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the engineeringly ingenious but aesthetically questionable expedient of putting the footpaths on cantilever supports, out over the river, that was done because there was little realistic hope of getting the money for a proper new bridge and bypass on the scale of Askeaton. Time, and Europe, will tell.

Despite having a wide main street, discourteous parking frequently reduces Charleville to a nightmare too - in fact, getting through Castleisland, the main street of which is much wider again, can be even worse.

THE flagship of the ESB — Ardnacrusha — produced less than 2.4 per cent of the nation's electricity last year, according to official figures now available.

Putting it another way, that's just less than a fortieth part of what passed through the national grid.

When the project was being planned, sceptics said that we'd never have need for a fraction of its awesome capacity.

But this region remains the centre of ESB power generation.

Last year, Tarbert oil-fired station produced four times the output of Ardnacrusha.

And giant Moneypoint, also on the Shannon Estuary, managed to produce more than 16 times the Ardnacrusha generation output from coal. In fact, Moneypoint produced 40 per cent of all electricity used in the country last year.

Yet Ardnacrusha managed to produce more in 1991 than in 1990 — fully 43 million units extra!

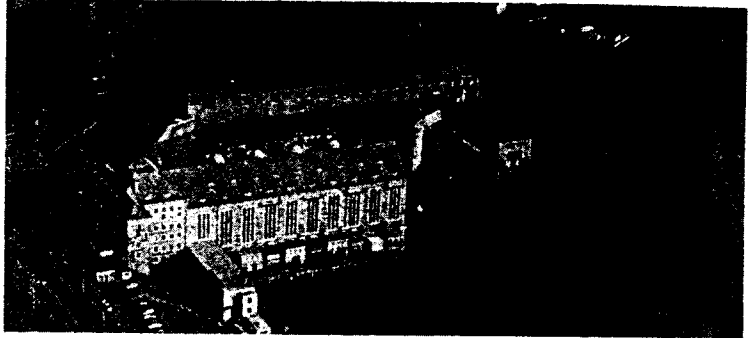
And all of this Shannon Scheme electricity was environmentally friendly with no pollution caused.

Costs per unit generated at Ardnacrusha was just over one and a half pence (1.609p to be exact). The comparable figures on the Liffey and Lee were about three pence per unit.

Ardnacrusha also beat super-efficient Moneypoint on cost-per-unit efficiency. Because Moneypoint uses bought-in coal, it cost 1.683p per sent-out unit.

Tarbert, struggling to the end of its days on sludgy oil, cost almost 2.6p per unit sent out, and was one of the most expensive. In fact, Tarbert's two 500MW generating sets are used mainly to top up the national grid, and are often kept on what is termed "spare spin capacity" — that is to say, barely ticking over, waiting to be called in and fuelled up if required.

More power to Ardnacrusha, more power to all Shannonside



Comparatively small but still significant contribution: Ardnacrusha (LL)

It worked to just 32 per cent of capacity, in fact, while Moneypoint was well above twice that. There are two further decommissioned generating units at Tarbert, deemed too expensive either to run or to repair.

Because of the cheapness of its product, Ardnacrusha was worked to more than 75 per cent capacity, and just about at its standard generation level.

Ardnacrusha was worth more than £5 million to the area last year — mainly in wages paid to people working there, and on purchases made in and around Limerick. This may not sound enormous when you hear that the total national wage bill for the ESB last year was just under £250 million, but it was a start. (That £5 million does not include the incomes of the peo-

ple at the ESB offices at Limerick, Shannon or Newcastlewast, for example, or of the many outdoor crews and other operatives.)

Much of Ardnacrusha's buildings and plant is so old that it is being depreciated at less than £150,000 a year. The equivalent depreciation equivalent for Moneypoint, as a matter of interest is a whopping £23 million.

But the ESB owes a packet: At the end of last year it owed £1,002 million! That's right — more than a billion pounds.

Of that, about half falls due for complete repayment within five years.

Which would explain why the ESB took out new loans last year of more than £100 million, as it repaid a similar sum to the banks.

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