

44 ARCHIVE SPECIAL

Stars of the silver screen passed through Shannon

Hollywood icons land: Movie stars touch down in early days of airport

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As with today, the press and eager fans, hoping to catch a glimpse of those who were immortalised on the stage and screen, followed the stars of yesteryear.

Many of the stars of the silver screen passed through Shannon airport on their way to or from America. Others used it as their stopping point before travelling through Limerick to Kerry. The first transatlantic flight at Shannon took place on October 24, 1945. The American Overseas Airlines flagship 'London' flew from Gander in Newfoundland took 8 hours 20 minutes to cross the ocean. On board was the first passenger to arrive at Shannon Airport, Mr M.J. Tobin, Governor of Massachusetts.

Those who arrived at the airport ranged from the early stars of black and white movies, such as Charlie Chaplin and Groucho Marks to the Hollywood starlets of the 1950s, such as Grace Kelly and Marilyn Monroe. Others who passed through were the all singing and all dancing Gene Kelly, the comedian Bob Hope, and actors Marlon Brando and Yul Brynner. The Limerick actor, Richard Harris was also a frequent flier into Shannon Airport.

In November 1948, the American film star Danny Kaye arrived at Shannon Airport on board an American Overseas Airlines Constellation on his way back to Hollywood, California after visiting Europe. He had just finished performing in

London Palladium, in front of the Royal family, a few weeks earlier.

Danny Kaye was born David Daniel Kaminsky on January 18, 1911 in New York. He began his stage career in 1933 as part of a vaudeville troupe. He appeared on film for the first time two years later, in a comedy short Moon over Manhattan.

Kaye hosted the 24th Academy Awards in 1952. Limerick's own Constance Smith presented one of the awards at the show. He was most well-known for his portrayal of the title character in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and *Hans Christian Anderson*. His acting career spanned over fifty years.

While at Shannon, Kaye stopped and spoke to the local press about his upcoming film "Happy Times" and the possibility of him visiting Dublin the following spring. He stated to the Examiner that he did not enjoy making films as "they are too mechanical, and most of your time goes into setting up the mechanics".

He said of his wife Sylvia Fine, who travelled with him, "she writes all my numbers, and is co-producer of my shows." All the while, he signed autographs for the awaiting fans.

In 1954, Zsa Zsa Gabor also landed

in Shannon Airport several times. First on May 7, when she and a man she was seeing at the time, Dominican Republic diplomat and race car driver, Porfirio Rubirosa, attempted three times to cross the Atlantic on a private converted U.S.

bomber before finally booking two tickets on a T.W.A. flight direct to Los Angeles. Their flight had originally left Paris earlier that day but the heating system failed. Then the undercharge failed. While in Paris Gabor bought a small dog that would travel with her on later trips.

Gabor was born on February 6, 1917 in Budapest, Hungary. The middle of three daughters who all became famous in their own right. Zsa Zsa was crowned Miss Hungary in 1936 which launched her into the starlight. In 1941, she emigrated to the United States where she starred in her first film *Lovely to Look at*.

Her second stop over in Shannon airport was on June 30. This time she did not engage with the press or sign autographs. Instead, she stayed on board the TWA flight destined for New York during the 45 minutes refuelling stopover. Once again, she was travelling with Rubirosa and her dog but also Alma Hitchcock nee Reville, the wife of the director Alfred Hitchcock, who stayed on

board the plane with Gabor. Although she was a family friend of the Hitchcocks she never starred in one of Alfred's movies. Gabor's final stop in Shannon airport that year came on October 10, and again Gabor remained on the flight while all the other passengers including Rubirosa disembarked. Gabor was married nine times, including to hotel magnate Conrad Hilton and her third husband actor George Sanders, who she divorced in April 1954. Rubirosa was married five times; he divorced his fourth wife in February 1954. Despite all their travelling together in 1954, Rubirosa and Gabor never married. She continued to act into the 1990s, her films ranged from *Moulin Rouge* in 1952 to *The Beverly Hillbillies* in 1993. She passed away on December 18, 2016, at ninety-nine years old. She was survived by the last of her many husbands, Frédéric Prinz von Anhalt, to whom she was married for twenty years.

In the summer of 1968, Kurt Russell arrived in Ireland to spend nine weeks filming *Guns in the Heather* in Co. Clare. During that time Russell and his fellow actors spent a great deal of time and money in the Clare, Limerick Galway area.

The Chronicle of August 6, 1968 told of Russell's visit to the greyhound track:-

"There was a touch of Disneyland at Limerick greyhound track last night. The drama began just before race four when Kurt Russell - he stars in the new Monday night R.T.E. series, *Jamie McPheeters* - donned the white coat to lead Broadford Toast in the parade as camera men -

by the dozen - mounted vantage points.

Russell, at 17, rated one of the bright young men of screenland is this week completing filming of the Walt Disney adventure film, "Guns in the Heather" which has been shot in parts of the Shannonside region.

To depict typical Irish life, however, it was decided that a visit to a greyhound meeting was an essential. Thus last night actors and beautiful actresses and many cameramen flocked to the Markets Field, Managing Director, Mr J. P. Frost, was only too willing to facilitate the visitors and it was he who suggested that Russell should lead out Broadford Toast for rave four.

The star received loud applause as he paraded up and down in his white coat and holding Mr Ned Quinlivan's fawn. He ran back across the field with the other parade men to collect Broadford Toast at the end of the 525 yards contest, and it was a very proud Russell who had the satisfaction of leading in the winner.

So pleased were the visitors with the running of Broadford Toast - and the handling of Kurt Russell - that after racing a member of the party made a strong bid to purchase Mr Quinlivan's flier. After brief negotiations, however, the deal fell through." Russell was not the only celebrity in attendance at the greyhound meetings in Limerick as on Saturday night Denis Law, Nobby Stiles, Bobby Charlton and other famous Manchester United soccer stars were the guests of Limerick's Mr Des Henrahan, Chairman of Bord nag Con and former sports editor of the Limerick Leader.



Zsa Zsa Gabor stopping to admire some Limerick Lace at the Duty Free in Shannon Airport in 1954. Porfirio Rubirosa who travelled with her throughout that year stands behind her



The flexible comedian Danny Kaye waves goodbye as he leaves Shannon Airport on November 3, 1948

Frank 'the human talking machine' brings movies to life

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kinds to give greater reality to the pictures being exhibited."

Perhaps Goggin was an early adopter of the Monty Python technique of using two halves of a coconut to make the sound of horses. He most likely had access

to various musical instruments that would have come in very handy while trying to create the backing track to the visuals on screen in the Theatre Royal.

The Leader continued, "he filled his part with an amazing amount of cleverness and ability and if there were incongruities here and

there, as there were bound to be, his work was exceedingly well done and added an enormous spice of variety and fun to the entertainments."

Goggin was still alive when this review appeared in the Leader and he was recorded as "genial as ever, and a humorous gleam and smile

will light up his face if you recall to him how he was Limerick's first talkie."

The Theatre Royal was destroyed by fire on the night of January 23, 1922. This was most likely due to the highly combustible film reels being used in the cinema at the time.

This brought an abrupt end to Frank Goggin's time as a human talkie machine, although he was still working as a stage manager a year later and represented the former staff members in 1941 when sending condolences on the death of Michael W. Shanley, the late owner of the "Old Royal".