

Note, 2025.03.11

In 2020, I came across this item (starting on next page) on the “ESB Archives” website.

<https://esbarchives.ie/2016/03/09/rural-electrification-of-bere-island-co-cork-in-1958/>

The site doesn't seem to have anything in it at the moment, but its welcome page does say “A bright idea, coming soon.” That's a bit better than just seeing the words “under construction”. I hope the updated version will be as good as the 2020 version was, and that it won't omit any of the great material the older one used to contain !

The piece was dated Dec. 1957, as the putting in of poles and wires in Bere Island was nearly done; and it mentioned the underwater cable that was expected soon from Germany.

I was struck by how well the ESB higher ups had gotten to know Bere Island and its history and people. It is a very nice -- and well-written -- tribute to Bere Island.[#]

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[#] The comment about the (telegraph) cable-laying of 1886 inspired me to go back to that era when what is now called the 'Victorian internet' was being extended to North America. Elsewhere on my “Historical Material” page you will find a link to what I wrote up on the Great Eastern in Berehaven.

December 1957

THE ISLAND OF BEARE

MANY scenic spots in this island of ours are renowned in song and steeped in history. Many, to the archaeologist, geologist, and botanist are gems of exceeding rarity, but from whatever point of view it is considered none can surpass Bantry Bay with its indented shores and numerous semi-tropical islands. Names like Garnish, Whiddy, Roancarrig and Dinnish, musical in themselves, might almost be termed natural freaks because of the mediterranean flora and fauna to be encountered there, and the same is also true of their sister region, Glengarriff, on the mainland. Perhaps it is because of its relatively recent history as a fortress that the Island of Berehaven has not received its just recognition in such picturesque company.

Berehaven.—The name is compounded from Beara, the Spanish Queen of Owen More, a chieftain of old, who himself was descended from the Norsemen, who found in Bantry Bay the Irish equivalent to their native fiords, and who termed its sheltered anchorages their 'Hafen.'

The most famous son of the region is, of course, O'Sullivan Beare, whose Castle of Dunboy nearby recalls the Battle of Kinsale where Spaniards fought beside the two Hughs, of Tyrone and Tirconnell, against the English forces under Mountjoy. Defeat in those far-off days of 1602 and the subsequent plantation of the region, earned for it the description of the oldest English-speaking territory in Ireland.

It is surprising that it receives scant mention from that great traveller and naturalist, Lloyd Praeger. In his time, however, it was a fortified island where visitors would be unwelcome, and where at any rate Praeger, as a student of nature and a man of peace, would have felt himself out of place. It remained a British fortification until the famous agreement of 1938 when it was handed back to the native Irish Government, and was subsequently to be mentioned by certain world-famous statesmen when they dwelt on the neutrality of the Republic during the fevered years of 1939-'45. It is still an outpost of the Irish Defence Services.

In the old days a small generating set gave lighting to the various service workshops, and included among its consumers some of the principal military residences on the Island. With the development of the neighbouring coastal region of Castletownbere, the thoughts of the Islanders turned to more universal supply from the national networks, and as this magazine rolls off the printing press a rural construction crew is working feverishly to fulfil the islanders' ambitions before the day when all the Christian world celebrates the Birth of the Redeemer.



Last August the advance party of the construction crew crossed the 5-mile stretch of water from Castletownberehaven pier to receive a royal welcome from the population of about 400 people. Shortly afterwards they were followed by what is now one of the best-known coastal vessels to our rural construction crews along the western seaboard, the m.v. Whitsun. But this bald statement hides a lot of detailed preparation and planning for the loading, unloading, and reception of the mundane but precious cargo of construction materials which she carried in one all-embracing run.

Time and tide demanded that she be ready to make the run-in at 5 a.m. that summer morning, and promptly on schedule she commenced weaving her way between rock, reef and ridge markers with Hungry Hill looming up on the mainland over her stern, and with her prow pointing in towards the small pier at St. Laurence Cove. Early as it was, a reception committee of the unloading staff and some of the islanders were there to greet her and bear a hand on the ropes. The crews of two Spanish fishing trawlers, in for bunkering and provisioning, gave the Dutch vessel a shout of welcome. All the materials necessary for construction were on board, and the cargo included a tractor and a Commer van. About an hour after mid-day the Master had a few anxious moments as the Whitsun went aground and there was a possible risk of fouling her propeller. She settled quietly, however, and under the supervision of Mr. J. Corbett (Cork Polefield) unloading proceeded in the race to catch the next tide.

At 6 p.m. everything was safely ashore, and the Whitsun, once again afloat and now in ballast, backed out of the Cove and headed out towards the more turbulent waters of the Atlantic Ocean. Back on the pier the traditional farewell fire blazed brighter as twilight advanced, and the Spanish crews once again manned ship in the fellowship of the sea to cry their "Bon Voyage" and "Well done" across the waters of Bantry Bay.



The island network is now completed. The submarine cable which will run from Adrigole to Ballinahill Pier is on its way from Germany. Some of the almost centenarians on the island recall that another cable ship, "The Great Eastern," anchored with her convoy between the island and the mainland before setting out on a July day in 1866 to lay the first transatlantic telephone cable from Valentia to the New World.

One hundred and twenty-six families on the island pray more fervently than ever for fair weather over the coming days, so that on Christmas Morning as they wend their way to Mass the lights in their homes will supplement the flashing beacon of Fastnet, and the lighthouse beam on Roanacarrig, ever vigilant to guide and welcome the fisherman as he plies his perilous trade in the surrounding waters.

We welcome these new consumers, our most recent group of islanders who have joined the Great Family of the Electrified. Among them is the Department of Defence and their powered water supply. Their buildings include a famous internment camp of the War of Independence days. "Guests" of the British Government of the time included such prominent personalities as the Rev. Dr. Alfred O'Rahilly, former President of U.C.C.; Canon O'Kennedy, St. Flannan's College, Ennis; Father John Quane, Adm., Killarney; Dr. Jim Ryan, our present Minister for Finance; the late Mr. Murt O'Connell, first Clerk of An Dail; An Seabhach, and a host of other well-known names. The news of the switch-in of the Island will bring a wry smile of memory to many a face, and they will be interested to know that the islanders still remember them, and even yet speak of the mass jail-break by which many of them regained their freedom almost on the eve of the Treaty which was the end of the struggle and the rebirth of our nation.

One final name must be mentioned. It is that of Capt. P. J. Janzen, the Master of the Whitsun. To him and to his crew we send Christmas Greetings, and our thanks for the co-operation which we have always received in some of the trickiest bits of coastal shipping carried out around these islands.

NAUTIC.