

The isolation in which man is compelled to live, in a district destitute of roads, or where transport is difficult and expensive, is fatal to his progress in civilisation and humanity.

— Sir Robert Kane¹

PROGRESS 1822-9

Richard Griffith, civil engineer, was making an important, if localised, contribution to man's progress in the upland marches of Kerry, Cork and Limerick during the third decade of the nineteenth century. Writing his official report in April 1829 he related the advances in roadbuilding since 1822:

It now becomes my pleasing task to describe the improvements which have been effected since the month of September 1822, when I first commenced laying out the new roads through this neglected district. The object of the Government was to open the country so as to render it generally accessible, and for this purpose three main lines of new road were determined on: one to run nearly in a north and south direction, from the village of Newmarket in the county of Cork, to Listowel in the county of Kerry, a distance of 32 miles, a second, at right angles to the first, and nearly in an east and west direction from Newcastle in the county of Limerick, by the small village of Abbeyfeale, to the town of Castle Island in the county of Kerry, a distance of 29 miles: and a third, also in an east and west direction, 20 miles to the south of the second, from Newmarket in the county of Cork, for a length of 14 miles towards Charleville in the same county, making a total of 75 miles of new road.

With the exception of eight miles at the northern or Listowel extremity, the whole of these new roads have been completed, and are now open to the public, some parts for three years, and some for two years.²

It was a satisfactory achievement, in which Griffith had been helped by a team that included James Jardine who carried out

1. *The industrial resources of Ireland*, 2nd ed. (Dublin 1845) 345.
2. *Report on the southern district in Ireland*, (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1829 XXII) no. 153, 2.

surveys for various roads during 1823-6. Thomas Kearney and Thomas Barclay who performed similar services and William Bald who drew up a map of the southern district.³

NEWCASTLE-CASTLEISLAND

The Newcastle-Castleisland road was finished in 1827. Its exact length was 26 miles 7 furlongs 18 perches. Breadth between fences was 32 feet, breadth of metalling 21 feet. Total expenditure was £27,043.9.3⁴. The works included the substantial Wellesley bridge near the Kerry-Limerick border, with a single span of 70 feet and a 20 foot rise. The single-span structure was on a principle designed to accommodate sudden mountain torrents, following heavy rainfall. The floods here often rose and fell 12 feet in the course of six hours. Flood action had swept away the old twenty one arch bridge half a mile up the river, leaving no trace remaining. The Kerry and Limerick grand juries had long since grown weary of the annual demands for its repair, as every winter an arch or two had been carried away.⁴ Subsequent engineers who reverted to multiple span bridges for turbulent mountain rivers have discovered their error too late.

THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER FEALE

The important bridge over the Feale, on the Tralee-Listowel mail coach road, which had been in great part carried away by the floods of autumn of 1822,⁵ had been now replaced by a solid structure of 5 segment arches, each 50 feet in span with a 12 foot rise. It was designed by Griffith and built under his direction. The estimate had been for £3,000. The cost was £2,418.7.0.⁶ It is a plain, solid, structure, considered 'handsome' by Thackeray, who crossed it in 1842.⁷ It has defied the floods of a century and a half.

The building of these roads brought a marked improvement in the industry of the people and the appearance of the country they passed through. When they began people flocked from all quarters seeking work at any rate of pay. They looked haggard and poor, were ill-clad and rarely possessed tools except a small badly made spade. The whole country was undeveloped and in a

3. *Report on the roads made at the public expense in the southern district of Ireland*, (Parliamentary papers H.C. 1831 XII) no. 119, 17.

4. *Ibid.*, 12.

5. *Report on the roads made at the public expense in the southern district of Ireland*, (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1823 X) no. 249, 11.

6. *Report on the roads* (note 3) no. 119, 17.

7. *The Irish sketch book*, chapter XIII.

state of nature. Since the roads were built a great improvement had taken place. In the last two years more than sixty new limekilns had been built to burn lime for agriculture. Carts, ploughs and harrows of superior type, and other agricultural tools, had become common. New and better houses had been or were being built in great numbers near the roads, and also in Newmarket, Castleisland and Abbeyfeale, new enclosures of mountain farms were being made in all directions, 'and this country, which within the last seven years was the theatre of lawless outrage, and residence of what might be termed the rebel army, has become perfectly tranquil, and exhibits a scene of industry and exertion at once pleasing and remarkable'.⁸ The people had invested prudently the money gained from their labour, having built substantial houses, bought cattle and farming implements and Griffith could point to numerous examples of poor labourers without money, houses or land when first employed, who within the past year had been able to take farms, build houses and stock their lands with cows and young cattle, so that in many cases those who six years before were labouring servants of small farmers had not become more independent than their masters. NOW

The great improvement in farming was made perceptible to Griffith in another way. For the last two years he found it hard to obtain labour for the uncompleted portions of the roads. No price could tempt the new landholders to leave their farms and during the summer of 1828 he had to invite outsiders from considerable distances away, 'and at advanced prices', to work on the roads. He also had to buy horses and carts to transport stone and materials. None could be had for hire, every farm horse in the country being employed in drawing lime to manure the land. This had added to the cost of completing the roads, and had made it more expensive to maintain the parts completed, because the moment any part of new road was opened, passages were made to join it by the neighbouring farmers, and deep ruts were soon formed in the roads by strings of loaded lime carts.⁹

The value of land had greatly increased in the interior of the district. In some cases double the former rent had been offered by tenants whose leases had expired, and new farms had been let at higher rents. But some of the landlords, according to Griffith, had seconded the exertions of their tenants by making large allowances for permanent improvements such as building, fencing, draining and liming.⁹

The surrounding fertile country had also benefited from the

8. *Report on the southern district* (note 2) no. 153, 2.

9. *Ibid.*, 3.

opening of direct lines, through the unimproved country, to the market cities of Cork and Limerick. For example, the new road from Newmarket to Listowel reduced the journey from Listowel to Cork from 102 to 66 miles; and the opening of the Newcastle-Castleisland road reduced the Limerick-Killarney route from 99 to 69½ miles.⁹

Other roads commenced and completed under Griffith's direction in different parts of the southern district included (a) 19 miles of new road from Limerick city by Askeaton to Robertstown which formed part of the Limerick-Tarbert-Tralee road, economically very important for Kerry; and (b) 19 miles of new road from Macroom to Glenflesk. Their completion had given an impetus to agriculture 'quite unexampled' in the mountainous districts of the south of Ireland, while the new road from Limerick via Askeaton to Tralee had become a leading line of communication. So had the road from Cork city, through Macroom and Glenflesk, to Killarney and Kenmare which reduced the distance from Cork to Killarney by 5 miles, and from Cork to

Griffith's report of 12 April 1831 indicated that the last eight miles of the Listowel-Newmarket line had been completed, so reducing the Listowel-Cork journey by a substantial 37 miles. On leaving Newmarket this road was laid out through the valley of the river Duhallow, from where it traversed high country into and through the Feale valley, intersecting the new Castleisland-Newcastle line. Passing from there over a tract of mountain country it descended into the valley of the river Smerla, across the river and into Listowel. It was completed in 1829; breadth between fences was 32 feet, breadth of metalling 21 feet, total cost £25,355.12.8.¹¹

Owing to the number of streams flowing into the rivers Duhallow and Feale which crossed the line of the new road, an unusual number of bridges was required. Some of these were of considerable size and in many cases it was necessary to sink the foundation of the abutments to a depth of from 10 to 16 feet below the bed of the river. The mountain country produced no stone which could be dressed with the hammer, or worked by the pick, punch or chisel. Consequently the whole of the arch-stones and faces of abutments of the large bridges, and the quoins of the arches and abutments of the smaller ones, had to be got from the limestone quarries beyond the borders of the mountain district, often at a distance of twelve miles from the work. Most of these stones were drawn over a mountain summit 900 feet high, on the old track

10. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

11. *Report on the roads* (note 3) no. 119, 11, 19 and appendix.

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which was repaired for the purpose and which, for the greater part, rose at an inclination of one in three. A special feature of the road was Knight's bridge over the river Smerla. It consisted of three arches of 30 feet span and rise of 6 feet, and abutments 13 feet high. It cost £1,126.16.6½.¹²

DEVELOPMENT OF KERRY TOWNS

As the roads developed, so did the districts they served. Each year new farms were enclosed and new houses built. Between 1829 and 1831, the increase in the produce of grain was considerable where formerly little had been grown. Property values had increased and the hilly country had become tranquil. The roads had contributed to a rapid development in the towns and villages situated on the borders. Castleisland like Caherciveen had improved out of recognition. Its change of aspect for the better was described by Griffith:

In the year 1822, the town of Castleisland in the county of Kerry, situated at the western termination of the new road from Newcastle in the county Limerick, bore the most unequivocal signs of poverty in its inhabitants; the houses were universally dilapidated, and the windows and roofs broken; there was no inn (at least none deserving of the name), and no shop which could supply anything beyond a farthing candle and a pennyworth of tobacco, and the street presented a mass of uneven rock, resembling a quarry rather than a road, and was nearly impassable for wheel-carriages. Within the last four years a great number of new houses have been built, all of which are two stories in height, are slated and otherwise well finished, among which is an excellent inn; several shops have also been established, at which clothing of all kinds, and groceries, can be purchased at moderate rates. The street has been levelled, formed, and an excellent road made, with footpaths on each side, neatly curbed with cut limestone.¹³

The new road, it was said, cost the public nothing. It was made at the expense of 'the proprietors of the town'. In proof of the general tranquillity¹⁴ owing to improved conditions, the garrisons which had to be placed in the various villages and towns bordering the hill district in 1822 had now been withdrawn from all places except Newcastle 'and the same persons who were engaged in

12. *Ibid.*, 10, 11, 19 and appendix.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.* note.

night marauding parties, are now beneficially employed in the cultivating of their own farms, and have become quiet and useful members of society'.¹⁵

Across the border the new road had contributed to the development of Abbeyfeale where in 1822 there was only one slate house, which was occupied as a barracks by the military. There were several houses roofless as a result of the previous winter's disturbances and the town resembled Castleisland in every respect. Griffith was struck by the improvement in the people's appearance.¹⁶

The new Rathkeale-Castleisland road helped to augment the trade and business of Tralee. The improvements effected immediately after the making of that road were astonishing, in the view of James Weale, an official in the Office of Woods who had a wide knowledge of the southern district. These he itemised as drainage, stone houses with slate roofs, the introduction of a considerable number of Scotch cars instead of the old Irish car, and the use of some very well constructed ploughs.

At Tralee the eye of the stranger is immediately arrested by the number of the new grain stores that have been erected. I think upon inquiry I was told, that out of eighteen or nineteen which I counted, three of them only were in existence as recently as the year 1813, and those three were the smallest of them. Much of the corn stored in those granaries must be the produce of the lands which have been opened up by the formation of this road of Mr. Griffith's.¹⁷

15. *Ibid.*, 4.

16. *Report on the roads* (note 3) no 119, 4: *Abbeyfeale*

The Sunday after my arrival, I had an opportunity of seeing the inhabitants of the village and of the surrounding country going to the Roman Catholic chapel, on which occasion the peasantry appear always in their best clothes, but in this case their apparel was much inferior to any I had ever before seen. The men's hats and women's bonnets (where they had any) consisted of coarse straw or rush rudely put together, and generally much worn; the coats and cloaks were almost universally torn and ragged, and the whole population bore the marks of squalid poverty. In the year 1829, I had the pleasure to see the same people on a similar occasion; the change was almost incredible, the women displayed in their gowns and petticoats all the gaudy finery of Manchester and Glasgow; the men were substantially clothed, generally in blue coats, and wore, universally, good black hats, the straw plait having entirely disappeared; several new houses have also been built in this village, and several shops have been established.

17. *Minutes of evidence before the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland*, (Parliamentary papers H.C. 1830 VII) no. 589, 141.

ROAD THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS FROM MACROOM TO GLENFLESK

This consisted of 19 miles of new road, built with the twofold object of improving the country it passed through and shortening the Cork-Kenmare and Cork-Killarney routes. It reduced the Cork-Kenmare journey from 88 statute miles to 57 and took $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles off the Cork-Killarney route. Completed in 1827, its breadth between fences was 30 feet, breadth of metalling 21 feet and total cost £13,564.16.8.¹⁸ It was carried through what Griffith described as a wild mountain district, and over a summit of 800 feet elevation above Glenflesk, but owing to the regular ascent preserved in rising to this elevation the proprietors of the Cork-Kerry mail coach line had found it to their advantage to transfer their coach to this new road, abandoning the old one which 'presented a great number of steep and dangerous ascents and descents'.

Local improvement included a 'new and very neat village', with corn-mill and other appendages, built at Ballyvourney midway between Glenflesk and Macroom, and numerous enclosures and new houses in the vicinity of the road throughout its length.¹⁹

Pierce Mahony gave testimony in April 1830 of the changes effected by the roads which, he said, within his own memory, literally opened up county Kerry to the rest of the country. There was now a coast road all around the county, with the exception of a few miles from Mr Butler's house at Waterville to Mr Bland's at Derryquir. Before this it was a two day journey to Cork alone. Now, however, one could leave Cork at eight in the morning and reach Killarney at three in the afternoon.²⁰

Smugglers were disconcerted. 'Nothing', said Pierce Mahony, 'tended to put down smuggling in the county of Kerry so much as these very coast roads of which I have spoken'.²⁰

PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS

Two significant letters were placed by Pierce Mahony before the select committee on the state of the poor in Ireland on 7 April 1830 as evidence of the improvement in the hilly district opened up by Griffith's roads. John Kelly, the writer, is stated to have carried on works in the district of Abbeyfeale as civil engineer to the knight of Kerry.²¹ From the first letter, however, it appears that he had been sent to Kerry in 1823, on Griffith's instructions,

18. *Report on the roads*, (note 3) no. 119, 14, 19.

19. *Ibid.*, 5.

20. *Minutes of evidence on state of the poor in Ireland* (note 17) no. 589, 106.

21. *Ibid.*, 96.

to commence the roads. The first letter gives examples of the success of individuals, while the second holds out, with great enthusiasm, the prospect of developing the agriculture and manufacture of a hill district of 200,000 Irish acres to the stage where it might support nearly half a million people and so obviate emigration to America. The letters appear to have been written to Pierce Mahony.

Sir,

Listowel Glebe, 24th October 1829

The day I saw you, I related a few facts on the subject of the improvement which has taken place in the comforts of the people in the country round Abbeyfeale, in consequence of the new roads ordered to be made by Government, which you expressed a wish I would state in writing, and send to you.

To give you a detail of the good done would exceed the limits I must prescribe for myself; I may state, generally, that nothing could exceed the poverty and wretchedness of the people when Mr. Griffith sent me into this part of the country to commence these roads, in 1823; it was immediately after the scarce summer of 1822. At Abbeyfeale and Brosna, more than half the congregation at mass on Sundays were barefoot and ragged, with small straw hats of their own manufacture, felt hats being worn only by a few. Hundreds, or even thousands of men could be got to work for 6d. a day if it had been offered: the farmers were mostly in debt, and many of the families of the labourers went to beg to Tipperary and other parts.

The condition of the people is now very different; the congregation at the chapels are as well clad and good looking as in other parts of the country. Many new houses of a superior description are built and building along new roads. A great number of new limekilns are built, rents paid, demand for labour increased, and a spirit of industry getting forward since the new roads became available, which was before unknown in the country. General statements, however, are not what you wish for, but particular facts; in the parishes of Knocknagoshel and Brosna, I am told it was usual for the people to be obliged to go to the markets of Tralee for a supply of provisions for the summer; the poor of Tralee used to complain of the Brosna people emptying their market. In consequence of the quantity of lime which Lord Headley makes his tenantry bring in, there was this season, which was not a plentiful one, as much provision in the parish of Knocknagoshel, as would nearly do for two parishes of the same consumption.

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The farmers at Brosna, without the encouragement given by Lord Headley, are following the example of his tenantry in bringing lime, so that Dennis Lane, the overseer of the new road told me last year, that it was usual to see from sixty to eighty horses a day pass him by during the summer, drawing lime from Castleisland for manuring land in the mountains; and last spring, before the new road to Newmarket was finished, the former commenced drawing limestone from Ballinatona, a new quarry near Newmarket, at such a rate on it, as considerably to increase the expense of completing the new road.

Daniel Cahill, of Mungaraheeny, has a meadow, on which he told me he used to have two cocks of hay every year; he contrived, at a heavy expense, to bring lime from Meelin, which he slacked and spread on the surface; the next year he had twelve cocks of the same size as the two above mentioned on the same meadow; the year following he had fourteen, and every year since from ten to twelve.

In 1828, while working at the road at Meentierna, and thence to Brena Bridge, in the northern part of the county of Cork, I was obliged to give unusually high wages to labourers, and to encourage men from Newmarket and Castleisland to come there to work, because the labourers of the country could not be got, being nearly all employed at their own business, which is lately very much increased; indeed, during the last two years I found it so difficult to get horses, that I was obliged to buy a number to make the roads with. The farmers of the country (who first gladly sent them at 2s. 8d. a day) find it so much more advantageous to keep them drawing lime, that they would not send them at all to us in summer.

I shall select a few examples only of the benefit derived by individuals; indeed was I to detail all I know of this, I should begin at one end of the works, and name every person living along the vicinity of the lines to the other.

Tim King, of Kilmainham, was ejected out of a farm he held, some short time before 1823; he was indebted to his neighbours when the work on the new road began, and had no means at all of supporting nine children. The first year he earned his support; the second he paid about 15 l. debts, but saved no money; since that he supported his family, gave nearly 20 l. portion was a daughter that was married, and has about 40 l. of cattle and other property now.

Tom Cahill, of Ahane, told me a few days ago, that he had neither clothes nor food the day he first saw me at Knockbrack. He soon after began to work in the roads: the first

year he clothed and fed his family; the second, (1824) was a hard year, and though he had constant work, he had nothing when the new potatoes came in; but from that till Christmas he bought three heifers; every year since he is thriving, and now he has fourteen head of cattle, and a good horse that he gave 21 l. for; the horse earns 4s. a day, and gets constant employment drawing lime from Ballinatona near Newmarket, to Brosna, during the summer.

John Grany; when he was young his father and mother both died on the same day of fever; after that he lived as a servant boy with his uncle, John Walsh. When the roads began he left his service, and continued in the work four years; he bought cattle, and kept them at grass according as he earned money. This year he sold all his cattle, and joined the works in the roads again. He has now about 55 l. in money and value.

Pat. Gowran, who is now a very useful steward on the road, was a servant in like manner. He is worth 45 l.

A hatter, at Castleisland, had a small field through which the new road passed; this part next the town was not opened until 1826. In making arrangements with him for his damages, he said, that he ought to make me a present of all the land he had, for that second year I was at the roads he sold more hats to the people of the mountains alone, than he did for seven years before to the high and low lands together. Although he never worked a day in the roads, he got comfort and prosperity by them.

The village of Abbeyfeale is much improved in its appearance. When first I saw it in 1823, there was one slated house, and two public houses, with a number of cabins; there are now eleven handsome slated houses, two stories high, and eleven licensed public houses.

I could state a great number of other facts of this nature, but you will perhaps say that this letter is long enough already.
(signed) John Kelly

A circle of twenty miles diameter, having Abbeyfeale for its centre, forms a portion of the great group of hills between the Shannon and the Blackwater, which are situated on the confines of the counties of Cork, Limerick and Kerry; which group occupies 640 square miles Irish, and are all nearly of the same character.

Abbeyfeale, in the centre of this tract, is a village in the county of Limerick, on the east bank of the river Feale: it has 440 inhabitants. This village being six miles north of the

junction of the three counties, the circle would extend four miles southward into Cork; and being close to the boundary of Kerry, extends ten miles westward into that county, and ten miles eastward into Limerick. Near its circumference are situated the towns of Castleisland, Newcastle, Shanagolden, Glin, Tarbert and Listowel; this last is eight miles distant, the others from ten to twelve; and there is no resident gentlemen, except a few in the immediate vicinity of the towns above mentioned, and below the bases of the hills.

The mineral productions, so far as they have been discovered, do not excite much interest; the hills are all of "coal formation;" highly indurated sandstone, and black slate clay of various degrees of hardness, are the rocks. Several beds of culm have been discovered, and some of them worked; but those already wrought seldom exceed twelve inches in thickness and dip at a steep angle: these circumstances, together with the unskilful mode of working, render the expense of raising the culm considerable; and the demand is not great on account of an abundant supply of turf in all parts. Limestone is the rock on which all those hills rest, and it is formed all round them at the base of the group, and in many places towards the south in the interior.

The outline of the hills within this circle is tame and uninteresting; the rock is covered with a coat of clay from three to thirty feet in thickness, formed of course of the decomposed debris of the rocks which lie beneath, and contain the two ingredients argil and silex, with scarcely any mixture of lime; towards the summits of the hills, and even a good way down their sides, the clay is covered with peat or bog, generally from six inches to three feet in thickness, which produces heath, and a few species of coarse grass; further down, approaching the vallies, there is no bog, but a vegetable soil, part of which is tilled, and produces good crops of oats and potatoes; where lime has been applied the produce is three or fourfold, and in some instances ten times the quantity has been obtained.

More than three-fourths of this tract has never been cultivated, and the whole affords great natural advantages to the improver, whether his object is agriculture or manufacture.

The average height of the hills being about 1,000 feet above the level of the sea, they are not too high for luxuriant vegetation. The bog, however, which forms the surface at present, if left alone and unmixed with any other substance, is nearly barren; the clay which lies beneath is entirely so; but if the light bog were drained and dug up, and some of the clay

stratum got up and mixed with it, along with a proper proportion of lime, a very superior vegetable soil may be made on every perch of the whole surface, and the acre which now only yields heath would produce the finest oats, potatoes or hay; so that the agriculturalist having the substratum a basis for his soil on the spot, and the peat his vegetable manure on the spot, wants only to bring lime to decompose that manure, and to employ labour, in order to convert the wild haunts of the grouse into a productive field for human sustenance.

A circle of twenty miles diameter, 201,062 Irish acres. It is allowed that a well cultivated acre will support five persons; in the present instance admit it will support three, and if three-fourths of the above quantity be in a state of nature the land now waste could by industry be made capable of maintaining 452,390 persons, or nearly half a million. Here might the labour of the emigrant be well directed at home, which is now in active operation clearing the wastes of America, if advantage were taken of the resources which our own country possesses.

The manufacturers will here find advantages not less interesting; a constant supply of water in the Feale, the Smerla, the Ullahaw, the Owbey, the Clyda, the Brena, and several other rivers, with from 40 to 50 feet fall upon an average on every mile of their lengths, offer a boundless field for their operations.

The area of a circle 20 miles in diameter, is 314 square miles, and allowing 36 inches depth of rain water to fall on the whole surface in a year, which is under the average for the last three years at Newcastle, there would fall 1,186,920,000 tons; divide this into 20 parts, and allow 15 of those parts to go off in evaporation, three parts to be lost by redundancy in floods, and one part to go waste about the dams and weirs made to conduct it to machinery, there still remains one-twentieth which might be used; this 59,346,000 tons of water in the year, which could be made to act upon a number of falls, amounting in the aggregate to 100 feet perpendicular at least.

Again, allow the effect produced only equal to one-third of the power employed, and we have nearly twenty millions of tons for the effective quantity, and this in operation on 100 feet fall, is equal to 11,428 steam engines, of 25-horse power each. Mr. Webster, at his lectures at the Dublin Institution in 1819, said that there were then 12,000 steam engines

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in Great Britain; therefore, we have in our circle of 20 miles diameter, nearly as much water power available for mechanical purposes as all the steam engines in Great Britain at that period were capable of producing.

Hitherto the want of passable roads was an insuperable bar to the improvement of this neglected district. The new roads lately made at the expense of the Government, of which there are 35 miles within this circle, are the first step towards a very desirable change; indeed, the effect they have already produced, both on the comforts and morals of the population, as well as creating habits of industry not existing before, is truly surprising.

Listowel, 6th Oct. 1829.

(Signed) *John Kelly*²²

THE NUMBERS EMPLOYED

In May 1824 Griffith calculated he had about 3,000 men employed on the roads, but at an earlier period between June and August 1822 he had as many as 7,000. Pay was reasonably good. A workman of ordinary ability would earn about a shilling a day. Wages were according to activity. They varied from six to fifteen pence. The average earnings might be from eight pence to a shilling. The works were measured and paid for once a month. At the head of each gang of 10 or 12 Griffith placed a man who could read and write and keep accounts.²³

'Generally speaking' said Griffith, 'I found those that could read and write, and understand English, were more easily managed than those who did not. I placed the best instructed persons at the head of the gangs of men.'²⁴

METHOD OF ROAD CONSTRUCTION

The methods of road-structure used by Griffith, and the care with which he put them into effect, ensured a job thoroughly done and, by the standards of the time, the best ever performed. The principal roads were 32 feet in breadth between the fences, except where heavy side cutting or other difficulties occurred, in which case the breadth was reduced to 26, sometimes 24 feet. The surface soil of the country through which the roads passed was made up of heavy tenacious clay or of bog. Consequently draining was

22. *Ibid.*, 96-8.

23. Evidence of Richard Griffith in *Minutes of evidence before the select committee (session 1824) on the disturbances in Ireland* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1825 VI) no. 20, 229.

expensive. In addition to the usual gulleets for the passage of water under the roads, it was necessary to make regular sewers in the direction of the road, on the side next the mountain, to carry off the water that issued from the hill side.

Guard drains were also cut in the direction of the road, and from 7 to 10 yards above it, to catch the water descending from the mountain, and in some places, where the mountain was high, a second guard drain was made a distance of 10 yards above the first.

The plane of the road being formed and drained, the surface for a breadth of 16 feet was covered by a rough pavement, four inches in thickness, formed of quarried stones, whose greatest dimensions in any direction did not exceed four inches. The stones were always laid with the flattest side downwards, and the rough upper-side and interstices were filled with small stones. The pavement, when completed, was covered with a layer of clay or loamy gravel two inches in thickness and on this foundation broken stones, the largest of which would pass through a ring two inches in diameter, were laid, generally to a thickness of eight inches at the centre of the road, and six inches at the sides, extending one foot beyond the pavement at each side, so as to make the metalled surface of the road 18 feet in breadth. The broken stones were afterwards blinded by a covering of fine gravel or sand one inch in thickness.²⁵

NUISANCES p. 122

There was trouble in keeping the new roads free of nuisances, although these were punishable by law. Griffith thought the magistrates were too lenient in enforcing the law, which was contained mainly in the general road act, 36 Geo III. The police were not eager to prosecute. Griffith told the select committee on turnpike roads that he had found great difficulty in prevailing on the police to keep nuisances off the new roads he had made in counties Cork, Limerick and Kerry. The truth was, that magistrates and police were willing to turn a blind eye on what they considered to be of little harm. It was suggested that the magistrates were unwilling to impose on poor people the stiff penalties of the road act. The nuisances of which Griffith complained were — feeding cows on the road, putting on manure heaps, stacking turf and having unrun

25. *Report on the roads* (note 3) no. 119, 10.

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pigs on the roadside.²⁶ So as to maintain the roads in good condition he drew up instructions for the guidance of roadmen which were mainly taken from the general road act.²⁷

THE VISION OF JAMES WEALE

In 1830 the select committee of the House of Commons which made an inquiry into the state of the poor in Ireland recommended that waste lands should be chosen for reclamation and improvement at the public expense. In consequence a treasury minute of 21 January 1831 was issued in which attention was drawn to 'the evience of Mr. Weale, an officer in the Land Revenue Department, that the Crown is in possession of a mountain estate in Ireland, every acre of which is stated to be capable of a high state of cultivation'. Mr Weale was instructed 'to prepare a statement of the measures which, in his opinion, would be necessary to bring into a state of improved cultivation the Crown lands called the land of Pobble O'Keeffe, in the barony of Duhallow . . .'.²⁸

James Weale was a principal officer in the Office of Woods, which went under various names in official reports, but in full style was known as the Office of the Commissioners of His Majesty's Woods, Forests, Land Revenues, Works and Public Buildings. Its address was Whitehall Place, London. Weale read Griffith's 1823 and 1829 reports with more than usual interest. He noted the improvements brought about by the new roads in that part of the southern district which they served. He was himself deeply interested in Pobal Uí Chaoimh,²⁹ the O'Keeffe community, an undeveloped tract on the confines of Kerry, Limerick and Cork which included some 5,000 acres of crown lands and is called in these reports Pobble O'Keeffe.³⁰ Now, following the instruction

26. Evidence of Richard Griffith in *Report from the select committee on turnpike roads in Ireland, with minutes of evidence and appendix* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1831-2 XVII) no. 645, 158.

27. *Report from select committee on turnpike roads in Ireland with minutes of evidence and appendix* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1831-2 XVII) no. 645, 158-9.

28. *Crown estate (King William's Town) . . . Report of Richard Griffith, Esq., dated 5 June, 1851* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1851 L) no. 637, 1-2.

29. E. Hogan *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (Dublin 1910) 563.

30. James Weale (?-1838) who had a deep interest in Ireland, collected books and pamphlets, some rare, and manuscripts, relating to Irish literature, antiquities and history. At Christie's salesrooms, in 1834, he competed successfully, and at expense, with Thorpe, a leading London bookseller, for the possession of a manuscript of Sir William Petty's *Down Survey* which he considered should be placed in Irish archives. In a letter dated Whitehall, 1 April 1834, Weale described his purchase to Major Thomas sarcom who afterwards edited the manuscript for the Irish Archaeological

he had received, he drew up and submitted to the secretary to the Commissioners for Woods, Alexander Milne, a report, dated 22 March 1831, in which he set forth a detailed plan for the

Society (Dublin 1851). After Weale's death in 1838, this manuscript and others were bought by the government through the intervention of Sir Robert Peel. Weale may have had a knowledge of the Irish language; his library included the 1681 New Testament in Irish, (*Tiomna Nuadh ar dTighearna . . . re hUilliam O Domhnuill. A Lunndain, or na chur a gclo re Robert Ebheringtham*, 1681) and the Irish Catechism of Bonaventure O Hussey, 1707 (O Heoghusa (Giolla Brighde (Bonaventura)) *An Teagasg Criosdaidhe . . . Secunda Editio . . . Romae* 1707). His library was sold in a six day auction commencing 5 February 1840 at 93 Pall Mall, London. His papers included *Collectanea Hibernica Historico - Bibliographica*, described as a curious and extensive collection of manuscript notes, compiled by himself, on Irish history, literature and bibliography. Books and papers of Irish interest from his library were bought by W. F. Wakeman, bookseller and publisher, D'Olier Street, Dublin. 'Of four ancient Irish MSS, one sold for half-a-crown, one for two shillings, and the other two fetched sixpence a piece'. There are copies of the sales catalogue in the Bodleian, British Museum and National Library of Ireland. (*Irish book lover* II (1910) 29-30, 61-2). Some of his papers are to be found in NLI MS 4158, TCD library, MS 1. 10 and British Museum Add MS 11,721; the latter of which includes transcripts, made in 1832, from MSS in Marsh's Library, Dublin.

His friendship with a fellow collector, Dr John Murphy, bishop of Cork, is indicated in a letter to the editor of the *Irish book lover* from his son W. H. James Weale, distinguished bibliographer, art connoisseur and author of many standard works. 'I am one of the few left who knew Dr Murphy, the book loving bishop of Cork. I can remember, when a very small boy, sitting on his knee, whilst he patted my head kindly. It was on one of my father's annual visits to Pobble O'Keeffe where he always had a rousing welcome from the people, and where one of the bridges was named after him. My father, as you know, had a fine collection of Irish books and MSS and always made a point of calling on the Bishop when in Cork and having a long chat with him on their mutual hobby'. (*Irish book lover* 7 (October 1915) 48.

Weale's intention was that the tenants on the crown lands should acquire property, which would give them responsibility and an incentive to further industry. The following account which he wrote about the inhabitants of Pobal Uí Chaoimh may be of interest. (Further report of Mr Weale . . . 15 March 1834 in *Crown lands experimental improvements and Cork and Kerry new roads, Ireland* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1834 LI) no. 173, 64:-

There is no deficiency of natural intelligence among them, though it may be sometimes found difficult from their imperfect acquaintance with the English language, and from their ignorance of other matters, to convey fully to their apprehension the meaning of the propositions addressed to them, and to comprehend the objections, the wishes, or the fears they desire to express. Even this impediment is rapidly yielding to the instruction which springs from an extended intercourse with strangers; and perhaps, as far as merely scholastic education can usefully aid in the development of the faculties of a rural population, the peasantry in the south-western counties of Ireland are more advanced than the same class in any county of England. In

improvement of Pobal Uí Chaoimh and the crown lands within it.³¹

James Weale first inspected this estate in 1828. In his travels through the southern district on that occasion he was greatly struck with the aspect of the country to the south-west of Limerick. Until then he had known of it only historically as the theatre of war in the times of Queen Elizabeth and James I, as a refuge of outlaws in the reigns of William and Anne and as the scene of the recent insurrection under the pseudonymous banner of Captain Rock. He was surprised that such extensive tracts of land, with a variety of fertile soils, had not shared in the general improvement that had taken place in the country over the previous thirty years. Having explored the district he believed its development should be undertaken by the government. Under this impression he made inquiries about the works then in progress under Griffith's direction, and was clearly impressed by the benefits that resulted from them. But he also made a discovery which caused him great disappointment. 'I learned' he reported 'that the original intention of connecting those roads by others to be formed through that district of it in which the Crown's Estate is situated, was indefinitely suspended, if not absolutely abandoned'. Weale was unable to discover why the roads were discontinued, whether from a shortage of public funds, or from what he calls 'local adverse influence', or from unwillingness on the part of the county grand juries to cooperate with the government in the project.

Griffith himself makes no reference to the discontinuance of the works. There is a suggestion, however, in his 1829 report, that a hiatus of some kind had occurred in his overall design for the

fact on these Crown lands, notwithstanding their remote insulation from all established schools, there are few adults who cannot write, read English, and use the common rules of arithmetic; and there are some among them who may fairly assert higher pretensions to reputed scholarship. At the same time, it may truly be said of them that they are not only unstained by the crimes which agitate the inhabitants of other districts more favourably circumstanced in most other respects, but they are also distinguished for an observance of their religious and moral duties, for the general kindness of their disposition, and by a deeply implanted affection for their kindred; of all which virtues, I have myself witnessed among them some striking manifestations.

In a brief account of Weale's work in the *Irish builder* XXIII no. 507 (February 1881) 34, it is said: 'Mr Weale's report paved the way for the establishment of the Board [of Public Works]; and if all his suggestions had been adopted, and if a similar spirit animated other men who came after him, greater benefits would have resulted'.

31. *Crown land improvement, Ireland copies of papers, . . . Report from Mr Weale, of the Office of Woods, &c., on the expediency and practicability of carrying into effect the proposed improvements of the lands of Pobble O'Keeffe, County Cork, 22 March 1831* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1831-2 XLV) no. 355, 5 et seq.

hill country. Weale drew attention to this, and quoted the following part of Griffith's report:

"The improvements above described, which are attributable to the new roads, do not extend to the whole of the mountain district situated within the River Shannon and the River Blackwater. There remains a considerable portion, extending northwards from the River Blackwater to a line drawn between the towns of Castle Island and Newmarket, comprehending an area of about 200 square miles, or 128,000 acres, in which there is no road passable for horsemen during the winter months.

"As expressed in a former Report, I have long contemplated the propriety of making a road through this neglected district, and of opening it to the markets of Cork and Mallow. It would complete the principal object for which I was sent down to the Southern District, namely, the forming new roads through those mountains, and rendering them accessible in every part.

"I am of opinion that the proposed road should commence at Castle Island, and proceed eastward through the mountains, and, passing through the collieries of Clonbanin, Drominagh, Dromagh and Coolclough, join the new road now making to Cork through the Bogra mountains at Clonmeen bridge, over the river Blackwater.

"This road, if completed, would open a direct communication from Tralee and Castle Island to the city of Cork, which is the best market, and would shorten the road between Tralee and Cork 14 statute miles, and between Castle Island and Cork 22 miles; the present distance from Tralee to Cork by Killamey being 76 statute miles, while the proposed road will be but 62.

"This road is of the utmost importance to the future improvement of the country. It would pass through, or very close to the whole of the valuable coal and culm collieries of the Southern District, and afford an easy communication with the surrounding country, many parts of which are in the greatest want of fuel for domestic purposes, and for burning lime, the only manure there used for corn crops.

"This road would also produce a most beneficial effect on the agriculture of the country through which it passes. There are limestone quarries at both extremities, and the whole of the intervening country is covered by a stiff cold clay soil, which when manured by lime is susceptible of great improvement, and capable of producing excellent crops of

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oats, potatoes and flax. At present, from want of roads, no limestone can be drawn into the country, and consequently the land remains untilled, and the inhabitants are wretched, slothful and discontented".³²

THE CROWN ESTATE

Here was important support for Weale's argument. The crown estate, he pointed out, was in the very centre of this unopened district, ten miles from Castleisland in the west and from Newmarket and Kanturk in the east. The estate was seven miles in length from north to south, running parallel with the Blackwater which formed the boundary between it and Kerry. From west to east it was two and a quarter miles broad, comprising in all 9,000 statute acres of undulating hilly country, with soils of strong clay and loamy gravel on high ground, and alluvium and peat bog in the valleys and low grounds. The crown lands were occupied by upwards of seventy native families, living in miserable mud cabins, subsisting on the 'deteriorated produce' of a few acres of potatoes and a few cows, together with any money they could earn from harvest work in the adjacent districts. The land was saturated with water and covered with thick-matted beds of moss, rushes and heath, the growth of ages. The people were totally isolated for the want of roads. No improvement could take place, urged Weale, so long as the large tract, of which the crown lands formed the nucleus, remained unprovided with them. He suggested the government should provide them, since it appeared the local authorities would not. He had no doubt of the benefits that would follow. All the engineers and agriculturalists who had viewed the country agreed that the improvements effected elsewhere by Griffith's roads would probably follow in this case. To this Weale added a further argument which suggests that the Whiteboy insurrection of 1822 must have been formidable:

I would humbly submit that it is of national importance that an extensive tract of territory, in itself a natural fortress, of which it may be said that the government now possess hardly a military possession, should not remain cut off from all participation in the growing prosperity of the surrounding country. It is not 10 years since this very estate of the crown was the appointed rendezvous of an insurgent force of 6,000 or 7,000 men, which afterwards crossed the Blackwater, and was encamped for several days in the vicinity of that river,

32. *Report on the southern district* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1829 XXII) no. 153, 3-4 quoted in *Crown land improvement, Ireland* (note 31) no. 355, 8-9.

committing great destruction of lives and property, and threatening the entire demolition of Millstreet, Killarney and other towns; and which ultimately was enabled to retire, and disperse itself throughout this district, with impunity to almost all who were engaged in it. Independently, therefore, of all considerations merely economical or fiscal, I conceive it to be essential to the security and tranquillity of the kingdom, that this district which presents an impregnable military position commanding all the great roads communicating with the south-western section of Ireland, from Limerick, Waterford and Cork, and in the heart of a populous and rapidly improving country, should be speedily rendered accessible, and the cultivation of its natural resources, for the amelioration of the condition of its inhabitants, promoted as much as possible.³³

This argument probably carried weight with the government. Weale stated that he had recently communicated with Griffith on the matter. He submitted a map of the district of which the crown estate formed the centre. The map showed the lines of new road which Griffith had proposed in 1823 should serve the district. Weale pointed out that the proposed new road from Castleisland to Clonmeen bridge on the Blackwater, being a direct route to Cork, would be 26 miles in length, that a large part of it along the Blackwater valley would coincide with the proposed Killarney-Waterford road, so that only 13 miles of new road would be required to complete it, making 39 miles of new road in all, which Griffith estimated would cost about £20,000.

The Castleisland-Cork road would run through the northern half of the crown estate. The Killarney-Waterford road would run a little distance from the southern end of it. The Castleisland-Cork road would intersect the estate and the Blackwater about 10 miles distance from the towns of Castleisland, Newmarket, Kanturk and Millstreet.

PLANNING A NEW TOWN

That situation gave James Weale the opportunity to introduce the proposition closest to his heart. He went on:

It has already been observed that the proposed new public road from Castle Island to Cork, must intersect the Crown Estate and the river Blackwater, at about 10 miles distance from the towns of Castle Island, Newmarket, Kanturk and Millstreet; and there being no intermediate town or hamlet,

33. *Crown land improvement, Ireland* (note 31) no. 355, 10.

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the line of intersection will obviously afford an eligible site for the establishment of a village, which carriers and farmers passing to and from Dingle, Tralee, Mallow, Macroom and Cork, along the new road, may make their resting place, and which may gradually become the depot for a variety of merchandize required for the supply of the circumjacent country, as the district shall improve in its condition. The influence which a prosperous village has in augmenting the value of the estate on which it stands, suggests therefore the expediency of an endeavour to secure this latent advantage by the erection of a few dwelling-houses and cottages; and which, if forthwith erected, will probably induce a settlement on the estate of a number of artificers and skilful labourers from among those who will be brought into the country by the contractors for the new road, bridges and other incidental works. Such settlement may be further encouraged by the annexation to each tenement of a small parcel of land.³⁴

This was the genesis of the celebrated King William's Town experiment, an early essay in small town planning which was the inspiration of James Weale, who saw its beginnings and the early years of its development. After his death (about September 1838) the project was continued under the direction of Richard Griffith.

* * It has received little or no attention from Irish social historians. Only the most incidental sketch of it is given here, and that in the context of its relation to the building of the Kerry border roads and bridges. Weale, who clearly had given it a great deal of thought, set down in detail his proposals for it.³⁵

34. *Ibid.*, 11-12.

35. *Ibid.*, 12 where the plan is outlined as follows:-

With a view to the establishment of a village, therefore, and as soon as the line of direction by which the road from Castleisland to Cork will intersect the estate shall be precisely entertained, I would recommend that a quarry of the best building stone in its vicinity should be opened, and a competent number of Labourers set to work at it; and that proper sites for the erection of the following buildings at convenient intervals on the sides of the high roads should be selected: viz.

One dwelling-house, to be occupied as an inn or carriers way-house, with suitable offices.

Three other dwelling-houses two stories in height with office buildings suited for the occupation of store-shopkeepers and other new settlers.

Four cottages, with lateral workshops and yards, for occupation by carpenters, smiths, masons and other artificers who may settle on the estate.

Four other cottages for workmen. A chapel; and a dwelling-house for the priest; with a detached school, and apartments for the master and mistress.

A good model farm-house and office-buildings.

Griffith read Weale's report and agreed with its contents, endorsing it as 'well founded and judicious'. He made detailed surveys and estimates of the proposed lines of road, arriving at revised figures as to length, of 42½ miles approximately. By his new survey the Castleisland-Cork road would pass nearly through the centre of the crown property of Pobal Uí Chaoimh while the Killarney-Waterford road, to the south of the property, would be joined to the other by a short length of cross road.³⁶

MAIL DELIVERIES — AND DELAYS

Griffith was helped in the design to develop the Kerry border roads and the King William's Town project by the official inquiry into postal communication between Britain and Ireland held in summer 1832. In the course of this inquiry some interesting facts about the Kerry mails came to light. Letters from Tralee and other towns were sent by Holyhead to London and Bristol. Delivery to and from was quicker by this route, on which postage per letter was 1s. 5d. The London-Milford Line - Waterford-Cork-Tralee route was shorter by 21 miles, and postage per letter was only 1s. 4d. But a letter by this route was delayed 12 hours in Waterford and a further 13 hours in the Cork post office.³⁷ So the people of Tralee preferred to have their mail sent through Holyhead at the extra 1d. per letter. By a curious anomaly the Dingle-London postage on a letter was 1s. 4d. while that of Tralee-London was 1s. 5d.³⁸ Griffith, who gave evidence to the committee³⁹ explained that when the roads planned in association with the King William's Town project were completed, the Tralee-Waterford route would

All these buildings should be constructed on the most simple plans, with stone walls and slated roofs; and they should be erected by contract with a responsible builder, under the direction of the civil engineer employed in the construction of the public roads, by whom the drainage, inclosures and occupation roads to be executed on the estate may likewise be most economically superintended, with the assistance of a resident foreman or clerk of the works to be provided by the Board.

36. *Report of Mr Griffith, with plan and estimates, for completing the new lines of communication between Tralee and Cork, and between Kenmare (recte Killarney) and Waterford, by the formation of new roads through the M'Auliffe Mountain district in the counties of Cork and Kerry. To Rt. Hon. E.G.S. Stanley, Dublin 16 August 1831.* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1831-32 XLV) no. 355, 17-8.

37. *Report from the select committee on poor communication with Ireland: with the minutes of evidence and appendix.* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1831-2 XVII) no. 716, 24.

38. *Ibid.*, 25.

39. *Ibid.*, 181 et seq.

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be shortened from 157 to 125 miles. Tralee should then receive its London correspondence at 11 a.m. instead of 7 p.m., and a penny cheaper, while Killarney should receive the London mail 15 or 16 hours earlier. It was considered that the direct Waterford-Tralee link would be very important for the steam vessel line from Valentia to America which was receiving serious attention at that time.⁴⁰

OPENING THE WILDERNESS

In the summer of 1832 an act was passed through parliament enabling the Commissioners of Woods to undertake the new Kerry and Cork roads as designed by Griffith. This was 2 Will. 4, c. 52, entitled *An act to promote the improvement of a district of mountain land in the counties of Limerick, Cork and Kerry, in Ireland, by making new roads through the same, and to encourage the employment of the poor inhabitants thereof. £17,000 would be provided from state funds, on condition that Cork first voted £4,700 and Kerry £2,300, these being the sums calculated to be in proportion to the cost of the works within their respective boundaries.*⁴¹ The warrant under the act was issued by the treasury

40. *Ibid.*, 26, footnote, which reads:-

The new line of road, about 32 miles, adverted to by Mr Griffith's report, and already commenced, will reduce the distance between Tralee and Mallow alone at least 12 miles, and the distance from Mallow to Waterford could be considerably shortened. A direct line of communication by Tralee would be useful in opening a more direct intercourse between Kenmare, Valentia and other harbours on the south and west coasts of Ireland and Waterford. Should the plan which has been proposed, and for which an Act of Parliament has been obtained be carried into effect, of opening a direct communication by steam vessels from Valentia to America, a direct line from Waterford to Tralee will be of the utmost importance.

41. *Crown land experimental improvements and Cork and Kerry new roads, Ireland. Copies of papers relating to experimental improvements in progress on the crown lands in the county of Cork; and to the new lines of public road in course of construction through the district in which the said Lands are situated, in the counties of Cork and Kerry . . . ordered by the House of Commons to be printed 26 March, 1834.* (Parliamentary papers. H.C. 1834 LI) no. 173, 24. On 17 April, 1834, Griffith sent in a slightly increased estimate, for £23,812.00. He explains the reason for the increase:

The amount of the estimate is greater than that formerly sent to your Lordship: this has been occasioned by an increase which I thought necessary to make in the dimensions of some of the bridges; and also by a material improvement in the county of Kerry part of the proposed road to Castle Island, which has been shortened upwards of half a mile; but in consequence of difficulties to be overcome, the

on 24 July 1832⁴² and at Kerry summer assizes, held in October 1832, the required sum was agreed by the grand jury. Cork grand jury agreed likewise.

Griffith opened up the work without delay, reporting to James Weale on 8 November 1832 that the new road for its entire length had been definitively marked out, with several gangs of men cutting drains through the bogs and wet lands of which the greater part of the line consisted and if the weather continued favourable, he expected to employ 500 men during the winter, exclusive of quarrymen and stonecutters.⁴³

BAGPIPE MUSIC

In the summer of 1833 Griffith had 1,250 men and 118 horses constantly employed. Considerable progress had been made on the roads, and two bridges were well advanced, each with two arches of 20 foot span, one of which, the King's Bridge, linked the crown estate to Kerry across the Blackwater.⁴⁴ Recreation was organised

amount of the estimate has been slightly increased (*Ibid.*, 23). (The portion of the estimate relating to Kerry was:

PORTION TO BE MADE IN THE COUNTY OF KERRY

	£	s.	d.
Amount of the estimate for forming, fencing, draining and metalling the county of Kerry part of the Castle Island road, viz. from the bounds of the County of Kerry at Pobble O'Keefe to Mangbridge at Castle Island, length 12m. 2f. 12p.	5,415	11	2
Amount of estimate for bridges, gulleys and covered drains on this part of the road	2,121	14	9½
Amount of estimate for forming, fencing, draining and metalling that part of the road from Clonbannon to Shanough Cross, situated in the county of Kerry, length 4f. 20p.	257	8	0
Amount of estimate for bridges, gulleys and covered drains on this part of the road	570	3	5½
TOTAL	£8,364	17	5
One-third thereof proposed to be charged on the county of Kerry	£2,788	5	9½
			(<i>Ibid.</i> , 24)

42. *Ibid.*, 29.

43. *Ibid.*, 30.

44. *Ibid.*, 36. *Report of Richard Griffith to James Weale 10 August, 1833. Other bridges at or near the new town included King William's Town Bridge, Weale's Bridge, Knockeerourke W. Bridge, Knockeerourke E. Bridge, Leader Bridge, Trench's Bridge, Ballymacquirk Bridge.* (Parliamentary papers H.C., 1834 LI) no. 173, 45.

which Griffith approved, with understandable reservations about one aspect of it, and the McAuliffe Mountains echoed to the skirl of the bagpipes as on the occasion described by him in matter-of-fact terms:

On Wednesday last, the labourers who had been employed on the works, for a distance of about six miles on either side of King William's Town, were paid there. On this occasion, the place exhibited the appearance of a small country fair. Two large booths, containing Manchester goods, were erected; several for cakes, and other eatables; and, I regret to say, five for the sale of spirits. In the evening there came a piper, and the assemblage was amused with a regular dance. As might be expected, there were some drunken men, but no quarrelling.

I have directed that in future no stands for the sale of spirits be allowed, and I shall take care at the next pay day to enforce the order; but I should rather wish to encourage the sale of clothing and eatables.⁴⁵

Nearly £9,000 was spent in 1833, 'the whole of which was paid to the labourers actually employed'. The spending of this money had a striking effect, seen in the many superior type houses being built on the lands adjoining the road. Lime for the land was all-important to Griffith.

The introduction of lime for manure is the great desideratum in the country. Long experience has proved its fertilising effect on cold clay soils, when perfectly drained; but hitherto . . . owing to want of roads, the only means of transport was in panniers on horses backs, or, as I have frequently witnessed, on the backs of the women and children.⁴⁶

The King's Bridge and Duncannon Bridge over the Blackwater were completed in 1834;⁴⁷ a thirty-one years lease was taken of the limestone quarry of Carrigdulkeen (Carrandulkeen) in the lands of Mausrowr, Co. Kerry, belonging to the earl of Kenmare, for the supply of limestone to the crown estate.⁴⁷

Griffith does not fail to pay tribute to the men who worked on the roads. 'I cannot conclude a subject in which I feel a great interest' he writes, 'without expressing my admiration of the industry and docility of the people who have been employed by me during the last year and a half, both on the new roads and on the Crown land improvements. Not a complaint is made, nor a

45. *Ibid.*, 37.

46. *Ibid.*, 38.

47. *Ibid.*, 65.

murmur heard; but all is zeal and anxiety to perform the duty allotted to each'.⁴⁸

LIME AND LAND RESUSCITATION

By June 1836 the Killarney-Mallow portion of road from Shanough (spelled variously Shanagh, Shannagh, etc.) Cross inside the Kerry border, to Roskeen Bridge on the Blackwater six miles west of Mallow, was completed and transferred to the Commissioners of Public Works. The Clonbanin-Castleisland line was completed between Clonbanin and the summit of Knocknaboul, two miles west of King William's Town. The remaining eight miles from there to Castleisland was in such a forward state that Griffith hoped to finish it and transfer it to the Board of Works by the end of 1836.⁴⁹ By June 1836 limestone had been drawn from the Carrigdulkeen quarry for the production of upwards of 3,000 barrels of lime for treating the land. All the turf supply for burning the lime became exhausted, and lime-burning would have had to stop until the following August, had Griffith not made the fortunate discovery of a thin bed of anthracite within a mile of King William's Town. 'It remained for us to introduce green-crop husbandry into the boggy and hitherto unfruitful mountains of Cork and Kerry; and, from the success of the experiments that have been made, no doubt can be entertained as to the successful results.'⁵⁰ Already the landed proprietors of the rich lowland country had been surprised at the numbers of fat cattle from the mountains, where only turnips had hitherto been grown, that competed at the Easter markets with the stall-fed cattle from their demesnes. Griffith hoped the mountain farmers would be able to produce green crops for winter feed for cattle and increase winter milk yields.⁵¹

THE INCREASE OF COMMERCE

The heavy rains of the autumn and winter of 1836-7 held up progress on the Castleisland-Knocknaboul road but Griffith hoped

48. *Ibid.*, 44.

49. *Mr Griffith's further report of the progress made on the new Cork and Kerry roads and of the improvements on the crown estate of King William's Town, County Cork.* (Parliamentary papers, H.C., 1836 XLVII) no. 315, 1.

50. *Ibid.*, 8.

51. *Further report of Richard Griffith, Esq., 10 March, 1837, on the progress made in the experimental improvements at King William's Town.* (Parliamentary papers, H.C., 1837-8 XLVI) no. 69, 1.

to complete it by May 1837. Preparations were being made in March 1837 to cater for passenger traffic by establishing two stage cars from Tralee, through King William's Town, to Cork, 'and thus the district between Castleisland and Cork, which, previously to the commencement of the works, was nearly waste and quite inaccessible, will become the scene of active agricultural improvement, and the direct line of thoroughfare from Tralee, the capital of the county of Kerry, to the City of Cork'.⁵¹

Those parts of the roads completed were in excellent order and made for easier load-carrying by horses. The usual load for a single horse cart was now 20 cwt, sometimes 22, while on ordinary country roads 12 cwt was considered heavy.⁵² The climate of the district through which the roads ran was extremely moist, and sandstone, the only material the country produced, was not a durable stone for metalling, being easily crushed by heavy carriages. But so carefully had the original formation of these roads been laid and so perfect the drainage arrangements, that the surface continued firm and dry, despite the heavy traffic 'consisting principally of strings of loaded carriages, frequently 20 in number, drawing limestone or culm, the whole following in the same track'.⁵³

The Commissioners of Woods expressed their indebtedness to Griffith for his work on the King William's Town project, referring to 'his constant and unwearied attention in enabling them to give a fair trial to these experimental improvements'.⁵⁴ It was a tribute well deserved. Besides his capacity for hard work, Griffith had the splendid optimism that makes for success. It is seen in his 1839 report, in which he surveys the progress of the model settlement, the economic and social effects of his completed road schemes, and the prospect for the future. In general it was a cheerful picture, of which the following extract is relevant to Kerry:

Since my last general Report of June 1836 already mentioned, the Farm Improvements and Building in King William's Town then in progress have been completed; and at the present Time the Village, and the improved District surrounding it, presents a pleasing Picture of Civilization and Cultivation. The whole of the new Roads for a Length of

52. *Ibid.*, 1. In a later report (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1839 XLVII) no. 233, 6, Griffith puts the loads carried by single horses and drays at 25 and 30 cwt.

53. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

54. *Crown land experimental improvements and Cork and Kerry new roads.* (Parliamentary papers, H.C., 1836 XLVII) no. 315, 1.

Forty-three Miles have been completed, and at this Moment Coaches leave Tralee and Killarney for Cork, and also leave Cork for Tralee and Killarney, every Morning, travelling by the new Roads; and thus this Mountain District, which a few Years ago was quite inaccessible except to Persons travelling on Foot, has become the Scene of active agricultural Improvement, and the direct Thoroughfare from Tralee, the Capital of the County of Kerry, to Cork. In respect to commercial Traffic, the new Roads have become the greatest Thoroughfare in the Country; and it was ascertained during the last Year that 80,000 loaded Carts passed by Dromagh Flour Mill, situated on the Side of the new Road Four Miles beyond the Junction at Clonbanin of the Killarney Branch with that of the main Line from Castle Island by King William's Town to Cork.

The Articles of Traffic consist of Corn, Meal, Flour, Butter, Iron, Timber, Porter, Spirits, Groceries, and Shop Goods, to and from Cork, Tralee, and Killarney; also of Limestone for Agriculture and building drawn into the Coal Country, and of Culm for burning Lime and malting drawn from the Collieries into the surrounding Limestone Districts. I have the Pleasure to say that the Roads are all in excellent Order; and that the usual Load drawn in a Single-horse Cart or Dray amounts to from Twenty-four to Thirty Hundred Weight, while in the ordinary Roads of the Country from Twelve to Fifteen Hundred Weight is considered to be a full Load for a Horse.

The Inn at King William's Town, which has been occupied as such for the last Three Months, is crowded with Carmen every Night, and frequently Stable Accommodation is given to Twenty-five Horses. The Inn has been so arranged as to accommodate both Carmen and Persons of a superior Class, without in the least interfering with each other; the upper Part of the House being altogether reserved for the latter, while the Carmen are accommodated in the lower, and their sleeping Apartments are contained in an Addition connected with the Offices, and from which they can have Access to the Stables without passing through the House. The Innkeeper and his Wife are both respectable Persons, and are great Favourites with Travellers of all Classes, so that I have no Doubt they will succeed; and that the Establishment of a good House of Accommodation distant Twelve Miles from the Town of Castle Island and the same Distance from the Town of Kanturk will prove a great Convenience to Travellers.

In speaking of the new Roads, the Buildings, and Improve-

ments, I have constantly in remembrance the former State of the District. The Improvements that have been effected must be considered in the Light of the Establishment of a new Colony; and if the same System that has been successfully adopted in this was followed in others, little would be heard of Want of Employment. At this Moment a very general Spirit of agricultural Industry pervades the People of Ireland from North to South; and a little Aid from the Landed Proprietors, occasionally assisted by the Public, would effect a most beneficial Change in the Habits and agricultural Knowledge of the People. Already several spirited Landed Proprietors are at work, some of whom have most judiciously published Statements of the Result of these Improvements and Experiments, and others, though they have not done so, have notwithstanding attracted very general Notice.⁵⁵

55. Further report of Richard Griffith Esq., dated 15th July, 1839, to the Commissioner of Her Majesty's Woods, &c., on the progress of the roads and land improvements on the crown estate of King William's Town, County Cork. (Parliamentary papers, H.C., 1839 XLVII) no. 233, 6-7. The progress of the new town is described as follows:-

The Village of King William's Town present consists of the Inn, the Schoolhouse, Four Houses of 2 stories, and Seven Houses of One Story in Height, together with an Office attached to each. These Buildings have all been erected according to the Plans approved of by your Board and submitted to Parliament. They are at present occupied, as follows:

	Rent of House		
	£	s.	d.
Inn, Mr. Martin Roche, let at present for	18	0	0
Schoolhouse and Offices, valued at	16	0	0
Schoolmaster's House, Ditto	6	0	0
Police Barrack, Ditto	6	0	0
Shop, lately held by Mr. N. Roche, now unoccupied	8	0	0
Dispensary, valued at	£2	0	0
Mason's Apartments, let for	3	10	0
Mr. Ivis's Ditto and Assistant Schoolmistress	2	10	0
	8	0	0
Cottages, South Side of Road, let for	9	2	0
Ditto North Side Ditto Ditto	10	0	0
Stable given free to Coach Company in lieu of Carriage of Letters and Parcels from Castle Island, Tralee, &c., valued at	3	0	0
Present Amount of the Value of the Buildings in the Village	84	2	0

Some of the Buildings, as the Schoolhouse, Master's House, Police Barracks, &c., will never bring in any Income, and are set down at Valuation Rents; but the other Buildings do or will produce Rents; and as the Traffic increases the Rent of the Inn may be increased, as

Thus Griffith's roads became highways of commerce through the hitherto barely charted uplands of the Kerry-Cork-Limerick borders. That they continued to be so is confirmed in his report of 24 July 1844, from the General Survey and Valuation Office, 2 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin, where he states:

In regard to the great lines of communication, called the new Cork and Kerry roads, two thirds pass through the village of King William's Town and the Crown Estate, I have to observe that they are in excellent order, being kept in repair under the superintendence of the Board of Public Works, and these roads, though passing through a mountainous country, are now used as the main lines of communication between Tralee and Cork, and Killarney and Cork.

The farm roads, and the road from King William's Town

well as of the Two large Houses of Two Stories in Height, built for Shops, which are well worth 12/- a Year each, and I have no Doubt will produce that Sum at no distant Period.

In a substantial entry, Lewis's *Topographical Dictionary* (1837) states that King William's Town

chiefly consists of a row of neat houses with shops, and of dwellings for workmen, situated on the northern side of the road [to Castle-Island]; at the western extremity near the bridge is a commodious dwelling-house with suitable out-offices; at present occupied by the sub-engineer, but intended for an inn, on the completion of the model farm-house now in course of erection near the village, which will be his future residence. Immediately opposite is a neat garden and nursery, extending to the river, which, though formed in the centre of a deep bog, has produced flowers, vegetables, and seedlings of a superior description, and from which nearly 50 acres of mountain land have already been planted. To the east of the nursery garden a handsome school-house in the Elizabethan style has been erected; it is surmounted by a cupola and its front ornamented by a clock; and it is in contemplation to erect a chapel, with a residence for the priest. The village is well supplied with water from a well on the Kerry side of the river. Three substantial farm-houses have been erected in the vicinity for tenants of the state ... and, as the land is gradually reclaimed, others will be erected on different parts of the estate, of which nearly 100 acres have already been brought into cultivation on an improved system, and made to produce excellent crops of grain and potatoes; and about 60 acres of mountain land have been drained for meadow and pasture.

King William's Town, originally named from William IV, is now called Ballydesmond. Modern gazetteers are less generous to it than their fore-runners. The comprehensive *Shell Guide to Ireland*, second edition, revised 1967, has no entry or index reference for it under any name.

In a description of 1934, T.M. Ó Drisceoil, of the Ordnance Survey says: 'To-day it is one of the best villages in the county [of Cork], neat, clean and prosperous, with accommodation for the tourist and traveller' *Cork Hist. & Arch. Soc. Jn.* 1934) 22. *Cork Hist. & Arch. Soc. Jn.* (1934) 22.

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to Carrendulkeen limestone quarry, made also at the public expense, are also in good order, and there is no difficulty of access from every farm in the estate to the limestone quarry and also to the principal markets for agricultural produce, namely Cork, Tralee and Killarney, and this in a district which, previously to the opening of the new Cork and Kerry roads, was inaccessible even to horsemen, except in very dry weather.⁵⁶

The next report from Griffith's hand came in 1851. It provides a sad anti-climax. Having detailed again the economic benefits produced in the hill country by the money spent on the last phase of roadbuilding, some £23,000 in all, he goes on:

And the progress of land improvement and cultivation was rapid and extensive up to the end of the year 1845; in the year 1846 the famine commenced, the effects of which, combined with the general reduction of the prices of agricultural produce, has paralysed all exertion, and apathy and wretchedness have succeeded to industry and exertion.⁵⁷

His excellent roads remained. In a fragment of autobiography which he dictated in 1869, Griffith recounts some of his Kerry experiences.⁵⁸

56. *Report of the improvements on the crown estate at King William's Town.* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1844 XLIII) no. 612.

57. *Report of Richard Griffith, Esq., dated 5 June,* (Parliamentary papers, H.C. 1851 L) no. 637, 4.

The list of instructions issued by Griffith was entitled: *Duty of the labourers or roadmen appointed to keep the roads in repair, made under the directions of Richard Griffith, Esq., government engineer.*

Most of these were taken from the principal road act, 36 Geo III, C.55. It was the duty of the roadmen, for example, to summon before the magistrates any one who

shall steep or dry flax, or burn bricks, lime or weeds within 100 feet of the centre of the road, or shall cut turf or make a turf stack within 40 feet of the centre of the road; or shall build any wall or make any ditch, or dig any pit, within 30 feet of the centre of the road, or shall lay any dirt, dung, turf, straw, rubbish or scouring of any ditches or drains, or any stones, bricks, timber, sand, clay or lime within 30 feet of the centre of the road, or before any house within 20 yards of the centre of the road, or shall leave or permit to be left on the road any plough, harrow, cart or carriage without the horses, or shall beat any flax, or winnow any corn, or shall spread any linen, blanket or cloth for winnowing corn within 100 feet of the centre of the road, or shall leave any dead beast on the road, or skin or permit to be skinned the carcass of any beast, within 100 feet of the centre of the road, unless in a house or yard enclosed with walls etc.

See also Maxwell: *Country and town in Ireland under the Georges* (Dundalk 1949) 281.

58. Public Record Office, 16067. This is a negative photostat copy of twenty eight quarto pages typed in double spacing. The beginning reads:

He puts the question of his birthplace beyond doubt. He was born in 8 Hume St, Dublin in 1784. (In fact the house, now a part of Hume St hospital, is marked by a plaque). On his way to study at Edinburgh University, he went to Newcastle to see the coal mines, 'and it was there that I met Miss Waldie, and fell desperately in love with her'. In 1809 he commenced his geological map of Ireland, and three years later he married Miss Waldie.

Some time after I was commissioned by the Board of Works and the Valuation Office to carry out very extensive road making in Cork, Tipperary, Limerick and Kerry and until this (the?) year 1823, I worked with 7,000 men under me, and completed 250 miles of road through most mountainous tracts of country, and beautiful roads they are. I had a house in Mallow all this time and my wife lived there for seven years. She became a great favourite for she was very pretty and amiable and even now when I go there the people talk of her no end. Of course I used to go back and forward to London a great deal

But pleasant as it was living in Mallow I liked Kerry a great deal better, not that I ever lived there but I had to go back and forward attending to the engineering and the people about used to ask me to stay with them whenever I liked, particularly Bland of Derryquin. He was an uncommonly jovial hospitable fellow, indeed he was too noisy sometimes and especially for his wife for she was a quiet sedate person and her son was very like her, mighty quiet and prim, except when he was eating oysters, and oh, I never saw a fellow that could eat as many as he could. He was extremely young at the time and he'd think nothing of a hundred at a sitting. They weren't small ones either for the best oyster beds in Ireland aren't ten minutes row from Derryquin — splendid oysters they are — one of them would be a meal for any one but that fellow, and there he'd go at them as grave as possible never uttering a word for fear of losing time. And then old Bland had a fish pond just beside the house, where the tide came in every day and brought all kinds of fish you could think of, so that even when it was too stormy

45 Merrion Square,
Dublin.

This manuscript was dictated by Sir Richard Griffith, Bart., to the Honourable Mrs Burrell (then Miss May Banks) at the above address. It ends abruptly with Griffith's visit to Killarney in 1844. The excerpts given here occur between pages 15-21.

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for the boats to go out you could always have plenty of fish

Well then besides Bland, there was Mahoney at Dromore, he hadn't built his new house then, but I hear it's very well done. And there was Mr. Hussey, Lord Lansdowne's agent, who was a very nice fellow. Lord and Lady Lansdowne came over to see their property there, in the year 1822. It was Lady Lansdowne's first visit and she had come to see about what could be done for the poor people, for it was the year of the first famine and there was a great deal of misery

The Killarney region is most interesting. I know every stone of it. My friend Profr. Gr [sic] and I went all over it together. The country people used to call him the devil's goat, he was such a good walker, but when I came they called me the devil's own goat — a nice distinction . . .⁵⁸

Sir Robert Kane, in his important book *The Industrial Resources of Ireland*, has noted the social effects of Griffith's roadbuilding in the Kerry border country as follows:

In the district called Pobble O'Keeffe's country, on the limits of the counties of Cork, Limerick, and Kerry, which had been a place of refuge for malefactors and desperadoes of all kinds, and had remained totally uncultivated, a set of roads were made under the direction of Mr. Griffith. As the roads advanced, cottages and farm houses sprang into existence along their sides; cultivation extended itself from their edges into the waste. The bad characters that had inhabited it disappeared, and a single policeman has marched a prisoner through the entire district, without any other than the most friendly greetings along his way. The whole organisation of the locality has been changed, and at the same time with a pecuniary benefit to the public funds, which I shall thereafter notice.⁵⁹

59. *The Industrial resources of Ireland* 2nd ed. (Dublin 1845) 346-7.