



The Nell Family

The Nell Household 1828 - 1841

The Nell family was one of the leading commercial families in Louth during the 19th century. Their success was intimately linked to the canal. They achieved wealth, social status, and contributed to trade and employment within the town. All this acted as a launching pad for their involvement in local politics. During the 19th century they came to use their wealth gained from trade to present themselves in their lifestyle and houses as gentry.

The founder of this commercial dynasty in Louth was Richard Nell (1772-1828). He had already achieved a standing in Hull as a skilled professional where he was a Master Mariner and a Ship Master.* When he returned to Louth to move beyond his profession and become a businessman and entrepreneur in his own right he was taking a somewhat risky step. However, by the time of his death in 1828, aged 56 he had clearly been successful. He had built up a commercial empire at the Riverhead. He was a major leaseholder here, where he ran a number of businesses. Some of these were his, others he ran in conjunction with other merchants. He was a merchant in timber, coal and corn. He was involved with corn milling and bone crushing, as well as the production of oil cake for animal feed. He also leased one of the two ship yards which had a dry dock, a block maker's shop and a blacksmith's shop. He also owned terraced houses that were rented out to people who worked at the Riverhead.

The family lived in comfort but did not seek to distance themselves much from the source of their wealth at this time.

The 1841 census returns for the Nell Household: ([Click here](#))

* In the light of our recent research we now understand that the Nell family played a larger part in the development of east coast trade in the 18th & 19th centuries than we had at first understood. One member of the family went on to have a major impact on global trade in the 19th century. This was the R J Nell (1816 - 1868) who was involved in the tea trade, but who chose to keep Louth as his base. We will be doing a major overhaul on the Nell pages after the publication of our new history of the Louth Navigation in May.

Row of 4 tenements owned and let by Richard Nell in 1828 with frontage onto Thames Street:

The occupants of these tenements show the wide range of occupations and social class at the Riverhead. There was an agricultural labourer and two mariners living across the canal from their wealthy landlords, the Nells. This shows how apt John Craggs description of the Riverhead as "looking like a town at a distance " was in 1799. The Riverhead was a focal economic point around which a community grew up quite separate from the old centre of Louth. It afforded an income to both merchants and their employees who all lived close to their place of work. It also provided an investment income for the gentry shareholders of Louth, as can be seen from the list of Shareholders (1840).