



The Irish Sheriff

Magazine of the High Sheriffs' Association of Northern Ireland

FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to our Spring publication of the Irish Sheriff. This edition includes not only an introduction to our current High Sheriffs but a couple of interesting articles on past Sheriffs. A Secretary's Note has been introduced and will become a regular feature.

Remember this is your newsletter, we would welcome your comments and feedback to editor@highsheriffsni.com.

Sue Wild and Kate Spencer

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

SHERIFFS AND PAST SHERIFFS

First of all, I would like to congratulate all current 'High' Sheriffs in Northern Ireland, and I hope that with the support of the preceding Sheriff and the association you have felt informed and enabled to develop your own distinctive way of representing the Shrievalty.

The association has worked extremely hard to ensure that the reference documentation on the members area of the website is both informative and useful. This documentation will be reviewed at appropriate times as and when necessary.

We have continued to develop our relationships with the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), the Prison Service and the Probation Service, the Lieutenancy and the Judiciary and we hugely appreciate when past Sheriffs suggest with support, introductions to organisations such as NIACRO (NI Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders). These are very much areas that we feel the Shrievalty should explore and it would be great to discuss at the AGM. Further to the notification sent out by the Hon. Secretary advising all members of the Annual General Meeting on the 29th of April 2026, I would like to ask members to make their best endeavours to attend as it is so important for all members to participate as the Shrievalty role develops in Northern Ireland.

Peter TW Mackie DL
Chairman HSANI



Peter Mackie Chairman HSANI



Let us introduce you to a very colourful past High Sheriff, Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh. The initial idea for this feature came from our chair Peter Mackie who kindly introduced us to a direct descendent, Morgan Kavanagh who still resides at the family home, Borris House, County Carlow. *We have tried to be as accurate as possible but readers should be advised to verify any information independently.*

Kate Spencer and Sue Wild

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE ARTHUR MACMURROUGH KAVANAGH 1831-1889

HIGH SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF KILKENNY 1856 AND HIGH SHERIFF OF THE COUNTY OF CARLOW 1857



Right Honourable Arthur Kavanagh

Arthur was born on the 25th of March 1831 at Borris House in County Carlow, the third son of Thomas Kavanagh and his second wife Lady Harriet Margaret Le Poer Trench. He entered the world with only rudimentary arms and legs, yet he went on to become a skilled horseman, enthusiastic sailor, an excellent shot, landlord, and Member of Parliament.

What made Arthur exceptional was not just what he achieved, but how with determination and undaunted spirit he refused to accept his limitations. His mother, Lady Harriet encouraged and supported him and he was raised to be fiercely self-sufficient. As a child he learned

to grasp objects with the ends of his arm stumps, and to ride using specially designed saddles.

As a teenager and young adult Arthur travelled extensively, firstly with his mother through Egypt and Syria and later as a young adult with his tutor through Scandinavia, Russia, down the Volga, across the Caspian through Persia and into India. A marathon even for an able bodied person.

Reading snippets from his letters home gives a view of an engaging and intelligent young man with a zest for life and all that it has to offer.

Arthur lived through one of the most turbulent periods in Irish history. As a landlord and local leader, he had to deal with the Great Famine, mass emigration, nationalist agitation, and growing disagreements between landowners and tenants. With the separate deaths of both of his older brothers Arthur unexpectedly inherited the Borris estate in 1854 at just 23 years of age. The estate was in financial trouble and Arthur set to make improvements. In doing

so he chose an unconventional path. Instead of evicting struggling tenants, he rebuilt the village, designing the low-cost housing himself and invested in a sawmill in order to provide work and stability on his Estate. He was a "hands on" landlord. Each morning after breakfast he would sit, behind the house under an oak tree. There he waited, available for his tenants, men and women, to come and seek counsel and advice.... Earning him the nickname "Father Confessor"! (Steele 1891, page 135)

In 1855 Arthur married his cousin Francis Mary Leathley. Their marriage seems to have been an affectionate and happy one and they went on to have seven children, four sons and three daughters

Although he was deeply religious Arthur disliked the rising bitterness between Protestant and Catholic. He was a convinced conservative, but believed that landlords had serious moral obligations to those who lived on their land. This outlook put him increasingly at odds with both radical reformers and his own political allies.

In 1866 he entered Parliament as a Conservative MP for County Wexford travelling from Ireland to Westminster in his own yacht, mooring it under the Houses of Parliament. He gave his first address to the House in 1869 and he impressed even hostile listeners

with his clarity, expertise, and moral seriousness—earning personal praise from William Gladstone. In Parliament Arthur fought for tenant rights, and argued repeatedly for fairer land laws, even when this placed him in direct conflict with Conservative leaders like Disraeli. The Land War of the late 1870s and 1880s turned public opinion decisively against landlordism as a system and in 1880, now leader of the Irish Tories, Arthur lost his seat.

Still respected for his integrity, he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of County Carlow and served on the influential Bessborough Commission investigating land reform, submitting a lengthy dissenting report written entirely by himself, without hands.

Ill health overtook him in the last two to three years of his life, and Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh died quietly aged 58 on Christmas Day 1889, listening to carols sung at his bedside.

He did not live to see the Ireland he feared giving way to the one he hoped for—but his life remains a remarkable testament to resilience, conscience, and the determination to play a full role in history, no matter the odds. In the words of his cousin Sarah Steele “The physical privations which would have crushed the fibre of a weaker nature served but to crown his moral completeness”. Steele 1891, page 302

References

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Steele, Sarah L, 1891, “The Right Honourable Arthur MacMurrough Kavanagh. A Biography” London, MacMillan and Co

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Youwho.ie – “Kavanagh of Borris: the MacMurrough”

INTRODUCING THE 2026 HIGH SHERIFFS OF NORTHERN IRELAND



Richard Emmerson

High Sheriff of the County of Armagh

Richard is married with four children and has lived in the City of Armagh for over 20 years. He has connections with Armagh from his school days where he was educated at The Royal School on College Hill. As well as a proud old “Armachian”, he is passionate about the history and significance of the county of Armagh.

Richard worked in finance for many years, initially with PricewaterhouseCoopers before he moved on to the public sector gaining employment with the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). He completed his professional accountancy exams during his early career with NIAO and was admitted as a Fellow of the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. He worked across a wide range of bodies in both central and local government audit during this time as well as a period as the Assembly Liaison Officer at Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

Leaving the financial world behind in 2018, Richard set up a small business working with local funeral directors preparing graves in private churchyards across Counties Armagh, Down and Tyrone. He also continues to run the family beef farm – having developed a passion for animals and nature at a young age being brought up on a working farm.



Dr Ivor Cairns FRCGP

High Sheriff of the County of Down

Ivor was born in Londonderry and educated at Campbell College, Belfast and then Queen's University, Belfast where he graduated MB, BCh, BAO in 1990. He underwent a period of postgraduate training in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, and the Tyrone County Hospital, Omagh. During his training he achieved the Diploma of Medicine in the Elderly of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ireland, and the Diploma of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. He completed his postgraduate training in Lisburn and was awarded Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners in the summer of 1995.

In January of 1996 he was made a Partner in Dr Chambers' practice in Lisburn Health Centre. Following the introduction of NHS revalidation and appraisal he was appointed a General Practitioner (GP) appraiser in 2004.

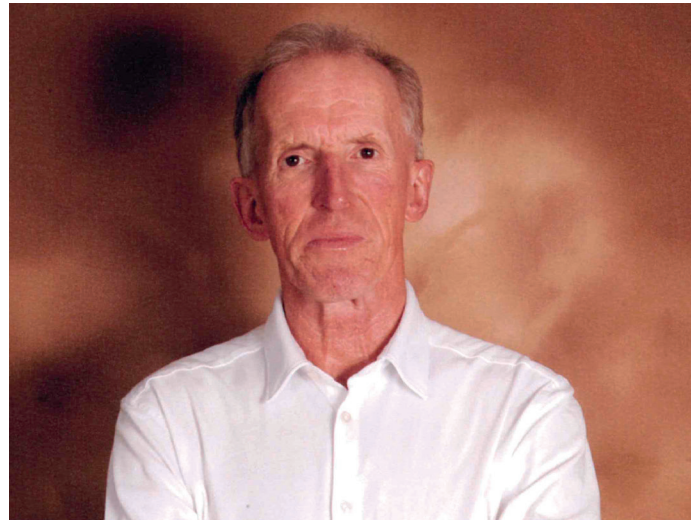
In 2008 he and his colleagues were successful in having their practice recognised as a training practice for GPs completing their postgraduate training and Ivor was appointed the practice's designated trainer.

In 2013 he became senior partner in the practice. He was one of the founder directors of the Federation of Family Practices of Lisburn from 2016 to 2022, and the treasurer from 2019 until 2022.

From 2016 until 2022 he was chair of the Interface Committee between the South Eastern Trust and the Lisburn Health Centre general practitioners.

In November of 2021 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of General Practitioners and in April of 2022 he was appointed as a lead appraiser.

Outside of work he has been member of the committee of Hillsborough Presbyterian Church for many years and assisted as a leader with their youth club and Boy's Brigade Company.



Peter D Jack MBE, LL. BP

High Sheriff of the County of Londonderry

Peter is a son, a brother, a husband, and a father – and a lawyer in a rural practice of 46 years' experience. He loves fighting for his clients for law, liberty, livelihood, and compensation!

He is a keen member (and current president) of the Rotary Club of Limavady where they specialise in global grants for projects in Kenya, Tanzania and Nepal helping to install basic hygiene and educational facilities. He has been privileged to see them working effectively on the ground. He was a founder member of the "We Deserve Better" and "Back to Work" campaigns and is currently training to be a hospital radio DJ for the Causeway Hospital in Coleraine.

He has penned five books based on his travels to 79 countries around the world, raising £15,000, with all proceeds going to Rotary charities. Drafting the articles (published in the local paper) which form the book was great craic – selling the books not so much!

Peter acts as Master of Ceremonies at sporting events all over the British Isles and France and local events too and has organised major triathlon and duathlon championships. He has also commentated for the BBC at the Commonwealth Games.

Peter has achieved a phenomenal 16 Ironmen events, about 60 Marathons, four or five Ultras and stood on mountain summits in six different countries in Africa, Europe, and Asia. He declares he took up triathlon so he would have an excuse to be slow in three different disciplines! He has recently been appointed to the Board of Athletics Northern Ireland and was privileged to carry the Olympic Torch on top of the Giant's Causeway in June 2012. He has cycled from Mizen to Malin and was a former president of Triathlon Ireland.



Alison Annan

High Sheriff of the County of Fermanagh

Alison brings with her a lifetime of dedication to public service and community wellbeing.

She served for 30 years as a police officer, mostly in County Fermanagh. A strong advocate for the Youth Justice Scheme she was one of the first facilitators for the development of Restorative Justice in Northern Ireland.

Alison has spent a lifetime of volunteering in County Fermanagh, firstly with 'Nexus NI' and laterally with 'Home-Start' in Enniskillen.

Over the last 28 years Alison has served as a volunteer on the board of directors at 'The Aisling Centre' in Enniskillen, a mental health charity, and was chairperson for the last six years. In 2019 the charity was privileged to be awarded the Queens Award for Voluntary Service.

In 2016, along with a group from her church, Alison spent a fortnight at the Operation Rescue Centre in Mekelle, Ethiopia working with street children. A humbling experience.

Alison is married to Gordon; they have one daughter and two young grandchildren.



Linda Anne Brown

High Sheriff of the County of Tyrone

Linda was born on a farm in the townland of Ballintrain, just outside Carrickmore, and is the youngest daughter of Billy and Anne Armstrong. She attended school in Sixmilecross and Omagh before embarking on a distinguished career in public service. Married to her husband Alistair since 1982, the couple live in Sixmilecross and are parents to Emma, Sam and Lynsey, and grandparents to Noah, Hannah, and Abbie.

After more than 30 years of dedicated service as a police officer, Linda is now retired, though retirement has done little to slow her commitment to community life. She has served as treasurer and committee member of Cloughfin Youth Club, Sixmilecross, for over 20 years, has been a member of the board of governors at Cooley Primary School for more than a decade, and continues her involvement with Sixmilecross Presbyterian Church, where she is currently the designated officer for child and vulnerable person protection.

Speaking about her appointment, Linda said she was "delighted and surprised" to be nominated, adding that she feels "honoured and very privileged" to have been appointed the High Sheriff of the County of Tyrone. She said she is very much looking forward to the year ahead, the challenges the role will bring, and the opportunity to meet new people while performing her duties.



Joan Doherty MBE DL

High Sheriff of the City of Londonderry

Joan Doherty MBE DL is married to Ken, and they live in the city of Londonderry/Derry. As a retired school principal, Joan has served on several boards; the governing body of North West

Regional College, the trust board of Western Health and Social Care Trust, and the independent monitoring

of the local prison. She served as the chair of the monitoring board for prisons for Northern Ireland. She was awarded an MBE for her work in the community. She has also been vice - chair of the Irish churches peace project and promotes cross community events where possible.

Save the Children and Marie Curie are two charities she supports having served in office in both.

Joan has held numerous voluntary roles in her local and wider church organisation and she currently serves as a trustee of her wider church. Her service of 16 years as a deputy lieutenant of the city has proved invaluable to her and she looks forward to her role.

THE SECRETARY'S NOTE...

The Shrievalty here has had a long and distinguished history of service, and the list of past High Sheriffs includes notable and renowned figures - many of whom have had a major impact on the local, national and world stage.

As a future regular feature in the Newsletter and on the Association website, I have compiled a number of short biographies of some of our more prominent predecessors, including Julia McMordie, Sir Otto Jaffe, and John C Bloomfield.

The first article is on Lord Pirrie, former Chairman of Harland and Wolff (below). I hope that you find these relevant and interesting, and I am most happy to take any suggestions for future editions.

A TITANIC CONNECTION: WILLIAM JAMES PIRRIE

William James Pirrie (later Viscount Pirrie) was born in 1847 in Quebec to Irish parents, came home to live in Co Down aged two, and went on to receive an education at the Belfast Royal Academical Institution. At the age of fifteen he began work as a 'Premium Apprentice' when he entered the shipbuilding and marine engineering world in Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast.

After becoming a partner in Harland and Wolff in 1874, and Chairman by 1903, he had transformed one of the country's leading shipbuilders into a business that dominated world shipbuilding and marine engineering for almost half a century. It is generally accepted that during his lifetime he created, almost single-handed, the modern shipbuilding industry.

Commentary in records kept in the Titanic quarter placed Viscount Pirrie as the 'Henry Ford of the shipbuilding industry'. Just as Ford pioneered mass-production for the motorcar, Pirrie introduced similar working practices in ship construction, including the standardisation of component parts, decorative features and furniture. By bringing 'in-house' the manufacture of various components, he further reduced costs resulting in greatly increased employment as the business expanded, turning Harland and Wolff from shipyard into a shipbuilding factory.

For thirty years, Pirrie planned the building of a passenger liner over 1,000 feet in length to fly the White Star Line burgee. With each giant liner built for White Star, from Oceanic (1899), Celtic (1901), Adriatic (1906), Olympic (1910), Titanic (1911) and Britannic (1914), this plan came closer to reality, step by step.



William James Pirrie

However, Pirrie's dream finally became a reality only after his death when the keel plates of the White Star liner *Oceanic*, the third vessel to carry this illustrious name, were laid down in Harland and Wolff's East Yard in June 1928.

Unfortunately, the Great Depression led to a dramatic reduction in orders for new tonnage and, together with White Star's declining fortunes, resulted in the project being cancelled.

Pirrie was, of course heavily involved in the design of the *Titanic* and oversaw the vessel's launch in 1911. He was scheduled to travel on the *Titanic*'s maiden voyage but was forced to cancel due to severe illness, which required surgery in March 1912. He sent his nephew, Thomas Andrews (Managing Director and Head of the Design Department), to take his place. Andrews died in the sinking. The disaster was a major blow to him personally and professionally.

Following the tragedy, he continued his work, becoming a key figure in organising British mercantile shipping during the first World War where his organisational genius helped turn the tide for the Allies. For this achievement he was created Viscount Pirrie by King George V in 1921.

In June 1924, Pirrie, with his wife Margaret, took a voyage to South America. Whilst on this voyage, he fell ill and died. Records recall that Pirrie's death was marked by an extraordinary event. When the liner carrying his body reached New York, almost every

ship in port lowered their ensigns in salute to a man who did so much to develop the passenger ship. As a mark of respect for his last journey across the Atlantic, his body was draped in rich purple cloth, transferred to the White Star liner *Olympic* and placed in one of her 1st Class suites.

His remains were interred in Belfast City Cemetery, marked by a polished granite obelisk topped with a bronze bust of Pirrie and two plaques, one featuring RMS *Olympic*.

He was appointed as one of His Majesty's Privy Councillors; served as Lord Mayor of Belfast, a Deputy Lieutenant, and a Magistrate; and was the first Honorary Freeman of the City of Belfast.

Viscount Pirrie served as High Sheriff of County Antrim and of County Down in 1898 and 1899 respectively.

Prof Mike Mawhinney thankfully acknowledges permission to use information held in the Titanic Hotel collection. While efforts have been made to ensure veracity, the author assumes no responsibility for inaccuracies, errors or omissions. Readers are advised to verify information independently.



AND FINALLY...

The website is nearing its one-year anniversary and since its launch we are delighted to note that we have had nearly 20,000 webpage views, with over 1200 unique viewers.

The public facing element of the site allows us to showcase our role in its many guises, and features reports on an exceptionally wide range of duties including: Royal Visits, Royal Gun Salutes, civic receptions, High Sheriff Awards, handover events, remembrance events, services of thanksgiving, visits to schools, emergency services day celebrations, VE Day celebrations, sporting club celebrations, Chinese New Year celebrations, and visits to a stroke rehabilitation centre, a Ramadan event, the Samaritans, and to a Make a Wish Foundation event.

Thank you to all those who have supported the website and I would encourage serving High Sheriffs to send me a photograph of their events (one per event will suffice) with a caption...it is a record of your year in office and an important marker of our developing role.

There will also be a few changes happening to the website layout over the next few weeks with the addition of some links and new pages. Always happy to take suggestions!

Prof Mike Mawhinney MBE TD Hon Secretary HSANI

