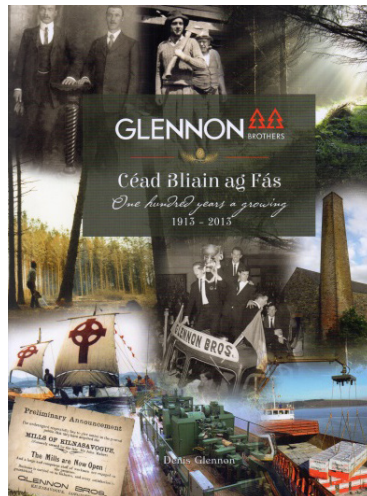


Glennon Brothers: *Céad Bliain ag Fás, One Hundred Years a Growing 1913-2013*

Denis Glennon. Glennon Holdings Ltd. 2014.
158 pages. Hardback and paperback
Available from Glennon Brothers Timber Ltd., Longford



This book is a celebration of the family's first century in the sawmilling business. A lavish publication, it is well written and designed and is illustrated with good-quality images which evoke the essence of the early days in the business. It features reproductions of early account books, invoices and order books together with details of wage advances given to millworkers. All of these will be of immense value to historians in the future. The family must be congratulated for its significant investment in recording the evolution of the business. In doing this they create an excellent headline for other family businesses. The book was written by Denis Glennon, a teacher at St. Mel's College, Longford. Denis is a member of the extended family and, though he is not involved in the business, he displays a well-honed appreciation of his subject.

The past one hundred years witnessed many changes in the sawmilling industry in Ireland. When Glennon Brothers Timber Ltd. began in 1913 there were approximately 850 sawmills on the island of Ireland. Currently only nine large mills and a few smaller mills remain. Glennon Brothers Timber Ltd. ranks high among the largest sawmills operating in Ireland and the UK and is the oldest-surviving family-owned sawmill business in Ireland. It is now managed by the third generation of the family.

For the first eighty five years the mill operated on the original site in Longford. This was once a flax mill, which were then quite common in the northern half of the country. Since

1998 the business has grown and developed dramatically both organically and through acquisition. It now has three plants in Ireland (Fermoy, Longford and Arklow) and two in Scotland (Toon and Humbie, near Edinburgh). The modern mill was developed over the period 1980-1998. There was a huge investment in kiln drying, which helped enormously with export market penetration.

This book eloquently chronicles the hardships endured in the 1920s and 1930s; the installation of electricity and the replacement of horses with lorries in the 1940s and 1950s. The rising economic tide of the 1960s is also recorded, together with the increased use of technology. There are chapters on employee and family reminiscences of events at the mill over the years. The 1970s oil crisis is well documented. It had a huge impact on the sawmilling sector as timber was hauled by lorry, usually over great distances. It cites an example of timber from Kenmare, Co. Kerry, which took eight hours to transport to the mill over roads which were, in many cases, primeval by today's standards. The energy crisis further impacted on sawing costs as the mill had been converted to electricity at this stage.

The book features a delightful chapter on Tim Severin's book *The Brendan Voyage*. Wood for this special boat was supplied by the late Paddy Glennon who took a personal, almost paternal, interest and pride in the project. Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior* L.) in 30-foot lengths was required. Paddy located a suitable 80-year-old ash tree and personally ensured that the timber for the mast was taken from the north-facing side of the tree, where he believed the wood was strongest. Typical of the man, Paddy presented the wood timber to Severin, saying "I'm repaying a debt, as my family has made a good living out of Irish-grown timber".

An interesting table at the end of the book catalogues the products currently produced and compares them with those produced in 1913. Back then the demand was for the following items: wheel shafts, wheel spokes, wheel stocks, felloes (for the benefit of younger readers, felloes are the parts of a wooden cart wheel directly inside the metal tyre rims which hold the spokes), egg cases, fowl-cases, doors, windows, gates, table legs, ladder poles, box barrows, fork, spade and scythe handles. The current production comprises kiln dried strength graded carcassing timber, pallet, packing case material, machined whitewoods, decking, fencing, roof trusses, timber frame houses, woodchip for MDF, bark mulch, etc. This gives us a glimpse of the versatility of Irish timber.

This is the first book published on the Irish sawmilling industry. Unfortunately a lot of lore and knowledge has already disappeared because people failed to record the stories of sawmillers, who once plied their trade in almost every part of the country. Most sawmills had their origins on the large estates, and as the estates disintegrated these sawmills disappeared, most without record. This book makes a fine beginning in recording the evolution and development of a now vibrant sawmilling sector from its humble origins.

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