

Roadways, waterways and railways

To live in Moira is to live at the centre of a hub; a transport network fans out from our community to all parts of Ulster. Moira roundabout is a landmark known to just about everyone. In days gone by, everyone travelling west passed through our village. Many from the west recall the childhood Sunday School trips or the outings to Belfast that brought them through this delightful village.

The beginning of the road network we have today is attributed to Sir George Rawdon. He was known as the "best Highwayman in Ireland." All the roads he constructed in his district were described as "very good." (Dobbs) From what had been a wooded wet valley with forest tracks, the region developed into a place for agriculture. New roads linked Lisburn with other towns and the developing villages. Rawdon could never have anticipated the highways and transport facilities in Moira district today!

In 1720 coal was discovered near Coalisland. It was brought to the Blackwater and into Lough Neagh and ferried to Moira and on to Lisburn or Belfast. There was one metalled (paved) road in this area available to those coal cart users. Some years ago when the DOE put up name plates, that road was called Coal Lane but strong objections by locals resulted in the more "polite" name, Colane Road.



Only about six miles separate the river Lagan at Moira from Lough Neagh and as early as 1637 Rawdon suggested digging a canal. Well over a century after it was first suggested, the Lagan Canal was commenced in 1756 and officially opened in 1763. The horse drawn barge, Lord Hertford, made the trip from Belfast to Lisburn. By 1794, when more money had been acquired, (by a government tax on beer and spirits) the work was completed on out to Lough Neagh. It was a mighty undertaking.

The route meant it had to cross the Lagan, so a magnificent aqueduct was built high over the river near Spencer's Bridge on the Hillsborough Road. It was a very fine piece of architecture 300 feet long and was built of sandstone quarried in the Earl of Hillsborough's estate in the town land of Kilwarlin. It took three years to build, cost £3,000 and was paid for by the Earl of Donegall. It was demolished to make way for the bridge where the M1 motorway now crosses the Lagan.



There are countless interesting stories around the canal. At Lady Bridge, beside Moira station, there is supposed to be a ghost of Lady Moira – probably the same one reported to haunt the Demesne (so she gets around!) At a point on the canal, not far from where Moira roundabout sits now, a sinking barge in 1941 was saved by using a pound of Killyman butter to plug the hole. (How they came to find this during rationing is not clear!) And on one occasion a barge waited outside a dock for three weeks to allow a wild duck to hatch her young! What a different world we live in today.

of people into the town from that place and the intermediate stations. ..After the meeting ... the entire party - numbering between eight and ten thousand people - left the town immediately and shortly after six o'clock Moira presented its usually quiet and monotonous appearance."

You can't think now of Moira without thinking of the M1. The planned route in 1946 would have by-passed Moira on the South, heading close to Waringstown and on past Lurgan. No work took place on the road in the cash-strapped post-war years, but in 1956 the plan was updated. It was decided to build the road to motorway standard, calling it the M1. The route was altered to take the road to the north of Moira and so in 1965 we got a major junction with all the benefits and headaches of more than 33,000 vehicles now using the M1 at that point.



The location of Moira has attracted most of us; we have easy access by road or rail to work, shopping and entertainment. Our children can travel easily to school and university. Air and sea travel is within easy reach. But that attraction has brought about much of our congestion. Perhaps one day the long considered by-pass will be built and Moira street will become a little more quiet.