

## Whites Shipyard

The Whites family were prominent Quaker entrepreneurs in Waterford with extensive shipping business interests in the city. They began trading in O'Connell Street (then King Street) in 1776 selling sugar and groceries. They were soon stocking imported goods such as tea, coffee, spices, sugar, hemp and tar, as the business grew they became ship owners and builders.

William White opened the shipyard in Ferrybank in 1820, many of their skilled workers and labours were recruited locally. Between 1820 and 1870 the craftsmen and artisans built over sixty wooden sailing ships. The work was of such a high quality that the reputation of Whites grew nationally and internationally, leading cross - channel ship owners in Britain including Beasley and Blyth to order ships.

In particular two ships built in White's shipyard made a valuable contribution to Irish maritime history - The Hellas and The Merrie England. The schooner Hellas was built in White's yard in 1832. It was 92 ft-long, weighed 209 tons and was destined for deep sea voyages.

In 1835 the Hellas had the distinction of being the first ship to bring a consignment of tea direct from Canton, China to Ireland for Bewleys of Dublin. Captain Scanlan commanded the ship, importing 2099 chests of tea, breaking the London tea supply monopoly. The Hellas was extremely fast and spent several years trading in and out of China carrying fruit and tea.

The 201 ft-long Merrie England was built in 1856 and was the largest wooden sailing ship ever built in Ireland. It was a splendid full rigged sailing-ship. It was built for James Beazley of Liverpool. It made many voyages from Liverpool to Melbourne in Australia and returned to Liverpool via Sydney and Shanghai. This was the last full-rigged sailing-ship built in White's yard.

Quaker families established three shipyards in Waterford, Penrose, Whites and Neptune. The shipyards provided a lot of skilled jobs, at its peak over 1,000 were employed. Waterford was becoming a centre for highly specialised industry with organised and skilled labour.