

CLANE LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



Sir Charles A. Cameron (1830- 1921)

On 4 August 1881, Constable Morahan of the RIC took five samples of milk as it was delivered to the Military Barracks, Newbridge. After dividing each sample into three, one as a reference and one for the supplier, the last was sent to Dr Cameron for analysis where adulteration was subsequently detected. The analyst mentioned in this routine incident was a remarkable Irish scientist, whose achievements are seldom recounted.

In 1862, Charles A. Cameron was appointed as Dublin's and Ireland's first public analyst and in 1874 he became the city's Medical Officer of Health, a position he held until 1921. He was also public analyst to 23 counties & five boroughs, including Kildare and became a forgotten champion of the poor and reformer of public health legislation. In 1885, and against official policy, he took the visiting Prince of Wales on a visit to the see the Dublin slums, an action that the monarchy recognised by bestowing him with a knighthood. In 1889, he publicised the fact that that more than half of Dublin needed to be rebuilt. During the year 1909, he arranged for the sanitary inspection of 74,000 tenement houses and 21,000 other houses. In the early 1900s Cameron took the Prince, now King Edward VII, to see the city's progress in slum clearance.

Cameron applied the latest discoveries in analytical chemistry to detect food adulteration. From Kildare in 1888 he analysed numerous milk samples, water from Naas and Athy whiskey and tea from Celbridge and even 'the viscera of a fox hound' from Killashee. Other technical interests included spirit distilling, sewerage utilisation, peat harvesting and turf-powered locomotives. In February 1921 he died at home in Dublin's Raglan Road.