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BO'R: It became desperately important for us to switch from transit traffic to some disembarking traffic and that was how the basic idea, we had something dramatic to show them and that was... As soon as Bunratty was finished we immediately set up the idea of a medieval tour which was a free tour and a free meal in the castle for anybody who disembarked. So immediately we were writing to travel agents on the American side mainly and some on the European side also. Saying "Your flights that are going through Shannon, anybody who disembarks will have a free tour and a medieval meal." That worked but it became...we had to fairly quickly had to put it on a paying basis as well. I can't remember exactly now how long it was going, I think it was for one year as a freebie. The idea of Bunratty and a medieval meal in Bunratty. There was something happening in England in a hotel in London, not exactly a medieval meal but a meal served in the time of King Henry the 8th and so on.

JH: So, this may have influenced the idea?

BO'R: Oh, it did. I went over to see it in fact; it was in a hotel of course it hadn't anything like the genuine feeling that you had getting one in a Castle.

JH: Could you recall how the Castle, how you came to be involved in the Castle itself?

BO'R: Yes of course before land planes came into Shannon, what was happening was that people were coming as far as Foynes and then they were getting on a bus and then they were coming over and

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taking a land plane into London that was the way it was being done. It meant that for a period I found myself being in Foynes for breakfast and then travelling on the bus with them and passing Bunratty en route and very often I would have told them whatever I could about Bunratty at that time so very early on it became something on the route between the sea plane and the land plane. At that stage I was being helped very much by John Hunt and Putzel Hunt who I had used as the advisors in regard to the interior decoration which I may have mentioned to you that at a particular stage I had a debate as to whether that should be done by the architect or the person who was leasing the place which I was. I got an all-clear through Tim O'Driscoll because he knew that the advice I was getting was super advice from John Hunt and Putzel who eventually, as you know, played a major part in setting up a museum and giving their extraordinary collection to the Irish nation as distinct from it going into England. They would have advised in regard to the interior decoration in Bunratty as well.

JH: That was very important as well, so Bunratty began, was it in the early sixties it began?

BO'R: Yes, there is a lot written about Bunratty I'm sure and it was regarded in the beginning as an extraordinary thing to do to have a castle used for a medieval meal but of course it worked extremely well and we finished up with about four or five Castles operating.

JH: And it was a wonderful idea, you were introducing people to an Irish culture or to that combination of Irish culture, the Anglo-

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Norman, the Anglo- Gaelic it was altogether and you were bringing them back in a time machine to another age.

BO'R: Yes, it was an extraordinary thing for somebody to cross the Atlantic on a modern plane and then to find themselves sitting down at a meal being served in what might have been the fifteenth, fourteenth century. The food was good and the music was good and there was a lot of humour in it.

JH: And the meal was good

BO'R:

JH: And of course, it was important locally for employment as well, even for entertainers etc.

BO'R: Yes, it has a long-term possibility even still; I mean all of the Castles that were restored then are still operating. They're associated with Shannon; Shannon is a special airport, that has itself promoted tourism for itself. I think it's going to have to that again increasingly in the future and of course, the fact it has a hotel school set up of international standard at the airport means that it has now about... that was set up in about 1950, it has about a thousand managers of hotels worldwide who have gone through it and more coming out all the time. So, they have a link with Shannon promoting it, so Shannon has no fear in the future, I think. It will have plenty of traffic but it will have to work for it as it had to do it in a way that other airports that are backed up by a city in the case of Dublin, Cork.

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The first idea of getting them to get off was the one-day medieval tour. It was really a tour of medieval... well, because they finished up at night having a medieval banquet in Bunratty which was ready then, but the actual bus tour was even more interesting in that it brought them to the small villages, Cratloe and Sixmilebridge and Newmarket-on-Fergus and Quin and Ennis

JH: Corofin?

BO'R: No, that was too far for that route... they finished up with Medieval dinner. They were entertained to dancing in Sixmilebridge in Joe Keane's pub. I couldn't let them use my own pub there, obviously, but they did use the Old Ground for entertainment. That has to be revived. So, you have given me a chance to get some things in there.

BO'R: It was quite apparent to us that we needed to develop tourism on a big scale to get people to get off the aircraft at Shannon instead of just using us as a stop down on the way to Europe and of course, we succeeded through the Bunratty idea. The dramatic idea of a medieval meal in a Castle in the fifteenth/fourteenth century caught the notion of a lot of travel agents and they began to offer it as a stop-off, You'll have a medieval meal and you'll drive through a medieval village, That was just a 24-hour stop over and that was really a great success from the beginning. The British had done something like it they had an Elizabethan meal in a hotel but of course it couldn't

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compete with Bunratty. So Bunratty became something that people talked about and people in Dublin just didn't know what was going on. I mean Blarney seemed to be the place that people got off for but suddenly there is this place called Bunratty which they off for. They have a medieval, what's a medieval?

CO'C: Frank O'Connor wrote disparaging articles about it

BO'R: Yes, he did. Lemass and Leydon weren't quite sure what to make out it, either for a while what it was going to be. Jokingly, I said we'll finish up with a medieval breakfast. Leydon in some alarm said to me "are you serious?" "No" I said of course I am only joking.

JH: Could we just touch on the evolution of that idea, of the Bunratty idea? It's written in the Bernard Shea book that George O'Malley of the Limerick wine and food society, he had asked for the hall as a venue for a function in Bunratty and held a function there and that may have given rise to the idea. Would you have any recollection of that?

BO'R: Oh yes, I remember that quite well, the wine and food society were having a function at Shannon and we were then talking about the medieval meal and Shannon and we had one which was fake one of course, where I had been sitting as Lord of the Castle and my wife alongside me but it was just a trial operation. My secretary Kitty O'Connor who was good in amateur dramatics had actually worked upon it but that was only the beginning and I think George O'Malley's medieval meal was held at the airport actually and Lord Inchiquin

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was at it. So, there was a readiness to accept it while there were those who were purists horrified at the idea of a medieval meal being produced in Bunratty. That it wouldn't be right to do it but everybody realised that all we were doing was having a bit of fun and doing it in a way that would get people to get off the aircraft. So, from the beginning we didn't charge for it for the first year. It was a way to get them to break it. Then the LS and D was too threatening for us not to charge for it so we began to charge for it and it built up every year until it had two medieval meals a night. Great fun and fairly genuine in a way in that we would celebrate a meal that might have had there when they were back from the defeat at Kinsale and the songs that would be sung in Irish were an endeavor to visualise what happened. There was always of course the background feeling that there were dungeons in the Castle of which there was a frightening one really, and somebody had to be thrown in the dungeon, so it was a little bit of foolery but it worked. Worked extremely well.

JH: There a great sense it seemed of bringing people back into the past and as well people from other countries say people from American and Europe or whatever and people who were living in rapidly modernising societies so this opportunity to be brought in their imaginations back into another age and that seems to capture the imagination.

BO'R: Yes, it did. Even to climb the circular staircase to the hall above the banquet hall was an experience for people of a modern age. Coming from an American for someone who had never been in a Castle before and to realise that the circular staircase was curved in

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such a way so that the man above you always had the advantage of his right hand. You had no easy way of getting up that staircase unless you could fight with a left-hand. Then there was the murder hole where apparently somebody who was unwelcomed would not get to the second floor and then there was the recounting of the history of the Castle upstairs and then coming down to the banquet after that. So, you couldn't have done it any place better than in Bunratty. People liked it and it worked and it was seen that we weren't serious, that we were joking about it but there was a lot of serious thinking in it all the same.

CO'C: Then you had people from the Abbey in Dublin who came as advisors who helped set up?

BO'R: Yes, there was a good deal of theatre in it, in the thinking of it and people who got involved including yourself, Cian, each gave it something. It has survived I don't know how many years it is now? It's 40 years and not once but twice a night. It works and it's going to have to work again in the Shannon of the future, which is going to really be no longer dependent on transit traffic.

JH: Could we go back just again to the origins of Bunratty I would just like to touch on the legal side of it how it came about? There was a board of trustees I think established at the time. Mr. John Hunt had a hand in it as well with Lord Gort. Hunt persuaded Lord Gort to lease Bunratty. Would you have a recollection of that?

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BO'R: Yes, John Hunt at an early stage became an advisor to me in regard to the interior decoration that was required. I felt that a startling interior decoration was required at Foynes and at Rineanna so that their first impact of Ireland would be a very good impact and I already knew of his house in Co. Limerick having a wonderful cottage and interior which talked of Ireland all over the place. And I said "that's what I want". I had of course to negotiate then with Garrett Fitzgerald's brother who was the architect for the airport he had been the architect for the Dublin airport and he was the architect for the Foynes airport and when I outlined this to him. He laughed at me a little bit but he said well Dublin airport did alright and I said this is much more important than Dublin airport. "Are you serious" he said and I said "Yes I am" and he very nicely stepped aside and let the John Hunt and his wife do the interior at Foynes and the interior at Rineanna then followed suit. John Hunt's interest in Bunratty came very early on. He knew Gort and I had in 1950 written in a report, which came out of the Marshall Plan that Bunratty should be restored. He spoke to Gort, because he knew that Gort was thinking of restoring a place in Gort which belonged to his family

JH: Lough Cutra:

BO'R: Lough Cutra and he decided ... and he with Hunt as his advisor made a deal with Bord Fáilte, of which I was the chairman with the Board of Works to do a restoration. There were clashes of course between what was a restoration, which would be genuine and what was a restoration, which could be made work. They worked it out very well it came.... and Gort very early on saw the rationality of

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making it into a place of entertainment that would get people thinking what way they lived in this place so there was a great combination there of Percy le Clerc from the Board of Works and John Hunt and Gort, who part of his life's concept was that he would tell about the past, I don't know why. It was a great triumvirate of people doing it and getting as much help as possible from people like Cian and others who were working for the development company and could see the importance of it being done.

JH: Just One area, that we might end on this particular area, we've almost three quarters of an hour it's the folk village idea and the origins of that. it was Kevin Danaher was asked to provide the original detailed proposal?

BO'R: Yes, and Cian played a major part in it

CO'C: Later on

BO'R: And the folk village one thing leads to another, lead to six villages then having rent-a-cottages built in them and that is going to happen again. I believe that there is going to be in the mid-west area there is going to be a proliferation of folk villages that will give people the feeling of life in a small village as a new product it will have to be worked upon.

CO'C: Going back to the Folk Park how did the idea develop? How did that happen?

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BO'R: The first thing was McCarthy with whom I had negotiated. I had bought the land on which the motel was built.

CO'C: The Shannon Shamrock

BO'R: Yes, that's right I had just extended the Old Ground and the extension of the Old Ground was a motel in other words you could drive in to your room and I said we will get the first motel now in the Shannon area. I bought personally the land on which the motel was put the Shannon Shamrock and then at that stage I had met McCarthy and he had agreed "Yes I will put up the money for it." At the same time, I was meeting Bernard McDonough who had promised to put a ball-bearing factory into the Shannon operation and I said what's happening Mr. McDonough about the factory? "Well" he said "my management team are not for it". I said "well why don't you give us something like Mr. McCarthy is giving us a hotel, a motel" "oh" he said "I saw that that wouldn't be good enough at all for what you want". Then he mentioned a place in America which I had visited in 1950 and I said well there is a place here that would almost duplicate that and he said "Is it ..." he couldn't remember the name "Is it Dromoland?" "Yes" I said "it is Dromoland? How did you know about it?" "Taxi man told me it was for sale." "Well" I said "you are not going out for another two hours will you come out and see him. Inchiquin is the owner of it, he wants to sell it", So he said: "I will". He left his son at the airport. His son wasn't very well and he had half the shop bought by the time we got back. Any case Inchiquin met us in what was his study and Macdonough O'Brien portrait was on the wall. McDonough was like that's my name and I said that means something

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Mr. McDonough. How much is it? He said, you know how brutally frank he was. It's in that book the conversation, that book about him. I think he said £50,000. I think McDonough said alright. Then Inchiquin began to feel he had made a mistake (Laughing) and as we walked out through the lounge or the dining room and he said oh well it's with a hundred acres he said not with a thousand acres. Oh that's different and we drove down the bockety avenue and I said to him that's a pity you didn't make that deal because I said that could be one of the best places in Europe and when he said you can't do that without having the best people to do it. I know that and I know you are not in the business. He was sand and gravel and that kind of stuff and factories. Before he got on the plane, I rang Inchiquin and he said "yes" I will give him full use of the thousand acres for scenic riding and whatever but I won't sell the land. I went out on the plane and said it to McDonough, he said no he said and off he went. About two weeks later I was in New York with Paul Quigley looking for factories for the new estate and I rang him up and I said are you going to buy Dromoland. I might he said and then I told him what I was doing he said "come down I would like to meet Paul Quigley. So, we went down by plane and then he met us at the plane. I think he sent a plane for us. We stayed with him anyway. We made the deal and he said to me "who would handle it well for you? well I said "my man is a state solicitor in Ennis. He's a good man." "Well what's his phone?" He got on his phone, "Michael I said this is Mr. Bernard McDonough he has just bought Dromoland". Gasp at the other end and "Mr. McDonough what do you want me to do?" "I want you to get the deeds for me. I will be over in fortnight's time." The deeds of that place they went back to Brian Ború almost.

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He had it rebuilt, he had about a million dollars put into it before he really got it but he got it anyway. Bernard McDonough. There is a book about him, which is worth looking at. Some interesting stuff in it. I have it here, I think.

JH: Just as we wind up just again to go back to the folk village is it....

JH: Just to go back to the Folk village somebody said that it became the impetus of Mid-west tourism. Quite an amount of stuff that spawned off from it. I mean social tourism was good in the Mid-west as you say with Rent an Irish Cottage. Those ideas seemed to come thick and fast around that time in terms of tourism. That process again, was it people sitting down and putting their heads together or did it grow as the ideas came?

BO'R: In 1950 I went on a Marshall plan visit to America and I had accumulated within in me then about 15 years of input not just my input but the input of staff talking to staff, what will we do and so on? I think that on the way back, I came back on the SS America, I wrote a series of recommendations and they were all built up over those fifteen years and they included Bunratty, they included the hotel school and the industrial development but they weren't necessarily my ideas but the ideas that we were all talking about and there is a report made at that time, which you could always get from my secretary in which there are about a dozen recommendations as to what should be done for Shannon at that stage.

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JH: So, was that where the folk village had its origins in that?

BOR: It had and the folk village had to do with what we had which was special. The medieval tour was a tour you couldn't have in England because the villages were more sophisticated than ours and so on, I mean the medieval tour that brought you to Sixmilebridge and into a pub there, not mine, and into a pub that violinists were playing and then brought you into a hotel where there were little girls dancing and that brought you into the Abbey in Quin where the monks were singing, we had wired stuff into it as to what it might be like, and that were brought into an empty room in Knappogue, a wreck of a castle you know, I mean it was something they wouldn't see anywhere else and it wasn't a long tour but it was different to it's kind of tour. That has to be revived again. There are a whole lot of things have to be revived.

JH: It's extraordinary and I am sure it wasn't lost at the time on people and it was extraordinary that the aviation, which was the great innovation at that time, was bringing people into a situation where they could touch the past.

BO'R: I remember on the first tour that went, I acted as the guide, and I remember getting great applause altogether and telling them I could remember as a young fellow, I don't know what age I was, I was about six or seven, that a gander and her young I walked in amongst them and that suddenly the gander decided I should be driven off and I fell back and I do remember the gander's mouth being above me. I was able to describe it accurately. Of course they were going through

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places that I had walked upon as a young fellow but I think there are lots of stories about the villages in Ireland that would be quiet different, not long tours because people get tired on tours and I think that the whole idea of bed & breakfast in every village in the Mid-West being sophisticated being made much better than it is because it's got management into it and entertainment at night-time in adjoining the cottages is going to be the savior of Shannon, something like that. A thousand well organized bed and breakfasts.

JH: Yes, that idea would lead us to the idea of social tourism, which began at that time.

BO'R: Yes, social tourism was basically related to using tourism not to give wealth to big hotels but to give wealth to the people. It is a very fundamental thinking because it means that tourism has got to have a contact with the people, not just the hotel workers and so on and social tourism is the essence of tourism because tourism is really successful if it is making friendship between the visitors and those who are being visited and to a certain extent we already have a good degree of it in bed & breakfast. The B&B properly managed and properly run is an ideal tourism because it will bring tourism visitors in contact with the people themselves. It will let them see how the people they are visiting live and so on. I think that the Mid-West could have some thousands of B&B which were not B&B in the ordinary way but where B&B that were part of an organized of an organised B&B operation which would give people who got off the flight at Shannon, a bedroom and bathroom and a very nice sitting

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room and met hosts who really wanting to make them feel happy visiting Ireland. In other words, a new kind of tourism could be organised because it could then have to have an organisation, which was producing entertainment at nighttime and producing dinners or luncheons in small restaurants, in other words. And I think it could be done in the Mid-west because of the relativity of Shannon to the workforce in the Mid-west and in order to hold Shannon we would get sufficient people interested in running specialised B&Bs and an organization backing them up that would provide entertainment and provide meals.

BO'R: The idea of welcoming into our homes people from all parts of the world is in itself an exciting concept because we are supposed to love one and other, you have to love people if you are going to make a success of having them stay in your house. So, the B&B idea when the rent-a- cottage idea ...we put that into operation, that was partly on the basis that the owner might be living in the cottage and that the cottage would in fact ...you rent a cottage and the owner who would look after you. There is something about tourism that is the probable way to overcome war itself because if humanity became confident about staying with Indians or wherever it is, Indians or Chinese or wherever it is all over the world then we are in a new basis.

CO'C: Do you remember the ??? idea of out buildings, old farmhouses the possibility that they too could be converted into accommodation that was another idea that didn't actually happen; there were legal problems that prevented it?

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BO'R: There were cottage courts, the cottage court idea was that you would have a series of cottages that were around one another there would be four of them perhaps, in other words there would be three cottages which had a...., they weren't a hotel. They were a cottage court.

BO'R: (reads) The role of the IDA at the time, its relationship with Shannon Development, proposals to transfer all industrial promotion, well not all, not to the centre. Tourism to Bord Fáilte well that was a duplication I was also the chairman of Bord Fáilte, and Lemass had said to me well you can use the two jobs now to make sure that Shannon is right and I felt that I could probably do more with Bord Fáilte for Shannon than Shannon. Shannon, I knew would have Bunratty anyway and would have an airport to promote. But national tourism shouldn't be divided up, the town to Clare County Council that was going to come about anyway, it was on the way and I felt this is going to release a lot of energy now for our team who were ahead of the game anyway and we will finish up with things that none of us can see now.

BO'R: Well, Erskine Childers was an extraordinary person. The first meeting he had with me was when I was made Chairman of Bord Fáilte and I had Tim O'Driscoll with me and he then addressed in regard to what Bord Fáilte was to do as if there was no board or

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there was no executive. He would have taking the heart out of Bord Fáilte altogether in trying to run it. I had to say we couldn't do that Minister you know. We have a board, which we have to make-work and an executive which we have to make work. He had written out what Bord Fáilte was to do he was a very imaginative fellow, a bit like myself really.

JH: That it was said of Lemass that not only could he conceive and perceive and look ahead and create in his own mind what is possible, but He also had the ability to pick the right people to do it and you were mentioned in that capacity with several others of that generation.

BO'R: Yes

JH: Dempsey in Aer Lingus, Mickey Joe Costello Sugar Company, I suppose, and several others of that in the period. You would have had some dealings with those people but you were much younger, that was the difference, you were only in your thirties, when you had the full confidence of essentially the Minister of Industry and Commerce and his senior civil servant.

BO'R: Yes, well at the time that I got into the idea of doing something about the Northern problem I saw clearly, I was then Chairman of Bord Fáilte that it was nonsense to have the island being sold by two bodies. and to a certain extent it was nonsense to have the two islands not working together for American traffic particularly

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because they are coming across the Atlantic and we can sell the two of them together and we can use all the offices of the British, in America they have six times as much as we have and that will increase tourism. I had a meeting with heads of the various organisations that had to do, CIE, Bord Fáilte and so on. Todd Andrews, I remember was quite positive that what I was saying was right which was very good for me because he was very involved indirectly in regard to North South struggle during the Civil war. I got agreement to do it, to find a way of working with our opposite on the other side of the border on tourism. I went to see Jack Lynch who was the Taoiseach. "Sound very good" he said "I like it". Well I said, "Can we do it"? "No" he said, "I will have to ask the cabinet." He was then I think already with Charlie Haughey with the cabinet certain had to agree things, and at the meeting that I reported back to on that. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, stood the dinner ...what's his name?

JH: Frank Aiken

BO'R: No?...one of his...it doesn't matter anyway.

He said to me I am sorry that we haven't been able to get it through. The cabinet at that stage had a divided situation apparently and this was regarded as going too far with the Northerners but of course it would have made the Good Friday agreement very easy because we would have double tourism in both parts of Ireland. I came to answer that question because you were asking me how did I relate the fact that I was chairman of two boards and that I was head of Sales and Catering as well. I was very lucky; Sales and Catering was a big operation with a thousand people working at the.... When de Valera

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came down to see the place he said "I am hearing good remarks about your restaurant every day." People were coming through and talking about it. The people concerned were important leaders from American and Europe that were passing through Shannon

NOTES:

1. Speakers on disk:

BO'R: Brendan O'Regan

JH: John Heuston

CO'C: Cian O'Carroll

2. ***** indicates breaks between tracks on the disk

3. This manuscript may contain errors in transcribing from the disk and in the interpretation of the spoken word. For external quotation the text above should be checked against the original recording.