

Hidden Gems and Forgotten People

LISBURN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



UNION LOCKS, LISBURN

At Sprucefield on the outskirts of Lisburn are the remains of Union Locks. Unique in Ireland, this flight of four locks once lifted lighters some twenty-six feet over a distance of one hundred yards, from the River Lagan to the summit level of the Lagan Navigation and onwards to Lough Neagh.

The Navigation between Belfast and Lisburn, a mixture of canal and river, was opened to traffic in 1763. Financial and engineering difficulties halted further progress for a number of years. Eventually in 1779 a new company was formed under the control of the Marquis of Donegall. Richard Owen, an English engineer with canal construction experience was employed to complete the canal from Lisburn to Lough Neagh. This was finally opened in 1793 with a ceremony at Ellis's Gut, in the presence of the Marquis and Richard Owen.

Abandoned shortly after WW2, several miles of the canal from Sprucefield towards Moira are now buried under the M1 motorway. The rest of the canal, though overgrown and derelict, survives.

Richard Owen fell in love with Ireland. He settled near Moira and requested that his final resting place should be at Soldierstown, overlooking the Broad Water, part of his canal. Unfortunately a recent building now obscures that view.