

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE



PAUL RODGERS (1834-1901)

Shipbuilder

Paul Rodgers was born in 1834, the seventh of the ten children of Paul Rodgers and Sarah (Logan) of Slievetrue, Antrim. In 1852 he was apprenticed for six years to Carrickfergus shipyard.

The first ship built in Carrickfergus was the brigantine *David Legg* (1845). The need for suitable vessels to export locally made goods and import coal led to expansion. Statistics for 1841 show that there were just three shipwrights; against 23, ten years later. In 1861 Rodgers was appointed foreman and the same year the *Dorothea Wright* was built, the first vessel known to be designed by Rodgers. In 1870 he became owner of the yard and his first ship, the schooner *Accrington Lass*, was launched four years later.

The yard employed about 150 people in its heyday. Iron, cheaply supplied from Belfast, was capable of producing larger, more durable ships and in 1885 four ships were built for the South American river trade route.

The opening of the new pier extension in 1885 helped development generally. The *Dawn* and the *Olga* (1886) were built to cater for the needs of local yachtsmen but a recession in 1884-1889 halted production at Carrickfergus for a while.

After Rodger's wife died in 1888 he sold the yard to Robert Kent, who completed the *Result*, the construction of which had been started before the sale. The *Result*, now on display at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, is the only surviving vessel of Rodgers'. By 1893 Kent had overreached himself financially so Rodgers re-bought the business for considerably less than he had sold it for. Subsequently, Rodgers concentrated on repair and conversion work and also took part in the lucrative coal trade.

Rodgers was also involved in public life; as a member of the Carrickfergus Municipal and Harbour Commissioners and the first Urban Council. Much respected by his employees throughout his life he followed in the tradition of the paternal Victorian, frequently refusing to make redundancies in spite of his own monetary problems and his contribution to the socio-economic development of the locality was of great significance.

Paul Rodgers died on 8 March 1901.

Patrick Devlin