

# Where the Mulcaire river flows



he Mulcaire River has attracted and served many interests down through history. Up to quite recently its reputation as a breeding haven for

**salmo salar** was a byword among anglers everywhere. Its quiet scenes of beauty are well known to the wandering Waltonian, who might be observed any time between March and September plying his craft, or merely enjoying the delights of the never failing stream and the kaleidoscope of its flower and tree-decked banks.

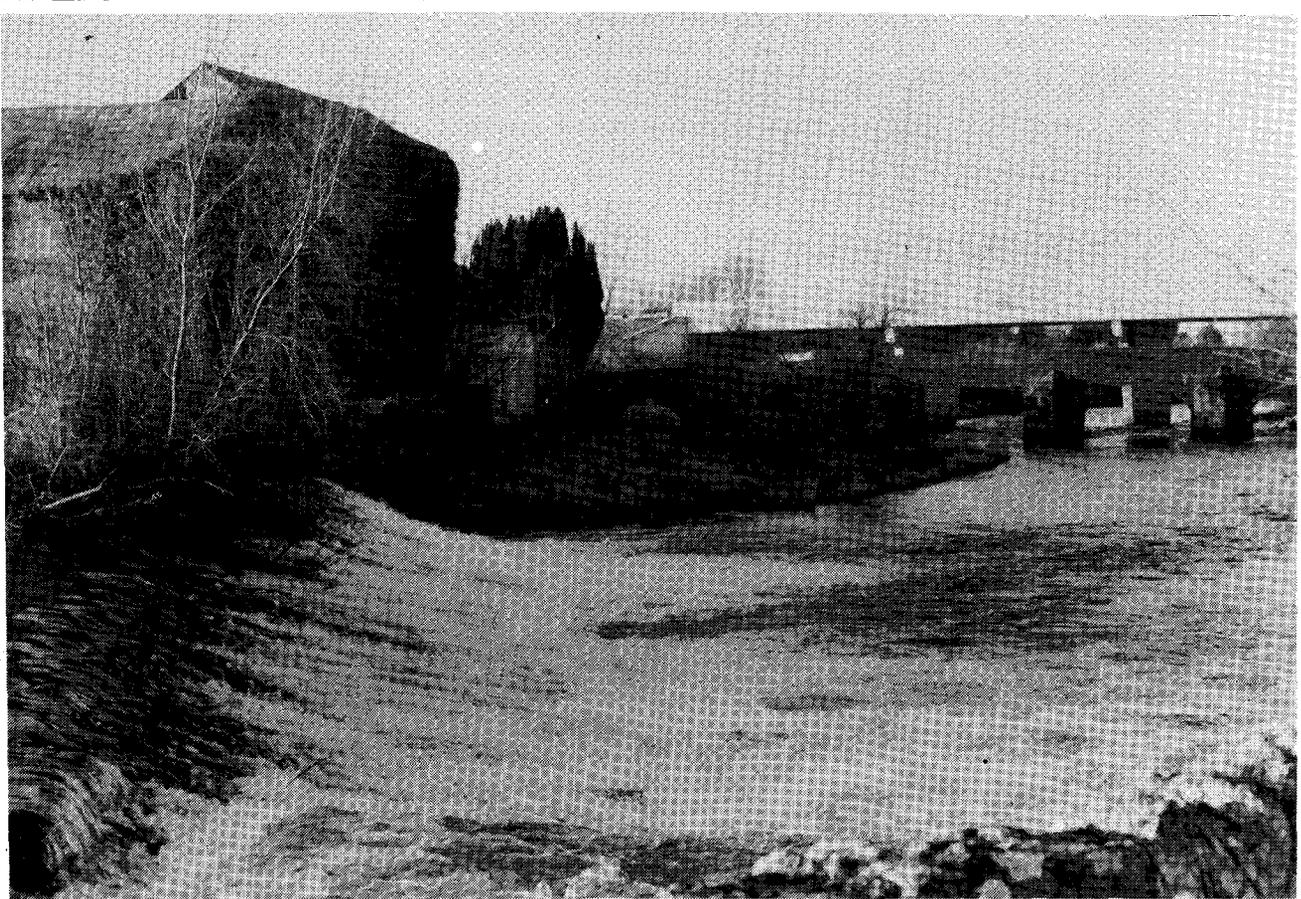
In the past there were those who used the steady power of the stream for their industries. Water mills were located at Annacotty, Ballyclough, Scart and Abington. Annacotty Mill was internationally famous in the latter half of the eighteenth century for the excellence of the paper manufactured there. This mill was built in 1747 by

by Kevin Hannan

Joseph Sexton, an enterprising merchant from Limerick city. The quality of the Annacotty paper was acknowledged by the most critical connoisseurs at the other side of the channel, so much so that the Treasury was influenced to make a number of cash grants to the undertaking. In literary circles, too, the paper was noticed with special favour. The Earl of Chesterfield, the famous literary critic and patron of the arts in the mid-1700s, wrote to Sexton:

"Sir, I am sincerely glad of the reward and encouragement which your industry hath met with. I never doubted but that it would; for, though imaginary merit commonly complains of being unrewarded, real merit, sooner or later, in some shape or other, seldom fails of success. Your paper already wants but very little of equal-

ing the best that any other country furnishes, and I see no reason why you should not bring it soon to such a point of perfection as to supply all the demands of Ireland, and possibly some of England; for at present we import a great deal from other countries. Let me give you one piece of advice, though I believe you want it less than most manufacturers in Ireland: never think your paper either good enough or cheap enough, be it ever so good or ever so cheap, but always endeavour to make it both better and cheaper; and sacrifice a little present and precarious to the future and permanent profit. Acquire the public confidence in the goodness and reasonableness of your manufacture, and your future will be solid and lasting both to you and your family, if they travel in your steps ... I am with that esteem, which you deserve from all Ireland, and from all those who wish it as well as I do, Sir, your faithful servant, Chesterfield".



The Mulcaire river at Annacotty, with the old and new bridges in the background.



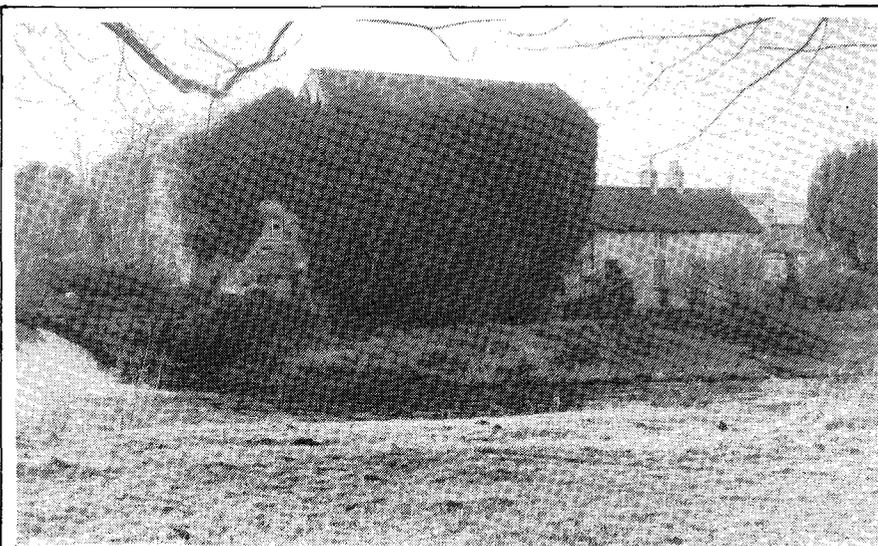
Specimens of this fine paper are to be found in many books in the National Library of Ireland and in other important libraries in England. Copies of **Biggs Military History of Ireland**, printed in Limerick on paper manufactured in Annacotty, are still in fine condition.

Two miles upstream can be seen the site of the old flax mill at Scart, last used by the Flynn family, who afterwards settled in Sixmilebridge and operated the picturesque mill there up to recent times.

Further upstream, at Browne's Weir, a well-known landmark for anglers, local tradition points out the site of an ancient mill, but there is nothing to indicate any trace of mill or millrace, though a great volume of water is retained above this weir for more than half a mile. Next come some delightful stretches of broken water: the Haunt, Walsh's Stream, the Meetings (the confluence of the Mulcaire and Newport rivers), the Stepping Stones, Poulcarthy, Bourke's Flat, the Poplars, the Joiners and the Sheep Hole, before we come to Abington, historically one of the most important sites by the river.

There in the early thirteenth century the Earl of Moreton (afterwards King John) granted a large tract of land, on both sides of the river, to Theobald FitzWalter, Lord of Carrick, at that time the head of the Ormonde family and a nephew of St. Thomas-a-Becket, the famous Archbishop of Canterbury. FitzWalter's close connection with such an eminent churchman may have influenced his action in settling the Cistercians on his estate about 1205. The monks came from the Abbey of Savingnaie, in France. FitzWalter spared no expense in the endowment of this abbey, and was himself interred there the following year in one of the first funerals to Abington. Like many other foundations of its kind during the thirteenth century, it was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Dinely's drawing of the place in the 1680s leaves us a picture of a very extensive foundation, with fine stone buildings. In his **History** Lenihan describes a number of its grand monuments and their inscriptions commemorating the principal families of the parish in the early years - Barrys, Ryans and Walshs, names still common in the district. He also tells us that "... the parish comprises 32000 statute acres, of which 12,000 are in Co Tipperary".

The 'big houses' in the parish were as follows: Glenstal Castle, (Sir William H. Barrington), Ashrow, (Thomas P. Evans), Clonshavoy, (Caleb Powell), Tower Hill, (William Lloyd), Farnane, (Thomas Costello) and Abington, (Mrs Apjohn). Houses such as these were always referred to by the peasantry as "gentlemen's places". All that now remains of the great monastic settlement is the quiet churchyard, a fragment of



**The Mulcaire river, with the ruin of the paper mill in the background.**

masonry and a large grassy mound.

The bridge there is of interest, since it is an extension of an ancient structure - the first over the Mulcaire. One must wade in the river and look up at the arches to discover its most interesting features. Dinely tells us that there was an inscription stating that Ellice Walsh erected the bridge after the death of her husband "for devotion and charity, praying passengers to pray for the rest of their souls in heaven", and that the stone was cut by Patrick Kearin, who, Lenihan believes, was the sculptor of the monument of Myler Magrath in the Cathedral of Cashel. Part of this slab is still preserved in the downstream parapet of the bridge, but is now almost completely defaced.

Working upstream from Abington one passes the "Lawn", once a delightful parkland studded with fine trees. The river is broken all the way to Brittas, in little runs and pools. A few hundred yards above the bridge is the site of the ancient mill of Abington, once used by monks. Further upstream there are two ring forts, one on each side of the river. The fort on the left bank is well covered by trees and scrub, while that on the right bank is almost level with the surrounding area, but still well defined in a perfect circle. The townland of Rath may have derived from this feature.

We must pause at Brittas and contemplate the tragedy of 1607, when Sir John Burke was forced to flee his fine castle home because he had committed the "crime" of assisting at Mass there. On a gentle eminence by the river the ruin still casts its shadow over the pool that bears its name - the Castle Pool - so well known to many generations of fishermen as one of the favourite haunts of the salmon after its long journey from the sea.

In this salubrious situation Sir John, Baron of Brittas, and one of the Lords

of Clanwilliam, lived the privileged life of a landed proprietor of considerable substance and influence. He was married to the beautiful Grace Thornton, daughter of George Thornton, one of the Governors of Munster, and they had nine children. Fortune and good health smiled on the family until the harsh laws proscribing the Catholic religion caused much concern in the otherwise happy household. When all others of his class - persons of land and title - were conforming to the reformed religion, John Burke defied a law, which he regarded as unjust and unpalatable. He continued to practice his faith - an exercise that provoked the attention of the authorities, who were at first reluctant to exert pressure on one so respectable and well connected. It is probable that a blind eye would have been turned on his Mass-going activities and his association with the Dominican friars if some complaints had not been made about his apparent immunity from the law.

Eventually the castle was surrounded by a detachment of troops under Capt Miller, as Mass was being said inside. Under cover of darkness all in the castle made their escape. Some time afterwards Burke was arrested at Carrick-on-Suir, whence he had come from Waterford where he had failed to find a vessel to take him to Spain. He was tried for high treason in Limerick and condemned to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

John Burke was executed at Farran-croghy, outside the city wall close to John's Gate, (the Good Shepherd laundry now marks the spot). Due to the influence of some of his friends, particularly Sir Thomas Browne, the body was not mutilated according to sentence, but was taken to the nearby churchyard of St. John the Baptist, where it remains to this day in an unmarked grave.