

Mullocks . . . a brief history

By JOHN DUNDON

ALTHOUGH there was a firm of that name, wigmakers, in Limerick in the 1750s, John Mullock, founder of Mullock and Sons, Shipping Agents, was a blow-in from County Offaly in 1778. A year earlier a canal stretching from Dublin through the midlands to Shannon Harbour on Lough Derg was finally joined to Limerick by a canal from Killaloe to the Canal Harbour, and thence by the Estuary to the North Atlantic Ocean.

This revolution in modern transportation gave the necessary impetus to the still youthful John Mullock, born in 1750 and his wife (nee Jacques) to leave Parsonstown, now Birr, and set up their family home and business at Merchants Quay, Limerick. Their first venture in overseas trade was the importation of Lisbon Wine, cheap port-type fortified wine which they, on landing, forwarded by horse drawn and sailed canal barges to their customers, innkeepers along the canal route between Limerick and Tullamore.

At the close of the 18th century Guinness Stout had yet to be established as the popular Irish tipple. My grandfather, William Herriott, quoting his father Michael, recalled that when he was young on the Limerick docks in the 1850s the foremen stevedores drank whiskey but the dockers drank port wine.

There is little doubt that he was successful as when he died aged 67 years in 1817 he was buried in a family grave, a choice location by the great west door of St. Mary's Cathedral overlooking the Shannon. He had been joined by his sons, John and Luke. John was born in 1781 and he took up the reins for a short time after his father's death to be succeeded by the founder's grandson, again John, born in 1799, who continued as principal until his death in 1851. The last member of the founder's family, his great-grandson, Luke Mullock the second was born in 1827, son of John Mullock the second and on his father's death, with Michael Herriott, born in 1831 as his chief clerk and assistant took command. Thus they continued until Luke the second's sudden death at the early age of 51 years in the autumn of 1881.

This Luke Mullock had married late (1874) to Sarah Louisa Sykes, born 1844, a daughter of Francis Cherry Sykes, a Quaker Grocer whose place of business was 112 George Street — now housing the Irish Permanent Building Society offices — and Riverview, St. Munchin's. The widowed Mrs. Sarah Mullock was left with four young children, the eldest Christened Richard Wilson Mullock, born in 1875 was then aged six, and three girls, Elizabeth, Frances Olive and Gwendolene Clare. The younger Gwendolene was only six months old on her father's death.

Mrs. Mullock then turned to her brother-in-law Richard Wilson, married to Luke Mullock's only surviving sister, Elizabeth who was born in 1828 and to her late husband's trusted chief clerk, Michael Herriott to run the business for her. However, Richard Wilson who had been a ship-chandler, died aged 58 years in 1888 and then both widows, Mrs. Mullock and Mrs. Wilson handed over full

Next to the Limerick Chronicle, Mullocks, Shipping Agents, are the oldest firm in Limerick. John Dundon, the present chairman of the company, chronicles the history of the firm from its very beginnings and outlines his family's connection with the original founders. The company also gave a new word to the English language . . . "Mullocking", meaning hard, physical work . . . read on.

control of the business to great grandfather Michael Herriott just about a hundred years ago in exchange for a very considerable annuity, guaranteed for the lifetime of these ladies or a minimum of fourteen years. Mrs. Wilson died in Limerick in 1899 while Mrs. Mullock in Dublin about 1902, but more about her death will be recalled later in this narrative.

The transfer of such a valuable and thriving business from a non-Catholic to Catholic ownership at this time is noteworthy and most unusual in Limerick of that era. It could only have occurred for two reasons, first that Mrs. Sarah Sykes Mullock was born a Quaker and The Society of Friends had been oppressed as much as Roman Catholics in earlier times and were noted for their lack of bigotry in 19th century rural society, and secondly Michael Herriott must have been a man of both ability and trustworthiness. His father David Herriott of Thomond Gate, had joined Mullocks as a young clerk about 1830 and Michael his son, my grandfather, had followed in the business about the time of John Mullock the second's death in the 1850s. My great grandfather was almost a contemporary of Luke Mullock whose great grandfather had founded the firm. Of him we can say today that when he came to Limerick in search of customers for his new shipping enterprise, Captain James Cooke was searching the vastness of the Pacific for new Continents.

Michael Herriott lived and worked on until his death in 1916, aged 85 years. He had a large Victorian family, eight children survived to adulthood and two of his sons, Frederick the eldest and my grandfather William joined him in his business. On his death his sons divided the activities and the premises between them. Frederick took over the then thriving retail coal merchant business and the retail yard at Steamboat Quay, while William retained the shop agency and the smaller wholesale coal yard and trade, much affected at the time by the losses of the U-Boat blockade in the Great War. Frederick, then in failing health sold out to a rival company some ten years later, while William, by hard work and enterprising foresight brought the shipping business successfully through the great depression of the thirties and the trauma of 1939-1945 War. He lived on until 1953 attending daily at his office to within a few months of his death, also aged 85 years.

My mother was his only daughter Mary; his eldest son, Gerard, born 1894 qualified as a doctor in 1915 and at once joined the Royal Army Medical Corps and served in the Middle Eastern campaign, later setting up in private practice in Southsea. His younger son, Laurence (Renzi), born in 1898, was one of the Redmondite Volunteers to the Forces in 1916 serving as a very young subaltern in France in 1917. He was invalided-out in 1918 and never regained his health,

dying after protracted illness in 1940. Thus, to fill the generation gap I was a very young entrant to Mullocks to join my grandfather Herriott in 1938 direct from school which I left before my 16th birthday.

This year the firm is 212 years old and the control passed totally to my mother's family just 100 years ago. Perhaps the most remarkable thing is that it is still a small family enterprise. It would be reasonable to expect that such a company should have grown into a large multifaceted concern, insulated against the ups and downs of commerce, or have gone to the wall long ago, but Mullocks has done neither.

It has moved its location only within the city from Merchants Quay to Arthurs Quay in 1800, to 97/98 Henry Street in 1838 to St. Alphonsus Street down the Dock Road in 1956 and finally to its present location, Security House, 15 Lower Mallow Street. The only branch office, still within the Shannon Estuary which we serve exclusively as shipping agents, was opened in Foynes in the 1960s. The building at Merchants Quay and Arthurs Quay have long since been demolished, but the office for 118 years in Henry Street where three generations of Mullocks and five generations of my family including myself have worked, is still standing as Shannon Hotel Supplies, today.

Prior to being taken over by Mullocks in 1838, the Henry Street part with stables attached had been the headquarters of the Limerick Watch, a private merchants police and fire fighting force. The rear stores fronting to Howleys Quay were once the warehouses of this local grain exporting family, they shipped oats, the Howleys of Richill, Lisnagry.

Since 1778 there have been many changes but much remains the same. The firm still performs similar services to shipping even though the ships of today dwarf the "Schooner Jean," 365 tonnes burden which we traded trans-Atlantic in the 1830s and later down to the Mediterranean where one of our treasures, a painting of her off leghorn in 1834, hanging in our office, was made. Our records are incomplete for the earlier years but the Slate Book of the "Jean" in the writing of one Daniel Gorman, her Master, dealing with his expenditure for crews and supplies, etc., and his income from passengers and their board and his general accounts with the owner give a fascinating insight into conditions at sea in those far off days.

From the historical point of view our continuous Custom House report books from 1850 onwards are more valuable. They record the arrival and departure, the tonnage and the name of the Master of every ship, sail, steam or motor vessel cleared in and out of the Shannon or Limerick by us over all those years.

Who would have thought that 100 years ago there was a lively trade in fresh water ice? Cargoes of up to 500 tonnes of hewn fresh water ice were

imported every spring from south west Norway, usually Kragero. These ice blocks were cut out on the lakes by small sawmills in the off-winter season, and then in the spring loaded, packed in sawdust, to supply the ice-houses of the four Limerick bacon factories of the day, Dennys, Mattersons, O'Maras and Shaws for the summer season. Some also went to the ice-houses built as an adjunct to the mansions of gentry and merchant princes. There were good times and bad, war and peace, famine and plenty, shipwrecks and rescue, all are recorded. We are also proud to record that we gave a slang word to the local idiom "Mullocking." What does it mean? Well, it comes from the old days of hard physical stevedoring work, when there was no other way to load or discharge a particular cargo from a ship except a hard slog and plenty of sweat. It was and still is, called "Mullocking."


Why should I set down this outline of Mullocks history now? Well, this year I will have been 52 years with the firm, managing director for 37. Undoubtedly, it is characteristic of old age to look back into the past, why not when you have more of it than of the future. But there is another very special reason as within the last year, quite

unexpectedly, I have come in contact with a descendant of the original Mullock family. By the observation of a certain lady who was passing down Mallow Street I was introduced to Denis Wilson Mullock, grandson of Luke Mullock the second and son of Dr. Richard Wilson Mullock, born at 4 Wellington Tce., in Limerick, in 1875. Denis Mullock lived in Southwold in Suffolk, England. Together, we have researched his family history and except for a few details, our job is complete.

Earlier, I touched on his grandmother, Sarah Sykes Mullock's death in Dublin about 1902. She died while her only son, Dr. Richard Wilson Mullock was serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps in South Africa during the Boer War. We have been unable to trace any record of her death or burial. However, the older generation in Limerick will, perhaps remember Alma Fitt of the Limerick Savings Bank. I knew him in his later life. He had been originally of Quaker stock and he used to tell me the same story . . . a tale of the death and burial of old Mrs. Mullock told to him by his mother who had continued to be a member of the Society of Friends. This is his story:

"Old Mrs. Mullock had left the Quakers because her

husband Luke Mullock was a wine and spirit importer and also lent money on mortgage. She had been a widow for many years and had moved to Dublin after her husband's death, but at the end of her days she had great regrets and wished to be re-united with the Quakers and with her own people in death. When she died her family appealed to the Friends to allow to be buried in the Quaker Cemetery at Punch's Cross, Ballinacurra, but this permission was refused. However, they sought and obtained the assistance of Mr. Herriott of Mullocks who had been her late husband's employee and life long friend. Her remains came down by train to Limerick — the evening mail grain at 8 o'clock and Michael Herriott with the assistance of some of his boys (casual dockers) hoisted the coffin over the high wall of the cemetery in the dark of the night and put the good lady down exactly where she wished to be with her own people, the Sykes's of George's Street. Perhaps the old tale is true, certainly a thorough search of the burial registers in Limerick and Dublin for that era show no record of Mrs. Sarah Mullock, nee Sykes. It is a fact, perhaps it is loyalty such as this that has contributed to the success of Mullocks for over 200 years."


SEAN Curtin

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