

A NEW SONG.¹

Tune - "Nora Creina."

LENNY had a Mill and Kiln,
But this forsooth would not content him;
Resolv'd was he to be M. P.
And K*dd and B**n*s would fain have sent
him²
A Declaration they did write,
And humbugged folks to sign their names -
One time they said there'd be *no fight*,
At others - talked of LENNY'S!! claims.

Oh my Lenny Dobbin dear,
"Highly distinguished" Lenny Dobbin
"Pre-eminent above each peer"!!!
Oh *would-be* Member, Lenny Dobbin,

But now his claims I will narrate,
Though hard it is to get the Rhyme, sir,
"Monopoly" see how he'd hate!!
Tho' pledging this e'en the last time, sir,-
The Yarn from Caste-street he takes,
The Linen cloth from Market-street,
In Dobbin-street a Hall he makes,
And says 'twas all to keep "dry feet,"!!!

Oh my Lenny dear, asthore,
Kind, disinterested, Lenny,
You got rich, when *they* got poor.
For customers they had not any.
Your Houses then you soon got sold,
Where all the Market throng was taken;
Your Tenants they were coining Gold,
By sale of Whiskey, Bread, and Bacon.
But Oh! poor men in Market place
And Castle-street, how they were sobbin,
To find themselves "robb'd out the face",
And all by *patriotic* Dobbin.

Oh Lenny. never think again
Of asking these for you to vote, sir,
Depend on me 'tis quite in vain,
The thing stacks too deep in their throat, sir.

But then "he is the poor Mans' Friend,"
And queer's the way he takes to show it,
But come I pray you now attend,
I'll tell you, tho' perhaps you know it.
A meeting not long since he called,
To fall the price of Labourer's wages,
And there he vapoured and he bawled,
And spoke a speech of full three pages.

Oh Lenny never speak again,
Be wise, and stick close to your trade, sir,

A Poet you were never born,
Nor yet an Orator were made, sir.

He said, and swore by "Dad-and-Dad,"
The Shilling was too much to pay, sir,
But 6 pence it was quite enough,
To give a poor man for his day, sir.
'Twas then that Kelly³ up be stood,
And said this motion he'd refuse, sir,
For cause, that man was never good,
Who'd rob the Workman of his dues, sir.

And now, Electors, choose your man,
To whom your interests you'd confide sirs:
The *future* from the *past* you'l scan.
And you'll be found on the right side, sirs,

Notes

1 The broadsheet is among a file of Borough Election material in Armagh County Museum

2 Kidd and Barnes were prominent merchant and professional families in Armagh and various members sat on the Corporation Grand Jury from time to time.

3 Arthur Irwin Kelly, Dobbin's opponent.



The gates of the linen market now moved from their original position in Linen Hall Street

The ballad of Lenny Dobbin

Elections, Ballads and buildings projects

by Sean Barden

Armagh mill owner, bank agent and MP, Leonard Dobbin like members of the Dawson and Ogle families is recalled nowadays in a local street name. He is remembered in the ballad “Dobbin’s Flowery Vale” which extols the romantic virtues of walks he developed in the Folly Glen on the outskirts of the city.

A lesser known ballad takes a more defamatory view of the man who built one of the city’s best known streets. The motives for the Dobbin Street project are questioned and he is slated as a hypocrite and opportunist. Today it might be tempting to imagine such work as an altruistic gesture by one of the city fathers but the ballad writer does not agree. The ballad was penned in 1833 during a contentious election campaign when Dobbin fought off the city’s Sovereign, Arthur Irwin Kelly to become MP for the borough. By that time Dobbin’s development was twenty years old but is portrayed in the ballad as a controversial issue.

Dobbin’s property

The Dobbins had resided in county Armagh for generations. Leonard’s grandfather settled in Tirnascoke east of Armagh in the 1690’s.¹ Leonard was born on 29 September 1762 by which time the family owned property and businesses in the city.² His father, also Leonard, is recorded in the year of his death, 1770, as a shopkeeper with five children living in Scotch Street.³

By the end of the century Leonard was a successful businessman buying leases of property in and around the city. Amongst the tenancies he acquired was an area in Scotch Street, which likely including the old family residence. It was known as the Nunnery Tenements or the Earl of Anglesey’s Liberty. His family had occu-

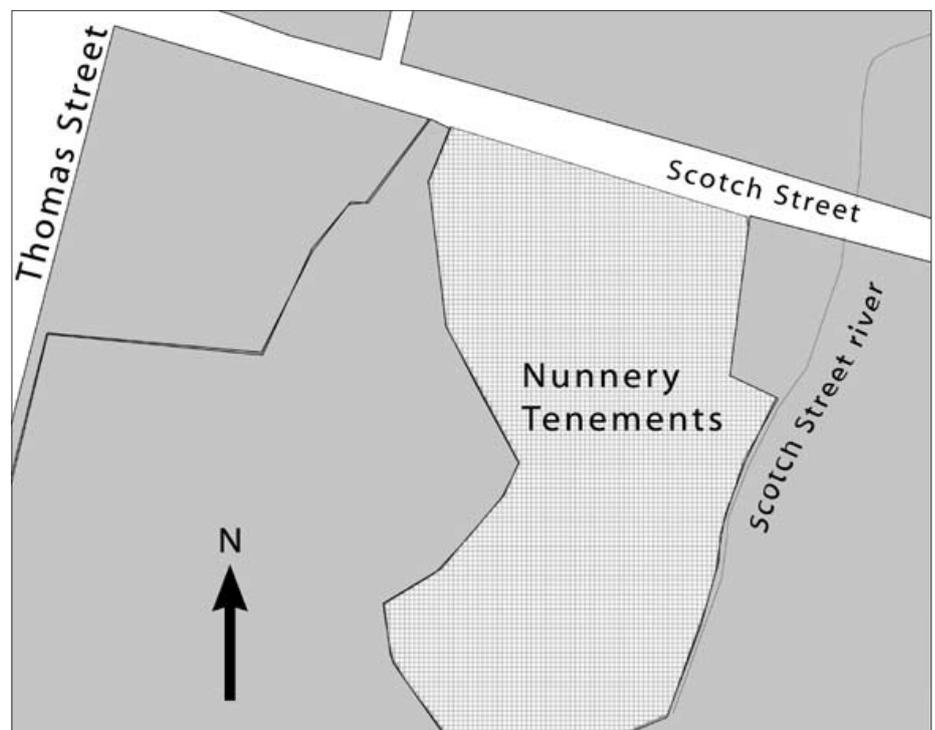
piated it for over forty years and when his landlord’s lease expired in 1799 Dobbin was able to buy him out. Centuries earlier it had been the location of a convent which was supposedly the traditional site of Patrick’s first church in Armagh.⁴

Dobbin Street development

In 1790 the area was one of the poorer residential parts of the city. On sloping ground and near the marshy Scotch Street River, it had “Nine cabbins and two ordinary houses”.⁵ Dobbin’s ambitious plans would dramatically change all that. Between 1810 and 1815 he had swept away both cabins and “ordinary houses” and built a “Superb slated

today one of the city’s most impressive buildings, known as St. Patrick’s fold. He also “rebuilt a great portion of Scotch Street with beautiful hewn limestone, in a very tasteful style of architecture.”⁷ Today a cursory glance beyond the shop signs reveals this “tasteful architecture” still very much intact.

The development continued with the creation of a new street. This linked the entrance to Scotch Street with Thomas Street and contained a string of stone houses forming a curving terrace, one of the finest in the city. Dobbin’s mini ring-road served a similar purpose to Thomas and Ogle Streets, easing the traveller’s pains as they could now evade the climb up Scotch Street on their journey across



Dobbin acquired the Nunnery Tenements which he developed creating Dobbin street

mansion 4 Stories” for himself which included “every suitable office house, enclosed yard, pleasure grounds”.⁶ The architect was Francis Johnston and it is

town from east to west. Fifty years prior to its construction Thomas Ogle had opened his own thoroughfare linking the top of Scotch Street with Irish Street, avoiding

the steep climb over the cathedral hill. In 1759 he had thrown “down a considerable portion of his father’s mansion-house... and in a part of the back yard, orchard, gardens and lands annexed...formed the intended streets”.⁸

The Linen and Yarn Halls

It was not this level short-cut that the balladeer objected to but the consequences of constructing the market buildings connected with the linen industry. The new linen and yarn halls served the crowded Tuesday market which brought thousands of people to the city.⁹ In 1803 annual sales at Armagh’s brown linen market amounted to £208,000.¹⁰ An observer in the town thirty-three years later described the hectic scene reminiscent of a manic Stock Exchange. “*The buyers range themselves upon elevated stools, and the people who have webs crowd round them, and the moment the clock strikes ten the competition begins, and within half an hour probably £15,000 of cloth*

is disposed of.”¹¹

Dobbin’s development of the linen market was a promising commercial endeavour that served the buyers and sellers better than the open air site in Market Street had. However the thriving commerce around the periphery of the market; those that sold the “Whiskey, Bread, and Bacon”, were now apparently bereft of customers. Philip Keenan’s Royal Hotel on the corner of Dobbin Street drew the crowds and business for the many entrepreneurs in the area was booming.

Thirsty merchants

An examination of directories shows, that over time certain businesses were attracted to the new development. A crude but valid means to observe any trend of decline in trades around the periphery of a bustling market where thirsty merchants gathered might be a count of Public Houses. If Castle and Market Streets are considered the old

market area and Scotch Street, Dobbin and Linen Hall Streets as the new, then counting the number of pubs in 1770, 1819, 1824 and 1840 shows the following tendency.¹² In both areas the number of pubs increased over the period but the increase was less in the old area with a rise from 9 to 12. While in the new area the increase jumped from 6 to 14.

Other services preferred the new market area too. In the 1760’s the town’s post office had been in Market Street but by 1819 it had moved to the bottom of Scotch Street and by 1833 was in a building there owned by Dobbin. He was agent for the Bank of Ireland and one of the new houses beside his mansion became the location of the Bank. Whether or not Market Street now lacked its former commercial clout, it is clear that lower Scotch Street and Dobbin Street was the up-and-coming part of town.



Dobbin’s mansion later the Bank of Ireland, now St. Patrick’s Fold

The election

Dobbin (a Presbyterian) had created an area away from the ancient market place that had been in the shadow of the old Cathedral from medieval times. It was the man responsible for these changes that in 1833 stood against Arthur Irwin Kelly for election as the city's MP. This was the first election after the Reform Act to choose an MP for the Borough. From the city's incorporation in 1613 its electoral franchise extended only to the Sovereign of Armagh and twelve free burgesses. The Sovereign was usually the Archbishop's "land agent or Seneschal of his Manor" and the burgesses had "almost uniformly been clergymen of the dioceses".¹³ The member for the borough was selected from among the burgesses so it followed that in reality the Primate said who became the city's MP.

The Act meant that the franchise was extended to all qualifying householders occupying premises valued at more than £10. Now there were over 400 voters to be won over and it was against this background that Dobbin and Kelly's contest was fought.

In an election that generated such interest 93% of the electorate voted. Of the 444 voters in Armagh in 1833, 218 selected Dobbin while his opponent, the Conservative Kelly obtained 193 votes.¹⁴

Was it Dobbin's popular speeches and his questioned liberal credentials, satirised in the ballad, that enamoured the new voters? Despite what the song maintained, there is little evidence that Dobbin's development harmed Armagh's business community at large and it had many supporters.¹⁵

An insight into the thoughts of the ballad writer are found in the last lines of the song. It instructs the voters, "The future from the past you'll scan" before they make their choice of man. Kelly represented the old established way and Dobbin was seen as the new. There was always a tension between the two faces of Armagh. The Protestant Primate's entourage of clergy and gentry did not see the ancient city in the same light as the linen drapers and bleachers to whom its Georgian splendour was a mere backdrop to a working market town like Lurgan and Dungannon. This past was personified in Arthur Irwin Kelly, (the Primate's agent and seneschal of his Manor) and the future in Leonard Dobbin, (Bank agent, property developer and businessman).

The Grand Jury

Both men were involved in the Corporation Grand Jury. Which lit and paving the streets; maintained a fire brigade and employed the Town Watch. It was

composed of around twenty men of different political opinions who all worked together. A Corporation Cess was raised by them and collected from the inhabitants to pay for these services. Each year the city's Sovereign chose a new Grand Jury and Dobbin had been a regular member since 1780. By 1833 Kelly was Sovereign of at least a twelve years standing and now as candidate in the upcoming election he selected the new Grand Jury who were "political adherents of his own party".¹⁶ They consisted of 22 men, 15 of whom had never sat on the Grand Jury before. Missing from the list was Dobbin and many other regulars who had served on almost every Grand Jury during the 1820's. More than three quarters of the new Grand Jury were also new to the job.¹⁷ Popular feeling in Armagh ran very much against this change and opposition to Kelly's packed Grand Jury would have undoubtedly done Dobbin's cause no harm. It may well have been that the election result turned on voting, not so much for Dobbin and the future prospects of the town but against Kelly and the legacy of the past. Dobbin stood again in 1835 and won again though with fewer votes but a bigger majority, winning 34 more than his opponent's 163 votes. He died a bachelor in February 1844 aged 81 leaving Armagh some of its finest early nineteenth century buildings.



The Dobbin Street area as it appears today

Postscript

The consequences of Kelly's decision to fill the Grand Jury with his adherents ran beyond his defeat in the election.

A little background to the origin and status of the Corporation Grand Jury is needed to understand what happened next. Legally speaking it existed in a very precarious state for it had in fact no basis in law.

It probably originated when a body of inhabitants and freemen had been selected to act with the Sovereign and Burgesses to make rules for the general benefit of the town. As all the inhabitants were incorporated, qualification to act on this



The Clock tower and gate is all that remains of the Linen Hall

body was in theory open to all Armagh's citizens. Over time many of the burgesses no longer resided in Armagh and gradually Freemen ceased to be made. Eventually entitlement to membership of the Corporation Grand Jury merely on grounds of inhabitancy became the accepted custom. It was modelled on Grand Juries of Courts Leet that acted for manors and the Sovereign selected members in the same way. However unlike its manorial templates the Corporation Grand Jury was never recognised by Act of Parliament.

Although made up of men chosen on the whim of the sovereign, it nevertheless did its work very well and its own illegality was a safety net against abuse. If it tried to impose an oppressive rate or enforce unpopular measures, a legal objection would have ended with its abolition. Kelly's unpopular Grand Jury was a paralysed authority and knowing any Rate they struck would not be accepted by the inhabitants they opted not to strike one.

These circumstances gave a body of the inhabitants the opportunity to commence proceedings bringing into force the provisions of the 1828 Paving and Lighting Act which enabled an elected board of Town Commissioners to look after the urban infrastructure.¹⁸ When the first 21 Commissioners sat in November 1833 only four of Kelly's Grand Jury were there. The name Dobbins does appear but that of a younger generation, a kinsman called Thomas. Leonard was now MP for the Borough and was occupied with wider concerns.

The Corporation Grand Jury that had looked after the city for at least a hundred years was soon no more. When Kelly retired as Primate's agent due to ill health in June 1837 his successor became

Armagh's last Sovereign.¹⁹ William Paton served until 1840 and in 1887 his daughter deposited her late father's symbols of office, the two corporation maces in the Public Library where they remain today.

It may have been an arbitrary body but for over a century it cared for and developed the war-torn town that had emerged from the turmoil of the seventeenth century. The Corporation Grand Jury together with individuals like Dobbins deserve as much recognition as some of Armagh's better known benefactors for building it into a neat and thriving city of stone and brick at the start of the nineteenth century. ❖

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