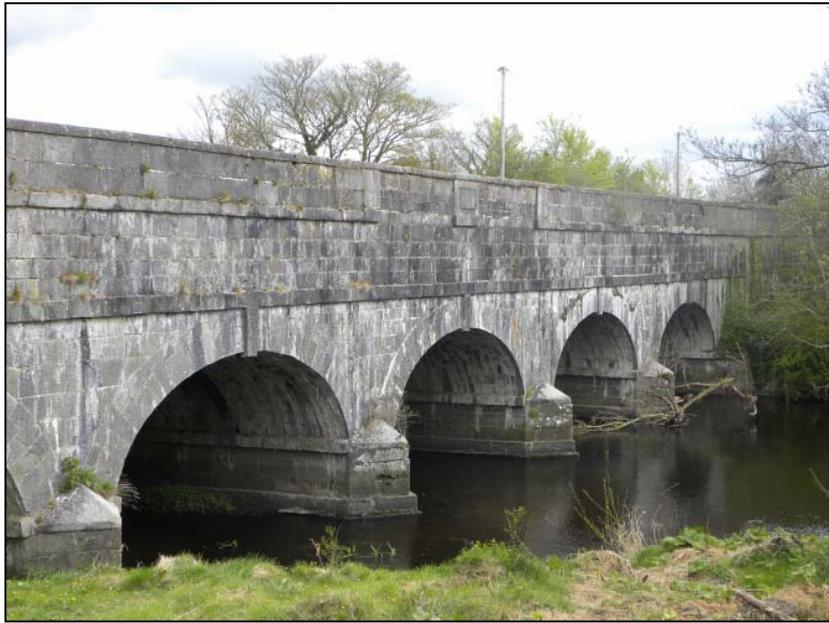


HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE
NAAS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



LEINSTER AQUEDUCT

We are fortunate in Naas and in the county to have the presence of the Grand Canal meandering through the countryside on its way west to the Shannon. The canal waterway provides a myriad of fascinating and interesting things to delight the eye: tranquil waters, old bridges, shady toe-paths, beautiful locks, wonderful stone bridges but surely nothing more unique and impressive than the Leinster Aqueduct. The Aqueduct lies on the Grand Canal, which links Dublin with the Shannon. It is situated just west of where the Naas branch line leaves the main water of the Grand Canal. A unique structure, it must surely have been a major engineering feat in its time. It was built in 1780 long before the advent of the JCB and modern lifting cranes. It certainly is an imposing stone bridge presenting an awe inspiring picture with its five symmetrically curved arches, beautifully crafted in fine cut stone, spanning the breadth of the river. It is a sight to behold the canal and the road side by side and passing over the expanse of the river Liffey. One can find a most interesting and unique drawing of the aqueduct in Ruth Delaney's book – *"The Grand Canal of Ireland"*. This particular illustration is from Alex Taylor's map of Kildare, 1783.

There was much discussion by the engineers at the time about where the best location for the Aqueduct would be and the best place to cross the Liffey. Two engineers, Charles Vallancey; Engineer in Ordinary in Ireland since 1762 acting for the Commissioners in Inland Navigation and John Trail, who was at that time employed by the Dublin Corporation, differed on where the best site would be. Vallancey's opinion prevailed, as he preferred an area further upstream where there was a ford. In fact it was originally envisaged that an Aqueduct could be avoided by locking down into the river and then up again. However on reflection it was decided that this idea would present problems in water supplies and was dropped. As early as 1776 it was advertised for proposals for *"Executing an Aqueduct"* over the Liffey and the continuing of the canal west of the river with two new locks and several bridges.

Work began on the Aqueduct in the spring of 1780 and while the Aqueduct was being constructed work proceeded on the line to Robertstown. Assistant Engineer, Richard Evens, built two special boats to transport material on the river Liffey and when the work was completed, he erected platforms on them to form a temporary bridge. It is interesting to note that there is a pumping station at the aqueduct that is used to raise water from the Liffey to augment the supply provided by the river Morell feeder.

The Leinster Aqueduct has always been a pivotal part of the Grand Canal system as it winds its way from Dublin to the Shannon and after over two hundred years still stands testimony to one of the great engineering developments in canal history.