

The Lock Keeper's Cottage

History of the Lagan Canal

- Late 17th & early 18thc massive development of the linen industry in the Lagan Valley.
- 1742 new canal opens linking Lough Neagh with Newry – competition for Belfast!
- 1763 September Belfast – Lisburn stretch opened “The Lord Hertford” was the first boat to travel along this stretch. Its arrival in Lisburn was greeted by bands and cheering crowds.
- 1782 Richard Owen appointed as engineer.
- 1794 stretch between Lisburn and Lough Neagh was open.
- 1839 the railway connection between Belfast and Lisburn (the second railway line in Ireland) opened. This eventually became competition for the canal.
- In the early 20th century, the advent of the more rapid road transport meant that eventually competition would prove too much.
- In 1954 Lisburn – Lough Neagh stretch closed.
- 1958 Belfast – Lisburn closed with the last barge delivering coal to the Island Mill.



History of the House

The river at this point had a series of shallow rapids so in 1756/7, the canal cut was made and a weir up towards Shaw's Bridge diverted water into it.

The lock keepers were employed to look after the locks and help the boats pass through them. They had to ensure that the locks were kept clean and operational and that the banks were kept clear. The lock keeper had to look after the weir as well to help maintain the correct water level.

If it was too high or too low, the boats could not pass. Sometimes in severe weather conditions and flooding, they had to stay up all night moving constantly between lock and weir to make sure the level kept down.

The original lock keeper's cottage was just over the bridge and up the lane from the present one. It was one storey high and in keeping with the Lagan Navigation Company's policies, it came with a garden and small amount of land. This was necessary because the wages of the lock keeper were quite low and they needed to be able to supplement their income by growing vegetables etc.

Thomas Bateson, who owned Belvoir Estate, wanted to build a boundary wall, which effectively took the land at the cottage. He came to an arrangement with the Lagan Navigation Company where he rented the present cottage and the land down as far as the Red Bridge. This cottage dates back to the late 18th/early 19th century and was owned by Sir Richard Ferguson and attached to the nearby linen bleaching company James Ferguson and Sons. Thomas Bateson then rented the present house from Sir Richard Ferguson for the sum of £1 per year. William McLeave became lock keeper at Lock no 3 in 1861 and he was the first lock keeper to live in the present cottage. It remained as a lock keeper's cottage until the closure of the canal in 1958. The original cottage was demolished in the 1950s and the site is marked by settling tank.



Family Life

William McLeave's son James was the next lock keeper. In the 1901 census he is described as living there with his daughters Jane and Maria who both worked in the linen industry and his son James, a mechanic.



George Kilpatrick was the next lock keeper at Lock No 3 and he came from a long line of canal folk.

George Kilpatrick started work at 14 driving horse and trap for Charlie Magowan canal manager, and then worked on repair squad.

In 1922, George Kilpatrick took over as lock keeper at Lock No 3. On his marriage to Sarah in Lisburn Cathedral, he returned with her to the cottage and stayed there for the rest of his life. They had a family of ten, all of whom were born and raised in the cottage.

When the canal closed in 1958, the family continued to live in the cottage. On his death, it went to his son Stanley who lived in it until his death in 1993, at which point it went to his sister Dorothy McBride (nee Kilpatrick) who sold it to Castlereagh Borough Council. The restoration of the cottage, which featured on the BBC Restoration Programme, was been undertaken by Lagan Valley Regional Park and Castlereagh Borough Council under the Landscape Partnership Scheme (Heritage Lottery Fund).

Outside

George had built a lean-to on the gable end of the cottage facing the towpath, which in time became an unofficial canteen for Wilson's food factory. He also got the wooden gate lodge from Wilson's and used it as a shed facing the front door.

There was also a dry toilet outside.

George Kilpatrick first introduced goats to the site, which many people will remember.



The Kitchen

The jamb wall is a feature of traditional houses and cottages. Its purpose is to control the draughts for the fire and the window provides a certain amount of light for the kitchen.

The fireplace in the kitchen was the heart of the house. This has been restored, as it would have been in the early part of the twentieth century. The grate itself probably dates back to the late 18th or early 19th century when the house was built. All the cooking would have been done over the fire with pots, griddles etc. being hung from a hook and set on the stone hobs beside to keep the food warm. The fender in front of the fire would have been used for "hardening" of oatcakes etc. Mrs Kilpatrick would have had the soda bread on the griddle for her family when they got up in the morning!



Bedroom/good room

This room served two purposes – it was the parents' bedroom and the "good" room where important visitors were brought and for "Sunday best". All ten Kilpatrick children were born in this room.

The fire would have been lit on Sundays and special occasions.



Upstairs

The "stairs" attached to the wall at the door were what were used for access to the upper storey. During the Kilpatrick's time, the six daughters slept in the room directly above the kitchen and the four brothers slept in the other room.