

AN OLD CEREMONY THAT SHOULD BE REVIVED

When Peter Tait claimed Admiralty of the Shannon

AT a number of functions in Limerick within the past few weeks references were made to the Shannon, "the Queen of Irish rivers," and its tremendous potential in the great tourist drive which has now been initiated.

On last Saturday night at the Limerick Boat Club dinner, the Mayor, Councillor Jack Danagher, looked back on the time when festivals on our rivers were affairs of great pageantry and colour, and looked forward to the time when the Shannon would again be the scene of these splendid aquatic events. The ancient ceremony of "throwing the dart" was, without doubt, the greatest of all our river festivals, and the Shannon-side Tourism Organisation might consider, with profit, its revival.

The late Mayor of Limerick day and there was a refreshment to claim the title of "Admiral" in cool breezes on the river, of the Shannon" was Ald. G. H. Russell, when, during his mayoralty in 1865, he sailed to the steamer Limerick docks and the steamer did not die away until the Scattery and performed the ancient ritual by casting the silver dart into the water.

The event attracted world-wide interest; it was timed and later shown on cinema and television screens. It may be mentioned, was a native of Scotland.

What was the ceremony of "throwing the Dart" like in the old days? The custom began to fall into abeyance in the last century, and when Alderman Vincent exercised his jurisdiction as Admiral in 1851, he was the first mayor to do so for 31 years.

The custom was next revived by Peter Tait in 1867, and, as far as the writer knows, the next Mayor of Limerick who threw the dart was Ald. Russell. It is generally believed that the ceremony was performed by Mayor Thady Glynn in 1911, but contemporary records show that while Mayor Glynn did voyage in state to Scattery that year, the only thing he threw while at the mouth of the Shannon was a magnified reception to about 100 guests.

The ceremony was performed by Peter Tait, with all the colourful pageantry of his post-dinner on July 10, 1864. In the previous month he had bought in Glasgow a steamer called the "Elvy." It was the fastest vessel on the Clyde, and its speed of 30 knots set up a new record for the Shannon. Tait bought the "Elvy" to put an end to a monopoly enjoyed by another Shannon vessel, the "Rosa," the owners of which had exploited the Limerick public for a number of years.

Militia Band

July 10, 1867, was a magnificent summer day. The sun blazed down from a cloudless



Ald. G. H. Russell exercised his jurisdiction as Admiral of the Shannon during his mayoralty in 1865, when he threw the dart between the heads off Scattery Island.

were re-echoed among the distant hills.

At Killrush, the steamer took on board Alderman Quinlan, High Sheriff of Limerick; J. Caulfield, Rev. Fathers White and Quinlan; Councillor O'Gorman, Messrs. McNamee, Marshall, Glynn, Miles, Scanlon and other guests.

In 60 minutes the Elvy had covered 18 miles against a headwind and tide, a rate of speed which had never been equalled on the Shannon. Soon the Hervey lighthouse was passed and, as Foyne was neared, the steamer sailed round the Frederick William, a small ship which had never been equalled on the Shannon.

Having rounded the Frederick William, the "Elvy" steered north for Kilrush, which was reached at 2.45 p.m. The "Elvy" had left Limerick at noon.

Here, again, there was an immense throng of spectators on the pier and the Mayor, the members of the Corporation and his other guests were greeted with cheers, which

the Elvy, Wednesday, July 10, 1867.

The steamer then continued her course towards the mouth of the Shannon. However, in consequence of the rush between the headlands, she did not sail further than Carrabhol, and steamed into the calm waters of the bay.

It was then announced that dinner was ready, and the guests accompanied the Mayor to the saloon cabin, where a magnificent dinner was served by Mrs. Lynch of the Royal George Hotel.

After dinner speeches were given by Alderman Quinlan, John O'Donnell, Arthur Garry, B.L.; Robert McNamee, J.P.; T.C.; James Frost, J.P.; Robert McDonnell, William Phelan, J.P.; T.C.; Eugene O'Callaghan, J.P.; T.C.; Councillor O'Gorman, J.P.; Russell, and Rev. Fr. White Carrigaholt.

The voyage home was made pleasant by music, singing and dancing. The Elvy left Kilrush at 8 p.m. and arrived in Limerick at 9.30 p.m. Thousands of citizens were waiting on the quays to welcome the vessel, and there was prolonged cheering for the Admiral of the Shannon.

EARL CONNOLLY Spotlights

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