

Some Notable Mayors of Limerick

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SINCE LIMERICK was first endowed with the right to elect a Mayor and Corporation, mayor has succeeded mayor for the past eight hundred years down to the present day. Some citizens held the office during times of strife and persecution, others enjoyed the honour in peace and prosperity. We had all nationalities: Danes, Normans, Saxons, Dutch and Celts. Some are remembered with pride, others with odium. A look back through the pages of history shows us the good and the bad. Here we will touch upon some of the notable holders of the ancient office.

Thomas Stritch

Thomas Stritch was elected mayor shortly before General Ireton stood before the city in 1651 and demanded its surrender. This brave and patriotic man boosted up the morale of the citizens and the garrison all through the long siege that followed the rebuttal of the Cromwellian demand. After he had been installed as mayor, Stritch placed the keys of the city at the feet of a statue of the Blessed Virgin and prayed for her protection of the city, pledging at the same

time that the keys would never be handed to the enemy while he was mayor. This pledge was honoured, for he was succeeded in office by Peter Creagh while the city was still under siege.

Creagh was one of the clique who had advocated the acceptance of the Ormond peace terms in 1646, and was now foremost in promoting the acceptance of unconditional surrender. After the fall of the city the office of mayor was suspended for four terms, the city being administered by a military governor during that time. A Cromwellian officer, Colonel Henry Ingolsby, was elected mayor in 1656.

Alderman Thomas Stritch, the ex-mayor, being one of the twenty exempted from pardon after the surrender, was hanged, drawn and quartered in October 1651. Another notable ex-mayor, Dominick Fanning, suffered the same fate three weeks afterwards. Fanning was elected mayor in 1646 when John Bourke was deposed and stripped of the Mayoralty after he had appealed to the citizens to accept Ormond's peace terms. Bourke addressed a huge crowd in the Irishtown from a rostrum beside Thomcore's Castle, at the junction of the present day John Street, Broad Street and Mungret Street. This place was, for many generations afterwards, known as 'Stoney Thursday Corner', in remembrance of the stoning of the mayor by the hostile crowd.

It is on record that Mayor Fanning refused to assist a Protestant woman and her two children after they had been burned out of their home in the Meelick area by a Confederate mob. The distressed woman was turned away from his castle in Mary Street and left to the mercy of citizens who had little sympathy for Protestants.

I find it extraordinary that the name of Thomas Stritch, one of the outstanding heroes in our history, does not occur in Lenihan's list of Mayors of Limerick. Yet in the course of his treatment of the Cromwellian siege in his *History of Limerick* (p. 182) we find the following reference: 'Mr. Thomas Stritch, on terminating a spiritual retreat, had been elected mayor, and ever after proving himself a devoted friend of Ireland.'

All other writers of the period, including Fr. Finnegan, gave full coverage to Mayor Stritch.

John Foord

The mayors during the Williamite sieges get little mention in our history books. However, John Foord, who was mayor in 1693 (the year of his death) won a special place in the annals as the first mayor in Ireland to take the Test Oath. Perhaps it was for this action that Foord was personified derisively as the mythical illiterate broom pedlar, Shawn-a-Scoob. His grave in St. John's which was vandalised many years ago even before this ghoulish practice became popular, has always been pointed out as 'Shawn-a-Scoob's grave'. During his short term of office St. John's churchyard was tucked into its present tidy shape, and a stone plaque set into the boundary wall on the eastern side bears the following translation of the Latin inscription:

JOHN FOORD BEING MAYOR, AND
PROMOTER OF THIS WORK,
THE PARISHIONERS OF ST. JOHN OF THE HOLY CROSS
AFTER THE RECENT HAVOC
OF THE WAR
PROCURED THE
BUILDING OF THESE
WALLS OF THE
CEMETERY AT THEIR
OWN EXPENSE

A.D. 1693

JOHN PATERSON VICAR
EDWARD UNCLES
ROBERT KEMP CHURCH WARDENS.
JOHN BARRY SCULPTER

Thomas Pierse

Lieut. Gen. Thomas Pierse was mayor in 1726, shortly after the enactment of the draconian penal law which made the marrying of a mixed couple - Protestant and Catholic - a capital offence. It is said that it was with relish that Pierse applied this law to the letter in the case of a local priest, Fr. Timothy Ryan. This innocent man was hanged on Gallows Green after having been sentenced by Pierse, before whom he was arraigned on a charge of marrying a Protestant man to a Roman Catholic woman.

Fr. Ryan was buried in St. Patrick's churchyard, only a short distance from the gallows. His grave was located during a clean up of the churchyard by the late Parish Priest of St. Patrick's, Fr. Moloney, in the 1940s. At that time the grave stone was cleaned and re-set but since then it has been lost in a welter of wanton destruction by vandals - all pursuing their Christian way of life!

Martin Honan

Martin Honan, of Quinpool House, Parteen, was elected the first mayor of the Reformed Corporation in 1841. It was a great day for Limerick when it was announced that the long awaited *Municipal Reform Act* was in force. One of the biggest parades of citizens ever seen in the city marked the occasion when the Corrupt Corporation, led by the mayor, Charles Smith Vereker, was deposed. Smith, who was one of a family clique which had alienated much of the Corporation estate to themselves at minimal prices on long leases, had misappropriated public funds and refused to give up office. He claimed that the *Municipal Reform Act* was null and void since the Lord Lieutenant had fixed a day for the Act to become law prematurely. Much confusion and embarrassment resulted from this impasse, with Smith still going through the motions of admin-

istering the affairs of the city from his office in the Exchange. The unprecedented situation in which Limerick had two mayors continued until Lord Elliot, the Chief Secretary, got the Royal assent legalising the immediate implementation of the *Municipal Reform Act*.

Martin Honan was a merchant prince who exported great quantities of grain from Limerick Port. His father, Matthew Honan, was the first merchant to export grain from Limerick. He contributed to the building of a great quay which stretched from Arthur's Quay to the present swivel bridge, and which still bears his name.

Martin Honan will also be remembered for his great charity during the Famine. He made large contributions to the soup kitchens and assisted many poor families in the district where he resided.

John Daly

John Daly, who spent many years in English gaols for his activities with the Fenian movement, was elected mayor in 1899, 1900 and 1901.

Shortly before his election some members of the Corporation initiated a movement to abolish the Night Watch. No doubt this would have succeeded were it not for the accession to power of the Labour party, led by Daly, who was in a position to insist on the retention of the old service. At that time the Watch was reconstituted, and the name changed to 'Limerick Night Constables'.

Daly, who was unmarried, transmitted his white-hot nationalism to the family of his brother. His nephew Edward Daly, one of the leaders of the 1916 rising, was executed, and his niece, Kathleen Daly was the wife of his old Fenian friend and cellmate in English dungeons, Tom Clarke, who was also executed.

The Daly homestead on the Ennis Road was a special target for the Crown Forces during the War of Independence. On one occasion in 1920 all the valuable furniture was seized after a niece, Madge Daly, had refused to pay a fine of £20 after being convicted of refusing to have the names of those residing in the house displayed on the inside of the door.

James Casey and Stephen O'Mara

The most appalling tragedy of the War of Independence in Limerick was the murder of the mayor, George Clancy, the ex-mayor, Michael O'Callaghan and Volunteer Joseph O'Donoghue, by Crown Forces in March 1921. Clancy and O'Callaghan were murdered in their homes in the presence of their wives, in the small hours of the morning, and O'Donoghue was taken from his lodgings in Janesboro by a party of R.I.C. and his bullet-riddled body found later on the road a short distance away.

Immediately after the murder of the mayor, Councillor James Casey bravely stepped in and acted as deputy mayor until Stephen O'Mara was elected. He boldly made all the arrangements for the funerals of the three men. Though the military authorities ordered that no undue ostentatiousness or speech-making

was to take place, James Casey delivered an impassioned oration at the graveside, condemning the murderers and the system that condoned their actions. O'Mara too was a brave man, as a number of attempts had already been made on his life. James Casey stepped into the breach once again after Mr. Patrick Quinlan had to relinquish the office of mayor after the passing of the *Managerial Act* in 1935. Mr. Casey was elected for the remainder of the term and received a belated honour when he was elected for a full term in 1935-36.

When he died in 1953 Mr. Casey, who had represented Labour interests in the city for the greater part of his life, evoked the following tribute from local historian, Ernest Bennis:

Jim Casey, always thinking how he could help the 'down and outs' organised an annual Christmas treat for the prisoners in the gaol. He also organised treats and entertainments for the inmates of the City Home; but his greatest achievement was the organising of the Blind People's Club, where he got together these lonely, isolated, helpless people, introduced them to each other, and gave them a right good social time together.

Jim Casey, one of our great local heroes and forgotten to-day, while some nonentities are remembered in streets or parks.

Mayoral Elections

Long before the introduction of the 'party system', mayors were elected on their merit by the free votes of the Council. The system now in vogue often consigns to the sideline a worthy aspirant to the office. At best it is a reprehensible system that compels members of the council to blindly follow the opinions of their party when in direct opposition to their own clear ideas, but this is a degree of servitude that is accepted as quite normal procedure. Some press reports of mayoral elections down the years have provided the citizens with grand comedy performances which often besmirched the dignity of the office of mayor.