

BARRY SULLIVAN on CYRIL MURPHY'S 'ESB IN BERE ISLAND'

There was a major life change for Bere Island in 1957 and 58.

The coaster WHITSON arrived at the Stone pier in Rerrin on Thursday morning 28th Aug 1957. She was piloted by Dick Dwyer. She carried a cargo of creosoted poles from Finland, numerous reels of cable, transformers, wire for stays, picks and shovels and 2 tractors. All of this was speedily offloaded and stored up in the coal yard.

The Captain and his wife took themselves off shooting rabbits for a few hours. It was said at the time that the Skipper had planned to stay for 2 days on the Island but that the Island men worked so fast that he was able to leave after the first day.

Paddy Collins, the storekeeper stayed for a few days then he went back to the main store in Dunmanway. He appointed me as the storekeeper.

Everyone who wanted work got a job and for once Bere Island was awash with money. Wages were £5-8-6. a week. This was paid by cheque.

Dan Cahill cashed a lot of the cheques, and a few happy days were spent in his premises.- these were "wet days" On one such day Sir James Beard and his men arrived there and treated the whole lot of us to drinks;- he said it was his birthday. Sir James owned Waterfall House at the time. That was once Lord Clinton's house and is now Neil Jordan's.

After 2 or 3 days work Paddy Moynihan ,who was top man on site came to the store and told us that the Island men out on site were the greatest workers he had ever seen.

Each tractor had an air-compressor on the back for drilling holes in the rock for gelignite whenever rock was met. Needless to say that was often. John Lowney and Pat Dwyer were in charge of the blasting.

Relations between the ESB men and Bere Island people were very cordial. The men were welcomed into all the houses and given hot meals on cold days.

There may have been a few minor courtships; and why not. They were splendid looking men and the Bere Island girls were never lacking in grace or beauty. So nature will out !

On the first night all the ESB men went to the dance in Castletown with the Island boys and girls. John Lowney took us out in the MORNING STAR. On the way back in, the tide was low and we couldn't reach the pier. But John had a small punt also and asked us to get into that to get ashore, 4 four at a time. I suppose the ESB men didn't know much about boats. When Paddy Moynihan was getting in he stepped on the gunwale. I was after him; he staggered , I put my hand on his back but he fell in the water. He started shouting and we were laughing as he was only in shallow water. Paul Sidley pulled him into the punt. Next day at work we asked him why he was shouting as he was only in shallow water and could have walked ashore. He said " I thought I was out in the middle of the Atlantic and that the last thing I'd hear was the Bere Island people laughing"