

Lady Desart's speech at the Library opening

November 3rd 1910

The silver key to open the library door was supplied by P.T. Murphy, Jeweller, High St., Kilkenny. The Countess of Desart then proceeded formally to open the building. When the key was heard to turn in the lock, there was a prolonged outburst of applause. The company then proceeded inside and some of the ladies who were present were provided with seats. The lay Mayoress, Mrs. Potter occupied a seat with the Countess of Desart. The Countess of Desart was received with loud applause and addressed the audience.

The Kilkenny Library Indicator

It would be a mistake to assume that after the City Library opened in 1910, that the service offered was in any way similar to what is offered today. The most obvious difference is that patrons did not have direct access to the books. An argument current at the time was whether the public should have access to the books when selected – 'open access' or 'closed access' were the Librarian would mediate between the borrower and the books. It was commonly felt that the public would run amok if allowed free access to the books. In addition issues of morality etc. could arise if the public had non-supervised access to books.



Such attitudes meant that readers seldom had direct access to books. Usually they were stored behind the counter often in lofty book-stacks necessitating the use of ladders to retrieve the books. A book catalogue with numbers relating to the books was provided to borrowers for selection. The problem with this was that the selected items had often being issued. In the 1880's a solution of sorts arose. These were Library 'indicators'. The most popular was designed in 1877 by Alfred Cotgreave then the librarian of Wednesbury. The Cotgreave Indicator was a wooden frame fitted with rows of small slots; each contained a small book like ledger held in a metal tray. Each mini-ledger referred to an actual book in the closed collection. The ends of the tray were marked with a number that was linked to the actual book. One end was blue for books in the library, the other red for those out. Thus, when a book was in, the blue end of the tray faced towards the reader, when the book was borrowed, the tray was removed from the back of the frame, the loan was entered in the mini-ledger, this was done by entering the borrower's number and the date, and the tray replaced with the red end towards the reader. Blue was in and Red out.

The main disadvantage of this system was the large amount of space, the actual indicators took up. It was thus useless for large libraries and indicators were usually found in small and medium sized libraries. The issuing system was cumbersome by its nature and the system was soon abandoned in favour of open access to the books by patrons.

The City Library reflecting many of these attitudes acquired a Cotgreave Library Indicator that has survived to the present day. The indicator follows the conventional design, measures 180 cm X 120 cm. It contains a 100 slots vertically and 50 across. It thus can account for 5,000 book issues. The indicator seems to have being used from the opening of the library in 1910 up to the early 1940's. Kilkenny being Kilkenny reversed the normal colour code, here red was 'in' and blue 'out'.

Kilkenny differed from the trend in the United Kingdom in that the indicator remained in use for a long period. This was probably due to a variety of factors. The collection in the library was comparatively small; the library service had few resources so the Indicator probably represented a considerable investment and it also implied very limited access to the books by the public that was seen as desirable at the time

'Mr. Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, it is I who should thank you for the privilege you have accorded me in opening the library today and presenting me with the beautiful key which will add one more treasure to my most cherished possessions. I wish it were in my power to do so eloquently, as the occasion demands. It is my misfortune, not my fault that I can only express myself so inadequately, in thanking you to the best of my ability. I should like to add that how I hope this fine building may soon be filled with volumes of light and leading instructions and recreation; that it may grow to be a better place where science and literature and all those wonderful things which professors and learned men include under the terms Classics and Humanities, may find a fitting home and an ever increasing sphere of usefulness. I hope that it becomes a dwelling where Irish thought and Irish learning will radiate with all vivifying power from the centre to the sea. I hope this library since knowledge is a means and not an end, will prove an incentive and an inspiration to those whom it is destined to serve. I trust it may never come to be looked upon merely as a pleasant club to lounge in or just a circulating library for that light literature which we all enjoy and are entitled to enjoy in our moments of leisure, but which becomes the most unwholesome of foods if indulged in to much excess, or to the exclusion of more solid nutriment. I trust we shall always regard our free library as a valuable asset – a school wherein mind and spirit may be developed till they become the instrument of good providence intended them to be when bestowing them on us. It is a waste of time to read and to study if no tangible results are to follow the hours we devote to those pursuits. I therefore confidently appeal to all Kilkenny men and women to do all that. In them lies not only generally but individually, to make this library a mighty engine for the uplifting of our country – for bringing into fruition all that is highest and best in ourselves and those we are responsible for. May all blessings crown such endeavours. Once again I thank you most heartily and have much pleasure in now declaring this library open and dedicated for all time to the use of Kilkenny city and county.'

The City Library in 1910

The building is Byzantine in style and being nicely proportioned is commodious and handsome in appearance. It is built entirely of hollow concrete blocks and lined throughout with Athy stock brick, being finished with a dark grey coating. The concrete blocks it is interesting to know were manufactured on the premises of the contractors by local labour and some specimens at present on view in the building reflect great credit on the skill and intelligence of our local labourers. Owing to the occasional flooding which causes such an amount of damage to residents on the Quay, it was wisely decided to raise the foundation almost three feet above the level of the Quay. The facade is extremely pretty, the nobly-proportioned cut-stone columns with moulded caps and bases that support entrance porch and the turret that surmounts the roof imparting to it an arresting and picturesque appearance. The porch is semi-circular in shape, the parapet walls being of reinforced concrete. Handsome doors of one panel, the top being glazed with plate glass and having a semi-circular fanlight above afford an entrance to the building. The doors of the vestibule and those erected in the other portions of the building are hung on patent swing hinges and close without making the least noise. The first thought that suggests itself to one on entering is the admirable manner in which the building is lighted



The Cuffes of Desart

The Cuffe's family's first association with Ireland dates from Elizabethan times when **Captain John Cuffe** was killed in Ireland fighting for the Queen. His nephew, **Hugh Cuffe** received a grant of lands in Cork and Clare for services to the Queen. It is from his brother **Philip** that the Cuffes of Desart are descended. His grandson **Joseph Cuffe** was a Cromwellian and received a grant of 5,000 acres in the Barony of Shillelogher in Kilkenny. This grant formed the estate of Desart. His son **Agmondesham Cuffe** was a supporter of William of Orange. These astute political allegiances meant that his son, **John Cuffe, 1st Lord of Desart** had the resources and security to commission the building of the large house that would become the family seat – Desart Court in

and ventilated. The four apartments which will be open to the public can be viewed from the entrance hall, and each one has several large mullioned windows so arranged as to admit a full supply of fresh supply without causing any draughts whatever. There are in addition, twelve inlets in the external walls and six ceiling exhausts all built after the most improved pattern and discharging into turrets on the tower. The ceiling on the entrance hall is lined, the wells being coved and moulded. The lending department is situate on the right hand side and the counter has a nicely framed and pannelled front with Austrian polished oak top. At one side the lending department in the ladies' room and at the other, the reference department, which is connected by an adjustable glass partition. On the left hand side the general reading room, which is the largest in the building is situate, and below that the gymnasium. The librarian's room is at the back of the lending department and immediately over the heating chamber, which is built lower than the normal flow of the Nore. It was found necessary to carry out the work in that manner and after a very severe test the chamber is now guaranteed to be absolutely air tight. The sanitary annexe at the back is built similarly to the main portion of the building having a flat re-enforced concrete roof covered with Limmer asphalt.'

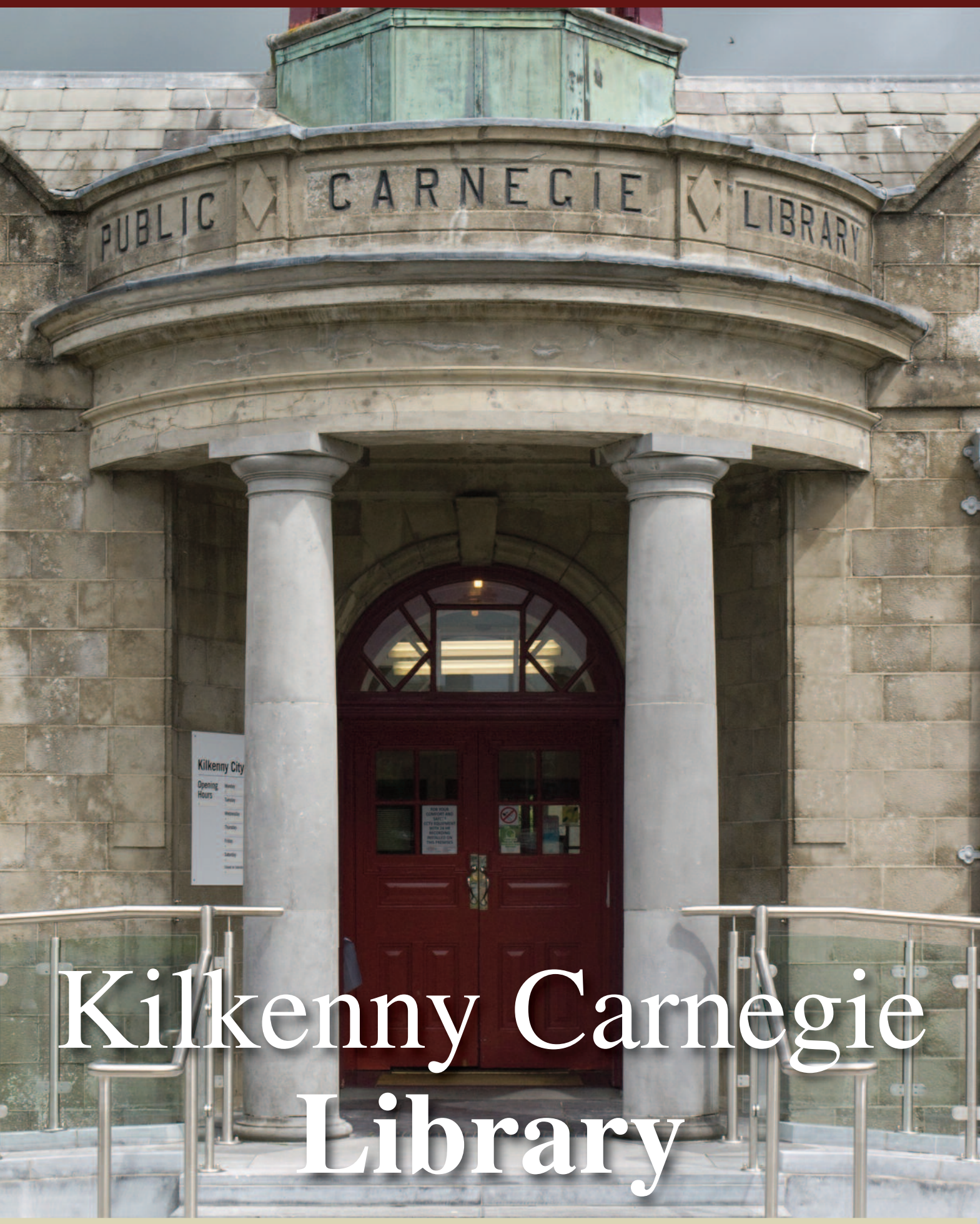
- Kilkenny People, Saturday, November 5 1910

1733. His grandson **Otway Cuffe** was created **Viscount Desart** in 1781, and advanced to the Irish Peerage as the **First Earl of Desart** in 1793. The Earl was succeeded by his only son also **Otway** in 1804. He married Catherine O'Connor, a member of an old Irish family in Offaly that had conformed to the Established church in the wake of the Cromwellian invasion. In 1818 she bore him a son **John Otway O'Connor Cuffe**. However the 2nd Earl died in 1820 leaving his two year old son as his heir. The dowager Countess remarried in 1826 but her second husband Rose Lambert Price was to die within two years of the marriage. The 3rd Earl, John was educated at Eton and Oxford. He married Lady Elizabeth Campbell and spent most of his time in England. His mother, the dowager Countess continued to live in Desart Court. He had four children, **William Ulick O'Connor Cuffe** who was to become the Fourth Earl, Hamilton Cuffe, who was to be the Fifth Earl and Otway Cuffe along with a daughter Alice. He died after a riding accident in 1865. The Fourth Earl, William after an early military career married Maria Emma Preston. The marriage was not a happy one ending in divorce in 1878. They had one daughter, Lady Kathleen Cuffe. During this period the Desarts spent most of their time in England, Desart Court was mainly used for recreation - hunting and shooting. His second marriage to Ellen Biscoffsheim, the Jewish heiress rumoured to have a dowry of £150,000 was a happier one. Large crowds turned out in Kilkenny to greet the Earl and his new bride in 1881. The Earl spent most of his time hunting and shooting. The outbreak of agrarian unrest in Ireland in 1884 lead to the Earl closing up Desart Court and relocated to England until his death in 1898.

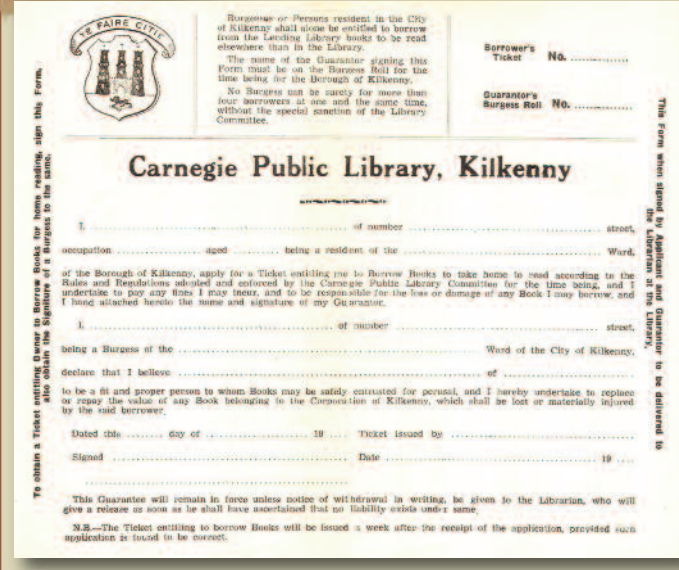
He was succeeded by his brother **Hamilton John Agmondesham Cuffe as the Fifth Earl**. He married Lady Margaret Lascelles and had two daughters. One, Lady Sybil Lubbock., recalled his life in her memoirs – 'A page from the Past'

published in 1940. Initially, Ellen the previous Countess of Desart refused to leave Desart Court, eventually she did, and the Fifth Earl and his family took up residence in 1899. He spent the next twenty years restoring the neglected house and grounds. After 1903, he sold most of the lands around Desart to his tenants retaining just the House and gardens. His brother Otway Cuffe had also returned to Kilkenny in 1898. As his brother had no son, he was now the heir to the Earldom. He took up residence in Sheestown House, just outside Kilkenny City. Unlike his brothers Otway was an enthusiastic embracer of all things Irish. He became president of the Gaelic League in 1904. He was also president of the Kilkenny Drama Club and acted himself. He also encouraged the revival of traditional crafts like wood-working and book-binding. In his many endeavours he was aided by his sister-in-law, Ellen, Countess of Desart. Otway was held in high esteem by the people of Kilkenny and was elected Mayor twice in 1907 and 1908. It was thus fitting that he was asked to lay the foundation stone of the Carnegie Library on John's Quay in 1908. He died in 1912. Ellen, Countess of Desart meanwhile had returned to live in Kilkenny at Aut Even and continued to support many of Otway's projects.

By 1922, Ireland was the in the grip of Civil War. While the 5th Earl was in London, Republican forces burned Desart Court. The Fifth Earl relocated to Hawkhurst in Sussex and died in 1934. Prior to this he had handed over the Desart estate to his niece, **Lady Kathleen Cuffe nee Pilkington**, the daughter of the Fourth Earl. Aided by compensation from the Free State Government, she restored and reopened the House in 1926. However by the 1930s, the changing political climate forced her to abandon the House. The House was put up for sale in 1934. It was used to billet soldiers during the Second World War. In 1957, it was totally demolished. No trace of it now remains.



Kilkenny Carnegie Library



Contributors: Damien Brett, Declan Macculey and Gabriel Murray. Dr. Brendan Grimes - Library Images



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Andrew Carnegie

Andrew Carnegie was born on 25th November 1835 in Dunfermline, Scotland in a typical weaver's cottage with only one room consisting of half the ground floor which was shared with the neighbouring weaver's family. His uncle, George Lauder, whom he referred to as 'Dod' introduced him to the writings of Robert Burns and such historical Scottish heroes as Robert the Bruce, William Wallace and Rob Roy. Falling on very hard times as a handloom weaver and with the country in starvation, William Carnegie decided to emigrate with his family to Allegheny, Pennsylvania in the United States in 1848 for the prospect of a better life. Andrew's family had to borrow money in order to immigrate. Allegheny was a very poor area. His first job at age 13 in 1848 was as a bobbin boy, changing spools of thread in a cotton mill twelve hours a day, six days a week. His wages were \$1.20 per week. Andrew's father, William Carnegie, started off working in a cotton mill but then would earn money weaving and peddling linens. His mother Margaret Morrison Carnegie earned money by binding shoes. Carnegie became a very wealthy industrialist. He devoted the latter part of his life to funding various charities and the building of libraries in Europe and America.

Kilkenny Corporation approached Andrew Carnegie for a grant to aid the establishment of a free library service. Carnegie agreed to build and equip the library on condition that the local authority provided the site and would maintain the service once established. £2,750 was promised by Carnegie for Kilkenny but was reduced to £2,100. The rate struck by the Corporation was low. The rate was to yield £140 but only yielded £105. Lady Desart purchased the site for the sum of £600. She also paid for the interior fit-out and the furniture provided by the Kilkenny Woodworkers. Between 1897 and 1913, Carnegie made grants amounting of up to £170,000 for the provision of eighty libraries in Ireland and England. The grants were made to local authorities that had adopted the 1855 Library Act. The fund was administered by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust (CUKT). Sixty-two libraries were built in Ireland. The first library was built in Dundalk in 1856, followed by Dublin 1884, Belfast, 1888 and Waterford in 1894



The Carnegie Library

The forerunner to a Public Library in Kilkenny was the Kilkenny Circulating Library in the early 1800's which had a reading room for members in the Tholsel which is now known as City Hall, the home of Kilkenny Borough Council. The annual subscription fee was 11 shillings and 4 pence.

at including three on John's Quay, Walkin Street, New Street, The Closh and James' Green.

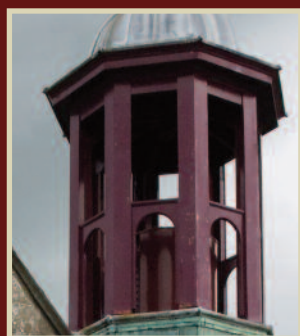
The eventual site at John's Quay was purchased for £600, by Lady Desart – widow of William the Fourth Earl of Desart. She also paid for the furniture. A noted local philanthropist she had established local woodworking and woollen industries. The foundation stone was laid in 1908. In 1910 the Library was handed over to the Corporation and was opened on the 3rd November by Lady Desart. Later that day she was conferred with the freedom of the City. Membership of the Library was free to the residents of the Borough, while there was a charge of 2/6 for non-residents.

The Reading Society books were transferred to the new library in 1911.

The library was all contained in a square shaped single floor. The original had six rooms in total, a Gymnasium used for the library, Reference Room, Librarian's Room, lending department, reading room and the ladies' room with an attached toilet.

The Classical effect front had a semi-circular entrance flanked by limestone Tuscan columns. A tower like cupola crowns the building. The building itself was constructed with solid concrete blocks, one of the first examples of this type of construction in Ireland. Until 1972, the Carnegie Library was the only purpose built facility offering a full range of library services in the County.

A committee was set up to look into procuring a site for the Library. Various locations were looked



County Kilkenny Carnegie Library Committee, 1923 – 1925

Although the public library service in the City dates from 1910, it was not until 1923, that a County service began to evolve. The initial Kilkenny County Library Committee was formed in 1923 as a necessary condition for the drawing down of a grant from the Irish Advisory Committee of the Carnegie Trust for the development of the a library service in Kilkenny. The aims of the Committee as outlined at the inaugural meeting on the 15th September 1923 were as follows:

- 1 Organising as quickly as possible an efficient book supply in the County
- 2 Raising public awareness of the service so that after two years of financial support from the Committee, the service would be funded from local public funds. If such funding was forthcoming the Committee would present both books and equipment to the County bought from the grant. Two further conditions were also stipulated.
 - a The scheme continued to be run by a qualified Librarian recognised by the Carnegie Trust
 - b Statistics of the scheme be furnished annually to the Trust and that the Trust's Irish Organising Librarian be allowed to inspect the scheme.

The venue for the first meeting was the Carnegie Library, John's Quay. The Chairman of the County Council was elected ex-officio Chairman of the new Committee. Alderman J. Magennis and Rev. C. McNamara were elected vice-Chairmen. The County Librarian, Miss F.M. Harrison was Secretary of the Committee. The Countess of Desart was among those co-opted on to the Committee.

Both a Finance and Book Selection Sub-Committee were set up also as conditions laid down by the Irish Advisory Committee. Mr. Lennox Robinson, Secretary of the Irish Advisory Committee of the Carnegie Trust attended the first meeting.

The Carnegie Library on John's Quay served as the central repository for the service during the two years of the Committee's operation. The main drive of the Library Committee was to extend the service out around the County. By March 1924, 2,415 volumes had been circulated to various small repositories around the County. These were known as 'Centres' or later 'Adult Centres'. These were staffed by local volunteers. The composition of the Committee and Sub-Committees was dominated by teachers both national and secondary and clergy. Three of the seven initial members of the Book-selection Committee were clergy. The perceived role of the service as being a tool for self-improvement both educationally and spiritually was thus emphasised probably reflecting public views of the time.

Local censorship of books was a constant feature. On the 19th December 1923, it was agreed for example that the works of George Bernard Shaw be removed from circulation. On the 26th November 1924, The County Librarian was queried by members that titles they had wanted withdrawn had not being sent out to local centres. It is important to note that such demands came from both lay and clerical members.

The other main areas that occupied the Committees were finance as funds were constantly low and the logistics of transporting books out to the Centres. However by the time of the Committee's last meeting on the 17th June, 1925, it had solid achievements to its name.

- 52 Centres had being set up around the County
- 5,412 Volumes in stock
- 5,410 registered readers
- 2,243 books in the Centres
- 15,820 books had being issued.

From 1925, the administration of the County Library Service as well as its financing devolved to Kilkenny County Council.

Kilkenny County Library Service, early years.

In August, 1925, Kilkenny County Council took over the running of the Library Service. The City Library remained under the ambit of Kilkenny Corporation and thus had a strange relationship with the evolving County service. There are no records of issues recorded for the Library in the 1933 Annual Report. This may be because the Library was still using the Cotgreave Library Indicator which did not facilitate the recording of issues. The development of the City Library may well have being stymied by being under a separate authority. It is interesting to note that other sites in the City maintained collections in addition to the City Library. These were:

- C.B.S. James Street
- Home Rule Club, John's Quay
- C.Y.M.S., William Street
- St. Kieran's College, College Road.

Mr. McSweeney is recorded as the local Librarian in the City Library in 1933. B.M. Barron was the County Librarian. 25 individuals served on the Library Committee. Among their number they included five clergy and one woman. The main development in 1933 was the transfer of the central book repository that served the County from the City Library to a portion of Evan's Home. Previously this portion had being used for educational purposes. The Carnegie United Kingdom Trust contributed £140 towards the internal alteration and repairs of the building. In 1937, the Library Service maintained over 103 Centres in the County, mostly in Schools. The books were exchanged every four months. Local volunteers ran these collections and many selected stock at the central repository. The educational emphasis of the service was still strongly emphasised with some fictional works read for leisure being described as 'tripe' in the 1937 Annual Report. The service had a stock of 33,330 in 1937; total issues were 87,774 with 29,386 books being dispatched around the County, interestingly despite official attitudes 67,273 of these issues were fiction, 13,587 children's and 6,914 non-fiction.



The City Library - a new beginning

On the 20th May, 1946, Kilkenny Corporation relinquished its powers and duties under the Public Libraries (Ireland) Acts 1855 to 1920 to Kilkenny County Council. This meant that for what had being to all interests and purposes, two services could be amalgamated into one. The change resulted in immediate modifications to the building. The interior was re-decorated and painted. Many internal partitions were removed allowing the public open access to the stock. It was probably from this period that the services of the old Library Indicator was finally dispensed with. The book stock was catalogued and a full-time Library Assistant appointed. During this period the library interior still had several rooms compared to now. These housed newspapers, magazines, local history and a reference room and also incorporated two lending departments, adult and childrens. By 1957, the City Library had a membership of 3,521, 2,108 were adults and a bookstock of 14,884. Interestingly the City Library still got loans of 500 books every 14 weeks from the County Service reflecting still the old division of the service. Borrowers were allowed to borrow three books. In 1959 the staffing of the Library service was as follows: Librarian 1, Library Assistants 4, Library Assistant – City Library 1, this was Nancy Dalton who was to give many years of loyal service to the City Library, Cleaner 1. Further major renovations and refurbishment occurred in 1979. During this period the lending and reference services were moved to rooms over the Village Inn in Patrick Street. The changes resulted in a more open-plan layout, removal of wall presses incorporating a new desk. In the late 1980's the last remaining partitions and display presses were removed and a much larger desk installed. Since the Library opened in 1910 flooding had always being at threat. While the Library building itself was seldom directly flooded, considerable loss of opening hours did occur. In recent years major engineering works on the adjacent river Nore have finally removed the threat of flooding from the library and its environs. Throughout the years the Carnegie Library has evolved and reinvented itself. Its core purpose is to remain flexible and responsive to the needs of the community. Traditional services now co-exist with newer services such as public access to technology. The introduction of the public access internet service is now regarded as a mainstream service allowing for the development of a virtual library service. It is regarded as a community space where communities can engage with knowledge in safe and comfortable environment. The physical accessibility of the building was addressed in 2009 with the installation of a ramp and there are a range of accessible technologies available to all. It's key role is as a space where people of all ages receive support with learning, access information in all formats, explore their heritage and culture, access technology, attend reader development events and borrow and read books.

Ellen Odette Biscoffsheim: The Countess of Desart, 1857-1933

In 1881, Ellen Odette, eldest daughter of Henry Bischoffsheim, a London banker, married William Ulick O'Connor, the fourth Earl of Desart (d.1898), with a seat in Kilkenny. Many years afterwards in a letter to the editor of the Jewish Guardian of 12th September 1930, she wrote emphatically resenting 'the unwarrantable assumption in your issue of 5th September that I have 'deserted the faith' of my fathers. Will you please contradict that unfounded statement in your next issue? I am, as I have been all my life, a staunch and practicing Jewess, far too proud of my faith and race not to feel extremely indignant at the slur you have tried to cast on me.' The Countess divided her public work between the Jewish and general communities. In England, returning to her country seat at Ascot, Berkshire after the death of her husband, she devoted much of her time to social and charitable work in the London Jewish community. Among the people of Kilkenny, where in 1912 she took up residence again at Aut Even, Talbot's Inch, she was spoken of with reverent admiration as the 'Jewish Lady'. When in 1910 the freedom of the city of Kilkenny was conferred to her, she claimed to be the only woman in Ireland this honoured and the only Jewess in the world – till then – to be made an honorary citizen. For her services to the cultural and economic welfare of Ireland, she was on the nomination of President Cosgrave, made a Senator of the Irish Free State in December 1922. When she died in 1933 she was buried beside her husband in Falmouth cemetery, Cornwall, but the funeral service was, at her request conducted to Jewish rites.



4th Countess of Desart



John Street Flooded in 1947

John's Quay & its environs

The origin of **John's Quay** is supposedly linked to the building of the Kilkenny Canal. In order to receive a grant from the government, the committee building the canal had to show that the river was in use. A boat was said to have been transported overland and docked at the east bank of the river, so the "quay" became a local joke. It can not be confirmed whether this story is true.

The flooding of the **Nore** has been quite destructive throughout the history of the City. In 1487 Green's Bridge was destroyed, in 1584 St. John's Bridge was also destroyed by the rising Nore. The 2nd of October 1763 was the worst flood of all destroying both bridges, and destroying property to the value of £11,000.

The origin of the name the **Lake** can be attributed to the flooding of the river. The lake area today consists of the area between Michael Street and the river. The lake in the 18th century consists of low lying grassland that lay between the river and the old mill stream, the stream flowing from the river at Greens' Bridge to a point past the library. As the water levels rose the area flooded and so lead to the name.

The Lake School opened in 1908 and was the first school for infants and girls within the area. Previously they had had to attend the Windgap School with the boys. The original school was located near the present building. The current School opened in 1937.

St Johns's Bridge opened on 21st of November, 1910 and was designed by L.G. Mouchel and constructed by J and R Thompson. Constructed of reinforced concrete it was the largest single arch bridge, constructed by the then new method of construction. It spans 43 metres long and replaced a bridge constructed in the 18th century. It is built on or near the site of a number of bridges that have existed over that area of the river since the 12th century.

Evan's Ayslum also known as **Evan's Home** was created by the bequest of Joseph Evans of Belevan, Ballyfrunk in 1818. It was to house the homeless of Kilkenny and could accomodate 12 men and 12 women. Joseph Evans also provided for the future financing of the institution. The building also housed the Model School and the County Library throughout its lifetime. It continued as a home until the 1990's.

The **Home Rule Club** located on John's Quay was founded on July 24th 1894 for "the advancement of Catholic and National Interests providing rational amusements for its members". It was started by a group of local individuals with likeminded political views. The building had previously held the Nore View School which was established sometime before 1840. The school had imparted education through a new method of memory training developed by Dr. Gregory Von Fainagle a German educationalist.