

# CENTENARY OF IRELAND'S 1920 LOCAL ELECTIONS

To commemorate the centenary of the local elections in 1920, which were pivotal in the history of local government in Ireland, a booklet 'Democracy and Change: The 1920 Local Elections in Ireland' has been published by the Local Government Archivists and Records Managers (LGARM), on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage.

**T**he 1920 local elections were the first in which proportional representation voting was used for major elections. The elections are also crucial as they took place in the midst of the War of Independence and resulted in Sinn Féin candidates once again winning the majority of seats as they had done in the 1918 General Election. Most local authorities went on to declare allegiance to Dáil Éireann as a result.

In his foreword to the publication, the

Minister of State for Local Government and Planning, Peter Burke TD stated: "We are fortunate that our local authority archives services have such a collection of historic documents that allows us to study and understand better the context of perhaps the most important local elections in the history of the state."

Michael Walsh, former Chairman of the City and County Management Association (CCMA), described the 1920 local elections as "a key point in the

history of local government in Ireland" and stressed the importance of marking these events during the ongoing Decade of Centenaries.

Dr Niamh Brennan, Chair of Local Government Archivists and Records Managers (LGARM), archivist with Donegal County Council, noted how local archivists have catalogued and digitised collections relating to the War of Independence and Civil War in their localities, and how the local archives of

## THE FOLKLORE BEHIND SYSTEM OF IRISH ELECTIONS

*Tallymen and late-night counts are part of the folklore of Irish elections. Who doesn't relish the drama of, say, the 19th count in Donegal North-East on General Election night? Thanks to the complex but effective system of voting known as Proportional Representative-Single Transferable Vote (PR-STV), Irish elections are never short of colour and drama, according to the Director of the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG).*

*Liam Kenny, who is one of the contributors to this special centenary booklet, says that few people may realise that this polling system, at once fair but convoluted, had its first exposure to an Irish electorate – not for parliamentary elections – but for local government polls.*

*"It was at the 1920 local government elections that PR was first deployed across the island. The British Government had decided to replace the pre-existing first-past-the-post system by PR in the hope that it would tame Sinn Féin who had swept the boards in the 1918 parliamentary elections run under the old system," he told 'Council Review'.*

*"Officials in county and town councils had to be trained in the complexities of PR and voters educated in its nuances. As if this was not task enough the elections took place against the escalating War of Independence. The result brought a stunning success for Sinn Féin who swept the conservative Home Rulers out of the council chambers.*

*"And PR proved so suitable for the Irish body politic that it was embedded as a permanent feature at all elections, national and parliamentary, by the new Irish state.*

*"The centenary of PR has been marked by this impressive publication 'Democracy and Change', published by the Minister for Local Government and Planning with content from the local authority archivists. It is available on council websites or on application to the Customs House."*



## LOCAL ELECTIONS IN IRELAND (1920)

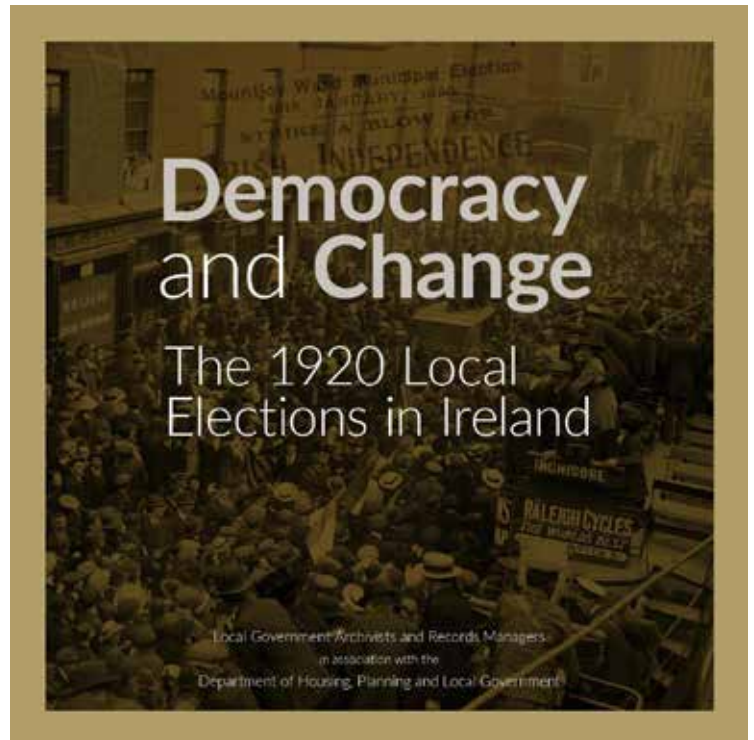
the Decade of Centenaries can fill in some of the gaps in the history of what was a hugely significant time in Ireland.

### BI-LINGUAL CONTENT

The illustrated booklet (in both English and Irish) includes a history of the background to the elections and local government reform and the decision to introduce proportional representation. There are sections on the borough, urban, rural district and county council elections in 1920; a section on the successes of women in the 1920 elections; a chapter on the role of local government during the ongoing War of Independence; and biographies of notable figures elected in 1920; it also includes images from local archives.

This booklet is part of the LGARM's commemorative projects for the Decade of Centenaries. It is available to download on various local government websites. Donegal County Council's Archivist, Dr Niamh Brennan, is the Chair of the LGARM and was joint editor of the publication with Grainne Doran (Wexford County Council Archives).

For more information contact Niamh Brennan at [archivist@donegalcoco.ie](mailto:archivist@donegalcoco.ie)



### CORK'S FORGOTTEN LORD MAYOR

*A new book on the third Lord Mayor of Cork to be elected in 1920 – Donal Óg O'Callaghan – was published on the centenary anniversary of his election to replace Terence MacSwiney.*

*'Forgotten Lord Mayor: Donal Óg O'Callaghan 1920-1924' by Dr Aodh Quinlivan, Lecturer in Politics in UCC's Department of Government and Politics, tells the story of O'Callaghan, who was a substantial figure on the local, national and international stages.*

*During a turbulent four-year period in office (November 1920 to January 1924), his life was interwoven with the most notable events and figures in Irish political history – the War of Independence, the Burning of Cork, the Treaty, the Civil War, Tomás MacCurtain, Terence MacSwiney, Michael Collins and Éamon de Valera. As a Gael, a soldier, a patriot, a staunch Republican and a devoted public servant, he helped lay the foundations on which Ireland was built.*

*"Much has been written about the life and times of patriot Lords Mayor Tomás Mac Curtain and Terence MacSwiney but this book on Donal O'Callaghan, the third Lord Mayor to be elected in Cork that challenging year, is an original piece of work," noted Dr Quinlivan.*

*"He was straightforward man – direct, honest and, above all else, principled. There are many layers to the O'Callaghan's story and I am delighted to have had the opportunity of bringing him to life. Hopefully, he will no longer be forgotten."*

*Lord Mayor of Cork Cllr Joe Kavanagh said: "During this year of commemorations it is a privilege to delve into the untold story of the third Lord Mayor of Cork to be elected*



*Lord Mayor of Cork Cllr Joe Kavanagh and his wife Stephanie pictured with Dr Aodh Quinlivan at the launch of 'Forgotten Lord Mayor: Donal Óg O'Callaghan, 1920-1924' at City Hall, Cork.*

*in 1920. Forgotten Lord Mayor gives us a fascinating insight into the story of our city's former Lord Mayor and the political landscape he navigated during this tumultuous time in Irish history. Aodh has done us a great service by bringing Donal Óg O'Callaghan's fascinating story to life."*

*'Forgotten Lord Mayor: Donal Óg O'Callaghan, 1920-1924' is supported by Cork City Council's Commemoration Fund 2020-2023. Priced at €15, the book is available to purchase from New Civic Offices at Cork City Hall, Waterstones, Vibes and Scribes on Lavitt's Quay and St Peter's Cork on North Main Street.*