

LIMERICK IRON FOUNDARIES 1806-1989

(Unpublished article)

by

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Introduction

There is a long tradition of ironworking in Ireland dating back to approximately 500 B.C. The early iron works were on a small scale and involved perhaps one or two skilled iron workers operating a small bowl furnace that had been formed in the ground and lined with clay. Iron ore, a rock which contains iron, was widespread in Ireland; as was bog ore which is found under peat lands. The ore was placed in the bowl furnace along with charcoal (which is made from wood) and a bellows was used to increase the temperature of the furnace to about 1200° C. This was hot enough to convert the ore into a lump of sponge-like iron which was then hammered to consolidate it, and remove waste particles, before final forging to shape.¹

Iron working on a large scale did not happen in Ireland until the seventeenth century when English entrepreneurs set up iron smelters throughout the country. The furnace used to melt the iron ore at this stage was the blast furnace which was constructed of local stone and brick and was generally 4-5 metres tall.² (**Fig. 1**)

The furnace was usually located in wooded areas and close to a river or stream as a waterwheel was required to work a pair of bellows supplying an air blast to the furnace. As well as iron ore and charcoal, some limestone was also put into the furnace and its purpose was to help remove waste elements in the form of molten slag. When the required temperature of about 1540° C was reached the iron melted and flowed to the base of the furnace where it was tapped off and run into a sand bed where it solidified. The shape of the castings produced in the sand bed resembled a sow and piglets and the iron became known as pig iron.³

The iron produced by this method was not of much use because it contained too much carbon and other impurities which made it weak and brittle. So it was taken to a finery forge, which was often located nearby, to be reheated and converted into wrought iron by being hammered with a large water-powered tilt hammer.⁴

¹ O Kelly, Michael J., *Early Ireland*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 260-1.

² Rynne, Colin, *Industrial Archaeology Ireland*, Collins Press, Cork, 2006, p. 105.

³ *ibid.* p. 112

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

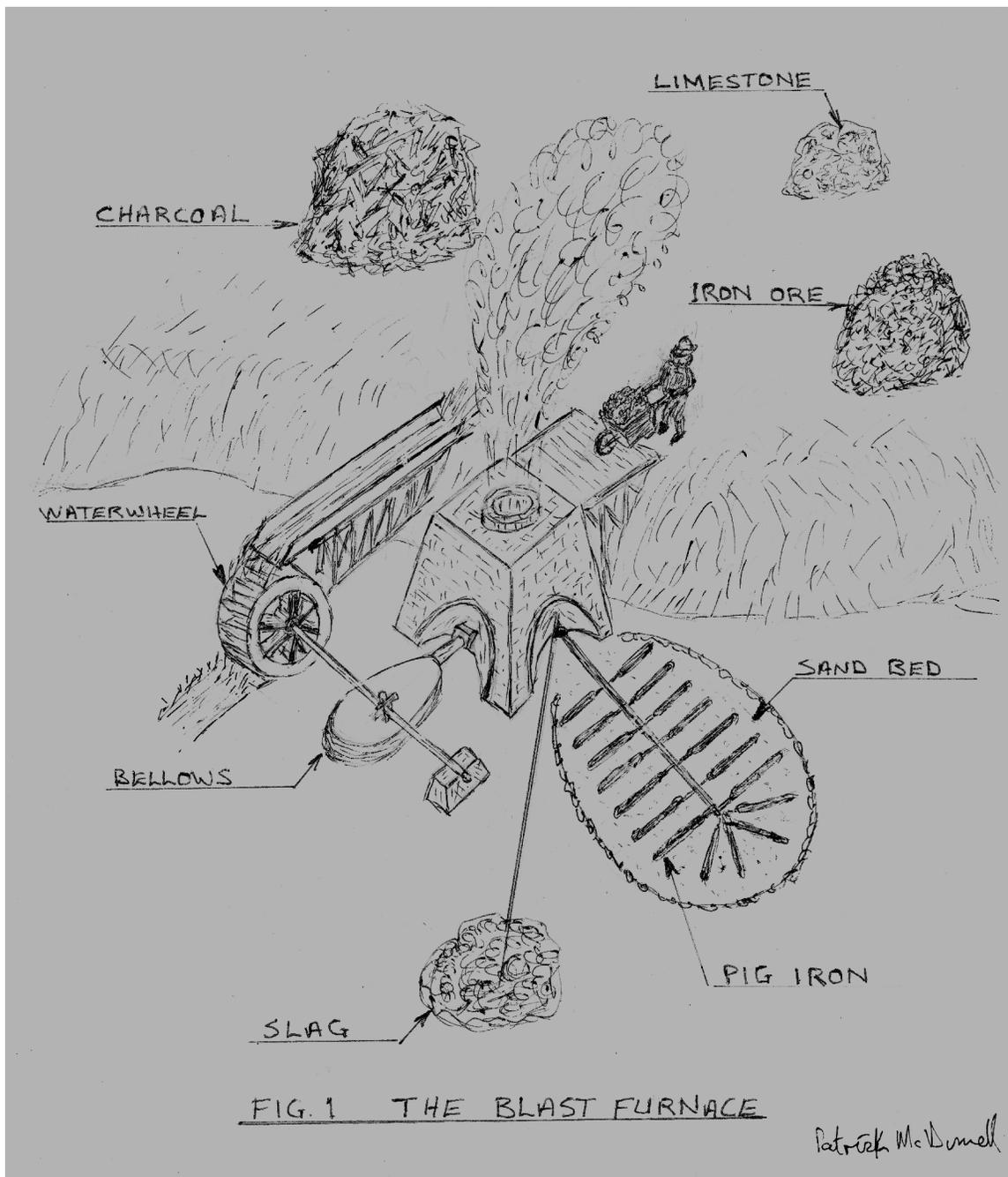


Fig. 1 Seventeenth Century Blast Furnace

There was a large iron making industry in the Sliabh Aughty area of East Clare where extensive native woodlands extended from near Tulla to Portumna. The remains of two blast furnaces can be seen at Whitegate and Raheen, near Tuamgreaney. The hammer works for the Whitegate furnace was located about half a mile away at Meelick. The bog ore used for these furnaces was mined locally. Iron ore was also mined near Askeaton and shipped to Limerick from where it was taken by road to Killaloe and again by boat to the

furnace sites. Ore was also imported from England to Limerick and transported in a similar way to the East Clare blast furnaces.⁵

There were up to 160 of these blast furnaces located all over the country and the production of charcoal to fuel these furnaces eventually led to the destruction of the native woodland which were not replanted. As a result furnaces were forced to close because the production of charcoal became too expensive.

The beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in England, and the increased demand for iron products, led to experimentation, with coke replacing charcoal as a fuel. This, together with the development of the steam engine, led to a great expansion of iron production in England and Wales.⁶ In 1794 a new type of furnace was developed, it is thought, by John Wilkinson in his Welsh ironworks - the Cupola Furnace which produced cast iron by re-melting pig iron. The use of a steam engine to power the air blast enabled the iron industry to break its reliance on waterpower and furnaces could now be set up anywhere where there was a supply of pig iron and coke; furnaces being sited either near the raw materials or markets.

In Ireland foundries were set up from around the year 1800 in ports where a supply of pig iron and coke could be imported by ship.⁷ Foundries were set up in Dublin, Belfast and Cork, and in 1806 an iron foundry was set up in Clare Street, Limerick by a millwright named James Doyle.⁸

The Cupola Furnace

The new cupola furnace (**Fig. 2**) was smaller and easier to set up than the older blast furnace, though it worked in a similar way. It was made up of a tall, barrel-shaped container that had a cast iron outer shell. Lined internally with fire bricks, it was held together with wrought iron hoops.⁹ The furnace was charged (filled) with a mixture of pig iron, scrap iron, coke and a small amount of limestone. After the coke was ignited air was blown in near the base of the furnace by means of a steam-powered air blower. When the required temperature was reached the pig iron melted and collected at the base of the furnace. When enough molten metal had gathered it was tapped off into heat resistant containers and taken to a prepared sand mould for pouring. This method was capable of producing high quality castings and well-formed fabricated parts that could be used in machinery.

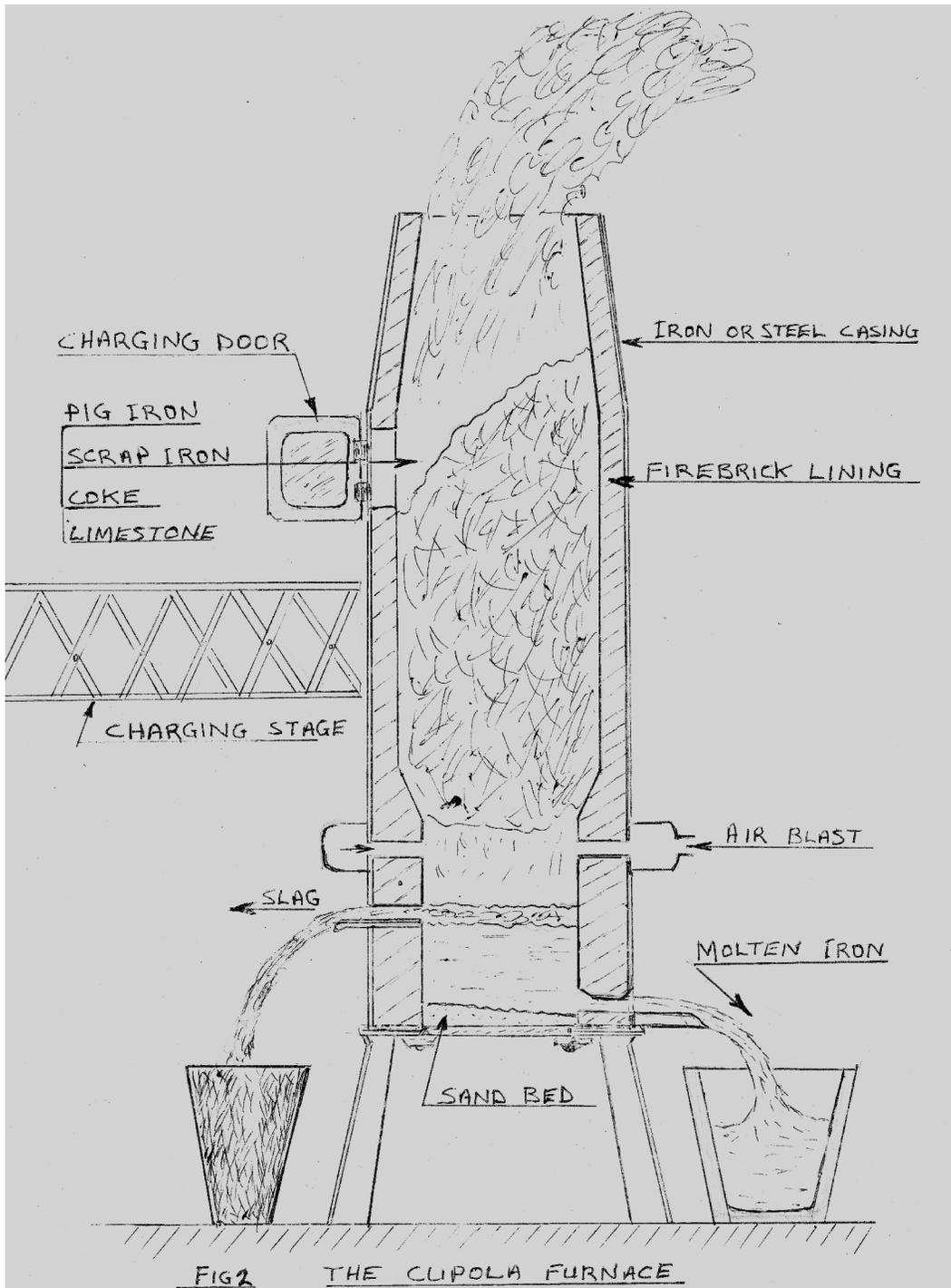
⁵ Madden, Gerard, 'The Ironworks of Sliabh Aughty', *East Clare Heritage Journal* No 7, 1997, pp. 48-51.

⁶ Mc Neill, Ian, *An Encyclopaedia of the History of Technology*, Routledge, London, 1990, pp. 153-4.

⁷ Rynne, Colin, *Industrial Ireland 1750-1930*, Collins Press, Cork, 2006, pp. 271-2.

⁸ *Limerick Chronicle* 3 May 1806.

⁹ Rynne op. cit., p. 271.



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Fig. 2 Cupola Furnace

The Iron-Casting Process

The casting of even a relatively simple shape, such as a quayside mooring post, involved quite a lot of work. The first stage was the manufacture of a wooden pattern, in two parts, (**Fig. 3**) having the shape of the finished casting, but slightly larger to allow for the contraction of the finished casting as it cooled. Wooden dowels enabled the two parts of the pattern to be assembled precisely, when required, during the preparation of the sand mould.

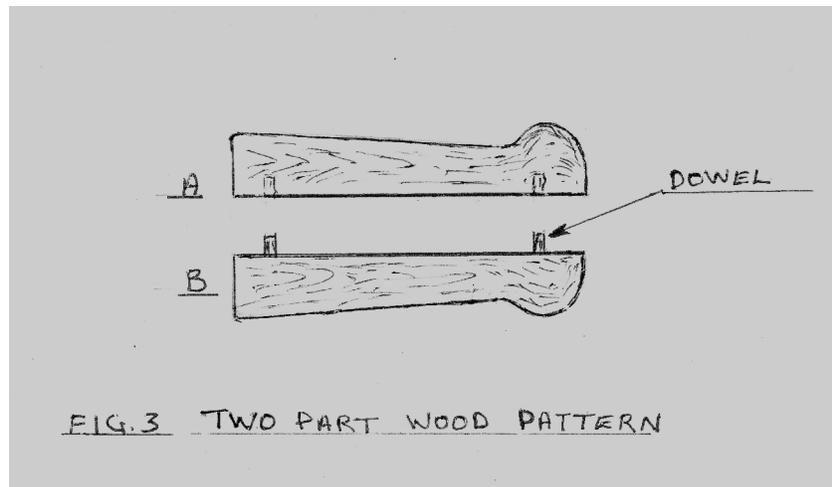


Fig. 3 Two Part Wood Pattern

Casting was carried out in two-part moulding boxes (**Fig. 4**) which were made of iron and which had four sides, but no top or bottom. During the moulding operation the boxes were secured in position by pins which allowed the two parts to be separated easily to remove the pattern when required.

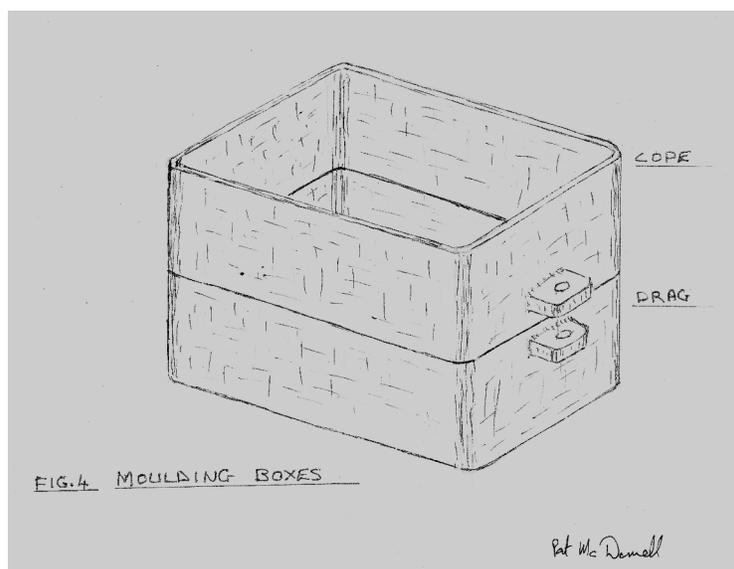


Fig. 4 Moulding Boxes

To form the shape of the mooring post inside the sand mould, part A of the pattern was placed flat on a moulding board (Fig. 5) and one part of the moulding box was placed around it. The pattern was then covered with fine facing sand; next the mould box was filled with moulding sand and rammed up level.

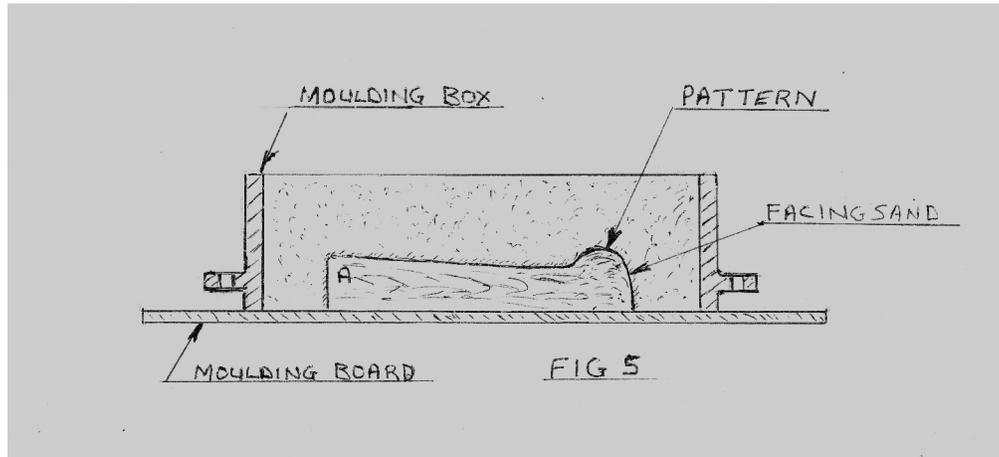


Fig. 5 Moulding Board

The mould box was now inverted and the second mould box was placed on top of the first, and part B of the pattern was placed in position. The pattern was then covered with facing sand and a layer of parting sand was dusted over the joint surface. Wooden plugs were placed in position to create channels for the molten iron; the second box was then filled with sand and rammed up level. (Fig. 6)

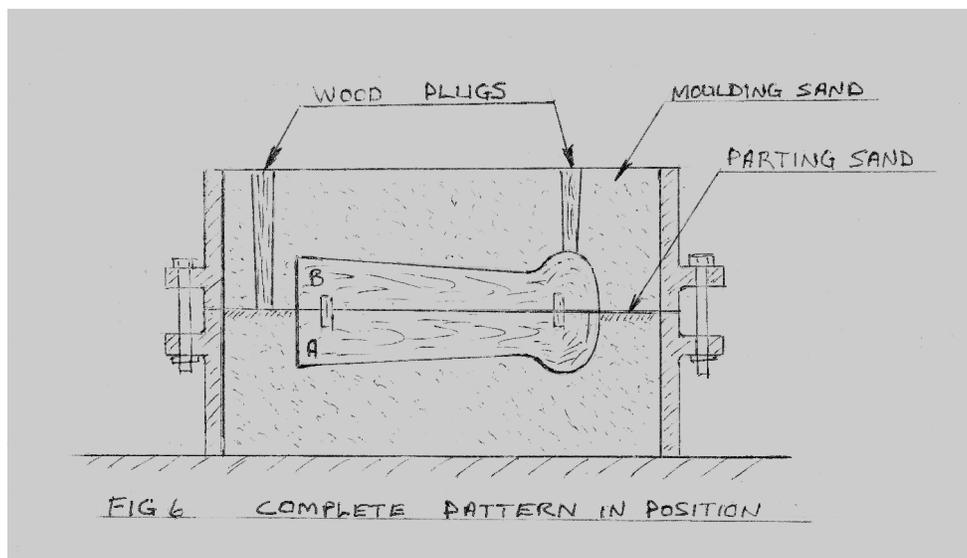


Fig. 6 Complete Pattern in Position

The two parts of the mould were then separated and the pattern was removed carefully. The wood plugs were removed and a channel called a 'gate' was formed to allow the molten iron to flow into the mould without causing damage to the surface of the sand. Finally the two parts of the mould were reassembled and secured together with steel pins. A feeding gate was added to the runner to make pouring easier, and the sand mould was now ready for pouring. (Fig. 7)

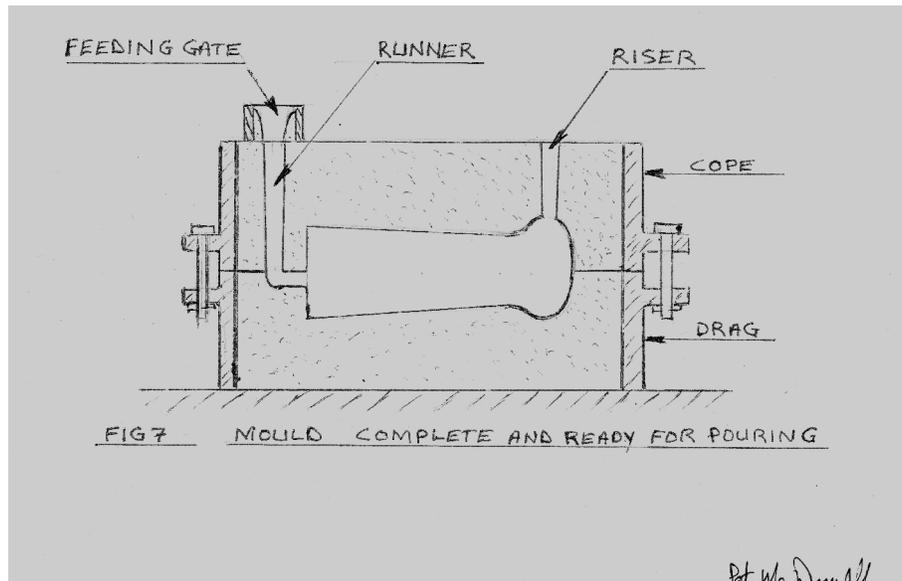


Fig. 7 Mould Complete and Ready for Poring

The molten iron was poured carefully through the feeding gate into the runner and when the mould was full, the iron rose up through the riser to indicate that pouring should stop. When the casting had cooled the mould was broken up to remove it; then the runner and riser were removed by cutting, or grinding, in a process called fettling. (Fig 8)

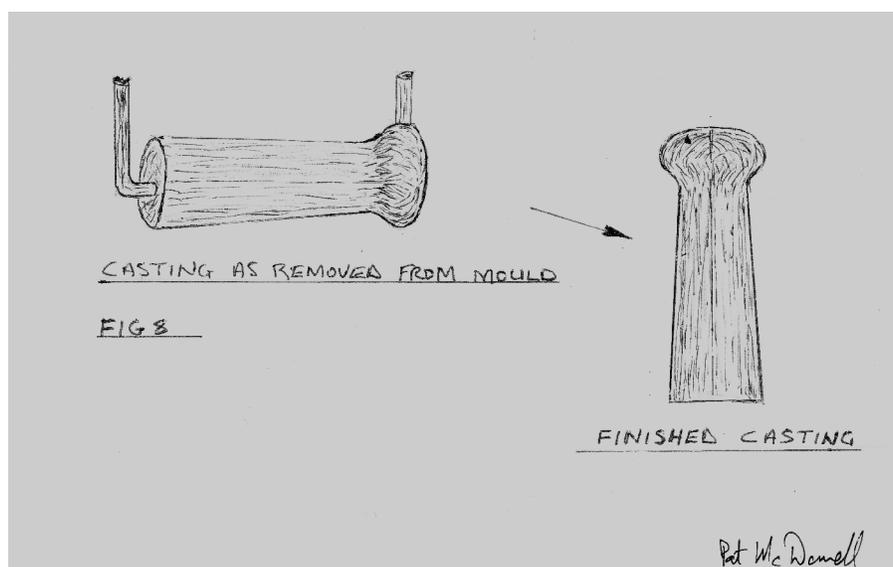


Fig. 8 Finished Casting

The operation of an iron foundry required the skills of a pattern maker to make the patterns using wood and an iron moulder who prepared the sand mould to receive the molten iron. The early iron foundries also employed blacksmiths who were skilled at shaping wrought iron into parts for machines which had to be tougher than cast iron. Later, as the products of the foundries expanded and became more complex, machines such as lathes, boring machines and drilling machines were added and skilled operators were employed to manufacture parts for machines. Skilled fitters then assembled the parts so that the machines worked properly. By the 1840s two foundries in Limerick had acquired the necessary technical skills to manufacture their own design of steam engines.

Early Limerick Iron Foundries 1806-1850

James Doyle & Company, Iron Founders

When James Doyle started his iron foundry business in Clare Street in 1806 he began a form of manufacture which was to continue in Limerick until the closure of Shannon Foundry in the late 1980s.¹⁰ Although Doyle's foundry was not the first metal foundry to be established in Limerick - John Ferrar's Limerick trade directory of 1769 mentions two brass founders working in St Francis Abbey¹¹ - Doyle's was probably the first iron foundry in the city to use the recently invented cupola furnace to produce iron castings.

With the introduction of this new method cast iron could now be produced more cheaply and iron began to replace wood in the making of machinery for water-driven mills: waterwheels, gearing and axles. There was a large milling industry in and around Limerick and many of the early iron founders were also millwrights who could design, manufacture and construct mill machinery for a variety of purposes such as flour milling, paper making and flax scutching.

By 1810 the foundry, trading under the name of James Doyle & Co., was producing a wide range of iron products such as hydraulic engines, stoves, salt pans, soap pans, frying pans, tea kettles, fire grates, corn kilns and kitchen ranges¹². The most notable product of the foundry was the iron bridge known as Barrington's Bridge which was cast in 1818. Over 53 feet (16.15 m) long, it spans the Killeenagarriff River on the road from Annacotty to Murroe and was the first iron road bridge to be turned out by an Irish foundry. Constructed for Sir Matthew Barrington, who owned estates nearby, the bridge is still in good structural condition. However it is not in use today as a new concrete bridge has been constructed alongside the iron one to accommodate modern traffic demands.

¹⁰ *Limerick Chronicle* 10 May 1806

¹¹ Ferrar, John, *Directory of Limerick*, Limerick, 1769, p. 16.

¹² *Limerick Chronicle* 18 August 1810.



Barrington's Bridge (1818). Made by James Doyle & Company, Iron Foundry

Barrington's Bridge was strongly constructed, having nine curved cast iron pipes of 12 inch (30.5 cm) diameter supporting the roadway. The pipes were cast in sections and later bolted together by means of flanged joints. The cast iron sides of the bridge are decorated neatly and bear the name of Matthew Barrington in the centre of the bridge and that of the maker, J. Doyle, on the sides.¹³

Newsom's Brass and Ironworks

The demand for locally produced iron products in Limerick would appear to have increased in the early part of the nineteenth century, for by 1818 at least two other iron foundries were in operation in the city.

An iron foundry had been set up next to the Cornmarket by Thomas Newsom who notified the public that they could be supplied with field and demesne gates, fire grates and fire backs, as well as quarry tools.¹⁴ Two years later the foundry was advertising an extensive range of products including grates, scales, beams, chains and window balconies that were probably for use on the new Georgian houses being built in Limerick at the

¹³ Cox R.C. & Gould M.H, Ireland's *Bridges*, Wolfhound Press, Dublin, 2003, p. 104.

¹⁴ *Limerick Chronicle* 7 March 1818.

time. Local iron foundries would also have manufactured the many other items of street furniture still to be seen in abundance in New Town Pery: iron railings, door knockers, shoe scrapers, coalhole covers. Interior household fittings would also have been in great demand; Thomas Newsom in 1820 having to import fenders and fire irons to supplement the products of his foundry.¹⁵

Newsom's continued in business until after 1824 - it is listed in Pigot's trade directory for that year¹⁶ - but it is not mentioned in Dean's directory of 1838, which suggests that it had closed by that date.

Work in an iron foundry could be very dangerous and one source of danger was the sand mould which was constructed from slightly damp sand. If the amount of moisture in the sand was excessive the steam produced when the molten iron was poured into the mould could cause the sand mould to explode. Perhaps this is what happened in an iron foundry near the Cornmarket in 1825, which was probably Newsom's. The *Limerick Chronicle* reporting that,

‘Two workmen employed in an extensive foundry near the Cornmarket, met with a serious accident on Wednesday, by a portion of the boiling metal flying out of the mould and falling on their persons. Ten others were slightly injured at the same time.’¹⁷

Six years later a man named John Lillis lost his left eye caused ‘by sparks of fire getting under the eyelid, while at work at a foundry in this city.’¹⁸ Despite the hazards of foundry work it must have been profitable for the proprietors because during the first half of the nineteenth century at least seven iron foundries were established in Limerick, although not all were able to survive the competition.

Hibernian Foundry

Sometime before 1817 a foundry known as the Hibernian Foundry was in operation in John Street. Run by Philip Doyle, a millwright, it was to benefit from the requirements of the local flax and linen industry. At that time Limerick Chamber of Commerce was actively encouraging the development and modernization of the industry in the city and county and was especially keen on sponsoring the construction of flax scutching mills. On 2 January 1818, for example, the Directors of Limerick Chamber agreed to pay Philip Doyle £40 8s 6d for making a hand operated scutch mill for dressing flax that was to be set up in the city's Cornmarket.¹⁹

That same year Limerick Chamber commissioned Philip Doyle to make and install the

¹⁵ *The General Advertise, or Limerick Gazette* 7 July 1820.

¹⁶ Pigot, J. *Directory of Ireland*, J. Pigot & Company, London, 1824, p. 288.

¹⁷ *Limerick Chronicle* 17 September 1825.

¹⁸ *ibid.* 22 January 1821.

¹⁹ Limerick Chamber of Commerce Minutes, 2 January, 1818, Ref. P1/3, Limerick City Archive, Limerick City Council, Merchants Quay, Limerick.

water wheel and machinery for a new flax scutching mill being built at Abington on the Mulkear River. Completing his task by November 1818 Doyle received £130 for his work. **[Footnote: Chamber of Commerce Minutes 10 July 1818, 14 August 1818, 6 November 1818.]**

Both Philip Doyle of the Hibernian Foundry on John Street and James Doyle of the Clare Street foundry were in direct competition with one another, for they both tendered for the supply of machinery required to dry flax by steam power at the Abington mill. Philip's proposal to erect the machinery for the sum of £37 was accepted; while James Doyle, whose proposal was considered ingenious and scientific, was paid three guineas in compensation for his trouble.²⁰

In 1821 Philip Doyle was also given the contract by Limerick Chamber of Commerce to manufacture and erect machinery at a scutching facility in Bruff. He was also was paid a sum of six guineas for inspecting various sites around Co. Limerick to check whether or not they suitable locations for a scutch mill.²¹

Among the other products manufactured by his foundry were water pumps, wrought iron and cast iron money chests, drain pipes, gutters and ridge plates. Bells were also on sale; the foundry advertising 'Bells from 7lbs to 3000 lbs weight' that would be found 'equal in tone to any manufactured in the United Kingdom.'²²

In 1840 Thomas Ahearne, then secretary of the Guild of Smiths of Limerick, recalled that he had been apprenticed in 1817 to Philip Doyle who at that time employed '43 men and boys working in the various branches connected with our trade.'²³ This would have made the Hibernian Foundry the largest of the early iron foundries in the city and it continued to operate in John Street until after 1824.²⁴

It would appear that it went out of business, or perhaps was taken over by new owners, sometime before 1834 because in that year a Mr William Watt advertised a wide variety of iron products manufactured at the Hibernian Foundry - the address of which was now given as Cornwallis Street (now Gerald Griffin Street) - including ploughs and pumps, hand threshing machines and winnowing machines, Referring to the threshing machines made at the foundry, the advertisement stated that,

'The Proprietor having been bred a mechanic can assure gentlemen that the above mentioned articles are purely his own invention and not taken from any other persons.'²⁵

He was also capable of doing mill work of all kinds. William Watt died about 1840 and the work of the foundry was taken over by his sons, William and John. William Jnr gave

²⁰ *ibid.* 10 July 1818, 14 August 1818, 29 October 1818, 6 November 1818.

²¹ *ibid.* 25 May, 1821; 3 Nov 1820.

²² *Limerick Chronicle* 14 June 1825.

²³ *Freeman's Journal and Daily Commercial Advertiser*, Dublin, 21 October 1840.

²⁴ *Limerick Chronicle* 28 March 1824.

²⁵ *ibid.* 13 September 1834.

notice in the *Limerick Chronicle* of 4 April 1840 that,

‘... he has been brought up to the trade and has been for twenty years in the most extensive Establishment in Manchester and is fully competent from his extensive practise to construct Mills of any kind on the same principles as practised in those splendid Establishments in Manchester.’

Some of the items manufactured in the foundry at this time included iron water wheels and machinery for flour mills, oil mills, paper mills, wood mills, cotton mills, and ‘Machinery of all kinds on the newest principle’.²⁶

In 1846 the Hibernian Foundry came under the management of Frederick Ryding Jnr who offered for sale ‘a large assortment of Watt’s celebrated plough Mounting, which shall be disposed of on the most reasonable terms.’²⁷ By 1847 Ryding had secured the services of a ‘highly talented Engineer, Mr James, of London’ who had much experience of foundry work in England including the construction of steam engines and mills.²⁸ His expertise appears to have proved beneficial to the company, for the following year the foundry was in a position to build steam engines and water wheels ‘of every description’ and capable of carrying out repairs at short notice.²⁹ The business continued to trade into the second half of the century.

Caledonian Foundry and Iron Works

In 1825 the Caledonian Iron Foundry was established in Mungret Street by David Spoworth who was a native of Scotland. He had extensive experience installing machinery for distilleries and breweries throughout Scotland and Ireland and among the products made in the foundry were pumps, farming utensils, iron ploughs, gates, grates, kitchen ovens and boilers.³⁰

This foundry continued to operate until 1836 when Mrs Spoworth, referring to the death of her husband, said that work would continue under the supervision of an engineer from a large foundry in England.³¹ It would seem, however, that the foundry did not prosper in business for very long afterwards because when commenting in 1840 on the decline of the number of people working in the Limerick iron industry, Thomas Ahearne was reported in the *Freeman’s Journal* as saying,

‘Mr. Spoworth kept the Caledonian Foundry in this city where thirty men and boys got employment, but not being able to compete with our English and Scottish duty free neighbors (as to price) he has long since shared the fate of my

²⁶ *ibid.* April 4 1840.

²⁷ *ibid.* 27 May 1846.

²⁸ *ibid.* 30 January 1847.

²⁹ *ibid.* 23 September 1848.

³⁰ *ibid.* 22 January 1825.

³¹ *ibid.* 1 October 1836.

master.³²

It seems probable that the Caledonian Foundry had closed by 1838, because it is not listed in Deane's Limerick trade directory published that year.

City Foundry

March 1830 saw a new foundry site established in Thomas Street by John James Doyle who moved his business from Clare Street. His new foundry was called City Foundry and he declared his intension to manufacture 'every description of Cast, Wrought Iron and Brass Work.'³³ In 1832 he informed the public that it was 'thirty years' since the foundry had first been established by his predecessor (James Doyle, who had set up Limerick's first iron foundry in 1806 in Clare Street) and in that time 15,000 tons of castings and wrought iron had been manufactured.³⁴ In 1832 the firm was advertising manually operated threshing machines, costing £8 each.³⁵ Demand for them may not have been very high because the following month the machines, which could be worked by two men, were advertised at the lower price of £7 each

The City Foundry continued to function in Thomas Street until 1835 by which time John James Doyle had set up a warehouse at 40 William Street to display an assortment of cast and wrought iron goods produced in the nearby foundry.³⁶ The firm may have continued in business for some time after this date, but this was the last advertisement for the foundry to be published in the *Limerick Chronicle* and the foundry is not listed in Deane's Limerick Almanac of 1838.

Eagle Foundry

Located, according to a newspaper advertisement of 1835, as being in 'Upper William Street opposite the County Hospital', this foundry was operated by J.C. Dickson who advertised a range of agricultural implements such as plough mountings, scale weights, winnowing machines, threshing machines and malt machines at 'low prices'.³⁷ The foundry is not listed in Deane's Limerick trade directory of 1838 and may have closed by then.

Phoenix Foundry and Iron Works

In the early nineteenth century importers of iron goods into Ireland had to pay import

³² *Freeman's Journal* 21 October 1840.

³³ *Limerick Chronicle* 6 March 1830.

³⁴ *ibid.* 10 March 1832.

³⁵ *ibid.* 28 December 1833.

³⁶ *Limerick Chronicle* 11 March 1835.

³⁷ *Limerick Chronicle* 3 January 1835.

duties, but in 1823 an Act of Parliament was passed reducing the duties annually until 1829. The following year the duties were abolished entirely in conformity with a general policy of Free Trade.³⁸ This meant that English and Scottish iron castings were now cheaper to import into Ireland leading to a reduction in demand for Irish made iron goods.

By 1836 many of the locally based, non-competitive iron foundries had closed, or reduced their business, and it might be assumed that there were now sufficient iron foundries in Limerick to supply local demand for iron products. However, in August of that year yet another new foundry was established in Roches Street. This was the Phoenix Foundry and Iron works and its owner, John Fogarty, stated in a newspaper notice that,

‘The above concern is now open for business upon such a scale of extent and elegance as the proprietor hopes will merit the patronage and support of the Nobility and Gentry of this rapidly improving district.’³⁹

The foundry operated from 1836 until 1845 when the owner decided to retire from business and offered to rent the foundry to one or two men ‘of talent and experience’ as a going concern. The notice that appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle* of January 1845 gives a very good description of the foundry and the type of work carried out there,

‘The Foundry is 106 feet by 40 feet. The smithy, 70 feet by 30 feet. The fitting shop 130 feet by 30 feet with two spacious yards and Pattern Lofts, well stocked with Geer and other Patterns in use in the locality. The concern is furnished with every requisite for a large trade, including a new 12-horse Steam Engine, Cranes, Clay Mill, Stoves, Cupolas for 10 tons, Turning Lathes, Boring Machines etc. all at full work.’⁴⁰

The offer of renting the premises did not work out however and by November 1845 the foundry had closed its gates and the entire stock had been purchased by Frederick Ryding who offered to sell it at low prices. The items listed give a good indication of the range of products, especially agricultural implements, made in Limerick City foundries at the time of the Famine. They comprised,

‘Ploughs of every description, also plough mountings, Turnip Sowers, and Scuffles on the most improved construction; Corn Stands, Manger Troughs, Field Gates, Garden Rollers, and Chains, Scales, Beams and Weights, Rain Shoots and Pipes, & Boilers from 15 to 40 gallons, and a variety of Articles too numerous to mention, which may be seen and prices known on the premises.’⁴¹

By May the following year Frederick Ryding had taken over the ownership of the Hibernian Foundry located at the upper end of Cornwallis Street. Perhaps using some of

³⁸ O'Brien, George, *The Economic History of Ireland from the Union to the Famine*, Longman, Greene & Co., London, 1921, p. 429.

³⁹ *Limerick Chronicle* 20 August 1836.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* 18 January 1845.

⁴¹ *ibid.* 5 November 1845.

the equipment from the Phoenix Iron Works, he commenced work as an iron founder ⁴² (see above, *Hibernian Foundry*).

High Street Iron Works and Foundry

Deane's directory of 1838 lists three metal and brass founders operating in the city at that time:⁴³ J. Fogarty, Phoenix Iron Works; Watt and Son, Cornwallis Street; and H. Lee, High Street.

Harrison Lee's High Street foundry was to become the largest and most enduring iron manufactory to be established in Limerick during the nineteenth century. By 1840 it was selling a wide variety of iron items comprising threshing machines worked by two, three, and four horses, winnowing machines, turnip cutters, field and garden rollers, boilers, eave shoots, down pipes, hot hearths, steamers, one and two horse ploughs; entrance, avenue and field gates and a wide variety of quarry tools.⁴⁴

In 1841 Harrison Lee changed the foundry name to City Limerick Foundry and advertised a list of over fifty articles of iron and brass construction for sale, including bells of all sizes and pumps of various dimensions.⁴⁵ That same year, when architect James Pain was given the work of designing a new entrance to St Mary's Cathedral on Bridge Street, Harrison Lee was given the work of casting the gates and railings.⁴⁶ Harrison Lee was to carry out much work for James Pain over the following years and the city's foremost architect, in a testimonial of March 1851, praised the quality of the work done for him by the foundry - Pain stating that Harrison Lee had carried out work for him for over twenty years and he had always found his work satisfactory.⁴⁷

In 1843 the Limerick City Foundry was expanded and by then Harrison Lee was giving employment to more than sixty men and manufacturing a wide variety of items including steam engines of his own design.⁴⁸ The Folk Park at Bunratty, Co. Clare has on display a selection of agricultural implements dating from the nineteenth century including a plough manufactured by Harrison Lee's foundry. It is a good example of the type of work produced there. In addition to the foundry, the iron works in High Street had a large forging section and the machine shops were equipped with lathes and drilling machines to allow for the finishing of machine parts.

⁴² *ibid.* 27 May 1846.

⁴³ *Deane's Limerick Almanac*, 1838, p. 87.

⁴⁴ *Limerick Chronicle* 22 July 1840.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 31 July 1841

⁴⁶ Lee, David & Jacobs, Debbie (eds.), *James Pain Architect*, Limerick Civic Trust, Limerick, 2005, p. 330.

⁴⁷ *Limerick Chronicle* 15 March 1851.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* 5 August 1843.



Plough made by Harrison Lee on display at Bunratty Castle Folk Park

Patrick Butler's Foundry

Another iron foundry that was functioning in the period prior to 1850 was that operated by Patrick Butler in James Street. This business was not listed in the trade directories of 1838 and 1840, but is recorded on the 1840 Ordinance Survey map of Limerick City - a foundry being shown in James Street. This business was later listed in Griffith's Valuation of Limerick in 1850⁴⁹ and the valuation of £2 15 s 0d placed on it would indicate that it was a small foundry when compared with the valuation of £60 for Harrison Lee's foundry in High Street.

Butler's did cast a boundary marker for the City Council in 1842 when Martin Honan was Mayor. This marker is located along the river path near Athlunkard Bridge and carries the name of the maker, P. Butler.

⁴⁹ Griffith, Richard, 'County of the City of Limerick, Union of Limerick' *General Valuation of Rateable Property in Ireland*, St John's Parish, s.v. 'James' - Street', Her Majesty's Stationary Office, Dublin, 1850, p. 15.



**City boundary marker, made by Patrick Butler's foundry,
located near Athlunkard Bridge**

Iron Foundries of Limerick 1850-1930

The period from 1850 to 1930 was characterised by the start-up of fewer iron foundries in Limerick than had been set up in the previous fifty years; firms such as Harrison Lee's being well established by 1850 and able to cope with competition. Nevertheless there were a number of new entrants into the field, ever eager to challenge the 'old lions'.

The Hibernian Foundry

The Hibernian Foundry on Cornwallis Street (Gerald Griffin Street) continued in business after 1850 and in March 1853 Frederick Ryding advertised a long list of items produced in his foundry including steam engines, water wheels, threshing machines, winnowing machines, ploughs, and iron boilers of all shapes and sizes. The foundry also catered for the shipping industry by manufacturing anchors, cables and cranes.⁵⁰

Frederick Ryding decided to give up the business later that year because of ill health and in November of 1853 all the equipment of the foundry was put up for sale in lots. The sale also covered steam engines, forge tools, bells, beams, scales and weights, lathes, grindstones, and a selection of farming implements.⁵¹

In January of 1854 the foundry yard, which measured 170 feet by 120 feet (51.8m x 36.6m), was put up to be leased by Mr Ryding at a moderate rent.⁵² The foundry was taken over by John Gleeson⁵³ who continued in the business at least until 1856 because he is listed as an iron founder in Slaters trade directory of that year⁵⁴ as well as being listed as a millwright and engineer.⁵⁵

Shannon Engineering Works, Foundry and Saw Mills

In March of 1854 William Burgess & Sons announced the opening of a new business on the North Strand called the Shannon Engineering Works having purchased a property known as the House of Industry. Originally built in 1774 as the city's poor house it had served that purpose until 1841 when the Union Workhouse on Shelbourne Road was opened.⁵⁶

The proprietors described themselves as engineers, millwrights, smiths and boiler makers, iron and brass founders, plumbers, architectural and civil engineering contractors, and called attention to the advantage of having their firm construct factories

⁵⁰ *Limerick Chronicle* 2 March 1853.

⁵¹ *ibid.* 26 November 1853.

⁵² *ibid.* 18 January 1854.

⁵³ *Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator* 17 November 1854.

⁵⁴ Slaters Directory of Limerick, 1856, p. 308.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 296.

⁵⁶ *Limerick Chronicle* 5 November 1991, p. 10.

and mill buildings and then installing the requisite machinery.⁵⁷ The foundry continued in business for about four years and in that time produced items such as gas lamps, kitchen ranges, field and ornamental gates, cast iron skylights and threshing machines.⁵⁸ However, by 1858 the foundry and all the equipment were for sale despite, or perhaps because of, the all encompassing nature of the business.⁵⁹

An auction of the freehold property, its buildings, foundry equipment and machinery was held on 20 April 1858 in the Northumberland Hotel, Dublin,⁶⁰ but it would appear that the foundry was not sold at that time because it was still for sale two years later.⁶¹ The property was later purchased in 1863 by the County Limerick Grand Jury to provide a barracks for the County Limerick Militia and became known as the Strand Barracks.⁶²

Harrison Lee & Sons' City Foundry

Harrison Lee had expanded his foundry on High Street in the years leading up to 1850. In fact, in April 1847, in the midst of the Famine, he informed the public that he was enlarging his concern and was offering 'Employment for good Moulders, Millwrights, Turners, and Smiths, at liberal wages.' In the same newspaper notice he requests that 'all persons indebted to him will forthwith pay in their accounts'.⁶³ It would appear that this appeal fell on deaf ears for in August 1848 Harrison Lee announced that because of the difficulty of collecting money his terms in future would be for cash only, paid on delivery.⁶⁴

That same month the foundry advertised a variety of products that included a range of bells suitable for church, chapel or farming use.⁶⁵ Limerick Museum is fortunate to have on display a church bell from Cahernarry Church, Church of Ireland, made in this foundry in 1863. It demonstrates the craftsmanship of the makers and their skill of metalworking.

⁵⁷ *Limerick Chronicle* 4 March 1854.

⁵⁸ *Limerick Chronicle* 9 January 1856.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* 30 January 1858.

⁶⁰ *Limerick Chronicle* 10 April 1858.

⁶¹ *ibid.* 28 January 1860.

⁶² *Limerick Chronicle* 5 November 1991, p. 10.

⁶³ *Limerick Chronicle* 28 April 1847.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* 4 August 1847.

⁶⁵ *ibid.* 12 August 1848.



**Bell manufactured by Harrison Lee & Sons (1863)
on display in Limerick City Museum**

The City Foundry benefited in some ways from the effects of the Famine as it was able to provide equipment for workhouses that had to prepare and cook food for large numbers of people. In 1851 Harrison Lee published testimonials from several people involved with the running of workhouses in Thurles, Kilrush and Limerick, praising the operation of the foundry's capstan mills. These mills were hand operated and were used to grind Indian corn to make the grain easier to cook.

It seems that Harrison Lee's son, also called Harrison, began working in the foundry about the year 1850 because one of those who provided testimonials, John Long, stated that he had been dealing with Harrison Lee Jnr for the last twelve months and had found him to be most intelligent and satisfactory in getting work done for him.⁶⁶

Over the years Harrison Lee & Sons carried out a great deal of work for the municipal authorities; much of it fairly mundane such as manhole covers. Following the Limerick Corporation Act of 1853 the foundry was commissioned to make cast iron plaques bearing the names of the new electoral wards. Attached to the sides of buildings to mark ward boundaries, a number of these plaques still survive; one example being a plaque for the Dock Ward at the junction of O'Connell Street and Lower Mallow Street.⁶⁷

Harrison Lee also made boundary signs for Limerick Corporation to mark the city's limits. One of these is sited at Punch's Cross on the corner of New Street and O'Connell Avenue. Erected during the mayoralty of Stephen Hastings in 1878, it bears the name of the foundry.

⁶⁶ *Limerick Chronicle* 15 March 1851.

⁶⁷ Gubbins, Seamus, *Limerick Street Antiquities*, Limerick Civic Trust, 1998, p. 18.



**Harrison & Lee cast iron pavement grille,
O'Connell Street, Limerick**



**City boundary marker (1878) by Harrison Lee & Sons.
Punch's Cross, Limerick**



Iron steps manufactured by Harrison Lee & Sons, 73 O'Connell Street

Harrison Lee died in 1866 at the age of 56 from congestion of the lungs and was interred in the family vault at St John's Church.⁶⁸ His elder son, Harrison Lee Jnr, died after a brief illness just three years later⁶⁹ and the work of the foundry continued under the direction of the founder's three other sons, Joseph William, Samuel Edward and Richard John.⁷⁰ By 1892 the City Foundry was employing seventy workers.⁷¹

For a short time in the early twentieth century Harrison Lee & Sons carried out motor car repairs to cater for the growing number of car owners around the city. In 1906 the foundry, in a newspaper notice under the heading 'Garage', informed the public that repairs would be carried out to all makes of cars with utmost despatch.⁷² It would appear that Harrison Lee did not continue with this type of work, instead concentrating on the production of tried and trusted reliables such as agricultural equipment. In 1907 the company won the Silver Medal for the best set of agricultural implements at the Limerick

⁶⁸ *Limerick Chronicle* 22 February 1866.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* 2 February 1869.

⁷⁰ Basset, William *Limerick City and County Directory* William Basset, Limerick, 1884, p. 29.

⁷¹ *Dublin, Cork and South of Ireland*, Stratten & Stratten, London, 1892, p. 285.

⁷² *Limerick Chronicle* 11 August 1906.

Horse Show.⁷³ The foundry continued to improve its selection of agricultural equipment and in 1909 advertised their New Pattern Potato Digger, as well as well as swing ploughs, chill ploughs and harrows.⁷⁴

Besides agricultural implements the foundry continued to produce a wide range of other goods and in 1916 the list of products included steam engines, saw benches, waterwheels, cranes, winches, pumps and column girders.⁷⁵ In 1916 the Lee family suffered the loss of Samuel E. Lee when he died after a short illness,⁷⁶ and less than six months later his brother Richard also died. In a tribute to Richard Lee it was stated that he had been a noted oarsman and had represented Limerick at various Irish regattas in his youth, and that he was survived by his son Richard M. Lee.⁷⁷ The foundry continued to trade as Harrison Lee & Sons, City Foundry, and in 1918 it advertised the repair of ships and boiler making in addition to its traditional work.⁷⁸

It would seem that trading conditions in the company were not good in the 1920s, and that the foundry was having some commercial difficulties, because in 1925 and 1926 the company issued a series of debentures to raise money. These debentures were loans to the company for which the company had to pay a fixed interest rate of 6%.⁷⁹ Work at Harrison Lee & Sons came to a stop in 1926 because of a strike by workers over a demand by management for a 25% reduction in wages, and while workers at Shannon Foundry, who were also on strike over a similar issue, returned to work after three weeks, the strike at the City Foundry continued.⁸⁰ This may have been partly responsible for a decision to sell the foundry by private treaty, as a going concern, in August 1926.⁸¹

The foundry may have continued in business until about 1930 (it is listed in the Cork and Munster trade directory for 1930), however a notice advertising new salesrooms located in the City Foundry, High Street, published in the *Limerick Chronicle* of 4 January 1930, would suggest that the Harrison Lee & Sons had closed by then.⁸²

⁷³ *ibid.* 20 July 1907.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* 4 November 1909.

⁷⁵ *Limerick Chronicle* 8 January 1916.

⁷⁶ *ibid.* 2 June 1916.

⁷⁷ *ibid.* 11 January 1917.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* 26 January 1918.

⁷⁹ Limerick City Museum website: ARCHIVAL SECTION? Inv. No. 2006.0157 - 2006.0162.

⁸⁰ *Irish Times* 17 March 1926, p.8.

⁸¹ *ibid.* 3 August 1926, p. 12.

⁸² *Limerick Chronicle* 4 January 1930.



Location of Harrison Lee & Sons City Foundry

Kitchen Range Manufacture

Some of the early iron founders, including James Doyle and Philip Doyle, produced grates, boilers and small stoves, but the first person to specialize in producing kitchen ranges would appear to be John Abell, a Quaker merchant. In 1824 he was running a hardware shop in Rutland Street⁸³ and is recorded in 1843 as selling fire grates, stoves and kitchen ranges as well as a range of cookware which had been coated with silver by the recently patented electro-plating technique.⁸⁴ At some stage in his career he began to manufacture his own design of large kitchen ranges and by 1855 he had a store at 3 Michael Street where he sold his Economical Hot Hearth Ranges, as well as selling wire fencing and iron posts, drain pipes and spouts.⁸⁵

That same year he published testimonials from three satisfied customers who had purchased his Economical Hot Hearth Range. Among them was Richard Russell, with an address at the Crescent, Limerick, who stated that he was very satisfied with the range which he bought from Mr. Abell a few years earlier, and that it could cook for up to thirty people.⁸⁶ John Abell died in 1861 after suffering for some time with bronchitis. In a tribute published in the *Limerick Chronicle* it was stated that as a member of the Society of

⁸³ Pigot, J. *Directory of Ireland*, J. Pigot & Co., London, 1924, p. 288.

⁸⁴ *Limerick Reporter*, 28 July 1843

⁸⁵ *Limerick Chronicle* 17 March 1855.

⁸⁶ *Limerick Chronicle*, 25 April 1855.

Friends (Quakers) John Abell had carried out much work for the relief of the poor of all creeds during famine times and that he was well known throughout Ireland as the inventor of improved kitchen ranges.⁸⁷

The business was taken over by Michael McSherry who informed the ‘Nobility and Gentry’ in March 1862 that he had been working for John Abell for more than twenty years setting the ranges for him. Using his initiative, McSherry was pleased to announce that he had improved the design of his former employer’s products, making them more efficient and economical on fuel.⁸⁸ In 1866 he advertised his Limerick Range for sale at his warehouse at 10 Bank Place, trumpeting the fact that it had been exhibited at the Dublin International Exhibition of 1865 and awarded the Prize Medal.⁸⁹

By 1877 the business had moved from Bank Place to 4 Bedford Road.⁹⁰ At some point Michael McSherry died, or retired, for by 1884 the business was being run by John McSherry. In an advertisement that appeared in *Bassetts Directory* of 1884 John McSherry proudly stated that the McSherry Range had won the Gold Medal at the National Exhibition of 1882 and had also been awarded First Prize at the Cork International Exhibition of 1883.⁹¹

Later McSherry may have gone into partnership because in 1893 it was advertised as McSherry & McInerney, Kitchen Range Makers, with an address at 17 Frances Street.⁹² The company may have continued for some years after this date but it is not listed in any of the Limerick trade directories after 1900.

Other Iron Foundries

John and Patrick McDonnell are listed as having a house, foundry and yard in Thomas Street in Griffith’s 1850 Valuation of the city.⁹³ This may have been the foundry that had been originally set up in Thomas Street by John James Doyle in 1830 that he operated until about 1835.⁹⁴ (See above, *City Foundry*).

In Slaters Directory of 1856⁹⁵ Johanus Nealon is listed as having a foundry in Cornwallis Street, and this may have been the foundry which had been operated by Patrick Butler in James Street (which was just off Cornwallis Street and near John’s Square) before 1850. J. Nealon continued to operate as an iron founder in Cornwallis Street until 1867, and possibly later, because he is listed in Henry and Coughlan’s Directory of that year.⁹⁶

⁸⁷ *ibid.* 17 August 1861, p. 3.

⁸⁸ *Limerick Chronicle* 6 March 1862.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 12 May 1866.

⁹⁰ *Limerick Chronicle* 20 October 1877.

⁹¹ Basset, William, *The Limerick City and County Directory*, 1884, William Basset, Limerick, p. 1.

⁹² *Limerick Chronicle* 1 January 1893.

⁹³ Griffiths Valuation of Limerick City, 1850, St Michael’s Parish, s.v. Prior’s Land, p. 81.

⁹⁴ *Limerick Chronicle* 6 March 1830.

⁹⁵ *Slater’s Directory of Limerick 1856*, p. 308.

⁹⁶ Henry and Coughlan, *General Directory of Cork*, 1867.

In Slaters Directory of 1870 James Everitt is listed as an iron founder in Carr Street⁹⁷, and a foundry is shown on the 1870 Ordnance Survey map of Limerick. Later in 1882 the foundry is shown on a map showing properties to be sold by auction on 11 July 1882 under the authority of the High Court, Chancery Division, Land Judges (formerly the Landed Estates Court).⁹⁸

Also in Slaters directory for 1870 the following entry appears under the category of 'Ironfounders' - 'Russell, John Norris & Sons, Henry st; works, North Strand.' This extensive family business, with an address in Henry Street, was listed elsewhere in the directory as being 'merchants, corn merchants, millers & flax spinners linen manufacturers, iron founders, machinists, ship builders & owners'.⁹⁹



Site of foundry on Carr Street. The evidence indicates that the foundry was owned by James Everitt

None of the foundries mentioned above seem to have survived the nineteenth century and apart from Shannon Foundry (established 1884, see below), and Harrison Lee's City Foundry, the only other foundry that was to remain in operation in Limerick at the beginning of the twentieth century was Mount Kenneth Ironworks situated in Frederick

⁹⁷ *Slater's Directory of Ireland*, Isaac Slater, London, 1870, p. 159.

⁹⁸ Ordnance Survey, City of Limerick, 1870, Sheet No. V.66; Public Auction of Properties in the City of Limerick & Counties Limerick & Clare, 11 July 1882, Registrar's Office of the High Court of Justice in Ireland, 1882, catalogue Lot 6 & Map 5.

⁹⁹ *Slaters Directory of Ireland*, 1870, pp. 150 & 159.

Street. This foundry was owned in 1886 by J.N. Russell & Sons¹⁰⁰ and later owned by Margaret Russell who was the proprietor until 1927.¹⁰¹ In the 1911 census Margaret Russell, then aged 70, stated that her occupation was owner of Mount Kenneth Ironworks.¹⁰²

Shannon Foundry

In 1884 a new Limerick iron foundry was listed in the pages of *Bassets Limerick City and County Directory* - W. F. McNamara's Shannon Foundry, Dock Road.¹⁰³ Elsewhere in the directory the firm of Thomas McNamara & Son is listed as plumbers, brass founders and gas fitters, with an address at Nos. 46-47 Thomas Street and at the Shannon Foundry, Dock Road.¹⁰⁴ W. F. McNamara and Thomas McNamara were clearly related, perhaps father and son.

In January 1884 advertisements first began to appear in the *Limerick Chronicle* advertising a range of castings that could be manufactured at the foundry and which could be delivered the next day if ordered before 12.00 p.m.¹⁰⁵ In 1885 Shannon Foundry was producing a range of iron products that included labourers' cottage windows, columns for hay sheds, and farmyard pumps. In addition, the foundry had the machinery capable of carrying out work such as turning, boring and fitting.¹⁰⁶

In 1889 Limerick Corporation invited tenders for the supply of pumps and associated machinery for the Pump House at the new municipal waterworks at Clareville in Co. Limerick and W.F. McNamara tendered for the work on behalf of Shannon Foundry.¹⁰⁷ His tender was initially rejected by the engineers in charge of the scheme but McNamara persisted. In a letter published in the *Limerick Chronicle*, and addressed to members of the Town Council, he outlined why his tender should be given due consideration. Among the reasons he gave in his favour were the facts that he had carried out similar work for Kildare Water Works and that he had been manufacturing pumps both for the home market and for many cities in England.¹⁰⁸

Through perseverance McNamara was eventually awarded the contract, manufacturing and installing the hydraulic machinery and pumps required to pump water to the reservoir on Newcastle Hill near Limerick City.¹⁰⁹ A plaque on the pump house states 'water turned

¹⁰⁰ Guy, Francis, *Francis Guy's Directory of Munster*, Francis Guy, Cork, 1886, p. 633.

¹⁰¹ *Cork and Munster Trades Directory*, Trades Directories Limited, Dublin, 1927, p. 26.

¹⁰² *1911 Census Ireland*, Household Return for Russell, Margaret, 61 Windmill Street, District Electoral Division of Limerick No. 4 Urban, Limerick, National Archives, Bishop Street, Dublin; also available online at www.census.nationalarchives.ie

¹⁰³ Basset, William, *The Limerick City and County etc. Directory*, 1884, p. 75.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.* p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ *Limerick Chronicle* 19 January 1884.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* 19 Sept 1885.

¹⁰⁷ *Limerick Chronicle* 23 March 1889.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* 16 April 1889.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* 23 February 1892.

on 28th May 1890'. However, the pumping machinery installed by Shannon Foundry carries the date '1891'. This water-driven machinery remained operational until the early 1930s when it was superseded by more modern, electric powered, pumping equipment installed in a new pump house.¹¹⁰ Fortunately the original Victorian pump house, and the machinery manufactured by Shannon Foundry, are still preserved in situ at Clareville Water Works and demonstrate the engineering knowledge and craftsmanship available in Limerick at the turn of the twentieth century.



The Pump House (1891) at Clareville Water Works, Co. Limerick

¹¹⁰ Lee, David, *Remembering Limerick*, Limerick Civic Trust, Limerick, 1997, p. 300.



**The pumping machinery at Clareville Water Works
made by Shannon Foundry (1891)**



Cast iron steps by Shannon Foundry in basement area of 75 O'Connell Street

W.F. McNamara continued working as an engineer and iron founder until his death in 1924 after forty years in the business. A tribute published in the *Irish Times* stated that 'Mr. Mc Namara was an excellent example of the type of Irishman who seeks to promote his country's interest by individual energy, efficiency and enterprise, in doing the work that lies to hand.' An interesting biographical detail was that as a young man William had moved to Glasgow to acquire a complete knowledge of the iron founding trade before returning to Limerick to set up Shannon Foundry.¹¹¹

After his death a limited company was formed to continue with the business; but trading conditions would appear to have been difficult because in February 1926 the workers at Shannon Foundry, and in Harrison Lee's City Foundry, went on strike in protest at a demand by management for a 25% reduction in wages.¹¹² After three weeks the fitters, moulders and smiths employed at Shannon Foundry returned to work after the employers had withdrawn the wages cut demand (pending negotiations).¹¹³ The following year Shannon Foundry secured a contract to supply iron brackets used to hold electric cables onto transmission masts in connection with the Shannon Power Scheme.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *Irish Times* 19 April 1924, p. 7.

¹¹² *ibid.* 3 March 1926, p. 12.

¹¹³ *ibid.* 17 March 1926, p. 8.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 27 July 1927.

Shannon Foundry 1930-1989

With the closure of Harrison Lee's by 1930 the Shannon Foundry, as the only iron foundry operating in Limerick by that time, was in a position to take advantage of new business opportunities that arose in the nineteen-thirties - supplying iron castings and equipment for a number of important new industrial and infrastructural developments that took place in the Limerick area. The company made metal work for the new grain silos built by Ranks Flour Mills on the Dock Road and also provided iron castings used in the construction of the Cement Factory near Castlemungret - work that began in 1936 and completed in 1938.¹¹⁵

The company was also involved in several infrastructural developments, Shannon Foundry manufacturing all the iron forgings and cast iron parts used in the construction of an extension to Foynes Pier completed in 1936.¹¹⁶ In 1938 the company acquired new premises on a two acre site on the Dock Road, building a cupola furnace capable of producing larger castings up to 10 tons in weight.¹¹⁷

Although involved in some major construction projects, Shannon Foundry continued with bread and butter work manufacturing agricultural equipment, pumps and general castings as well as making manhole covers and other items for Limerick Corporation. In 1955, for example, the foundry gave the Corporation a quotation of £2 15s 0d each to supply twelve hydrant boxes for a site at Mayorstown.¹¹⁸ In 1950, when the city boundary was extended,¹¹⁹ Shannon Foundry was given the contract of casting boundary markers to mark the new city limits.

By 1970 work had ceased at the original foundry building in St Alphonsus Street with production moving to new premises in Edward Street.¹²⁰ At this time there were forty-four workers employed at the Dock Road foundry and over 100 workers at the main premises in Edward Street.¹²¹ During the 1970s the machinery and equipment at the Dock Road foundry was updated and automated to increase output and by 1976 the product range of the foundry included grey iron castings, aluminum castings, sand and pressure die castings

¹¹⁵ Kemmy, Jim, 'A Mixture in Cement' (editorial), *Old Limerick Journal*, No 26, 1989.

¹¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 24 March 1936.

¹¹⁷ *Limerick Official Guide* Irish and Overseas Publishing Ltd., Dublin c.1950.

¹¹⁸ Limerick City Museum website: ARCHIVAL SECTION? Inv. No. 1987.2692

¹¹⁹ Potter, Matthew, *The Government and the People of Limerick*, Limerick City Council, Limerick, 2006, p. 431.

¹²⁰ *ibid.* 19 June 1970, p. 26.

¹²¹ *ibid.* 29 September 1970.

City boundary marker made by Shannon Foundry (1950)

Manhole cover manufactured by Shannon Foundry in 1979

The engineering section in Edward Street was involved in structural steel design, fabrication and erection, as well as the manufacture of aluminium windows, doors and patent glazing.¹²² By 1981, however, the economic recession of the 1980s was beginning to have an effect on demand and pickets were placed on the Dock Road premises after nine men were made redundant because of the downturn.¹²³

Over the next few years the two sections of Shannon Foundry were to face trading problems which led to their separation into two independent companies under different names. In 1983 the Managing Director of Shannon Foundry Ltd., on the Dock Road, published a notice to assure customers, suppliers and the general public that his company was a separate entity from the Edward Street based Shannon Foundry (Limerick) Ltd. (which was in voluntary liquidation at the time) and that they would continue to manufacture and supply all cast iron road furniture and fittings from the Dock Road foundry.¹²⁴

In 1984 the operation of Shannon Foundry Ltd. was taken over by an engineering

¹²² *Limerick Civic Week*, Limerick Leader, Limerick, March 1976, p. 4.

¹²³ *Limerick Leader* 4 April 1981, p. 1.

¹²⁴ *Irish Times*, 26 October 1983, p. 20.

company from the U.K called Dover Engineering Works Ltd., and a new company called Shannon Foundry (D.E.W.) Ltd. was formed. When the new Shannon Bridge in Limerick was completed in May 1988 a brochure published to celebrate the occasion stated that, 'All of the Shannon Foundry product range has been used on the new Shannon bridge.' Striking a positive note, the article stated that the foundry had recently been re-equipped and modernised and had recently installed a new Shot-Blast unit for large components. The item also announced that Shannon Foundry (D.E.W.) Ltd. had obtained overseas contracts for the supply of 95,000 castings on an annual basis and had recently increased its workforce by 60%.¹²⁵

Despite this glowing optimism all was not well with the company and by July that same year Receivers had been appointed to the business by Lloyds Bank of London.¹²⁶ The foundry was put up for sale to be auctioned on 10 August 1988 as a going concern. The sale to include the two acre site, plant and machinery as well as the stock and works in progress.¹²⁷ However, hopes of maintaining the foundry as a going concern did not materialise and by October 1989 notice was given by the liquidator, William A Lacey of Barrington Street, Limerick, that the company was being voluntarily wound up and that creditors were required to submit their claims for debts on, or before, Monday 23 October 1989.¹²⁸ With the closing down of Shannon Foundry (D.E.W.) the long tradition of iron casting in Limerick, reaching back to 1806, had come to an end.

Engineering work still continues at the former foundry premises, for James J O'Donnell General Engineering Works Ltd. purchased the property in 1990 from the liquidator and moved their operation from Ellen Street to the Dock Road location. James O'Donnell has a proud family association with the former Shannon Foundry site - in 1938 his grandfather, also James, who worked in the Shannon Foundry, built the new cupola furnace.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ 'Shannon Foundry' *Public Works Journal*, B.E.A.M. Publications, Lanesborough, Co. Longford, (not dated but most probably 1988 when bridge was opened), p. 16.

¹²⁶ *Irish Times* 20 July 1988 p. 16.

¹²⁷ *ibid.* 22 July 1988 p. 22.

¹²⁸ *ibid.* 2 October 1989.

¹²⁹ Conversation with James O'Donnell, 27 May 2010.



Site of the former Shannon Foundry; off the Dock Road

Grave Markers

Perhaps it is fitting that this article end by mentioning a product not featured so far - grave markers. Cast iron furnishings for grave sites, such as iron railings and iron headstones, were once in demand and both Shannon Foundry and the City Foundry made grave furnishings and Celtic crosses in cast iron. A walk around the city's graveyards will reveal many examples of the craft of the city's iron foundries. One grave that serves as an example, situated in the grounds of St Mary's Cathedral and made by Harrison Lee & Sons about 1900, shows the skill of both the pattern maker and the iron moulder who produced this scroll type headstone.

Cast iron headstone made by Harrison Lee & Sons, City Foundry c.1900

**Cast iron Celtic Cross made by Harrison Lee & Sons,
City Foundry c. 1900. Mount St Lawrence Cemetery**

ADDITIONAL IMAGES

Early Nineteenth Century cast iron coalhole cover, Mallow Street



Harrison Lee gate, Verdant Place, King's Island, Limerick

