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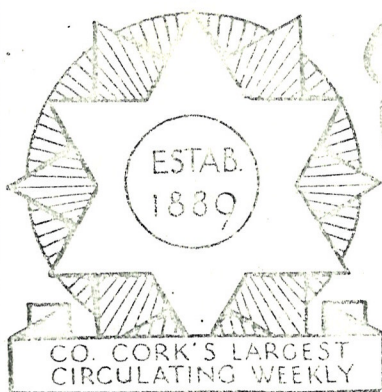
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SPECIAL STAR REPORT



The Round Tower Watch House at Inniscarra Bridge, one of the guard houses for the Powder Mills and occupied up to the mid-fifties.

A SIN

Idea of tourism 'mecca' a wild hope ?

WITH a generous wind and a short practice, George Kelleher could probably pitch a stone from his back garden and land in the waters of the Lee as they foam over Inniscarra weirs. Across the river from a jungle of overgrowth hides from view what strangers would see as a labyrinth of closed up or dried-up old canals and a collection of ramshackle buildings, but what for George Kelleher represents an intense lifelong interest involving years of research and voluminous documentation.

Hidden in the wilderness are the ruins of the Ballincellig Gunpowder Mills, stretching for two miles along the Lee valley eastward from Inniscarra Bridge. It is here that George Kelleher dreams a huge tourist attraction will be established with the restoration to working order of certain sections of the mills, the setting-up of an open-air exhibition of agricultural and other obsolete machinery, and the establishment too of an arts and crafts centre.

For the dream to become a reality, however, the owners of the property, Cork County Council must be persuaded to part company with the necessary finance for the project, and the man who has been doing most of the persuading has been George Kelleher.

"I brought the matter to the attention of the people in County Hall on numerous occasions over the past years."

Southern Star O'DEISCIRO



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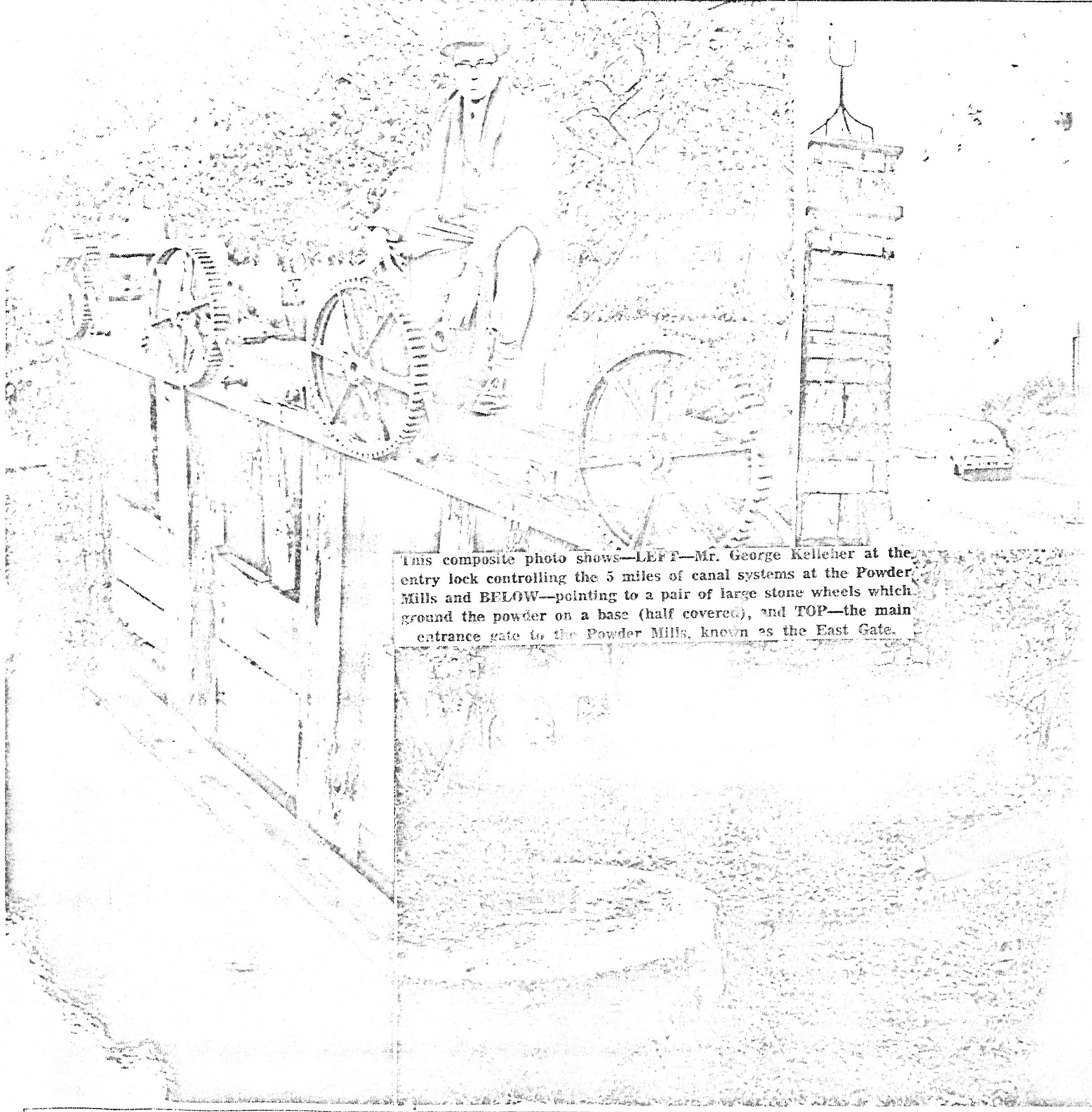
Cork County Chronicle

The Western Advis
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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 1975.

SOUTHERN STAR, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER

ULAR ATTRACTION ?



This composite photo shows—LEFT—Mr. George Kelleher at the entry lock controlling the 5 miles of canal systems at the Powder Mills and BELOW—pointing to a pair of large stone wheels which ground the powder on a base (half covered), and TOP—the main entrance gate to the Powder Mills, known as the East Gate.

STORY BY JOHN DRISLANE

"If Ballincollig is planned imagin

tourism 'mecca' a wild hope ?

WITH a generous wind and a short bit of practice, George Kelleher could probably pitch a stone from his back garden and land it in the waters of the Lee as they foam over the Inniscarra weirs. Across the river from him, a jungle of overgrowth hides from view what strangers would see as a labyrinth of clogged-up or dried-up old canals and a collection of ramshackle buildings, but what for George Kelleher represents an intense lifelong interest involving years of research and volumes of documentation.

Hidden in the wilderness are the ruins of the Ballincollig Gunpowder Mills, stretching for two miles along the Lee valley eastwards from Inniscarra Bridge. It is here that George dreams a huge tourist attraction will be established with the restoration to working order of certain sections of the mills, the setting-up of an open-air exhibition of agricultural and other obsolete machinery, and the establishment too of an arts and crafts colony.

For the dream to become a reality, however, the owners of the property, Cork County Council must be persuaded to part company with the necessary finance for the project, and the man who has been doing most of the persuading has been George Kelleher.

"I brought the matter to the attention of the people in County Hall on numerous occasions over the past few years," he says.

"These representations were accepted and noted but nothing emerged. I drew attention to the unique nature and the enormous historical heritage of the mills, yet in the Ballincollig Draft Development Plan brought out by the council in 1972 (and subsequently passed unaltered) there is no mention of the existence of the mills"

George is the type of man who won't take "no" for an answer, and one gets the impression that if at this stage he managed to get a "yes," he would become immediately suspicious. No one can doubt that he knows what he's talking about. He is an absolute authority on the mills, and at the drop of his straw hat he can produce literally trunks of information on the subject.

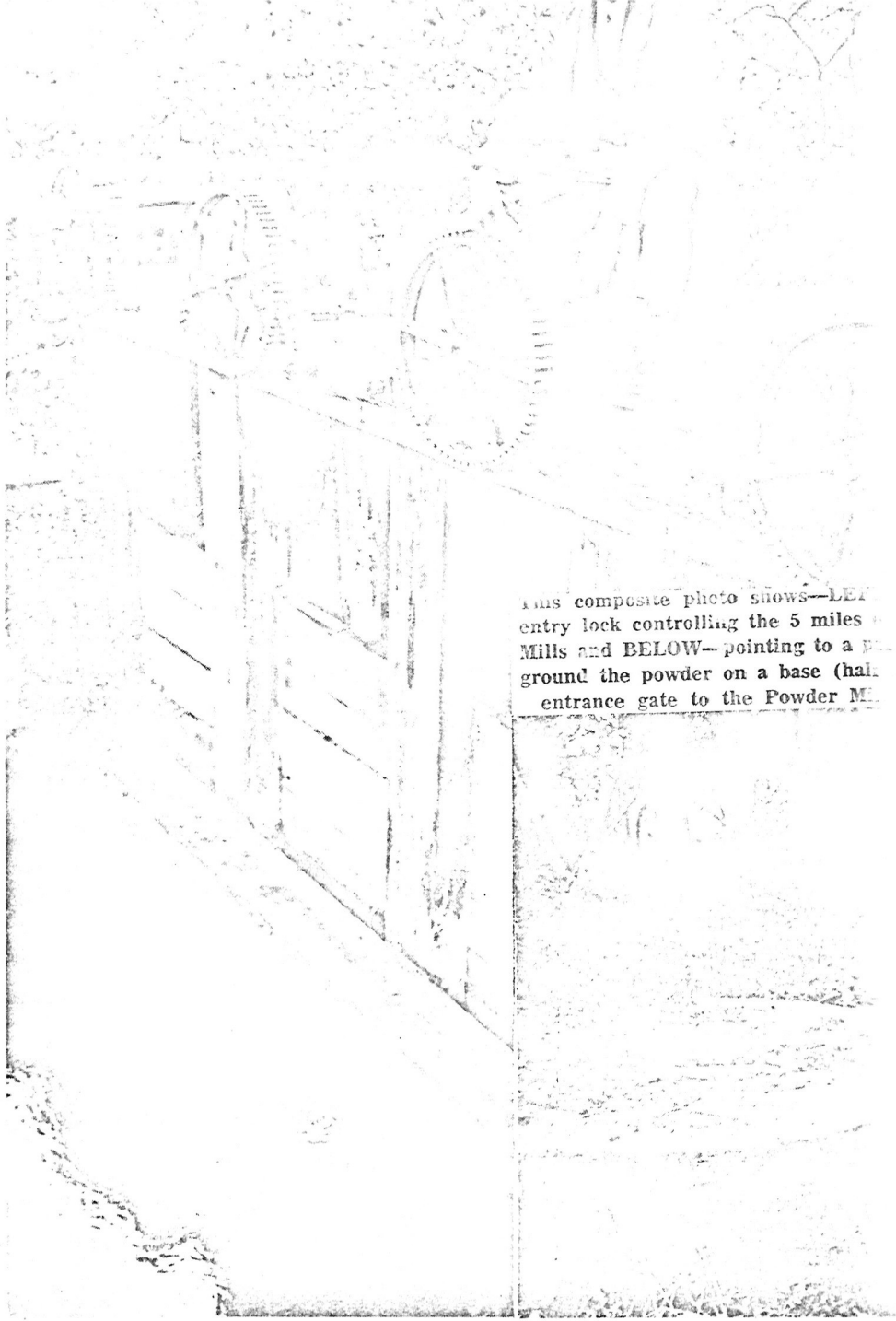
HIS INTEREST

His interest in the mills goes back as far as he can remember. After school visits and long summer holidays spent exploring the place built up his knowledge so that now he can truthfully claim to know every inch of the mills.

"It is absolutely unique in Ireland and no other local authority in Europe to my knowledge has anything like it," he says. "It is a great pity that the council has not made some kind of a start there in this, European Architectural Heritage Year."

While acknowledging the fact that the council has allocated £2,500 for the cleaning of the canals, George feels that such an allocation is a complete waste and that "it might as well be thrown from the roof of the County Hall." The reason, he says, is because the weirs are badly in need of repair and should be tended to first. "It is like a case of a bridge falling into disrepair and the council carrying out improvements on the roads leading to it," he says.

Like all of his ideas, George's proposals for the mills have been carefully and meticulously



This composite photo shows—LEFT—entry lock controlling the 5 miles of the Lee and BELOW—pointing to a pile of powder on a base (hall) entrance gate to the Powder Mills.

STORY BY JOHN DRISLAN

worked out and to his mind they are perfectly feasible. He does not advocate the restoration to working order of the whole mills: just as sufficient a portion as necessary to demonstrate the process by which gunpowder was manufactured. An exhibition of agricultural machinery and other obsolete equipment would prove a great attraction he feels as many such items have never been seen by the younger generation. Some of the 60-odd buildings could be restored and made suitable for use as workshops by people engaged in arts and crafts.

"It would get the tourist traffic from Blarney to Killarney since the western entrance lies on that road, and it would also get the traffic from Cork to Killarney since the eastern entrance is on that road," George points out.

All these proposals came before the rather obscure National Monuments' Advisory Committee of Cork County Council in August of this year, and it is unlikely that there will be any further news about the council's attitude until the next meeting of that committee. It is not wholly irrelevant, perhaps, to point out here that prior to the meeting in August, the National Monuments' Advisory Committee had not met for 1½ years.

Looking at the mills to-day in their state of forlorn decay, it is hard to imagine that here was once the work-place of 200 people, many of whom lived with their families in nearby cottage-rows: here was where sturdy dray-horses pulled transport barges along winding canals day in and day out; here was a hive of activity where for over 100 years gunpowder was produced for the British Empire, some-

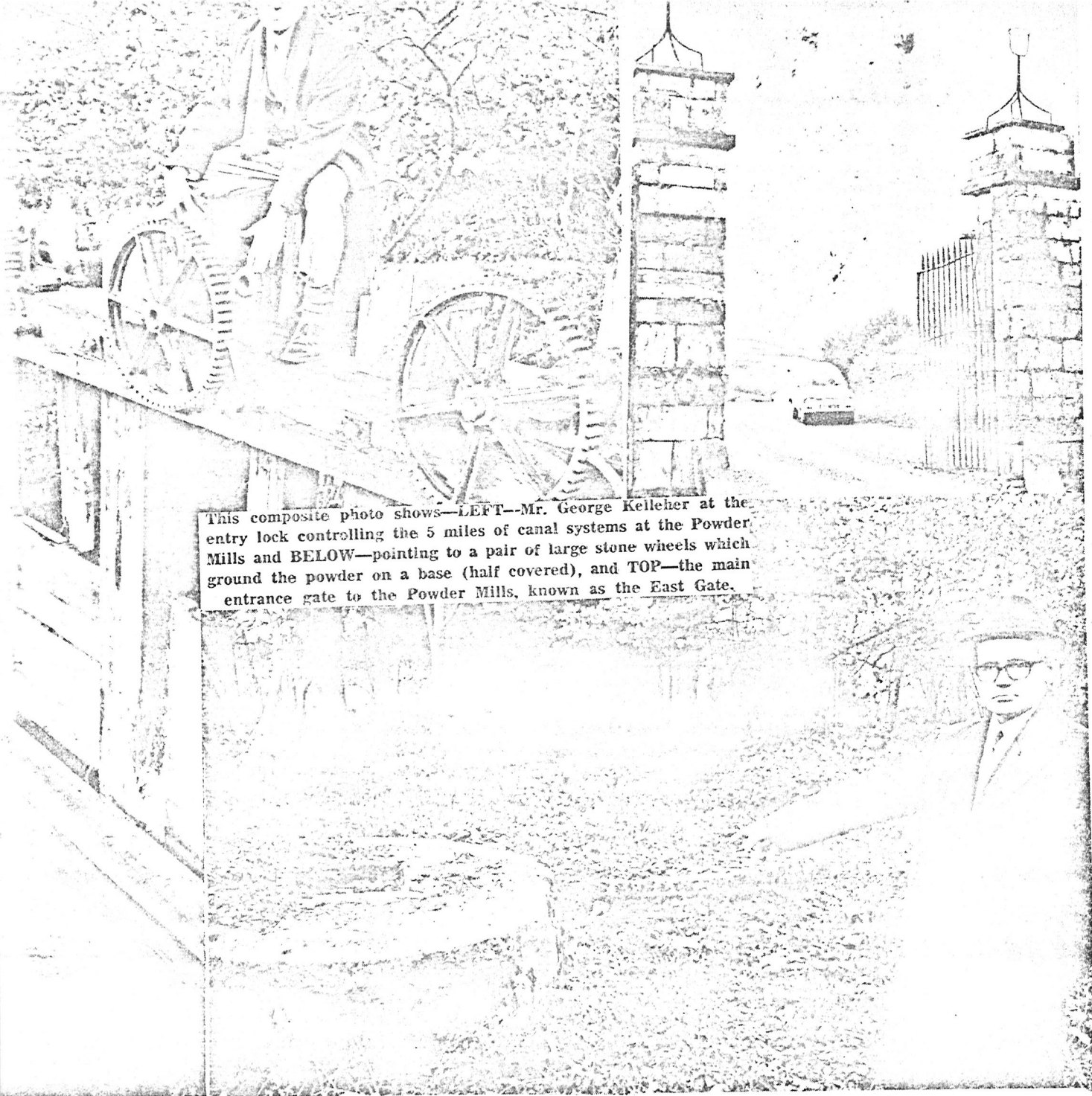
times at the rate of 30,000 barrels

WERE BUILT

It was in 1794, at the height of the wars, that the mills were built. At this time the British War Office had forty Martello towers around the coast for defence against Napoleon, and a fine specimen still exists at Ballincollig. The charcoal for the gunpowder was manufactured from alder trees planted on the surrounding marshland, and the finished powder was stored in a magazine at Ringaskiddy, before being shipped to the British colonies in West Africa and the East Indies.

Later, the British War Office transferred the property to private enterprise, and ceased production at the time of the First World War. The last company which occupied the buildings was eventually taken over by the I.C.I. corporation. The property was sold to the Department of Defence, and although it was not until February, 1971 that Cork County Council began negotiating with the Department, it did not come into the council's possession until April 1974.

With all the talk to-day about the mills as a "satellite town," the position seems somewhat incongruous. Much of the open spaces in the vicinity of the mills are being eaten up as the huge housing scheme is fulfilled, and this development is being watched by George Kelleher.



This composite photo shows—LEFT—Mr. George Kelleher at the entry lock controlling the 5 miles of canal systems at the Powder Mills and BELOW—pointing to a pair of large stone wheels which ground the powder on a base (half covered), and TOP—the main entrance gate to the Powder Mills, known as the East Gate.

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WERE BUILT

It was in 1794, at the height of the Napoleonic wars, that the mills were built. Also around this time the British War Office constructed forty Martello towers around the country for defence against Napoleon, and a particularly fine specimen still exists at Belveilly, Cobh). The charcoal for the gunpowder was manufactured from alder trees planted in the surrounding marshland, and the finished product was stored in a magazine at Rocky Island, Ringaskiddy, before being shipped out to the British colonies in West Africa and other markets

Later, the British War Office sold the property to private enterprise, and the mills ceased production at the time of the Boer War. The last company which actually occupied the buildings was eventually absorbed into the I.C.I. corporation. Then, in 1949, the property was sold to the Department of Defence, and although it was announced in February, 1971 that Cork County Council was negotiating with the Department, the property did not come into the council's hands until April 1974.

With all the talk to-day about Ballincollig as a "satellite town," the position of the mills seems somewhat incongruous. More and more open spaces in the vicinity of the mills are being eaten up as the huge housing demand is fulfilled, and this development is being closely watched by George Kelleher.

"If Ballincollig is planned imaginatively and with an eye to the long term future, that is, the next century and the century after, its heritage will become more important than anyone realises," he says. At the present rate of growth and with an inevitably shorter working week in years to come he can foresee a vastly increased demand for recreational outlets. Future housing development, he feels, should be directed towards the south of the town/village rather than towards the open spaces adjacent to the gunpowder mills.

MORE IMPORTANT

"In particular I feel that the large area of land lying west of the Brigading Field, north of the powder mills, and east of Great Island, should be preserved as an open space," he says.

After all his submissions to and dealings with the County Council on the matter, George remains confident about the future of the mills. "I believe that the County Council, which has shown remarkable initiative in other fields, will come to realise the value of the unique asset which it possesses at Ballincollig and will develop it accordingly."

A lot of water may have to flow over the Inniscarra weirs first, but maybe some day the dream will come true, and will flock to the Lee valley to see what would be a singular attraction and they'll admire everything about the place and take pictures and spend money. And across the river the man in the straw hat will watch them and smile contentedly.