

The Turret Clock in Limerick Docks

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The background to the decision to erect a turret clock on the docks in Limerick is outlined and analysed. Aspects of its subsequent history and more recent proposals to have it moved to a more prominent location are also discussed.

On 21 July 1880 the foundation stone of the first free-standing harbour turret clock to be built in Ireland was laid in Limerick docks. The decision to erect the clock arose from the destruction by fire of the nearby Bannatyne's corn stores two years earlier¹ whose large clock with its four massive dials had been clearly visible to those who worked on the docks. Nearly two years was to pass before the matter of a clock was brought to the attention of the Limerick Harbour Board, when it was argued that stevedores and others had expressed concern that because there was no public clock, confusion ensued among the workforce, as 'in the morning and evening the men knew the hours for commencing work and leaving off through the ringing of the 'Angelus' bell at the Redemptorist church, but the rest of the day they were left ignorant of the hours when to go for breakfast and dinner'.² It therefore became an immediate necessity to put in place a clock to regulate and measure the working hours of the employees of the board. The issue was first discussed by the members of the harbour board³ on 19 April 1880.⁴ The board as the employer 'had an interest in getting a full days work for wages paid, and the workers in giving no more time than he was paid'.⁵ This was at a time when harbour employees were poorly paid and were not in a position to buy watches, and also may not have been able to read the time.⁶ It had been suggested that the clock tower could be built over the office of the harbour master but when it was pointed out that the building would not be able to sustain the weight, it was agreed that a tower would have to be specially built for that

¹ *Limerick Chronicle* (cited hereafter as *L. C.*), 25 July 1878.

² *Ibid.*, 20 April 1880 & *Munster News* (cited hereafter as *M. N.*) 21 April 1880. The bells of the Redemptorist Church had been installed the year previously on 25 March 1879 under the mayoralty of Michael O'Gorman, *Ibid.*, 25 March 1879. As part of a wages settlement in March 1868, dock labourers agreed to commence work from 6.00am and finish at 6.00pm: both these times were indicated by the pealing of the 'Angelus' bell, K. Donnelly, M. Hoctor, & D. Walsh, *A Rising Tide: The Story of Limerick Harbour* (Limerick, 1994) p. 24.

³ The Limerick Harbour Board, under the provisions of the Limerick Harbour Act 1867, was composed of fifteen elected Commissioners, five from the importers and exporters, five from the harbour rate payers and five from Limerick Corporation with the Mayor of Limerick and the President of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce *ex-officio* members, Donnelly, Hoctor, & Walsh, *Story of Limerick Harbour*, p. 64.

⁴ *L. C.*, 20 April 1880.

⁵ David S. Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World* (Harvard, 1983) p. 74.

⁶ Shannon Foynes Port Company (cited hereafter as SFPC)/5/1924. Limerick Harbour Works Department, Wages Book, Return of Men Employed From 9 March – 15 March 1883. The rates of pay varied for tradesmen as well as labourers according to their daily rate and the number of days that they worked, e.g. a carpenter having worked 6 days at 5s a day received £1. 10s, a shipwright having worked 5½ days at 6s a day received £1. 13s. This rate also applied to an engine fitter who worked for 5½ days at the same daily rate. Labourers were not on a uniform rate of pay, e.g. one labourer having worked 6 days at 2. 4d a day received 14s, another having worked 5¾ days at 2s. 6d received 14. 5d, and another having worked 6½ days at 2s 8d received 17s. 4d. Men's watches around this period of time cost from between £1. 10s to £10 or between £4. 10s to £40. *M. N.*, 23 January 1878.



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purpose.⁷ The harbour engineer, William Jeremiah Hall,⁸ had already received a quotation from an interested reputable English firm (not identified), and was prepared to accept this, it was decided that the contract should be publicly advertised, thereby allowing Limerick tradesmen the opportunity to compete for the tender.⁹ The board therefore withheld permission for the harbour engineer to proceed with any work relating to the clock until he produced, with the necessary inventory, a design for a clock tower. The Secretary, William Carroll,¹⁰ was directed to draft the advertisement for publication in the newspapers. Both the plan and the advertisement had to be submitted to the board for their approval.¹¹ At their meeting on 31 May 1880 it was agreed that the turret clock tower¹² should be located close to the dry docks, and the plan devised by the harbour engineer was approved and he was instructed to commence with its construction.¹³ The structure was to be:

Designed in the Italian style and its object is to combine utility with economy and simplicity of architecture. It will be 60 feet high from the base to the pinnacle of the roof, on which there will be a weather gauge 5 feet in height. It will be 38 feet to the base of the clock chamber and 45 feet to the center of the dial plates. It is being erected on a foundation 11 feet deep, laid on a concrete bed. The foundation contains over 300 tons of masonry, most of the lower stones of which are from two to three tons in weight. The walls are about 5 feet thick, reducing to 3½ feet at the surface and will gradually reduce to about 2 feet in the thickness at the summit.¹⁴

The board also approved the draft advertisement, addressed 'To Clock-Makers' who were invited to tender 'for Supply and Erection of a Turret Clock, To Strike The Hours according to the specification to be seen at the Office of the Harbour Engineer, Limerick Docks, between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. daily'. Tenders were to be received before 12 o'clock on Monday, 14th June 1880 and it was specified that neither the lowest nor any tender might be accepted.¹⁵

By 14 June 1880 twelve bids for the contract had been received from eleven clock makers in various parts of the United Kingdom, ten of which met with the requirements

⁷ *L. C.*, 4 May 1880.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 22 May 1890. William Jeremiah Hall, C. E., Architect and Harbour Engineer, lived at 18 Hartstonge Street, Limerick City. He was the eldest of six sons of Ambrose Hall, J. P., Mayor of Limerick in 1875 (Irish Architectural Archive, Dictionary of Irish Architects, [http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/Hall,William Jeremiah](http://www.dia.ie/architects/view/Hall,William%20Jeremiah), accessed 25 May 2013). I am grateful to Mr. Patrick Hall for providing this reference.

⁹ *M. N.*, 21 April 1880.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 December 1887 & *M. N.*, 17 December 1887. William Carroll was secretary to the Harbour Commissioners 1867-86. Prior to this, he was the collector of tolls for the Port of Limerick. He was secretary of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce for almost fifty years. secretary of the Limerick Market Trustees and the Limerick - Foynes Railway Company, in addition to being an agent for the National Assurance Company of Ireland, and the Ulster Marine Insurance Company and a recognised broker of the Dublin Stock Exchange. He died at his residence in Upper Mallow Street on 17 December 1887 and was buried in Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery.

¹¹ SFPC /P1/57. Limerick Harbour Board (cited hereafter as LHB) Minutes. 19 April 1880.

¹² *Ibid.*, /P1/57. LHB. Minutes 31 May 1880.

¹³ *L. C.*, 1 June 1880.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 22 July 1880. The original weather vane was severely damaged during the hurricanes of Autumn 1962 and was replaced by a weather vane provided by Mr. John Dundon Snr. of Mullock & Sons. This information was taken from a plaque placed at the base of the tower at the docks.

¹⁵ *L. C.*, 12 June 1880. The original draft copy containing the same wording and dated 19 May 1880 is in SFPC/P1/911, 19 May 1880.

of the specification as laid down by the harbour engineer.¹⁶ These quotations included the cost of the works for chiming the hour and the quarters with the required bells.¹⁷ They were from Birmingham, Leeds, London, Manchester, Cork, Dublin and Limerick. The Limerick tenders consisted of two bids, one from Richard Wallace, 129 George Street¹⁸ and one from Conrad Cromer, 13 George Street,¹⁹ for the amounts of £249 and £306 respectively.²⁰ Another Limerick firm, L. E. Ryan, 25 George Street,²¹ had apparently sent his tender to the harbour engineer's office, whereas it should have been sent to the office of the board's secretary, whose office was in the Chamber of Commerce building, George Street. Ryan in a letter stated that he had inadvertently sent his tender to the engineer's office. However, it was alleged that it had been deliberately withheld until after the closing date in order to ascertain who the other tenders were and what their bids were, so that he could place a lower price.²² Despite having sent a letter of explanation, dated to coincide with the meeting of the board on 17 June 1880, it was decided not to open the tender and although he made himself available to explain the circumstances, the mayor intimated that the issue had been dealt with, and there the matter ended.²³ A general discussion thereafter ensued in which the merits of each bid was examined. With the elimination of all but three tenders, the deliberations centred on the criterion 'that if a clock to chime the hours only be decided on, those of Lund and Blockley, London and Bailey and Company, Manchester, are the same price £165 each and the cheapest. That if a clock to chime quarterly is decided on, Lund and Blockley's tender at £225 is lowest, and that of Sivel and Company, Cork, at £225. 10s next'. The margin of ten shillings may not have had any bearing on the ultimate selection, but the secretary pointed out that Sivel were not *bona fide* clock makers but representatives of a Birmingham firm and a member of the board gave weight to this by stating that it was illogical:

To hold that the agents of an English firm were clock-makers, or that the money would be kept in Ireland, when in reality it would be sent to England. They were

¹⁶ *L. C.*, 15 June 1880. There was two tenders from one firm. SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes, 17 June 1880.

¹⁷ *M. N.*, 19 June 1880.

¹⁸ William Bassett. *Directory of the city of the City and County of Limerick and the Principal Towns of Counties of Tipperary and Clare* (Limerick, 1880), p. 88. The firm of Richard Wallace, jeweller and watchmaker was the oldest established firm of jewellers in the city. On the death of Richard, his son John Henry Wallace became the senior member of the firm and had resided initially at Upper Hartstonge Street but later at 17 Barrington Street, where he died on 4 December 1901. He was buried in St. Munchin's Churchyard. *L. C.*, 5 December 1901. I am grateful to Mr. Michael Maguire of the Limerick City Library local studies section for this reference.

¹⁹ National Archives Ireland. Census of Ireland, Household Schedules, Limerick City 1901. Conrad Cromer was a native of Germany, and lived at 13 George Street, Limerick. His business was conducted at 18 George St. Bassett, *Directory of the city of the City and County of Limerick* (Limerick, 1884) p. 16. I am grateful to Mr. Michael Maguire of the Limerick City Library local studies section for this reference.

²⁰ SFPC/P1/659. Summary of tenders for turret clock, dated June 1880. The names of the other tenders with prices were; Lund & Blockley (London), £225, Benson (London), £296. 15s, Baily & Company (Manchester), £250, Leeson & Son (Birmingham), £211. 5s, Sivel & Company (Cork), £225. 10s, Dobbyn (Dublin), £240. 13s. 4d, and Chancellor (Dublin), £288. Two other tenders submitted bids and did not meet with the specified requirements were Potts & Son (Leeds), £237. 10s and Prescott & Company (Dublin), £250.

²¹ Bassett, *Directory of the city of the City and County of Limerick* (Limerick, 1884) p. 46. Laurence E. Ryan, was a jeweller and watchmaker, who resided at 11 Upper Mallow Street, and later at the North Strand (now Clancy Strand). He was elected as member of Limerick Town Council in 1884, representing the Shannon Ward initially and then the Castle Ward. Ironically, he represented the Town Council on the Harbour Board for a number of years. He died at his residence on the North Strand in June 1891 and was buried at Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery. *L. C.*, 23 June 1891. I am grateful to Mr. Michael Maguire of the Limerick City Library local studies section for this reference.

²² *L. C.*, 17 June 1880.

²³ SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes, 17 June 1880.

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bound on principle to give the contract to Messrs Lund and Blockley, though they might hate them, or their nation.²⁴

Thus, it was resolved to give the contract to Lund and Blockley, who being well-known clock manufacturers 'are prepared to send competent men to any part of the United Kingdom, to report as to the condition and requirements of all kinds of clocks and carillons'.²⁵ This was to be regretted later on. It had been argued somewhat prophetically that if it was possible, the contract should be given to a local firm, for if problems arose after the twelve months warranty had expired, it would be more convenient and cheaper to have a local man than to incur the expense and inconvenience of having to get somebody over from London to repair the clock.²⁶ This of course was an expense that the contractors would have to pay for, not the board.

The ceremony of laying the foundation stone was performed by the eldest daughter of the then Mayor of Limerick, Michael O'Gorman.²⁷ She placed, in a chamber specifically cut out for the purpose in the stone, a phial containing a record of the ceremony, including the names of those in attendance. All these were of the professional and merchant class, and were members of the Harbour Commissioners and the Town Council. No representatives of the harbour employees were present. In addition to this she placed a small coin on top of the phial and declared 'this stone well and truly laid, and call for God's blessing upon the good work', after which the ceremony concluded, without giving the clock a name.²⁸

Within a year of the foundation stone being laid, the clock tower had been erected and the works were operational. The *Limerick Chronicle* was fulsome in its praise for the Harbour Engineer, William Jeremiah Hall, C. E., Architect, who it explained was responsible 'for the design and ... accomplishment' of both the tower and the clock works. The newspaper then gave a descriptive account of the working mechanism of the clock in great detail:

²⁴ *L. C.*, 17 June 1880, SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes 17 June 1880. Sivel & Company, in a letter to the *Limerick Chronicle* contradicted the allegation made by the board's secretary. They stated that he had misrepresented them, as they never corresponded with nor were they the representatives of a Birmingham firm, and were perturbed that this statement should have been made and the motive behind it. *L. C.*, 26 June 1880.

²⁵ *L. C.*, 17 June 1880, SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes 17 June 1880. Lund & Blockley had showrooms at 42, Pall Mall, London, and workshops at William & Mary Yard, Pulteney Street, London. They also had a branch at Rampart Row, Bombay (now Mumbai), India. There is still a firm of opticians of the name of Lund & Blockley in Mumbai today. They were manufacturers of church and turret clocks. They were also watch and clock manufacturers to Queen Victoria and other royal personages including the Imperial Family of Russia, the Indian Government, the Queensland Government (Australia), the War Office, the Admiralty and the Royal Geographical Society. Chris Pickford (ed.), *Turret Clock Lists: Lists of Clocks from makers catalogues and publicity materials*. AHS Turret Clock Group Monograph No. 3 (1995) reprinted with additional material (Surrey, 2009) pp 196-8.

²⁶ *L. C.*, 17 June 1880.

²⁷ Matthew Potter, *First Citizens of the Treaty City: The Mayors and Mayoralty of Limerick 1197-2007* (Limerick, 2007) pp 134-5. Michael O'Gorman, was elected to Limerick City Council on 1 December 1870 and served as mayor in 1879 & 1880. Prior to becoming a house and land insurance agent he was the chief agent for the Grand Canal Company. He died on 16 November 1908 and was buried in Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery.

²⁸ *L. C.*, 22 July 1880. The record of the ceremony in the phial reads that 'This stone was placed in position on the twenty-first day of July, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty, Anno Domini, during the mayoralty of the Right Worshipful Michael O'Gorman, mayor of Limerick. Maurice Lenihan, Justice of the Peace High Sheriff of Limerick City and Town Councillor, James Spaight, J.P., T.C., President of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, Zachary Myles, Alderman John R. Tinsley, J.P., Alderman Eugene O'Callaghan, J.P., Robert MacDonnell, J.P., T.C., John Cronin, T.C., James Harris, Richard Power, John McDonnell, J.P., Richard Phillips, J.P., Alderman William Spillane, J.P., James Bannatyne, Arthur Russell, William Boyd, J.P., William Spaight, J.P., Luke Mullock, William Carroll, Secretary to the Harbour Commissioners, William J. Hall, Civil Engineer (hereafter cited C. E.), Architect and Harbour Engineer and Morgan Fitzmaurice, Harbour - Master.

The clock goes for eight days, striking the hours on a bell of nearly 10cwt, and chiming the quarters on two bells of 4cwt and 2½cwt respectively. The time is shown on four copper dials, each 6 feet 3 inches in diameter, printed on black and gold. Each minute hand with counter-poise weights, 4lbs and 3 feet long. The motive power is given by weights, weighing over half a ton, suspended from three iron barrels by patent iron wire cord, carried over block pulleys fixed on the floor of the clock chamber at the top of the tower. These weights, which fall a distance of 45 feet, are enclosed in boxes or 'wells' at the bottom of which is a thick layer of saw dust, so as to prevent accident in case the lines should break. The large going wheel is 12 inches diameter, and is furnished with maintaining power for keeping the clock going during the time of winding; it has also the 'Dead Beat' escapement with a 1¼ seconds compensated pendulum, the weight of the bob being 1½cwt. The rod is made of drawn zinc and iron tubes. All the bushes are of hardened gun-metal, screwed into the cast iron frame, so that each wheel can be taken out separately if required. The large or main striking wheel is 12½ inches diameter, with 28 cams fixed on it faced with steel, and raises a hammer of ¼cwt to the height of 9 inches from the large 10cwt bell upon which it strikes. The quarter main wheel has a complete set of cams attached to it which raises two hammers to strike the quarter chimes, with all the necessary cranks, levers etc required.

After noting that the clock frame was made of cast iron which was lined with wrought iron, and that the four sets of hands could be set from inside the tower by means of a 'minute dial' attached to the clock, the paper commented on the bells which it described as 'exceedingly pleasing in tone, especially the large striking, or hour bell, which can be distinctly heard from a great distance'.²⁹

For approximately six months from the time of its completion on 13 July 1881, the clock appeared to be working satisfactorily, and for the purpose it was constructed, namely to regulate the working hours of the harbour employees. This led the harbour engineer to state in his annual report for 1881, that 'the clock is proving a great boon to the harbour', and that it would remain the responsibility of Lund and Blockley until 1 August 1882, and if it proved to be satisfactory it would then become the responsibility of the board to maintain. Then and only then would the balance of monies owed be paid to the manufacturers.³⁰ This confidence was shown to be misplaced when a member of the board proclaimed that the clock was not working properly, as it 'was down two or three days in the week. It was generally wrong when he saw it'. Another member, who was probably one of those who expressed the view at the meeting of the board on 17 June 1880 that the tender should have been given to a local or Irish firm,³¹ remarked that this was 'the result of giving to a stranger the contract for this clock instead of to a local maker who would be on the spot'.³² He was to be more explicit at the following meeting on 6 February 1882 stating that it had been possible to get a local firm but the board in their wisdom, who were penny wise and pound foolish, had accepted the contract from

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 August 1881. An invoice dated 8 November 1880 was sent to Lund & Blockley for £85 10s 7½, this was paid on 16 August 1881. A copy of the invoice and date of payment was as a matter of courtesy and to show that everything was above board sent to William Jeremiah Hall, Limerick Harbour Engineer (Archives of John Taylor & Co., Bellfounders).

³⁰ Delivered to the board in January 1882, *L. C.*, 24 January 1882, SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes 23 January 1882.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1880.

³² *M. N.*, 8 February 1882.

Lund and Blockley because they were the lowest tender. Another member with distinct nationalist overtones did his utmost to place the clockmakers from outside the country in a bad light by exclaiming in the most robust fashion that it was a 'foreign importation'.³³ He of course neglected to say either through ignorance, forgetfulness or deliberately that had an Irish firm made the clock, the parts for it would more than likely have had to come in from abroad. Similar comments were to be made by some members at meetings of the board for quite some time to come.

In the meantime members asked why repairs to the clock could not be undertaken by a local firm. It transpired that the contractors would not allow any such interference, which could cause irreparable damage to the works, which had been the case in other places.³⁴ Eventually in February 1882, following the receipt by them of a letter from the board's solicitor, Francis Kearney,³⁵ 'holding them responsible for the failure of their contract',³⁶ they responded that 'they had instructed H. L. Stewart, Lr. Cecil Street,³⁷ to attend to the clock at the docks. Should he not be able to do so, they would send over one of their workmen to look after it'.³⁸ The Harbour Master reported at the meeting of the board on 20 February 1882 that since this local clock-maker had carried out the necessary repairs, it was working satisfactorily. Not all members present were happy with this: one who was critical of their policy on foreign importation implied that this was only tinkering with the works of the clock, and as soon as the warranty under the terms of the contract was finished they would more than likely be left with a dysfunctional clock.³⁹ On a number of occasions members enquired about the condition of the clock, only to be informed that 'it was not going very well', registering half-past ten when it should have been indicating half-past four in the evening, or that it was operating 'very unsatisfactorily'.⁴⁰ This led the board to initiate moves through their solicitor to have the clock returned to the contractor 'as they find the clock is entirely defective as to be quite unfit for Harbour use'.⁴¹ The solicitor informed the Board that they did not have the power to undertake this but he did, however, suggest that Lund and Blockley might be sued for breach of contract.⁴²

Litigation soon ensued, which was to last nineteen months. Needless to say that it was not all one sided. The contractor countered by threatening legal action if the board did not pay the balance of money due for the clock, which amounted to £26. 4s. 'being [the] balance of 10 per cent retained in the hands of the board under the contract of 30th Nov. 1880'.⁴³ In the heel of the hunt the board's solicitor obtained an order from the Court of

³³ Ibid., 8 February 1882.

³⁴ Ibid., 25 January 1882.

³⁵ *L. C.*, 5 November 1892. Francis Kearney, Solicitor, George Street was the law advisor for the Harbour Board. He died, aged 72, on 4 November 1892, and was buried in Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery.

³⁶ SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes, 6 February 1882.

³⁷ Bassett. *Directory of the city of the City and County of Limerick* (Limerick, 1880) p. 82. Henry Law Stewart, resided at Bedford Row but carried out the business of manufacturing jewellery and watchmaking at 9 Cecil Street. Later on he was to reside in 104 George Street, Limerick, where he died on 23 April 1916. He was buried in St. Munchin's Cemetery, *L. C.*, 25 April 1916. I am grateful to Mr. Michael Maguire of the Limerick City Library local studies section for this reference.

³⁸ SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes 20 February 1882 & *L. C.*, 21 February 1882.

³⁹ *M. N.*, 22 February 1882.

⁴⁰ *L. C.*, 5 September & 20 September 1882.

⁴¹ SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes 3 April 1882.

⁴² Ibid., 17 April 1882.

⁴³ Ibid., 4 September 1882 & *L. C.*, 5 September 1882.

Queen's Bench to continue with legal proceedings for the breaking of the agreement, the proceedings to be held in Ireland, owing to the breach having occurred here.⁴⁴ A year was to elapse before anything further appears to have taken place relating to the matter. This does not mean however, that discussions were not going on behind the scenes. Having incurred quite an amount of adverse publicity in the local newspapers, Lund and Blockley endeavoured to regain their reputation by proposing a face-saving compromise to the board. They put forward for consideration through their solicitor in Ireland, Mr. Armstrong, a proposition 'to supply entirely new works and to have the work completed to the satisfaction of the Commissioners according to the terms of the original contract within a reasonable time, each party to bear their own costs of the Law proceedings up to the present time'. Although the general thrust of this proposal was agreeable, the Board would not entertain the idea that they should be liable for any legal costs, and were trenchant in their view that it was the responsibility of the contractors since they were in default.⁴⁵

Following the notification of the board's decision, by their solicitor, to Lund and Blockley that they would not be liable for legal costs, and the ongoing possibility of continued litigation, circumstances were to change radically over the next number of weeks. Blockley, one of the partners of the London firm, visited Limerick and examined the clock works, concluding that 'the work was not in accordance with the specification', and therefore the board was perfectly within its rights to pursue the action that it had taken. Furthermore, he declared that it was necessary to rectify the firm's reputation, which had been tarnished as a consequence of the debacle, and agreed to provide new works for the clock consistent with the contract as laid down. He also consented to defray any legal or other costs incurred by the board. Having attained all that they set out to achieve, the board withdrew any further legal action against the contractors but decided on the recommendation of the harbour engineer to retain the defective works in the tower *pro tempore*, until the new works were installed and operating to the board's satisfaction.⁴⁶

By the middle of 1884 this work had been completed, and gave Lund and Blockley the opportunity to highlight this in an advertisement published in *The Building News* that 'they have just manufactured and fitted up at Limerick Harbour a turret clock with four 6ft. Copper dials to 'ting tang' the quarters and strike the hours on three bells weighing about 15cwt'.⁴⁷ Needless to say that there was no reference to the fact that this was the second works that had been installed within a very short period of time by the firm. The harbour engineer and board, based on previous experience, were not so forthcoming in passing judgement on the merits of the new works. However, at the first meeting of the board in 1885 it was reported that 'the new clock works are giving every satisfaction'.⁴⁸

Sixteen years later during the month of May 1901, at the height of the Boer War an unusual occurrence took place affecting the clock. Some individual decided that it would

⁴⁴ SFPC/P1/435, 17 April 1882.

⁴⁵ SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes, 22 October 1883.

⁴⁶ SFPC/P1/435, 5 November 1883, letter from Francis Kearney, solicitor to William Carroll, secretary. P1/57, LHB Minutes, 12 November 1883 & 7 January 1884. Interestingly in the LHB Labour Book 1883 - 1887 there is an entry for a H. B. Blockley, clockmaker, who received on account the sum of £2 for the period between 11 April to 17 April 1884. This may be the same Blockley who had previously visited Limerick and had returned to examine how the new works were progressing. There is no record of this visit in the Harbour Board Minutes. SFPC/P1/1924. LHB Labour Book 1883 - 1887.

⁴⁷ *Building News.*, 2 May 1884. I am grateful to Mr. Chris Pickford for providing this information.

⁴⁸ SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes, 12 January 1885.

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⁵⁵ Ibid.

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be a useful target for rifle practice and pierced the south face dial with three or more holes from a distance of at least 250 to 350 yards.⁴⁹ The *Limerick Chronicle* took a light-hearted view of the event:

The Dock Clock has grave reason to complain. To have its face disfigured with rifle bullets is a thing which no chronometer performing a useful public service should be expected to stand for anytime, and if the target practice which was reported on at the Harbour Board yesterday continues, it is quite possible the clock will show its resentment by refusing to keep time at all.

Despite an offer of £5 being made by the board for information leading to the apprehension and conviction of the perpetrator, nothing came of it.⁵⁰

With the clock now functioning to the satisfaction of the board and the contract with Lund and Blockley ended, the only remaining issue was the requirement to keep the clock maintained. Nevertheless, it was to be sixteen years after the installation of the new works before they decided to advertise for clockmakers to tender 'for keeping in repair, tending, and regulating the Harbour Clock for a period of not less than three years or more than five years'.⁵¹ It is not known how many clockmakers tendered but Michael Spring, a local clockmaker who resided in the city, was awarded the contract at £5 per annum, to take effect on 30 July 1900.⁵² In fact Spring was to hold the contract for sixteen years. Following his death in 1916, the contract was awarded to John George Knight, for the same amount of £5 per annum and he held it until he died in 1924.⁵³ Apparently it was to be nearly five years before the contract was to be again awarded, this time to A. W. Moorhead at £8 per annum⁵⁴ and this sum was increased to £10 per annum the following year.⁵⁵ It is not known for how many years he maintained the clock but by 1935 it was showing signs of malfunctioning, with the chimes being described at a meeting of the board as a 'monstrosity'.⁵⁶ At the following meeting there was a call from members to have the clock replaced with a new one as it was 'old and a bad timekeeper' the engineer argued that it was an excellent clock and most certainly could be repaired. Furthermore, he intimated that he 'was about having repairs carried out' to it. The board accepted his argument and he was instructed to communicate with manufacturers of turret clocks and obtain estimates for its repair, and report to the board at the next meeting. There is no record of this happening, it is therefore not known who repaired the clock or maintained it during the following years.⁵⁷ Then in early 1955 a mishap of serious proportions occurred, which caused damage to the hands of the west face of the clock resulting in injury to

⁴⁹ *Limerick Leader* (hereafter cited as *L. L.*), 13 May 1901.

⁵⁰ *L. C.*, 14 May 1901.

⁵¹ *M. N.*, 16 June 1900.

⁵² SFPC/P1/57. LHB Minutes, 30 July 1900. Michael Spring lived with his sister, Teresa, who was a music teacher at 12 Ellen Street (NAI, Census of Ireland, Household Schedules, Limerick City 1901). He died on 19 June 1916, and was buried in Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery (*L. C.*, 22 June 1916). I am grateful to Mr. Michael Maguire of the Limerick City Library local studies section for this reference.

⁵³ SFPC/P1/59. LHB Minutes, 3 July 1916. John George Knight lived in 13 Bedford Row, Limerick, with his wife and three children NAI, Census of Ireland, Household Schedules, Limerick City 1911). He later went to live at 2 Glentworth Street, Limerick, where he died on 2 March 1924, and was buried in St. Munchin's Cemetery, *L. C.*, 4 March 1924 & *Guys Limerick Directory, 1914* (Limerick, 1914), p. 116.

⁵⁴ SFPC/P1/60. LHB Minutes, 28 January 1929.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30 June 1930.

⁵⁶ *L. C.*, 10 January 1935.

⁵⁷ SFPC/P1/60. LHB Minutes, 28 January 1935, *L. L.*, 28 January 1935 & *L. C.*, 2 February 1935. There is no record of any report submitted by the engineer at the subsequent meeting or any meeting after that.

the works, and although efforts were made to repair it, it was hard to make the necessary adjustments as the machinery was 'old and worn.'⁵⁸ This obviously did not work satisfactorily as the following year the upkeep of the clock was once more raised as 'the works had broken down and repairs may have to be carried out by the makers'.⁵⁹ However, by this stage Lund and Blockley had ceased to manufacture or repair clocks for quite some time.

It was to be 1957 before the engineer came before the board indicating that he had obtained prices from Messrs. John Smith and Sons of Derby⁶⁰ for the repair of the works.⁶¹ By the month of July 1957 the clock had been dismantled and sent to Derby but a slight inconvenience had arisen at Liverpool Docks, in which the board had to pay a deposit of £170 to the customs authorities to comply with regulations before the works were released. As this sum was to be refunded when the works were returned to Limerick, the board agreed to this but only after indemnification was granted against the loss of any parts or the whole works.⁶² Interestingly, around the same time the Limerick City Council had awarded the contract for repairing Tait's clock also to Smiths for £200, and indicated that this would not have been possible but for the fact that comparable repair work was underway with the dock clock.⁶³ With the return of the clock in good order, the board was more than pleased with the repair work carried out by the firm.⁶⁴

In addition to ensuring that the dock clock was maintained in good order, it was also necessary to keep its four dials in pristine condition, therefore a local contractor had been employed to re-enamel them for £13.⁶⁵ There were only two other occasions, in 1908 and 1918, on which the board thought it was essential to have the dials painted.⁶⁶ Also, the board had at some time in the past decided that the clock was such a valuable asset to the port that it insured it for £750 annually against fire, increasing this amount by £250 in 1931.⁶⁷

Capitalising on the good relationship established between board and the the firm, Smiths offered to maintain the clock for £9.10s per annum, which the board agreed to. They were to retain this contract on an annual basis in its mechanical form on the advice of the harbour engineer until 1997.⁶⁸ That year, following a visit to the clock site, Smith's representative gave the board a choice of continuing to service the clock in its mechanical state or convert it to an automatic operation as the board had betrayed an interest in doing this. The firm indicated that:

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 April 1955. There is no explanation of what caused the mishap.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, /P1/62. LHB Minutes 25 June 1956.

⁶⁰ Smith of Derby Clockmakers Ltd. *A Tradition in Time* (Derby, n.d.), pp 1-4. John Smith & Sons clockmaking company was founded in 1856 and following subsequent acquisition of several companies including in 1933 William Potts & Sons, of Leeds, are now known as the Smith of Derby Group. Ironically, William Potts & Sons, Leeds had submitted a tender for the manufacture of the clock in 1880 but did not meet with the specified requirements as laid down by the Harbour Engineer. Today, John Smith & Company claim to have cleaned, repaired or overhauled in excess of 8,000 mechanical clocks, restored over 6,000 clock dials and attend in excess of 4,500 public and church clocks annually.

⁶¹ SFPC/P1/62. LHB Minutes, 25 March 1957.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 8 July 1957.

⁶³ *L. L.*, 19 June 1957. There were no Limerick tenders for the work.

⁶⁴ SFPC /P1/62. LHB Minutes 11 November 1957.

⁶⁵ SFPC/P1/62. LHB Minutes 11 November 1957. The name of the contractor was not disclosed.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 November 1908 & 8 April 1918. In 1908, Mr. M. Daly was the successful tender at £8, the only other tender was Messrs Hynes at £13. 10s. In 1918, Mr. Michael Mayne was the successful tender at £9. 15s and the only other tender was Mr. T. Gilligan at £20.

⁶⁷ SFPC/P1/60. LHB Minutes 30 December 1931.

⁶⁸ SFPC/P1/62. LHB Minutes 10 February 1958, 12 January 1959, 11 January 1960. At a board meeting held in November 1978 Smith's were granted an increase of ten shillings, *ibid.*, 6 November 1978.

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⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, /P1/2619
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⁷⁰ *L.L.*, 28 April 1
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This could be achieved by fitting one of our heavy duty movements, Type T 300D, to the timeside of the mechanism. This movement would drive via chains and sprockets into the hour arbor and would be controlled in the event of a power failure by one of our Auto Restart Units, which has been designed to avoid having to restart the hands of any self starting synchronous electric clock after a power failure. Following a mains failure lasting more than twelve seconds the unit cuts off the power to the clock for precisely twelve hours less twelve seconds. The clock is then automatically restarted without any need for adjustment of the hands. Alterations between summer and winter time also occur automatically and the unit is fitted with a rechargeable battery system. The strike and quarters would be driven by an electric motor connected into the fly arbors and controlled by one of our automatic self correcting electronic programmers, Type C 170, which can also be programmed for a night silencer should this be required. This work would not entail the dismantling of the clock mechanism but the overhaul of the hammers and connecting wires would be required.

To strengthen their case for this adjustment to take place, Smiths informed the board that such a process had already been carried out to the clock in Tait's Tower. This was agreed to by the board, and the work had been completed by late April 1997.⁶⁹

Before any of these alterations took place, the question of moving the clock to a new location was raised at a meeting of the board in April 1990. The view was expressed that it was hidden from public sight behind the walls of Limerick Harbour, and should be re-located to the centre of the new roundabout at the Shannon Bridge. This was strenuously opposed by Councillor Ger Fahy of Limerick City Council, who argued that it should be kept in the dock area but that it should be re-constructed at 'the railed-in-space between Coakley's and Shannon Bridge', which would be the most appropriate place, because moving it to the roundabout 'would constitute a traffic hazard'. These suggestions were countered when the board announced that 'when a proposal has been received in connection with the re-location of the dock clock together with the funding thereof...', which would more than likely be in excess of £150,000, it would receive favourable consideration by the board.⁷⁰

The history of Limerick's Clock in the Dock casts light on different aspects of the port's past. It shows both the astuteness and the short-sightedness of the city's business community. For example, the competition to secure the contract for the clock shows that local manufacturers did not do themselves any favours, over-pricing their bids, and thereby being unable to beat outsiders. The limitations of the harbour board are also revealed by the discussions about the clock. The men who constituted the board were astute businessmen, and well able to work out the best deal, but they lacked experience in dealing with specialists like clock manufacturers. They were not far-sighted enough to realise that the lowest tender was not always to their advantage, and this led to a breakdown of the clock soon after it had been installed. Finally, the history of the clock reflects the decline of Limerick port. In the local newspaper reports of the Limerick Harbour

⁶⁹ Ibid., /P1/2619. Correspondence dated 6 January – 1 May 1997 to the Chief Executive, Limerick Harbour Board, from John Smith & Sons (Ireland) Clockmakers (Smith of Derby), 44 Ashleigh Gardens, Skehard Road, Cork. In 1888 there was an attempt made by the Harbour Engineer, Jeremiah Hall to have all of the public clocks in Limerick City connected with the Post Office by electricity but due to the expense involved at the time, it did not succeed. *L. C.*, 21 August 1888.

⁷⁰ *L.L.*, 28 April 1990 & SFPC/P1/64. LHB Minutes 9 April 1990. The railed-in-space is now a roller board skating area, and Coakley's has long since ceased to trade.

Board meetings the Dock Clock was referred to as a public clock: this was to some extent true, in so far as the public could view it from outside the perimeter wall of the docks. However, its purpose was much more specific to the time it was built, in that it was designed for regulating the working hours of the harbour employees in a time when Limerick was a busy port. With the continued reduction in the number of dock labourers and tradesmen at Limerick Harbour over the years due to the adoption of modern technology and a contraction of shipping activity, the clock has long since ceased to stand watch and regulate their working hours. It now stands as a lonely sentinel towering over a once thriving port.⁷¹

⁷¹ I am grateful to the Shannon Foynes Port Company for allowing me access to the minute books and documentation of the Limerick Harbour Board, and to their archivist, Mr. Seán Liston for his assistance with this material without whom it would have not been possible to compile this article.

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