

**LECTURE REPORT**  
**23 April 2013**  
**SHANNON AIRPORT – FROM FOYNES TO THE FUTURE**

The speaker, Joe Buckley, has held responsibilities in airport operations, as Terminal Manager, and is currently Cargo and Technical Traffic Development Manager at the airport. He devoted the lecture to looking at how Shannon evolved from flying boat operations in the 1930s, to the airport it is today, taking in many innovative, and often unique, developments.

Foynes, a small town on the south side of the Shannon estuary was used by flying boats in 1935. Subsequently Foynes was used for North Atlantic air services that were frequented by many of the world's leading politicians and most famous entertainers. Between 1941 and 1945 around 48,000 passengers used Foynes: meanwhile, a grass aerodrome at Rineanna, on the north side of the river and slightly further inland, was established. It was this site that became Shannon Airport, taking on landplane aviation demand after WW2.

**THE ORIGINS OF 'IRISH COFFEE'**

In the winter of 1943 a flight returned to Foynes, due to bad weather, and as staff welcomed the returning flight, the airport restaurant Chef, Joe Sheridan, having been asked to prepare something warm, put some good Irish Whiskey into their coffees, and after sampling the drink one of the passengers approached Sheridan and asked if he had used Brazilian Coffee. Joe jokingly answered, "No that was Irish Coffee!!"

Shannon does not boast a large population catchment, and many of the earliest innovative developments to boost demand that have subsequently characterised Shannon's development are attributed to Brendan O'Regan. After starting at Foynes he moved to the airport, setting up of the World's first Duty Free shop. In 1951 he also created the Shannon College of Hotel Management, as he regarded well-trained and educated Hotel Managers as essential to successful tourism. The College (in 2013) is a part of the National University of Ireland, and has 27 staff and 404 students (181 are international from 19 countries).

Traffic grew at Shannon in the 1940s because as much as 85% of transatlantic traffic stopped there to refuel, but the advent of long-haul jet airliners changed that and also threatened Shannon's future. The Irish Government's response, with O'Regan's support, was to create a regional development agency, the Shannon Free Airport Development Company, in 1959, to promote regional tourism and industrial development in the region. The Shannon Free Industrial Zone became the world's first export processing zone in 1960, and today this site is used by over 100 companies, sustains 7,700 jobs and contributes €600m in payroll, local materials and services.

The Soviet Union still needed a trans-Atlantic service stopover, as destinations such as New York and Cuba could not be reached non-stop from Moscow, Shannon signed a bilateral agreement with the USSR in 1980 for the handling of Aeroflot flights. All the airport charges, even crew accommodation, were paid by a barter arrangement which involved the USSR supplying aviation fuel to Shannon. The Airport received the fuel by ship which docked at a

jetty connected to an 11 million gallons capacity fuel farm. A hydrant system was (and still is) used to distribute fuel on the apron, and the airport has never imposed restrictions on its customers nor limited the supply of fuel required. Aeroflot utilisation peaked in 1991, but already the airport's expertise had been utilised in a 1988 accord to enter into a joint-venture, Aer Rianta International, to operate Duty Free shops at Moscow Airport. Aeroflot's share of the profits paid for the painting and refurbishment of their aircraft at Shannon.

A very significant development was the establishment, in 1988, of a US Immigration Pre-Inspection facility. This allowed passengers flying to the US to complete US entry procedures while still in Europe. In 2009, and involving a €22m terminal redevelopment, this was updated to fully meet post 9/11 US Homeland Security requirements, and in 2010 the pre-clearance capability was extended to business jet operations. Shannon is the only non-US airport with the latter capability, and one of very few with passenger airliner capability.

With pre-clearance, operators can fly directly to 220 US Airports, use domestic terminals at International airports, and provide seamless passenger connections, If a passenger is denied US entry, as it occurs before they are in the US homeland, fines (imposed on the airline) are avoided. The pre-clearance process is brief enough to be achievable during a refuelling.

#### **UNIQUE LONDON-NEW YORK SERVICE**

The US pre-clearance service is utilised by a British Airways service (BA003) operated using an Airbus A318 (nominally a 100-seat airliner, but with just 32 luxurious seats) from London City Airport to New York Kennedy. This means departure from London is from within a few miles of the city district. The airport has the UK's shortest check-in time requirement – 20 minutes. The operation schedule is for departure at 16:15, arriving at Shannon for a 45-minute technical/passenger pre-clearance stop (17:30-18:15), and arriving at New York at 20:15 local time – elapsed flying time is 8.5 hours.

Since January 2013, Shannon is now an independent airport authority incorporating the Shannon Industrial Estate and a number of industrial parks in the Mid-West region. It processed 1.4 million passenger in 2012, and aims to be handling up to 2.5 million passengers within five years. Increase range of long-haul and transit flights, both passenger and cargo, making use of Shannon's favourable geographical position and US pre-clearance, plus a planned extension of the US pre-clearance process to include Cargo are cited as making such ambitious plans achievable.

The International Aviation Services Centre (IASC), a significant cluster of international businesses, primarily conducts aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul, provides aircraft technical support (even recycling), handle corporate and business aviation, and provides training and education is also developing. The airport plans to add new hangars, state of the art cargo facilities, and a corporate jet centre, potentially creating an additional 3,500 jobs within five years.

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