

JONES ENGINEERING GROUP

A Journey Across Three Centuries

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A catalogue record for this book is available
from Trinity College Dublin Library
ISBN: 978-1-906429-27-0

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Published by Associated Editions on
behalf of the Jones Engineering Group
Publishing adviser: Anne Brady VERMILLON
Editor: Dermott Barrett,
Barrett Business Communications
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Archive digitisation: Fionn McCann
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Designed and typeset by VERMILLON

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Julieanne O'Neill and Barry Steele. With thanks
to Dermott Barrett for his editorial work.

The institutions

We would like to thank and to acknowledge the help
and support we have received from the librarians,
archivists and staff of: The Construction Industry
Federation (CIF), Dominican Archives, Dublin City
Library and Archives Pearse Street, Dublin 2, Dublin
Institute of Technology, the General Registration
Office (GRO), Glasnevin Cemetery, National Archives
of Ireland, National Library of Ireland, University
College Dublin Library and the Library of
Trinity College Dublin.

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Dominican Archives, Dublin City Library and Archives,
The Examiner, Gallery Oldham, Guinness Archives,
Irish Builder and Engineer, *Irish Independent*, Irish
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Tommy Purcell, RTÉ, Sisk Group, Barry Steele
and Simon Watson.

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Front cover image: A Guinness grain ship moored at
Ringsend Malt Store in 1948. The adjoining building
was to become our head office, Waterways House.
We have been working with Guinness for over half
a century.

(Guinness archive, Diageo Ireland)


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CLARA CULLEN



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Author's note

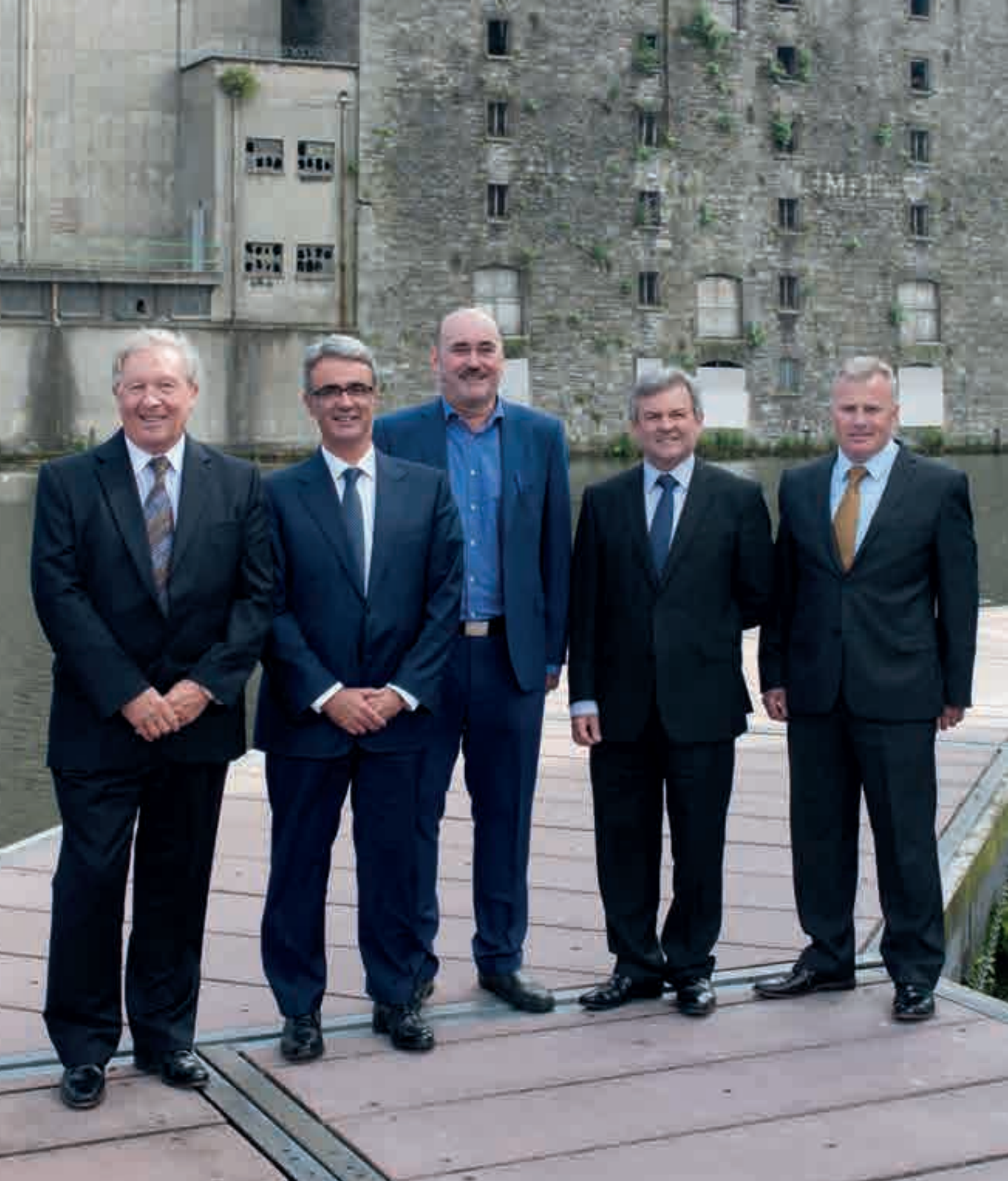
Researching and writing the history of H.A. O'Neil Limited, the Jones Engineering Group and its predecessor the Jones Group has been a challenging and hugely rewarding project. It is the unique story of a company that had its beginnings 125 years ago in a small plumbing company which, under the direction of men of vision and acumen, has weathered the various political, social and economic challenges of the Irish state to become the industry leader it is today. It is the story of a company with an entrepreneurial spirit and a strong work ethic and one where the core values and commitment to quality

of the Jones Engineering Group's founders continues today. The role of the Jones Engineering Group can be summed up in the words of one of the group's directors – 'Architects design buildings, builders build buildings, the Jones Engineering Group breathes life into those buildings'.

The author would like to acknowledge the help, encouragement and support she has received from the project team, from the directors of the Jones Engineering Group and from the staff, both present and retired, who have contributed to this history.

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Foreword

Very few firms remain in business long enough to celebrate their centenaries, let alone 125 years of operations, which makes H.A. O'Neil Limited, the founding company of the Jones Engineering Group, a unique firm. This book sets out the history of the group, from its founding by Harry O'Neil in 1890, through the modest scale of its operations in those early days to the present era in which the group operates not only in Ireland but around Europe and the Middle East.

As a young man, Harry O'Neil emigrated to the United States, learned his trade there and returned to Ireland imbued with a vision of how the plumbing and mechanical services industry could develop. He appreciated from the outset that education, training and innovation would be key elements of future success, combined with a desire to share his experience with the construction industry in particular and the wider community in general.

Based on this vision, the core values of recruiting, nurturing and developing the best people have been a cornerstone of our group's development from those earliest days. We are very much a people business in which opportunities are realised, challenges are met and success is driven by teams of the best people available.

When we pause for a moment to look over our past, we realise that the history of the group has in many ways mirrored the history of Ireland, and at the same time, has made an important contribution to our nation. H.A. O'Neil played a significant role in the development of our national infrastructure in the early days of our country's independence. Despite difficult periods such as the 'economic war' of the 1930s and the Second World War in the 1940s, the group maintained its commitment to training, education and innovation. Thus, when industrial and social

development accelerated in the 1950s, when we joined the EEC in 1973 and became a major centre for multinational business, we had the skills and expertise available to develop and build the services infrastructure needed to accommodate the nation's extensive industrial, social and commercial development.

Over its long history, the group has been led by just three people. Harry O'Neil guided the company from its founding in 1890 to 1947, steering the business through the turbulent times of the first half of the twentieth century. In 1948 his apprentice, Chris Jones, took charge and led the company until 1993. During that time, Chris built the firm into one of Ireland's leading and most respected group of companies. Since 1993, Eric Kinsella has led the group and while maintaining the legacies of Harry and Chris, has grown the group into a truly international business with a reputation second to none for delivering complex projects. Today a team led by Jim Curley, with Stephen McCabe, Shane Gillece and John King are taking the business and the group into the future.

Were Harry O'Neil to return to the group today, no doubt he would be surprised to see that it has developed from a small plumbing business in Rathmines Dublin into a leading international engineering services contractor that operates in Ireland, Europe and the Middle East and is the contractor of choice for clients ranging from the public sector to leading edge multinational companies in the pharmaceutical, food, data and semiconductor industries. There is also no doubt that at the same time he would be delighted to see that his commitment to education, training and innovation has been retained, together with the ethos of a family business.

What follows is our story.

Opposite: Pictured at Waterways House with the historic Boland's Mills in the background following the announcement of senior management appointments effective from 1 January 2016 were, from left: Eric Kinsella, executive chairman of the group, John King, group financial controller and group director, Shane Gillece, group director mechanical, Jim Curley, group chief executive and Stephen McCabe, group director electrical.



1 The story of Harry O'Neil

There are few Irish companies in existence today that can trace their origins back to the end of the nineteenth century. This is particularly true of companies operating in the highly competitive engineering and construction sectors. Jones Engineering Group is an enterprise that started from humble beginnings in 1890. After an initial period of growth it then faced into all the challenges put in its way as a newly independent Ireland forged its identity, often under difficult economic conditions. The evolution and growth of the company was down to timely and wise decisions at critical moments in the development of the business, coupled with the vision and tenaciousness of a number of outstanding individuals who shaped the group into the success it is today.

The story of Jones Engineering Group starts with a young plumber, a person of exceptional vision and ambition, called Harry Austin O'Neil. Like so many Irish people before and after him, he left Ireland to seek work in the United States. However, instead of putting down permanent roots in America, Harry brought his enormous experience back home to Dublin and set up his own successful plumbing and heating business in 1890, towards the dawn of the twentieth century, when the plumbing and heating industry was being transformed.

His business in time became a limited company, being registered with the Companies Office in 1942 as H.A. O'Neil Limited. This modest family-controlled company was to become the centre of Jones Group plc in 1973 and in turn the core of the Jones Engineering Group. Over the years this enterprise has gone from strength to strength, playing a significant role in the engineering and construction sectors not just in Ireland, but also in the United Kingdom, Europe and the Middle East.

The legacy of Harry O'Neil is not only one of single-mindedness and solid business acumen, but is also about a culture of continuous learning and integrity, combined with a firm support and respect for clients, employees, their families and the wider community. Harry's lifelong commitment to education, providing quality and extraordinary service, along with giving back to the industry and the communities within which he worked, while supporting people to be the best they could be, were the standards he espoused. These standards and values have been faithfully maintained and built upon by successive generations of owners and employees within the organisation.

Opposite: Bray, County Wicklow, was a popular holiday resort in the 1800s, shown here at the turn of the nineteenth century. Harry O'Neil was born in Bray on 13 April 1866.

(The Lawrence photographic collection National Library of Ireland)



Left: A Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) group in uniform pose with their bicycles in the late 1890s. William O'Neil served thirty-one years with the RIC, before retiring to live in Bray.

(The Poole photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)

Harry O'Neil's family background

Henry Austin (Harry) O'Neil was born in Bray, County Wicklow, just south of Dublin, on 13 April 1866. He was the son of William O'Neil, a constable of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) who was stationed at the time of Harry's birth in Finglas, in north County Dublin.¹ His mother was Bridget Rourke (or O'Rourke), the daughter of Francis and Elizabeth Rourke, of Ard Bray, County Wicklow.² Recorded on his birth certificate as Henry O'Neill, the baptism register for Bray on 13 April 1866 records him as 'Henricus Austinus O'Neil, parents Guilimus O'Neil and Bridgidae O'Rorke [sic], residing in Finglas'.³

His parents, William and Bridget had married in the same church in Bray just two years earlier, on 27 December 1864. Harry's father recorded an address in the north Dublin suburb of Clontarf on his marriage day, presumably because he was stationed there at that time. William's father's name was recorded as 'Felixius' – possibly Felix or Phelim – O'Neil, of County Fermanagh. Bridget was recorded as Brigetta Rourke, of Bray.

Below: The burial record of William O'Neil (father of Harry O'Neil) at Glasnevin Cemetery. He died at Loughlinstown hospital, County Wicklow, on 21 September 1896.

(Glasnevin burial records for grave
Glasnevin MA 26.5 south section)

Date of Interment	Burial Number	Epitaph Number	NAME	AGE					Place of Burial	MARK OF GRAVE	
				Years	Months	Weeks	Days	Hours			
September 23	272321	275060	William O'Neil	63					Sir P. Dunn Hospital, Woodbine House, Bray, County Wicklow (Loughlinstown & Wicklow)	M	South 2nd 2nd



Above: An officer of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) in full dress uniform. William O'Neil joined the force in 1851 at the age of 19 and served in various barracks in County Dublin.
(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)

William, a Catholic, had joined the RIC at the age of 19 in January 1851, giving his previous occupation as 'labourer' and his county of birth as Fermanagh.⁴ His RIC file records him as 'O'Neil, William, No. 14656, Age 19, R.C., native of Fermanagh'.⁵ He was appointed to serve in the county of Dublin in May 1851.

The RIC was Ireland's armed police force from 1836 until 1922, serving everywhere but the city of Dublin which was policed by a separate force, the unarmed Dublin Metropolitan Police. As a member of the RIC, William could be assigned to any part of Ireland, but in fact spent his entire police career in different RIC barracks in County Dublin. He moved up through the constabulary ranks and was a sub-constable in Drumcondra in 1852, in Lusk in 1855,⁶ and in Skerries in 1856, becoming acting constable at Raheny in 1864. He was promoted to constable in 1865, serving at Finglas in 1866 and at Blanchardstown in 1867.

For the most part, William's career in the RIC was uneventful. His name appears in the records of the Courts of Petty Sessions (now the local District Courts in Ireland) in Drumcondra, Balbriggan and elsewhere, as both complainant and witness in various minor crimes in the districts for which he was responsible. He did have one major lapse from grace, when, in April 1873 he and another constable, Hugh Richmond, were tried at Coolock Court with 'Neglecting his duty in allowing a prisoner named Michael Leath, alias Smith, to escape on 3 April 1873 under committal from Baldoyle to Kilmainham Gaol'.⁷ The case was dismissed but William was consequently reduced in rank to sub-constable and he seems to have remained at that rank for the rest of his police career.

During Harry's youth the O'Neil family moved from place to place in the county of Dublin, probably reflecting the various postings of Harry's father to different RIC barracks. Harry's younger sister Emily (Emilia) was born in July 1869 and christened at Rathfarnham, a village to the south of the city. Elizabeth (Lily) was born in February 1876 in Clondalkin, County Dublin⁸ and Harry's youngest sister, Mary, was born in March 1880 at Brennan Parade, Bray.

Harry's father retired from the police force in March 1882, having served thirty-one years. He received a pension of £60 per annum and settled in Bray. Like many of his colleagues, he had to find another income to supplement his pension and he became an inspector of hackney cabs,⁹ work that he continued until his death in 1896 at the age of 63. He was also appointed 'Inspector of Nuisance' to the Town Commissioners in

Name of Birth	Age	Religion, Profession	Rank or Occupation	If married, name of wife, or the child of A. B. of	Alleged Disease or Cause of Death	Name and Residence of Informant or Particular	Date of Issuing Order for Interment
September 21	Male	Catholic	Hackney Car Inspector	Married	Paralysis	James O'Neill & Son, 81 Great South Circular Road, Dublin	September 22

Bray.¹⁰ William O'Neil died in the hospital at the then Loughlinstown Workhouse on 21 September 1896 of paralysis, and is buried in Glasnevin cemetery.¹¹

Harry was 30 at the time of his father's death and had taken out a lease on a house at Emorville Avenue in Portobello, a traditionally Jewish area just south of the city centre. His mother Bridget moved there after her husband's death and died there in January 1899, aged only 55. Her occupation was given as 'had been a car inspector's wife'.¹²

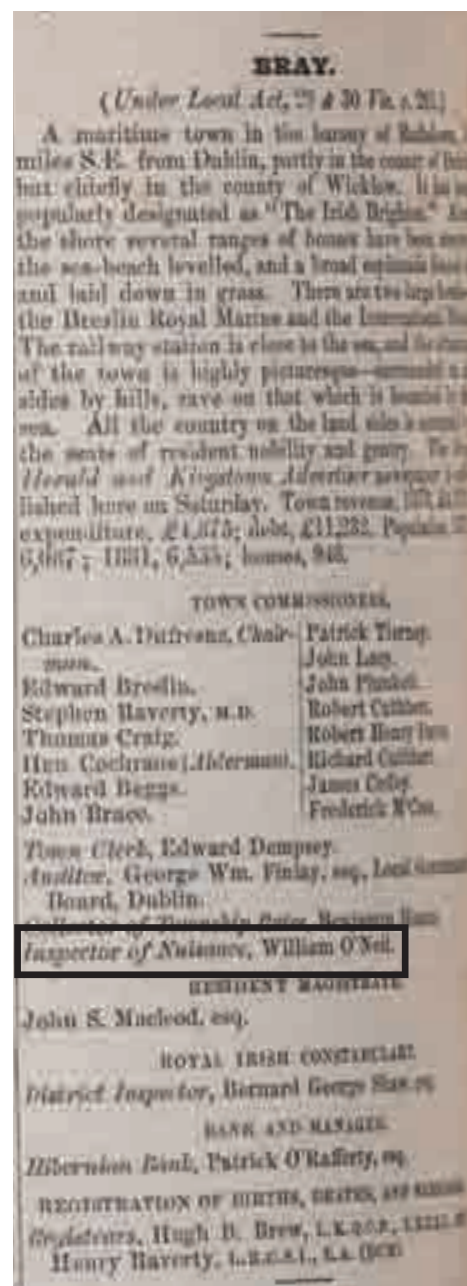
The house in Emorville Avenue had been leased by Harry in 1895 and *Thom's Directory* lists Harry O'Neil as the occupier of the house from 1895 to 1903. Although by then he and his wife and family were living elsewhere, two of his sisters, Emily and Lily, continued to live there until 1903. Emily had married an RIC constable, Richard Mooney, and lived in Emorville Avenue with their young sons Harry¹³ and Vincent, probably while her husband was posted elsewhere.¹⁴ Lily, who described herself in the 1901 Census as an 'accountant', also lived there until her marriage the following year to John Joseph Stanislaus Spears, a civil servant working with the Inland Revenue, after which the couple moved to Cashel, County Tipperary.¹⁵

Harry's youngest sister, Mary, was the only one who remained in Dublin and the O'Neil family maintained close links with Mary's family throughout their lifetimes. In 1907 Mary married Arthur Warren Darley (1874-1929), a composer and professor of music at the Royal Irish Academy of Music, the Leinster School of Music and finally at the Dublin Municipal School of Music. Arthur Darley was a noted violinist and student of Irish folk music. He set the music to such famous Irish ballads as 'Boolavogue', 'The Boys of Wexford' and 'Kelly the Boy from Killane'. He was also the first musical director of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin and first director of the Dublin Municipal School of Music. However, his main income is believed to have been derived from 'investments in land and house property'.

Mary and Arthur had three children – Arthur, George T.E. (Thomas) and Mary Eithne (who died tragically in 1927 at the age of 13).¹⁶ Arthur became a doctor and the younger son, Thomas, worked as an engineer with the Board of Works.

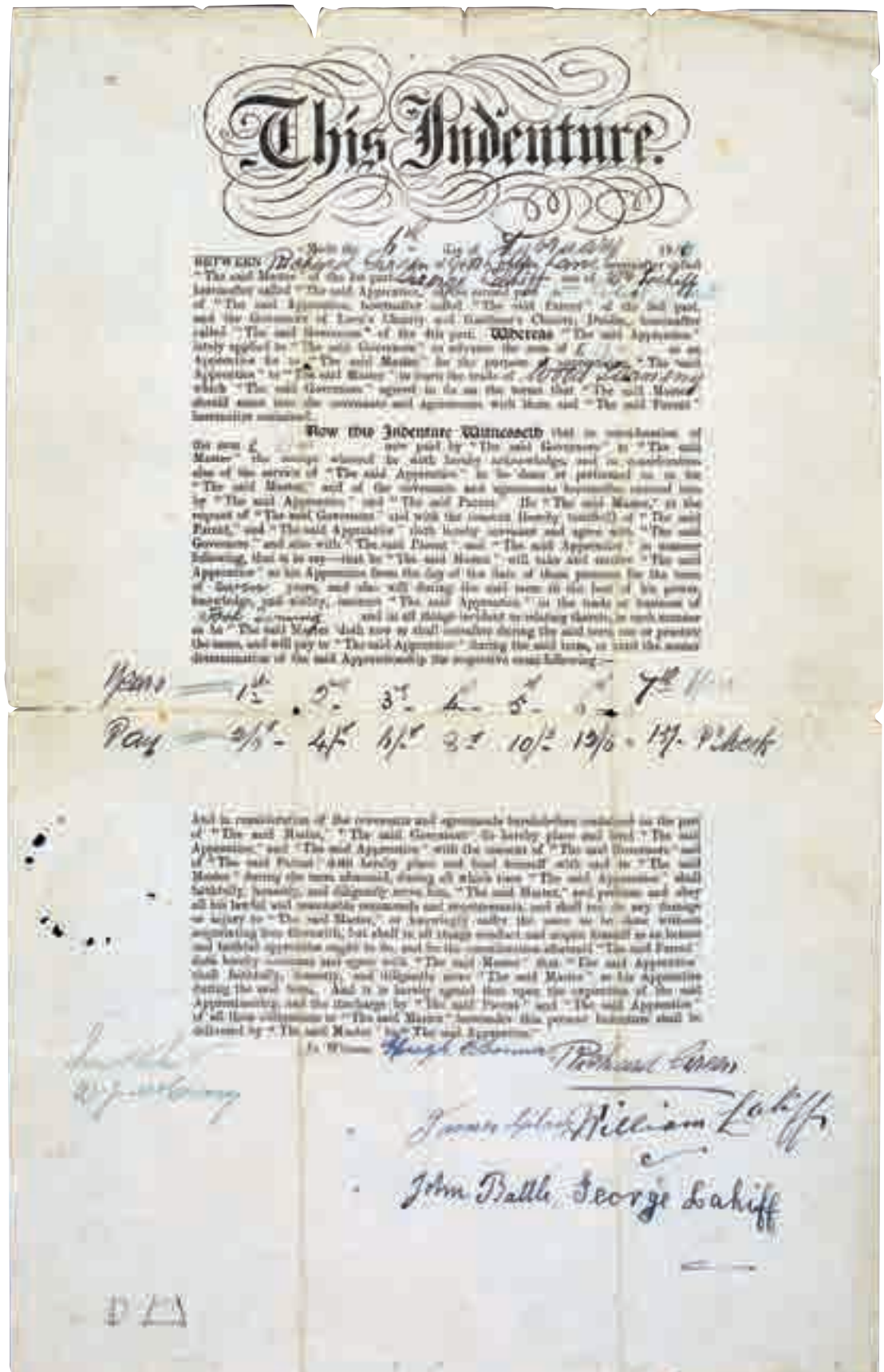
The Darley family had a country residence called Bruckless House in Donegal and their Dublin home was at 18 Northumberland Road, in the fashionable south inner Dublin suburb of Ballsbridge. Arthur supported the nationalists during the Irish War of Independence, providing shelter to many of its leaders in his Donegal home. His funeral in December 1929 was attended by a large and representative number of Ireland's politicians and musicians, while W.T. Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State as it was at the time, paid a personal visit of sympathy to Mary Darley.¹⁷ Obituaries acknowledging Arthur's achievements and contribution to Irish music were published in newspapers as diverse as *An Phoblacht* and *The Musical Times*.¹⁸

Mary Darley shared her husband's love of the arts and was also active in Dublin society. At her home in Northumberland Road she 'frequently acted as hostess to many young musicians, writers and artists'.¹⁹ Her brother Harry and his family would certainly have been part of the company of Ireland's cultural and political society who were guests in the Darley home. In later years one of the regular guests at her *soirées* was her niece, Alice Mary O'Neil, Harry's younger daughter.²⁰ Mary Darley's funeral in July 1947



Above: William O'Neil's listing as an 'Inspector of Nuisance' (an early form of health inspector) at Bray, a post he assumed after his retirement from the police service in 1882.

(Thom's ... Directory 1884, p.1234, courtesy
of Dublin City Library and Archive)



was attended by representatives of the Irish Government, the Irish Red Cross, the National Library, academics and many members of Ireland's musical societies.²¹

Learning the plumbing trade in the United States

Because the O'Neil family moved address so often when Harry was a child, it is not certain where he was educated. There is also no record of why he chose the plumbing and heating business as a career, rather than the more white-collar professions of his father and brothers-in-law.

Like so many other young Irishmen, Harry O'Neil saw the United States as the land of opportunity and crossed the Atlantic in the 1880s. He learned the plumbing trade there and America certainly proved to be the right place to be for the ambitious and highly intelligent Harry. The eastern seaboard of the United States became the world leader in the design and installation of sanitary piping systems during the nineteenth century, providing ample scope for Harry O'Neil to serve an apprenticeship, become a journeyman tradesman, finally moving on to become a master plumber.

The urban centres of the United States, such as New York, Chicago and Philadelphia, having to address the problem of increasingly dense populations, introduced new methods of providing safe drinking water and sanitation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Modern plumbing really started when the Croton Aqueduct for New York City was completed in 1842. Three years later the city allowed sanitary sewers from buildings to be connected to the public storm drain sewers.

Philadelphia was a rapidly developing city in the latter part of the nineteenth century. It had the distinction of being the first city in the world to adopt a cast iron pipe for its mains water distribution system. It was also the first city in the United States to build a large-scale waterworks, while Chicago had the first comprehensive sewage project in the United States.

Adequate sewer and water supply systems also facilitated more sophisticated plumbing in private houses. With developments in modern sanitary engineering and advances in technology, together with the establishment of the correlation between disease and waterborne bacteria, by the late nineteenth century the large industrial American cities had also enacted codes requiring toilet rooms in every unit within tenement buildings. Knowledge of these developments in public sanitation and in the domestic sphere would have informed the young Harry O'Neil, who was so keen to be at the cutting edge of his trade. In 1890, at the age of 24, he returned to Ireland to put his new knowledge and skills to use, and established his own plumbing and heating business in Dublin.



Above: The cutting edge of technology circa 1900: operatives cutting a 48-inch cast iron pipe in Philadelphia, a city noted for its advanced plumbing and sewerage system. When Harry O'Neil returned to Dublin from America he brought with him his knowledge of the most innovative skills in the design and installation of sanitary piping systems.

Opposite: The Cunard Line steamship *Umbria*, on which Harry travelled to the United States, departing Liverpool with emigrants for New York in the 1880s. Harry O'Neil returned to Dublin to set up his own plumbing and heating business in 1890.

(Courtesy of the Norway Heritage Collection
www.norwayheritage.com)

Overleaf: A view of Mulberry Street, New York at the time of Harry O'Neil's arrival.

(Courtesy of Corbis)







The foundation of H.A. O’Neil

The impetus that brought the 24-year-old back to his native land is unclear. He may have seen profitable business opportunities in Ireland and perhaps relished the challenge to apply his skills and knowledge of new technologies, along with implementing the latest developments in the plumbing trade that he had experienced in the United States.

At that time Dublin was rapidly expanding beyond its old traditional boundaries of the Royal Canal to the north and the Grand Canal to the south, offering new opportunities for Harry’s chosen trade. It is also probable that his father William was beginning to suffer from the paralysis that was soon to prove fatal. With his younger sisters and his mother dependent on William’s earnings as an inspector of hackney cabs, along with the small income derived from his pension, Harry may have felt it incumbent on him to return to Ireland and provide financial support for his family. Commitment to his family was a trait that he was to display throughout his life.

On his return he worked at establishing his business and was successful enough by 1895 to take out a lease on 5 Emorville Avenue, Portobello, Dublin.²² The following year he married. His bride was Alice Inglis, born in Limerick, daughter of John Inglis, a steward, and at the time of her marriage, a shopkeeper in the small village of Aughrim, County Wicklow. The marriage took place in the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart in Aughrim.²³ Henry’s occupation at the time was recorded as ‘plumber’ while his father’s declared occupation had changed to be a ‘car inspector’.



Above: The certificate recording the marriage of Harry O’Neil and Alice Inglis at Aughrim, County Wicklow, in 1896.
(GRO, Marriage Certificate, Registration district of Aughrim, in the Union of Rathdrum)

Left: A picture-postcard view of the peaceful town of Aughrim, south County Wicklow. Harry’s wife Alice was a shopkeeper there before their marriage in the town in 1896.
(Eason photographic collection National Library of Ireland)

CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1901.
(The description of the work of filling up this form are given on the other side.)

FORM A. *To be filled in by the head of the family.*

RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c. who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the first of MARCH, 1901.

NAME AND SURNAME	RELATION to HEAD of FAMILY	AGE	SEX	DATE OF BIRTH	PLACE OF BIRTH	EDUCATION	RELIGION	INDUSTRY or OCCUPATION	REMARKS
Harry O'Neil	Head	36	M	1865	Portobello, Dublin	Plumber	Roman Catholic		
Alice O'Neil	Wife	36	F	1865	Portobello, Dublin		Roman Catholic		
Eileen Mary O'Neil	Daughter	2	F	1898	Portobello, Dublin		Roman Catholic		
Alice Mary O'Neil	Daughter	1	F	1901	Portobello, Dublin		Roman Catholic		

I certify that the foregoing is a true and correct statement of the members of my family and their visitors, boarders, servants, &c. who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the first of MARCH, 1901.

Harry O'Neil

CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1901.
FAMILY RETURN—FORM B.

City of Dublin
South Dublin
Portobello Quay
St. Patrick's
Dublin
St. Patrick's
Spencer Street
Harry O'Neil

Above: Census of Ireland 1901, showing the members of the O'Neil family living at 8 Spencer Street, Portobello, where Harry and Alice O'Neil lived from 1898 until about 1905.

(Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911
www.census.nationalarchives.ie)

Putting down roots

By 1898 Harry and Alice were living at 8 Spencer Street, also in Portobello (just one street away from other members of the O'Neil family in Emorville Avenue) and it was here that the couple's children were born. A daughter, Eileen Mary O'Neil, was born on 18 November 1898. Her younger sister, Alice Mary, (known as Eilish) was born at the same address in April 1901 and by then Harry was describing himself as a 'master plumber'.²⁴ Harry and Alice O'Neil had another child, Edmond Joseph, in 1903, but sadly this son died at St Patrick's, Kimmage Road, in May 1904, at the age of only one year. The cause of his death was whooping cough and his burial records noted that he was a 'plumber's child'.²⁵ By then the house in Spencer Street, categorised as being class three housing, with one window in front and limited room²⁶ was getting too small for Harry's growing family. By 1905 the O'Neils had left Spencer Street for a more spacious house at 5 Selskar Terrace, in nearby Ranelagh.

The 1911 Census records 'Henry Austin O'Neil', aged 44 and a 'plumber-master' living there with his family and sharing the house with another Wicklow man, Philip O'Connor, a heating engineer, and his family.²⁷ By 1913 Harry O'Neil – now listing his occupation as a 'building contractor' – and his family had made their final move, to 3 Cheltenham Place, situated beside Portobello Bridge in Rathmines.²⁸



From then on he is noted in *Thom's Directory* variously as a 'building contractor'²⁹ or as 'a plumber'.³⁰ Harry O'Neil lived in Cheltenham Place for the rest of his life and his daughter Alice Mary continued to live there into the 1970s. The house was a private dwelling, with five or six rooms, on the Rathmines side of the Grand Canal at Portobello. Prior to the O'Neils moving in, this house had been occupied by three families.³¹

Cheltenham Place has been described as 'a small terrace of four houses, set back and below the level of the road. Numbers 3 and 4 can be seen on the 1837 Ordnance Survey map'.³² While Harry O'Neil and his wife and daughters made the house their home, the company business was carried out in the backyard and outhouses of this late Georgian building.

Harry O'Neil established and ran his very successful plumbing and heating business in Dublin during some of the most turbulent decades in Ireland's history. From his home and business premises at Portobello he would have seen many significant incidents during Ireland's War of Independence and the subsequent Civil War.



Top: The township of Rathmines.
(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)

Above: Cheltenham Place, Rathmines.
(Courtesy of Barry Steele)



Top: The aftermath of the 1916 Rising. The photograph shows the junction of Abbey Street and Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street), with the burnt-out General Post Office to the left and Nelson's Pillar in the background, with the statue of nationalist M.P. Sir John Gray still standing, on left. H.A. O'Neil continued to trade successfully, despite the turbulence of this time.

(The Keogh photographic collection National Library of Ireland)

Above: A modest display advertisement for O'Neil heating and plumbing services in the *Irish Builder and Engineer*.

(Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

Right: A barge travels along the Grand Canal at Portobello Harbour. The O'Neil home at Cheltenham Place is up the canal from here, beside Portobello Bridge.

(The Wiltshire photographic collection National Library of Ireland)



During the Easter Rising the area around Portobello saw some serious fighting, while in nearby Portobello Barracks the pacifist Francis Sheehy Skeffington, together with two journalists – Thomas Dickson and Patrick MacIntyre – were murdered. Harry was almost certainly a witness to the handing over of the barracks by the British Army to Irish troops in May 1922, after which it became the National Army's headquarters.



Above: The shelled remains at the junction of Henry Street and Sackville Street. Despite the havoc caused by the Rising, Harry O'Neil's business continued to grow.

(The Keogh photographic collection National Library of Ireland)

Opposite: Mass destruction after the 1916 Rising. Photograph shows the General Post Office after heavy shelling, with Nelson's Pillar to the right and curious crowds viewing the rubble of Dublin's main thoroughfare. The area around Harry's home in Portobello, south of the Liffey, saw some fighting at that time.

(The Keogh photographic collection National Library of Ireland)





While many small contractors failed, Harry's business prospered and he could afford to send his two daughters, Eileen Mary and Alice Mary to the fee-paying convent school, Muckross Park in Marlborough Road, Donnybrook. Eileen attended the senior school there from 1911 until 1917 and Alice was a pupil at the junior school from 1910 to 1911, later joining her sister in the senior school from 1913 until 1917.³³ The two O'Neil girls participated in sport and in the cultural activities encouraged by the Dominican nuns and in later years were active members of the school's past pupils union, Eileen being elected as President of the Muckross Park Past Pupils Union in 1941.³⁴

A man of many interests

A man of many parts and interests, Harry O'Neil maintained an active interest in politics all his life and is believed to have been an active member of *Córas na Poblachta* (The Company of Republicans), founded in Dublin's Mansion House in Dawson Street on 2 March 1940.³⁵ Through the O'Neil family links with his Darley in-laws, Harry would have known and had connections with many of those involved in local and national politics in the first decades of the independent Irish state. Arthur Warren Darley's political commitment to the nationalist cause was almost certainly shared by Harry who, it is possible, aided Arthur in the sheltering of nationalists during the War of Independence.

It is almost certain that again, through connections with the Darley family, Harry O'Neil became acquainted with George Bernard Shaw. As Shaw wrote in a 1940s postcard to Harry, he had been born 'just three minutes walk' away from the O'Neil home in Cheltenham Place at 3 Synge Street in Portobello, on the other side of the Grand Canal. Shaw's original friendship with the Darley family may have been through music, as Shaw's mother and sister were musicians and would certainly have encountered Arthur Darley and his family in musical circles. However, Harry was one of the people with whom Shaw corresponded on a number of subjects, including eugenics – Shaw holding very strong views about marrying across class lines, as seen in an annotated typescript to Harry O'Neil.

Harry was also active in education and in the organisations connected to his business interests. In 1943, when a Dublin branch of the Federation of Builders, Contractors and Allied Employers of Ireland was formed, O'Neill [sic] H. and Company Limited, 3 Cheltenham Place, was listed as one of the plumbing contractors involved.³⁶ The Federation (then called the *Saorstát Éireann Federation of Building Trades Employers*) had been founded in 1935 by a group of builders and in 1941 was one of the bodies granted a negotiation licence under the Trade Union Act of 1941.³⁷ It was later to be re-named the Construction Industry Federation, the name it still holds today, with its headquarters situated along the Grand Canal, very close to Cheltenham Place. From its foundation the Federation



Above: Harry O'Neil's daughter, Alice Mary, seated on the right of the group and wearing a beard as part of a pageant at her convent school, Muckross Park, Donnybrook, which she attended between 1910 and 1917.



Above and opposite: A postcard and envelope sent by George Bernard Shaw from his home in Ayot St Lawrence, Hertfordshire, to Harry O'Neil at 3 Cheltenham Place Dublin during the Second World War in 1941.

Far right: George Bernard Shaw photographed in 1909, aged 53. Shaw was an acquaintance of Harry O'Neil, having been born in Synge Street, close to the O'Neil home in Cheltenham Place.

(Courtesy of Gary Lucken/fotoLibra)

The Taoiseach is not up against me. He is up against Churchill, ~~Attlee~~,
Mussolini, Roosevelt and Northern
Ireland. I, who have only given him
a friendly warning, do not matter in
the least. The notion that the situation
can be dealt with by being unkind to
me is appalling. Are there no statesmen
in Ireland now?

4107 ST LAWRENCE, BELLEVILLE, ONT. L8L 4H1
STATION WHEATHAM/ST. LAWRENCE
TELEPHONE: 366-0441

I was born within three minutes walk of you.

[illegible]

A black and white portrait of an elderly man with a long, full white beard and mustache. He is wearing a dark, wide-brimmed hat and a textured, possibly tweed, jacket over a dark vest and a light-colored shirt with a dark tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a serious expression. The background is dark and out of focus.

(under its various titles) has played a significant role in labour relations, in establishing building standards, in making representations to government on behalf of the building industry and has actively participated in the development of apprenticeship training in Ireland.³⁸

Through his membership of the Federation, Harry contributed to the development of the building trades in Ireland, establishing standards and supporting the continuing development of education opportunities for those entering the trades. His participation in the Federation also established a tradition of commitment within H.A. O'Neil and its associated companies of giving back to the industry through participation in trades associations and on advisory bodies and educational bodies, something which continues in the business to this day.

Following Harry O'Neil's example, other directors of the companies of the Jones Engineering Group have continued the tradition of taking an active part in the work of the Construction Industry Federation and other interest groups.

Harry's interest in and commitment to education was not confined to his membership of the Federation and other trade groups. He personally contributed to the development of trade education, and as late as 1947, when he was in his 70s, Harry O'Neil was on the advisory board of the then Bolton Street Technical Institute, which was founded in 1911 and is now part of Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). He contributed to the disciplines of building and plumbing, as a representative of the Association of Master Plumbers, Heating and Ventilating Engineers of Ireland.³⁹

An innovator within the plumbing trade

A progressive plumber, Harry O'Neil was always interested in new developments. Chris Jones recalled that Harry was one of the first people to recognise the value of plastics such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC)⁴⁰ in plumbing, as opposed to metals, and that he was always a forward-looking man. Even in his later years he continued to be interested in the potential of new materials and new methods of work. In 1940 he wrote to the *Irish Builder and Engineer* advocating (with illustration) the 'one pipe system of plumbing' based on the American system of one pipe for wastes of all plumbing fixtures, writing:

American practice is to bring the waste of all plumbing fixtures, including the W.C., into one vertical stack ... All pipes are inside the building in ducts or built into the walls. Nearly all the piping in a large building is fixed and tested before the walls are built, but the floors are in ... One advantage of this type of joint is that the W.C. bowl can be removed to clear the soil pipe and be easily re-fixed. The tendency in modern plumbing is that pipes are neither to be seen nor heard.⁴¹

Another article in the *Irish Builder* in 1944 on sanitary accommodation in tenement houses dealt with the large number of three- and four-storey houses in Dublin and other cities where 'sanitary accommodation is almost non-existent, comprising in a very high proportion of cases only a water tap and a W.C. in the yard'. The article featured the forward-thinking suggestions of 'Mr H.A.O'Neil, the well-known plumbing



Above: A relic of Dublin's early sewerage system: a cast iron sewer vent on a footpath in Leeson Park, manufactured by the famous foundry of Tonge and Taggart, Dublin.

Opposite: An article in the *Irish Builder and Engineer* of November 1944, outlining Harry O'Neil's expertise in providing sanitary accommodation on the landings of Dublin's many tenement houses. The article is accompanied by a larger advertisement reflecting the development of the business and referencing a number of recent contracts.

contractor of Cheltenham Place, Portobello Bridge, Dublin'. Harry suggested:

A simple means of improving the conditions in such buildings, by which the work can be done from inside the house and the need for costly scaffolding and outside work is obviated. Subsequently repairs could also be done from inside the building ... The scheme sounds a simple one and would provide the cheapest accommodation possible, particularly if large scale production of the unit were undertaken. As many of these old houses are sound in structure, some such scheme is well worth consideration.⁴²

He was also inventive and was always investigating new possibilities for his business. George McCann, a former director of H.A. O'Neil Limited, recalled stories of Harry O'Neil's inventiveness:

When I joined O'Neil's, Harry O'Neil wasn't there but he had been there so recently that the guys would be talking about him ... he was always into inventing things and discovering and they claimed that he invented the compression fitting which became the connection fitting of the trade but he never patented it and somebody else picked up on it ... I remember some of the guys talking about him sending two or three of them up to the bus terminal in Clonskeagh and when the bus conductor wasn't looking they were to sneak on and measure the bus and measure the seats because he'd come up with some idea of introducing more seats and no discomfort onto buses. He used to be coming up with ideas like that ... These were stories I just heard.⁴³

Because of the tragic early death of Edmond Joseph O'Neil, in 1903, Harry had no son to succeed him in the business. His elder daughter Eileen married David Barry in 1926 and the couple had two sons, Oscar, and Cormac.⁴⁴ Eileen took little part in the business, although her son Oscar – by then a qualified engineer – did work with H.A. O'Neil for some months in the 1940s. There is only one mention of Eileen Barry in the minutes of the H.A. O'Neil Limited meetings of directors.⁴⁵

Harry's younger daughter, Alice Mary (Eilish), never married. She was interested in music and the arts, ran an arts and crafts shop, 'The Wee Studio', at 51a Dawson Street, Dublin⁴⁶ and is believed to have had her own glove factory. Tradition has it that Alice O'Neil was a girlfriend to Kevin Barry, an 18-year-old medical student executed by the British authorities at Mountjoy Prison Dublin in 1920 and the first Irish republican to be executed by the British after 1916. This tradition was substantiated by information that on Wednesday, 20 October 1920 when Mrs Barry arrived at Marlborough Barracks for the trial of her son Kevin Barry, her entourage included her brother Pat Dowling; Seán O hUadhaigh, the solicitor acting for Kevin; Father Augustine, O.F.M. Cap.; Eileen O'Neill [sic], a young friend of Kevin's; Gerry McAleer, his almost constant companion for four years, and Joe Farrell,⁴⁷ a close friend of the family and an engineering student at the College of Science.⁴⁸



Above: Kevin Barry (1902-1920) photographed in his Belvedere College rugby jersey. Barry, an 18-year-old medical student, was executed in Mountjoy Prison in 1920. It is believed he was the boyfriend of Harry's younger daughter, Alice Mary (Eilish).

*(The Keogh photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)*

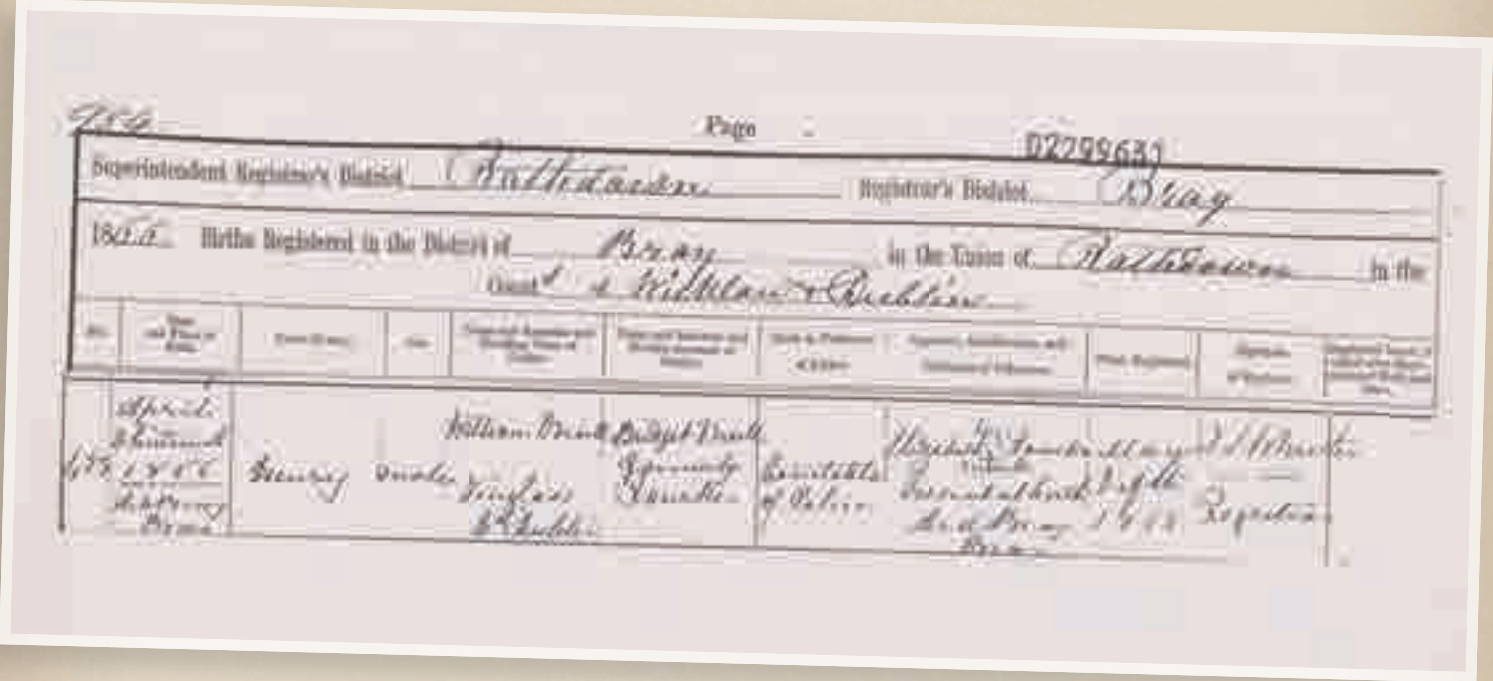
Below: 3 Cheltenham Place, 2015.
(Second house from left).

It is also believed that Alice never married because she could not get over the death of young Kevin Barry. Some of this story is supported by the recollections of former Jones Group chief finance officer Derry Hussey, who recalled that Alice had in her possession a school cap belonging to Kevin Barry that she gave to him. The cap was later passed on to the family of The O'Rahilly.⁴⁹

Alice took a more active part in the management of the business in the 1940s, becoming company secretary and a director when the business became the limited company, H.A. O'Neil Limited in 1942.⁵⁰ After Harry's death in 1947, she continued as a director and shareholder of the company until 1993. Until the 1970s she continued to live in what had been the family home at 3 Cheltenham Place.⁵¹



What sort of person was Harry O'Neil?



*‘They said
he was always
into inventing
things and
discovering...’*

Former employees of
Harry O'Neil speaking
to George McCann,
director of H.A. O'Neil
Limited from 1993.

Above: The certificate
of Henry (Harry) O'Neil's
birth in Bray in April 1866.
(General Registration Office (GRO),
Birth Certificate, Rathdown,
Registration District Bray in the
Union of Rathdown)

His daughter Alice described her father as a kind man, while others saw him as austere, but also a man of foresight.⁵² He was careful financially, and did not invest needlessly, spending very little on his business premises or equipment. He was an inventor and innovator, a man of vision, a creative eccentric and a man interested in many aspects of human life. He was also an armchair socialist. He envisaged in the early 1940s, that ‘the day will come when every tradesman will have a car’.⁵³ He was also a businessman, who established and ran his plumbing and heating business very successfully for half a century, sometimes under challenging circumstances.

During his almost sixty years in business, Harry O'Neil had been responsible for the installation of plumbing and heating services in many prestigious buildings in and around the city of Dublin and elsewhere. Included in this list were the former University Residence in Hatch Street, Dublin Airport, the Department of Industry and Commerce headquarters in Kildare Street, work during the early years of the Electricity Supply Board (ESB), the new telephone exchange in Exchequer Street in Dublin (now the Fallon & Byrne building), the Cathedral of St Patrick and St Felim in Cavan town, as well as convents, churches and schools throughout Ireland.

However, by the 1940s he was growing old, and the economic environment and shortages in Ireland during the ‘Emergency’ years of the Second World War had taken their toll and H.A. O'Neil Limited was in increasingly poor financial shape. Harry O'Neil died in November 1947. Although he may have wished the company to stay in the hands of a member of his family, in fact the time had come to hand over to others the management of the company he had established and built into a successful business.

Chapter 1 – Endnotes

- 1 See Thom's *Official Directory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the Year 1866* (Dublin: Thom, 1866). [Title varies, and henceforth *Thom's ... Directory*].
- 2 General Registration Office (GRO), Birth Certificate, Rathdown, Registration District Bray in the Union of Rathdown.
- 3 National Library of Ireland, Catholic Parish Register, Bray, County Wicklow (NLI P 9371).
- 4 There is a Felix O'Neil recorded as living in Drumkeeran, County Fermanagh in 1862.
- 5 Royal Irish Constabulary Register 1816-1922 (PRO HO series, 184, copy in NLI MFA series).
- 6 Irish Petty Sessions Court Registers 1828-1912, Court of Balbriggan, 19 June 1855, 23 October 1855.
- 7 Irish Petty Sessions order books, CSPS 1/5646.
- 8 National Library of Ireland (NLI), Elizabeth O'Neil, born 1876, Parish of Clondalkin, Parish Register, Book 3, p. 159.
- 9 Hackney cabs, as vehicles plying for public hire were required to be licensed by the local authority and to be inspected regularly for roadworthiness.
- 10 *Thom's ... Directory 1884*, p.1234. An Inspector of Nuisance was a person employed by a parish or council to inspect for breaches of law, e.g. bad sanitary conditions, obstruction to footpaths and roads etc. Refuse heaps, smells and insanitary conditions of all kinds were known as 'nuisances'. In 1846 the Nuisance Removal and Prevention of Diseases Act was passed, enabling towns to appoint inspectors to report on the offensive conditions in their areas. The title was later changed to Sanitary Inspector.
- 11 Glasnevin burial records for grave Glasnevin MA 26.5 south section.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 GRO, Henry Austin Mooney, born in 1892 (Rathdown, April-June 1892, 2/836). He is not in 1911 Census of Ireland but a Henry A. Mooney, aged c. 20 and born in Wicklow is in UK 1911 Census – registered as becoming a member of crew 'military branch' on HMS *Algerine*.
- 14 Richard Mooney, an RIC pensioner, aged 46, with a son Vincent (aged 13) is recorded in 1911 Census of Ireland (www.census.nationalarchives.ie). He had married again in 1910 to a Mary – Emily had died in 1905; GRO Dublin South, 2/437; Glasnevin burial records.
- 15 See GRO Marriages Dublin South July-September 1902, 2/656.
- 16 Census of Ireland 1901 and 1911 (www.census.nationalarchives.ie).
- 17 *Irish Independent*, 23 December 1929.
- 18 'Arthur Warren Darley' in Harry White and Barra Boydell (eds), *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland*, 2 vols., (Dublin: UCD Press, 2013), Vol.1, pp. 281-2; *An Phoblacht*, 11 January, 1930; *The Musical Times*, 71:1044 (1 February 1930), p. 175-76.
- 19 *Sunday Independent*, 6 July 1947.
- 20 Derry Hussey interview.
- 21 *Irish Press* 9 July 1947; *Irish Independent*, 9 July 1947 for descriptions of Mary Darley's funeral.
- 22 *Thom's ... Directory 1895*, p. 1821.
- 23 GRO, Marriage Certificate, Registration district of Aghrim, in the Union of Rathdrum.
- 24 GRO, Birth certificate, No.3, South City, Union of Dublin South; GRO, January-March 1899, Dublin South, 2/[637/657]; GRO April-June 1901, Dublin South, 2/640.
- 25 Glasnevin burial records for grave Glasnevin MA 26.5 south section.
- 26 Census of Ireland 1901 (www.census.nationalarchives.ie).
- 27 Census of Ireland 1911 (www.census.nationalarchives.ie).
- 28 *Thom's ... Directory 1913*, p. 2112.
- 29 *Thom's ... Directory 1915*, p. 1874.
- 30 *Thom's ... Directory 1936*, p. 1936.
- 31 Census of Ireland 1901.
- 32 Deirdre Kelly, *Four Roads of Dublin: a History of Rathmines, Ranelagh and Leeson Street* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1995), p. 237.
- 33 Muckross Park Roll Books 1910-1917.
- 34 *Irish Press*, 7 July 1937; *Irish Times*, 13 June 1938; *Irish Press*, 14 November 1941.
- 35 Córas na Poblachta was a Republican Party that existed briefly in the early 1940s. It fielded five candidates in the 1943 General Election, but all of them were unsuccessful. Some of its members later went on to join Clann na Poblachta. For more see, Eithne MacDermott, *Clann na Poblachta* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1998), pp. 10-11, citing Seán MacEntee papers (UCDA, P67/544; P67/550; P67/552[1]; P67/534)); Notes on IRA activities 1941-47 (UCDA, P 67/550).
- 36 *Irish Builder*, 11 September 1943. [Title varied, *The Dublin Builder*, or *Illustrated Irish Architectural, Engineering, Mechanics' & Sanitary Journal* (1859-1866); *Irish Builder and Engineering Record* (1867-1871); *Irish Builder* (1872-1899); *Irish Builder and Technical Journal* to 1979; henceforth *Irish Builder*].
- 37 Dáil Éireann debates, v. 129, 30 January 1952. For more on the history of the Construction Industry Federation see Frank Dunne, 'A History of the Construction Industry Federation' in *Construction: The Official Journal of the Construction Industry Federation*, 6:9 (1985), pp. 54-75.
- 38 In 1965 P. Lynch of the Electrical Contractors Association was a member of the committee set up to review details of the Industrial Training Bill 1965.
- 39 City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee, 'Mechanical Engineering, Architecture and Building, Printing and Book Production: Prospectus Session 1947-48' (1947). *Prospectus: Bolton Street*. Paper 71; <http://arrow.dit.ie/prosbt/71>, p.6.
- 40 Polyvinyl Chloride. Use began in Germany in the early 1930s and production commenced there in 1935; first manufactured in Britain in 1938.
- 41 *Irish Builder*, August 1940.
- 42 'Sanitary accommodation in tenement houses: an easily installed unit' in *Irish Builder*, 18 February 1944, pp. 145-6.
- 43 George McCann, transcript of interview.
- 44 GRO Marriages 1926, April-June Dublin South 2/404; GRO Births, 1927 January-March Dublin South 2/503; GRO Births 1928 April-June Dublin South 2/523.
- 45 H.A. O'Neil Limited, Minutes of Directors, 12 February, 1951.
- 46 'Miss O'Neill [sic], The Wee Studio, 51a, Dawson Street, 'arts and crafts'; *Thom's ... Directory 1951*, p. 925. She shared this address with a dance studio and an haute couture establishment while 'The Teatime Express' was at No.51b.
- 47 Joe Farrell [O'Farrell] was from Portlaoise; was shot and wounded during the War of Independence; he later became an engineer with the ESB, where he helped Kathy Barry find a job.
- 48 Donal O'Donovan, *Kevin Barry and His Time* (Sandycove, County Dublin: Glendale Press, 1989), p.106; citing contemporary newspaper reports and MS 8043 in NLI.
- 49 Kevin Barry's sister Elgin [Eileen/Ellen] Barry had married Richard [The] O'Rahilly, the son of Michael Joseph O'Rahilly (1875-1916) in 1935.
- 50 H.A. O'Neil Limited, Minutes of Directors, 14 July 1942.
- 51 *Thom's ... Directory*, 1975, p. 173.
- 52 J. Curley, H.A. O'Neil Limited company history (typescript).
- 53 J. Curley interview 2.



A picture from Lower Sackville Street that tells its own story.

2 The challenging conditions of the early years

*‘Do what is beyond
your strength even
should you fail
sometimes.’*

Charles Stewart Parnell, 1885

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city and country in which Harry O’Neil established his plumbing business and lived with his family, was undergoing a process of enormous change.

The political, economic and social background

At that time the political landscape was shifting, under the influence of Charles Stewart Parnell, founder and leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. However, Parnell’s role as the uncrowned king of Ireland was being challenged by revelations of his involvement with Katherine O’Shea, following her divorce from her husband, Captain William O’Shea. The ownership of the land of Ireland was also changing beyond all recognition through a series of Purchase of Land Acts.

At the same time the country was changing in many other ways. A broad intellectual movement known as the Celtic Revival began in the late nineteenth century, largely initiated by artists and writers who were concerned with preserving Ireland’s individual native and cultural identity. Over time, this movement took on the identity of a new cultural nationalism.

At the end of the 1800s the main political focus was on the achievement of constitutional Home Rule for Ireland and the restoration of power from Westminster to an Irish parliament in Dublin. Events from 1914 onwards began to shape a new Ireland. A more radical Irish nationalism emerged, culminating in the Easter Rising of April 1916 – a development which utterly changed the social and political nature of Ireland.

The subsequent War of Independence was followed by the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the establishment of the Irish Free State. This was followed in turn by a bitterly fought civil war that impacted on Irish politics for generations. There was economic uncertainty during the 1930s, and in 1939 the beginning of another world war in which Ireland remained neutral. During the ‘Emergency’ of the Second World War, Ireland experienced severe shortages of raw materials and other essential commodities.

Dublin was a city with many social problems around the turn of the century, but the infrastructure of the capital was also undergoing major change. Dublin Tramways linked the city to the new middle-class suburbs like Rathmines, which had grown up beyond the old city boundaries of the canals and the North and South Circular roads.

Opposite: An enterprising architect – Frederick W. Higginbotham – plies his trade immediately after the 1916 Rising, hoping to benefit from the rebuilding of Dublin city centre. Architects were an important source of work for H.A. O’Neil at that time.
(Irish Builder 1916 – courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

In 1893 electric tramways were beginning to provide transport to and from the Dublin suburbs and the city centre for the first time. Within the city proper, the population had increased and new suburbs began to grow up in Kilmainham and Inchicore, to the west of the city centre.

In the old inner city over 87,000 lived in poverty in the city's infamous tenements. These tenements were mainly rooms within the former grand homes of the Anglo-Irish, many of whom had departed Dublin after the Act of Union in 1800. By 1911 Dublin had the worst urban housing conditions in the United Kingdom and Ireland – far removed from the worlds of upper- and middle-class Dubliners. However, things were slowly changing.

Despite the grim conditions of thousands of city-dwellers, the streets were becoming better paved and the standard of street lighting was improving. New reservoirs provided a supply of clean water and measures were being taken to improve the city's drainage system. In the following decades the local authorities began to build large-scale housing developments in new suburbs such as Cabra, moving many of the people from the squalid conditions of the tenement buildings of the city centre to much healthier accommodation.

H.A. O'Neil proves its versatility

Most businesses engaged in the building and allied trades at the time were small. Harry O'Neil would have undertaken a range of work to stay in business, including repairs, upgrading plumbing in existing houses and installing toilets and hot and cold running water.

The latest in plumbing and sanitary facilities were being installed in the new houses being built in Dublin's expanding suburbs and townships – especially in the independent township of Rathmines where the family lived. There were therefore ample opportunities for an energetic and knowledgeable man with his own plumbing business, like Harry O'Neil.

The Rathmines water supply had come for many years from the Grand Canal, which was polluted but cheap. However, between 1883 and 1887 the Rathmines township commissioners constructed modern sewers and their own water scheme, Bohernabreena Waterworks, in the Glenasmole Valley. This valley is situated in south County Dublin, where the Dublin mountains give way to the higher peaks of County Wicklow. It is also the source of the River Dodder, which flows through Dublin's southern suburbs to the sea at Ringsend. Water was also supplied into other parts of Dublin from the Vartry Reservoir at Roundwood, County Wicklow, which had been opened in 1863. The extension of local authority services such as mains sewage meant an end to the old 'ashpits' which hitherto had been the means of disposing of human waste and 'night soil'.

Opposite: The Custom House, on the north bank of the River Liffey. Designed by James Gandon and completed 1791. Burnt down by the Irish Republican Army in 1921 but restored by the Irish Free State government. H.A. O'Neil was one of many

businesses that was involved in the reconstruction of Dublin following the 1916 Rising.

*(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)*





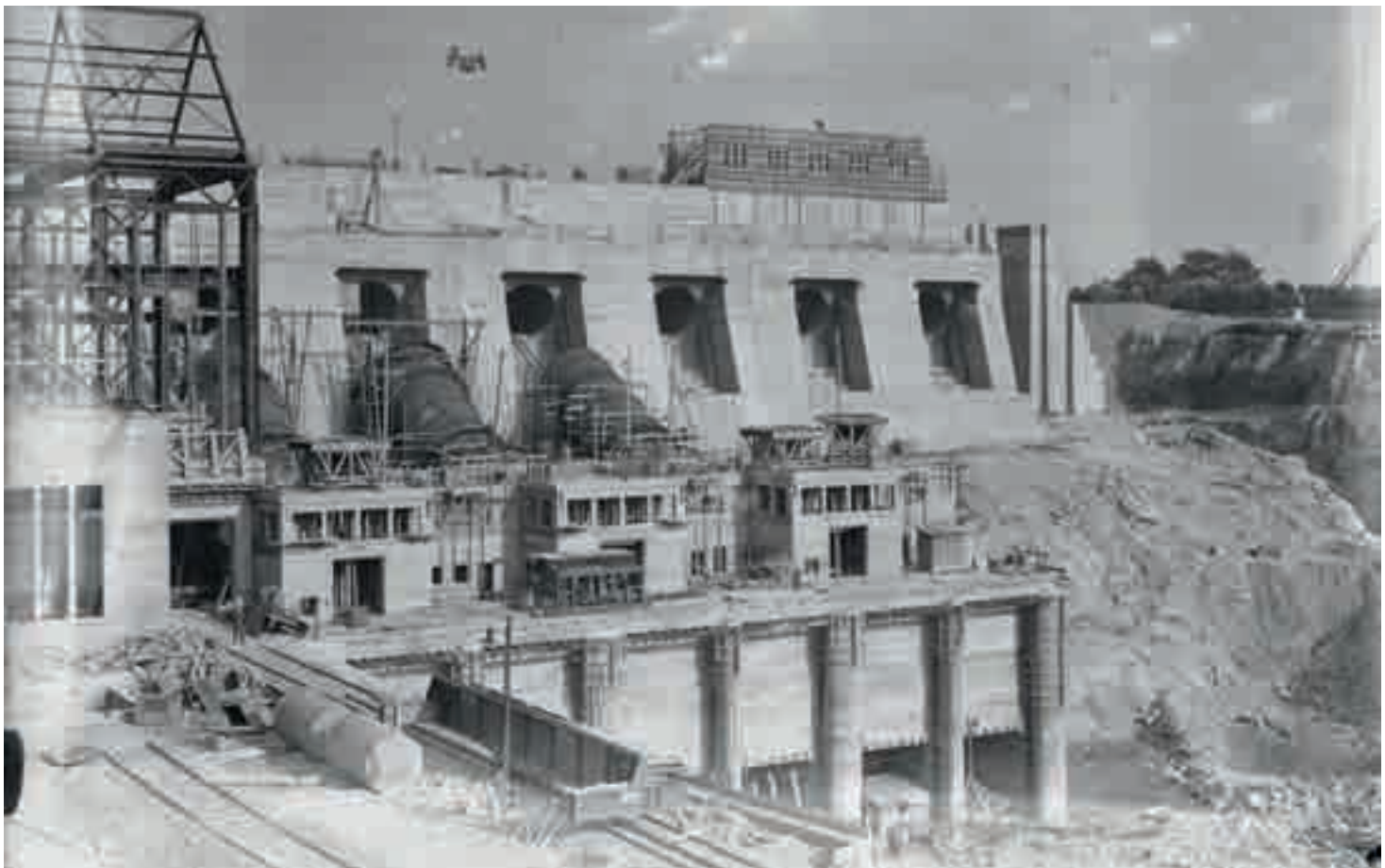
Apart from small contracts and local authority work, larger projects to come Harry's way included work on Earlsfort Mansions, a block of flats on Earlsfort Terrace, designed by T.E. Hudman (1852-1937) and built by James Pile, and the Victorian Gothic University Hall in Hatch Street, designed by the Rathmines architect C.B. Powell.

Like all businesses connected with the building trades in Dublin, H.A. O'Neil benefitted from the opportunities offered by the work connected with the rebuilding of the centre of Dublin following the 1916 Easter Rising. The firm continued to prosper during the years of the Great War and the political uncertainties following the Rising.

From the 1920s onwards the Irish Government favoured private home ownership and offered subsidies on new homes built for owner occupiers, providing new opportunities for businesses like that of H.A. O'Neil. The Shannon hydro-electric scheme at Ardnacrusha, which opened in 1929, made electricity accessible to industry and domestic consumers.

A sign of things to come in the 1930s was the development of 'labour-saving dream homes' being built on what was the former Fitzwilliam family's Irish estate at Mount Merrion, south of Dublin, off the Stillorgan road. This trend mirrored the growth of similar suburban living in the United Kingdom. Homes on the Mount Merrion estate featured all-electric kitchens and modern bathrooms with hot water on tap.

The Shannon hydro-electric scheme at Ardnacrusha, which opened in 1929, provided electricity to industrial and domestic consumers. Government subsidies encouraged private home ownership and opened up opportunities for H.A. O'Neil in the housing and construction sector.
(Independent Newspapers, National Library of Ireland)





Above: Seán Keating, *Night's Candles are Burnt Out*, 1927–28, oil on canvas. This is one of a series of paintings by Keating of the Shannon hydro-electric scheme. (Image by kind permission of Gallery Oldham)

Dublin Corporation embarked on schemes to demolish the old city slums and replace them with more modern local authority housing, while older buildings were extensively upgraded. H.A. O'Neil would almost certainly have had work on these projects as they did in the 1940s when Harry O'Neil contributed suggestions to the *Irish Builder* about more efficient ways to install toilets in older buildings.¹

It was in the late 1930s that Harry began to advertise the services offered by his company.² By 1944 one could see the growth of the business, evidenced by the increased size of the advertisements in the *Irish Builder*. A builders' strike in 1937 caused great difficulties for firms connected with the construction business and two years later the outbreak of the Second World War caused shortages of imported raw materials into Ireland and consequent rises in costs.

These were difficult times for all building businesses. Established construction firms such as John Sisk & Son and G&T Crampton, as well as smaller traders like Harry O'Neil, experienced great difficulties in the late 1930s.³ During the war uncertainty of supplies of imported timber and other construction materials into neutral Ireland added to the economic uncertainties in the construction sector. However, H.A. O'Neil continued to trade, working on small domestic contracts and on work in shops, in religious institutions – including churches, convents and presbyteries – and hospitals.⁴

Larger contracts present opportunities – Chris Jones recruited

Two big contracts for prestigious projects had been awarded to Harry O'Neil's business in the years just preceding the war. One was in 1939 when:

The tender of Mr. H.A. O'Neil, 3 Cheltenham Place, Dublin, has been accepted for the sanitary fittings, plumbing, etc. at the new Government offices in Kildare Street. Mr J.R. Boyd Barrett, 61, South Mall, Cork, is the architect and Messrs. Sisk and Co. are the general contractors.⁵

This iconic building, to house the Department of Industry and Commerce, was one of the highest profile projects commissioned by the Irish Government in the 1930s.⁶ New staff were taken on by H.A. O'Neil – one of whom was a young apprentice, Christopher Jones. Chris was from Bandon, County Cork, and joined the firm in 1940 on the representation of his brother-in-law Herbert Dennis, then a foreman for John Sisk & Son in Dublin.⁷ He started on wages of seven shillings and four pence a week with the company. He was to play a pivotal role in the future of not only H.A. O'Neil and the subsequent development of the Jones Group, but also in the future development of the Irish construction industry in the twentieth century.

This very innovative government building in Kildare Street was to have concealed service pipes, a practice developed in the United States, and something that was very familiar to Harry O'Neil.



Above: Fresh up from Bandon, County Cork, Chris Jones, aged 15, walks down Talbot Street Dublin with his mother Molly. She had just bought him a pair of new boots. He joined H.A. O'Neil in 1940 on the representation of Herbert Dennis, his brother-in-law, who was then a foreman for John Sisk & Son in Dublin.

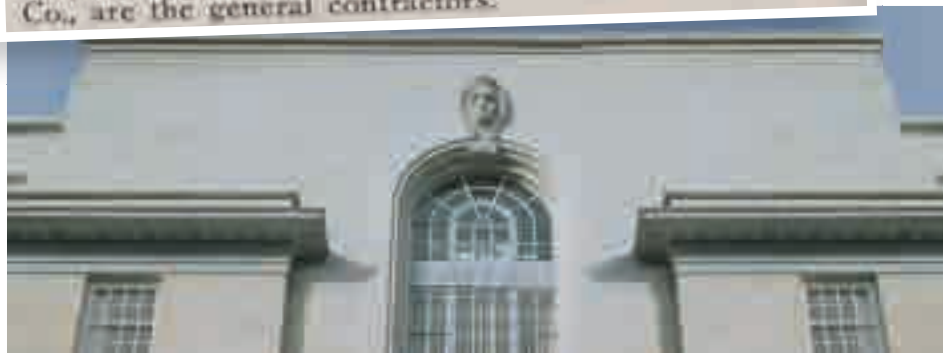
Left: Tender acceptance notice in *Irish Builder*, 19 August 1939.

(Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archive)

Below left: Department of Industry and Commerce building (detail).

Opposite: The iconic building to house the Department of Industry and Commerce, in Kildare Street, Dublin. Designed by Cork architect J.R. Boyd Barrett and built between 1939 and 1942, the contract necessitated H.A. O'Neil taking on extra staff, including young apprentice Christopher Jones. The project allowed Harry O'Neil to provide the latest plumbing facilities, originally developed in the United States.

Dublin.—The tender of Mr. H. A. O'Neil, 3 Cheltenham Place, Dublin, has been accepted for the sanitary fittings, plumbing, etc., at the new Government offices in Kildare Street. Mr. J. R. Boyd Barrett, 61 South Mall, Cork, is the architect, and Messrs. Sisk and Co., are the general contractors.







Above: A group photograph of men working on the Department of Industry and Commerce building on Kildare Street in 1940-41. Circled are Harry O'Neil (left) and apprentice Chris Jones.

Right: An article by Harry O'Neil in the *Irish Builder and Engineer* from 1940, along with a published letter written from 3 Cheltenham Place, Portobello Bridge, Dublin. It illustrates the innovative piping in the shaft on one of the seven floors of the Kildare Street government building, before the walls are built.



As the architect J.R. Boyd Barrett wrote in the *Irish Builder* of 1940:

Mr Henry A. O'Neil, plumbing, heating and general contractor, of 3, Cheltenham Place, Portobello Dublin, who has studied this subject closely and has carried out plumbing work in most of the buildings named [Belfast hospital for sick children, Government Buildings Kildare Street, Collinstown airport buildings and the new schools in Crumlin], sends us the interesting photograph reproduced herewith. This shows piping in the shaft on one of the seven floors of the Kildare Street building, before the walls are built. The shaft contains soil, waste and vent pipes, as well as hot and cold and drinking water pipes. Provision is made for 45 W.C.s (with individual flush valves and flush pipes), seven slop sinks, 43 wash hand-basins, 21 urinals, and 21 drinking fountains, and every trap is vented. All these will, of course, ultimately be concealed within the walls, only the operating buttons of the flush valves and the connecting pipes protruding'.⁸

Right: The Department of Industry and Commerce building in Kildare Street Dublin was constructed around a steel frame supplied and erected by the well-known Dublin steel fabricating company, Smith and Pearson. This advertisement in the *Irish Builder and Engineer* from 21 November 1942 states that 1,040 tons of steel was used in its construction.

**A Backbone of
1,040 TONS OF STEEL**

The new Government Office in Kildare St., is another work of the vast capacity of large buildings erected in one, one built around a Smith & Pearson steel structure (as shown in photograph), fabricated from 1,040 tons of steel. Thus this imposing building has built into it Smith & Pearson's 10 years' experience in the fabrication and erection of steel-work. Architects: J. R. Boyd Barrett, A.R.I.B.A., F.R.I.A.; Contractors: John Slat & Co.

FABRICATED AND ERECTED BY
SMITH AND PEARSON
NEWCASTLE IRON WORKS, DUBLIN



The second significant project had been awarded the previous year, in 1938, when H.A. O'Neil won a contract for work at the new Dublin Airport at Collinstown, in north County Dublin. Murphy Bros. of Rathmines were the main contractors on the site with H.A. O'Neil being sub-contracted for the plumbing in the main terminal building, designed by the architect, Desmond FitzGerald (brother of the late Taoiseach, Dr Garret FitzGerald), and in hangars one and two.⁹

There were delays at the end of 1939 due to the late arrival of equipment and the difficulties in obtaining essential supplies due to wartime shortages. When Dublin Airport officially opened on 19 January 1940 with the inaugural flight – an Aer Lingus Lockheed 14 bound for Liverpool – the terminal building was still being completed. This contract was to be the first of many projects at Dublin Airport that involved H.A. O'Neil and other companies within the Jones Engineering Group. One of Chris Jones's first jobs was working there, cycling daily from Drimnagh to the airport site, during one of the worst winters in living memory.¹⁰

Apart from work on this landmark building, other projects undertaken by the company included the Sisters of Charity's new schools in Crumlin, the famous Ham Lambert's veterinary headquarters in South Richmond Street, the Seaverge Hotel in

Above: Dublin Airport at Collinstown provided the biggest contract opportunity for H.A. O'Neil in 1938. With Murphy Bros. as main contractors, H.A. O'Neil was sub-contracted to provide plumbing services in the main terminal building.
(Hugh Doran Collection – Irish Architectural Archive)



Above: Another early school contract was the work undertaken at Blackrock College, a well-known boarding school for boys, situated at Blackrock, south of Dublin city.

Bray, County Wicklow, the Dominican Priory in Tallaght, Boylan's shoe shop in Grafton Street, All Hallows College on Gracepark Road Dublin, the Illustrating Company in Townsend Street, the Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital on Adelaide Road, the Franciscan Priory on Merchants Quay, as well as plumbing for the Electricity Supply Board.¹¹

In 1944 the firm's current contracts included the new telephone exchange in Exchequer Street, Dublin (now Fallon & Byrne), a new convent for the Little Sisters of the Poor on Roebuck Road, The Hermitage Dundrum, the Dominican Convent in Wicklow, Mount Anville Convent in Goatstown, St Mary's College Rathmines,¹² Diocesan College Ballaghderreen, County Roscommon, the new St Patrick and St Felim Cathedral in Cavan town and Riverstown Catholic Church in County Sligo, designed by architect R.H. Byrne.

Along with these sizeable contracts work also took place on new convent schools in Milltown in south Dublin, St Vincent's Hospital on St Stephen's Green, a new bank in Inchicore, Dublin, a convent and presbytery at Kilcullen, County Kildare, Blackrock College Dublin and a new kitchen for the Green Restaurant in Dublin.¹³ Among the main contractors H.A. O'Neil worked with at the time were Sisk, Murphys, Creedons and Cramptons.

Chris Jones, then a young apprentice, particularly remembered working on the contract for O'Neils on the church, presbytery and convent at Kilcullen. This was work that entailed staying away from home in digs and Chris's memories of the accommodation in Kilcullen as 'in the most appalling digs, cold, over a pub in the village. Eight of us in a room',¹⁴ are graphic but not, it appears, unusual.

The hard work and poor conditions in which Chris and his fellow apprentices worked involved long hours on-site, but as apprentices they also needed not only practical experience and training but also classroom education. Chris attended classes at the Technical Institute in Bolton Street from 7.30 to 9.30 in the evenings – after a hard and long day's work.





Above: The Cathedral of St Patrick and St Felim, Cavan town, was one of many church contracts undertaken by H.A. O'Neil. Opened in 1942, this neoclassical-style structure was designed by W.H. Byrne and built by John Sisk & Son.

Left: A striking view from 1948 of the nose of a Viscount aircraft with a Rolls Royce Belvedere ambulance, seen in front of the terminal building at Dublin Airport, where H.A. O'Neil had installed the heating and plumbing systems.

(Irish Photo Archive: www.irishphotoarchive.ie)



Top: The Convent of the Holy Cross, Kilcullen, County Kildare. Chris Jones, then a young apprentice, recalled working at the convent while sleeping eight to a room in digs over a pub in the village during the 1940s.

(The Lawrence photographic collection National Library of Ireland)



The Royal Victoria Eye and Ear Hospital has been known to generations of Dubliners as the 'Eye and Ear'. Symmetrical in form, the building on Adelaide Road was a Queen Anne-inspired design by architects Carroll and Batchelor. A heating and plumbing contract at the hospital opened the door to many later hospital projects for H.A. O'Neil.

(The Lawrence photographic collection National Library of Ireland)



Above: Schools and religious institutions were important sources of income for H.A. O'Neil in the early decades of the twentieth century. One important contract was the Convent of Mercy in Wicklow town.

*(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)*

Right: All Hallows College at Gracepark Road, Dublin. Dating from 1842, the college was originally founded to train Catholic priests for the foreign missions and later became a college of higher education until its closure in 2014. Harry O'Neil provided heating and plumbing facilities for this Drumcondra college.

*(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)*



Not all employers took their commitment to the ongoing training of their young employees as seriously as Harry O’Neil, as seen in evidence given to the Commission of Inquiry into Technical Education in Ireland¹⁵ in 1926. One father complained that having paid apprenticeship fees for his son he removed him after a year, as the only skill the son had learned was card playing! Representatives of the employers also complained about the expense of taking on employees. Harry not only fulfilled his commitment to the formal as well as the practical education of his apprentices, but also participated in advising on trade courses.

H.A. O’Neil becomes a limited company

The difficulties of carrying on a business such as O’Neil’s during the war years, having to cope with a scarcity of raw materials and dealing with problems associated with importing supplies, posed serious challenges to the family firm. Earnings from new contracts were limited and the business was also owed significant amounts of money by some of its customers.

Probably on the advice of the company solicitor, John P. Dunne, it was decided to make H.A. O’Neil Heating and Plumbing into a limited company. The reason for this was almost certainly to protect any family assets if the financial situation continued to deteriorate. Accordingly, the company was duly incorporated in July 1942 with two shareholders, ‘Henry A. O’Neil, Director’ and ‘Mrs Alice O’Neil, housewife’.¹⁶

Harry’s daughter, Alice Mary O’Neil, was appointed company secretary at a salary of £250 per year. Their solicitor advised that as recommended by the auditors, steps should be taken to collect outstanding accounts and that ‘the company name should be mentioned in all notices, advertisements and other official publications of the company’. From this time on all the advertisements for the business carried the new company title, H.A. O’Neil Limited, listed the locations where the company had projects and carried the motto ‘Whatever we do – we do well’.

By the following board meeting another director had been appointed to the company – a staff member called Thomas Finlay. Finlay was appointed managing director, while Harry O’Neil assumed the title of governing director, with Harry retaining the majority of the company’s shares.

The company’s financial circumstances were extremely fragile at that time and the directors agreed to furnish a list to the solicitor of those debtors whose accounts had been outstanding for a considerable time and which were in danger of becoming statute-barred from being collected. Despite this resolution, by October 1943 there were still significant debts of over £5,000 owing to the company. The following year, gross income had not increased significantly and after payment of the directors’ fees and the secretary’s salary, there remained a profit of only £453. It was decided that ‘out of the profits available, bonuses totalling £153 should be given to various employees of the Company’.¹⁷ This £153 was distributed as a capital bonus and was allocated as fully paid shares to the sixteen employees, including the young apprentice, Chris Jones, who



Above: witnessed share allocation showing the granting of one share each to Harry O’Neil and his wife Alice, dated May 1942.

Opposite: The Certificate of Incorporation for H.A. O'Neil Limited, 28 May 1942.

Below: A young Chris Jones and his brothers, (from left), Gerard, John, Chris, Tommy and Ted at Blarney Park, County Dublin.

received three shares. However, by August 1944 the accounts showed a loss of approximately £1,300 in the previous year. The board of directors minutes noted that:

Completed work was down on the year by about £5,000, materials fell by £230 and wages also by £230. The bad results were attributed to allowances for 'shop-time' and rebates and adjustments on the contracts for Ferbane Convent and the Department of Industry and Commerce building in Kildare Street. Another factor was the additional cost of materials above estimated price in the case of the contracts for Bray School and St Vincent's Hospital.

Stern measures had to be taken. No dividends were paid, Harry O'Neil's fee as governing director was reduced by £50 to £400, Mrs O'Neil's fees were reduced from £250 to £200, the other directors agreed to cancel their directors' fees and secretary's salary for the year, as a temporary measure in view of the unfavourable results. It was also decided that greater care be taken in calculating estimates and that the probable rising cost of materials be taken into account in this regard. Greater efforts to compel payment from recalcitrant debtors were also to be carried out.

Although there were new contracts in the immediate post-war period, they were small and the company continued to lose its experienced staff and workmen. In 1945 three managers left without giving notice to set up their own group, FKM.¹⁸ They were Francis Monaghan, Herbert Francis Kelly and managing director Thomas Finlay. According to company folklore, the three men left just as the company closed for the traditional builders' summer holidays, leaving a note to tell Harry O'Neil of their departure.

Young Chris Jones takes control

A lack of leadership from the top was a matter of serious concern for the remaining staff. It was at this juncture, with the company in extreme trouble, that one of the senior remaining staff, Chris Jones's foreman, Colm Brennan, recommended to Harry O'Neil that the young apprentice be given the

opportunity to run what remained of the company.

Chris Jones remembered meeting with Harry O'Neil to discuss the suggestion and telling him that he 'had very limited experience ... I said I didn't want any extra money as you are putting me into a job that I have no connections with and limited experience about. However, if you think I'm good enough for the job, I'll take it on'.¹⁹



'If you think I'm good enough for the job I'll take it on.'

Chris Jones to Harry O'Neil, 1945

He also promised not to leave the business in the same way that other employees had the previous year. When he agreed to take on the challenge Chris Jones was only 21 years old.

The working partnership between Harry O'Neil and Chris Jones was not destined to be of long duration. Just over two years after Chris committed himself to try and turn around the fortunes of the company, Harry died. Harry's will appointed his wife Alice his sole executrix and she became governing director of the company. The following year her daughter Alice Mary O'Neil replaced her as sole director. With little practical experience of the plumbing and heating business her views as to how the company should be run were very different from those of Chris Jones and their partnership was not destined to be a harmonious one.

Below left: A share certificate issued for H.A. O'Neil Limited in the name 'Miss Alice O'Neil', and dated 8 October 1958. Alice was company secretary and a director after the business became a limited company in 1942. After her father's death in 1947 she continued as a director and shareholder.

Below: A wistful study in charcoal of the young Alice O'Neil, by Dublin artist Harry Kernoff (1900-1974). Kernoff was of English and Russian extraction and was famous for his landscapes, genre scenes and portraits. He was part of the Jewish community in Portobello, close to the O'Neil home at 3 Cheltenham Place, where Alice lived until the 1970s.

(Courtesy of Derry Hussey)



Chapter 2 – Endnotes

1

Irish Builder, 18 February, 1944.

2

See, for example, *Irish Builder*, 81 (1939) for 16 September 1939, 30 September 1939, 14 October 1939, 11 November 1939, 25 November 1939.

3

See Ruth McManus, *Crampton Built* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan and G&T Crampton, 2009); Emma Cullinan, *Building a Business: 150 Years of the Sisk Group* (Dublin: Associated Editions on behalf the Sisk Group, 2009).

4

Irish Builder, 23 March 1946.

5

Irish Builder, No. 17 (19 August 1939), pp. 718; 732; 812; 912; 1036.

6

The Department of Industry and Commerce Kildare Street, Dublin (Dublin: Office of Public Works, 1992).

7

John Donohoe, *Chris Jones: The Complete Man* (Dublin: privately published, 2013); Offprint from *Irish Builder*, (1940).

8

Offprint from *Irish Builder*, (1940).

9

Hugh Oram, *Dublin Airport: The History* (Dublin: Aer Rianta, 1990).

10

Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p15.

11

H.A. O'Neil Limited, advertisement, *Irish Builder*, 1940.

12

St Mary's College, Rathmines was founded in 1890; closed in 1916 and re-opened in 1926. Kevin Barry was a student there until 1916.

13

Irish Builder, (18 November 1944).

14

Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, pp.17-18.

15

Report of the Commission on Technical Education (Dublin; Stationery Office, 1928)

16

Memorandum of Association, in H.A. O'Neil Minutes of Directors Meetings.

17

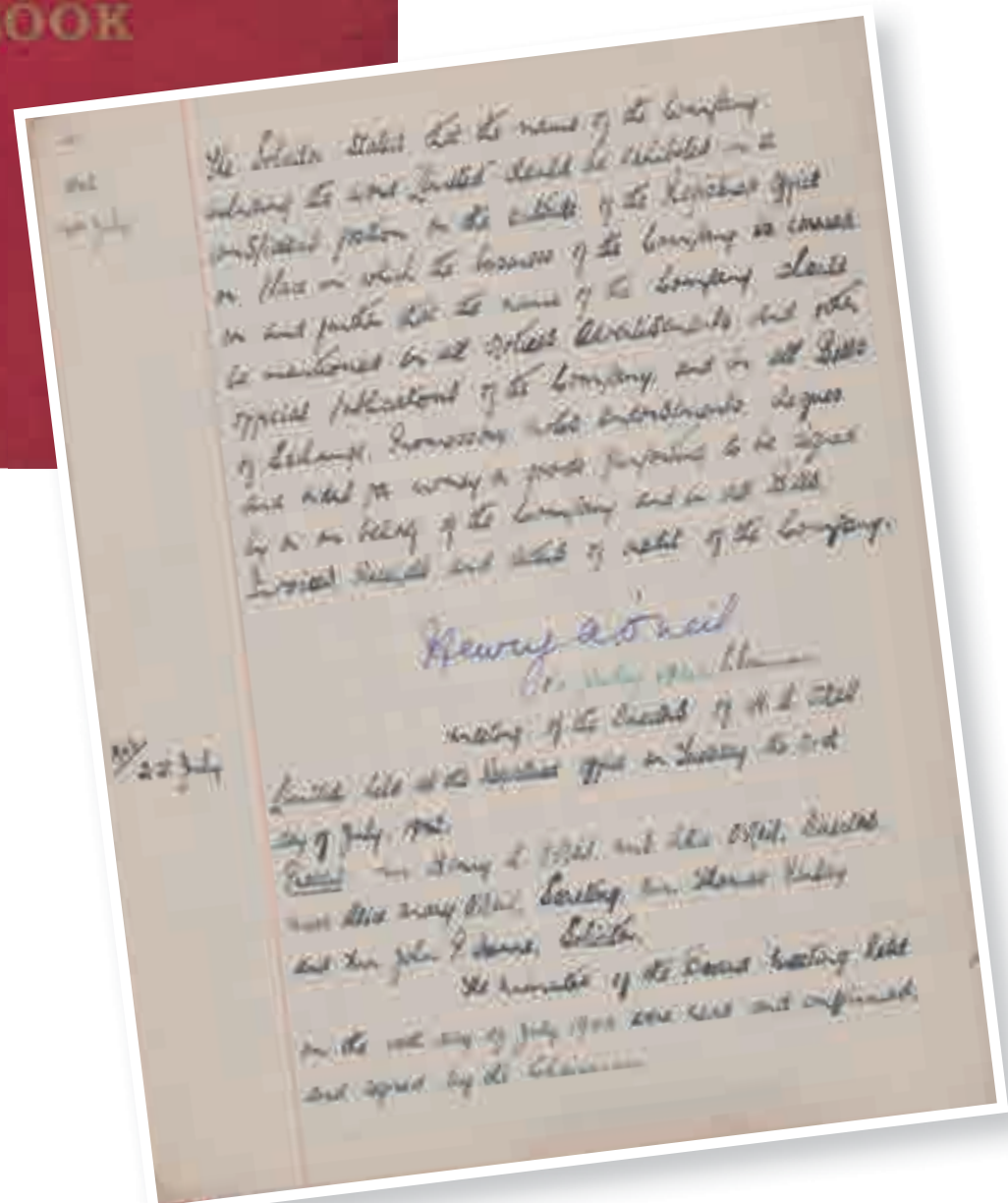
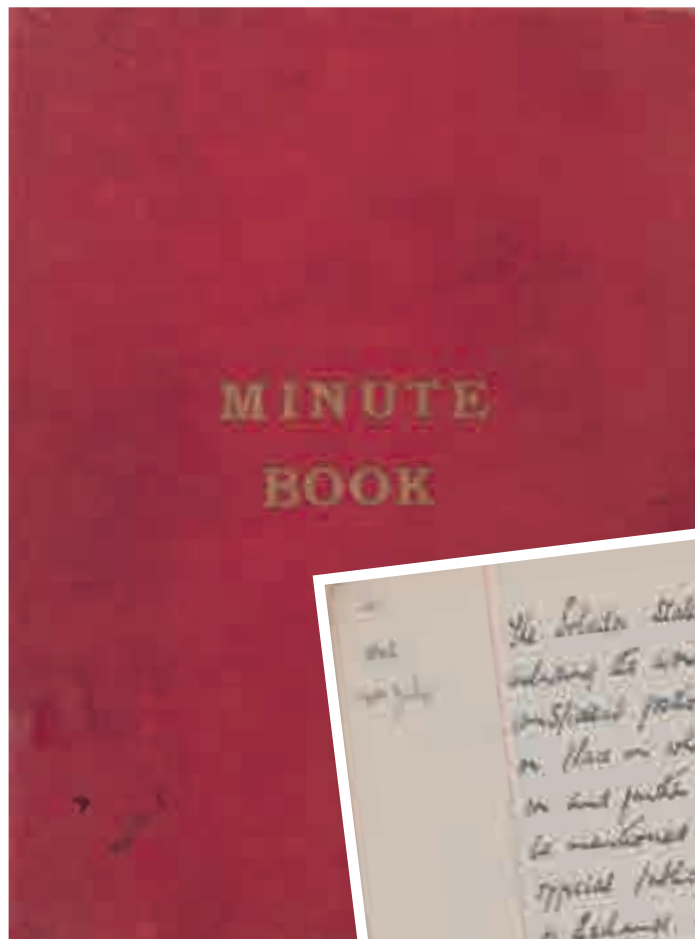
Ibid.

18

The project management construction services company FKM are still in business today.

19

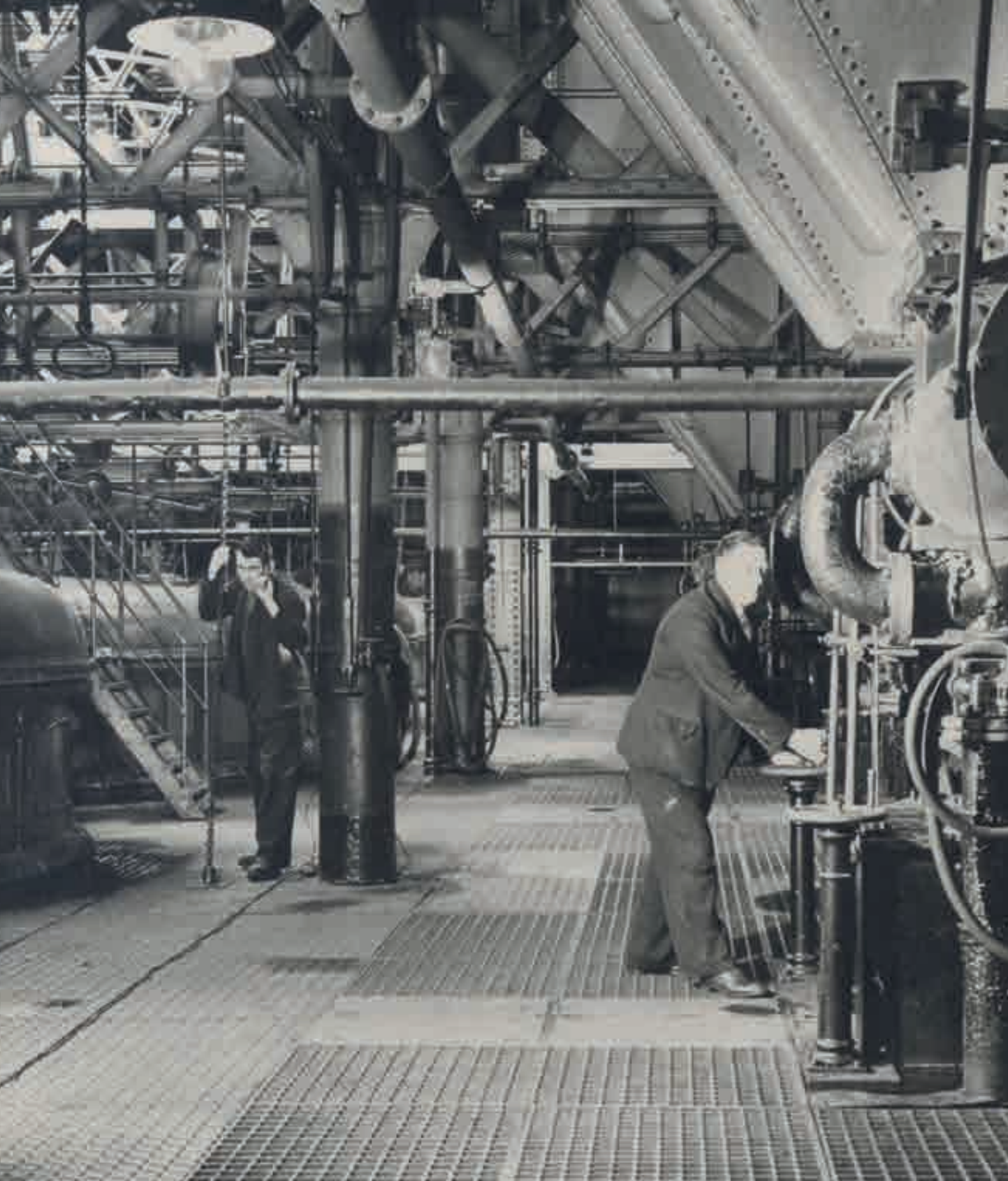
Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p.25.

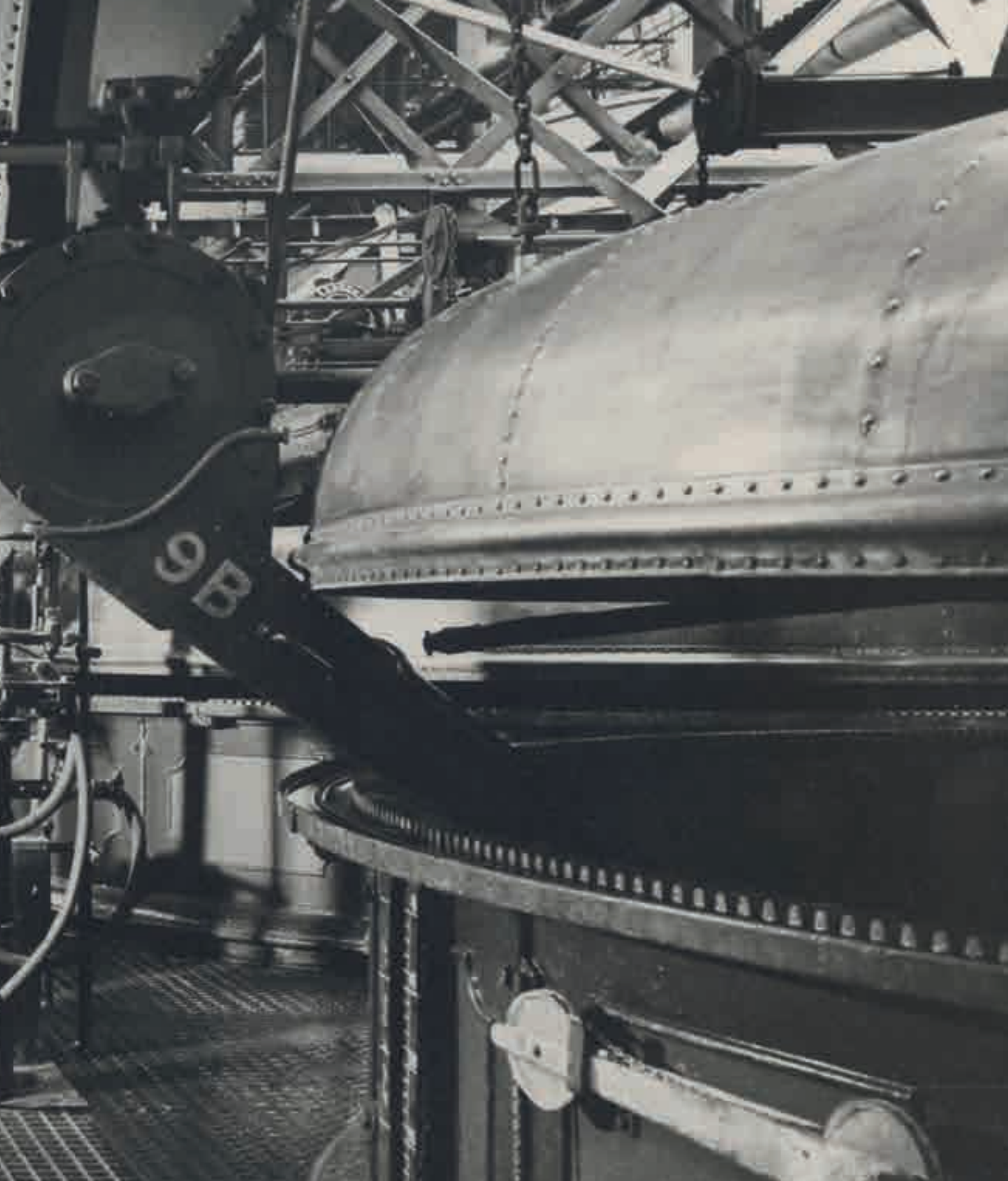


Above: Cover of H.A. O'Neil company minute book and minutes of board meetings of 14 and 21 July 1942.

Overleaf: Workers at the Guinness Brewery at St. James's Gate Dublin. H.A. O'Neil Limited has played a significant role at the brewery for over half a century.

(Courtesy of Guinness Archive, Diageo Ireland)







3 The second generation 1948–1960

‘There is no use in blinding ourselves to the fact that this year is going to be much harder on our people than was any year of the war ... The difficulties ahead are frightening.’

Seán Lemass, 1947

Ireland in the late 1940s was a tough place for a young man with little business experience to take over a struggling firm and attempt to bring it back into profit and economic viability. As Seán Lemass warned in March 1947: ‘There is no use in blinding ourselves to the fact that this year is going to be much harder on our people than was any year of the war ... The difficulties ahead are frightening.’¹ The winter of 1946–47 was the worst winter in Irish history. The ‘big freeze’ lasted from January 1947 until May, bringing blizzards and freezing temperatures, all during the worst fuel crisis in Ireland’s history.² For building contractors it was a period when little work could be attempted or completed.

The business climate in Ireland after the war

As a neutral country Ireland had ended the war with less material destruction than most European countries, but the Irish economy continued to display the effects of wartime dislocation in the form of rationing, rising inflation, falling living standards

Opposite: A typical engineering and drawing office in the 1943.

(Fairey Surveys Ltd)

Right: Main Street, Belturbet, County Cavan, in the grip of the ‘Big Snow’ of 1947, the year Harry O’Neil passed away, setting young Chris Jones a formidable challenge to continue the business at a bleak time in Ireland’s economic history.

(Courtesy of Kieran J. Campbell)





and frequent strikes.³ Ireland was included in the countries which could benefit under the United States funded Marshall Plan, intended to stimulate growth in the post-war European economy. However, as a neutral country, any aid provided to Ireland came in the form of loans rather than grants and on condition that most of the loan would be invested in agriculture rather than industry.

The minor building boom of the early 1950s in Ireland was therefore limited and in Professor Mary E. Daly's words 'the 1950s were a most gloomy period for the Irish economy'.⁴ Unemployment rose, the numbers of Irishmen and Irishwomen, especially trained workers, emigrating was the highest since the Great Famine of the 1840s. Prices increased and living standards in Ireland fell behind those of the rest of Western Europe. Things improved temporarily during the early 1950s when the Irish Government and local authorities continued their policy of building hospitals, schools and institutions, while a new programme of public sector housing began. H.A. O'Neil had a share in many of these projects. However, the latter part of the decade was a bleak time for all those companies involved in construction in Ireland.

It was in this stark economic environment in 1947 that Chris Jones joined the board of directors of H.A. O'Neil Limited, having borrowed the money from his brother-in-

Above: The contract at Cherry Orchard Fever Hospital (opened in 1953) at Ballyfermot, west Dublin, provided work for the company during a bleak decade for the construction sector.

Opposite: Not a car in sight – a view of Main Street Bandon at the turn of the nineteenth century.

(The Lawrence photographic collection National Library of Ireland)



Above: Brothers Chris and John Jones, part of a family of nine from Bandon, taken around 1934.

law Herbert Dennis to buy sufficient shares. The following year he was elected managing director, Harry O'Neil's widow having retired from the board.

Chris Jones makes his mark

The new managing director was born in Bandon in May 1924, the youngest child of a family of nine born to Timothy Jones and his wife, Molly McKeon.⁵ His father Timothy had served in the Royal Navy before retiring to take up a position as manager of a bonded warehouse in Bandon for Murphy's Brewery.⁶ He was later elected to Bandon Town Commissioners and Cork County Council, finally becoming chairman of the county council.⁷

Chris attended the local national school in Bandon for six years and he began his secondary schooling at Christian Brothers school North Monastery in Cork. He returned from Cork to attend the vocational school in Bandon⁸ where, as he recalled, he was 'utterly flabbergasted by the enthusiasm of the teachers – none of whom were qualified', especially by a metal worker who came from the Cobh dockyards, P.J. Horgan.⁹ His experience at that school gave Chris an enormous appreciation of the values of sound technical education, and the necessity for high standards of work. In fact, these high standards became part of his general attitude to life.





Throughout his career Chris Jones supported the ongoing development and expansion of technical training. Systems were established to ensure that apprentices working within the companies of the Jones Engineering Group would be given proper training. He believed in giving back to the construction industry as well as finding the brightest people to work in his company and in providing them with opportunities to develop and progress their careers. These beliefs were incorporated into the ethos of H.A. O'Neil Limited and subsequently into the companies that became part of the Jones Engineering Group.

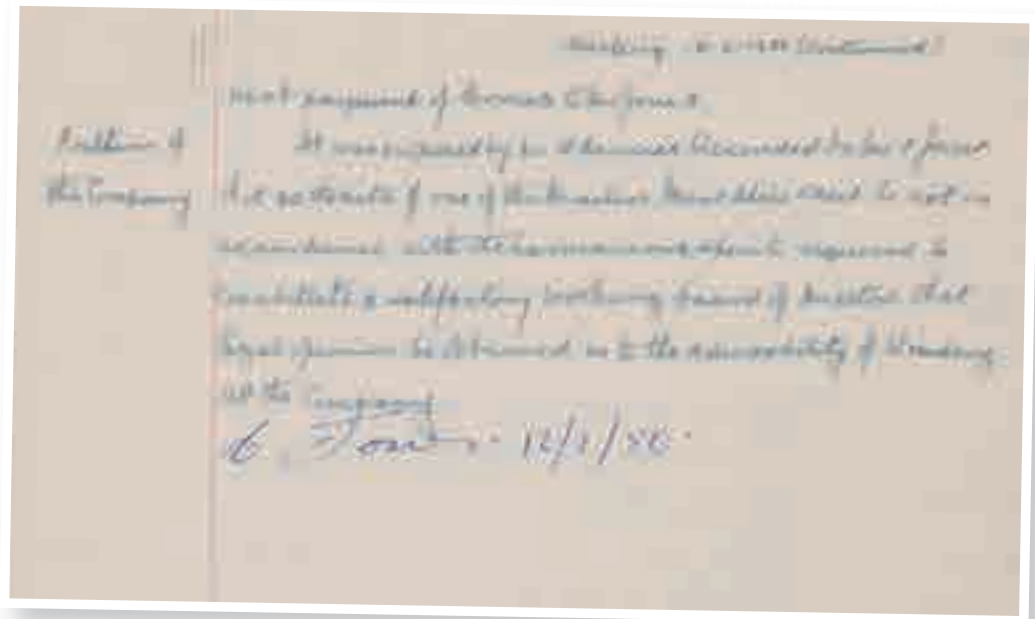
Chris Jones had little business experience but he had already displayed his undoubted entrepreneurial skills. As an apprentice and working on a small contract at a chip shop in Crumlin, the shop owner had complained to Chris about the difficulty of buying potatoes suitable for chips. Chris found a supply of the correct kind of potatoes and supplied them to Dublin chip shops in Crumlin, Westland Row and Rialto every Saturday – charging £6 a ton for potatoes he bought at £3 a ton from farmers in north County Dublin. However, supplying chip shops with potatoes at a profit was a far cry from the challenging task of trying to turn around the fortunes of H.A. O'Neil Limited.

Horried at the lack of financial management in the company, he set about gathering payments due to the company and insisted on paying outstanding bills to the company's suppliers, thereby establishing goodwill and better working relationships for the future.¹⁰ He also explored new opportunities for obtaining work outside the

Above: A fish and chip shop in Dublin.

Chris Jones displayed his early business flair by selling potatoes at a handsome profit to Dublin chip shops in Crumlin, Westland Row and Rialto. He bought his supply of potatoes from farmers in north County Dublin.

(Courtesy of Antonio Aprile)



*'Turnover is
vanity, profit
is fantasy,
cash is reality'.*

Chris Jones, 1950

greater Dublin area. This brought him into conflict with Harry O'Neil's daughter, Alice Mary O'Neil, who wanted to continue her father's policy of restricting the company's work to Dublin city and suburbs. This limited vision, together with her reluctance to settle suppliers' bills in full, led to disagreements on the board of directors – and with Chris Jones in particular – but change was on the way.

As Chris recalled: 'Her idea of what we were doing, and my idea of what we were to do, was poles apart'.¹¹ The matter came to a head in 1950 when the minutes of the board of directors of H.A. O'Neil Limited recorded that

It was proposed ... that the acts of one of the Directors Miss Alice O' Neil be not in accordance with the harmonious spirit required to constitute a satisfactory working board of Directors that legal opinion be obtained as to the advisability of winding up the Company.¹²

Matters were resolved and after this Alice's active role in the company ended to all intents and purposes, although she remained a director of the company for many years.

A three-strand approach to achieving financial stability

There were three strands to Chris Jones's strategy for bringing the company back to financial viability – cash, staff and contracts. The first one was to ensure that all outstanding accounts to the company were paid. Those of his colleagues who worked with him recall his regular question 'How's the cash?' – a lesson well learned and applied from his earliest days as a director of H.A. O'Neil.¹³ The other mantra remembered by those who worked with him was 'Turnover is vanity, profit is fantasy, cash is reality'.

Above: Minutes of H.A. O'Neil Limited board meeting from February 1950.



The next strand was his determination to find good staff. New contracts could not be delivered efficiently without a viable and trained workforce. The majority of those employees who, along with Chris Jones, had been allocated shares in H.A. O'Neil Limited as a capital bonus in 1943, had left the company by 1947.¹⁴ New men were recruited from other contractors, often from British companies with Irish subsidiaries, such as Haden's and Matthew Hall.

By 1958 the company's staff had increased to around one hundred people. Many of these were men who were to stay with the company for the remainder of their careers. They included Gerry Jones, Teddy Bourke, Mick McDonagh, George and Eddie Binley, Colm Brennan, Billy Kelly, George O'Brien, Dick Beatty, Tommy Beatty, Mick Reilly, James Curley (Snr), Eddie Purcell, Tommy Purcell, Paddy Brennan, Brendan Pierce, Sean Kavanagh, Leonard Fleming, George Garnet, Barney and Miley McGuirk, Owen White, Rory Brennan, Alan and Terry Smith, Dominic Jennings, Sean Moran and the supervisor for contract work in Cork, Reggie Killeen.¹⁵

Aware that new contracts and customers were badly needed, Chris Jones looked for opportunities inside and outside Dublin, and in areas where O'Neils had no previous presence. Chris Jones's sister Mary had married Herbert Dennis, chief foreman and construction manager with John Sisk & Son, and Herbert Dennis gave Chris an early opportunity. This was the possibility of tendering for the plumbing contract for 1,000 new houses in Walkinstown, a suburb situated south-west of the centre of Dublin. The main contractors for this large contract were the Construction Supplies Company and Sisk.¹⁶



Top left: Staff pictured outside the H.A. O'Neil premises at 164 Rathmines Road. Included are (left to right) Michael McDonagh, Des Binley, Mr Cassidy, Teddy Bourke, Billy Cree and Colm Brennan.

Above: Staff and families day out on the River Shannon. The group includes Tommy Purcell, Sean Moran, Billy Kelly, George Binley and their wives.

Right: Kevin Boland, Neil Blaney and Gerry Jones (far right) leaving Leinster House, Dublin, on 3 June 1971.

(Irish Photo Archive: www.irishphotoarchive.ie)

Below: Article from *The Irish Times*, 11 June 1970, indicating Gerry Jones's involvement in the controversial arms trial of the same year.

(Irish Times Archive)



H.A. O'Neil won the contract, but with a small workforce and with existing work on hand, it meant that the workers had to assemble the materials after hours and fit out the houses during the day. Seen as a 'make or break' opportunity for the firm, the project proved very successful.¹⁷ The Walkinstown development led to the establishment of good working relationships with Sisk and to the partnership of the two firms in many high profile projects over the years.

There were contracts won in partnership with other construction firms, many of them for plumbing and heating work in the new housing estates being developed around Dublin immediately after the war, such as the Priory estate in Stillorgan, for which H.A. O'Neil won the plumbing contract in 1949. Contracts to work on religious buildings continued, including convents, churches and schools all over Ireland. H.A. O'Neil also won additional customers and contracts in new areas of the business. One early project was with the Office of Public Works (OPW) to work on the Ordnance Survey building in the Phoenix Park.

Managing the firm while looking for new work was too much to be undertaken by one man alone. Chris Jones's brother-in-law Herbert Dennis became a member of the board of directors in 1949. The following year Chris persuaded his brother Gerard (Gerry) Jones to leave his post in the civil service and to work with him in the company.

Gerry Jones, a colourful character, set up the administrative structure of the company, keeping track of contracts, payments and accounts and ensuring that any variations and extras were paid for.¹⁸ Gerry became a member of the board in 1953. In addition to his business career, Gerry was also active in politics as a member of the Fianna Fáil party. He was a patron of the Royal Hospital in Donnybrook and honorary Belgian consul in Ireland.¹⁹ Gerry's political links may have provided new contacts and

opportunities for the company, but Chris's insistence on quality work and high standards ensured that customers of H.A. O'Neil would return when they needed the company's services.

The company order book increased and the type of work being undertaken became more varied. By 1953 dividends were paid again to shareholders.²⁰ The company bought a new car (a Chevrolet) for Chris Jones and in 1954 the annual general meeting of H.A. O'Neil voted that 'a good present be made to Mr Christopher Jones on the occasion of his marriage'.²¹

The company moves to Rathmines Road

The cramped working conditions for employees in the outhouses and yard of 3 Cheltenham Place, described by Chris Jones as a 'grovel hole',²² were 'one small little room. The store was the ladies' lavatory ... We had no space, we had no yard, only a tiny little hovel, full of scrap'.²³ These facilities were far too small for the expanding workload and staff numbers, so it was agreed that the company should move premises. Suitable accommodation at number 162 Lower Rathmines Road, previously owned by the Smurfit family, was purchased in 1949 at a cost of about £3,000. The premises were modernised and H.A. O'Neil Limited moved in, remaining in Rathmines for the next twenty years. Later, in 1960, number 164 Lower Rathmines Road was acquired followed by the Princess Cinema which became the company's workshops. Harry O'Neil's widow and his younger daughter, Alice Mary, stayed in the premises at Cheltenham Place, with Alice Mary finally moving out in the 1970s.²⁴

Despite the gloomy economic outlook during the 1950s in Ireland there were new opportunities for those companies willing to seek them out. One of the big opportunities for H.A. O'Neil and other firms involved in the construction industry was the new government initiative in expanding existing hospitals and building new ones.

A coalition government came into office in Ireland in 1948 and the Minister for



Top: The simple brass nameplate displayed outside the H.A. O'Neil headquarters at 162 Rathmines Road.



Below: The original company nameplate from Cheltenham Place. The company moved from 3 Cheltenham Place to Rathmines Road in 1949 and remained there for twenty years. The business moved to Beech Hill in Clonskeagh in 1969 and to Waterways in 1995.



Left: Dr Noel Browne (front right) appointed Minister for Health in 1948, signs the first of three contracts for TB sanatoria in Galway, Dublin and Cork, all of which would provide valuable contracts for H.A. O'Neil. Also in the picture is George G. Sisk (left), standing (left) is William Cotter, company secretary and Norman White, architect.

Right: Work on the Southern Regional Sanatorium, later the Cork Regional Hospital, brought the company into a bigger league. The high quality of workmanship was acknowledged by Minister for Health, T.F. O'Higgins in 1955.



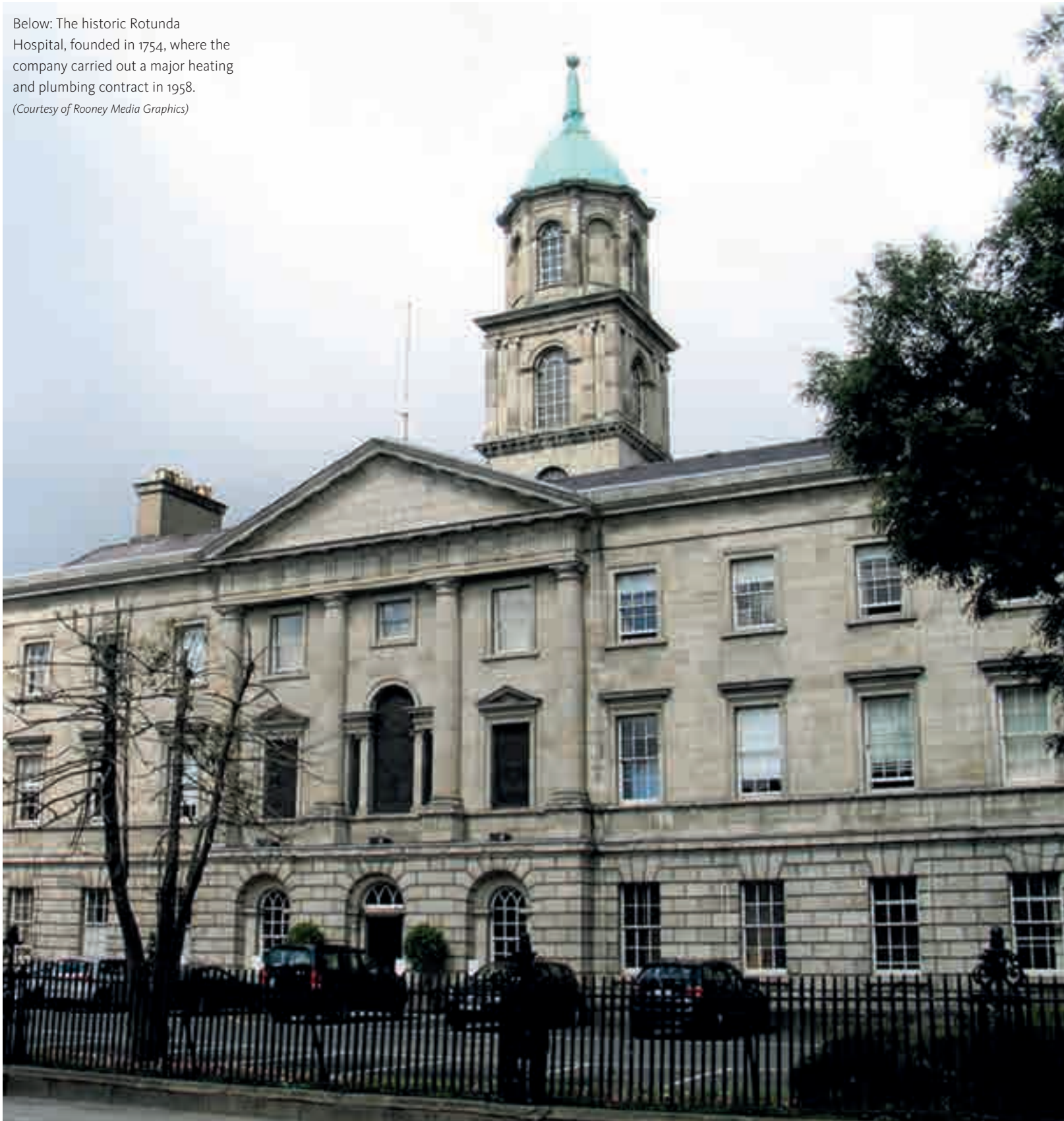
Health, Dr Noel Browne, established as part of his new health policy, the elimination of tuberculosis (TB) in Ireland. In an initiative funded by central government through the Irish Hospitals Trust,²⁵ the Irish Government embarked on a major hospital building programme and TB sanatoria were built throughout Ireland. A mass X-ray programme began, and TB treatment was provided free of charge for all and free vaccination Bacillus Calmette-Guérin (BCG), was introduced. Within ten years the Irish death rate from TB had dropped from 124 per 100,000 to 24.²⁶ However, some of the hospital facilities were later utilised for people suffering from infantile paralysis – or polio – a new health scourge that was to be a source of major public concern. H.A. O'Neil were successful in a bid they submitted for the plumbing contract on Castlerea Mental Hospital, then being converted to a TB sanatorium,²⁷ working with the celebrated Irish architect Michael Scott. The company spent several years working in Castlerea.

Operating outside Dublin demanded transport beyond bicycles, and a second-hand motor van was purchased, at a cost of £381, less five per cent.²⁸ Other contracts for hospitals followed – a new TB hospital in Galway with beds for 500 patients, and in 1952 another hospital in Cork, called the Southern Regional Sanatorium (later Cork Regional Hospital). Chris Jones recalled:

That Cork job gave us big status in that industry. We were now regarded as equal to any of the competitors from England. There were very few Irish companies at it, maybe two smaller ones. I started making contacts with building contractors in Limerick, Cork and round Dublin, and became a very prominent and well-respected mechanical contractor.²⁹

The work that H.A. O'Neil did on the Southern Regional Sanatorium was publicly acknowledged by the then Minister for Health, T.F. O'Higgins, when he made special

Below: The historic Rotunda Hospital, founded in 1754, where the company carried out a major heating and plumbing contract in 1958.
(Courtesy of Rooney Media Graphics)





Above: Tommy Purcell recalled working with a tilley lamp like the one above to light up the work in the winter time.

Right: Tommy Purcell and George McCann pose for a photograph while working at Crumlin Hospital. Tommy Purcell appears to be standing on George's shoulders, but he's actually standing on the windowsill!

Below: Notes and sketches from Tommy Purcell's workbook from his courses in Bolton Street c. 1940s. Diagram of low pressure heating system.



mention of the high standards of workmanship of, among others, H.A. O'Neill [sic] Limited, who had carried out the heating and hot water installations, adding: 'To all of them and particularly to the many craftsmen and other workers who have been engaged on this project, I offer my congratulations'.³⁰

With an increasing reputation for getting the job done and done well, there were other contracts for H.A. O'Neil in Ireland's hospitals – Our Lady's Hospital Navan in 1955, Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children in Crumlin Dublin, completed in 1956, St Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny in 1957, and Dublin's Rotunda Hospital in 1958.³¹

George McCann (later a director), worked on the Crumlin hospital project as an apprentice, along with two other young apprentices – Tommy McIlhinney and Tommy Purcell. Tommy Purcell spent two years on the Crumlin hospital site and recalled that 'we were working in Crumlin Hospital ... It was in the winter time and you'd to work with a Tilley lamp [to light up the work]'.³²

Health and safety concerns were not paramount at the time and on one occasion when Tommy Purcell and George McCann posed for a photo on the Crumlin site, he recalled that – 'I'm supposed to be standing on his shoulders but I'm actually standing on the windowsill ... That was in Crumlin Hospital ... it was a huge place ... we used to walk on parapets that were six stories up – you'd walk along the parapet'.³³

The work on hospital projects continued, one in the Rotunda Hospital which required copper roofing, leading to the acquisition of new expertise and to other



contracts in the same area on new buildings, for the OPW and for other groups on the restoration of heritage buildings. As the decade went on Chris Jones and the company continued to look for new opportunities to expand the business.

Shannon contract leads to major expansion

One opportunity which led to the expansion of the firm in several new directions was when H.A. O'Neil, through Brendan Martin of Esso,³⁴ won the contract to fit a new system of oil pipelines in Shannon Airport. By 1955 the increase in the number of aeroplanes (and bigger and more expensive aircraft) using Shannon Airport necessitated a new method of refuelling, which would enable a faster turnaround of these aeroplanes, eliminating waste time on the ground for the aviation companies. A new hydrant system and underground pipelines connected to serve outlets on the parking aprons for these aircraft, through a system of satellite storage to Esso's remote bulk storage tanks on the east side of the airfield was installed.

Work on the new system began in October 1954 and entailed the excavation of 120,000 cubic feet of earth and concrete. More than 3.5 miles of piping was fabricated and laid. The aviation fuel was pumped through these pipelines from the Esso bulk tanks to aircraft standing by for refuelling.³⁵ The technology for doing this was beyond H.A. O'Neil's existing expertise but the problem was solved by bringing in a welder from the UK who could do X-ray standard welds. Because of the boggy conditions at Shannon, difficulties also arose as the pipes had to be kept dry and the water pumped out of the trenches. There were other problems too. Chris Jones remembered that the work had to be heavily insured as 'There were all sorts of boozed up film stars, and other characters arriving, and you couldn't have anyone falling and breaking a leg'.³⁶

The Shannon project brought Chris into contact with an Esso engineer, Denis Magee, and a good working relationship developed. He was later recruited to the company, eventually becoming chief executive and chairman. Shannon also gave the company valuable experience in a new field and enhanced its reputation of being able to deliver on its commitments.

With experience gained at Shannon Airport and in the building of oil lines at the Cork docks for Caltex in 1959 the company expected, with some justification, to be awarded a contract for at least part of the work at a new refinery being built at Whitegate in County Cork. However, the contract was awarded to an American company, Bechtel, so Chris Jones turned his attention to another aspect of oil delivery – shipping.



Top: A view of the Shannon Airport tower in 1946. A decade later H.A. O'Neil went on to win further projects at this transatlantic hub in the south-west of Ireland, including the installation of a state-of-the-art refuelling system to cater for increased and more sophisticated air traffic through the airport.

Above: The success of the 1954 Shannon Airport contract to fit a new system of oil pipelines brought H.A. O'Neil into a bigger league and enhanced the company's reputation for being able to deliver, on time, on its customer commitments.

(Courtesy of Brendan Daly)

Right: A 1960s picture of the five directors of the Jones Group – from left; John Jones, Denis Magee, Chris Jones, Derry Hussey and Gerard Jones.

Below: The first venture into commercial shipping was in 1959 with Celtic Coasters. Dublin Shipping Limited followed, consisting of a fleet of small and medium-sized coasters, including the *Rathlynn*, *Rathmore* and *Rathnew*.



Shipping subsidiary set up in 1959

In March 1959 Celtic Coasters Limited was set up³⁷ as a subsidiary of the Jones Group to transport petroleum products between the refinery at Whitegate and installations along the Irish coast. Later, another shipping company, Dublin Shipping Limited, was formed, with a fleet of small and medium-sized coastal vessels carrying oil and bitumen to depots around Ireland and the west coast of Britain. These shipping companies were to continue to trade between Ireland and Britain and further afield until the 1990s.

The 1960s ushers in a new era

By 1960 living standards in Ireland were rising. Up to the end of the 1950s houses were normally heated by open fires, back boilers, and in some cases ranges, burning wood, coal and turf. Then, thanks to the development of new techniques, fuels and equipment, central heating – until then the preserve of institutions and large houses – became almost essential in new Irish homes. Aware of these new opportunities and ‘sensing that a new era of building was at hand’,³⁸ the directors of H.A. O’Neil recruited people with expertise in central heating to ensure that the company would be staffed to meet this new business.

In November 1960 H.A. O’Neil opened the Heating Information Centre at 164 Lower Rathmines Road to provide the public with information on the installation of domestic central heating and its technical and economic aspects. By then H.A. O’Neil Limited had come a long way in the twelve years since Chris Jones had become the managing director of a small company in difficult financial circumstances. H.A. O’Neil now had contracts across the whole island of Ireland, had established a proven track record in delivering on commitments given, had extended the company’s areas of expertise and had earned a reputation for always being available in an emergency. Chris Jones could tell his fellow directors that he looked forward to the future with confidence!

[illegible]

Chapter 3 – Endnotes

- 1 Lemass to Dáil Éireann, March 1947, quoted in *Irish Builder* of 22 March 1947.
- 2 Kevin Kearns, *Ireland's Arctic Freeze: The Big Freeze of 1947* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2011).
- 3 Bernadette Whelan 'Adopting the "American Way": Ireland and the Marshall Plan, 1947–57' in *History Ireland*, 16 (May/June 2008), pp.30-33; Bernadette Whelan, *Ireland and the Marshall Plan, 1947–1957* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000).
- 4 Mary E. Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland since 1800* (Dublin: Educational Company, 1981), p.163.
- 5 John Donohoe, *Chris Jones: The Complete Man* (Dublin: privately published, 2013), p. 4.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Originally established in 1902 as Bandon Technical School, the school was renamed St Brogan's College in the early 1980s.
- 9 Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p.8.
- 10 Ibid., p. 25.
- 11 Ibid., p. 32.
- 12 Minutes of the Meeting of Directors of H.A. O'Neil Limited, 18 February 1950.
- 13 See Eamon Fitzgerald interview.
- 14 Minutes of the Meeting of Directors of H.A. O'Neil Limited, 4 November 1943 and 11 August 1947.
- 15 Jim Curley, senior, memoir.
- 16 The CHS consortium in which John Sisk & Son were a 50 per cent partner. See *Sisk in Dublin: The First Fifty Years* (Dublin: Sisk, 1988), p. 1.
- 17 Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p.26.
- 18 Ibid., pp. 38-39.
- 19 For more on Gerry Jones (1919-99) see Shaun Boylan, 'Gerard ("Gerry") Jones', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <http://dib.cambridge>; *Irish Times*, 30 October 1999.
- 20 Minutes of the Meeting of Directors of H.A. O'Neil Limited, 16 July 1953.
- 21 Minutes of the AGM of H.A. O'Neil Limited, 29 July 1954 and 21 July 1955.
- 22 Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p. 34.
- 23 Ibid, p.34.
- 24 *Thom's ... Directory 1975-76*, p. 173.
- 25 The Trust, established in 1930, administered the proceeds of the Irish Hospitals Sweepstake, a lottery on major horse races held three times a year between 1930 and 1986. It enabled a major hospital building programme between the 1930s and the 1950s in Ireland. See Marie Coleman, *The Irish Sweep: A History of the Irish Hospitals Sweepstake, 1930–87* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009).
- 26 Daly, *Social and Economic History of Ireland Since 1800*, pp.181-2.
- 27 It continued to function as a hospital until 1994 when it was closed. It was renamed St Patrick's Hospital during the 1960s. From 1996 it opened as a prison.
- 28 Minutes of the Meeting of Directors of H.A. O'Neil Limited, 12 February 1949.
- 29 Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p. 47.
- 30 *Irish Times*, 19 May 1955. Another firm, P. Lynch Limited, which later became part of the Jones Group, did the electrical work at the hospital.
- 31 *Irish Times*, 1 July 1958.
- 32 Tommy McIlhinney interview.
- 33 Tommy Purcell interview.
- 34 H.A. O'Neil notes (typescript).
- 35 *Irish Times*, 28 June 1954.
- 36 Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p. 51.
- 37 The company was set up on 6 March 1959 and dissolved on 1 December 2000.
- 38 Chris Jones at opening of The Heating Centre, *Irish Times*, 4 November 1960.

Opposite: The Heating Centre Rathmines. The first signature in the Heating Centre's visitors' book was that of Jack Lynch (1917-1999), then Minister for Industry and Commerce and later Taoiseach twice in the 1960s and 1970s.



4 The drive towards the Jones Group: 1960–1973

‘... never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude.’

Éamon de Valera, 1961



Above: The University College Dublin (UCD) building on Earlsfort Terrace, off St Stephen's Green.

(The Wiltshire Collection National Library of Ireland)

Left: O'Connell Street, Dublin, 8 June 1961.

(Charles Cushman Collection: Indiana University Archives, P12241)

Economic growth was non-existent in Ireland in the late 1950s. Inflation and unemployment figures were high and emigration was at an almost all-time peak, while living standards were low, in an economy driven by a policy of protectionism.

A proposal to revise this policy, the *First Programme for Economic Expansion*,¹ was published in 1958, advocating free trade and arguing that jobs would have to be created by a shift from agriculture to industry and services. This programme became a landmark in Irish economic history, primarily for its bold new ideas, which were adopted by a government led by Taoiseach Seán Lemass.

Tax breaks and grants brought the stimulus of foreign investment into the Irish economy through a programme of trade liberalisation. The programme also provided for the investment of over £200 million in an integrated system of national development and structural reform to last for the following decade. Economic growth accelerated as a result and, in 1973, the course of Irish history changed when Ireland acceded to the European Economic Community (EEC).

Irish society was changing and becoming less insular. Telefís Éireann was launched in December 1961 by the President of Ireland, Éamon de Valera, who warned that, ‘... never before was there in the hands of men an instrument so powerful to influence the thoughts and actions of the multitude’.² This signalled a new era in Irish broadcasting and opened up a different world to Irish audiences.

The 1960s – a decade of major change

During the 1960s education was seen as a major priority for successful future economic and national development. A full-scale analysis of Ireland's education system resulted in far-reaching educational reforms and in 1967 free post-primary education was introduced. This new educational initiative, together with an increasing population, meant a demand for new secondary schools of the traditional type, as well as the newly-introduced community schools. At the same time many existing schools extended their buildings as part of this ambitious initiative.

One important vote of confidence in the future of education at third level was the move, commencing in 1964, of University College Dublin (UCD) from Earlsfort Terrace and other sites in the city centre to a greenfield site at Belfield, south of the city – a move that allowed constant expansion and growth for Ireland's largest university over the following decades.



As Irish society became more prosperous, higher levels of disposable income saw an increased demand for new retail facilities. The 1960s heralded the development of supermarkets and shopping centres in Ireland, the novelty element of which was then a source of major wonder. The first one to be completed was at Stillorgan, in south County Dublin.

The hospitality sector received a huge boost as hotels all over the country were expanded or new ones built to cater for a population with more leisure, as well as to support a rapidly-growing tourist industry. The Jones Group won many hotel contracts during the 1960s. These included the Ryan chain of hotels around Ireland, Actons Hotel in Kinsale, County Cork, Wynns Hotel and the Ashling Hotel, both in central Dublin, the Imperial Hotel in Cork and the Strand Hotel in Rosslare, County Wexford.

Irish cityscapes were also changing. In the past, apart from many purpose-built bank buildings, business was conducted in older converted domestic dwellings. But in the 1960s new office blocks replaced older business premises (unfortunately often destroying buildings of great historic and heritage value in the days before the first Planning Act of 1964) in a wave of urban redevelopment.

Dublin especially changed very much in the 1960s. New commercial buildings and offices were being built throughout the city, changing the predominantly Georgian



Top: The arts block and library at the University College Dublin (UCD) Belfield campus in south Dublin. The company maintained a strong presence on the Belfield site as the university developed throughout the 1960s and 70s.

Above: Another first for the company – the contract for Ireland's first (open air) shopping centre at Stillorgan, south County Dublin, opened in 1966.



Above: Sean Moran was an apprentice with Chris Jones in Cheltenham Place. He became a chief surveyor with H.A. O'Neil Limited and was later appointed a director.

cityscape. St Vincent's Hospital moved from St Stephen's Green – its home since 1834 – to a new hospital site on Merrion Road in Ballsbridge. It was only one of many well-known institutions that moved out of the city over succeeding years.

As the city's population increased Dublin expanded, with new housing estates being built and suburbs being established where before there had been farmlands and green fields. All this burst of infrastructural development provided huge opportunities for H.A. O'Neil Limited and its associated companies. These companies operated together under the informal umbrella title of 'The Jones Group' and in the following decades they played a significant role in many of these developments in Ireland.

Changes take place at board level

The 1960s signified a period of enormous change and development for H.A. O'Neil and its associated companies. One of Chris Jones's earliest supporters, Herbert Dennis, had died in 1959. Denis Magee joined the board of directors in 1965 and Derry Hussey came to the company in the same year (later becoming company secretary and finally a director of the Jones Group).

By 1971 the board of directors had been extended to include two others, Sean Moran who had been an apprentice with Chris Jones, and Peter Nolan, originally a draftsman with H.A. O'Neil and the contracts manager in the Rathmines office.



Right: Work commenced on the new St Vincent's Hospital at Elm Park in Ballsbridge Dublin in 1964. Terry Tierney, who went on to become a director, recalled working eleven-hour days on the site. It was the largest voluntary teaching hospital to have been commissioned in Ireland or Great Britain since the Second World War.



New people had joined the Jones Group, such as Henry King, who was also contracts manager in the Rathmines office and Harry Toher, who was the personnel officer in the Beech Hill headquarters.

Other companies in the Jones Group had also been established or acquired – Climate Engineering, Harper & Fay, Dublin Shipping, Tube Rollers and Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited. The group also acquired substantial interests in Runtalrad and Thermal Insulation Distributors.

Servicing an expanding Dublin housing market

Dublin's new housing estates of the 1960s and new consumer demands for the upgrading of existing homes offered significant and profitable opportunities for H.A. O'Neil.

Matt Johnston joined the company in 1963 as a draughtsman, his main responsibility being the design of heating and water service systems – both of which involved a certain amount of estimating. Bigger jobs such as schools and office blocks came through the consulting engineers but the smaller jobs were much more informal:

Above: John Reynolds (left) and Matt Johnston in the H.A. O'Neil drawing office in Rathmines in 1970. Matt joined the company in 1963 as an estimator. He retired in 2008 but stayed on part-time until 2010.

Above inset: Henry King, general manager of Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited in the Rathmines office.



Above: Introduction to the products and operational details of Runtalrad from a Jones Group prospectus.

You'd do a design and do an estimate and probably you'd negotiate more or less the entire job, the final price ... we would set out and we would design a job, estimate it and you'd bring it through to the finish. As it worked out, you could start and finish all the parts in the job.³

Some central heating work was done for individual customers and Matt Johnston recalled a number of great stories from that time. One job in particular involved installing a central heating system in a house in the south Dublin suburb of Rathfarnham:

Our idea of a survey would be just to see what we needed to do to size the system. We did up a little sketch of location of windows and doors and a little work plan to size the radiators and do our heat losses and we went ahead and did the heating system. But the customer had given our drawing to his interior decorator to design the kitchen and they took whatever scale we had on it as being correct and of course, when they went to put the kitchen in nothing fitted! There was uproar about it but we said look, we don't do these designs for interior design. If he wanted an interior design he should have done his own survey!

Much of the work on domestic dwellings came through a contract with the Electricity Supply Board (ESB). This involved fitting immersion heaters in hot water cylinders not only in the new estates but in older buildings too. Business also came through The Heating Centre in Rathmines 'where you could walk in off the street and talk to somebody about having heating put in your house'. There was always a learning curve, according to Matt Johnston, one being the changes from imperial to metric measurements.⁴

So central heating was becoming an important source of revenue for the Jones Group. In 1967 the group acquired a majority share of Runtalrad, a radiator manufacturing company in Kilkenny, which manufactured, under licence, a Swiss radiator described by Chris Jones as 'a very upmarket, exclusive radiator, designed for choosy architects or house and garden people';⁵ and distributed in Ireland and Britain. Runtalrad was to be supplemented by another company, Tube Rollers Limited, situated on a neighbouring site, the output of which included, from 1975, precision steel tubing, while supplying the raw materials to Runtalrad. However, by the end of the decade the group had moved away from domestic central heating work, except for special individual contracts.

The Irish construction sector expands

Following the rolling out of Lemass's innovative economic development plan, the 1960s brought significant new business and industries to Ireland. By the end of the decade much of the work of the Jones Group centred around new commercial buildings,

factories and institutions, as well as the development and expansion of the airports at Dublin, Cork and Shannon.

There were contracts with Waterford Glass, Semperit, Irish Dunlop, Banagher Tiles, Aqua International, McCann Motors, Killarney Hosiery, P.J. Carroll, The Irish Press, Warner-Lambert Ireland in Blackrock, Industrial Mouldings, Nuclear Data (Ireland), Roadstone, Palgrave Murphy, Howmedica and the Boland's bread factory in Deangrange, County Dublin.

Working in partnership with John Sisk & Son, G&T Crompton, P.J. Hegarty & Sons, P.J. Walls, Collen Bros. and other major Irish construction companies, the Jones Group also played a significant role in the redevelopment of Ireland's cities, especially in the construction of the new office complexes that were changing the urban landscape. These included the Irish Life complex in Abbey Street Dublin, new CIÉ offices at Upper O'Connell Street, the Irish Hospitals Trust in Ballsbridge and the large office block called Carrisbrook House, also in Ballsbridge. In Sandyford, south County Dublin, work began on the award-winning Irish Management Institute (IMI) building, designed by Arthur Gibney. Outside Dublin there was a major development on the South Mall in Cork and office blocks in Waterford city.

A hugely important landmark building involved the companies of the Jones Group in 1963 when the contract was won to work on the new headquarters of the Services Industrial Professional and Technical Union (SIPTU). This was a 200-foot high, seventeen-story building on the site of the historic Liberty Hall. When completed in 1965, the new Liberty Hall, dubbed 'Ireland's first skyscraper', was the tallest building in Ireland.⁶

Another high profile building with which the company was associated and in which it did the heating plumbing and ventilation, working with leading construction company G&T Crompton, was the purpose-built United States Embassy, on a highly visible site at the corner of Elgin Road and Pembroke Road in Ballsbridge. Designed by the American architect J.J. Johansen, in consultation with legendary Irish architect Michael Scott, it was a circular design that 'enables the building to face in all directions, friendly and attractive from any angle'.^{7,8}

Some years later, in 1973, H.A. O'Neil Limited signed a contract for the new Setanta development in Dublin, which was one of the first major city centre developments in Dublin, consisting of five acres of office space. It was bounded on one side by Nassau Street, by Kildare Street on another and by a new street called Setanta Place opened up off South Frederick Street.

St Vincent's Hospital moves to Elm Park

The move in the 1960s by St Vincent's Hospital to a brand new complex at Elm Park in Ballsbridge had been a long time under consideration, as the original plan to move was made as far back as 1934. Costing £5 million when completed, St Vincent's Elm Park was



Top: The huge Semperit tyre factory at Killeen Road in west Dublin, opened in 1970, was a landmark industrial building and gave rise to huge employment for an underdeveloped area of the city.

(Courtesy of Dublin City Library and Archives)

Above: A major achievement for H.A. O'Neil Limited was winning the contract to work on the new Liberty Hall beside the River Liffey at Eden Quay Dublin. Constructed between 1961 and 1965, it was Ireland's tallest building at the time.

*(The O'Dea Photographic Collection
National Library of Ireland)*

Right: A newspaper display advertisement for H.A. O'Neil's heating, plumbing and ventilation services, following the widely-publicised opening of the new American Embassy in Ballsbridge in May 1964. The company had played an important role in its construction.

(With thanks to Irish Newspaper Archive
and Irish Independent)



Above: The new United States Embassy in Ballsbridge Dublin, as it looks today.

THE NEW UNITED STATES EMBASSY

**complete
mechanical
services**



**heating
plumbing
ventilation**

carried out by
H.A. O'Neil Ltd.
100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210, 220, 230, 240, 250, 260, 270, 280, 290, 300, 310, 320, 330, 340, 350, 360, 370, 380, 390, 400, 410, 420, 430, 440, 450, 460, 470, 480, 490, 500, 510, 520, 530, 540, 550, 560, 570, 580, 590, 600, 610, 620, 630, 640, 650, 660, 670, 680, 690, 700, 710, 720, 730, 740, 750, 760, 770, 780, 790, 800, 810, 820, 830, 840, 850, 860, 870, 880, 890, 900, 910, 920, 930, 940, 950, 960, 970, 980, 990, 1000



Official opening tomorrow

If it is too soon writing this, the new American Embassy has given Dubliners something to talk about. And there is nothing the Dubliner likes better than an important, big, grand, new, but at the same time, a building which is simple, elegant, and during the long months of its building the new Embassy has been the great of many debates, ranging from world politics to architectural aesthetics.

The official opening, tomorrow, should bring the community to a climax. For, once the proverbial "curtain" is drawn, the new, grand, big and new, will also be seen and what a fine work the new building will be accepted, for both sides, as just another chapter of the Dublin landscape.

Design

The building was designed by the architect, Mr. James J. O'Connell, who has been working on the design for some time. The building is a modern, curved, multi-level structure, which is a departure from the traditional, straight, multi-level structure. The building is a modern, curved, multi-level structure, which is a departure from the traditional, straight, multi-level structure.



**REINFORCED STEEL
WINDOWS**



The steel windows are supported by the Hot Dip Galvanizing Process and were manufactured by Smith & Pearson Ltd., 10, New Avenue, London E.C.4, and the American Architect's design and construction.

SMITH & PEARSON LTD.
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GLASS...

We are proud to have been chosen sole suppliers of glass and mirrors to the new American Embassy.

Dockrells



the United Catechism Company

proud to have
the catering
trial of the new



Hammond Lane Industries Ltd.
117, PRINCE STREET, DUBLIN

Architect

The building was designed by the architect, Mr. James J. O'Connell, who has been working on the design for some time. The building is a modern, curved, multi-level structure, which is a departure from the traditional, straight, multi-level structure.

G. & T. CRAMPTON LTD.
DUBLIN 4

MAIN CONTRACTORS
FOR
NEW EMBASSY
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

'the largest voluntary teaching hospital to have been commissioned in Ireland or Great Britain since World War II'.⁹

Work began on the site in 1964 and Terry Tierney, now a director of the company, began his career there as a site clerk, a job entailing an eleven-hour working day from 8.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m., with a two-hour break in the middle of the day. He recalls Chris Jones visiting the site on a regular basis and increasing his wages to cover travelling costs.¹⁰ Teddy Bourke, who worked with H.A. O'Neil from the 1950s to the early 1960s, has clear memories of the work on the site and the construction of the hospital's main service route, a subway running beneath the main building for about 400 yards.

We were starting Vincent's Hospital (in 1964) ... it really was the first big new hospital ... I remember well – there are tunnels under Vincent's that carry all the services; if you look at Vincent's you just see a big long building and there's tunnels coming in underneath ... I had spent weeks on the drawing board laying out the tunnels.

Teddy recalls a later story, based on his insider knowledge of the tunnels:

It was maybe two years ago, but I was bringing Phyll (his wife) up to Vincent's. It was a morning that was really raining cats and dogs and Phyll was in a wheelchair at the time and there were very, very high winds. The guy with the wheelchair came out and said 'I won't be able to bring her over (to the main hospital), we couldn't bring her out in those conditions'. It was quite a long walk, so I said to him 'Why don't you use the tunnel, the underground tunnel?' And he looked at me and said 'How do you know about the tunnel?' So I said 'I just happened to work on them,' and he said, 'You're the only person that ever told me that he knew about the tunnels under the hospital.' So we were probably exposed to the weather for only about a minute!"

H.A. O'Neil Limited worked on improvements to existing hospitals as well as in the construction of new ones. Such work included St Kevin's Hospital and Cherry Orchard Hospital both in Dublin, and outside Dublin the group continued to win contracts for other hospitals, such as Gorey District Hospital (1965), St Joseph's Hospital in Longford (1965), St Vincent's Hospital Athy (1965) and St Senan's Hospital Enniscorthy (1968).

As new techniques, technologies and materials (such as stainless steel and PVC piping) were developed, the contracts moved from being purely for heating and water services to include ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC), along with even more specialised work. This new expertise enabled H.A. O'Neil



Above: At the Banquet of the General Assembly of Génie Climatique International (the European Association of Heating, Ventilation and Plumbing Contractors), in the Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin in May 1986. Pictured from left are four Irish Presidents along with the President of GCI, Eoin Kenny, President of CIBSE UK, Ted Bourke, President of MEBSCA, Chris Jones in his role as President of CIF, Poul Steffensen, President of GCI Denmark and Paddy Clonan, President of CIBSE Ireland.

Below: The renovation of St Senan's Hospital in Enniscorthy in 1968 was an opportunity to further apply the company's wide experience and technical expertise in the public health sector.

*(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)*





Above: The renovation of Gormanston College, County Meath (above) was one of many schools contracts undertaken during the 1960s. A planned visit by the head of the Franciscan Order to inspect the new heating system called for some original thinking!
(Courtesy of Kieran J. Campbell)

Limited to bid for and win contracts in new areas, such as in specialised sections of hospitals (for example, operating theatres and the smallpox unit in Cherry Orchard Hospital). These new skills could also be utilised in other industries, such as meat packing plants and the food and dairy industries – with Wexford Creamery being a good example.

Growing communities and the changing face of Irish education

At this time of unprecedented change, new communities generated their own requirements, and fresh opportunities subsequently arose for the expanding Jones Group of companies.

As small villages became towns in their own right there were demands for new schools and – in 1960s Ireland – for new churches to serve those communities. Throughout Ireland, new primary schools were being built to provide education for the growing population and H.A. O'Neil shared in the contracts for these new schools and churches.

There were new secondary schools being built and established ones being expanded (these were mostly run by religious orders until the 1980s), with the company having contracts for schools work such as at the Ursuline School in Cabinteely, County Dublin, Gormanston College, a Franciscan boarding school in County Meath, CBS North Monastery in Cork city and St Flannan's in Ennis, County Clare.

Sometimes these contracts caused problems and needed creative initiative on the part of Chris Jones. The heating contract at Gormanston College was one example. The drama happened late on a Saturday night when Chris was informed that the newly-installed heating system had stopped working on the eve of a visit by the head of the Franciscan Order, who was coming to inspect the extensive renovations at Gormanston,

including the wonderful new central heating system.

Having established from the head brother at the college that the pump accelerating system had broken down, Chris rang one of his trusted heating installation men and told him that he was needed right away to go on a mission. The mission was to break into St Teresa's Church in Mount Merrion (another contract) and to 'borrow' the unit there for immediate installation at Gormanston. All went well and the heating was soon restored to the college in time to receive their distinguished visitor. How Chris later dealt with the alarmed clergy in Mount Merrion is another story!

By the end of the 1960s education in Ireland was being fundamentally reformed. The introduction of free secondary education increased the demand for school places and generated new building programmes. A heightened concentration on technical education led to the establishment of regional technical colleges, and H.A. O'Neil won the contract for the Cork Regional Technical College (RTC) in 1972.

In Ireland's universities many changes were also underway. Innovative disciplines and technologies led to contracts for the company in University College Cork (UCC) during the construction of the new dairy science building. In Trinity College Dublin (TCD) a new computer science building was being built, along with accommodation for that university's biochemistry department. The first phase of the move by University College Dublin (UCD) to its new home at Belfield was the construction of buildings to house the science faculty. H.A. O'Neil had a role in the construction of the science buildings, working with John Sisk & Son, the main building contractor. The company was to continue to maintain a presence in Belfield, working on other buildings within the new campus throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

Opposite page: Contracts for a new computer science building, along with accommodation for the biochemistry department were undertaken in the 1970s at Trinity College Dublin (TCD). This picture shows the Campanile in Front Square, with the old library building in the background.

*(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)*

Right: The introduction of innovative disciplines and technologies led to the contract being granted to Jones Group for the new dairy science building at the University College Cork (UCC) campus.







Specialist work on heritage buildings

Although many of the contracts the companies won in the 1960s were for newly-constructed buildings, the skills and experience acquired by H.A. O'Neil staff when working on the historic Rotunda Hospital in Parnell Square, along with copper-sheeting work on the roofs of some of Ireland's new churches (such as the St Laurence O'Toole church in Kilmacud) led to the company winning contracts on older heritage buildings.¹² One was for the heating installation in the Bishop's Palace, a building with medieval origins in Kilkenny, another for St Mary's Cathedral in Carlow, while the company also worked on Government Buildings in Kildare Street and numbers 51-52 St Stephen's Green, then the headquarters of the Office of Public Works (OPW).

Not all experiences working in or refurbishing historic buildings were pleasant. George McCann remembered working on the Garda Depot in Templemore, County Tipperary, in 1962.

It was a bit of a nightmare. Long hours, terrible, boring ... it was built apparently during the time of the Napoleonic War by the French prisoners of war. The British built it, and it was originally a British army barracks. Later the Irish Army took over and they only used part of it. Then somebody got it into their heads to make it the police training depot. So they had to modernise it, put in new boiler houses and heating systems, because it really was like something out of the dark ages. So we worked on that, but they were bad times, because there was very little work going around and we had to work very long hours.¹³



Opposite: The Record Tower, Dublin Castle, also known as Red Hugh's Tower.
(Courtesy of William Murphy)

Above: The former military barracks at Templemore, County Tipperary, was converted into a new Garda Depot in 1962. George McCann recalled working very long and boring hours on the installation of the building's new heating system.
(The Lawrence photographic collection National Library of Ireland)



The move to Beech Hill

The end of the 1960s saw an Ireland very different from the country of a decade earlier. New government economic policies had encouraged foreign investment. Urban landscapes were rapidly changing from the start of the decade and the country's social and cultural life were entering uncharted waters. The Irish people had heightened expectations of prosperity and believed they could look forward to the 1970s with optimism.

The political situation in Northern Ireland and the beginning of what would later be euphemistically called 'the Troubles' were a serious concern, but the prospect of Ireland becoming a member of the European Economic Community promised vastly increased trading possibilities and higher levels of prosperity for the country.

In H.A. O'Neil Limited and its associated companies, things were also progressing and diversifying. During the 1960s the workforce within the companies had expanded their range of experience, a proven track record for efficient and timely delivery of contracts was established with customers – while management was always conscious that a company is 'only as good as its last job'.

The range of work undertaken during this period of increased trading had widened, to include the growing sectors of air conditioning and fire protection. There were substantial contracts on the order books and not all work was won on past performance. Patrick Kavanagh recalled how H.A. O'Neil obtained the contract with the Ford Motor Company in Cork:

Above: Aerial view showing the Beech Hill campus at Clonskeagh, Dublin.



Above: By the close of the 1960s the range of companies within the group had grown so much that a move was made in 1971 into what was formerly the Chivers jam factory at Beech Hill (above), situated in the south Dublin suburb of Clonskeagh. The site covered 4.5 acres.



Above: The Ford factory on the banks of the River Lee in Cork.

Fords had a local contractor but they suffered a very bad flooding and it was over a weekend so they rang their contractor, who responded: “Ah I’ll go in on Monday, sure I haven’t any staff here to be doing things like that”. But Fords knew of H.A. O’Neil’s and that Chris Jones had a brother in Cork, and the guy in Fords knew that, so he contacted Chris’s brother and asked, “Could you get someone ... you have a brother in the business, can you get him down, do something here?”

So the brother rang Chris and Chris rang a few of his staff and responded: “We’ll be in Cork in an hour” and they went down and they stopped the flood and when the Ford contract came up it never went to tender, it went straight to H.A. O’Neil’s. That’s the difference between first class and third class you know.¹⁴

Chris Jones recalled that at the close of the 1960s, the organisation was still an ‘informally constituted group, controlled and managed by my brothers, John and Gerard, myself and our associates’,¹⁵ with subsidiary companies whose activities included general mechanical services contracting, the manufacture and marketing of radiators, and the operation of its own fleet of oil tankers. However,

by 1970 the group’s directors were giving serious consideration to the future development of the companies, reviewing the existing financial structure of the company and the possibility of seeking outside money.

The range of companies within the group demonstrated how wide the interests of the group had become. By the end of the 1960s the activities of the associated companies had grown so much that a 4.5-acre site at Beech Hill in Clonskeagh was acquired in 1971. The end of an era dawned when the Rathmines properties were disposed of and in 1972 the Jones Group moved to their new Beech Hill headquarters. The move to what was the old Chivers jam factory at Beech Hill meant that all the different sections of the group, scattered in different buildings along the Lower Rathmines Road, could now be brought together in one place.

At a meeting of the board of directors of H.A. O’Neil in 1972, Chris Jones reviewed the company’s activities and reported that it was proposed to seek a Stock Exchange quotation in 1973, for a new company – Jones Group Limited.¹⁶



Above: From left; Paddy Jones, P.J. Doyle and Tommy Purcell. Paddy Jones joined the company in 1965. P.J. Doyle, in the centre, came to H.A. O'Neil as an engineer and later became managing director. He died in 1989. Tommy Purcell joined the company in 1953 and worked on projects for Ferenka, NIHE, Merck Sharp & Dohme, Asahi and Alcan Aluminium.



Left: Paddy Jones (left) and George McCann were apprentices at the same time when H.A. O'Neil was based in Rathmines. Paddy worked on hospital projects, as well as contracts for Guinness, Asahi and Wyeth. George, who later became a director in 1970-1, was superintendent of the Ferenka project and subsequently worked on projects for Avondale Creameries, Guinness, Courtaulds in Letterkenny, Tara Mines and Alcan.



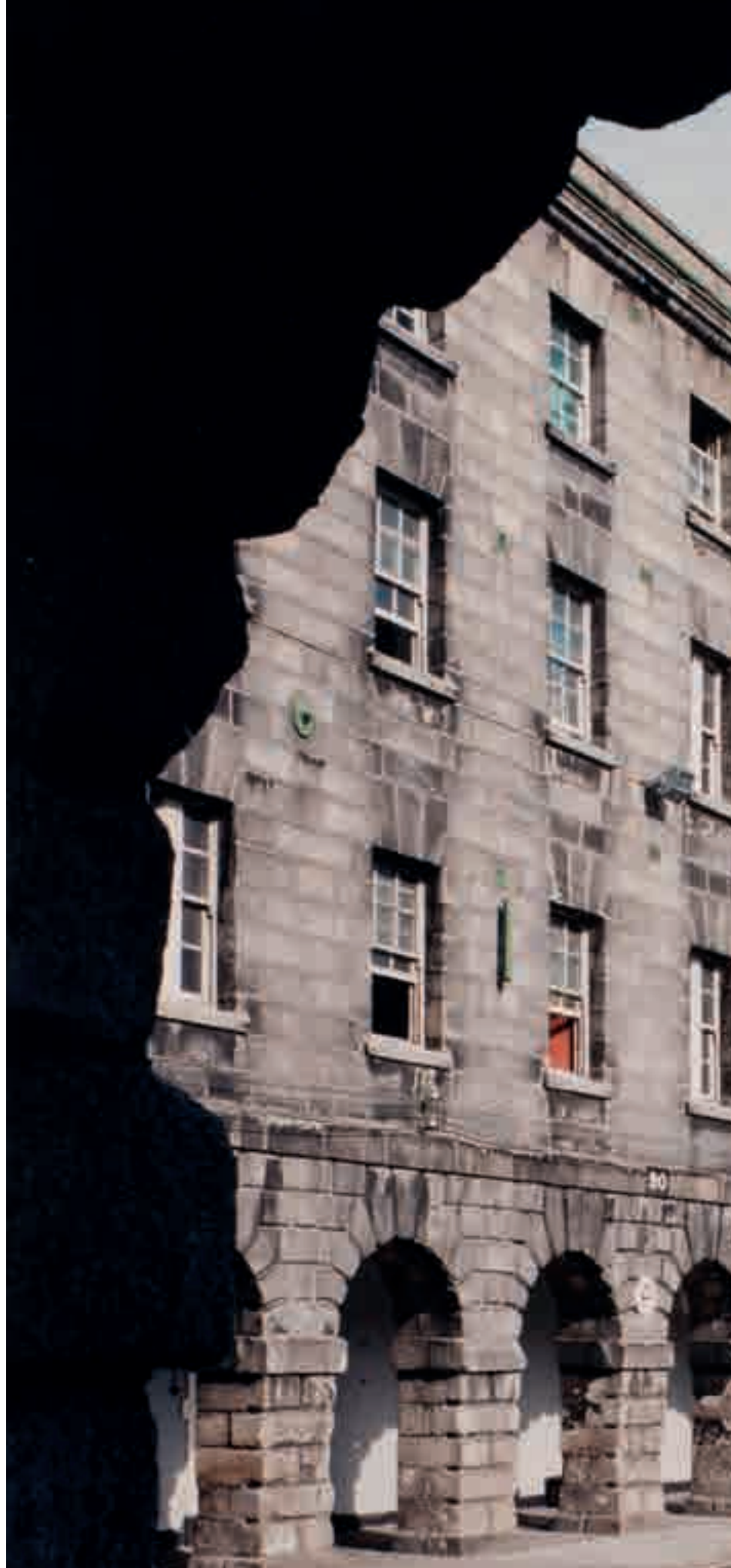
Above: H.A. O'Neil Limited and Climate Engineering Limited staff attending the Irish Management Institute (IMI) sponsored 'Front Line Management' course at IMI headquarters in Sandyford on 28-30 April 1975. The photograph includes Joe Aherne, Joe Brannigan, Aidan Bourke, Christy Callaghan, Paddy Connolly, John Cummins, Bernard Doran, Denis Foley, Paddy Hennessy, Bobby McKenna, Gerry McSherry, Roy Noonan, Paddy O'Toole, Noel Scott, Eddy Stanley, Tommy Vella and Jimmy Whelan.

Left: A group shot from the 1970s at a supervisor training course, including Brendan Martin, Chris Jones and Sean Moran who were group directors at the time and Jim Curley who went on to become the present group chief executive.

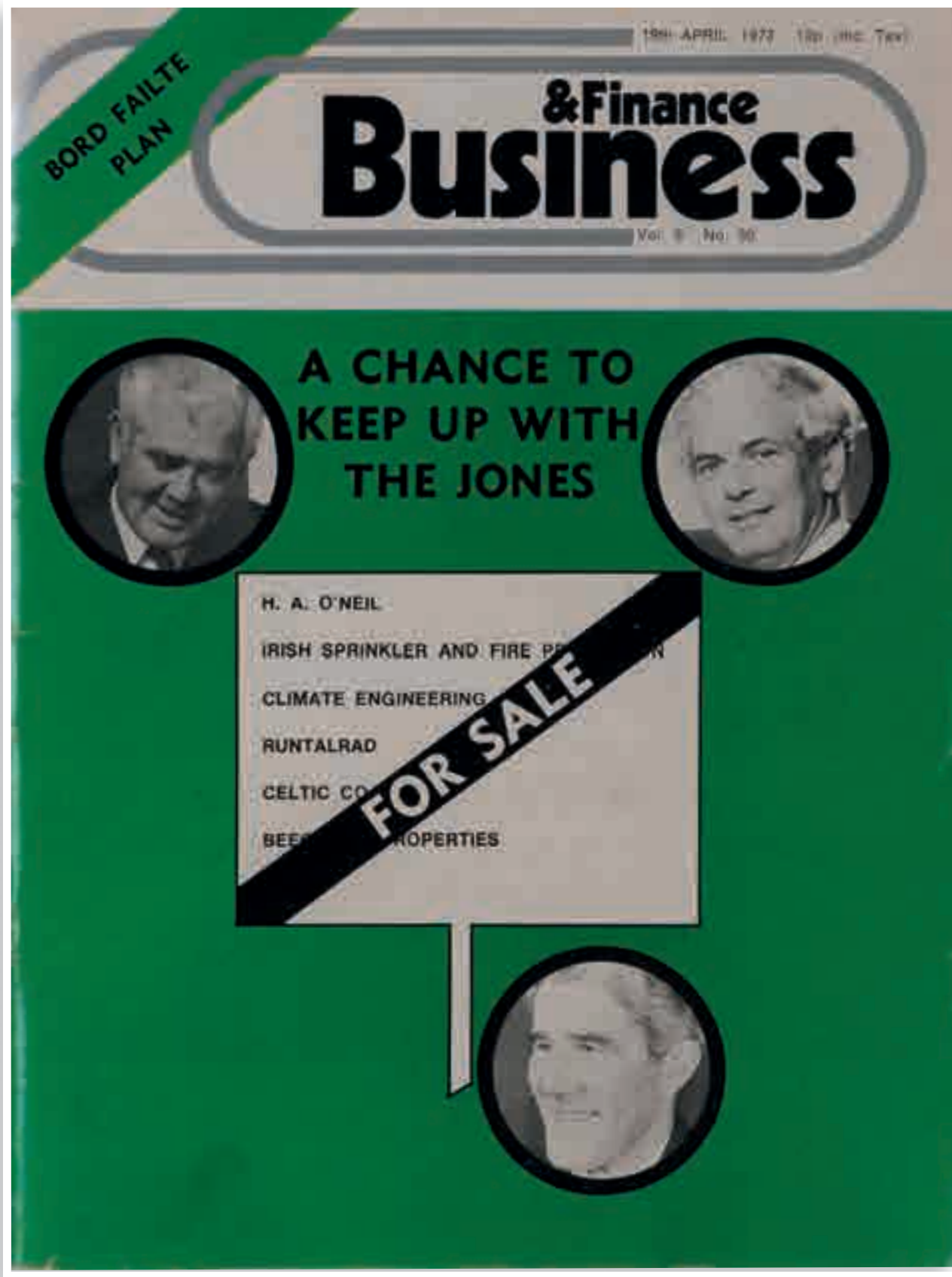
Chapter 4 – Endnotes

- 1 Department of Finance; Department of Industry and Commerce (11 November 1958). *Programme for Economic Expansion* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1958).
- 2 RTÉ archives, 31 December 1961; quoted by John Bowman, *Window and Mirror: RTÉ Television: 1961–2011* (Cork: Collins Press, 2011), p. 1.
- 3 Matt Johnston interview.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 John Donohoe, *Chris Jones: The Complete Man* (Dublin: privately published, 2013) p.58.
- 6 *Irish Press*, 1 May 1965.
- 7 Opening day United States Embassy programme, 23 May 1964.
- 8 *Irish Independent*, 22 May 1964.
- 9 *Irish Press*, 27 November 1970.
- 10 Terry Tierney, conversation.
- 11 Teddy Bourke interview.
- 12 According to Terry Tierney, H.A. O'Neil Limited had a section with special expertise in copper and lead sheeting.
- 13 George McCann interview.
- 14 Patrick Kavanagh interview.
- 15 Chris Jones, Jones Group offer of shares, 12 June 1973, p.4.
- 16 Minutes of the Meeting of H.A. O'Neil Limited Directors, 19 May 1972.

Opposite: Courtyard of the National Museum of Ireland, Decorative Arts and History – formerly Collins Barracks and, before 1922, The Royal Barracks. H.A. O'Neil carried out some major projects here and continue to maintain the building.







5 The public years: 1973–1993

‘One of the principal reasons for our decision to seek a stock market exchange listing has been that it will enable us to give increased participation in the success of the company to employees.’

Chris Jones, 1973

Following Ireland’s membership of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, the general atmosphere in Ireland became more optimistic and the population began to sense a feeling of better things to come. For those outside the country our new status sent out a very positive message, signalling that this small and formerly isolated country was now open for business on an international level.

The 1970s were notable for the number of multinationals that established operations in this country. Initially these were mostly heavy industry operations, such as the Ferenka factory in Limerick. Over time the companies setting up in Ireland became very diverse, to include corporations specialising in pharmaceuticals, communications, computer hardware and software, telecommunications components, as well as those operating in the financial services sector.

Despite the continuing social and political difficulties in Northern Ireland at that time, these were good years for the Republic of Ireland. There were problems domestically with industrial disputes and globally with energy crises in the 1970s, along with stock market fluctuations, but overall there was a sense of positivity in the air.

The Jones Group goes public in 1973

For H.A. O’Neil Limited and the companies that made up the Jones Group at that time, 1973 marked an important departure. After careful planning by Chris Jones and his team (notably Denis Magee and Derry Hussey) in April 1973 the Jones Group made public their plans to change from being a privately-owned holding company with interests in mechanical engineering and shipping to become a multi-faceted public company. The share issue was expected to be one of the largest share flotations in Ireland.^{1,2} The vast majority of the equity was owned by the three Jones brothers, Christopher, John and Gerard – hence the title given to the new venture by *Business and Finance* of 19 April 1973 was ‘A chance to keep up with the Jones’.³

Until 1973 the group had been a holding company, together with its related subsidiary companies, which had been set up as a result of opportunities that had been presented to Chris Jones and his team over the years.

By 1973 the bulk of the group’s business was in the industrial sector, in activities relating to mechanical engineering. There were two specialist subsidiaries, Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited (ISFP), specialising in the design and installation of automatic fire sprinkler systems, and Climate Engineering which was involved in the design and installation of air conditioning.

Opposite: The cover of *Business & Finance* magazine from 19 April 1973.

The first of the three other subsidiaries were Runtalrad, a radiator company in Kilkenny manufacturing under a Swiss patent. This company exported about one-third of its output. The second subsidiary consisted of two shipping companies, the first of which began operations sailing small oil tankers from Whitegate Oil Refinery near Cork city and expanded into routes around the Irish coast. In 1969 these shipping activities were divided, following the setting up of Dublin Shipping Limited which traded mainly in the Irish Sea, while the remainder of the company's shipping operations were operated by Celtic Coasters Limited. The last subsidiary was Beechill Properties Limited, the company that owned the group's headquarters at Beech Hill in Clonskeagh.

As chairman, Chris Jones took particular responsibility for the engineering and mechanical services part of the business. His brother John Jones had his own building company which was not part of the business. Gerry Jones, who had joined the group from the civil service in 1950, was appointed a director in 1953 and had as his main role the responsibility for the group's backroom operations.⁴

The public company, Jones Group plc was floated on 12 June 1973.⁵ Derry Hussey, who was the group's financial director at the time said that:

the thinking was that it was big enough to be a public company and that as a public company it would have more access to capital and that kind of thing and it was also beneficial to the shareholders.⁶

Some of these shareholders consisted of people who were part of the Jones family, as well as others from outside the family grouping. Shareholders within the family included Mary Dennis, who was a sister of the Jones brothers and the widow of Herbert Dennis.⁷ Alice Mary O'Neil, who was Harry O'Neil's daughter, was also a shareholder. The group's prospectus outlined the new areas of responsibility of Chris, John and Gerry Jones, together with the roles of others in the group. Chris Jones remained as managing director, with responsibility for engineering and mechanical services. He outlined the reasons for seeking a stock market quotation, stating that it would enable the Jones Group:

to take advantage of the rapid expansion in the heating and air conditioning markets in Ireland and to cater for the expected growth in construction and allied industries, arising from Ireland's accession to the EEC and increased government expenditure... [and] will enable it to avail of suitable opportunities for expansion by acquisition arising in areas where the Group has experience and expertise.⁸

Below: A poster from the 'yes' campaign, urging the Irish people to vote in favour of joining the then European Economic Community (EEC). Over 80 per cent of voters said yes and Ireland became a member in 1973.

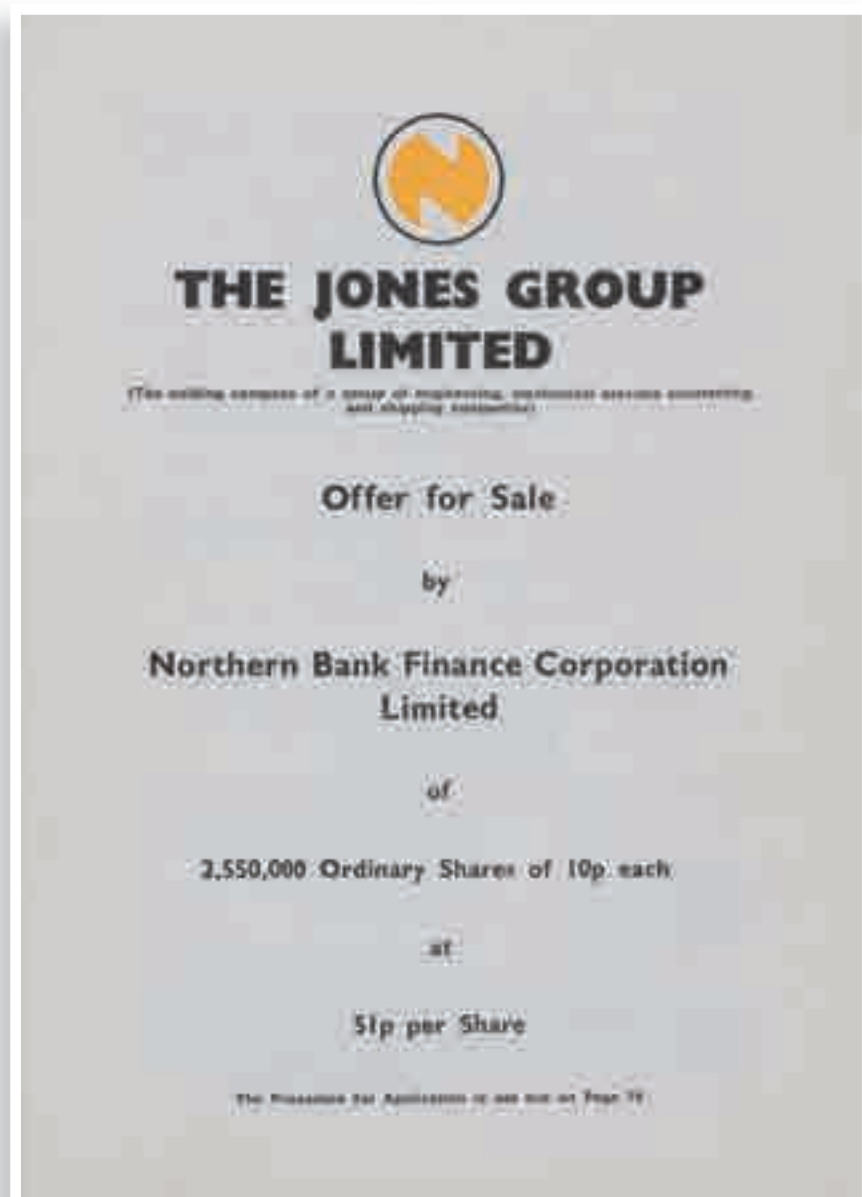
(National Library of Ireland)



As part of the flotation, a share incentive scheme was offered to employees. Acknowledging that ‘one of the biggest single factors contributing to our success has been our ability to attract, reward and motivate people’, Chris Jones declared that:

one of the principal reasons for our decision to seek a stock market exchange listing has been that it will enable us to give increased participation in the success of the company to employees.

By 7 June 1973, 210,000 shares had been issued under the scheme to some of the group’s almost 800 employees.⁹ In the event, the public flotation of the Jones Group broke all records for the amount raised by public issue in Ireland, the issue being over-subscribed 38.5 times.¹⁰



Right: The Jones Group Limited ordinary shares are offered for sale through Northern Bank Finance Corporation in 1973.

‘Developing new companies for new needs’

Now established at its new headquarters at Beech Hill in Clonskeagh, the Jones Group broke new ground by taking on significant and diverse contracts and over the next twenty years acquired or established further companies ‘developing new companies for new needs’. Some of these ventures were in markets that were just opening up, in order to meet ever-changing commercial demands and to deliver the profit and growth expected from a thriving public company.

At this time group operations became internationalised, with interests extending to the United Kingdom, the United States, Saudi Arabia and Iraq. In 1975 Jones Group diversified into steel production through the output of a new factory at Callan, County Kilkenny. The Callan plant concentrated on the manufacture of welded steel tubes and metal sheeting in a joint venture with a French company called Société Meusienne de Constructions Mécaniques.¹¹

During the same year (1975) the group acquired a 50 per cent interest in Harper & Fay Limited, a Dublin company specialising in the design, procurement and installation of water and wastewater treatment projects.¹² The group’s shipping operations expanded, with new vessels being acquired. At the same time Jones Overseas Services was established, while changing consumer and commercial demands led to the establishment of two distribution companies, Jones Oil (a takeover of Esso’s oil distribution arm) and Blugas. A third such company called Citigas was to be set up much later in 1984, when Dublin’s town gas supply was being converted to natural gas.

By the 1990s the Jones Group portfolio of companies and associated companies also included Appian Fasteners (1975), suppliers of industrial fasteners such as nuts, bolts and washers, the air conditioning contractors Chryotemp (1975), Thermal Insulation Distributors Limited and a circuit board manufacturer called Mid-West Circuits.



Left: A Jones Oil tanker as it appears today.

Harper & Fay Limited

is a member of the Jones Group of Companies, and specialises in the design, procurement and installation of water and waste-water treatment projects.

The company is staffed by experienced professional engineers and scientists supported by civil, mechanical and electrical design teams, fabrication workshops, laboratory and service department.

Projects can be undertaken at appraisal stage and managed through process design, manufacturing, procurement, installation and commissioning stages for private industrial and public sector clients. Post completion maintenance contracts are offered.

It also acts as manufacturers representative for various sized products. A range of manufactured products is offered for direct sale.

The Jones group can offer a Mechanical Process and Building Services contracting facility. Air Conditioning systems and Sprinkler fire protection and insulation services.

The company has successfully completed water and waste-water treatment projects in the following sectors:

- Municipal Sewage Treatment
- Municipal Water Treatment
- Water and Sewage Pumping
- Dairy, Meat, Food Processing
- Textiles, Brewing, Soft Drinks
- Metal Finishing, Electronics and Pharmaceutical industries.

Right: Introduction to the products and operational details of Harper & Fay Limited from Jones Group: Engineering, Manufacturing, Distribution (c. 1990).

A new electrical division is established in 1991

In order to better position the group, it was clear that an electrical division was now essential, so in 1991 Patrick Lynch Limited was acquired. This was a long-established Dublin electrical firm with which H.A. O'Neil Limited had a close association on many projects going back to the 1920s. The purchase of this company not only added electrical expertise, but it also brought with it a 'great team of people'.

The strategy behind this key purchase was the work of Eric Kinsella, the man who had recently been appointed as managing director of H.A. O'Neil Limited. Eric was a chartered electrical engineer and a graduate of Trinity College Dublin (TCD) who had joined the firm in 1977 from the Dublin engineering design firm Varming, Mulcahy, Reilly and Associates. Initially appointed to a business development role within the Jones Group, Eric was later appointed a contracts manager and then a director of H.A. O'Neil Limited, taking up the position of managing director of H.A. O'Neil after the untimely death of P.J. Doyle in 1989.

A chartered engineer, P.J. Doyle had joined the company as an engineer from J.A. Kenny, later becoming a director and succeeding Denis Magee as managing director. During his time with H.A. O'Neil, P.J. Doyle had built up a strong team that had enabled the company to take on some of the most challenging projects that have ever been constructed in Ireland. This included the enormous smelter plant that was built by the Canadian corporation Alcan Aluminium, near Foynes, County Limerick, on the mouth of the River Shannon.

Making time for social activities

Although the focus of both management and staff at Jones Group Limited was on developing every aspect of an increasingly complex business, while delivering quality service to its many customers, there was also time to organise more leisurely pursuits.

Within the Jones Group it was never a case of all work and no play. There were various sports clubs and a social club to bring people together outside working hours. There were inter-group competitions between the different companies in the group – events like table quizzes, as well as a wide range of sporting events. Social functions were organised, including Christmas parties, along with staff outings, not only for employees but also for their families.

The Jones Group sponsored a number of promising football teams. In 1973 a perpetual trophy, named after the Jones brothers' father, Timothy Jones, for soccer teams attached to the Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU) sports and social centre at Clogher Road in Crumlin was presented to the ITGWU by the Jones Group. 'Jones also built the centre, which provides indoor games facilities, bars and function rooms for ITGWU members'.¹³

There were also golf outings and competitions, both in Ireland and abroad. Chris Jones became involved in racehorse ownership in the 1970s and his horses won a string



Above: The presentation of the Queen Mother Champion Chase trophy at Cheltenham in 1996. From left: Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, jockey Francis Woods, Mary Moore, Jill Jones, Arthur Moore and Chris Jones.

of victories, the most outstanding of which was Klarion Davis, who won twenty races, including the Arkle Chase and the Queen Mother Champion Chase at Cheltenham in 1995 and 1996.¹⁴

Senior management changes after 1973

The senior management of the Jones Group changed over the years from 1973, when the directors of the new Jones Group plc were Christopher Jones (chairman and managing director), Liam St. John Devlin (chairman designate), John Joseph Jones (executive director), Gerard Jones (executive director), Denis Mary Magee (executive director) and Dermot Reginald (Derry) Hussey (executive director). John Jones died in August 1977 at the age of 55 and Gerry Jones retired from the company in 1984.

After the flotation the senior team in H.A. O'Neil Limited still included some of the people who had worked in the company when Chris Jones started his apprenticeship back in 1940. These included, among others, Sean Moran and Colm Brennan. Other key people had joined the management in the 1950s and 1960s, having made their careers within the company or having been recruited from British firms that were withdrawing from Ireland.

This generation of managers played key roles at the time of the company floatation. They included George Binley (travelling supervisor looking after mechanical work), Henry King (general manager of ISFP and later a director of H.A. O'Neil), George McCann (a future director of H.A. O'Neil), Terry Tierney (a future director) and Des Collins (financial controller and future director), all of whom were key members of the H.A. O'Neil team. Senior members in the subsidiary companies included Kevin Ryan (with the group from 1965, general manager and director of Climate Engineering), John Cuthbert and Walter O'Connor (general manager of Runtalrad who later became group chief executive).

A new generation joined the company in the 1970s and ultimately helped shape the future direction of the group. These included Eric Kinsella who had joined in 1977 in a business development role, and Jim Curley who began working with H.A. O'Neil in 1978.

The Ferenka (Ireland) contract – linked to a dramatic kidnapping

One of the largest single industrial projects undertaken in Ireland in the early 1970s was the Ferenka (Ireland)¹⁵ factory in Annacotty Limerick, for which H.A. O'Neil was awarded the contract for mechanical services for the 538,000-square-foot factory.¹⁶ The contract was for plant erection, process pipework, mechanical services and instrumentation and the value of the project was £7.5 million. Ferenka was a subsidiary of the Dutch multinational group AKZO International, which had its headquarters in Arnhem, Holland. The Limerick factory produced brass-plated steel cord that was used in radial tyres for the automotive industry. At its peak there were 1,400 construction workers on this factory project.

One reason Ferenka is always remembered by the general public is for the dramatic kidnapping of its Dutch director, Dr Tiede Herrema. Having just left home in Castletroy



Above: A 1976 Ferenka Ireland advertisement in a feature for Limerick Civic Week. H.A. O'Neil was awarded the mechanical services contract for the 538,000-square-foot factory at Annacotty, County Limerick.

(Courtesy of Limerick Museum)

near Limerick on the morning of 3 October 1975, Dr Herrema was abducted by two members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army, Eddie Gallagher and Marion Coyle. The kidnappers demanded the release from Limerick Jail of three IRA prisoners, including Dr Rose Dugdale. After a massive security operation, the kidnappers were eventually traced on 21 October 1975 to a house in Monasterevin, County Kildare. After a further two-week-long siege, Herrema was released, shaken but unharmed. He left Ireland soon after. This contract was also remembered because, before construction began, a 'fairy' tree had to be unearthed to make way for the plant and this 'magic' tree was replanted beside the main entrance to the executive building.¹⁷

Work on Ferenka had begun in 1972 just before the Jones Group became a public company, but it was quickly followed by another huge contract when Climate Engineering was awarded the largest air conditioning contract ever undertaken in Ireland at the time. This was for the installation of the systems in the £5 million Setanta Centre development, an enormous office block and retail development in the centre of Dublin. Other major contracts followed, including in RTÉ Montrose and at nearby University College Dublin Belfield.¹⁸



Above: The Setanta Centre Dublin, viewed from Nassau Street. In the early 1970s Climate Engineering was awarded the air conditioning contract for this development – the largest ever undertaken in Ireland at the time.

(Courtesy of www.fantasyjackpalance.com)

Opposite: An aerial view of the RTÉ Montrose complex in 1969. Substantial contracts were undertaken here during the 1970s.

(RTÉ Stills Library)







Above: The Tara Mines plant near Navan, County Meath. This four-year contract commenced in 1973 and comprised the supply and fabrication of the main ancillary steel work on the surface buildings of the mine.

Asahi comes to Killala, County Mayo

The prestigious Ferenka project gave H.A. O'Neil Limited the credibility, experience and a track record for delivering on their project commitments in a timely way and to a high standard. It also meant that the Jones Group companies were well positioned to bid for, and win, new contracts, especially for large multinational companies establishing themselves in Ireland.

One of these was Asahi Synthetic Fibres (Ireland) – a Japanese chemical company which in 1973 set up two synthetic fibre-making and spinning companies in Ireland based outside Killala, County Mayo, in a joint venture with the Irish Government. Production was scheduled to commence in 1976.¹⁹ This substantial new industrial project presented many practical challenges for the company. Matt Johnston (who was chief estimator of the mechanical division until his retirement) recalled that the plant was 'built on rock, so everything had to be above ground, they couldn't bury anything. They were blasting for weeks on end, just to get some pipes in'. Another major problem at the time was a prolonged national strike by Irish banks, causing serious difficulties in terms of paying the workforce, which at that time meant transporting very large sums of cash. This potentially put Matt and his colleagues in a position of grave personal danger. As Matt Johnston recalled:

We had probably maybe 100 guys on the site but they had to be paid, so we were getting the money from the Irish Permanent or someone to make up the wage packets ... I remember myself and another guy setting off with I don't know how many thousands of pounds in an envelope. At that time the IRA were very active.²⁰

Tommy Purcell (a senior supervisor) also spent time working on the plant at Killala and remembered:

this big excitement that you're going down to Killala and I suppose we knew it was work that we had never done before. We went into Asahi there and I can remember working with the Japanese.²¹

Another big contract was won in 1973 for work at Tara Mines, near Navan, County Meath. This was a four-year contract, comprising the supply and fabrication of the main and ancillary steel work on the surface buildings of the mine,²² working with Joseph Murphy Structural Engineers (JMSE). Tara Mines are still in operation today and it is the largest lead and zinc mine in Europe and the ninth largest in the world.

The following year an opportunity presented itself in Letterkenny, County Donegal, where Courtaulds had established a polyester filament factory and where the Jones Group were awarded the contract for mechanical services.

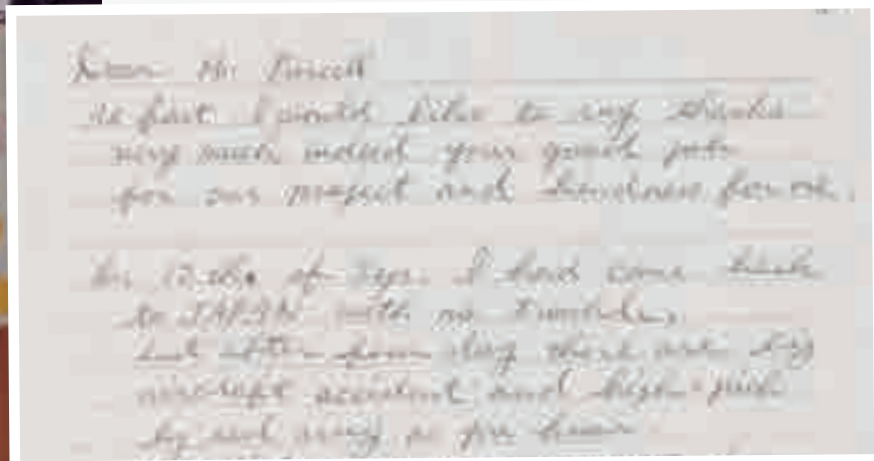
Opposite: The enormous Asahi factory at Killala, County Mayo in operation in 1978.
(RTÉ Stills Library)



Left: Chris Jones (right) and Mr Toshinori Onodera, Managing Director Asahi Limited, sign the contract to begin work on the plant at Killlala, County Mayo, for the Japanese company Asahi in 1973.

Below: A hand-written envelope by Mr Masuda from Fuji city Japan, addressed to Tommy Purcell. Mr Masuda worked with Tommy Purcell and had very happy memories of the time he spent in Ireland.

Back in the days before email – a friendly letter from Mr Masuda of Asahi and airmailed to Tommy Purcell of H.A. O'Neil.



Specialist expertise leads to work on historic properties

In the 1960s the company had gained invaluable experience working on copper and lead sheeting contracts on a number of buildings (especially churches) around the country. During the 1970s this experience led to the awarding of similar contracts on an expanding variety of buildings and institutions. H.A. O'Neil provided the copper panels for the Revenue Computer Centre in Kilmainham, Dublin in 1973, followed by the copper roofing for the Irish Life Centre, in Middle Abbey Street, Dublin.

With this specialist expertise under its belt, the company won contracts to carry out skilled work as part of the restoration of many of Ireland's historic buildings and heritage institutions. One such job was the 1984 contract – worth £1.4 million – at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, for the restoration of this historic seventeenth-century home for retired soldiers. In 1991 the building became the headquarters of the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA).

There was also work on City Hall in Dame Street Dublin, a gem of late eighteenth-century architecture designed by Thomas Cooley. Other sensitive work was carried out at Áras an Uachtaráin, another structure dating from the eighteenth century. Before this historic building became the residence of the President of Ireland in the twentieth century, it had served as the 'out of season' Viceregal Lodge of the British Lord Lieutenant, who normally resided at the Viceregal Apartments in Dublin Castle.

Through the success of these specialist contracts the companies within the group established an excellent working relationship with the Office of Public Works (OPW), the body that manages and maintains the Irish State's property portfolio. This working relationship continues to the present day.



Above: Earlier specialist experience of copper and lead sheeting contracts resulted in new opportunities during the 1970s, including the above Irish Life Centre in Middle Abbey Street, Dublin.



Left: H.A. O'Neil were part of the team who carried out restoration work on City Hall, Dame Street, Dublin in the late 1990s.
(The Lawrence photographic collection
National Library of Ireland)



Above: Specialist skills within the company were employed in carrying out restoration work for the Office of Public Works (OPW) at Áras an Uachtaráin in the Phoenix Park.

(Courtesy of Áras an Uachtaráin)



Left: In 1984 H.A. O'Neil were one of the specialist teams contracted for the restoration of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. The work took three years. In 1991 the building became the headquarters of IMMA.

(Courtesy of Keith Salvesen)

Cementing long-term working relationships

In the early 1970s the Jones Group won their first contracts with two companies with which long-lasting working relationships were to blossom. One was chocolate manufacturer Cadbury, first established in Ireland in 1932 but which, by the 1970s, had two plants, one in Rathmore in County Kerry and another in Coolock, on Dublin's northside. Since then there has been a Jones Group presence on both sites. Tommy McIlhinney was one of the people who had an enduring connection with the company, together with Paddy Bourke and Gerry McSherry, while Simon Watson spent some of his time as an apprentice working in the Coolock factory.

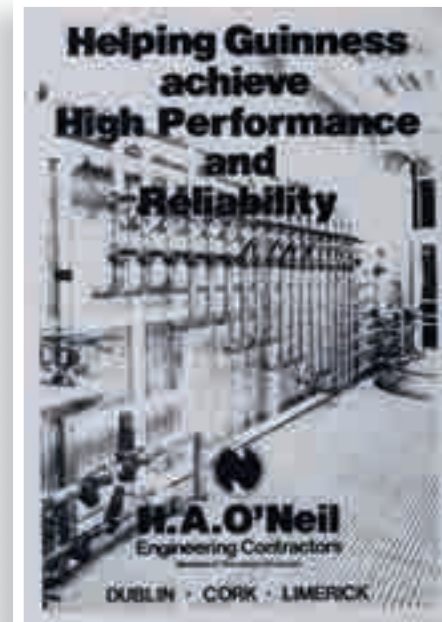
H.A. O'Neil has also enjoyed a long-term relationship with one of Ireland's oldest businesses – the famous Guinness brewery at St. James's Gate in Dublin, which is now part of Diageo, a British multinational alcoholic beverages company headquartered in London. George McCann, who later became a director of H.A. O'Neil, spent much of his working life at the Guinness plant on various projects and contracts. One outstanding memory he has is of a big explosion in the Guinness brewery in 1986, when the CO₂ (carbon dioxide) plant blew up. He was driving down to Wexford and received a phone call to return to Dublin as a matter of urgency. Not only had the explosion blown up the CO₂ plant,

but it had blown up a huge bridge in the back of the main brewhouses across into the building that's now the Storehouse and it had blown down all the pipework and they had stopped producing Guinness. As I learned very quickly, Guinness wouldn't stand for any hold-up in delivery to the pubs ... but then our best people worked their magic and did their jobs which they were all pretty good at. By the way we worked twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week ... I put in sixteen-hour shifts.²³

Hospitals, retail outlets and office blocks keep the workforce busy

Contracts with Ireland's hospitals continued, as usual, to play a huge part in filling company order books during this period. There were many contracts for improvements to existing hospitals such as at St Vincent's Hospital at Elm Park Dublin, St Senan's Hospital in Enniscorthy, County Wexford, the Mercy Hospital in Cork city, Ardkeen Hospital in Waterford, and other Dublin hospital contracts at Mount Carmel Hospital in Churchtown, St James's Hospital, off the South Circular Road, St Joseph's in Raheny and Connolly Hospital in Blanchardstown. These were also busy times with new hospitals under construction. A contract for mechanical services for the new Cork Regional Hospital was signed in 1974 and in 1978 a £3 million contract was signed for mechanical services at Beaumont Hospital in north Dublin. Jim Curley was project engineer at Beaumont Hospital, working with Eric Kinsella.

The experience gained at Beaumont Hospital was later put to good use in the design and construction of a prestigious new private hospital being built in Blackrock, south County Dublin. The Blackrock Clinic was co-founded in 1984 by surgeons Joseph and James Sheehan, the late Maurice Neligan and nuclear medicine specialist George Duffy,



Above: Using a reference to Guinness in a testimonial advertisement for H.A. O'Neil in the 1970s. The company has enjoyed a long working relationship with the brewery over the decades.



Above: A Cadbury's Chocolate Dairy Milk press advertisement from 1971. H.A. O'Neil has enjoyed a long-lasting relationship with Cadburys since the 1970s.



Left: The boiler house at Cork Regional Hospital. The mechanical services contract for the hospital was signed in 1974.

Below: An aerial view of St Vincent's Hospital at Elm Park Dublin — one of H.A. O'Neil's many hospital projects when it was built in the mid-1960s, along with major improvement works undertaken during the 1970s.



as a private high-tech hospital, providing healthcare to private patients. The changing pattern of Irish consumerism saw the growth of additional shopping centres around Ireland. H.A. O'Neil did the mechanical services, including the ventilation and plumbing fit-outs for shopping centres in counties Kilkenny, Waterford, Cork and Laois, along with developments in Killarney, County Kerry and in parts of Dublin city.

There were new office buildings for the Irish Management Institute (IMI) and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB), both in Sandyford, County Dublin, together with major office developments in Galway city, in George's Street in Dublin, AIB Bankcentre in Ballsbridge, Smurfit Dublin headquarters and Dublin City Council Civic Offices at Wood Quay in central Dublin.

The later 1970s and early 1980s saw an economic downturn in Ireland, with high tax rates and increased unemployment. But a resurgence in the economy in the 1980s highlighted the need for new office space in Irish cities. During that time the Jones Group had roles in the construction of the Irish Life Centre in Middle Abbey Street, Irish Life on George's Quay and the Royal Hibernian Way shopping centre, built on the site of the famous Royal Hibernian Hotel on Dawson Street Dublin.



Above: The Blackrock Clinic in south County Dublin was constructed in the early 1980s and opened in 1984. The company drew on its wide experience of other hospital contracts in the completion of the Blackrock project.

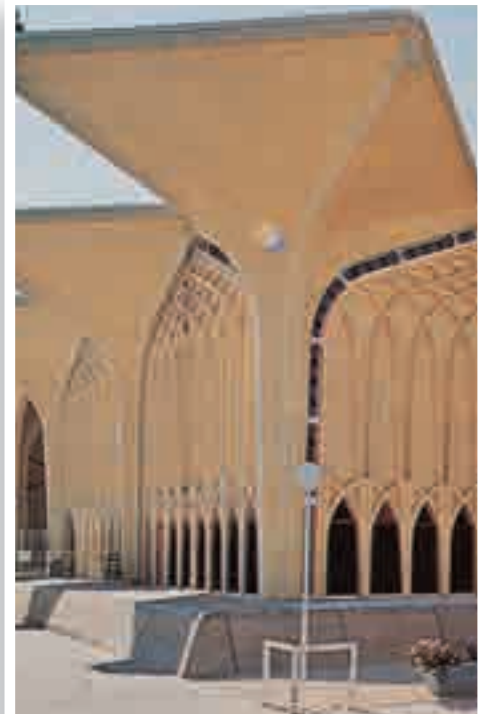
1976 Saudi Arabia hotel contract begins overseas expansion

In 1976 the Jones Group expanded abroad and were awarded the contract to supply mechanical services in the construction of the new 200-bed Dhahran International Hotel in Saudi Arabia, budgeted to cost £6 million. *The Irish Times* quoted the Jones board when it reported that 'The Jones Group is concentrating on winning contracts to supply air conditioning to Saudi Arabia – five staff already there and expected to increase to twenty.'²⁴ Another Saudi contract was for work at the Dhahran International Airport. Other contracts in the Middle East at that time were two Iraqi projects – a warehouse complex in Baghdad, along with the Al Mansour Mall in the same city.

Alcan becomes 'the biggest construction site in Europe'

In 1979 the contract signed with Alcan Aluminium Limited to build a plant to extract alumina from bauxite at Aughinish Island, near Askeaton on the River Shannon estuary in County Limerick, was one of the largest individual contracts for the company at the time. Described as 'the biggest single construction project ever undertaken in Ireland', it was also the biggest construction site in Europe at that time. In October 1979 H.A. O'Neil tendered successfully for the mechanical contract that involved the construction of the heart of the whole process system. It was a fifty-fifty joint venture with Press Construction from the United Kingdom. The contract was worth £80 million at the time, excluding the value of the permanent materials, which today equates to a value of €325 million. This huge contract was completed on schedule within thirty months and within budget.

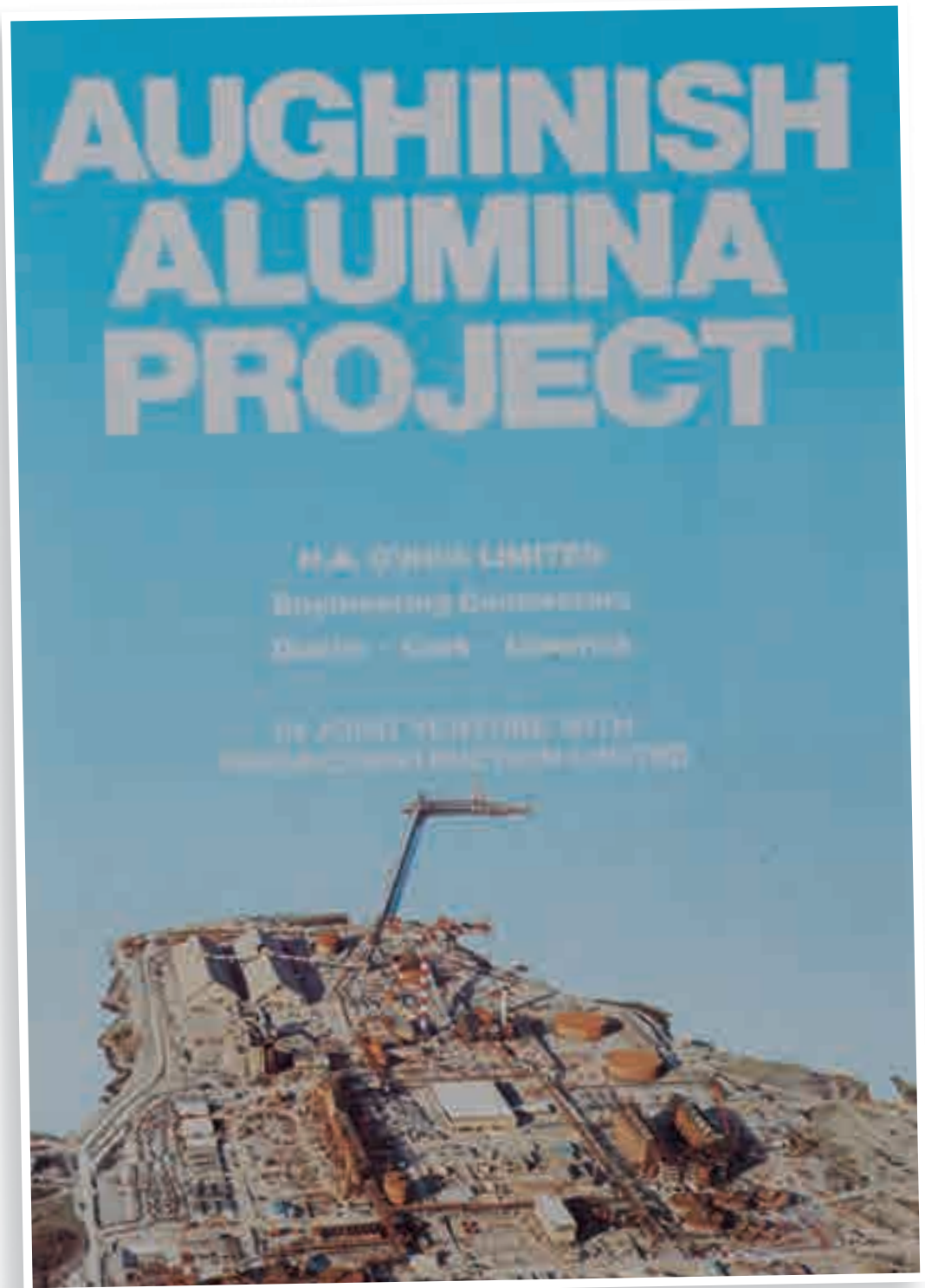
An on-site management team of 270 administered and controlled all aspects of the project at its peak, including construction management, financing and planning. H.A. O'Neil set up an ICL mainframe computer in Limerick city to deal with the project's payroll, accounts and cost control. It was also used to process the payrolls of



Above: An image of Dhahran International Airport, Saudi Arabia, from a Jones Group brochure in the early 1990s.

‘The contract was worth £80 million at the time, ... which today equates to a value of €325 million.’

Right: A brochure publicising the role of H.A. O’Neil Limited in the Aughinish Alumina plant at Askeaton, County Limerick. The mechanical contract was signed in 1979 and the project was completed jointly with UK-based company Press Construction Limited. Aughinish was the biggest construction site in Europe at the time.



H.A. O'Neil's sub-contractors and the application software was designed and written by H.A. O'Neil's own computer department.

At the height of the Alcan construction project those on the company's payroll amounted to 2,600. At the end of the project the computer (an ICL 2903 with a disk storage of 9.8 megabytes and a 300-line printer) was presented to the Limerick College of Art, Commerce and Technology. One of the H.A. O'Neil supervisors for the project, Tommy Purcell, recalled that:

Alcan was fantastic to work on. I was four years working there. At one stage we had as many as fifty-seven cranes on the site. But there were often labour problems to be sorted out. Sometimes the site needed structural steel fitters, but we might only have riggers available. In that case we would have to look for skilled and experienced people from Northern Ireland. The Northern fitters were top class, but they could be awkward as could be. They had great experience from working in places such as Courtaulds in Letterkenny and Belfast Shipyards. Because we had both nationalists and unionists in the workforce they wouldn't talk to one another, so we had to try to keep them separated!²⁵

Carving out a niche market with the pharmaceutical multinationals

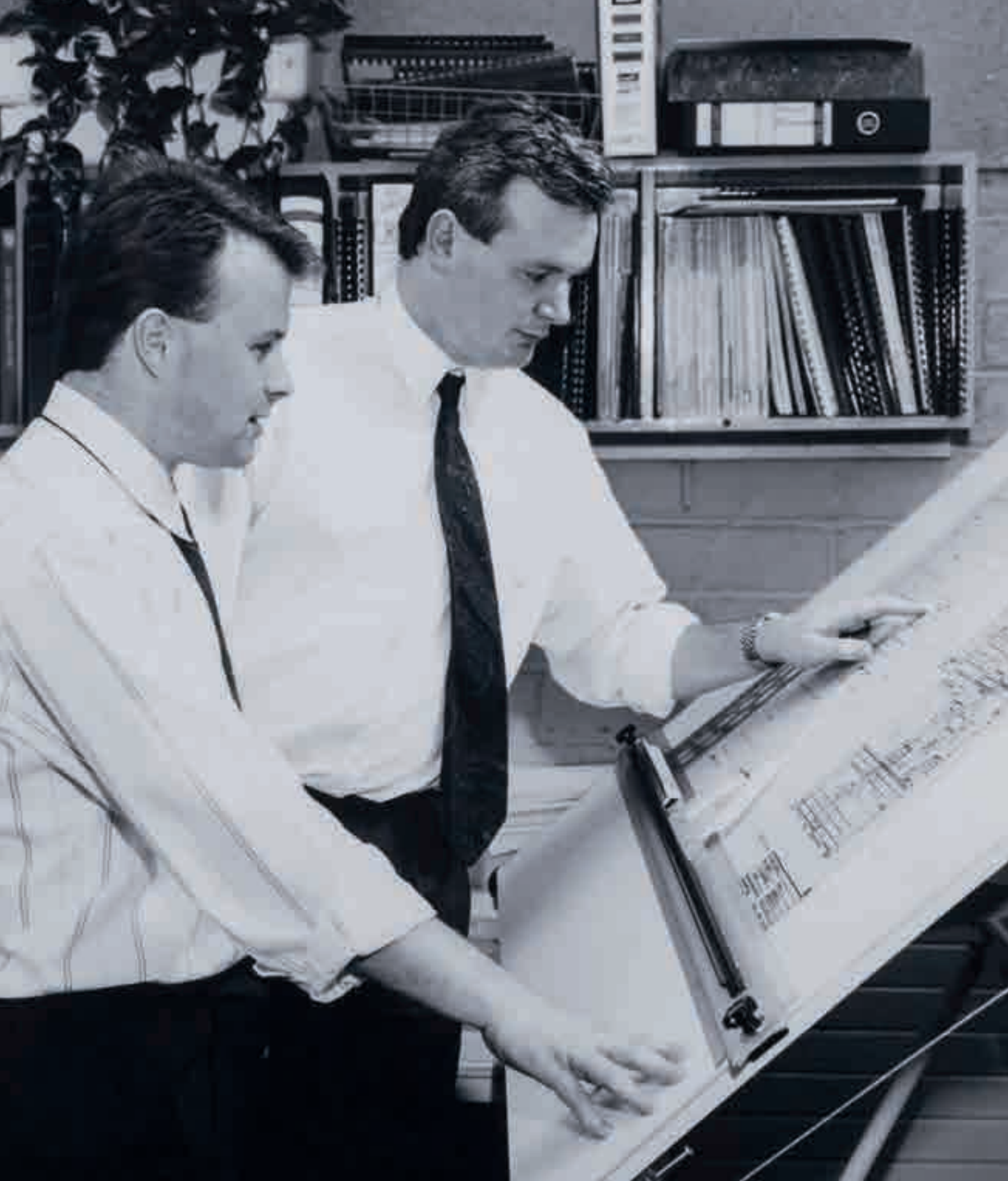
During the 1970s and 1980s H.A. O'Neil Limited, with its wide and varied experience, expanded its business to include contracts with the pharmaceutical industry, which at the time represented a new area of manufacturing in this country. Among the first of these big contracts with pharmaceutical multinationals was one for Bristol-Myers Squibb in Swords, County Dublin and for Merck Sharp & Dohme in Clonmel, County Tipperary, where Tommy Purcell recalled 'you had all the architects coming in'²⁶ to see the plant. There were also contracts for mechanical processes at Abbotstown Laboratory in County Dublin, Waterford Pharmaceuticals, Warner Lambert in Cork, Howmedica in Limerick and Abbott Laboratories in Sligo.

Along with developments in the international pharmaceutical industry, the global move to a new information world was reflected in the establishment of Amdahl, Digital, Ericsson, Apple, Microsoft and other computer manufacturing and component companies in Ireland during the same period.

Opposite: Stephen McCabe (left) and Kevin Fitzharris in the drawing office at Beech Hill. Stephen joined the company in 1987 and has gone on to become a group director electrical of Jones Engineering Group.

Below: The Merck Sharp & Dohme chemical plant at Clonmel, County Tipperary. During the 1970s and 1980s H.A. O'Neil developed extensive expertise in the pharmaceuticals industry, including the construction of this factory.





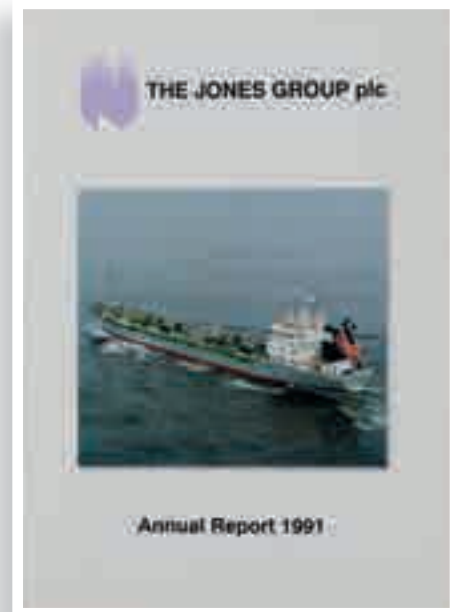
Jones Group sets up Citigas and wins contract to convert Dublin gas network

In the early 1980s the Jones Group set up Citigas Limited and won the contract to convert the Dublin gas network to natural gas. The company undertook this massive conversion work as part of a project that lasted two years and was valued at €15 million.

The Citigas project was based on a database provided by Dublin Gas, which gave the names and addresses of 99 per cent of all gas customers in Dublin. The labour force was made up of skilled foremen from H.A. O'Neil, with installers drawn from an unskilled pool who were then trained to standards set by Dublin Gas. Michael Maher, who worked on the gas conversion project recalled:

Each team was based in a large Renault Traffic van that was fitted out as a workshop in order to deal with difficult appliances. The supervisors used a fleet of small Renault cars to visit the various teams around the sector. As the operation moved around the city we set up local bases in disused yards using cabins on wheels, which could be relocated easily. The whole operation was controlled using two-way radios with a station in each local base and with the signals bounced to the main radio station on Three Rock Mountain. Progress was planned and managed by weekly meetings held in our Dorset Street offices. The Citigas management team was matched with an equal number of people from Dublin Gas.²⁷

The first Dublin consumers to benefit from the new natural gas were those living in the south-western suburbs of Clondalkin, Walkinstown and Tallaght. The first of almost 150,000 Dublin homes to be converted was the home of Mary Denny of Walkinstown Road, in the same estate where H.A. O'Neil Limited had installed the plumbing system in 1948 when the Denny residence was built.²⁸



The front cover of the Jones Group plc annual report for 1991.



Left: Citigas was set up in 1984 when Dublin's town gas supply was being converted to natural gas. This letterhead dates from 1985.

Jones Group – an impressive portfolio of companies

When the 1990s arrived there were several new companies in the group, reflecting its increasingly diverse interests. Harper & Fay, acquired by the group in 1975, had contracts for water treatment plants north of Dublin city in Swords, south of the city in Shanganagh, a plant on the River Liffey itself and in Abbeyfeale, County Limerick. It also had installed treatment plants for private companies like Anglo-Irish Meat Processors and Harp Lager, both in Dundalk, County Louth, Avonmore Creameries in County Kilkenny, Nippon Den kai in Cork, as well as an important overseas project in Iraq.

By the early 1990s the Jones Group had assembled an impressive portfolio of companies, but in ways it had over-extended itself and by 1992 it was leaving itself vulnerable to a possible hostile takeover. By that time construction in Ireland was going through another recession and the group was heavily involved in a wide and diverse range of interests.

There was media speculation that the Jones Group might merge with Irish-based engineering group Unidare, one commentator arguing that such a merger would protect each one and would be a defensive move to protect both from a hostile takeover.²⁹

In October 1992 the Jones Group wrote off a total of \$4.5 million following its decision to sell its US subsidiary, Enviroquip, to the local management. The senior management of the group's companies, having reviewed the overall situation, took the decision to implement a rationalisation of operational divisions and dispose of those companies that were not central to the group's core activities.

The shipping and manufacturing companies were sold, as was the group's headquarters at Beech Hill.³⁰ There was a senior management buy-out of the engineering division and the decision was taken to dispose of the surplus cash to shareholders of the Jones Group.³¹

The financial director, Derry Hussey, recalled that:

We had to decide whether we were going to go on an acquisition trail – which we should have done earlier – or simply give the money back to the shareholders and rightly or wrongly, we decided to give the money back to the shareholders. We sold off everything and H.A. O'Neil Limited was bought by the management and Chris Jones.³²

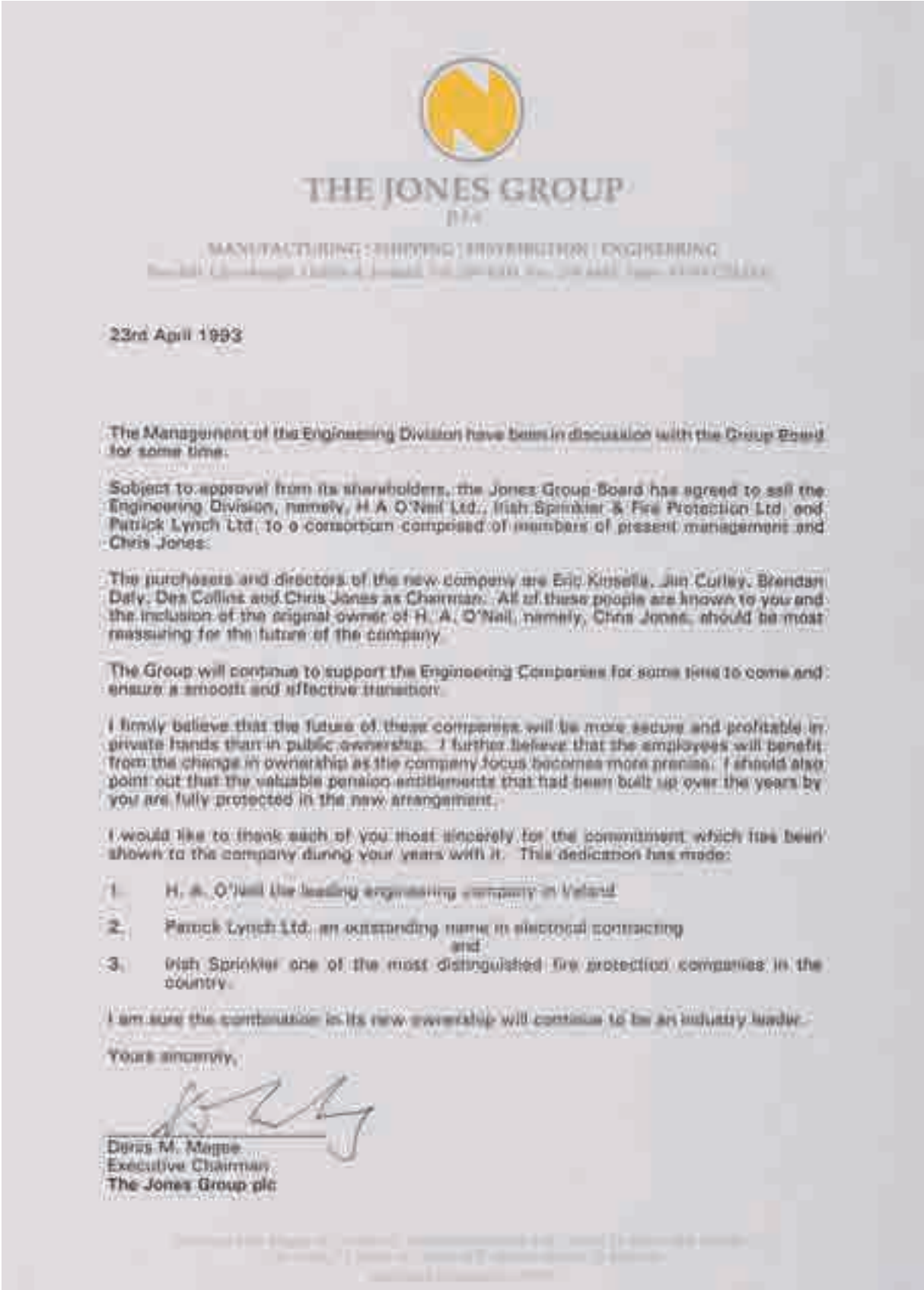
Denis Magee, Jones Group executive chairman and Derry Hussey gave up their executive positions in 1993 and in 1996 Chris Jones, after fifty-six years with H.A. O'Neil Limited, stepped down as a member of the board of the Jones Group plc.³³ The group withdrew from being a publicly quoted company and in 1993 H.A. O'Neil Limited along with Patrick Lynch Limited and Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited became the new Jones Engineering Group. The new owners were Chris Jones, Eric Kinsella, Jim Curley, Des Collins and Brendan Daly.

An old chapter had just ended and a new and even more exciting one was about to begin for the firm founded by Harry Austin O'Neil, 103 years earlier.



Directors photographed circa 1995: Back row, from left: James O'Shea, John Hartnett, Brendan Daly, Ray Murphy, Chris Jones Jnr. and Jim McCormack. Front row, from left: Terry Tierney, Peter O'Callaghan, George McCann, Eric Kinsella, Jim Curley, Tony Byrne and Des Collins.

Right: The Jones Group plc buyout letter, signed by Denis Magee, 23 April 1993.



Spring turns on the first Dublin natural gas supply

By Dick Grogan

NATURAL GAS was burned directly in a Dublin consumer's gas stove for the first time yesterday, when the Tánaiste and Minister for Energy, Mr Spring, "switched on" the new gas supply to the home of Mrs Mary Denny, of Walkinstown Road, the first of almost 150,000 Dublin houses to be converted for this purpose.

Mr Spring encountered heckling from supporters of the jailed and former Ranks worker, Mr Harry Fleming, when he arrived at Mrs Denny's home to inaugurate the two-year conversion programme that will extend gradually through the city.

The Tánaiste shook hands — apparently inadvertently — with Sinn Féin European candidate and Ranks Action Committee member, Mr John Noonan, but moved away hastily when Mr Noonan asked him if the Labour Party was going to leave workers in jail. Other Ranks workers' supporters chanted "Free Harry Fleming" as he entered and left the Denny home.

Yesterday town gas was first purged from the Walkinstown system and was "flared off" at several designated points as the Kinsale natural gas was gradually fed in. The gas company operatives failed to gain entry to only five or six houses in the Walkinstown sector and the supply to these was disconnected from outside pending access to the premises.

The Department of Energy, in a statement, said the allocation of natural gas to the Dublin Gas Company alone was expected to reduce the energy import bill by about £90 million a year by the end of the decade, and the return to the Exchequer over the life of the project, was expected to be about £740 million.

Mr Spring, in a speech later, said that the conversion costs — between £100 and £200 per customer — were not being passed on to the consumer but would be borne by the State and the company "in the interests of promoting the use of this high quality native Irish fuel."

He said that gas prices to consumers in Dublin had decreased by "up to 40 per cent" since the arrival of natural gas — a statement which, while technically accurate, could be misleading, as the 40 per cent cost saving only

applies to the heaviest category of domestic user.

The reductions are on a sliding scale, and there is little or no saving for the small scale gas user, although the advent of natural gas should at least ensure that prices will remain much more stable than they would otherwise have been.

Mr Spring also said it was the Government's intention that every possible encouragement be given to Irish industry to participate in both the £55 million conversion project and the £64 million expansion of the gas company grid. Several major industrial users, such as Irish Biscuits Ltd in Tallaght, have already opted to change over to natural gas as a process fuel.

The natural gas scheme, however, is not without some less favourable implications for other sectors of the Irish energy industry. As the total pool of energy demand is limited, and is not demonstrating much growth at present, any large-scale change-over by industry to natural gas must inevitably encroach on electricity's share of the market and thus — indirectly at least — contribute to the economic arguments being put forward by the ESB for the closure of peat-fired generating stations.

Eight five-man teams of technicians are now working their way through the 600 other homes in the Walkinstown sector, and all should be converted by Friday, after which the operation will move on systematically through neighbouring sectors until the whole city is converted in mid-1986.

Mr Spring issued a blunt warning to Dublin Gas that the Government expects results, when he addressed the staff of the company last night.

He said: "I must put it quite plainly that for the level of State support to Dublin Gas, I and the Government will expect that targets for costs will be met, any cost overruns avoided, sales projections achieved and capital repayment schedules observed."



The Tánaiste, Mr Spring, switching on natural gas in the first house in Dublin — the home of Mrs Mary Denny (left) in Walkinstown Road. Also present were Mr Donal McAleese, chief executive, New Dublin Gas, and Mr Michael Keating, Lord Mayor of Dublin. — (Photograph: Little Kelly)

Above: The Tánaiste, Dick Spring, turns on the first Dublin natural gas supply in the home of Mary Denny, on Walkinstown Road. Also present is Donal McAleese, chief executive, New Dublin Gas (centre) and Michael Keating, Lord Mayor of Dublin.

(Irish Times Archive)

Chapter 5 – Endnotes

- 1 *Irish Times*, 19 April 1973.
- 2 *Business & Finance*, 19 April 1973.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 Richard Keatinge, 'Jones Group will go public later this year' in *Irish Times*, 19 April 1973.
- 5 *Irish Independent*, 12 June 1973.
- 6 Derry Hussey interview.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Jones Group prospectus, p. 8; *Irish Times*, 12 June 1973.
- 9 *Ibid.*
- 10 *Irish Times*, 19 June 1973.
- 11 *Irish Times*, 18 April 1974.
- 12 *Irish Times*, 9 September 1974.
- 13 John Donohoe, *Chris Jones: The Complete Man*, (Dublin: privately published, 2013), pp.75–9.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp.100–101.
- 15 Enka Glanzstoff, part of the AKZO Group.
- 16 Jones Group prospectus, p.4.
- 17 'Dutch bosses didn't believe in fairies' in *Irish Times*, 11 October 1970.
- 18 Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p. 68.
- 19 *Irish Times*, 6 July 1974.
- 20 Matt Johnston interview.
- 21 Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p.69.
- 22 *Irish Times*, 30 June 1977.
- 23 George McCann interview.
- 24 *Irish Times*, 24 January 1976.
- 25 Tommy Purcell interview.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 Michael Maher memorandum.
- 28 *Irish Times*, 22 May 1984.
- 29 *Irish Times*, 8 July 1992.
- 30 *Irish Times*, 18 October 1995.
- 31 *Irish Times*, 20 December 1997.
- 32 Derry Hussey interview.
- 33 *Irish Times*, 10 June 1993; Donohoe, *Chris Jones*, p.74.



6 Realignment – Jones Engineering Group 1993–2008

‘Little did those who sold the contracting division of Jones Group or those who bought into it know that in 1993 the Irish construction sector was at the bottom of its cycle of recession and that the biggest property boom in living memory was about to start.’

The next phase of the company’s development took place against circumstances of dramatic economic and social change, not only in Ireland, but also around the world.

During the 1990s developments in information technology and communications services were changing not only the way people communicated with each other, but also the way business was conducted. These developments fundamentally changed how people worked, and how they sought and stored information. So having an educated and English-speaking population, backed up by a favourable tax regime, Ireland attracted and encouraged many multinational business corporations to establish themselves here, especially in the Dublin region.

Dublin’s changing fortunes began to forge a new identity for the city. The long-neglected Liffey quays and surrounding areas were being rejuvenated after decades of neglect, and the largely abandoned docklands were being seen as a part of the city with a bright future.

All around Ireland urban centres began to expand. This expansion was most profound in Dublin, and a growing population resulted in new housing developments extending beyond the capital into the neighbouring counties of Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and Louth.

The commercial sector was gaining momentum at this time. After the opening of the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in Dublin, growth continued in the office, retail and leisure sectors. The public finance available for individual government departments was plentiful and there was significant spending on health and education projects.

In the second half of the 1990s, Ireland’s economy was growing at over 9 per cent per annum on average, driven primarily by growth in exports, which more than trebled in value terms between 1994 and 2001. Population growth of some 38,000 persons per annum underpinned a well-performing housing market. The numbers signing onto the Live Register fell from 300,000 in 1993 to 135,000 in 2002. Prospects for the country looked good.

However, there was a fundamental shift in the balance of power of the nation’s economy from 2001 onwards. Exports stagnated as the economy began to lose competitiveness. The pace of growth slowed somewhat, averaging 5.5 per cent per annum over the 2001–2007 period. While still a strong rate of expansion, growth in

Opposite: A proliferation of tower cranes along the quays of Dublin’s River Liffey, when the ‘Celtic Tiger’ property boom was very much in evidence during the first years of this century.

(David Poole/FotoLibra)

NewHomes



Left: When houses sold at a rate of one a minute in Dublin – an *Irish Times* article from October 2004.

(*Irish Times* Archive)

this period became increasingly unbalanced, being driven mainly by domestic sources – consumer spending and construction – and by the mid part of the decade, growth and government finances were heavily skewed towards residential construction. Immigration drove population growth to over 100,000 people per annum in the mid-2000s. The country's financial institutions were awash with cheap money, eager to lend to thousands of people who believed that investment in property was a guarantee of future wealth.

As the construction of domestic dwellings spiralled, a linked result was a demand for new infrastructural facilities like hospitals, shopping centres and public buildings – all of which fed into the construction-led 'Celtic Tiger' phenomenon. The result was a massive escalation in grossly inflated house prices. Many Irish people, with the full blessing of the banks and building societies, signed up to second mortgages in order to purchase properties abroad. In doing so they looked to places that seemed to offer amazing value compared to prices at home. This included countries as diverse as France, Spain, UK, Portugal, Hungary, Turkey and Bulgaria.

Politically this period was marked by inquiries into abuses of the planning laws, leading to tribunals of inquiry and the appearance of many politicians and developers before them. The devastating events of 9/11 (11 September 2001) in New York were felt around the world and changed the way we travelled and thought about security.

The collapse of the 'dot-com' bubble in 2000 had caused temporary uncertainty on the world's financial markets, but the housing boom in Ireland continued unabated, despite some people who warned it would all end in tears. In 2008, following the subprime mortgage crisis and the collapse of the investment bank Lehman Brothers in the United States, the extent of the banking crisis in Ireland was also realised. As

a result, the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' economy, which was overly dependent on the property market, heated to boiling point and came to a crashing end, causing untold financial misery for many years to come.

The construction business in Ireland takes an upward swing

Little did those who sold the contracting division of Jones Group or those who bought into it know that in 1993 the Irish construction sector was at the bottom of its cycle of recession and that the biggest property boom in living memory was about to start. Commencing in that year the construction business volumes took an upward swing, a trend that was to continue from then until 2007. This was a period of sustained growth in construction in Ireland, the longevity of which had never occurred before and is unlikely to happen again in the working lifetime of those now connected to the industry.

Most of this growth came in the form of multinationals either setting up in Ireland or through the expansion of those already here. Some of the major projects that either were set up or expanded, and in which the Jones Engineering Group was involved, included Johnson & Johnson, Hewlett Packard, Worldport, Xerox and Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS), to name but a few.

Right: *The Irish Times* front page of 12 September 2001, the day after the terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in Manhattan.
(*Irish Times Archive*)

Below: A graphic sign displaying the day's date on Lehman Brothers world headquarters in New York. US Stocks were poised for a massive sell off on 15 September 2008 after embattled investment bank Lehman Brothers Holdings filed for bankruptcy.
(*Peter Foley/EPA/Corbis*)



While the construction industry in Ireland recovered from the dip at the beginning of the 1990s, the number of projects on which the group's companies won contracts began to increase rapidly. At the same time the nature of the work on offer was changing, as contracts moved away from predominantly mechanical services to process, industrial HVAC and more specialised areas – especially in the information technology and pharmaceutical sectors.

Jones Engineering Group is formed in 1993

By 1993 Jones Group plc had evolved into a conglomerate with interests in areas as diverse as construction, manufacturing, shipping, oil distribution, insulation, air conditioning and wastewater treatment. H.A. O'Neil Limited, with its focus on mechanical and building services engineering and contracting, was no longer at the centre of the group. At this time H.A. O'Neil Limited was been managed by Eric Kinsella with Jim Curley as director in charge of the HVAC division and George McCann as director in charge of the process side of the business. Des Collins filled the important role of chief financial officer at that time.

After the untimely death of P.J. Doyle (the then chief executive officer of H.A. O'Neil Limited and a Jones Group plc director) in 1989, Eric Kinsella took over at the helm of the contracting division of the group. As the 1980s came to an end and the 1990s began, it became apparent to Eric that H.A. O'Neil Limited was no longer a fit as part of a public company. He recognised better than anyone that the best place for the contracting companies was in the hands of owner operators who could focus not only on the short-to-medium term objectives, but also could set long-term strategies that



Above: Inside the Xerox toner building in Dundalk. Jones Engineering was responsible for the installation of the mechanical and electrical services in several of the buildings during construction of the Xerox campus in 1999.

Left: Standing left to right – Tony Byrne, Brendan Daly, Michael Cunningham, Chris Jones Jr and Des Collins.

Seated left to right – Tony Joyce, Jim Curley, George McCann, Eric Kinsella, Chris Jones and Terry Tierney at a board meeting in Beech Hill.





Above: An aerial view of the Hewlett Packard ink cartridge manufacturing facility, built in 1997 on the site of the former Irish Meat Packers Limited plant. The Hewlett Packard facility was a major contract for the Jones Engineering industrial HVAC division.

Right: The entrance to the Vistakon facility at National Technology Park, Plassey in Limerick. Jones Engineering Group has been working with Vistakon since its foundation there in 1996.
(Courtesy of David Hawgood)



would deliver even better outcomes into the future. Being part of a public company was not all negative for a contracting firm, as it brought great discipline in the areas of reporting, planning, target setting and focusing – disciplines that are often lacking in businesses in this sector. These are skills and systems that can greatly assist in the governance and day-to-day management of a construction business.

Having assembled a team about him, Eric Kinsella – in partnership with Chris Jones, Jim Curley, Des Collins and Brendan Daly – persuaded the Jones Group plc to let the engineering division break loose from the Jones Group. This division comprised of H.A. O'Neil Limited, Patrick Lynch Limited, Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited and a number of dormant companies.

The new group was branded as the Jones Engineering Group, reflecting the origins of the company and the esteem in which Chris Jones was held not just in the construction industry but also in Irish business in general. Chris took up the position of chairman of the group with Eric Kinsella as group managing director and chief executive officer, driving the company's progress through the people he had assembled around him to become the dominant player in the mechanical and electrical services sector in Ireland. The management of H.A. O'Neil Limited was restructured to cope with this new growth in the country. Strategically, the company formed three divisions to manage this growth – the commercial HVAC division, the industrial HVAC division and the process piping division.

The work of the commercial HVAC division

The commercial division focused on the installation of heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) projects in the various sectors of the construction industry, which covered offices, retail, hotel and leisure, public building, together with educational, medical and mixed developments. Stephen McCabe was given responsibility for managing the commercial HVAC division as senior contracts manager, and following his success in this area, Stephen was appointed to the board as director in charge of the commercial HVAC division in 1999.

New contracts in hospitals

Hospital contracts, which had been a mainstay of H.A. O'Neil Limited since the 1940s, continued to generate substantial work for the group's companies. The ever-increasing list of diverse contracts in the medical field enabled the team to grow, adding specialist skills and making the group the most experienced hospital services contractor in Ireland.

In the Dublin area there was a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) facility installed at Beaumont Hospital, a contract at Our Lady's Manor in Dalkey, the Dublin Dental Hospital in Lincoln Place and Cherry Orchard Hospital in Ballyfermot. After the success of the design and installation of the Galway Clinic at Doughiska, a replica, mirror-image building was created by the same team for the Hermitage Medical Clinic in Lucan, County Dublin.



Hospital contracts ...

- Ardkeen Hospital, Waterford
- Dublin Dental Hospital
- Galway Clinic
- Naas General Hospital
- Tullamore Hospital
- Bons Secours Galway and Cork
- Hermitage Clinic, Lucan, County Dublin
- St Vincent's Private Hospital Dublin

Left: St Vincent's Private Hospital Dublin

Retail contracts ...

- Ashleaf Shopping Centre Crumlin, Dublin
- Roches Stores Henry Street, Dublin
- Adelphi Centre, Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin
- McDonagh Junction Shopping Centre, Kilkenny
- St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre, Phase 2
- Dunnes Stores, Cornelscourt, County Dublin.
- Swan Centre Rathmines, Dublin
- Superquinn supermarkets in various locations
- Charlestown Centre, Finglas, Dublin

Right: St Stephen's Green Shopping Centre
(www.HDtimelapse.net)



Outside Dublin there were projects at Cork Regional Hospital in Wilton (which later became Cork University Hospital), Cork University Dental Hospital, Bons Secours in College Road Cork and, further west, Tralee General Hospital. In the midlands, hospital projects included St Luke's Hospital in Kilkenny, Naas General Hospital, Tullamore General Hospital and the Midland Regional Hospital at Mullingar. In the south-east there were contracts at Ardkeen Hospital, later known as Waterford Regional Hospital and St John's Community Hospital in Enniscorthy. In the west of Ireland contracts included those at Mayo General Hospital, an acute psychiatric unit at Ennis General Hospital, St Joseph's Hospital Ennis, University College Hospital Galway oncology department, and the Bons Secours Hospital at Renmore, Galway.

Expansion in the retail sector

The population growth around Dublin, coupled with the changing shopping habits of the Irish, were both reflected in the contract books at the time, as new shopping centres continued to supplant traditional shops and shopping streets in Ireland's cities, suburbs and towns.

There were contracts for the supermarket chains Dunnes Stores, Roches Stores, Tesco, Superquinn and Marks and Spencer, as well as new names in the Irish retail sector, such as Aldi and TK Maxx.

New projects in the education sector

Ireland's third-level education institutions were also expanding in the late 1990s. Under the 'Free Fees Initiative', introduced in 1995-6, the Irish Government undertook to pay the fees of qualified students registering for the first time on full-time recognised degree programmes. As a result, the student population grew rapidly, with increasing numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate research students.

Facilities at Irish universities and institutes of technology multiplied, serving not only the undergraduate population but also the developing technological and information needs of the research communities. Companies within the Jones Engineering Group worked on many of these projects. Amongst them was a new chemistry building in Trinity College Dublin and a new science block at Dublin City University. At University College Cork there was a languages building, a bioscience building, a school of pharmacy, a postgraduate library and the Tyndall National Institute, one of Europe's principal research centres in Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

At NUI Galway there were contracts for a new library, a science and technology unit and a languages building. Meanwhile a contract was signed for work on the electronics and bioscience building at NUI Maynooth, a sports building and the Kemmy Business School at the University of Limerick, and at University College Dublin a new student centre and a new building for the Faculty of Commerce in Belfield (the UCD Lochlann Quinn School of Business).

In Waterford Institute of Technology a new library, restaurant and more lecture theatres were constructed. The National College of Art and Design (NCAD) moved into a new building at a converted distillery premises in Thomas Street Dublin, and there were projects for the companies within the Jones Engineering Group at the DIT College of Catering in Cathal Brugha Street Dublin, the College of Commerce Cork, the Institutes of Technology in Limerick, Blanchardstown IT, Dundalk IT and at Waterford IT.

Below: The national 50m swimming pool was Ireland's first Olympic sized pool at University of Limerick.



Office accommodation contracts...

- The Bar Council of Ireland, Church Street Building, Dublin
- Dublin City Hall, Dame Street, Dublin
- Guild House, Irish Financial Services Centre, Dublin
- Site K, Blanchardstown, Dublin
- TelLabs, Tullow, County Carlow
- Lapps Quay, Cork
- Riverside 1, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin
- Point Village, East Wall, Dublin
- Hanover Quay (formerly Facebook HQ), Dublin

Right: Riverside 1, Sir John Rogerson's Quay, Dublin



Financial and commercial sector developments

There were new commercial office block developments and new business parks, some in greenfield sites and others established within urban areas as part of urban renewal schemes. The group played a significant role in the development of many of these projects. They included contracts at Millennium Park Naas, County Kildare and Lapps Quay in Cork city. Meanwhile, the Bar Council of Ireland extended into a bright new building in Church Street Dublin, close to the Four Courts. In 2006 Jones Engineering completed the mechanical, electrical and sprinkler work in Riverside 1, a fifth generation office building for McCann FitzGerald solicitors at Sir John Rogerson's Quay.

The landmark project of this period of boom and prosperity was the Irish Financial Services Centre (IFSC) in Dublin – Ireland's finance portal for the international financial services business. Jones Engineering Group had overall responsibility for design development and the installation of the mechanical and fire protection services throughout the first phase of this significant project. This first phase was the construction of the International Centre, IFSC House and La Touche House:

three statement buildings which announced the arrival of Dublin as an international financial services hub. In total, 1.3 million square feet of office space was constructed during phase one.¹

The IFSC was to become host to half of the world's top fifty banks and to half of the top twenty insurance companies. It is now globally recognised as a leading location for a range of internationally traded financial services.

Supporting all of these projects were the group's companies – especially Patrick Lynch Limited – which worked on the building and refurbishment aspects of many of these contracts – the most significant contract being the 100,000 square foot headquarters for AIB Bankcentre in Ballsbridge, Dublin.

Heritage buildings and semi-state construction projects

Contracts with semi-state bodies continued, providing work on duty-free shops at Dublin Airport, along with the National Museum of Ireland development at Collins Barracks and Mountjoy Prison in Dublin. There was also high profile work at Dublin's Mansion House in Dawson Street, the European Foundation (along with John Sisk & Son) at Loughlinstown, County Dublin, and Shannon Airport terminal. Other diversified work took place at historic Kilkenny Castle, Baldonnell Aerodrome in County Dublin, City Hall in Dame Street Dublin, the RTÉ premises at Montrose, Donnybrook in south Dublin, the State Laboratory at Celbridge, County Kildare, and Haulbowline naval base in Cobh, County Cork.

The areas around the group's Dublin offices on Grand Canal Basin were almost derelict when the Jones Engineering Group moved there in 1993-94. By 2006 the fortunes of the area were totally reversed, as a thriving office, financial, retail and residential community transformed the old docklands and basin. Indeed the Jones Engineering Group played a major role in these exciting developments, especially at Grand Canal Quay and along the River Liffey. These landmark developments reflected the country's mounting prosperity, as did the new hotels and leisure centres around Ireland, such as Heritage Hotel, Killenard, County Laois and Fota Island Hotel near Cork city.

The work of the process and industrial HVAC divisions

Although these divisions have clearly defined areas of operation, many of the projects that the process and industrial HVAC divisions undertook in these years had been inter-related and both divisions had worked in partnership on many of them.

The process division is responsible for installing the process piping systems that cater for the stringent protocols and procedures required by the pharmaceutical, food and beverage, electronic, manufacturing and assembly sectors of the industry, where quality of product cannot be compromised. For future development and expansion at

Industrial HVAC division contracts...

- Hewlett Packard, Leixlip, County Kildare
- Wyeth, Newbridge, County Kildare
- Xerox, Blanchardstown, Dublin
- Worldport, Blanchardstown, Dublin
- Digital Realty Trust, Blanchardstown, Dublin
- MSL, Galway
- IBM, Blanchardstown, Dublin
- Microsoft, Dublin

Right: Nypro, Waterford



the time it was essential that H.A. O'Neil Limited would have to continue to provide a number of highly skilled, multidisciplinary project management and construction teams with skill sets tailored to suit the particular and ever-evolving requirements, protocols and procedures of the wide range of clients the Jones Engineering Group served across the construction industry spectrum.

The mechanical process division was headed up by George McCann, who was the director in charge of the division from 1989. Working initially with George were Derek Waters and Peter O'Callaghan. Later Shane Gillece took over this division, having already taken charge of the industrial work.

After George McCann's retirement in 2003, Shane Gillece became a director and later head of these two divisions – developing a reputation on behalf of himself and his team for the delivery of complex projects.

The industrial HVAC division is responsible for the installation of heating, ventilation and air conditioning and utility systems. The division was established to cater for the specific protocol and procedures required by the group's industrial and manufacturing clients, where output was under increasingly stringent and audited conditions to ensure a high standard of manufacturing and production. These sectors included food and beverage, electronic, manufacturing, medical devices and data storage facilities.

The highly varied range of projects completed during this period

Computer and computer-related companies

Computer and computer-related companies continued to be major customers of the Jones Engineering Group during the period. Some major computer components firms had been customers since the 1980s. The world's leading semiconductor facility located just outside Dublin has been a customer of the group since 1989. H.A. O'Neil Limited, together with Patrick Lynch Limited, continued to maintain a significant presence on that site.

These ongoing contracts with multinational companies throughout Ireland are evidence of the experience and specialised knowledge the group's companies bring to their projects within the electronic and data centre sectors.

Data centres

One outstanding contract has been the Worldport facility at Blanchardstown, Dublin, which was the largest web hosting facility in Ireland at the time. It began operating in October 2000. Worldport provided web-hosting services to medium-sized and large businesses, allowing them to outsource their internet operations. This gave H.A. O'Neil Limited their first insight into what was to become a new niche market sector for the storage of data.

By 2002, data centres already accounted for 1.5 percent of the total power consumption of the United States and was growing by an estimated ten per cent every year. More than five million new servers were deployed every year. As experts warned of excessive power usage, hardware manufacturers began focusing on more power efficient components to enable future growth. Data centre owners began developing



Clockwise from left: Craftsman orbital welding in the Class 10 welding booth, Damastown, County Dublin.

Ductwork serving the high purity workshop in Damastown.

National Institute for Bioprocessing Research and Training (NIBRT), Dublin.

One of the Jones Engineering Group Cork workshops, where piping modules were fabricated for the Eli Lilly project in Kinsale.

Process piping at the Schwarz Pharma plant, Shannon, County Clare.



smart design approaches to make the cooling and airflow in data centres more efficient. By 2007, large operators started investigating renewable energy sources, such as wind energy to run their data centres.²

In 2007 Jones Engineering Group began working with Digital Realty Trust (DRT), a data centre solution provider for many of the world's leading enterprises. The group carried out the mechanical and electrical work on their new data centre, located in Clonshaugh, north Dublin. Due to the success of the project, along with the great expertise and knowledge of the team, Jones Engineering Group has built on this relationship and continues to work with DRT throughout Ireland and the United Kingdom.

A major factor contributing to the growth of the data centre market in Ireland is Ireland's cool climate. In 2008, Jones Engineering began work on one of the world's first data centres to rely entirely on 'free cooling' with units on the facility's roof directing cool outside air through the centre, leading to significantly greater energy efficiency. The Microsoft data centre in Clondalkin, County Dublin, is just over twice the size of the pitch at Dublin's Croke Park Stadium, which is itself twice the size of a soccer pitch. Jones Engineering Group completed the mechanical and sprinkler services in this data centre. It has been recognised as 'best practice' in environmental sustainability through its innovative design.

Through knowledge and experience, working with some of the major players in this market, the group has continued to expand its teams in this niche market sector and today works with some of the global names in the data centre industry throughout Europe.

Pharmaceutical and health care projects

Major customers of the Jones Engineering Group in the 1990s were large pharmaceutical and healthcare companies and almost all of the multinational pharmaceutical companies have manufacturing facilities in Ireland. With a proven record of experience and a clear understanding of the particular protocols and specific requirements of this sector, Jones Engineering Group companies have continued to maintain a working presence in many of these facilities.

One project of particular interest was Wyeth BioPharma in Clondalkin, the largest single investment biopharma facility in the world when it went into production in 2005. Regarded as one of the largest integrated biopharmaceutical campuses, it was constructed in just thirty-three months, at a total investment of €1.8 billion, and covers 11,500 square metres in total.

The facility required 1.25 million person hours of engineering; nine million person hours of construction; 15,000 tonnes of structural steel; 48,800 metres of process piping; 2,400 separate items of equipment; fifty different sub-contract packages; 7,587 different drawings; and 1,200 specific validation protocols. Construction personnel peaked at 2,500 staff. Among the other firms working on these projects were P.J. Hegarty & Sons, John Sisk and Son, Jacobs Engineering and Project Management Group. The Wyeth project marked a significant growth in the company, while employing at peak 300 personnel directly on this project.

*'The Wyeth
BioPharma
facility required
1.25 million person
hours of engineering;
9 million person
hours of construction;
15,000 tonnes of
structural steel;
48,800 metres
of process piping;
2,400 separate items
of equipment;
50 different sub-
contract packages;
7,587 different
drawings;
and 1,200 specific
validation protocols.
Construction
personnel peaked
at 2,500 staff.'*



Above: An Aerial view of the Wyeth (now Pfizer) bio pharmaceutical facility in Grange Castle. This was the biggest biopharma facility in the world when it went into production in 2005.

Simultaneously H.A. O'Neil Limited was also carrying out a major semiconductor facility project in Leixlip employing 320 personnel directly, and in Mulhuddart County Dublin, H.A. O'Neil Limited was employing 255 people on a new bulk manufacturing facility for Bristol-Myers Squibb. The final facility contained 90,000m of piping, 240,000m of electrical cable and 155,000m of instrument cable. H.A. O'Neil Limited worked with the engineering services and construction company Fluor and others on this facility, which had a final investment value of \$500m when completed in December 2002.

Food and allied industries

In the food and allied industries there were projects for the group's companies at Heinz Custom Foods in Dundalk, County Louth, Ballina Beverages in County Mayo and at the Cuisine de France plant at Grange Castle in Clondalkin, Dublin. H.A. O'Neil Limited continued to maintain its strong presence with its two very long-standing customers; Guinness at St. James's Gate Dublin, and Cadbury at both of their sites, Rathmore in County Kerry and the plant at Coolock in County Dublin.

The industrial sector expanded rapidly in Ireland throughout the 1990s. A flood of overseas manufacturing corporations set up facilities in this country during that decade. At the same time indigenous companies were expanding. This boom in industrial activity subsequently led to a significant increase in infrastructural development.

The companies within the Jones Engineering Group worked on projects for many of these organisations, among them car component factories, packaging companies and electrical goods companies like Braun in Carlow. At the same time the group's proven experience with oil pipelines and fuel services contributed to contracts for projects with Burmah Oil, Bord Gáis Éireann, Ringsend Power Station, and for Esso



developments in Alexandra Basin and Dublin port, with a major contract to work on the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) Poolbeg site, including the ESB oil line refurbishment.

As a group whose interests and customer base lay in the areas of engineering and construction, the fortunes of the Jones Engineering Group were linked to the enormous prosperity of the years between 1994 and 2008 that became known as ‘the Celtic Tiger’ era.

However, by 2006 there were warning signs that the boom might be ending, though the early warnings of economists like Morgan Kelly and David McWilliams and organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) went largely unheeded.³ In August 2006 the IMF observed that while growth in Ireland had been substantial, the economy had become increasingly unbalanced in recent years, with heavy reliance on building investment, sharp increases in house prices and rapid growth, especially in property-related sectors. At the peak of the boom, construction output generated 21 per cent of Ireland’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), about twice the level seen in other developed European economies. While output in all construction sectors had grown, the increase was largely driven by housing, which by 2006 provided 65 per cent of total construction output. Many commentators justified this high level of housing output

Above: An exterior view of the ESB Poolbeg generating system at Ringsend, Dublin, seen from the mouth of the River Liffey.

(Courtesy of Barry Steele)

Right: Inside the turbine hall of the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) Poolbeg Generating Station at Ringsend, Dublin, showing some of the sophisticated piping arrangements installed by H.A. O'Neil Limited.



by reference to the demand for homes from our relatively young population, coupled with high levels of immigration. In addition, Ireland had an infrastructure deficit when compared to more developed European economies, justifying increased expenditure in areas such as roads and our social infrastructure.

A global financial crisis was to bring the days of prosperity to an end and the Jones Engineering Group faced new challenges in the following years.

This period was not just marked by the volume and quality of work that was available in the market at the time but, in the case of Jones Engineering Group, the diversity of this work provided outstanding opportunities for highly skilled people to grow in their careers.

In 1993 the total number employed by the group was 280. By 2008 this number had grown to 1,018. Within this number was a new breed of young energetic managers capable of constructing and delivering ever more complex projects in shorter and shorter time frames. Also within these numbers were numerous world-class craft workers and supervisors, along with administrators and apprentices. The team was there to take on the next challenges. This is the team from which the succession and future ownership of the firm was to come.

Chapter 6 – Endnotes

- 1 IFSC website, www.ifsc.ie.
- 2 Wolfgang Gruener, 8 April 2013, source: www.tomsitpro.com/articles.
- 3 See, for example, *Irish Times*, 28 December 2006, 7 September 2007.

Opposite: The International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) buildings in the Dublin docklands area announced the arrival of Dublin as an international financial services city in 1992. Jones Engineering Group had overall responsibility for the design development and installation of the mechanical and fire protection services.

(*Irish Times Archive*)







7 Building for a sustainable future

*‘This is a group
that continues
to impress ...
They have a well-
earned reputation
for quality and
innovation ...’*

Taoiseach Enda Kenny, 2014

In 2007 Ireland’s economy started its descent into crisis. Housing output fell rapidly and as a result, tax revenues declined substantially, undermining the Irish Government’s budget plans. Unemployment increased and bank loan arrears emerged. International events, triggered by the collapse of the Lehman Brothers bank in 2008, led to severe reductions in the availability of short-term interbank finance, a source on which Irish banks had become heavily dependent. Property values declined, undermining the balance sheets of our banks, which had heavy exposure to property. From this, confidence in the banks fell sharply and faced with the prospect of deposit outflows, the government issued a blanket guarantee of the banks’ liabilities and decided to recapitalise the banks using public funds. When added to the significant budget deficit, this decision led to unsustainable increases in the country’s cost of borrowing, which in turn led to an €85 billion financial assistance package being negotiated with the European Union and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2010.

A ‘troika’ representing the EU, the European Central Bank (ECB) and the IMF was set up to oversee the implementation of a recovery programme involving tax increases, widespread cuts in public spending and structural reforms to the economy. The National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) was established to take over bad loans and associated assets from the banks. Emigration increased and many graduates and craftworkers left to seek employment in Canada, Australia and the Middle East, as well as the traditional emigrant destinations of the United Kingdom and the United States.

Facing the challenges posed by the sudden end to the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era

The demise of the ‘Celtic Tiger’, after fifteen years of a construction boom, meant that new and very serious challenges had to be faced by the directors and senior management of Jones Engineering Group. A decision could have been made to simply batten down the hatches and try to weather the storm of the worst financial crisis ever to hit the country. For a number of the main construction companies their answer was to downsize or go into hibernation. Some household names in the industry went bankrupt and disappeared – in many cases bringing down long-established sub-contractors with them.

The shocking legacy of the boom-time construction industry in Ireland was that it shrank from approximately 350,000 people employed in the sector to only about 100,000 people. To put this into context, the construction industry in Ireland turned

Opposite: The shell of the partially completed head office building planned for the failed Anglo Irish Bank, situated on North Wall Quay Dublin. It became an iconic symbol of the demise of the ‘Celtic Tiger’ era in Ireland. Ironically, now it is destined to become the ‘green’ headquarters of the Central Bank of Ireland.

(Courtesy of William Murphy)

over €38 billion at the height of the boom (21 per cent of GDP) and dropped to a low of approximately €7 billion, with a possible long-term position of around 12 per cent of GDP. It was obvious that construction employment levels would invariably follow these figures.

Having analysed the significant issues facing the group at this crucial time in its history, it was decided that a bold strategic solution had to be put in place, acting immediately and decisively, just as H.A. O'Neil Limited had faced up to the problems of the 1940s. Once again, however, a firm commitment to people was of paramount importance.

The initial task was to manage the overhead. Aware that one of the key strengths of the group has always been its people, measures were put in place to address the situation, with an emphasis on staff retention. Some members of staff had no experience of the boom-bust cycle and they were oblivious to what might lie ahead. For them the whole situation came as a surprise. On the other hand, those who had joined the industry before the 1990s would have been all too familiar with the outcome of a recession and the actions that needed to be undertaken.

The next step was to raise the awareness of the entire team on the practical implications of the financial downturn in Ireland and the challenges that lay ahead for Jones Engineering Group. A series of workshops were organised, the format was a 'state of the nation' address, which spelled out the reality facing the Irish economy in general and the construction industry in particular.

Below: Some of the team involved in the specialist lift division, which evolved out of the restructuring workshops within the Jones Engineering Group following the economic collapse in Ireland from 2008.

From left to right: Stephen Anderson, Robbie Byrne, Diarmuid Gilvarry and Colin Salisbury.



The management strategy was then to tap into the existing knowledge, experience and strengths within the group and ask team members themselves for ideas and suggestions as to the possible way forward. A series of sessions were organised to identify what the group did well and where the group could deploy these skills in other sectors and in other jurisdictions. A cross section of people from each operational division attended these workshops, working together as teams, in order to identify the core strengths and skills within the Jones Engineering Group and to identify where future opportunities might lie. The theme was: 'Let's find a solution and work together'.

These workshops generated invaluable recommendations and suggestions as to how the group might address a bleak future. All of the information from the various sessions was collected and collated. This rich reservoir of ideas came not only from senior management and directors but also from amongst the younger generation of supervisors, engineers and administration people, many of whom had gone through the group's graduate programmes. These individuals were as imaginative and in many cases braver and more creative with their brainstorming ideas than their older and more experienced colleagues!

Putting a plan into action to safeguard the future of the group

Working groups were established, each headed by a 'champion'. These champions were tasked with moving ideas forward, which included presenting the directors with a business case for each identified initiative. Once the key skills and strengths had been defined internally, it was decided to apply these to different industries, businesses, and jurisdictions. Out of all of this came solid proposals that helped secure the group's position during the recession and established it as a star performer. Jones Engineering Group subsequently became one of the few firms in the engineering and construction sectors in Ireland to significantly increase employment and turnover during the worst recession in the history of the Irish State.

Again recognising that the group's greatest asset was its people, there was a renewed focus on continuous professional development (CPD), with the emphasis on establishing and developing 'best practice' in the various fields in which the group companies operated. Other opportunities also presented themselves as ways and means of delivering services to customers even more efficiently and cost effectively.

The specialist lift division is set up

Following on from the workshops, existing expertise within the group identified a gap in the market caused by the economic downturn and the needs of some multinational blue chip clients who had started to move areas of their manufacturing processes overseas. There was a new demand to provide a complete specialist lift and 'move-in – move-out' package, leading to the setting up of the specialist lift division. This division provided clients with a full equipment and relocation package, to cover de-installation, crating, transportation, relocation, installation and mechanical and electrical hook-up in a new location.



One such project carried out in 2011 by H.A. O'Neil Limited was a large decommissioning project in County Cork that involved preparation work for a commercial site sale of an entire drug product facility. All of the process equipment on site had to be isolated, disconnected and removed, together with the production and laboratory equipment. This equipment was then crated and shipped to other sites worldwide.

Other major projects carried out by the specialist lift division included the Bord Gáis power station in Cork, where H.A. O'Neil Limited carried out the installation of mechanical services, along with the lifting and installation of 700 tonnes of steel and 3,200 tonnes of equipment.

Above: Some of the specialist lift division team. From left to right: Harley Drummond, Gabriel Heeney, Frank McGovern (in the forklift), Robbie Byrne, Niall McLoughlin, Paul Black and Stephen Anderson.

Jones Celtic BioEnergy formed in 2010

One of the early proposals adopted from the working groups was the suggestion to look for new opportunities in the power, waste to energy and green energy areas. This led to the establishment of a joint venture with Celtic BioEnergy Limited (CBE) in Midleton, County Cork, for the purposes of delivering on high quality bioenergy projects throughout Europe and 'to provide solutions for the generation of renewable energy from biodegradable sources' and the formation, in 2010, of Jones Celtic BioEnergy (JCBE).

Right: Jones Celtic BioEnergy, founded in 2010, is a specialist technology and construction company that engineers and builds facilities for the anaerobic digestion of material and its conversion into gas for use in combined heat and power plants, as well as for direct gas injection into gas mains. Shown here is a facility commissioned by Fife Council and built on an old landfill site at Lochhead, Dunfermline, Scotland.



Jones Celtic Bio is a specialist technology and construction company that engineers and builds facilities for the anaerobic digestion of material and its conversion into gas for use in combined heat and power plants, as well as for direct gas injection into gas mains. Since its formation the company has successfully completed a number of major projects in the United Kingdom, including a Scottish facility at Fife, just north of Edinburgh, which, at the time of its construction, was the largest anaerobic digester in the world for the conversion to gas of municipal brown and green waste. Other projects included facilities for councils in Barnsley, Rotherham, Doncaster and Milton Keynes in England, together with projects in Ireland.

Using the group's contacts to develop overseas opportunities

When the recession hit Ireland in 2007, Jones Engineering Group was working for many of the American multinational manufacturers based here. As the provider of the best quality work delivered by a world-class workforce, it seemed logical to explore the possibility that these companies might give the group an opportunity to work with them overseas. When these new opportunities presented themselves, many members of the team stepped forward to take on these new challenges.

Initially contracts were found in Spain, Holland, the United Kingdom and the Middle East and the Jones Engineering Group's long established relationship with a number of the large engineering houses brought about some new opportunities in the fields of pharmaceuticals, food, infrastructure, the data sector and the semiconductor industries.

One such opportunity arose when a firm of Irish consulting engineers approached Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited to work on a sprinkler system for a new infant formula plant that was being built at Al Kharj in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The

group was awarded this contract and also tendered successfully for the installation of the mechanical and electrical elements.

Following on from the great success of this project in Al Kharj in 2010, Jones Engineering KSA was established and the group's relationships in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia blossomed and grew, working with the major food company, Almarai. This company was founded in 1977 by Irish agri-foods pioneers Alastair McGuckian and his brother Paddy.²

Further successes in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia followed. A \$27 million contract was signed in 2014 with a multinational for a soft drinks manufacturer in Jeddah. Earlier, in January 2014, speaking of the Jones Engineering Group's success at a trade mission to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Taoiseach Enda Kenny said:

This is a group that continues to impress with its achievements in the region. They have a well-earned reputation for absolute quality and innovation and I look forward to seeing this growth continue over the coming years.³

As well as Jones Engineering KSA and Jones Celtic BioEnergy, other companies were established to serve an expanding and diverse client base. Jones Engineering Group UK was set up in 2009 and Jones Engineering Qatar in 2011. Today there are teams from Jones Engineering Group companies working in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom. By 2014, approximately one-third of the group's revenues was derived from overseas business.⁴



Above: Left to right – Derek Myers, director, Ciaran Tighe, contracts manager and John Hartnett, director working on the airport project in Doha, Qatar.

Below: The exterior of the Almarai infant nutritional facility in Al Kharj, a city in central Saudi Arabia, south of the capital, Riyadh. The group designed and installed the sprinkler system and mechanical services for this factory.





Left: Stephen McCabe (left) and Richie O'Leary on a site walk at the Almarai facility.

Below: The transport fleet outside Almarai's infant nutritional plant in Al Kharj.



Below: Photographed at a trade mission meeting in Saudi Arabia in 2014 are, from left to right; John Hartnett, Abdulrahman Al Nashmi (specialist adviser to Jones Engineering Saudi Arabia Limited) and Taoiseach Enda Kenny.





Above: David Byrne, director (left), Sean Costello, construction manager (centre) and David Patton, construction manager (right), in the Almarai poultry processing facility in Al Kharj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



Right: A close-up shot of a pipe bridge at the Schwarz Pharma plant at Shannon, County Clare, with John O'Mahony division manager (in white hard hat) and Julieanne O'Neill, marketing co-ordinator (in blue hard hat), walking away from camera.

‘We took the project right from the design stage, the whole way through and managed it to commissioning ... it was a great project to be involved with.’

Catriona Gallagher, 2014

It is an old but true saying in sales that it is easier to sell to existing clients than to find new ones and 80 per cent of contracts during this period were with customers with whom the group had worked in the past. In the midst of an unprecedented recession, Jones Engineering Group developed new partnerships and continued to work on existing contracts in Ireland, while seeking new projects to protect its market position.

During these challenging years the group worked on large mixed developments, including the Point Village and the Grand Canal Theatre (now the Bord Gáis Energy Theatre) located in Grand Canal Docks, Dublin.⁵ Another key project was the Shannon-based Schwarz Pharma plant, which at the time was the largest Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) project in Ireland.⁶

In the United Kingdom the group won contracts in the food industry, data centres, and waste energy areas. One major high-profile contract was at the London Olympics site in 2012. Catriona Gallagher, a contracts manager in the commercial HVAC division, recalls this project in Olympic Park as exciting and memorable:

Our contract was at the north end of the park and it was to be used originally for wheelchair tennis. It was eventually going to be the legacy building that was going to be left as hockey pitches for the surrounding area ... we took the project right from the design stage, the whole way through and managed it to commissioning ... it was a great project to be involved with.⁷

This contract provided special challenges. Security at the Olympic Park site was very strict according to Catriona, ‘almost like going through airport security every morning’. Everyone working on the site had to be screened by the police so they could do a background check.



Above: Catriona Gallagher (contracts manager for the project) and Dave McSweeney, project engineer, of Jones Engineering Group, with Enterprise Minister Batt O’Keeffe (centre) and Kevin Sherry (left) of Enterprise Ireland, during the construction of the London Olympic Park in 2010.



Right: Olympic Park, London.



Jones Engineering Services – continuing a long tradition

The maintenance of engineering installations for customers has always been a source of important work within the group since the time of Harry O'Neil. This activity was formalised through the establishment of Jones Engineering Services (JES).

This division is based in Mulhuddart, County Dublin and combines the skills and wide experience of the various maintenance departments within the companies of the Jones Engineering Group. Continuing a long tradition of quality service and offering the latest options in maintenance and new technologies, experienced JES maintenance crews provide complete centralised mechanical, electrical and fire protection backup to a variety of commercial, industrial and public sector clients. This includes looking after maintenance work in some of Dublin's most notable public buildings.

Today JES personnel maintain a significant presence at the Houses of the Oireachtas at Leinster House in Kildare Street, Dublin Castle, the National Library of Ireland, the Mater Hospital, Collins Barracks Dublin (now the National Museum of Ireland Collins Barracks), the Microsoft Data Centre, Cuisine de France (now L'Artisane) in Clondalkin and the Riverside 1 building on the Liffey at Sir John Rogerson's Quay, to name but a few.⁸



Above: John Rooney's retirement party at Beech Hill in 1990. Back row left to right – Ken Doyle, Pat Bollard, Pat Stanley, Stephen McGhee, Paul O'Connor, Jack Kearney, Avril Dean, John Doyle, Patrick Bowe, Martin Tyrell and Caroline O'Shea. Front row left to right – Kieran Quinn, Sean Hanley, John Rooney, Paddy Horgan, Shane Baker and Paul Doherty.

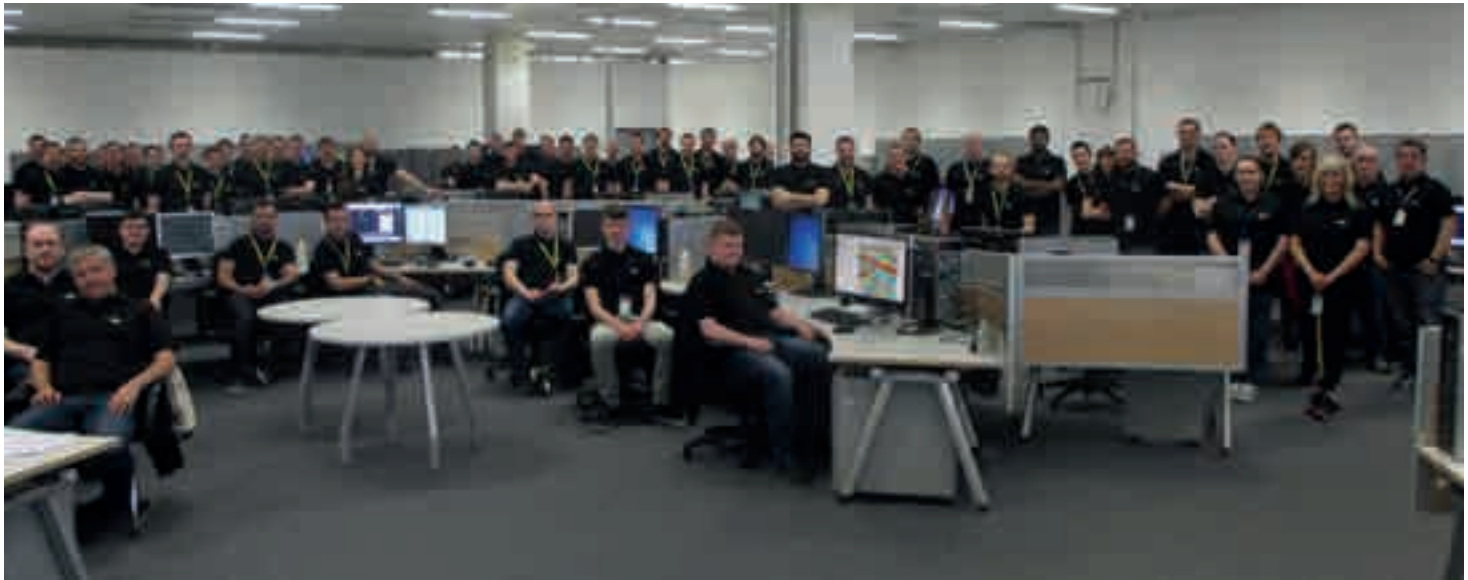
Above inset: Some of the Jones Engineering Services maintenance engineers and their vehicles outside the Damastown office, from left to right – Liam O'Reilly, Ronan O'Malley and Sean Hanley.



Left: The National Library of Ireland, Kildare Street, Dublin.



Below: Ireland's national parliament building, Leinster House, Kildare Street Dublin.



BIM and Lean Construction further improve performance

In recent years Jones Engineering Group has invested heavily in building information modelling (BIM), and has become a leader in this area within the construction industry. Recognition of the group's excellence in this field was acknowledged when it was awarded first prize for the BIM Initiative of the Year at the prestigious Irish Building and Design Awards on 24 April 2015. Following on from this in June 2015 the group won the Innovation in Construction Award, at the Irish Construction Industry Awards, held in the Ballsbridge Hotel, Dublin.

A culture of continuous improvement in key processes was created by applying Lean principles – a way of working originally pioneered by the Toyota Motor Corporation in Japan. The basic idea was to maximise value for the customer, while minimising waste, using fewer resources. In April 2014, the Jones Engineering Group, together with Intel Ireland, consultancy firms SCEG and Phathom HQ and DIT's Construction Innovation Lab, launched the first Lean Construction Institute (LCI) Community of Practice (CoP) in Ireland.⁹ In November 2014 Intel hosted the Lean Construction Expo. The Expo consisted of thirty-seven stands by different groups, ranging from process improvement teams (PITs) to individual contractors. The aim was to show where each group was positioned and where they were on their journey through the Lean process.

Jones Engineering Group, with a proven commitment and as a firm advocates for Lean Construction and the reduction of waste, put much energy, time and effort into Expo 2014. They were rewarded for this commitment with the award of 'Best Stand Lean Construction 2014' by the committee of judges. It was a great demonstration by the whole team involved and showcased the Jones Engineering Group's leadership in pursuing the Lean Construction goal. In his speech at the award ceremony, group chief executive Jim Curley congratulated the Jones Engineering team on their exceptional performance, adding that 'the aim is to bring Lean where we have brought safety in construction'.¹⁰

Above: The BIM team on one of the Jones Engineering Group major projects.

Streamlining operations through a major investment in computer software

The group also invested heavily in computer software in order to make operations more streamlined. As part of the group's innovative and development strategy, new business management software was adopted with the introduction of a new enterprise resource planning system called Systems Application and Products (SAP). Taking advice from consultants, a new system appropriate to the group's needs was designed. The benefits of SAP have been immense, minimising the use of paperwork and supporting the growth of the group's customer base and services. Within overseas operations it has proved vital in managing the many currencies being used and the reporting of costs. Overall, the benefits of real time information available to the site management teams at the click of a button provides a huge advantage when producing reports and checking the progress of projects, both in Ireland and abroad.

Taking on the biggest threat to survival . . . and winning!

The constructive and positive actions taken by the directors and staff of Jones Engineering Group back in 2008 – in the face of the greatest threat to Ireland's economy – proved to be the correct ones.

Today the group is one of the largest employers in the engineering sector not only in Ireland, but also in Europe. Employing over 2,000 people, with an annual turnover in excess of €360 million," the group has contracts for projects in Ireland, the United Kingdom, continental Europe and the Middle East, delivering quality work through the skills of quality people.

The group's firm commitment to staff education has made it the first engineering contractor to be certified by Engineers Ireland as having a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) structure suitable for engineering graduates when it was accredited in 2007. The group is also the largest trainer of engineering services apprentices in Ireland. The conviction that every crisis also offers new opportunities certainly proved true for the Jones Engineering Group during Ireland's recent years of economic crisis. This crisis allowed new key people to be identified and gave them space to move forward in their careers. Many of those people are now division managers in their own right. Amongst them would be Brendan McAtamney, John O'Mahony, Paul Nicholls, Anthony Farrell and Stephen Anderson. Other key people moving forward during this period included Ray Greene, Robbie Irvin, Damien Conefrey, Eileen Faherty, Kevin White, Les Power, Pat Murphy and Brian Buffini. Another layer of people is being prepared to move forward and meet the needs of the expanding Jones Engineering Group.



Above: The Irish Building and Design Awards ceremony at the Ballsbridge Hotel in April 2015 when the Business Information Modelling (BIM) Initiative of the Year Award was won by the team from Jones Engineering Group.

From left to right: Niall Coulston who presented the award to the team, the winners John O'Brien and Cathal Browne, with Marty Whelan (who was MC for the night) on the extreme right.



Above: Jones Engineering Group constantly seeks improvements in key processes by applying Lean principles – maximising value for the customer, minimising waste and using fewer resources.



Left: The Jones Engineering Group team on their stand which won the 'Best Stand, Lean Construction' at the Lean Construction Expo 2014, held at the Intel headquarters in Leixlip, County Kildare.



Chapter 7 – Endnotes

- 1 *Jones Celtic BioEnergy prospectus*, p. 14
- 2 Almarai was established in Riyadh, KSA, in 1977 as a partnership between Prince Sultan bin Mohammed bin Saud Al Kabeer and the Irishmen Alastair and Paddy McGuckian.
- 3 MENAFN News (www.menafn.com).
- 4 *Sunday Independent*, 26 October 2014.
- 5 *Jones Engineering Group Newsletter*, 2 (2007), p. 2.
- 6 *Jones Engineering Group Newsletter*, 2 (2007), p. 3.
- 7 Catriona Gallagher interview.
- 8 *Jones Engineering Group Newsletter*, 3 (Autumn 2008), p. 2.
- 9 See issues of *Lean Times: weekly update of JEG Lean information*.
- 10 *Lean Times*, 12 (20 November 2014), p. 3.
- 11 *Jones Engineering Group prospectus*, p.1.



8 Jones Engineering – the complete group

‘James O’Shea described the buy-out as ... a “model of what can be achieved between a realistic willing purchaser and vendor.”’

The 1990s was an important decade of consolidation for Jones Engineering Group as the focus intensified on servicing the heightened demands of the construction and engineering sectors. The group we know today was formed by a management buyout in 1993, while the previous year the Dublin-based electrical contractors Patrick Lynch Limited, founded in 1927, had been acquired. Four years later, in December 1997, the Cork company, O’Shea’s Electrical Limited, followed. Like Patrick Lynch Limited, this Cork business also had a long history, dating from 1929. In a way it was a joining of forces between companies that had grown up together, crossing paths frequently since the early days of H.A. O’Neil and now coming together in a perfect ‘fit’.

Both of these key acquisitions were part of a far-seeing strategic plan, resulting in greatly enhanced synergies being created within the group’s operations. These two long-established companies, along with H.A. O’Neil and Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited, saw the group well positioned to service an expanding construction industry which was becoming increasingly sophisticated and wide-ranging in its requirements.

O’Shea’s ELECTRICAL ENGINEERS AND CONTRACTORS¹

O’Shea’s Electrical was founded by Michael O’Shea, who was born in 1900, near Millstreet, County Cork. One of eleven children born to Patsy and Honora O’Shea, Michael served his time as an apprentice electrician in Sidney Nolan’s, at 87 South Mall in the centre of Cork city. He became actively involved with the nationalist movement after the 1916 Rising and, despite the political and social turmoil of the time, qualified as an electrician. In 1923 Michael married Sarah, his boss’s youngest sister.

O’Shea’s Limited opens on South Mall in 1930

In 1929, at a time when electricians were very much in demand, Michael and his brothers Pat and Tim bought a derelict site on South Mall, renovated the building and opened a business the following year. An announcement read that ‘Messrs O’Shea’s Ltd., motor and electrical agents, wish to inform their many patrons that they have now opened a new and extensive premises at 41 South Mall’.² While Tim O’Shea concentrated on motor sales and Pat on construction, Michael operated his electrical business from the same address – maintaining a three-way partnership that was to endure for over forty years.

Opposite: The impressive headquarters of O’Shea’s Limited, which opened in 1930 at 41 South Mall, in the centre of Cork, showing a row of new cars for sale outside. From this address the combined motor, construction and electrical businesses were operated.

Early electrical contracts in County Cork included Millstreet Hospital, St Francis College Rochestown, Drishane convent in Millstreet and the Dunlop Rubber Company, which opened in Cork city in 1934. Another major contract was the rebuilding of the Cork Bridewell Garda headquarters. The disruption caused by the Second World War was to change everything.³ Through hard work and determination, the O'Shea business survived the war years, helped in part by a contract to service the lighthouses around the south coast of Ireland.

Things were slow for the electrical part of the business immediately after the war, while the motor division diversified into motorbikes from Jawa and agricultural machinery like Zetor tractors, companies founded in Czechoslovakia in 1929 and 1946 respectively. Later, in the 1960s, the motor part of the business was to develop into a separate company, located in Dublin.

Michael's electrical department concentrated on installing generators, but also teamed up with the construction department on contracts for the Church of the Descent of the Holy Spirit in Dennehy's Cross in Cork, the Crawford Industrial Institute, The Munster Arcade and Roches Stores, also in Cork city. In 1961 O'Shea's were awarded the contract to rebuild the Cork Opera House, designed by prominent Irish architect Michael Scott. This prestigious contract led to work on the new Intercontinental Hotel on Cork's Western Road, as well as two other hotels in Limerick.



Above: From the days when a brand new Citroën cost around £300 – an advertisement in the *The Cork Examiner* of 8 March, 1930, promoting the Cork car dealership held by O'Shea's Limited. (With thanks to Irish Newspaper Archive and The Cork Examiner)



Left: An advertisement from the *Gaelic Weekly News* of 26 October 1968, urging farmers to buy Zetor tractors from the motor division of O'Shea's Limited. (www.Limerickcity.ie)



Above: The remains of the Cork Opera House in 1955, following a disastrous fire that completely gutted the building, leaving the city without a major theatre for the first time in 250 years. Ten years later O'Shea's Limited won the contract to rebuild this great cultural icon.

(Cork City Library)

The business reaches a turning point

In the early 1960s the O'Shea's electrical division was busy working on the changeover from the direct current system (DC) to the alternating current (AC) system, mainly on government contracts. It was a competitive time and in one instance the company lost out to well-known Dublin company called Patrick Lynch Limited.

It was also the decade in which the founders were preparing to hand over to the next generation. Young James O'Shea, having graduated from University College Cork with a degree in electrical engineering, joined the company in 1971. By that stage all three brothers were in their seventies, having managed the business for over forty years.

In the 1970s the company worked on the very large contract for the Norwich Union Insurance Company on Cork's South Mall. Later, working on the Cork Regional Technical College, there was another sub-contractor called H.A. O'Neil Limited on site, under the management of Chris Jones – the first time James O'Shea encountered a man he later described as a doyen of the construction industry.

The move into process engineering and instrumentation

The General Mills office contract on Cork's Little Island saw a move into process engineering by the company. It also raised James O'Shea's awareness of the increasing role of instrumentation and he opened a specialist instrumentation division in 1978. A contract was awarded for a Marathon Petroleum Corporation oil rig off Kinsale, County Cork, followed in 1980 for the refurbishment of the Irish Steel complex at Haulbowline in Cork Harbour. A young radio operator called John Hartnett, who had joined O'Shea's in 1978, worked at Haulbowline, training as an instrument technician. He was a contracts manager by 1979 and in 1983 became general manager. He was appointed as a director of O'Shea's Electrical Limited in 1997, becoming a Jones Engineering Group director in 2001, responsible for both O'Shea's Electrical and Patrick Lynch Limited, while in 2010 he became Middle East director of the Jones Engineering Group.

O'Shea's Electrical and Douglas Calibration Services formed

Under the management of James O'Shea, a separate company called O'Shea Electrical Limited was established in 1981. While continuing with traditional style contracts this new company commenced work on the Cork-Dublin gas line, in joint partnership with Maple Precision Engineering and Cossor Electronics from the United Kingdom.

In 1982 O'Shea's took a 50 per cent share in Douglas Electronic Systems Limited. Having survived the challenges of the 1980s, O'Shea's Electrical Limited formed a separate calibration service in the 1990s, aimed mainly at the pharmaceutical sector. This was to become Douglas Calibration Services Limited and contracts followed with Irish Refining Plc at Whitegate outside Cork city and the SmithKline Beecham plant at Currabinny, Carrigaline, outside Cork.



Above: A photograph from the 1980s showing a Marathon gas platform off the Old Head of Kinsale in County Cork, where O'Shea's Electrical Limited won a contract to service the offshore platform for Marathon Petroleum.



Left: The Irish Refining factory at Whitegate, Midleton, County Cork. Douglas Calibration Services completed an important contract there in the 1990s.

O'Shea's Electrical Limited becomes part of the Jones Engineering Group

An agreement was signed in December 1997, when the electrical and instrumentation contracting divisions of O'Shea's Electrical Limited became part of the Jones Engineering Group, 'thus ending over seventy years of the O'Shea family's immediate ownership of electrical contracting interests'.⁴ James O'Shea described the buy-out as one in which both sides acted honourably and in a way was a 'model of what can be achieved between a realistic willing purchaser and vendor'.⁵

James O'Shea remained as managing director of the company for three years following the sale, before handing over to John Hartnett and his team.

Tim Ferris was then appointed to run the company. Tim started his career with Jones Engineering Group in 2006, working with Patrick Lynch Limited as a senior contracts manager. Between 2009 and 2010 he took on the role of acting general manager in O'Shea's Electrical Limited, being officially appointed in 2012. He became a director of O'Shea's Electrical Limited in 2013.

PATRICK LYNCH LIMITED – ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS⁶

When the Shannon hydro-electric scheme at Ardnacrusha, County Clare, opened in 1929, it harnessed the power of the River Shannon and brought electrical power to the country. It had an immediate impact, providing the essential framework for social, economic and industrial development. Electrical consumption expanded dramatically in the decades after Ardnacrusha, initially in the cities, towns and larger villages in Ireland but the rural electrification scheme, which commenced in 1946, facilitated the supply

Below: Photographed in September 2015 outside the Jones Engineering Group headquarters at Waterways House, with the old Boland's Mills building in the background. From left: John King, Jim Curley, Eric Kinsella, Tim Ferris and Peadar Walsh (O'Shea's Electrical Limited).



of electricity throughout the more remote parts of the country, contributing to the modernisation of Ireland.⁷ It was therefore a time of great opportunity for electricians and electrical companies working in the domestic, commercial and industrial areas.

Patrick Lynch, originally from Boyle, County Roscommon, established his electrical business in Hawkins Street in Dublin⁸ in 1927. The business expanded quickly as opportunities opened up, working on infrastructural projects such as the new schools and hospitals being constructed by the government of the Irish Free State. In an interesting historical twist, Patrick Lynch worked alongside H.A. O'Neil Limited on some of these contracts, the most important one being Shannon Airport. As the business developed, Patrick Lynch became a registered trainer of apprentices and supervisory staff.

The outbreak of war brings new challenges

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, there were new challenges for electrical firms as well as plumbing and heating firms. The construction industry as a whole was seriously curtailed by the shortage of raw materials and, as a consequence, work became scarce. Nevertheless, the company survived the war years and with the coming of peace in 1945 there were new opportunities. Patrick Lynch moved to larger premises at 2 Burgh Quay, Dublin and became a limited company in February 1951. By the end of the decade Patrick Lynch Limited was considered to be one of the larger and most reputable electrical contracting companies in Ireland.

The winning of a contract for the original terminal building at Shannon Airport was a major milestone. This was followed by a large long-term contract at the duty-free complex at Shannon Industrial Estate. Having established his credentials on the Shannon project, contracts followed at Dublin Airport and later at Cork Airport. Patrick Lynch again found himself working closely with H.A. O'Neil Limited, which provided the mechanical and engineering services at these airports.

Partnering H.A. O'Neil Limited in the health sector

In the 1940s the Irish Government commenced a major programme of hospital and sanatoria building.⁹ This was funded by an organisation called the Hospitals Trust¹⁰ and three regional sanatoria for the treatment of tuberculosis (TB) were built in Cork, Galway and Dublin. These buildings were designed by the New Zealand-born architect Norman White, (1903-77), who was employed by the Department of Health and Local Government. His son John spent his working career with Patrick Lynch Limited and John's three sons, Kevin, Malcolm and Dermot are now members of Jones Engineering Group teams.

Both H.A. O'Neil Limited and Patrick Lynch Limited were among the contractors who worked on the Western Regional Sanatorium in Galway (now Merlin Park Regional



Above: Patrick Lynch, photographed in the early 1950s.

Opposite: Looking south across the Liffey close to O'Connell Bridge, Dublin, showing the Patrick Lynch Limited offices on Burgh Quay, situated close to the junction with Westmoreland Street.

Below: A view of the runway and terminal buildings at Cork Airport on 1 January 1975. (RTÉ Stills Library)







Left: James Connolly Memorial Hospital (formerly the Dublin Regional Sanatorium) at Blanchardstown in the 1950s.

Hospital) and the Cork sanatorium. Commenting on the Cork project the Minister for Health, T. F. O'Higgins, made special mention of 'Messrs P. Lynch Ltd., who carried out the electrical work and ... H.A. O'Neil, who had carried out the heating and hot water installation',¹¹ establishing links that continue to this day.

Other hospital contracts followed and frequently H.A. O'Neil were fellow contractors on these sites. They included Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin Dublin, the James Connolly Memorial Hospital (formerly the Dublin Regional Sanatorium) at Blanchardstown, County Dublin, the Cherry Orchard Hospital in Ballyfermot Dublin, built in 1953, and the Southern Regional Sanatorium, now St Stephen's Psychiatric Hospital in Glanmire, outside Cork city.

A new generation takes charge

The 1960s heralded a period of change for Patrick Lynch Limited. Substantial new contracts were won, where the company again worked side by side with H.A. O'Neil. These included Liberty Hall Dublin, and various buildings on the new UCD campus at Belfield, south of the city.

The company's workforce increased, and as the portfolio grew, a new design and build service was established to meet the needs of customers. The management structure changed and a new generation, under Leo Lynch, moved into leadership of the company. Leo graduated in engineering from Trinity College Dublin, played rugby for Lansdowne Rugby Football Club and won an international cap for Ireland against Scotland in 1956.¹²

Below: Two generations of the White family have worked with the company over the years. Photographed outside the Jones Engineering Group headquarters are, from left: John White with his sons Kevin, Malcolm and Dermot.





Above: A group portrait showing members of the technical and administrative staffs of the Department of Health, as well as a number of construction contractors, believed to have been taken around the time of the opening of the Western Regional Sanatorium in Galway (now Merlin Park University Hospital) in the early 1950s. Standing in the front row is Norman White (fifth from left), the New Zealand architect who designed the hospital, and his wife, Helen White. This photograph belonged to the late Cecil Dowdall (1916-96), who is standing in the back row on the far left.

Some of the other people in the picture include: Dermot Kavanagh, Rodan Flood, P.J. Walls, Jim Deeny, Sean McCarthy, Dick French, Derry O'Donovan, Derry McCarthy, Jack Sisk, Mick O'Driscoll, Steve Cotterell, Mick Jordan, Brendan O'Herlihy, Harry Clifton, Charlie Lysaght, Gerry Jones, Chris Jones, Joe Wallace and Patrick Lynch (front row on the far right).



Right: An aerial view of the Western Regional Sanatorium (now Merlin Park University Hospital) Galway, from around 1952.



Above: The Irish international rugby team of 1956, photographed before their game against Scotland at Lansdowne Road, Dublin. Leo Lynch (son of Patrick Lynch, founder of Patrick Lynch Limited) is third from the right in the back row. The first player on the left in the back row is Tony O'Reilly (Sir Anthony O'Reilly) and the famous Jack Kyle (1926-2014) is third from the right in the middle row.
(Irish Photo Archive)



Left: The Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) match programme for the Ireland versus Scotland game at Lansdowne Road, Dublin on 25 February, 1956. Leo Lynch of Patrick Lynch Limited, a member of Lansdowne Rugby Club wore the number five jersey on the day.
(Irish Photo Archive)

The departure of Patrick Lynch marked the end of an era. He had established his company in 1927 – a challenging time for anyone to start a new business. John White, who had known Patrick Lynch, had grown up knowing the eight Lynch children and worked almost all his life in Patrick Lynch Limited. He remembers him as a big man, who was always working, whether it was identifying any possible opportunity to do business or sitting at home on a Sunday evening, doing his accounts or writing up estimates. He was on the boards of both Jervis Street Hospital and Temple Street Children's Hospital and a member of the Electrical Contractors Association. He was also a member of the committee set up to review details of the Industrial Training Bill in 1965.

The face of Irish building and construction changed in the following years. Substantial new industrial, commercial and institutional construction projects began in Ireland and Patrick Lynch Limited was associated with the majority of these, often working with H.A. O'Neil Limited. Among the high profile buildings that both companies worked on were Liberty Hall, the new Beaumont Hospital in north Dublin, Blackrock Clinic and Blackrock shopping centre in south Dublin, the Guinness plant at St. James's Gate, buildings on the new UCD campus at Belfield and the Central Bank headquarters in Dame Street, Dublin.

Below: The former Central Bank of Ireland building in Dame Street, Dublin, photographed shortly after its completion in 1975.



Opportunities arise in the Middle East during the 1970s

In the 1970s Patrick Lynch Limited and the companies of the Jones Group expanded, providing substantial employment and playing a significant role serving both Irish industry and the multinationals that were establishing themselves in Ireland.

The year 1975 saw a new opportunity for the company, when a member of senior management went on a business exploration trip to Doha, the capital of the State of Qatar. The result was the establishment of a partnership with one of the largest construction and trading families in that country. This Middle East business helped the company through the economic difficulties of the late 1970s and the 1980s and enabled it to maintain its core teams. Contracts in Qatar included the Qatar Petroleum Company (QPC)

headquarters, the local television station, the central wholesale market and the audio and interpretation system for the 1976 conference of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) held in Doha.

The acquisition by Jones Group plc in 1992

In 1992, not long after the retirement of Leo Lynch, the Jones Group plc acquired Patrick Lynch Limited. This acquisition complemented the engineering division and prepared the group for an era of rapid movement into a world of digital electronics and information technology. Still trading within the industry as Patrick Lynch Limited, the company has



continued to thrive as one of the top specialists in its field, delivering quality services on some of the largest projects being carried out in construction at present.

After the acquisition, Brendan Daly continued to manage Patrick Lynch Limited as general manager and director. Brendan had been with Patrick Lynch since the late 1970s and had gained vast project experience on many of the company's biggest contracts. He was also involved during the buyout of Jones Group plc and the transition to Jones Engineering Group in 1993. He retired in 2006.

John Hartnett then became the group director responsible for both O'Shea's Electrical and Patrick Lynch until he left for Saudi Arabia in 2007. Pat Mooney then took over operations following John Hartnett's departure. Pat joined H.A. O'Neil as a design engineer in 1979, working in the Middle East and in England, before returning to Ireland to manage large mechanical projects. He continued in that role until 2014.

Stephen McCabe had been managing the commercial division of H.A. O'Neil until Ireland's economic collapse took place. Stephen joined the company in 1987 and worked across all sectors of the industry. He was appointed as director and general manager of Patrick Lynch in 2013. In 2012 he had spearheaded the development of a new division, Jones Celtic BioEnergy and in 2015 was appointed group director of the electrical division.

Above: From left to right – Leo Lynch, Brendan Daly, Helen McConnell and Pat Mooney at a Jones Engineering social gathering.

The three parts of the Jones Engineering Group electrical division

Today the Jones Engineering Group electrical division comprises three subsidiary companies – Patrick Lynch Limited which operates in Dublin from the group's

headquarters, along with O'Shea's Electrical Limited and Douglas Calibration Services Limited which operate from the group's offices in Cork. Collectively these three companies employ over 600 people. They provide a full range of electrical installation services to the commercial, industrial, pharmaceutical and public sectors.

IRISH SPRINKLER & FIRE PROTECTION LIMITED

The founding directors of Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection (ISFP) were Chris Jones, Denis Magee and Sean Moran. The company was formed in 1965, when a gap was spotted in the market for a local specialist fire protection division to complement the existing services offered to the construction industry by the Jones Group.

Later Henry King and Eric Kinsella joined the board of the company, which initially specialised in the design, supply, testing and installation of fire protection systems to satisfy the requirements of the Fire Officers Committee, Factory Mutual Insurance Company and the National Fire Protection Association. Over the first few years contracts tended to be in specific fire hazard areas, such as paper manufacturing, printing and covered car parks.

The 1970s begins a period of rapid expansion and challenge for ISFP

The company proved to be a great success from the start. One of the first major customers was the Cadbury's chocolate factory that had opened in Coolock, north Dublin in 1964. All was to change as the company entered the very different circumstances of the 1970s. During this time fire cover premiums increased dramatically, resulting in rapid business growth.¹³ Demands for the specialised services offered by ISFP rose as the Irish economy expanded. New factories were built and urban landscapes were transformed by the development of high rise offices, apartment buildings and shopping centres. Everywhere there was construction activity there was a demand for sophisticated sprinkler systems, and ISFP took advantage of its position as one of the most prominent operators in this specialist field.

Right: Colm Brennan's retirement party in Beech Hill, from left to right – Shay McGovern, Simon Watson, Martin Duffy, Jim Curley, Tom Jones, Tony O'Donnell, David Cassidy, Paddy Horgan, Declan Darcy, Aiden McKay, Chris Jones, Colm Brennan, Shane Gillece, John Rooney, George Binley, Peter O'Shea, Paddy Jones, Tommy McIlhinney, Pat Monks, Tommy Purcell, Paddy Moran, Matt Johnston, Dave Giffney, Michael Maher, George Gibson, George Murphy, Willie Creighton, Terry Tierney, George McCann, Henry King, Des Collins and Jimmy Halligan.





Above: Tony Byrne and John Rooney in the canteen at Beech Hill in 1990.

Left: An employment advertisement from the *Daily Mirror* of 16 February, 1973, seeking experienced sprinkler designers for Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited.

When the 1980s arrived an influx of multinational companies into Ireland began. They represented many different areas of operation, all with their individual requirements. There were food manufacturers, chemical and pharmaceutical concerns, electronic, power and energy suppliers, as well as household names in the world of commerce and retail.

By 1990 the company was the leading specialist in its field, servicing a full spectrum of customers involved in industry and commerce. The company successfully completed approved sprinkler installations at the Central Bank's currency centre at Sandyford in south Dublin, the Ilac shopping centre in Henry Street Dublin, the Semperit tyre factory in Ballyfermot, Dublin, and the enormous Irish Life Centre in the centre of the capital.

In the early 1990s the Swiss company Sandoz – one of the world's best-known pharmaceutical manufacturers – built a factory at Ringaskiddy, County Cork. It was a huge opportunity for the group when it was awarded the contract to design and provide the mechanical and sprinkler systems in the new building. Everything worked out according to plan and ISFP's reputation grew as a result. It made Irish Sprinkler and Fire Protection Limited the obvious choice when other multinational pharmaceutical companies set up plants in Ireland.

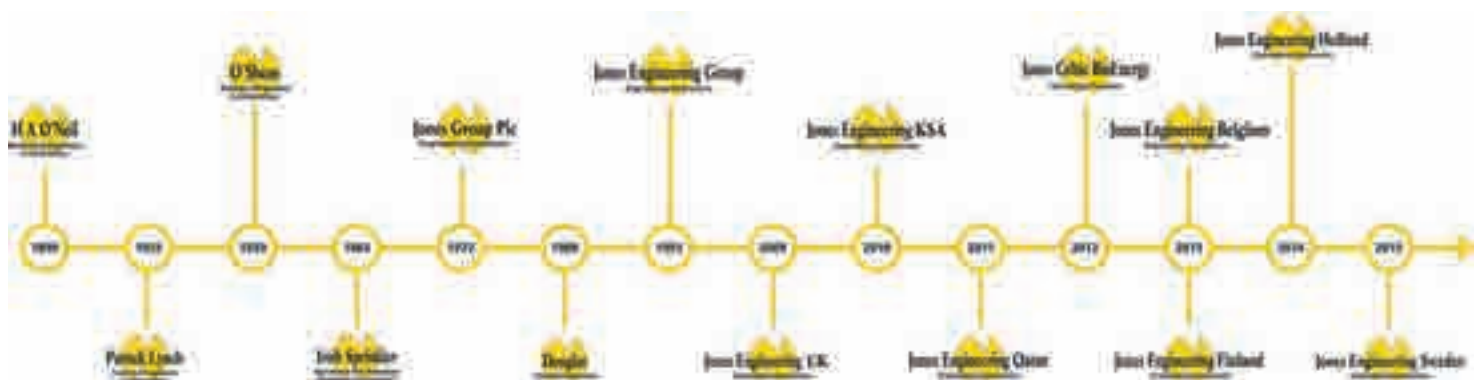
Below: From left to right – Des Collins, Eamonn Fitzgerald, Michael Maher, Dermot O'Brien, John McHugh, Kevin McLoughlin, Martin Duffy, Mick Ginty, Stephen Anderson, Joe Foy, Paddy Moran, Tony Carty, Mary Carty, Ulf Dietrich, Sandra Guilfoyle, Tony Duggan, Greg Curley and Jim Curley at Tony Carty's retirement in Herbert Park Hotel, Ballsbridge, Dublin.



Below: Timeline showing the evolution of the companies within the Jones Engineering Group from 1890.

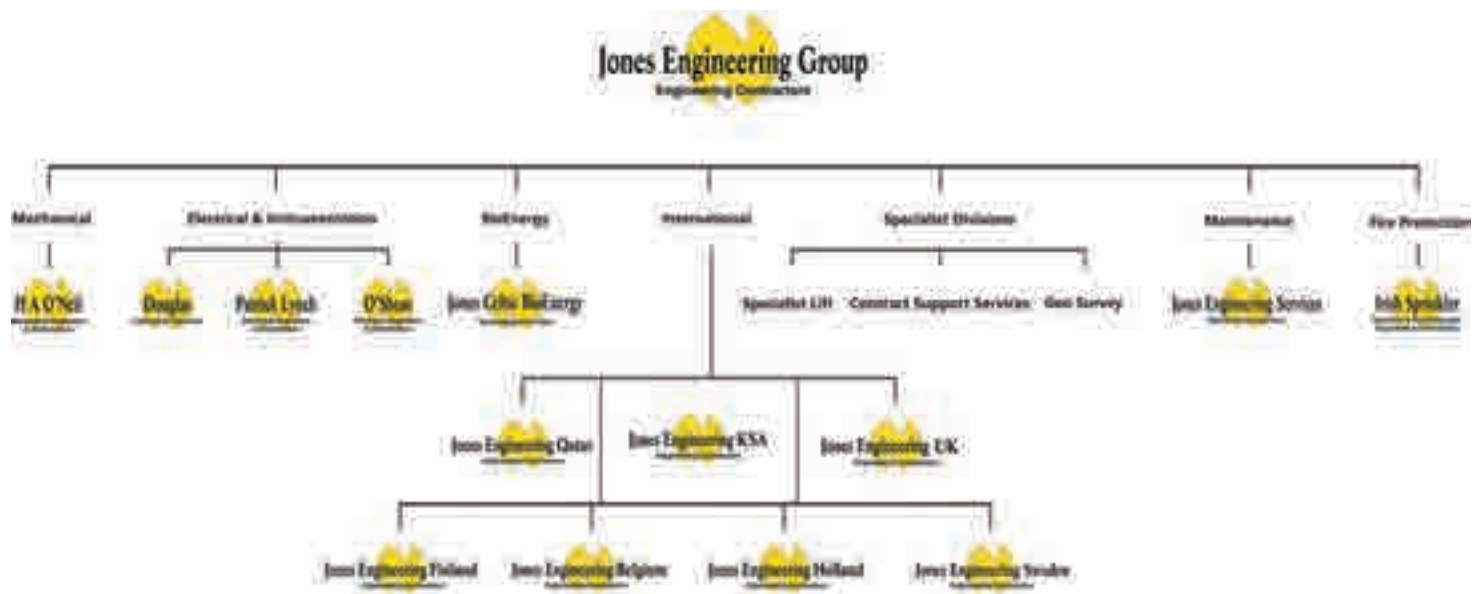
In a constantly changing world Irish Sprinkler & Fire Protection Limited has always been to the forefront in its market. As new industries with special requirements, such as data centres, set up in Ireland, ISFP provided a service tailored to their needs. Today the company is responsible for the installation of comprehensive fire protection systems for the world's leading data centre providers both in Ireland and around Europe. The company has also completed a number of significant contracts in the Middle East.

Tony Byrne joined the board of directors of ISFP in the early 1990s at a time of rapid growth. The most recent member to join the board was Denis O’Riordan, who was appointed a director in 2008. He commenced his career with H.A. O’Neil in 1981 as a mechanical services technician and has been particularly active in the design side of the business, seeing it evolve from the manual drawing stage to the latest 3D computer aided design (CAD) and building information modelling (BIM) methods.





Some Jones Engineering people photographed at Waterways House head office, Dublin, (above), Damastown office, Blanchardstown, (left) and Munster office, Euro Business Park, Cork, (below).



Chapter 8 – Endnotes

- The author would like to record her sincere gratitude to James O'Shea, the son of Michael, who generously gave permission for his MA thesis to be used as a source for this section.
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- O'Shea, [O'Shea Ltd., Cork: a history]' p. 44.
- O'Shea, [O'Shea Ltd., Cork: a history]', p. 43.
- The huge contribution of Brendan Daly and of John White to this section is acknowledged with grateful thanks by the author.
- See Maurice Manning and Moore McDowell, *Electricity Supply in Ireland: the History of the ESB* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1984).
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9 Quality work through quality people

‘Today the Jones Engineering Group is one of the largest employers and trainers of craftworkers in the construction industry.’

The founder of H.A. O’Neil Limited, Harry O’Neil, had been a man of vision and technical innovation. When it was time for Harry O’Neil to hand over to a new generation during the 1940s, another man of vision and principle, Chris Jones, took charge of the company.

From the start, Chris Jones was committed to finding good people and keeping them. He recruited ‘the best people we can find’.¹ In doing so he set the foundations for the development of the corporate culture that continues today. This philosophy is based on finding the best people, placing a value on what they have to offer – a process that goes beyond mere training and education – to valuing an individual and encouraging that person to reach his or her full potential.

This policy encourages staff to develop their skills and talents, supports them from the time they join the company and as they progress through their careers. It has ensured that Jones Engineering Group and its entire workforce remains at the forefront of the engineering industry.

One of the younger members of staff described the corporate ethos when she commented:

I think when you look back at the company and the way that it’s progressed and that it really is essentially a family company, I think that you know even though Mr. Jones has passed away now ... I think the core ethos there is that it’s a family company and I think that’s the way – not just that it’s marketed that way but I think that’s just the way it is.²

This emphasis on a people-focused culture throughout the group is also articulated by Jim Curley, group chief executive, who joined the company in 1978, a year after Eric Kinsella, the executive chairman of the Jones Engineering Group:

We place a huge emphasis on selecting bright energetic people. If you have a good team you can take on the challenges and opportunities that come your way and are more likely to find your future successors from within. We can see from the history of the firm that, even in our very early days, it was recognised that you can only succeed in the long term with good people.³

Opposite: Joseph Moran (left) and Aoibhin Gaynor (centre) of Jones Engineering Group, featured on the cover of the March-April 2015 issue of *Construction Magazine* in an article titled ‘Future stars – choosing a career in construction’.
(www.cifie)

Entering the world of engineering through an apprenticeship course

In the early days of the engineering profession, the route to qualification was through a trade apprenticeship. The apprenticeship system followed from the old medieval crafts guilds, where young men learned the skills of their trade by working with a master craftsman. An apprentice had to be of good character and the master also had to be acceptable as a person who could be trusted to train and supervise. By the middle of the nineteenth century, although the route to qualification in a chosen trade was still through apprenticeship, a realisation of the importance of industrial education led to the establishment of institutes where workmen and artisans could learn the scientific principles underlying their trade.

In Ireland, a network of technical schools began to develop at the end of the nineteenth century.⁴ By the early twentieth century, some Dublin-based apprentices were allowed by their employers to attend 'day-release' and evening courses at the technical colleges in Kevin Street, Rathmines and Pembroke (Ballsbridge) and from 1911, Bolton Street.⁵ These courses offered the opportunity for students to enter for the Trade Certificate examination of the City and Guilds Institute, and later for the Department of Education examinations.⁶ In the early years the subjects covered in the plumbing course were fairly basic and included elementary science, workshop appliances, lead burning, water supply and drainage.⁷ While the plumbing apprentices attended courses in Bolton Street, the electrical and heating service apprentices attended classes in Kevin Street.⁸ This was an intensive course, largely driven by the Electricity Supply Board (ESB)⁹ and Chris Jones recalled at the time that 'there was a serious demarcation line between the plumbing trade and the fitting trade, namely who did what'.¹⁰

Below: A view of the classical-style façade of the college in Bolton Street Dublin, dating from 1911 and now part of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). Jones Engineering Group has had a long association with the engineering school there and many people from the group have studied at Bolton Street.

(RTÉ Stills Library)



Below: First management/supervisors training course 1970, South County Hotel, Stillorgan. From left to right – Paddy Horgan, Bob McKenna, Jimmy Murphy, Mick Wade, Dick Fitzhenry, Tony Carmody, Brendan Halpin, Aidan Bourke, J. Galvin, Paddy Kennelly, Chris Jones, Colm Brennan, Jim Shaughnessy, Gordon Pinder, Paddy Sullivan, Dessie Davis, Eddie Ryan, J. Cummins, George Binley, Joe Brennan, Danny Keane and J. Duffy.

By the 1940s, when Harry O’Neil was on the advisory board of the technical institute at Bolton Street,¹¹ the courses had become more detailed, reflecting the developments in technology and new materials in the building and construction industry and in technical education.¹²

Working conditions for apprentices had also improved by the early part of the twentieth century. Apprentices still had to serve their time but the commitments not to marry and not to frequent alehouses were either excluded or not enforced.¹³ Pay was poor, entry to the trades was controlled by the masters and the unions, and anyone not connected by family found it difficult to enter a trade.¹⁴ One justification for this ‘nepotism’ was ‘the likelihood was if the father was a good craftsman that the son would be a good craftsman because the father would make sure that the son wouldn’t let the family name down’.¹⁵

In 1940 when Chris Jones came to Dublin to serve his time as a plumber with H.A. O’Neil Limited he attended evening lectures in Bolton Street from 7.30 to 9.30 after his day’s work, cycling from his home in Drimnagh to the building project in Dublin Airport to be at work for 8.30 a.m., returning home in the evening and then cycling into Bolton Street for classes. Chris Jones later wrote that the plumbing apprentice in the 1940s ‘was a many faceted operator – from making the tea to doing the shopping



for the Master's household. As we know, the plumber and his mate were a music hall joke over many decades'.¹⁶ One of the responsibilities of an apprentice plumber was to take the plumber's tool kit which 'consisted of a large array of heavy tools wrapped in a carpet bag' from job to job in a hand cart.¹⁷

Chris Jones hated having to push a handcart, describing it as 'an awful indignity to meet your school friends or fellows in suits on the streets'.¹⁸ George McCann shared this dislike. Remembering his apprenticeship with H.A. O'Neil Limited, he recalled some of his tasks:

I used to have to go into Rathmines a couple of times a week, not every week and light the fires in the offices ... Sometimes I had to wash Chris's car which was a Chevrolet a big American car, I remember that. And then I'd go back up to where I was (working) ... and they got other guys to do that job. That's what I thought of when I saw the hand-cart business and Paddy Jones pushing the hand-cart along Rathmines with a toilet pan on it and I reckoned I'd have to go AWOL if I was ever asked to do that but as it turned out, the hand-cart disappeared and I never was.¹⁹

Chris Jones champions improved training

By the mid-1960s things had improved greatly for apprenticeship training in Ireland. The registration of apprentices was introduced and the application process became fairer, the entrants were better educated and the Irish Government offered 'off the job' training. Courses at the technical colleges had expanded to embrace new technologies, materials and methods, and Chris Jones and the Jones Group played a part in these changes, contributing to the development of the curriculum in Kevin Street and in Bolton Street.

During the 1970s, as the trades became more integrated and new techniques and materials became available, the group continued to play a significant part in developing quality industrial training at all levels – a cause to which Chris Jones gave his strong support during his time serving with the Construction Industry Federation (CIF) and through his sponsorship of the Irish Institute of Training Managers in 1973.²⁰

Nowadays, in the training and development of its craftspeople, the Jones Engineering Group has the full support of the regional technical colleges, the colleges of the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), FÁS (now Solas) and the trade unions. Apprentices are given every opportunity to develop their skills to the highest international standards and they attend specially designed in-house courses to supplement the Solas government-based training programmes. This training is enhanced by a broad range of 'hands-on' site experience under the guidance of some of Ireland's best supervisors and time-served craftspeople.



Above: A group of men from H.A. O'Neil Limited working at the Cadbury's Rathmore plant, County Kerry, in 1986. Pictured from left front row: Denis Hickey, Des O'Connor, Jim Reardon, Dan Fogarty and Eddie Walsh. Back row, from left: Denis Cahill, Jim Shields, Gerry McSherry, Jimmy Whittle and Tadhg McCarthy.



Left: Photographed at St James's Gate Dublin in May 1985, during the building of the centrifuge room at the Guinness Fermentation and Beer Processing (FBP) plant. Among those in the photograph are: Paddy Kenna, John Green, Brendan Halpin, Jimmy Brennan, Eddie Dunne, Martin Power, Dan O'Connor, Brian Flood, Alan O'Donoghue and Denis Lynch.



Left: Some of the 2014 Jones Engineering Group mechanical and electrical apprentices with 1989 International Skills Olympics gold medal winner Simon Watson. Front, from left: Simon Watson, Francie McCabe, Brian Murray and Brian Stewart.

Simon Watson, now a manager for team development within the Jones Engineering Group, began his apprenticeship with H.A. O'Neil in 1985 and recalled his experiences:

I started my apprenticeship in 1985 as a plumber. I always wanted to be a tradesman. I always wanted to do something with my hands, so plumbing was what I was kind of gravitating towards ... I served a four-year apprenticeship, working on a number of different sites but mainly in Guinness's for the four years, while studying in Bolton Street.²¹

Simon now has responsibility for the development and training of craft-labour and apprentices within the Jones Engineering Group. He has been a technical representative on the committee that has re-designed the new plumbing apprenticeship curriculum, which includes modules on the new technologies and developments in green and solar energy.²²

A history of achievement by apprentices at national and international level

Today the Jones Engineering Group is the largest employer and trainer of apprentices in the construction industry. Since the 1960s apprentices within the group have distinguished themselves, winning awards at international and national competitions and bringing great honour to the group.^{23,24} These high achievers include:

- › Michael McDaid who was a gold medal winner at the age of 21 at the international championships in 1961.
- › John Lavelle won a gold medal at the City and Guilds competition in 1963.
- › Joe McCann came third in the National Apprentice competition in 1988.
- › Pat Monaghan won the National Apprentice competition in 1989.
- › Simon Watson won the National Apprentice competition in 1988 and went on to win the gold medal at the International Skills Olympics in Birmingham in 1989. The medal was presented to Simon by the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.
- › Alan Elms won the EuroSkills gold medal in 1998.
- › Ross Nolan qualified for the preliminaries of the plumbing section of the National Skills Final in 2007.
- › Eric Hendrick was a participant in the final of the National Apprenticeship Competition in 2008.
- › Daniel Rhattigan won the National Skills competition and was National Plumbing Champion in 2011. He competed and received a Medallion of Excellence at the 2011 World Skills Olympics in London in 2011.
- › Ciaran Coady won the gold medal at the World Skills competition in Germany in 2013, having previously won the National Skills competition.
- › Peter Whittle won the National Skills Competition plumbing section in 2016.
- › Gary Conroy participated in the National Skills Competition electrical section in 2016.

‘Since the 1960s apprentices within the group have distinguished themselves, winning awards at international and national competitions’

Jones Engineering Group



Clockwise from top left: Photographed at Waterways House, Dublin are, from left: Mick O'Hanlon and apprentice prizewinners Simon Watson (1989), Ciaran Coady (2013) and Daniel Rhattigan (2011), with group chief executive Jim Curley on extreme right.

John Lavelle (fourth from right) winner of a gold medal at a City and Guilds competition in 1963.

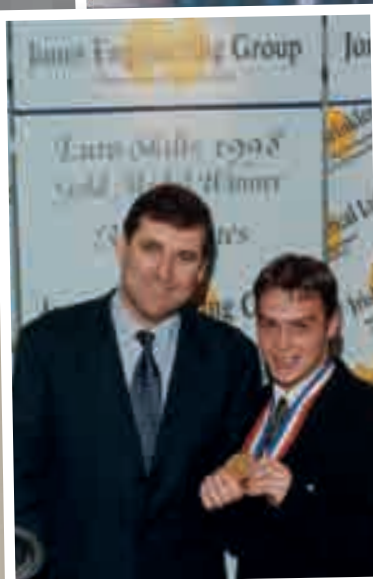
Gary Conroy competed in the National Skills Competition electrical section in 2016.

Daniel Rhattigan proudly displays his trophy as National Plumbing Champion, having won the National Skills competition in Dublin in 2011. He also received a Medallion of Excellence at the 2011 World Skills Olympics in London the same year.

Alan Elms winner of the EuroSkills gold medal in 1998 with Minister of State Tom Kitt.

Apprentice Simon Watson is congratulated by British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, on winning a gold medal at the International Skills Olympics in Birmingham in 1989.

Peter Whittle winner of the National Skills Competition plumbing section in 2016.





Joining the group as an engineering graduate

Until the late 1970s, many trainee engineers joined the Jones Group from school and were sponsored through a rigorous course of study over several years, both full-time and part-time, normally at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) Bolton Street until they became qualified engineers. The late P.J. Doyle, a former director of the Jones Group and managing director of H.A. O'Neil Limited, was an external examiner on the Level 7 and 8 Building Services degree programme there for a number of years in the mid-1980s. DIT course leaders from Bolton Street and members of the Jones Group would meet to review industry feedback on improvements that could be made to the degree programmes, and the first Level 8 students graduated there in 1988.

The group also has established links and internships with Irish universities. Executive chairman and Trinity College Dublin alumnus Eric Kinsella and his wife Barbara endowed the Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Kinsella Scholarships at Trinity College Dublin in 2015. These scholarships allow up to six students to study at the Trinity College School of Engineering. Speaking at the launch of the scholarship, Eric Kinsella encapsulated the idea of 'quality work through quality people' when he said that 'Jones Engineering Group prides itself in the quality of our employees. Our investment in people has always been one of the keys to our success'.²⁵

Nowadays all engineers are recruited at graduate level and join a five-year training programme. They are recruited from a number of third-level institutions, including University College Dublin (UCD), Trinity College Dublin (TCD), Dublin City University (DCU), Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), University of Limerick (UL), University College Cork (UCC) and NUI Galway.

Above: Chris Jones (front row centre) with staff and apprentices of Jones Engineering Group at an apprentice day training seminar.



Above: The presentation, in 2006, of a Continuous Professional Development (CPD) award by Senator Feargal Quinn. From left: John McGowan, President of Engineers Ireland, Jim Curley, Sandra Guilfoyle, Senator Feargal Quinn and Stephen McCabe.

A commitment to Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

A comprehensive system of CPD, 'designed to support lifelong learning by stimulating and recognising good organisational practice in the areas of professional development',²⁶ is in place throughout the Jones Engineering Group, reflecting the firm commitment to support all personnel in developing their careers in whatever area they specialise. Jones Engineering was first credited with CPD in 2007 from Engineers Ireland – the professional body for engineers and engineering in Ireland – and was the first engineering contractor to achieve this accreditation.²⁷ This partnership has enhanced the internal training programmes of the group, providing important links to outside developments and broadening horizons.

Catriona Gallagher, now a contracts manager with the group, joined H.A. O'Neil Limited as a CAD operator with a diploma in civil engineering. She first worked on the Swords Pavilion site in north county Dublin and comments:

They offered me the opportunity to go to Scotland²⁸ to do my degree ... the next step for me was something in project management. So the post-grad was just the natural thing to do ... they see it as your continuing professional development. It's beneficial to them, it's them kind of investing in you.²⁹

Others are offered the same opportunities as Catriona. People working in every department are encouraged to work towards achieving professional status with the

relevant professional bodies. This commitment of the Jones Engineering Group to the continuous training of all its employees in a wide range of technical and managerial areas has the ultimate aim of providing better customer service and greater personal satisfaction.

A proud record of site safety and quality standards

The Jones Engineering Group prioritises the safety and welfare of its workforce, customers and all those who use its installations, believing that 'site supervisors, foremen, etc. will be judged as much on their safety record as for their ability to manage a project'.³⁰ Today all the companies in the group have 'Safe-T-Cert' certification.³¹

These safety requirements are a far cry from what Chris Jones, as an apprentice working on the Department of Industry and Commerce building on Kildare Street Dublin in 1940, could ever have envisaged. In sharp contrast to current practice, he recalled that one of the problems for those men working on that project, all those years ago, was how to ensure a good cup of tea:

The race was to get some hot water at tea times. The boiler was down in the basement and it was a very high building, so by the time you'd get from roof to basement there'd be no hot water left for your billycan. So the clever ones used to slide down from the top of the building via a rope, rather than use the stairs.³²

Quality has always been a watchword in the Jones Engineering Group. In the 1940s the motto of H.A. O'Neil Limited was 'Whatever we do – we do well' – a sentiment that remains at the heart of the group's reputation for producing quality work. By the 1990s, quality and quality certification became a major focus. With the object of continuing to deliver 'quality work through quality people', the companies within the group focussed on and achieved quality certification. This, together with a well-earned reputation for delivering on projects on time and within budget, has helped maintain the Jones Engineering Group at the forefront of the industry.

Company ethos – our people are our strength

From his earliest days in charge of H.A. O'Neil Limited Chris Jones was very conscious of the people who worked for him and how important they were for the success of a company which boasted as its motto 'Quality work by quality people'. Members of the workforce, both those still working with the group and those who have retired, recall him as a gentleman, not one to suffer fools gladly, but who took an interest in the people who worked for him as well as in the work that they did. As he said, 'As a large employer, you still have to recognise the humanity in everyone'.³³

However, the reputation of the company did not rely on individual acts of kindness to support its long-standing reputation as a family company. One very practical initiative was a credit union for staff, set up by Chris Jones. The Aonach Credit Union (Jones Engineering Group Members Credit Union) for staff and their families was first established in February 1971. Tommy McIlhinney recalled benefitting from the



Above: Safety certificate awarded to Jones Engineering Group.



Above: Chris Jones wearing his chain of office as president of the Construction Industry Federation in 1985.

Credit Union and was able to buy a car ... 'It was my first car, a Beetle'.³⁴ One of the smaller credit unions within the league of credit unions, it only ceased operating in recent years.

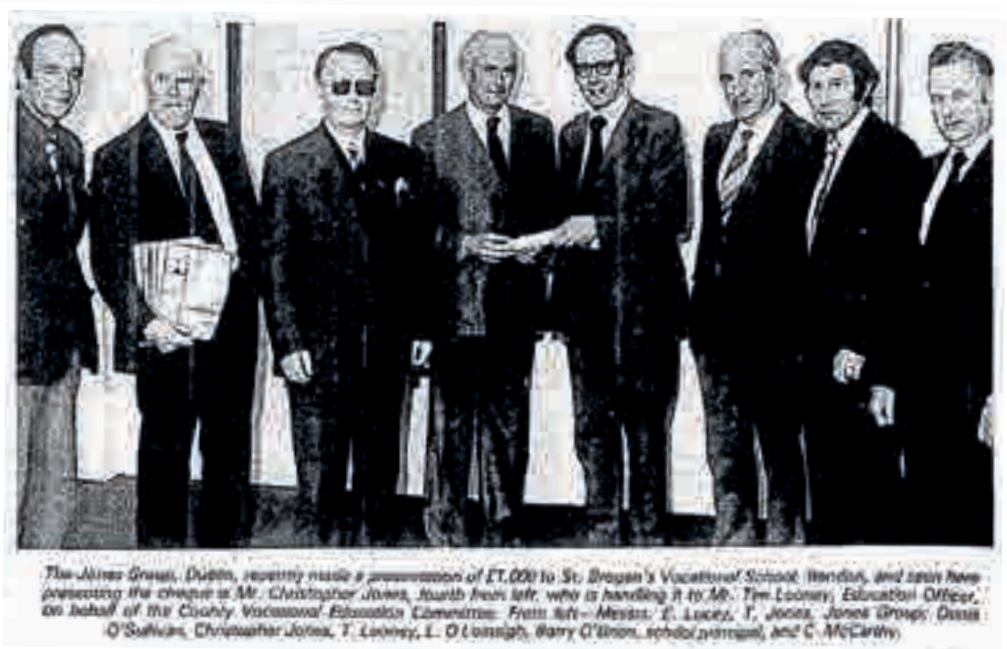
Giving something back to society

Long before the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) came into existence during the 1960s, the idea of giving something back to the construction industry and the wider community as well as improving the quality of life of its workforce, was part of the operating philosophy and commitment of the Jones Engineering Group.

Rather than formalising the practice of supporting communities and society in general, many activities were simply undertaken out of a spirit of gratitude, a sense of good manners, and of the right thing to do in a given situation. It has already been shown how the business supported education and training, going right back to Harry O'Neil's era. Chris Jones, for example, never forgot the education he had received at Bandon Technical School. At a presentation in the school in the 1980s, Chris said 'I believe there is now more than ever a real necessity for vocational training, especially to technician level'.³⁵ The Jones Group has continued to maintain its connection with the school (now St Brogan's).³⁶

From the beginning, the H.A. O'Neil company minutes record deeds of gifts to a range of charitable causes, such as the Irish Heart Foundation and Cappagh Hospital.³⁷ One particular charitable organisation to which both John and Chris Jones were committed was the Rehabilitation Institute, set up in 1949 to support people recovering from TB, but whose remit now includes all disabilities. Chris was an active member of the board, advising on asset management and fundraising, and he was an active supporter of the work of Christopher Nolan, who overcame severe cerebral

Right: Chris Jones makes a presentation of £1,000 to his old school in Bandon, now St Brogan's Vocational School. Tim Looney, education officer, accepts the cheque on behalf of the County Vocational Education Committee, as reported in the *Southern Star* on 18 April, 1981. From left: E. Lucey, Tommy Jones, Denis O'Sullivan, Chris Jones, T. Looney, L.O'Loinsigh, Barry O'Brien (school principal) and C.McCarthy.



palsy to become a famous poet and author, whose work included his prize-winning autobiography *Under the Eye of the Clock*.³⁸

The tradition of supporting various charities continues to the present day with sponsorship of local activities and sports clubs around the country. Support of sporting activities is not confined to Ireland. With the expansion of Jones Engineering Group companies to the Arabian peninsula – including Saudi Arabia and Qatar – members of the group have enthusiastically continued to participate in the same sporting activities that they enjoyed in Ireland and a new vitality has emerged in the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) scene there through its hurling and football teams.

The ‘giving back’ initiatives and activities of the Jones Engineering Group are wide-ranging, both in Ireland and overseas, often working quietly behind the scenes to help deserving causes. Art competitions and endurance cycling events have been organised on a regular basis, continuing the philosophy and belief of the group that ‘As a company and as a group of individuals we recognise that we have a responsibility to help our community whenever we can’.

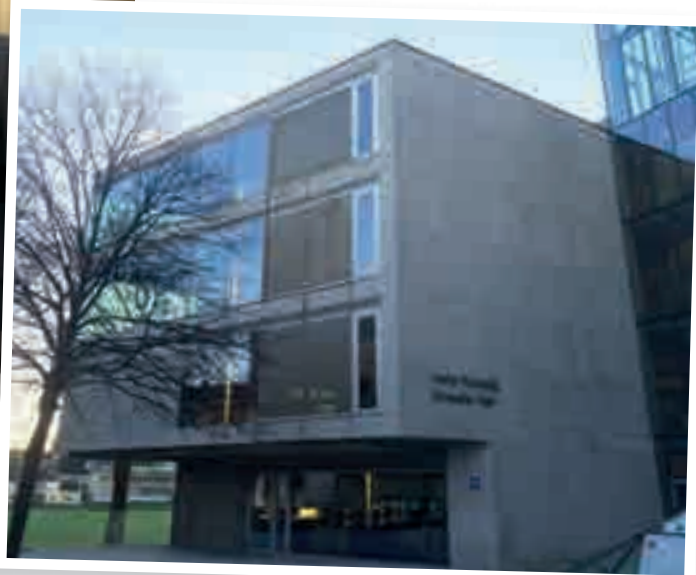
There have been other philanthropic endowments from individual members of the Jones Engineering Group over the years. Recently, for example, Eric Kinsella, the executive chairman of Jones Engineering Group, and his wife Barbara have funded a new state-of-the art student study hall (to be named after his parents, William and Kathleen Kinsella), in addition to the previously-mentioned engineering scholarships at Trinity College Dublin.³⁹



Above: As a member of the board of the Rehabilitation Institute, Chris Jones (right) makes a presentation of a Pat Phelan portrait to a young Christy Nolan in recognition of the publication of his book *Dam-Burst of Dreams*, published in 1982 and sponsored by Chris Jones.



Below left: The first three engineering students to benefit from the Eric Kinsella endowment, photographed at the Trinity College School of Engineering. From left to right: Darragh McKay, Cara O’Brien, Eric Kinsella, Stefano Lupo and Dr Patrick Prendergast, Provost of Trinity College Dublin.



Below right: Kinsella Hall new state-of-the art student study facility at Trinity College Dublin.

*‘As a company
and as a group of
individuals we
recognise that we
have a responsibility
to help our community
whenever we can’*

Jones Engineering Group ethos

Top: The Jones Engineering Group football team playing Gaelic Games in the sun — Naomh Alee Riyadh Éire Óg team, Gulf Intermediate Champions in Dubai in 2012.

Right: In March 2014 the plumbing and heating apprentices who had won gold medals at previous WorldSkills Competitions visited Diepsloot, South Africa in support of the Healthabitat Sanitation Studio in collaboration with local community partner Water, Amenities and Sanitation Service Upgrade Project (WASSUP). On the left is Jones Engineering apprentice Ciaran Coady (Ireland – WorldSkills Leipzig 2013), with Shane Trevitt (United Kingdom – WorldSkills London 2011).

Left: Jones Engineering Group staff compete in the Dragon Boat Regatta, held at Grand Canal Dock Dublin in 2014. Included are Adrian O’Leary, Tanya Doyle, Stephanie Alken, Chris Husk, Greg O’Donnell, Sarah Maher, Sarah Nolan, Martin Fagan, Rob Kavanagh, Catriona Gallagher, MaryBec Linehan, Justin Richardson, Cormac Finn, Neil Kennedy, Philip Carroll and John McAndrew.

Bottom right: members of Jones Engineering Group completed the daunting cycle from Mizen Head to Malin Head over the course of three days from 28 to 30 August 2015, raising over €60,000 for the *Make A Wish Foundation*. Included in the picture are: Ray Greene, Barry Steele, Tim Ferris, Sean Downey, Thos Kennedy, Sean O’Neill, Stephen Burke, Johnny Burke, Damien Conefrey, Andy Redmond, Adrian O’Leary, Mike Wall, Simon Watson, George Devin, Donal Moran, Eamon Murphy, Brian Nolan, Shane Lennon and Keith Maxwell.



Jones Engineering Group
site construction teams



Above: Alexion Pharmaceuticals, College Park Dublin.



Left: Stryker, one of the world's leading medical technology companies Carrigtwohill, County Cork.



Left: Long-serving staff who between them have clocked up over 250 years' experience with the group. From left to right: Brendan Stafford, Joe McCann, Gerry O'Brien, Martin Rothwell, Francie McCabe, Jack Stephens, Martin Power and John Flood.



Clockwise from above:

Pfizer Biopharma facility, Grangecastle Dublin.

Diageo brewery, St. James's Gate, Dublin.

Almarai infant nutritional facility, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

Our team in Belgium.

Vistakon J&J, vision care facility, Plassey, Limerick.





A final word

Looking back over the 125-year history of Jones Engineering Group it is clear that the same human values and commitment apply today as when the business was founded in 1890. This is a story of triumph over adversity, sometimes faced with the sort of challenges that most businesses would not have survived. There were the initial challenges as Ireland struggled to emerge as an independent nation. The deprivations of the First, followed by the Second World War, when the bleak political and economic outlook brought the business to the brink, to be overcome by the courage and tenacity of the management team of the company. Guiding the business through the safer and more prosperous waters of the 1960s and a period of rapid expansion, the company hit the headlines when it became a multi-faceted public company in 1973.

After twenty years of enormous success between 1973 and 1993 as Jones Group plc, it was time to make the courageous decision to become a private entity again. In 1993, at a time of

economic uncertainty, a team led by Eric Kinsella broke away from the Jones Group to establish the Jones Engineering Group, the name reflecting the origins of the company and reinforcing its core values and expertise. However, nobody could see at that stage that the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' was about to roar, and to be followed by the deepest recession that had ever hit Ireland some fifteen years later, when the construction industry would take the main brunt of this disaster that would eventually threaten the very sovereignty of the country. Jones Engineering Group faced the challenge and not only survived through the power and strength of its people and company commitment, but emerged stronger than ever to face the future.

As the group continues to thrive, preparing to move to a new headquarters in Dublin, Henry Austin O'Neil and Chris Jones would be proud of how far H.A. O'Neil Limited has come as part of the Jones Engineering Group since he began his original plumbing and heating business in Dublin in 1890.



Quality work through quality people.

Chapter 9 – Endnotes

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