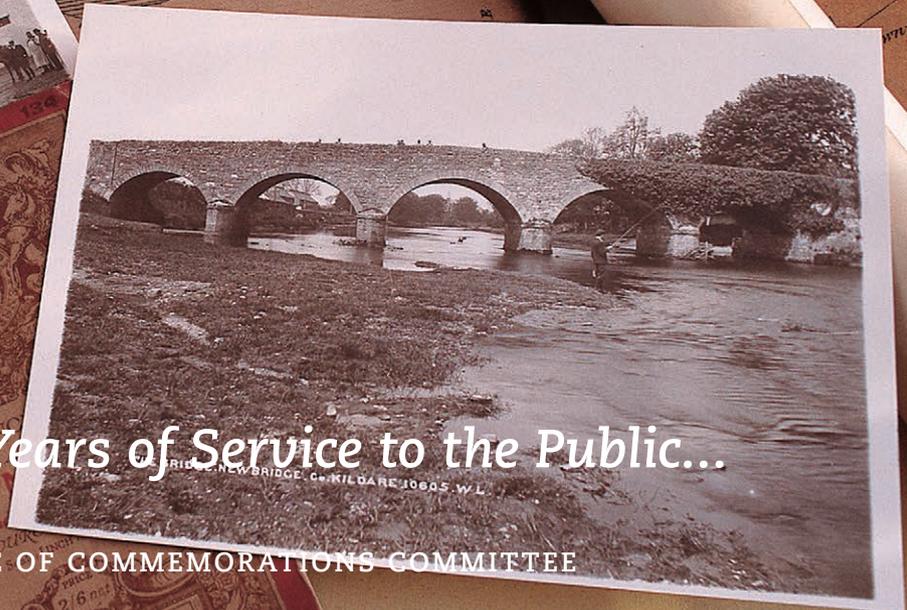




# 1899-2019 FIRST ELECTION AND FIRST MEETING KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

ELEVATION OF THE NEW BRIDGE

Level of Highest Flood  
28 Feet  
Summer Level



Celebrating 120 Years of Service to the Public...

KILDARE DECADE OF COMMEMORATIONS COMMITTEE



**Cllr Seán Power**  
Mayor

Kildare County Council

## MESSAGE FROM CLLR SEÁN POWER, MAYOR, KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

With a proud, unbroken record of democratic decision-making over 120 years, Kildare County Council is preparing for the election of the next council. The 1899 election of a local government should be remembered for clearing a peaceful pathway towards self-determination at the national level. The new democratic entity consolidated County Kildare as a community of people with a cherished sense of identity borne from broader shared experiences. Kildare County Council provided a forum for this community to decide how to serve their local needs. This booklet serves to remind us of the beginnings of the organisation and of the important services that continue to be provided on behalf of the people of the county.





**Peter Carey**

Chief Executive  
Kildare County Council

## MESSAGE FROM PETER CAREY, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

Established to provide local services for health, housing and roads, the roles of Kildare County Council have expanded significantly since 1899. Economic and community planning now frame the range of developments undertaken for the growing population of those living, learning, working and doing business in the county. With climate change and global trade patterns informing our local choices, the democratically-led council cooperates with our citizens, national agencies and international collaborators to deliver key infrastructure, services and social supports for our communities.

As we continue to work to meet future challenges, it is timely to reflect on the efforts and successes of the organisation and its people over a 120-year history. These commemorations remind us of our heritage and provide a context for the legacy that we will shape for future generations of County Kildare.

On behalf of Kildare County Council, I would like to thank the Kildare Decade of Commemorations Committee and Liam Kenny for their contributions towards the publication of this commemorative booklet and historical record.

---

## KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL FORMER CATHAOIRLIGÍ 1899–2019

---

Stephen J. Browne	1899 – 1910	Michael St. Ledger	1970	P.J. Sheridan	1999
Matthew Minch	1911 – 1919	Michael Cunningham	1971	Rainsford Hendy	2000
Domhnall ua Buachalla	1920 – 1922	Andrew Mahon	1972	John O'Neill	2001
Michael Fitzsimons	19023 - 1933	Michael Brady	1973	Jim Reilly	2002
Thomas Harris	1934 – 1941	John McKenna	1974	Michael Fitzpatrick	2003
Michael Smyth	1942 – 1944	Terence Boylan	1975	G.W. Hillis	2004
Thomas Harris	1945 – 1948	John O'Neill	1976	John McGinley	2005
Gerard Sweetman	1949 – 1950	Michael McWey	1977	Fionnuala Dukes	2006
Michael Smyth	1951	Austin Groome	1978	Mary Glennon	2007
Gerard Sweetman	1952	Michael McWey	1979	Senan Griffin	2008
Michael Smyth	1953	Joseph Bermingham	1980	Colm Purcell	2009
A. W. Moore	1954	Patrick Hyland	1981	Brendan Weld	2010
Thomas Carbery	1955	Emmett Stagg	1982	Micheál Nolan	2011
A. W. Moore	1956	Patricia Lawlor	1983	Micheál Nolan	2012
Michael Cunningham	1957– 1958	James O'Loughlin	1984	Mark Wall	2013
James Dowling	1959	Timothy Conway	1985	Fiona O'Loughlin	2014
Michael Cunningham	1960	Bernard Durkan	1986	Brendan Weld	2015
Terence Boylan	1961–1962	Gerard Brady	1987	Ivan Keatley	2016
Michael St. Ledger	1963	Michael McWey	1988	Martin Miley Jnr.	2017
Michael Cunningham	1964	James O'Loughlin	1989	Seán Power	2018
Terence Boylan	1965	James Gallagher	1990		
James Dowling	1966	James O'Loughlin	1991		
Michael Cunningham	1967	Michael McWey	1992		
Terence Boylan	1968	John O'Neill	1993		
James Dowling	1969	Michael Nolan	1994		
		Seán Ó'Feargháil	1995		
		Seán Reilly	1996		
		Liam Doyle	1997		
		Jim Reilly	1998		



**Cllr Pádraig McEvoy**

Chairman, County Kildare  
Decade of Commemorations  
Committee

## MESSAGE FROM CLLR PÁDRAIG MCEVOY, CHAIRPERSON OF THE DECADE OF COMMEMORATIONS COMMITTEE

With the conclusion of the 2014-2019 term of Kildare County Council, the County Kildare Decade of Commemorations Committee decided to mark the origins of democratic government at a local level. From the outset, the committee was mandated to support the creation of a legacy of research for future generations and to offer leadership guided by the values of inclusiveness and sensitivity. This publication bookends the story of the inaugural elected members in County Kildare with the record of the current council. It would not have been possible without the generous support of local historians, officials and the wider public. On behalf of the committee, I thank all involved for their contributions.

6 and 7 Wm. 4, cap. 116, sec. 52. 33 To Michael Durgle, of Blackhill, to build a gullet and charge the fence at Mr. Burtle's house at Blackhill, on the road from Kill to Blackchurch, .. 0 1 0

6 and 7 Wm. 4, cap. 116, sec. 52. 36 To [unclear] to provide and set two sewer grates in the village of Kill, opposite Mr. Ard's home [unclear] 1 5 0

*6.17 Mr. H  
Cap. 116  
Sec. 52*

*Existing Contracts, 400  
Terms applied for, 100  
[unclear] 500 11 7  
[unclear] 8 10 11*

3 years, Summer Session, 1878.

6 and 7 Wm. 4, cap. 116, sec. 52. 1 To Joseph McGrath, of Blackhill, to stone 650 perches of the road from Ballymore to Balinglas, between Henry Dunne's and the County bounds, including footpaths and paved channels, 1s per perch. Philip Brady and James Keegan, sureties, 6th half-year, .. 16 5 0

6 and 7 Wm. 4, cap. 116, sec. 52. 2 To Edward Kelly, of Mullinah, to repair 1000 perches of the road from Kiltash to Hillside, 5d per perch. Michael Kelly and Christopher Williams, sureties, 6th half-year, .. 10 8 4

6 and 7 Wm. 4, cap. 116, sec. 52. 3 To Edward Mangan, of Annullinstown, to repair 700 perches of the road between Two-mile-House and the Watch House, 8d per perch (cash). Patrick Mangan and Patrick Bolger, sureties, 6th half-year, ..

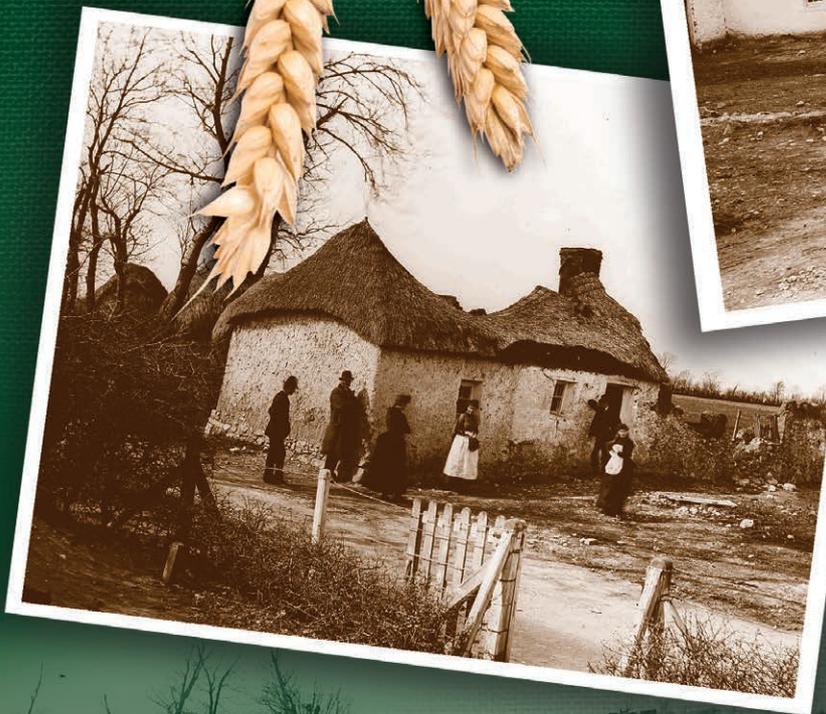


# 1899–2019 FIRST ELECTION AND FIRST MEETING KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

The year 1899 marked both an ending and a beginning. It was the end of a century which had seen Ireland convulsed by famine and agitation; a century which witnessed the mobilisation of campaigns for religious toleration, land distribution and national aspiration under the leadership of figures such as O'Connell, Parnell & Davitt.

Kildare had not escaped from the impact of such influences. True, the famine did not strike with the same ravaging intensity as in the poorer counties of the west but it had taken its toll. the county's population was on a downward slide and at the turn of 19th century was barely half of its pre-Famine figure.





**The Clongorey Evictions**  
In November 1886 the river Liffey flooded downstream of Newbridge, destroying crops and turf in the Clongorey area. The tenants could not pay the rent. In 1887 there was a drought which resulted in turf not being saved as turf needs moisture to stick together. The tenants sought a rent reduction from their landlord Mr Mansfield. A reduction was given but it was not enough. The tenants were facing ruin.

---

## THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1898

---

The political mobilisation of land and nationalist agitation in the nineteenth century did not affect Kildare with the militancy seen in other parts. Yet the County's legacy of its leading role in the 1798 Rebellion had not been forgotten. And on the agrarian front the Clongorey Evictions which had seen upwards of fifty households evicted from their holdings near Newbridge in the early 1890s still touched a raw nerve.

It was against this background that the Westminster parliament translated a scheme for local government to Ireland, and for our purposes, to Kildare. The 1898 Local Government (Ireland) Act was an extraordinary comprehensive piece of legislation which established the basis for the network of county councils which has remained a strikingly consistent feature of the map of Ireland.

The Act achieved breakthroughs on many fronts. It extended the right of voting in local government elections to all householders and, for the first time, opened up the vote to women. It was not a perfect franchise; women, for instance, had to be heads of household.

However the extension of the franchise to all householders gave 'ordinary' people the right to participate for the first time in choosing their own representatives.

In organisational terms the 1898 Act redrew the local authority map of County Kildare. The Grand Jury— an elite body which had run county business for almost three centuries— and its subsidiary Baronies were erased as units of local government. They were replaced by the county Councils and its dependent Rural District Councils.

Similarly the Board of Guardian districts based on the workhouses at Athy, Celbridge and Naas were merged into the newly created Rural District Councils for sanitation and housing purposes although the Guardians remained in place for health and welfare functions. The Guardians who had been set up as poor relief authorities in the years before the Great Famine had opened the door to participation in local democracy; while property ownership was a qualification to vote for them they at least had allowed some middle-class farmers and business people to come through into public life.

However their role as a forum for local democracy was to prove minor compared to the excitement generated by the advent of the county and rural district councils where, for the first time, every household in the county had a stake in choosing its local representatives.

From the first weeks of 1899 electioneering was in full flight. Elections for the town commissions in Athy, Naas and Newbridge were set for January of that year. Thus the political fires were being stoked in the first few weeks of the year well in advance on the county-wide poll for the County Council and Rural Districts Council scheduled for April.

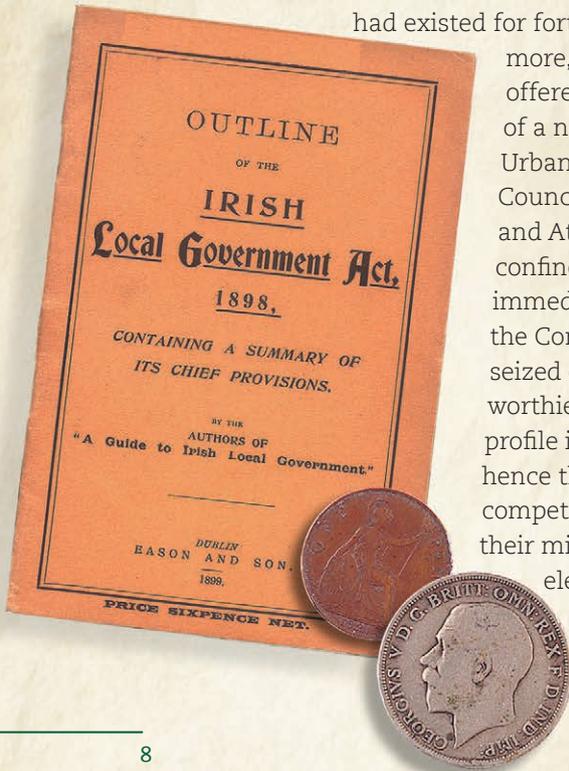
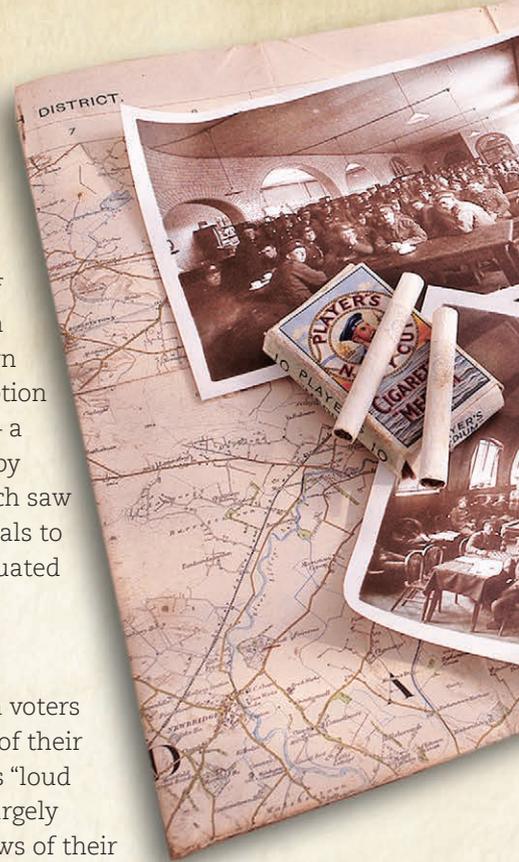
The commissions were town councils which had existed for forty years or more, the 1898 act offered the prospect of a new status as Urban District Councils in Naas and Athy. Although confined to the immediate town areas the Commissions were seized on by local worthies aiming for a profile in the county; hence the competitive nature of their mid-winter election contests.

The *Kildare Observer* newspaper headlined a report of a raucous re-election meeting in Naas Town Hall with the description “Laughable Scenes” – a description merited by the proceedings which saw the candidates’ appeals to the electorate punctuated by jeers and heckles.

What the newly enfranchised women voters of the town thought of their reaction described as “loud laughter” from the largely male audience to news of their addition to the voters list is not recorded!

In Athy, interest was equally vibrant, 565 out of a possible 745 voters cast their Town Commissions ballots on January 10 putting Matthew H. J. Minch of the well known grain merchant family at the head of the poll: his name was to loom large in county council circles in subsequent years.

The ink was barely dry on the town council election proclamations when the County Council contest started in earnest. And if the political pundits of Kildare in 1899 thought they had their fill with the municipal elections it was to prove minor compared to the bitter battles contested in the most public way possible by the rival candidates from the northern to the southern districts of Kildare.





As a local commentator observed:  
*'The taste of power which the electorate have observed in the construction of the municipal bodies according to their own desires has helped to whet their appetite for the further display of that power. The time is drawing nigh when they will be called on to construct the more important bodies— County and District Councils.'*

Certainly the electors had no shortage of information about the candidates as the *Leinster Leader* of February and March 1899 carried columns of advertisements from the candidates appealing to their sympathies. The notices revealed the contention between the Unionists, almost to a man members of the country gentry, and the Home Rulers, who were, in the main, middle-class farmers or town based merchants. But the dividing lines were not always clear; not all gentry were Unionists.

The Parish Priest of Ballymore Eustace, Fr H. McCarthy eulogised Mr George Wolfe 'the scion of grand old historic family in the land' as having emblazoned the spirit of Home Rule on his manifesto.

The fact that Wolfe also supported 'a Catholic University for the Catholic education of a Catholic people' was no doubt the primary source of the clergyman's enthusiasm but the endorsement highlighted another facet of the 1899 elections- the pervasive involvement of the Catholic clergy in the contest.

Banned from taking part in the election by a clause inserted into the 1898 Local Government Act to placate the Unionist population, the clergy ensured that their influence was felt.

In Athy Fr Rowan chaired a selection meeting for candidates for the town's rural hinterland while in Monastervin the Parish Priest Fr. Kavanagh, went into print to support the candidacy of Mr. Edward J. Cassidy, the owner of a big distillery in the town.

Some Unionists like Cooke-Trench of Millicent were given enthusiastic support in their localities – to quote from a *Leinster Leader* report of a meeting in Clane: "the Clane Electors... will support him not as a politician but as one of the ablest of the minority to whom it is expedient to give representation".

On the other side of the political spectrum the Home Rulers were often a house divided: and there were voices for the labour movement even if there was no party of that name.

Such competing agendas led to a heady political atmosphere with candidates pressing their claims through the public notices of two newspapers in the county.

---

## ELECTION BROADSIDES

---

*Edward Delaney of Feighcullen advertised his appeal to the electorate of Kilmeague as follows –*  
“I offer myself as a County Councillor for your decision. You know my politics since the good old days of the Land League.”

*Hendrick Aylmer of Kerdiffstown House near Naas hedged his bets in a appeal to the voters of the Kill Electoral division –*  
“As a large farmer and employer of labour I shall strive to improve the condition of theses classes - so far as is consistent with the welfare of the rest of the community.”

*William Smith of Carbury made his pitch to ‘The Free and Independent Electors’ of north-west Kildare as follows –*  
“My political opinions on all national questions are now and always have been– Home Rule, a Catholic University, a complete Land Purchase system – and the release of all prisoners convicted of political offences.”

*Charles Greene of Kilkea was modest in his message to the voters of County Kildare –* “Having passed most of my life amongst you I need not say much about my political opinions as they are well known.”

*Peter Timmons of Monastervin knew where the priorities lay for the county council voters of the Barrowside town –* “The heavy taxes on tea, on the cheaper kind of tobacco and beer, should be taken off in the interest of the labourers.”

*Baron de Robeck of Gowran Grange near Punchestown hoped that familiarity would breed support –* “I address you as an old friend, being settled amongst you for some fifty years.”

Such modest proposals however were often overshadowed by bitter head-to-head contests in a number of electoral areas with the local newspapers abandoning any editorial objectivity to give explicit advice to the voters.

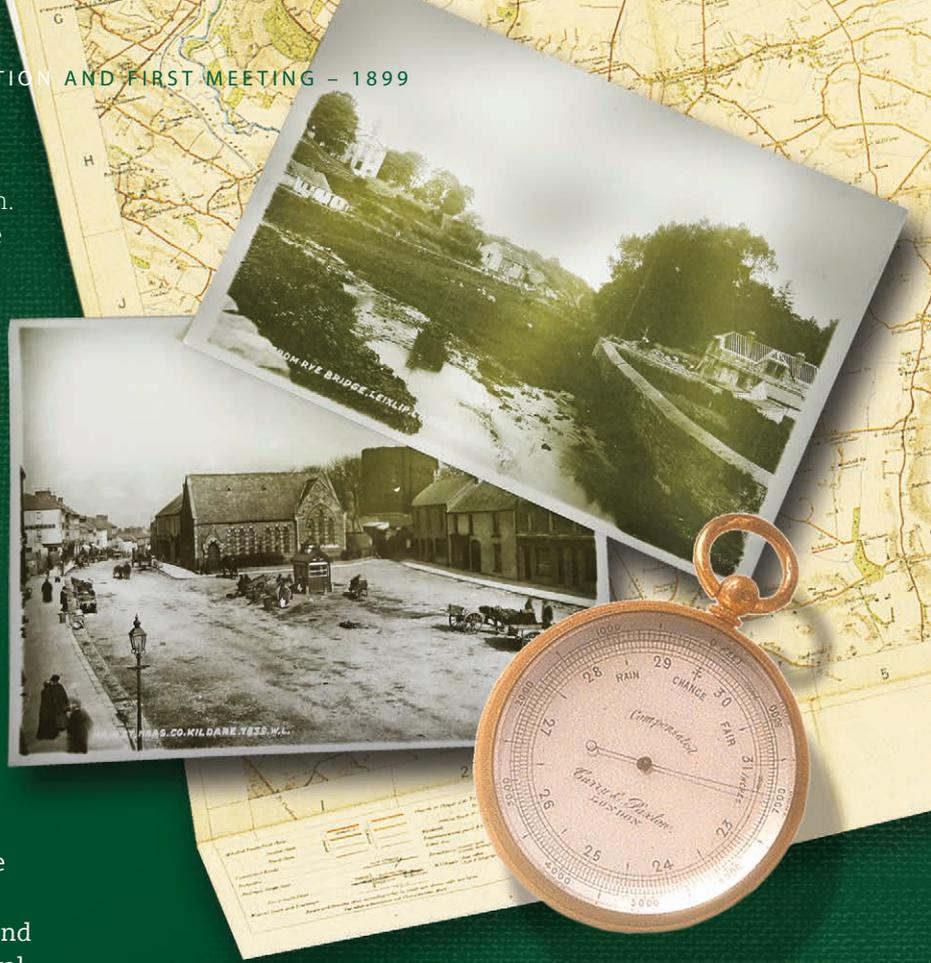
*The Leinster Leader had this to say about the contest in the north Kildare.* “Mr James Cummins of Windgates.. has the temerity to pit himself against Mr John Field of Kilcock, the chosen candidate of a daily converted public meeting recently held in Rathcoffey.”

## FIRST ELECTION AND FIRST MEETING – 1899

Things were also hotting up in Maynooth. A meeting called to endorse the candidature of Mr Ronaldson was broken up by “a howling mob, whose most conspicuous features were turmoil, disorder and drunkenness.” The fact that the meeting took place on St. Patrick’s Day, 1899 may explain the latter vice, as the rival candidate, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald of the great Carton family, was absolved from involvement in what the writer declared was a ‘disgrace and blot on the fair name of Maynooth.’

Monastervin too had a near brush with electioneering excesses with supporters of the rival candidates, Dowling and Cassidy, contesting ground. The *Kildare Observer* report noted: “Those best informed attribute the ultimate outbreak of hostilities to a narrow section, who having seized control of the local fife and drum band - originally established on neutral lines - refused to allow this band to attend the meeting at Kildangan, which on this occasion, was in favour of Mr Cassidy. This was the first genuine Irish row witnessed in Monastervin for a considerable number of years.”

Punctuated by such drama the build-up to the county’s first democratic local elections moved to its April climax. Fortunately the date of election had been fixed for the week before Punchestown week – otherwise the attentions of Kildare voters might have been diverted from their democratic duty.

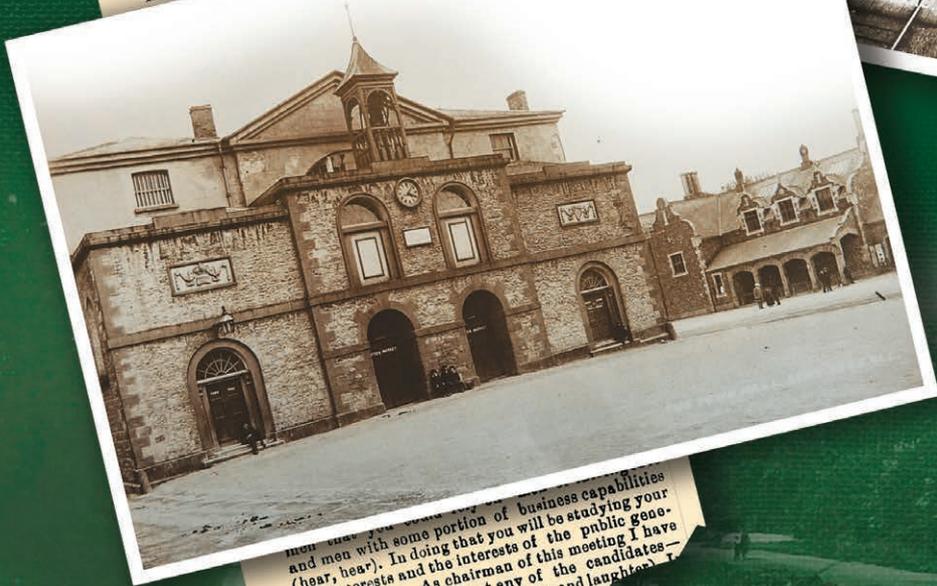
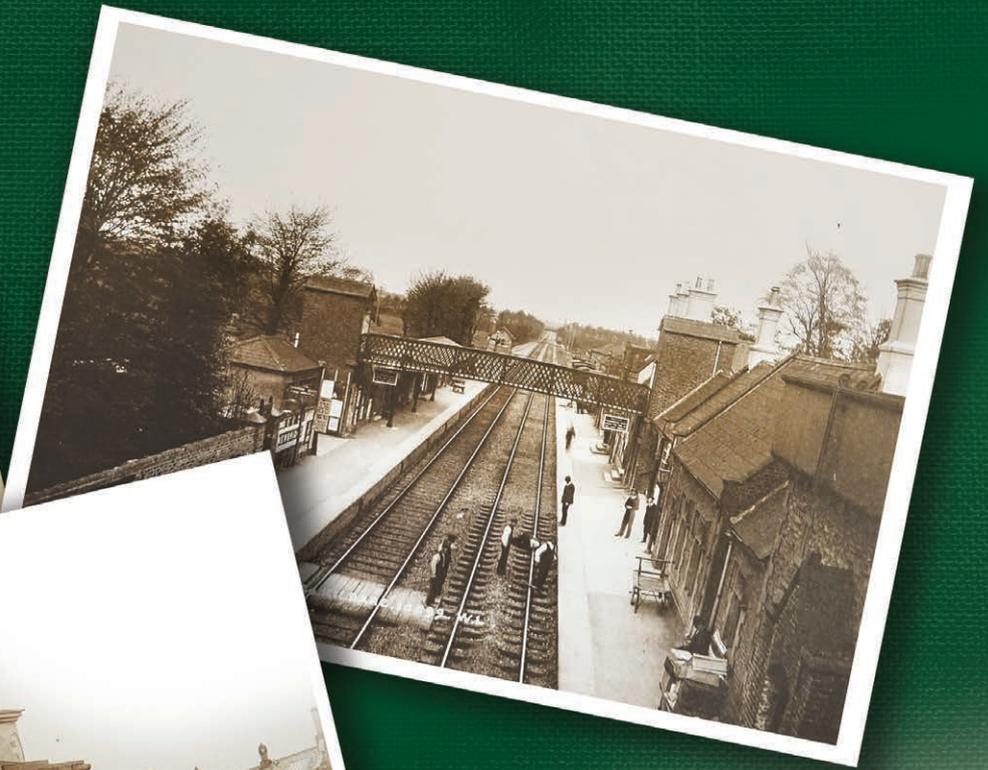


## COMING ELECTIONS.

REPRESENTATION OF NAAS DISTRICT  
ELECTORAL DIVISION.

MORE SELECTIONS AND CONFUSION.  
SUNDAY'S MEETING A FIASCO.

A meeting was held in the Town Hall, Naas, on Sunday evening in connection with the representation of Naas district electoral division. According to announcement the meeting was called "to decide upon the candidates worthy of support for the representation of Naas on the District Council and to pledge the electors to cast no vote in favour of the enemies of the people." There was the usual big crowd present, mostly composed of non-voters and persons who merely came "to see the fun" for something better to do. Of the eight candidates nominated for the district, only three were present—viz, Messrs N J Flanagan, J E Butterfield, and J Robinson. Prominent besides the candidates were Messrs Wm Staples, O T C; James Kennedy, and Denis Donohoe, John Turner, M Walsh. "The



men that you will be studying your business capabilities and men with some portion of business capabilities (hear, hear). In doing that you will be studying your own interests and the interests of the public generally at large. As chairman of this meeting I have not a word to say against any of the candidates—they are all good men (hear, hear and laughter). I have no much for them, it will be for

---

## GOING TO THE POLLS

---

*A* part from the political propaganda, the Kildare electorate benefited from a public information campaign run in the press to educate them on the detail of exercising their new found franchise, the material yielded such as:

“...anyone who is not quite sure of his ability to avoid serious mistakes that may lead to a waste of his vote should not be ashamed to consult those who are better informed. It is no disgrace to be unacquainted with the regulations of a new and unworked system.”

The electorate of Kildare went to the polls on 6 April with the polling stations opened from 10am to 8pm. There was potential for confusion in that every sector was voting for at least two local government bodies– the County Council and the relevant Rural District Council. However the authorities had got around the problem by an innovation described as ‘colour voting’ with voters being given different colour ballot pages; white for the county council elections and yellow for the district councils.

The votes were counted in Naas Courthouse on the following day under the supervision of Mr Charles Daly, Sub-Sheriff and Returning Officer. News of the results spread on the telegraph wires to the furthest points of the county. In the north-west extremity of the county the Broadford Fife and Drum Band took to the roads of Carbury to celebrate the election of Mr More O’Ferrall.

The bonfires blazed also in Monastervin where Mr Cassidy’s success was feted with banners such as ‘Cassidy our Councillor’ and ‘Cassidy for Ever’ being displayed across the Street. A grateful Mr Cassidy rewarded such enthusiastic support by presenting his distillery workmen with a new set of instruments for their band!

In the neighbouring town of Kildare Mr John Heffernan’s election sparked rejoicing. The inevitable fife and drum band was in action there too and the crowd stopped outside Mr Heffernan’s house to hear him addressing his victory speech from an upstairs window.

In Naas where one of the most bitter contests had taken place the victorious Stephen J. Browne was chaired through the streets in a torchlight procession, his vanquished competitor Thomas J. de Burgh was left to lick his electoral wounds in his estate in Oldtown.

His rejection must have been all the more severe when he read that another member of the county aristocracy Lord Frederick Fitzgerald, had been elected despite questions about his commitment to Irish aspirations. Such reservations were put aside by the populace of the town on his election for the Maynooth and Leixlip electoral division of the County council.

He was met in Maynooth by a brass band and amid scenes 'of wild enthusiasm was carried to his carriage outside where a procession was formed... and escorted all the way to Carton. The crowd cheering vociferously.'

However such excitement regarding the elections was to be short-lived and indeed never quite repeated for any subsequent county council election. The electioneering for the first democratic local elections was now over. It was time to get down to the gritty business of convening the first council meeting and getting to work on the many roads, sanitation, housing and health issues which were confronting the county.



## WHERE TO VOTE.

### LIST OF POLLING STATIONS.

The following are the polling stations for the various county and district electoral divisions of the County Kildare :—

**Naas County and District Divisions.**—  
 Electors for registration unit of Naas Urban will vote at Town Hall, Naas, as follows :—  
 Nos 1 (Denis Ardagh) up to and including 310 (Simon Maguire) will vote at the booth No 1 at right hand side of Town Hall ; Nos 311 (John Maher) to end of list, including lodgers, and those on the Local Government Board Supplement will vote at booth No 2 at left hand side of Town Hall.

**County Division of Kilmegane.**—Electors for the registration units of Kilmegane North, Kilmegane South, and Rathernan will vote at School House, Kilmegane ; ditto Kilpatrick, O'loncurry, and Lullymore will vote at National School, Barnaran.

**District Division of Nurney.**—Electors for above-named district electoral division will vote at the school house, Nurney.

**District Division of Kilberry.**—Electors for the above district electoral division will vote at the school house, Bert.

**County Division of Maynooth.**—Electors for the registration unit of Leixlip will vote at the band room (Leixlip); ditto Maynooth will vote at the Town Hall (Old Courthouse) Maynooth.

**County Division of Morrinstownbiller.**—  
 Voters for the following registration units will vote at the mugs rotunda, Morrinstownbiller House, Newbridge.

**Kilcullen County and District Divisions.**—  
 Electors for the Registration units of Kilcullen and Giltown will vote at Courthouse, Kilcullen ditto Inchaquire and Usk will vote at Ballymonnt National Schools.

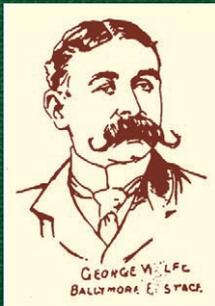
**Ballitore County Division and Kilkea District Division.**—Electors for the registration units of Ballitore and Narraghmore will vote at Mr Edward Lalor's house, Ballitore ditto Burtown and Moone will vote at Moone School ; ditto Grangemellon and Kilkea will vote at Ballyroos Schoolhouse.

**Castledermot County and Kilkea District Divisions.**—Electors for the registration units of Ballaghmoon, Dunnanogue, Belan, and Johnstown will vote at the National Schools, Castledermot ; ditto unit of National dermot will vote at the Courthouse, Castledermot ; ditto units of Graney and Carrigeen will vote at Ballyraggan National Schools.

**Clane County Division, Clane and Downings District Divisions.**—Electors for the registration units of Clane and Downings will vote at the Courthouse, Clane ; ditto Donore and Robertstown will vote at Courthouse, Robertstown.

**Monasterevan County Division, District Divisions of Ballybrackin and Monasterevan.**—  
 Electors for the registration units of Ballybrackin will vote at the Courthouse, Ballybrackin.

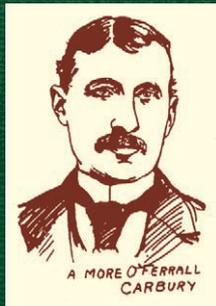




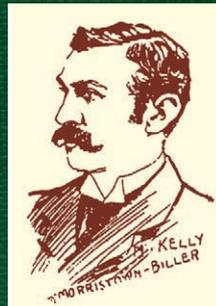
George Wolfe,  
Ballymore Eustace



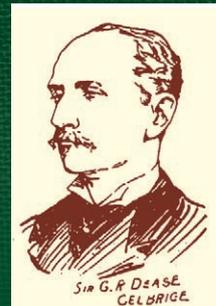
Francis Colgan  
Timahoe



A.R. More O'Ferrall, DE  
Carbury



James Kelly  
Morrinstownbiller



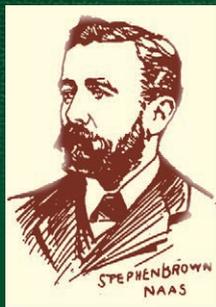
Sir Gerald R. Dease, JP  
Celbridge



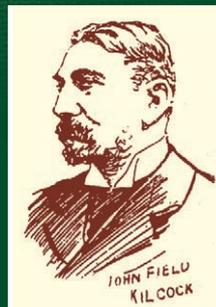
Charles J. Bergin,  
Kildare



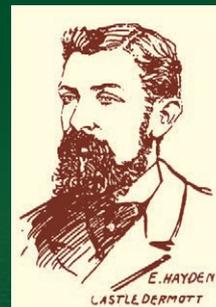
Matthew J. Minch, MP, JP  
Athy



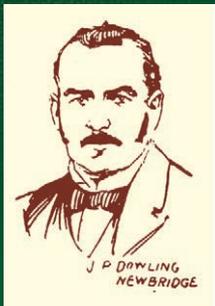
Stephen J. Browne  
Naas



John Field  
Kilcock



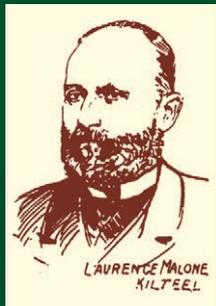
Edward Heyden  
Castledermot



J. P. Dowling  
Newbridge



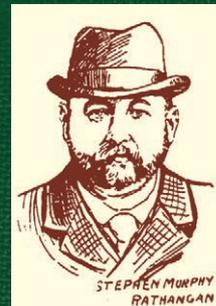
Owen Cogan,  
Ballitore



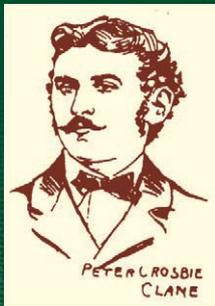
Lawrence Malone  
Killeel



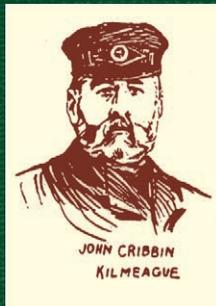
Lord Frederick FitzGerald  
Maynooth



Stephen Murphy  
Rathangan



Peter Crosbie  
Clane



John Cribbin  
Kilmeague

---

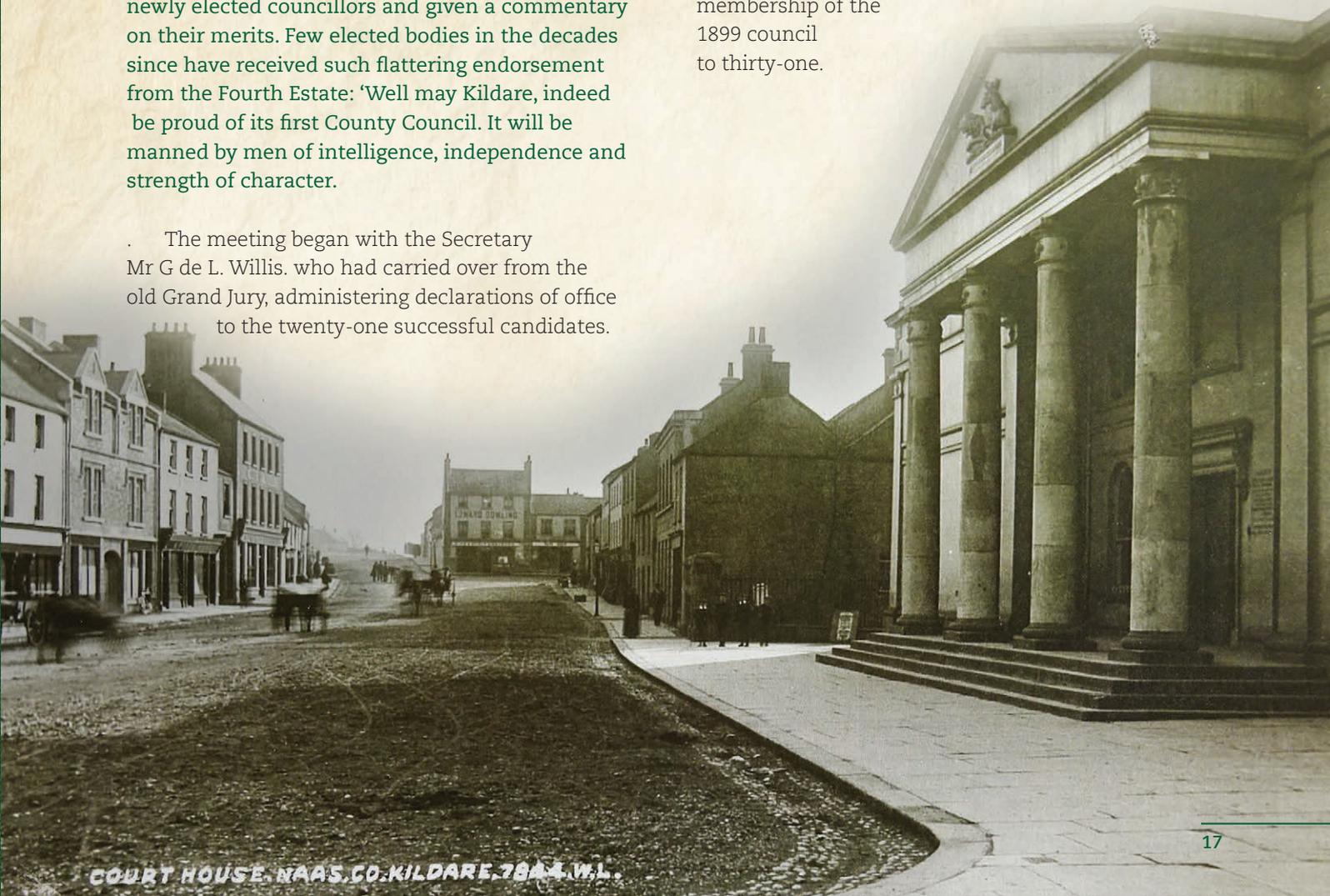
## FIRST MEETING, 22 APRIL 1899

---

The first meeting of Kildare County Council took place in the Courthouse, Naas at 11 o'clock on 22 April 1899. A small group of people gathered at the courthouse steps to witness the arrival of the newly-elected councillors. Recognising the historic nature of the occasion the *Leinster Leader* commissioned portraits of the newly elected councillors and given a commentary on their merits. Few elected bodies in the decades since have received such flattering endorsement from the Fourth Estate: 'Well may Kildare, indeed be proud of its first County Council. It will be manned by men of intelligence, independence and strength of character.

The meeting began with the Secretary Mr G de L. Willis, who had carried over from the old Grand Jury, administering declarations of office to the twenty-one successful candidates.

However the peculiarities of the first council did not stop there: under the Local Government Act the chairs of the five subsidiary District Councils were entitled to *ex officio* membership as were three nominees from the defunct Grand Jury. And the Council also had the power to co-opt two further members thus bringing the total membership of the 1899 council to thirty-one.



The first meeting lasted seven hours by which time a vast amount of business relating to the establishment of the new council was transacted. Obviously most interest centered on the elevation of the first chairman of the County Council.

And true to the political character of the new body there was a contest between Edward Fenelon of Kilcullen and Stephen J. Brown of Naas. The roll call vote was not without its tensions. According to an eye witness:

'For the first five minutes the voting was pretty equal but as the list of members was gone through the number for Mr Brown steadily increased, until at the close he had secured double as many as the opponent.'

So incensed was the defeated candidate that he refused the offer of the vice-chair position.

The political tone of the meeting continued with the first resolution adopted by the new Kildare County Council carrying the following message:-

'That we affirm the right of the Irish Nation to a full measure of self Government. We accept the Local Government Act of 1898 as a first installment of the same, and call on the Imperial Parliament to proceed with further restitution of our rights.'

Mr Mansfield of Newbridge voted against and several of the 'old guard' such as Mr Medlicott of Kildare and Sir Gerald Dease of Celbridge abstained but the motion was carried overwhelmingly setting the Home Rule tone of the council for many years to come.

Three other motions standard to all of the new councils and relating to the demand for a Catholic University, the over taxation of Ireland, and the excessive freight charges imposed by the railway companies were passed before the more practical business of that first meeting continued.



Personnel and finance are the twin essentials of any new organisation and the new Kildare councillors had to make immediate arrangements. The Council was over £1,000 in debt from its first day and the overdraft facilities were approved with the Hibernian Bank in Naas.

Committees were appointed to investigate staff and financial requirements while the first real county business was to assess a detailed roads programme put forward by Mr Glover, the long-serving County Surveyor, who noted that there was 1,131 miles of road in the county of which 24 miles could be classified as mail coach roads.

But among the minutiae of committee business, the coroner's salary and courthouse accommodation a rare note revealing the human background to the new experiment in local government broke through the dry record of the minute books. The Secretary read a letter from the Celbridge Board of Guardians recommending that the County Council seek support for giving relief to Kate Tyrrell of Saggart, a woman who presumably had fallen on hard times. Administrative reality precluded any note of compassion and the Secretary was instructed to reply that the council could take no action because the applicant was outside the bounds of the new county administration.

However welfare matter within the county did feature on the agenda of that first meeting when Cllr John Heffernan of Kildare town asked the council to discuss with the Trustees of the Duke of Leinster the re-opening of the county infirmary in the town.

Another plan which dominated the minutes of the early meetings was to convert the abandoned county jail in Naas into a county asylum as an alternative to sending Kildare people to Carlow. This proposal was never realised.

Both of these issues are representative of the topics of practical local administration which occupied the business of the County Council once the atmosphere cooled in the council chamber following the elections. The agendas for the remainder of 1899 are taken up with discussions on the terms and conditions of the council's staff (who were appointed by vote of the councillor's): with responding to demands from the rural district councils for road funds, and with considering appointments to new agricultural and technical committees.

The Council also supported the formation of the General Council of County Councils, a nationwide network of the newly formed councils, and was represented at its inauguration in Dublin by Cllr John Heffernan.

Much of the detailed work was carried out by the district councils who had first-hand responsibility for road maintenance, for water supplies and for housing. However inevitably the demand for funds was routed through the County Council which had to make provision in the rates demand which it calculated each year.

In this way the newly elected council settled down to the unspectacular but essential work of providing the people of Kildare with the services and facilities that would equip them to face a new century.

---

## EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF AN EARLY MEETING – MAY 1899 COURTHOUSE , NAAS.

---

*From the Kildare Observer, 3 June 1899*

‘The Council chamber is by no means an imposing one, but it is sufficient for the purpose of county legislation. At the head of a long table covered with green baize on which are placed pens, ink, paper, etc. sit the Chairman Mr Stephen J. Brown (Naas). Conspicuous on his right side sits Sir Gerald R. Dease, DL, Chairman of the Celbridge Board of Guardians, by whose side is usually to be found Mr John Field (Kilcock), chairman of the Celbridge No.1 District Council, both councillors of sound judgment and of few words.

On the opposite, or the left-hand side of the chairman, are to be seen Mr E. Fenelon (Kilcullen), and Mr J. P. Dowling (Newbridge), who may be recognised by their volubility and willingness to join in every argument.

Nearby, on the same side, the towering figure of Mr George Wolfe (Ballymore Eustace), who is ever ready to display his Home Rule convictions cannot fail to be noticed, while a little lower down on the right (sits) the veteran Grand Juror and nominee of the old body Mr J. E. Medlicott, who at all times evinces a deep interest in the welfare of the county and is deservedly popular with all classes takes his place.



A worthy colleague sits close by in the person of Mr John T. Heffernan, Naas No. 1 District Council, also on the right-hand side, high up near the chairman, the member for South Kildare, Mr M. J. Minch, talks and debates a good deal on all important matters under consideration by the Council. At the end of the table the familiar figures of Mr A. M. O’Ferrall, DL an experienced and capable county administrator, Mr Wm. T. Kirkpatrick, and Mr Mansfield, DL., also experienced men in the county business, find places. Amidst this lower group is to be seen the representative of the Geraldines, Lord Frederick Fitzgerald while also near by is the youthful councillor fresh from Oxford, Mr J. E. Cassidy, Monasterevin.

Mr E. Hayden (Casteldermot) and Mr Owen Cogan (Ballytore) take seats at opposite sides of the table, not necessarily in opposition...while the other members, as follows, sit themselves down where they may at the table and attend, as in duty bound, to the uninteresting yet important duties for which they were elected:-

Mr Laurence Malone (Kilteel), Mr F. Colgan JP (Timahoe,) Mr C. J. Bergin (Kildare), Mr S. Heydon (Churchtown), Mr. James Kelly (Rathbride), Mr Stephen Murphy (Rathangan), Mr Thomas Orford (Athy No.1 ), Mr J. Kelly (Baltinglass No.3), Mr W. R. Ronaldson (Celbridge No.1), Mr Joseph O’Loghlen (Edenderry No.2).



After the reading of the minutes, no small matter when the work of six or seven hours has to be recorded, the secretary of the council brings forward a big pile of correspondence which has to be gone through before the dozen matters on the agenda paper may be considered.

The correspondence and the discussions which ensue on the reading of each document is wearisome work, but the councillors manfully stick it out and console themselves with the fact that they fought manfully at the polls for the privilege of displaying this self-sacrifice.’

---

# MEMBERS OF THE FIRST KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

---

## I. ELECTED COUNCILLORS

**Mathew J. Minch, MP, JP**  
Athy

**Owen Cogan,**  
Ballytore

**George Wolfe,**  
Ballynore Eustace

**A.R. Moore O'Ferrall, DL**  
Carbury

**Edward Hayden,**  
Castledermot

**Sir Gerald R. Dease, JP**  
Celbridge

**Stephen Heydon,**  
Churchtown

**Peter Crosbie,**  
Clane

**James Kelly,**  
Harristown

**John Field,**  
Kilcock

**Edward Fenelon, JP**  
Kilcullen

**Charles J. Bergin,**  
Kildare

**John Cribbin,**  
Kilmeague

**Laurence Malone,**  
Kilteel

**Lord Frederick  
Fitzgerald,**

Maynooth

**Edward J. Cassidy,**  
Monastervin

**James Kelly,**  
Morristownbiller

**Stephen J. Brown,**  
Naas

**J. P. Dowling,**  
Newbridge

**Stephen Murphy,**  
Rathangan

**Francis Colgan,**  
Timahoe

## II. EX-OFFICIO COUNCILLORS CHAIRMEN OF THE RURAL DISTRICTS COUNCILS

**John Heffernan,**  
Naas (No.1 RDC)

**John Kelly**  
Baltinglass (No.2 RDC)

**William Ronaldson**  
Celbridge (No.1 RDC)

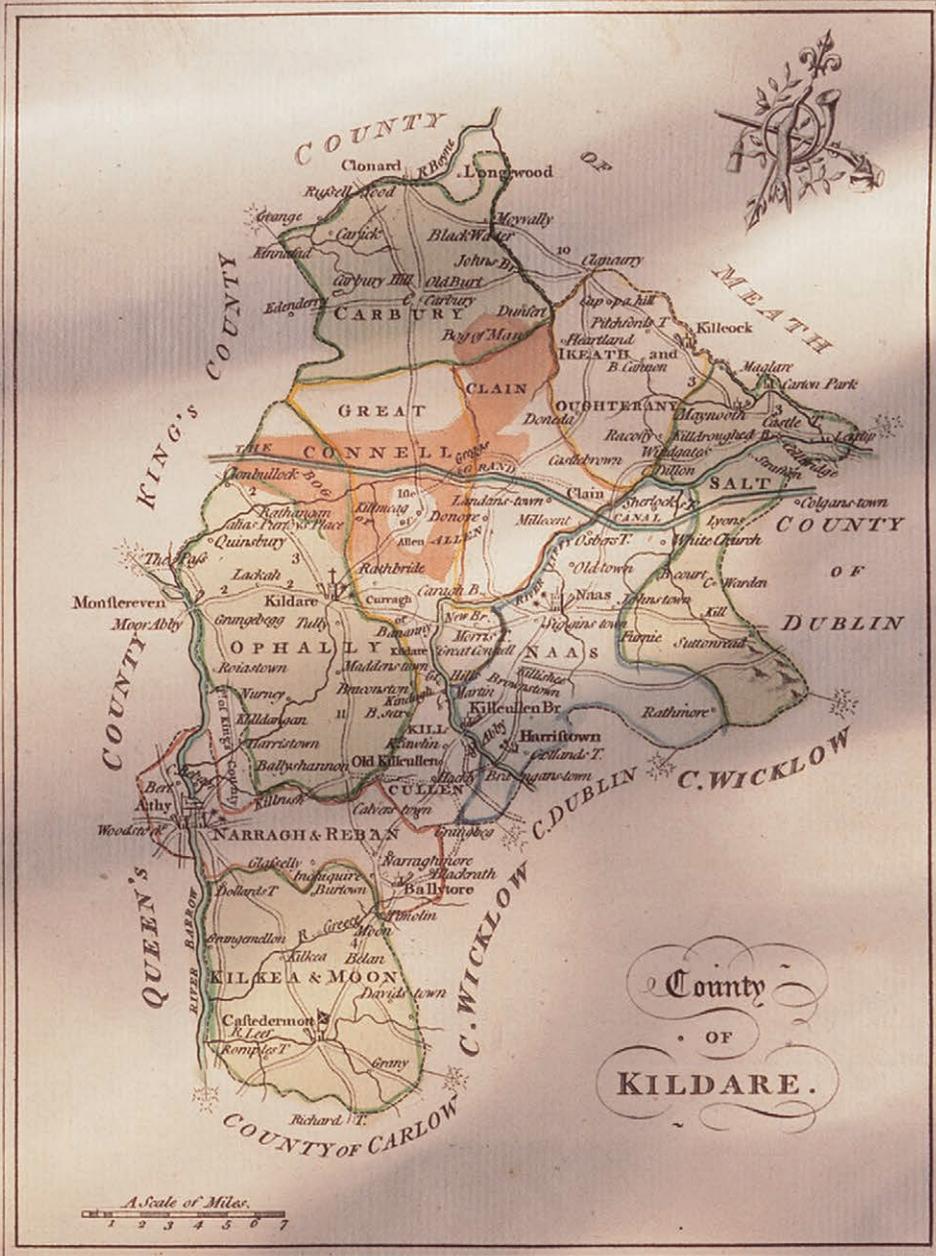
**Thomas Orford**  
Athy (No.1 RDC)

## III. NOMINEES FROM THE OLD GRAND JURY

**James E. Medicott**  
**George Mansfield**  
**William Kirkpatrick**

## IV. CO-OPTED BY THE NEW COUNCIL

**Richard McKenna,**  
Rowanstown  
**Joseph Connolly,**  
Pollardstown



---

## WHO WAS WHO IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN KILDARE FROM 1899

---

### **Kildare County Council**

Responsible for the main roads, courthouses, coroners, agricultural and technical instruction committees, asylum committee and raising funds for the subsidiary rural district council.

### **Rural Districts Councils**

Charged with local roads maintenance, water supply, sanitation and housing. There were five rural District Councils in Kildare: Naas No.1 RDC; Baltinglass No.3 RDC; Edenderry No.2 RDC, Celbridge No.1 RDC; Athy No.1 RDC. The RDCs were abolished in 1925 and their function merged with the County Council.

### **Urban Districts Councils (from 1900)**

Prior to 1900, Athy and Naas Town Commissioners' democratically elected bodies but with little power. From 1900 they became fully fledged local authorities responsible for housing, water and sewerage, markets and fairs, lanes and lighting within the town bounds.

### **Town Commissioners**

Newbridge Town Commission was (and indeed remains) an elected body with few functions although its role in the area of housing was significant. Largely unaffected by the impact of the 1899 reforms.

Later in the 20th century Leixlip had a Town Commission from 1988.

All of the town councils were abolished in 2014.

### **Boards of Guardians**

Responsible for welfare assistance, orphans' and childrens' welfare and workhouses (the latter were increasingly functioning as hospitals). The Guardians had been set up in 1838; their areas of responsibility traversed county boundaries so that the Celbridge Guardians embraced County Dublin areas such as Lucan and Newcastle. Conversely the Edenderry Guardians form their base in Offaly took on the Carbury area of north-west Kildare. The Guardians were abolished in 1922 and their functions transferred to a county health committee which worked under the auspices of the County Councils. Athy workhouse became the County Home, Naas Workhouse was converted to the County Hospital and Celbridge Workhouse was closed.

### **Kildare County Council Elections 1899/2019**

The 1898 Act specified a three year term of office for councillors. This interval was maintained faithfully until the First World War when there was a long gap until 1920 when the election took place mid-way through the War of Independence.

The terms of office were irregular until 1950 when amending legislation specified five-yearly intervals. However national political considerations often intervened to delay democracy at local level and there were increasingly long gaps between local elections. This unsatisfactory situation was rectified when in a referendum in 1999 the Irish public voted constitutional recognition for local government with a maximum interval of five years between elections.

### Kildare County Council Election Years

1899	1974/79
1902/05/08	1984/91
1911/14	1999
1920/25/28	2004
1934	2009
1942/45	2014
1950/55	2019
1960/67	

### Who could Vote

The 1898 legislation removed the property qualifications that had existed for elections to the Poor Law Guardians throughout the 19th Century. However the county council vote was still not a perfect franchise: women could not vote unless they were heads of households. The head of the household restriction was removed in 1918.

### System of Voting

For the first election candidates were voted for by a straight vote system with one seat for each county council electoral division in the county. The now familiar system of Proportional Representation was introduced from the 1920 elections.

### County Kildare- Population in Selected Years

1841	114,488	1971	71,977
1891	70,206	1981	104,122
1901	63,566	1991	122,656
1926	58,028	2002	163,944
1951	66,437	2011	210,312
1961	64,420	2016	222,504

### Snippets from the Minutes: 1910

“That we the Kildare County Council respectfully tender to his Majesty, King George V, Queen Alexandra, and the other members of the Royal Family the expression of our deep sympathy in their great sorrow and hereby record our sense of loss which the Nation has sustained by the death of His Majesty King Edward VII.”

Proposed by the Chairman, Cllr S.J. Brown, seconded by Cllr M. Minch and passed unanimously.

May 1910.

### Snippets from the Minutes : 1913

“That this council heartily congratulate Mr John E. Redmond and the Irish Parliamentary party on the signal victory which they have achieved by the triumphant passage of the Home Rule Bill through the House of Commons, a result which has been brought about by the splendid tactics of the nationalist leaders and the devoted services of their colleagues including our county representatives Messrs O’Connor and Kilbride....”

Proposed by Cllr John Conlon, Seconded by Cllr James Sunderland, and resolved.

February 1913.

---

## PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION INTRODUCED IN 1919 FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

---

Many cherished features of democracy in modern Ireland have their roots in innovations in the local government sector. The opening of the door to franchise for women, for example, in the 1899 local government elections was an important step on the road to full voting rights for women. Another distinctive feature of Ireland's electoral mechanics was also pioneered in the local government sector – namely the voting system known as Proportional Representation. This is where the voter indicates her or his choice of candidate by ranking the candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference. This has the effect of ensuring that no vote is wasted. Even if the voter's first preference is not elected it is possible that her or his lower preferences had a role in electing other candidates. This system is in contrast to first-past-the-post electoral systems where the voter has only one choice and the winning candidate takes all. The version of Proportional Representation practised in Irish is virtually unique among electoral systems worldwide.

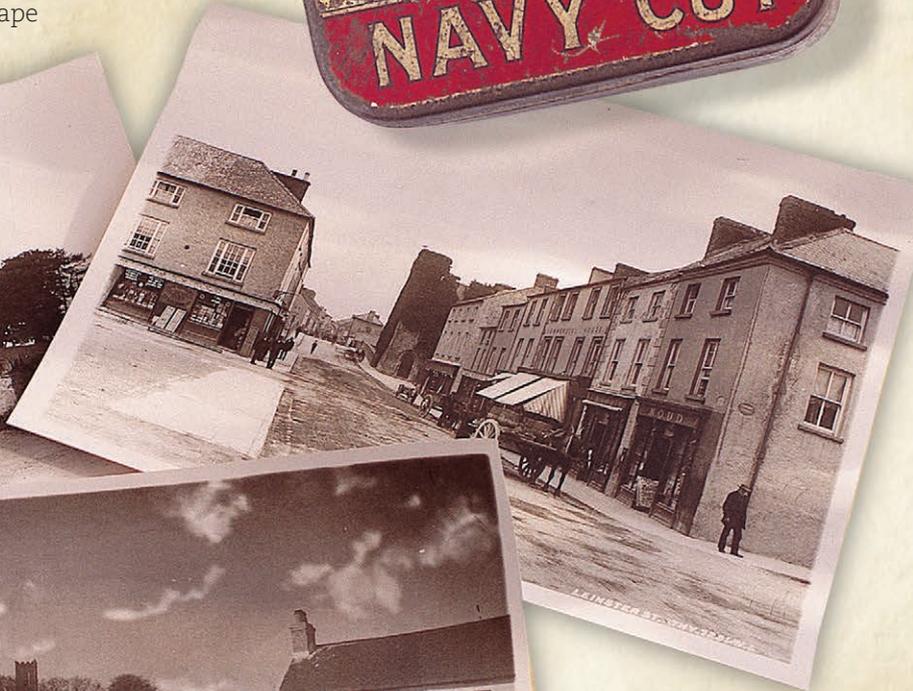
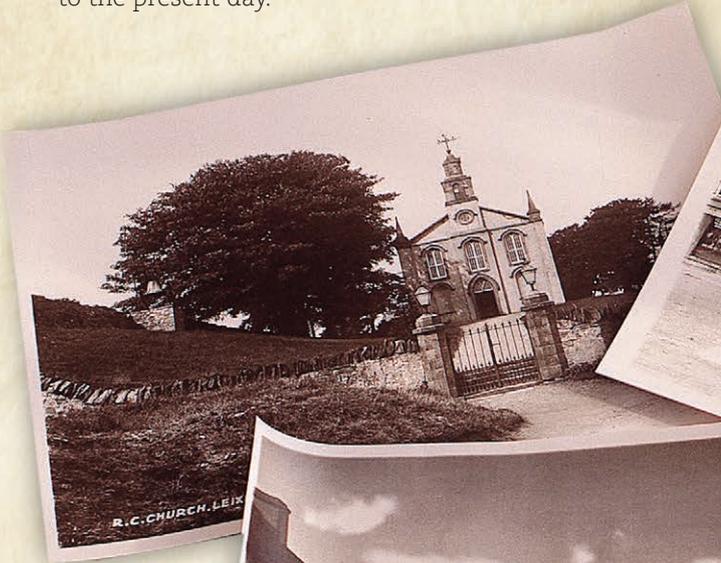
The first iteration of PR came about following a localised political situation at Sligo Borough Council where ratepayers petitioned the Westminster parliament to bring in legislation which would change the system to PR and allow them have a say in how the Borough was being run. The Sligo experiment was so successful in ensuring that one clique did not dominate the Council that it was decided to apply the PR system to the next set of local elections scheduled across the country.

An Act entitled the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1919 passed in June of that year declared that the local elections in Ireland would be organised on the basis of Proportional Representational voting. This measure took place against the background of the early months of the War of Independence and it was hoped that the PR system would help maintain some representation for the southern Unionists in the local councils at a time when the Sinn Féin party was set to repeat at the local elections its stunning success at the parliamentary elections in 1918.

In the end the Proportional Representation did not play a major role in the 1920 local elections as many of the electoral districts in the south of Ireland were not contested leaving Sinn Féin with a clear run to take over control of the County Councils throughout Ireland other than those in the north-east of the Country.

However PR had made an impression with the body politic of the emerging Irish state to the extent that it was adopted as the means of election for the first elections held in the new Irish Free State and has continued as the method of polling for all levels of election, Dáil and local government, into modern times. Although PR is a complex system for returning officers to operate and can result in election counts going on for days, it has embedded itself in Irish political culture.

On two occasions Governments have promoted referenda which would see PR replaced by first-past-the-post voting but in both cases the change was rejected by the Irish public. Thus PR introduced by an Act of Parliament in Westminster in 1919 for local government elections has become a distinctive feature of the Irish political landscape to the present day.



## Athy Municipal District



Cllr Brian Dooley  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Aoife Beslin  
The Labour Party



Cllr Ivan Keatley  
Fine Gael



Cllr Thomas Redmond  
Sinn Féin

## Celbridge-Leixlip Municipal District



Cllr Kevin Byrne  
The Labour Party



Cllr Íde Cussen  
Non Party



Cllr Anto Larkin  
Non Party



Cllr Joe Neville  
Fine Gael

## Kildare-Newbridge Municipal District



Cllr Suzanne Doyle  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Paddy Kennedy  
Non Party



Cllr Mark Lynch  
Sinn Féin



Cllr Fiona McLoughlin  
Healy, Non Party

## Maynooth Municipal District



Cllr Réada Cronin  
Sinn Féin



Cllr Tim Durkan  
Fine Gael



Cllr Daragh Fitzpatrick  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Pádraig McEvoy  
Non Party

## Naas Municipal District



Cllr Anne Breen  
The Labour Party



Cllr Fintan Brett  
Fine Gael



Cllr Deborah Callaghan  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Billy Hillis  
Fine Gael

---

MEMBERS OF  
KILDARE COUNTY  
COUNCIL MAY 2019

---



Cllr Martin Miley Jnr.  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Mark Wall  
The Labour Party



Cllr Brendan Young  
Non Party



Cllr Bernard Caldwell  
Non Party



Cllr Michael Coleman  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Joanne Pender  
Non Party



Cllr Seán Power  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Mark Stafford  
Fine Gael



Cllr Morgan McCabe  
Non Party



Cllr Martin Aspell  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr John McGinley  
The Labour Party



Cllr Teresa Murray  
Non Party



Cllr Naoise Ó'Ceairúil  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Paul Ward  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Brendan Weld  
Fine Gael



Cllr Seamie Moore  
Non Party



Cllr Sorcha O'Neill  
Non Party



Cllr Robert Power  
Fianna Fáil



Cllr Darren Scully  
Fine Gael



Cllr Carmel Kelly  
Fianna Fáil

---

## MEMBERS OF KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL 2019

---

For 120 years and counting Kildare County Council has been at the heart of social and economic progress in the county. The day-to-day services on which households and enterprises base their activities have been – and continue to be – put in place by the County Council. Everything from playgrounds to parks and heritage to housing - and much more - fall under the remit of the Council.

What makes the Council unique, among all the other public bodies providing services, is that its policies are decided by women and men from the locality elected by the vote of the people.

Every five years Kildare residents have the opportunity to elect the Councillors who will oversee the Council's multi-faceted programmes. The Councillors have a dual role.

Firstly, as members meeting in Council to make the big decisions such as agreeing the Council's budget priorities and making the County Development Plan which shapes the growth of the county. And, secondly, as a point of local contact for residents and the community to highlight their concerns and issues.

This heritage of local and responsive democracy has continued in an unbroken line in Kildare for the past 120 years and will, no doubt, continue for as long again into the future.

Kildare County Council would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution made by the following Councillors who were elected to the Council in 2014 and have since retired, been elected to Dáil Éireann or since deceased.



Cllr Willie Callaghan, R.I.P.  
Fianna Fáil  
Naas Municipal District



Cllr Willie Crowley, R.I.P.  
Non Party  
Kildare-Newbridge  
Municipal District



Cllr Mark Dalton  
Non Party  
Athy Municipal District



James Lawless, TD  
Fianna Fáil  
Naas Municipal District



Fiona O'Loughlin, TD  
Fianna Fáil  
Kildare-Newbridge  
Municipal District



Frank O'Rourke, TD  
Fianna Fáil  
Celbridge-Leixlip  
Municipal District





The Seal of County Kildare was designed in 1899 by the the County Surveyor, Edward Glover.

### The Seal

The Seal embraces the coat of Arms of the Principal Towns of Kildare in 1899.

– Naas with its Serpent and Athy with its Castle and Bridge.

These are surmounted by the Harp of Leinster.



### The Coat of Arms

The Coat of Arms of County Kildare, as granted by the Chief Herald in 1991 to Kildare Council Council, comprises

– the Saltire Cross of the FitzGerald, Earls of Kildare and Dukes of Leinster, forming four sections in which are depicted

– a St. Brigid's Cross

– a Horse's Head denoting equine tradition

– Oak Leaves representing Cill Dara, the Church of the Oak, from which the County takes its name

– the Harp of Leinster

– crossed swords representing the County's military heritage.

The Motto reads 'Meanma agus Misneach' which means 'Spirit and Courage.'

*Photographs from the National Library, Lawrence Collection circa 1900.*

*Clongorey Evictions: Images Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.*

---

## FEMALE FIRSTS IN THE RECORD OF KILDARE COUNTY COUNCIL

---

### **Kildare's First Female Councillor Cllr Brigid Darby - 1934**

Cllr Brigid Darby of Athy was Kildare's first female County Councillor elected in 1934. She had been a member of Athy Urban District Council since 1928. Her election to the Council was recorded in the Kildare Observer newspaper in the following terms: "In Athy a lady candidate, Miss B. Darby headed the poll for the County Council ... she is the first lady candidate to be elected."



Brigid Darby was no passive placeholder. She left a big impression on the public record with her outspoken contributions to council meetings making headlines in the local press right through the 1930s. A teacher and later principal at Churchtown NS, Athy, she was an active secretary of the Gaelic League and sometimes spoke in Irish at Council meetings. In 1937 she was nominated by the General Council of County Councils to the Governing Body of University College Dublin. She held her Council seat until she retired in 1945 having served eleven years on the County Council.

### **Cllr Patsy Lawlor of Kill, first female Chair of Kildare County Council**

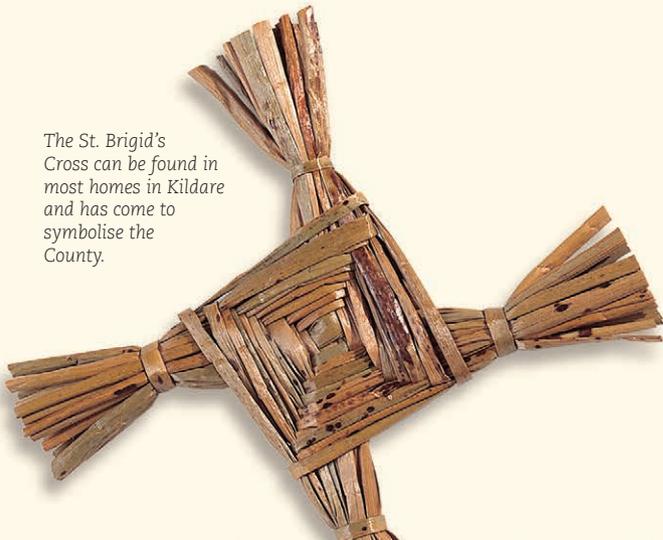
Cllr Patsy Lawlor of Kill was elected the first female Chair of Kildare County Council in 1983 at a time of intense political activity in her career. She had been elected to Seanád Éireann in 1981 and was also Chair of the General Council of County Councils, the national body for elected councils. In that capacity she brought a national conference attended by councillors



from throughout Ireland to Newbridge. She had a high-profile as President of the Irish Country Womens' Association. Perhaps her finest moment was cutting the tape for the opening of the Naas By-Pass, the first motorway standard road in the Republic of Ireland, in October 1983



The St. Brigid's Cross can be found in most homes in Kildare and has come to symbolise the County.



## Kildare County Council

Head Office, Áras Chill Dara, Devoy Park,  
Naas, Co Kildare. W91 X77F

**Text:** Liam Kenny

### Sources:

Kildare County Minute Book, April 1899 Kildare  
Observer 1899

Leinster Leader 1899

Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898