

HISTORY OF THE SITE

Cleeves Riverside Quarter's appeal is not just in its geography, ramping as it goes down to Ireland's greatest river in the heart of its third largest city, but its character is very much shaped by its history.

It's a history that is about entrepreneurship and employment, about social resistance and civic pride.

Activity on the site dates back to the 1800s when the Lansdowne Quarry opened and the site was identified for development as a Flax Factory. In 1884 it was purchased by Sir Thomas Cleeve, who established The Condensed Milk Company of Ireland. Purpose built structures were required to meet the power requirements for condensed milk production, leading to the building of the Engine House, Boiler House and Stack.

The Condensed Milk Company of Ireland had, at its height, some 3,000 employees on its payroll and sourced its raw material from 3,000 farmers across

Ireland. Its exports reached every corner of the British Empire. A separate factory in Limerick was set up for the manufacture of Cleeve's Toffee. It was believed that company profits reached £1m+ during this period.

Away from its industrial history, the site became a landmark for social resistance in 1919 when it was an epicentre of the Limerick Soviet as 15,000 workers took strike action against the British Army's declaration of a 'Special Military Area'. The United Trades & Labour Council effectively took control of the city, ensured the distribution of food, goods, utilities and went as far as to issue their own currency. 100 years on, Limerick Twenty Thirty made the site available for an award-winning site-specific play, Bread Not Profits, written by local playwright Mike Finn, that saw the recreation of this powerful moment on the very site where it happened.

Cleeve's company would never fully recover from the industrial action and, following the end of WWI, the



price of milk dropped dramatically, affecting company profits also. The Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) then saw many attacks on the Factories and Creameries owned by Cleeve's - a symbol of British rule - and considerable damage was done to the business by these actions. In 1923, the company went into liquidation.

In 1927 The Free State Government established a new semi-state body, the Dairy Disposal Company, took control of the Condensed Milk Company, with the Cleeve's name maintained only through the continued operation of the sweet factory built adjacent to the main milk processing factory.

The company operated under State control until the early 1970s when the break-up of the Dairy Disposal Company saw transferral of ownership of creameries to local farmer cooperatives. By 1974 the Condensed Milk Company was sold to one of these, Golden Vale, a subsidiary of the Kerry Group. In 2011 Milk processing stopped on the site.

The site remained vacant until it was acquired by Limerick City and County Council in 2015 and was added to the portfolio of Limerick Twenty Thirty in December 2020.

