

CO. TIPPERARY JOINT LIBRARIES COMMITTEE

The public library service as we know it today has its origins in the middle of the 19th Century, a time when Ireland was just recovering from the effects of a devastating famine. There is little doubt that the passing of the Public Libraries Act (Ireland) in 1855 had little or no immediate impact on those it was designed to benefit, i.e. the poorer classes that formed the vast majority of the population. The Public Libraries Museums Act of 1850, a ground breaking Act, which empowered Municipal councils in England and Wales to levy a rate of a halfpenny in the pound to establish public libraries was extended to cater for Ireland in 1853. However, since a minimum town population of 10,000 was required in order to establish a public library under this Act, no progress was made. The 1855 Act reduced the population requirement to 5,000 so allowing, in theory at least, a greater number of towns to adopt the Act. Furthermore it allowed for a sum not exceeding one penny in the pound to be levied for library purposes by any borough or town council. It could hardly have been anticipated then that this Act would remain the principal piece of legislation dealing with public libraries in Ireland for the next almost 150 years.

This Act of 1855 was an adoptive one which meant that a meeting of householders had to be convened with at least two-thirds voting in favour before the Act was deemed to have been adopted. The fact that by 1880 only two towns, Dundalk and Sligo, had established public libraries under the 1855 Act and the 1877 Amendment Act clearly illustrates the problems which existed at the time. The abject poverty of the country was the predominant reason as well as the unwillingness of rate-payers to support the cause but it was patently obvious too that a penny in the pound rate support was not going to be sufficient in most towns to develop a public library service. The apathy of a people hard-pressed to eke out a basic living from day to day, together with appalling levels of illiteracy and other social problems, also contributed to the lack of movement. But if the 1855 Act did nothing else it lay down that most fundamental of public library principals - freedom of access for all. The Public Libraries (Ireland) Amendment Act 1877 deserves specific mention since it enabled local authorities to co-opt non-members of the authority to act on Library Committees, a practice which exists to the present day.

In the context of County Tipperary specifically it is also worth mentioning the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act 1894, if for no other reason than to show that here for the first time was a piece of legislation allowing two or more neighbouring authorities to form a joint committee for library purposes. While its significance was not to become evident in Tipperary for a further 30 years, nevertheless the legislative basis for the present County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee is to be found therein when taken in conjunction with Section 65 of the 1925 Local Government Act. The 1894 Act also empowered local authorities to adopt the Libraries Acts by resolution. Equally the 1902 Public Libraries (Ireland) Act, which empowered the recently founded Rural District

Councils to adopt the Libraries Acts, is important in so far as it recognised, for the first time, the great need to make books available to the widely dispersed centres of population. Up to this the emphasis, at least from a legislative point of view, was solely directed towards urban communities. However, despite the existence of the enabling legislation, Clonmel Corporation was the only local authority in South Tipperary to adopt the Acts before the 20th Century dawned and in January 1900 were still in the process of putting them into operation.

On the face of it one might be forgiven for assuming that the people of South Tipperary were, prior to 1900, without a book in their midst. For the vast majority of the population that was indeed the case but many people, particularly those among the upper and middle classes, had access to reading material especially those who resided in the larger towns. Many of the big houses of the gentry contained very fine private collections of books, pamphlets and newspapers. Efforts were made in the first half of the 19th Century by the upper and middle classes to improve the intellectual state of the working classes by forming Mechanics' Institutes with four in South Tipperary: Clonmel, Carrick-on-Suir, Tipperary and Cashel. These Institutes were mainly concerned with giving instruction in the practical sciences while they had also the aim of fostering a desire for learning among the broader public. The problem was that only those who could afford the fees gained any worthwhile benefit. For that and other reasons most of these Institutes were short-lived and unsuccessful. However, the Clonmel Institute, founded in 1842, was vibrant and reasonably successful mainly because it had a wide groundswell of support throughout from not only the local gentry and clergy but also from among the commercial workers in the town. A lending library was a feature of the service offered and this generally became quite popular with a good range of both fiction and non-fiction available. Despite the difficulties brought about by the Great Famine, the Clonmel Institute survived and continued to operate through the 1850's and 1860's until it was subsumed into the newly formed Clonmel Literary Society, by which time the emphasis had changed from scientific and technical to literary and social. Other society and subscription libraries, Repeal reading rooms and the newly founded national schools system also played their part in placing greater emphasis on bringing education and information to the wider population.

CLONMEL CORPORATION

When Clonmel Corporation adopted the Libraries Acts, agreement was reached in 1899 to transfer the library of the Clonmel Literary Institute to the Corporation and to rent the building for the purpose of setting up a public library and other public uses. The following members were appointed to the Library Committee for 1900:- Cllrs. James O'Connell, Edward J. Walsh, Edwin Fayle, William Dwyer, Thomas Skehan and John O'Donnell. Six other non-members of the Corporation were added soon afterwards:- Charles Fennell Esq., Frederick J. Quinn Esq., James White Esq., Michael Ryan Esq., John Power Esq., William M. Casey Esq.

The basic rate of a penny in the pound was adopted with an estimated expenditure for the year of £117-7-5. By 1922 the rate in the pound had been increased to two pence.

URBAN DISTRICT COUNCILS

In the case of Tipperary Town Council the Minute Books state that a letter was received from the Local Government Board dated 2nd March, 1904 enquiring if the provisions of the Public Libraries Acts had been adopted. In his reply the clerk "pointed out how matters stood" which neither confirms or denies. However, since South Tipperary County Council noted in November, 1930 the resolution of Tipperary Urban Council to adopt the Public Libraries Act 1855-1920 one might reasonably assume that no earlier adoption was made even though it was not uncommon for Councils to adopt the Acts for a second time forgetting or ignoring the earlier decision. The sole reason for Tipperary U.D.C. adopting the Acts in 1930 was to immediately relinquish their powers to South Tipperary County Council which in turn would delegate the responsibility to the Joint Libraries Committee. Carrick-on-Suir and Cashel U.D.C.'s received similar correspondence as did all local authorities, clear evidence that development was slow and lethargic despite the existence of a public library grants scheme in operation since 1897, made available by Andrew Carnegie, the fabulously wealthy Scotsman who was such a pioneering influence on the public library movement in Britain and Ireland. His contribution of almost £180,000 between 1897 and 1913 to build up to eighty libraries in Ireland was very significant indeed in the early years of the development of the public library service. In 1848, at the age of thirteen, he emigrated to America with his parents, who were humble weavers, and settled in Pittsburg. He started work there in a cotton factory as a bobbin boy and later worked as a messenger boy in a telegraph company. It was here that he had his first experience of a library when he was allowed to borrow books from a private library, an experience and opportunity he never forgot. Through careful investment and a keen eye for business opportunities, he went on to amass a fortune mainly in iron and steel, and shipping. In 1901, he sold his company for \$480 million. His intention had always been to put his fortune to good use and his contribution of vast sums for Public Libraries throughout the world was just one way of doing this.

It might seem peculiar that not one Carnegie Library was built in County Tipperary, but Carnegie fervently believed that only those who were prepared to help themselves should be given assistance. Some measure of the level of commitment at local level can be gleaned from the fact that no Carnegie Libraries were built in 21 of the 32 counties in Ireland. It is remarkable though that most of the counties bordering County Tipperary i.e. Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Kilkenny, all have Carnegie Libraries. However, a bold attempt was made by Carrick-on-Suir Urban District Council in 1904 to acquire a Carnegie Library. In October that year, a resolution was unanimously passed requesting that Mr. Carnegie be asked to give a "grant towards the building of a free library in the town since no facilities exist at present within the Urban District for promotion of

education among the adult classes". Mr. Carnegie's answer was not the most welcome since it concluded that the rate of a penny in the pound would not be sufficient to sustain a library. He went on to advise that assistance should be sought from the local Rural District Council so as to make it a practicable proposition. Despite the fact that the clerk was directed to write to the R.D.C. on the subject there is no evidence that a solution was found as the Local Government Board was still asking if the Public Libraries Acts had been adopted at the end of 1911. Indeed as late as November, 1936, the then clerk was informing the U.D.C. that he had received local representation regarding the desirability of a Public Library and he went on to give particulars of the procedure required to join with the County Library Scheme. At a meeting of the U.D.C. on 13th November, 1936 a resolution, moved by Cllr. J. Babington, was adopted and despite no evidence to show that the Authority had ever adopted the Libraries Acts the Council relinquished their powers under the Public Libraries Acts in favour of Tipperary S.R. County Council. There was, however, a Reading Room in the Town Hall in Carrick-on-Suir in 1889 operated by the Young Ireland Literary Society which may well have included a lending library. The Young Ireland League was foremost in promoting the terms of the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act 1894. Like many other towns throughout the country, private subscription libraries were in evidence during the first quarter of the 20th Century with one such library at Lough Street.

Cashel Urban District Council also made a determined effort, at least in theory, to provide a library. Procedures for adoption of the various Acts had been placed before the Council as early as 1904. Again at a meeting of the Council on 2nd December, 1908 the idea of establishing a public library was put forward with a subsequent directive from the Local Government Board that the rate of one penny in the pound for library purposes should not be exceeded. It was obvious to the members that such a rate could either not be met or would not be sufficient to meet the costs of running a library and so they called for the promotion by the Irish Party of a workable Public Libraries Bill. In 1909 the members sought the co-operation of the Rural District Council in their continued efforts to build a library for the town which they felt would have the added value of allowing for the distribution of books to various centres throughout the rural districts. The Rural District Council, however, decided not to co-operate. Two years later in 1911, Cashel U.D.C. finally unanimously adopted the Libraries Acts, the proposal having come from Dr. Laffan, seconded by Mr. R. Looby. They immediately sought a grant from Carnegie's Fund to help them to provide a building. The way was now clear, or so it seemed, for the provision of the first Carnegie Library in the county but the reason for the members' earlier concern regarding the rate in the pound now becomes clearer. Carnegie offered a grant of £2,000 to build a library but because the members failed to agree to levy a rate of a halfpenny in the pound, the offer was effectively rejected. One is tempted to conclude that this illustrates a total lack of initiative and vision on the part of the U.D.C. That may be so, but times were difficult and the records show that a number of authorities throughout the country failed to claim grants or did not accept. The prevailing attitudes of council members and ratepayers, as well as local management problems and shortage of finance all played their part to varying degrees, to stifle the

development of the free public library service in Ireland in the early years of the 20th Century and the problems brought about by the First World War, the War of Independence and the ensuing Civil War contributed further to the slow rate of progress. Indeed the years between 1912 and 1924 show little movement in South Tipperary adding further evidence to the fact that the foregoing problems were having a detrimental effect.

COUNTY COUCILS – THE CO-OPERATIVE APPROACH

In late 1924 the pattern of library development changed quite dramatically in Tipperary with the merging of the two County Councils (North and South Riding) for the purpose of operating the County Tipperary Carnegie Libraries Scheme. At this point the Carnegie funds were being operated by a Trust which had been set up in 1913. Effectively this was the first realistic attempt to extend the public library movement to rural County Tipperary and to an extent there existed two parallel services for a number of years thereafter, urban and rural, operated by their respective authorities. Indeed the movement becomes quite complex at this time and it was common to see the two systems operating simultaneously in the main towns.

The Constitution of the County Tipperary Carnegie Library Committee was clearly outlined by the Irish Advisory Committee of the Carnegie Trustees who directed that the Library Committee should provisionally consist of the following:-

The T.D.'s for the county

The Chairman, Secretary and two other nominees of South Riding County Council

The Chairman, Secretary and two other nominees of North Riding County Council

Urban and District Councils – one nominee each

County Committee of Agriculture (S.R.) – one nominee

County Committee of Agriculture (N.R.) – one nominee

Tipperary National Teachers Organisation – six nominees

Tipperary Gaelic League – one nominee

The Inspector of National Schools – one nominee

The Principals of Secondary and Technical Schools – one nominee

The Ecclesiastical Inspector of Schools – one nominee

A representative of the Bishop of Cashel

A representative of the Archbishop of Cashel & Emly

The Committee was to have power to co-opt not more than ten further members and the Carnegie Trust retained the power to nominate not more than five additional members.

The members of the first County Tipperary Carnegie Library Committee set up in 1924 were:

Members

Representing

F. Phillips, Esq., Cashel

Cashel U.D.C.

T. O'Neill, Esq., Town Clerk, Nenagh

Nenagh U.D.C.

W. Butler, Esq., Thurles

Thurles U.D.C.

J. Ryan, Esq., Ballykern, Ballincurry, Thurles

Slieveardagh R.D.C.

James O'Mara, Esq., Moonfin, Nenagh

Nenagh R.D.C.

T. Quinlan, Esq., Ballygeelish, Clonmel

Clonmel No.1 R.D.C.

D. Maher, Esq., Roscrea

Roscrea No.1 R.D.C.

J.J. Hassett, Esq., Barnane, Templemore

N.R. County Council

P. Gleeson, Esq., Ballycahill, Thurles

N.R. County Council

J. O'Gorman, Esq., St. Mary's B.N.S., Nenagh

I.N.T.O.

D. Costelloe, Esq., B.N.S., Cloughjordan

I.N.T.O.

J.R. Nash, Esq., Templetuohy N.S.,

I.N.T.O.

E. Mansfield, Esq., Cullan N.S. Tipperary

I.N.T.O.

R. Griffiths, Esq., Kilsheelan, Clonmel	I.N.T.O.
M.J. Slattery, Esq., Annacarty B.N.S.	I.N.T.O.
P.J. Reilly, Esq., Principal	Clonmel Tech. School
M.O. Hickey, Esq., Carrickbeg, Carrick-on-Suir	Carrick-on-Suir No.1 R.D.C.
A. Barlow, Esq., Shrough	Tipperary No.1 R.D.C.
W.J. Condon, Esq., Clogheen	Clogheen R.D.C.
F. Meagher, Esq., Templemore	Templemore U.D.C.
M. Kirby, Esq., Tipperary	Tipperary U.D.C.
W.J. McClelland, Esq., Headmaster	Clonmel Grammar School
Count P.J. O'Byrne, Roscrea	Chairman. N.R. County Council
J. Cree, Esq., Headmaster	Tipperary Tech. School
Very Rev. J. Byrne, C.S. SP.	Rockwell College, Cashel
Very Rev. M.J. Ryan	St. Patrick's College
Rev. T.J. O'Connor	Eccl. Inspector
C.V. Barrington, Esq., Cashel	Bishop of Cashel
D.F. O'Connor, Esq., Clonmel	Clonmel Corporation
D. Breen, Esq.,	T.D.
Rev. Administrator, Thurles	Archbishop of Cashel
Patrick Morris, Esq., Crohane, Killenaule	S.R. County Council
D. Hogan, Esq., Ardvallane, Tipperary	S.R. County Council
E. Meagher, Esq., Rosemary Square, Roscrea	Roscrea R.D.C.
J. Reidy, Esq., Greyfort, Coleville Road, Clonmel	County Tech. Inst. Comm.
J. Ryan, Esq., Nenagh	N.R. Comm. Of Agriculture

Rev. Bro. Carew, Superior

C.B.S. Thurles

W. Dwyer, Esq., Solicitor, Roscrea

J. Kennedy, Esq., Town Clerk, Thurles.

E. Long, Esq., Editor, Tipperary Star

N.R. Tech. Committee

CO-OPTIONS

Rev. Fr. Devane; Rev. Fr. Fitzgerald, Thurles; Mrs. L. Ryan; Dr. Callinan, Thurles; Very Rev. Dean Ryan, Cashel; Mr. Dempsey, Nenagh; Mr. Sean O'Byrne, Roscrea; Mr. P. Butler, Clonmel; Miss Mahon, Carrick, Birr.

BOOK SELECTION SUB-COMMITTEE

Rev. Fr. Fitzgerald, Thurles; D. Costelloe, Esq., Cloughjordan; J. Ryan, Esq., Nenagh; W. Dwyer, Esq., Roscrea; E. Mansfield, Esq., Tipperary; Rev. Bro. Carew, Thurles.

FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE

Rev. Bro. Carew, Thurles; E. Long, Esq., Thurles; J. Kennedy, Esq., Thurles; P. Gleeson, Esq., Ballycahill; W. Butler, Esq., Thurles.

The inaugural meeting was called for 12 noon on Wednesday, 21st January, 1925 but was not held until Saturday, 24th January, 1925. Small wonder that the Confraternity Hall, Thurles was chosen as the venue for the meeting given the potential turnout but the Secretary need not have worried since only a handful turned up and indeed only eight members were present for the next meeting which was held in the County Book Repository Thurles, on Friday, 22nd May, 1925 with Rev. Fr. Fitzgerald acting as Chairman. Among the decisions taken at that meeting was a unanimous one to purchase a "motor" for the transport of books, and two further members, Mr. Flynn, Tipperary and Mr. Paul O'Flynn, Carrick-on-Suir, were co-opted.

At that first meeting in January, 1925, the aims of the Carnegie Scheme, which had been adopted by resolutions of the two County Councils, were outlined to the Committee:

- (i) To organise as quickly as possible an efficient book-supply in the county.
- (ii) Make the public so “alive” to the value of the scheme that they will support it out of the public funds after two years have elapsed.

At this time it was intended that the Trust would fully finance the operation of the scheme for two years, after which the two County Councils would continue to operate the scheme and finance it out of the public funds. The Trustees would then hand over the books and equipment to the county, the only remaining conditions being that the scheme would continue to be operated by a trained certified librarian and that statistics would be furnished annually to the Trust at its headquarters in Dunfermline in Scotland. The Trust moved quickly to appoint James Brennan, Esq., as County Librarian with Ms. Helen Roe as Assistant Librarian. From the Trustees’ point of view this method of grant-aiding the public library service in Ireland would be far less costly than building libraries and would be easier to monitor. No expensive building was required – a basic book repository in the County town would be sufficient, from where collections of books could be dispatched to the various centres. Very quickly the Tipperary Committee began opening library centres mainly in villages and small towns, with the centres predominantly were located in parish schools and the head teacher acting as voluntary librarian. Other locations such as Young Men’s Societies, Parish Halls, etc., were used and, in many cases, a small local committee was formed to oversee the running of the centre.

Because Thurles was deemed to be the most central town in the county it was here, in 1925, that the County Book Repository was set up in a rented premises over a bottling store at Slievenamon Road. Thurles was also chosen because it possessed admirable rail facilities for the despatch of books throughout the county. The accommodation however does not seem to have been very suitable, some members of the Committee being moved to describe it as no better than a cow-shed. Notwithstanding this, the scheme does seem to have flourished in its first two years, January, 1925 – December, 1926, by which time sixty-two centres had been set up. According to Mr. Brennan, Librarian, the initial work of setting up the County Book Repository was slow – furniture, stoves, office equipment and shelves as well as lighting had to be installed while at the same time a list of books had to be made for presentation before a Book Selection Committee which was one of two Sub-Committees of the Carnegie Committee – the other being the Finance Committee. To avoid the formation of a number of centres in the larger towns, it was decided to ally the working of the centre with the Urban Council which it was felt would also give the centre a “definite social standing”. Returns from the various centres during the first year of operation proved that the scheme was very popular in rural areas with much demand for books on History, Travel, Biography, Agriculture and Literature. Fiction authors in demand included Kickham, Sheehan, Carleton, Bodkin, Haggard, Orczy, Grey, Conrad, Chesterton and Belloc. Expenditure for the year ending 31st

December, 1926 was £1,587 – 16s – 3d excluding the County Librarian's salary of £250.00. The grant from the Carnegie Trust amounted to £1,600. From these costs it was estimated that a rate of a halfpenny in the pound would be sufficient to support the scheme after 1926.

Among the South Tipperary Centres operating at 31st December, 1926 were :-

Aherlow, Ardane, Glenbane, Ayle, Coolmoyn, Grange, Cullen, Kilross, Clogheen, Donaskeigh, Ballyporeen, Ballough, Fethard, Kilcooley, Lisvernane, Rossmore, Shronell, Skeheenarinky, Cahir, Cashel, Deanery, Clerihan, Tipperary, Cappawhite, Annacarty, Moanmore, Ardfinnan, Donohill, Emly, Bانشa, Ballylucky, Knockavilla, Burncourt, Ballinaclough, Gormanstown, Cahernahallia, Killenaule, Ardmayle, Dundrum, Thomastown, Cashel U.D.C., Gurteendevane and Hollyford (some slight spelling variations are evident).

COUNTY TIPPERARY JOINT LIBRARIES COMMITTEE

Immediately on the cessation of the Carnegie Trust's administration of the County Library Scheme, the two County Councils accepted the responsibility for the operation and expansion of the scheme. Section 65 of the Local Government Act 1925 gave the County Councils powers to adopt by resolution the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act 1855 for the whole or any specified parts of the county exclusive of any urban district. The Act further allowed Urban Councils, if they so wished, to relinquish their powers under the Public Libraries (Ireland) Acts 1855-1920 in favour of the County Council. On 7th December, 1926, South Tipperary County Council adopted the Public Libraries (Ireland) Act 1855 and agreed to strike a rate of a halfpenny in the pound for the purpose. They further agreed to take over the County Library Service as established under the Carnegie Trust on the understanding that the County Council would have full power and control in regard to the management of same, and the appointment of a Committee of management. A similar resolution had been adopted by North Tipperary County Council and so a new body, to be known as the County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee, came into being on January 1st, 1927, taking over directly from the Tipperary Carnegie Library Committee. Henceforth it would be the Joint body which would direct the progress of the public library service on behalf of the two Ridings, acting as a distinct Library Authority right down to the present day. It is the only Joint Libraries Committee in the country (a Joint Libraries Committee operated in Longford/Westmeath for a period between the late 1940's and the late 1980's).

In March, 1927, South Tipperary County Council appointed six members to the new Joint Committee and resolved that the Joint Body would have power to co-opt a further five members from South Riding. Since similar arrangements were made by North Tipperary

County Council the first Joint Libraries Committee consisted of twelve members with power to co-opt a further ten. The South Tipperary members were as follows:

Mr. P.L. Ryan, Chairman County Council, Russelstown House, Tipperary.

Mr. Wm. J. Mulcahy, M.C.C., Ardfinnan Castle, Cahir.

Mr. James Timoney, M.C.C., Cappawhite.

Mr. Patrick Morris, M.C.C., Crohane, Killenaule.

Captain C.M. Moore, M.C.C., Mooresfort, Tipperary.

Mr. Richard Curran, M.C.C., Cregg, Carrick-on-Suir,

North Tipperary members :-

W. Butler, M.C.C., U.D.C., Friar Street, Thurles.

Jeremiah Ryan, M.C.C., Friar Street, Thurles,

Martin Cunningham, M.C.C., Timeighter, Roscrea,

J.J. Hassett, M.C.C., Barnane, Templemore,

Joseph Morrissey, M.C.C., Moynetemple, Templemore,

James Bourke, M.C.C., Clonakenny, Roscrea.

The first General Meeting of the Joint Libraries Committee took place at the County Book Repository, Thurles on Friday, 18th March, 1927. Only four members turned up for the meeting and there was no representative from South Tipperary present. Nevertheless the members set about their business adopting the minutes of the last meeting of the Carnegie Libraries Committee, dealing with the powers of the Committee and passing a resolution calling on the two County Councils to amend their resolutions so as to give power to each contributing Urban Authority to select "one man" to act as a representative on the Committee. They went on to make the following co-options:

Messrs. P. Dempsey, Secretary. Committee of Technical Instruction, Nenagh; J. Ryan, Secretary. County Committee of Agriculture, Nenagh; Sean O'Byrne, Roscrea; Fr. Fitzgerald; Dr. Callinan, Thurles.

In a letter of apology for inability to attend, Mr. P.L. Ryan suggested that Mr. W. Ryan, Tipperary be co-opted. However, this co-option was not made but in true democratic character the members decided that representatives of South Tipperary County Council should meet to make their five co-options. Mr. P.L. Ryan, though not in attendance, was appointed Chairman of the Committee. All twelve members of the two County Councils were appointed to the Finance Sub-Committee and the following were appointed to the Book Selection Committee:

Mr. J. M. Kennedy, Town Clerk, Thurles; Fr. Fitzgerald, the Presbytery, Thurles; Fr. Devane, St. Patrick's College, Thurles; Mr. P.J. Dempsey, Secretary, Committee of Technical Instruction, Nenagh; Sean O'Byrne, Roscrea; Mr. J. Ryan, Secretary County Committee of Agriculture, Nenagh; Fr. J. Ryan, C.C. Templemore; Dr. Callinan, Thurles.

In order for Urban Councils to take advantage of the service now being administered by the County Library Committee, it was necessary for them to contribute at a rate of a halfpenny in the pound or submit a corresponding amount to their respective County Councils for that purpose. Carrick-on-Suir did not agree and so could not avail of the service at this time but the U.D.C. relinquished their powers under the Libraries Acts in 1936 and thereafter a centre operated in a room in the Town Hall which had formerly been occupied by the caretaker. While Clonmel Corporation maintained a separate library service up to 1965 it nevertheless benefited from the County Library Service with annual despatches of books not only to specific centres in the town, e.g. secondary schools, military barracks, but also by arrangement with the County Library Committee for bookstock, particularly fiction, to be deposited at their Municipal Library. The Corporation contributed at a rate of a halfpenny in the pound for this service. However, the service in Clonmel was by all accounts poor and inadequate and for that reason various attempts were made, especially in the 1940's, by the Corporation to relinquish their library powers in favour of the County Council, and ultimately the Library Committee, but all to no avail since agreement could not be reached. In fact, Clonmel Corporation would not relinquish their library powers until 1965 and indeed the finer details of the "handover" to the Joint Libraries Committee were not finally ironed out until 1972.

Throughout the '30's and '40's, notwithstanding the difficult years of World War Two, the new Library Committee made steady if modest progress especially in rural areas where heretofore, in most cases, no library service had existed. The number of centres had reached one hundred in 1941 with over 40,000 books being transported countywide on an annual basis. Virtually every village in the county had a library, however modest the collection or humble the location. Apart from the major towns, these centres were voluntarily run by enthusiastic local people who placed particular value in having such facilities in their communities. Indeed many of the town centres were equally voluntarily operated until a system of payment was introduced in the late '30's and early '40's.

The transition from urban operated libraries to a county system was anything but smooth and the protracted negotiations regarding Urban Council representation on the Joint Libraries Committee and the relinquishing of powers in relation to public libraries did nothing to speed up the process. Yet, when they finally became part of the larger body, the urban centres became the vanguard of the library service with the whole-hearted co-operation of their respective Councils. In the 1950's and 1960's the emphasis gradually moved from providing numerous small library centres throughout the county to consolidating the larger village and urban areas. It was becoming more and more difficult to maintain the service in the smaller centres and by degrees the number of these outlets fell, shortage of finance being very much the contributing factor. The produce of a halfpenny in the pound up to the mid-1940's allowed little leeway and even after this was increased to a penny in the pound in 1944 no significant progress was made. There was, though, increased emphasis placed on the provision of children's library facilities from around the early to mid 1950's, at which point too efforts were made to improve facilities in places such as Fethard, Clogheen and Cahir. In Clogheen, a room was made available in the courthouse and Fethard library was relocated to the Tirrey Centre.

It was becoming more and more obvious at this time that facilities in the larger urban areas were less than adequate, with most comprising no more than a small room located in the Town Hall or some rented premises with minimal staff and restricted opening hours. Of course the state of the public library service right throughout the country was declining ever since the Carnegie Grants had dried up in the 1930's, despite the fact that, by 1945, all the County Councils had adopted the Libraries Acts. For that reason, An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, which had been set up under the Public Libraries Act 1947, undertook a survey of the public libraries system in 1951 out of which grew a list of recommendations for the improvement of the system which covered, among others, finance, library buildings, location, bookstocks, schools libraries, staffing, mobile libraries, etc.

THE MODERN ERA

The 1960's brought about a certain kind of renaissance in the development of public libraries in Ireland not least because it was then that grant aid became available to library authorities under the provision of the Public Libraries Act 1947 (Grants) Regulations, 1961. While it would not be until 1978 that the Joint Libraries Committee took full advantage of these regulations nevertheless, in 1968, they succeeded in providing the first purpose-built library in South Tipperary with the building of a new library on a site provided by Cashel U.D.C. at The Green, Cashel. Two years later, in 1970, the Committee agreed to a priority list for the erection of new libraries in Tipperary and Carrick-on-Suir. The site for the library in Tipperary Town was acquired from the U.D.C. adjacent to Dan Breen House at a cost of £2,000. The new library was officially opened on 23rd June, 1977 with the total cost being borne by the Library Committee. Even as the official opening was taking place the building of the new library at the Fair Green in Carrick-on-Suir was well under way, the site having been offered by the U.D.C. there. This was the first library in the county to be built to recommended public library standards, as laid down by the International Federation of Library Associations (I.F.L.A.). It was also the first time since the provision of Carnegie Grants for the County Library Headquarters in the late 1920's and early 1930's that the Joint Libraries Committee availed of public libraries grant-aid. The grant was in the form of 50% of the loan charges applicable on a loan of over £80,000 which had been raised by North Tipperary County Council on behalf of the Library Committee. At this time the Joint Libraries Committee were not empowered to raise loans or for that matter to own land (the 1994 Local Government Act has allowed this impediment to be overcome). The grant-subsidy scheme was operated by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna on behalf of the Department of Local Government with the loan having been raised through the Local Loans Fund.

Arrangements were made in 1982 to relocate the Cahir Library to a new building, which had been acquired by South Tipperary County Council on the Square. Prior to this time, the library had been located in The Dispensary and earlier at No.2 Castle Street. Under a rental-aid scheme, again operated by An Chomhairle Leabharlanna, the Joint Libraries Committee recoup 50% of the annual rental costs payable to South Tipperary County Council.

As early as 1973 South Tipperary County Council had been actively seeking a suitable location for a new library in Clonmel and very early on the merits of the Borstal Site at Emmet Street were being examined. However, since major developments were taking place elsewhere a decision to build was deferred until the mid '80's. In the meantime new libraries had been built at Borriskane and Roscrea and a new County Library Headquarters was developed in Thurles. Because of the increased costs which were

accruing to the Joint Libraries Committee, South Tipperary County Council undertook to build the new library in Clonmel at Emmet Street, Loans were raised by the County Council for the purpose and, when finally the building was completed in 1987, the library was leased to the Library Committee. No doubt Clonmel Library is the flagship of the service in South Tipperary with extensive adult and children's areas as well as exhibition and lecture facilities. Officially opened on 24th April, 1987 and built at a cost of £600,000, the library of over 6,000 sq. ft. with 27,000 stock items, is a monument to enterprise and co-operation between the Joint Committee and the parent body South Tipperary County Council.

In 1988 new regulations governing the grant-aiding of public library capital projects were introduced by the Department of the Environment. Under these regulations, successful submissions to the Department would become eligible for a 100% grant for the building costs with 50% for the costs of stock and equipment. The new library in Nenagh, which was officially opened in 1996, was provided for in this manner with grant aid totalling almost £600,000. However, arising out of a recently published report on public libraries in Ireland[i], the system of State support for public library projects is set to change again.

It would be impossible and entirely incorrect to analyse the contribution of South Tipperary County Council to the public library service as distinct from that of North Tipperary County Council. From the time that both County Councils became involved with the "public library movement" in 1925 they were effectively united in their support and commitment to the County and that union was further cemented by the setting up of the Joint Libraries Committee in 1927. For this reason the development of the service throughout the entire county is equally attributable to both County Councils through their financial support of the Library Committee, which is now the only remaining public body with a countywide remit directly linking the two County Councils. Under the terms of the 1994 Local Government Act, the Joint Libraries Committee is officially recognised as a Library Authority in its own right with all the powers of a local authority for the purpose of public library provision. Appointments to the twenty one member Library Committee are made by the County Councils as provided for under the 1991 Local Government Act, with eleven appointed by South Tipperary County Council and ten appointed by North Tipperary County Council. At least one third of the members appointed by each County Council must be elected members of their respective County Councils. Powers of appointment to the Joint Committee lie solely with the two County Councils.

In 1981 a community library centre was opened in Golden through the efforts of an enterprising local committee. Staff and maintenance continue to be provided for by the committee while the Joint Libraries Committee provide the bookstock. All the rural library centres are staffed on a totally voluntary basis by very committed local people who, like their counterparts since 1925, continue to uphold the spirit of a rural library service and while for various reasons the number of centres has diminished greatly in latter years, there is growing evidence that there is a demand for library services in smaller communities. It is for that reason that the Joint Libraries Committee in its five year Development Plan 1997-2001[ii] have provided for the introduction of a Mobile Library Service in the county.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS LIBRARY SERVICE

Links were forged between the County Library Service and Primary Schools from as early as 1925 and today a network of 146 primary schools are serviced by the County Library. Since 1969 a formal system of co-operation has existed between the Department of Education and the various library authorities throughout the country whereby the library authorities, with the support of a per capita grant from the Department of Education, undertake to supply a range of books and professional support to primary schools. Despite burgeoning costs the Joint Libraries Committee invested heavily in this service over the years being mindful of the merits of introducing children to a wide range of books at an early age.

LOCAL STUDIES / COUNTY ARCHIVES

The Tipperary Local Studies/Archives Department, located at the County Library Headquarters at Castle Avenue, Thurles, is a popular and ever expanding aspect of the library service. The collection comprises books, journals, maps, photographs, newspapers and manuscript material all relating to the history, geography and culture of the county and it is evident that, from the very beginning of the County Library Service, a strong emphasis has been placed on such material. Every effort is made to continue adding to the stock by purchasing all current publications of Tipperary interest and by seeking out rare books and other printed or manuscript items. The Archives Department is home to many of the Minute Books of the various Boards of Guardians, e.g. Clonmel, Clogheen, Cashel, Tipperary, dating from the early 1840's as well as some fine examples of Poor Law Union Rate Books, Estate Rentals and maps, Grand Jury Presentments, etc. There is also a very comprehensive newspaper collection, much of which is available on microfilm and this collection is also being added to on a regular basis. When the new branch library, presently in the planning stages, is built in Thurles, the Local Studies/Archives section will expand very significantly allowing extensive storage, exhibition and study facilities. Computerisation will further improve access to the holdings not only at Library Headquarters, but eventually throughout the county through the branch library network.

The Tipperary Local Studies / Archives Department is also home to the extremely vibrant County Tipperary Historical Society, which was founded in 1987, having a world-wide membership of nearly 700 people with an interest in the history, culture and folklore of the county. The Society's success has been partly due to the high profile the activities and publications of the Society have gained through its Web pages, launched in 1995, and hosted on Tipperary Libraries' Web site.

NEW CASHEL LIBRARY

Perhaps it is apt that the next new purpose built library in the county will be located in Cashel where an excellent opportunity was missed in the early years of this century. For many years now the scope and location of the present library facilities in Cashel have been under review. In 1998, through the co-operation of Cashel U.D.C., South Tipperary County Council and the Joint Libraries Committee, a site was been identified at Friar Street, alongside the new Civic Offices development. Detailed plans for the new library of 4,000 sq. ft. are presently being drawn up with construction due to begin in 1999. A sign of the commitment of South Tipperary County Council to ongoing public library development is evident in the fact that, despite indications that grant-aid may not be forthcoming, they have undertaken to meet the building costs which are estimated in the region of £500,000.

ICT (Information Communications Technology)

The Development Planii, adopted by the Committee in 1997, outlined plans for the service to begin the county-wide automation of library routines between 1997 and 2001. It is envisaged that this will begin in 1999 with the initiation of "retrospective cataloguing" in Thurles, whereby an electronic catalogue, rather than the manual one in use up to now, is introduced - beginning with the cataloguing of the extensive stock in H.Q. Automation has huge implications for all facets of the service, but the end result will be a much more efficient and effective system which will go a long way towards reducing the enormous manual workload currently involved in the cataloguing, classification, circulation control aspects of the service. The proposed new library in Cashel, due for completion in late 1999, will, therefore, be the first automated public branch in the service. This vital, new resource would reflect the vision of the library of the future: where books and technology sit side-by-side in comfortable surroundings, combined with meeting areas and exhibition space which will facilitate, and project, the interests and culture of the community being served.

PC technology will also play an integral part in this new "one-stop-information-shop". More and more material is being moved to the CD-ROM platform, from encyclopaedias

to self-tutoring language software, and the library will have a duty to ensure that this form of learning is made available alongside the more traditional methods. PCs, therefore, will be provided for both children and adults connected to a CD server which will offer access to a variety of reference, language-learning and multimedia CD-ROMs, along with business oriented software which will encourage users to learn or use word-processing, database & spreadsheet packages at their own pace. Internet access, for both personal and business use, is fast becoming an invaluable source of information, particularly for its currency and vast range of information - as such, it will play a pivotal role in the access to information offered by the library of the future

The library service also played a part in a number of applications in 1998 for the status of Information Age Town, principally in Clonmel and Thurles and is currently involved in further applications to secure funding for public access ICT centres in both towns. Indeed, a free PC, with a year's free access to the Internet, is due to be made available to the public in 1999 in Clonmel public library.

The five year Development Planii for the library service also envisages the development of two further libraries in Thurles and Templemore, the expansion of the Local Studies / Archives Department and the introduction of a mobile library service.

Much has changed over the years in the way that the Library Committee has been financed by the County Councils. From an initial contribution based on the produce of a halfpenny in the pound the financial contribution to the Committee's revenue is now determined by demands agreed at the yearly Estimates Meetings of the Library Committee. The contribution of South Tipperary County Council in 1998 was £482,301.36. The task of providing modern public library facilities is becoming more demanding each year, with increased emphasis on high quality buildings, extensive stock, professional staff, increased opening hours, etc., and while books will continue to constitute the core element of the service, there is need for increased expenditure on ICT and multimedia services. Consequently the roles played by South Tipperary and North Tipperary County Councils will become ever more demanding and crucial.

It is not possible in the context of this chapter to fully outline the role of the Joint Libraries Committee in the overall development of library services in County Tipperary. The uniqueness of this body and its role as public library provider for the last seventy odd years, its unifying presence in a county which was divided in 1838, and its personalities and politics, deserve separate and more in-depth treatment and analysis.

[i] Branching Out: A New Public Library Service; Department of the Environment and Local Government, 1998

[ii] Development Plan, 1997-2001, County Tipperary Joint Libraries Committee, 1997

An edited version of this article appeared in Tipperary S.R. County Council 1899-1999: A Century of Local Democracy compiled by Brendan Long [Tipperary S.R. County Council, 1999]