

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE
NAAS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



THE CORBALLY CANAL

Most people are familiar with the Sallins to Naas canal since it is used so regularly by people seeking a pleasant walk along one of the most picturesque areas in the town. However it is often forgotten that there is an equally attractive canal line running from Naas to Corbally. This section of waterway was opened in 1811 twelve years after the opening of the Sallins branch line and at a cost of £20,844. It is different from the Sallins line in that it is longer, being about eight kilometres in length, and significantly, it has no locks. Unfortunately, although navigable, it rarely sees the bow of a canal barge anymore because of a culvert put in place in 1954 when the old Limerick road was bypassed. Boats have no longer access Naas Harbour. Thankfully today the waterway is still intact and provides a great natural habitat for the rich water- based flora, fauna and wild life that is manifest along its banks. There are a number of bridges spanning the canal on its journey to Corbally. The first one carries the road to Caragh and is also known locally as “Ploopluck Bridge”. It is a curious name and is thought to be a corruption of the word, “Cloghpook” derived from the Irish meaning – of the Pooka’s Stone. The Jigginstown Bridge is named after the nearby 17th Century house built by the Earl of Strafford, Thomas Wentworth. Connaught Bridge is believed to be named after the many labourers from that province who worked on the building of the Canal. The other two bridges are called Hoare and Mooney bridges and are most likely associated with officials responsible for the scheme. Ladytown House, also known as Elm Grove, would have been visible from the canal until it was demolished in 1840. It is interesting to note that it had been built by a great uncle of Oscar Wilde’s father in the mid 18th Century. It was also owned by Viscount Allen. In the cemetery behind is an example of a 18th Century Watch Tower designed to discourage body-snatchers. The canal terminates at Corbally, sometimes referred to as Herbertstown Harbour from a house that was near by. . It is again interesting to note that there was originally a plan to extend the canal through Kilcullen, Baltinglass, Kiltegan and Hacketstown to Kilabeg. This would have added fourteen locks and thirty two miles of waterway and although approved in 1808 it never materialised and instead the canal fell into disuse. However imagine the hive of activity there must have been during its heyday when one of its main cargo’s was barley for the Maltings at Athgarvan. There is a story told that much of the material for the building of the Curragh was brought via the canal in 1856. Although it is now sad to see only the remains of old crumbling store buildings and outhouses in the harbour it still retains that unique attraction of a time and place once an integral part of the local community. These tranquil waters still offer much to anyone interested in enjoying a walk along the towpaths of time to escape for a little while from the hustle and bustle of modern day living. Take a walk and you will enjoy it.