



Construction underway on the hydroelectric power station at Ardnacrusha which was a pioneering project and one of the wonders of the world in its day

Shannon a source of power down the ages

■ For strategy, trade and latterly electricity, the river has always been a crucial asset

THIS WEEK we continue our look at the Shannon Callow, on the River Shannon journey. The American Mink, fox and otter are some of the mammals recorded there.

The grazing of cattle keeps alder and willow from spreading. The higher elevation of sections of the Callow, make it less prone to flooding. This provides a greater diversity of plants in particular clover, marsh bedstraw, marsh marigold meadow grass, meadow-sweet, sedge, water mint, and creeping buttercup.

The Shannon flows for less than 50 kilometres out of Lough Derg, and into the sea at Limerick. It splits into two sections, to facilitate the hydroelectric station at Ardnacrusha. On its banks can be found the towns and villages of Killaloe, Ballina, O'Brien's Bridge, Montpelier and Castleconnell.

Killaloe was once the capital of Ireland and Brian Boru and his ancestors, lived at Beal Boru on the banks of the Shannon. They had a fleet of ships, and a boat building facility and as a result they controlled the movement on the river.

Oliver Cromwell and his forces spent 10 days at Ballina in 1651, and it was reported they carried out repairs to the bridge. The present bridge linking the towns has 13 arches, but the number has changed many times, due to parts of it being swept away by floods. In the 1800s Killaloe was famous the world over as a fishing destination with salmon, trout, and eels very plentiful in the river. Killaloe once laid claim to seven hotels, but at present only one survives.

The nearby village of O'Brien's Bridge is located on the west bank of the river, and it is named after Turlough O'Brien who built a bridge over the Shannon at this location in 1506. This was a wooden bridge, and in 1510 Gearóid Mór Fitzgerald, the 8th Earl of Kildare burned the bridge.

The O'Briens rebuilt the bridge, but this time they erected a castle either side of the river to help protect the important crossing.

In 1844 Sir Robert Kane published a plan to harness the power of the river Shannon, between Lough Derg and Limerick. Another scheme was proposed by Frazer in 1901, and the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme became a reality in the



Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

1920s. In 1925 the new Irish Free State Government spent a fifth of the national budget (five million) on building a massive hydroelectric power plant at Ardnacrusha in South-East Clare.

They diverted the river, built a headrace, constructed Ireland's largest hydroelectric power plant, and established the world's first national electricity grid system.

The project which was overseen by German company Siemens-Schuckert, was delivered on time, and reasonably within budget. The manager of the project was Thomas McLaughlin, from Drogheda, who went on to become the first CEO of the newly formed ESB. More than 5,000 people were employed at its peak.

A railway line was extended from Limerick Docks, and all the heavy lifting equipment came into the country via Limerick Port, which had to be extended. The site attracted a huge amount of sightseers, transported by excursion trains from all parts of Ireland.

By 1929 it was reported that 250,000 spectators, had been shown around the works.

The Shannon Scheme was officially opened at the village of Parteen on July 22, 1929 and the first electricity was produced two months later. The scheme was so successful that it served as a model for similar projects all over the world.

By 1935 the plant was producing four fifths of the country's power. It was the largest hydroelectric power station in the world until the Hoover Dam was built. The 85MW of generating plant in Ardnacrusha was adequate to meet the electricity demand of the entire country in the early years. This was increased in the 1990s to 110MW, and the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme still produces electricity at present.

The city of Limerick has stood on the river Shannon for more than a thousand years. The Viking

King Thormodr Helgason, built the first permanent Viking stronghold on Inis Sibhtonn in 922.

This small island in the middle of the Shannon was later to be called King's Island. It offered an ideal defensive position, and a natural crossing point on the river.

Helgason used Limerick as a base to raid lands and ecclesiastical sites along the river Shannon. In 1937 at Lough Ree his army clashed with his fellow Norsemen who were stationed in Dublin. The Limerick Vikings were defeated and from then on were only a minor clan in the area.

King's Island gets its name from the Castle built on the orders of King John, which was completed around 1210.

The king also granted Limerick a charter giving its citizens the right to elect a mayor and bailiffs, who would govern and administer the city. The castle had a unique structure for its time. It was built without a keep and had high curtain walls designed to withstand enemy attacks.

The curtain walls ran between a series of towers, which had various defensive uses.

The castle was built on the boundary of the River Shannon, in order to protect the city from the Gaelic kingdoms, to the west and from any rebellion by Norman lords to the east and south.

Under the general peace imposed by the Norman rule, Limerick prospered as both a port and a trading centre. This was partly due to the castle acting as a watchdog on any cargo, passing through the port of Limerick.

The castle which has undergone a major redevelopment and investment in recent years, is now a major tourist attraction in the city.

Thomond Bridge crosses the river at King's John Castle, and the first bridge constructed at this location was around 1185. The current bridge was constructed in 1836, and it has only seven arches. It is a

wide road bridge built by the Pain Brothers. The users had to pay a toll to cross it at the time of construction, and the original toll house still exists at present. The castle sits at one end of the bridge, and the Treaty Stone at the other end.

The Treaty of Limerick which ended the Williamite War in Ireland was signed on an irregular block of limestone on the banks of the river Shannon, on October 3, 1691. The Treaty Stone is now displayed on a tall pedestal to prevent souvenir hunters from taking pieces of it.

In 1760 Limerick's walls were knocked down and the foundations of modern day Limerick were laid. In 1762 to signal the unity of the river, and the land the then Mayor of the City Edward Villiers, sailed down to the mouth of the river Shannon, and threw a silver dart into the sea.

It marked the limits of his jurisdiction as under ancient charter, he also held the title Admiral of the Shannon. A large warship coming up the river at the same time lowered its colours in salute to the mayor.

Patrick Sarsfield, who became known as a hero after the Battle of the Boyne, the Siege of Limerick, and the Flight of the Wild Geese, has a bridge in the city named after him. It opened in 1835 after taking 11 years to build and it was at first called Wellesley Bridge.

This bridge allowed for expansion to the northern shore of the river. The man-made island below the bridge is home to both the Shannon Rowing Club founded in 1868, and Limerick Rowing Club founded in 1870.

The bridge was home to an early monument to Viscount Fitzgibbon, however the IRA blew it up in 1930.

A monument to commemorate the 1916 Rising can be found on the bridge at present. The newest road bridge over the Shannon was built in the late 1980s, and while its official name is The Shannon Bridge, it is often referred to as the New Bridge, although the Abbey Bridge across the river of that name is newer. We'll leave it there for now, and next week conclude our journey in the Shannon Estuary.

Castlemahon ass was small but evil in town

John B. Keane

OUT IN THE OPEN

THE Castlemahon wild ass! I'm ashamed to say that I had never heard of this little-known animal until recently.

He roamed the heights of Turraree and the purple heath of Clounleharde so beloved by the poets until very nearly the turn of the century. It was in Glin recently while relaxing from the rigours of the road that I heard about this extraordinary creature.

In size, the Castlemahon wild ass was infinitely smaller than its domesticated fellows but what it lacked in size it made up in sheer viciousness and evil temper.

At its maximum this now extinct herd numbered over a hundred and stragglers were quite common in places like Barragone and Carrigerry.

In the second great famine of the seventies the natives turned on the wild asses to supplement their meagre rations and very soon they no longer wheeled and thundered over the West Limerick uplands.

The squealing of the mares and the stentorian braying of the jacks or stallions no longer carried on the wild breeze.

No longer did the wild masses of untamed asses rise the dust on the summer bohareens or the greater roads of the coastline.

The last Castlemahon wild ass, according to my Glin informant, was seen on the slopes of Knockathea in the year nineteen hundred and six.

He was spotted by a turf cutter and that is the last recorded instance of a sighting. Readers will remember that less significant events received more publicity at the time.

There was the disastrous earthquake of San Francisco and there was the revival of the women's suffrage movement in Britain.

Not a word about the asses although far bigger asses in military uniforms were receiving the lion's share of publicity.

So much for the Castlemahon wild ass. No one seems to know how he came into being. Was he only a tame ass who reverted to the wilderness called to birthright by the ancient mists that crown the hills above the Shannon or was he, as some believe, a refugee from the hinterlands of Asia Minor who was brought by boat to the green shores of Erin?

We shall never know.

A winner

LET ME make a right ass out of myself and continue about asses. I should perhaps have mentioned earlier that the highest price offered, although not ac-

cepted, for a racing two hundred pounds.

This amount was to Paddy Behan of I which is beautifully on the Listowel Athea.

The name of the Listowel Factory money was offered had won the Donkey Derby for time. This was in 1964.

This was widely to be the greatest derby of all time. The asses from Tipperary Limerick, Cork, and Newry.

After a disaster and after being i with on the histori course the great donkey pulled out to win by a nose. I went wild and the young Gerald I from Finuge was sh high by grateful who had back th from three to one evens.

It was indeed a g

No longer wild masses untamed rise the dust on the summer bohareens greater roads the coast

sion. It is doubtful, if it was the greatest race of all time.

The greatest

ONE MUST go back a hundred years from the famous night in 1864 and another derby, which must rank as the greatest time.

An account of the to be found in the Chronicle and Echo in the October of 1864. The Alethes. I cannot the full account but the best I can.

Alethes begins: "Thursday last, sixth of October, of grace 1864, was a red letter day in the little unkempt and Bohemian race of Listowel.

"The Listowel Races got up by several belonging Charles Kingsley having a little more exercise and di physique were to with all due pomp The races were announced with vehemence of voice, loud and loquacious tinkle of "Bird Eye" the re town crier. "Long