

Outlook augurs well for the old mill by the stream . . .

By NORMA PRENDIVILLE

AFTER MORE than 25 years of stagnation, the millrace and race spill at the old mill in Croom are flowing freely again. The overgrowth and debris of decades have been cleared away, a new pathway built along the stream and a new generation of villagers will once more be able to meet and linger at the bridge and watch as the clear water of the millstream rejoins its parent water, the Maigue, in a rushing waterfall.

This regeneration of the ages-old stream is all part of an ambitious project to restore the old granary by the bridge to its former glory. The granary was bought over two years ago by local man, Plunkett Hayes, whose only concern was to prevent this fine cut stone building from going the way of so many others of its kind - straight to the demolition squad. A man who is singularly shy about his own role in the whole undertaking, Plunkett says simply that he wanted to save the building but in so doing, he has restored to his own place one of its key and determining features.

Croom has been a milling town for over 200 years, when the Lyons family first built the mill. Their association with Croom ended in 1935 with the departure of Captain James Denis Lyons, but years before that, the Maguire family took over the running of the mill which was known as Croom Mills Bakery. The mill ceased to function after the Second World War.

It was a busy place in its time, with grain being milled in the now dilapidated building on one side of

the bridge before being shunted, by means of an augur, underground and to the five-storey granary building on the other corner of the bridge. It is this granary which has now been restored.

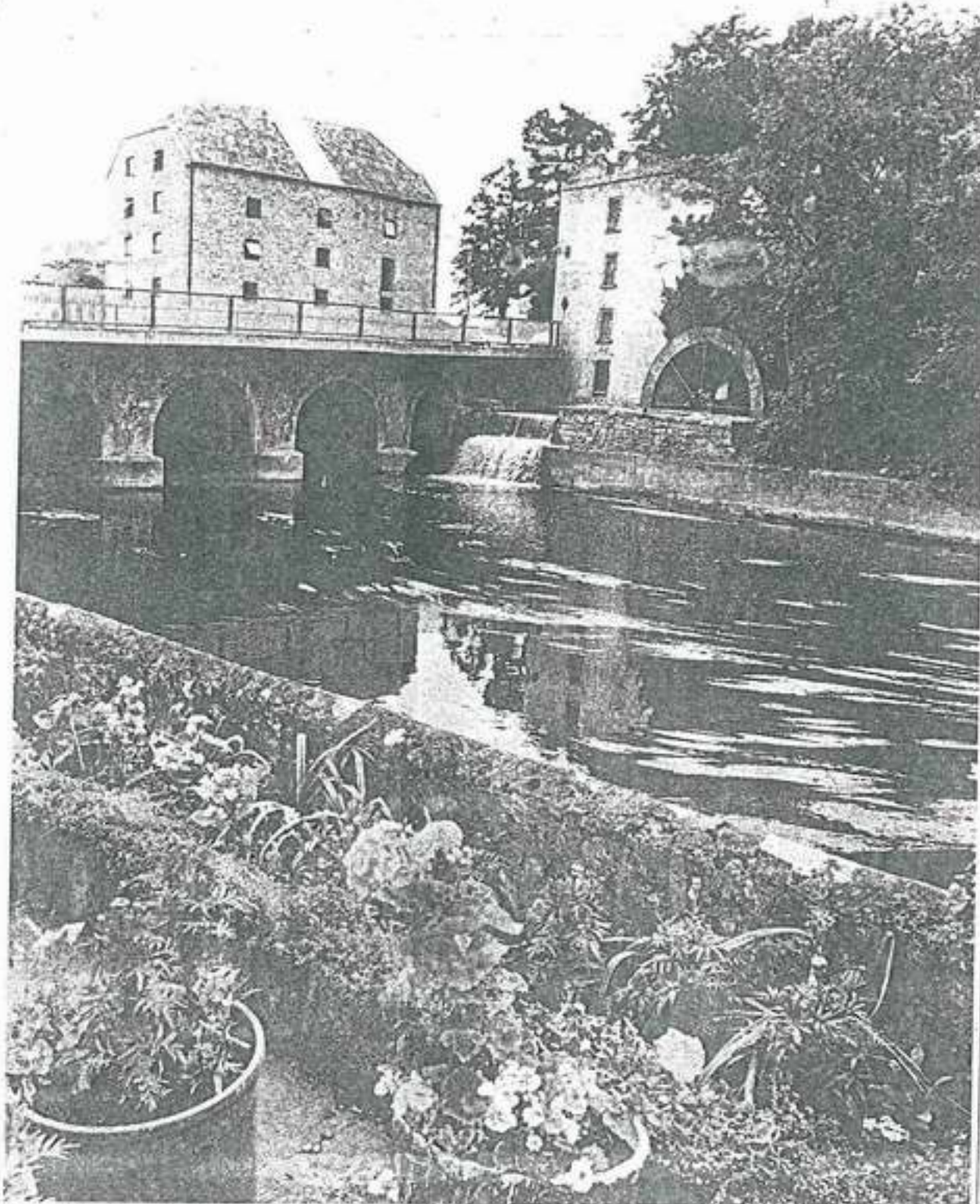
The absolute minimum has been changed in restoring the granary. New windows have been installed and extra light has been let in through glass panels in the roof. Other than that, the granary remains much as it always did.

In the immediate area, however, there have been drastic changes. The original millstream ran downriver from the weir, beneath the granary and bridge before it reached the millwheel. Along part of this route, the stream has now been sunk underground and runs through a two-foot pipe before emerging again into a deep pool about 50 yards from the granary. The banks have been filled in and terraces built to accommodate a riverside walk and carpark.

The whole project has been undertaken with great sympathy and discretion, through the use of matching stone and the retention of old trees. As a result, access to the river has been greatly enhanced.

The project is far from finished, however, according to Plunkett Hayes. It may take another year before everything is in place. And no decision has yet been made as to the ultimate use of the building. A number of options are being discussed but they remain, as yet, options.

Whatever new function the granary will serve, it has certainly got a new lease of life.



The old mill . . . back in operation.

Project submits plan to halt West population drop

WEST LIMERICK has suffered a 3% decline in population since the last census report.

And a package to halt the tide has been put to the Department of Finance and the Midwest Review Group which is monitoring EC structural funding by the West Limerick Resource Development Project.

Project chairman, Sean Liston, this week outlined the group's submissions for EC funding with the words: "This is not a shopping list, but rather the measures we believe are necessary to maintain the population and to improve the quality of life in the area."

The project's proposals, he said, come under various headings and they are seeking funding for them from the structural funds that come on stream in 1994.

The total cost of all the measures proposed is not yet available, he continued, as this is an initial submission which will have to be costed in detail.

"What we are seeking to do now is to lay down the framework for a development plan which would involve local groups, the County Council and the EC," said Mr Liston.

Maintaining local schools, shops and post-offices and housing are seen by the project as key factors in any such development plan, according to Mr Liston. The possibility of encouraging people to move

to West Limerick from other, more populated areas, was also something which they are seriously addressing.

Another proposal, Mr Liston continued, is for a greater emphasis on vocational and economic training, particularly in alternative land use, product marketing and tourism skills.

The submission also includes a range of recreational projects such as proposals for a development of fishing on the Deel and Feale rivers, along with sports such as boating and canoeing on these rivers as well as on the Shannon and at Dohoye Lake. The development of the Great Southern Walking Trail is also included in the submission.

In addition, the project has submitted that the cultural and historical heritage of West Limerick should be developed. In this, according to Mr Liston, they envisage a continuing development and promotion of places such as the Palatine Centre in Rathkeale, Knockfierna and the numerous sites associated with the Earls of Desmond, particularly those at Askeaton, Glin and Newcastlewest.

"The traditional musical heritage of West Limerick is one of the best in the world," Mr Liston pointed out, and the project has outlined various ways in which this could be developed and marketed as an economic

resource. Chief among these is the establishment of an interpretative centre at a central location which would also serve as an information-bank for visitors.

The project also calls in its submission for a change in the way community-based projects are funded by the EC. In particular, it argues that community-based projects should not have to meet the same financial criteria as commercial projects.

"While it may be realistic to demand of commercial projects that they match any structural funds pound for pound, it is not realistic to expect the same of community-based and community-driven projects," Mr Liston explained.

But, he stressed, this was not an argument for a hand-out. Local funds and local involvement are crucial to any project, and they want to see this trend nurtured and developed but many community-based groups are not in a position to raise the large amounts of money necessary under the present formula. Unless the rules are changed, a lot of valuable schemes and proposals will not get off the ground.

The continuing co-operation of community groups and organisations through the project is testament to the willingness and dedication of the people of West Limerick to their own area, Mr Liston concluded.

□ Picture: DERMOT LYNCH