Unidare: a case-study in the evolution of the 'Celtic-tiger'
Donard de Cogan* & Barry Toomey**

Introduction
This paper is concerned with a manufacturing company in Ireland whose rise and fall mirrors that of its founder, C.O. Stanley, whose life and career is described in Frankland's remarkable book [1]. Unidare was something of our youth - a big factory with a 'can-do-will-do' attitude in what was otherwise a conservative, agriculture dominated country.

Starting this paper is particularly daunting because we almost feel that we have nothing to say beyond what is in Frankland's book. Enquiries to the author and to Nicholas Stanley suggests that what is in the book is all that they know. However, both authors of this paper are fortunate to have links in Ireland and can at least add a retrospective view over the back of the 'Celtic tiger'.

Our treatment will start with a quick resumé of the situation in Ireland at the birth of Unidare. This will be followed by a summary of Stanley and his Irish associates - a sort of 'West-British' brotherhood. We will then chart the history of the company itself and conclude by asking whether the end-game could have been otherwise

Figure 1 Turbine hall of the Shannon hydroelectric project

* School of Computing Sciences, University of East Anglia, Norwich NR4 7TJ
** 1 The Grange, Kill Lane, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland
Electrical Supply and the Irish Free State
In 1987 PG S7 had their annual summer meeting at Trinity College Dublin where O Breatuin [2] and Shiel [3] gave excellent reviews of rural electrification in Ireland. the former concentrated on the evolution of the transmission arrangements that commenced in 1929 with the inception of the Shannon hydroelectric scheme. This must be viewed as a technological declaration of independence from Britain by a new nation, but of course the award of the contract to Siemens was lifeline to that company in the post-WWI era. The Francis-type turbines, shown above provided 90MW.

In 1934 a further 25MW was added when a Kaplan turbine was installed. The second world war hampered further development and it was not until 1946 that the 'Rural Electrification' project was able to continue. Shiel's 1987 paper to the Summer Meeting [3] concentrated on the period 1946 - 1976. The composite (figure 3) which has been abstracted from that paper shows a time-series of maps: 1929, 1940 and 1960. The 1940 map provides detail down to the individual 10kV transformers, shown as tiny nodules at the end of lines. By 1960 the coverage was so extensive that nothing below 38kV is shown.
Figure 3. The evolution of Rural Electrification in Ireland. Charts shown for 1929 (left), 1940 (middle) and 1960 (right)

Figure 4. The installation of a pole-mounted transformer as part of the Irish Rural Electrification scheme 1938
Working against all of this was a protectionist tariff system which hampered developments where only the really big operators could survive. An inspection of the publications of the Institute of Engineers of Ireland during this period reveal who was active and samples include

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Reyrolle’ Brown-Boveri</td>
<td>Air-blast switchgear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>ASEA</td>
<td>Air-blast breakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACEC</td>
<td>motors (made in Waterford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Driver-Harris</td>
<td>cables (made in New Ross)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These last two are interesting because they highlight a means of avoiding import duty, namely to manufacture (or at least assemble) within the state. Ford were assembling cars in Cork by this time and C.O. Stanley was not going to miss such an opportunity.

**C.O. Stanley and his Irish business links**

Frankland does a superb job of encapsulating the spirit of Stanley, who described himself as a 'Proddy-Woddy' and was proud to be West-British - a term that is more often used derogatorily. The father-in-law of one of these authors (DdeC) attended Bishop Foy's School in Waterford a few years after Stanley. Arthur Hearnden, grandson of the second superintendent at the Valentia cable station displayed the same qualities of unsung, non-sectarian charity. Frankland [4] cites a response to an Irish journalist "who asked if CO had invested in Ireland for patriotic or purely business reasons '. . from pure bloody sentiment' he said, 'I was well aware that investments outside Ireland would have been more profitable'. His love of country was always mixed with exasperation" and both the authors of this paper can understand this sentiment.

Frankland [4] highlights his first business ventures in Ireland. A year after his Arks Advertising had opened in Dublin, he was approached by Sunbeam Textiles in Cork owned by William Dwyer (a Roman Catholic). The company was in difficulty and needed effective advertising. After enquiries through his family CO gave Dwyer £5,000 and later added a further £10,000. He became a director of the company, renamed Sunbeam Wolsey, which subsequently became very successful.

Always looking for new outlets CO persuaded the Pye board that the only way to sell radios in the Irish Free State was to set up a separate company, Pye(Ireland) who would avoid import duty by manufacturing within the State.

So, we have already been introduced to the first of Stanley's men, Willi Dwyer, the next and in the sense of our story, more important was Cdr Alan Bradshaw, born and educated in Ireland. He had been an administrative officer in the Navy before joining Pye as Company Secretary in early 1939. At the outbreak of war Bradshaw returned to the Services and became Director of Administration at Bletchley Park. Incidentally, Dwyer joined the Ministry of Supply in London. The other Irish man in this story, Perry Greer will be mentioned later.

* The Parsons link would of course be significant in the Irish context
**The start: Aberdare Electric Ltd**

In the post-war era the Irish Prime Minister, Sean Lemass was anxious to progress the Rural Electrification scheme and perceived a need to manufacture cable and pole-mounted transformers within the State. He put it out that he would welcome a response and CO, in his role as chairman of Sunbeam-Wolsey in Cork mustered forces for the preparation of a tender which Lemass could and ultimately did accept.

The first step involved the technical and financial assistance of two companies in Wales. One was *South Wales Switchgear* who were specialists in pole-mounted transformers in the range 5, 10 and 15kV. The other was *Aberdare Cables* who specialised in copper wire. Both companies were owned by the conglomerate *International Combustion* in Derby, whose boss was Sir George Usher (who became a founder Director of this new company) and whose chief executive was F.G. Penny (also a founder Director). *Lawrence Scott & Electromotors* of Norwich were also in at the start*, but it is not clear whether they had a director on the Board. The total investment of these companies was £210k. Only £70k was put out to the public.

C.O. Stanley (as Chairman) also brought in (as a founder Director) Sir Robert Renwick (of the London stockbroking firm, who also had a controlling interest in *County of London Electricity*). Bradshaw, now back with Pye was sent across to set up the company and was another of the Directors. Another influential founder Director, although not directly involved in the day-to-day running was (of course) Willi Dwyer and the final founder Director was Lt. Col. Boyd-Rochford, an old Irish aristocratic type who according to John Sedgwick, did not contribute much, but "was influential".

* It was hoped that this might lead to the manufacture of electric motors in Ireland, but this never happened.
Aberdare Electric Ltd was incorporated in Dublin in 1947. A 35 acre site was purchased in Johnson Road, Finglas in 1948 and a Cork contracting firm undertook the construction.

One of DdeC's principal informants, John Sedgwick, had recently been demobilised at this time. He had been a student at Trinity College Dublin and had finished his accountancy qualifications before joining the RAF. After the war he first worked as an auditor for Ford in Cork. He records that this was a very valuable experience, as Ford were bringing new business systems to Dagenham and Europe via Cork. Sedgwick's wife spotted an advertisement in the Irish Times, looking for a chief accountant for a new electrical firm (Aberdare Electric). He applied and had a tough interview from Bradshaw, who told him that there were 90 people in for the job. At the end of the interview Bradshaw asked "... when can you start?". He joined in November 1948.

Bradshaw had his office on the second floor of a building in St Stephen's Green in the centre of Dublin. He needed a first class electrical man and with the aid of Sir Robert Renwick, he pulled in Percy Howard (Perry) Greer, who, like Bradshaw came from Northern Ireland. Greer who had been responsible for the revitalisation of Tricity Cookers, joined in early 1949.
The first copper wire was produced by the company in June 1949. However, the ESB (Irish Electrical Supply Board) decided that it going to use aluminium wire in preference to copper. According to Michael O'Brearthuin [5] (an engineer with the ESB) this was partly for economic reasons. It was also in tune with a world-wide change in the power supply industry. Garrett Scaife of TCD [6] confirms these views. O'Breartuin, reports a comment by his manager in the late 1960s when it was decided to remove the original Siemens lines from Ardnacrusha to Dublin and Cork. Then had become redundant because the new 220kV system had taken over their function. The manager believed that the scrap value of the copper would pay for the construction of the lines which were replacing them.

*Aberdare Cables* (Wales) were specialists in copper, so it was left to *Aberdare Electric* (Ireland) develop its own expertise in aluminium extrusion. Eventually, they became suppliers of aluminium cable all over the UK and beyond. They developed SCA (Steel Coated Aluminium). This consisted of six strands of aluminium with a central core of high tensile steel (HST). This wire was initially supplied from Germany. The company eventually teamed up with Tinsley Wire of Sheffield and started to manufacture their own HST. Arising from these new skills, they started to make steel strands for ropes as well as barbed wire and steel netting.

Further expansions included insulated cable and they had significant contracts from the Irish Department of Posts and Telegraphs for multi-conductor and stranded cable. There is a curiosity
here that deserves further investigation. Robert Erskine Childers, son of the author of "Riddle of the Sands" and later President of Ireland is cited several times in Frankland's book. When the Fianna Fail party, of which he was a member, was returned to power after the post-war period of 'Inter-Party' government, he became Minister for Posts and Telegraphs.

Figure 8 Pictures of Pole-mounted transformers manufactured at the Johnson Road factory, as shown in the 1949 Annual Report

Aberdare Electric becomes Unidare
During 1952/3 Aberdare Electric Ltd found themselves in competition for overseas contracts with Aberdare Cables and when documents relating to a quotation for a South African contract ended up in the wrong hands, it was realised that it was time to have a name change. Many options were considered, but it was felt that the retention of the '-dare' part of the name was essential. 'Monodare' was one option, but then Unidare was chosen. The -dare element was used in a wide range of subsidiary companies.

Unidare were by this time producing transformers up to 50kV and were supplying heavy cables to the UK grid. They had particularly good contacts with LEB and supplied Balfour Beatty. From insulating cables they moved into plastics. A Dublin company named Bishop Plastics was in trouble, so Unidare bought them out. Originally, most of the material for their SCA cables was supplied by British Aluminium, but Unidare then linked up with Alcan. Alcan suggested that they make aluminium foil, They eventually became the major supplier of kitchen foil, cigarette foil etc. There was a need to anodise aluminium, so they linked up with a German expert and did their own in a separate factory on the Finglas site. There was a heavy demand for electric pumps, so Aquadare was set up. The activity in plastics soon led to the manufacture of plastic pipe, in particular, drainage pipe. Much of the pipe was produced in Northern Ireland. Political
considerations dictated that they have a manufacturing plant north of the border and they eventually had a big factory in Portadown.

Early in the 1950s Perry Greer saw a business opportunity. Now that rural electrification was in place, people needed storage heaters, but up to that time the only ones available in Ireland were imported from Czechoslovakia and cost £37 each. Unidare undertook their own development in conjunction with Roadstone to produce a special concrete with the correct thermal properties. Their first units retailed at £9 – 10 = 0 (£9.50 in decimal currency). All manufacturing of storage heaters was transferred to Portadown*.

Unidare took over a small company in the Johnson road who were producing welding electrodes. Just about that time Oerlikon in Zurich were the largest in this area. They had opened a plant in Crawley, but it was not doing well. Perry Greer met the man who had been put in to restore the fortunes of the factory and following lengthy discussions Unidare agreed to buy them out with Oerlikon retaining a 20% stake. Crawley was retained, but a similar factory was opened in Finglas and welding rods became one of their most productive lines. They were also very successful in electric and gas boilers. In conjunction with a Swiss company, they had gone into hot-plates for electric cookers but it was not profitable. Somewhere along the way Unidare acquired a Dutch company, Daalderep which specialised in making coffee machines for aircraft. There was also a company for producing computer network cables.

At its height Unidare had an 80 acre site with 60 acres of premises, employing over 2,300 staff. The main factory was extended twice and in the late 1950s they opened offices and stores in Hayes, Middlesex.

The start of the 'End-game'
Up to this point we have described the remarkable rise of Unidare. The fall followed the Stanley misfortunes even if there was a phase-lag. Aberdare Cables and Lawrence Scott had got out and Unidare by the mid 1950s was effectively a free public company. Its original 5/= (25p) shares were now worth 7/6 (37.5p). At some point there were indications that there might be an attempted hostile takeover by US companies. In order to prevent this Stanley took a controlling interest - which had long-term repercussions.

But then Pye got into trouble Mark Frankland tends to lay the blame on C.O. Stanley, rather than on his son, John for the difficulties that were about to befall. He claims that his bailing out of E.K. Cole (EKCO), who also produced radios was a financial drain. John Sedgwick is of the belief that CO's buy-out of Invicta, was probably a bad move. There are others who believe that John Stanley's personality had much to do with it as had the decision to take Pye into credit financing. It has been reported that their company, Credit Finance Ltd was a virtual money sink.

Frankland [1] describes the desperate straits in which Pye found itself and John Stanley was deserted by many who had been at one time CO's closest allies. After what Frankland refers to as the '1966 execution' Philips took over Pye and through CO's holdings found itself in

* In the 'end-game' this part of the business was sold to Dimplex.
possession of Unidare. CO was retained as an adviser to Philips, but his lack of real power was obvious. He proposed that Perry Greer be transferred from Unidare to become the new managing director of Pye. His advice was ignored. This might have done something for Pye, but on second thoughts, maybe not. One thing is certain: a 'can-do, will-do' attitude in a general purpose engineering company did not fit in with the Philips business model and they started to look for possible let-outs. Initially, it was argued that the Philips family (said to have been Felix Philips) had promised that Unidare would not be sold before first being offered to the Irish Government or to the Irish people. Possession of this letter acted as a protection for some time.

time. In the 1970s Philips sold out to an Irish conglomerate and this was the beginning of the end of Unidare as it had existed up to that time. Perry Greer retired a Managing Director in 1976 and later retired from the Board.

Figure 6 Percy Howard (Perry) Greer (the authors are particularly grateful to the Archivist at the Institute of Engineers of Ireland for locating this picture)

Concluding analysis
There is no doubting Greer's brilliance as an engineer/manager in the electrical industry, although there is not as much explicit evidence as we would like. His subsequent career included: Director of Credit Finance, Director of the Insurance Corporation of Ireland, Director of Smith and Pearson. He was particularly active in maritime activities and was Chairman of Irish Shipping. He could boast 50 years experience in ocean sailing. He was a member of the executive committee of the Howth Lifeboat and was a commissioner of Irish Lights from 1970 - 1987. He died on 12 February 2000.
The Engineers Journal (Produced by the IEI) for November 1966 reports on a conference held in Ireland on the subject of design and innovation. At that time there was a realisation that Irish designed products had much in common with those produced within the Soviet Union and there was an ongoing love-affair with the cleanliness of Scandinavian design. The Conference report on p. 378 of the Engineers Journal starts with a contribution from Bjerre Lavesen, General Secretary of the Danish Academy of Technical Sciences. Greer was one of the speakers who responded and talked about what they did at Unidare. He highlighted what was perhaps the character of the company "all is new and we do not have hide-bound attitudes". He then went on to discuss their attitude to design and innovation. We will return to this presently.

We have commented above about the lack of information on Unidare, which, seeing its importance is all the more surprising. We feel that there is much more material in the public domain, but there remain many sensitivities. Nicholas Stanley, writing to one of the authors (DDeC) commented with regret that Greer would not talk to them when work was in progress on Frankland's book. The bosses of Unidare in its present form were very anxious that we did not discuss beyond the mid 1970s and we are happy to respect their wishes at this time. Mention has been made of Erskine Childers. He is cited in the downfall of the Stanleys [6]. CO retained him to push the case for a commercial TV station in Ireland to mirror ITV, but later felt that the case had been pushed too hard [7]. Up to this moment attempts to speak to the Childers family, to get their view of events have not been successful.

John Sedgwick, who retired as Unidare Company Secretary in 1983, believes that C.O. was a pioneer entrepreneur and like many such people continued to throw money at the problem, when consolidation was the thing to do. But maybe there is a wider picture. After a meteoric career that lasted longer than many in his position the tide was moving against him. There had been more than one spat with Bishop Lucy of Cork (both of these authors remember the bishop as the terror of all who did not agree with him). CO had opposed the introduction of FM radio in the UK [8]. Commercial TV in Britain had been introduced in spite of strong opposition and was very successful. When CO tried the same in Ireland, it was effectively the 'bridge too far'. Such was the power of the Catholic Church in Ireland at that time that he should have seen it as a non-starter. He was exasperated when the Government announced that RTE was to be a semi-state body, but such an organisation was more in line with the thinking at the time and both authors would argue that the opening of TV broadcasting by RTE and, thanks to Rural Electrification, the bringing of the world into every living room, even in the remotest parts of the country was the beginning of the erosion of this monolithic power-base of the Church. We should also remember that CO opposed the EEC and the removal of tariffs, which he said would be very damaging for the last vestige of his empire, Pye (Ireland). It was.

It is our belief that Unidare measured up very well to other companies of similar size and purpose at that time. Danfoss in Denmark springs to mind. However, with the advent of the EEC and the removal of protective tariffs it had become less competitive. It might have weathered the transition to the EU, but not with the Stanleys at the helm. It is probably unlikely that Greer would have had the vision. His 1966 presentation at the design conference smacks of 'we are alright as we are' but maybe we are being hard on him. It might have been possible for a
state buy-out to give the company a new lease of life, but traditional civil service conservatism as it existed in Ireland at the time would suggest that this could not have run. In the end, what happened was probably inevitable.

References
4. M. Frankland op-cit p. 242
5. M. O'Breartuin (email exchange with author, DdeC, June 2005)
6. M. Frankland op-cit p. 314
7. M. Frankland op-cit p. 251
8. A. Davies "The introduction of frequency modulation for sound broadcasting in Britain" (preview of paper to be presented at forth radio conference in St Petersburg). DdeC is particularly grateful to Anthony for providing this additional insight.