

Poor fella, he died of exposure, drink and malnutrition. At the inquest of his death in Newry Workhouse, a witness said that probably he hadn't had his clogs off his feet for 15 years!

Another that I remember was a man whose name was Tommy McCann. He was known as "Top Coat." He wore his overcoat in Summer when others were in shirt sleeves.

Dan Skelten was known as "Heel of the Evening." John Neill was known as "Bapp" Neill. He had a very big, round face like a full moon.

Then there was "Wur the War" and "Gabby Taylor," Hughie Fox was "The Fox". A local man, Paddy Quinn was "Smokey Quinn."

I seem to think that a lot of the lightermen were very romantic. The names they had on their lighters would suggest this — i.e. the names of their wives or sweethearts. Frank Campbell's Lighter was the "Nora." Billy McCann's Lighter was the "Flora." James Neill's Lighter was the "Emma." T. McGurgan's Lighter was the "Edith."

At the beginning of this article, I stated that coal was transported from Coalisland to Dublin. This was correct, but in my memory, the coal was transported from Newry to Portadown. By now the border had come into being and also the coal deposits apparently fizzled out in the Coalisland area.

Fisher's fleet of ocean-going boats brought the coal from England and hence the about-turn in the canal distribution. I have already mentioned the names of the Lighters and again I can recall that the names of some of Fisher's boats were names of trees. There was "The Oak," "The Elm," "The Walnut," and "The Rowan." Vessels from Norway also came into Newry with cargoes of timber, some of which went by lighter to Portadown.

At some of the lock houses on the canal, there were stables, built. During winter, the lightermen would stop at a house where there was a stable. As darkness approached, the lighter would be tied up, the horse fed and the skipper and his helper would sleep in the cabin.

There was a stable at our lock and usually the men would come into our house for a night's crack. Tall yarns would be told, a game of cards or draughts would be played. Peter Campbell was a regular visitor. He brought along another man called Dan Harte. Both of them played mouth organs and great nights of music and song took place. My mother always laid on a bit of supper, mugs of tea with soda bread and country butter.

The job of a lock-keeper wasn't well paid but the house was rent free and there were "perks" to the job. At our lock there was a small hut on the "Back Line" as it was called. The back line was the bank on the other side of the canal. This small hut was about the size of a "privvy" (in case younger readers may not know, a privvy was a "wee house" at the bottom of the garden that you went to when you had to). In this hut over the back line, were kept the necessary implements for operating the sluices on the lock gates. The door of the hut was open during the day and it wasn't by accident that a large potato basket (capable of holding approx. 1/2 cwt.) was always lying handy and in full view of the lightermen. Most of them took the hint and filled it with the best of Whitehaven coal. So we had no fuel bills. My mother would hand over a cake of soda bread or an apple tart, a few eggs or a jug of milk. In a way, it was the "barter system," but strictly off the record.

When I reached the age of 11 or 12 years, I was often asked to go down and do a bit of cooking. I would have fried bacon and eggs, steak and onions, etc. This saved time for lightermen, instead of stopping to do the cooking, they kept on going and by the time they reached the next lock (McVeigh's), 1 1/2 miles distant, I would have had the menu all set up and a "tanner" earned for myself. Sometimes delph was scarce and the tea was taken in jam pots.

Not all the cabins were rough and tumble. Some were well equipped and well furnished with good bunks. Some skippers brought their wives and families with them during the summer months. I remember one man on a lovely summer day, having a big horn gramophone playing away on deck. His wife sat knitting away and changing the records, keeping the music going.

My father was on the maintenance staff of the canal.

Long before Larry Hagman was born, we had our own "J.R." — J. R. Monaghan was the inland inspector. To the big-wigs in the Newry Port and Harbour Trust, he was called J.R. Around the 'Pass he was called the Gaffer and to the workmen he was called "Ould Jamie."

He was a stout, broad-shouldered man with a very austere look. He wore a hard hat, a "Dickey," yellow boots and carried a stout yellow cane stick. Mention of a "Dickey," — if some younger readers may not know what it was — it was a hard white collar with a wide white front which covered the whole chest.