

# Court of Inquiry - working conditions on the canals, lakes and rivers of Ireland - 1935

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In 1935 there was a court of inquiry set up by the Minister for Industry and Commerce to look into the operational practices of the Grand Canal Company (GCC), following a labour dispute between the GCC and its workmen. The report of the inquiry gives us considerable insight into the conditions of the men working on the canals and rivers and general information about industrial relations at that time.

Ten demands of the workers were investigated. These covered the working hours and off time of the boatmen, the duties of the crew and handling of specific cargoes.

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During the inquiry mention was made of the suffocation incidents on board 56M in 1928/29 and on board 51M in 1932 and the drowning of some boatmen. Travel times, living conditions and accommodation on board the boats owned by the GCC were examined. The court also looked at the age and duties of the greasers, the size and weight of the bags that were taken on as cargo and the sequence in which the men were laid off and then re-employed when business picked up again. The remuneration of other men working on the canal was discussed and comparisons made to dock workers and those working in other modes of transportation.

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The unloading of beet and loading of sugar in Carlow was reviewed in great detail as were the effects that the Barrow drainage scheme had on commercial traffic, specifically in the use of the winches installed to help boats navigate against the increased flow. Also talked about was Guinness, its transportation and temperature and the timing of travel between points on the canal and the Shannon.

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There are also details in the report on cargoes, revenue and tonnage carried on the canal in the early 1930's.

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Gerry Burke 2011

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Here Court of Inquiry 1935 transcript are the full proceedings of the inquiry, available for downloading and perusing. Warning: the document is 8MB, no problem if you are on Broadband, otherwise may be slow. If you are looking for a specific topic or name, use the the search facility in Adobe Reader.

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Men at work - photographs taken in the 1940's and 1950's around GCC boats.

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