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A long forgotten story

Mystery surrounded the death of a German foreman at Ardnacrusha for which worker John Cox was hanged, writes **Colm Wallace**

IN 1925, the newly-formed Irish state embarked on an ambitious project to harness the powerful waters of the River Shannon.

The government, looking to supply electricity to the population, needed a company with experience in the field to complete the mammoth project. As the War of Independence had just ended, they chose to look beyond our former foes and nearest neighbours in England. Instead they opted for Siemens, a major German engineering company. The spot chosen was Ardnacrusha, Co Clare, two miles from Limerick City. The scheme at one stage employed several thousand local labourers, although many of the highly-skilled jobs were secured by German nationals. Jacob Kunz was one such worker.

Kunz was a foreman employed on the Shannon Electric Scheme. He was a 45 year-old unmarried man and had come from Bavaria to work in Ardnacrusha with his brother and sister. The trio also sharing a house in the area. By Christmas, 1928, Jacob had worked on the scheme for several years and had

**“ Goodbye
all. I shall
pray for you up
above. ”**

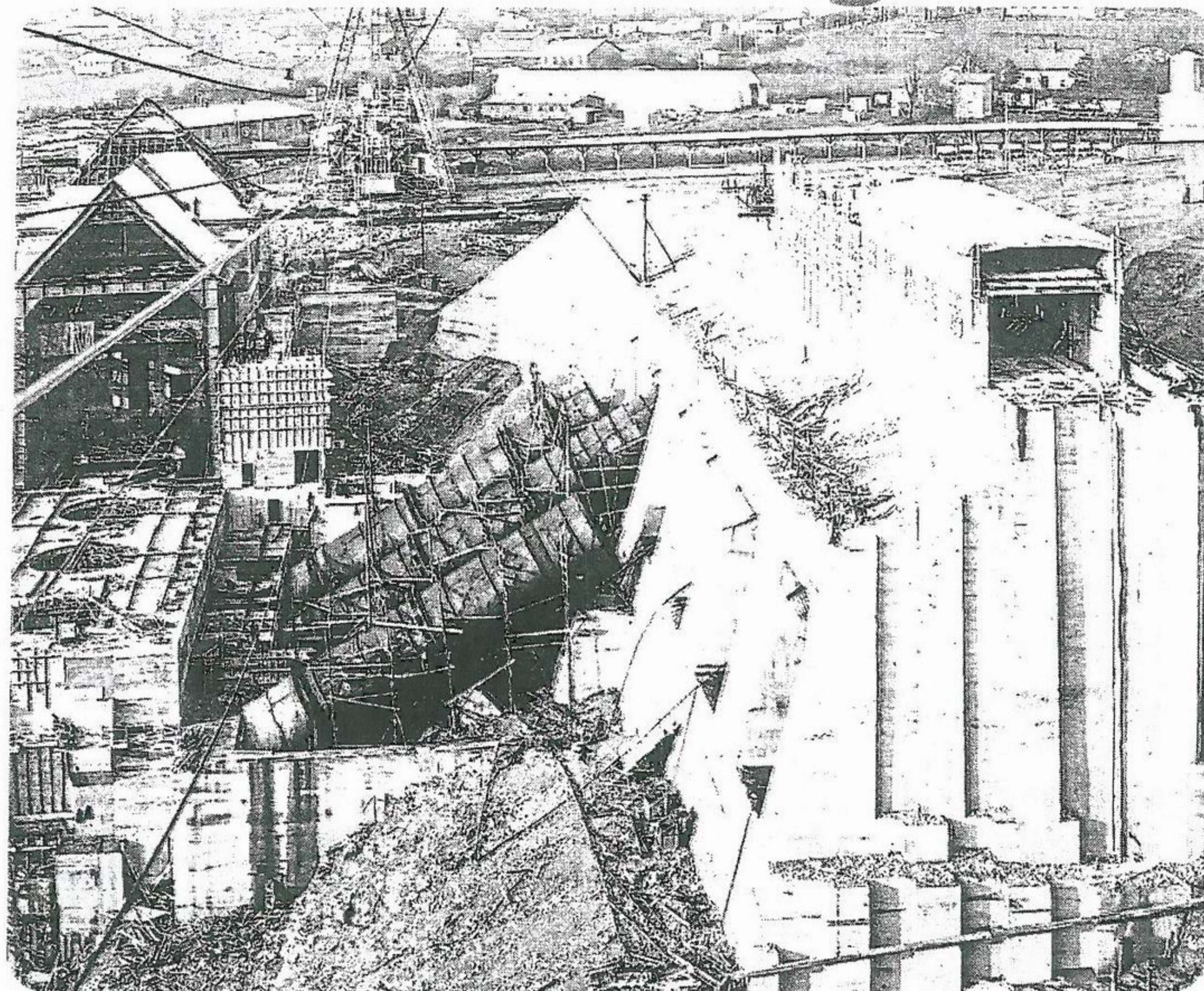
The final words of John Cox before he was hanged

amassed a considerable sum of money. From a wage of £6 a week Kunz had £60 which he kept in his wallet and savings which totalled over £400. These were sewn into a secret pocket in his vest. Just after 5:45pm on Friday, December 21, 1928, Jacob finished work and left the job in Parteen to return to his lodgings in Ardnacrusha. He was the last man to leave the job and he walked alone. On the road near the Long Pavement Train Station, he was attacked from behind and felled with a blow from a heavy object. As he lay unconscious on the track, his pockets were rifled and £80 stolen. The assailant did not discover the money hidden in the lining of his vest.

About fifteen minutes later two men walking home saw Kunz sitting with his head in his hands near the railway line. When they asked him what was wrong, he mumbled “sick, sick”. He was bleeding heavily so they quickly brought him to the medical office. He would not go in and went back in the direction of the attack saying “my monies, my monies.” His condition deteriorated and the men brought him to Limerick Hospital. He died before midnight, death being due to a skull fracture and brain laceration.

The Civic Guard quickly searched the area and soon found a heavy iron bar 200 feet from the crime scene. Within several hours of the murder they had arrested five men. Amongst them was John Cox. Cox was born in 1887 and lived in Rosemary Place in Limerick. He was 42 years old and married with four children. He had been a soldier in World War I and served for three years, spending a considerable amount of time in hospital. He subsequently joined the Free State Army but was discharged on account

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Construction at the power station at Ardnacrusha in the 1920s: Jacob Kunz had come from Bavaria to work in Ardnacrusha

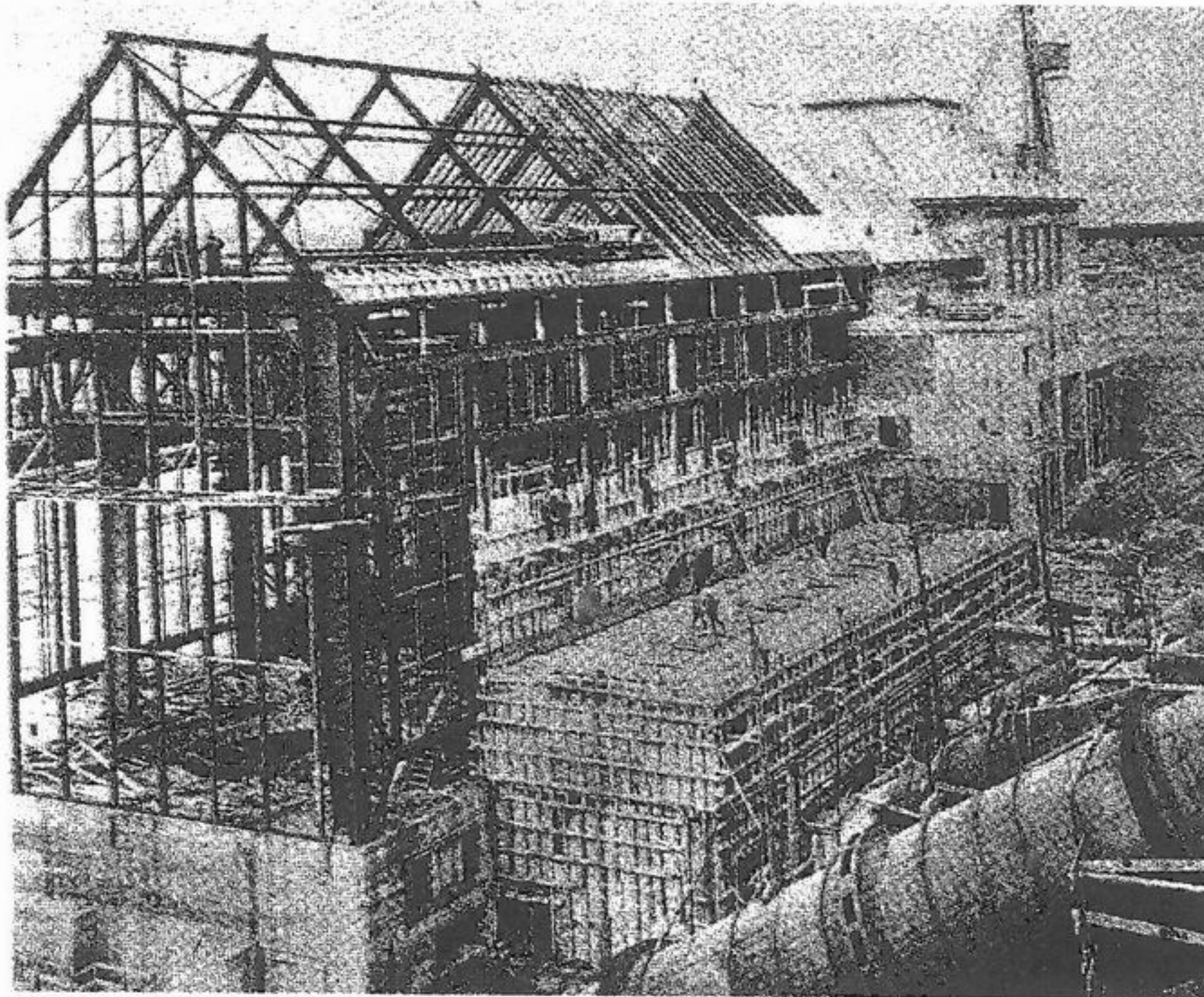
Story of an unsolved mystery

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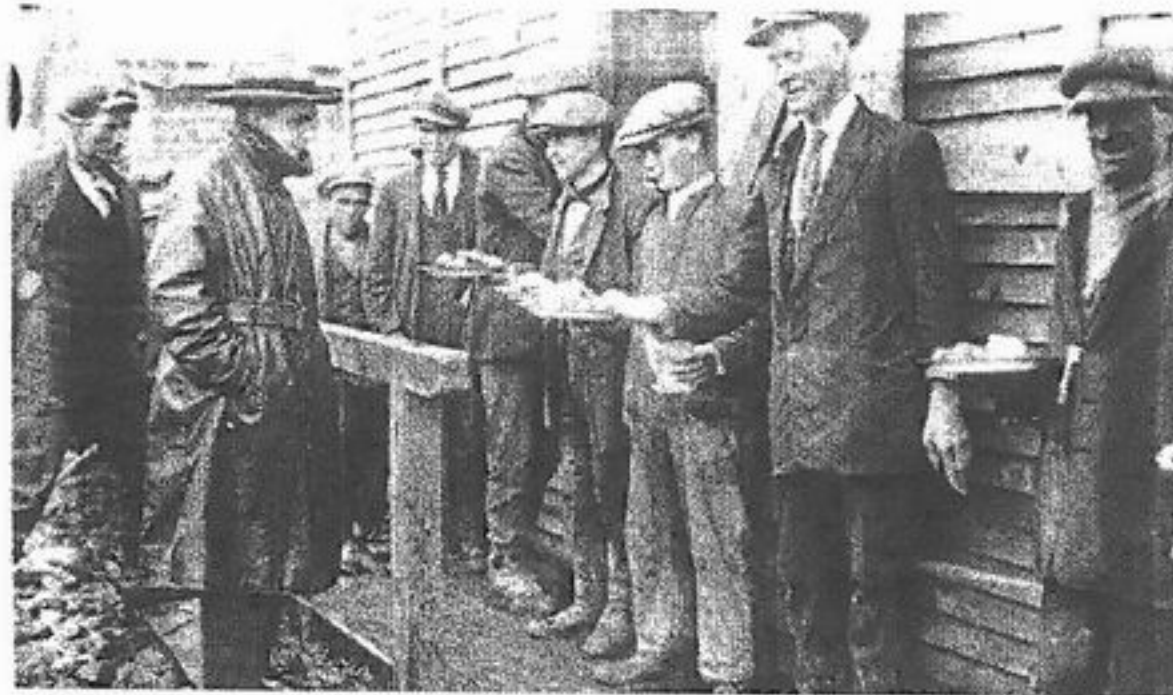
of injuries he had received during the war. Cox had worked on the Shannon Scheme since January, 1923 and earned 30/- a week. At one stage he had been a foreman, but by December 1928 he had worked on Kunz's gang for the previous eight months, filling trucks.

Cox, an employee at the scheme, had been at work early on the morning of the murder, but left around 11am, after injuring his hand. He went home and then drank in several pubs around Limerick. Afterwards he had gone to the Garda Station asking Sergeant Mulroy, a friend of his, for "the price of a pint," as he was "broken." Mulroy refused. The Gardaí believed that he had then went out in the direction of Ardnacrusha. When Sergeant Higgins accosted him late on the evening of the 21st, he was going into his brother-in-law's house. Higgins asked Cox to accompany him down to the station, to which Cox replied "Very good sergeant, I will be with you." At the Garda station, Cox's pockets were searched and two pound notes were found therein. Cox explained "That's my own. I'm keeping it for Christmas." Cox claimed that he had not been near the scheme since 11am on the day of the murder. When asked to account for the yellow clay which was on his boots he reiterated that he been nowhere but the streets of Limerick City. Cox said to Sergeant Higgins after the interview: "What are we arrested for...it is for the beating that Kunz got today." When asked what he knew about what had happened to Kunz, Cox would not answer. Similarly, when asked about his whereabouts between 5pm and 8pm that day, he would not respond.

Cox changed his statement two days later admitting that he had been out towards the scheme on the evening of the murder. After injuring his hand, he had returned to Limerick and visited a couple of public houses, drinking pints in each. He admitted talking to Sergeant Mulroy but denied asking him for money. Subsequent to this, Cox said he had taken Flannery's bus from Limerick at 4:30pm to visit the medical tent on the scheme to get his hand seen to. This statement was corroborated by the medical officer at Ardnacrusha, Dr. Dietrich. According to the doctor, Cox



An archive image showing the construction of the turbine room at Ardnacrusha



Workers at the Shannon hydroelectric scheme, Ardnacrusha pictured in 1928, a year before John Cox was hanged at Mountjoy Prison

entered the office at 5.27pm, leaving a few minutes later. Cox claimed to have returned to Limerick on the 6pm bus but he was unable to say who had been conductor or driver on that journey. No staff members or passenger on the bus at that time could remember seeing him.

Several days later, on Christmas Eve, Cox was in custody being further questioned about his movements on the day of the murder. Around 1.30pm, he gave Sergeant Staunton a bundle of clothes which he

asked would be delivered to his wife. Staunton, however, opened the package and found a folded note inside, meant for Cox's wife. As a result of what was written in the note, the Gardaí went to a dilapidated house on Athlunkard Street. Under a stone inside, they found over £79 in cash, a similar sum to what was missing from Kunz's pockets.

Cox was arrested and charged with murder. His trial began in Dublin Central Criminal Court on March 11, 1929. He pleaded not guilty to the charge, saying

that he had not been within half a mile of Kunz during the attack. He claimed that the money he had hidden was given to him by a man named Edward Cassidy. He had met Cassidy at 7pm on the night of the murder and he had allegedly handed Cox a bundle of notes and asked him to hide it.

He also stated that before that day he heard Cassidy threaten the life of Kunz. Cox also said that Cassidy had confided in him: "I'll get money for Christmas, wherever I'll get it." When asked why it had taken him five days to tell the Gardaí where he had gotten the money from he said that he didn't want to tell them as he assumed it had been stolen. Cassidy, however, had an alibi for the hours in question.

Cox also claimed that Sergeant Mulroy was lying and he had never asked him for money as he had plenty of his own. His inconsistent statements in the days after the murder, he said, were due to a loss of memory because of all the alcohol he had been drinking that day.

He also said that he had refused to answer questions about his whereabouts at the time because there were five Gardaí questioning him. Cox pleaded

SENTENCED TO DEATH

Saved from the Gallows

COLM WALLACE



The cover of *Sentenced To Death* by Colm Wallace

not guilty and said he would not mention the name of anyone who committed the crime. When asked if he thought the money from Cassidy was Kunz's, Cox replied that he didn't know but that he thought Cassidy may have gotten it for getting married.

The jury did not believe Cox's highly improbable version of events and after 2 hours 15 minutes, the defendant was found guilty of murder. Mr Justice Johnson pronounced the death sentence on the accused. Cox had maintained a cool indifference throughout the trial but on hearing this "a deadly pallor came over his face; his lips quivered and a vacant stare came into his eyes." Cox submitted an appeal but it was to no avail.

On April 23, John Cox heard that there was no hope for commutation. He spent his final two days in prayer. He had a last visit from his wife and brother the night before the execution before going to bed at 12am. He awoke at 4am, and attended Mass. His last words were "Goodbye all. I shall pray for you up above." John Cox was hanged at 8am on the morning of April 25, 1929 in Mountjoy Prison. It was just four months after the murder of Jacob Kunz.

Colm Wallace has written a book *"Sentenced to Death: Saved from the Gallows"* about thirty Irish men and women who had the death penalty imposed on them between 1922 and 1985. It is available in all good book shops and is also available on amazon.com

For more information see the author's Facebook page www.facebook.com/colmwallaceauthor or contact Somerville Press, Dromore, Bantry, Co. Cork. 028-32873

CHRIS CORNE

Art reviews and news from Limerick's bid to be Europe

Our home-hop and its revolutionary

RUSANGANO Family are lot to say, and they can today. The three members of the band are from Zimbabwe; God Knows is from Zimbabwe and MynamesisJohn is from Zimbabwe. They are all grown-up with a strong sense of Irishness on the

Critics have highlighted their cultural Ireland. On the other hand, they are praised for their energetic and are filled with stories - such as God Knows raps the lyrics, "I'm Here there are layers upon layers experiences of immigrants who

As part of Ormston House's Rusangano Family ran an interactive workshop on June 2. The workshop began with band members, followed by students. After this, they talked about their new album, Let The nameisJohn gave a crash course ended with each audience member to the lyrics of a song, which G formed.



Rusangano Family portrait PICTURE

The Murder Machine project performance by Ceara Conway, an installation by The Otolith Group, George Hallett beside a collection of four speaker sound pieces was another development.

The next development of the Ormston House is a discussion with Sean Taylor this Thursday June 9th speaker sound installation, titled 'The Murder Machine' launched in Ormston on May 10th. Rusangano Family workshop not simply a side to the main event but an integral part of it.

Working outside the expected workshops and events are a display of physical art objects, talking off script from the familiar form. Yet, there are a series of events taking place - just like a relationship between Ireland and formed, at least in part, by a story from colonial masters.

The extent to which Murder Machine lives up to its identity as an event of artwork and intervention layer and reflecting on what has been there is a sense of energy and

Much of the conceptual weight of such topics as the post-colonial place of language in forming a title and central reference point Pádraig Pearse. This conceptual objects and events that make a rare magazine Transition or a collection of rare books and so on; they are ever present, and this theme is seen, felt and heard throughout. Read more at <http://www.limerickleader.com>

Fitness group with a difference to hit streets

EUGENE PHELAN

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IT's the latest fitness group to start up in Limerick city and is certainly different.

University of Limerick medical graduate Tristan Magedera has just started Limerick Slow Walking Group.

"It is totally free to join and the idea is that we will meet up every Sunday morning and do a short walk in the city," he said.

The meeting point will be the bus and coach stop at Arthur's Quay park, with walks taking

place on the hour from the early time of 6am.

Further strolls take place at 7am, 8am, 9am, 10am, 11am and 12noon.

"We will never have to cross a road, we will walk from Arthur's Quay under Sarsfield Bridge, and go up the steps at the far side, walks across the bridge and down to St Michael's Boat club and back," said Tristan, a former fitness instructor.

Born in Watford, just outside London, Tristan is now living in Thomondgate.

"The idea is we all stay together and walk at the pace of

the slowest person in the group. If it takes just half an hour to come back we can have a chat and if people want to head off with the next group on the hour, they can," Mr Magedera, who has lived in Limerick for four years, told the Limerick Leader.

All are welcome to attend the walks.

More information is available by logging onto Facebook and looking up Limerick Slow Walking Group.

Alternatively, you can call Tristan directly at 0894870000 for more information.



Tristan Magedera, who is setting up Limerick's Slow Walking Group

PICTURE: MICHAEL COWHEY

Limerick

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