

Transcript for clarity: Paragraphs from pages 281-283 of QUARRELS in James E. Handley's book: "THE NAVVY in SCOTLAND"

Another end-of-line quarrel between the Irish and the natives had an unpleasant sequel. At the completion of the Stirling and Dunfermline Railway in June 1850 the Irish marked the final monthly pay-day with the usual drinking in Dunfermline on the Saturday night. After the public houses had closed the men remained at the town centre and a fight developed between two of them but spread to the local onlookers with renewed awareness of old grudges. The gravity of a couple of injuries they had inflicted on the inhabitants sobered the navvies and they retreated to their lodging houses. In the early hours of the Sunday morning the superintendent of the Dunfermline police and a posse appeared on the scene. They burst open the doors of the lodging houses and thirteen navvies were seized, each prisoner as he emerged with his captor being greeted with yells of mingled satisfaction and execration from the bystanders. On the Monday mass meetings of the populace were held and a species of lynch law was determined on, not only for the navvies but against all the Irish in the town. They listened without heed to the warnings of the sheriff substitute and the provost. A crowd of between two and three thousand formed themselves into vigilantes resolved upon expelling the Irish not only furth of the boundaries of the royalty of Dunfermline but of the kingdom of Fife itself. Their first victim was an Irish labourer who was hoeing a field of turnips for a local farmer. Him they beat and threw over a dyke. Then they went into the workshops and compelled the Irish to leave and take up a position in the middle of the mob. They went into houses and forced the Irish to join their countrymen. One man barricaded his door against the mob. They burst it open. He defended himself with an axe. They struck it upwards and the blade opened his forehead. Another had a dog at his side to help to defend himself. They cut the throat of the animal. They went to a local foundry and dragged the Irishmen from their work. Many of the Irish weavers, shoemakers and masons' labourers had been in the town for years but that fact secured no reprieve for them. The mob then marched their captives in the direction of North Queensferry with the intention of having their prisoners shipped across the Forth. The sheriff substitute and the procurator fiscal of the county in a hired drosky swept by another road to the van of the advancing rabble and enrolled as special constables the workmen in a neighbouring quarry to oppose the forcible banishment of the Irish across the Forth. By the time they had reached the quarry the crowd had dwindled to about 400. Their Irish victims whom they drove before them were directed into the quarry by the sheriff. Meanwhile Scots miners at the collieries of Townhill, a mile or so from Dunfermline prompted by the incident in the town resolved to expel their sixty Irish fellow-miners. They had ejected thirty from one section and with the aid of 300 weavers from the town, were preparing another assault when the manager of the mine went up to the leader of the mob with a brace of pistols and threatened to blow his brains out if his confederates did not put an end to their spitefulness. Under the

protection of the military from Edinburgh most of the Irish returned to Dunfermline late in the evening but for safety sheltered for the night in the town hall. The military also checked the work of intimidation that was proceeding at the pits of Halbeath and Willwood, a mile beyond the Townhill ones. As the result of the attack a number of the Irish in Dunfermline collected their few belongings and left the town. The combined efforts of cavalry and constables brought into custody one aggressor from the collieries. In view of the incident the magistrates appealed to the Secretary of State for the establishment of a military barracks at Dunfermline but he suggested instead an increase in the constabulary force adequate to the population. For the 16,000 inhabitants there were only three policemen and one superintendent.

navvies who were working in the valley of the Evan Water. They came out of the cutting like a swarm of bees, assembled at Moffat to drive the Irish off the line and walked along it towards Lockerbie with pickshafts and other implements, collecting additional forces of their countrymen as they advanced. The contractors hastened to indicate the true state of affairs but many, deaf to a rational explanation, continued on the line until they reached Lockerbie. There, however, a psychologist among the contractors, realising that an English navvy with a full belly was a contented English navvy, plied them with bread, cheese and beer and the men returned peaceably to Moffat.

At about the same time the Highlanders and the Englishmen working on the Scottish Central were keeping Dunblane in a state of alarm with their rivalry. Once from pay-day on Saturday to the following Thursday they fought Bannockburn over again in the streets of the town. Many on both sides were injured. In sentencing to fines or imprisonment those who had been arrested the sheriff stated that an additional police force had been requisitioned and threatened that, if necessary, he would take full advantage of the law that authorised him to enlarge as generously as he pleased the number of policemen on the railway. The company would be at the expense of maintaining them but indirectly the money would come out of the pockets of the navvies themselves. To one notorious offender he refused the option of a fine on the ground that his mates would only put up the money for his release.

A few months later the English navvies on the Caledonian line at Gretna assembled to the number of about 200 with the intention of forcing the Irishmen who were working nearby on the Nithsdale line to demand either an increase in wages or give up their job. Both sets of labourers were employed by the same contractor and the Englishmen, who had carried over from the north of England their higher wages, were afraid that they would be reduced to the lower rate that obtained in Scotland. The Irishmen, who were inferior in numbers, moved off on a hint from the police and avoided a disturbance.

The end of work on a line or a section of it with dispersal of the navvies was a favourite time for settling scores with villagers and police who had proved hostile and with fellow-labourers who had the misfortune to be of different nationality. In January 1848 work was completed on the Caledonian Railway at Cobbinshaw, two or three miles south of West Calder in Midlothian, and the Irish navvies who were working there were discharged. Before

they left they surveyed the contemporary scene. Like Ko-Ko, they had a little list of offenders who might well be underground and who never would be missed. First on it were the police, and then followed the villagers of West Calder and the English and Scots navvies who had combined with them to aid the police in their tussles with the Irishmen. Moreover, they had an additional grievance. They occupied to the number of 1,000 a temporary village of huts around Cobbinshaw. When they had finished work on the line the authorities, fearing disturbances if they remained idly on, ordered them to leave the huts immediately and threatened to destroy the dwellings if they did not do so. The navvies felt that the authorities ought to be paid back in their own coin and that if there was to be any burning of huts it would be a good plan to begin in the village of West Calder. From their huts at Cobbinshaw, armed with a variety of weapons, more than 300 Irish navvies marched on West Calder where official authority numbered only eight or ten policemen hurriedly collected from the neighbouring stations in apprehension of a disturbance. To their help, however, and as a protection for themselves rallied the villagers and the English and Scots navvies. After some severe fighting the Irishmen were driven back. They threatened to return when they had added to their strength the Irish who were working on the line within a few miles of Cobbinshaw. Information of their intention was sent to Edinburgh and a detachment of cavalry to the number of fifty rode out to Mid-Calder to await developments. Discouraged at that turn of events the Irish navvies left their huts at Torphin, Balgreen and Woolford and dispersed. It was the second occasion on which they had been disappointed in their line of attack. Six months earlier they had assembled to visit West Calder in hostile mood but information about their project had been diffused and a strong body of constables and half a troop of cavalry from Edinburgh posted in the village upset their plans.

Another end-of-line quarrel between the Irish and the natives had an unpleasant sequel. At the completion of the Stirling and Dunfermline Railway in June 1850 the Irish marked the final monthly pay-day with the usual drinking in Dunfermline on the Saturday night. After the public houses had closed the men remained at the town centre and a fight developed between two of them but spread to the local onlookers with renewed awareness of old grudges. The gravity of a couple of injuries they had inflicted on the inhabitants sobered the navvies and they retreated to their lodging houses. In the early hours of the Sunday morning the

superintendent of the Dunfermline police and a posse appeared on the scene. They burst open the doors of the lodging houses and thirteen navvies were seized, each prisoner as he emerged with his captor being greeted with yells of mingled satisfaction and execration from the bystanders. On the Monday mass meetings of the populace were held and a species of lynch law was determined on, not only for the navvies but against all the Irish in the town. They listened without heed to the warnings of the sheriff substitute and the provost. A crowd of between two and three thousand formed themselves into vigilantes resolved upon expelling the Irish not only furth of the boundaries of the royalty of Dunfermline but of the kingdom of Fife itself. Their first victim was an Irish labourer who was hoeing a field of turnips for a local farmer. Him they beat and threw over a dyke. Then they went into the workshops and compelled the Irish to leave and take up a position in the middle of the mob. They went into houses and forced the Irish to join their countrymen. One man barricaded his door against the mob. They burst it open. He defended himself with an axe. They sturck it upwards and the blade opened his forehead. Another had a dog at his side to help to defend himself. They cut the throat of the animal. They went to a local foundry and dragged the Irishmen from their work. Many of the Irish weavers, shoemakers and masons' labourers had been in the town for years but that fact secured no reprieve for them. The mob then marched their captives in the direction of North Queensferry with the intention of having their prisoners shipped across the Forth. The sheriff substitute and the procurator fiscal of the county in a hired drosky swept by another road to the van of the advancing rabble and enrolled as special constables the workmen in a neighbouring quarry to oppose the forcible banishment of the Irish across the Forth. By the time they had reached the quarry the crowd had dwindled to about 400. Their Irish victims whom they drove before them were directed into the quarry by the sheriff. Meanwhile Scots miners at the collieries of Townhill, a mile or so from Dunfermline, prompted by the incident in the town resolved to expel their sixty Irish fellow-miners. They had ejected thirty from one section and, with the aid of 300 weavers from the town, were preparing another assault when the manager of the mine went up to the leader of the mob with a brace of pistols and threatened to blow his brains out if his confederates did not put an end to their spitefulness. Under the protection of the military from Edinburgh most of the Irish returned to Dunfermline late in the evening but

for safety sheltered for the night in the town hall. The military also checked the work of intimidation that was proceeding at the pits of Halbeath and Willwood, a mile beyond the Townhill ones. As the result of the attack a number of the Irish in Dunfermline collected their few belongings and left the town. The combined efforts of cavalry and constables brought into custody one aggressor from the collieries. In view of the incident the magistrates appealed to the Secretary of State for the establishment of a military barracks at Dunfermline but he suggested instead an increase in the constabulary force adequate to the population. For the 16,000 inhabitants there were only three policemen and one superintendent.

On the Scottish Central Railway a quarrel between Scots and English navvies had a historical flavour. During the course of it the English, to mortify and exasperate their opponents, broke the iron grating erected for the protection of the "Gathering Stone" on the field of Sheriffmuir where nearly 150 years before in the "Fifteen Rising" Mar's Jacobites and Argyll's Hanoverians fought an indecisive engagement. Two navvies, summoned for breaking pieces of the Stone, were merely admonished when they pleaded they were taking them as souvenirs.

The tempers of the Highlanders and the Irish working near one another on the Edinburgh and Glasgow Railway were trigger-happy and exploded on the most trifling provocation. Once when both parties had gathered amicably in the neighbourhood of Falkirk to make a presentation to a railway official a dispute about the quality of the snuffbox that was to be the token of their regard ended in a violent fight in which the Highlanders were the aggressors. A rumour that several of the Irishmen had been killed in the quarrel ran along the line and inflamed their countrymen. On the following Sunday a group of them attacked some Highlanders who were passing through Winchburgh on their way to their lodgings at Kirkliston. That was merely a preliminary encounter. The Highlanders, who worked on the west side of the line, rallied their clansmen, and the Irishmen, who were employed on the east section of it, circulated among their countrymen in the Grassmarket and Cowgate of Edinburgh information of the impending fight. Near Winchburgh, where their predecessors working on the Union Canal had once drawn up in battle array, the Irish, 1,500 strong, armed with implements from the line prepared for an even greater force of Highlanders approaching from the west and armed in like manner. Meantime on the application of the local authorities a detachment of seventy infantry and forty