

# Castletown Quay in the 1920's

George H Freestone remembers the quay area as it was in his boyhood in the 1920's. Many houses in the area were demolished in the 1950's to make room for a car park. He wishes to thank and acknowledge the help of Lady Wilson in compiling the information in this article. Numbers in brackets refer to the accompanying plan.

I was born at 20 Parliament Square in Castletown in December 1921 (15). My very early days are far distant but, when I was able to take notice of things, I remember playing and the Quay. To me at that time the Quay, Fitt's Rock and the slaughter-houses were Castletown. In fact I didn't know that the Iron Bridge or the Apostle's Bridge existed until I started school at Victoria Road. Castle Street was the end of Castletown to me. I remember making boats with a penknife, with a match stick for a mast and a paper sail, and sailing them in the dubs off Fitt's Rock, getting a wet "botty" slipping into the slippery dub just over the breakwater walls. It is not slippery there now, but in those days it was fed with the seepage from the slaughter-houses.

The slaughter-houses belonged to Gellings, butchers of Bank Street shop. Johnny Gell of the Parade (at present Barclay's Bank) and Cubbons, butchers of Arbory Street and, of course, Florrie's shop at the beginning of Malew Street (at present a second hand shop).

At Johnny Gell's, Walter Dee and Cyrill Quilliam were the slaughter-men, sometimes helped by Eddy Wheeler who later became postman. As kids we would watch the killing of the beasts and we sometimes pulled on the rope to force the animal's head down to a ring on the floor. In that position it would be pole-axed and then a cane was inserted into the brain before it would be bled. The piece of meat from the cut, the sweetbread, was a delicacy sometimes given to us. When a pig was killed, Walter Dee would give the belly to Bella Pollard who lived with her many cats exactly opposite to the slaughter-house entrance in Chapel Gut (7). Walter's favourite shout at this time was "Belly for Bellow!" He would repeat this often until one of us kids would bring the belly to Bella.

Quite a lot of men were employed at Cubbon's slaughter-house, which was quite a thriving business. I remember Charlie Cubbon "Lolla", John Stanley Cubbon, Tom Douglas Cubbon, Tom Faragher, Ridgeway Quirk, Bark Callister, Henry Shemmin (Henry was also delivery man) and Bobby Milligan. Old Harry Cubbon had a pony and trap and went round the countryside in the course of his business.

We were never much involved with Gelling's slaughter-house. With Old Man Gelling, Tom, Malcolm and Ernest, it was more of a family affair.

In the twenties, everything was done with manpower. For instance, the cattle would be bought at the market, or wherever, and herded, driven by road, to fields alongside Curlew Cottage at Scarlett, C Faragher was the drover, where they were grazed until required.

When the time came, they would be driven back to the slaughter-house and held in the lairage until they cooled down again. On one occasion we, as kids, were following on and shouting etc. One of the animals went straight up the stairs of Teddy Kewin's house in King Street (2), the staircase being directly in line with the door. I think Bobby Milligan got in front and drove the animal down, back into the street.

Also in King Street live C Callow, the tailor (1). His son, Edward; and I played together as kids. Edward's aunty was Jenny Bell, the sweetshop (33). Edward always had sweets. Regarding Edward Callow, I have great respect for him as being a seafarer. He was Captain Callow and rose to be Commodore of his fleet. Edward is

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still alive today. Old Jim Condon in King Street (46), known as "Jim the Artist" was a real character. He would get clean overalls Monday morning and sit all week on the Market Square - I never remember him painting!

Buck Collister, butcher, known as "Windy Bills", why I don not know, lived in Chapel Lane opposite the Grammar School in one of the two little cottages. Next door was Eddie Monty Callow (44,45). I never remember him working but he fished every day, rod and line, off the pier head of the Irish Quay. Then came Mother Quinney (43). She lived to be a hundred and sat on the step all day smoking a "clay cutty" pipe. Mother QUINNEY also launched the *PIP VAN WINKLE* in her hundredth year. The *RIP VAN* was an old hulk rebuilt by Willie Cubbon "Coady", Tom Faragher, J R Cooil, Lalla Cubbon. She was reborn in Malew Street works shed (now part of the Mill Street/Malew Street complex.) Lizzie Christian, Lizzie the Flitter, lived with dozens of cats in one of the Alms Houses in Chapel Lane (12). Elly Wipes lived in the other (13). I think her name was Cubbon but she was always known as Elly Wipes, a harmless old biddy.

We lived in 20 Parliament Square (15). Opposite were the Misses Cavendish (49, two old spinsters who, when they made rice pudding, would hand the dish out of the back window for us to scrape off.

Jack and Dickie Duke were fishermen. Their boat was called the *WILD WAVE*, a twenty-odd foot open boat. In August and September they would row and sail, "dipping lug sail", to the Carrick Rock in Port St Mary Bay and catch 15 or 20 callig and blokin and sell them on the slabs on the Castle's Dike. Their main job was fishing crabs and lobster and they would take them for shipping to Castletown Railway Station. Jack Duke lived down the Quay (23) and Mrs Duke would make a ginger cake and would always call us when it was ready. I often got a sail in the *WILD WAVE* out to the stock pot were they kept their crabs alive until needed. In consequence I got the name "Skipper" - some people still call me that. Dickie Duke lived down Quay Lane in the house on the right with steps up to it. (19). Dickie's wife Alice played the mandolin.

Still down on the Quay and harbour, the general cargo boat, owned and run by the Steam Packet Company, used to come in once and possibly twice a week. The boat being the *TRY CONNELL* (pronounced Tirconnell), the master Captain Collister.

I have in my narrative mentioned the Quay as "my area". In those days everyone played in their own areas and a stranger in our area would be pelted with "tangles" (seaweed) - in fact a tangle fight with the Queen Street gang occurred quite often.

Of the families of my "play" childhood the two most remembered are the Blackburns, who lived down the lane (57) and the Kellys. Mr Blackburn was a bus driver and had quite a large family. The older boys were some of my playmates. Jimmy Kelly (39) was a painter and had a still larger family and one of the sons, Tom, is approximately the same age as me. We attended school together and we played together, digging in the sand, playing skimming on the water, catching grannies for bait. (grannies - like woodlice only of the sea). Our main playthings were a whip and top and an iron hoop. The hoops would have been made a C Teare's, Blacksmith (28). I forget how much they cost but it would only be coppers. The top of course, everyone shared until someone broke a window and that would be the end of that - until next time!

The simple pleasures are the fondest memories! I never remember rainy days, only sunshine. Digging lugworms and fishing at the White Pole or Bollan Rock under the then Mr Chamber's house on the other side of the harbour - or nutties with a bent pin

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and cotton on Fitt's Rock. And holding Kelly the Ducks, publican of the Duck's Nest, the Mapleleaf, in alongside the slip, sometimes falling in the sea.

At the back of 20 Parliament Square we had a whitewashed area and, when a large conger was caught my father would split it and hang it up on the wall for the winter. This was our salt cod! My father owned a bike and I can remember being taken to Langness on the carrier at the back to see the great whale washed up. (As a child, anyone who owned a bike was a millionaire! My first bike was bought for 7 shillings). We also had a grey tom cat called Barney. When the tide was right it would go down the slipway and hook a fish out and then rattle on the bedroom window to be let in.

In 1929 my father moved to the south of England and we returned early in the '30s to live at 75 Malew Street, my sunshine days on my beloved Quay forgotten. But then I was able to discover Castletown and the rest of the world.

G H Freestone, Castletown, July 1994