

Getting the Electric

Louise Hegarty

'Before getting the electric, we had no running water, no refrigeration, no machine for washing. We were bound to daylight hours. Electricity meant parish hall dances and colour and fun. It was a release from the drudgery. It meant we could finally see ourselves.'

The first **induction coil** was invented in 1836 by Nicholas Callan, a priest and scientist from Louth. This early form of transformer contributed greatly to the widespread distribution of electricity throughout the world.



The advantages of electricity to the agricultural industry and the day-to-day lives of farmers would be undeniably immense. It would lead to an improvement in hygiene and safety standards, the simplifying of many daily tasks and a rise in efficiency, which would result in greater profits. It would also make rural Ireland an attractive site for new industries. It is imperative therefore that such a scheme begins without further delay.

- 'Electricity in Rural Ireland' by A. Byrne published in *Muintir na Tíre* (Issue 22, March 1929, p.8)

Thomas McLaughlin (1896 - 1971) was born in Drogheda. After studying in UCD and UCG, McLaughlin moved to Berlin in 1922 to work for the German electrical engineering company Siemens-Schuckert. He returned to Ireland in December 1923 where he became one of the key figures in the Shannon hydroelectric scheme. He later became the executive director of the EBS.

In Cavan there was a great fire,
Judge McCarthy was sent to inquire,
It would be a shame, if the nuns were
to blame,

So it had to be caused by a wire.
- Flann O'Brien & Tom O'Higgins

In our country, electrification is more than merely producing light or power. It is bringing light into darkness... we are going to put into the homes of our people in rural areas a light which will light up their minds as well as their homes. If we do that, we will have brought a new atmosphere and a new outlook to many of these people.

- James Larkin Jnr, TD, speaking during the Second Stage debate on the Electricity Supply (Amendment) Bill, 1944

... I hope to see the day that when a girl gets a proposal from a farmer she will inquire not so much about the number of cows, but rather concerning the electrical appliances that she will require before she gives her consent, including not merely electric light but a water heater, an electric clothes boiler, a vacuum cleaner and even a refrigerator.

- Minister Seán Lemass speaking during the Second Stage debate on the Electricity Supply (Amendment) Bill, 1944

Customs-Free Airport Act, 1947

- 2.—(1) The Minister, with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance, may by order declare that, on and after a specified date, the land enclosed within the limits defined by the order shall be the Customs-free airport for the purposes of this Act.
- (2) The Minister, with the concurrence of the Minister for Finance, may from time to time by order amend the order under subsection (1) of this section by varying the limits of the airport.
- (3) The airport shall comprise only land which for the time being belongs to the State.



The **Rural Area Organiser** was an important figure in developing the relationship between the ESB and local people. The job involved encouraging householders to sign up to the scheme as well as advising on the purchase of electrical appliances.

Once upon a time there was a man and a woman who lived with their two children—a girl and a boy—on a small farm. Beside their house was a fairy fort. The woman was pregnant with a child and late one night she gave birth to a little boy. They warned the two older children never to leave the window to the bedroom open in case a fairy entered and took the baby, who was vulnerable...

- *The Changeling* transcribed by a member of our volunteer transcription project, duchas.ie

**What does rural electrification mean to you?
How can you get it to your house
and farmyard?**

AN ACT TO MAKE PROVISION FOR THE FORMATION AND REGISTRATION OF A COMPANY HAVING FOR ITS PRINCIPAL OBJECTS THE ACQUISITION, ERECTION, AND OPERATION OF SUGAR FACTORIES IN SAORSTÁT ÉIREANN, AND TO PROVIDE FOR THE ACQUISITION BY THE MINISTER FOR FINANCE OF SHARE CAPITAL OF SUCH COMPANY, FOR THE GIVING OF GUARANTEES BY THE STATE IN RELATION TO DEBENTURES ISSUED BY SUCH COMPANY, FOR THE COMPULSORY ACQUISITION OF LAND AND THE CONSTRUCTION, MAINTENANCE, AND OPERATION OF TRANSPORT WORKS BY SUCH COMPANY, AND FOR OTHER MATTERS CONNECTED WITH THE MATTERS AFORESAID. [23rd August, 1933.]

The switching on ceremony was an important part of the process and generally featured a dance, a dinner and speeches from local politicians, members of the clergy and representatives of the ESB.

- *Switching on: A History of Rural Electrification in Ireland* by John Swanzy (Mweelrea Press, 2016)

This is the tenth issue of the staff magazine and we are now well into the swing of things. We have completed at least one area in each county with some counties already having completed two or three. Before the end of this year we will be adding another five construction crews to the ten already working in the field. Shortly, we will also be increasing the number and variety of appliances available in our showroom

- Editor's Letter, *REO News* (vol. 10, September 1948, p1)

A backslider was a householder who had initially signed up for the electricity scheme but who changed their minds once crews arrived.

Each area was canvassed in order to assess interest and need and to promote the benefits of electricity. A majority needed to sign up to the scheme in order for it to proceed. Showrooms were opened so that electrical appliances could be demonstrated to the public. Routes were surveyed, budgets were drawn up and then the erection of electricity poles began.

- Swanzy, *ibid.*

Virginia O'Brien (1898 - 1988) was the longest serving chairwoman of the Irish Countrywomen's Association. During her lifetime she witnessed significant changes in the lives of rural Irish people: the advent of independence, the rural electrification scheme and membership of the EEC. She was married to Frank O'Brien until his death and they had five children together.

THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND ACT, 1948

AN ACT TO REPEAL THE EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY (EXTERNAL RELATIONS) ACT 1936, TO DECLARE THAT THE DESCRIPTION OF THE STATE SHALL BE THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, AND TO ENABLE THE PRESIDENT TO EXERCISE THE EXECUTIVE POWER OR ANY EXECUTIVE FUNCTION OF THE STATE IN OR IN CONNECTION WITH ITS EXTERNAL RELATIONS. [21ST DECEMBER, 1948]

BE IT ENACTED BY THE OIREACHTAS AS FOLLOWS:—

The key-note of Electric Water-Heating is simplicity. There is no complicated ritual of turning handles at the psychological moment – you just turn the hot water tap.

'They were young men. They looked like my grandsons. But they did the job well. There was a lot of interest from everyone and we would all go out to watch them erect poles and string cables. My wife would bring them cups of tea and slices of warm brown bread.'

Transcript of recording made as part of a local history project:

Once it was dark and the speeches were over, we put out the paraffin lights and candles and the local priest switched on the big metal switch and then everything was bright. Myself and Davey ran out into the street and all the streetlights were on and we could run around in the dark. And we could see the lights all over, up the hills and far away. The fields twinkled. When we came back, we sneaked a small bit of porter and danced and got shouted at because we trampled on the marigolds.

You will want a light on in every room. Place it so as to give the best light where you need it most. In some cases you might want two or more lights. Make sure that your staircase light can be switched on or off from either the foot of the stairs or the landing.

Supply will be given to whole areas. An 'area' should be about 25 sq. miles. A parish or creamery district might conveniently form the basis of such an area.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The switching on ceremony will take place from 8 o'clock on Tuesday night the 14th of October in the parish hall. There will be a blessing from Father Aherne and opening speeches from Mrs O'Brien of the ICA and Mr Geary of the ESB. The switching on will happen at half past nine sharp. Following this there will be a dance with music provided by the West Coast Showband.

Statement of evidence of Garda [REDACTED] of An Garda Síochána made on the 16th October 1948. I hereby declare this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that if it is tendered in evidence I will be liable to prosecution if I state in it anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true. I was called to a house at [REDACTED] at 12:05am on the 15th of October 1948. I spoke with a man there who I know to be [REDACTED] who resides at the residence with his wife, [REDACTED], his three children and his mother-in-law. He informed me that his infant child had gone missing from the house. He and his wife had been at the parish hall and had returned to the house at approximately 11:20pm. He says that his mother-in-law was in the house with the children while they were out and that she was asleep in the back kitchen when they returned. They went upstairs to check on the children and found that the youngest [REDACTED] was missing. They searched the house, but he could not be found. His wife then left the premises to see if he had maybe wandered into the street and he followed her. The child is 2 years old and was wearing blue and white pyjamas when he went to bed. He has light brown hair and blue eyes. This statement has been read over by me and is correct.

Statement of [REDACTED] of [REDACTED], [REDACTED] taken on the 15th of October 1948 at [REDACTED] by Garda [REDACTED]. We, my wife [REDACTED] and I, saw [REDACTED] running through the street. We were on our way back from the switching on ceremony. I had consumed three drinks and my wife one. We were taking our time. We were admiring the new streetlights. Then we heard a woman screaming and crying and my wife said, 'is that _____?' She knows her from the ICA. And the woman was knocking on doors and was very distressed. We started to walk over to her and then her husband appeared and caught up with her and held her. We went to check that things were okay but obviously they weren't. I went back to the parish hall to alert Garda [REDACTED] and he accompanied me back to the street. *This statement has been read over by me is correct.*

The entire village came out to search in laneways and ditches and neighbours' gardens and fields and graveyards. But nothing. And no-one had seen anything of course because everyone had been at the switching on ceremony. There was no sign of anyone having gained entry to the house. The old woman downstairs never woke. The other children remained asleep in their beds. It was as if the child had just disappeared into thin air.

- *The Village in the Dark* by JB Duane
(New Editions, 1995)

HOLY HOUR TO PRAY FOR VOCATIONS on the 24th of October from 3 o'clock to 4 o'clock. All are welcome—prayer followed by tea and biscuits.

ANNUAL COLLECTION FOR CHARITY at all Masses during November.

SPECIAL MASS to be held this Sunday for the _____ family. Prayers will be said for the safe return of their young boy.

The weather has been difficult in recent weeks for crews working in the West and Northwest, which has meant that we are slightly behind schedule. More workers will be sent to help these crews catch up.

- Editor's Letter, *REO News* (vol 12, November 1948, p.1)

Statement of [REDACTED] of [REDACTED].
I hereby declare this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that if it is tendered in evidence I will be liable to prosecution if I state in it anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true. I noticed a man in the village in the days before the disappearance of the young boy. I didn't recognise him, which is unusual because we all know each other around here. He was about 5'10" with long dark hair. He was wearing a brown jacket and dark coloured pants. He didn't seem to have washed in a couple of days.

'Apparently she left the front door unlocked and her mother asleep downstairs. The older children didn't even wake up. Someone snuck in and took the baby. And I feel terrible for them. I do. But they were very careless. Leaving the children like that to go out drinking and dancing.'

A Garda source has informed *An Iar-Nuacht* that they have ruled out the involvement of any ESB workers or electricians in the recent disappearance of a two-year-old boy. It had been reported that the Gardaí were eager to speak to anyone who had been in the boy's home in the days prior to his abduction but these men have now been officially discounted as suspects.

- 'No connection between ESB and missing child' *An Iar-Nuacht* (20th October 1948)

Some people may think of electricity in the home as a luxury to provide comfort in various ways. This is to some extent true, but no housewife will need much propaganda to convince her that its labour-saving value in the domestic sphere is unchallengeable. An electric kettle will boil 12 pints of water for 1d. If you compare this with any other method of boiling water you will find that it is considerably cheaper and it is just as quick as any other method.

'I don't think that little boy ever left that house'

Transcript of recording made as part of a local history project: ... And then another little boy was snatched. God love us and save us. I remember praying for his parents every night. They were good people. Myself and Máire joined the search and we hoped that we would find something—a clue, some hope—but of course we didn't. The village was very glum.

'Most of these cases... you should look at a member of the family. That elderly woman, I never see her out and about. She stays inside always. I wonder if something...'

Statement of ██████ of ██████
I hereby declare this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that if it is tendered in evidence I will be liable to prosecution if I state in it anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true. ██████ admitted to me that he had taken the boy one night in ██████ pub. He laughed about it. We had consumed three pints between

APPEAL FOR INFORMATION - MISSING PERSON

DATE MISSING: SUNDAY 5TH DECEMBER 1948

18-MONTH-OLD BOY: SEÁN

HAIR COLOUR : BLONDE EYE COLOUR: LIGHT BLUE

LAST SEEN AT 11 O'CLOCK SUNDAY MORNING IN THE FRONT GARDEN OF HIS HOME

DRESSED IN CREAM TOP AND BOTTOMS

PLEASE ALERT THE GARDAÍ IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION

Gardaí are investigating whether there is any connection between the abductions of two infant children from the same area. No-one has yet been arrested in relation to the disappearances, but the Gardaí have started re-interviewing people in the locality. They are specifically looking to speak to anyone who was on New Road on the morning of the 5th of December.

- 'Gardaí investigate link in missing child cases' *An Iar-Nuacht* (7th December 1948)

Statement of ██████ of ██████ . I hereby declare this statement is true to the best of my knowledge and belief and I make it knowing that if it is tendered in evidence I will be liable to prosecution if I state in it anything which I know to be false or do not believe to be true. I was woken up one night just before the second child was taken—I think it was Monday—by the sound of a car outside. I am a light sleeper. My wife didn't wake. I went to the window. I didn't recognise the car. It just stopped in the middle of the road with the engine running. No-one got in or out and then after about five minutes it just drove off.

Extract from Garda report dated the 20th of December 1948: The man said that he was at home with his wife on the night in question. They live in ██████. He says that he may have come through the village before, but he couldn't remember. He says that he earns money doing odd jobs for people and travels about a lot.

Everybody here today has been deeply affected by the disappearance of the poor boy who was baptised in this very church. We will pray for his parents and for his siblings and for his wider family. We pray also for friends and neighbours, for the Gardaí and the volunteers who have been searching tirelessly to bring Seán back home.
- Homily of parish priest

After the disappearance of the second boy, the Gardaí came under increasing pressure to make an arrest. After interviewing and fingerprinting the adult population of the village they set their sights on the more likely of suspects: a labourer or drifter. They sought out men who had been known to be working or travelling through the area and tried to connect any of them to the two disappearances.

- *Missing: Ireland's Vanished Children* by Sorcha Cahalane (W&A Publishing, 2001)

LITIR UM THOGHCHÁIN

An bhfuil tú cráite le polaiteoirí éilíte?
Clann na Poblachta, LAB.

Stop ag vótáil do FG, FF,

Tabhair do vóta don iarrthóir neachspléach. Tabhair do vóta don iarrathóir fíor-Ghaelach.

- Geallaim díobh 32-contae Éire aontaithe. Áit a bhfuil COSC ar an teanga Béarla.
- Bac ar fhrithchléireachas.
- Táim réidh chun troid ar leith na daoine.
- Bac ar cistiú poiblí na páirtí polítíochta.
- Bac ar an gCummanachas.
- Tá sé soiléir san am atá inniú ann nach bhfuil meas againn ar saol an duine. Tá sé tabhachtach ansan go bhfuil ionadaí againn a bhfuil sásta troid ar son cearta daoine ó bhreith go bás nádúrtha.

Tabhair do Vóta Uimh. 1 do Séan F Verrity.

**One socket in every room is now regarded as essential for convenient living
- with two or three in some locations.**

... for Paraic, electricity means he can check on his animals early in the mornings or in the dark winter evenings with ease. He reckons he will increase his profits by at least 15% this year due to the increase in work he is able to...

- Extract from radio documentary on the rural electrification scheme (October 1952)

'My mother saved up her egg money to buy a brand new oven. We had a nice smart girl come to the house to demonstrate it for my mother. She made some brown bread to make sure the oven was working. She had a lovely dress on, and her hair was back from her face and I still think of it now every time I smell brown bread baking.'

I liked the cooker the best and I liked looking in all the cupboards. I liked how shiny and new everything was. They let us plug in some of the appliances to see how they worked.

- Extract from an essay written by a schoolchild for a competition run by the ICA

**2 SMALL BOYS MISSING AND
yET NOTHING IS DONE THEIR
aRE ThINGS THE GOVERNMENT
DON'T WANT U TO NO. THEIR
ARe MONSTERS IN THE
ELICTRICS THEIR TAKING
ARE CHILDREN. We NEED TO
PRTECT ARE FaMILies WE are
BECOMIGN sick and tired ARE
CHILDREN ARE SICK BECAUSE
O THEM lord GOD HeLP US ALL**

The middle-aged labourer who was arrested in connection with the recent disappearances of small children has been released without charge. Since October of last year two infants have been abducted from areas in the west of the country. No other arrests have been made.

- 'Man released without charge in baby-napping cases' *An Iar Nuacht*
(30th March 1949)

We have been thinking a lot lately about the real real-life affect our work has on people's day-to-day lives. We have seen it already: housewives who now have more time for their hobbies, farmers who have increased production. And we also like to believe that we have improved the quality of people's lives outside the realm of work...

- Editor's Letter, REO News (vol 16, March 1949, p.1)

The initial connection between the disappearances and the introduction of electricity was unwittingly made by An Garda Síochána themselves. In the days before the first abduction two electricians had been in the boy's house installing appliances. Gardaí interviewed these two men but they both had alibis for the night in question. They were completely ruled out as suspects but that tinge of doubt around the ESB never fully left the minds of some villagers.

- Duane, *ibid*.

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE	
MINUTES OF JUNE MONTHLY MEETING OF COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, ON 10TH APRIL 1949 AT 2.00 P.M.	
PRESENT	MINISTER O'REILLY, CLLR O'DONOVAN, CLLR Ó MEALÓID, CLLR HIGGINS, CLLR SINCLAIR, CLLR LYNCH, CLLR HACKETT, CLLR McGRATH, CLLR MULLANE, CLLR TWOMEY, CLLR SCANLAN, CLLR PHILPOTT, CLLR FRANKS, CLLR Ó BRAONÁIN AND REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ESB
APOLOGIES	Cllr Mullins, Cllr O'Brien, Cllr Hynes, Cllr O'Sullivan
CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES	Minister O'Reilly spoke about the need for calm heads. He expressed regret and concern for the families of the missing boys. He introduced Mr Geary of the ESB to speak directly about the safety of electricity in homes. Mr. F Higgins circulated information to the members on the proposed budget.
NOTICES OF MOTION	To approve the draft deed of mortgage to provide a loan for the completion of O'Mahony Park.

Advice to parents:

- Make sure that your doors and windows are locked and bolted
- Do not allow your children out after dark or to play on their own
- All children need to be supervised on their way to and from school
- Please alert the Gardaí to any suspicious activity

Extract from Garda report dated the 14th of April 1949: The woman believed that the child was not hers. She said that he had been swapped with another child. She wanted us to take the boy into care and to issue a missing persons report for her own child. She seemed to be under the impression that something —‘a fairy’—had got into the house through the electricity cables and had taken her child and swapped him for ‘a changeling’.

A group of men arrived at ESB headquarters in Athy yesterday morning to deliver a letter on behalf of the village of D[REDACTED]. The area has recently suffered a number of unsolved abductions of children and these men believe that the ESB have a case to answer. Some local villagers have linked the disappearances to the recent switching on of electricity in the area. The ESB had no comment to make.
- Translation from Raidió na Gael broadcast (17th April 1949)

I would like to bring the Minister’s attention to the very worrying case of two missing children in [REDACTED]. I have been speaking to local people there in recent weeks who say they feel they have been forgotten about. There now appears to be only three full-time Gardaí working on the case. There has been little to no reassurance from the authorities. It seems to me that the Government has abandoned the people of [REDACTED]. Will there be any justice? Can the Minister tell me what he is planning to do?
- Oral Questions in the Dáil (18th April 1949)

This morning, the head of the ESB was being asked to clarify comments he reportedly made at a private luncheon over the weekend in which he described those who refused electricity as ‘backwards’ and ‘idiots’.

- Radio Éireann (8th May 1949)

EXTRACT FROM REPORT BY HEALTH BOARD INTO OUTBREAK OF CERTAIN SYMPTOMS IN [REDACTED], JANUARY - MAY 1949: We have compiled a list of people who have reported to their General Practitioner any symptoms that did not have an obvious cause. These symptoms include headaches, vomiting, stomach cramps, tingling, numbness, burning and chest pain. The following list is a sample:

- A 45-year-old woman who reported sudden occasions of vomiting and experiencing headaches after using her electric cooker.
- A teenage girl who described having stomach cramps, headaches and nausea, which were not alleviated by any pain-relieving medication or anti-inflammatories.
- A 21-year-old man who had experienced tingling in his extremities and weakness in his upper arms which got better when he was outdoors.
- A 52-year-old man who was found outside his home tearing his clothes off because he said that there were wires in them.
- A 10-year-old boy who had a high fever and numbness in the extremities.
- Two sisters aged 18 and 20 who complained of debilitating pain in their left upper abdomen with no obvious reason for said pain.
- A 60-year-old woman who stated that her neighbours were playing tricks on her using electricity.
- A woman in her mid-forties who said she was ‘full of electricity’ and who was kept up at night by the sound of men digging in her cellar and laying electric wires.

O Murchu, Parait suddenly on 23rd of April 1949. Much loved by his wife

The three-year-old girl who was declared missing early this morning has been found and returned home to her parents safe and sound. It seems that the child wandered off while shopping with her family and...

- Translation from Raidió na
Gael broadcast (20th April
1949)

**Electric Water-Heating
is peculiarly suitable
for use in doctor's and
dentist's surgeries
owing to the ease of
economy of installation,
the simplicity and
cleanliness of operation,
and the complete
absence of fumes and
odours**

You would barely recognise the village now we are so suspicious and untrusting. I find myself crossing the road to avoid people. I keep my head down to avoid making eye contact. We do not know our neighbours anymore like we should. I want to be more open, but we all have that lingering doubt in our minds. The Guards are telling us that it is most likely a drifter, an outsider but it could still be one of us. One of us could have kidnapped these children and done... Oh, I can't bear thinking about it. What would anyone want with those poor boys? Couldn't they have just left us alone? And the Guards have no leads, no suspects. For a while, we had several Gardaí stationed here. We would see them on their beat and they would give us comfort, but now we see them less and less. They are slowly forgetting us. They want to forget us. This is a crime that will never be solved, and they want rid of it.

- Extract from letter dated
18th April 1949, found in the
apartment of the late Ms Julia
O'Keeffe of New York City

INFORMATION LEAFLET FROM THE ESB:

Electricity is the safest form of power available for both domestic and commercial use. Electricity poles and cables are organised and installed by highly trained workers and the wiring of your house and farm can only be done by a trained electrician. Rest assured, you and your family are safe with electricity in the home. If you still have doubts, please visit our showroom where we will demonstrate various electrical appliances and give advice on what is best for you and your home.

Two thousand people marched yesterday to bring national attention to what they believe is the mishandling of an investigation by the Gardaí into the disappearance of two infant children in the same area over a six-month period. The protesters are demanding an inquiry into the alleged mishandling of the matter by authorities.

- 'Protesters Demand Answers', *The Irish Times* (29th April 1949)

Virginia O'Brien, Chairperson of the Irish Countrywomen's Association, has urged people to continue to support rural electrification. She was speaking at an event last weekend regarding recent protests against the scheme, following links between the introduction of electricity and the disappearances of two young children. People have also been complaining of health issues relating to electricity in their homes. She informed the audience that the Gardaí and local health officials had completely ruled out any such connections and that people who perpetuated these falsehoods were doing damage to the local community.

- 'No link says ICA Chair' *An Iar-Nuacht* (30th April 1949)

A **mass hysteria** is a collective obsessional behaviour where a group of people spontaneously manifest similar hysterical symptoms.

**IT WILL NEVER STOP THEY WILL CONTINUE TO RUIN FAMILIES WE NEED
TOO TAKE BACK CONTROL NO-ONE WILL HELP US WE ARE ON OUR OWN**

'I have not been able to sleep through the night since they put in the electrics. It's doing something to my brain. I feel groggy and tired all day. My wife feels nauseous. She has had weakness in her limbs. She's so weak some days she can't get out of bed. The doctor says he can do nothing for her.'

'It's clear that we're not being told all the facts. Now I know there's been talk of monsters. I'm an educated man. I don't believe in monsters. But I can't help but see a connection between these cables in our houses and the disappearances of our children. There is something. There is something affecting our children. Why aren't the ESB answering our questions?'

Transcript of interview with Minister O'Reilly on Radio Éireann, 3rd May 1949:

Q: ... Minister O'Reilly, these crimes have occurred in your own constituency. are An Garda Síochána doing enough?

A: Firstly, I want to say that I completely understand the frustrations and the worry people are feeling as regards these cases. I want to assure everyone that the Gardaí are doing the best they can to get these two children back to their parents. I'm a parent myself and...

Q: But I mean realistically, and I don't really want to say this, but realistically what are the chances of the boys being returned to their families safely?

A: I'm not going to get into that kind of talk. We need to think of the parents —some of whom will be listening to this. We need to think of them and how we can support them...

Q: But Minister, one arrest has been made and that man was subsequently released. No other suspects. This man has now died, and it seems now that the trail has run cold. Will we ever get an answer?

Gardaí say that further investigations are needed to establish whether a man found in a ditch at the side of the road died from injuries due to a hit-and-run. A post-mortem was carried out on Monday by the State Pathologist, but the results have not yet been released. Gardaí are looking for any witnesses who may have been travelling on the Old Road between the hours of 5:30am and 6:30am on the 23rd of April to come forward.

'I'm a farmer. I can see the benefits of electricity to my life, but I don't believe it is worth putting my young family at risk. Until we have found out what has happened, all electricity to the village should be switched off.'

'The important thing is to remain calm.'

- Radio Éireann (14th July 1949)

The electric cooker has been proved to be the cheapest method of preparing meals. It is quick too because of the speed-o-matic plates which are fitted to every new cooker.

First the lights went off. This happened suddenly one evening a couple of days after a rowdy meeting in the local hall. No kettles were boiled, and all electrical farming equipment was stopped. Candles and matches and paraffin lamps were passed around. Nobody outside of the village really noticed anything was amiss until the electricity poles and cables started crashing down. Men were sent out to replace or repair the poles, but they would just be torn down once more. The poles were cut down and used for firewood. Ovens and dishwashers were hauled out of houses and dumped in front of the ESB showroom. Door-to-door collections were made to collect lightbulbs...

- Duane, *ibid.*

'We had a glimpse of what life could be like. It was fleeting. I tell my grandchildren about it, but they don't believe it.'

There were reports of at least two households who refused to stop using electricity. They enjoyed the benefits that came with it and they did not want to return to harder times. Local opinion of them was hostile. The thought that they would be willing to put their children at risk for the sake of convenience was too much for their neighbours. These families were forced out of their homes, and effectively hounded out of the village.

- Duane, *ibid.*

Transcript of recording made as part of a local history project: ... and things got very scary. The streetlights were smashed. My father ripped the cables from the house and removed the hoover and cooker. My parents didn't want any hassle.

... from the nuns in Italy who believed they were cats and the dancing manias of the 12th century to the small village in rural Ireland that refused electricity for fears of 'monsters in the cables'...

- *A Brief History of Madness*, by Madeleine Heffernan (Tigh Uí Dhrisceoil, 1987)

The washing machine is situated directly adjoining the sink so that the wringing may be carried out without wetting the floor.

Two men have been arrested on suspicion of setting fire to an ESB showroom just outside of [REDACTED]. The men were protesting the introduction of electricity in the area. Gardaí are looking for witnesses to the incident.

- Radio Éireann (20th July 1949)

They hold aloft their candles and gas lamps —symbols of their revolt against what they believe is the scourge of electricity. Some have called them Luddites; others have mocked them for their supposedly backwards ways but none of that has stopped them. They have remained steadfast in their belief. They are strong in their principles in a way that very few people are these days and I have to say I respect them for that.

- 'An Irishman's Diary' *The Irish Times* (1st August 1949)

And because he was a man, he tried to fix her: he bought her things, he listened, he yelled at her, he brought her to a doctor. He tried to change himself, tried to make himself into something new. But nothing seemed to work. He could never make her whole again and so he decided that instead he would create a life for them together: he found a cottage by the beach and placed her there. He cooked for her, he held her, he loved her, he married her. He kept others away. He made their lives together as small as they could be. They were each other's secret. They were cocooned. Then came a brief flickering moment of joy: a baby came, and her belly grew. And she was happy, and he marvelled at how happy she was until the blood came and took the baby away.

- Extract from *This Gathering Light* by Angela Czochara (2006)

Across the country parishes lit up. The lives of farmers and rural housewives improved dramatically in a short space of time. No longer did water have to be drawn from a well and carried by cart. No longer was cooking restricted to an open fire. By 1965, 80% of rural households were connected to the electricity supply.

- Swanzy, *ibid.*

MEMORANDUM

FOR: ATTENTION OF THE MINISTER

SUBJECT: RURAL ELECTRIFICATION

DATE: 10th SEPTEMBER 1949

Local party members advise against the forced introduction of electricity in the village of [REDACTED] in County [REDACTED]. The presence of the army will only exacerbate an already tense situation.

A representative from the ESB has also expressed concern for the wellbeing of their employees if they are forced to work in the area. As you know there have been reports of ESB workers being attacked, work gear being stolen, and a display shop being set on fire.

In loving memory of [REDACTED] who has been missing from his home since 14th October 1948. Mammy and Daddy think about you every day.

Transcript of recording made as part of a local history project: ... I would tell Mammy I was going to stay with Máire and she would tell her mam that she was staying with me and then we would go and stay with Davey's cousin. Davey was someone I knew from the village. His cousin lived in [REDACTED] and she had a record player and we listened to jazz records that her sister in America sent her. And we would dance in her living room and her mother made us a roast chicken dinner.

I live with my mammy and daddy, my two sisters, and a dog called Rusty. I have been in this new school for three months and I like it a lot and I have made lots of friends. I do miss my old friends and my old school and the rocky place where we would go and play. But here my room is bright and there aren't monsters and my mammy and daddy are happy. I liked my old home a lot but then things were scary, and we had to come here. Everything is nice here.

- Essay by a child that formed part of an exhibition in the National Museum of Country Life
(March – October 2016)

For decades the village of [REDACTED] has been ridiculed for its refusal to be welcomed into the 20th—not to mention 21st—century. However, the truth is altogether more worrying as the team from *Prime Time Investigates* uncovered Monday night on RTÉ One. The programme provided a rare insight into a people who have effectively closed themselves off from the outside world.

We are first introduced to Mary, a pleasant woman in her late sixties who sees nothing wrong with the hard work involved in washing, cleaning and cooking without electricity. She says she was raised to work hard, and she sees no problem with it. We subsequently join local men at a pub where they sing songs and tell stories and create their own entertainment. They speak in an odd, old-fashioned dialect that marks them out as different. It is a quaint kind of life and one that looks appealingly nostalgic until we meet Neasa.

Neasa grew up in the village and was subject to physical abuse at the hands of her family. She escaped when she was 18 and has never returned. For her it is not just about the electricity, she explains, the darkness is a form of control. The village does not allow strangers to stay long and they do not respect the authority of the Gardaí or the State. A place where no light shines will always be ripe for abuse...

‘An Dorchadas/The Darkness’, *The Irish Times*
(15th December 2009)

With the switching on of electricity in the Black Valley, Co. Kerry in June 1976, the whole of the island was finally electrified. Except of course for one village which refused to be dragged into the 20th century. It remains the only area in the country without electricity to this day.

- Swanzy, *ibid.*

It has been now over 30 years since two small boys vanished from their homes in [REDACTED].

A recently formed community group is staging a rally this lunchtime to commemorate the disappearances.

They will lay flowers at the locations the boys were last seen—a bedroom, a front garden, a pavement—before continuing on to the local Garda station.

The Gardaí have responded to concerns by launching a renewed appeal for information.

The Garda Superintendent in charge of the investigation said that the passage of time might have made some people more willing to come forward with information. He reassured people that they will be treated respectfully and discreetly.

Anyone with information is asked to contact the Garda Confidential Line.

- ‘30th anniversary of disappearances’ *The Irish Examiner* (October 1979)

The Numbers

The Electricity Supply Board was established on **11 August 1927**.

1 million poles, **100,000** transformers and **75,000** miles of line **300,000** homes connected.

By **1946** the number of consumers had reached **240,000** using **380 million** units per annum.

This is the last ever issue of the REO News and we hope that you have gained some insight and support from what we have published.

- Editor's Letter, *REO News* (vol. 168, November 1961)

'I would do my homework in the evening by lamplight. At school we had dry toilets that were only flushed once a day.'

The initial amusement and subsequent alarm of some public servants in relation to a village in the West which had turned against the rural electrification scheme has been revealed in the latest batch of state documents released under the 30-year rule. Memos from the Department of Rural Affairs reveal the dismissive attitude of civil servants towards the area. The village had suffered several child abductions which were attributed to the recently installed electricity cables. The villagers become increasingly suspicious resulting in the tearing down of the electricity infrastructure. Their belief was that there were 'monsters' in the electricity lines.

- 'State papers: a round-up' *The Irish Examiner* (27th December 1978)

Looking for a digital detox holiday on a budget? Then take a look at some of these amazing properties in [REDACTED] in Ireland.

Step back in time to a simpler era. The entire village has no electricity which means you can have the opportunity to switch off completely.

Enjoy your dinner by paraffin lamp, practice mindfulness while you wash clothes by hand, learn how to cook your food over an open fire...

- Article in *The New York Times Travel Section*, (7th June 2012)

Proper lighting in the home or workshop is the best guarantee of continued good eyesight for adults and children.

The expectation in official circles was that over time old superstitions would fade away, the older generation would die off and electricity would be reintroduced without incident. And yet the village remains in complete darkness to this very day. Partly this is to do with geography—it is situated in an isolated rural area—and partly it is due to a lack of financial support from the government. When the local population started to rip out poles and cables, the ESB were sent to restore the light, but their workers were attacked and abused. On the completion of the rural electrification scheme, the government refused further State funding for the area unless the locals agreed to allow electricity back in their homes. They declined and the stalemate has continued ever since.

- Duane, *ibid.*

Welcome to *Fade Away*, the podcast about people who have disappeared without trace. In Season 1, we examined the case of Marcy Wainwright, a woman who one day vanished from her factory job. In Season 2, we focused on the Clement family, who haven't been seen since Christmas Eve 1865. Now in Season 3, we are looking into the alleged abductions of two children in...

... one of many who say that this is a cover up. The police missed vital clues while neighbours looked the other way. A lot of coincidences. What was really going on? I would recommend everyone to read *Satan in Ireland* by JM Henry to learn more about satanic groups that were...

- Extract from blog entitled 'The Disappearances 1948 - 49'



Gardaí have confirmed that they are pursuing several new leads of inquiry following renewed interest in the cases arising out of a true-crime podcast which has...

- 'Podcast leads to new avenues of inquiry',
An Iar Nuacht (23rd November 2015)

'This third season has been a real breakthrough for us. We got good numbers and interaction for season one and two but this year things have just gotten crazy,' says Weeverman. And what does she say to critics who accuse the true-crime podcast genre of unethical behaviour and exploitation. 'It's something we are both very aware of. That's part of the reason we chose crimes that were committed at least a generation ago. We don't want relatives to be upset and having to read... '

- Extract from interview with Harriet Gose and Francine Weeverman, *Flash Magazine* (13th April 2015)

Intro to *Fade Away*, August 2014



TO: info@fadeawaypodcast.com

FROM: -----

RE: PODCAST — INFO

DATE: 29 Sept 2015, 13:47

Hi,

My name is I've just come across your podcast and I think I might have some information for you.

My grandmother grew up in the village and she was there when the abductions took place. She emigrated to Canada in the 60s. She never spoke about what happened but after she died, we found some notes she had written which may be useful to

Discussion thread on Episode 6: What Did the Neighbours Know?

C_A_Dupin	The problem the cops had was that they believed ‘everyone was at the switching on’ so they never got a proper list of people together. And we all know of course that Mrs Geary didn’t attend because she was feeling unwell and so she went home by herself. And the O’Reillys didn’t attend either—were they going to a wedding the next day or something...	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite
M4Murder	But are we seriously suggesting that any of these people were involved in the kidnapping of the first child? What’s the motive here? The first child to me is the key because he was upstairs in his own bed. That’s not a ‘by chance’ kidnapping. That was planned. The switching on was the opportunity they needed.	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite
Hastings	What about the witness statement from Francis Byrne? She saw footsteps in her garden but the police never took photos or imprints.	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite
ChndlerR1	[comment deleted]	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite
C_A_Dupin	@ChndlerR1 This is a serious thread to discuss matters that arise in the course of the podcast. That’s serious discussion only pertaining to the facts of the case. If you want to speculate wildly there are plenty of other forums for that.	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite
M4Murder	@Hastings Yeah, I thought that was interesting too. Like, FB’s garden backed on to the victims so someone could likely have escaped that way. They didn’t dwell on it on the pod though so maybe they know more than they are letting on about that right now.	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite
TruCrimFan	Hi! new to the thread. I’m just wondering what people feel about the parents. Am not talking shit I just am genuinely wondering. It’s kind of like Occam’s razor. A lot of the neighbors seem to think that the house was a little dysfunctional. Maybe they were abusing the kid or they killed him accidentally or something. The other kidnappings were a cover up. Again, please don’t ban me. I really want to know more.	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite
C_A_Dupin	@ TruCrimFan There are threads about the parents. Check out the search bar.	Like	Dislike	Comment	Favourite

Reviewers have often suggested illusions in his music to PJ Harvey, Steely Dan and Captain Beefheart, but all of this was news to the young Sammy Lynch. He had never heard of any of these artists. He grew up in a tiny village in the West of Ireland without electricity and therefore no record players, no radios and no internet. He had grown up with music, of course, but it was all traditional melodies and songs that had been written hundreds of years prior. For his twelfth birthday he asked for a guitar and started immediately to write his own weird little songs.

- 'Darkness into Light' by Oliver Rapid, *PPOPP Magazine* (Issue 381)

... a link in the minds of many people even today between the erection of electricity poles and the disappearance of fairies, banshees, leprechauns. Maybe their homes were indeed disturbed by workers or perhaps this is just a metaphor for...

- 'The Last of the Fairies' by Sam Beaton *Hibernian Monthly* (vol 67, 3rd August 1998, p. 22 27)

The Network Renewal Plan began in the late 1990s to upgrade the electricity supply to reflect the needs of modern Ireland.

There remains a lot of interest from an anthropological view as well. The village has retained many of the old methods and routines that modernisation has swallowed up in the rest of the country. Old methods of cooking have been preserved and farming practices from a bygone age remain commonplace. Their isolation has preserved the village as if frozen in time.

- Duane, *ibid.*

**Naw purteen narr honchee
Tch buteagh y ar maggee
Fado al sunee thist giy arournagh**

- Song written in the local dialect

**You Won't Believe These Places
That Have No Electricity**

- *Buzzfeed* (March 2019)

The link between 'screen time' (short-wavelength, artificial blue light emitted from electronic devices) and sleep disorders has been well established in several studies (Delahunt et al., 2015; Brennan & Jones 2008; Parsons 2016). The comparisons as set out in Graph 1b shows the differences in sleep quality between Group A (control group) and Group B (digital natives) ...

- Comparative evaluation of the health effects of technology between digital natives and digital naïfs, Goetsmen & Waine (2017)

On the way out of the village is a memorial to the two children. It is well-kept and is always covered in flowers and teddy bears and mass cards.

- Cahalane, *ibid.*

Mary Lane (1924 - 2020): Mary Lane worked as the chief archivist for the ESB between 1966 and 1996. She trained initially as a librarian and worked for a time for UCD before joining the ESB as assistant archivist in 1945. On the retirement of her predecessor, she took over the main role.

John 1:5 And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.