

Local commercial architecture

By John Morton

COMMERCE is really trade. It's not manufacturing or making things but rather buying and selling them, distributing them, transporting, importing and exporting.

Next to domestic and religious architecture, it was the earliest evidence of man's settlement of the earth, - ports, harbours, passes and river crossings forming the cradle of its development.

So why, you may ask, were Tandragee, Scarva, Poyntzpass, and Jerrettspass of sufficient importance to leave any legacy?

The many raths in the area, The Dane's Cast and Black Pig's Duke are indications of early activity, but it goes back even further. Michael Herity, lecturer in archaeology in Dublin observed "In 2000 BC a new polarization can be seen in the direction of travel.... The Irish sea now became a route uniting Cornwall and Argyll... with ports at Waterford, Pembroke, Dublin, Anglesey, Carlingford, The Isle of Man, Galloway and The Mull of Kintyre." These traders were Scandinavian, bringing the Celtic art and culture to the East of Ireland long before the Viking period. Carlingford and the navigable and sheltered Carlingford Lough brought spasmodic early trade, but it was not until about 1250 AD that things became more established and a communications system began to develop. Trade with Europe increased and administration became more centralized, but still itinerant. The many kings and their administrators spent much time travelling around their "courts." Settlements developed along navigable rivers and coastal areas. Travel was usually on foot, or for the few on horse. The population of the country was small and mainly pastoral with little or no external trade. Travel was generally limited to monks and soldiers and minstrels. The trade that did exist was coastal, roads were virtually non-existent. Although travel by water was important a great extent of the Irish waterways were associated with extensive bogs, and not easily accessible, indeed they tended to divide the country rather than provide a means of communication or trade.

John Barry gave a vivid description of communications in medieval Ireland "Beyond the road lay bogs, thickets, forests and rough and treacherous ground."

Passes over these lands became important as communications developed. The North East of Ireland, the Mourne and Co. Down and the Glens of Antrim were divided from the centre of the country by the bogland that extended from Newry to Lough Neagh, and then

along the Bann to the North Coast. Passes did exist through this corridor. At a pass you could obtain hospitality - or be robbed and disposed of! Passes were often fortified. Again John Barry states that some of the hardest fighting in the nine years war to subjugate Gaelic Ireland at the end of the 16th Century took place at Moyra Pass below Slieve Gullion. The Belfast-Dublin, railway now runs through it. At that time 'the Pass' was described as a "broken cavsey (or causeway) beset on both sides by bogs, where the Irish might skip, but where the English could not go." Fynes Morrison in the 1600s said that "from mountain to mountain, road to road and bog to bog the Irish had raised traverses with huge and high flankers of great stones, stacked on both sides with wattled palisades." Where there were trees on either side of the flanker the Irish had 'plashed' the undergrowth of the trees. "It would not have been easy for swine to get through, let alone men."

Passes were defensible trade routes, and a number of these existed from early times across the route now taken by the canal and railway between Gilford and Newry. Roads were slow to develop. In 1750 travel was still mainly on foot or horseback, although a road network had started to develop allowing regular use of wheeled vehicles. The first road map of Ireland was published in 1778, by Taylor and Skinner. It was in the form of a bound book and contained 288 pages. The first route in the book was from Dublin to Donaghadee - some six pages in all. In addition to showing towns and villages and distances between them it marked gentlemen's houses, churches, inns, spas, barracks, racecourses and a few antiquities. Irish roads at this time were reported to be in better condition than those in England, due to less traffic and the use of smaller carts, carrying no more than one ton. You can, I am sure, appreciate the problem of taking 30 tons of potatoes to Dublin from Poyntzpass! Walking with a horse and cart, a four to five day journey in each direction - say ten days in all, times 30 journeys = approx ten months! That is why commerce, and large centres of population centred on ports or navigable rivers where boats could carry hundreds of tons of merchandise.

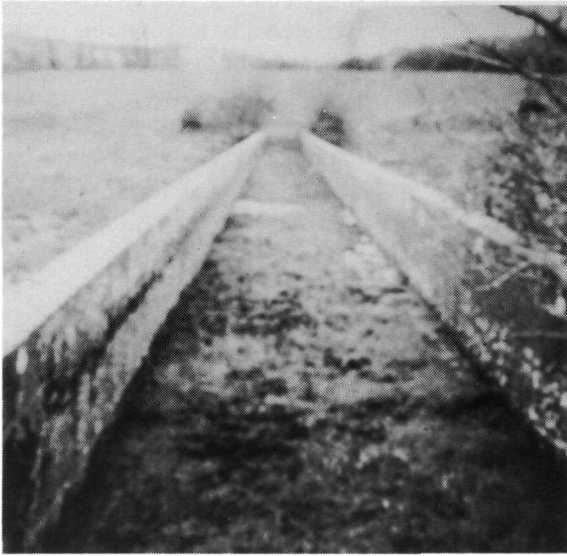
Let us look back at the date of the Taylor and Skinner road map, 1778 — that is some 36 years after the Newry canal was opened. It was the canals both here and in England that provided the answer to inland transport and allowed the raw materials to be moved



Warehouse at Tandragee—built for storing grain.



Canalside warehouses at the Madden.



The aquaduct, part of a 3½ mile construction to bring water from the River Cusher at Tandragee to feed the head of the Canal at Scarva.

in bulk, thus setting the industrial revolution into full swing. The Newry canal, built, primarily to carry coal from Coalisland to Dublin via Newry, joined together a number of these old established passes — Scarva, Poyntzpass, and Jerrettspass. They now received trade from all directions. Any place of importance adjacent the canal boomed. Potatoes, cereals, cattle, sheep, timber, all could be transported in quantity to Dublin, or even transhipped to Liverpool. Terryhoogan, Scarvagh House, Acton, Lisnabrague, Drumbanagher, Dromantine all had a “common market” scale outlet for their produce. This was to be the foundation of the ‘legacy.’

We have heard in previous talks of the shops and fairs in Poyntzpass and the commerce in Tandragee. I will briefly add Scarva to the list. In 1860 Scarva town held three fairs each year. Commercial activities included a blacksmith, boot and shoe maker, carpenter, two coal merchants, doctor and dispensary, draper, two emigration agents, four grocer’s shops, two hotel keepers, a linen manufacturer (S. & J. Shanks had 15 looms and provided yarn for an additional 22 local hand loom weavers), Post Office, news agent, spirit retailer and railway office.

Bassetts, Co. Down records that some 100 years prior to the above census, John Wesley visited Scarva on no less than four occasions, 1756, 60, 62 & 67, staying at Terryhogan House. “Here he slept in a clean chaff bed, and a 5 o’clock next morning, had as his congregation all the inhabitants of the village and many others.”

We have also heard in a previous talk to the society of the development of the Belfast/Dublin railway, its

route dictated more by politics than logic. However, the fact that it followed the route of the canal through this ribbon of villages, brought even more trade, and more work and enterprise to the area. The road had little importance until the development of the motorized vehicle.

I do not intend to discuss the development of these means of transport, but to stress and emphasize the significance of communications on the commercial life of the area, and to look at the architectural legacy that commerce has left in the area, because it was the first non-coastal area of Ireland to develop a commercial infrastructure.

The canal offers the most important source of commercial architecture.

At Money Penny’s, on the Portadown side of the lock itself, is the old stable building, where the horses towing the lighters would be stabled alongside no doubt, those who led the horses. The lockhouse itself has been recently restored. However, of the greatest interest is the lock itself, lined with huge blocks of granite, finely cut and superbly built. The ironwork railings are typical of industrial ironwork.

The road from Moyallon at Knockbridge crosses the Bann, the canal and the Cusher as well as a series of minor watercourses in a series of bridges, each with a good look from the underside. No spaghetti junction, but certainly of local importance, in stone, concrete, and iron.

Further towards Tandragee the railway and canal run side-by-side. At the Madden examples of their particular architectural styles exist. One has to imagine the hustle and bustle of the quayside, the hiss and puff of the steam trains and the rumble of horse drawn wagons as they ferried cargos to and from Tandragee,



The aquaduct—without water—from above.



The aquaduct crossing a stream.

via the Madden Bridge over the River Cusher, a simple and elegant stone structure.

In Tandragee a few large warehouses still remain, although their state of repair is not good. The strong stone structures with heavy simple detailing are worthy of more care and preservation.

Going through Tandragee, the two mills are worthy of a second look. Although they are not commercial architecture as such, the comparison of Georgian and Victorian styles in the two buildings is of interest.

Inspect the bridge over the Cusher, not from above but from down at the river. The enormous overburden

of the arches would suggest that the road level has been raised considerably. The arches no longer acting to take the thrust of the bridge but the bridge acting more like a wall with a doorway in it. It has lost the elegance of the Madden Bridge.

It was from the mill pond at Tandragee that water was canalized and taken to Scarva to 'top up' the head of the Newry canal a distance of almost four miles. Just past the quarries en-route to Scarva it crosses a small stream in a superb aquaduct.

An interesting point was brought up on the construction of this aquaduct by an elderly local lady "I've heard tell" she said "that the ground was so boggy then when they built the central arches they had to spread sheep fleeces over the ground and build the stone piers for the arches on top of the fleeces, to prevent them sinking." She asked if I thought there was any truth in it. Of course it sounds a bit like an old woman's tale doesn't it? So what is the truth? To answer her questions, I will relate another tale - Close to where I lived as a child in Lincolnshire is the parish Church of St. Bothlop, or 'Boston Stump'. It is recorded as having the tallest parish Church tower in Britain, set on the edge of a tidal river estuary in the middle of marsh land. Two versions exist as to the foundations of Boston 'Stump'.

The first is that St. Bothlop was 'led' to the place and told that there he would find a rock on which to build the foundations of a Church - (Both words 'rock' and 'foundation' have double meanings). If rock there was, it would have been most unusual as none exists near the surface of the fens within 20 miles of Boston.



Warehouses alongside the Canal at Poyntzpass.



Railway bridge over the Canal,
south of Poyntzpass.

The second is that it was founded on wool. Again the words have a double meaning. Sheffield was founded on steel and Coventry on the motor car. Boston was a major port at that time with a large wool trade with the Netherlands, so money from this could have been used 'to found the Church.' Indeed excellent Church records record the number of bales of wool donated or tithed by the various landowners towards building the Church.

The tower has not been without its problems over the past 400 years. The spire was not replaced after it fell down the second time, arches have been filled in solid to prevent them collapsing, and iron braces added. With recent drainage of the fens the 'stump' was again on the move and a firm of engineers called in to investigate and report on the matter. Subsoil tests were done with sonic devices and by boring cores below the tower. No rock was found. However core tests did show substantial quantities of wool fibre in the subsoil below the tower. The quantities of wool fibre were sufficient to suggest that the original church records of bales of wool donated or tithed for 'foundations of the Church' may have been literally for that purpose. Faggots - bundles of thorn bush cuttings - were also used to bind poor soil before building foundations, particularly roads and railways.

Modern road construction over poor ground uses a similar technique. A broad roll of woven fabric is laid on the earth before the stone base is laid. The principal is the same, the mat clogs and siffens the boggy soil. In reply to the question, I must say I don't know what is under the central piers of the aquaduct, but the old woman's tale 'sound a good one'. Stranger things

have been used in buildings in the past. One government department responsible for the restoration of old buildings was recently lamenting in a technical journal that due to silage and other modern techniques of feeding cattle, good quality cow dung was no longer easily obtainable for restoration work and they were having to import it!

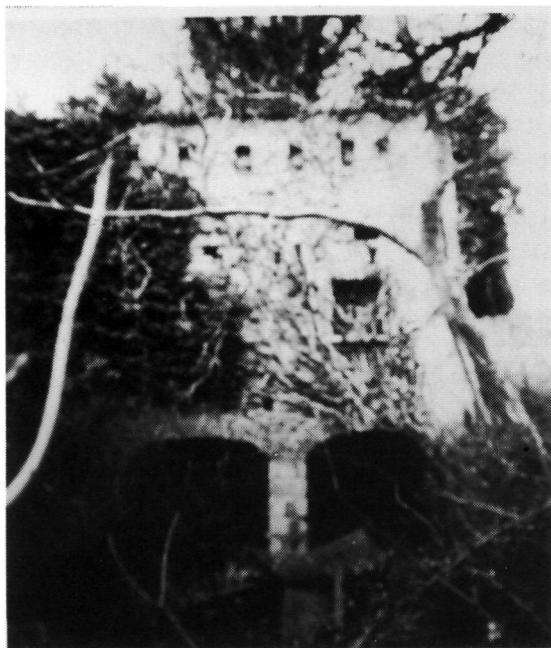
Back to Scarva! At Madden the canal and railway run side-by-side and the quaysides and railway sidings, and associated building remain but in a rather derelict condition.

At Poyntzpass things are somewhat better preserved — the railway signal box still in working order and the large warehouse at the edge of the canal still in service. Although no locks remain intact with lock gates, sufficient remain between Poyntzpass and Gamble's Bridge to imagine a past life, with canal, railway and road intertwining. At Gamble's Bridge there is disappointment and elation — Disappointment at the 'flat' modern bridge which totally lacks elegance. Elation with a structure almost hidden by ivy and undergrowth despite it being the largest building in the vicinity.

It is one of the finest lime kiln in this part of Ireland. A double kiln structure built of fine stone, it is of ex-



Inside the Lime Kiln at Gamble's Bridge—
photo taken from the fire hole looking
upwards.



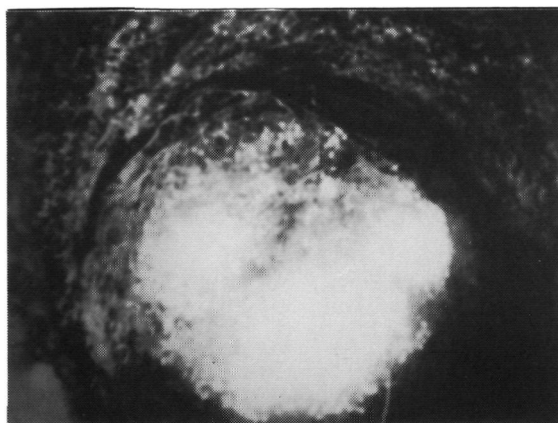
Lime Kiln at Gamble's Bridge.



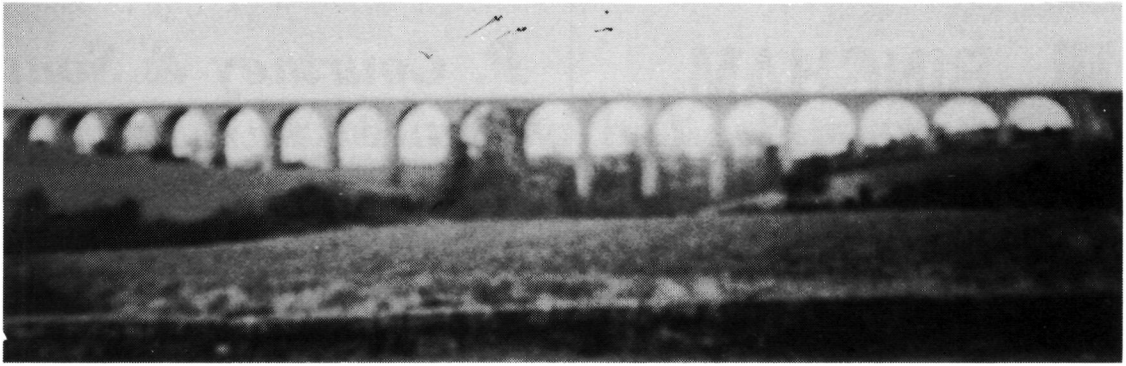
Lime Kiln at Gamble's Bridge—
viewed from below.

ceptional interest. The left hand kiln has collapsed, revealing the structure. The right hand kiln is intact and a superb example. Do not approach this from the top, it is unprotected and a long way to fall! lime formed an important raw material for building and farming, the availability of coal and limestone, transportation by both canal and rail, made this Kiln a commercial asset to the area. It is regrettable that such a fine example of a large lime Kiln is not better preserved and maintained by the community or historical buildings department of the DoE. Regrettable is probably too polite, perhaps disgraceful is more appropriate. Like the flattened Gamble's Bridge itself it shows how careless we have become. Compare Gamble's Bridge to the one at Jerrettspass. Inconvenience is something we should consider in relation to progress. We have to decide where the priorities lie. Of additional interest in Jerrettspass is a structure designed by Sir Gils Gilbert Scott, Architect of Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral. It is red, two feet six inches square and seven feet high. Yes it's the red telephone box one of the few still remaining — can we keep it please!!!

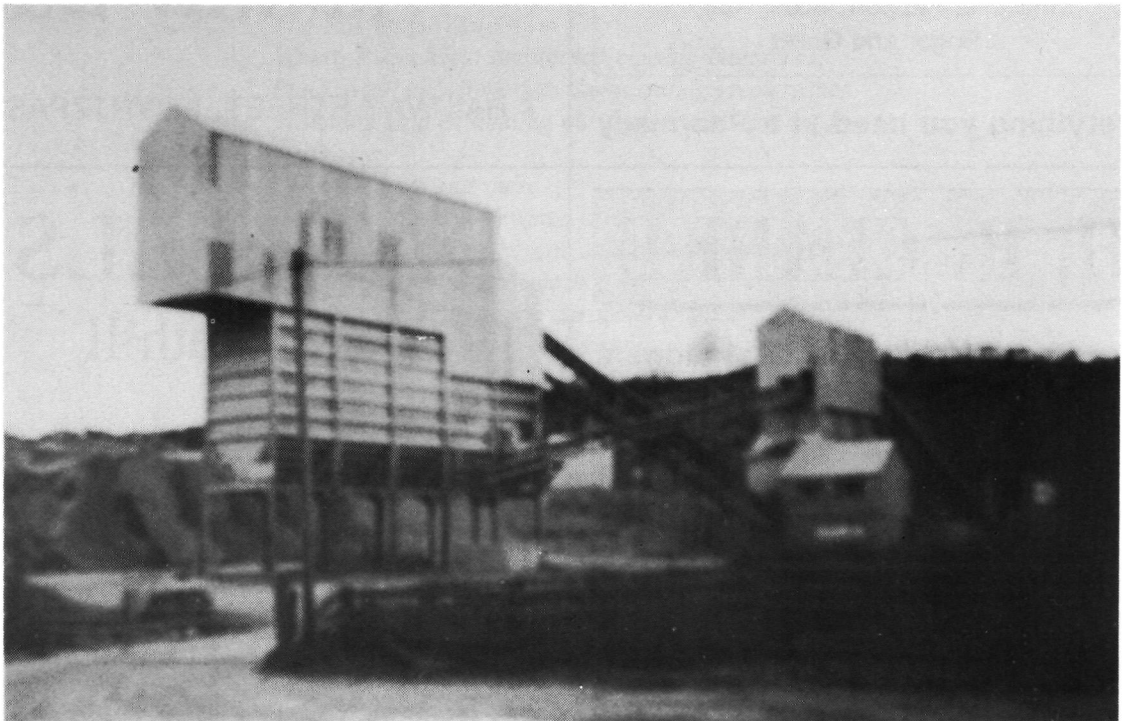
Before we leave the area, or as we leave the area, let us go past or over one of the major viaducts in Ireland, Craigmore. This is the architectural legacy of commerce in the area, a very rich legacy indeed for a ribbon of small villages with their origins in paths through the bogs.



Bridge on the Canal at Jerrettspass.



Craigmore Viaduct, carrying the Belfast/Dublin railway.



Quarry plant (recently demolished) between
Tandragee and Scarva.