

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter

North Mayo Heritage Centre

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YouTube

Next
Artisan Food &
Craft market
12th July

Dr. Francis Ferran

Ferran Terrace is a well-known address in Ballina but most local people know little about the man after whom it is named.



A native of Co Derry, Dr. Ferran studied medicine at Queen's College, Belfast and it was in 1912, shortly after marrying, that the 34-year-old Francis was appointed Dispensary Medical Officer in Foxford. He would go on to serve the community for 11 years – but in more ways than just medical care.

Images: Google streetview and Dr. Ferran Foxford Historical Association (facebook)



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DR. FRANCIS FERRAN

FRIEND OF FOXFORD, FRIEND OF FREEDOM



Francis Ferran was born on the 14th of March 1877. His birth record states an address of Draperstown, Co. Derry.

He was the son of Felix Ferran, a merchant, and Mary Carleton. Francis studied medicine at Queen's College, Belfast, and shortly after his graduation, and while based in Omagh, he married Ellie Harbison on the 2nd of February 1911 in Holycross Church, Belfast. The couple lived on the Campsie Road in Omagh after their marriage. In 1912, Francis was appointed Dispensary Doctor for Foxford.

Almost as soon as he had arrived in Foxford, Francis Ferran became involved in the Nationalist cause. He trained the Fianna Scouts from 1913,¹ and joined the Foxford Battalion of the East Mayo Brigade. Serving as Senior Medical Brigade Officer, Dr. Ferran 'tended to the wounded in safe houses, hiding places and ambush sites, often at great personal risk'.²

By 1917, at the height of the Great War, the threat that young Irish men might be conscripted into the British Army came to boiling point.

In April of the following year, a large Sinn Féin demonstration was staged in Foxford, to mark the second anniversary of the Easter Rising. It was estimated that 2,000 people turned out. The star attraction was Arthur Griffith, one of the founders of Sinn Féin, but Dr. Ferran chaired the meeting.

The Derry born doctor gave an angry speech, in which 'he slammed the Irish Parliamentary Party for its support of Britain during the war.' Dr. Ferran then *'vehemently opposed any notion that conscription be imposed on the young men of Ireland.'*³ Away from the crowd, the RIC were taking notes. Ferran and three other speakers were brought before a special court sitting in Ballina, and bound over to the peace.

All four refused to comply with the bond, and were imprisoned for four months.

The jailing of Dr. Ferran 'inflamed the people of Foxford ... who were now left without a doctor as the Spanish 'influenza' epidemic swept through the country'.⁴

Dr. Ferran was elected to the Dáil twice - 1921 and 1922, for Sinn Féin, in the Sligo-Mayo-East constituency.⁵ He was a TD only a matter of months before he had to decide on the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which was passed in the Dáil on the 7th of January 1922.

Five Mayo based TDs; Ferran, along with John Crowley, Tom Derrig, P.J. Rutledge and Tom Maguire voted against the Treaty. They were on the losing side. It was to be the opening of the final chapter in Dr. Ferran's life. He had moved his family (he and Ellie had two daughters, Maire and Anna) to an isolated house near Lough Conn for their own safety.⁶

During the Civil War which followed the vote of January 1922, Dr. Ferran was arrested and beaten up in Ballina Barracks, before being sent to Athlone, and then to the detention centre at the Curragh. It was his second time to be interned there. His health broke down, and he died in custody on the 10th of June 1923. His certificate of death records him as a political prisoner. He was buried in the Republican plot in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin.

His widow, Ellie, remarried. She died in 1963.⁷ Following his death, Ferran Terrace in Ballina was named in his honour. On the 7th of September 2024, a commemorative plaque was unveiled in Foxford to honour his memory in the town he served for 11 years.

¹ Reilly, T. 2014. Ballina: One Town, Three Wars & More. Yew Tree Publishing, p.379.

² The Western People, the 4th of September 2024

³ Reilly, T. 2014. Ballina: One Town, Three Wars & More. Yew Tree Publishing, p.255.

⁴ *ibid* p.255.

⁵ <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/members>

⁶ Reilly, T. 2014. Ballina: One Town, Three Wars & More. Yew Tree Publishing, p.379.

⁷ Mitchell-Brennan, S. 2002, 'Our father gave all that he had for his country... even his life.' The Western People, the 16th of November 2022



Grandniece of Dr. Ferran, Dairine Ní Cheallaigh laying a wreath in Dr. Ferran's memory (2024) at the Dispensary, where he worked.
Image: Dr. Ferran Foxford Historical Association (facebook)

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