

# Chapter 11

## Clarecastle – Port & Fishing

**The Port of Clare, Clarecastle Port Shipping Records, Clarecastle Quay, a Clarecastle Sailing Ship**

**Eric Shaw**

**Fishing on the Fergus**



Boland's Rock Fish-traps – located about five miles down-river from Clarecastle.  
photograph taken by Eric Shaw

As long as the River Fergus has flowed through the parish and that people have populated its banks, the river has been a source of transport and a source of food in the form of fish. In 2004, a uniquely well-preserved complex of medieval fish-traps at Boland's Rock\* was investigated by a team from Galway University. Local fishermen had been aware of these traps that became visible at low tide but this was the first time that the wooden traps were scientifically examined. Radiocarbon dating of the timber used in the traps showed that they dated back to the late 11<sup>th</sup> to late 12<sup>th</sup> century AD. These traps may have been set by

Augustian monks from Clare Abbey and Canon Island to provide food for the large number of monks and students that are linked to the abbeys.

\*shown on maps as Boorland's Rocks but known locally as Boland's Rock

### Net-fishing on the Fergus

The boat used by the Clarecastle net-fishermen for many years was known as a gandalow, a boat design used in the Fergus and Shannon Estuaries. The drawing above of the Quay shows a gandalow on the river. The boat is keelless and with the spring in the floor, it is ideal to manoeuvre in shallow water or over the mud flats. It was about 21 feet in length and about 5 feet across, mainly made of white deal, with teak used for the bow, stern and knees. Up to recent times, there were fourteen drift-net licences and a couple of draught-net licences held by families in the village. The drift-net went with the tide. The draught-net was paid out in a circle and it took two men to operate that system. The drift meant the distance between one fishing boat and the next and is reflected in many of the names used to identify points in the river.

The salmon-fishing season usually began in February and ran through until May for what was known as spring salmon. After that, salmon weighing less than eight lbs. known as pale, were fished. Then there was coarse fishing for fluke, bass and mullet. During slack times in the summer, the boats were lifted from the water, sealed with caulker and repainted. After that, towards the winter months, duck-shooting took over so that the gandalows were in use for almost the entire year. There were two large punt-guns used in duck-shooting from a punt. These could bring down a large flock of duck or geese and are now on display in Navin's Pub.

The recently published Parish Map<sup>1</sup> gives fine details of the old fishermen's names of locations along the river that marked their drift-net movements. Gandalows are still being made by the Scanlan and Considine families.



An example of a drift-net licence from 2005 Clarecastle

-photograph courtesy of Eric Shaw



stock of punt-gun in Navan's Bar,

-photographs courtesy of Eric Shaw



A gandalow under construction by John Scanlan – one of the largest salmon  
 photograph courtesy of Eric Shaw caught by net in the  
 Fergus in the 1960s– courtesy John Power

Reference:

1. Parish Map 2013-published by Clarecastle Heritage and Wildlife Group.

## Clare Castle Port Shipping Records



Clarecastle Port Shipping records – photograph courtesy of John Power

In the lead-up to the Gathering 2013 Festivities, a concerted effort was made to unearth old photographs, documents and artefacts pertaining to the history of the Parish. Some remarkable finds were made. These included a Register of Shipping covering the years 1914 to the end of the commercial life of the Port in the mid-1960s. The Minute Books of the Harbour Trustees for the same period also became available. The Register shows all boats arriving at and departing from Quays in Clarecastle in those years. It gives the name of vessel, the date of arrival/departure, where the vessel came from, the tonnage and description of the cargo and for whom the cargo was imported. From the Trustees point of view, an important column in the Register showed the fees paid by the boats for landing of the cargo.

The principal importers were Patrick Power, Clarecastle, Dan McInerney of Ennis and Suttons of Clarecastle. Timber, flour and coal were the main cargos.

The last shipment of deal from Mirimichi in Canada came in to the port in 1915. Thereafter, timber was imported from the Baltic countries. That Canada run was the usual one for William Carroll, Timber Merchant, in the 1880s and earlier. The Great War (1914-1918) and the Second World War (1939-1945) had devastating effects on the commercial life of the Port but the years between the wars were quite successful. The 1950s saw the level of trade through the Port contract again until all shipping activities finally ceased in the early 1960s.

Another associated find in recent months were a number of very fine photographs of shipping taken at the Quay in Clarecastle by David Browne. These capture images of what the Port was like when boats discharging cargoes were tied up and the work of the local Carmen.



Photograph of Clare Port with John McNamara- courtesy of David Browne

David Browne's photograph of John MacNamara with the boat, "Gloria" in the background was probably was taken in October 1959. The "M.V. Gloria" arrived in to Clarecastle on 27 Oct 1959 from Whitehaven, with a cargo of 558 tons of coal for Dan McInerney. Only five or six boats were to follow in the years ahead, so the carmens' work was almost at an end.

## Clarecastle Quay

If one stands on the bed of the river when the tide has fully stripped out, the scale and workmanship of the crescent-shaped quay in Clarecastle can be fully appreciated. This wall of stone has borne the brunt of rough weather and tidal flows over the past 170 years and still looks as solid as the day that the foundation-stone was laid in 1843. The present quay incorporates an earlier structure erected by Sir Lucius O'Brien between 1763 and 1770. The above drawing is from a map entitled "Port of Clare – River Fergus" made by Lieutenants J. Wolfe and R. B. Beechey and Mr. J. S. Taylor of the Royal Navy in 1840<sup>1</sup>. It gives a good impression of what the O'Brien quay must have looked like and is also a wonderful, evocative image of the village, castle and barracks. A cutter is tied up at the quay with a long

pennant flying from a tall mast, a stage-coach is crossing the fine Semple bridge and the fishing boat is similar to the present-date ganalow still in use on the river.

With the level of trade in the 1840s, the O'Brien Quay had become too short to handle the number of ships using the Port of Clare. The *Clare Journal* of 7 April 1845<sup>2</sup> describes the O'Brien quay as “the old dilapidated quay” and the new quay as “ample and commodious”. The paper goes on to say “for during the time when the old quay was taken down, which commenced in July 1843, till it was finished in March 1845, sixty labourers were the average number employed. These men being now thrown out of employment, a great deal of privation must necessarily befall them and their families”. The redevelopment of the quay cost about £4,000. A plaque was erected at the northern end of the new quay, with the following inscription:

**V - R**  
**THIS QUAY was erected by THE COMMISSIONERS**  
**APPOINTED UNDER THE ACT 2 and 3 VIC. CAP.61**  
**THE RIGHT HON<sup>ble</sup> WILLIAM BARON HEYTESBURY G.C.B.**  
**LORD LIEUTENANT.**

**COMMENCED JULY 1843**  
**THOMAS RHODES ENGINEER**

**FINISHED MARCH 1845.**  
**RICHARD GREY CONTRACTOR.**



Plaque of wall of quay, Clarecastle – photograph courtesy of Eric Shaw

Thomas Rhodes (1789-1868), was an English engineer. During the 1830s and 1840s Rhodes was engaged on a number of Irish engineering and surveying projects. As a member of a special three-man Commission set up in 1831 to report on the navigation of the Shannon, he made a [survey](#) of the river from Limerick to its source, producing his report in 1833. In 1839 he was engaged as the Shannon Commissioners' principal engineer, a position which he held until 1846. In this role he was responsible for several major bridges, locks and weirs, including the bridge at Portumna, Co. Galway, and Banagher, Co. Offaly. Richard Grey was a Galway contractor.



The Clarecastle Quay-wall – photograph courtesy of Eric Shaw

The quay is about 512 feet in length and is 16 feet 3 inches in height. There are nine stone steps at the northern end and thirteen stone steps at the southern end. Four iron access ladders with twelve rungs are inserted in the face of the quay-wall. [The *Clare Journal* states that there were five iron ladders]. Seven finely-carved stone mooring-posts are spaced along the quay for the attaching of mooring lines. The limestone for the quay may have been quarried in Ballybeg. Large discarded blocks of stone similar to the ones used in the construction of the quay, can be found in the area of Carroll's Quarry in Ballybeg today. The *Limerick Chronicle* of 9 April 1845 states that 5,416 cubic yards of rock and 7,922 cubic yards of clay and gravel were used in the construction of the new quay. The base of the quay is formed from a row of large cut stones that protrude slightly. The wall of the quay is constructed from rectangular ashlar limestone (dressed) blocks in regular courses which rise to ten courses in all. Some of these blocks of stone are quite large and it must have taken great effort and skill to cut and move these from the quarry to the edge of the river.

In the late 1880s, five gas lamps were installed along the quay. These fine cast-iron lamp standards can be seen in older photographs and they added greatly to the appearance of the area. In 1895, an iron crane was installed on a large block of concrete mid-way along the quayside. This remained in place until the 1960s when it was removed for scrap.



Unloading a coal-boat at the Quay in the 1950s- photograph courtesy of David Browne

The unloading of ships at the Quay and the transporting of coal, timber and building materials in to Ennis provided welcome employment for the car-men of the village. The coming of the railway to Clare Castle in 1859 began to cause a drop in business followed by decline to the Port of Clare. World events such as the Great War and Second World War added to the drop in business. The last coal-boat was unloaded in 1961.

The large grain-stores, two old ship's anchors and the quay-wall itself are reminders of an era that has passed. The buying-out of the net salmon licences in recent years has meant that the Quay is no longer a hive of activity but rather an area of leisure and a pleasant place for locals and visitors to walk. Old photographs of the Quay, shipping records and traditions to do with fishing, duck-shooting and boat-building, along with the memories of the people of the village should be recorded, preserved and treasured.



Clarecastle Port by W. Lawrence c.1900 – Clare Library

Reference:

1. Map of River Fergus & Port of Clare 1840 courtesy of Hydrological Office, London.
2. The *Clare Journal* of 7 April 1845.

## A Clarecastle Sailing Ship



William Carroll 1817 – 1889



Abbeyview

William Carroll was born in 1817. At the time of his marriage in 1846, William Carroll was already a successful building contractor and timber merchant in Ennis, with quarries for stone in Ballybeg.

He lived in a thatched farmhouse on his father's land at Ballybeg. His son, W. R. Carroll, who became an architect in 1870, designed the present house, *Abbeyview*. The house passed down through generations of Carrolls, Perrys, and Shaws until it was sold out of the family in 1976.

### **Carroll's works include:**

- The 1854 Franciscan Church in Ennis
- Church at Our Lady's Hospital, Ennis
- Carroll's Bridge in Bank Place, Ennis
- The Metal Bridge at Doora
- The Ennis Library
- Ballyea Chapel
- Ennis Railway Terminus
- Clooney House reconstruction
- Haulbowline and Spike Island – quays and barracks buildings
- Carrigaholt Pier
- Ennis Turkish Baths
- Ennis Pro-Cathedral Spire
- The Vandeleur Mausoleum in Kilrush
- The O'Connell Monument, Ennis
- The Orphanage and other buildings for the Mercy Convent, Ennis

William Carroll was a member of the original Clare Castle Harbour Board. The British Parliament passed an act to set up the Clare Castle Harbour Trustees Board and this body took control of the port on 24 March 1887. The Board had the following members: Lord Inchiquin, Chairman; H. B. Harris, Ennis; J. N. Russell, Limerick; William Carroll, Ennis; C. Rynne, Ennis; P. O'Brien, Clare Castle; P. McNerney, Ennis; P. O'Kelly, Clare Castle; and J. Hill, Ennis. To serve his large timber-yard in Ennis, Carroll chartered ships to bring timber from Eastern Europe and from Canada in to Clare Castle Port. As his business prospered, he purchased a barque named the *Alfred* in 1880 and based the ship in Clare Castle. The *Alfred*

was wrecked off the coast of Prince Edward Island two years later on 24 October, 1882 but her story gives an interesting insight into the life of a sailing-ship of that period and the activities of the Port of Clare.

The *Alfred*, official number 45,491, was built in Southwick, England in 1864. Her builder was Rawson and she had a gross tonnage of 349 tons. She was 116 feet, 6 inches in length, 27 feet, 6 inches in breadth and had a depth of 17 feet<sup>1</sup>. The ship had a barque rigging with three masts and was registered at Scarborough Port. Her first owners were H. Smith & Co. and then W. H. Ross & Co. both of Scarborough. She was listed as A1 Class on Lloyd's Register and her hull was felted and sheathed with yellow metal. The ship was very similar in size and design to the present-day reconstructed *Jeannie Johnston*. This barque gives a very accurate impression of how *the Alfred* must have looked.

Under Carroll's ownership, the voyages of the *Alfred* can be plotted from the Crew Lists that still exist. An example shows that on 18 May 1881, the *Alfred* sailed from Liverpool to St. Johns, New Brunswick with a crew of ten and with James Martin as Master. James Martin was born in Kilrush in 1824 and passed his examination for a Certificate of Competency as Master at Cork in 1865. Among the crew were William Hickey, James O'Mahony, Daniel Behan and Joseph Mahony of Limerick. The ship arrived back with a cargo of timber for Carroll to Clare Castle on 26 September 1881<sup>3</sup>.

On 18 October 1881, the *Alfred* sailed from Clare Castle to Troon in Scotland<sup>(3)</sup>. In April 1882, she sailed from Limerick to Quebec, arriving back in Clare Castle on 21 July of that year. That trip had a further significance for Carroll in that his son Patrick Carroll is listed among the crew of twelve. The rest of the crew signed on for a wage of £3.5s.od. per month while Patrick was given a nominal wage of just one shilling<sup>4</sup>.

On 16 August, 1882, the *Alfred* set sail from Clare Castle, calling at Limerick, on her way to Miramichi or St. John's, New Brunswick, with the following crew:

Wm. J. Stephenson (Master)	of St. John's, New Brunswick.
George Hopkins	of Ramsgate
John Miller	of Limerick
Thomas Lenord	of Limerick
Matt Kelly	of Ballylongford
Benjamin Genou	of Limerick
Charles Nelson	of Germany
Thomas Carroll	of Kilrush
George Lay	of Gravesend
J. Williams	of Londonderry
John Tyrrell	of Arklow
Patrick Carroll	of Ennis

John Miller deserted the ship at Kilrush and was crossed off the Crew List. George Lay failed to join the crew and Patrick Carroll was taken on as a substitute. All were listed as seamen with the exception of Lenord who was shown as a cook/steward and Hopkins was listed as Mate.

The final adjustments were made to the Crews List at Beeves Light on 21 August 1882, just as the ship left to cross the Atlantic. Mitchell's Maritime Register for the period October and November 1882 gives a graphic account of the final days of the *Alfred*. The Register received a telegram on 24 October from the western end of Prince Edward Island announcing that the *Alfred*, barque, for Miramichi, in ballast, had struck on the east end of North Cape that morning. The telegram stated that there had been a heavy gale from the NE on the

previous day and that the ship was a total wreck. The Nautical Magazine carried the following report:

*Alfred, Barque; built at Sunderland 1864: owned by Mr. Carroll; tonnage 349: (on voyage from) Clare Castle to Miramichi (New Brunswick, Canada); ballast (i.e. cargo on outward journey); lost near North Cape, Prince Edward Island October 24<sup>th</sup> 1882*<sup>5</sup>.

The Board of Trade's *Abstracts of Shipping Casualties 1882-83* gives a similar account, with the additional information that no lives were lost and that the wind was southeast two knots when the ship ran aground. The wreck was put up for auction on 7 November 1882 and the final report on the ship states that "she will be broken up"<sup>6</sup>.

On 13 March 1883, an inquiry on the wrecking of the *Alfred* was held at Cardiff before Jones, Stipendiary Magistrate. The Master, William James Stephenson, who had been born at St. Johns, New Brunswick in 1852 and had passed his examination for Master in Canada in 1874 (Colonial Certificate No. 483), was found in default for careless navigation. His Masters certificate was suspended for three months. The Crew List shows Stephenson as being discharged on 24 October 1882 at North Cape and the words "wrecked, P.E. Island" were written opposite each of the crews' names.

That entry also marked the last occasion that Carroll's son Patrick appears in any records located to date but it would seem that he stayed on in Canada before moving south to the USA. He apparently was in the USA in 1889, when his father died at *Abbeyview*. William Carroll died in 1889 and is buried in the family vault in Drumcliff, Ennis, which he had built about 10 years previously.

#### **References:**

1 Lloyd's Register & Mercantile Navy List 1882

2, 3 & 4 *Agreement and Account of Crew Lists*, Memorial University of Newfoundland

5 *Nautical Magazine*, Vol. 52, 1883.

6. *Mitchell's Register*, October to November, 1882.

Eric Shaw is a great-great-grandson of William Carroll.

For further information on the Carroll Family of Ballybeg, see Eric Shaw, *Other Clare Journal*, Vols. 5,8 & 9 and 'Raising the Carrolls' in the *Clare Champion* of 9 May 2003, p.16.



A three-masted barque

