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# Tullamore Hotel

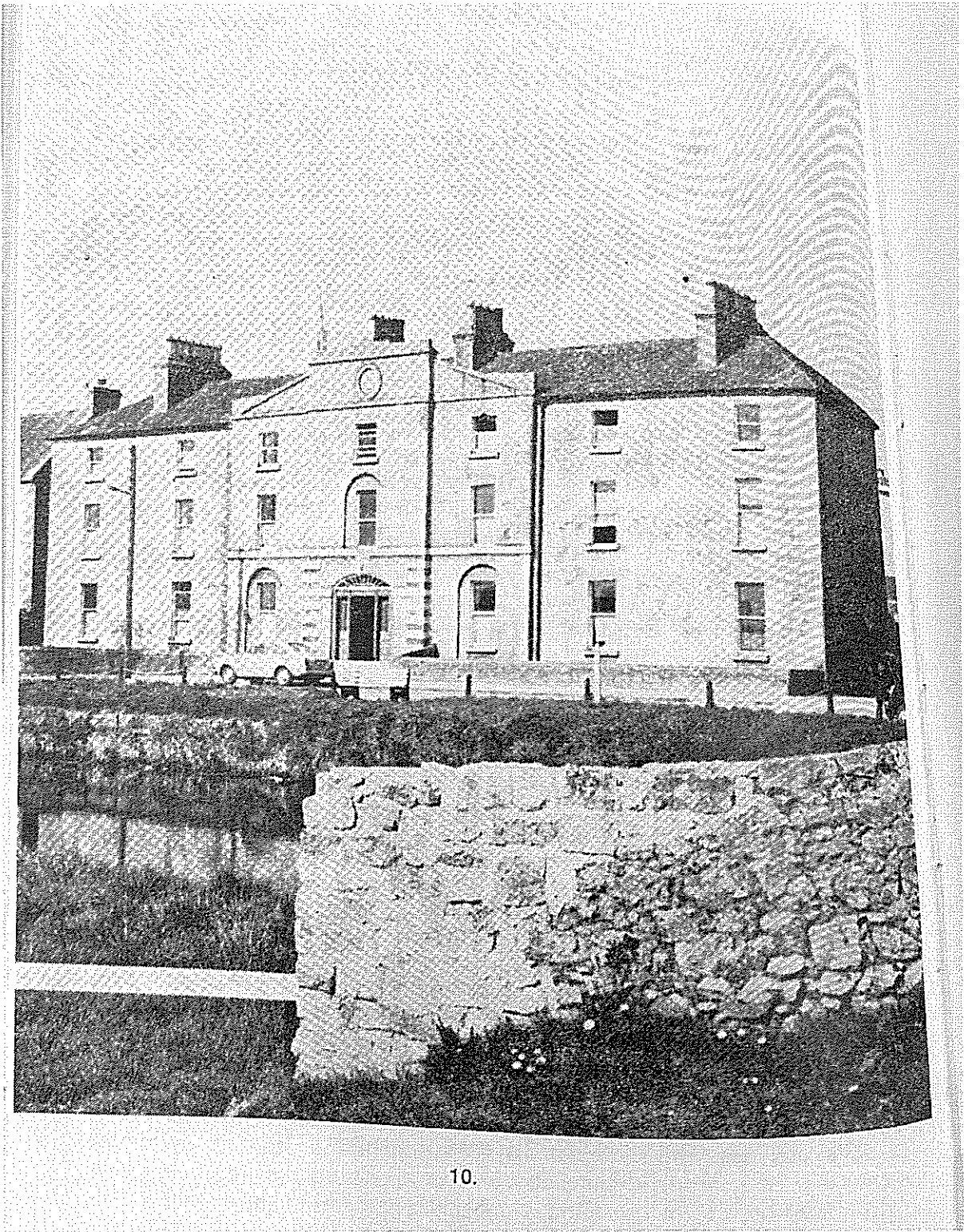
Ruth Delany.

In 1798, having finally overcome the enormous engineering difficulties involved in making a canal through the Bog of Allen, the Grand Canal was completed to Tullamore. This was to be the terminus for several years because a controversy arose over the line of the continuation of the canal to the Shannon and, although this was eventually completed in 1803, some of the levels were difficult to staunch and it was not permanently opened until 1805.

On 2nd April 1798 the passenger service between Dublin and Tullamore commenced; the fare was 10s. 10d. state cabin and 5s. 11½d. common cabin (Irish currency). It will be remembered that at this time Tullamore was undergoing a rebuilding programme after the disastrous "Balloon" fire and the inspector reported to the board that there was a great shortage of passenger accommodation in the town. It was decided that a harbour should be constructed and a hotel should be built similar to the one under construction at Robertstown. Michael Hayes won the contract for the hotel and work commenced in March 1801. Hayes had established himself as the stonework contractor for the locks and bridges of the canal and it is interesting to note that shortly after this the board decided to strike £42. 11s. 7d. off his account for the "extraordinary and unnecessary" expense incurred in building the 26th lockhouse just outside Tullamore. The contract price for building the hotel is not stated but it was revealed at a government inquiry in 1812 that up to that date the building had cost the company £3,200 and the furnishings £1,200.

Early in 1802 the hotel was ready to receive the public. Robertstown hotel had been finally completed in the previous year and, although it was being run by the company with a hotelkeeper, it was decided in the case of Tullamore to make efforts to lease the building. George Forrest, who was also engaged in the coaching business, agreed to lease it for 3 years and in 1804 he renewed his lease for a further term. In 1807, however, he complained that changes in the passage boat time-tables had deprived him of much of his business. In an effort to fight competition from coaching establishments, the canal company had been forced to provide a through service to Shannon Harbour and most of the passengers, no longer obliged to spend the night at Tullamore or Robertstown, elected to continue their journey.

Forrest did not renew his lease and the board decided to appoint its own hotelkeeper. Robert Boucher, a passage boat master, was



offered the position at a weekly wage of two guineas, but he was dismissed two years later because of "the misconduct of his wife". Business must have been very poor because in October 1813 the Board resolved that efforts should be made to find a new tenant and if these failed the hotelkeeper's wages should be reduced to one guinea and the wine and spirit licence discontinued. In the following year Andrew Morgan, the hotelkeeper, agreed to lease it for £52 per annum but he had to undertake to pay all the taxes and licence and to maintain it as a hotel for the passengers. For a time all went well; Morgan furnished the Board with a copy of one of his advertisements:

To such as take the Boat his House claims a decided preference, as it precludes every disappointment; the Apartments fitted up with neatness and elegance; Beds constantly aired; Good Dinners and excellent wines; Carriages, and Jaunting Cars, and Careful Drivers at reduced prices.

In the 1820's, following the end of hostilities with France, Ireland entered a difficult period economically. Morgan reported a decrease in business and his rent was halved but finally in 1834 he said that he would have to terminate his lease because business was reduced to "a few breakfasts". An inventory was made of the furniture which included:

15 night chairs unfurnished	£4. 10s. 0d.
1 ouncil and a deal Beaufet	
1 set of Northumberland tables 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in x 4 in (bad)	£3. 0s. 0d.
4 fourposter bedsteads with curtains	from £4. 10s. to £1 each
22 waggon roof bedsteads with curtains	17s. 6d. each
6 waggon roof ditto without curtains	£1 10s. 0d. each
1 sofa bedstead (bad)	10s.

In the same year, 1834, Bridget Purcell agreed to rent the hotel for £50 per year and three years later when she married it was reported that she intended to continue in the business and the hotel was "in tolerable repair" and "respectably conducted". In October, 1838, the Board was told that the hotel was "generally empty" and it was suggested that she should be asked to surrender her lease. In the following year, however, it was reported that Mrs. Galbraith was living in the hotel once more and paying off her debts and the establishment was "better conducted than formerly". Finally at the end of that year she surrendered her lease and the local canal collector was placed in charge of the building.

A new tenant, William Morgan, was not found until June 1841. He undertook to maintain a limited establishment of a waiting room and 8 bedrooms, but he fell into arrears with his rent and 2 years later

he was forced to surrender the lease and his sureties had to pay part of his debt. This would appear to mark the end of the building's life as a hotel and there is no further record of it until 1848 when it was leased to the Vice-Guardians of Tullamore Union, who surrendered it in June 1851 "in better order and condition than when they took it over". Again there is no record until September 1855 when it was leased to Michael English, one of the company's carpenters, for £12 per year, but by this time it was said to be "neglected" and to have "suffered very great dilapidation".

In 1856 the Midland Great Western Railway Company took a short lease while they were constructing their line from Clara to Streamstown. Finally on 1st April 1859 the Board agreed to let the Hotel, yard and gardens to the Rev. McAlroy, P.P., for 61 years at £20 per annum provided he would undertake to spend £100 on "permanent and substantial repair and improvement of the concern."

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The old hotel is to be demolished — if it has not already come down. News on going to press is that a new building has already gone up behind the old one and when the new is completed, the old is to be removed.

There is nothing to be said by outsiders. It was obvious from the beginning that the people of Tullamore were content with the arrangements and considered them inevitable. The Tullamore branch of the Inland Waterways made a protest, but without the backing of the townspeople in general, the protest carried no weight.

(Ruth Delany's article first appeared in **The Westmeath Offaly Independent**. We are grateful to the Editor for permission to re-print).