell, Esq.	1,000
Rev. William Maunsell	250
Eaton Maunsell, Esq.	250
John Tunnadine, Esq.	250

¹² For a good account of Edmond Sexton Pery see A. P. W. Malcomson, "Speaker Pery and the Pery Papers" *Nth. Munster Antiquarian J.*, 16(1973-74), 33-60.

¹³ 7 Geo. III, c. 26(Ir.) 1767.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Lenihan, *op. cit.*, p. 363. Lenihan, however, gives no source for his information, but as the sum subscribed, £10,000, is the same as that to be sought from the public in 1767 when the enabling Act was passed, it is possible that Lenihan's 1768 subscription and that of 1767 are, in fact, one and the same.

John Thomas Waller, Esq.	250
John Dowdail Hammond, Esq.	250
Andrew Welsn	250
John Martin, M.D.	250
James Guthrie, Merchant	250
Stephen Roche John, Merchant	500
Phil. Roche John, Merchant	500
Edmond Sexton, Merchant	250
James Browne, Merchant	250
Thomas Casey, Merchant	250
Michael Rochford, Merchant	250
James Lyons, Merchant	250
Thomas Mark, Merchant	250
TOTAL	£10,000

Twenty-eight years after construction of the canal had commenced, another committee was appointed to look into the state of the navigation. So in December, 1783, this committee concluded that the canal would be of great value to the country and, secondly, was of the opinion that a wet dock would be of great value at Limerick. For this purpose it seemed that a weir was needed across the Abbey River in order to cut it off from the proposed wet dock and it was suggested that this river should be diverted to flow under Thomond Bridge, on its way to the sea. Another advantage provided by the canal would be the easier availability of 'firing' the lack of which caused much distress to the poor: '... many poor families had almost perished for want of it last Winter, which inconvenience would be entirely removed if the Canal was completed to Killaloe, and a Communication opened thereby between the City of Limerick and the Collieries.'¹⁶ The name of the colliery is not stated but it is probable that it was at Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny.

The 18th March, 1788, saw the production of another report. Although the Limerick Navigation Company had spent £8,524.4.2 of its own money, as yet, no dividend had been paid. The state of the work was described as 'in great Forwardness but not so as to form a Communication with the different Counties intended by Parliament.'¹⁷

So another ten years elapse and finally in 1799 the first boats begin to ply between Limerick and Killaloe. On 19th May, 1800, the Limerick Navigation Company submitted a statement to parliament in which much information was given on the construction, operation and problems of the navigation. On the first Monday or Tuesday of the New Year a committee of ten members and a secretary were elected; any holder of £250 worth of stock was entitled to vote at this election. The committee thus elected met every Friday, at the First Lock House, Limerick, with the duties of ordering the payment of the workmen, looking into the state of work on the project; in short it had the 'entire Management of the Company's affairs.'¹⁸ During the winter boats could come from Banagher to Limerick but because of the lack of towing paths and the presence of shoals the journey was not safe in summer. Because of these difficulties, also, only ten boats of a size from fifteen to twenty tons used the navigation. One thousand tons of corn had been brought to Limerick, from lands bounding the Shannon; as had large quantities of slates from the Barony of Doochara, Co. Tipperary. Also imported into the city was '... an immense Quantity of Turf from the adjacent Bogs, of which the City of Limerick, from

¹⁶ *Irish Commons Journal*, 12th December, 1783, XI, p. 165, app. p. cxxviii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17th March, 1788, XXI, app. p. dccixi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 23rd June, 1800, XIX, app. VI, p. mxxviii.

the frequency of adverse Winds, stands in the greatest need; English Coal at present selling there at fifty British Shillings per Ton.¹⁹

The tolls received by the company amounted to £102.10.0, for the year 1799, while the salaries of the officers amounted to £120.15.0. Thirty pounds was divided between the Treasurer and Secretary; the Overseer earned £22.15.0, while the nine lock-keepers earned £68, between them, annually. The company owed £500 to the Bank of Limerick and £500 for iron and timber work on the canal.

In order, finally, to put the navigation in a totally complete and workable state the company proposed to removed the rocks which proved dangerous in summer; construct a towing-path from Limerick to Killaloe and repair the banks. All of this would cost £5,000, which, it was hoped, would be supplied by a grant from parliament. It was proposed that if the work was not carried out or if the canal was not totally adequate, within three years, then the company would relinquish, to the government, the right and title of the navigation. However, when the Directors-General of Inland Navigation were set up in 1800, the company withdrew this offer.

This body was set up because a committee of the House of Commons made a report stating that the canal commissioners, set up in 1751, were not constituted so as to promote their objectives effectively. It went on to state that £857,382 had been spent, but there was no corresponding advantage to the public.

'Following this report it was decided to form a new public department to control inland navigation, to complete works and to promote new ones. A statute of 1800, abolished the local undertakers, enabled the Lord Lieutenant to take over all works relating to inland navigation in Ireland and to appoint five directors-general of inland navigation to have general oversight of all such existing and projected works.'²⁰

The Directors-General replaced the commissioners; they did not replace private concerns such as the Limerick Navigation Company. Now there may be in the above-mentioned report part of the explanation as to why the building of twelve miles of inland navigation lasted for over forty years. Parliament was generous with money and this would have a tendency to allow for a relaxed, even careless attitude to predominate. Also, from 1767 onwards, everything was in the hands of a committee of ten shareholders; these men were rich landowners and wealthy merchants of the area served by the navigation, so they really knew little or nothing about the running of such an enterprise. This last fact will become even more clear as the story of the canal progresses.

Brownrigg's Report: The Product of Forty-four Years' Work (1757-1801)²¹

A very detailed report dated 1st September, 1801, was drawn up by Mr. Brownrigg, Surveyor on the Limerick to Killaloe section of the canal, for the Directors-General of Inland Navigation. This report shed much light, from a new source, on the state of the entire navigation. Mr. Brownrigg commented in an illuminating manner on possible reasons as to why the building of this twelve mile stretch had taken almost fifty years to complete. The navigation was of a mixed kind, partly river, partly still water. Therefore it was necessary at the entrance and at the exit of every artificially cut section to provide against floods and the rising of the river 'even to seven feet extra height of banking,

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ V. T. H. & D. R. Delany, *The Canals of the South of Ireland*, Newton Abbot 1966, p. 21.

²¹ All quotations in this section are taken from the report on the Limerick Navigation, dated 1st September, 1801, prepared for the Directors-General of Inland Navigation by Mr. John Brownrigg.

bridges, trackways, lock gates etc.' Also, a river navigation was more likely to run to ruin far more quickly than a still water navigation.

'Nothing can equal the inconvenience of the termination of the navigation in this city.' There was, according to Mr. Brownrigg, no canal harbour in Limerick in which boats could load or unload, no wharfinger to point out the berths and, finally, no officer to protect the boats from vandalism. The western bank of the canal was treated by the millers of the Lock Mills as their private property and the eastern bank was generally given over to the sale of turf. The boats were loaded or unloaded in the head of the first lock with the stem or stern of the boat bumping against the lock gates. In order to correct these shortcomings, he strongly recommended the purchase of a plot of ground and the construction of a triangular-shaped harbour capable of holding between twelve to twenty vessels all discharging cargo at the same time.

The report went on to discuss the navigation, in specific detail, beginning with the Custom House Quay. It had been proposed to build a wet dock here in order to keep twenty sea-vessels at the Custom House and to keep all the crafts from inland water-ways between the New Bridge (now Mathew Bridge) and the first canal lock always afloat in deep water. This plan was almost completed 'but like all the other works of the Limerick Canal Company it was dropt when almost ready to receive the finishing hand'. An overseer resided in a navigation house at the first lock, and here also the company met to discuss its business; situated here also were two yards and a storehouse. The lock itself was a fine and costly piece of work of much 'needless ornament,' and it was capable of holding vessels of one hundred and fifty tons burthen.

The waters of the canal at Limerick were rented to the owners of the Lock Mills at a charge of £40 per annum. Mr. Brownrigg reported that there was only one surface of water, in summer, from the first lock through the chamber over the breast of the second lock and up to the deep waters of the Shannon; at the end of the first artificially cut section of canal. This had been arranged by the canal company to serve the owners of the mill—it ensured the millers three feet of water running over the mill weir. However, this arrangement created no difficulties in the running of the canal.

From the first lock up to the second or Park Lock there was marshy ground on either side of the cutting; however, there were banks running on either side of the water that were the result of 'prodigious labour and expense'. Again, the suggestion is made that these were constructed to convenience the mill proprietors. Park Lock itself was 'an excellent piece of plain rough masonry' and its chamber was positioned to keep out the back water of the Shannon during winter floods. However, from Park Lock upwards Mr. Brownrigg was of the opinion that the bottom of the canal had never been properly sunk and that as a consequence the level of water was very low in summertime. This, plus the fact that the canal entered the Shannon here at right angles, made access rather difficult.

On the three-quarters of a mile section of canal from Limerick City to the Shannon, boats were tracked or drawn by ropes pulled, not by horses, but by men; when the boats entered the Shannon oars alone or oars and a square sail were used.

Annabeg Lock was at this time in bad condition for all parts of the walls admitted water. Gilloge Lock was described as very old and built in a strange and unusual fashion:

It is double, with unequal falls, the reason for which I cannot conceive, the sides of the chambers are not perpendicular but batter up like a dish, from 16ft., at bottom to 27ft., 4 inch., at top. The chambers are so large I imagine they were intended for a very great trade and to contain two large vessels or three or four small ones at once.

Newtown Lock was in good condition and could hold three of the biggest vessels on the

Shannon. The condition of the canal from there to within a few perches of Clonlara Lock was very broad and deep. However, a short distance from the lock a swell of gravel had formed.

Between Newtown Lock and Clonlara Lock was Clonlara Bridge, narrow and hump-backed, which was most noteworthy for the interesting Sheela-na-Gig built into its north wall.²² This bridge, apparently built in 1769,²³ was demolished in 1974 and replaced in 1975 by a flatter, more modern one; the Sheela-na-Gig was re-mounted in its northern wall. Clonlara Lock was 10ft. 4½ inches in height but did not possess gates strong enough to go with the great height. To Monaskea Lock the canal was again deep and in good condition, and to Errina Lock the navigation was from 10 ft. to 6 ft. in depth. The very detailed comments made by Mr. Brownrigg on the Clonlara and Monaskea locks deserve to be quoted in full, as they provide another very interesting insight into the standard of efficiency of the Limerick company.

It appears to me that all those locks lately built are done by contract without the superintendance of a constant Inspector, during the progress of the work, and that the Stonework is designed to deceive the eye of experienced persons; the gates also I understand were done by the yard or the piece, the timber was cut to answer the scanting and lengths, without consulting the grain or the camber so that very important rails of the Gates have the grain too much crossways, of what use, in one of those deep locks, can those be, when a pressure of not less than Fifty tons of water bear against the Gates, the consequence of making locks in this way is, that the lower gates of Clonlara and Monaskea locks, although among the latest made on the Canal, are faulty and dangerous; Besides the paucity of all the upright timbers, and cross rails, the sheeting I think, has been made of fresh deals, and have shrunk so much they require immediate caulking.

The Iron machinery was of the most approved kind, but for want of greasing, the rust renders them so stiff and unmanageable, that it is with the greatest labour the sluices are drawn up, and this with sudden snaps, and jerks, which not only rack the machinery themselves, but shake all the connected wooden parts, so much as to hurry these neglected works into the appearance of ruin before they are half worn out.

The stone work in the locks, as I observed before, looks very well to the Eye, but is much formed of fine large stones, set on edge and not on their flat, well known on the grand Canal by the name of *starters* these are in stone work much the same as Nanier in Cabinet work, only covers and conceals from the eye, the weakness and infirmity of the work behind them, these upright stones have scarcely ever a firm connection with the rubble stone behind them, they are almost two distinct things; they have no bonds, the rubble work when not watched by a careful person during the execution is thrown carelessly together and filled with mortar and irregular stones, or more frequently with great quantities of mortar and not half enough of small stones to fill up the spaces, and make a solid body, or left with great hollows, and spaces concealed and shut out from the eye, and when finished the water, forging itself through the interstices of the front work find those spaces and chambers for itself behind those shell work fronts, and, on letting down the boat, as the lock is emptied, the water returns from behind in an hundred spouts, bringing with it every loose particle, or grain of lime, or sand; and finally renders the whole masonry, a meer honeycomb, weak and unconnected, ready upon slight occasions to fall to pieces.

On the stretch of the canal from Monaskea to Errina Lock a strange state of affairs sheds more light on the somewhat lax organisation of the Limerick Navigation Company. It appears that the farmers had possessed themselves of the east bank and had proceeded to erect ditches and various divisions of their own. The lock keeper was driven off with his cattle and was warned that if he complained of this treatment he would be dismissed from his post for the farmers claimed to have the protection of powerful landlords, who were members of the canal company. Mr. Brownrigg made the comment that 'the company are so neglectful as to afford no protection to their own officer and property'.

²²E. Rynne, "A Sheela-na-Gig at Clonlara, Co. Clare", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 10(1966-67), 221-222.

²³*Ibid.*, p. 222.

Errina Lock had gates of 14 feet 9 inches. Now it was unusual for the gates of a still water navigation to be above 6 feet; however, the extra height in Errina was to guard against winter floods. From this lock for three-quarters of a mile the canal was in good order but then it grew shallow. This inadequately cut section was known as 'Browning's Contract'; it ran through flat country but was never sunk to a sufficient depth nor properly finished.

From the best information I can get I learn that some Gentlemen of rank and influence and members of the Canal company are securities for the performance of the work. Mr. Browning left in the hands of his executors, one Thousand Pounds to be applied either to the completion of his contract, or indemnifying his bail, the executors are gentlemen of rank and influence also members of the canal company, the executors wont pay the Thousand Pounds nor any part of it till the work is done; the securities wont do the work without the money and they have interest enough to prevent the company taking any steps against any of the parties and there the canal remains also impassable.

After this the canal entered the Shannon at right angles in low ground. Therefore, in the winter season, the mouth of the still water canal was almost impossible to detect, because it was entirely covered with water. Mr. Chapman, a former engineer with the company, had given the canal a little turn to the north, at its extremity, which, it was claimed, was a great improvement.

The Shannon river became the navigation for nearly four miles from the end of Errina canal to the entrance to Cussane canal. Within this four miles stands the village of O'Brien's Bridge. Here it could be difficult to pass upstream because of a strong current through the arches of the bridge;

there is one arch near the Clare side something loftyer than the others, this is called the Navigation Arch, because the boats in winter pass under it; It maybe safe to do so in winter but I would not advise the smallest boat to make choice of this Arch in Summer, because just close above the bridge and on the west point of the arch, is the remains of an Old Castle, demolished in the war time.

There was deep water, at all seasons, from O'Brien's Bridge to Parteen; at Parteen there were shallows and eel fisheries which Mr. Chapman by-passed by cutting a little running canal in the west bank of the river, but he left the company's service before it was completed. When excavating this short section the workmen came upon red grit rock, so the canal was not sunk to a sufficient depth, in spite of the fact that it could be satisfactorily finished in a fortnight.

Cussane was a large double lock, built on a bad foundation. Mr. Brownrigg assumed that it cost a great deal of money and considered that it would have been a fine piece of work if it had been fully finished. The gates were bleaching white and green from the lack of pitch and part of the masonry was never backed with earth. From Cussane lock to the Middle Moy lock there was a very fine deep canal in good order. This latter lock had a bridge over the tail to accommodate the Bishop of Killaloe, whose demesne was served by the canal. From here to Killaloe the navigation was close to the verge of the river and enclosed by a rough bank, which was unfinished.

According to Mr. Brownrigg, when the workmen were digging the foundations of Cussane lock they cut through 5 feet of yellowish light clay and 3 feet of bog. Under the bog they found 'stone weapons and tools, a kind of stone falichon (a broad curved sword) some like Chizels wedges or hatchets fixed in wooden handles. Mr. Chapman the Engineer got these things and gave some of them to the present Bishop of Killaloe and brought some to England'.

Killaloe guard lock began at the bridge of the town. It was the newest on the canal and was in comparatively good repair. From Killaloe there was a cutting for a few perches into

Lough Derg and then it suddenly ceased and had no connection with the navigable water farther up the Shannon.

I am at the utmost loss to form an opinion or to conceive any cause for such a respectable and intelligent body of Gentlemen as compose the Limerick Navigation Company bringing this great work above the bridge of Killaloe to within a musket shot of the deep water and there ceasing their works altogether.

Towards the end of his report Mr. Brownrigg went through each section of the canal and discussed the reasons why it had been thought necessary to construct that particular part of the navigation. For example, the first artificial cutting and the two locks from Limerick city up to the deep water of the Shannon were built to avoid the rise by the salmon weir and the mill weir. The second canal and six locks were planned in order to surmount the falls of Castleconnell and Doonass; the little running canal at Parteen, which was without a lock, was built to avoid a shallow and an eel weir. Finally, the fourth canal with three locks surmounted the problem of the falls of Killaloe.

The kinds of boats used by the various traders on this part of the Shannon were also the subject of observation by Mr. Brownrigg. Flat-bottomed boats, from six to eight tons, were used chiefly around Limerick. They usually carried turf, sand, lime, brick, stone, timber, coals and dung and were managed by two men, who were almost always the owners. Another boat, called a lighter, of almost the same shape, had a burthen of twelve to sixteen tons; however, it was not so numerous and was worked by four men, none of whom were owners. The cargo carried consisted of bricks, turf, coal, timber and ballast for shipping. This boat had two oars, one of which was in the stern, and there was no rudder. On the river to Killaloe there were some small boats of six to eight tons burthen. They were half-keeled, part of the bottom was flat and they had a falling mast, a square sail and a rudder. These boats were chiefly employed in bringing slates and corn to Limerick and they returned to Killaloe with coal and timber.

The Dammed Canal (1802-1813)

The first boats to pass through this section of inland navigation from Limerick to Killaloe did so in the year 1799, yet by the year 1802 the treasurer and secretary of the Limerick Navigation Company, Andrew Watson, was declaring in a letter to the Directors General of Inland Navigation, that the canal was in a declining state. In consequence of this the directors-general were willing to recommend to the Lord Lieutenant and the Treasury that the sum of £16,000 be granted to enable the company to bring the entire stretch of navigation to a satisfactory state of completion.

In May, 1803, Mr. Brownrigg submitted to the Directors-General of Inland Navigation a report and an estimate for putting the navigation into a complete state of repair. He listed four main areas of concern. These were the shallows at the end of the first artificially cut section; the length of canal near Errina, which had never been sunk to a proper depth, called 'Mr. Browning's Contract'; the little canal at Parteen, sunk in a hard grit rock, which was very difficult to work and finally, at Killaloe, a weir wall was needed above the town and the river bed needed deepening from the guard lock to Green Island in Lough Derg. Many other works, of lesser importance, were also needed such as the repair of masonry on locks and bridges and the raising of banks.

Mr. Brownrigg never seems to have been short of evidence to show to the world the inefficient and even eccentric nature of the Limerick Company. In his report of September, 1801, he had discussed the necessity of, and the most suitable location for, a canal harbour.

But strange—no sooner was it known (the location) than the proprietor a member of the Canal Company and of the Committee directly built four houses upon the spot. And as if he was determined that there never should be an harbour to the Canal, he let a large tract of the low ground to a speculator. This in vain to say anything further on this point.²⁴

In 1803, the Directors-General of Inland Navigation undertook to complete the navigation before the 1st December, 1807, and then hand it back to the Limerick Navigation Company. On its side the company would then keep the canal in good repair and maintain enough employees to run it satisfactorily; it was also agreed that the company would charge one penny per ton per mile upon corn, meal, malt, flour, potatoes, lime, sand or manure; two pence per mile upon all other goods and three pence per mile for each passenger.

A report on the progress of the work was submitted to the Directors-General by Francis Trench, in July, 1805. He began by discussing Baal's Bridge and the problems it posed. The arches were low and narrow and a row of houses was built on one side of the bridge; therefore it could hinder passage from the canal lock to the quays of the city. However, Trench pointed out that solving this problem did not come into the agreement between the Directors-General and the Limerick Company.

Mr. Brownrigg had dredged the first section of still water canal and where it joined the Shannon he had reinforced its banks with masonry, in order to make it strong against the force of the river.

It had been proposed to lay a chain across the river at the point where a crossing of the Shannon was necessary to enter the second still water section of the navigation. The function of the chain would be to enable boats to be drawn across by the crews in the face of any strong current. However, in Mr. Trench's opinion this was not a satisfactory solution to the problem.

The Blackwater 'a sudden and violent River after rains'²⁵ deposited a great shoal of sand and gravel at the point where it ran into the Shannon, which was near Annabeg Lock. Mr. Brownrigg laid a dry weir wall and turned the river down into the Shannon in a 'well judged direction out of the way of the navigation'.²⁶

The structure of Annabeg Lock was very faulty; the tracing under Gillogue lock also needed repair and the masonry in the lock itself needed attention. Clonlara Lock was found to be in a very bad state and in fact the entire lock was completely repaired. All the locks on the navigation were given new gates and almost all the banks were brought to an adequate state of repair.

Where the trackways were constructed along the banks of the Shannon the proprietors of the land would not permit their cattle to be cut off from the waters of the river and so Mr. Brownrigg had to arrange for a passage to be constructed under the trackways and;

a Fence wall to the land and Wing Walls spreading into the Shannon leaving a free access to the River and protecting the Fields of the Neighbours from the Encroachment of the Cattle.²⁷

Seventeen of these arches were constructed in the summer of 1805, and they cost from

²⁴ Report on the Limerick Navigation, dated 9th May, 1803, for the Directors-General of Inland Navigation by Mr. John Brownrigg.

²⁵ Report on the Limerick Navigation, dated 24th July, 1805, for the Directors-General of Inland Navigation by Francis Trench.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

sixty to one hundred pounds each. Mr. Trench felt that the work was justified and well executed.

The cost of completing the navigation was rising far beyond the original estimate and this was ascribed to the rise in the price of labour because of the combination of workmen who were attempting to get better wages and the dishonest advantages taken by people who could possibly make money on the enterprise.

The most expensive part of the work was completing the cut at Parteen and sinking it to its proper depth. The blockage of rock ran to 26 perches and every inch of it needed removal by blasting, as it was red grit, without grain and not lying in strata. To complete the work at Parteen in the summer season before the level of the Shannon should be raised by rain necessitated night work. A suggestion was put forward by the overseer and agreed to by Mr. Brownrigg to give each of the men who should work at night a penny roll and a pint of porter 'an Expense which We trust you will not think misapplied.'²⁸ Once the cut at Parteen was finished, Mr. Trench felt that there was no other problem of any great significance.

The Ardcluney and the Ballyheige Rivers were both diverted from their original courses because the deposits of sand and gravel which they brought with them interfered with the navigation.

Cussane Lock was reconstructed in an excellent fashion by Mr. Pemberton, principal overseer (who worked for £3. 8. 3. per week), according to his own design.

The Sluice is Metal, opening horizontally, and the Tunnel passes through the Breast of the Lock and opens into the Chamber under the centre of the Breast.²⁹

In general conclusion, Mr. Trench expressed a confident expectation that all would be ready by December, 1807, in order to hand the navigation back to the Limerick Company.

The directors of the Grand Canal Company were very anxious to establish and maintain a commercial link between Dublin and Limerick, for the Grand Canal connected with the lower Shannon at Shannon Harbour and so such a link would lead to an increase in business. To this end a reduction in tolls on boats coming from Limerick to Dublin was introduced in January, 1804.

In January, 1807, the Grand Canal Company's agent at Limerick sent a letter to the Dublin office in which he set out some of the difficulties encountered on the Grand Canal and River Shannon. With particular reference to the Limerick to Killaloe canal he stated that the incomplete state of the navigation added to the already considerable uncertainties of the voyage. He felt that the merchants of Limerick had little or no faith in the transport of goods to and from Dublin by the canal, and he was of the opinion that their feelings were justified. Because of the strength of the current and the height of the water in winter, he considered the passage at O'Brien's Bridge as being particularly hazardous.

In 1804, Mr. Brownrigg fixed a cable by means of a large Rock sunk in the Shannon above the Bridge with a large Buoy chained thereto, that the Cable was led through the Arch, and had a small Buoy at the termination, all which was found to answer the purpose of warping the Vessels up the Stream against violent Currents in the Arch of the Bridge.³⁰

At O'Brien's Bridge, it appeared that the navigation arch was the fourth one from the

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Minutes of the Directors-General of Inland Navigation, for 18th February, 1806.

Co. Clare side; this was not far enough out from the shore to avail of the deep water of the river yet it was too far out for the boat to be pulled by tracking. Boats going to Limerick could use the chain erected by Mr. Brownrigg, and let themselves gradually down river; likewise boats going to Killaloe could haul themselves upstream. However, in times of heavy flood this exercise was not possible to boats with only three hands and a steerman;

there is not one of the Trading Vessels properly rigged or found, not having a Windlass or proper Hawser, without which a slender Crew cannot bring a vessel through O'Brien's Bridge or Parteen.³¹

In the summer of 1807, Mr. Brownrigg was urged to employ as many labourers as he could find, in order to keep the work up to date. However, the employment of extra men was not as simple a matter as it first appeared. It seemed that tillage was progressing very slowly and all possible effort was concentrated in that direction. This, plus the knowledge that Mr. Brownrigg needed their services, encouraged the labourers to again form combinations in order to raise wages.

The dredging machines Mr. Brownrigg needed to complete the Errina canal and 'Mr. Browning's Contract' were of a very inadequate nature. This fact, and the difficulty of getting labour, made him think it would be necessary to postpone this work until the end of the season, at which time he would put a dam across the canal and do the necessary work with shovels. However, the Directors-General would not permit him to wait and instructed him that, if necessary, he was to erect the dam immediately; so it was arranged that the navigation was to close on 6th July, 1807, in order to facilitate the necessary work.

In spite of such decisions to speed work as much as possible the canal was not ready to be handed back to the Limerick Navigation Company by December, 1807. Finally, in February, 1809, it was considered to be almost ready, but in that month there was a great flood on the Shannon caused by an extraordinary fall of snow followed by heavy rains; the banks at Errina were burst, the double lock there was destroyed and so were many other works on the navigation. However, the Directors-General repaired all this damage and on 14th December, 1810, it was again considered that the navigation was completed. True to form, the Limerick Navigation Company did not agree with this conclusion and at a general meeting of that body on 1st January, 1811, it was proposed that two engineers, independent of either party, should inspect the works and report their findings. In order to accommodate the Limerick Company, the Directors-General agreed to hold the canal in their jurisdiction until 25th March, 1811.

Mr. John Killaly, engineer, was commissioned by the Directors-General to assess, in an independent spirit, the work done on the navigation. He listed several repairs, of a minor nature, and then made a general conclusion.

Having in the foregoing statement pointed out such repairs, &c. as I conceive absolutely wanting, I still own myself at a loss to decide, whether in their completion your contract with the Limerick Company will be fulfilled. Were I to judge from the estimate they laid before your Board in January 1803, I would say that there has been much more done than they originally looked for; but if I am to decide from the wording of the contract itself, I should certainly say you have not completed it.³²

He continued by looking at the specific projects the Limerick Company requested:

³¹ *Ibid.*, 9th January, 1807.

³² (Ireland) Thirteenth Report of Commissioners on Fees, Gratuities, &c.—(Directors-General of Inland Navigation), app. 28, p. 63.

first, an improvement in the passage of Baal's Bridge; this Bridge in its present state is a very great nuisance, and I sincerely hope you have nothing to do with it; the navigation arch is so low, that high water at equinoctial spring tides reaches within 1 foot of the suffeit, in common spring tides within 4 feet of it, and in neap tides within 7 or 8 feet.

The next thing is, the raising of the River trackways to 2 feet above the highest flood; to effect which, even retaining but 7 feet breadth at top, would, on a moderate computation amount to £10,000., as the pits out of which the present banks have been made should be filled in again, and fresh ground purchased for the necessary excavation.

The lock they speak of at O'Brien's Bridge, and the Canal from thence to Parteen would, I conceive, cost £12,000. at least, and the turning of the Ballyheague River under the Killaloe Canal, at the head of Moys lock, would not be accomplished under £2,000.

Surely when they come to weigh those matters, they cannot have the conscience to think of saddling the country with so great an expense for such an undertaking; but I have strong hopes they will act fairly, and that matters will yet be amicably settled; for though it may be the wish or intention of some of the Limerick Company, not to take the work off your hands on any conditions, under the impression that it will be a losing concern, I imagine the majority are of a different opinion, particularly as I learn that they have lately had an offer to rent the Navigation from them for 27 years, at £500. per annum and to give £3,000. security for keeping the works in proper order.³³

A dam had been placed across the canal at Errina in 1809, in order to facilitate the repairs consequent upon the very heavy flooding of that year. By February, 1811, it was still there and so the canal from O'Brien's Bridge to Limerick was impassable; naturally this greatly annoyed the traders of both the Shannon and Grand Canal. Their costs were increased because land carriage was necessary between Limerick and O'Brien's Bridge.

In April, 1812, a memorial was sent from the Mayor and Corporation of Limerick to the Lord Lieutenant requesting him to ensure that the navigation was completed with all speed. The Lord Lieutenant forwarded the memorial to the Directors-General who, in reply, gave him a copy of a letter which they had sent to the Limerick Navigation Company. In it they stated that it would be impossible to bring the navigation to a complete and perfect state of repair, and keep it so, because any accident or bad weather could cause problems. They also stated that in 1795 there had been talks of selling the canal and they wanted to know if, for example, the Grand Canal Company were willing to purchase it would the Limerick Navigation Company think of selling.

On 30th September, 1812, the Grand Canal Company wrote to the Lord Lieutenant, pointing out that the opening of the canal between Limerick and Killaloe had initiated a trade in corn between Dublin and the counties adjoining the Limerick Navigation. Consequently the amount of corn grown in the Limerick to Killaloe area had increased; the 1812 harvest, especially in the neighbourhood of O'Brien's Bridge, was very good indeed. If the canal was opened for trade many people would purchase corn and send it to the port of Dublin for export to Britain and elsewhere. The Grand Canal Company feared that disappointed at not being able to sell their corn in 1812, the farmers and landowners would be deterred from growing corn, in large quantities, in future years. The Company also went on to point out that in Dublin and the adjoining counties there was a great scarcity of potatoes in that same year. This had even led to riots and the extremely high price of 16d. to 18d. for a stone. Yet in Co. Clare there had been an abundant crop and the company concluded that if the canal had been open it would have been possible to relieve the situation in Dublin.

The final act in the drama came in July, 1813. In an Act of Parliament of that year it

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

was set out that as much of a five hundred thousand pounds grant by Parliament as was necessary was to be applied in purchasing the interest of the Limerick Navigation Company. In the same Act the canal was transferred to the Directors-General of Inland Navigation.

It is interesting, at this point, to have a look at the tolls taken over the years by the Limerick Navigation Company, if only to dispel the idea that the canal was so doomed it made nothing at all. In a statement to the Commission of Enquiry dated 12th January, 1812, the company's income from 1802 to 1810 was listed; however, it appeared, true to form, that the books of accounts for 1800 and 1801 were mislaid. The tolls listed were as follows:

In the year ending 31st December, 1802	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£180. 5. 0¼
Do. 1803	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£127. 5. 1
Do. 1804	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£145. 2. 10¼
Do. 1805	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£ 94. 6. 3
Do. 1806	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£354. 5. 11¼
Do. 1807	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£568. 2. 3
Do. 1808	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£583. 19. 7½
Do. 1809	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£118. 16. 4
Do. 1810	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	£100. 2. 3

The Coming of Steam and the Return of the Limerick Navigation Company (1814-1836)

An insight into the day-to-day problems encountered in the running of the canal is given, from 1814, in the letter books of the Directors-General of Inland Navigation. For example, in the summer of 1815 trouble arose between the officials of the canal and Messrs. Westropp & White, millers, at O'Brien's Bridge. Mr. Seymour, supervisor on the navigation was prevented, by force, from erecting a wall around the trackway at the Mill Quay. The millers in Limerick could also present problems, for Messrs. Rochford & Hogan, the proprietors of the Lock Mills, demanded that the Board (the Directors-General of Inland Navigation) should clean away the weeds and mud above Park Lock, in order to facilitate the mill's use of the waters of the canal. However, the Board were quick to point out that responsibility for keeping this section of canal in an adequate state rested with the millers themselves.

At times the users of the canal attempted to defraud the Board. A drunken boatman put an extra load on his boat after the toll on his cargo had been computed; for this offence he was fined 5/- by Tim Mackey, the supervisor at Limerick. The boatman, however, took exception to this and summoned Mackey before the Mayor, who in those days was in charge of policing the area in his jurisdiction. The Deputy Mayor came to the conclusion that Mackey had no right to impose such a fine, while the Board strongly insisted that under the existing law it had every right to act in this manner.

In June, 1817, the unsettled state of the country caused many traders to request a military escort for all boats using the canal; so to this end it was decided that a sergeant and twelve privates would go with the boats from Limerick to Killaloe at 6 a.m., on every Wednesday morning. On Thursday mornings the same arrangement obtained for boats travelling from Killaloe to Limerick.

The following is a list of various officials of the navigation, including lockkeepers, with the amount of their half yearly salary, on 2nd June, 1815:

Tim Mackey, Collector and Supervisor ...	£50. 0. 0
Roger Hourigan, Lockkeeper, Limerick ...	7.10. 0
Tim Kellaheer, Lockkeeper, Park ...	7.10. 0
Patrick Curtis, Ferry House, Plassy ...	5. 0. 0
Patrick McNamara, Lockkeeper, Annabeg ...	5. 0. 0
Michael Moloney, Lockkeeper, Gillogue ...	5. 0. 0
Michael Glosheer, Lockkeeper, Newtown ...	5. 0. 0
Roger Cusack, Lockkeeper, Monaskea ...	7.10. 0
Tom Browne, Lockkeeper, Errina ...	5. 0. 0
J. Johnson, Lockkeeper, Cussane ...	5. 0. 0
John Ellis, Lockkeeper, Moys ...	7.10. 0
Stephen Moloney, Lockkeeper, Killaloe ...	50. 0. 0
Thomas Seymour, Collector and Supervisor ...	

The state of the general labourer on the canal was also hard. In December, 1817, the Board wrote to Mr. Brownrigg approving of his step in cutting the payment of the labourers to ten pence a day because the early darkness of the winter evenings shortened the hours when it was possible to work.

In February, 1821, Mr. Mackey received a letter confirming that the Lord Lieutenant had approved of his having charge of the entire line of the navigation; he was also allowed half a guinea a week to enable him to hire a horse.

Pigs were found wandering on the banks of the canal and as they were seen as a possible source of damage to the trackways they were driven from Killaloe to Limerick by Stephen Moloney, lockkeeper, in order that they should be placed in a pound. Mr. Mackey was instructed to return the pigs to the owner on payment of a fine of five shillings for each pig. He was also instructed to inform the owner that if the offence occurred again the pigs would be killed immediately.

However, it appears that not only wandering pigs were in danger, for the lockkeeper at Cussane requested to be allowed to carry firearms in order to provide himself with protection against the crews of boats, but exactly how they threatened him is not stated. The permission was not given and he was advised instead to have them bound to the peace.

Prior to 1823, the lock house at Gillogue was used as a police barracks but in that year the Board, by arrangement with the chief magistrate of police, returned the house to the lockkeeper, whose appointment was approved by the Lord Lieutenant.

In the summer of 1824, a little glimpse was given into the situation of the poor of Limerick. Mr. Mackey was supervising the cleaning of the canal at Rhebogue and the 'numerous peasants assembled' showed what he described as 'a Disposition to Riot'³⁴ in an effort to be employed on the job. To cope with the problem, Mackey called on the assistance of the Mayor and a Captain Drough and requested the help of the police.

In some cases it appears that the lockkeepers had minds of their own. In January, 1826, the agent at Limerick and Killaloe for the Shannon Navigation Company complained that the lockkeeper at Killaloe was levelling the bank, opposite to the quay, by throwing the earth into the canal, for the purpose of making a tillage garden for himself, 'to the great delay of boats loading and unloading.'³⁵

The first attempt to have the use of steam introduced to this section of navigation was apparently made in April, 1815, when a man named R. D. Watson wrote to the Directors-General suggesting the use of a steamboat, which he felt would greatly assist boats

³⁴ Minutes of the Directors-General of Inland Navigation, 28th July, 1824.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 29th January, 1826.

through the lakes of the Shannon, particularly in the face of strong winds. While the Directors-General agreed with all of his conclusions, it was felt, nevertheless, that money could not be spent on such a venture when the actual navigation itself was still incomplete. The Grand Canal Company was also very interested in improving the effectiveness of the canal. The passage at O'Brien's Bridge was proving fatal; a boat had been sunk there in April and another one in May, 1818, and the crew of one of the boats drowned. Consequently, many merchants and boatmen were reluctant to use the navigation and the Grand Canal Company felt that the solution to the problem lay in the use of steamboats along with the construction of a lock and a new section of canal at O'Brien's Bridge. However, the Directors-General turned down both suggestions.

In 1822, John Grantham made a report on the navigation for the Limerick Chamber of Commerce. There is a memorial in Killaloe Cathedral to Grantham which states:

Sacred to the memory of John Grantham Civil Engineer Formerly of the 11th Light Dragoons who died in Limerick on the 23rd of February, 1833 aged 58 years. This monument was erected by a few friends in testimony of their esteem for his private worth and as a memorial of his having made the first survey of the River Shannon with a view to improving it and of his having been the first who introduced Steam Navigation on its waters in the year 1825.³⁶

In his report to the Chamber of Commerce he commented that, in general, the canal was well constructed but O'Brien's Bridge constituted a great hazard. In winter the current flowed very swiftly and as the boats used the centre of the river it could prove very difficult to pass up or down stream. He felt that a lock, while a very good idea in itself, would be too expensive a method of solving the problem, so he suggested that two arches of the bridge, nearest the Clare side of the bank, should be made into one and the trackway continued underneath.

At Parteen a violent stream ran in the river, both in summer and winter, and here Grantham felt a lock would solve the problem and its construction should be seriously considered.

Another report was made in July of the same year, by John Stokes, engineer for the Grand Canal Company. He laid out a line for a canal from the head of the falls at Parteen to the deep water below O'Brien's Bridge. This, he felt, would not only make the canal more safe and useful but would also provide employment to the poor of 'an immense population' and would give to 'the poorest wretches human eyes ever beheld' money which would 'save thousands from starvation.'³⁷ He went on to describe how a boat discharging potatoes at O'Brien's Bridge had been surrounded by hundreds of wretched women and children, who made attempts to catch the occasional potato which fell to the ground during the process of unloading and weighing, but even if they did succeed in securing a potato they were compelled to return it.

John Grantham had been asked by various merchants and businessmen to establish the use of steamboats between Dublin and Limerick on inland waters. On 5th April, 1824, the Directors-General wrote to Grantham agreeing with his use of the Limerick to Killaloe section in this plan, provided that no harm was done by the steamboats to the bed of the canal or the towing paths. He requested to be allowed to rent a plot of ground at Limerick in order to build a store for the use of the steamboat company. The Directors-General granted him a plot 100 feet by 30 feet at a rent of 11/- per foot per annum for 99 years. In

³⁶ V. H. T. & D. R. Delany, *The Canals of the South of Ireland*, Newton Abbot 1966, p. 173.

³⁷ Minutes of the Grand Canal Company, 8th May, 1822.

order to give encouragement to the project, Grantham was also to be allowed to use the navigation free of toll for one year. However, this relaxation only applied to the steam-boats for when he was forced, temporarily, to abandon the use of steam because of the difficulties presented by the passage through O'Brien's Bridge in January, 1827, he was expected to pay toll at the usual rates.

Baal's Bridge, Limerick, had always been a source of great annoyance for all using the navigation. Boats passing under this bridge had first to discharge their cargo at one side, sail beneath the bridge and then re-load the goods. The Directors-General acknowledged that the bridge was a great inconvenience and saw that if it was properly rebuilt it would enable the navigation to be extended to the mouth of the Shannon; however, the necessary funds were simply not available. Therefore, in view of this stalemate many of the land-owners and merchants of the area came together to raise enough money to form a new company and take over the ownership and management of the canal. An Act of Parliament dealing with the problem of Baal's Bridge and also giving power and recognition to the new company was passed in 1830. It was entitled 'An Act for the Improvement of the Shannon Navigation from the City of Limerick to Killaloe by rebuilding the Bridge called Baal's Bridge in the said City.'

Lenihan, in his history of the city, has the following to say about the old bridge:

During the time when Limerick was a fortress within the limit of the town wall the inconvenience of the limit of ground to build on was much experienced. To meet this difficulty in part, the Earl of Shannon to whom the bridge belonged permitted the building of two ranges of houses on it, which so contracted the roadway that it was almost impassable. After the Siege and surrender of the City to King William's troops, the houses on the east were purchased and taken down by an Act of Parliament, which was a great improvement. The range on the west side, which were a good class of shops in their day, remained until the bridge was removed in 1830.³⁸

So the Act of Parliament provided for the removal of the old bridge, the building of a new one that would facilitate the extension of the navigation down the estuary of the Shannon and the setting up of a new Limerick Navigation Company.

And whereas it is just and expedient that the Property of the said Canal and Navigation from the deep water above Killaloe to Limerick, with the Tolls and Profits thereof should be applied to the Purposes of rebuilding and maintaining the said Bridge and extending or otherwise improving the Navigation of said River Shannon and that the same should be vested in a company of persons interested in the maintenance and Preservation of the same, and who would undertake the Superintendence and Management of the said canal and the Outlay of such Sum or Sums of Money as might be deemed necessary for the general Improvement of the said Navigation of the River Shannon within such periods in such a Manner and under such control as the Lord Lieutenant or other Chief Secretary, Governor and Governors of Ireland for the Time being shall direct or appoint. And whereas several Persons have entered into a Subscription for the Purpose of raising a Joint Stock or Fund for the purposes aforesaid and have formed themselves into a Company under the Denomination of 'The Limerick Navigation Company.'³⁹

³⁸ Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick; Its History and Antiquities*, Limerick 1866 (reprinted, Cork 1967), p. 476. James Grene Barry, in an article entitled "Old Limerick Bridges", *J. Nth. Munster Archaeo. Soc.*, 1(1909-11), 7-13, contradicts Lenihan's statement as follows: 'Lenihan, in his History of Limerick, assumes that the rows of houses on this bridge were erected before the Williamite sieges; but the evidence is all the other way. The maps of the sieges of 1690 and 1691 do not show rows of houses on the bridge. Viscount Shannon (not the Earl of Shannon as stated by Lenihan) got a grant from the Crown of this bridge, and after the surrender of the city let both sides of it for building. It is doubtful if there was a single brick house built in Limerick before 1691. The Dutch, who settled in the city after that date, established brick works in the corcass lands on both banks of the Shannon, and practically rebuilt Limerick' (p. 10).

³⁹ 'An Act for the Improvement of the Shannon Navigation from the City of Limerick to Killaloe by rebuilding the Bridge called Baal's Bridge in the said City'. 11th of George IV, 1830.

The Act also stipulated that the rebuilding of the bridge had to commence within three months and that it must be finished within two years; the estimated cost was £3,000 and the architects were J. and G. Paine.

However, the reign of the new Limerick Navigation Company was a short one indeed. It lasted until 1836, when the Limerick to Killaloe canal was taken over by a body called the Shannon Commissioners. In that year the revenue from tolls was £1,514; 14,600 passengers had been carried and the tonnage of goods carried amounted to 36,018. The Shannon Commissioners were a body set up by the government to control the navigation of the entire Shannon as much investigation had led to the conclusion that one reason why this great river was not exploited to its full potential was the fact that its control lay in so many diverse hands. For example, the Limerick Harbour Commissioners had claimed jurisdiction over the tidal portion of the river; the Limerick Navigation Company controlled the Limerick city to Killaloe section while the middle Shannon was served by the Grand Canal Company.

The Limerick to Killaloe canal ceased to operate in 1929 because the hydro-electric station at Ardnacrusha required the flooding of the navigation from below Killaloe to Parteen. Considering all the thought, planning, work and money put into its construction, and remembering all the boats that once moved over its waters and the commerce it brought to the lower Shannon, it is not a little sad to walk the sometimes overgrown towing-paths and see the blocked-up locks, the gateless hinges, and the bed of the canal itself, full no longer with water but now richly green with the growth of bushes and even the occasional tree.

The canal at Clare Street, Limerick, is now neglected; the lock gates are rotting and the waters are used as an unofficial dumping ground. The entire stretch, from the city to the point where the cutting enters the Shannon, presents a picture of quiet neglect, except on summer evenings when the bright sun and the green grass clothe it in an illusion of renewal and life.