

REPORT
OF
SIR JOHN MACNEILL,
TO THE
COMMISSIONERS
FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE
PORT OF DROGHEDA.

Drogheda :

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1849.

REPORT.

TO THE COMMISSIONERS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT
OF THE PORT OF DROGHEDA.

GENTLEMEN—As soon as my other engagements would permit, after receiving your Secretary's letter, I visited your Harbour, and examined your River from the Quays to the Bar.

From that examination and survey, and from the information received from Captain Toker, the Master of one of the Drogheda Steamers, who is thoroughly acquainted with the navigation, and also from some of your Pilots, I am fully convinced that the Report I made to you in 1840, and the plans therein recommended for the improvement of the Harbour, were well founded. I see no cause, whatever, from the information obtained in my late survey, to change the opinion I then gave ; but on the contrary I am confirmed in the correctness of the views I then formed as to the plans to be adopted for the improvement of the Harbour.

The short spur jetties, lying across the tidal way, inside the parallel dykes, should be removed, and the stones of which they are composed placed along the parallel dykes, to strengthen and make them up to an

uniform height; the parallel dykes themselves should, in different parts of the river be narrowed, and in some places widened out, so as to form an uniform channel for the tidal water diminishing in size from the Bar towards the Quays.

The sharp angles in the River should be cut off, particularly between the New Deep and the Swash, and all the banks formed by deposits of sands and muscles, should be removed by the Dredge.

The most important point, however, is the improvements of the Bar. In my former Report I stated that the channel in the sands forming the Bar had a tendency to change to the Northward; this prediction was well founded—the channel is now considerably to the Northward of what it was when I made my Report in 1840, and still further from what it was in 1826—at which period it was close to the North side of the South Bar Perch.

If some steps are not soon taken to prevent this tendency of the channel to change to the Northward, the entrance to the River will be rendered most difficult, and in certain winds hazardous; for it will become necessary to run to the Southward and immediately after rounding the point of the North Bull to run nearly due North up to the Crook; with a heavy gale from the North or Northwest, this would be almost impassible, and certainly attended with extreme danger of running on the South Bull.

To remedy this evil and keep the Channel in its present position, or if possible to force it into its original one near the South Bar Perch, is the first and great object to be attended to. In my former Report I stated how this should be accomplished, viz.:—by forming a Mole or Breakwater along the North side of the Channel, from nearly opposite the Maiden Tower to the North Bar Perch, and as much farther as the funds of the Commissioners would from time to time permit, until it was run out into twelve feet of water, at the level of low water of Spring Tides.

Mr. B. Gibbons, in his letter of the 22d May, 1848, to the Secretary of your Board, states that three times the sum asked (viz.:—£2,000) as a loan would scarcely be enough to form this Mole or Breakwater. I am not aware that any estimate whatever of the expense of completing such work was ever made. I am certain it would cost much more than you should, under the present circumstances of the Trade of the Port, borrow money to carry into effect at once; but a beginning should be made, and carried on, as fast as the funds will admit of.

There would be no difficulty in forming the Mole in the manner I formerly pointed out, and I have no doubt, when so formed, of its perfect stability. All that is required is to give it sufficient slope and proper width; a Mole so formed is much more likely to stand the violence of a heavy sea, than a wall of ashler, besides being far cheaper and much more easily executed.

I am of opinion that the debt due to the Board of Works—£7,000—should be paid off in the first instance ; and the control and management of the funds kept in your own hands. Until this is done I don't think any work whatever should be commenced, and as the surplus revenue is now about £4,000 per annum, it will take but a short time to get released from the debts, which now interfere with the improvement of the Harbour. When this is accomplished it might be well to consider the propriety of raising £10,000 by debentures, to enable the most important improvements to be carried on, with more energy and expedition than could otherwise be done. I don't anticipate that there would be much difficulty in raising the sum I have mentioned by debentures ; it is frequently done, and often attended with great advantage to the public. If this, however, cannot be accomplished the surplus funds—say £4,000 per annum—after the debts are paid off, would do much, if properly applied, and in a few years, by a careful and judicious management, the Harbour might be immensely improved without borrowing any money whatever, though it certainly would be better to borrow a limited sum on debentures, and commence the improvements at once. Whenever the works do commence—whether on borrowed money, or on the funds of the Commissioners—the first thing that should be done would be to take the stone that is now lying near the Quarry, and have it deposited on the North Bull. In order to effect this a greater number of Pontoons than you have (and which

I understand are eleven) should be procured, as well as a small Steam-Tug to take them up and down the River. The Pontoons and Tug Boat should be provided, and be the property of the Commissioners ; but the quarrying, filling, and teaming of the stone should be done by contract. I formerly alluded to the obstruction given to the tidal water flowing up the River by the old Bridge above the Quays. There is now a prospect of this obstruction being removed, and if so it will very materially benefit the navigation of the River, and as such I would recommend you to promote it as much as possible—for a new Bridge thrown across the River, without any Piers, instead of the present one, would be of very essential service to the Navigation and maintenance of deep water along the Quay.

I am, Gentlemen,
Your most obedient servant,

JOHN MACNEILL.

20, Rutland-square, Dublin,
26th March, 1849.