

Special Report

PITCHED ON A ROCK AND

Overlooking the Shannon, Castleconnell is a village steeped in history since it was gifted by King John to William de Burgh of West Clanwilliam. This was the ancient seat of the O'Conaings, who lent their name to Caislean-ui-Chonaine before it fell into the possession of the O'Briens of Thomond.

King John made a grant of Castleconnell, with five knights' fees, to William de Burgh, who erected a strong castle there.

At the end of the 13th century, de Burgh considerably enlarged and strengthened this castle, which was the chief stronghold of his descendants at the end of the sixteenth century.

In later centuries, Castleconnell became a popular spa resort patronised by the local ascendancy classes and visiting gentry from overseas.

Fine Georgian houses were built with impressive architecture and spacious private grounds which bordered the magnificent scenery and fishing grounds of the River Shannon.

Castleconnell became known far and wide for its salmon fishing, the famous Castleconnell Rod, and John Enright, who became World Fly-Casting Champion in 1906.

Although situated just six miles outside of Limerick City, Castleconnell still manages to retain its unique identity and abiding sense of history.



A hub for three communities . Heritage centre

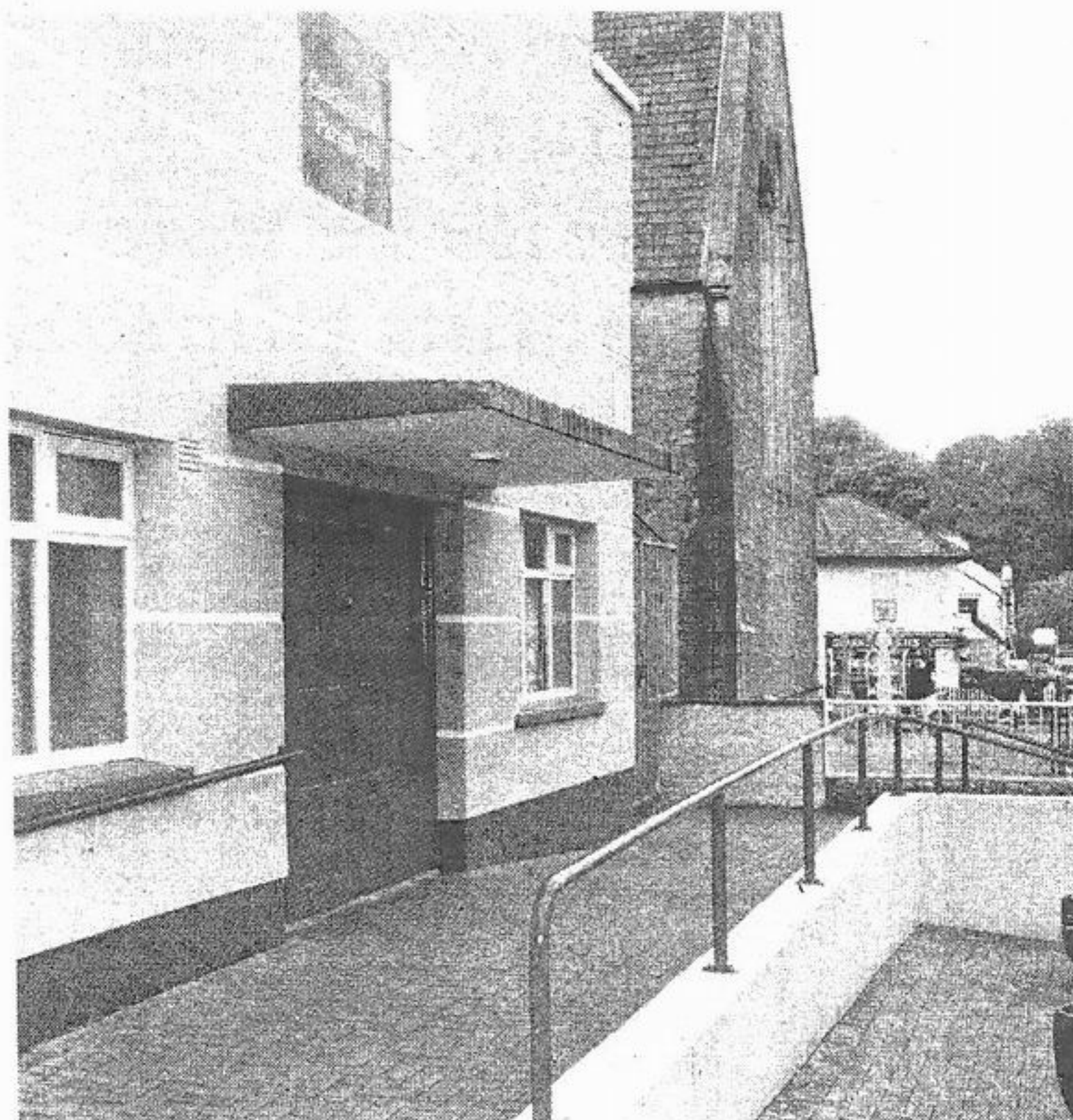
WHEN Castle Community Council formed the Millennium Project Group in 1998, their primary task was to establish a community centre for the people of Ahane, Castleconnell and Montpelier.

Almost 20 years later, the fruits of their efforts continues in Castle Street after the group purchased the building in 2001.

Now owned by around 500 parishioners aligned to the ACM Community Development Society Limited, the building is a central hub for the three communities who can avail of meeting rooms, community secretarial service, typing, photocopying and internet access.

The community centre often hosts day and evening classes and is the focal point for the organising committees of the Christmas and St Patrick's Day parades and parties.

This service is available to all local community groups and private individuals.



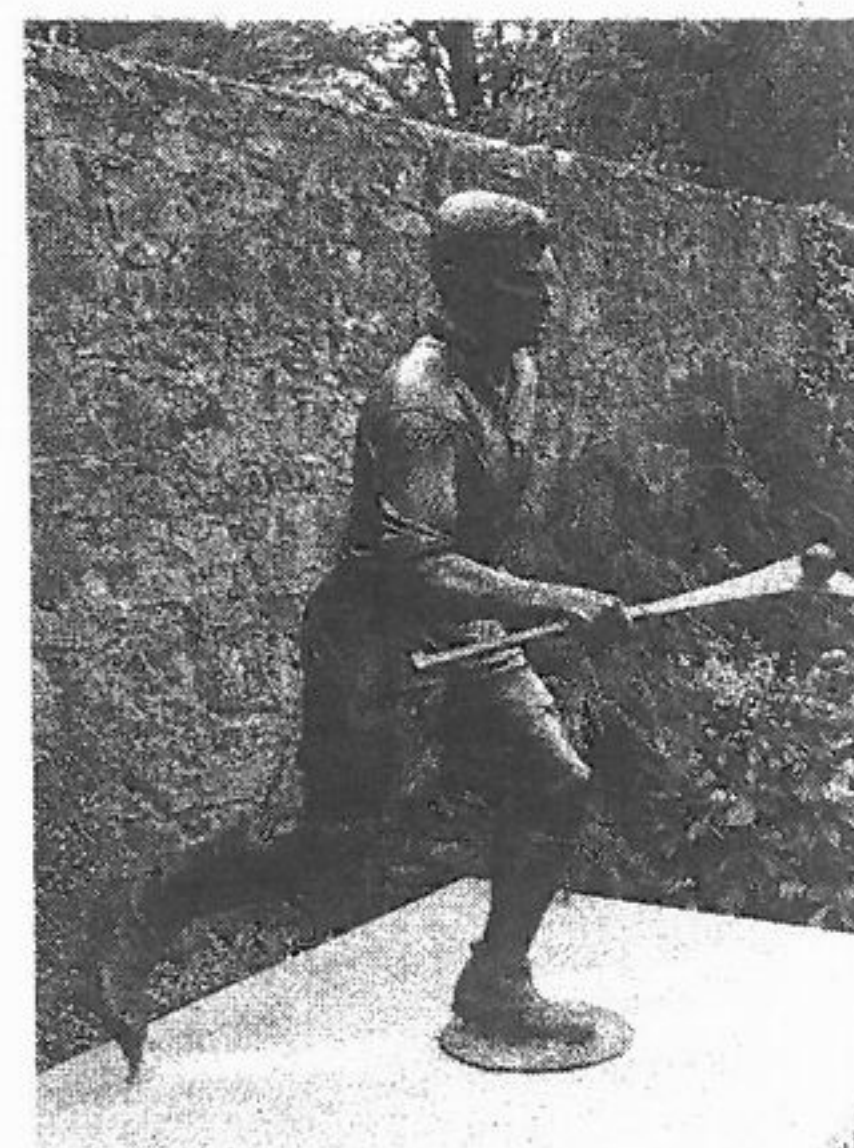
WHEN a community unites, great things can be achieved and the aim of a group of locals in Castleconnell a number of years ago was to establish a heritage centre in the village.

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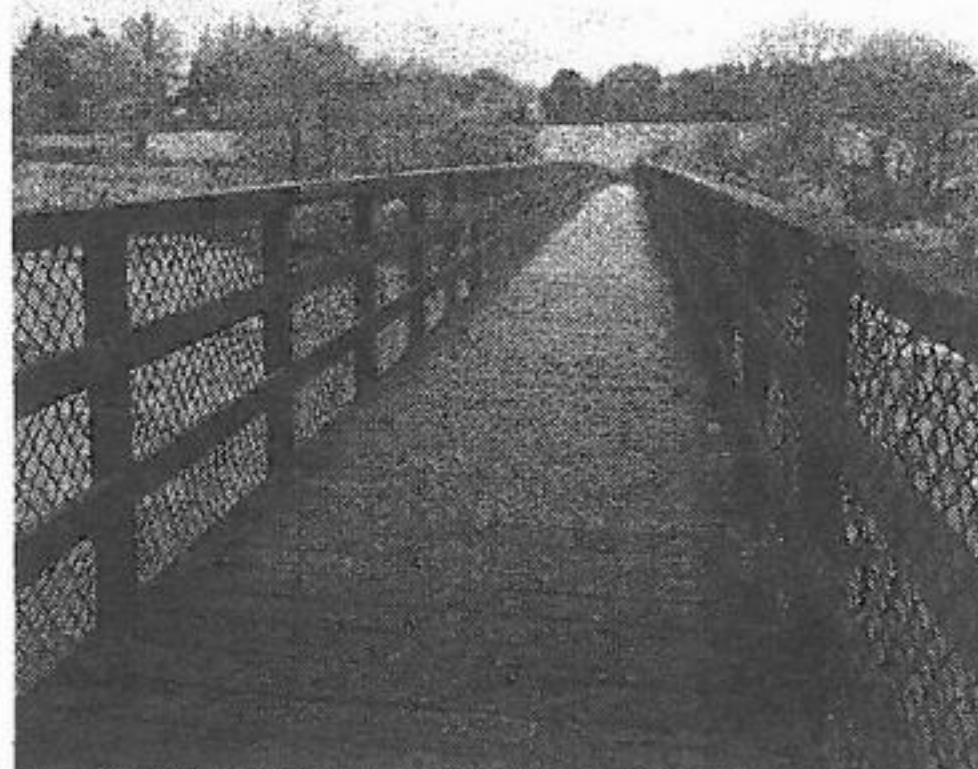
From these endeavours, national success in the All Ireland Pride of Place competition (2012) and the Gathering John Enright festival (2013) was achieved.



This new Heritage Centre was formally opened by local historian Paddy Tuohy last year on St Patrick's Day.

While still very much in its infancy, it now provides a central location to store and showcase the rich history of the parish for visitors and current and future generations to enjoy.

STEEPED IN HISTORY



Housing Co-op helps turn the key on new homes

EIGHT families will turn the keys to a new life in Castleconnell this week after Co-operative Housing Ireland assisted in the renovation of unoccupied apartments in the village.

As part of the new initiative, eight two-bedroomed apartments were purchased and renovated by the national housing organisation in their first major investment in the region.

David Ryan of the group's housing office explained that housing co-operatives are a worldwide movement of self-help, mutually owned associations working to relieve housing need in their communities.

"Eight families were interviewed and selected from the local authority's social housing list and we are delighted to have been able to make this happen for them", Mr Ryan explained as the final touches were being put to the apartments and the agreements.

As an approved housing provider in the State, Co-operative Housing in Ireland dates back to the 1950s.

These were local, self-help, home ownership building co-operatives providing affordable homes for their members.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, more co-operatives continued to be formed and, in 1973, NABCO (the former name for Co-operative Housing Ireland) was set up to represent co-operative housing nationally.

"Starting in the 1980s, we have worked with local co-operative housing societies around Ireland to help develop social-rented co-operative homes. Since 1973, more than 3,500 co-operative dwellings for ownership have been developed and 1,800 rented homes continue to be managed by local co-operative societies".

Mr Ryan said that they hope to be expanding their presence in the Mid West and Limerick in the near future and that the co-operative will look to fill more unoccupied units in Castleconnell and in other locations in the wider Limerick region over the coming months.

Local councillor Michael Sheahan said that this was a "good news story for the area and the village and it's great to see new life being given to the village and to these units.

"We now have a number of suitable families about to turn the keys on new homes and begin a new life and that is what is important," he said.



Illegal poaching claims spark conservation fears

THOUSANDS of spawning river lampreys that have become trapped at Annacotty weir are the target of poachers who use the eel-like fish as bait, according to a senior environmental consultant.

The lampreys were trapped trying to ascend the weir on the River Mulkear and Dr William O'Connor said that he later learned that illegal fishing was occurring at the weir this month as the lampreys were being caught to be used in lucrative fishing competitions.

On April 17 last, Dr O'Connor was informed that major illegal lamprey fishing had occurred on the Mulkear and were to be used for a fishing festival with prize money of €10,000.

With annual "poaching" occurring, Dr O'Connor wrote on the lampreysurveys.com website that "it is of concern that despite that large run of River Lampreys this year there was little evidence of spawning activity downstream of Annacotty weir.

"These lampreys cannot pass this weir. Even early run River Lampreys cannot pass here as this weir is never flooded out and there are no side channels where lampreys can pass."

The senior environmental scientist with over 20 years ecological management experience claimed that the lampreys cannot pass the "artificial barrier, which serves no purpose and is just an ornamental weir which was installed in the 1990s during an OPW flood scheme".

"The lampreys try repeatedly to pass this obstacle

and get heavily preyed upon by grey herons at night".

River lampreys, together with two other species, have been listed amongst a number of EU conservation directives where six-year progress reporting is to be maintained.

Dr O'Connor has called on urgent action to be taken at Annacotty and cites it as a "major problem".

"As the weir is ornamental an obvious option would be to remove it outside the lamprey and salmonid spawning seasons.

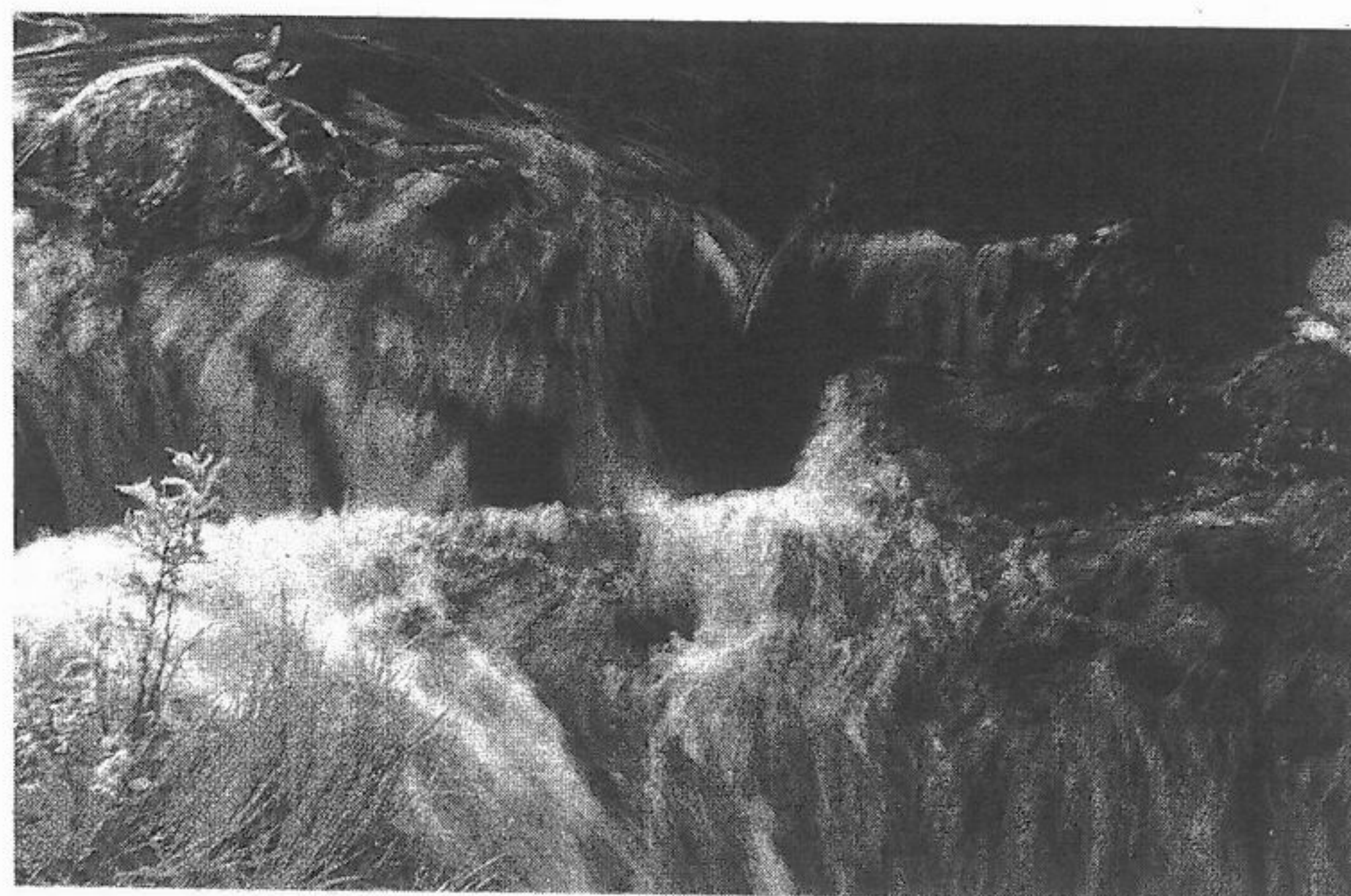
"However, apartments have been built right up the bank immediately upstream and lowering the water levels could potentially destabilise construction foundations."

Dr O'Connor has called for the removal of the sluice gates and the installation of a rock ramp and side channel at the weir to allow the lampreys pass.

According to his studies, there has also been an apparent decline in water quality in the lower reaches of the river, with excessive siltation evident during April.

"The lamprey 'pass' installed here by Inland Fisheries Ireland under the €1.75 million Mulkear LIFE project cannot be used by River Lampreys which are a key conservation interest of the Lower River Shannon SAC.

Inland Fisheries Ireland say that 90 per cent of lampreys use their pass, but Dr O'Connor says



there is no evidence to support this claim.

He goes on to state that the weir "also blocks the migration of the critically endangered European eel *Anguilla anguilla* and even Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar* salmon have difficulties.

"I have offered to work on a voluntary basis with

Inland Fisheries Ireland to design a passage solution for this site and prepare the Natura Impact Statement for any subsequent planning application.

"To date they have ignored this offer, but I am hoping that they will engage", he said.