SHANNON

‘Between Old World and New World’

A Social History Project
Analysis and Development

By

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On behalf of

Dúchas na Sionna
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This report is dedicated to the ‘Pioneers’, the men and women and children who created and continue to create community in Shannon.

Acknowledgements:

Dúchas na Sionna would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the Shannon Social History Project. We gratefully acknowledge the assistance of our main sponsor Clare Local Development Company Ltd and the LEADER fund. Local businesses and societies were also most generous in their support for the Shannon Social History Project and the Hastings Farmhouse Conservation Project:

Ei Electronics, Shannon
Shannon Archaeological and Historical Society
Club na Sionna
Shannon Town Council
Orion Tooling Ltd.
Shannon Abrasives Ltd.
Compuscript Ltd.
Schwarz Pharma UCB Ltd.
Fire Safe Training

I am indebted to Dúchas na Sionna who initiated and guided this project. Particular thanks are due to Seán Ó Nuanáin, Tom Chambers, Rosemary Power, Labhras Ó Donnghaile and Greg Duff for their insightful comments on the final draft. Thank you also to Cuimhneamh an Chláir for advice and use of recording equipment, to Dr. Gerard Mullally, Department of Sociology UCC for advice at the commencement of the questionnaire and Alison Carey for technical assistance. I would also like to thank the staff of Sean Lemass Library Shannon and of the Clare Local Studies Centre for assistance with accessing research material. Thank you to the Shannon Airport Authority and Shannon Development who provided photographs and to everyone who shared photographs and other memorabilia from their personal archives.

Most of all Dúchas na Síonna says a heartfelt thank you to all the interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project who so generously shared their memories. We note with sadness the passing of three of the interviewees since recording their interviews. We hope that their recordings bring some comfort to their families.

Tá áit speisialta ag Sionna sa scéal sin tré chothú agus buanú aerphoirt, tionsclaíochta, turasóireachta agus forbairt aitiúil agus freisin tré bhaile nua a thógáil Chun freastal ar oibríthe agus a dteaghlaign.

Sé “Dúchas na Sionna” le tacaíocht ó “Leader” agus fuilleamhóirí eile a chuir tús leis an tionscnamh seo. Is iad a thiomáin agus a stiúr chun críche é tré thaighde, agallaimh agus taifeadtaí.

Tionscnamh é a chuireann ós ár gcomhair cúlra an cheanntair roimh an fás agus ansin faisnéisí tetsclimithe Bhaile nua na Sionna agus a thimpeallacht.

Is iad cuntaisí daoine a tháinig chun cónaí agus oibre ann ó cheithre háirde na cruinne agus as Éirinn féin.

Is gaisce tábhachtach stairiúil é an tionscnamh seo idir bhaileúchán eolais, cur i gcló agus stórail. Beidh na glúnta a thiocfaidh ina ndiaidh buíoch díobh siúd a rinne an deá obair.

Istigh anseo tá scéalta tré shuíle agus ó bhéil na ndaoine (rogha trasghearradh) a d’fhás iad fhéinig agus a dteaghlaign i dteannta fás an chéad bhaile nua i nÉirinn le míle bliain.

Ní aontaíonn gach duine le gach atá le rá ag daoine eile, ní nach ionadh, ach sin éagsúlacht a thugann láidreacht do phróiseas agus creidiúint don chóras oibre a toghadh.

Is rud leanúnach é an stair, is féidir le cáth cur leis san todhchaí.

Gura fada buan iad na staraithe.
Chapter 1 - Background

1.1 Introduction

The story of Shannon is actually many stories. It is the story of an airport, an industrial estate and town. It is also a story of transition ‘between the old world and the new’ described by Brendan O'Regan at the dedication of Mary Immaculate Church in 1966.¹

Shannon was Ireland’s first planned town of the twentieth century. In 1960 one hundred and thirty-six flats and ten houses were built on Drumgeely Hill at the edge of the international airport and new industrial estate by the River Shannon, some 20 km from Ennis and 23 km from Limerick City. They provided the first accommodation for the executives and workers at the nearby industrial complex. The industrial estate was planned as the world’s first customs free zone situated within an airport complex and provided advanced factories with the purpose of attracting foreign multi-national companies to set up operations at Shannon.

The result was that the earliest community at Shannon was uniquely cosmopolitan in an Irish context as executives and technicians arrived from abroad with their families to begin start-up operations for the new companies. The first school, housed in a room of the Community Hall, included English, South African, German, Swiss, Dutch and American children. Irish children were in the minority.

From those pioneering days Shannon has developed into the second biggest town in County Clare with a population of almost 10,000 people. As it has grown and matured it has sought to establish its identity as a modern, Irish town.

When talking about Shannon many residents speak of the strong community spirit that was evident in the early days of the town’s existence. The pioneering spirit forged strong ties among the mainly young population who had no local family connections to fall back on. But there was a down side to the unsettled nature of the early town when weekends and holidays saw the town empty as Irish people went ‘home’ to the places that they had come from.

My family was one of those, who in the early 1960s was lured back from England with the promise of a job and a house at Shannon. After an initial period living with grandparents in Limerick city during which time my parents joined the hundreds of young people bound for the Shannon industrial estate on the early morning buses we finally secured our house in Shannon. My father enjoyed working in Rippen Piano Factory and my brother and I settled into Shannon School No 1 in Drumgeely Community Hall. Having lived in a Victorian two up, two down in Birmingham and in cramped conditions in my grandparents’ house in Limerick we loved our new house with its open plan living accommodation. My mother

¹ The Importance of Shannon Stressed. Irish Press 10th October 1966.
wasn’t such a fan of the open plan as it was impossible to heat from the single, small fireplace.

As children we were blissfully unaware of the bleakness that many of the interviewees reported about Shannon in the early days. We enjoyed our unusual school surroundings, our international playmates, playing on the building sites after workmen finished for the day (little attention to health and safety in those days!), and the freedom to roam and explore the countryside around us. When a playground with swings, jungle jim and slide was installed in Drumgeely our world was complete. We grew up with the town and although my parents moved back to Limerick in 1973 when it came time to settle down Shannon was the place I wanted to be. With my husband and two children we moved back to Shannon in 1984 where our family grew to five children.

When Dúchas na Sionna initiated this project to collect the memories of the first Shannon residents I was excited at the prospect of re-visiting those early days and learning more about how people who had moved to the town experienced the pioneering days of its existence. I knew I had loved growing up in Shannon but I had little appreciation of how it was for adults who came here, removed from the usual family supports available to young people starting their families. As the town grew they set down roots and crafted its identity. They have seen the town grow from an original settlement on a hill with few amenities into the town that it is today.

Soon after the commencement of the Shannon Social History Project it became clear that there was another story waiting to be told, that of the people who lived in the locality before the advent of the modern town. Theirs was a traditional way of life, already changing because of the influence of the airport since the 1930s and 40s, but still maintaining that link between the ‘old world and the new’.

The overall objective of this project is to contribute to the story of how Shannon developed and to give voice to the people who were instrumental in creating community in the most unique of circumstances for Ireland, that of establishing a new town from the beginning. While not every aspect of life in Shannon is covered what follows is based on the oral testimonies of people who recorded interviews for the Shannon Social history project. This report covers the background to and the first phase up to the early 1980s, a cut-off date made necessary by the richness of the material and the need to record people’s memories of these years before it is too late.
1.2 Environmental and Historical Background

Apart from the three drumlin hills of Drumgeely, Tullyglass and Tullyvarraga Shannon Town is built on flatland which prior to the embankment building projects of the eighteenth century was subject to regular flooding. When plans to develop the town were decided upon a programme of land drainage and reclamation was embarked on to render the marshland of the Shannon corcass suitable for the housing developments to come. Some of the interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project who lived in the area before the 1960s had stories of hunting for wildfowl across the marshlands where the modern town now stands. The importance of valuing the natural environment has always been an important ingredient throughout the town’s development. Extensive tree planting schemes give Shannon its green infrastructure and there are an abundance of open areas and walking routes which add considerably to the attractiveness of the town for residents and visitors alike. Preserving wildlife habitats and corridors is also an important element in the town and the ‘Shannon Wetlands’ adjacent to St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School, the Leisure Centre and the Gaelscoil preserves some of the original wetland of the locality. An information board erected by Dúchas na Sionna is located at the southern border of the wetland site and informs the reader about the wildlife species that may be found there.

In the 1930s the flatlands of Rineanna proved to be the most suitable location on which to build Ireland’s first international airport. Just as traditional towns grew around natural meeting places, at crossroads, safe harbours and market places or on the fording points of rivers it seems appropriate that Ireland’s newest town should grow at that hub of modern transport, the airport. However, while Shannon’s raison d’etre was originally focused on the airport it has been lamented that the town of Shannon has not fully appreciated its location at the confluence of the Shannon and Fergus estuaries. These waterways were immensely important throughout the millennia as an abundant food resource and means of travel into the interior when the country had a thick tree cover and roads were non-existent.

While the modern town owes its beginnings to policies that sought to promote the potential of the international airport and to establish Shannon as an industrial base, it does not mark the beginning of human occupation in the locality. Traces of human activity from all periods can be glimpsed in the archaeological and historical record. It is interesting to note that the plan to develop the town of Shannon in 1960 was not the first time that the idea of building a purpose built settlement in the area had been discussed. Documents in the National Archives show that the government had drawn up plans for a small community called Shannon Airport/Rineanna to be located close to Firgrove and Clonmoney in the 1940s. Local folklore speaks of an ancient prophesy that foretold the building of a city by the side of the river.

While hunter/gatherers are often difficult to find in the archaeological record there can be little doubt that the estuary with its abundant wetland would always have been an attractive location for coastal foragers. A stone axe found at Tullyglass Point in the 1970s indicates that people were exploiting the resources of the estuary in this area during the Neolithic period c. 4000-2000BC. This period saw the transition from the hunter/gatherer lifestyle to farming which necessitated a more

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2 [www.nationalarchives.ie](http://www.nationalarchives.ie) Document of the month February 2014 – a map showing the layout of a small settlement around Firgrove House. Document S13090 C/1 Dept. of the Taoiseach
3 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 14th July 2011.
settled way of life. The Late Bronze Age (c. 1100-600BC) chiefdom centered on Mooghaun Hillfort just north of Newmarket-on-Fergus included lesser sites such as the hilltop enclosure at Clenagh a few kilometres north-west of Shannon and even smaller domestic enclosures in its immediate hinterland at Caherteigue, Ballymurtagh and Clonmoney West\(^5\). The great Clare gold find discovered near Mooghaun hillfort in 1854 shows the immense wealth that this chiefdom could command.

The evidence for human occupation in the area abounds in the Early Medieval Period (c. 500-1200AD). Ringforts, often called fairy forts, were the farmsteads of the period and are the most common monument type in the environs of the town of Shannon. They were predominantly circular and in this locality range in size from c. fifteen metres to c. thirty metres internal diameter. Depending on the locally available material enclosing banks were constructed either of earth or stone or a combination of both. A surrounding ditch provided additional security from attack or from wild animals. While the marshlands of Drumgeely, Tullyglass and Tullyvarraga were not a suitable environment on which to build a ringfort there are many examples in the surrounding townlands. A fine ringfort may be seen in Knockane townland close to the Shannon Town Roundabout. It is visible as a tree covered circle that stands about a metre above the surrounding field surface. Excavation in advance of runway construction at Thady’s Hill in Rineanna in 1959 showed that its ringfort was constructed in the seventeenth century\(^6\). This was a surprisingly late date since the evidence from other areas around the country suggests the main era of ringfort construction ended in the twelfth century. It is an important finding as it signifies that this was an enduring building tradition in south-east Clare.

Other indicators of settlement in the Early Medieval period are the church sites and monastic enclosures found in the immediate vicinity of the town. The fifteenth century church of Kilconry, four kilometres west of Shannon town centre is built on the early monastic foundation of a fifth century female St. Conaire. A cousin of St. Senan’s of Inis Cathaigh (Scattery Island), St. Conaire was refused access to his island because of Senan’s rigid rule that no woman be allowed set foot upon the island. The oldest built structure in the locality is the ruin of Clonloghan Church situated two kilometres northwest of the town. Only the east gable survives containing a simple round headed window which may have been built as early as the tenth century and was possibly founded by St. Enda of the Aran Islands\(^7\). Other early Christian church sites are identified on Inis Da Droma (Coney Island) associated with Saint Brendan, Canon Island and Deer Island in the Fergus Estuary. There is a tradition that Saint Bridget presided over a convent of nuns on Feenish Island in the fifth century. The establishment of so many early monastic foundations on the lower Fergus Estuary islands and on the nearby mainland indicates the importance of these water ways in the Early Historic Period.

Historical sources suggest that there may have been a Viking settlement at Tradaree, the old Gaelic name for the area defined by the Fergus and Shannon Estuaries on the west and south and by lines drawn north-westwards from Bunratty to Quin and from there westwards to Clarecastle. The twelfth-century Cogadh Gaedhael re Gallaibh states that they established a fortress at Tradraigthe c.

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\(^5\) Eoin Grogan, North Munster Project, Volume 1: The later prehistoric landscape of south-east Clare. (Wicklow, 2005).
\(^7\) T.J. Westropp. 'The Churches of County Clare and the Origin of the Ecclesiastical Divisions of that County'. Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 1900.
960 AD. In 1914 a Viking thistle brooch was found at Clonloghan indicating a Viking presence in the area or at least contact with Vikings by the indigenous Irish population. The following extracts from Gerrard Ryan’s ‘A Survey of Monuments of Archaeological and Historical interest in the Barony of Bunratty Lower’ indicate the fragmentary but enduring evidence that both the Vikings and Brian Boru were active on the Shannon and Fergus estuaries in the tenth century.

“...He (i.e. Brian Boru) seized everything possessed by the Danes there (Scattery) as well as in the other islands of the lower Shannon and Fergus...”
Annals of the Four Masters, for 977 A.D. (Cited in “County Clare” no. 1, 1977 page 24)

Other sources support this view of Viking settlement in this area of the Barony of Bunratty Lower (e.g. Westropp, 1915, page 314). In fact Mac Namara (1915, page 221) goes even further and quotes Todd who stated that the Vikings had fortified areas of Tradree (i.e. West Bunratty Lower Barony). Brian Boru is said, by tradition, to have used Cratloe Woods and attacked the Viking settlements both along the coast of the Barony of Bunratty Lower as well as Limerick city (source “History of Cratloe Parish”, 1979 edition, page 7). Eventually this site at Bunratty was destroyed (Lynch, 1977, page 17).

The earliest archaeological evidence for Anglo-Norman settlement at Bunratty may be the motte-and-bailey at Clonmoney West and the moated site at Culleen both within a short distance of Shannon. Bunratty was an intense focus of Anglo-Norman settlement between the mid thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries but after their defeat at the Battle of Dysert O’Dea in 1318 the castle and town were burnt and the settlement deserted. The current castle at Bunratty was built by the MacNamara in the earlier part of the fifteenth century and is the fourth castle to occupy the site. The castle came into O’Brien hands sometime around 1500 perhaps through marriage. While no buildings associated with the Anglo-Norman settlement survive above ground recent survey and excavation in the Shannon Estuary mud-flats adjacent to Bunratty have identified a series of fish traps dated to between the eleventh (pre-Anglo-Norman) and thirteenth centuries. These provide interesting information on the exploitation of the local resources by the inhabitants of Bunratty and environs at the time. Of even further interest to Shannon people is the finding of an Anglo-Norman penny by a schoolboy at Tullyglass in 1979. The coin is an English penny struck c. 1305-1310.

In addition to Bunratty Castle a number of ruined tower houses or towerhouse sites indicate strong Gaelic settlement within a short distance of where Shannon town now stands. Stonehall, Clonmoney and Clonloghan towehouses all within two and a half kilometres of the town centre have disappeared. In the case of the latter two they appear to have been levelled before the first Ordnance Survey mapping in the 1830s and 40s but the ruin of Stonehall Castle survived into the 1950s when it was levelled because it lay in the path of a proposed new runway. Unfortunately, the destruction was needless as the direction of the runway was subsequently changed. The

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10 Martin Breen. The history of Bunratty Castle. Ruan 2012.
dangerous ruin of Smithstown Castle stands surrounded by factory bays in the Smithstown Industrial Estate close to Shannon town. Drumline and Clenagh tower houses also lie within a few kilometres of Shannon town centre and the ruin of a castle can still be seen on Feenish Island in the Fergus estuary. Many of the towerhouses of south-east Clare were built by the MacNamaras, Mc Mahons or O’Briens in the years between c. 1400 and early 1500s.

The eighteenth century saw the building of some fine houses in the vicinity of where Shannon town grew up. Ballycasey House, whose stables have been converted into Ballycasey Craft and Design Centre, was built by John Miller, M.P., who was created a baronet of Ireland in 1778. Clonmoney House situated in Clonmoney West townland was built by Ralph Westropp in the early eighteenth century. The remains of a few farm buildings associated with Knockane House are located just north of the Shannon Town roundabout. Local tradition claims that Daniel O’Connell was entertained here by Patrick McMahon esquire on his way to the 1828 by-election in Ennis. Stonehall Castle had a later house attached but it too was demolished in the 1950s. The eighteenth century Ballucunneen House about three kilometres east of Shannon is maintained in excellent condition.14

The pathway known to Shannon residents as the Slí na Mara boreen that skirts the eastern base of Tullyvarraga Hill was the original and only routeway into the area occupied by the modern town. The 1840 first edition ordnance survey map shows a number of clusters of farm buildings dotted along its route. Of these only Murphy’s thatched cottage (formerly Power’s cottage) currently operating as a restaurant, and the remains of Hastings Farmhouse survive. The 1901 and 1911 censuses tell us that families called McInerney, McNamara, Jones, Hastings, Minahan, Keyes and O’Gorman were living in Tullyvarraga. Ellen and John O’Gorman are well remembered by the first generation of Shannon residents and Ellen is featured on a 1969 recording that is now part of the Dúchas na Sionna archive. Information regarding the history of the locality and of the role of the Hastings family during the War of Independence when General Lucas was held captive at the farmhouse has been recorded during the course of this project. The censuses record that five McNamara families lived at Drumgeely in 1901 and 1911 and a McInerney family lived at Tullyglass. All the families were engaged in agriculture but a survey of traditional trades and crafts in the Shannon area show that people in the locality were also blacksmiths, coopers, basketmakers, weavers and spinners, candlemakers and surprisingly clogmakers, probably as a result of Dutch influence when a number of Dutch families settled in Sixmilebridge at the end of the 16th century.15

The foregoing serves to remind us that while Shannon is a new town, the area it is situated on has seen human activity that stretches back over the millennia. As much as the M18 is now our major conduit for journeys to Ennis, Limerick and beyond and the airport is our starting point for destinations even further afield, the Shannon and Fergus estuaries were the motorways of the past. Our ancestors would have hunted and fished along the estuaries, would have farmed the rich corcass land and would have been witness to the many raiding and commercial fleets that sailed the estuary waters as well as the myriad of smaller craft belonging to local farmers and fishermen who exploited the rich estuarine environment.

1.3 Literary Review
Several books have been written about various aspects of the development of the Shannon story. They are:


*Shannon Departures* is a study in Regional Development and looks particularly at the role played by Shannon Free Airport Development Company (SFADCo or later Shannon Development), a State sponsored body charged with the economic, tourist and social development of Shannon initially and then the broader Mid-West Region. The book looks at the genesis of the Shannon project, the key players, the official support and sometimes official misgivings about the venture as it developed. Chapter two gives an overview of the history of the airport up to the 1950s and the conditions prevailing in the region when the airport, one of the biggest employers in the mid-west region, was in danger of being overflown with the advent of the modern jet engine. Chapter three charts the beginning of Shannon Development and the establishment of the industrial estate at Shannon. The chapter gives an account of how the Government supported Shannon Development in its fledgling operation of attracting industrialists to Shannon. It looks at some of the companies who came at the start, those that survived and those that did not. Chapter four entitled ‘A Shop on Drumgeely Hill’ deals with the beginning of building a town at Shannon. Initially, the idea was simply to provide houses for workers close to the industrial estate but in Shannon Development the idea quickly evolved into that of planning and building an entire new town. The early developments are chronicled from the initial accommodation on Drumgeely Hill, to the Outline Development Plan for the town prepared by Downes & Meehan, Dublin. The plan recommended housing design and a layout based on new town developments in England. Reflecting the growing uncertainty in Government regarding the developments at Shannon funding for the new town was allocated on a piecemeal basis with approval being given for a small number of houses at a time. Interviews were conducted with some of the key decision makers at the time and primary sources from the SFADCo archive were also consulted. There are footnotes at the end of each chapter and a select bibliography is included at the end.

*Ireland’s Shannon Story* had its basis in a thesis which was submitted for a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Limerick in 2000. It takes Shannon Development as a case study in local and regional development and looks at the dynamics between individuals and agencies and how they affect development at a local, regional, national and even international level. A crucial aspect to the early success of the Shannon venture was the personal relationship between Brendan O’Regan, Comptroller of the Sales and Catering operation at Shannon Airport, and Sean Lemass, initially Minister for Industry and Commerce and later Taoiseach. The book traces that relationship and the impact that it had at various stages of the Shannon Project, in the setting up of Shannon Development and in the early industrial developments and subsequent establishment of Shannon town. The book also looks at the
on-going relations between Shannon Development and national agencies such as the IDA and Bord Fáilte and the effect that they had on Shannon Development’s activities in the mid-west region through the latter half of the twentieth century. Chapter six and seven look specifically at the growth of the industrial estate and the town of Shannon. It makes extensive use of the Shannon Development archive and features many charts based on statistics gleaned from documents in the archive. Each chapter is footnoted at the end of the book and a comprehensive bibliography is provided.

Shannon Airport- A Unique Story of Survival deals comprehensively with the history of the airport from its pioneering start as a sea-plane base at Foynes and development of the land base at Shannon (known as Rineanna in its early days) through to modern times. While this book is primarily concerned with the history of the airport it is an important research source for any study of the development of the town. Both the industrial estate, and subsequently the town, was conceived as a direct consequence of the need to ensure the economic viability of the airport. The author interviewed some of the key personnel who were instrumental in decision making at the airport as well as some of the employees who worked there. This book is an invaluable record of the history of the airport and the people who worked there from the 1930s to early 2000s. There is a reference section at the end of the book.

Shannon: Ireland’s New Town. A Social Survey. 1968. Shannon. A special report commissioned by Shannon Development and carried out by Fr. Liam Ryan. The report was commissioned to ascertain the attitudes of Shannon residents to their town. About half the households in Shannon (c. 300) were included in the survey and the findings generally found a high level of satisfaction amongst Shannon Residents although there were some negative areas identified, such as the lack of shopping and entertainment facilities in the town.

The Other Clare, journal of the Shannon Archaeological & Historical Society, is an invaluable resource for researching the historical background of Shannon and environs.

Local and National Newspapers were researched extensively.

Dáil Debates in relation to the setting up of Shannon Free Zone, and Shannon Town were consulted. http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/
1.4 Community Engagement

1.4.1 Launch

On the 11th March 2011 Dúchas na Síonna launched the Shannon Social History Project in Sean Lemass Library, Shannon. Invitations were sent to sporting and cultural organisations within the town, educational and religious establishments, local industry and the media. A display of early photographs of the town, industrial estate and airport provided a talking point and an opportunity to reminisce for the people who attended the launch.

1.4.2 Senior Citizen’s Club

A presentation was made to the Senior Citizens Club on 6th April 2011 at their premises in Purcell Park. As a result of this presentation a number of Shannon’s senior residents agreed to be interviewed for the Shannon Social History Project.

1.4.3 Information Days in Shannon Town Centre

Figure 1: Launch of Shannon Social History Project 11th March 2011

Figure 2: Dúchas na Síonna Photograph Display Skycourt, Shannon 15th/16th April 2011
On Friday 15th and Saturday 16th April 2011 the photograph display was erected in the Knappogue Mall of Skycourt. A desk was manned by the Project Co-ordinator and Dúchas na Sionna volunteers who engaged with the community giving information on the aims and objectives of the Shannon Social History Project. The photographs generated much comment and reminiscences about the early days of Shannon. A number of people donated photographs to the Shannon Social History Project as a result of the information days in the Town Centre. The photograph display then moved to a vacant retail unit in Skycourt courtesy of Skycourt Management and remained there for approximately one year after the Information day event. The Project Co-ordinator was contacted on a number of occasions by people who had seen the display in the Town Centre and who had a memory to share prompted by the images or requesting a copy of a particular photograph. Where possible copies of the original photographs were made and supplied to those who requested them.

1.4.4 Hastings Farmhouse Conservation Project

The background story of the people who lived in the locality in the decades leading up to the 1960s adds context for the developments of those years.

Hastings Farmhouse was one of a number of farmhouses located along the old routeway into Tullyvarraga which can be traced today along the Sli na Mara boreen. On the first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1840 the house is shown at the end of the boreen close to Illaunamangh Point and within a few hundred metres of the Shannon estuary. The farmhouse was lived in by the Hastings family until the early 1970s after which it fell into ruin. In 2012 Dúchas na Síonna initiated a project, funded by Clare Local Development Company Ltd and local fundraising to conserve the remains of the farmhouse. Dúchas na Síonna are working towards presenting the now conserved ruin and surrounding garden as a place of quiet reflection close to the graveyard and as a local historical landmark.

In 1920, a high-ranking officer of the British Army, General Lucas, was captured by the IRA while fishing in Cork. For several weeks he was held hostage and moved from house to house. Hastings Farmhouse was one of a number of ‘safe houses’ in the locality that the General was held in. The
General built up a good rapport with his captors, who facilitated a daily exchange of mail between him and his young wife who prematurely gave birth to their first child on hearing of her husband’s capture. The General eventually escaped but would only say that he had been ‘treated as a gentleman by gentlemen’. The story has come down through the generations and many of the interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project had family memories to add to the known accounts of the period. The story came full circle in August 2012 when Ruth Wheeler the granddaughter of General Lucas attended the Open Day on completion of the Hastings Farmhouse Conservation Project.

There were a number of opportunities for community participation throughout the Hastings Farmhouse Conservation Project. At the beginning of the clearing process a volunteer day was held in which members of the community cleared the vegetation which had grown up around the farmhouse in the forty years since it fell into disrepair. A further opportunity for community engagement came at the Open Day as local businesses, entertainers and historical re-enactors contributed their equipment and skills to ensuring the day was a success. A local haulage company provided the use of an open-sided truck to use as a platform for speeches, a tent-hire company provided a refreshment tent and local musicians provided the entertainment throughout the day. A historical re-enactment group provided a group dressed in military uniform of the War of Independence era to lend colour to the festivities on the day. An article outlining the Conservation Project and the historic links of the farmhouse to an important event during the fight for national independence was subsequently published in Volume 37 of The Other Clare annual journal of the Shannon Archaeological & Historical Society. As well as acknowledging the invaluable support of CLDC and the LEADER fund in the conservation project the article acknowledged the contribution of local community groups, individuals and businesses in bringing the project to fruition.

1.4.6 Schools’ visits

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A number of Shannon Schools visited Hastings Farmhouse after the conservation process was complete. To date approximately two hundred children have visited. They have been given a guided tour of the site and encouraged to think about the way of life experienced by people in the Shannon area before the birth of the modern town. The visits built on the students’ curriculum studies in local and national history (War of Independence, vernacular architecture, place names, traditional farming lifestyle), and also nature studies. Through hearing the General Lucas story and its connection to Hastings Farmhouse the children learned of the humanity of those involved in that war time situation. The children took part in an on-site quiz as part of their visit and were awarded a book prize to take back to their school library.

1.4.7 Heritage Week events
Outreach to the local community was also undertaken in the form of Heritage Week events organised by Dúchas na Síona and the Shannon Archaeological & Historical Society to places of historical and social interest to residents of Shannon. The series known as ‘Know your Place’ has featured visits to the medieval church sites of Kilconry, Kilmaleery, Clonloghan and Bunratty in 2011; two Open Days at Hastings Farmhouse in 2012 and visits to Clonmoney Motte and Bailey, Culleen Moated Site and Stonehall Walled Garden in 2013. The sites lie mostly within a four kilometre radius of Shannon and the visits are designed to promote an interest in and awareness of the rich historical and archaeological legacy that surrounds the modern town of Shannon. The outings are advertised and reported in the local media and are growing in popularity each year.

1.4.8 Local Media
The launch of the Shannon Social History Project featured prominently in local media: The Clare Champion, The Clare People, The Clare Courier, Clare FM and Jet FM. There were periodic updates in local media as the project unfolded. The Hastings Farmhouse Conservation Project was also featured on a number of occasions in the local media particularly at the start of the project and at the Open Days on 18th and 22nd August 2012.

1.4.9 Digital Media
A dedicated website www.shannonsocialhistory.com was designed and created by John O’Brien, member of Dúchas na Síona. Photographs are periodically uploaded to the website.

Photographs are also made available on the Dúchas na Síona Facebook page. The photographs elicit much on-going interaction with people identifying people or places that are featured therein. Some people contributed reminiscences prompted by the photographs via the Facebook page. Photographs of the school visits featured on the Facebook page also.
1.4.10 CLDC Information Day

On 13th May 2013 Dúchas na Síonna exhibited the Shannon Social History photograph display at the Clare Local Development Company’s Celebration of 21 years of Local Development in County Clare. The display attracted considerable interest and generated much discussion from members of the public and those involved in Leader funded community projects throughout County Clare.

1.4.11 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed through the Citizen’s Information leaflet which is delivered to every house in Shannon with an invitation to participate in the Shannon Social History Project. The questionnaire was designed to elicit information on when people came to Shannon, why they came and what their experience of living in Shannon has been. People were invited to submit the completed questionnaires to a dedicated box in the Library and in the Shannon Leisure Centre. There was also an option to fill in the questionnaire on the Shannon Social History Project Facebook page. A total of 165 questionnaires were returned with 60 people indicating a willingness to be interviewed. There was a further opportunity for Shannon residents to fill in the questionnaire and to view the photograph display during the information days in Skycourt in April 2011. See Appendix 1 for a copy and analysis of the questionnaire.

1.4.12 Letters

Where it was possible to find an address for people who were among the first residents in Shannon, but had moved away, a letter was written to them outlining the project and inviting them to contribute some of their memories. This process resulted in a number of replies outlining the experience of some of the very first residents of Shannon, including Shannon’s first school teacher and some of the executives who came to set up the first manufacturing operations on the Shannon Industrial Estate.
Chapter 2 - Methodology

2.1 Methodology
Recorded interviews commenced in May 2011. Interviewees were identified through the questionnaire, or were suggested and introduced by a family member or friend. The purpose of the Shannon Social History Project was discussed with each interviewee in advance of the recording and they were informed that they would be invited to sign a consent form at the end of the recording. The consent form informed the participants of the future uses that Dúchas na Sionna might make of the recording, where it would be stored and gave the interviewee an opportunity to declare any conditions that they wished to attach to any use of their recording. Each participant was furnished with an unedited Cd of the finished recording. Permission was sought to take a photograph of each interviewee. See Appendix 2 for Consent Form.

To date thirty-eight interviews have been recorded. The length of each interview generally varied between forty-five minutes and an hour and thirty minutes long. Most interviews took place in the interviewee’s own home with a small number taking place in the interviewer’s home. Each recording commences with a statement of the interviewee’s name, the place and date of the interview, and the statement that the recording is conducted as part of the Shannon Social History Project. While allowing for the individual experience of each interviewee an ‘aide memoire’ of possible questions was loosely used to begin the conversation. The first questions usually elicited information regarding when and why the interviewee came to live in Shannon? The questions that followed were designed to prompt the interviewee to share their story regarding their experiences and memories of coming to live in the new town of Shannon. For the most part it was not necessary for the interviewer to ask too many questions as interviewees were generally extremely willing to share their stories and spoke easily about their experiences of coming to live in Shannon. See Appendix 3 for a list of interviewees and date of interview.

2.1.1 Research Questions:
When conducting the interviews for the Shannon Social History project a few key research questions informed the type of information sought during the interview process.

- How did people experience living in the new town (a) initially, (b) as the town developed?
- How did the social and community life of the town develop?
- What was the experience of new groupings coming into the town and how did they influence the character of the town as it developed. eg: an influx of Northern Irish people in the early 1970s and the arrival of a small Chilean Population in the mid-1970s.

2.1.2 Aide Memoire
The following are an example of the type of questions used by the interviewer as an ‘aide memoire’ during the course of the interviews:

- When and why did you come to live in Shannon?
- Had you heard much about Shannon before you came?
- What was your initial impression of Shannon when you arrived?
- What amenities were available – School, Church, Medical, Transport, Shopping, etc?
• What social outlets were available in the beginning/as time went on? Did you get involved in any organisations or groups?

2.1.3 Editing the Recordings
An audio editing software programme ‘Audacity’ was used to edit the recordings. This was used to ‘clean up’ the recording by removing any part of the recording that the interviewee did not wish to include or to reduce long pauses or unnecessary interjections by the interviewer i.e. overuse of the word ‘yes’ to encourage the interviewee. A copy of each original recording is kept in the Dúchas na Sionna Archive along with an edited version of the same recording.

2.1.4 Transcribing the Recordings
Each recording was transcribed in full. This represented a large amount of work on the part of the interviewer with each recording taking between five and eight hours to transcribe depending on the length of the recording. Towards the end of the transcribing process the interviewer acquired ‘Dragon Naturally Speaking’ transcription software which went some way to speeding up the process of transcription but not substantially so. The software recognises one voice only, therefore it was necessary for the interviewer to speak each recording out loud and the software would convert it into type. However, it was found to be frequently incorrect, therefore it was necessary to closely proofread for mistakes.

2.1.5 Cataloguing photographs and other donations to the Project
Interviewees often provided photographs or other memorabilia for use in the Shannon Social History Project. These were photographed, catalogued and returned or, where permission was given by the person donating the item, have been catalogued and added to the Dúchas na Sionna archive.

2.1.6 Background Research
Throughout the recording process the interviewer conducted extensive background research into the history of the Shannon area through a variety of primary and secondary sources. Local and national newspapers and transcripts of Dáil Debates were consulted either on line or through a search of the records held in the local studies section of Clare County Library. Many of the earlier newspapers were viewed on microfiche. Background research was conducted to shed light on some of the events that had been referred to by interviewees during the recorded interviews.
Chapter 3 – The Interviews

3.1 The Interviews
The 38 recordings were analysed and a number of themes were identified and arranged within a chronological framework. The themes identified fell into three main groupings or time periods:

- Section 1 – The period before the birth of the modern town (1920s-late 1950s).
- Section 2 – The birth of the Shannon Industrial Estate and Town (early 1960s-mid 1960s).
- Section 3 – The growth and consolidation years (mid 1960s – early 1980s).

3.2 Before the Town
Ten interviews were conducted with people who lived in the area before the birth of the modern town. An additional recording was donated to the Shannon Social History Project by Séan Ó Cléirigh former Principal of St. Conaire’s National School.

- Jack (RIP) and Nuala Hogan: Interviewed on 7th February 2012
- John Brennan: Interviewed on 3rd February 2012
- John Murnane: Interviewed on 26th March 2012
- Michael & Sheila Power: Interviewed on 28th February 2012
- Mary Hanley: Interviewed on 14th July 2011
- P.J. Reidy: Interviewed on 4th April 2012
- Jimmy Kelly: Interviewed on 24th January 2012
- Paddy Keane: Interviewed on 1st October 2013
- Gráinne and Hugh Weir: Interviewed on 31st August 2011
3.2.1 Hastings Farmhouse

The conservation project to conserve the remains of Hastings Farmhouse generated much interest in the Hastings family, particularly their connection to the capture of General Lucas in County Cork in late June 1920. Some of the participants in the Shannon Social History Project who had lived in the area before the building of the modern town had memories either directly of the Hastings family or of hearing family stories passed down from the previous generation.

Jack Hogan and John Brennan are first cousins whose fathers Tom and James were both involved in guarding General Lucas during his stay in the locality. The wedding of Jack’s father Tom Hogan and John’s aunt Margaret Brennan took place at Brennan’s house in Clonmoney in June 1920. Photographed in the wedding party is Micheál Brennan CO East Clare Brigade sitting front right with revolver drawn.
The General was held at Hogan’s of Moyhill and Brennan’s of Clonmoney as well as Corbett’s of Bunratty and Hastings of Tullyvarraga before being moved out of the area. At the time the Hogan’s were living temporarily in Moyhill while their house in Caherteigue was being built. It was to this house in Moyhill that the General was first brought after crossing by boat from the Limerick side of the Shannon Estuary. Jack recounts that Micheál Brennan did not mention the fact that the General stayed at Hogan’s in his memoir of the period but attributes this to the fact that Tom Hogan went on the Anti-Treaty side during the Civil War while Micheál Brennan was Pro-Treaty.

Figure 8: General Lucas (seated) back row left to right: Patrick Brennan and Micháel Brennan. Front row left to right, Paddy Brennan and Joe Keane. Photograph courtesy John Brennan.

John and Jack’s accounts contribute significantly to the body of information regarding the holding of General Lucas in the area and confirm the commonly held view of a likable man willing to help with hay-making, take part in a fishing trip and engage in card playing with his guards in the evening. Nuala Hogan recalls that Jack’s aunt spoke to her of the measures undertaken to facilitate the exchange of letters between the General and his wife including, the use of a code name and stealing a stamp from the post office in Kilmallock. Jack also told of his father’s involvement in the attack on the barracks of Newmarket on Fergus in which no one was injured but a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition captured.

John Murnane’s father Seán was an officer in the East Clare Brigade of the Irish Republican Army and had passed on some War of Independence stories including Black and Tan activity in the area which involved a search of his house, a proposed ambush of Black and Tans at Carrigoran that almost backfired, and modifying hand grenades so that they were caught in netting put up by the army to protect their barracks from such missiles.

All three interviewees John Murnane, Jack Hogan and John Brennan reported that their fathers, like so many who have been involved in traumatic experiences were reluctant to speak to them of the events of those years but there was much talk amongst the adults for them to listen to and get the substance of what had transpired.
Gráinne O’Brien Weir whose family owned Dromoland Castle before it was sold to an American Hotelier Bernard McDonagh in the 1960s has donated a rare photograph of the 10th Hussars taken at Dromoland in June 1920, the same month that General Lucas was captured in Cork. No doubt the soldiers in the photograph were some of those deployed to search for the General.

In the 1960s recording Ellen O’Gorman gives a first-hand account of look-out men being posted on Tullyvarraga Hill while General Lucas was being held at Hastings. She would bring them tea as they were afraid to come indoors for fear of being caught by British soldiers searching for General Lucas. She also gives an inkling of the big operation that was involved in guarding the General with the observation that Hastings farmyard was full of people, men and Cumann na mBan women guarding the doors. She tells of guns hidden in a dresser in Hastings and of burying a gun of their own in the ground only to find it rusted and useless when it was dug up some time later.

### 3.2.2 People of the locality

‘Tom the Saint’ was the last inhabitant of Saint’s Island in the Shannon Estuary close to Clonmoney. According to Ellen O’Gorman his habit was to row into Bunratty or walk over the mudflats to the mainland every Sunday to attend Mass at the Wells church and to do his weekly shopping at Norah’s shop in Hurler’s Cross. John Brennan recounts that he owes his life to ‘Tom the Saint’ when he and a group of friends were caught in a storm on the Shannon Estuary. ‘Tom the Saint’ happened to be in the boat with them as they had picked him up when passing the island. Tom’s skill with the boat in the difficult conditions was the only thing that got them all home safely.

MacNamara was such a common local name that nicknames were required to identify which MacNamara was being talked about. John Hastings married Margaret MacNamara from Dromgaibhle (Drumgeely). Maggie’s father was Simon MacNamara, thus she was known as Maggie Simon and Bridie MacNamara was known as Bridie Seamus. There were also the Grove Macs and Mick the boss. Close to where Shannon Aerospace is now was a MacNamara family known as the
Johnnies i.e. Jack Johnny and another MacNamara family was known as the Patsies i.e. Jack Patsy (Mary Hanley, P.J. Reidy, Paddy Keane interviews).

Ellen O’Gorman speaks of Bridie Seamus who was the last resident in Dromgaibhle before the Flats and houses were built. Bridie ignored the compulsory purchase order on her farm and even despite representations by the Parish Priest and Brendan O’Regan refused to leave. According to Ellen she was eventually forced to leave when the Sheriff evicted her. It was a sad end to her time in Dromgaibhle. She then lived for some time with Ellen and John doing some of the farm work for them but eventually she lived out her days in a caravan located on the old Ballymurtagh/Ballycalla road.

3.2.3 Traditions and change

As a child, Mary Hanley accompanied her father and mother on frequent visits to Hastings farmhouse. While her father and John Hastings exchanged War of Independence and Civil War stories, Mary’s mother and Maggie would chat in the corner and read Ireland’s Own. Mary gives a good account of the furnishings and layout of the house and of the work that took place in the kitchen. Cooking was done on the fire and Mary’s favourite activity was to turn the bellows to fan the fire drawing Maggie’s admonishment not to do it quickly for fear of burning the turf too fast. Butter was churned in the big forty five gallon churn on the table and a separator separated the cream from the milk. There was no electricity and water was drawn from a well or collected in a tank which was positioned to catch the rainwater that dripped from the thatch. The wet and dry battery operated radio provided news and entertainment and had to be re-charged on a weekly basis. Interestingly part of the radio battery was discovered during the conservation work on Hastings farmhouse. In the summer Mary would help to save hay by standing on the horse-drawn tram. It was Mary’s job to bring out a meal of home-made bread and apple tarts with a can of tea to the workers in the meadow where it tasted better than it ever did in the house.
John Murnane laments the passing of the old ways of farming ‘The old ways and wisdom about farming is being lost’. He recalls that that people could make a living and provide for all their own needs on small farms. His family sold wheat to Ranks flour mills in Limerick and also grew oats and barley. They kept hens, chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys as well as cows and pigs. John gives a graphic account of the process of killing and preserving a pig. It was a two day job that was celebrated with a few bottles of porter at the end. No part of the pig was wasted. Jimmy Kelly also recalls that when his mother killed a pig she would invite all her neighbours in for a bacon breakfast after Mass on Sunday morning.

Jack Hogan speaks of his time as a farmer in Caherteigue before all his land was sold for airport and industrial estate development and he and Nuala moved to Nuala’s home place of Feakle. Jack recalls occasionally being called to provide hay for animals that were being transported through the airport. He recalls one particular incident when he was woken at three o’clock in the morning to make a bran mash in which a sedative could be given to a horse that was ‘uneasy’. Jack sold potatoes to retailers in Limerick and was given an order at one time to supply 5 cwt (50 Kg. approx.) of Golden Wonders with two hours’ notice. Jack and Nuala set to and had five bags of potatoes ready to deliver in time. When they arrived in Limerick there was a queue of people waiting to buy them. Jack was paid double the going price for having supplied the potatoes on time.

Jack wasn’t so fortunate on another occasion when he lost his entire herd of dairy cows to brucellosis. Jack remembers the heart break of seeing all ninety eight cows loaded on to four lorries and taken away. After that Jack changed to beef cattle and horses. He is proud of his judgement of good horses and had particular success with a mare that was a half-sister of the very successful Dawn Run.

Michael Power, whose family’s farm in Tullyvarraga was sold in the 1960s to Shannon Development, remembers using the cottage currently known as Murphy’s Cottage adjacent to the Oakwood Arms Hotel during the summer hay cutting season. He also remembers cutting hay at the airport for the Board of Works and baling it in preparation for sale to local farmers.

Jack Hogan sold milk directly to the airport as did Paddy Normoyle a farmer from Drumline. Gráinne Weir recalls that Dromoland also supplied milk for the passengers and crews who came through Shannon Airport. The Americans wanted pasteurised milk and Dromoland was the first in the locality to have a pasteurising plant put in.

3.2.4 School life

John Brennan recalls his school days in Clonmoney National School in Hurler’s Cross. It was a two storey building that had three teachers, two upstairs and the ‘Master’ below. A partition across the bottom floor divided it into a classroom and a hall that was used for concerts and dances. One of the strongest memories that John has of his school years is putting on plays that were run by Master Harry Carroll. At that time each pupil was supposed to bring money for coal but some of the poorer families couldn’t afford it so a concert was run to raise the money to buy coal. One of the plays that stays in John’s mind is The Colleen Bawn in which he played Hardress Cregan. On that occasion they took in about fifteen or sixteen pounds at the door which bought a lot of coal.

17 Interview with John Murnane 26th March 2012
Jack Hogan attended Stonehall National School and recalls collecting stories from the older members of the community for the Folklore Survey that was carried out in 1937/38. As Jack was born in 1922 he was too old for primary school in 1937 so his memory of collecting stories confirms that the teacher Patrick McCormack had school children collecting stories from an earlier date than the Folklore Commission’s Project. Jack recalls that one neighbour in particular Danny Halloran had a great store of stories to tell ‘He was very conversable although he wasn’t educated. He was a grand old man’. The children would write out the stories or say them verbally to Master McCormack the next day.

3.2.5 Folklore and customs

In 1937 The Folklore Commission of Ireland launched a scheme to encourage schools to collect local folklore. Children of fifth and sixth class were asked to interview their older relatives and neighbours and to write down the folklore of their areas. Under the direction of the school principal Master Patrick McCormack Stonehall National School was one of the schools who took part in the scheme. The submissions from Stonehall were recently published by Dúchas na Síonna in booklet form. Local townlands from which folklore was gathered included Dromguila (Drumgeely), Tullyglass and Tullyvarraga. Entries in relation to Dromguila state:

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18 Interview with Jack Hogan 7th February 2012.
In the Corcass here there lived a little fairy man. He was quick to run – so quick that none could catch him. He had a purse and every time it was opened it contained a shilling. He was called *Sparán na Scillinge*. A man named McNamara caught him at last and became very rich. (*Mr. John McNamara, Dromguila*).

Three men standing at Dromguila cross saw a woman pass followed by a cat. They thought she was very old. Another man further on thought she was very young. They caught the cat. The woman came back and told them to let the cat go. They followed her to Knockane. There they were stricken ill and could go no further. (*Danny O’Halloran*).

A hurling match was held here in the old times between Cratloe and Tradaree. A Tradaree man brought the ball across a trench. A Cratloe man struck him with a hurley and killed him. (*Danny O’Halloran*).

An entry relating to a hedge school on Tullyglass:

In Tullyglas on a hill called *Cnoc na Scolie*.

Entries relating to Tullyvarraga:

*Inis Gullion*; down at Tullyvarraga. The Puritans landed here to attack Bunratty. There was a chieftain buried here on a hill and the grave was a large cairn. The cairn was destroyed by careless visitors who threw the stones down the hill. (*Mr. Hastings, Tullyvarraga*).

*Tobar Críost* in Tullyvarraga – there is a bush growing over it – a person with an empty cart can pass it – not with a load of hay. A man cut the bush and never had any luck.

Tullyvaraga (*Tullach Fairrige*) – Here is the Terry Hill so called because the Terry Alts dug it up on one occasion. The diggers were protected by seven armed men. The Peelers came by boat to drive off the intruders. The Terries fired one shot after the other so that when the last man had fired the first had loaded and was ready to begin again. The Peelers retreated.

A man crossing a field here saw a two-headed horse jump up, run along the bank and disappear into a marsh.

To ascertain if there was still knowledge of some of the traditional folklore of the area a question was put to the interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project regarding their knowledge of folklore. While some of the respondents said that they didn’t believe in those ‘old superstitions’ some of them had some odd tales to recount that they couldn’t explain. When Michael Power bought his farm in Clenagh he was told that he was going into a very dangerous area for *piséogs*.20

The death coach, known in County Clare as the *Cóiste Bodhar*, features in north-western European folklore. The coach is usually driven by a headless horseman and is a harbinger of death in the locality. Ellen O’Gorman mentions that the *Cóiste Bodhar* was seen frequently in the area although she had never seen it. The Stonehall Folklore Survey mentions that ‘when a McMahon died in Knockane the headless coach came up the drive to the hall door and then went away’21. More commonly reported was the sighting of a phantom dog. Both Ellen and John Murnane told of seeing a dog that was as big as a sheep or bigger on the Slí na Mara Boreen. Ellen’s story recounts that

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20 Interview with Michael and Sheila Power 28th February 2012.
some children who were being sent to a neighbour’s house to borrow candles for a wake threw stones at the dog that at once became as big as a donkey. John also had stories of a man dressed in black with a top hat that used to guard the entrance to Stonehall Castle. When he was encountered it was customary to ask if you could help him and to stand back and leave room for him to pass. It did not appear to be a malevolent force.

Jack Hogan tells of a perfectly healthy horse being made lame by a man who had a lame horse at home. After feeling Jack’s mare’s leg on the pretext of showing Jack where his own horse was injured Jack’s horse became lame while the neighbour’s horse was inexplicably cured.

The practice of burying eggs in someone’s garden was meant to bring harm to that family. John Brennan and Michael Power both reported that bad luck followed when eggs were dug up from potato drills on their farms. Such bad luck could be guarded against by shaking holy water blessed at Easter on the house and each corner of the farm on May Eve. P.J. Reidy also talks of blessing the land with holy water on May Eve. It was customary not to ask for anything from anyone on May Eve for fear of taking their luck.

3.2.6 Death customs
John Murnane recalls that when a death occurred the body would be waked all night. The corpse would be laid out at home by local women but in the case of a male corpse, a man would shave him. It was the custom to give out clay pipes at the wake. Men and women would smoke the pipes which were bought specially. If the family couldn’t afford a headstone an unmarked stone would be put up.

3.2.7 Marriage
Jack Hogan repeats a story that he heard from his father regarding his wedding. This was the wedding of Tom Hogan and Margaret Brennan referred to earlier as having taken place in Clonmoney House in June 1920 during the War of Independence.

Figure 12: Strawboys making a visit. Photograph taken from Information Board at The National Museum of Country Life, Castlebar, March 2014.
The story concerns the night that the couple came home from their honeymoon. They were visited by the ‘Strawboys’ who proceeded to sing and shout outside the gable end of the house that the couple were sleeping in. Jack’s father wasn’t impressed. He got a ewer of water and threw it down on top of them. Jack’s father enjoyed telling the story and enjoyed the implication that there was more than just water in the container.

The Stonehall Folklore Project records the tradition of ‘Strawboys’ at weddings.

In the old times hereabouts people were married in their own houses. “Straw Boys” attended every wedding then. They were usually men who were not invited to the wedding. They dressed themselves in Straw and attended the wedding at which they were welcomed.

Another marriage custom recorded in the Stonehall Folklore Project states:

When people got married they gave four pence to each poor person who comes to the house. “When will you be given’ us the four pence?” is a question of frequent occurrence.

John Murnane also speaks of a wedding that he was a guest at. The marriage ceremony took place in Carrigerry Church early in the morning and everyone in the locality was invited to the bride’s family home for the party which went on from morning to late at night. There was music and dancing and when the house wasn’t big enough the dancing spilled out into the yard. John was surprised when the groom asked him to drive the couple to the Railway Hotel in Limerick where they had a room booked for the night. He was even more surprised when the groom invited him up to the room for a drink. A case of wedding night nerves on the part of the groom!

3.2.8 ‘An Cúirt’

Jack Hogan, John Murnane, John Brennan, Michael Power, P.J. Reidy and Paddy Keane recall the practice of going ‘An Cúirt’. Jack Hogan remembers that there were four or five houses that would alternate the running of a house dance in the winter time. There would be lads playing the fiddle and concertina and so on. Like the Hastings, Jack and Nuala had a wet and dry battery operated radio which had to be re-charged every ten days or so. There was never a shortage of company and activity. The neighbours would call in the evening and there would be story-telling and playing cards. The only time Jack remembers that there was a prize for the winner was when he won a heifer that had been put in by a neighbour. His father gave him eleven pounds for the heifer and he thought it was like Christmas ten times over.

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
Michael Power also remembers the house dances which he called ‘Hall and Home’. ‘Hall and Home’ was held particularly for a couple after they married when one of the partners was new to the area. It was a way of getting to know the neighbours in the locality. Paddy Keane recalls that Power’s cottage (Murphy’s cottage) in Tullyvarraga was the venue for Saturday night set dancing. Local musicians would come in or else music was played on a gramophone.

3.2.9 Christmas
Jack Hogan regrets that he wasn’t ever allowed to go on ‘the wran’. His father said it would be like begging but on one occasion Jack, his brother Louie and sister Mary decided to dress up anyway and put on *aghaidh-fidil’s* (face-masks). Believing they were safe from discovery they deliberately ran into their father singing ‘*the wran, the wran, the king of the birds*’. At first their father didn’t recognise them but then he noticed that one of them had used a rope to tie his clothes together and recognised the rope as one he had made himself. He sent them all home but he had already given them some money so they were pleased enough with their encounter. Jack remembers that the GAA collected ‘*the wran*’ as a fundraiser and that they would come into the house and play and dance around the house. It was marvellous.

P.J. Reidy also remembers going on ‘*the wran*’. The money collected went towards a dance held in the house of a neighbouring bachelor in Stonehall called Johnny Moroney. P.J. names the local musicians: Charlie Nix and Bob Frost on the Violin, Jimmy McMahon from Stonehall Castle, Peter McGrath, John Doyle and Jimmy Welsh from Ballymurtagh Cross. Mrs. Mc Mahon would also play. P.J. recalls one night in particular when a loud thud was heard. The heat from the dancing bodies inside the house warmed the galvanised roof and the snow melted and slid off the roof in one go.
Jack also recalls the first Christmas that he and Nuala celebrated in the first year of their marriage in 1950. As there was only the two of them they decided to have a pheasant instead of a turkey. As Nuala was taking the pheasant out of the oven Jack came up behind her and tickled her. ‘That was it; the Christmas dinner was gone in one strike’. Nuala was not impressed but she didn’t manage to stay cross with Jack for long. Jack reports that the reason for their long and happy marriage was that they always talked out any differences of opinion. Nuala interjects that she just did what Jack wanted and that kept the peace!

3.2.10 Transport
When the land at Rineanna was being drained for runway construction in the late 1930s the common mode of transport for the workers was by pony and trap or bicycle. During the 1938 strike at the airport it was reported that some people cycled distances of fourteen miles to be at work for 8.30 a.m. and cycled back again in the evening. John Brennan recalls that there were often over fifty bikes parked in their yard at Hurler’s Cross left there by people who would cycle from the surrounding areas and then catch the bus that was bringing workers to the airport from Limerick. Paddy Keane remembers seeing forty to sixty cyclists heading for Sixmilebridge at that time with as many more going to Newmarket-on-Fergus.

Ellen O’Gorman speaks of cycling to Limerick in an hour and a half. She would bring her shopping back in two bags hung on the handle bars. Ellen complains about the condition of the road at that time, ‘full of stones that would knock you off the bicycle’. Nuala Hogan heard stories from Jack’s aunt about cycling to Limerick to buy a jacket for General Lucas who had been captured in his fishing clothes.

Mary Hanley speaks of her father’s Model T Ford as one of the first cars seen in the locality in 1939. It was such an unusual sight that people jumped up on the ditch when they saw it. John Murnane

24 Interview with Jack and Nuala Hogan 7th February 2012
recalls that the first car he ever saw was a Baby Austin (made by the Austin Motor Company between 1922 and 1939) with wheels that looked like bicycle wheels. John was aggrieved that the woman who owned it wouldn’t give a lift to anyone but commented that it was so small that a big man wouldn’t fit in it anyway.

3.2.11 The coming of Electricity
In the early 1950s the townlands around Newmarket-on-Fergus were being electrified. When Nuala and Jack Hogan’s house was being wired for electricity, they were keen to also have their house plumbed for water. Water was pumped from a pump in the farmyard that was connected to a spring some distance away. An engineer who was there from the airport on the day discouraged them from doing the plumbing telling them that it wasn’t worth their while as their farm would be bought for runway development and that they wouldn’t be there long enough to reap the benefit. Nuala still feels aggrieved at that advice as they were another four or five years in the house and she had four small children to care for.

3.3 The Airport

Figure 15: View of Terminal Building from Airside 1950s. Photograph courtesy Patricia Culligan, Shannon Airport
The airport featured prominently in most of the interviews given by the older respondents.

Jimmy Kelly started working at the airport as a young lad in the 1940s and under Brendan O’Regan’s guidance worked his way to a senior management position before he retired in 1993. Mary Hanley’s father Christy O’Brien came from County Cork in the late 1930s to work as a water engineer for the Board of Works and later the Department of Transport and Power. He worked at the airport until his death in 1974. Jack Hogan’s farm in Caherteigue was sold piecemeal for airport and Industrial Estate development. John Murnane remembered the excitement of seeing the first aeroplane landing at Shannon Airport and he, John Brennan and Jack Hogan remember attending the dances and other social events in the Camp Bar. John Brennan’s mother took in boarders who worked at the airport as did Paddy Keane’s mother in Ballycalla close to the ‘Honk’, Quinlivan’s Bar at the back of the airport. Sand and stone from Reidy’s quarry was drawn by lorry to lay the foundations for the runways. Paddy Keane’s farm at Ballycalla was also sold for airport development and like Jimmy Kelly he began his working life at the airport in the 1940s.

3.3.1 Airport Strike 1938

![Resident Engineers Office 1938. Photograph courtesy Patricia Culligan, Shannon Airport](image)
In 1938 there were almost 700 men employed in drainage and general construction works at the airport. The men worked long hours in very difficult conditions. The conditions for the men digging drains to lay pipes to drain the marsh land were particularly hard as they spent most of their time working in muddy water. They were paid thirty two shillings a week which was subject to deductions for ‘broken time’ i.e. down time during bad weather. The newly formed Rineanna Labour Union encouraged the men to demand an increase in their wages and when the Board of Works refused to negotiate the men went on strike. The situation for the striking men and their families became increasingly dire and after four months they were forced back to work without achieving an increase in their wages. However, negotiations in the aftermath of the strike resulted in an increase to thirty five shillings a week. An even longer strike in 1942 ended when bad weather threatened to breach the river embankments that protected the airport from flooding. Rather than allow their good work to be wiped out the men went back to work having been offered an increase of seven shillings a week which they accepted.26

A ballad to commemorate the construction of the embankment was written by the resident engineer, Captain D. Campbell. It’s a long ballad but the following are excerpts from the song:

How we closed the Gap in Embankment E  
Capt.D. Campbell, 2nd November 1940

You’ve heard of the dam at the Zydr Zee  
Now hear the tale of Embankment E;  
Listen and I will make exposure  
Of how we accomplished the final closure.

It was planned today to keep out the tide,  
And soon the work got into its stride,  
But the time was short, there was much to do  
And the tide would be full at ten to two.  
Soon the ripples were licking the dam;  
Slowly it rose, but not like a lamb,  
For a stiff nor’wester that cut to the bone  
Lashed the seas and an angry moan,  
Filled our ears as the tossing waves  
Foamed and fretted against the staves.  
We toiled and strained and kept up the pace,  
But it looked as if we had lost the race;  
For the tide was now near the top of the clay  
And we feared the fill would be carried away.  
Then ‘All hands on timer,’ the Captain cried,  
And we piled the planks on the seaward side,  
Plank on plank in the standards’ grip,  
Till the inside looked like the side of a ship;

Like the side of a ship with the seems uncaulked,
And the tide came up but the tide was baulked.
The tide came up and spewed thrught the seams
And tested the strength of the timber beams.
The oak beams bent but they stood the strain,
And we blessed Tulla town nor cursed it again.
The the trains came up with their loads of clay
And we staunched the leaks. We had won the day!27

3.3.2 The War Years

During the Emergency an army base was maintained at Shannon airport. The men were housed in Nissan huts and the whole area was known as the Camp. More units were based at Firgrove, Urlanmore and Dromoland.

To guard against the possibility of invasion a number of anti-aircraft gun emplacements were constructed on high ground overlooking the airport runways. Two of the gun posts built into the side of Ballycalla Hill and connected by an underground tunnel survive adjacent to the Shannon Aerospace building, forgotten reminders of those years of worry and fear. Jack Hogan remembers the annoyance of his father when blasting for the gunposts dislodged a slate from the roof of the house. Its replacement always stood out against the fine Killaloe slate that the roof was constructed with. John Murnane remembers cycling through the tunnel, flash light in hand and of talking to the soldiers who manned the gun waiting for the never materialised invasion. Paddy Keane recalls seeing the twelve pounder guns and other anti-aircraft guns around the perimeter of the airport. Another deterrent was laying logs across the runway to prevent aircraft landing.

27 Ibid.
Michael Power speaks of rationing during the war years. Coffee was plentiful but tea was rationed. This was unfortunate according to Michael as the country people hated coffee. Imported flour was rationed but home flour wasn’t, although the quality of home flour left something to be desired says Michael.

The Camp Bar provided plenty of entertainment. Jack Hogan and John Murnane remember the travelling cinema that would come there and the dances and other social events. It was a very popular place with all the young people of the locality. Jack Hogan recalls the great singing sessions that used to take place and the fine singers that were among the army personnel.

Jimmy Kelly’s career at Shannon Airport spanned almost fifty years. In the post war years Jimmy remembers some of the groups of people who came through the airport such as the GI brides travelling to the United States, some of them with four or five children. Paddy Keane recalls the Hungarian refugees arriving at Shannon in the 1950s and Jimmy Kelly also remembers the Cubans coming through en route to Russia. He recalls the anxiety of the Cubans around the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis not quite knowing what was happening back home. Another group that Jimmy recalls passing through the airport were Jewish Students on their way to Israel and that many young Jewish girls were entertained by Irish boys during stopovers.

Jimmy eventually took over the running of the Duty Free Shops and was at the helm when Shannon Airport was instrumental in getting the Moscow Duty Free Shop up and running to an extremely tight deadline.

3.3.3 First flights
John Murnane remembers seeing the first aeroplane to land in Shannon. This was the Air Corps Anson Mark 1 that flew from Baldonnel to Shannon on a reconnaissance mission on 18th May 1939.28 An air of expectation and celebration pervaded the crowd that gathered to witness the event. John recalls that some people were engaged in sports while others lay in the grass looking at the sky and waiting. The aeroplane arrived and landed beside them on the grass runway. After that John became used to seeing aeroplanes in the sky. He recalls his astonishment at seeing men jump with nothing but a ‘square of cloth’ over their heads out of the tiny aeroplanes that his mother used to call ‘kittle benders’. John also gives an account of witnessing an in-air re-fuelling operation. While in the air a small, red airplane dropped a hose into a bigger aeroplane beneath it and the re-fuelling took place. Both aeroplanes landed and the small airplane drove up into the back of the larger one which took off again.

This telegram was sent to Lord Inchiquin on September 16th, 1945 by Jesse L. Boynton of Pan American World Airways. The occasion was the landing of the first trans-Atlantic proving flight and the telegram was an invitation to Lord Inchiquin to witness the event and to join the Pan American officials for lunch at the airfield afterwards.

3.3.4 Air Disasters

There were a number of air crash disasters at Shannon Airport some of which resulted in a tragic loss of life. The 'Star of Cairo' crashed at Inismacnaughten in the Fergus Estuary on 28th December 1946 with the loss of twelve lives. Jack Hogan gives a graphic account of the 'Empress of the Skies' on the 15th April 1948 which crashed in Moylan's Crag close to his farm in Caherteigue. Jack was the first person on the scene after the crash and encountered the only survivor Mr. Mark Worst running away from the burning fuselage. Thirty people lost their lives. P.J. Reidy and John Brennan recall walking in past O'Gorman's and Hastings farmhouses to view the KLM Constellation which crashed into a mud bank shortly after take-off on 5th September 1954. Twenty eight people lost their lives in that crash. Paddy Keane speaks of witnessing the aftermath of a number of crashes including the Alitalia Dc7c that crashed close to Clonloghan Graveyard on 26th February 1960. Paddy tells of the heroic efforts of a local woman, Eileen O'Dea, the first person to arrive at the scene who, at great risk to herself, singlehandedly pulled as many people as she could from the burning aircraft. Thirty four people lost their lives.

By far the greatest loss of life occurred on the night of 10th September 1961 when a President Airlines plane crashed into the Shannon Estuary shortly after taking off on a flight to Canada. The disaster killed all eighty three passengers and crew, one of the worst air disasters in Ireland's history. Pauline Hughes, one of the first residents of Shannon, recalls hearing a thud in the middle of the night after a plane had taken off. It was the next day before Pauline realised that the 'thud' was the moment when eighty three people lost their lives.

3.3.5 Brendan O'Regan

The part that Brendan O'Regan played in developing the reputation of the Sales & Catering Division of Shannon Airport and later in the development of the Industrial Estate and Town is well known. He was a visionary who was able to relate to people at all levels, from those at the highest level of

30 Interview with Michael and Pauline Hughes for the Shannon Social History Project – 30th May 2011.
government to the ordinary worker under his charge. Aware that the young Jimmy Kelly might be homesick he took the trouble to write encouraging letters to him when Jimmy was away in Germany training for his post in Sales and Catering. Jimmy never forgot that kindness to him and it was the start of a lifelong friendship between the two men. Later when Jimmy was contemplating emigrating to America, Brendan encouraged him to stay at Shannon Airport asking him ‘Do you want to be a small fish in a big pond or a big fish in a small pond’?\(^{31}\) Jimmy obviously chose to stay and his career at Shannon Airport flourished.

\(^{31}\) Interview with Jimmy Kelly 24\(^{th}\) January 2012
Chapter 4 – Hard Times and New Beginnings

A number of people who lived in Shannon in the very earliest days of the town contributed to the Shannon Social History Project by letter:

- Tine Rippen
- Bas Kardol
- Martin and Giselle Bender – Martin and Giselle subsequently gave an interview while on a visit to the town in May 2012
- Elizabeth Kavanagh – Shannon’s first teacher

Interviewees who remember the early days of Shannon Town (early 1960s):

- Nancy Parry interviewed 11\textsuperscript{th} May 2011
- Seán Ó Nuanáin interviewed 14\textsuperscript{th} July and 17\textsuperscript{th} August 2011
- Deirdre O’Donnell interviewed 20\textsuperscript{th} September 2011
- Cian O’ Carroll interviewed 17\textsuperscript{th} October 2011
- Michael (RIP) and Pauline Hughes interviewed 30\textsuperscript{th} May 2011
- Martin & Giselle Bender interviewed 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 2012

4.1 Hard Times

The 1950s marked a period of severe economic stagnation and rising emigration levels in Ireland. It was clear that the protectionist policies of the previous decades were holding back the development of industry in Ireland. However by the late 1950s the Whitaker report heralded fresh thinking and new approaches. Seán Lemass, the Minister for Industry and Commerce in 1957 was to the fore in promoting the concept of outward looking policies and was ‘enthusiastic to see emerging in Shannon a movement that typified and symbolised the policies he was spearheading’\textsuperscript{32}.

Some of the interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project recall those stark years of the 1950s when the situation was so dire that ‘it was a case of pull the plug out of the Bog of Allen and let the country go back into the sea, it was that bad’.\textsuperscript{33}

Seán Ó Nuanáin who was later to take up a position with Shannon Development recalls that he kept reading in the newspapers about the successes of the enterprise on the west coast of Ireland. He had already visited the area twice during the 1950s, once on a scout trip where they camped in the Ballycasey area and again when he and his future wife Moira arrived at Shannon Airport from Cork on a CIE mystery bus tour. At a time when emigration was high and the country was economically devastated he looked on the venture at Shannon as an expression of ‘practical patriotism’:

\textsuperscript{32} Brian Callanan, \textit{Ireland’s Shannon Story, A Case Study of Local and Regional Development} (Dublin, 2000, Ch.4).
\textsuperscript{33} Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin, 14\textsuperscript{th} July 2011.
People went automatically to England and America; some went to Africa and Australia. But it was heart rending because I lived at the side of the river in Cork and the emigrant ship the Inisfallen headed off twice a week to Fishguard loaded with emigrants.

The scene was such that you had an echo across the water of people crying on the ship and the almost echoing of the sorrow back from the people running along the side of the wall on the road, some cycling, others with prams and crowds there, waving and shouting and saying ‘Mary will we ever see you again’, and ‘mind yourself’, you know all these kinds of things. It still touches me right down, because living there it was just so heart rending. So to hear of Shannon in the late 50s and coming into the 60s, this thing of Shannon. While there were also tears at the airport in Shannon, but here was something coming back, there was hope.

Miss Elizabeth Kavanagh, the first teacher in Shannon also recalls the sadness she witnessed at the airport in the early 1960s as parents came to see off their emigrating children:

Much worse it must have been for parents from around the country who would arrive at the Airport on Thursday afternoons with their children, bidding them farewell as they left on the weekly flight to the U.S. in search of work. They did not know when they might meet again! Sundays were much happier, when the weekly flight from the U.S. arrived and reunions took place.

Valerie Sweeney witnessed the sad scenes of families arriving at the airport to say goodbye to their young people. The young emigrants were always identifiable by the large brown envelopes they carried that held their chest x-rays, required proof of health for entry into America. Particularly poignant were the babies accompanied by nuns who were bound for adoption by American families.

4.2 New Beginnings
In the 1950s, the airport at Shannon came under threat by the advent of the longer range jet engine which negated the need for a stop-over to re-fuel. This gave rise to fears that through traffic at Shannon would drop off dramatically. Brendan O’Regan and Seán Lemass discussed the prospect with the result that O’Regan and his Sales and Catering Team were charged with investigating the potential for increasing freight and passenger traffic through the airport. A report made a number of recommendations including the establishment of a separate Development Authority at Shannon to oversee industrial development that would use the air freight facilities at the airport and to develop ways of making the Shannon region attractive to transatlantic passengers. This was the genesis of the Shannon Airport Development Authority which operated as part of the Sales & Catering organisation to begin with and was subsequently incorporated as a limited liability company, under the name Shannon Free Airport Development Company (SFADCo – hereafter called Shannon Development) in January 1959. Funding for the operation was to come from Sales and Catering Profits with £50,000 from Government funds.

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34 Ibid.
36 Interview with Valerie Sweeney 3rd October 2013.
37 Brian Callanan, Ireland’s Shannon Story, A case study of Local and Regional Development, (Dublin, 2000, Ch.4).
38 Ibid.
Central to the early success of the company at Shannon was the relationship between Government officials and Brendan O’Regan. Sean Lemass was impressed by the vision and energy of O’Regan and supported his appointment as the first General Manager of Shannon Development. When Lemass became Taoiseach in 1959, the new Minister for Industry and Commerce, Erskine Childers also supported the Shannon project with enthusiasm. Mr. Childers introduced the Shannon Free Airport Development Company bill into the Dáil in October 1959 requesting additional exchequer funding and argued in support of the need for a separate development authority at Shannon when dissenting voices argued the need for such a separate authority.

4.3 Shannon Industrial Estate

Figure 19: Industrial Estate under construction c.1961. Photograph courtesy Shannon Development

On April 4th 1960 Mr. Erskine Childers, the Minister for Transport and Power, was in Shannon for the opening of the first new advance built factory, that of W.B.Pink, Ltd. The company which manufactured clothing industry equipment lasted for just fifteen months but it and a few other early enterprises which also didn’t survive served as demonstration projects to create confidence for other industrialists contemplating locating in Shannon. At the time of the opening of the Pink factory a total of eight industries were already committed to taking up factories at Shannon including Rippen, the Dutch Piano manufacturers who were soon to take possession of the industrial estate’s first custom built factory. The Irish Times article also reported that ‘negotiations were

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39 Dáil Debate – 21st October, 1959 – Vol. 177. No. 1
40 Brian Callanan, Ireland’s Shannon Story.
42 Brian Callanan, Ireland’s Shannon Story p.85.
under way with six British, five American, three Irish, one Dutch, one French and one German firm for other Shannon factories.\textsuperscript{43}

The eight industries operational at Shannon in 1960 were Rippen, Pink, Sony, Lana Knit, Progress, SPS, Hohenstein and Spee whose products were Pianos, Fabric marking machines, Radio, Fabrics, Floor maintenance, Precision Fasteners, Plastic buttons and Wire mesh.\textsuperscript{44}

Later that year Brendan O’Regan reported that the demand for industrial space is such that ‘we can, without undue optimism, fix on a target of 9,000 workers within seven or eight years’.\textsuperscript{45} ‘Requests’, said Brendan O’Regan, were coming:

‘mainly from the more progressive type of exporter-manufacturer whose imagination is fired at being part of the world’s first air cargo industrial estate, from which he can deliver to any part of the globe in a matter of hours; the industrialist who realises the many other benefits such as the 25-year tax exemption’.\textsuperscript{46}

While the years up to 1968 were years of high growth on the Shannon Industrial Estate the expected figure of 9,000 employed predicted by O’Regan in 1960 for eight years hence did not materialise. Employment figures grew from 463 in 1961 to 3,942 in 1968.\textsuperscript{47} Growth slackened from 1968-80 influenced by a number of factors on a local and national level. One of the factors was that Shannon Development now had responsibility for regional development across the whole Midwest region and not just for Shannon itself. By the latter half of the 1980s Shannon again saw modest growth particularly in aviation related industry.\textsuperscript{48}

Within a year of beginning to build the advance factories promotions undertaken by the Shannon Development Company were bearing fruit and Shannon was already being seen as a success story. One of the earliest companies to open on the industrial estate was Rippen a Dutch piano manufacturing company.

\textsuperscript{43} The Irish Times – April 4\textsuperscript{th} 1960.
\textsuperscript{44} Brian Callanan, \textit{Ireland’s Shannon Story}, p. 86.
\textsuperscript{45} 9,000 at work within eight years – The Irish Times September 27\textsuperscript{th} 1960.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
4.3.1 Rippen

The official opening of the Rippen Piano Factory was held on the 10th July 1961. Bas Kardol and Nico Rippen, both recent arrivals in Shannon were joint Managing Directors of the Shannon Plant. For the occasion ten Irish pianists and ten Dutch pianists were to play the Rippen pianos. Bas Kardol describes what happened when both groups of pianists were due to arrive at the same time on flights from Dublin and Amsterdam.

Traffic Control at Shannon Airport were very co-operative. The flight from Dublin was kept in the air until the plane from Amsterdam had landed, thus giving Mr. Rippen (ex the A’dam flight) the opportunity to welcome the guests from Dublin.  

The Irish Times reported that the Irish pianists led by Dr. A.J. Potter played a special arrangement of the traditional tune ‘Finnegan’s Wake’ and the Dutch pianists played ‘Piet Hein’ a traditional Dutch tune at the opening of the factory by Mr. Childers, Minister for Transport and Power.

The Irish Times article continued with an account of the speeches that were made by Company officials:

The factory at Shannon is already as big as the parent company in Holland.... It would not be long before the factory would be enlarged, its output increased and its labour force enlarged.

Officials of the company explained that the model of piano that was being manufactured at Shannon represented the greatest advance in piano making in over a hundred years. The Rippen piano could be folded together to be half the size and weight of other small pianos. There was a market for over

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49 Letter from Bas Kardol 9th May 2012.
50 The Irish Times 11th July 1961.
51 Ibid.
250,000 pianos in the United States and Britain alone and it was imperative that the factory be situated as close to an airport as possible to facilitate transport.\textsuperscript{52}

Also present on the day were a party of Dutch journalists and industrialists from Amsterdam flown over by the Rippen Company to attend the opening and to watch the loading of pianos a mere one hundred metres from the factory door.\textsuperscript{53}

4.4 Drumgeely Hill – The first steps

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\caption{Flats and houses under construction on Drumgeely Hill 1960. Photograph courtesy Shannon Development}
\end{figure}

From very early on it was realised that in order to support the fledgling industrial estate local accommodation for workers and executives was required. As early as 1960 the plan for a new town at Shannon was beginning to take shape at the Development Company but the government wasn’t yet ready to acknowledge the need for a town and instead gave permission for piecemeal development as new accommodation was required.\textsuperscript{54} The Company drew on experience from abroad, looking in particular at New Town Development in England in the post war era. In January 1962 An Outline Development Plan was ready for the new town. Based on a short term population target of 6,000 architects Downes, Meades & Robinson in association with a town planner Frederick Rogerson drew up a master plan for the town. The long term population projections for the town were envisaged to be in the region of 25,000-35,000 and the plan recommended designating the

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{52} Ibid.
\bibitem{53} Ibid.
\bibitem{54} Dáil Debate 25 July 1961.
\end{thebibliography}
development of up to 3000 acres for industry, housing and associated development. Seán Ó Nuanán explains:

The original plan was to have a town all the way to Bunratty on the estuary side of the road. At one time it was shown for a road to continue along Corrib Road out onto the Bank and along towards Bunratty. That would be an amenity road with visual access to the estuary. That’s why Corrib Road looks like our Champs D’Elysses.

A reappraisal of the ODP in 1972 by Shephard Fidler acknowledged that the projected figures were unlikely to be realised but even then thought that Shannon was capable of growing to 50,000 by the year 2000. Obviously none of these figures were arrived at. In the 2011 census of Ireland the population of Shannon stands at 9,673.

The Development Company began by building 136 flats and ten executive houses on Drumgeely Hill, a low eminence on the perimeter of the airport and adjacent to the industrial estate. The flats and houses took advantage of the elevated site and had lovely views over-looking the estuary on one

Figure 22: Drumgeely Hill Accommodation newly built 1961. Photograph courtesy Shannon Development

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55 Callinan, Brian: Ireland’s Shannon Story, A Case Study of Local and Regional Development. (Dublin, 2000, p. 109).
56 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanán, 14th July 2011.
side and towards the airport and industrial estate on the other. Seán Ó Nuaáin recalls that when ‘coming off a plane you thought you were coming into a Metropolis’.  

Shannon Development Company’s housing brochure of the time gave an outline of the types of accommodation available. The flats consisted of ninety-two dining-cum-lounge, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a bathroom, ten three bed-roomed flats, thirty one-bedroomed flats and five bed-sitting rooms. They were ultra-modern and had conveniences such as under-floor heating, parquet flooring, built in wardrobes and a balcony. The kitchens were small but were fitted with built-in cupboards and had G.E.C. Electric cookers and Refrigerators. Each block of flats had a laundrette, lifts and garbage chutes. While basic furniture was supplied on request, the majority of the flats were unfurnished.

Rent for a one bedroom flat was £11-10-0 per month plus rates. There were four layouts for the two-bedroomed flats ranging in cost from £15-15-0 to £17-10-0 per month plus rates. The rent for a three-bedroomed flat was £18-10-0 plus rates. The average heating costs for the year were estimated to be £50 for the three-bedroomed flat and £35 for the detached houses.

The ten detached houses each contained an L-shaped lounge, kitchen, bathroom, three bedrooms, storeroom and garage. The rent quoted in the brochure was £12-13-4 per month plus rates.

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59 Interview with Seán Ó Nuaáin, 14th July 2011.
60 Drumgeely Housing, Shannon Free Airport Development Co. Ltd. Ireland. Photocopy of brochure donated by Michael and Pauline Hughes.
4.4.1 Community Hall
Pauline Hughes recalls that a Dublin company built the Community Hall on Drumgeely Hill. The Hall quickly came to serve as school, shop and social centre for the Drumgeely Hill residents. One day Pauline’s cellar filled with water due to the works on the Hall and the workers had to help clear it out. One gets the impression that Pauline welcomed the Dublin accents even if it did mean that her cellar was full of water. An air of cooperation existed between them as Pauline lent them sweeping brushes and they caught the mice that were a feature of life on a building site. As well as the Community Hall, a children’s play area and tennis courts were provided on the green area between the Flats and the houses on the hill.

The Community Hall quickly became the focal point for the expanding Drumgeely community. It served as home to the town’s first schools and shop and was used for public meetings, cinema, bingo, concerts, Plays and children’s organisations. There was hardly a day or night when the Hall was not in use.

4.4.2 The First Residents
Some of the earliest residents on Drumgeely Hill were the families of executives who came to set up companies on the new Industrial Estate. Tine and Nico Rippen were the first people to take up residence on Drumgeely Hill. Nico Rippen was Managing Director of the Rippen Piano Factory which occupied the first purpose-built factory unit on the Industrial Estate. They arrived in mid-January 1961 when their house on the hill was not yet quite ready. The builder mobilised all his men and by the end of January, Nico and Tine who were just married were able to move in. Eleven months later the couple’s first child, a daughter Lineke, was born at home, the first birth in Shannon. According to Tine it was announced on the news and in the papers and Shannon Development sent a note of congratulations to the family.

Tine Rippen recalls the conditions on Drumgeely Hill in those pioneering days when the whole hill was essentially a building site:

The weather during the first weeks was exceptionally wet! We bought ourselves Wellington boots because ‘the road’ on the hill changed into a muddy track of slippery clay. The car couldn’t bring us to the house and often we parked half way and with our boots on we slithered to the front door and back to the car again. One day we managed. We parked in front of the house and got inside but
when we looked out of the window we saw to our astonishment and horror the car sliding down past the side of the house to come to a halt somewhere at the bottom of the hill and luckily not down the embankment into the Shannon River!  

The family of Bas Kardol, joint Managing Director of the Rippen Piano Factory soon joined the Rippen’s on the hill. Bas Kardol recalls the conditions that greeted the family when they arrived in Shannon:

When we arrived in Ireland (from South Africa) the house destined for us at Drumgeely Hill was far from ready; thus we stayed for some time at the Shannon Shamrock Hotel.... The area in and around Shannon was at the time very wet and muddy. I used to travel from the hotel by car to Shannon loaded with cartons, etc. which were needed to place on the path to our own then unfinished house.  

The reality of living on what was essentially a building site is shown in the following story by Bas Kardol:

After the opening of the factory we (my wife and two children) went for a short holiday to Amsterdam. When my wife and our five year old son went to a typical Amsterdam grocery shop, the following took place: At that time our son spoke English, Dutch and some Gaelic. Another young kid in the shop said to our son ‘you talk funny. Where are you from?’ Our son replied proudly ‘from Ireland!’ The other boy said ‘Never heard of Ireland’, whereupon our son replied, ‘Of course you have not heard of it, they are still building it’.  

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62 Letter from Bas Kardol 9th May 2012.
63 Ibid.
One of the first Irish families to arrive on the hill was the Hughes family. Michael and Pauline and their three children had relocated from Dublin when Michael took up a position as an accountant with Shannon Diamond and Carbide Company in February 1961. The prospect of moving to Shannon was not one that Pauline relished initially. She describes her reluctance to leave her house, family and friends in Dalkey. The conditions that were part of the Shannon pioneering experience must have seemed bleak and miserable to the young mother and to make matters worse Pauline didn’t drive so she found herself captive on the hill.

There was no proper road on the hill, anyway, therefore women just stayed on the hill with their children. There was nowhere to walk to, the land was all marshland.64

But life quickly began to take on a pleasant routine on the hill. More families arrived and while the men worked on the industrial estate, the women began to make friends and socialised together. In a short account of her early years in Shannon, Pauline describes how the pared down lifestyle began to take on an appeal of its own:

I did enjoy those early days. There was a glorious freedom about it all, no rush, no bustle, after all there was nowhere to rush to, no telephones for a while and all the time wide open spaces all around, planes overhead, ships coming and going up the Shannon river and plenty of sky with its changing patterns to be seen all the time.65

4.4.3 An International Flavour

The Evening Press of Monday August 20th 1962 carried a feature article on County Clare’s new town. At that stage the name of Shannon had still not gained currency when referring to the new

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64 Interview with Michael and Pauline Hughes 5th May 2011.
community. Drumgeely, the name of the townland in which the first houses were built, was still the name by which the settlement was known both locally and further afield. The article focused on how women of all nationalities were experiencing life in the new community. Pauline Hughes and Giselle Bender, both interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project, were among those interviewed in the 1962 article which spoke of the area as the ‘United Nations of Ireland’.66

Among the 150 families then living on Drumgeely Hill fourteen nationalities were represented. Despite the international dimension the article was pleased to note that among the population were many returned Irish immigrants who were attracted to Shannon by the availability of jobs and housing.

Despite the lack of amenities the overwhelming feeling reported by the women was one of great happiness with their lot in Drumgeely. Giselle Bender declared that ‘Living here is good ... However, being attached to an airline company one never knows when we may have to leave but it will be with regret’67. Pauline Hughes stated that ‘Living here is just a dream...I’d much rather be living here than in a city suburban area’.68 Mary Crowther from Scotland reported that ‘I came to Ireland expecting the worse but I found the best .... There is a great opportunity for all the people here and we feel that we are living in a new world’.69 Community spirit was obviously high amongst the new residents and people were willing to get involved in organising social events for their small community.

Pauline remembers how the women from South Africa, America, Canada, Holland, England and Ireland would get together; ‘we all investigated one another’s way of life, housekeeping, cooking etc. and what a lot I had to learn’.70 Giselle Bender recalls this aspect of learning from each other:

...me being a full time mother for the first time and I was never interested in housekeeping. I learned from Jo Kardol a lot, how to iron big sheets and tablecloths and how she preserved the toys that the children weren’t using. She put them in a plastic bag, all the little pieces as well. And when she gave something to my children because they were younger she took it out of the cupboard and everything was with that. And that’s how I did it afterwards exactly. She taught me how to wash a pot and many other things. We didn’t talk about it I just watched her.71

Elizabeth Kavanagh enjoyed the shared dinners of the early days:

Our entertainment consisted of inviting each other to our houses, and cooking traditional meals representative of our different countries.72

In an account of her early years in Shannon Pauline Hughes describes how the different nationalities’ customs were reflected in the houses.73 She noted that the Dutch favoured a short lace curtain and that they liked to hang their bedclothes out of the window to air daily. One of the ten executive houses on the hill had had an outside light installed by its South African occupant in preparation for

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66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Interview with Martin and Giselle Bender 22\textsuperscript{nd} May 2012
72 Shannon – Reminiscences of Miss E. Kavanagh (Teacher) 2\textsuperscript{nd} November 2011
73 The First Few Years (‘On the Rocks’ or Birth of a new town) – unpublished account by Pauline Hughes
balmy summer evenings when he could sit on the patio to sip a cool drink. She was amused that he did not realise that in Ireland by the time it got dark enough to need a light it was too cold to sit outside.

4.4.4 International Cook-Book
In 1965 the newly formed Shannon Guild of the I.C.A. decided to publish an international cookbook to celebrate the fact that Ireland was playing host to the 11th triennial Conference of the Associated Country Women of the World (A.C.C.W.). The Shannon International Cook-Book was made up of favourite recipes suggested by women of various nationalities then living in Shannon. The recipes included one from Ireland for Hare Soup suggested by Mrs. W. Flynn, a Pea Soup recipe suggest by Mrs. Noteboom from Holland, Mnandi (a fish dish) suggested by Mrs. Hilton Davies from South Africa, Welsh Rarebit suggested by Mrs Tony Yates from England and a Small Kitchen Beef Stroganoff suggested by Mrs. Martha Holt from Iceland. Other countries represented in the book were South Africa, U.S.A., England, India, Germany, Scotland and Wales. Some of the more exotic sounding recipes were for Greenadilla pudding (South Africa), Sauerkraut (Holland), Provencal Tripe (Ireland), Sauerbraten (U.S.A.) and Sassaties – Mutton Skewers (South Africa). Truly an international collection!

An interesting reflection of social norms of the time is that most women are identified by either their husband’s first name or initial and their surnames. Thus Pauline Hughes is identified as Mrs. Michael Hughes etc. To our modern thinking it seems strange that the names of men who had nothing to do with either cooking the meals or producing the book should be recorded while the women who put in all the hard work do not use their own first names.

A photocopy of the cookbook was donated to the Shannon Social History Project by Michéle Hughes.

4.4.5 International Tennis Match
In 1962 Martin Bender took up the position of Swissair’s Station Manager at Shannon Airport. He recalls his introduction to Ireland when he arrived ahead of his wife Giselle and two children. At just age 27 he was excited at his promotion but even more excited that he was coming to Shannon which he knew already by reputation. He had heard of the excellent catering facilities and ‘this magical duty-free shop’. Martin was quite unprepared for the Irish hospitality he experienced on first arriving:

On my first day in Ireland... I was also introduced to my first pint of Guinness. .... The introduction to my second, third and fourth pint of Guinness followed. I wasn’t allowed to pay for a single round. Then I was driven to my hotel, the Ardhu House Hotel. But before we got there, somebody said: ‘Let’s quickly stop at Dirty Nelly’s and have one for the road’. I didn’t know who she was and didn’t really care, but vaguely remember having finished my very first dinner in Ireland with my fifth pint of Guinness! I woke up next morning, fully dressed on a hotel bed with my suitcase at my bedside. 74

74 Letter from Martin Bender 14th November 2011.
Martin and Giselle quickly settled into life in their new surroundings and joined the tennis club which was very active on Drumgeely Hill. It was not long before Martin had organised an international tennis match between the Irish players and a visiting team from Zurich, Switzerland. It was not recorded which team won but no doubt the Swiss team were entertained in true Irish style such as that experienced by Martin on his first day at Shannon.

4.4.6 Social Life
In the very earliest days social life on Drumgeely Hill had to be of the ‘home-made’ variety. The Hughes family often invited neighbours and friends to drinks parties in the basement area of their house on Drumgeely Hill. They called themselves the ‘Cellar Rats’ and the parties were great fun.75 Giselle Bender recalls that Martin brought so many people home. ‘People from the Chamber of Commerce, they were practically at our place every weekend. Lots of high-spirited people, Irish people, had lots of sing songs’.76

With more people arriving in Drumgeely the social life expanded somewhat. The Development Company hosted ‘Welcome Balls’ at the airport to welcome new residents into the community and the companies on the industrial estate would host annual dress or dinner dances at the airport also.

4.4.7 Schools
The educational needs of the first Drumgeely children were catered for in Drumgeely Hall. St. John’s national school was the first to open in October 1961, known officially then as SHANNON AIRPORT No. 2 N.S., (later St. John’s) a combined Protestant denomination school taught by Miss Elizabeth Kavanagh. Catholic children had to travel to Clonmoney and Stonehall schools until there were sufficient numbers to warrant opening a second school. Pauline Hughes recalls the inconvenience caused by having to send her children to the school at Clonmoney while there was a perfectly good primary school on her doorstep because the church authorities were opposed to integrating children of differing church traditions in one school. A second one teacher school, known as SHANNON

75 Interview with Michael and Pauline Hughes 5th May 2011
76 Interview with Martin and Giselle Bender 22nd May 2012
AIRPORT No. 1 N.S. (later St. Senan’s) opened in 1962 to serve the needs of the Catholic school children. The schools were divided by a screen which could be pulled back when required to give the full use of the hall. The effort to segregate the school children on religious grounds was ultimately unsuccessful as two of the students, one from each school, eventually married each other.

When Elizabeth Kavanagh arrived in Shannon she was accommodated at the Hostels at the airport as the Flats were not quite ready. Her morning routine involved walking to the airport canteen each morning for breakfast and continuing her walk to Drumgeely for school. Betty Kavanagh, as she was known recalls the opening day of the school:

The Bishop of Killaloe, Dr. Stanistreet, came to open the school, which was set up in the Community Hall. When the Bishop left, I had to find a tractor and trailer and had to have the furniture (dual desks, blackboard, easel and teacher’s desk) removed to a flat as the Community Hall had neither water nor electricity. There was mud everywhere so I had to wait until a workman arrived to put down planks so that we would not fall in the mud!  

Figure 28: Bastian Kardol, Netherlands at School in Shannon. Cork Evening Echo 10th November 1961. Photocopy of article courtesy Bas Kardol.

The first school at Shannon attracted media attention and articles appeared in the *Sunday Press* on 8th and 15th October 1961 and in the *Cork Evening Echo* on 10th November 1961. The *Cork Evening Echo* enthusiastically announced that ‘This is the most unique school in Ireland’ its pupils drawn from England, South Africa, Holland and Scotland. In fact the only Irish person in the class was the teacher! There was bemusement that this collection of international children was learning Irish!

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77 Reminiscences of Miss E. Kavanagh (Teacher). Letter sent to Dúchas na Síonna for the Shannon Social History Project October 2011.
School continued in the flat until the basic facilities were installed in the Hall and the little school moved back. By this time the Catholic school was ready to open and Miss Carmel Kenny was employed to teach in St. Senan’s primary school. The two schools operated together until the numbers at St. Senan’s grew to the point where it required two classrooms and St. John’s had to move back into the Flats until its purpose built school, the first in Shannon, opened in September 1963.  

St. Senan’s new school building opened its doors to over one hundred pupils and three teachers in August 1964. Its three teachers were Miss Carmel Kenny, Mrs. Margaret Nicholas and Mr. Brendan Vaughan the Principal.

Continued development during the expansion phase of the town led to the opening of St. Conaire’s School in Tullyvarraga in 1968, St. Tola’s in Tullyglass in 1978 and St. Aiden’s at Ballycasey in 1982. The last of Shannon’s five primary schools Gael Scoil Donncha Rua was established in 1985. It operated initially from the ground floor of the Kincora Flats apartment block at the Town Centre before moving to its present premises adjacent to the Shannon Leisure Centre. St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School opened in 1966 to cater for secondary school aged children and St. Caimin’s Community School, Shannon’s second secondary school opened in 1985.

4.4.8 Sale of Work

The annual Sale of Work was a very popular event initiated in the 1960s to raise much needed funds for the Primary schools of Shannon. Hard-working Parent’s committees spent the weeks leading up to the Sale of Work collecting and sorting through the items donated by the town’s people for sale on the day. The companies on the industrial estate also contributed generously to help towards

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79 Letter from Betty Kavanagh.
paying for the building and maintenance of Shannon’s schools. Patricia McCarthy, Deirdre O’Donnell, Valerie Sweeney, Louise Commane, Geraldine Lambert and Renée Ó Donnabháin all have memories of collecting for and running the Sale of Work and the big event that it was in the social life of the town. It was a whole day affair that bonded the community in a common goal. After the Sale a dance in the Community Hall was held to give the community a chance to relax after the monumental effort they had put in. The Sale of Work was an example of the community ‘doing it for themselves’. Large sums of money were generated and distributed among all of the schools in Shannon.

4.4.9 Shopping

In the beginning the very first residents of the town were facilitated for shopping out of the storeroom of the airport restaurant. Potatoes, frozen peas and cauliflower chipped off a huge frozen block, jams and marmalade measured out of huge containers and fillet steaks and pork steak already coated in egg and breadcrumbs were everyday purchases. At the customs checkpoint on the perimeter of the airport the question of ‘Any goods?’ usually received the answer of ‘No goods’ unless the women were in a playful mood in which case they might reply, ‘One stone of potatoes, three chops and a pound of peas’ to the astonished customs man. Eventually, a shop opened in the annex of the Community Hall. It was the first self-service shop in the area and was well stocked. However, even then, Pauline Hughes bemoaned the lack of fresh vegetables and Giselle Bender reported that they ate mostly from tins, there being no fresh food available.

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Chapter 5 – Growth and Consolidation

5.1 The Town Grows
Some of the interviewees from phase two also informed the project about life in the town during the growth and consolidation phase. Additional interviewees whose time in Shannon commenced from the mid-1960s onwards:

- Stella Walsh interviewed 24th May 2011
- Brendan and Emily Regan interviewed 20th June 2011
- Anne Smyth, David & Alice McGettrick, Ursula Meehan interviewed 5th April 2012
- Eddie Ryan interviewed 26th August 2011
- Patricia McCarthy interviewed 14th December 2011
- Aodán Fox interviewed 14th December 2011
- Louise Commane interviewed 1st March 2012
- Marguerite O’Keefe and May Farrell interviewed 23rd June 2011
- Diarmuid and Renée O’Donnabháin interviewed 13th July 2011
- Sr. Fionnuala Glynn interviewed 18th June 2011
- Geraldine Lambert interviewed 19th October 2011
- Patricio Riesco interviewed 4th October 2011
- Ann Magoufis interviewed 14th February 2012
- Paddy Glynn interviewed 17th May 2012
- Conor (RIP) and Margaret (Peg O’Brien) interviewed 1st September 2011
- Bernard Ryan interviewed 9th October 2011
- Max Haliday interviewed 19th October 2011
- Brenda Clarke interviewed 5th October 2011
- Eugene O’Donnell interviewed 11th August 2011
- Anna Keohane interviewed 29th November 2011
- Valerie Sweeney interviewed 3rd October 2013
5.2 Drumgeely Housing Estate

Work began on the first major phase of development of the town at Drumgeely in 1962. The houses on Drumgeely Avenue and Fergus Drive were quickly followed by those on Fergus Road, some of the Parks and one side of Corrib Drive. By November 1963, one hundred and eighty six houses were completed and taken up by workers on the industrial estate. The development also saw the construction of a group of small shops at Drumgeely which included a chemist, a supermarket and a newsagent on the ground floor of a row of three storey buildings with offices above. The town’s first public house ‘The Crossroads’ soon followed. People still had to travel to Limerick or Ennis for major household items or for clothes but their immediate needs for food, newspapers and medicine were catered for.

5.3 Community Officer

Having learned from the British experience of setting up new towns, Shannon Development was mindful of the social needs of new communities. A Community Officer was appointed to welcome new residents to the community, iron out any difficulties that they might have and to promote and co-ordinate activities for the community. It was important that the community officer be close to the community so the community office was located in the offices above the Drumgeely shops.

Pearl O’Shea is remembered with great fondness by early Shannon residents. Her duties included ensuring newcomers felt welcome to the town and knew of the availability and location of services plus bringing out a fortnightly social diary delivered to every house in Shannon, advertising services and activities in the town. The community diary continues to provide information on town activities fifty years on.

Seán Ó Nuanáin recalls how nervous he was when their house on Corrib Drive was ready and his wife and family were arriving for the first time. They were giving up their comfortable lifestyle in Cork so Seán, in order not to raise expectations, painted a picture of a cold, bleak, desolate place. On
the day of the family’s arrival Seán had done what he could to create a welcoming atmosphere and Moira still remembers that when she arrived the fire and television was on (still just becoming a feature in Irish homes and ‘she thought it was a lovely welcome. She still remembers it as being the nicest spot. And Pearl O’Shea arrived down with a bunch of flowers.’

5.4 Settling in period
The first years of the towns existence was very much a settling in period for the earliest residents. On the one hand people refer to the bleakness of the area, treeless, windswept, the sense of living on a building site and mud everywhere. For a long time people who could, returned to their ‘home places’ at the weekends and for various holiday periods. There was an air of transience in the town, as if people were just passing through on their way to other destinations. People in the surrounding towns and villages were aware that Shannon’s population was a mobile one. When one of the interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project tried to have coal delivered from a Limerick coal merchant, he said that he wouldn’t deliver to Shannon because people would leave without paying for the coal.

But there was also an excitement about Shannon. Deirdre O’Donnell recalls that ‘everyone was moving in at the same time. Almost every day the furniture removal van was moving someone in’. Most were young married couples with young children who enjoyed a freedom that they hadn’t known in the towns and cities that they had come from. Deirdre remembers that when they visited family in Cork her children were confined to playing football in the front garden while in Shannon they could leave the house in the morning and not return until they were hungry.

Everyone was in the same situation. While they may have felt cut off from their extended families there was a sense of ‘doing it for ourselves’. An interviewee for Liam Ryan’s 1968 social survey spoke of having to ‘create our own traditions’. Conor O’Brien recalls how everyone helped each other during that settling in period in Drumgeely.

If anybody happened to be going to Limerick and they’d mention to Peg or myself if we needed anything from Limerick they’d bring you out an item if you wanted it. The people were extremely friendly up there; we were a very close community in Drumgeely.

5.5 Tír na n-Óg
The most notable feature of the community at Shannon throughout the 1960s and 70s was the age profile of the residents. Liam Ryan’s Social Survey report of 1968 notes that the population consisted of young families with children mostly under the age of four. There were relatively few teenagers and even fewer elderly people. Deirdre O’Donnell recalls that her father nicknamed the town Tír na nÓg and the few older people were referred to as ‘grannies’. 

82 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 14th July 2011.
83 Interview with Deirdre O’Donnell 29th September 2011.
84 Liam Ryan, Social Survey 1968.
85 Interview with Conor and Peg O’Brien 1st September 2011.
86 Interview with Deirdre O’Donnell 29th September 2011.
5.6 Expansion

Throughout the 1960s housing development proceeded according to original forecasts for population growth. There were three main areas of development Drumgeely, Tullyglass and Tullyvarraga with large areas of open space between them. The area between Tullyglass and Tullyvarraga Hills was to become the main focus of retail and civic development. At first this seemed to make no sense to the early residents. Why have everything so far away? Not everyone had cars and there was no reliable bus service so a trip to the Town Centre from Drumgeely involved a long walk. Max Halliday likens the separate developments at Shannon to ‘a bit like Clew Bay. It’s all islands’.  

On a walk to view the newly constructed Shannon Comprehensive School Deirdre O’Donnell and her neighbour Peg with their children decided to explore a little further. Having skirted the side of Tullyvarraga Hill and being invited in for a glass of whisky (tea for the children) by the O’Gorman’s on the Síl na Mara Boreen they were astonished to see a ‘lost city’ spreading out below them. It was Aiden Park. ‘We couldn’t believe it. Who’s going to live so far away from the centre of civilisation which was Drumgeely’?

Soon, however, the attractions of the new houses meant that there was quite a bit of movement between the housing estates. With central heating the new houses proved a lure to some Drumgeely residents who were tired of trying to heat their open plan living spaces with a single small fire. When Conor and Peg O’Brien moved to Finian Park from Caragh Park in Drumgeely in April

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87 Interview with Max Haliday 19th October 2011.
88 Interview with Deirdre O’Donnell, 20th September 2011.
1971 it was the fact that it felt like they were moving into more open countryside that Conor enjoyed most. Until trees planted along the estuary grew too tall, there was a good view of the estuary from Conor’s house. He particularly liked the fact that he lived so close to the boreen with its old house ruins and the walks and picnics that he and the family enjoyed in the forest on Tullyvarraga Hill. Conor loved the birdsong and was even able to identify the call of the now elusive Corncrake among the bird sounds of the open countryside. In 2007 while recognising that work on the maintenance of the forest was necessary he lamented the loss of some of the trees so much that he was inspired to write a poem.

_Tullyvarraga Hill_

_The hill above our house_
_Where noble trees once stood_
_Is now an open space_
_The cutting of the wood._

_We cannot see the fern_
_Or the bluebells in full bloom_
_Or hear the dawn chorus_
_Or blackbird’s merry tune._

_But it is just a memory now_
_When all our kids were young_
_We had those lovely picnics_
_To play and have god fun._

_And now small trees are planted_
_Cannot be seen from view_
_May grow for generations_
_Long after me and you._

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Conor’s interest in history brought him into close contact with the O’Gorman’s who lived on the boreen. He recalls a decorated stone built into the cow byre of the house. In all probability the stone had adorned the top of a narrow slit window in nearby Smithstown towerhouse and was incorporated in its position in the cow byre for safe-keeping during its construction. Conor remembers that while the house was whitewashed the stone was always painted silver. Silver paint was also noted on the piers at Hastings farmhouse and indicates that this was a popular colour used to highlight decorative features on old houses in the locality. Conor regrets that he was at work on the day that the cottage walls were bulldozed when vandalism had destroyed the thatched roof of the dwelling. Had he been present he would have rescued the decorated stone.
Before its destruction Max Halliday had his pottery workshop in the cow byre to the side of O’Gorman’s cottage and the drama group Shannon Players held rehearsals in the cottage for a time in the mid 1970s. The cottage was also used by the Scouts as a meeting place.

Throughout the 1970s Shannon Development reduced its housing construction. Population expansion had not taken place at the rate expected owing to a slower than expected rate of industrial development at Shannon. This was the result in part of economic conditions in the aftermath of the oil crisis and in part due to Shannon Development diverting projects to other areas in order to fulfil its responsibilities for developing the whole region. Many people still chose to commute to work, travelling from all parts of Clare, Limerick and even Tipperary therefore reducing the need for housing at Shannon.  

5.7 Religious Worship

5.7.1 Christ Church

With the exception of the Catholic Oratory at the Airport the first purpose built church opened in Shannon on 8th July 1962. This was Christ Church, a combined Protestant denomination church serving the spiritual needs of Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist residents of Shannon and environs. The church was dedicated by the Bishop of Killaloe, Right Rev. Henry A. Stanistreet and was attended by about two hundred people including the Minister for Transport and Power, Mr. Childers and Mrs. Frances Condell, Mayor of Limerick. Shannon Development hosted a reception afterwards. The joint use of one building for interdenominational worship elicited much interest and was commented on in the press. However, the spirit of ecumenism didn’t yet stretch across inter-faith denominations. Those Catholics that were present waited with the tea and sandwiches while the dedication ceremony was ongoing! Later at the reception Minister Childers commented that it was a most auspicious occasion.

It is a pleasure to see people from all over the world gathered together in happy harmony. It is an example of people of sixteen different countries gathered together in what was an Irish international fellowship of human beings working in harmony.

Frances Condell, Mayor of Limerick added that

Not only Shannon was proud of what had been achieved today but all Ireland was proud of Shannon.

5.7.2 St. Senan’s Parish

Shannon remained part of Newmarket-on-Fergus Catholic Parish until 1967 when the parish of St. Senan’s was consecrated. For the earliest Shannon residents their usual place of worship was the little airport oratory located close to the hostels. Nancy Parry remembers the trek up to the airport for Mass in the severe winter of 1962/63. The longed for lift didn’t materialise as the snow was thick

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91 Irish Times 9th July 1962 and Irish Independent 9th July 1962
92 Rosemary Power, pers. comm. From Christ Church records.
93 Irish Times 9th July 1962.
94 Ibid.
on the ground and she and her friend had to walk all the way. However, they were more fortunate for the return journey for which they secured a lift home.\textsuperscript{95}

Figure 34: Shannon’s First Communion. Miss Carmel Kenny (Teacher), Pauline Coleman (2nd from left), Michèle Hughes, John McInerney. Photograph courtesy Michael and Pauline Hughes

Shannon’s first First Communion ceremony was held in the Airport Oratory in 1963. Four children made their Communion on that day. Two years later there were eighteen children in the first communion class. Not all sacraments could be celebrated at the oratory and when Nancy and Jim Parry’s youngest daughter was born she was christened in the Wells Church at Clonmoney.\textsuperscript{96} Confirmations were held in the old church at Newmarket-on-Fergus until St. Senan’s Parish came into being. Deirdre O’Donnell recalls that at her daughter’s confirmation in the Newmarket-on-Fergus church she heard the gallery overhead creaking so much that she thought it would fall down.\textsuperscript{97}

Mary Hanley remembers that they would either go to church at the Wells church in Clonmoney or to the oratory at the airport. As children they always preferred to go to mass at the airport oratory as it usually involved a stop at the airport shop afterwards for sweets. Mass was at eight and ten o’clock on a Sunday morning. Most of the family would go to the later mass but all the mothers went to the earlier mass so that they would be home to cook the dinner which was always served in

\textsuperscript{95} Interview with Nancy Parry, 11\textsuperscript{th} May 2011.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid
\textsuperscript{97} Interview with Deirdre O’Donnell, 20\textsuperscript{th} September 2011.
the middle of the day. The trip to the airport often involved a visit to the viewing platform to look out through the telescopes at the planes and their passengers coming and going. It seemed so exotic as she dreamed of going on a Pan Am or TWA flight to America.

5.7.3 Mary Immaculate Church

On Christmas Eve 1967 the newly elected Bishop of Killaloe, Bishop Michael Harty declared Shannon a new parish dedicated to St. Senan. A year before the Church of the Immaculate Mother of God, known by Shannon residents as ‘Mary Immaculate’ had opened. Emily Regan recalls seeing ‘Mary Immaculate Church going down Corrib Drive on lorries’. The building of the church attracted much interest as it was one of the first pre-fabricated buildings in the area.

The blessing of the church was presided over by Right Rev. Monsignor Hamilton P.P. Nenagh, Vicar Capitular and Mass was celebrated by Very Rev. Patrick Canon Barry P.P. Newmarket-on-Fergus. Shannon’s dynamic young curate Fr. Eamon Gaynor, in residence since 1962 was living the spirit of the Second Vatican Council in Shannon and he and Rev. Ralph Baxter the Church of Ireland Minister had done much to further the cause of ecumenism in the new town. Unlike the dedication of Christ Church four years earlier when Catholics did not enter the church the blessing ceremony of Mary Immaculate was attended by Rev. Ralph Baxter, Church of Ireland Minister and Rev. William Mills, Presbyterian Minister of Limerick and Shannon. Fr. Gaynor saw that the vibrant young community in Shannon offered a unique opportunity to promote the vision of the Second Vatican Council:

...of fostering brotherhood between them (Catholics) and people of various Protestant denominations and in doing so, of providing a sorely needed model of fruitful, peaceful, non-sectarian living for the whole island, north and south.

Accordingly, Fr. Gaynor and Rev. Baxter set about organising joint prayer meetings and bible study groups as well as lectures, debates and social outings. The annual Sale of Work (see page 56) was a further ecumenical exercise initiated by the two clergy men to raise money for the two schools.

...preparation for which brought together Catholics and Protestants and even bosses and workers for months in advance.

Rev. Baxter even ‘played the leading role in organising a fundraising campaign that resulted in the boosting of the Catholic Parish collection from thirty pounds weekly to two hundred!’ When Fr. Gaynor left Shannon in 1969 for his new posting to Quin he was sadly missed by his Shannon congregation. In reflecting on his years in Shannon Fr. Gaynor leaves no doubt that they were very happy years for him, ‘Days of sunshine indeed in Shannon and in Ireland! Days of sunshine in my own life as well’.

98 Interview with Emily Regan 20th June 2011.
99 Limerick Leader 22nd October 1966.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
5.7.4 SS. John and Paul Church

Figure 35: Bishop Michael Harty at the laying of the foundation stone at SS. John & Paul Church 1980. Photograph courtesy Seamus O’Donoghue©

Figure 36: SS. John & Paul Church, c. 1980s. Photograph courtesy Seamus O’Donoghue©
To facilitate Shannon’s growing population a new church was consecrated in the Tullyvarraga area on November 13th 1980 by Bishop Michael Harty. The church named SS. John and Paul has a capacity of four hundred and fifty people. The foundation stone for the church had been blessed by Pope John Paul 11 at a ceremony at Shannon Airport before he left Ireland after his historic visit in 1979.\textsuperscript{104}

Emily Regan recalls the community effort involved in organising a ‘Buy a Brick’ campaign to help raise funds for the new church building project. She regrets that an original design for a bigger church was rejected. Building prices escalated while a suitable smaller design was chosen which in the finish cost the same to build as the bigger church originally envisaged.\textsuperscript{105}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image}
\caption{Ladies of Shannon Apostolic Work 2012.}
\end{figure}

One of the church groups that continues to be very active is the Shannon Apostolic Work Group. The group sews vestments and altar cloths to send to the missions. The group is also very active in fundraising for the missions and holds an annual display of the work they have completed during the year as well as a Sale of Work. All the money raised from this and other fundraising initiatives goes to the missions.\textsuperscript{106}

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\textsuperscript{104} www.killaloediocese.ie accessed on 16\textsuperscript{th} April 2014.  \\
\textsuperscript{105} Interview with Brendan & Emily Regan 20\textsuperscript{th} June 2011.  \\
\textsuperscript{106} Interview with May Farrell and Marguerite O’Keefe 23\textsuperscript{rd} June 2011.
\end{flushright}
5.8 Christmas in Shannon

One of the features of living in Shannon in the early days was that at weekends and holiday times the young families would return to their home places leaving the town quiet and empty. When Nancy Parry came to live in Shannon in 1963 she would bring the children to her home place of Ballinasloe every weekend. Having lived in Dublin and England as well as Tralee before moving to Shannon Deirdre O’Donnell’s family did not feel the tug of ‘home’ at Christmas time. The children preferred being in their own house but Deirdre saw how hard some people found being separated from their extended families. When Brendan and Emily Regan moved to Shannon in the mid-1960s Emily sorely missed her family in Kildare. She felt completely cut off, ‘a real shock to the system’.¹⁰⁷

Six of Brendan and Emily’s children were born in Kildare and they quickly found the freedom of living in Shannon stimulating. Emily took longer to settle and recounts how she would go home to Kildare for the weekend and end up staying for a week. Feeling the loneliness of her first Christmas away from home Emily lit a candle in the window. Invited by the candle the Dominican nuns on their way to confession on Christmas Eve called into see the family. Emily remembers that lovely pre-Christmas celebration of tea and pudding with fondness, grateful to the sisters for their kindness. Brendan doesn’t remember the loneliness of their first Christmas in Shannon. His memories turn to

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Brendan and Emily Regan 20th June 2011.
the Christmas parties held by all the neighbours on Corrib Drive. ‘Fourteen different houses over fourteen days. A party every night. They were great times’.  

Emily was soon able to repay the kindness shown to her by the sisters as she was later instrumental along with others for collecting enough money to buy Sr. Josepha a moped to replace her bicycle, an example of the community spirit that is always remembered by people who came to Shannon in those pioneering days of the town.

Patricia McCarthy also remembers bringing her boys to spend Christmas with her family and that of her in-laws, although they did not have as far to travel as some of the other Shannon residents. Her ritual was to bring the children to her husband’s family’s home when they lived in Foyle Park and later in Hurler’s Cross on Christmas Eve. On arrival it was customary to light a candle in the window to light the way for the ‘holy family’ and to welcome in strangers. With the children settled in bed she would return to her own home to collect ‘Santy’ for the boys. While her mother-in-law went to midnight mass Patricia and Dennis would get everything ready for the boys the following morning. After an early Christmas Dinner, the family would venture to Sixmilebridge to spend time with Patricia’s family. Not having a car of their own they were grateful for a lift from friends or neighbours or failing that would hitch a lift to get there. Patricia regrets that the custom of the visiting ‘Wranboys’ no longer happens in Shannon.

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108 Ibid.
109 Interview with Patricia McCarthy 14th December 2011.
A universal theme in the interviews for the Shannon Social History Project is that Shannon is a wonderful place to bring up children. With mostly young families moving to Shannon in the early 1960s there was a constant need to provide facilities for children.

The first person to take up the challenge of catering for the children was Jim Parry who started The Junior Club in 1963. Almost every child who moved to Shannon was immediately introduced to The Junior Club by their friends. Anyone who grew up in Shannon in that era remembers the excitement of the summer sports days and the fancy dress competitions at Halloween. The Junior Club photograph taken in 1965 shows just how popular the Club was with Shannon’s children.
The 1st Clare Brownie Pack introduced the Scouting organisation into Shannon in 1964. Brownies, Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Beavers have continued to be run by dedicated parents and those interested in the scouting organisation in Shannon ever since. Anna Keohane is one such dedicated parent who was a Brownie leader for ten years. She gives an account of bringing girls on weekend trips to the Brownie Cottage and the activities that the Brownies participated in.110

When Geraldine Lambert came to Shannon in the early 1970s she recognised the need for a youth club. One had previously run in Park Hall but had become inactive so she and others started Drumgeely youth club and ran two sessions on Tuesday nights in Drumgeely Hall. The youth club ran discos and even a monthly film showing. Showing a film took quite a bit of organising as it had to be ordered from a catalogue, delivered by CIE, shown on a projector borrowed from Shannon Development and then returned the following day. Steve McKee used to help out with running the discos which were a great favourite with the children. After a time the youth club got the use of Park Hall which Geraldine found more manageable for the usual activities although discos continued in Drumgeely Hall111.

As Anna Keohane’s family grew she also became involved in running the Tullyvarraga Youth Club with Denise and John Ahern. They had indoor soccer and pool tables and a corner for socialising where the kids could sit and have a soft drink. The ‘Tops of the Clubs’ was a particularly popular undertaking amongst the youth club children. It was a type of ‘Tops of the Town’ variety show for kids and they competed in competitions all over the county. They often did very well and a few cups were won.112

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110 Interview with Anna Keohane 29th November 2011.
111 Interview with Geraldine Lambert.19th October 2011.
112 Interview with Anna Keohane 29th November 2011.
Louise Commane was seven when her family came to live in Shannon in 1967. Stand out memories for Louise include attending school for a period in Drumgeely Hall when some of St. Senan’s classes had to return to the hall for a time when the school was being extended. She recalls living in the Flats initially where the playground area beside the hall was a favourite place for children to play. When she was older she indulged in the dangerous activity, much beloved by Shannon teenagers, of sliding on cardboard down the highest slope of Drumgeely Hill just coming to a stop before reaching the Airport road. Trips to Silver Strand, a sandy area on the shore close to where the Shannon and Fergus estuaries meet provided the sense of going to the beach for a generation of Shannon children before invading grass covered the pebbly beach. Most of all Louise remembers the complete freedom that she and her sisters had to roam at will and, before the era of health and safety, allowing their imaginations free rein by playing ‘house’ in the foundations of the emerging Tola Park after the builders had left for the day.

5.10 Irish Identity
The cosmopolitan nature of the early Shannon community was its strength as well as its weakness. ‘Everyone came from somewhere else, we were all blowins’. People of diverse nationalities and church traditions all working together to create a community. Class structures that might have been part of the embedded culture of more settled communities were not apparent in Shannon. Everyone experienced the same conditions, the same lack of facilities, and the same loneliness at being apart from extended family. There was a sense of working together to make things better for everyone.

However, the cultural mix and the fact that this was a new community set up in a very different way to any that had gone before made it unique not only in its local setting in Clare but in Ireland. Seán Ó Nuanáin describes the ‘mid-Atlantic’ culture that was evolving as people from so many diverse backgrounds tried to create a cohesive community. There was no sense of belonging to the wider culture of County Clare. People gravitated towards the larger city of Limerick for shopping or socialising rather than to Ennis the county capital. Pauline Hughes captures that feeling of not quite fitting in: ‘But at first we sat on our hill with our smart fitted kitchens slightly out of tune with our Clare neighbours’.

Seán Ó Nuanáin saw that a special effort was needed to knit the Shannon community into the wider Clare society and that an opportunity existed to create a distinctive Irish identity in Shannon. He and a few like-minded people, namely Liam Diamond and John Ormond, both fluent Irish speakers, came together after a German Class that they had been attending closed. They decided to start Club na Sionna with the aim of promoting the use of Irish language and culture within the town. The Cassidys, a family steeped in Irish language and music had arrived in the town around the same time to open a chemist shop in the Drumgeely shopping centre. Soon after Irish dancing and Ceili was catered for when classes got under way with Michael Hackett and Nora Bennis. Club na Sionna’s first activity was to set up a Comhrá group where about six households signed up to host a weekly meeting where anyone who wished to learn and speak Irish was welcome. These elements provided the founders for Irish activities plus many others within the town. Pearl O’Shea, the community

113 Interview with Louise Commane 1\textsuperscript{st} March 2012.
114 Interview with Deirdre O’Donnell 29\textsuperscript{th} September 2011.
115 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 17\textsuperscript{th} August 2011.
116 Pauline Hughes – *The First Few Years.*
officer became involved and offered the use of the Community Office, located in an office above the Drumgeely shops, where the group met until growing numbers necessitated a move to the larger premises of Drumgeely Hall in 1965.

Soon *Club na Sionna* had affiliated into *Conradh na Gaeilge* and was instrumental in promoting a number of developments to further the ‘*gaelicisation*’ of Shannon. The Club took part in *Glór na nGael* competitions, an Irish speaking town’s competition run rather like the tidy towns, and won prizes in various categories such as first prize for the new entry in 1966. In subsequent years the *Club na Sionna* entry won first prize for towns with a population under a thousand and later again for towns under three thousand.

There were other competitions too. The Club entered a *Claisceadáil* choral group, founded by Nial Ó Beacháin and continued by Gus Barrett, into the *Oireachtas* coming second against Sean Ó Riada’s *Cór Chúil Aodha* on a number of occasions. There was also a *Scóráiocht* (cabaret) competition featuring singing, music, dancing and *Seanchaí* (story-telling). They won on a number of occasions but one event in particular sticks out in Seán’s mind. The forty five strong *Scóráiocht* group entered a competition in Corofin. There were so many that they decided to stage their performance on the floor right next to the audience rather than on the stage. The audience really enjoyed the show but the judges said there was ‘too much ‘yahooing’ and the title won the previous year was lost’.  

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117 Interview with Sean Ó Nuanáin 17th August 2011.
Another standout event was a trip back from Carrigaholt where the group had performed for the Owen O’Curry work camp. Seán’s car broke down on the journey back in the middle of nowhere. There were no houses and at that time the phones in that area went off at ten o’clock so two of the Cassidy boys walked into Ennis to phone their mother who came to the rescue. The trip had taken all night and Seán and others had no choice but to shower and go straight to work.

A Naionra (nursery school) opened in 1966 in Park Hall, Drumgeely. Yet again, there was a cosmopolitan mix as French and Dutch as well as Irish children attended. Eventually there were three Naionra operating in different parts of Shannon and these formed a basis for the opening of
Gaelscoil Donncha Rua first in the Kincora apartment complex at the Town Centre and then at its permanent site (if temporary buildings) close to the Leisure Centre.

In 1966 Club na Sionna established Ógra na Sionna, a bilingual, cultural based youth group for eight to twelve year olds. After a year or so it grew into Deagóirí na Sionna for the twelve to fifteen year age group. Ógra na Sionna catered for about fifty children while Deagóirí had about fifteen. Children learned Irish naturally through games and activities including, for older children, an annual trip to the West Cork or Kerry Gaeltacht. Many Shannon children had their first trip away from their families on these excursions to the Gaeltacht.

In the late 1960s Club na Sionna leased Enright’s old farmhouse in Smithstown and re-named it Teach a Phiarsaigh. Céilís, music séisiúns, and Irish language classes were all held in Teach a Phiarsaigh. RTE personnel visiting Clare would occasionally ring to ask if anything was happening there and the girls from the Irish language programme Buntús Cainte visited a special session. The house had become a well-known Céilí house drawing such personalities as Micko Russell from Doolin who was a native Irish speaker and musician. It lasted up until the late 1980s when the house was demolished to make way for an extension of the free zone.

In the late 1960s Club na Sionna was in the process of preparing to build a cultural centre. A site had been identified and funding was being put in place. Matt Roche, who was involved with both Club na Sionna and the GAA club, convinced Club na Sionna not to go it alone but to join forces with the GAA in their endeavour to build a playing pitch and pavilion. Club na Sionna agreed provided that it became the cultural centre as well and made Seán Ó Nuanáin, Matt Roche and Colm Cassidy available to become trustees of the GAA funding committee and Labhrás Ó Donnghaile and Matt Roche to be part of the working committee.118

118 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 17th August 2011.
Club na Sionna nurtured Gaelic Games in Primary Schools in Shannon and donated sets of jerseys to St. Senan’s and St. Conaire’s. Seán Ó Nuanáin remembers that St. Senan’s chose the Down colours because Down had won the All-Ireland that year.\(^{119}\)

There is no doubt that Club na Sionna was successful in its endeavours to promote Irish language and culture in Shannon and to aid in its assimilation into Clare society. When Shannon Town Centre opened in 1972 it was known as Croí na Sionna and all of the shops displayed their names in Irish as well as in English. The Irish identity of Shannon continues in the street and housing estate names today as well as in the strength of the GAA club and other Irish Cultural interests such as Club na Sionna (Conradh na Gaelige), Comhaltas Ceoltóirí, Dúchas na Sionna, Irish Dancing etc.

5.11 St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School

When it came time for Ireland’s newest town to provide post primary education for its students, it was appropriate that the choice rested on the most progressive system available. Thus on the 6th September 1966 one of Ireland’s first two Comprehensive schools, St. Patrick’s was opened in Shannon. The ceremony was performed by Dr. Patrick Hillery who as Minister for Education had pioneered the introduction of the Comprehensive system in Ireland.\(^{120}\) Another Comprehensive School opened at Cootehill, Co. Cavan and two more were in the pipeline in Carraroe, Co. Galway and Glenties, Co. Donegal.

The Comprehensive system aimed to provide a holistic education for its students combining vocational and technical training with academic endeavour. For the first time in the Irish educational system individual needs, aptitudes and interests were provided for so that the entire personality of the student could be encouraged to develop to its full potential. The appointment of Diarmuid Ó Donnabháin as Principal ensured that St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School was at the forefront of creating the structure upon which the holistic ethos was developed. The young Principal had a lot to

\(^{119}\) Ibid.

\(^{120}\) Irish times 7th September 1966.
prove. The school at Shannon was a showcase school for the whole Comprehensive education concept in Ireland but there were many traditionalists who resisted the idea of change. An *Irish Times* review posed two questions that were then uppermost regarding the Comprehensive system of education.

1. With prejudice evident elsewhere can schools like Shannon gain acceptance for a blend of vocational and secondary traditions?

2. With other schools “streaming the hell out of the kids” (Mr. Sean O’Connor) can schools like Shannon succeed with mixed ability classes?^121^

Three years after the inception of the school the review reported that Mr. Ó Donnabháin was regarded by some as ‘one of the best headmasters in the country’.^122^ Certainly he had the confidence and commitment to implement the vision of providing the best possible education for the students in his care.

> ‘I believe that only within the framework of the comprehensive school can the environment be created in which the individual child will be able to develop all the various facets of his personality.’^123^

When asked about his belief in the Comprehensive system Diarmuid recalls the *Irish Times* article in which he is quoted as saying

> Why am I here? Why am I living in an airport in a wilderness, having come from a grand cushy job in Cork? Because I saw the comprehensive school as a major breakthrough in Irish education.^124^

Even now, all these years later he remembers regretting those words immediately as his first thought was that Shannon people would resent hearing their town called a ‘wilderness’. However, the anticipated reaction came not from Shannon but from his colleagues in Cork. ‘What the hell do you mean talking about a cushy job in Cork’?^125^

The Comprehensive School opened its doors to ninety four students in September 1966. The *Irish Times* report of the opening stated that the children were mostly drawn from the towns and villages within a ten mile radius of Shannon.^126^ The capacity of St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School at the outset was for three hundred and twenty nine students. In the first year there were six full time teachers plus two part-time teachers who taught music and P.E. The teaching staff rose to eleven the following year and to sixteen and nineteen in the following two years respectively.\[^{127}\] The growth in the teaching staff reflected the rapid increase in Shannon’s population and in the numbers of pupils attending the school. By 1970 the student population had risen to two hundred and seventy five.\[^{128}\]

The 1968 Liam Ryan survey reported a high level of satisfaction with the Comprehensive system and school in Shannon but it also highlighted that there were some levels of prejudice surviving amongst

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122 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
125 Interview with Diarmuid Ó Donnabháin 13th July 2011.
127 Ibid.
parents who had second or third level education themselves. ‘These are more inclined to send their children to old style education in Limerick or Ennis. Their reservations are less about the school, more about the system’.129

Such prejudice is illustrated by the experience of the O’Brien family in Smithstown as outlined by Mary Hanley.

I went to Colaiste, my brother went to Limerick and then my younger brother went to Flannan’s and after that most people went to the ‘Comp’ in Shannon. But I do remember when my younger brother was going to school the Parish Priest calling to the house and saying to my mother, ‘Oh, you should send Christy to Flannan’s because really we don’t know anything about what they’d be teaching them in a place like that’.130

Díarmuid Ó Donnabháin recalls the air of optimism that prevailed in Ireland of the 1960s.

1966 was the 50th year celebration of 1916 and that was very strong in the education world – cherishing all the children of the nation equally. And then you had the Northern talks with Sean Lemass and Terence O’Neill and Whittaker’s Programmes of Industrial Development were coming along and we all looked at it as if we’d never again see a poor day.131

From the beginning St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School, known affectionately as ‘The Comp’ was different. While the idea of co-educational primary education was not new, co-educational secondary schooling was untried in Ireland. Díarmuid Ó Donnabháin’s previous experience was teaching boys in primary and secondary schools in Cork. He was surprised at the ‘civilising effect that the girls had on the boys’. A more subtle effect noticed was that the ‘fellas were happy to sit back and let the girls do all the work’.132 ‘The Comp’ must still rank as one of the few second level schools in Ireland that does not impose a school uniform on its students. This was a decision taken early on by Díarmuid feeling that the freedom to choose what clothes to wear was essential to expressing individuality, a part of ‘growing up’. There were practical implications too:

If you wanted to create problems for yourself discipline wise it’s very easy for a kid not wear the tie or some other way. That was always my thinking, why make rules that would cause problems?133

St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School continued to be at the forefront of innovation and excellence in education. The commitment to ensuring the optimum learning environment for the child was strengthened when under Díarmuid’s guidance St. Patrick’s Comprehensive school went on to develop the Curriculum Development Unit in Shannon. In a 1969 article Díarmuid Ó Donnabháin outlined his views on the importance of Curriculum Planning in the Comprehensive school.134

Many of the past pupils of the school were perhaps unaware at the time that they were participating in a very new concept of education. The element of choice in choosing from the list of optional subjects, the combining of Environmental and Social studies and the availability of subjects such as

129 Social Survey, Liam Ryan 1968.
130 Interview with Mary Hanley 14th July 2011.
131 Interview with Díarmuid Ó Donnabháin 13th July 2011.
132 Ibid.
133 Ibid.
Woodwork, Music, Art, Metalwork, Home Economics open to all students were taken as a normal part of the school environment. On visiting other schools St. Pat’s students were often shocked to learn that such a diverse range of subjects was not available in all schools and counted themselves very fortunate to be availing of such an innovative and forward looking education.

5.12 Bunratty Entertainers
Stella Walsh came to work in Bunratty and Knappogue as an entertainer in 1971 and continued her working life there until her retirement in 2011. She became Entertainments Manager at Shannon Heritage with responsibility for the entertainment at Bunratty, Knappogue and Dunguaire Castles. She has wonderful memories of those days when they were all ‘young and mad’. They worked seven days on and three days off with daytime rehearsals and two banquets a night to perform. However, that didn’t dampen their enthusiasm for playing and singing and she particularly remembers the wonderful parties they had in the Drumgeely flats where the girls stayed four to a flat. Many of the girls played fiddles, harps, guitars and with their wonderful singing voices they had the essentials for creating endless hours of entertainment amongst themselves.

The girls were also welcome in the towns and villages in the hinterland of Shannon. They often visited Durty Nelly’s after the banquet at Bunratty, Christy Farrell’s pub in Kilmurry after performing in Knappogue or Malachy’s pub in Quin where impromptu sessions could go on into the early hours of the morning.

With no cars of their own Stella and the other girls often found themselves hitching lifts from passing motorists to get to wherever they wanted to go. Buses to Ennis and Limerick were infrequent which meant that hitch-hiking was a common mode of travel for many of Shannon’s early residents. It was not uncommon for a boyfriend of one of the girls who had a car to suddenly acquire four or five more passengers. Stella recounts that many of the girls met their future spouses, either locals or those whose work also brought them to the area, while working at the castles. Some even made their family homes in Shannon or the surrounding areas.

In addition to performing at the castles the girls were often invited to perform for visiting dignitaries at Dromoland Castle, Adare Manor and elsewhere. Occasionally the entertainers went on tours of Europe, America and even Iceland. There were performances in the Whitehouse for President Nixon and also in Ireland for President Regan. A highlight for Stella was performing for Pope John Paul 2nd on his visit to Ireland in 1979.

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135 Interview with Stella Walsh, 24th May 2011.
136 Ibid.
Chapter 6 – The Town Matures

6.1 Town Centre

The Liam Ryan report of 1968 identified the lack of shopping facilities as one of the primary areas of dissatisfaction among Shannon residents. With the opening of Phase 1 of the Town Centre development on 15th March 1972 the town might be said to have come of age. John Sisk & Co. (Dublin) Ltd. who had invested £1 million was the site developers. There was a carnival atmosphere as the community gathered to witness the official opening by Brian Lenihan, Minister of Transport and Power. Mr. Lenihan was greeted by a guard of honour provided by the Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, Cubs and Ógra na Sionna. The highlight of the entertainment was a parachute jump by three sky divers who provided a splash of colour as they landed where the official party was assembled.\textsuperscript{137}

Cian O’Carroll remembers very clearly the day that the Town Centre opened:

\begin{quote}
It was opened by Brian Lenihan and they had the band playing ‘\textit{Those magnificent men in their flying machines}’ and Brian Lenihan said ‘we’re not building an infrastructure, we’re building a ‘superstructure’’.\textsuperscript{138}
\end{quote}

Seán Ó Nuanáin recalls the excitement generated in Shannon Development at the first official recognition of Shannon as a ‘town’ when Brian Lenihan referred to it as such in his speech.\textsuperscript{139} Until that time there had been no official recognition in government circles that what was being developed at Shannon was a town and not merely ‘houses for workers’.

\textbf{Figure 47: Building Town Centre c. 1971. Photograph Shannon Development. Courtesy Skycourt Management}

\textsuperscript{137} Clare Champion 18\textsuperscript{th} March 1972.
\textsuperscript{138} Interview with Cian O’Carroll 17\textsuperscript{th} October 2011.
\textsuperscript{139} Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 14\textsuperscript{th} July 2011.
The entire 50,000 sq. ft. of retail space, forty two units in all, was fully let months before the official opening was due to take place. Quinnsworth supermarket was the anchor tenant and a full range of trades and services were provided in the smaller units. They included Homemaker Hardware Ltd, owned by Jim and Nancy Parry; Cassidy’s Chemist and Hillery & Maxwell (Pharmacists) Ltd; The Peacock Grill and Snack Bar, proprietor Elvio Nardonne; Clancy’s Newsagent; Ann’s Mother and Baby Care Shop, proprietor Ann Maher; Riordan’s Travel; Mamie’s Ladies Clothing and Jim’s Market Garden. Other services were provided by Hair Creations; Pick-a-Shoe; O’Neill’s Delicatessen and three banks; The Provincial Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and Allied Irish Bank. The Knights Inn offered first class dining facilities.

For the first time the weekly trek to Limerick or Ennis for more than the most basic household requirements was no longer a necessity. Croí na Sionna provided the much needed focal point for the town but from the start there was dissatisfaction with the design. Geraldine Lambert recalls how the wind and rain was channelled through the narrow shopping mall causing people to have to ‘hug the wall’ for protection from the elements. She regrets that the opportunity was missed to create a more suitable development for the conditions at Shannon.

Everyone knew at that stage that Shannon was a windy town and it was so badly designed with it all inside and the back of the shops facing the road. You didn’t even have a store that looked anything and then you had a big mound in case people would find it.

When Brenda Clarke came to Shannon she had a hard time finding the Town Centre.

I drove up and down looking for the Town Centre. I followed the signs as best I could but I kept passing it on the road side and saying, ‘I haven’t found anything only Quinnsworth, I still can’t find the Town Centre. So it took me three days to find the Town Centre and realise that Quinnsworth was it.

On a visit to the Town Centre Brendan Regan encountered two Americans who wanted to know where the Town Centre was. On being told that they were in it they expressed disbelief saying ‘We can’t be in it, this is just a shopping centre’.

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140 Irish Independent 5th November 1971.
141 Clare Champion 1st April 1972.
142 Interview with Geraldine Lambert 19th October 2011.
143 Interview with Brenda Clarke 5th October 2011.
144 Interview with Berndan and Emily Regan 20th June 2011.
Many Shannon residents feel that the town still lacks a core. Patricia McCarthy regrets the original decision to privatise the Town Centre feeling that the opportunity was lost to create a streetscape that would give Shannon its heart

\[\ldots\text{we needed that heart of Shannon and we haven’t got it yet. In spite of our efforts and no matter what we do, we can’t get it and we won’t get it until we get that streetscape.}\]

The exposed element of the site was finally dealt with in the late 1980s when the Town centre was enclosed.

Posting some photographs of the Town Centre from the 1970s on Facebook elicited some responses from people who remember the changing face of the Town Centre. Jimmy Long recalls that as a sixteen year old apprentice he earned £5 a week building the flower beds that were a feature through the centre of the main shopping mall. Shearie Fean worked as a tea boy during the construction but put his entrepreneurial skills to work by charging the workers fifty pence in new money (Ireland converted to the decimal system in 1971) to take their shopping orders for the Mace shop in Tullyglass. With seventy men on his books he made a tidy profit and was paid by Sisk’s into the bargain. Joan Walsh recalls that a trip to the Town Centre from Tola Park necessitated a trek across a muddy field but it was worth it. Other contributions recalled the hours spent hanging around the Town Centre with the occasional visit to Pickwick’s Restaurant when funds allowed.

\[\text{\cite{interview}}\]

Interview with Patricia McCarthy 14th December 2011.
6.2 Northern Ireland and Shannon

When the Civil Rights unrest in Northern Ireland erupted in 1969 in a summer of marches and riots across Northern Ireland many people fled south of the border. The Irish Government set up a series of Camps around the border to cater for the influx of refugees. Shannon people responded to the crisis by organising a ‘Northern Relief’ committee comprised of people drawn from various organisations in the town. Money, clothes and food were collected from the townsfolk while some of the factories also donated money and packing boxes. *Teach an Phiarsaigh* became the ironing and packing centre of the operation. Three lorry loads of food and clothes were sent from Shannon. One went to Donegal where there was a camp for young children; another went to Monaghan and the final one to the Anderson Relief fund.¹⁴⁶

In 1972 ‘Bloody Sunday’ and its aftermath resulted in a nationwide upwelling of grief and a need to express solidarity with the victims of the violence in the North. The 2⁴ of February was declared a national day of mourning as a mark of respect for those that died in Derry. Across the country schools, shops and businesses closed and flags on government buildings flew at half-mast.¹⁴⁷ In Shannon Development there was fear that the foreign industrialists of the companies on the industrial estate would not quite understand the intensity of the emotions that were being experienced. Seán Ó Nuanáin considers that Paul Quigley, CEO of Shannon Development showed great leadership in his handling of the situation. He contacted all the major companies and declared that there would be an inter-denominational service in one of the larger factory bays. The *Clare Champion* reported that

> Despite a heavy downpour ...approximately three thousand five hundred workers ....assembled behind a Tricolour and black flags...and marched in silent parade to a service in a factory bay celebrated by Rev. E. Whyte with lessons read by Rev. R.E. Baxter.¹⁴⁸

When it was over everyone marched back to their factories in an orderly fashion. Seán remembers the service as a ‘lovely occasion’ and feels the action acted as a safety valve by giving an outlet for the expression of the intense feelings of outrage and solidarity that was being experienced by people at the events of the previous Sunday.¹⁴⁹

Throughout the 1970s many people wishing to escape ‘The Troubles’ in the North arrived in Shannon attracted by the availability of work and housing. As Cronin Estate was just being finished most of the new arrivals were housed there. The Shannon Development Company’s Report: A Special Census (1975) attempted to analyse the population makeup of Shannon. Fiona Berkley’s Case study of the effects of Northern Irish immigration to Shannon finds that at 208 adults, the number of people identified in the report as coming from Northern Ireland was not a true reflection of the actual number of Northern Irish people that had actually moved to Shannon at that time. For instance the questionnaire asked about the previous place of residence and not the place of birth of each person replying. It also only took into account those over the age of eighteen which made no cognizance of the high number of children and younger teenagers who had immigrated with their

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¹⁴⁶ Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 17ᵗʰ August 2011.
¹⁴⁷ The Irish Times Feb 3ʳᵈ 1972.
¹⁴⁹ Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 17ᵗʰ August 2011.
families. Berkley’s analysis of the movement into Shannon from Northern Ireland notes that the greatest level of population rise in Shannon was during the early 1970s a period that coincided with significant levels of displacement and outward migration from Northern Ireland. It is not therefore unreasonable to assume that the rise in Shannon’s population at this period was due in no small part to the influx of Northern immigrants to the town during that period.

At first there was some suspicion and mistrust of the immigrant population but the Northern Irish community quickly assimilated and became involved in all aspects of the social and commercial life of the town. When the sisters Anne Smyth, Ursula Meehan and Alice McGettrick and Alice’s husband David arrived in Shannon between 1974 and 1976 they immediately felt the relief of not being in the middle of ‘The Troubles’ although it took quite a while for David not to feel homesick for Belfast. For the first year David and Alice and their three children frequently made the journey back to Belfast. For Alice the journey was harrowing, ten hours spent on bad roads but for David the inconvenience was worth it. ‘I detested Shannon; I thought it was the worse place’. However, after the first year David’s involvement with school committees and the parish council started to engender a feeling of belonging and he now feels that coming to Shannon was the best decision he could have made.

The sisters and David describe some of the fear that they had lived with in Northern Ireland such as checking under the car for bombs in the morning and being afraid when taking the children to the shops. While the move to Shannon gave them some peace of mind they also found some difficulties in getting used to aspects of living in the Republic. They had all taken a financial hit by moving south of the border. Having to pay for medical treatment and school books as well as the cost of children’s shoes all came as quite a shock but they were resourceful and brought with them the habit of saving in the Credit Union.

Anne took charge of collecting the money from her family members and some friends also and making the weekly trip to the Credit Union sometimes with fifteen or twenty books. She remembers that Eddie Mulligan, Matt Roche or Joe Connolly would be waiting for her to arrive so that they would have cash for lending. ‘Sometimes, I wouldn’t make it until Saturday morning and that’s when they had the sweat’. She is proud that when the Credit Union was celebrating its fortieth birthday in Shannon they sent her an invitation acknowledging the part she played in keeping the fund going in those early days.

In describing the resentment and suspicion that was part of the early experience of Northerners in Shannon Anne describes an incident in the Ladies locker room of a local sporting club. Having come into the room the women stopped talking and she became aware that she had interrupted something. On asking what it was they replied, ‘Well, we were just wondering, with so many Northerners here, will the Protestants come down and bomb us’. Anne responded that she didn’t think so as it was an awful long way from Belfast to Shannon and as there were only three roads into

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151 Ibid.

152 Interview with Anne Smyth, David & Alice McGettrick, Ursula Meehan 5th April 2012.

153 Ibid.
Shannon they could be easily caught. She silenced their fears with ‘I think we’re quite safe from the Unionists’.  

The family contributed in no small way to the commercial and social life of the town. Another sister Mary was one of those involved in setting up ‘Plain and Purl’ a sewing and knitting shop in the Town Centre. Alice ran a Kindergarten and also had a Toy and Pram store. Anne offered the use of her house as a meeting place for the drama group ‘Shannon Players’ to meet and smiles when she remembers that she had hardly any furniture for the group to sit on. Ursula has been a stalwart of the Shannon Musical Society since its inception in 1978 and all Alice and David’s children have been involved with Wolfe Tones na Sionna

Brenda Clarke moved to Shannon with her husband in 1979. She recalls her surprise at hearing so many Belfast accents amongst the children in her class while working as a substitute teacher in St. Senan’s. After a while it seemed normal as there were also many northern accents to be heard in the Town Centre. At the time of the Hunger Strikes in Northern Ireland Brenda recalls ‘an avalanche of black flags hanging out the windows’. The *Irish Times* of July 16th 1981 reported on a simulated funeral procession in which two black coffins were carried from Ballycasey to the Airport causing a considerable traffic hold up.

6.3 Chilean Refugees

In the mid-1970s a small number of Chilean refugees fleeing the brutality of the Pinochet regime came to Ireland under a United Nations – sponsored programme of resettlement. In all about twenty three families settled in Galway, Waterford and Shannon. The Irish government supported the resettlement programme but there were deep fears regarding the arrival of the refugees.

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154 Ibid.
155 Interview with Brenda Clarke 5th October 2011.
Reservations were expressed in the Dáil regarding Ireland’s ability to absorb the immigrants because it ‘was not as cosmopolitan as other Western European countries’. An even deeper fear underpinning the reservations was that the Chileans ‘were refugees because they were Marxists and probably Communists’ and are ‘liable sooner or later to engage in political agitation here’.

The Committee for Chilean Refugees in Ireland undertook the practical arrangements for the resettlement of the refugees. Shannon Development and the local authorities in Galway and Waterford provided assistance with housing, education, social welfare payments, language training and advice on employment. As a cosmopolitan town in 1970s Ireland, Shannon was perhaps better equipped than most Irish towns to integrate the Chilean immigrants although most Shannon people knew ‘Chile only as a name on a map, we knew nothing at all about it. It was quite exotic.

Twenty year old newlyweds Patricio and Pabla Riesco arrived in Ireland on 1st April 1974 the first of the Chilean refugees to arrive. They stayed in Dublin for a week but had a connection with the Cassidy family in Shannon through a relative, Fr. Noel Dunne, the missionary priest who had helped the Riescos to come to Ireland. The young couple came to Shannon at the invitation of the Cassidy family and stayed as their guests at their home in Aiden Park for three or four months. Patricio has high praise for the welcome he received and the kindness he and Pabla experienced both from the Cassidy family and the wider Shannon community. Through the Cassidys they were introduced to Irish music which they both still love. All Patricio knew of Shannon before he came was that it was a new town ‘built from nothing in the middle of the countryside’. He integrated quickly, learning the language and within a few months he was playing soccer with Park Rangers and later with New Town.

About a month after Patricio and Pabla arrived in Shannon they were joined by eight or nine families from Chile. A total of twelve Chilean families eventually settled in Shannon. Although they had no previous connection with or knowledge of each other the families came directly to Shannon because the Riescos had already settled here and because of the availability of housing and work. Patricio recalls that even though there were a lot of houses empty at the time, initially the Chileans were living two or three families to a house. However, within four to six months each family was housed individually.

Patricio recognises that integration was more difficult for some of the older Chileans than it was for him and the younger members of the immigrant families. Nevertheless he constantly reminded the Chilean community that they had to make the effort to integrate. Most of the adults did not speak any English and some had suffered torture and imprisonment in Chile. Patricio acknowledges that he was one of the lucky ones; he was able to escape although his mother and one of his brothers were arrested while the military were looking for him and their house destroyed. Most people came

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159 Interview with Geraldine Lambert 19th October 2011.

160 Interview with Patricio Riesco 4th October 2011.

161 Ibid.
with their families but there was at least one case where a lady and her child were here while her husband was unable to leave the safety of the Italian Embassy in Santiago in Chile. The family were reunited in Shannon about a year and a half later.

Facilities were put in place to help the Chileans to become established in Shannon. An English language teacher was provided in the Comprehensive school by the Department of Education.\(^162\) Job training for the adults was provided by ANCo in a variety of trades and in the beginning an English teacher was also available there to facilitate learning the language. Initially the daily routine consisted of studying English in the morning and learning a trade in the afternoon. Having completed the training period in ANCo Patricio went to work first in Ennis and then to EI where he became chairman of the union. The process of re-training and procuring employment resulted in varying degrees of success. It was noted in the Dáil that a number of difficulties were being experienced by some of the Chileans in finding suitable employment, particularly in the Galway area.\(^163\)

Patricio was very conscious of his responsibility to make people outside of Chile aware of what was happening there. A solidarity group was established in Shannon and Patricio has fond memories of the Irish people who got involved naming Greg Duff and Gerry Hartigan as well as the Cassidy family as particular friends of the Chilean community. The Dublin Solidarity Committee was equally active in raising awareness and support for the plight of Chileans in Chile organising a public meeting in the Mansion House at which Madame Allende the widow of the dead President was the guest speaker.\(^164\)

Although still very young Patricio had been politically active in Chile since his secondary school days, saying it wasn’t unusual at that time for ‘secondary school students in Chile to be more interested in politics than in music.\(^165\) In 1986, wishing to take a more direct role in securing the return to democracy in Chile, the Riescos went back with their young family. Patricio prides himself that he was one of those that returned to help the cause. It was a dangerous time and for three years the family worked for the overthrow of the military dictatorship, moving from place to place often under an assumed name. For security reasons people’s names and locations were known only to a few trusted individuals.

Looking back I took a big risk… We knew exactly what we wanted. We wanted our people to be free. We Chileans didn’t accept the military dictatorship.\(^166\)

With the overthrow of the military regime in 1989 and the return to democracy in Chile Patricio and Pabla returned to Shannon to continue raising their three daughters. Just a few of the original Chilean immigrant families continue to live in Shannon. Most have since repatriated to Chile in the years since the end of the military dictatorship. However, where children were very young when their parents arrived or indeed were born in Ireland they often continue to live on in what is for them their home country.

\(^{162}\) Kay Vaughan *Scoil Chuimsitheach Naomh Pádraig 1966-1987* Commemorative Booklet.


\(^{164}\) Irish Times – 13\(^{th}\) November 1975.

\(^{165}\) Interview with Patricio Riesco 4\(^{th}\) October 2011.

\(^{166}\) Ibid.

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Patricio continues to observe what is happening in Chile on a daily basis. While recognising that the gap between rich and poor is still very great, he is aware that there are not the extremes of poverty that existed in the seventies. Patricio is hopeful that Chile is moving in the right direction although he is aware that the country still has many obstacles to overcome.

The circumstances that brought Patricio to Shannon were very difficult but he remains enthusiastic about his adopted country and town in particular.

Even though I am a foreigner in this country I am a bit of an Irishman as well, I feel a bit Irish as well in a certain way because this time it’s the place I opt to live freely. We love this place, especially Shannon, especially Shannon!\textsuperscript{167}

\textbf{6.4 Shannon Community Association}

The Shannon Community Association was formed in 1964 to promote social and sporting activities but also to serve as a liaison group representing the needs of the community with Shannon Development. Some of the foreign executives working in the industrial estate were very community minded even though their tenure in Shannon was necessarily going to be a short one. Joe Vilo, an American Executive working in SPS was instrumental in founding the group and was its first Chairperson. Other names associated with the association in those early years were Paddy Monaghan, Ernie Conway, Brendan Regan (not to be confused with Brendan O’Regan), Vincent Hearns, Seán Ó Nuanáin and Jim Corden. Some went on to become active in the political life of the town with Brendan Regan being elected as Mayor when Shannon achieved Town Council status in 1982.\textsuperscript{168}

Throughout the 1960s most people still rented their homes from Shannon Development and there was a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the company. On the one hand it acted as a sort of benevolent authority, providing housing and jobs for the people yet it was also resented for what was perceived to be over regulation in the life of the town.

A discussion at a public meeting at Drumgeely Hall serves to illustrate the conflicting attitudes at the time. A member of the audience exasperated with some of the negative views being expressed voiced his impatience:

Listen here, most of you are like me, I was on the housing list for three years up in Dublin and I still hadn’t got a house to live in. Most of you have finished up with a grand house, what are you complaining about. ‘Cop yourselves on now, and think about it.’\textsuperscript{169}

\textbf{6.5 Rent Strike}

The dissatisfaction with Shannon Development eventually came to a point in a Rent Strike which ran from the 1\textsuperscript{st} April 1971 to 1\textsuperscript{st} July 1972. The Shannon strike was one of a series of nationwide rent strikes on going at the time and had begun when Shannon Development imposed a unilateral rent increase without prior consultation with the community. A tenant’s association was formed to organise the protest against the rent increases and also against the way the rents were being assessed. The rent increase amounted to £1.63 per month bringing the average rent of a three

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{168} Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin, 14\textsuperscript{th} July 2011.

\textsuperscript{169} Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin, 14\textsuperscript{th} July 2011.
bedroomed terrace house to £9.75 per month and that for a four bedroomed, centrally heated terrace house to £21.63 per month. A spokesman for the Development Company maintained that the increase was a fair one as the last increase had been in 1964 and there had been four national wage rounds since then. The assessment of the rent due was made on the basis of one seventh of a tenant’s basic wages plus one ninth of any overtime or bonuses.

Relations between the Tenant’s Association and Shannon Development were tense. At first the Development Company refused to negotiate with the Tenant’s Association and it escalated to the point where dozens of the householders staged a sit down protest on the main road to the airport causing a backlog of traffic on either side. After fifteen months of withholding rents the Tenant’s Association announced that the tenants would resume paying rents but only under ‘vigorous protest’. The Tenant Association had earned some concessions for the tenants. For instance each household could take in two lodgers without declaring the income for rent assessment and there would be special negotiation in particular cases of hardship. Cian O’Carroll, the estates manager at Shannon Development, decided to plead the case directly with the householders and organised four or five teams of two to visit every house in Shannon. By calling at daytime, the teams met mostly with the women of the town and over cups of tea were able to explain their position. Cian feels that’s what eventually ended the strike. Patricia McCarthy of the Tenant’s Association recalls that they ‘...were very careful to collect the money for the rents so that when the rent strike was over and a resolution found that the people wouldn’t be in debt’. The strike cost the Development Company almost £60,000. The settlement was based on phased rent increases over a period of five years.

6.6 Town Status

As the town grew it was apparent that the informal community representation arrangements between Shannon Development and the residents were no longer suitable for Shannon. The rent strike had ensured better communication between Shannon Development and the residents but throughout the 1970s the need for a local authority structure for Shannon became more pressing. In 1975, the Shannon Town Alliance was established.

The alliance brought together representatives from the political parties in Shannon and the Community Association, with its first concern to define a suitable type of local authority for Shannon.

The group represented the town in various negotiations with Shannon Development and Clare County Council and in 1977 it submitted a petition to the government for town commission status for Shannon. Geraldine Lambert remembers the long process before town commission status was finally granted in 1981.

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172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
174 Interview with Cian O’Carroll 17th October 2011.
175 Interview with Patricia McCarthy 14th December 2011.
177 Brian Callanan, Ireland’s Shannon Story. (Dublin, 2004). p.117.
We dealt with half a dozen different ministers for the environment and local government and every one of them conceded that Shannon had a great case for being upgraded. And we’d get to the stage where they were thinking ‘yes, we’ll proceed to the next thing’ and then the government would change or the minister would change and you’d be back to square one.\textsuperscript{178}

Elections for the first Town Commissioners were held on March 11th 1982. Nine candidates were elected under the chairmanship of Brendan Regan and Tomás Mac Cormaic was appointed Shannon’s first Town Clerk. On January 1st 2002 in accordance with the Local Government Act 2001 Town Commissioners were discontinued and replaced by Town Councillors. At the March monthly meeting of the Shannon Town Council it was decided to replace the title of Cathaoirleach with that of Méara Bhaile.\textsuperscript{179}

Patricia McCarthy has been a long serving member of the Town Council since the first elections in 1982. She recalls the intense rivalry of the elections which was all forgotten as soon as the polling stations closed. ‘And then the interesting thing was, close of polls, everybody into the Crossroads’.\textsuperscript{180}

The Town Commissioners dealt with many issues relating to the town but perhaps the most pressing problem facing the new Commissioners was the lengthening waiting list for housing at Shannon. A slowdown in the building of houses by Shannon Development had resulted in a scarcity of houses available for renting. At the time of the establishment of the Shannon Town Commissioners the waiting list had reached two hundred.\textsuperscript{181}

6.7 Social Issues

Sr. Fionnuala Glynn remembers the Society of Care with affection, the first of the charitable organisations to operate in Shannon. The organisation was chaired initially by Rev. Young with a committee drawn from all of the church traditions in Shannon. Sr. Fionnuala recalls being astonished at the generosity of Shannon people to the society knowing that in other places similar societies struggled to collect enough for their day to day needs. Money was always forthcoming from the Shannon Industrial Estate and the Town centre but many people remember the Society of Care’s trailer collecting used furniture for re-distribution to people in need. Sr. Fionnuala’s work as a social worker brought her into contact with many struggling families in Shannon. Without the network of extended families to rely on Sr. Fionnuala recalls that frequently the Society of Care was the only organisation that Shannon people could turn to.

One of the most frequent calls on Sr. Fionnuala’s energies was representing people in their dealings with social welfare. In the 1970s the onus was on deserted wives in particular to prove that they had done everything in their power to gain maintenance from their husbands. She recalls how demeaning it was when social welfare officials would call to their homes and had the right to search the house for signs of co-habitation. Social Welfare entitlements would be held up for inordinate periods of time causing undue hardship for deserted wives and their families. Shannon Development’s policy of allocating houses only to people who worked in the Industrial Estate or the Airport was particularly hard on women who had been deserted recalls Sr. Fionnuala who welcomed

\textsuperscript{178} Interview with Geraldine Lambert 19\textsuperscript{th} October 2011.
\textsuperscript{179} http://www.shannon.ie/your-council/elections/ accessed on 12\textsuperscript{th} March 2014.
\textsuperscript{180} Interview with Patricia McCarthy 14\textsuperscript{th} December 2011.
\textsuperscript{181} Irish Press 7\textsuperscript{th} April 1982.
the change in that policy, a welcome that was echoed by Patricia McCarthy in recalling the difficulties encountered in trying to secure social housing in Shannon.

6.8 Industrial Estate and Town - Connections

Some of the earliest companies to set up on the industrial estate continue to be among the largest employers in the area and have strong connections with the town of Shannon. The success of recent open days at SPS and EI Electronics indicates the level of loyalty and affection that generations of people from Shannon and hinterland hold for those companies where many worked, often over the course of their entire working lives.

Patricia McCarthy recalls the early days when most people walked to work and how people identified with and were identified by the companies they worked for: ‘Some of the old people would still say, oh yes, he’s SPS or they’re EI you know. Everybody drives in their cars now but then you’d see droves of people walking across’.

6.8.1 EI - Moy Park Girls

EI, trading today as EI Electronics a wholly Irish owned company started operations in Shannon as a subsidiary of the US firm General Electric. In the late 1960s and 70s it employed up to 1,200 people in the manufacture of radio components. Subsidised buses were available to transport its predominantly female work force to and from work but in order to accommodate some of the girls for whom a daily commute was not feasible EI took over one of the parks that had recently been built in Drumgeely. The ‘Moy Park Girls’ are affectionately remembered by some of the interviewees of the Shannon Social History Project.

Deirdre O’Donnell’s husband Seamus worked in EI and, as well as the Annual Dress Dance that Deirdre looked forward to dressing up for, she remembers the ‘Moy Park Girls’ singing their way back to their houses in the park having finished their shift at midnight. Seán Ó Nuanáin recalls that the EI girls were frequent participants at the Céilís held by Club na Sionna at Drumgeely Hall. Separated from their extended families the girls relished the opportunity to be part of the community life at Shannon and EI often subsidised dances locally for them.

6.8.2 SDC Recreation Club

In 1961 Shannon Diamond and Carbide Ltd. was one of the first companies to commence trading on the Shannon industrial estate. Later known as De Beers Industrial Diamond Division and most recently as Element 6, in 1968 Shannon Diamond established a Recreation complex for its employees, their families and friends. A clubhouse was built and playing pitches laid out on a fifteen acre site close to the estuary on the outskirts of the town. The recreation club provided a home ground for the existing GAA and rugby clubs within the company and Snooker, Badminton and Darts Clubs were soon in existence. Expansion in 1975 added Squash to the repertoire of activities and in

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182 Interview with Sr. Fionnuala Glynn, 18th June 2011.
183 Interview with Patricia McCarthy 14th December 2011.
184 Ibid.
185 Interview with Deridre O’Donnell 20th September 2011.
186 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 17th August 2011.
the 1980s two tennis courts and a second snooker room completed the range of sporting facilities at
the club.\textsuperscript{187}

The SDC Recreation Club played host to many visiting teams from abroad. The first fixture at the
court was a rugby match between Ndola Wanderers from Zambia and the SDC Rugby Club
(International Diamond Rugby Football Club).\textsuperscript{188} The Club was also the scene of sporting rivalry
between firms on the industrial estate as they played for much coveted trophies in soccer, rugby and
hurling.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Rugby Match played at Shannon Recreation Club, 1969. Photograph courtesy Element Six.}
\end{figure}

Notwithstanding the fine sporting opportunities afforded at the SDC Recreation Club, for the
Shannon Community at large what was most attractive were the many social activities that were
organised. Tickets for the various dances that took place throughout the year were in high demand
and anyone who had an SDC contact made full use of it to secure entry to some of the social
highlights of the year. The St. Stephen’s Night and New Year’s Eve Dances were particularly popular.
Another popular attraction was the small children’s play area at the end of the playing pitches.
Walks along the service road running beside the estuary were often punctuated by a drop in for a ‘go
on the swings’.

O’Grady.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid.
Chapter Seven - The Voluntary Sector

7.1 Shannon Sporting and Cultural Organisations

While it is not within the scope of this report to include every sporting organisation in the town the following are a few that were mentioned in the course of interviews for the current project. Dúchas na Sionna acknowledges that there are countless men and women who give selflessly of their time, energy and expertise to develop an interest in all types of sporting and cultural endeavours in the town.

7.1.1 Wolfe Tones na Sionna

The quest for an Irish identity can hardly be more reliably fostered than by introducing a town’s young people to the ancient Irish games the promotion of which is at the foundation of the GAA organisation in Ireland. To that end a public meeting was held in Drumgeely Hall in March 1967 with the intention of forming a GAA club in Shannon. The proposition was carried and a committee was duly elected under the chairmanship of Brendan Regan. In the first year the club fielded junior hurling and football teams who achieved some successes despite being in the very early stages of the club’s development.189

Wolfe Tones was at the forefront of promoting Gaelic games in the schools in Shannon. The two primary schools, St. Senan’s and St. Conaire’s played an annual ‘Derby’ in which a league of ten teams of ten-a-side was run for trophies donated by Wolfe Tones. St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School also fielded hurling and football teams and was beginning to make an impact in local and Colleges competitions.

189 Wolfe Tones na Sionna. G.A.A. Souvenir Book 1972
190 All GAA photographs are taken from Wolfe Tones na Sionna. G.A.A. Souvenir Book 1972 courtesy of Eugene O’Donnell and Labhras Ó Donaghaile.
Figure 52: St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School GAA Teams 1972
Shannon Development initially made a playing area at Ballymurtagh available to the club, which, while a valuable facility, had many shortcomings not least of which was the lack of showers and a proper dressing room. A further difficulty was the necessity of crossing the main airport road to reach the playing pitch.

The club quickly realised that in order to develop in Shannon it would need to provide more suitable facilities. Negotiations were undertaken with the GAA Central Council and with Shannon Development. A twelve acre site in Tullyvarraga was purchased with the intent of developing a playing pitch and pavilion which would include dressing rooms, showers, function room, kitchen, and bar and lounge to cater for 500 people. In a further phase of development it was planned to build a handball alley, two tennis courts, a running track and a pitch and putt course.\(^{191}\)

![Figure 53: Finance Committee: Seated left to right: Rev. Fr. Harry Bohan, Matt Roche, John McCarthy, Seán Ó Cleirigh, Standing Left to right: Denis Horgan, Brendan Vaughan, Mark McDonnell, Labhras Ó Donghaille.]

The cost of the entire project was estimated at £50,000 with £34,000 required for the first phase of laying out a playing pitch and building the pavilion. A finance committee was formed to investigate the possibilities for raising the necessary funding. Together with Club na Sionna’s input (see Club na Sionna p.76), the GAA funding body agreed a loan of £15,000 for the project and the rest was to be raised through fundraising efforts. A substantial sum was raised from the companies and business people in the town and on the industrial estate. The people of Shannon gave their support wholeheartedly by subscribing to an ‘Investor’s Club’, in which, for a subscription of twelve pounds over a year they would be included in a monthly draw for £100, with three extra special draws at Easter, Summer and Christmas for £300, £200 and £300 respectively making a total of £2,000 in prize money. Five hundred people subsequently subscribed which was over two hundred more than was anticipated.\(^{192}\)

Brendan Regan remembers walking around Shannon with the President and National Secretary of Croke Park and members of the Executive Committee when choosing a site for Wolfe Tones in 1970.

\(^{191}\) Ibid.

\(^{192}\) Ibid.
On seeing some of the small enclosed backyards of the houses the chairman of the Munster Council Sean Ó Siocháin asked ‘do ye keep horses here, what are the black Corrales for’?  

Brendan recalls that at one time there were up to twenty-five teams in Wolfe Tones GAA – hurling, football and ladies football, all less than twenty-one years of age. He laments the fact that so many young people are being lost to the club now due to emigration.

Conor O’Brien remembered the fundraising efforts in the Crossroads on a Saturday night. A traditional music *seisiún* ensured that everyone had a good time while raising funds for the building project. Some of the players included himself on banjo, Martin McDonald on accordion and Paul Conroy on accordion. Anyone who could play an instrument was welcome to join in.

Originally called Shannon Airport GAA and Athletic Club the name was later changed to Wolfe Tones na Sionna, a name chosen by Brendan Vaughan (Principal of St. Senan’s) at one of the meetings at the Crossroads. The name was chosen to reflect the multi-denominational and multi-cultural dimension of Shannon’s community.

Geraldine Lambert attended the first function held in the GAA on St. Patrick’s night in 1972. ‘We had a fabulous night’. The *Clare Champion* reported that’ the Tulla Céili Band performed for the opening dance in the Shannon GAA Club’s new pavilion on St. Patrick’s night’. However, the official opening of the Club’s new facilities took place on 21st May 1972. Padraig O Fainin, President of the Gaelic Athletic Association performed the opening ceremony.

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193 Interview with Brendan and Emily Regan 20th June 2011.
194 Interview with Conor and Peg O’Brien, 1st September 2011.
195 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 17th August 2011.
196 Interview with Geraldine Lambert 19th October 2011.
197 *Clare Champion* 18th March 1972.
Two inter county games were planned for the day of the opening. All-Ireland football champions Offaly played Sligo and All-Ireland hurling finalists Kilkenny played Clare. A huge crowd was expected for the opening. Eugene O’Donnell recalls that there was a full week of celebrations for the official opening, and remembers a football match a week or two later when a Kerry team that was short some players arrived. A few Kerry lads who were living in Shannon were drafted onto the Kerry team to even up the sides and an enjoyable friendly match ensued. Eugene also regrets the fall off in numbers in recent years due to emigration.

The GAA continued to grow and develop adding new pitches and upgrading the pavilion facilities from time to time. It became a focal point for the social and cultural life of the town. A wide variety of functions were held there including the institution of the Friday night disco for the teenagers of Shannon. Discontinued now, many of today’s twenty and thirty something’s remember the thrill of getting ready for ‘Ga’ disco and the romances that might have been made there. Geraldine Lambert remembers the excitement when her kids finally got to go.

For so long that was the place. All of our kids would have cut their disco teeth in the ‘Ga’. They knew they had arrived when they were allowed to go to the ‘Ga’.

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198 Ibid.
200 Interview with Geraldine Lambert 19th October 2011.
Camogie was a little slower than hurling or football to get started in Shannon but has gone from strength to strength in the years since its inception in the early 1970s and now has the only dedicated camogie pitch in the country. Yet again Club na Sionna was at the forefront of setting up the camogie team in Shannon. Seán Ó Nuanáin recalls that he was approached by Fr. White who asked him ‘wouldn’t ye do something for the girls; there’s plenty for the boys’. Seán duly set about training a camogie team in Shannon. Mary Hanley who played for Coláiste in Ennis recalls that the ‘highlight of my school life was playing in the Munster Final in 1969 in Cork, … as long as I had a hurley, I didn’t care about anything else’. Mary joined Wolfe Tones camogie team, who that year broke the dominance of Éire Óg in Ennis who had been unbeaten for four years. Mary continued her involvement with camogie and hurling into her adult years first as a young teacher in the Comprehensive School between 1974 and 1976 and again as Vice Principal in St. Caimin’s when it opened in 1985.

7.1.2 Shannon Athletic Club
Eddie Ryan current Managing Director of Atlantic Airventure was one of the original founders of The Shannon Athletic Club which was set up in 1969. At around the same time the Community Games were getting under way and Eddie and the Athletics Club were instrumental in bringing the Community Games Association to Clare. Eddie pays tribute to all his co-founder members of the Athletics Club in Shannon. Sean Cleary, Joe Austin, Maurice O’Connell, Pat Scally, Der O’Mahony and Tadhg Toomey are all deserving of recognition for the great work they put in with the children of the town. The club commenced with one hundred members aged between six and seventeen years old. In 1971 six children from the Club were among the first Clare entrants to the Community Games. By 1973 one hundred and thirty Shannon children were taking part in the Munster championships and won fourteen championship medals. Eddie served for over ten years as Secretary of the Shannon Athletic Club and for an equal amount of time on the committee of the Clare Community Games. Shannon embraced the ethos of the community games which was to promote a healthy interest in sports among young people at a community level. He recalls a particular event when the Clare contingent of Community Games participants marched through the streets of Dublin.

201 Clare Courier Online – 19th April 2011.
202 Interview with Seán Ó Nuanáin 17th August 2011.
203 Interview with Mary Hanley 14th July 2011.
We had three busloads and we all disembarked at Eden Quay and put them into parade and marched them all the way up to the Parnell Street monument on a Friday afternoon and stopped all the traffic. The police went berserk. And there were people running in from the side-lines shaking hands with us. We had the Clare Banner with us.\textsuperscript{204}

Eddie also recalls how the community supported the Athletics Club by turning up every second Sunday to bring eighty or ninety kids to Athletics Meets around the country. That support helped the Athletics Club to thrive. ‘We cleaned up this County, we cleaned up Munster, we were one of the finest Athletics Clubs in the country.’\textsuperscript{205} The Athletics Club continues to thrive in Shannon.

7.1.3 St. Senan’s R.F.C.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{shannon-boys-rugby-team-1960s.jpg}
\caption{Shannon Boys Rugby team 1960s. Photograph courtesy Bernard Ryan}
\end{figure}

In 1974 a meeting in The Crossroads Pub in Drumgeely resulted in the formation of St. Senan’s Rugby Club with Cyril Kiely as its first President elect and Eamon Dooley as first team captain. When Bernard Ryan moved to Shannon in 1976 he joined the club at the invitation of his neighbour Noel O’Loughlin. Bernard admits to knowing little about Rugby in those early days coming from a hurling background in Tipperary. However, he found a natural home for his sporting interest in St. Senan’s Rugby Club and has been involved in the club first as a player and then a committee member since then. Indeed Bernard notes that most of the people involved in those early days have remained friends and continue their involvement with the club today.

\textsuperscript{204} Interview with Eddie Ryan 26\textsuperscript{th} August 2011.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid.
Home for St. Senan’s for many years was at Ballycasey Cross not wholly ideal as it involved children crossing the busy main road to reach the playing field. There was always the worry that someone would be hurt but thankfully that never happened. The club enjoyed some successes and won the Culligan Cup in the late 1970s. Emigration took its toll in the eighties and while the club went into a decline it held on playing one match a year against Young Muster’s in Limerick for the Kiely Cup.

The 1990s saw the revitalisation of the club when it started playing in the Gleeson League. Aiden Quish of the Knight’s Inn sponsored a set of jerseys and the club got a great boost in 1998/99 season when they won the Gleeson Cup in front of a large group of spectators in Thomond Park.

![St. Senan’s Rugby Team 1970s](image)

The club finally moved to its new grounds in 2005. It was a big undertaking but with major fundraising the club can now boast facilities that are as good as can be found anywhere. However the support that the club received from both the GAA and the De Beers Recreation Club is still appreciated. Bernard recalls,

> For a long time we had no club house. But all the time we always had either De Beers Club or the local GAA. In all fairness, the GAA went out of their way to help us. The ban was in force and they were not allowed to give their facilities to any club but basically the door of their dressing rooms would be left open and we would go in and use their facilities. No one was supposed to know we were going in there and no one gave us permission to use them. But they were fantastic facilities.

Jimmy Slattery Park now has two playing pitches and a clubhouse and the club continues to flourish with the interest in Rugby growing in Shannon as it does throughout Ireland.

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206 Interview with Bernard Ryan 9th November 2011.
7.1.4 Swimming Pool

The idea of a swimming pool for Shannon was first considered in 1966 when plans for the development of the Town Centre were originally under discussion. It was felt that a pool would provide a much-needed amenity for the town which had a growing population of young children. In 1967 a local committee set to work with the objective of furthering the effort of providing Shannon with a swimming pool. Years of hard work followed during which various fund-raising endeavours including a ‘Buy a Brick’ campaign gathered the funding necessary to build the pool. Many of the companies on the industrial estate and town businesses also contributed to meet the £70,000 which was the cost of providing this much needed facility in the town. The first sod was turned by Minister Erskine Childers the then Tánaiste in 1973 and facilities were opened to the public in June 1974. Prior to the opening of the new pool a generation of Shannon children had made the trek to Silver Strand in Rineanna or swam in the estuary off one of the Points. Hearing stories now from her grown up children about what they got up to when they were kids, including walking out onto the mud or swimming in the estuary, she is grateful that she didn’t know at the time what they were doing. In 1975 a family membership could be had for £5 admission to membership and £15 subscription for the year. A child could gain entry to the pool for a cost of 10p for an hour. By 1987 a family membership cost £70.

On April 23rd 1994 the Shannon Swimming Pool was elevated to Sports Club status with the opening of The Shannon Swimming and Leisure Centre by President Mary Robinson. The opening of the complex was the culmination of almost twenty years of hard work by the Shannon Community Activity Centre committee.

Figure 59: Julie Hyde presents a bouquet of flowers to President Mary Robinson at the Opening of Shannon Swimming and Leisure Centre 1994. Photograph courtesy Mrs. Hyde

7.1.5 Festivals

Shannon Expo ‘75 was a major exhibition sponsored by the John Sisk owned Shannon Town Centre Company to showcase all aspects of the growth and development at Shannon town, airport and industrial estate. It was officially opened by An Tánaiste and Minister for Health Mr. Brendan Corish and ran from October 8th to October 12th 1975. Over the five days of the exhibition almost five thousand people visited the Expo centre, a vast 10,000 ft. marquee erected in the Town centre carpark. Some of the companies on the industrial estate including E.I., Molex, Butte Knit and De Beers were among the exhibitors at Shannon Expo ‘75 which featured over forty five stands. A community stall was decorated with beautiful lace and other craft items made by the Ladies Guild and many of the town’s organisations had representatives on hand to tell people about the range of activities that could be experienced in the new town. The exhibition was a display of confidence in the new town and in its future prospects.208

![5th Annual Shannon Recreation Week](image)

Figure 60: Shannon Recreation Week. 21st Anniversary Souvenir Booklet 1982. Copy of Booklet courtesy Paddy Glynn

In 1982 the Shannon Recreation Week Committee joined forces with a newly formed Shannon Festival Society to present the 5th Annual Shannon Recreation Week. As well as celebrating its twenty-first anniversary, Shannon was celebrating the tenth anniversary of the opening of the Town Centre, the completion of a new library and the achievement of Town status with the election of the Town Commissioners. There was a lot to celebrate and be proud of. The committee brought out a Souvenir Booklet to commemorate the event. There was a full schedule of events including a

Fashion Show, an old time waltzing competition, various sporting events and open air concerts. A highlight of the week was the crowning of the Recreation Week Queen. 209

One of those involved in the organisation of the event in 1982 and subsequent years was Paddy Glynn, one of the most energetic and enthusiastic community volunteers in Shannon. His involvement in Shannon organisations spans over forty years and includes the Handball committee, the Parish council, the Shannon Community Activities Centre and the Shannon Community Auction. Indeed, Paddy and a small band of volunteers continue to make Shannon a better place to live today through his work at the Oasis of Peace Garden located to the rear of Mary Immaculate Church.

One of Paddy’s most ambitious community projects was the Shannon International Festival of Humour which ran from July 8th-17th 1988. Paddy and his committee saw that themed festivals such as The Rose of Tralee or the Ballybunion Bachelor Festival attracted much support and envisaged similar success for a themed festival in Shannon. The idea of a Festival of Humour with the objective of finding Ireland’s best stand-up comic was decided upon and the committee set to work to organise the event. The scope of the undertaking was broad ranging. Irish Country Music Star Susan McCann was set to entertain and celebrities such as Derek Davis, Gerry Ryan and Mike Murphy were booked to make appearances. Dr. Desmond McHale of Cork University lent his academic weight to the International humour summer school set to take place in Bunratty Castle Hotel. A humorous short-story competition run in conjunction with the festival resulted in the publication of a booklet entitled The Humours of Munster and a One Act Comedy play competition generated about sixty new plays.

Figure 61: Booklet of Humorous Short Stories published by the Shannon Festival of Humour 1988. Copy of the Booklet courtesy Paddy Glynn

Unfortunately, despite the superhuman efforts of the organising committee the event failed to make money. Paddy knows that the idea for a comedy festival was a good one as he was visited by the organising committee of the The Cat’s Laugh Festival who subsequently implemented Paddy’s idea in Kilkenny where it continues to be successful to the present day. It is perhaps a case of a good idea at the wrong time and maybe in the wrong place. One of the happiest memories that Paddy takes from the event is that of the support that he and fellow organisers received from the community in helping to pay the huge debts incurred by the festival:

The late Tom MacCormack, Canon O’Donoghue and Thomas Moore and a few other gentlemen of the community got together and they did a fundraiser for us and paid off our debts. Shannon was never found wanting for community spirit. Marvellous, absolutely marvellous. You know they were there in the background minding their own business, but if you were in trouble they came to the fore to help and they did.210

7.1.6 Shannon Archaeological and Historical Society

In 1976 a group of young people with an interest in history, archaeology and folklore came together with the purpose of forming a society through which people who were new to Shannon could learn about the heritage of South Clare in which the new town was located. The society organised a series of lectures over the winter months and outings to places of interest throughout the summer, a format that is still followed today.

In addition the new society immediately set about producing an annual journal composed of articles pertaining to the history, archaeology or folklore of South Clare. In deciding upon a title for the journal the name The Other Clare was chosen to portray a dimension to the forward looking and modern town; that of its rootedness in a place of abundant historical and archaeological heritage. Since then the scope of the journal has expanded to cover the entire county and has become what it is today, a valued resource for Clare people at home and abroad.

It is testament to the energy and dedication of committee members, contributors and sponsors that The Other Clare has an unbroken record with volume 38 due for publication in the summer of 2014. The lovely pen and ink drawings by Hilary Gilmore that feature on the cover each year give the journal its distinctive and attractive appearance and The Other Clare has justly gained a reputation for being one of the most respected historical journals in the country. While many academics and professionals choose to publish in The Other Clare it has been a central principle of the society that the journal should equally be a forum for the layperson with an interest in any aspect of local heritage. This approach considerably enhances the appeal of the journal for both contributors and readers alike.

The Shannon Archaeological & Historical Society reflected the young, dynamic nature of the town. The original committee were young, enthusiastic and committed individuals who invested an enormous amount of energy into creating an interesting itinerary of outings and lectures for its members. The Shannon Society always prided itself on being family friendly and many of the young families making their homes in Shannon enjoyed family days out with the society. The children enjoyed the picnics and each other’s company while all the time absorbing knowledge and interest

210 Interview with Paddy Glynn, 17th May 2012.
in the county’s antiquities and heritage. Some indeed went on to pursue careers in historical and archaeological disciplines.

Some of the interviewees for the Shannon Social History Project referred to the Shannon Archaeological and Historical Society as one of the most important social outlets for them and their families. Diarmuid and Reenie Ó Donnabháin were founder members of the society and remember the outings to the Burren with particular fondness,

The Historical and Archaeological Society was a very important part of our lives. It was the centre of our social activity for a long time. ²¹¹

Conor O’Brien was a man of many interests but remembers the enjoyment he got from his involvement with the Shannon Archaeological and Historical Society. While his arthritis meant that in his later years he could no longer participate he recalls his younger days ‘when I was able to run up the hills and go up the sides of castles and so on’. ²¹²

²¹¹ Interview with Diarmuid Ó Donnabháin 13th July 2011.
²¹² Interview with Conor and Peg O’Brien 1st September 2011.
Far from exhausting places to visit, themes for lectures or articles for *The Other Clare* the Society continues to flourish in Shannon and to foster interest and research into Clare’s rich past in an enjoyable and informative manner. It maintains its family friendly atmosphere and extends an open welcome to new members and indeed to anyone wishing to join in the many events that it runs throughout the year.

### 7.1.7 Shannon Musical Society

One of the most successful organisations in Shannon in terms of its popularity both in attendance at the productions and for community involvement is the Shannon Musical Society. Founded in 1978 by Gus and Kitty Barrett, Aiden and Ann White and Kieran and Breda O’Gorman, its first production *Oklahoma* was performed the following year. Some of the people involved in the debut performance are still involved in the society today. In recognition of the debt of gratitude owed to them the society has honoured the founding members by making them lifelong honorary members. Shannon Musical Society has never missed a production since its foundation and in some years there were actually two productions.

One of its most stalwart members, Aodán n’Fox joined the society as a fresh-faced sixteen year old in 1987 when he took part in that year’s production of *Annie Get Your Gun*. He remembers the excitement of his first role particularly when the costumes arrived three nights before the show. At that time they were real theatrical costumes that had to be ordered from the U.K. The prospect of wearing a real cowboy outfit with cowboy boots caused unimaginable excitement for Aodán.

Throughout his long tenure Aodán has been involved in all aspects of the society and knows the effort that is involved in bringing each production to the stage. He estimates that from the committee level, to those involved in fundraising, front of house, backstage as well as the performers there may be up to two hundred people involved ‘so it’s a huge community effort’. The effort is well rewarded as the Shannon society is known throughout the region for the quality of its productions. AIMS the Association of Irish Musical Societies holds an annual award scheme and Shannon features on their list of awards almost every year. The Shannon Musical Society’s website carries a list of the awards it has received over the years. However, the greatest measure of the success of the society is reflected undoubtedly in the sell-out performances every year.

Such success is due in no small part to the professionalism that has always been a trademark of the Shannon society.

*There’s a great ethos in Shannon that when you sign up to the show that you’re committed to it and we’re a very professional society, we take what we do very seriously. …. So although we may be amateurs we’re never amateurish.*

The society has served its apprenticeship well. Aodán is proud that bringing in professional directors and choreographers contributed to the level of professionalism in the society but the society now finds the expertise for these roles from within its own membership.

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213 Interview with Aodán Fox 14th December 2011.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Ibid.
Having stressed the importance of commitment Aódan went on to emphasise the enormous amount of fun to be had by being a member of the society also. The cast and crew always enjoy the productions immensely and have formed great friendships within the society. Aódan recalls that many marriages, including his own, have been made amongst the members. At the beginning of the 2011 performance of *The Wedding Singer* photographs of cast members who had met their spouses through the Shannon Musical Society were projected onto the stage. Indeed Aódan recommends joining the society as an ideal way of meeting members of the opposite sex. This he particularly recommends for young men as females outnumber males by a ratio of about twenty to one!

Attracting young men into the society continues to be one of the more problematic areas for musical societies in general and Shannon is no exception. Aódan despairs when he hears young lads singing in the pub at eleven o’clock at night:

> You know they love to sing but they won’t do it without five pints in them. You’d be amazed how many times I’ve been accosted at Supermac’s at maybe midnight or one o’clock in the morning by some young lad who says ‘I’d love to do that’ and bursts into song and I’m going ‘Well come down, please come down’.

The June weekend trip to Killarney for the AIMS awards is the social highlight of the Musical Society Calendar. The Saturday night features a Gala Banquet and the awards ceremony where there can be anything up to a thousand people attending. The society has been the worthy recipient of many AIMS awards over the years but the awards ceremonies don’t end there. On the last night of the show each year the Shannon Musical Society bestows the ‘Haines Awards the honorary awards for insults to Musicals’ on those who have had a mishap on stage during the previous week. Medals bought from Jimmy Rocks in ‘Dressco’ are awarded but must be returned at the end of the night so that they are available for the following year. A stand out ‘blooper’ occurred during the performance of *Calamity Jane* when a can-can dancer lost her petticoat. Without missing a beat she kicked the petticoat into the orchestra pit and continued to dance albeit laughing helplessly.

A number of years ago the society initiated the Gus Barrett Award which is given each year to a person, selected by the committee, who embodies the dedication and commitment which makes the musical society the success it is. The award honours those qualities that Gus himself had in abundance:

> ‘Gus was always there. If you needed him to stick up a poster, he was there, and if you needed him to play the lead, he was there. He always had the best interests of the society in his heart’.

Aódan pays tribute to all of the society’s patrons and sponsors without whom the show could not go on. While regretting the lack of a dedicated facility, the society is abundantly grateful to St. Patrick’s Comprehensive School which has been the venue for all of the Shannon Musical Society’s productions to date. The introduction of tiered seating some years ago has added greatly to the theatrical experience for the audience. The effect is well worth the financial cost to the society even though an enormous effort is required to install and de-install the seating for just one week of performances.

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217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
The future of the Shannon Musical Society looks bright for the foreseeable future. Aóda’s stage school Eclipse continues to train aspiring young performers passing on the ethos of commitment and professionalism that has been a trademark of the Shannon Musical Society since its inception. Shannon can take great pride in its Musical Society and in the quality of the performances that it has produced every year since 1979. No doubt the commitment and dedication of the people who are at the helm will ensure many more years of quality entertainment for the people of Shannon.

The attitude in Shannon has always been – we may be amateurs but we’re going to do our damndest to be the most professional that we can be. So you don’t mind the hard rehearsal because everybody takes it seriously. Everybody wants it to be the best it can possibly be.\(^\text{220}\)

**Conclusion**

The journey to bring this report to conclusion has been an extremely enjoyable and fruitful one. The people of Shannon and surrounding areas, both past and present residents, have been most generous in contributing their memories and reflections of what it was like to participate in the adventure that was the creation of Shannon. The setting up of Ireland’s first International Airport, the world’s first Industrial Free Zone within an airport complex and, Ireland’s first planned town of the twentieth century on reclaimed marshland in southern Clare was a brave undertaking. There was no certainty that it would succeed but it did succeed. In 2014, under the Shannon Airport Authority, the airport is looking forward to growing success. The Industrial Estate contributes significantly to Ireland’s economy and provides major employment in the region. Shannon Town has a vibrant and growing population yet still maintains the strong community spirit that has always been its trademark.

The scope of the current project necessarily grew from the initial brief to collect the memories of the first residents of the town to include those of people who lived in the surrounding areas before the town was built. They truly are ‘the link between the old world and the new world’. Their contributions provide insights into the traditional lifestyle of the locality and the impact that the advent of the airport initially, and then the industrial estate and town had on their lives. We are fortunate indeed, to have first-hand accounts of that era of enormous social change.

Half a century on from the first tentative steps in building a new town it has been a privilege to record interviews with the original ‘pioneers’, the men, women and children who created a new community along the banks of the Shannon Estuary. While the vision of Brendan O’Regan and others at Shannon Development created the infrastructure for the new town it was the people who lived and worked, and endured the ‘frontier’ like conditions in the early days that contributed to making it the dynamic and enjoyable place to live that it is today. The spirit of volunteerism is stronger than ever in Shannon with many sporting and cultural organisations catering for the needs and interests of the population. All of these organisations began because people were willing to ‘do

\(^{220}\) Ibid.
it for themselves’, to give freely of their time, energy and expertise to create an interesting and varied community in which people could grow and develop. Children are and always were particularly well catered for. It was not possible to include every organisation in this report but those that are included are a representative sample based on the interviews where interviewees had first-hand experience and memories of the beginnings of those organisations.

As the town of Shannon heads into the second half of its first century the interviews conducted over the course of this research provide a wealth of information and insight into some of the events, attitudes and human endeavour that went into its creation. It is a story that is on-going and while the current report is focused on the first decades of the town’s existence the wish is that the endeavour to record the experiences of those people who continue to create community in and around Shannon will continue. *Dúchas na Sionna* is proud to have initiated the process.
Bibliography

Breen, M. 2012. The history of Bunratty Castle. Ruan, Co. Clare.


http://www.clarelibrary.ie/eolas/coclare/archaeology/ryan/index.htm


**Glossary**

**Coiste Bodhar:** Folk tale of a ghostly coach that was the harbinger of a forthcoming death.

**Going on the ‘wran’ (wren)** Traditional folk custom of young men going in disguise from house to house on St. Stephen’s Day singing and dancing. In former times the group would promise to release a captured wren in return for food or money. While the practice of capturing a wren was discontinued in later years ‘going on the wran’ was often used as a fundraiser for local activities.

**Aghaidh Fidil:** Face-mask.

**The Honk:** Quinlivan’s Pub in Rineanna

**Boreen:** Narrow road.

**Piseóg:** Superstition.

**Corcass:** A marsh or mud flat along the bank of a tidal river.

**Terry Alts:** A nineteenth century secret agrarian society in County Clare.

**War of Independence:** 1919-1921 – Fought between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the British Government. The war of Independence ended with the signing of the Treaty on 6th December 1921.

**The Black and Tans:** A force of temporary soldiers enlisted to help the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) during the War of Independence.

**Cumann na mBan:** Irish Republican Women’s Group
Appendices

1. The Questionnaire

A total of 165 completed questionnaires were received, the majority being returned to the designated boxes left in the Library and the Leisure Centre. Fifteen questionnaires were completed through the Google document which was accessed through the Shannon Social History Project Facebook page.

Questions were grouped under four headings: Personal, Coming to Shannon, Family Life and Social and Community. Some of the answers lent themselves to quantitative analysis and others asked for opinions and feedback on the experience of living in Shannon.

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221 Smithstown Industrial Estate – Developed in the early 1980s and located to the north of Shannon Town Centre.
Data analysis:

The responses to the Personal questions show that the majority of the people who responded to the questionnaire were in the 40-60 and 60-80 year age groups with a smaller proportion in the 20-40 year age group. Most were long term residents with half having lived in Shannon for 35-50 years and a further 30% living in the town between 25-30 years. The proportion of male and female respondents was fairly even although there was a slight majority of females responding. Three-quarters professed themselves to be Catholic, just over half were married and under a quarter were single. The majority of people had not attended school in Shannon but a significant number had, indicating that a good proportion of the 20-40 and 40-60 year olds had grown up in Shannon. Over three quarters of the people who responded to the questionnaire worked in Shannon across the Industrial Estates, Airport and Town.

Coming to Shannon

Have you always lived in Shannon?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where were you born?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Ireland (outside of Shannon)</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (excl. Northern Ireland)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Where were you living before moving to Shannon?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Republic of Ireland:</th>
<th>85</th>
<th>51.5%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain (exc. Northern Ireland)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond:</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Breakdown of where in the ROI people moved from to Shannon:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clare:</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>16.47%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Limerick:</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin:</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**When did you move to Shannon?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1960s:</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>4.3%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970s:</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond:</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>80.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If born in Shannon - when did your parents move here?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960s</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why did your parents come to Shannon?

- **Work**: 52 (31.5%)
- **Family**: 5 (3%)
- **Other: (work & study)**: 1 (0.6%)
- **Did not respond**: 107 (64.8%)

Why did you come to Shannon?

- **Work**: 71 (43%)
- **Family**: 37 (22.4%)
- **Other: (Northern Troubles)**: 2 (1.2%)
- **Did not respond**: 55 (33.3%)
What did you expect living in Shannon to be like before you came here?

106 people (64.2%) responded to this question. A variety of expectations were recorded:

- Quiet place to live
- Did not know what to expect
- Close to work
- Desolate
- A nightmare (drugs and rough youths)
- Interesting
- Isolated, bleak, lonely
- Few amenities
- Easy availability of work and housing
- Temporary
- Like a desert – the end of the world
- Relaxed pace of life
- New community – new town problems
- Peaceful – wide open spaces
- Basic facilities

Is living in Shannon what you expected?

116 people (70.3%) responded to this question. The response was overwhelmingly positive although a few negatives were recorded:

- Much better
- Loved living here
- Great place to live
- Good educational facilities
- Great clubs and facilities for young children though not so good for teenagers
- Surpassed all expectations
- Would not like to leave now
- Easy access to housing
- Great friends and neighbours
- Difficult in the beginning but improved with time
- Good community spirit and identity within the town
- Very active town
- Fine town - everything you could want for
- Freedom for children
- Great place to bring up a family
- The best town to live in
- Could do with more shops and facilities
- Needs a cinema and more facilities for teenagers
- Lots of improvement still required
Data Analysis:

The number of people who have always lived in Shannon tallies with the number of people who attended school in Shannon. A breakdown of the places people were born shows that the vast majority of people who responded were born in Ireland. A significant proportion of those not born in Ireland were born in the Britain and the next significant group was born in Northern Ireland. The question asking where people had moved to Shannon from showed a similar pattern to the question regarding place of birth with some minor alterations. A few more people moved to Shannon from the Britain while two less moved here from Northern Ireland than had been born there. The biggest alteration occurred in the ‘Did not respond’ group which jumped from ten to forty-three between the two questions. The breakdown of where people had moved to Shannon from within the Republic of Ireland shows that the largest group of people came from Limerick, followed by Dublin, Clare and Cork.

The questions regarding when and why people had come to Shannon show some interesting trends. The 1960s and particularly the 1970s saw the biggest influx of people with declining numbers in the 1980s and 1990s. The population increase in Shannon during the 1970s is reflected in the CSO population statistics which shows that the population of Shannon increased from 3,681 in 1971 to 7,565 in 1979 a percentage growth of 117.3% (www.cso.ie). Work was cited as the overwhelming reason for people moving to Shannon followed by family reasons. The Northern Troubles was cited by two people as the reason for their move to Shannon.

Expectations about coming to live in Shannon ranged through not knowing what to expect, to bleak, lonely and desolate to an expectation that as it was a new town there would be some new town problems encountered. Some people reported that they expected their stay in Shannon to be temporary. The easy availability of work and housing was also mentioned as was the quiet, relaxed and peaceful atmosphere.

The experience of living in Shannon generally seems to have been very positive although the lack of facilities such as a Town Centre rather than a shopping mall, cinema and bowling and a general lack of facilities for teenagers (in particular 13-16 year olds) was cited as still being the major drawbacks for a town of Shannon’s size. Facilities for younger children were seen as being good being well catered for by sporting clubs and other organisations. Most people identified great community spirit, friends and neighbours as being positives that they experience about living in Shannon. Many said they loved living in Shannon and would not like to leave.

Family Life

Did you meet your spouse/partner in Shannon?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes:</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No:</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond:</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you have children?

Yes  113  68.5%
No  31  18.8%
Did not respond:  21  12.7%

The following is a breakdown of the size of family where that was indicated: 13 (One child), 25 (Two children), 28 (Three children), 27 (Four children), 8 (Five children), 2 (Six children), 2 (seven children).

Were they born while you were resident in Shannon?

Yes:  76  46.1%
No:  30  18.2%
Did not respond:  59  35.7%

Did they go to school in Shannon?

Primary School:  21  12.7%
Secondary School:  1  0.6%
Both:  82  49.7%
Did not respond:  61  37%

Did your children stay in Shannon after they left school?
Are there good facilities for young parents in Shannon?

Yes: 67 40.6%
No: 42 25.45%
Did not respond: 56 33.9%

Are there good facilities for young children and teenagers in Shannon?

 Were there good facilities in the past?

Yes: 62 37.5%
No: 68 41.2%
Did not respond: 35 21.3%

Is Shannon a good place to raise a family?

Yes: 129 78.2%
No: 5 3%
Did not respond: 31 18.8%

Data Analysis:
Quarter of those that responded to the questionnaire had met their spouse in Shannon while more than half had not. Family size was concentrated in the 2, 3 and 4 children per family with much fewer numbers of 1, 5,6,7 child families. Approximately half of the families had children who attended both primary and secondary schools in Shannon and slightly more children left Shannon after their school years than stayed.
The question regarding facilities for young parents in Shannon indicate that more people are satisfied with the facilities than are not but less than half thought there were good facilities in the past. A similar question regarding facilities for young children and teenagers showed that significantly more people thought there were good facilities for this group than didn’t. However, opinions expressed elsewhere in the questionnaire regarding the lack of facilities for teenagers suggests that this question should have been more focused with younger children and teenagers being the subject of two different questions.

Notwithstanding the general lack of facilities for teenagers, Shannon was overwhelmingly deemed to be a good place to bring up a family.

**Social and Community**

**Are you, or have you been, a member of any clubs or organisations in Shannon?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>126</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No:</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond:</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The clubs/organisations that were most frequently cited include:**

- Wolfe Tones GAA: 33 members
- Soccer Clubs (combined): 18 members
- Scouts (combined): 18 members
- Shannon Golf Club: 13 members
- Shannon Musical Society: 9 members
- Parish Organisations: 9 members
- Leisure Centre: 7 members
- Youth Club: 7 members
- Parents’ committees: 6 members
- Community Radio: 6 members
- Senior Citizens: 5 members
- Shannon Archaeological & Historical Society: 4 members
- Shannon Credit Union: 4 members

**Other organisations listed were:**

Bowls, Badminton, Shannon Apostolic Society, Pioneer Association, Comhantas Ceolteoirí Éireann, Junior Club, ICA, Shannon Masters Swimming Club, Bridge Club, New Life Christian Church, Twinning Committee, Adult Literacy Scheme, Library, Family Resource Centre, St. Senan’s Rugby, Handball, Meals on Wheels, Fine Gael Party, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Ladies Club, Legion of Mary,
Camera Club, Lions Club, Tennis Club, Model Flying Club, Clare Care, Oakwood Choir, Non Nobis Domine Choir, Order of Malta, Residents Associations, Scrabble, Aqua-aerobics, Ballet, Irish Dancing, Shannon Outdoor Club, Athletics, Shannon Walking Club.

### Do you socialise mostly in?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shannon</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ennis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limerick</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Does your place of work have a sports or recreational element in the town?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes: (mostly Leisure Centre)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No:</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to have (De Beers)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are there good social amenities in Shannon?

Yes: 95  57.6%
No: 51  30.9%
Did not respond: 19  11.5%

Was there good community spirit when you first arrived in Shannon?

Yes: 118  71.5%
No: 16  9.7%
Some: 7  4.2%
Did not respond: 24  14.5%

Is there still good community spirit in Shannon?

Yes: 106  64.2%
No: 16  9.7%
Some: 26  15.8%
Did not respond: 17  10.3%
What do you think contributes to community spirit in Shannon?

Responded: 121 73%
Did not respond 44 27%

The answers to this question were overwhelmingly positive:

- Good neighbours
- People
- Church and Neighbours
- Everyone has a history elsewhere
- Safety and freedom
- Housing
- Friendliness
- Clubs and Societies
- New Town
- Integration
- School, work, church
- Relying on Neighbours
- Size of the town
- Youth Clubs
- We grew up together
- People rally round when tragedy occurs
- Volunteerism

Does your church play an important social role in your life?

Yes: 57 34.5%
No: 74 44.8%
Somewhat: 6 3.6%
Did not respond: 28 17%

Do you wish to add anything?

Responded: 65 39.3%
Did not respond: 100 60.6%
Comments in this section varied between being positive about living in Shannon to pointing out some of the shortcomings and changes in recent times.

**Positives:**

- Interesting to watch Shannon grow
- Nice place to live
- Low crime rate
- Neighbourly inclusion in terms of different religions and ethnicities
- Love the St. Patrick’s Day Parade – Community Spirit at its best
- Fortunate to have so many amenities
- Have always felt lucky to live in Shannon
- Would not want to live anywhere else in Ireland
- Love the diversity of people and cultures within the town
- The town spirit which always gets behind people’s achievement
- Very well landscaped
- Good sports facilities for the young
- Unique town – no snobbery
- Fortunate with churches/schools etc.
- Everybody is accepted for who they are
- A vibrant town
- Great place to live and work
- Safe place to live
- A variety of sporting activities
- Really enjoy living in Shannon
- Great community spirit

**Negatives or suggestions for improvement:**

- Some anti-Northern mentality still
- Sad to see so many young people having to leave
- Green areas/Riverside walks etc. should be maintained
- Park area that was built on should be replaced
- Should be more youth clubs for teenagers
- Lack of integration into Clare Society
- Some anti-social behaviour
- Town Centre wrong from the beginning
- No heart to the town
- Our airport needs to succeed and develop
- More clothes shops – Leisure facilities and entertainment for teenagers required such as a cinema and bowling alley.
- Could do a lot more for families
- Needs a main street
- In recent times families from Limerick having a disproportionate effect
- Badly needs a plan to make it attractive to tourists and residents
• In the past problems with Shannon Development, the 15 degree pitch roofs were a disaster
• Would like to see an ambulance service
• Would like to see more volunteer/community projects to help the disadvantaged

Data Analysis

The section on Social and Community indicates that the vast majority of people who live in Shannon also socialise in Shannon. The people who responded reported participation in a wide range of sporting and recreational clubs and organisations with Wolfe Tones na Sionna GAA, Soccer Clubs, and Scouting groups (including Scouts, Brownies, Girl Guides, Cubs and Beavers) being most frequently listed. Following these, the Shannon Musical Society and Parish Organisations were also strongly represented.

In general people felt that there were good social amenities in Shannon and that community spirit was strong both when they arrived and currently. A common experience was that because most people had moved to Shannon without extended family there was a stronger than usual reliance on friends and neighbours for support. Consequently, good neighbours and friends were high on the list of things recorded as contributing to good community spirit in Shannon, while safety and freedom for children, integration of religions and ethnicities, clubs and societies, school, work and church were also frequently cited as important in this respect. An interesting comment was that which said there was no snobbery and that Shannon was a unique town.

A higher percentage of respondents reported that their church did not play an important social role in their life than did.

The final question asking if respondents wished to add anything elicited a range of responses about living in Shannon. Many of the opinions recorded in some of the previous questions regarding the positive and negative experiences of living in Shannon were reiterated in this question. People often listed their positive experiences first including neighbourly inclusion, fortunate to have so many amenities, low crime rate etc. In some instances these were followed by some of the negative aspects and suggestions for improvement such as more youth clubs and amenities for teenagers, sadness that so many young people had to leave and the lack of a main street or heart to the town.

Conclusion

The 1968 social survey of Shannon carried out by Fr. Liam Ryan was far more extensive in its reach and range of questions than that currently carried out. About 300 households or half of all households in Shannon at that time were visited by the surveyors. The questionnaire covered a wide range of areas regarding the experience of the respondents of living in Shannon.

Some of the trends that emerged in the current survey were comparable with the 1968 survey especially in the range of responses regarding the experience of people living in Shannon both in the past and today. Some similar issues were identified as being positive aspects of life in the town, such as good community spirit, social amenities and schools. The majority of people identified Shannon as being a good place to raise a family.
2. Consent Form

To research, preserve and promote the Heritage of Shannon and its Environs

Interviewer: ..................................................................................................................................................

Interviewee: ..................................................................................................................................................

Date of Interview: ...........................................................................................................................................

CLEARANCE NOTE AND DEPOSIT INSTRUCTIONS

The purpose of this deposit agreement is to ensure that your contribution is added to the collection of The Shannon Social History Project Archive in strict accordance with your wishes. All material will be preserved as a permanent public reference resource for use in research, publication, education, lectures, broadcasting and the internet.

Copies of the archive will be lodged with:

Sean Lemass Library, Shannon.
Local Studies Section, Clare County Library, Ennis.
University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.
Cuimhneamh an Chláir, The County Clare Oral History and Folklore Group, c/o Clare Education Centre, Kilrush Road, Ennis.

If you wish to attach any conditions to your contribution please outline these in the space provided below: .................................................................................................................................................................................

........................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................................

I hereby assign the copyright in my contribution to the Shannon Social History Project Archive

Signed: .................................................................................................................................................. Ph. No: .........................

Address: ..................................................................................................................................................

Signed: .................................................................................................................................................. Date: ..................................

Signed: .................................................................................................................................................. Date: ..................................

(Interviewer for Dúchas na Sionna)
3. List of Interviewees

8. Mary Hanley - Interviewed 14th July 2011.
13. Conor (RIP) and Margaret O’Brien – Interviewed 1st September 2011.
20. Patricia McCarthy – Interviewed 14th December 2011.
26. Jack (RIP) and Nuala Hogan – Interviewed 7th February 2012.
35. Martin and Giselle Bender – Interviewed 22nd May 2012.
Letters received from:

1. Elizabeth Kavanagh, 12th September 2011.
2. Martin Bender, 14th November 2011.

This project was completed by Olive Carey on 29th April 2014 on behalf of Dúchas na Síonna.

Signed: .......................................................... Date...........................................