



"There would have been about five boats a day. The canal boats would mostly come by during the day, it was not fair to the horses to travel through the night. The lightermen usually pulled in when it got dark and if they were at our house they would come in and have tea. The boatmen had cabins on the boats, wooden bunks to sleep on, not very dressy but they were functional. I remember some of their names - Ned Larkin and Black Jack, or was it Black John... he was a man who had a long black beard. I remember them because they would have come to yarn with my father, to sit in the shop with a storm lantern until all hours of the night. It was mainly coal and grain taken to somewhere in Aghalee and sometimes timber on the barges."



Can you choose a scene from the speech bubble and draw it in the space below, for example the horses outside the cottage, the lightermen asleep in their bunks or the boatmen having tea at the cottage.



Travelling along the Lagan

" When I was around 9 or 10 we were allowed to go on a barge as far as Edenderry and we would come back, usually we had wee old bicycles, old rickety things. The river men were lovely men, they looked after you, made sure you were all right. Only one man I remember had his wife with him, she was not like a woman: a very tough lady, she travelled with her husband, she wore dark long clothes and was so sun tanned that she was nearly mahogany in colour. They managed; they had a wee stove in their cabins, they survived with very little in those days. I don't remember children on the boats. They would nearly always have dogs, they would have got off at the locks and run around. The horses all had names, they were beautiful, nearly like shire horses, big hooves, very docile. There was the odd time there were two horses pulling a barge, but mostly there was one. I think the boatmen were employees, I don't think they owned the barges, the lighters. There were two or three men on the boat, a lot of the time one would have got off and walked with the horse along the towpath. I remember that so well. We would have run down when my father said there was a lighter coming, my sister and I and maybe my brother would have run down half way round the corner to Stranmillis, and would have found them walking with the horse. They were very, very good to their horses because that was part of their lives. They were nice horses too, working horses."



Imagine that you were one of the Kilpatrick children just home from school on a nice summer's day and a boat was coming up to Lock no 3. You and one of your brothers and sisters want to get the boat to Edenderry. Using the information above, write a description of your journey.



Remember to include:

- how you felt
- what the lighter looked like – what the cargo was
- who was on the lighter – what did they look like, what would they have talked about
- did you help get the lighter through the lock
- what the horse was like
- did you meet anybody else on your journey

The Weir

George Kilpatrick also had to look after a weir which controlled the amount of water that was in the canal. The river often flooded in the winter but for the lighters to pass, the level of water in the canal had to be right:

"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 (the lock keeper at Lock No 2) 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 a lot more times."



Turn this memory into a story board, with a new event in each box. Don't forget to number them!
