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TRAVEL for pleasure is comparatively new. It is at most a child of the twentieth century, and it is strange to think of a travel agency as old established. Yet Riordan's Travel Agency was founded fifty-three years ago, and its growth and prosperity is a striking tribute to the foresight of its founder, Maurice P. Riordan.

Tourism has to-day reached the proportions of a major industry, and even greater growth can be expected during the next ten years as more people realise that a holiday abroad will not cost them more and can often cost less than their normal vacation at home. To cater for this expansion, Mr. Riordan has now turned his business into a limited company, taking in three young people to share the direction with him.

Opening his first office at 5 Cecll Street, Mr. Riordan catered principally for emigrants to the U.S.A., for in those days, we are inclined to forget, emigration of our young people was just as big a problem then as it is to-day. His only other clients were the wealthy few who could afford travel as a luxury. Travel as a leisure past-time was unknown by the majority of people then and it was only in the 1930's that holidays abroad for people of more modest means became possible. In the early 1900's the idea of people taking a sunshine holiday in Spain, a pilgrimage to Rome or Lourdes, or a business trip by air to America was fantastic and would be greeted with derision by most people.

The firm started with an agency for the old White Star Line, now absorbed by the Cunard Steam Ship Co., and they did so well with this company that in three months they had secured agencies for all major shipping companies and they were appointed as Limerick correspondents for Thomas Cook and Sons, the well-known London travel people.

Gradually the business developed and Mr. Riordan organised tours to the Continent. He conducted a party to Rome for the Holy Year of 1933, and also to the Paris and Brussels Exhibitions of the middle '30's, and to the Fashion Play at Oberammergau.

In 1939, Mr. Riordan accompanied a large party of his clients to the World's Fair at New York. The party arrived home just on the outbreak of war.

FOUNDING OF I.T.A.

Maurice Riordan was one of a small group of Limerick and Cork businessmen whose informal discussions led to a tourist development conference in Cork on the 6th April, 1915. It was attended by about thirty people, of whom Mr. Riordan was by far the youngest.

In a letter published in the newspapers the previous month, he wrote: "I have already endeavoured to bring about such a desirable result (doubling the number of visitors to Ireland) by writing recently to several American papers inviting Americans, and especially those of Irish descent, to visit Ireland during the coming summer."

The meeting in Cork decided to ask the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Mr. J. M. Gallagher, to summon an All-Ireland Tourist Conference in the Mansion House, which was duly held on the 21st April of that year.

From this big meeting grew the Tourist Organisation Society of Ireland, which had as one of its objects the fostering of tourist trade under the Health Resorts and Watering Places (Ireland) Act. This Act allowed local authorities to levy a rate of up to a 1d. to publicise holiday resorts in their areas.

Ambitious plans were prepared for 1916, but matters of greater moment were by then engaging the attention of the nation and apart from

local activity nothing was done on a national scale.

In March, 1922, Mr. Riordan wrote to Mr. G. E. Smith, Traffic Manager, G.S.W.I., urging the revival of the tourist organisation to develop the industry in the new State.

Mr. Smith replied that Mr. Olden, Managing Director of the Shelbourne Hotel, who was Honorary Treasurer of the Organisation, had some funds at his disposal, but that he did not think that the prospects of a tourist industry were very rosy in those troubled times.

Events proved Mr. Smith a good prophet, and it was not until late in 1924 that the next move was made to organise the Irish tourist trade again—and again Cork was the birthplace of the movement.

The Irish Tourist Association was founded there in 1924, with Mr. Riordan a member of the General Committee. It assumed national dimensions in 1925, and on the initiative of the Government it absorbed the Tourist Organisation Society and the West of Ireland Tourist Development Association, and so the new national Irish Tourist Association was established, with Mr. J. P. O'Brien as Secretary.

So was born an organisation which was to create a thirty million pound a year industry, second in importance only to agriculture, and tell the world about Ireland on a scale which was to surpass the wildest dreams of Mr. Riordan and the other pioneers who met in Cork forty years ago.

AIR TRAVEL

Mr. Riordan always took a keen interest in aviation affairs and was Secretary to the Committee which entertained the Irish pilot, Major Fitzmaurice, and his two German companions at Cruise's Hotel on the occasion, in 1928, of the first ever east-west crossing of the Atlantic, from Galway to the U.S.A.

It is of interest to note that Riordan's Travel Agency issued the first air ticket in Limerick, a return flight from Beldonnell to Croydun, via Bristol. The carrier was an unknown company, Irish Air Lines, now known and used by tens of thousands every year as Aer Lingus.

Riordan's Travel Agency became general agents for Imperial Airways (now B.O.A.C.) and when this Company made the first test flights from Foynes to Newfoundland, Mr. Riordan was responsible for all arrangements at Foynes, including the provision of buoys, moorings, the hire of a launch and for attending to Customs formalities. The first test flight took place on 5th February, 1937, the flying boat was the "Cambria," piloted by Captain C. J. Powell. The Irish Government representative on this occasion was Mr. T. J. O'Driscoll, who is now Director of Bord Failte. Limerick Corporation was represented by the Mayor, the

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 14)



THIS YEAR

Continental

HOLIDAY

A Historic Occasion . . .

This historic picture was taken on February 25, 1937, at Foynes, on the occasion of the first test flight of the Atlantic Air Service. Included are Mr. M. P. Riordan, Limerick Agent Imperial Airways (now B.O.A.C.); Capt. G. J. Powell, pilot of the Cambria; and Ald. Dan Bookin, T.D., Mayor of Limerick.

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