

LIMERICK CHRONICLE

Celebrating
250 years -
1768 - 2018

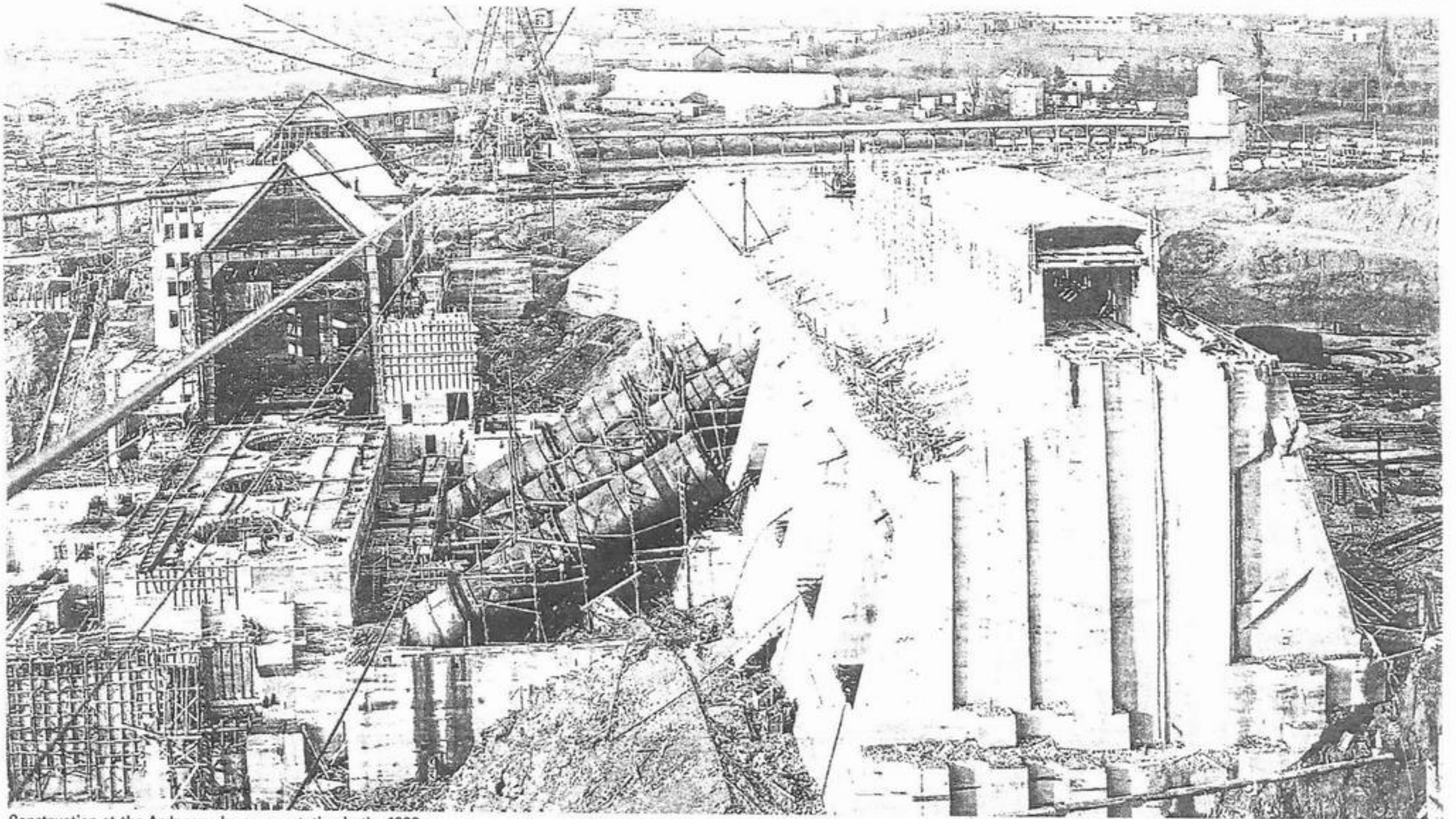
INSIDE THIS WEEK



*Christmas festivities
from yesteryear*

ARCHIVE SPECIAL: PAGES 36-37

DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE



Construction at the Ardnacrusha power station in the 1920s

Battle of the Tail Race

The New ESB Plan at Parteen resulted stirring incidents over fishing rights that took place in the 1930s

THIRTY years ago the gigantic hydro-electric scheme at Ardnacrusha was completed. Its effect on the future of the Shannon fisheries was given rise to speculation and conjecture.

Since the Shannon Scheme had come into operation, the fisheries had been seriously interfered with, and it was not disputed that salmon going upstream to spawn entered the tail race at Ardnacrusha. There, considerable quantities remained until they became spent and useless.

On the other hand, the salmon which happened to reach their destination by following the old course of the Shannon got imprisoned in the head race on the return journey to the sea, as did their fry. In one week in July 1932, a fishery official had to bury over 150 salmon taken

from the tail race. Over 500 more were carried off by the current. And great quantities of fry were being mangled by the turbines.

The Board of Conservators had the matter under consideration for a few years and had conferred with the Government. The Abbey fishermen, however, brought the matter to a head. They considered that their living was imperiled by the wholesale destruction of salmon, and they decided to fish the tail race. Their determined action resulted in some of the most exciting scenes witnessed in the Limerick area for many years. The Army was called out, and shots were fired.

For a considerable time, the Abbey Guild of Fishermen were agitating to secure permission to fish the tail race. This had been refused by the Department of Industry and Commerce. In the late summer of

1932, representatives of the fishermen called on the Secretary to the Board of Conservators, Mr Alton, and told him they would enter the tail race and net the waterway. The deputation was accompanied by a number of prominent citizens. They held that they had made recommendations which, if carried into effect would prevent the incoming salmon from entering the tail race, and the downcoming salmon and fry from entering the head race. These recommendations had not been put to the test.

When their decision to net the tail race became known, a great deal of tension prevailed in the Parteen district. The waterway was under the control of the Department of Industry and Commerce, and the moment of defiance had come.

Hundreds of people gathered on

the banks of the river to see if the fishermen would carry out their determination to fish. The attempt was made at 11:30 pm. The full fleet of the Abbey fishermen, numbering twenty-four boats, each being occupied by two men, approached the prohibited water.

An Inspector of the Fishery Board shouted to the men from the bank that fishing was not allowed in the tail race. The boats, however, proceeded on their course and dropped their nets in the disputed waterway. Bailiffs in three motor-boats followed. As they came up with the fishermen's boats, they placed them under "arrest" one by one. Three of the boats escaped capture, but nine nets were seized, and the names of forty-two men were taken by the Gardaí. While this was happening, there was booing and cheering from

the spectators, and for a time excitement ran high.

From the bridge spanning the rail race, stones were thrown at the bailiff's boats, and one man received minor injuries. With a view to dispersing the people on the bridge, shots were fired in the air by bailiffs. The fishermen did not resort to any violence, but the rumour was current that they would again attempt to fish the tail race on the following night. The exciting proceedings of the first night came to an end at 3 o'clock on the following morning.

Exciting night scenes

Further exciting night scenes took place at Ardnacrusha on the following night, and they were again continued until three o'clock in the

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE →

34 ARCHIVE SPECIAL

Fishing rights of Tailrace leads to standoff

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

morning.

About 9pm twenty-four boats, manned by two men each, numbering forty-eighth in all, approached the tail race and entered it. They were followed by bailiffs and Gardai in three motor launches. One or two of the invading boats were caught up with immediately inside the canal and forced onto the shore. Here a struggle of a vigorous nature took place between the bailiffs and the occupants of the boats where the bailiffs proceeded to seize both the nets and boats.

The fishermen fought for possession and eventually had to be ejected bodily from the two boats. A big crowd on the bank jeered and booed, and for a time the situation looked rather dangerous. A number of revolver shots fired into the air had the effect of dispersing the crowd.

Later, stones were thrown by more youths and Gardai on duty drew their batons and ordered the crowd to retire a certain distance. This they did.

Eventually, the two boats were landed on the shore, and the bailiffs went in pursuit of the other fishing craft. But when they had gone, the fishermen retook possession of the seized boats and paddled them away amidst the cheers of the crowd.

During the night's operations, the engines of two motor boats were put out of operations, by strokes from paddles, and the work of the bailiffs were impeded.

Up to 11pm a number of the fishing boats, with their occupants, had been placed under detention. The remainder continued to fish. Darkness had now fallen, and it could not be said with certainty what took place on the waters. However, in all, seventeen bats and ten nets had been seized. Seven boats succeeded in escaping.

The selected boats were taken possession of by a party of armed military, who were on duty. They were taken to Sarsfield Barracks. A fishery Inspector received a rather serious injury to his hand by a blow from a paddle.

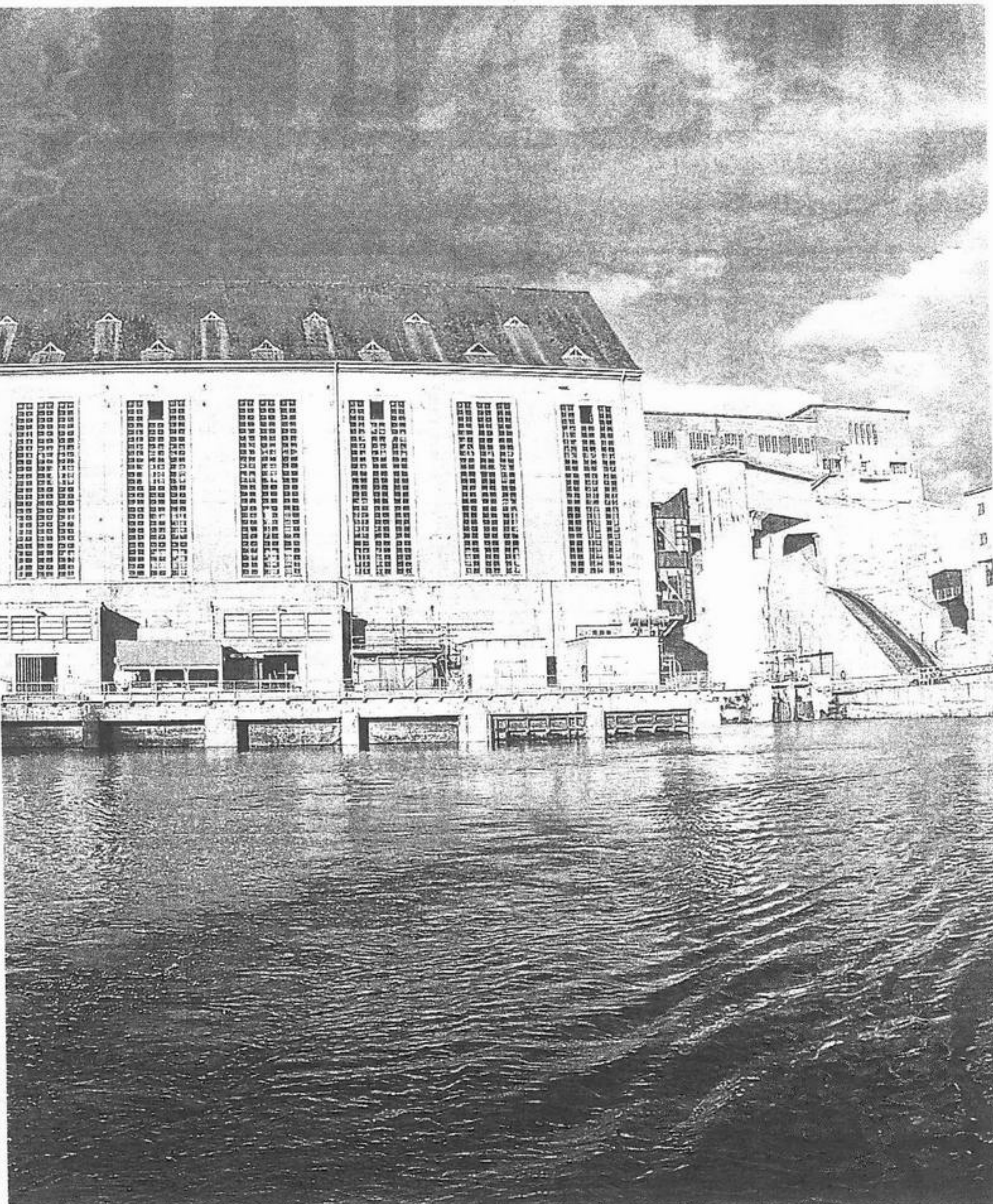
Military with fixed bayonets

There was a repetition of the scenes on the third night when a reduced fleet of ten boats fished the tail race shortly after ten o'clock. Bailiffs in motor launches accompanied by Gardai went to round them up. As the motor launches closed in on the fishing fleet, considerable commotion prevailed. A large crowd gathered on the banks and cheered and booed. Shots were fired.

A stampede followed, and two girls collapsed. Military on duty with fixed bayonets ordered the people to retire at a certain distance. The entire ten boats of the Abbey fishermen were seized and handed over to the military on duty, who brought them on a lorry to Sarsfield Barracks.

Fishermen's telegram

Limerick Dáil Deputies received this telegram from the fishermen - "under a torrential downpour thousands from the city tried to force their way through a large force of Gardai with drawn batons, and



View behind the dam: Ardnacrusha power station viewed from the tailrace canal

practically all the available military in Limerick with rifles and fixed bayonets who held all approaches to the road. The fishermen, as on previous nights, continued fishing until overpowered."

Corporation resolution

At a meeting of the Limerick Corporation, the following resolution was passed: "That we, the members of the Limerick Corporation, protest most emphatically against the treatment meted out to the

Abbey fishermen...These men, the fathers of families, are depending for their living on the fisheries. Since the inauguration of the Shannon Scheme, their fishing grounds are rendered useless, as the fish cannot get through to the Upper Shannon...It is a hard thing to see your livelihood taken away from you and starvation facing you. We endorse the action taken by the fishermen in the protest they are making. We call on the Minister responsible to deal promptly with the

situation and remedy this grave injustice, and to avoid bloodshed, and, possibly the loss of life."

Compensation

Subsequently, an order was received from the authorities in Dublin returning to the fishermen the boats and nets that had been seized. In view of the near end of the season, the fishermen did not propose to fish and tail race again that year, but stated their intention to do so when it opened on the following

February.

In the meantime, however, the Limerick Dáil Deputies and the other parties arranged a conference with the Government. After protracted negotiations, the Abbey fishermen were given compensation for their fishing losses, and the final chapter closed on one of the most stirring epics of the river Shannon.

This article was first published in the Limerick Chronicle on September 8, 1962.