O’Dwyer’s: A bridge to the future

Spanning the Shannon: New bridge in the 1930s helps fuel city’s expansion

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The bridge connecting Limerick city centre and Corbally was known as Park Bridge. It consisted of a unique structure as it was constructed mostly with concrete. When the bridge was being built from 1929 to 1931, concrete was plentiful in the city, following the completion of the Ardnacrusha Hydro-electric plant.

The original bridge that connected Limerick city and Corbally was known as the Athlunkard Bridge, according to Kevin Hanan in an Old Limerick Journal article this bridge was built by the Vandelac family in 1768. The Vandelac family owned a mill in the area. The original bridge was on private property and as such, the leases in Corbally had stipulations that if the Park Bridge should fall into disrepair they would receive a £50 abatement on their rents.

In 1830, a new bridge was built to connect Limerick and Clare over the Shannon River at what was to become the Corbally Road. The famous Páirc Bros. architects, who also designed Thomond Bridge and Baill’s Bridge, designed this bridge. It was named Athlunkard Bridge despite being located 1.5km from the newly opened Athlunkard Street. In the early 1930s, Athlunkard Bridge was a toll bridge and the tollhouse still sits on the Limerick side.

Although Athlunkard Bridge was opened in 1830, there was a notice in the Chronicle on November 22, 1832, from the “Commissioners for erecting Athlunkard Bridge,” making approaches thereto are ready to receive proposals in writing for making a road from Park Bridge over the Abbey River, to the new Road leading to Athlunkard Bridge, according to the plans and specifications to be seen at the office of their secretary, at the Commercial Buildings.

As is common today there was an extension on receiving proposals for constructing this road. On December 29, 1832, there was a notice in the Chronicle which read, “notice is hereby given that applications will be made in the next session of Parliament for leave to bring in a bill to amend an Act passed in the 7th year of the reign of King George 4th... to enable the Commissioners mentioned in said Act, to remove the Bridge called Park Bridge, in the Parish of Saint Mary and City of Limerick, and to erect another Bridge over the Abbey River in stead thereof, and for other purposes. Dated this 14th December 1832. Matthew Barrington, solicitor for said Commissioners.”

It would take almost a hundred years from this notice for the Park Bridge to be replaced. This was despite further reports in the Chronicle on December 5, 1882 stating that the Board of Works should repair “the bridge of Park, which was the only supply to the Athlunkard Bridge, and if Park was cut off or shut up, they would receive no tolls. This bridge was now in a fearful state.”

Plans for a new bridge at the end of Athlunkard Street began in August 1930. It cost a total of £21,308 and over a year to complete. It was dedicated to Dr Edward Thomas O’Dwyer, born 1845 in Tipperary, he was consecrated Bishop of Limerick on 29 June 1899.

A plaque on the bridge reads, “This bridge is dedicated to the memory of the Most Rev’d Dr. E.T. O’Dwyer Bishop of Limerick (1888-1917) an honorary Freeman of the City in recognition of his great services to Church and Country A.D. 1931. Alderman Patrick Donnellan Mayor, J.J. Roughan Engineer, J.J. Peacecke City Surveyor, William M. Nolan Town Clerk.”

The Leader recorded on October 3, 1938, “the roads at Park, from O’Dwyer Bridge to the Canal, will be treated with water-bound macadam and tar-spray.” In 1938, the concrete railing was erected on the Corbally side of the bridge after several complaints from local residents. The previous railing was made of recycled railway sleepers and several of these had gone missing in the five years since the bridge was completed.

Provision Temporary Carriage Way at Park Bridge.

The Town Clerk has received a letter from Mr. Gordon Campbell, Secretary to the Department of Industry and Commerce, regarding the proposal to construct a temporary carriage way over the Park Bridge while the bridge is being erected, stating that it would not be feasible to comply with the proposal, as a temporary carriage way would cost £1,700, and would take three months to erect.

The residents of Corbally were inconvenienced for over a year as there was no temporary structure in place during the construction of O’Dwyer Bridge as can be seen in the Chronicle article from May 24, 1930.

Above: this was one of the last images of the old Park Bridge, taken not long before the bridge was dismantled in 1930.

Building of Park Bridge

To Be Begun Immediately.

It was learned today on good authority that the building of Park Bridge will be proceeded with immediately, and that all river works in connection with the navigation will be completed before next winter.

Right: this notice was put into the Chronicle about the construction of the new bridge on February 22, 1930.