

# THE FOYNES FLYING BOAT & MARITIME MUSEUM

by Margaret O'Shaughnessy



*Boeing 314 Yankee Clipper arrived at Foynes on July 9, 1939, on the first Pan American trans-Atlantic passenger service over the northern route between New York and Southampton.*

Pan Am Historical Foundation



Juan Trippe engaged Charles Lindbergh to scout out places that Pan American might use to begin trans-Atlantic service. Lindbergh chose Foynes, a small village in County Limerick on the west coast of Ireland on the River Shannon. Foynes had been an important seaport since 1846 and had many of the attributes needed to service the flying boats: a sheltered harbor, train service, oil companies, and a local workforce.

On July 6, 1937, Sikorsky S-42B NC16736 *Clipper III* arrived at Foynes from Botwood, Newfoundland, after a survey flight of 12 hours 34 minutes under the command of Captain Harold E. Gray. Thus began Pan Am's long association with Foynes.

There were more survey flights until on July 9, 1939, NC18603 *Yankee Clipper*, a Boeing 314, arrived at Foynes under the command of Captain Arthur E. La Porte with 19 passengers. From then until October 1945 Pan Am delivered thousands of passengers across the North Atlantic via Foynes.

From 1939 to 1945 our village welcomed royalty, movie stars, presidents, politicians, refugees, and people working for the war effort.

*Charles Blair made the first nonstop westbound service between Foynes and New York in June 1942, flying a Vought-Sikorsky VS-44A for American Export Airlines. AEA became American Overseas Airlines, which was bought by Pan Am in 1950.*

Although I was not lucky enough to have worked for Pan American, I was fortunate to fly trans-Atlantic twice with the airline and this great company has dominated my life for the past 30 years; why?

Growing up in a small village in Ireland I often heard my grandfather talking about flying boats. Of course, I had no idea what he was talking about until much later in my life. My romance with Pan Am began in 1987 when, as a member of a local community group, the idea was floated to establish something to honor and commemorate the glory days of the flying boats. This was the period 1937 to 1945, when Foynes was the center of the commercial aviation world.

When I first started to look at establishing a small museum to preserve this unique aviation history I called on Trevor Lewis, the Pan Am manager at Shannon Airport. His suggestion was to contact Maureen O'Hara Blair, widow of the extraordinary Captain Charles Blair, and who stayed in Ireland every summer. With some trepidation, I called her and immediately she offered to help in every way possible.

Next problem was where to house the museum. Again luck was with us and we leased four small outhouses, part of the original terminal building, which was important. Over the next two years we raised funds and acquired information and artifacts. This was when I flew on Pan Am.

What a wonderful experience. I visited New York and Newfoundland, collected material, and then began building our new museum. We officially opened on July 8, 1989, and Maureen was on hand to cut the ribbon. She was our patron until her death in October 2015. We had more than 200 former Pan Am staff for the opening and what stories were told, tears were shed, and friendships renewed or began.

Henceforth Pan Am has been my addiction. I have met people from all over the United States and beyond, many of them becoming dear friends. They have encouraged and supported me and most of all they thanked me for preserving this special bit of Pan Am history. Pan Am put me under a spell and has been my constant obsession through all these years.

Maureen O'Hara became a very close friend, visiting the museum and celebrating her birthday with us on August 17 every year. She donated lots of memorabilia belonging to her beloved husband and enjoyed nothing more than telling the story of how Charlie flew the last flying boat out of Foynes in October 1945 and the first landplane into the new airport across the River Shannon at Rineanna while flying for American Overseas Airlines, which was acquired by Pan Am.

We now have the task of building a new wing to our museum to house memorabilia given to us by Maureen's grandson, Conor Beau FitzSimons.

The Pan Am story continues with the most recent chapter being a wonderful Pan Am Reunion in Foynes in April 2016.

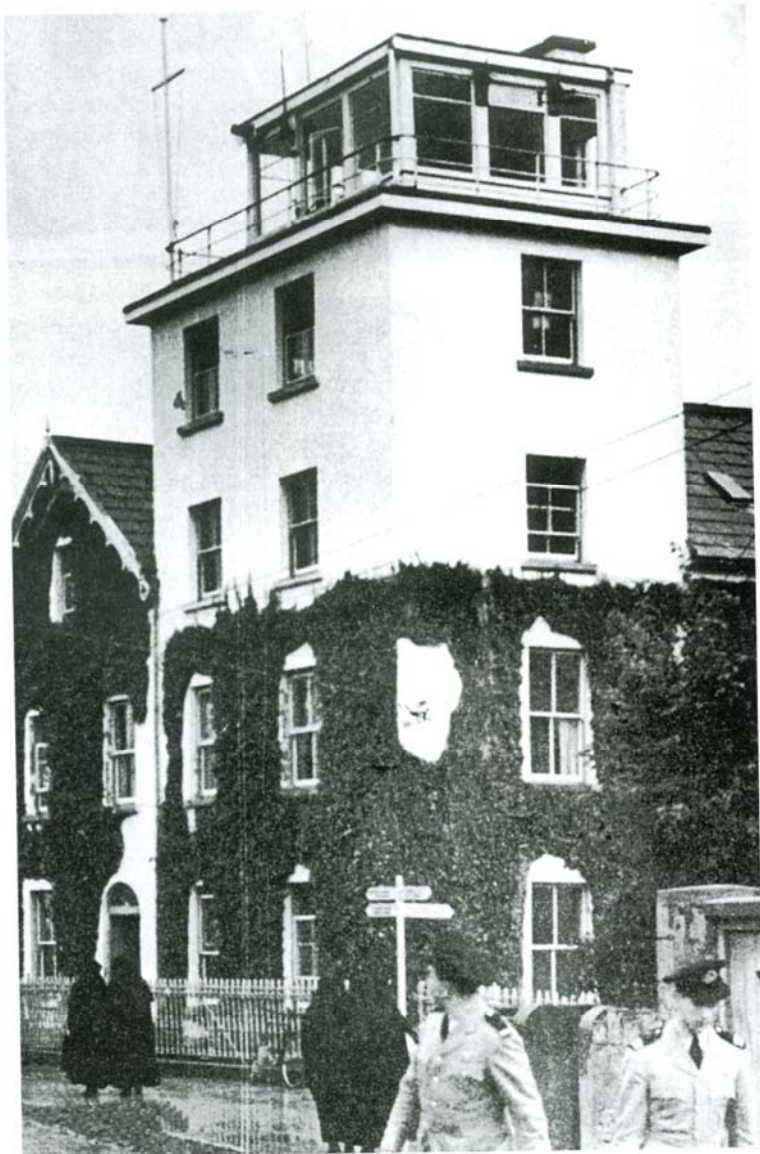
We were honored to host it and meet new friends and old. What is it about Pan Am that draws you in? I still don't know. But if asked I would have to reply it is its people, they are special and they continue to this day, long after the demise of the airline, to keep its memory alive.

All I can say is it changed my life and I have been privileged to meet and know so many wonderful Pan Am people. I am eternally grateful for that.

So, we invite you to come and visit our very special museum, located in the original airport terminal and featuring the world's only full-size replica of a Boeing 314 flying boat. This is also where Irish Coffee was invented by Chef Joe Sheridan to cheer up some cold and weary passengers. You will receive a great big *Céad Míle Fáilte*. We look forward to seeing you sometime soon.



Maureen O'Hara was patron of the museum until her death in October 2015.



The terminal at Foynes during World War II.

## FOYNES - THE CENTRE OF THE WORLD 1939-1945

**TRANSATLANTIC AIR SERVICE**  
SUMMER SCHEDULE  
U.S.A. - NEWFOUNDLAND - EIRE - ENGLAND AND CONNECTIONS BEYOND  
SERVICE OPERATED WITH THE FAMOUS FOUR-ENGINE "FLYING ACE"

FLYING ACE	CLASS	DEPART	ARRIVE	CLASS	DEPART	ARRIVE	MILES
100	1st	10:00	12:00	1st	10:00	12:00	100
100	2nd	10:00	12:00	2nd	10:00	12:00	100
100	3rd	10:00	12:00	3rd	10:00	12:00	100
100	4th	10:00	12:00	4th	10:00	12:00	100

**U.S.A. - CANADA - NEWFOUNDLAND - EIRE - ENGLAND**  
ET, June 24

Flight	Miles	Pan American Airways Co. (PAAAC) (ZZ)	Flight
Sat. 7:30	0	Lx Port Washington, N.Y., U.S.A.*	EST Ar 14:00
12:30	569	Ar. Shovel, N.B., Canada**	60 MT Lx 11:00
13:30		Lx. Shovel, N.B., Canada**	Ar. 10:00
16:30	1567	Ar. Botwood, Newfoundland**	NLT Lx 7:00
18:00		Lx. Botwood, Newfoundland**	Ar. 5:30
Sun. 8:30	3061	Ar. Foynes, Eire*	15 MT Lx 16:30
9:30		Lx. Foynes, Eire*	Ar. 15:30
13:00	3411	Ar. Southampton, England**	GCT Lx 14:00

\*Mail only. No passengers carried until further notice. \*\*However, consult your nearest PAA office or Travel Agent for latest information.

CIE Tours

### THE FOYNES FLYING BOAT MUSEUM



Margaret, a Foynes native, has dedicated 30 years to preserving the history of Pan American. She heads the Foynes Flying Boat & Maritime Museum, which currently employs 24 people and receives 60,000 visitors annually.

The Foynes Flying Boat & Maritime Museum by Margaret O'Shaughnessy