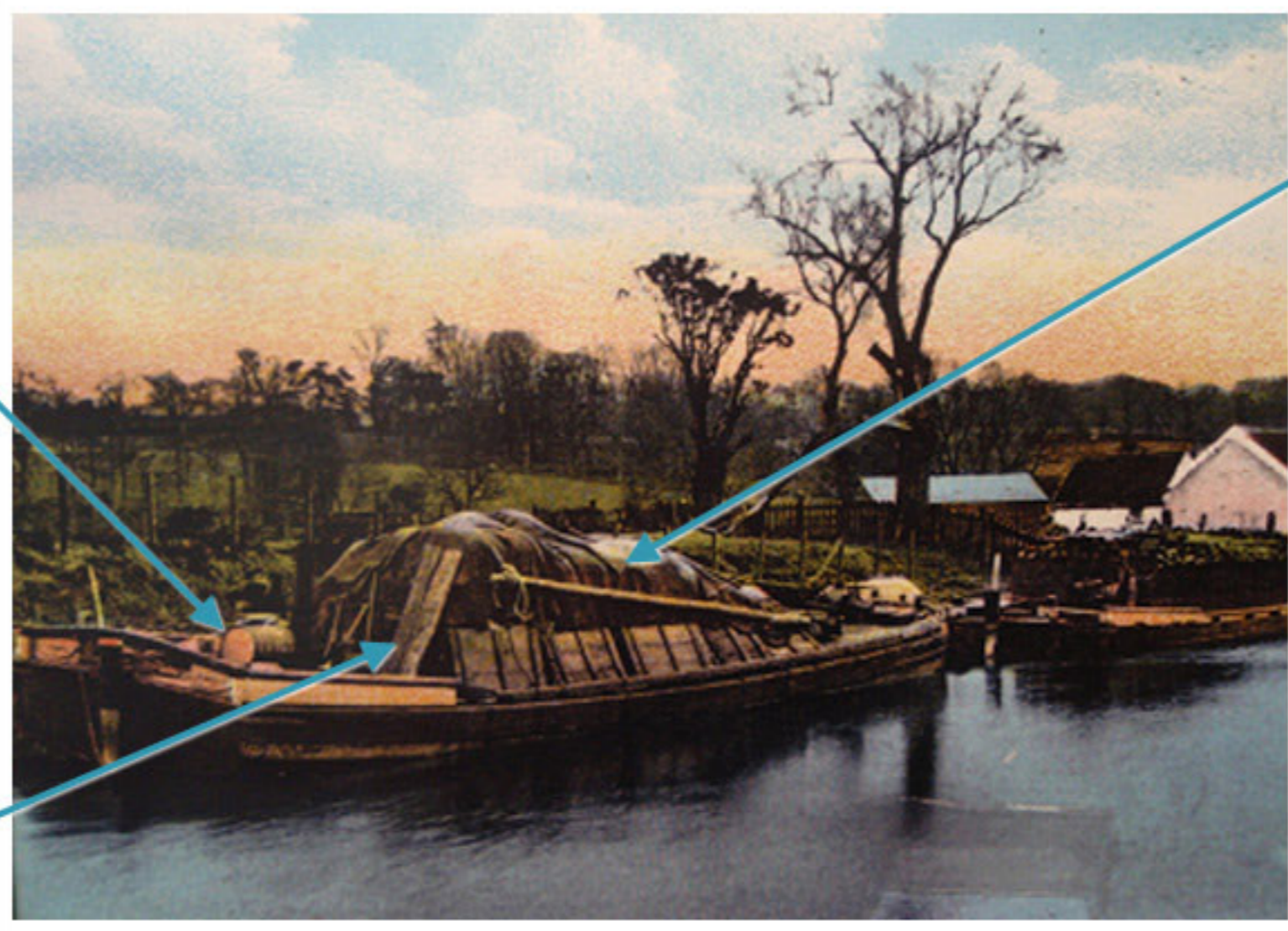


'Lighter' was the special name given to the boats on the Lagan.

Breaker
for carrying fresh
water

Cabin
for accommodation



Cargo

'The men who operated the boats were known as "Lightermen". The Lightermen and their families usually lived on board the boat. The job of the lighterman was to transport the cargo between Belfast and Lough Neagh as quickly as possible.

The main cargoes on the boats would have been coal to power the factories and mills in the Lagan Valley and linen from the mills. Other cargoes included flour, turf, tiles, sand and farm produce.



In the picture are two lightermen, Johnny McVeigh and "Hell's Fire" Jack McCann. Can you say five things about them?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Family life onboard



Fig. 4. A Cabin in Rt. Stewart's Boat, Belfast, painted by John Nixon in 1785. Robert Stewart maintained at least one boat on the Lagan Canal for mercantile purposes and also boated for pleasure. (Collection Ulster Museum).

Robert Stewart's Lighter 1785

This is a very old picture of the inside of a lighter.

The lightermen lived on the boats with their wives and families. The area that they lived in was called the "cabin". Life on the canal could be very cold and wet but the cabin was always warm and dry with a big coal-fired stove which kept going day and night. Cooking was done over this fire. Cupboards filled the wall space on either side of the fire. Bench seats went along the other walls and there was a shelf up above this which was used for sleeping on. Sometimes they also had a hammock. There was very little furniture because there was very little space. There would have been no running water or electricity on the boats. Fresh water for drinking was carried in a barrel or "breaker".

Can you draw a picture of the family accommodation on the barge?

Family life onboard

Lizzie Rafferty was married to James Rafferty who was a lightermen and she described herself as a "lighterwoman".



"I used to "mate" for my family and the hauler and sit singing. There was my husband Jimmy and Paddy and Frankie and Lily. Our boat was the "Sara". She belonged to Benburb and carried Indian corn. I never worried about my 12 children for I always kept them close by me. I used to bath them on a Saturday evening either on the bank or on the deck. Then I washed the cabin sole. I didn't allow them back into the cabin till the floor had dried".

1. "Mate" means to help out onboard a ship or a boat. What kind of jobs do you think Lily might have done?

.....
.....
.....

2. How would you have liked life on the Lagan?

.....
.....
.....

3. What would have been your favourite thing?

.....
.....
.....

4. What would have been the worst?

.....
.....
.....

The journey time between Belfast and Lough Neagh was approximately two days. The lighters would usually find somewhere to "lie up" for the night. There was a "lying up" area just upstream of Lock No 3.



Using everything you know, write a description of what life was like for children on the lighters on the Lagan. Think about where they would have slept, what would they have had to eat, what chores they would have to do, the people they would have met.