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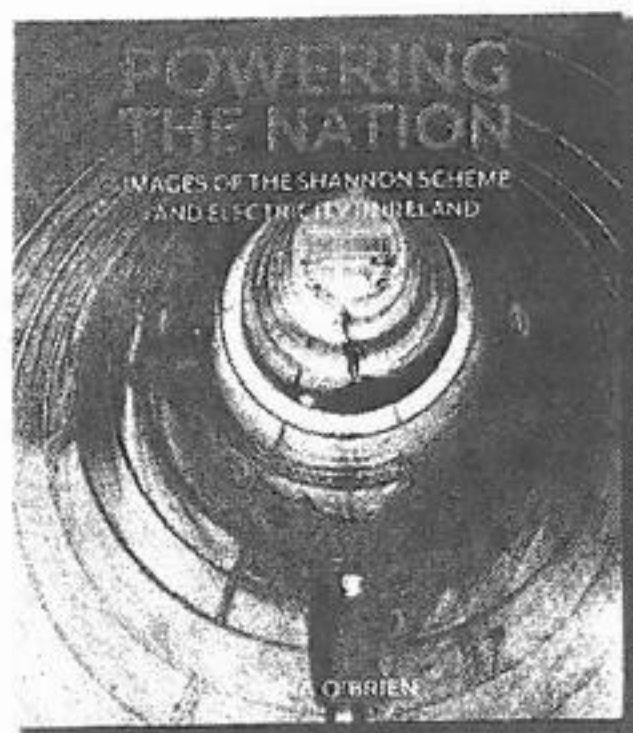
Electrifying the Shannon

A technological marvel: **Jess Casey** talks with Sorchá O'Brien who recently completed a book on the ambitious Shannon Scheme

IN THE 1920s, a few miles outside of Limerick, the Free State set out to harness the power of the Shannon River as part of a colossal industrial initiative that led to a brighter future for Ireland.

Using the drop from Lough Derg to the mouth of the Shannon to power a run-of-the-river hydroelectric generating station, the Shannon Scheme laid the groundwork for the rural electrification of Ireland.

'Powering the Nation' by design historian Dr Sorchá O'Brien tells the story of the images behind this technological marvel. Using archival material, like the paintings, drawings and lithographs created by the artists who were drawn to the project, and photos, postcards and cigarette cards, advertisements and stamps, the book looks



Powering the Nation by Sorchá O'Brien

at how the scheme quickly became a powerful symbol of our fledgling State.

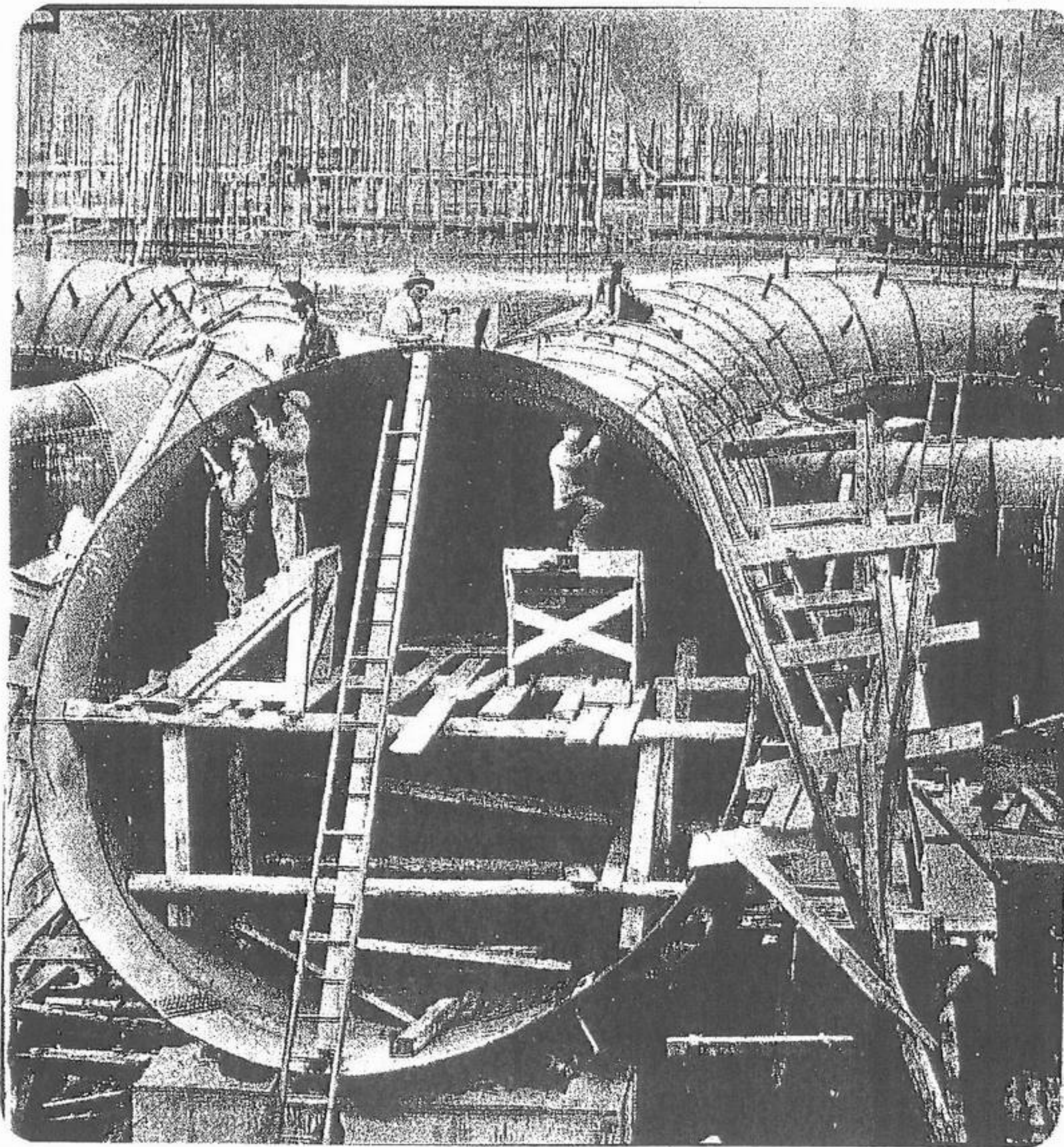
"It's very much a period of nation building," Dr O'Brien tells the Leader, "where you've got the new Government, the first Government of the Free State, who are trying to set up all the different sorts of infrastructure."

"The Shannon Scheme was very much a project that was intended to supply electricity to the country so that the people of Ireland could actually have amenities like electrical power or electrical light, appliances and so on, the same as a lot of other European countries," she adds.

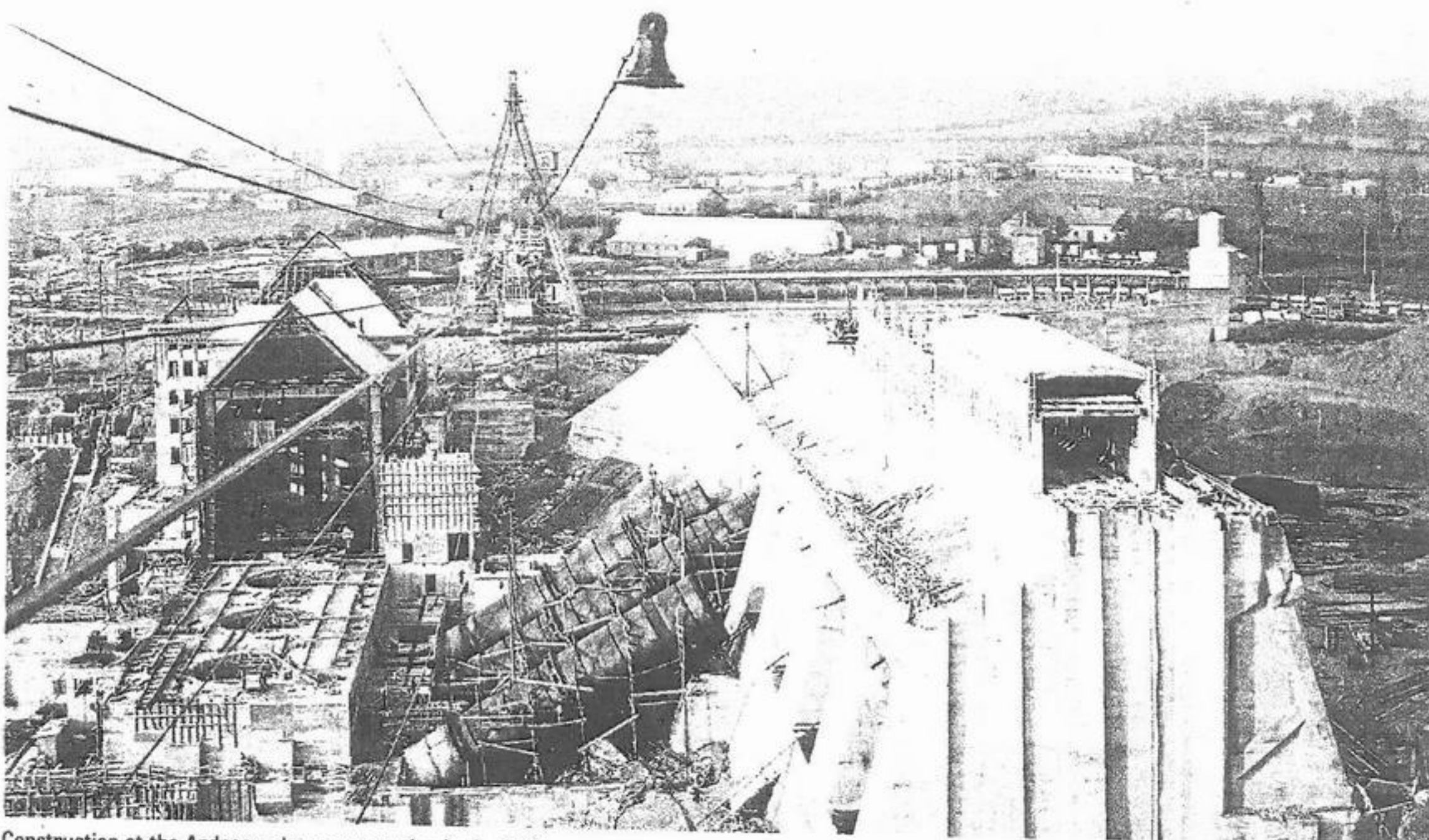
A huge amount of people in Ireland didn't have those facilities at the time.

"There's small generators in places but there's no national grid, there's no national supply of electricity," she

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Workmen constructing the spiral castings as part of the Shannon Scheme in 1926



Construction at the Ardnacrusha power station in the 1920s PICTURE: COPIED BY PRESS 22

The story behind the scheme

CONTINUES FROM PAGE 1

says.

The idea for the scheme came from a young Irish engineer by the name of Thomas McLaughlin, who had spent the early 1920s working for Siemens in Pomerania, now Poland, and an acquaintance of Patrick McGilligan, the Minister for Industry and Commerce at the time.

"He was working on hydroelectric power stations there and looking at this and saying 'this could really go down very well at home'," Dr O'Brien explains.

"At the time there was a lot of people who thought 'Oh we'll just electrify the Liffey and provide hydropower to Dublin and then we'll do the rest of the country later because there's not really that much demand.' Whereas McLaughlin was saying 'No - we'll go straight for the Shannon.' Electrify the Shannon and even if that provides more power than we need, we can connect more people to the grid and that power can be used."

The Shannon Scheme was a very ambitious project, one that required a generous budget to match.

"It had a £5.5 million budget, which was 20% of the national budget in 1925. Imagine now, somebody saying 20% of the national budget is going to go on one project, it was massive."

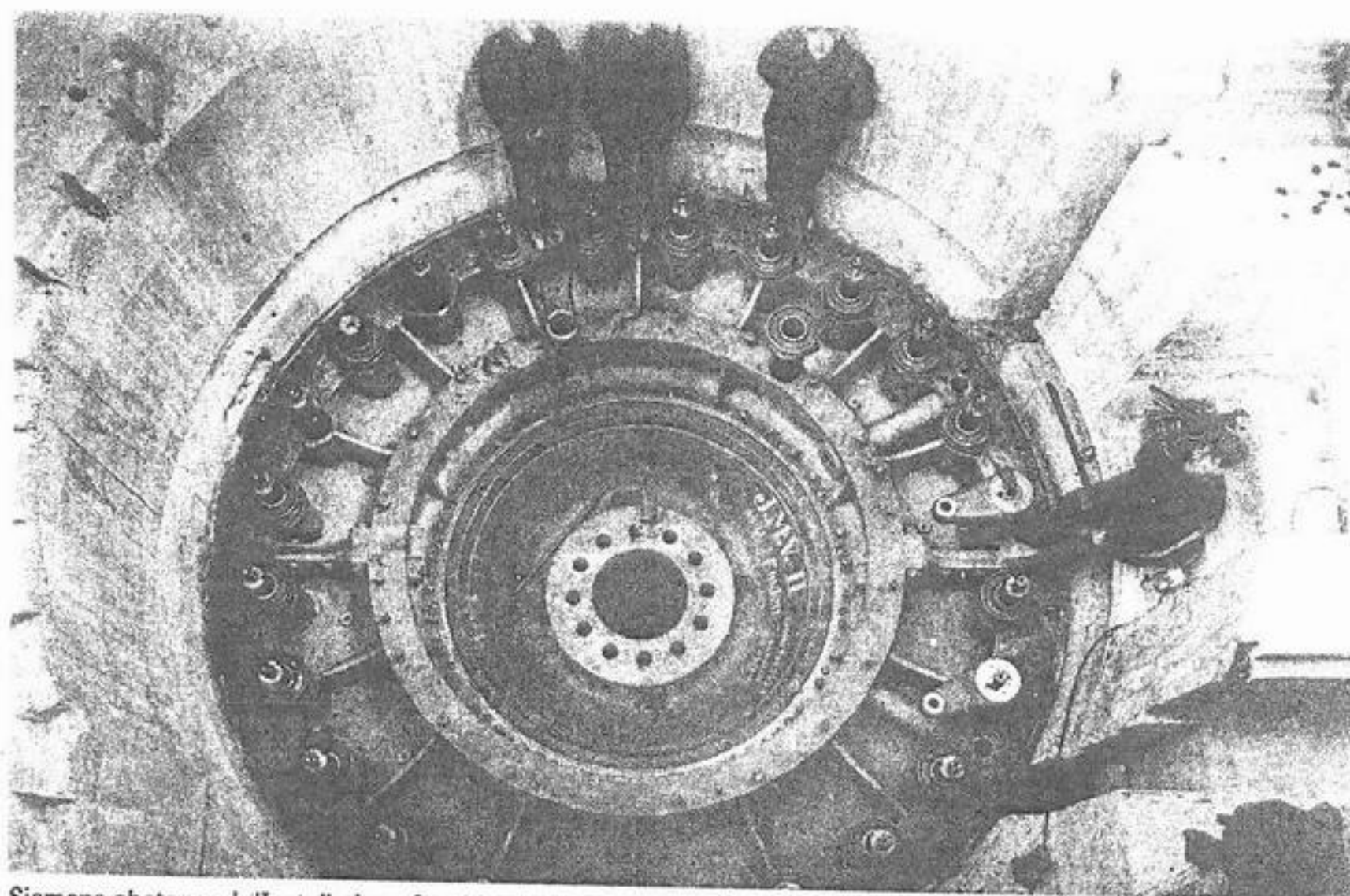
The contract for the new power station went to two German companies, Siemens Schuckertwerke and Siemens BauUnion.

"They set up shop in Ardnacrusha and they also had offices in Strand Barracks in Limerick."

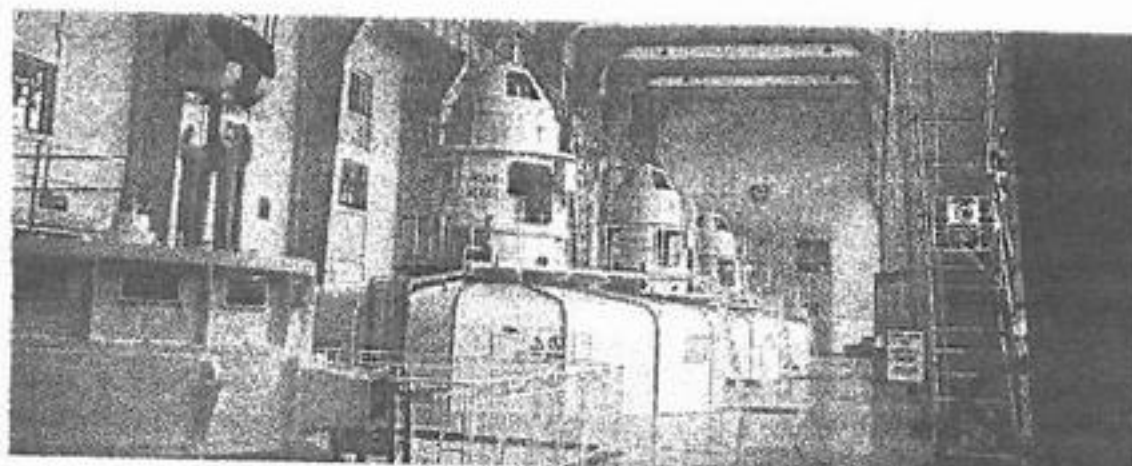
At one point up to 5,000 Irish unskilled labourers were employed on the scheme as well as several hundred skilled German workers, adds the author.

"There was a narrow gauge rail line running from Limerick Docks out to Ardnacrusha because so much of the equipment was coming through from Germany. Everybody from miles around was being drafted in to work on this project, particularly when they were building the canals because that needed the most manual labour."

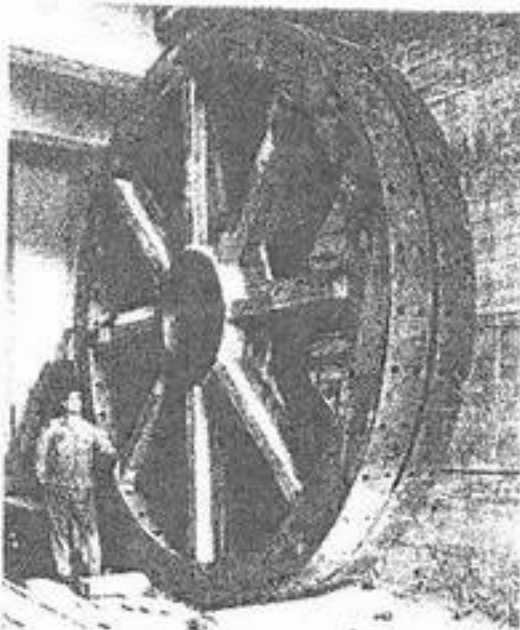
"You've got people coming from all around, you've got lots of



Siemens photograph 'Installation of turbine II' 1929 PICTURE: COURTESY OF THE ESB ARCHIVE.



Ardnacrusha turbine hall PICTURE: COURTESY OF SORCHA O'BRIEN



'Workman posing with turbine rotor' 1929 PICTURE: ESB ARCHIVE



Ardnacrusha control room PICTURE: COURTESY OF SORCHA O'BRIEN

was a huge accommodation crisis as well."

The book contains collections

in Ireland working on the scheme, as well as photos captured by amateur photographers

Scheme set up by ESB. These collections were key to Dr O'Brien's research and to telling the story of the scheme, she adds.

"It was a huge construction sight, there was quite a lot going on. Giant buildings and canals, but there's also a very human story behind it as well of the people who were working on it and the people from Limerick going to visit it as well."

"It became this symbol of Ireland at the same time as being something very technological. You've got this idea that something technological could be Irish as well. To us now, that doesn't seem so strange because we've had an IT industry, but in the 1920s this was something more radical."

"It also established the ESB which is a hugely important thing in itself. It started off the idea of the semi-state company," she adds.

"That was very important throughout the 20th century and the work that ESB has been doing over that time period has been really important to the development of the country and it wouldn't have happened without the Shannon Scheme, without that kickstart," adds Dr O'Brien.

Powering the Nation by Sorcha O'Brien is available in

Gardening

On the move to

THIS is the best time of the year to move shrubs and trees that are growing in the wrong place.

Every gardener, whether novice or experienced, has plants growing in the wrong position for a number of reasons, they may be a clash of colour, plants may have grown too large for their present position or a plant may not be growing well. It is easy to make a mistake when planting trees and shrubs, to discover within a few years that they have outgrown their allotted space. Once the error becomes apparent the plant should be moved before it gets too big. Moving plants a few years old is easy and is always successful. Young plants are quite easy to lift and will re-establish themselves successfully. Some plants like camellia, cornus, hydrangea and rhododendron can be dug up and moved even after ten years. Other plants like broom, ceanothus and eucalyptus will not move successfully once they are a few years old.

Deciduous trees and shrubs are best moved in winter or early spring. Evergreens should be left for another month or two when growth has started. Rhododendrons are evergreens that are easily moved at any age or size because they have a small root system of very fine roots.

Try to lift established plants with as large a root-ball as possible. Prepare the



Plants can be moved for a number of reasons: including a plant just not growing well.

soil in the new well, digging in post or well rot. Replant the tree the same depth it was taken from too deeply the soil. Firm the soil transplanted tree water it well and a layer of compost conserve moisture necessary to produce shoots on large shrubs as the drainage system may not support all the weight of the plant.

To move old and shrubs successfully, prepare the plant in the previous year.

In association with Boyce's Gardening Centre
www.boycesgardening.com

Wild about

The Leader's resident naturalist shares with us the hidden gems of

The great modern

BENEATH the ancient beech trees, near Pallasgreen, a thick brown carpet of leaves still remain. They break down very slowly, but quickly lose their winter crunch, and become a soggy mass. The trees are at least 150 years old, and have seen the passage of two legs to four, the combustible engine, and now back to walkers like me, trying to shed a few winter pounds.

The occasional house breaks up the line of the trees. In the driveway of a house a cooing call attracts my attention. I pause and just see a pair of collared doves (pictured) flying into a garden tree.

These doves have gone from one of the rarest, to an everyday species, in a few short generations. This was evident a few weeks ago on a walk through. The walk was been expertly lead, and I could sit back and take in

other person's experience. Plan the main focus, when I spotted a pair of collared doves on a street lamp, nobody got excited about this now mundane species.

In 1939 the nearest collared dove in Ireland was in Yugoslavia. It then came to Ireland in 1959 when it was recorded in Dublin. Breeding was confirmed for the first time in Limerick and Kilkenny. There are now at least 30,000 pairs in the country.

While many species like the squirrel outcompete native mammals like the red squirrel, the dove has found