

# Fermoy Board of Guardians

Ref. IE CCCA/BG/89

## Descriptive List Cork City and County Archives

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## Identity Statement

<b>Reference Code:</b>	IE CCCA/BG/89
<b>Title:</b>	Fermoy Board of Guardians
<b>Dates:</b>	1870 – 1924
<b>Level of description:</b>	Fonds
<b>Extent:</b>	14 items

## Context

**Creator(s):**

Fermoy Board of Guardians

**Archival History**

The surviving records of the Fermoy Board of Guardians were deposited in the Archives in the early 1980s, and in an accession of records from County Council Offices, Annabella, Mallow, in 2007.

**Administrative & Biographical History**

The Fermoy Board of Guardians was the governing body of Fermoy workhouse and poor law union. Fermoy Poor Law Union was established under the Poor Law (Ireland) Act, 1838. It was one of 16 unions in the overall County Cork area. Each union was centred on a city or market town and its hinterland, and this union area sometimes ignored existing parish or county boundaries. In this central town was situated the union workhouse (usually built between 1838 and 1852) which provided relief for the unemployed and the destitute.

Fermoy Workhouse opened on 4 July 1841. The earliest minutes to have survived are from 1870-71. At that time, the area of the union included the dispensary districts of Fermoy, Rathcormac, Kilworth, Ballynoe, and Ballyhooly. In November 1916, the Mitchelstown and Fermoy Unions were amalgamated. The enlarged Fermoy Union area included the Rural Districts of Fermoy, Mitchelstown I, and Mitchelstown II. The Mitchelstown districts included the dispensary districts of Mitchelstown, Kildorrery and Galbally (Co Limerick). Kilbehenny dispensary house, in Mitchelstown dispensary district, was also in Co Limerick. No separate records for Mitchelstown Union exist prior to the amalgamation. The Mitchelstown workhouse building was sold in 1919.

Each workhouse was managed by a staff and officers under the charge of a workhouse master, who reported to the board. Overall responsibility rested with the union's board of guardians, some of

whom were elected, and some of whom were ex-officio members appointed usually from amongst local magistrates. The board appointed its own inhouse committees, and received reports from workhouse officers and from dispensary district committees and district medical officers. It also made resolutions on internal and poor law matters and, sometimes, on wider political or social issues. Poor law services were principally financed by a poor rate levied on property owners in the union's districts, and collected by rate collectors appointed by the board. Central government also provided loans.

Each union was under the central supervision of the Poor Law Commissioners up to 1874 and thereafter of the Local Government Board (later Local Government Board in Ireland). These government-appointed bodies received reports from the board and its officers, appointed inspectors and auditors, sanctioned or rejected proposed expenditure, appointments, and policies, and made the final decision on major administrative issues.

In October 1920 the Board resolved to 'sever their connection with the English Local Government Board', recognising instead the authority of Dail Eireann and its Department of Local Government.

Over time, the responsibilities of the guardians increased to encompass public health, including some medical relief for the destitute at the workhouse, 'outdoor' relief through a system of dispensary districts, and other functions including overseeing smallpox vaccinations, the boarding-out of orphan and deserted children, monitoring contagious diseases in animals, and providing labourers' cottages and improved sanitation. The workhouse buildings included a fever hospital, and fever sheds were created in local districts when larger outbreaks occurred. The workhouse also provided education to child inmates, and employed school teachers.

These changing responsibilities were governed by legislation, including the Public Health (Ireland) Acts 1874 and 1878, Medical Charities Acts, Vaccination Acts, Dispensary Houses Act, the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Act, Contagious Diseases (Animals) Act 1878, and Labourers' Acts. While these acts tended to increase the role of the board, the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898 saw most of its public health functions taken over by the newly-created Cork County Council and the Fermoy and Mitchelstown Rural District Councils. The board continued to administer the workhouse and its hospital, and to supervise some forms of outdoor relief.

The Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act 1923 led to the abolition of the workhouse system, and its replacement with the formation of the county boards of health and public assistance.

## Content & Structure

### **Scope & Content**

The surviving archives of the Fermoy Board of Guardians consist of minute books from 1870-71, 1899, and most of the years from 1905 to 1924 (BG/89/A/1-40). It is most unfortunate that nearly all 19<sup>th</sup> century minute books have not survived, and that no records are thought to exist of Mitchelstown Union prior to its amalgamation with Fermoy in 1916. The minute books present, however, do document the provision of poor relief and rural dispensary services in the first quarter of the twentieth century, and are an important record, for instance, of the care of orphaned and boarded-out children, deserted families, and the disabled and mentally ill. The amalgamation of Mitchelstown Union, including districts from Co Limerick, with Fermoy Union was a significant late development in the Poor Law history of south Munster. The minutes also reflect national political developments and local experiences of them, and shed some light on topics such as the Great War, and the Influenza epidemics of 1919.

The only other record present, a receipts and payments book (BG/89/CF/1: 1918-25), provides some useful background information on the financial operations of the union in a period also well documented in the surviving minutes.

### **Arrangement**

The collection is arranged into two separate series, that of minutes containing most of the records (see table of contents). This arrangement is based on that devised for Poor Law records nationally by Sean McMenemy of the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (see Appendix 2 to McMenemy's article in Irish Archives Bulletin Vol 1, No 2, October 1971). Please note that gaps occur.

### **Headings**

#### 1. Minute Books

A10-40	Board of Guardian Minute Books	1870-1924 (13 items)
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#### 2. Financial Records

CF1	Guardians' Receipts and Payments Books	1918-1926 (1 item)
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## **Conditions of Access & Use**

**Access:** Open by appointment to those holding a current readers' ticket.

**Language:** English

**Finding Aids:** Summary descriptive list.

## **Allied Materials:**

### **Related Material**

CCCA:

Board of Guardian records for other poor law unions in County Cork  
Cork County Boards of Health and Public Assistance records, 1921-66  
Fermoy Rural District Council records, 1899-1925  
Cork County Council records, 1899-1925 (including Labourers' Cottages ledgers, 1887- )

Elsewhere:

National Archives of Ireland:

Archives of the Poor Law Commissioners  
Archives of the Local Government Board in Ireland  
Archives of the Department of Local Government

## **Archivist's Note:**

Timmy O Connor  
Local Government Archivist, CCCA  
March 2011

## List of Items and Descriptions

### 1. Minute Books

#### BG/89/A Fermoy Board of Guardian Minute Books

**Scope and Content:**

A record of meetings and decisions made by the board of guardians in administering the workhouse and poor relief generally. At meetings, administrative, financial, rates, and medical books were examined, officers' reports and committee findings heard, correspondence read and considered, and applications for admission decided on. Matters arising with regard to the workhouse, staff, provisions, bills, rate collection, the Poor Law Commissioners/Local Government Board, and other issues, were also discussed. The minutes also include weekly statistics of admissions, discharges, and deaths in the workhouse, and of outdoor relief. The earliest surviving volume begins in 1870, and there is a long gap thereafter until 1899. Most volumes from 1905 to 1924 are present. Gaps are indicated where they occur.

**Date:** 30 Mar 1870 – 19 Apr 1924 (Gaps)

**Level:** Series

**Extent:** 13 volumes

1.-9. Missing  
10. 30 Mar 1870 – 22 Mar 1871

Supplemental sheets for proceedings under the Medical Charities Act and the Nuisances Removal and Diseases Prevention Acts follow ordinary minutes. The volume is indexed.

Includes:

30 Mar 1870 Lists of wardens and committees of management appointed to the dispensary districts of Fermoy, Rathcormac, Kilworth, Ballynoe, and Ballyhooly.

6 Apr 1870 PLC letter referring to the case of a woman 'who after being prematurely confined of twins, it is alleged was in an unfit state to be removed to the workhouse and died from want of nourishment and stimulants'. PLC remark that this 'affords an illustration of the insufficiency of the present arrangement for affording relief through the relieving officer', and ask the board to consider dividing the union into relief districts, each with its own relieving officer.

Master's report referring to repayment of loan relief given to two inmates [a recurring item: see index 'L'].

13 Apr 1870 Ordered that seven pounds be granted to provide outfits for two boys, Stephen and John Veale, inmates of the workhouse, whose passage to Queensland has been paid for by their parents.

27 April 1870 Master's report referring to a hospital patient who, at his 'earnest request' was 'permitted to receive the ministrations of the RC Chaplain on Sunday last. The man died on Tuesday'.

11 May 1870 Resolved, that the union be divided into four relief districts, not three as proposed by the PLC inspector, namely: Fermoy, Ballyhooly, Rathcormac, and Conna districts. Electoral divisions and dispensary houses included in each district are indicated. [See also 27 Apr and 18 May 1870]

18 May 1870 PLC letter regarding reports and forms to be returned in respect of vaccination defaulters. In response, the board suggest that in future the PLC communicate directly with medical officers for this information. [See also 25 May 1870]

8 Jun 1870 Resolved, that a pump be ordered for the town of Rathcormac 'with a view of providing a proper supply of water for the inhabitants'.

22 Jun 1870 Master's report regarding a report that the schoolmaster entered the female fever ward around midnight 'under the influence of drink'. The schoolmaster was dismissed.

6 Jul 1870 Ordered, that arrears of rate amounting to £25 13s 3d be declared unrecoverable 'having been assessed on houses unoccupied wholly or in part during the year'.

10 Aug 1870 Sanitary Officer's report on two cases of smallpox in the Kilworth Dispensary district. [ See also 3 and 31 Aug and 14 and 21 Sep]

17 Aug 1870 Ordered by the board, acting as the sewer authority, that the sewage committees appointed on 3 Aug be dissolved (on foot of notice of motion seeking 'proper steps being taken by the board to provide a sufficient supply of pure water for the towns of Castletownroche and... Ballyhooly').

24 Aug 1870 Master's report stating that he prosecuted at petty sessions a man for deserting his wife and five children, inmates. The man was initially sentenced to three months in prison, but the magistrates complied with his request to be allowed pay two shillings a week to meet the costs of their maintenance (£2 1s 0d) and legal costs (3s 6d).

7 Sep 1870 County Surveyor's report on Kilworth water supply.

9 Nov 1870 County Surveyor's report regarding Castletownroche water supply.

16 Nov 1870 Warrant from the parish of St Marylebone for the removal of a woman born in Mitchelstown parish and her child. The master reported that the woman and child, in the charge of an official, arrived at the workhouse .

7 Dec 1870 Board of Education letter forwarding an extract from their inspector's report. It states 'the course of training and instruction appears well adapted to the age, capacity, and social circumstances of the pupils'. He notes 'In the female department the pupils are very young, their average being only 6.6 whilst that of the boys is 9.2'.

21 Dec 1870 Master's report suggesting 'the propriety of appointing a paid female nurse for the Fever Hospital' and proposing Miss Eliza Dwyer for the post.

Resolved, that the board 'fully approve of the sealed order for the appointment of a general unions apothecary, and for establishing a general depot for good and genuine drugs'. It is preferred to the existing 'system of medical contracts'. It is added 'there should be a stringent system of inspecting drugs by highly qualified analytical chemists'.

22 Feb 1871 Master's report regarding the late porter, referring to missing clothing and money taken from inmates. One inmate reported that she pawned one of her petticoats and gave some of the money raised to the porter 'to buy tea and sugar for her occasionally'. [See also 15 Feb 1871]

11.-19.  
20.

Missing

29 Apr 1899 – 22 Jul 1899

The volume contains both Fermoy Union and Rural District Council minutes up to 20 May 1899. Thereafter, only RDC minutes are recorded. The book was discontinued in use after 22 July. The RDC minutes are written into the supplemental sheets for Public Health Acts and Labourers Acts proceedings. The board of guardians minutes, in addition to ordinary proceedings, record proceedings under the Medical Charities Act, Vaccination Acts, and Dispensary Houses Act. Most guardians, excepting urban guardians, served as councillors.

Includes;

29 April 1899 LGB letter stating, 'in reference to entries contained in the first minutes of proceedings of the Rural District Council', that clerks serving both the board and the RDC must keep all records 'totally distinct and separate', and advising 'if this instruction is not carefully observed' they will authorise the RDC to appoint a clerk 'other than the clerk to the board of guardians'. [In the RDC minutes, an LGB letter states that minutes should be forwarded 'in three distinct and separate portions': proceedings under the Public Health Acts, under the Labourers' Acts, and other proceedings]



6 May 1899 No meeting held 'pursuant to resolution, fixing once a fortnight for the future meetings of the board'.

13 May 1899 Resolutions from other unions adopted regarding 'the inalienable right of the Irish people to have the management of their own affairs' and the compulsory sale 'of lands to occupiers and tillers of the soil on fair and equitable terms'. The meeting also passed two other resolutions on the land question.

Report of committee appointed to confer with the dispensary medical officers 'as to fees for attendance on persons unable to pay the usual fees'.

- 21.-24. Missing
- 25. 30 Dec 1905 – 29 Dec 1906
- 26. 12 Jan 1907 – 11 Jan 1908
- 27. 25 Jan 1908 – 6 Feb 1909
- 28. 20 Feb 1909 – 19 Feb 1910
- 29. 5 Mar 1910 – 18 Feb 1911
- 30. 4 Mar 1911 – 2 Mar 1912
- 31.-34. Missing
- 35. 1 Apr 1916 – 24 Mar 1917

Includes:

14 Oct 1916 Sealed Order declaring 'as from 1<sup>st</sup> November 1916, the dissolution of the Mitchelstown Union and thenceforth shall form part of the Fermoy Union'.

25 Nov 1916 LG Dept letter regarding arrangements arising out of the recent amalgamation of Mitchelstown Union. Reference is made to the closing of accounts, the transfer of stock, and taking possession of the workhouse. It is added that 'no special instructions are required for bringing into operation the details of the amalgamation', as Mitchelstown guardians become guardians of the new Fermoy union on the date of the amalgamation.

- 36. Missing
- 37. 11 May 1918 – 10 May 1919
- 38. 24 May 1919 – 29 May 1920

Includes:

26 July 1919 LG Dept letter allowing the payment of a bonus of £10 to three nuns in the infirmary 'in respect of services during the Influenza epidemics'. They decline to sanction the same payment to fever hospital nurses. [War bonuses and ration allowances are recurring themes in this volume].

15 May 1920 Requested, that the LGB fix the date for the annual meeting, the clerk informing them of the dates of the annual meetings 'of the several Rural District Councils in the Union': Fermoy, Mitchelstown No I, Mitchelstown No II. It is also asked whether Mitchelstown councillors must sign

39. declarations of acceptance of office as guardians.  
19 Jun 1920 – 17 Jun 1922

Minutes of ordinary proceedings are followed by sheets for financial minutes and statistical minutes, and by the supplemental sheet for proceedings under the Medical Charities Acts.

Includes:

19 Jun 1920 Annual Meeting, resolved, 'to hold the meetings of the board of guardians monthly in future at 2 o'clock pm so as to suit the convenience of members from Mitchelstown area'.

Resolved, that the board 'acknowledge the authority of Dail Eireann as the duly elected government of the Irish people'. [See also 21 Aug 1921]

Resolved, to pledge support 'in aid of the railway and other workers who refuse to handle war equipment for the army of occupation in this country'.

17 Jul 1920 Resolutions passed, making canvassing for appointments under the board a disqualifying offence, and requiring candidates for appointments to have a knowledge of Irish 'which would include at least to Book III Ceachta Beaga'. An addendum adds 'except in such cases as a candidate producing a certificate from a competent Republican authority that he was engaged in work for the Republic and had not sufficient time to study Irish'; Orders made arising out of the sale of the late Mitchelstown workhouse to Messrs Fitzgerald and Russell. [See also, e.g., 17 June 1922]

18 Sep 1920 Resolved, that the board adjourn for all but urgent business 'until the men in prison on hunger strike are released and as a protest against the action of the government regarding them'.

Enclosure, form of half-yearly tender for workhouse supplies.

Medical officer's report stating 'that the Conna Dispensary Depot is almost a ruin and should be immediately looked after'.

16 Oct 1920 Resolved, 'that this board of guardians do completely sever their connection with the English Local Government Board'.

18 Dec 1920 Medical officer's report stating that the workhouse nursery is overcrowded 'and some of the infants have to be transferred to the body of the house at night'.

19 Feb 1921 Department of Local Government letter requesting information on the admission of 18 cases of diphtheria. [See also 17 Sep 1921]

16 Apr 1921 Master's report stating that two raids of the workhouse by the military took place on 27 February ('between the hours of 1 o'clock and 4:30 o'clock am') and 10 March. An inmate was arrested during the first search, and the second search is described as 'most exhaustive'.

Committee report regarding alleged impropriety on the part of the Master.

Impropriety was not substantiated, but it is recommended 'that children in the workhouse be refused access to the body or general run of the workhouse'. Ordered, 'that three months after confinement, all able-bodied women and their children be discharged from the workhouse'.

21 May 1921 Medical Officer's report stating that diphtheria broke out in the nursery. All children were moved to the main female block on the ground floor, which he recommends be retained as a permanent nursery. Ordered, 'that the master be empowered to have as many able-bodied men and women as possible discharged from the workhouse before the next meeting'. [Total inmates to 14 May: 233; total to 11 June: 201]

21 Aug 1921 Decided not to appoint a permanent chairman [following repeated deferrals of the annual election owing to small numbers of guardians in attendance].

LG Dept letters regarding officers, salaries, and allowances, one making reference to 'the financial condition of the local bodies'.

Enclosures, Analyses of drugs under dispensary regulations forms

17 Sep 1921 Letter from the secretary, St Anne's Hill Hydro, Blarney, stating that a patient 'cannot be admitted as "The Home" for the poorer classes has been closed since 1914 and will not reopen'.

Visiting committee report referring to dietary and to religious procedures attendant on the burial of inmates in the workhouse cemetery.

Ordered that a blind inmate be sent to an institution for the blind 'to complete his training as a basket maker'.

Ordered, that the inspector of cruelty to children be contacted regarding a case of desertion in Fermoy.

15 Oct 1921 Request to be informed by the LG Dept on points of the Co Limerick workhouse amalgamation scheme, including whether the Limerick committee will become partly responsible for superannuation allowances arising out of the abolition of the Mitchelstown workhouse.

21 Nov 1921 Master's report referring to the admission of an inmate 'suffering from severe head wounds' who subsequently died and whose body was removed by 'a party of police and military under District Inspector Gibson' for a military inquiry before being returned. The board resolved that 'no official... hold any communication, or give information to any member of the Crown forces'. [See also 17 Dec 1921]

21 Dec 1921 LG Dept letter regarding a proposed allowance of £1 per week in lieu of rations to each nun employed in the union.

21 Jan 1922 Master's report in response to LG Dept letters regarding deficits in the provision check account. He explains 'during the period of hostilities it became necessary to afford food and lodging to members of the IRA as well as others who were wanted by the enemy forces... no record of any kind could

be kept of these transactions'. Also present is an LG Dept letter forwarding findings of a sworn inquiry into charges brought against the master.

18 Feb 1922 Resolved, that representatives be sent to the meeting on the draft scheme for the abolition of workhouses, and that they argue 'in favour of the retention of the local hospital'.

40. 15 Jul 1922 – 19 Apr 1924

Includes:

19 Apr 1924 Medical Officer's report referring to payment for surgical work performed for the military. The guardians note that 'the Free State Army Authorities had contributed over £800 towards the cost of maintenance of their patients and the rate charged [ie, by the medical officer] was considerably in excess of the average cost'.

LG Dept letter, stating that, in the event of confirmation of the abolition of boards of guardians under the County Amalgamation Scheme, steps should be taken to have Union accounts closed and to forward a statement of assets and liabilities to the County Council.

## **2. Financial Records**

### **BG/89/CF/1 Board of Guardians' Receipt and Payment Book**

#### **Scope and Content:**

Treasurer's record of receipts and payments. Noted on the credit (left) side are the date of receipts, and the amount lodged. Noted on the debit (right) side are the dates of payments and the amount paid. Receipts and payments are noted as being 'To Balance' or brought forward. In general, particulars of receipts and payments, other than the date and amount, are not noted. Some entries, however, do note recipients, e.g., Cork County Council, RDC, Commissioners for Charitable Donations, and loan relief to inmates.

**Date:** 30 September 1918 – 9 May 1925

**Level:** Item

**Extent:** 1 volume