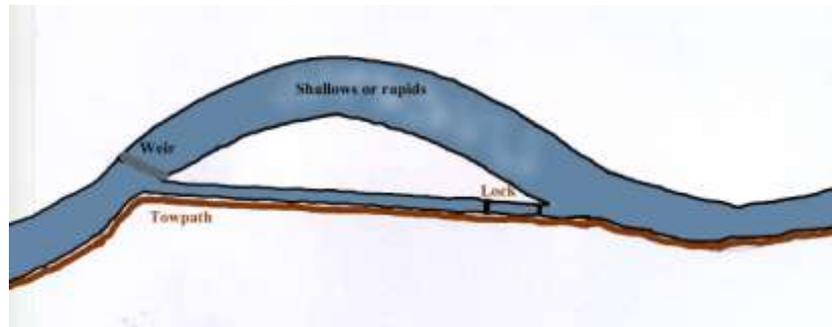


The Canal

The Irish Parliament gave a grant of £10,000 in 1755 to make the River Nore navigable as far as Kilkenny. Boats could already get up as far as Inistioge, but from there on there were weirs and places too shallow for boats to pass easily. To deal with this it would be necessary to dig a number of short canals to bypass such obstructions. A weir would be constructed across the river at the head of the canal. This forced some of the water into the canal, while the rest flowed over the weir. There would be a lock, or sometimes several locks on the canal. The



water level above the lock was higher than that below, and the lock had two pairs of gates to enable barges to drop to the lower level, or rise to the higher one. If the upstream gates were open, and the downstream ones closed, a barge could be towed into the lock. The upper gates would then be closed, and afterwards the water in the lock

would be let out through a sluice gate. The barge would sink with the water inside the lock, and when it had reached the level of the water below the lock, the lower gates would be opened and the barge could be on its way downriver. The barge was pulled by a horse which was led along a towpath alongside the river or canal.

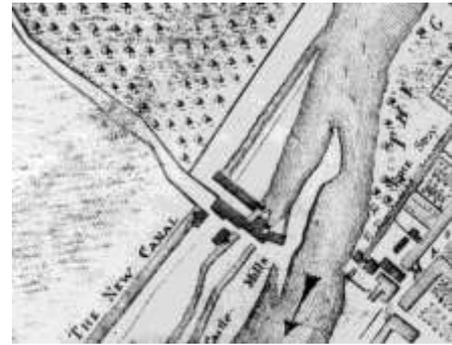
What might have been



This lock is on the River Barrow at Leighlinbridge. The main river channel is on the right and upriver you can see the weir which diverts some of the flow of the river into a short canal. There are two pairs of lock gates. The upper gates are closed and

the water behind them is several feet higher than the level in the lock. If a boat comes into the lock from below, the lower gates will be closed. The large wooden beam visible on the left gate makes it easy to close it. When the gates are closed water will flow into the lock from sluices in the upper gate. Its level will rise, and the boat will rise with the water. When the water inside the lock reaches the level of the water above the upper gate, the people on the boat will open the upper gate and the boat can sail upriver. The house on the left was built for a lock-keeper, whose duty it was to open and close the gates, and work the sluices. Nowadays all this is done by the people on the cruisers using the waterway.

Unfortunately the canal on the River Nore was never finished. The start of the canal is marked on Rocque's map of Kilkenny, published in 1758. The whole project was abandoned in 1761 and no barges ever made the journey from Inistioge. On Rocque's map, right, you can see the Nore, a millrace leading to Castle Mills, and the start of The New Canal.



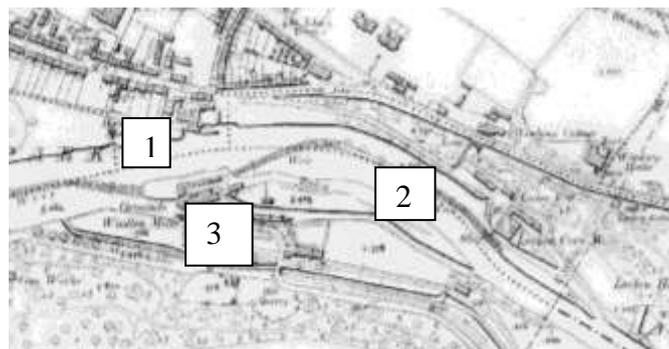
This photo shows the start of the canal as it is today. The weir is in the background, and the millrace entrance is hidden from this angle.

The next photo is taken farther down the canal walk. In the foreground is the cutting made for the canal. In the background is the ruined Lacken Mill on the far bank of the Nore.



The Canal Walk

The land used to construct the canal was eventually turned into a public walk and park for the citizens of Kilkenny. The first Ordnance Survey map of the city showed this walk as it was in the 1830's. You can see the weir on the



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river (1), the millrace providing power for Ormonde Mills (2), and the start of the disused canal (3), with a walk along the bank.

The entrance was made more impressive by the generosity of two mayors of Kilkenny, Edmond Smithwick and Robert Cane. The gates were a gift of the brewer, Edmond Smithwick, who was Mayor in 1844, and the stone gate lodge

was built in 1849, when Doctor Robert Cane gave his salary as Mayor to pay for its construction. The gates have been removed since this photo was taken in 1893, but the gate lodge still stands.

Further along the walk, the old canal bed has become a wide grassy area.



The 1893 photograph shows this area from the city end, while the 2008 photograph shows it from the opposite end. The old picture shows the bandstand which is still in the same position.



This gate and turnstile can still be seen at the end of the walk. It was called Quarry Gate in 1893, because it was near the Black Quarry, where Kilkenny’s famous “black marble” was quarried. The well on the right provided drinking water in the past.



This bridge over the old canal was called Quarry Bridge. It is beside Quarry Gate. Below is a detail from the picture. It shows



a man with a cart which seems to have a large

barrel on it. Perhaps he was getting a supply of water from the well. The lane between the high wall and the houses led to the Bennetsbridge road. The path in the foreground led to Archersgrove Mills, a few hundred metres downriver from where Ossory Bridge now stands.

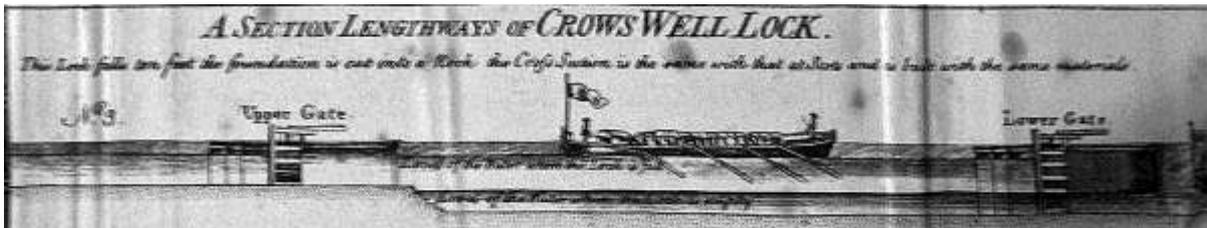




Left Quarry Gate and bridge today and, right, the dried up canal bed near Ossory Bridge

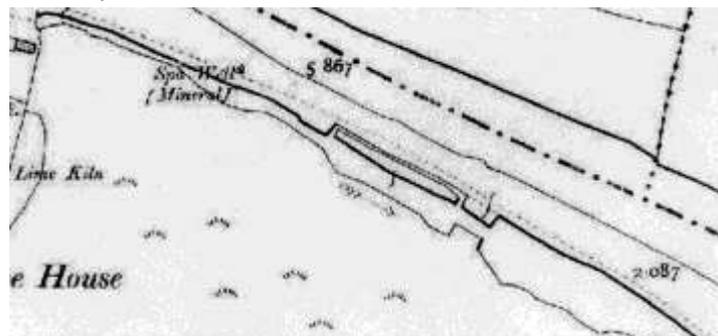


In 1872 Patrick Watters published a history of the Kilkenny Canal in the Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland. He included a map of the canal and drawings of the locks, taken from the printed journals of the Irish House of Commons. Below is a drawing of the lock at Crow's Well, just below Archersgrove Mills (also known as Fennessey's Mill)



In 1757 The Board of Commissioners responsible for the construction of the canal were told: "That at Crow's Well there is a fine stone lock, two hundred feet in length and twenty-one feet in breadth, with all its gates, sluices etc., which falls ten feet."

In this map, drawn at the beginning of the 20th century, It is easy to make out one side of the lock and the points where the lock gates were. Crow's well is marked as Spa Well. Today the well is so overgrown with briars and other vegetation, that you could pass it by without knowing that it was there.



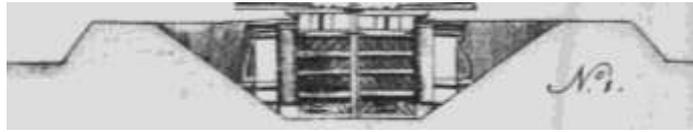
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Most of Crow's lock is gone. On the left, you can see the stonework on one side of one of the lock gates as it appeared in 1893. On the right is its present-day appearance. It is much overgrown, but some of the structure is still visible, as is part of Scot's Lock near the very start of the canal near the former Ormonde Mills. In the 18th century these mills were owned

by the Scott family. The watercourse is now crossed by a bridge leading to a dwelling house in the grounds of the old mill.

This is how the gates were presented in Patrick Watters' plan. Note the embankment on either side, the gates and the beams on top for opening them.



Today the remains of the lock are quite difficult to see. On the right of this picture you can see part of the stonework of the lock. Most of the lock has either disappeared or been covered over with earth.



At the present time the Canal Walk is being renovated by Kilkenny Borough Council. Perhaps the citizens of Kilkenny will be able to enjoy this fine walk for another couple of centuries.

1. When did the Irish Parliament give its first grant to build a canal on the Nore?
2. When was work abandoned?
3. What is the abandoned canal bed used for today?
4. What remains of the canal locks are still to be seen?
5. What do you think of this sculpture placed on the Canal Walk by Kilkenny Borough Council?

