



The Ardnacrusha Hydroelectric Station under construction in the 1920s. The project cost some £5m and would provide all the state's electrical needs

Power station's pivotal role in fledgling state

■ Public tours now available of the magnificent and important Ardnacrusha station

ARDNACRUSHA TOURS are now available to members of the general public as part of celebrations to mark the ESB's 90th anniversary. The ESB is inviting schools and the public to visit and explore one of Ireland's greatest engineering developments at Ardnacrusha Power Station in Co Clare.

As part of the Shannon hydroelectric scheme, Ardnacrusha took some four years (1925 to 1929) and 5,000 workers to build.

Costing more than five million pounds to construct at the time, which was almost one-fifth of the entire annual budget, Ardnacrusha became a symbol of forward thinking in relation to harnessing Ireland's natural resources. With the national grid constructed at the same time, the 86 MW capacity was then enough to meet the electricity demands of the whole country.

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, but little happened until the Shannon Hydroelectric Scheme became a reality in the 1920s.

Dominic O'Brien, from Limerick had a very detailed article on the background and construction published in the Limerick Association Yearbook and I include some of the following from it.

"The Shannon Scheme was the brainchild of a young Irish engineer Thomas A McLaughlin, who left Ireland in 1922 to work with the German firm of Siemens Schuckert. In his work on the supply of electricity to various parts of Germany he became convinced that electricity was the key to the economic uplift needed by Ireland. At this time the Irish free State, in the aftermath of the Great War, the War of Independence, and the Civil War was in a very depressed condition.

"He carried out a large amount of preliminary work on his own, before approaching Siemens or the Irish Government. When he did it was with a very carefully thought out scheme of utilising the waters of the River Shannon, to generate cheap electricity for the whole country.

"The main aim of his scheme was the harnessing of almost the whole



Then & Now

with Tom Aherne

fall of the river at one point, in Ardnacrusha, and not at a number of separate points.

"Minister for Industry and Commerce Patrick McGilligan commissioned Thomas to submit his proposals. The Dublin lobby had recommended that the River Liffey should be the first river to be developed as the big demand for electricity would come from the greater Dublin area. The extension of supply to outside the metropolitan area did not appear to be a high priority (sounds familiar).

"On August 13 1925 the contract between the Irish Government and Siemens was signed. The cost was £5.2m and the scheme was to be completed in 3½ years. The first consignment of material for the scheme arrived in Limerick Docks in September.

"They came from Hamburg aboard the Limerick Steamship Co. Steamer Luimneach and it was stored at the Strand Barracks which was acquired by Siemens. A railway line was constructed from Longpavement, in the Limerick suburbs to Ardnacrusha to move material to the site.

"The scheme involved work on the Shannon from Killaloe to Ardnacrusha, where a large camp was built to accommodate 750 Irish and 200 German workers. They each had their own canteen, as the Germans liked their own food which was mainly black Bavarian bread and German sausage.

"A temporary power station was built in Ardnacrusha to supply diesel generated electricity to the site. A repair shop, a stone crushing and water plant, a sawmill, stores, and a small laboratory was also constructed. There were three other camps at Clonlara, Parteen Weir, and O'Brien's Bridge.

"The work at first was mainly excavation, and the most modern machinery was used mostly multiple bucket excavators. The excav-

ations for the Tailrace and Power Station, ran into heavy concentrations of rock and about one million cubic metres was blasted and moved.

"Life in the camp at Ardnacrusha, like that on any building site was at times primitive and tough. There was a great variety of people working there, including a group from the West of Ireland who only spoke Connemara Irish. Other languages spoken included Munster Irish, English, German, and bad language.

"Keeping clean was a problem as clothing was limited and some of the workers, used to wade fully clothed into the Shannon, even during the depths of winter, to wash the dirt and grime from their clothes. The temporary power station was used by others on a Sunday to wash their shirts, from the hot water pumped out from the generator cooling system.

"The meals served to the workers was a half pint of tea, ten ounces of bread and two ounces of butter for breakfast, repeated for tea with jam added. Lunch was half a pound of lean meat, vegetables, a pound and half of potatoes, and two ounces of bread.

"The cost per week amounted to eleven shillings and eight pence. Fish and chip shops were opened around the camp for workers to supplement these rations, due to the nature of the heavy work being done.

"Cinema shows were held and hurling and football games were played and drink was occasionally available in the canteen. Many workers went to Limerick for their entertainment after the day's work was completed.

"They travelled by bus, and the local jarveys would call to the camp to ferry them into the city. The relations between the Irish and the German workers were very good and each were more than happy to share their skills with each other.

"By June 1927 work was well advanced on the construction of the Weir and intake at Parteen Villa. The weir was constructed in three parts, to avoid interference with the free flow of the river. The construction work was done in a dry area between Cofferdams, and involved extensive diving operations. Large scale excavations were necessary for the foundations of the Power Station, but in spite of this, the work progressed very rapidly.

"In June 1928 all the excavation work had been completed at the Station, and building was in progress. The building of bridges at Blackwater, Clonlara, and O'Brien's bridge was well advanced. By December dramatic advances had been made and the Power Station as it stands was recognisable. By the summer things had advanced so much that an official opening was possible.

"The Shannon Scheme was officially opened at the village of Parteen on July 22, 1929 (88 years ago) on a wet and windy day. President W.T. Cosgrave formally opened the intake gates of Parteen Weir, letting the waters of the Shannon into the Headrace for the first time. The canal was not actually flooded by the President as this process extended over several weeks to enable the engineers to test the embankments.

In the course of his speech President Cosgrave, referred to the day as a momentous one and said our most famous river is entering on a new chapter in its history; henceforth it will be harnessed to the service of the nation. The Shannon Scheme was remembered in verse by Syl Boland in 1927

Oh, were I Homer, that ancient roamer

I'd write a poem on a noble theme
To sing the story and praise the glory

Of that wondrous project the Shannon Scheme.

Today, Ardnacrusha represents around 2% of our total installed capacity. The guided tours can accommodate groups of up to 30 people and run for approximately 90 minutes. The tours are free and they are available up to August 31. There are a number of tours each day and booking is necessary at www.esb.ie

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John B. Ke

OUT IN THE OPEN

ARISTOTLE ONASSIS, the Greek Shipping magnate, has quite a lot in common with your friend and mine, the inimitable Joe Quaid of Knockadireen, formerly of Woodford, Listowel, and originally from that hallowed spot known as Athea, where the songs of the Gale River mingle with the happy breeze of Knockathea.

It is rumoured that Onassis is writing his life's story. The same can be said of Joe Quaid, who is writing his memoirs under the fascinating title of "Quaid's County".

Joe Quaid married his wife, Moll, on the same day that Onassis married Jacqueline Kennedy. In addition, Moll and Jacqueline were both widows.

Aristotle Onassis has a gold tooth and so has Joe Quaid.

"What about money?" I asked Joe.

"I have enough," he answered, "and I'm sure Onassis isn't short either."

Wasn't it Longfellow who wrote:

Lives of great men all remind us,

We can make our lives sublime,

And departing leave behind us,

Footprints in the sands of time.

The night of Joe Quaid's marriage was a memorable one. The wedding itself was a quiet one and as Joe himself once said: "There isn't all that novelty in getting married a second time."

When Joe and his charming wife, Moll, arrived home from the honeymoon in Duagh they bolted their door and prepared to retire for the night. What they overlooked was the fact that the area in which they lived was a renowned one for sopping and that no home-coming couple were allowed to settle in for the night without first paying tribute to visiting soppers.

For the benefit of those who may not know, I should explain that soppers were neighbourhood musicians, dancers and their handlers who dressed up in straw sops to go a calling on newly-married couples.

The reason for wearing the sops was in case the young couple would not take too kindly to such a late visit on such a special night and the sops, accordingly, were worn to conceal identities. Many couples regarded sopping as a crude and repressive imposition but others enjoyed it.

Anyway, like I said, Joe and Moll were on the point of retiring when the commotion started on the roadway outside.

There was the wild care-free music of melodeon, fife and bodhrán. There were the shrill, uncouth yells that intimated mischief-making

unless strong forthcoming.

Then came the pounding on the door used to simulate Joe showed no

"Come in, boys," and drew back the large crowd and surged into the

"All I have in mind," Joe explained, "is of stout and I'm for myself."

So saying, he bottle, uncorked and lowered it down in satisfaction. The

looked on in This was a new Politely, Joe said the door.

"If I get married," said Joe, "I'll be a night for sure."

No carnival

RUMOUR there will be Duagh this year is not so. My friend told me that if Duagh hold it, the carnival transferred to

It was a grey na Sidewalk and the wa. Duggan Kar Dugg later h South

The last ti festivals of a area was in K 1923. In August Knockalough held for the l

The clerk was Dan Kir the sole ste Sheehy of K

The race: Buckley's five stake mon pounds. The subscribed l many of v alive.

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