

Local history



Leader Memories

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Rynanna: Airport of the future

1939 report: "Today, where a few years ago there was little more than a rugged country boreen, there is now a magnificent stretch of modern road, a white undulating ribbon."

On Saturday, August 19, 1939, the Limerick Leader waxed lyrical of the advances made in securing Shannon Airport as the airport for the future. The twin-part of the scheme, the trapping of a vast expanse of water for the purpose of harbour accommodation for sea-plane while the landing strip for land planes is fully a mile in length and almost levelled

FOUR hundred men, working two shifts a day, are hurrying forward the construction of the Shannon Air Port at Rynanna, the initial stages of which were commenced some three and a half years ago. The landing field, covered some three hundred acres, has been levelled off and presents a magnificent expanse fully a mile in length. Further levelling operations are still in progress. The twin-part of the scheme, the trapping of a vast expanse of water for the purposes of harbour accommodation for sea planes, is also being pushed ahead. Thousands of tons of excavated rubble are being conveyed on light railways for the erection of the encircling embankments.

A Disappearing island

"Rynanna, 3 1/2 miles." On a two-fingered signpost on the main Limerick-Ennis road the direction stands, scarcely observable by the casual motorist going city wards, but more likely to catch the eye when travelling in the opposite direction. Here is the entrance to the great trans-Atlantic air-port of the future, a mere eleven miles from Limerick. As yet it is but still in its visionary stage, but gradually it is developing towards that completion which will make it the most important outport in the

position and ideal situation, presented itself as an excellent site for development, and a move was at once made to acquire the necessary amount of land for the aerodrome.

For this purpose some 700 acres of land were taken over from various owners in the district and on this vast expanse was mapped the lay-out of the position of the flying field. The initial stages of the work were of necessity on a small scale but gradually, as the plans expanded, the demand for labour grew until at one period there were up to 600 men engaged.

NEW CONCRETE ROAD

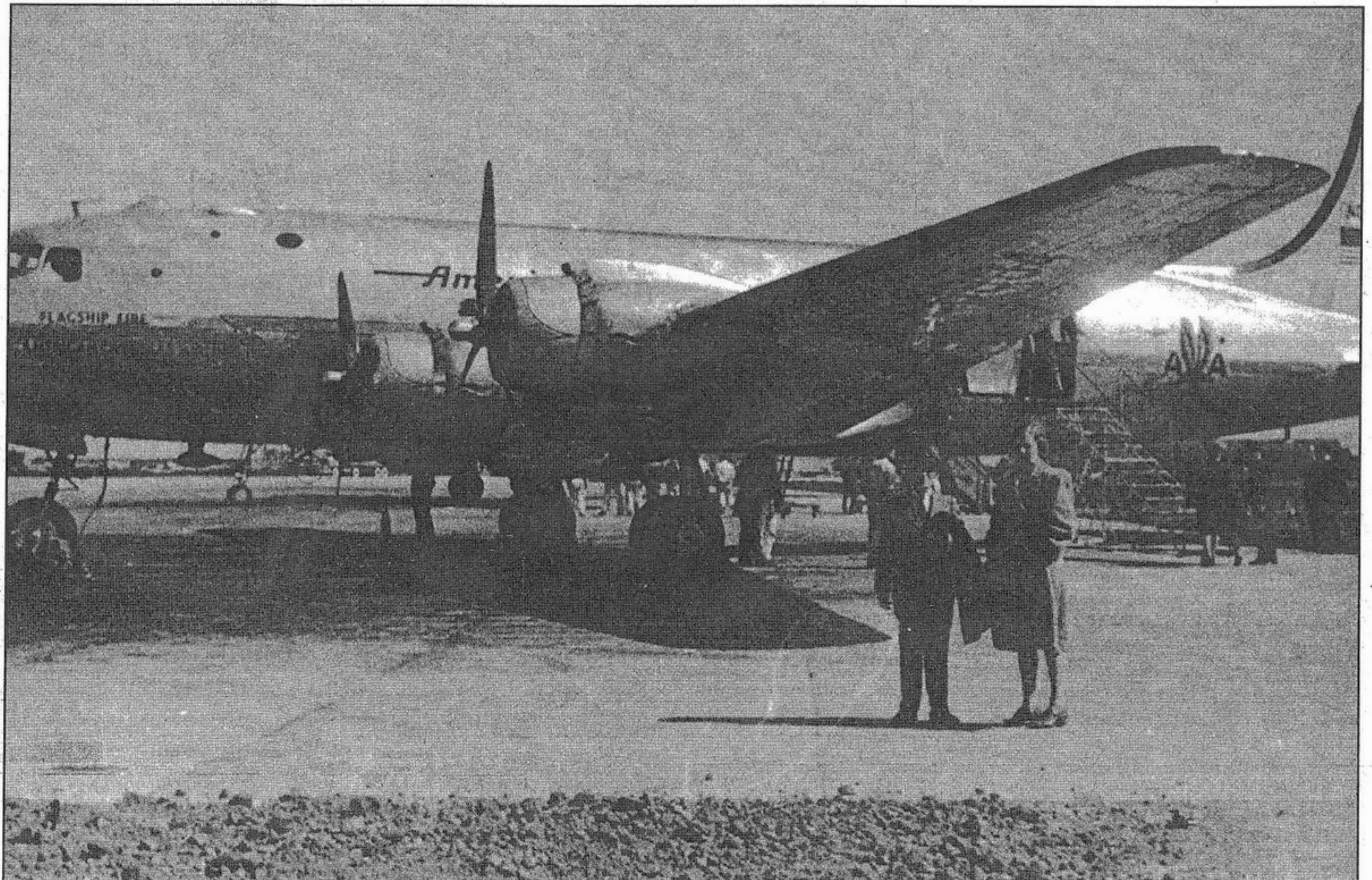
One of the earliest works was the laying down of a concrete road over a four miles stretch from the Limerick-Ennis road to the site proper.

Today, where a few years ago there was little more than a rugged country boreen, there is now a magnificent stretch of modern road, a white undulating ribbon that at one stretch extends in a straight line for almost three miles. It is bordered on either side by neat wire paling past the homesteads of cottiers and farmers to whom in the course of a few years the arrival and departure of the air-liners will be just an ordinary every-day occurrence.

Although, generally, little is known of the proposals of the companies which will operate the services, it is conjectured that the Shannon Airport will be used as the Eastern terminus for trans-Atlantic planes.

PROVISION FOR SEA AND LAND PLANES

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TAKING PRACTICAL SHAPE
Imperceptibly, the gigantic enterprise which was envisaged only a few years ago is taking on a practical shape. The commercial possibilities of trans-Atlantic air traffic have already been proven, the regular departures and arrivals of the air boats at Foynes have become an accomplished fact, the successful air-fuelling of the heavily laden boats has taken the venue another stride, and it but now remains to complete the organisation plans which will make Rynanna, or to give it the official term, Shannon Airport, the jumping-off ground for America on the one hand and the distributing centre for Continental cities on the other.

FIRST STEP OVER THREE YEARS AGO
So little is actually known of the plans of the companies concerned in this wonderful phase of civil aviation that one has to rely to a certain extent on conjecture, but, the obvious magnitude of the undertaking puts conjecture in a safe position. Three and a half years ago the first step was taken to remove from paper and put in practice the ideas which had been born in the minds of the air visionaries. The Irish Government, which had a co-operative interest with the other countries concerned in the furtherance of this work, lost no time in commencing operations.

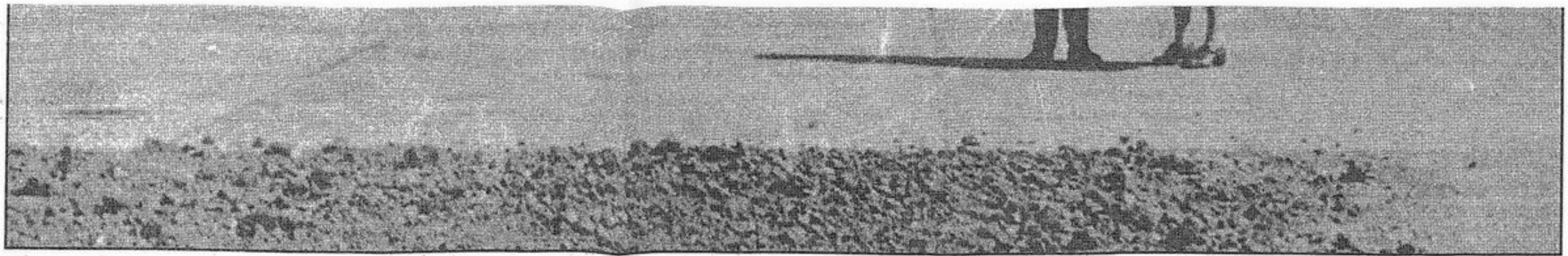
SOME 790 ACRES ACQUIRED
Rynanna, with its commanding

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The companies have yet to decide also whether sea or land planes will be used on the crossings but in either event provision will be made at Rynanna for both types of craft. It is likely, of course, that land planes will be used for the purpose of taking passengers on the final stages of their journey to England and Continental airports. The construction of the long runway and incidental work were commenced about two years ago. In this constructional work the naturally level nature of the ground lent itself admirably, but, at the same time, a considerable amount of work had to be done in the way of clearing the site, removing hillocks and filling drains.

THE AERODROME PROPER
Some three hundred acres are under the site of the aerodrome proper, with runways in different directions. The reclamation work has now produced a lovely expanse of level, emerald green grassland fully a mile in length by some four hundred yards in width. Concrete runways have yet to be constructed. Workers, of whom there are about four hundred engaged, are drawn from all over the area. Early on provision was made for them by the erection of a series of huts for use as sleeping quarters, wash-houses, canteen, etc. The men are at present engaged in further levelling. Meanwhile work is progressing steadily in the erection of a reclamation embankment to enclose the harbour where the sea planes will come to anchorage for embarking and disembarking passengers.

THE HARBOUR
The harbour is situated a matter of only a few hundred yards from the flying field. There, on the



Building of Airport The accompanying article on the building of Shannon Airport makes for riveting reading. The journalist gave a tremendous account of how the landscape was being transformed before his very eyes. When this article appeared on Saturday, August 19, 1939, work had been on-going for the previous 3 1/2 years. There was another three years before the first landings were recorded in Shannon. The inaugural trans-Atlantic flight to touch down occurred on October 24, 1945. It was a DC4 and its call sign was "Flagship London". It flew under the name American Export Airline Systems. The call sign on the plane above is "Flagship Eire", an American Overseas Airline Inc. The first flight took the route Boston, Gander and Shannon. The picture below is a vintage, c. 1949 which shows the new sign posting system at Clarecastle and the local Sergeant Long pointing the way to an American tourist. The bottom picture, left, is one showing the early office space at the airport

lovely sweep of the Shannon, the air liners will come to rest before taxi-ing in to the harbour. Six large drag line excavators are being used in the work of raising the embankments. The preparatory work of constructing the landing lagoon is one of the most interesting phases of the scheme at present in hands. The Shannon at this point has formed a large natural bay, which is the site of the harbour, and when the tide is in there is a depth of about eighteen feet of water. About a mile out from what might be termed the mainland is situated McMahon's Island, a pleasant little oasis, tree-dotted and covering about five acres. Here a family formerly resided.

ERECTION OF A HUGE SWEEPING EMBANKMENT
For the purpose of forming the harbour it has been necessary to erect a huge embankment running from the mainland in a semi-circular sweep which will eventually connect with the island, and be continued to complete the horse shoe effect back to the mainland. Further on a second embankment of the same nature, which will also join with the island, is being raised. At the same time the construction of the embankments from the

island is proceeding. Miniature railways carrying light engines and bogeys are used for conveying the material which is being dumped into the Shannon to build up the embankments. The men as it were, work before them. Trestles are erected before each section of the embankment. On these the bogeys are run and the excavated material then tipped over into the river. In a matter of about three months the workers have constructed over half a mile of one of the embankments; this of course is apart from the work on the other sections. Thousands of tons of materials are being excavated from a high bluff and are being dumped into the embankment work.

THE ISLAND BEING EATEN AWAY
At the same time, excavators are eating their way through the little island, which will eventually disappear. At low tide it is possible to walk from the mainland to the island. A light railway has been laid down from the mainland, to the island. When the tide is in the railway has the appearance of an underwater transport system. The men working on the scheme operate in two shifts, the first coming on at about 6 o'clock in

AIRPORT OF THE FUTURE
Progress Of Work At Rynanna
CONSTRUCTION OF HARBOUR FOR SEA-PLANES

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The landing field, covering some three hundred acres, has been levelled

the morning. Guiding posts are driven into the bed of the river to indicate the layout of the embankments. The rubble embankments on the harbour side are being faced with rough limestone. From a quarry some distance away thousands of tons of this stone are brought on a light railway to be used as a breastwork. The embankment will eventually be raised three or four feet above their present height.

WHERE SEAPLANES WILL REST
When the "encirclement" which will form the landing harbour is completed steps will be taken to deepen the harbour, which will then become a trapped sheet of placid water on which planes may come to rest under ideal conditions. As with any scheme of such huge sizes, there is really as yet little to be seen from the average laymen's point of view. The administration offices, hangers, wireless station, and other buildings, which in the course of time will be erected, have not yet been started, and several years must elapse before the complete scheme for making Rynanna one of the most modern airports will have been accomplished.

READY NEXT YEAR
The erection of a first class hotel to meet the requirements of travellers to and from America is

envisaged. No definite information, however, appears to be available on this point although the necessity for such a development seems apparent. It is possible that a start will be made this year on the erection of the administration block.

In the general way in which the work of constructing both the landing field and the harbour has progressed there is reason for anticipation that the Shannon Airport will be ready for use next year. Meantime "via Foynes" will continue.

