



*Richard Hanna Lock Keeper Lock No. 12*

The lock keepers were employed to look after the locks, help the boats pass through them and record details of the boat and its cargo. At some locks, they had to collect a toll from each boat passing through. An important element of the job was to ensure that the locks were kept clean, operational and that the banks were kept clear. Most lock keepers had a weir to look after as well to help maintain the correct water level. If it was too high or too low, the boats could not pass. Because there was a lack of reservoirs on the Lagan Navigation, conservation of water was paramount.

The linen bleachers required flowing water to conduct their operations, which included rinsing and washing the linen after bleaching. The bleachers and the linen mills they were attached to were a powerful lobby group, and managed to stop the construction of reservoirs; however, some were put in as the canal needed to be viable for the benefit of all concerned. This meant that water was a precious commodity and its use carefully marshalled in the Lagan Navigation Company's regulations for lock keepers. Lock keepers found flaunting these rules would find themselves fined which would have had a big impact on such a meagre wage. Sometimes in severe weather conditions they

had to stay up all night moving constantly between lock and weir to prevent flooding.

Lock keepers was paid a wage that was poor considering the important nature of their work. To counter this each lock keeper was given their own house with a small piece of land where they could subsidise their income by growing their own food.

Lagan Navigation Company's regulations for lock keepers

1. No Lock Keeper shall absent himself from his duties or entrust these to any deputy without the authority of the inspector, on pain of dismissal or of such fine as the Directors may inflict.
2. The Lock Keeper shall carefully watch over the Banks, Towing Paths, Bridges and Keys, and keep in repair the Banks and Roads under his charge, and shall report without delay to the Inspector, anything in the state of works that require immediate attention under a penalty of 10/=.
3. The Lock Keeper shall require the production of the Permit before passing any Boat or Lighter through his Locks, and shall enter the same in his book under the penalty of 2/6.
4. The Lock Keepers shall not permit the discharge of any cargo, or portion thereof, from a lighter, while the chamber of the Locks, he shall not allow Lighter masters or others to use Boat-hooks or Spiked Poles in pushing Lighters out of the Lock Chamber, nor allow stones nor other materials to be deposited on the banks or quays nearer to the water than twelve feet nor allow the same to remain on banks or quays longer than 24 hours under a penalty of 5s for each offence.
5. The Lock Keepers shall attend to all Lighters that come at proper hours but shall not pass any

Lighters through the Locks at night without an order in writing from the Secretary or the Inspector under a penalty of 5s.

6. The Lock Keeper shall keep his short gates locked after dark and shall not allow any stranger to have access to, or use handles, bars or other implements for opening Locks, Pen Weirs or Waste Sluices, under a penalty of 5s.

7. The Lock Keeper shall not permit any lighters to be moored within 60 yards of the Lock Gates, nor to enter the locks unless there is sufficient water to carry them through the next level, nor when Lighters pass allow the gates to close of themselves under penalty of 2/6 for each offence.

8. The Lock Keeper shall not allow the chamber of his lock to remain full for half an hour time nor by carelessness or waste of water, suffer his level to be run so low as to obstruct the traffic, under a penalty of 5.

9. All Lock Keepers, during any weather shall keep their gates properly secured with moss to prevent waste of water, and when two or more Lighters are together he shall pass them in each others water under penalty of 9s 6d.

10. The Lock Keepers at Union Locks and Western levels on the Lagan Canal and at Benburb and all other short reaches on the Ulster and Coalisland Canals shall not run more water into the Chamber of the Lock than is necessary according to the fixed gauge to pass the Lighter under a penalty of 10s.

11. When a loaded Lighter enters a Lock the Lock Keeper shall sound his horn so as to give warning to all approaching Lighters under a penalty of 1s.

12. The Lock Keepers shall not suffer the racks to fall without winding them down under a

penalty of 5s.

13. The Lock Keeper at the entrance and outlet of each canal shall not permit any Lighter to proceed at a greater draft of water than that allowed at the time under a penalty of 10s.

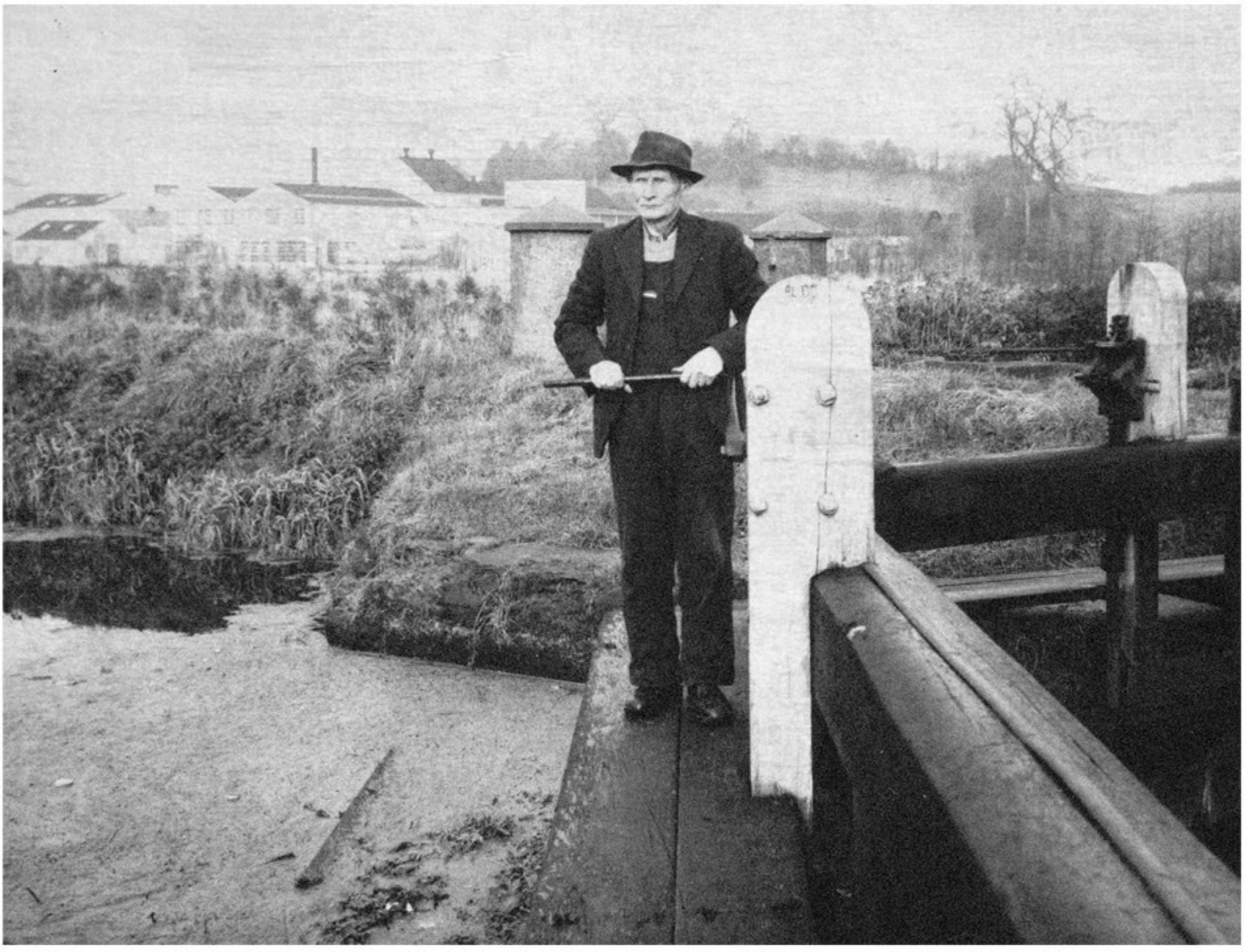
It can be seen from these regulations that the conservation of water and maintaining levels was a huge responsibility of the lock keeper. The fines that were imposed were a real deterrent due to the poor wages in monetary terms the lock keepers were paid, 4 pence a day would have been the norm though wages varied depending on the lock and related duties.

## Dorothy McBride's memories of her father's work

The last lock keeper at Lock No 3 was George Kilpatrick who lived there with his wife and ten children, all of whom were born in the cottage. Dorothy was one of those ten children and recalls what it was like for her father working as a lock keeper.

"My father was on call 24 hours a day and if the river might have flooded the weir had to be pulled as they called it, sluices had to be lifted to regulate the water. My father looked after a weir at Newforge, where the canal met the River Lagan. If it was raining and the water started to rise he would have to go up to the weir. My father had a thing, the key they called it, for moving the sluice up and down. It would have been a horrible job; he was soaked to the skin many a time. My mother would have been up too, having tea ready for him. The light was hardly out when there was bad weather. If Mr Rowan was not available, my father also had to cycle to his lock and pull the sluices for him. Now, how they got word to each other I do not know because there were no phones. Someone must have passed messages along the line as they called it. There were big floods, I remember

we were flooded twice but I am sure there were lot more times.”



*George Kilpatrick winding the sluice gates at Lock No. 3. The Newforge Factory is in the background.*