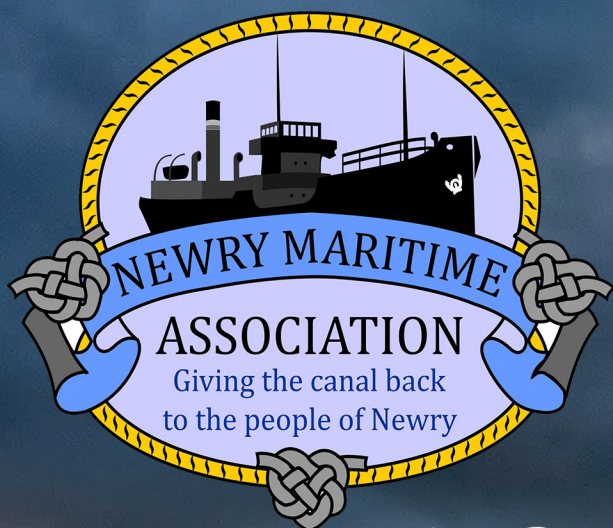




Lighthouse Bi-Centennial Project.

Greenway, Victoria Lock,
Upper Fathom, Newry.
Saturday 7th September 2024
@ 2pm.



Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne
and Down

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Unveiling of a striking digital image of Haulbowline Lighthouse on the track bed of the former Dundalk, Newry and Greenore Railway, now part of the Newry/Carlingford Greenway. Haulbowline, built at the behest of the merchants of Newry, celebrated its Bi-Centenary on 1st September 2024.

Text by James McArevey

The Townland of Fathom.

The townland is part of the historic “Ring of Gullion”, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The panoramic views from the Flagstaff viewpoint over Carlingford Lough and the surrounding hinterland are amongst the best the island of Ireland offers.

After a turbulent period, Ireland was partitioned into 26 counties, forming the Irish Free State, and the remaining 6 counties becoming Northern Ireland. Both entities had their governance in Dublin and Belfast.

On 1st April 1923, customs arrangements were formalised on all major cross-border roads with the remainder and vast majority declared “Unapproved”. On this road, HM Customs had a frontier post some 800 metres south of this point. This was known as HM Customs, Upper Fathom. Just across the border, in the Townland of Cornamucklagh, the Irish Customs had a post at Ferryhill Co Louth.



There was a thriving “Black Economy” in the area for decades, depending on price differentials and availability of products on either side of the land boundary. Ireland and the UK joined the European Union in 1973 and with introducing an “Open Borders” policy years later, all border posts were closed on 31st December 1992. On 1st January 1993, both nations joined the Single European Market and crossing the border became a seamless experience.

Upper Fathom and Ferryhill Customs posts were no longer part of our everyday lives!!!.

“Operation Harvest” was a military campaign waged by the IRA across the North of Ireland between 1956 and 1962. A bomb caused severe damage to the seaward gates at Victoria Lock in May 1957 which resulted in the closure of the Port of Newry for many months.

The government in Stormont decided to close border roads and on 28th January 1958 the Newry to Omeath road was closed by a barrier of steel spikes set in concrete, just beyond the Customs post. The spikes were removed in June 1959. History was to be repeated just 15 years later when the British Army closed the Ferryhill Road with concrete bollards at the Border.

The Dundalk, Newry and Greenore Railway. (DNGR)

One of the largest railway networks in Britain, some 22,000 miles, was operated by the London and North Western Railway Company (LNWR). They built the railway village of Greenore for their workers and a luxury quayside hotel and golf course for the passengers on their steamers.

The company operated a passenger/livestock ferry service between Greenore and Holyhead and they created an Irish subsidiary, (DNGR) to complement their operations. A railway line was built to Dundalk which opened on 1st May 1873 and work commenced on a link to Newry in 1874. The 13 miles of track, with stations at Carlingford and Omeath, was opened in August 1876 with a terminus at Bridge Street, Newry. A spur to the GNR station across the town was completed in 1881 giving DNGR links to the all-Ireland railway network.

Just like the Border areas, DNGR suffered as a result of partition and slipped into further decline during and after WW2. Inevitably, the decision to close the company was taken and both lines carried their last trains on 31st December 1951.



(DNGR) Terminus at Greenore



On the night of 3rd November 1916 the LNWR steamer, "SS Connemara" collided with the Newry registered collier, "SS Retriever" just a few hundred metres South of Haulbowline Lighthouse. There were 94 fatalities with just 1 survivor, James Boyle from Warrenpoint, a seaman on "SS Retriever" and a non-swimmer.

The ferry service was withdrawn in 1926 and the hotel building in Greenore was demolished in 2006.

Captain Harry Hollywood MBE.

On Saturday 25th July 2015 NMA was delighted to host the Ulster History Circle at Victoria Lock for the award of a prestigious Blue Plaque to Captain Harry Hollywood MBE, former Commodore of the famed Fisher fleet.

Joseph Fisher & Sons operated a fleet of coastal ships, numbered 17 at its peak, with Newry as their register port. NMA had nominated Captain Hollywood for the award.

"Harry Hollywood was a wee gentleman and he knew his job inside out."

– Mickey Fearon (91), former Newry seaman with over 40 years sea service.

"These were tough men, and they are just not around anymore."

– Leo Cunningham, Carlingford Lough Pilot, 35 years service.

"I tip my hat to those men. I don't know how they did what they did, but they did it in the toughest working conditions and with the most basic navigational aids."

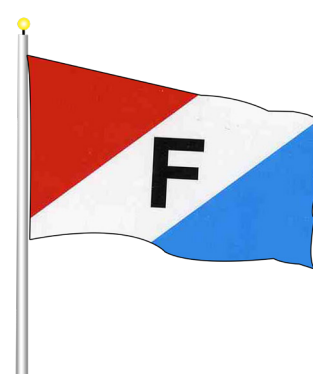
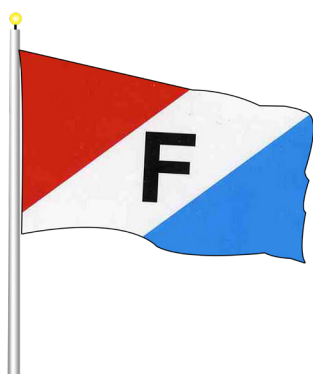
– Captain Tom Ramsey, formerly of Fathom, Co Armagh, Retired senior Captain, Esso Petroleum Fleet.



These testimonials are indicative of the integrity of Captain Hollywood and the genre of men he represents, the Newry seamen. Born in 1876, Harry was one of a family of five, and along with his brother and like his father, he followed the call of the sea—a time-honoured tradition in Fathom.

He was 14 when he joined the local firm of shipowners and coal importers, Joseph Fisher and Sons. Just 5 feet tall, he had to stand on a wooden box to see over the ship's wheel and was known to everyone as "Wee Harry". His long career at sea spanned over 63 years, and he witnessed the transition from sail to steam and finally motor vessels. "Wee Harry" witnessed partition and sailed through two world wars, becoming Commodore of the Fisher fleet of 17 coasters. With their red, white, and blue funnels and similar house flags flying proudly from their mastheads, the Newry registered ships were a familiar sight across Ireland, Britain, and North West Europe. Conditions were spartan, navigational aids were basic, and often the ships would be away from their home port for months on end.

Harry was awarded an MBE in 1945 and travelled to Buckingham Palace with his niece, Anna Maguire, where he received his award from King George VI. Captain Hollywood's last command was the SS Balsa, launched by Scotts of Bowling in 1947, and he remained in charge of the ship until he retired.



When "Wee Harry" joined Fishers, the founder Joseph was in charge. Frank Fisher succeeded his father in 1901, and when he died in 1951, his son Jim took over, meaning Harry had worked for three generations of the family. When Harry retired in 1953, Jim Fisher's son John was working in the company, giving him a link with the fourth generation. Harry never married and lived with a married sister, Lily Maguire, her husband, and two children. He died less than a year after he retired in 1954, aged 78.

Pat and Anna Maguire died within months of each other in 2008, and Hawthorn Cottage was demolished in June 2013.

Victoria Lock.

This lock, the Albert Basin, and the last section of the waterway from the former oil tanks site were completed and opened in April 1850.

This fine tribute to Victorian engineering functions just as it did 165 years ago and is the entrance to, and exit from, the Port Of Newry.



Severe damage was caused to the sea gates following a bomb blast in 1957, closing the port for many months. In January 1968, the port was closed again. This time, the collier "Saint William," owned by J&A Gardner of Glasgow and a regular visitor to Newry with coal shipments, failed to stop in the Lock and collided with the sea gates. Harland and Wolff were involved in the repairs. Just six years later, the port closed, and all business relocated to Warrenpoint, bringing the curtain down on 232 years of Canal commercial trading, which had played such a key role in the development of Newry.

Saint William

The Victoria Lock is 220 feet in length and 50 feet wide. The Lockmaster lived on site, supervising the comings and goings of ships and the men who manually operated the lock gates.

The Newry Port and Harbour Trust assumed responsibility for the Newry Canal in 1901, and Mr James O'Neill was appointed as Lockmaster here, a position he held until retirement in 1951.

He was succeeded by Captain Terry O'Hanlon DSC, and he remained in post until 1968.

The last Lockmaster at Victoria Lock was a man with a lifetime of experience at sea, and he was Mate on "MV Olive," the last new build ship for Fishers. Mickey Fearon was in charge for 6 years until the port closed in March 1974.



A LINK TO THE PAST

EDDIE QUINN

His only brother Felix was a seaman, like so many of the neighbors, as there was little to sustain people in the townland. Traditionally, the men took jobs in the Port of Newry or went to sea.

Hollywood is a very prevalent name in the locality, and Eddie remembers 9 Captain Hollywoods active at sea when he was growing up. He also has vivid memories of a black 10-month period in Newry port history when two of Fishers ships, SS Privet and SS Walnut, disappeared in the Irish Sea with the loss of 18 men.



From the 18 men lost, six hailed from Fathom and were all known to Eddie. His neighbor Tom McArdle was drowned on the SS Walnut on 27th October 1941, and Eddie recalls that a cloud seemed to envelop the close-knit rural community, which had suffered with regularity over the years.

Eddie is well-placed to unveil the Blue Plaque for Harry Hollywood today as he knew him personally, and as a boy, worked at Hawthorn Cottage for 6d a day. Like Mickey Fearon, he describes the Captain as "a wee gentleman who liked his cigarettes and a drop of Powers also!" He recalls that "Wee Harry" gave him his first pair of long trousers, which were ideal for the growing lad due to Harry's small stature.

Eddie Quinn is greatly valued for his fantastic recall of a past generation and a way of life which has totally disappeared. He is an excellent source of reference, providing a detailed social commentary on local history. The Port Of Newry closed to commercial traffic in March 1974, with all business transferring to Warrenpoint. There are no seamen in the Townland of Fathom today, an area once synonymous with the occupation when almost every house had at least one sailor.

The Blue Plaque for Captain Harry Hollywood was unveiled by a former friend and neighbour, Eddie Quinn, whose sprightly gait belied his then 91 years.

Eddie Quinn passed away on 28th December 2020 aged 96.



Outside Tom McArdles House



Ann & Eddie Quinn



90th Party, with Maurice Collins



Photographs by, Ann Bruen

Thank You.

We at NMA wish to thank everyone who has assisted with the delivery of our event today.

We especially wish to thank the talented photographer, Ann Bruen, for participating in and contributing to our Bi-Centennial project, Michael Mc Caul Signs, who delivered this impressive artefact and for their continued support.

Modern Fireplace Co & Monumental Works, Project Stakeholders.

Braham Group, Warrenpoint, Sponsors of Haulbowline illumination.

Seamus Crossey and Kerri Morrow, NMDDC, for their valued help and support.