

A letter from the past

**SUTTON'S COAL OFFICE,
Mount Kennet Quay,
Limerick
Sept. 23rd. 1904**

Dear Sir,

Referring to our conversation on the telephone to-day, I must say I was rather surprised at your question asking whether a large number of men who had been employed by Bannatynes discharging Grain Steamers had to go into the Union on the introduction of Grain Elevators by that Firm into Limerick, and have been there ever since.

No such state of things ever existed here. It is quite true when this machinery arrived in port, the men - about 150 to 200 - got up a demonstration, and marched in a body over to the Union, were admitted, and remained there for the night, but the next morning they all cleared out, and were never seen there since.

To verify this statement I went over to the Union to-day and was informed in the Master's Office that what I stated above is exactly what occurred. About 150 to 200 men sought admission in a body to the Union, were admitted, but the next morning they all left and never returned.

This of course was nothing more than a demonstration on the part of the men, probably to enlist sympathy with them in what they considered was a grievance. But let me tell you what is the result of the introduction of these grain suckers into Limerick. I have been told by an old employee of Bannatynes's Firm, that their imports have more than doubled since this machinery was introduced, and that their trade is increasing daily, although the population of the country is unfortunately decreasing.

I have also been told by him that they employ far more hands now, than they ever did previous to the advent of the Suckers, and that they possibly could not carry on their trade at present without this machinery.

It is true he said that some of these men do not earn as much money as they did when the steamers were worked by hand, but then he said their work is not half as hard now as it was then, and their earnings go quite as far with them, for with the hard work they had to perform before,

they drank the money almost as fast as they earned it.

He says no four men could keep tugging at a handwinch from morning till night, especially in large deep steamers. The men got completely worn out towards night at his unhuman work, and can only stick a few days a week at it.

There are no men on the quays of Limerick who would or could work handwinches at the present day. They simply would not do it. Steam is everywhere used.

The men here too are not slow to see that they are in competition with Dublin, Cork and Waterford, and they quite recognise that a couple of pence a ton would be the means of diverting say a cargo of coal from their port, and so they endeavour to keep pace with the times, and do things as expeditiously, and economically as possible in order to keep the trade at home.

Bannatynes can now discharge a five-thousand ton steamer in five days. In the old order of things it used to take a month and very many owners would not send their steamers to Limerick at all. It is not hard to see the enormous advantage gained by a firm like Bannatynes in this way. Fancy a big steamer lying at the quays here for a month instead of five days, and think of the enormous reduction in the freight this quick dispatch brings about.

The fact of the matter is that the tremendous competition in American and English flour so largely imported into this country compelled the Bannatynes to introduce this machinery or close down their mills, as has happened in the case of many mills all over the country.

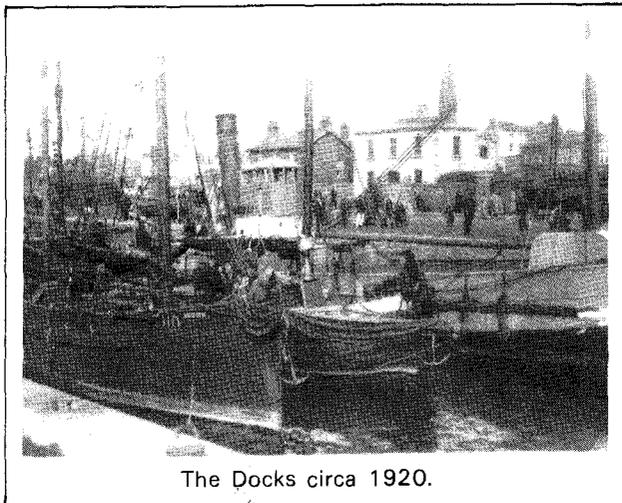
It is well for Limerick there are such people as the Bannatynes there, who are able to introduce such modern machinery as they have lately done into all their mills; spending thousands of pounds on it for otherwise the milling industry would simply be crushed out by the keen competition I have referred to, giving the Americans a monopoly of the trade of Ireland, and giving them the chance perhaps of raising the poor man's loaf as high as they may wish to put it.

It may not be generally known, but I am assured it is a fact that America, with the enormous quantity of offals, such as bran, Pollard, tailings etc., at her disposal taken from flour sent this and other countries, is crippling the Bacon Curing Industry of this country. She keeps all the offals at home, feeds her own pigs cheaply with them, and so has a magnificent Bacon Curing Industry. We in Ireland have very little offals, because the quantity of grain milled by us is insignificant. Offals are consequently dear, and with small prices for Pigs, farmers cannot buy them. Of course the small prices obtained is due to American competition in the Bacon line. In Limerick the Bacon Curing Industry is not all as healthy as it used to be.

It would be well therefore if we had many more firms in the country like Bannatynes, with their modern machinery enabling them to compete with any country, we would have more industries, more work, and more people.

Yours obediently,
Geo. Goodwin.

Sir. A. Sutton,
Messrs. Sutton's Ltd.,
CORK.



The Docks circa 1920.