

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE
NAAS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



ODLUMS MILLS

The Naas area has a long tradition of mills and milling but sadly many of the traditional mills are fast disappearing, not only in this locality but all over the country. Odlum is a household name, be it the flour used in your kitchen or the porridge oats you enjoy in the morning. In the Naas area it was an important local industry providing welcome employment for many local people over the years. Sadly it will close its doors and we will see the end of another part of our industrial heritage. Today it sits neatly and picturesquely on the banks of the Grand Canal with its attractive buildings and its very impressive silos reaching up to the sky above the trees. Odlums are the largest cereal milling company in Ireland and a quick look at their family history is interesting. It appears that the origins of the family date back to Cromwell's England in the 1660's and to Oldham in Lancashire. The Odlums in Ireland seemed to be mainly of farming stock in the 18th Century, either as tenant farmers or yeomen. But the 19th Century saw them diversify into flour milling. It is interesting to note that despite being immigrants to Ireland there are a remarkable Diaspora of Odlums around the world who can trace their origins to the original Thomas and his three sons Richard, Henry and Edward. The mill in Sallins was set up in 1915, a number of years after the Leinster mills in Naas which had been acquired by the family in 1903. The Sallins mill was extensively renovated and upgraded in 1995 to make it on a par with modern mills in the rest of Europe. The Mill was famous for its manufacture of Irish oatmeal that was marketed under the McCann brand name. The story of the McCann Irish Oatmeal story is an interesting one. John McCann built his first mill at Beamond near Drogheda that was powered by water from the river Nanny. The oatmeal was recognised as being of very high quality and won many awards throughout the world in the period between 1851 and 1883. The distinctive "nutty" taste was a special feature of the oats and this was particularly popular in the American market. The product was known as "steel cut Irish oatmeal".

Odlums acquired the business of James McCann in 1964 and transferred the products to their own mill at Sallins. The business remained in family hands until 1988. In 2007, Origin Enterprises that had previously had a 50% share in the Odlum Group, acquired full control of Odlums from the state-sponsored Greencore Group. Let us hope that these buildings can find some practical use so that we can keep for future generations what was an important part of our local industrial and social history.