

Introduction

In this piece local historian Mickey McGuinness explores the industrial heritage of the Creggan area, specifically, the many industries supplied by the Creggan burn and reservoir.

The Creggan Country Park enterprise has developed water based leisure facilities and environmental projects on the former city reservoir over the past fifteen years. This has raised the prospect of examining the theme of water and its importance to life and industry in general and in particular the historic part played by watercourses around Creggan in Derry's history. Associated themes are the life sustaining element, the Siege of 1688-89 and the application of water power to early industrial ventures.

At its most basic water is essential to sustain life. Consequently human settlement tended to be found near water sources. The discovery of a bronze age cist grave in Creevagh in 1956 would suggest that availability of water encouraged human settlement around the Creggan Burn valley from prehistoric times. A Cist grave uncovered in Ballyarnett and now exhibited in the Tower Museum would have been very similar to that found in Creevagh.

The valley of the Creggan Burn is part of the ancient landscape of the area. This is evident in the valley which shapes the reservoir, the continuation of which may be observed as it runs downhill parallel to the Glen Road, once known as Lover's Glen. In recent times the course of the burn has been culverted from the Creggan Country Park to the Northland Road. It runs under the Northland Road before emerging behind Foyle & Londonderry High School. It then disappears underground on its way to the River Foyle. It is to be hoped that this unspoiled remnant of the original watercourse will be retained.

Water Mills fed by Creggan burn are indicated on maps from the seventeenth century onwards. It has been suggested that some were mills associated with Derry monasteries from earlier times.

The Neville Map, drawn immediately after the Siege in 1689, provides valuable evidence of historic and economic enterprises. The valley connecting the Jacobite camp at Creggan in 1688/ 89 with Pennyburn Mill would have provided a sheltered way for Jacobite troops issuing from Creggan to defend the Jacobite stronghold at Pennyburn Mill in the various skirmishes over the siege period. The mill is indicated on the Neville map and is seen to be fed from the Creggan Burn. Good water supply was also important to sustain the troops at the Jacobite encampment, a luxury not afforded to the besieged within the walled city.

Neville shows sites fed by the burn where water was the motive power or an important element of a production process. One was Pennyburn Mill whilst another was identified as the Bishop's Mill.

The site of the Bishop's Mill was later re-used for a different purpose, as evinced in the OS map of 1907 which shows the Glen Laundry on the same spot. Comparisons between both maps indicate that the laundry stood on the site of the seventeenth century mill with the laundry using the same water supply. Information from the map and photographs give us some idea of the appearance of the Laundry in the early 20th century and allows us to determine where it previously stood on the Glen Road.



The Pennyburn Mill.

The question of laundry ownership was uncovered in a publication "Northern Ireland (illustrated) Up-to-date", published around 1900, which included a section on The Welch Margetson Shirt Factory. An account of the factory operations informs us that

'The shirts, as brought from the stations, are stored temporarily in what is called the un-dressed room, and from here are conveyed to the Glen Washhouse. This is situated about two miles from the city, in the Lover's Glen, a picturesque lane running out of the Strand Road, and occupies a site suitable in every respect for a gentleman's mansion. This building has been specially erected, arranged and equipped with the most improved mechanical plant designed by scientific experts for carrying out on labour-saving methods, the various processes of a modern laundry. A splendid supply of soft water is

obtained from a well sunk on the premises 475 feet deep, and stored in a double dam about 100 yards above the washhouse, to which it has a 20 ft. Fall; recent extensions have also been made to the works for laying down additional plant for washing purposes'

Originally a separate laundry for collars and cuffs, which required specialist treatment, was retained within the factory in Carlisle Road.

'The collar department, situated on the same floor as the machine room, is another important feature of the concern, as may readily be assumed, from the fact that some hundreds of various patterns are cut in this particular article alone, not to

mention a large variety of cuffs in different shapes. A separate laundry is provided for this class of goods, which is fitted with all the most recent improvements in washing, ironing and polishing machinery, by means of which is obtained the beautiful gloss and finish to be noted on the articles turned out from this department'

After some time all laundering was carried out within the main factory premises and photographs of the 1930's show that, by then, the Glen Laundry had fallen into disuse. The site, originally that of a seventeenth century (and perhaps earlier) corn mill, had thus been brought into service in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which shows a continuity of service in the interests of local industry over a long period.

Nineteenth century maps also show that a corn mill, probably a small venture, existed alongside the burn where it exits under the Northland Road, but by this stage the most comprehensive developments were downstream from this location. Again, the Neville Map, a seventeenth century survey, provides a valuable aid in uncovering this piece of our local history and depicts parts of the Creggan Burn which would have still been recognisable up to forty or fifty years ago.

Neville shows that the Burn split downstream from the Northland Road, with one arm flowing parallel to what was to become the Duncreggan Road. The other runs towards Springtown to join with other streams to form the Pennyburn Stream. The stream fed the mill dam at Pennyburn and was to feature in a famous legal battle over water rights some 300 years after the siege.

Pennyburn Mill was a strategically important Jacobite stronghold during the Siege and was obviously a working mill even before 1689. For three centuries it witnessed industrial activity based on the availability of a water supply as a motive force and as a necessary element of production. John McCartney, a

grandson of former owner John McCartney has provided an interesting study of the complex around Pennyburn. Extracts from his chronology highlight that a windmill coexisted with water mills and that:

'In 1802 Sterling, Horner and Dunlop have the lease on Pennyburn corn mills. The water wheel working 34 weeks a year and the windmill working on average 28 weeks a year. They install a 4 hp steam engine as an alternative power source'

In 1780 a small distillery had been established at Pennyburn but had been forced to close in 1802 due to competition from the illicit poteen makers of Inishowen. By 1815 a legally registered distillery was established which, by 1818, was producing 100,000 gallons of whiskey per year. By 1829 however, this promising enterprise had come to an end.

The ruins of Pennyburn Windmill were demolished in 1860 and by 1865 a new owner Patrick McCartney set about restoring the flour mills to their former prosperity. When he died the thriving business was inherited by his son John in 1874.

In 1900 the steam engine in the complex broke down, setting in motion a train of events which were to cause a considerable stir in legal circles. The breakdown meant that the mill became totally dependant on water power and this raised issues on water rights and competition over this scarce commodity. The competitor was the Londonderry and Lough Swilly Railway who had inserted a three inch pipe into the Pennyburn stream to extract water for their own purposes. The LLSR claimed the right to do so on the grounds that they had entitlement (known as riparian rights) because their railway line crossed the Pennyburn stream. Since they owned the small piece of land on each side of the railway line, they claimed they were thus entitled to extract water from the stream. The scene was set for the famous Pennyburn Stream Court Case.



*The lower basin of the Creggan Reservoir, circa 1930.
Courtesy Bigger/McDonald Collection*



The Glen Laundry.



Pennyburn Windmill

After McCartney had blocked the offending pipe, thereby blocking off the supply to the railway, the LLSR instigated an action in the Chancery Division Law Courts in May 1901 claiming obstruction of their rights. McCartney counter claimed that the watercourse was "made by his predecessors to serve the mill and was maintained by him"

At issue were water rights. On one side McCartney claimed that the stream was an artificial one having been artificially engineered for supplying Pennyburn mill. A branch of the Creggan burn had indeed been culverted along with other streams to supply the mill by previous owners and continued to be maintained by McCartney. The LLSR counter



A LLSR engine in its prime.

claim was based on riparian rights which argued that they had rights by virtue of ownership of that part of land which carried the rail line over the stream.

The case was transferred to the King's Bench Division in the High Court in Derry in June 1901. Lord Justice Holmes found in favour of McCartney, dismissed the LLSR claim and awarded costs to McCartney. The Railway company appealed to the King's Bench Divisional Court in November 1901. Four judges unanimously found in favour of LLSR, giving them entitlement to "a reasonable portion of the water of the Pennyburn Stream for their steam engine". John McCartney was ordered to pay the costs.

On January 1902 a resolute McCartney took his claim to the Irish Court of Appeal. Only one judge out of the four hearing the case found in favour of McCartney. Things were looking grave as costs continued to rise. The three to one verdict, whilst an improvement on the previous unanimous verdict against him, meant McCartney's finances were in a perilous position. There was only one option left. He decided to appeal to The House of Lords.

The case was heard in 1904, three years after the original court case. The Lord Chancellor (the Earl of Halsbury) rejected the riparian rights claim of the Railway based on their ownership of a tiny piece of land and the extracting of water from that land for use on a railway system which stretched for over forty miles.

Lord Lindley concurred, judging that "if one bought a small piece of land just necessary for the crossing of a stream then they only bought the water rights for that portion of land abutting the stream, and this did not include taking a large quantity of water away from this point for consumption elsewhere"

Lord McNaghten, echoing the Lord Chancellor's conclusion, found that "the LLSR could not properly establish that its railway system and the lines of connected railway companies were a single riparian tenant"

Costs for the four cases, totalling over £4,000 (a large sum in 1904), were awarded against LLSR, a decision which saved McCartney from bankruptcy. It also marked not only a victory for the mill owner but also the final chapter of a famous case in legal history.

Flour milling at Pennyburn declined in the following years and the death of John McCartney in 1912 brought an end to a centuries old industry on the Pennyburn site. In previous centuries Pennyburn had contributed to the industrial growth of the City by harnessing the elemental forces of wind and water to provide the motive power necessary to the operation of the flour and corn mills. Creggan Burn and other sources provided the water supply which was also essential to production processes as in the Glen Laundry and the distilling and brewing enterprises.

Thus traditional Derry industries like distilling, brewing, shirt manufacture, corn and flour milling were, for many years, dependant on waters issuing from the hills around Creggan.

Appropriately, measures to interpret this heritage and place it within a continuum which reaches from the ancient past to the present are being pursued at Creggan Country Park. The park project and its importance as an environmental education project is enhanced by the decision to install wind and hydro turbine. They in turn demonstrate modern examples of adapting elemental forces in the production of energy, sympathetic to modern environmental demands. In the process we can be reminded of a rich vein of our history and the previous adaptation of these same sources.



This pamphlet has been produced as part of the Creggan Country Park's 'Step Back in Time' Heritage Lottery funded project examining the history of the Creggan Country Park site and the wider Creggan area. A number of pamphlets covering subjects linked to the Creggan Country Park heritage are available including:

- The siege of Derry
- Industrial heritage
- Land ownership
- Natural Heritage
- Early History
- Living Landscapes/the Rath
- Talking History

Creggan Country Park can also arrange Walking Tours of its site exploring all these subject matters in detail as well as offering field trips to other sites associated with these topics. Tours can also be tailored to suit groups focusing on specific academic fields. For example the Industrial Heritage module can be expanded to suit groups studying science/geography whilst the siege module can be tailored for modern history groups.

Tours are organised in association with Creggan Country Park's partner organisation derrybluebadgeguide (www.derrybluebadgeguide.com). For details on organising these tours contact Creggan Country Park on (028) 71363133 or info@creggancountrypark.com.



The park's environmental education project is enhanced by the decision to install wind and water turbines.

Right: The park has taken a grass roots approach to educating our youth on the importance of sustainable energy and environmental protection.



Creggan Country Park Industrial Heritage – the watercourses of Creggan

By Mickey McGuinness

