

Businessman Brendan O'Regan set up the world's first duty-free shop at Shannon Airport in 1947 and the first free trade zone industrial estate; he did as much to modernise Ireland as Sean Lemass did, says **Ryle Dwyer**



Shannon Airport, where Brendan O'Regan developed the world's first duty-free shop in 1947.

Picture: Press 22

Ireland's top salesman

THE 1920s and 1930s in Ireland were blighted by the Civil War and its poisonous aftermath, while the 1940s were years of shortage and deprivation. After World War 2, the country seemed to drift, as people expressed their lack of confidence in it by emigrating in droves, reminiscent of the aftermath of the Great Famine.

Credit for the economic turnaround in the late 1950s and 1960s is usually given to Seán Lemass and the civil servant, TK Whitaker. They undoubtedly made monumental contributions, but one man made an even greater one, but you do not read about him in history books.

Brendan O'Regan was born in Clare in 1917 and raised in Sixmilebridge, until he went to secondary school at Blackrock College, Dublin. He was one of the students who persuaded the college president — the future Archbishop John Charles McQuaid — to revive hurling at the school.

In 1933, O'Regan played on the team that won the Leinster colleges' junior hurling championship, and he went on to play a leading role in winning the senior hurling title two years later. His first job, after finishing Blackrock, was in a hotel in Llandrinod Wells, Wales, run by the legendary

Brendan O'Regan: Irish Visionary, Innovator, Peacemaker

Brian O'Connell with Cian O'Carroll
Irish Academic Press, €20



Kerry-born hotelier, Toddy O'Sullivan.

Brendan broadened his hotel experience, working in Germany for 10 months, before doing an internship at the famous Carlton Hotel, in London. During World War 2, he returned home to manage the Stephen's Green Club in Dublin.

There, he came to the notice of prominent people, like the Minister for Supplies, Seán

Lemass, and his distinguished departmental secretary, John Leydon. In 1943, Tim O'Driscoll, of the Department of Industry and Commerce, offered O'Regan the position of catering controller at Foynes, which was the busiest port in Europe for transatlantic seaplanes. The stop was supposedly for civilian passengers travelling on the British airline, BOAC, or carriers like Pan Am, and the American Export Airlines (AEA).

Foynes was not "a normal civilian airport". AEA, for instance, was engaged in transporting military and diplomatic personnel on the transatlantic route, exclusively on behalf of the US Naval Air Transport Service.

It was at Foynes that Joe Sheridan, one of O'Regan's staff, came up with the idea of 'Irish coffee' as a novel drink for passengers. It became a great hit. Famous passengers visiting Foynes included Yehudi Menuhin, Ernest Hemingway, Douglas Fairbanks, Bob Hope and Humphrey Bogart, along with distinguished political figures, including John Curtin, prime minister of Australia, future British prime minister, Anthony Eden, and the US first lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as future US president, John F Kennedy.

Lemass recognised the importance of air travel, and Rineanna, on the other side of the Shannon, had a concrete runway before London, Paris, Rome, or Berlin. Hence, it was in a position to exploit the development of transatlantic air travel during the late 1940s and 1950s.

O'Regan moved across the Shannon to Rineanna, where he developed catering at the airport. By 1949, around 100,000 air passengers passed through what became Shannon Airport. Only 6,334 of those disembarked, but most of the others had to spend about an hour at the airport. O'Regan recognised the potential to influence those people to visit Ireland.

Most people were still crossing the Atlantic on ships. On visiting the United States in 1950, O'Regan noted the sale of duty-free whiskey on the ship at sea, and so he opened a duty-free shop at Shannon. It was the first duty-free shop at any airport.

In 2008, the *Moodie Report*, the bible of the travel retailing business worldwide, described O'Regan as the "founder of the duty-free industry", initiating and inspiring this €60bn-a-year business. He was also one of the first to recognise that "Ireland had a

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Innocent posts on social media turn into shocking stalker saga

IN the late 1990s, I wrote an article titled 'mobile manners.' Commenting on the disturbance caused by phone conversations on the beach, at the theatre, and during a funeral mass, I suggested that some guidelines were needed.

Twenty years on, such concerns seem laughable. But with the proliferation of social media, and the prevalence of shared data, should there be some kind of code of conduct to adhere to? Is it okay, for example, to share photos of people without their knowledge or their consent?

It's an issue tackled by Andrea Mara in her second thriller, *One Click*. Lauren is in Italy on holiday, and she becomes intrigued by a woman on the beach. Sitting languidly at the edge of the sea, a book dangling from her hand, the young woman seems the picture of idle sophistication. A keen photographer, who loves sharing on her blog, as well as social media, Lauren snaps the woman, and, almost unthinkingly, posts it onto Instagram.

The photo goes viral, and a tweeter asks where the beach is. More insistent tweets follow, requesting the name of the woman in the photo, and soon the messages become threatening. Lauren con-

One Click
Andrea Mara
Poolbeg Crimson, €9.08;
Kindle, €4.53

Review: Sue Leonard



fesses her action to the woman, who turns out to be Cleo, an American who has recently moved to Dublin.

Cleo has a dark past, and she thinks she knows who the cyber stalker is, but Lauren isn't convinced. And when the messages hone-in to her own life, she's convinced it's somebody close by. The two keep in touch, as the menace increases.

Lauren has other problems to contend with. Recently separated — her husband now lives with a neighbour — she's lonely. Indeed, that's the reason she became attached to Facebook and Twitter in

the first place.

"Nobody wants to hear about the loneliness," she confides to a friend, "because it makes them uncomfortable. So we have to plaster on smiles and pretend we're fine for fear we'll push people even further away."

Then there's Rebecca — the elder of her two daughters. Moody and difficult, she's opted to spend after-school time with her father, even though she's disdainful of his shallow new woman, Nadine. And there's Jonathan, a client who seems more intent on antagonising Lauren than in coming to terms with a recent breakup.

There were times I became impatient with Lauren. She's had one cyber stalker before the new trouble began, but she's learned nothing, and is still wildly oversharing. Her decision to talk to a journalist seems unhinged — she asks to be anonymous, but can she trust her interviewer?

Overall, this is a well-plotted novel, with a lot of red herrings and false leads. I was convinced, many times, that I had guessed the denouement, but the author outsmarted me. Whilst slow in places, the end, when it came, was worth the wait. The dramatic revelation shocked me to the core, yet made perfect sense of all that had gone before.

At the close, we see Lauren emotionally battered, yet ready for a fresh start. She's moved on, and no longer wishes to have her husband back. As a friend points out to her, the dinner parties she thinks she misses, had in reality, bored her stiff. All the talk had been of clean eating and fake tans.

And if she has, finally, learned that negotiating social media needs thoughtful care, then so has the reader. It's a timely tale, and makes a perfect beach read. If nothing else, it will remind you to post your holiday snaps on social media with extreme caution.

John Lockley has been what he calls a 'living pilgrim', learning Buddhism, traditional medicine and laughter to raise a solely spiritual army that will lessen war in the world, writes Josephine Fenton

JOHAN LOCKLEY is an extraordinary looking man. He has surrounding his eyes what appears to be a white mask. He calls it "white birth skin". When she first saw him, his Dublin-born mother, exclaimed, "he looks like an abo". According to the family story "the white doctor frowned, my dad laughed, and the black Xhosa nurses ululated".

Lockley's mother was Catholic, and his Rhodesian father Protestant. Born in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1971 he talks about growing up in the context of conflict. His homeland was burdened by apartheid whilst, what was then Rhodesia and is now Zimbabwe, was in the midst of a civil war. Back on the island of Ireland in Europe the Troubles raged.

However, city-bred Lockley dreamed, during his childhood, of "the African bushveldt, animals, and plants, about illness and healing". Unbeknownst to him or his parents these dreams were preparing him for his calling, that of sangoma, or traditional African healer.

Once adult, Lockley became a "living pilgrim", travelling "the world working with healers, mystics, psychics, Zen masters, and shamans". He learnt Buddhism in South Korea, sangoma medicine in South Africa and "laughter and music — a living story that never ends" in Ireland.

Lockley calls his practice The Way of the Leopard and teaches his pupils to become "spiritual soldiers" who, if their numbers become sufficient, should be able to lessen the amount of war in the world. It's an admirable aim. Lockley uses the word "soldier" for monks and young men who, like himself, eschew violence.

One of the striking sections in this book describes the period in which Lockley aged 18, having been drafted into the South African forces, worked as a medic in a rehabilitation hospital catering mainly for black special forces. He says these soldiers arrived "in tatters, their bodies and minds ravaged". They came to the military hospital in Pretoria from the war in Angola.

African patients, whilst they were recovering, moisturised their bodies — from top to toe — with vitamin creams. The emollients, ordered by the racist but skilful white doctor, Colonel Gordon, were shunned by injured whites as "sissy". But apparently and much to Gordon's mystification the blacks got better more quickly. Lockley, although white, took to rubbing the creams on

Businessman did his 'duty' for Ireland

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great opportunity to participate in a huge new industry of international tourism, which the air age would bring, and that well-managed Irish hotels were essential."

By February, 1951, he was behind the establishment of the training course that led to the hotel school at Shannon. He was appointed chairman of Bord Fáilte in 1955, and held the position until 1973.

He recognised that the lack of job opportunities was responsible for the high emigration, which was a real blight on Irish independence.

He concluded that the unemployment malaise resulted from the country's protectionist policy, with its high tariffs, "combined with a ban on new foreign investment, under the Control of Manufactures Act 1932 and 1934".

Lemass, who had been responsible for that legislation, did not recognise its harmful impact as late as 1956.

"Talk of foreign investment in Irish industry would never come to anything," Lemass warned a gathering at UCD in February, 1956. The idea of foreign investment would only do harm to the country, he argued.

O'Regan recognised the importance of providing employment. Establishing foreign-owned industries at Shannon would provide



Dr Brendan O'Regan, who developed Shannon Airport and founded the Shannon Free Zone. Picture: Maxwells

much-needed local employment. This would inevitably be of much greater local economic benefit than any tax revenue foregone.

The development of the export processing zone at Shannon was his brainchild.

It led to the establishment, in 1959, of the Shannon Free Airport Development Authority (SFADCO), with the full backing of Lemass, often in the face of strong opposition from Neil Blaney, and even TK Whitaker.

O'Regan promoted the importance of expanding the concept of

such industrial zones to undeveloped countries. This was to have an enormous influence on Red China.

"Under the direction of Deng Xiaoping, the Shannon model was used as a template in the development of the SEZ in Shenzhen," the authors note.

"It was to prove spectacularly successful and the population of the obscure fishing village increased from 25,000 to 14m over the next thirty years."

The Chinese vice-president, Xi Jinping, visited Shannon in Febru-

ary, 2012, shortly before taking over as president. "Generations of Chinese leaders have visited Shannon and used its ideas to boost their economy," an article in *China Daily* proclaimed on December 31, 2015.

O'Regan exploited the enormous prospects at the airport to develop tourism by providing free, one-day tours of the surrounding area. These encouraged the development of the Bunratty Castle banquets.

The one-day tours were replaced in 1963 with a mediaeval tour programme. Some 11,100 visitors attended the Bunratty banquets in its first full year, and O'Regan's influence extended to the establishment of Siamsa Tíre: The National Folk Theatre of Ireland, in Tralee.

He was not only the father of modern Irish tourism, but also provided tremendous inspiration for the Good Friday Agreement, in a quest to develop rational relations with Northern Ireland. He was the inspiration behind Co-operation North, the Irish Peace Institute, and the Centre for International Co-operation.

O'Regan went on to help organise secret talks between Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds, and the UDA paramilitaries. These talks helped prepare the way for the Good Friday Agreement.

This magnificent study of Brendan O'Regan — by Brian O'Connell, with Cian O'Carroll — is historical biography at its best.