

Part 7: The End of an Era

Narrator: The War in Europe ended on May 25th, 1945. As normal life re-established itself, times also began to change for Foynes. The shipping, absent due to the threat of German U-boat attack for the 5½ years of the Second World War began to return to the harbour. Technology had advanced radically during the war. Larger and more powerful aeroplanes had been built and operated successfully. The jet engine was invented by Frank Whittle. A new path in aviation was being opened up at the expense of the seaplanes. Foynes was one of the last casualties of war. Having flourished when all around it foundered, Foynes time had, finally, come. The last nail in the coffin was the development of Rineanna. A new land-based airport was established at the far side of the river. It was called Shannon International.

Poem:

*Over in Rineanna now they have land planes galore,
Though they stole the show from Foynes we wish them luck and more,
We're scattered now forever boys, at home and foreign climes,
But our thoughts sometimes wander back to those exciting times,
When flying boats rode anchor in the harbour of dear Foynes.*

Narrator: On the 29th of October 1945, the last scheduled Pan Am flying boat left Foynes Harbour and flew into the west.

Frank Buckley: It was a sad time really, there's no doubt about it. There was supposed to be a last plane, but I think some more planes came in after that. The facilities were still there - it wanted nothing really. The launches were there, the water was unlimited... you could land - I can even remember one morning there was fog on the River Shannon at Foynes. And where did the plane land? Below at Glin. And my brother, God rest him, was living and married in Glin and it was he who went out in a boat and brought the passengers in a rowing boat off the plane. Ah, it was a great time... sentimental and... y'know?

Billy O'Neill - he worked with BOAC. He was in the operations side here in Foynes. Billy O'Neill, Kevin O'Connor. Billy O'Neill went out to Bathurst, or somewhere out foreign or out in Africa, I think. Foynes itself closed in 1946... Well, it was a sad day really.

Narrator: Pan Am's next transatlantic flight landed just across the river from Foynes at Shannon. It was a DC 4. The age of the big flying boat had ended.

Foynes today is a thriving port, which still stretches its influence across the world. The flying boats are gone, but not forgotten. Frank showed me the pontoon pier, which survives still; the old hotel in Boland's Meadow is now a hospital. The legacy of the flying boats is celebrated in the Foynes Aviation Museum and in a hundred small ways: the local pub is called 'The Flying Boat', and of course, there are men like Frank Buckley, who carry the memory of those days with them, forever.