ISSUE 30
MAY 2026

Little Village

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LUCAN VILLAGE : WAS ALL THE UPHEAVAL WORTH IT?

SEE P34

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THE GREAT COMMUTE

Are Lucan and Leixlip Getting a Fair Deal?

There is a particular kind of misery attached to commuting in Ireland. It starts early, usually in bad light, often in bad weather, and with the same foolish little burst of hope that maybe this morning will somehow be different.

It rarely is.

For people in Lucan and Leixlip, the commute is not just a way of getting to work. It is part of the shape of the day. It affects what time you get up, how stressed you are before nine o'clock, whether you can collect a child on time, and whether you arrive home fit for conversation or only capable of staring at a wall while the kettle boils.

That is why people get so worked up about transport around here. It is not really about buses and trains in the abstract. It is about time, energy and quality of life.

On paper, things are supposed to be improving. There are plans, redesigns, revised routes, bus corridors, better links, more frequent services and all the usual language of progress. And to be fair, some of that is real enough. The authorities are not pretending nothing needs to change. They know the pressure is there.

But commuters do not live on paper.

They live in the gap between what is promised and what actually happens on a wet Monday morning when the traffic is crawling, the bus is late, and the train connection is suddenly looking a lot more theoretical than real.

Lucan, in particular, knows that feeling well. It has long seemed to exist in a state of permanent transport anticipation. Help is always coming. Improvements are always planned. Relief is always somewhere on the horizon. Yet for many people actually trying to get in and out every day, the reality still involves sitting in traffic wondering how a place this busy ended up depending so heavily on patience and luck.

That is not to say nothing is being done. Clearly, plenty is being talked about and worked on. The question is whether ordinary people can feel it yet.

Because there is a big difference between a scheme being underway and a commute feeling easier.

Leixlip has a slightly different version of the same complaint. It has trains, which sounds good, and often is good. Plenty of towns would be delighted to have the rail options Leixlip has. But anyone who relies on public transport knows that having a service and having a smooth journey are two different things entirely.

A train can still involve a rush, a wait, a connection, a missed link, or that low-level anxiety that comes from constantly checking the time and wondering whether the whole thing is about to unravel because one part of the chain slipped by three minutes.

And then, of course, there is the other problem both places share: sheer numbers.

Lucan and Leixlip are good places to live. That is part of

Continues P06

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the Spring Edition of Little Village.
The release of Ireland's 1926 Census, a century later, (2026) is fascinating with the amount of detail contained in it. Have a look at our article on" Census 1926" and see for yourself the great value of its release.
An article on "The Quiet Shame of the Robot Lawn Mower" was submitted to us by one of our readers. We, at Little Village, found it funny, witty and enjoyable, and so have decided to publish it for your enjoyment too.
Finally, "Will It Ever Stop Raining in Ireland This Year" is a good read on our famous topic of discussion – The Irish Weather!!!!! After reading it, you will see that 2026 is not proving to be the wettest imaginable year in Dublin and Kildare. There has, in fact, been worse individual months in recent years.
So, on that note, we will take our leave and wish you all a very enjoyable Spring.

Until next time, THE LITTLE VILLAGE TEAM

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Little Village Magazine, 11 Cherryhill Avenue, Kells, Co. Meath.
Creative Top Publishing Ltd. publishes Little Village Magazine.

Company registration No. 534480

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Views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the publisher.

the issue. They are close enough to Dublin for commuting, established enough to feel like proper communities, and popular enough that more and more people want to be based there. Which is great, up to the point where roads, buses and trains start protesting on a daily basis.

It often feels as though the population arrived first and the transport planning came jogging along behind, slightly out of breath.

That is why locals sometimes sound ungrateful when transport improvements are announced. They are not really ungrateful. They are just worn out. After a while, people stop reacting to phrases like “network redesign” and “enhanced connectivity” with excitement. They want to know one thing: will this make my day easier?

Will I get to work with less hassle?

Will I spend less of my life in queues?

Will I get home before the dinner is cold?

Those are not glamorous questions, but they are the real ones.

The trouble is that official transport language can sometimes glide past the human side of it. A ten per cent increase in services may sound encouraging, and perhaps it is, but the person standing at a stop in the rain is not thinking in percentages. They are thinking that the bus is late again and they are already late too.

Likewise, a redesigned route map can look impressive, but if it leaves people feeling they now need the planning skills of an air-traffic controller just to visit town, the glow fades fairly quickly.

That said, it would be unfair to claim Lucan and Leixlip are being ignored. They are not. They are clearly part of major transport plans and future improvements. The problem is more that the need has been obvious for so long that patience is wearing thin.

So are they getting a fair deal?

The honest answer is: not yet in a way people can properly feel.

They are getting attention. They are getting plans. They are getting promises. Whether they are getting a fair deal depends on whether all of that turns into journeys that are genuinely quicker, easier and less draining.

People in Lucan and Leixlip are not asking for miracles. They are not expecting a teleportation system. They would settle for reliable buses, decent connections, manageable traffic and a transport system that does not make everyday life harder than it needs to be.

And if that sounds like a modest ambition, it is.

Until then, the commute will remain what it has been for years around these parts: a test of patience, endurance and occasionally language not fit for publication.

But if the long-promised improvements do finally make a real difference, people will acknowledge it. They may grumble first, because this is Ireland and grumbling is part of the national transport strategy, but they will admit it in the end.

Usually with the highest praise available in local conversation: “It’s actually not too bad now.”

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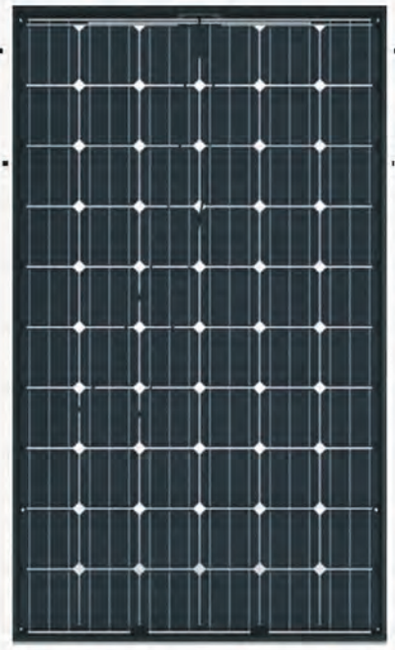

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LEIXLIP AND THE INTEL EFFECT

Confidence, Caution and Coffee-Shop Economics

In some towns, the biggest employer is just that — the biggest employer. In Leixlip, Intel has long been more than that. It is part of the atmosphere of the place. When things are going well there, people feel it. When there is bad news, or even the hint of bad news, people feel that too.

That is because Intel is not some distant name on a business page. In Leixlip, it is tied up with jobs, mortgages, school fees, local spending and the general sense of whether things are steady or shaky. It is part of everyday life.

So, when Intel makes headlines, Leixlip pays attention.

For years, the company has been one of the big forces shaping the town. It brought jobs, investment and a certain sense that this part of Kildare mattered on a global scale. That is not something every town can say. Leixlip is not just another commuter spot on the edge of Dublin. Thanks in large part to Intel, it became a place people associated with serious industry, advanced technology and decent careers.

That has brought real pride. And why wouldn't it? There is something quietly impressive about living beside one of the most advanced chip-making operations in Europe. Even if most of us could not explain what goes on inside Fab 34 without breaking into a sweat, we know it matters.

Continues P.10

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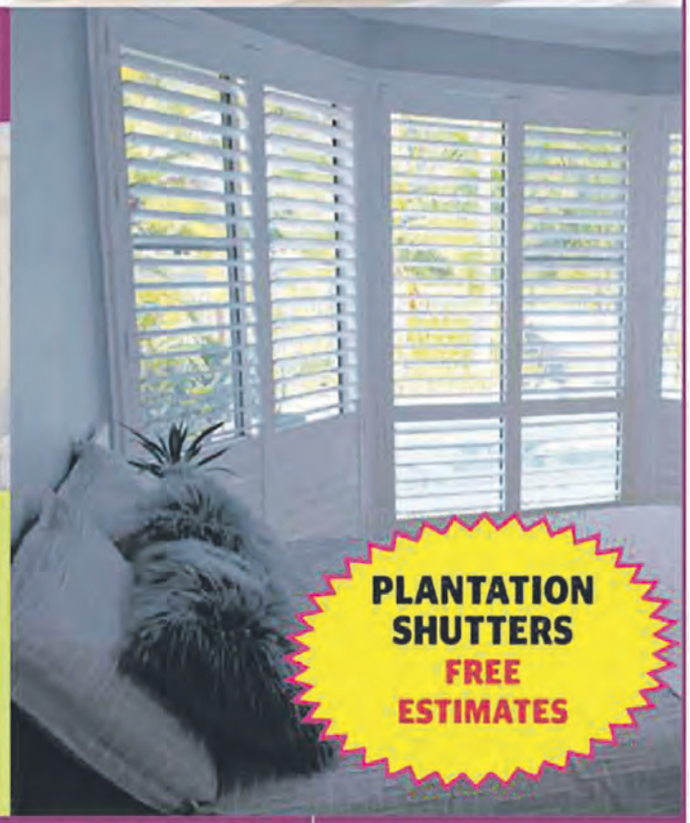

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The latest Intel move has given people another reason to sit up and take notice. The company is buying back Apollo's stake in Fab 34, taking full ownership again. That may sound like the sort of thing only stock market people get excited about, but locally it feels a bit more personal than that. To many in Leixlip, it looks like a sign that Intel is doubling down on the town rather than backing away from it.

And after the nerves of the past while, that is welcome.

Because the truth is, the last year or two has not all been reassurance and good news. There has been plenty of talk about cutbacks, restructuring and job fears. That creates a particular kind of tension in a place like Leixlip. When one employer matters this much, every rumour has a longer echo. Even people who have nothing directly to do with the plant still feel the ripple effects.

That is the strange thing about a multinational in a town. It can bring huge benefits, but it also makes the local mood a bit vulnerable to decisions being made far away in boardrooms most people will never see.

And yet, for all the size and sophistication of Intel, the real local impact often shows up in ordinary places. In cafés. In shops. In sports clubs. In takeaway queues on a Friday evening. In the rental market. In the quiet fact that a lot of families around Leixlip have, in one way or another, built their lives around the opportunities the company created.

That is what you might call the coffee-shop economics of Intel. Not the grand speeches about investment and innovation, but the smaller everyday effects. The packed sandwich bar at lunchtime. The local club getting sponsorship. The family who can afford to stay local because someone has a good job nearby. The tradesman getting work. The landlord finding a tenant. The school with more families putting down roots in the area.

That sort of impact does not always make the headlines, but it is often the part people understand best. It also explains why feelings about Intel are rarely simple. There is pride, certainly. There is gratitude too. Plenty of people in and around Leixlip have had good livelihoods because of what Intel brought to the town. But there is caution as well, because experience has taught people not to assume that big companies think like local communities do.

A town thinks in generations. A multinational thinks in quarters. That does not make Intel the villain of the piece. It is simply the reality of modern economic life. A company can be deeply important to a town and still make tough decisions when global conditions change. Leixlip understands that now better than ever.

So what is the mood at the moment?

Probably a mixture of relief and guarded optimism. The buyback of Fab 34 feels like good news. It suggests confidence. It suggests commitment. It suggests that Leixlip remains a major part of Intel's plans. That matters, not just to the people who work there, but to the wider town too.

At the same time, people are not getting carried away. Once you have lived through enough rounds of uncertainty, you learn to welcome good news without assuming it means the worries are over for good.

Still, there is no point pretending that a positive signal is not a positive signal. In a town like Leixlip, where Intel's fortunes spill well beyond the factory gates, a strong vote of confidence from the company lifts the mood more widely than any business analyst's note ever could.

And that is the Intel effect in the end.

It is not just about chips or investment figures or corporate strategy. It is about the way one giant employer can shape the pulse of a place. The confidence. The caution. The quiet spending power. The jobs. The nerves. The pride.

And, yes, the coffee shops too.

MORE THAN A TREMOR

Why We Need to Talk More About Parkinson's in Ireland

There are some illnesses we think we understand because we recognise the name. Parkinson's is one of them. Most people, if asked, would picture a trembling hand, a slightly stooped walk, a familiar public image of old age and frailty. But Parkinson's is far more complex than that, and far more present in Irish life than many of us realise. In Ireland, about 18,000 people are living with Parkinson's, and that number is expected to rise in the years ahead.

What makes Parkinson's difficult is not just the condition itself, but the way it can arrive quietly.

It often does not begin with one dramatic symptom. It can start with stiffness, slower movement, disturbed sleep, constipation, changes in speech, low mood or a fading sense of smell. Yes, tremor can be part of it, but it is not the whole story, and for some people it is not even the first story. Parkinson's is a progressive neurological condition that affects movement, balance and co-ordination, but it can also affect confidence, energy, communication and everyday ease in ways that are much less visible from the outside.

That matters because people are very good at explaining things away. We tell ourselves we are tired, getting older, a bit run down, not sleeping properly, under pressure. Families do it too. A hand is shaky, but maybe it is stress. A walk is slower, but maybe it is just age. A voice is quieter, handwriting smaller, face less expressive — all easy enough to dismiss when life is busy and nobody wants to make a fuss. But awareness is often the difference between struggling in silence and getting help sooner. Persistent symptoms that affect movement, balance or day-to-day function are worth bringing to a GP. Parkinson's is not "just part of ageing."

One of the hard truths about Parkinson's is that diagnosis is not always neat or immediate. There is no single conclusive test. Doctors usually diagnose it through symptoms, medical history and physical examination, sometimes using tests to rule out other conditions. That uncertainty can be unsettling. It can leave people feeling caught in a strange in-between: not well, not sure, and trying to carry on as normal while something clearly is not quite right.

And yet, a diagnosis is not the end of life as people know it. That is one of the most important things to say out loud. Parkinson's is serious, but many

people continue to live active, meaningful, engaged lives for years after diagnosis. Medication can help manage symptoms. Physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and regular exercise can all play a major role in helping people stay mobile, independent and connected to the world around them. Support is not only about treatment. It is about helping someone keep living their own life in their own way.

There is also a practical side that deserves more attention in Ireland. Parkinsonism is covered under the HSE Long-Term Illness Scheme, which means approved medicines and appliances can be provided without a means test.

For families already dealing with appointments, transport, fatigue and the general drain of long-term illness, that kind of support can make a real difference. It may not remove the burden, but it can soften it.

Still, the part of Parkinson's that often goes unseen is the emotional cost. The outside world may notice a tremor or a slower step, but not the private calculations that come with it: the hesitation before going out, the worry about falling, the embarrassment when words do not come clearly, the frustration of taking longer to do simple things, the tiredness of having to think about what used to happen naturally. Illness changes more than a body. It changes the rhythm of a day, the confidence with which someone enters a room, the ease of saying yes to plans.

That is why awareness has to go beyond symptoms and leaflets. It has to include compassion. It has to include patience. It has to include the ordinary decency of understanding that someone living with Parkinson's may look fine one hour and completely depleted the next. Not every struggle is visible. Not every effort announces itself.

In Ireland, organisations such as Parkinson's Ireland provide information, support and local services for people living with the condition and

for their families and care partners. That kind of community support matters enormously, because illness can be isolating, and isolation makes everything harder. A good support network, a knowledgeable nurse, an exercise group, a local contact who understands — these things may sound small on paper, but in real life they can be the difference between coping and not coping.

Perhaps that is the real point of a health awareness article. Not simply to list symptoms, but to widen the picture. Parkinson's is not just a shaking hand. It is not a shorthand for old age. It is a complex condition that touches movement, mood, sleep, speech and identity. And in Ireland, it touches thousands of homes.

The more we understand that, the better chance we have of recognising it earlier, responding to it better, and meeting people with something more useful than pity. We can meet them with awareness, support and respect — which, in the end, is what every serious illness deserves.

THUGAMAR FÉIN AN SAMHRADH LINN
LE JOEY'S LE GAEILGE
AG GUÍ GACH SONAS AGUS SPRAOI ORAIBH DON SAMHRADH

DIALANN MÁRTA TY

Dialann, a chara,

Bhí mí na Márta an eachtrach gan dabht. Ar an 5ú lá de Mhárta, chuaigh muid ar an siúlóid Gaisce. D'fhanamar in óstán ar feadh oíche amháin. Dar liomsa, bhí an siúlóid an-deacair. Bhí mé an bhródúil nuair a chríochnaigh mé, áfach. Táimid ag baint amach ár nGaisce Cré-umha i mbliana agus cuid de na riachtanais ná go gcaithfimid siúlóid a dhéanamh.

Ar an 11ú lá de Mhárta, chuaigh muid go Amsterdam. Ligeamar ár scíth nuair a shroicheamar. Ar an dara lá, chuaigh muid ar thuras farraige. Bhí sé an deas. Chuaigh muid go dtí Músaem na nIontas. B'an chuid craic é. Chuaigh muid go dtí musaem Anne Frank chomh maith. Bhí sé an bhrónach. Ar an tríú lá, chuaigh muid go bpáirc théama. Ba é seo an lá is ansa dom gan dabht. Ar an lá deireanach chuamar chuig monarcha seacláide freisin agus cheannaigh mé cuimhneacháin do mo theaghlach.
Táim ar bís do thuilleadh imeachtaí eile ach píosa brónach go bhfuil rudaí ag teacht chun críoch.
Xoxo Joeys

RÓLIMIRT - AON SCÉAL? CAFÉ, TALLAGHT

"Dia duit, cad ba mhaith leat ?"
"Dia is Muire duit, ba mhaith liom caife a fháil le do thoil"
"Go hiontach! Cén méid ba mhaith leat?"
"Ba mhaith liom caife meánmhéide"
"Aon rud eile ?"
"Sea, an bhfeadfainn roinnt briosca i a fháil freisin le do thoil?"
"Ar ndóigh! Bheadh sé sin 7 euro le do thoil!"
"Seo dhuit"
"Go raibh maith agat, bíodh lá maith agat"
"Agus tú féin!"

SEANSCÉALTA & FINSCÉALTA

Táin Bó Cúailnge

Is cuid de chnuasach laochscéalta é an Táin Bó Cúailnge, nó An Táin. Scríobhadh scéalta an Táin sa 6ú aois sa tsean Ghaeilge.

Fadó, fadó bhí éad ar an bhanríon Chonnachta Méabh ar a fhear chéile Ailill. Bhí tarbh mór fionnbheannach aige. Ní raibh a leithéad ag Méabh. Shocraigh sí an tarbh 'Donn Cuailgne' a cheannach ó Dháire, taoiseach i gCúige Uladh. Ní raibh sé sásta an tarbh a dhíol áfach. Mar sin, shocraigh sí dul ar an ionsaí. Chuir draoi Mhéibhe fir Uladh faoi draíocht, an Rí Conchúr Mac Neasa agus an grúpa laochra, An Chraobh Rua. Thit siad go léir ina chodladh, ach amháin an laoch ba láidre Cú Chulainn. Throid Cú Chulainn i gcoinne arm Mhéibhe - bhí sé ró-láidir do pé laoch a bhí ag Méabh. Sa deireadh chuir sí a laoch is láidre, Fírdhia, ag troid i gcoinne Cú Chulainn. Mharaigh Cú Chulainn é ach faraor, bhí Cú Chullain an bhrónach, cé go raibh siad ina chairde tráth.
Sa deireadh bhí Cú Chulainn tuirseach traochta. Ní raibh sé ábalta Cúige Uladh a chosaint a thuilleadh. Ghoid Méabh Donn Cuailgne agus abhaile léi go Cúige Chonnacht. Ach, d'ionsaigh agus mharaigh Donn Cuailgne an Fionnbheannach. Gortaíodh an Donn Cuailgne go dona agus fuair sé bás freisin.

Cúpla focail ón Múinteoir ranga...

Tá buanna na cruthaitheachta agus na hurnuachta ag na daltaí 4A2 ó Choláiste Iosaf Naofa, Leamhcán. Molaim chun na spéire iad. Cé go bhfuil siad go léir difriúil ó thaobh na scilleanna teanga de, chuir siad a gcroíthe isteach sna hiarractaí chun scríobh as Gaeilge san Saoriris Little Village.

Tá buíochas ó chroí le gabháil freisin le Little Village. Ní raibh aon leisce oraibh deis a thabhairt donár ndaltaí. Ní dhéanfaidh siad dearmad ar an taithí seo go deo agus seasfaidh sé dóibh sna blianta amach rompu.

So téigí amach agus úsáid na cúpla focal a chairde.
Ní mór breith ar an uain ar an urla!

IMEACHTAÍ i RITH AN tSAMHRAIDH

Is iad dhá fhéile choitianta a bhíonn ar siúl gach bliain in Éirinn ná Bloom agus Féile Pride Bhaile Átha Cliath.
Bíonn féile Bloom ar siúl ón 28 Bealtaine go dtí an 1 Meitheamh. Is í an fhéile garraíodóireachta agus
maireachtála inbhuanaithe is mó in Éirinn í. Tá sé ar siúl i bPáirc an Fhionnuisce, Baile Átha Cliath.

Beidh féile bróid Bhaile Átha Cliath ar siúl ón 24 Meitheamh go dtí an 28 Meitheamh. Ceiliúrann sé baill den phobal LADTA+. Gach bliain, Glacann breis is 100,000 duine páirt. Tá sé inrochtana agus saor in aisce freisin. Bíonn sí ar siúl i gcathair Bhaile Átha
Cliath.

BOB AMADÁN AIBHREÁIN

Scéal grannmhar daoibh...

Lá na seilge uibheacha a bhí ann. Bhí na páistí ar bís. Bhí an coinín Cásca tagtha faoi dheireadh. Léim an coinín Cásca amach agus dúirt sé leis na páistí "Cibé duine a fhaigheann an ubh is mó, beidh an duais is fearr aige".

Chuaigh na páistí ag cuardach uibheacha "seacláide". Scread páiste le lúcháir nuair a fuair siad an ubh mór. Ghreim sé isteach san ubh, "Yuck" a scread sé, agus an Coinín Cásca ag gáire. "Is bachlóga Bhruiséile atá ann," a dúirt sé agus é á sheileadh amach. D'fhiafraigh an coinín Cásca de na páistí "A pháistí, an bhfuil a fhios agaibh cén lá é?". Chogarnaigh siad eatarthu féin. "**1 Aibreán**"

"Amadán Aibreán sona daoibh, a pháistí!"

SIÚLÓIDÍ DÚLRA

Tá neart áiteanna ann le siúl i mBaile Átha Cliath. Tá cuid de na siúlóidí seo cois cósta agus tá cuid eile intíre.

Is é an chéad shiúlóid a mholfainn ná siúlóid **Aillte Bhinn Éadair**. Is siúlóid álainn cois cósta í seo le a neart radharcanna iontacha. Tógann sé seo thart ar uair an chloig agus is siúlóid éasca í.

Molfainn freisin **Gleann na gClóire**. Is limistéar ainmnithe é seo i bPáirc an Fhionnuisce atá aitheanta as a radharcanna coillte agus fiadhúlra.

Seo agaibh siúlóid atá oiriúnach do theaghlaigh, Mholfainn **Conair agus Gairdíní Sí Mhullach Íde**. Tá neart anseo don teaghlach taitneamh a bhaint as.

SIÚTÁIL IN ÉIREANN: GAME OF THRONES

Mar gheall ar thírdhreacha áille na hÉireann, is áit iontach í le haghaidh láithreacha scannánaíochta. Go háirithe, **Game of Thrones**. Mar shampla, úsáideadh **Caisleán an Bhardaigh i gContae an Dúin** mar phríomhláthair scannánaíochta do Winterfell. Scannánaíodh na radhairc ar thránna Dragonstone ar **Trá Dhún Bó i gContae Dhoire** agus agus scannánaíodh na radhairc ar an Kingsroad ina n-éalaíonn Arya Stark sna **Dark Hedges i gContae Aontroma**. Tá go leor scannán cáiliúla eile scannánaithe anseo ar nós The Force Awakens agus Saving Private Ryan.

What Happened to Owning a Proper Dog?

When did man's best friend become a fashion accessory? More by Grumpy man

There was a time in Ireland when a dog was a proper dog. A solid animal. A creature with mud on its paws, a suspicious interest in slurry, and a working knowledge of every ditch, field and puddle within a three-mile radius. A dog had weight. Presence. A bark that made the postman re-evaluate his life choices.

Now we have dogs that look like they'd blow away if you opened a window too quickly.

Somewhere along the line, the national understanding of "getting a dog" seems to have shifted from "a loyal companion who will tear around the garden like a mad thing" to "a nervous little luxury item with eyes like wet buttons and a wardrobe budget larger than any man". Increasingly, the modern aspirational pet is not a dog so much as a trembling side dish. Something beige and expensive that fits into a handbag and reacts to ordinary life as if it has just heard dreadful news from the stock market.

You see them everywhere now. Tiny dogs with names like Hugo, Coco or Princess, being carried through farmers' markets as though their wee paws have never known the indignity of touching pavement. They have coats for rain, coats for winter, coats for "transitional weather", and in some cases, social media accounts. Their owners speak of them the way previous generations spoke of prize racehorses. "He only eats hand-reared chicken." "She won't walk on gravel." "He has separation anxiety if I leave the room to make tea."

At this point one is tempted to ask: is it a dog, or is it a chronic invalid?

Of course, there is nothing wrong with small dogs in themselves. Many of them are full of character. Fair play to them. Most are trying their best. The issue is not size. The issue is attitude and not always the dog's. There has been a cultural rebrand. Dogs used to be allowed to be dogs. Now many are curated, accessorised, and managed like furry influencers. They are shampooed, fluffed, photographed and ferried about as if the whole point of canine existence is to coordinate with a cashmere throw.

And let us be honest: some of these so-called luxury breeds do not exactly radiate ruggedness. They look permanently astonished, like minor aristocrats who have just discovered the hotel has run out of sparkling water. They are less "faithful hound" and more "nervous brunch companion".

Compare that to the proper Irish dog of old. The family collie who rounded up children as effectively as sheep. The Irish terrier who feared nothing, including tractors. The Labrador who came home filthy, ecstatic and carrying something that definitely did not belong to him. These were dogs with a sense of purpose. Dogs who could cope with weather, terrain, noise, and reality. Dogs who did not require a padded carrier and hypoallergenic paw balm.

Perhaps that is what people are really nostalgic for: not just bigger dogs, but dogs that seemed gloriously unbothered by modern fuss. A proper

dog didn't need an Instagram account. It needed a stick, a field, and the chance to gallop at top speed for no reason whatsoever.

Still, before we get too smug, it is worth remembering that every generation makes a show of itself in different ways. Once upon a time the height of pet indulgence was slipping scraps under the table. Now it is birthday cakes made from dog friendly ingredients and a monogrammed lead. Progress, of a sort.

And maybe the truth is this: whether it weighs three stone or three pounds, whether it sleeps in a kennel or on an orthopaedic cushion imported from Milan, every dog remains, underneath it all, wonderfully doggish. Even the handbag variety. Give them half a chance and many would gladly swap the designer carrier for a good hedge and something disgusting to roll in.

Which is heartening. It suggests that the proper dog has not vanished entirely. He is still in there, somewhere beneath the bows, the blow-dries and the tiny, quilted jacket.

He is simply waiting for someone to put him down on the ground and let him get mucky.

Nikki Hendy's Adult Fun Choir

If you're looking for a choir that is all about having fun and putting a smile on your face every week then look no further.

With no auditions, no need to read music, just a joy of singing. Nikki set this choir up over 3 years ago in Lucan, to give people an outlet to sing in an environment that would be uplifting and sociable. We have built up such a lovely friendly atmosphere in the choir and new members are always welcomed. Our repertoire focuses on inspiring and uplifting songs with a range of emotions and spanning across genres of rock/pop & musicals.

As a singer myself I know too well the benefits of singing. Singing and music was always a form of therapy for me, all through my teenage years and still is today. Studies show that singing, especially in a group, can enhance your mood, your immune system, your blood pressure and reduce your feelings of chronic pain. Research shows that singing releases endorphins and dopamine – the feel-good chemicals in our brains that make us feel uplifted and happy. It also releases stored muscle tension and decreases the levels of the stress hormone cortisol in your blood stream, which allows us a sense of calm and it also activates the vagus nerve. The benefits to joining a choir are endless, and so I would encourage everyone to join a choir. I am a firm believer that EVERYONE CAN SING. If you can speak, you can sing. Everything can be improved with practice. You don't have to be the next pop star, just start.

Here's what current members of Nikki's choir have to say..

'..I'm so proud to be part of this choir. It's a joy and pleasure. You're so enthusiastic that the feeling passes to everyone. I'm delighted I joined it's a great boost to my mental health! Lovely bunch of ladies and men…great feeling to make a difference to people suffering with dementia.'

'I joined Nikki's fun choir with my partner on a bit of a whim, I can't really sing but I love music and singing. He can sing however, so that's helpful. And they were all very glad to have another man in the group! 6 weeks in and we absolutely love it. There's so much fun and lightness to that hour we're all together, despite the miserable weather outside. Singing at the Dementia Café with everyone was such a highlight of the year so far, it was such a lovely thing to be part of. So we're delighted we joined up and look forward to seeing what fun and challenges are in store in the coming weeks. Learning something new is great!'

'I don't have great physical health at the moment. For me to be able to take part in a group activity and make new friends has been wonderful. As my daughter told me – music is morphine for the soul. I'm so grateful to you for giving Lucan a community choir'

'Nikki's choir is great fun..she always has new and fun songs for us to learn! Going to choir is always a great pick me up after a busy day.'

' I've found a real sense of camaraderie and fun in choir. They're a great bunch of people and Nikki is full of positivity and joy. She's helped us discover that we can sing together a lot better than we would have assumed possible! I've personally discovered a lot more confidence in my own abilities and very much look forward to singing a lot more with this group'

We regularly sing to rise money for charity and in the community, such as Lucan Library, Starbucks Café Lucan, at SuperValu's Christmas customer evening, the Dementia Cafe and had a recital, along with Nikki's solo students, to raise money for Breast Cancer research.

Our next performance will be @darkness_into_light_lucan in aid of @pieta.house on Sat May 9th.

For more information about Nikki's choir you can visit the Facebook and Instagram – Nikki Hendys Singing Studio

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The Quiet Comeback of Ireland's Red Squirrel

There are few sights in Irish nature more cheering than the sudden flicker of a red squirrel in the trees: a flash of russet fur, a bottle-brush tail, and those faintly ridiculous ear tufts that make it look as though it has dressed for the opera.

The red squirrel feels deeply native to the Irish imagination, and in fact it is a native species here, thought to have been present since before the last Ice Age. It is a woodland animal, and after catastrophic deforestation in the 16th and 17th centuries the population suffered severely; the squirrels we see today largely descend from 19th-century reintroductions.

For years, the story seemed to be heading one way only. The invasive grey squirrel, introduced in Ireland in 1911, spread widely and brought with it bad news for its smaller native cousin. Grey squirrels compete with reds for food, damage trees by bark stripping, and carry squirrel pox, which is lethal to red squirrels. Bigger, tougher and less fussy about food, they looked for a long time like the winners of the contest.

But Irish wildlife, like Irish life in general, has a habit of refusing to stick to the script. The red squirrel has made a real recovery in recent years. In the 2019 All-Ireland Squirrel and Pine Marten Survey, red squirrel records rose to 1,784, up from 1,465 in 2012, and the species was recorded in every county. The species' conservation status in Ireland improved from "Near Threatened" in 2009 to "Least Concern" in the 2019 Red List assessment. The west remains a major stronghold, but the species is also doing notably well in places such as Cork and Wicklow, and the old midlands gap in its range has shrunk to parts of Meath, Louth and Dublin.

The most intriguing twist in the story is that the red squirrel has not staged this comeback alone. Much of the credit goes to another native species: the pine marten. Research in Ireland has shown that where pine martens recover and establish healthy breeding populations, grey squirrel numbers tend to fall, allowing red squirrels to recolonise woodlands. Scientists are still working out the exact mechanics, but the broad pattern is now well established enough to be one of the most remarkable wildlife turnarounds on the island. In 2019, pine martens too were recorded in every county, and their expanding core range was linked to further grey squirrel decline.

This does not mean the job is done. The happy ending, as ever in conservation, has an asterisk. Grey squirrels remain particularly numerous in large urban areas such as Dublin and Belfast, and researchers note that urban parks may act as a refuge for greys from pine marten predation. That means our towns and city green spaces matter hugely in the next chapter of the red squirrel story. The comeback is real, but it is not automatic, and it is not guaranteed everywhere.

There is also something rather lovely about the character of the red squirrel itself. It is not the brash, pavement-strutting opportunist of postcards from London parks. Red squirrels are shy, elusive creatures, most often seen high in the canopy, slipping around the far side of a trunk as if they would rather not make a fuss. Perhaps that is part of why people are so fond of them. Their recovery feels less like the return of a pest and more like the return of grace.

Across Ireland, that fondness is now being turned into practical work. In Killiney Hill, for example, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's restoration project includes habitat surveys, fencing to help vegetation recover, planting to improve habitat, awareness measures and continued grey squirrel management. Elsewhere, long-running survey work and local conservation groups have helped keep watch over populations and respond when pressure returns. Even the 2019 survey authors warned against assuming that because the species is doing better, it can now be left to fend for itself without further monitoring or local intervention.

And that may be the nicest part of the red squirrel's recovery in Ireland: it is not just a story about one attractive little animal. It is a story about woodland health, native species, scientific monitoring, citizen science and the slow repair of damage once thought irreversible. The National Biodiversity Data Centre has launched a new All-Ireland Squirrel and Pine Marten Survey for 2026, asking the public to record sightings, building on earlier surveys in 2007, 2012 and 2019. So, if you catch that quick red shimmer in the branches on a walk this spring or summer, it is worth a second look. You may be seeing not just a squirrel, but one of Ireland's quietest success stories.

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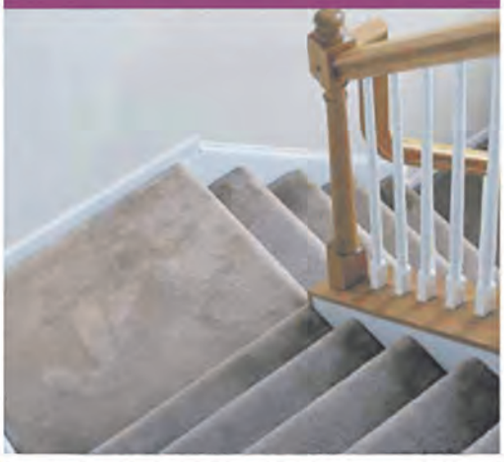

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35 YEARS

Will It Ever Stop Raining in Ireland this year?

Yes. Briefly. Just long enough for an Irish person to say, "Grand, summer's here," wash the car, put on lighter shoes, and be punished for hubris within 48 hours.

As of the time of writing this article, Met Éireann's forecast for Dublin and Kildare is mainly dry with sunny spells, and the east has actually been relatively dry over the last week: Casement recorded 3.5mm, only 26% of normal for that seven-day period. So, the short answer is that it has stopped, at least for the moment. The longer answer is that 2026 has already done enough rain in the opening months to leave people in Dublin 15 emotionally waterlogged.

To keep this honest, the cleanest official comparison is January to March 2026, because Met Éireann has monthly climate statements through March and daily station data up to 19 April 2026. April is still in progress, so anything beyond that becomes "current impression" rather than settled climate bookkeeping.

And on the numbers, 2026 has not been imagining things. January 2026 was wet nationally, with Ireland at 123% of the 1991–2020 average and 164mm of rain overall. Around Dublin it was especially grim: Phoenix Park had 141mm, Dublin Airport 137.7mm, and Casement 114.5mm. For Phoenix Park and Dublin Airport, it was the second wettest January on record, and for Casement it was the wettest January since 1995. That is not "a few showers now and then"; that is a properly committed Irish January.

Then came February 2026, which apparently looked at January and decided the standard had been set. Nationally, February was 119% of average, with 126.0mm, ranking as the 19th wettest February. Dublin Airport had its wettest February on record with 133.7mm, while Phoenix Park had 132.6mm, its second wettest February on record. So, if people in D15 felt that the sky had developed a personal issue with them, the data is not entirely unsympathetic.

March 2026 was a bit less dramatic, though still not exactly Mediterranean. National rainfall came in at 108% of average with 102.1mm. Locally it was much more ordinary than the previous two months: Casement 56.6mm, Dublin Airport 56.8mm, and Phoenix Park 55.5mm—all only a little above average rather than apocalyptic. In other words, March was not the month that broke anyone; January and February had already done the damage.

So how does 2026 so far compare with recent years? Against 2025, it is clearly wetter. Met Éireann described January 2025 as below average nationally for rainfall, February 2025 at Dublin Airport was only 48.3mm, and March 2025 was exceptionally dry nationally at 36.2mm, with Dublin Airport getting just 13.5mm, its driest March since 1990. By contrast, Dublin Airport logged 137.7mm in January 2026, 133.7mm in February 2026, and 56.8mm in March 2026—about 328.2mm across the first quarter. So compared with the same stretch of 2025, 2026 has been much wetter in Dublin and noticeably wetter nationally too.

Against 2024, it is more of a split decision. January 2024 was relatively modest locally, with Casement on 58.7mm, and February 2024 was wet but not 2026-level chaos in Dublin terms, with Casement on 64.9mm. But then March 2024 arrived like a man kicking in the pub door after closing time: Dublin Airport had 115.4mm, its third-highest March rainfall on record, and its highest daily fall for March on record. So, 2026 has had a wetter opening two months than 2024 around Dublin, but March 2024 was far wetter than March 2026.

Against 2023, 2026 again looks very front-loaded. January 2023 was much drier in Dublin, with 41.4mm at Dublin Airport and 42.4mm at Phoenix Park. February 2023 was so dry that Phoenix Park had its driest February since 1965, with long dry spells around Dublin stations. But March 2023 was a belter in the other direction: Dublin Airport recorded 119.3mm, its wettest March since 1947. So compared with 2023, 2026 has been much wetter in January and February, but not as wild as March 2023 once spring got going.

So, the verdict is this: no, 2026 is not proving to be the wettest imaginable year in Dublin and Kildare. Ireland has produced worse individual months in recent years, especially March 2023 and March 2024 around Dublin. But yes, the feeling that 2026 has been relentlessly wet is grounded in reality, because January and February 2026 were genuinely exceptional in Dublin, with near-record or record rainfall at the main nearby stations. It is not that the whole year has been one endless hosepipe from heaven. It is that the year came out of the traps absolutely flying.

And the good news, if one dares use that phrase in Ireland before June, is that the current pattern is at least giving the east a breather. So, it will stop raining. It just will not sign anything in writing.

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35 YEARS

Lucan Tidy Towns started in the 1990's. In 2025 we won a gold medal in the national Tidy Towns competition, the first by any group in South Dublin Council area.

We look after Lucan Village itself and also the areas leading into the village. We collect litter and organise cleanups obviously, but that's only the start. We maintain a large number of shrubbery and flower beds throughout the area. There are more than 30 of these beds which need weeding, digging, planting, feeding, and watering in summer. We remove graffiti, we sweep footpaths and kerbs, we paint bollards, fences and whatever needs a touch up.

The past year has been very challenging, with the disruption arising from the works in Village Green as was, the Weir Promenade, and the entrance to Lucan Demesne. We are glad to see that these works look like ending soon, and we can play our part in making the best of how they will look.

Our volunteers are out working every Saturday morning 10 months of the year. In the summer we also work in the evenings, as it's the busiest time of year for looking after all the planting. We have a core group of up to 25 people, some of whom have come to live in Ireland from overseas. We are always happy for any new people to join us. We usually meet in the car park at Carroll's pub, where we have our shed for storing our tools. The space for the shed was kindly given over to us by Donal Walsh of Caroll's. If you are interested in joining us the best way is to email us at lucantidytowns@gmail.com

We know that the community as a whole are very appreciative and supportive of what we do.

We need everyone to play their part in keeping Lucan looking well all the time, but especially during the summer months. The Tidy Towns adjudicator will be paying us a visit during June or July.

We worked very hard to earn our precious gold medal. We can't rest on our laurels, so we in Tidy Towns Lucan and you the community must do everything we can to win our second one in 2026.

CASTLETOWN IS BACK !

And We Really Should Appreciate It

There is a funny habit we all have around Lucan and Leixlip. We can live beside something wonderful for years and barely give it a second thought, then happily drive half across the country for a day out involving expensive coffee, a queue for the toilets and a sandwich that somehow costs the same as a small mortgage repayment.

Meanwhile, Castletown has been there all along.

Or almost all along. For a while, with all the rows over access and gates and who could get in where, it felt as if this great local amenity had slipped half out of ordinary life. It was still there, of course, in all its elegance and grandeur, but it somehow became less easy, less casual, less part of the normal local rhythm. You couldn't just say, "Let's head over to Castletown," without somebody replying, "Can you still get in?" or "What's the story with that place now?"

Now, thankfully, the answer is much simpler. Castletown is back. Properly back. And it deserves to be enjoyed again.

That is good news, because it is one of those rare places that suits nearly everyone. If you are into history, architecture and old houses, you can have a grand time admiring the scale of the place and all the layers of Irish history sitting in the walls. If you are not especially interested in any of that and simply want a nice walk in peaceful surroundings, it works just as well. If you have visitors staying, it is ideal. If you have children who need to be taken somewhere before they start bouncing off the furniture, it is ideal. If you just want to get out of the house for an hour and clear your head, it is ideal.

That is the beauty of it.

Some local attractions can feel like effort. Castletown never really does. It has space, trees, walks, river views, and that lovely sense that you have stepped out of the usual rush without having

CONTINUES P28

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to go very far at all. For people in Lucan and Leixlip, that is not a small thing. It means you can have the feeling of a day out without all the usual palaver.

And maybe we value that more now than we used to.

For years, Castletown was almost too familiar. We knew it was there. We knew it was grand. We knew we should probably go more often. But familiarity can make people lazy. It becomes one of those places you assume will always be available, always be accessible, always be there for some future Sunday when the weather is decent and everyone happens to be in good humour at the same time.

Then access became a genuine issue, and suddenly people noticed what they had been taking for granted.

That often happens with local treasures. It is only when they become awkward or uncertain that you realise how much they matter. Castletown is not just an old house outside Celbridge. It is part of the wider life of this whole area. It is somewhere generations have walked, wandered, met friends, brought children, shown to visitors and quietly used as a bit of breathing space when the world felt too busy.

And breathing space is something modern life is badly short of.

There is also something reassuring about Castletown itself. In a world where everything new seems to arrive with an app, a booking fee and a reminder email, there is comfort in a place whose main attraction is simply that it is beautiful and has stood the test of time. You do not need to understand Palladian architecture to enjoy it. You do not need to have read a book on Irish history to appreciate the setting. You can just turn up and let the place do the work.

That, in its own way, is a luxury.

Of course, there is history there in abundance for those who want it. Castletown is one of the great houses of Ireland, and you feel that the minute you see it. It was built to impress, and it still does. There is no point pretending otherwise. It has that rare thing in architecture: confidence. It does not ask for your admiration. It assumes it.

But what makes it special for locals is not only the grandeur. It is the familiarity. Grand, yes, but not remote. Historic, yes, but still woven into everyday life. You can admire the house, then go for a ramble through the grounds, then stand around chatting in the usual Irish fashion for twenty minutes before actually deciding whether you are going for coffee or heading home.

That is what gives the place its charm. It is not museum-ish in the cold sense. It still feels lived around, used, folded into the local landscape rather than sealed off from it.

And now that tours and events are happening again, there is a fresh reason to return even if you think you “know” Castletown already. A lot of us know places only in the vaguest sense. We know where they are. We know they are nice. We may even know where the best bit of the walk is. But that is not quite the same as really engaging with them.

Maybe now is the moment to do that.

Not in a worthy, educational, eat-your-greens sort of way. More in the sense of remembering that one of the nicest things about living around Lucan and Leixlip is that somewhere as special as Castletown is right there on the doorstep. You do not have to make a huge production of it. You can go for an hour. You can bring the grandchildren. You can bring a friend who has never been. You can go because the weather is good, or because it is not. In fact, there is something very Irish about enjoying a place like Castletown under a sky that cannot quite make up its mind.

The important thing is that it is part of local life again.

And perhaps that is the real point. Places like Castletown are not just there to be admired from a distance or mentioned proudly when talking to outsiders. They are there to be used, appreciated and woven into ordinary days. That is when heritage really matters — not when it sits behind ropes and brochures, but when it becomes part of how people actually live.

So yes, Castletown is back. And maybe this time we should try not to overlook it.

Because the truth is, we nearly forgot how lucky we are to have it.

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The Quiet Shame of the Robot Lawn Mower

Why outsourcing the grass to a small silent machine feels like a moral collapse

There was a time in Ireland when cutting the grass meant something.

It meant duty. It meant rhythm. It meant me in old runners pushing a mower up and down a damp suburban lawn with the grim determination of a man defending civilisation itself. It meant the smell of petrol, the roar of an engine, the occasional muttered curse when the cord wouldn't start, and the deeply satisfying sight of neat stripes appearing where once there had been only botanical laziness.

Now I stand at the kitchen window in a clean jumper, holding a coffee, while a robot the size of a stubborn suitcase glides silently around my lawn like it owns the deeds.

And I feel guilty. Not just a little guilty. Deeply, irrationally, culturally guilty. The kind of guilt that seems to come not from my own conscience, but from generations of Irish people silently judging me from beyond the grave. Men who dug drains by hand. Women who scrubbed steps with brushes. Ancestors who survived hardship, emigration and turf smoke, all so that one day I could say, "No, I won't be cutting the grass myself — the little fella does it now."

It is, on paper, a triumph. The robot mower is efficient, quiet and weirdly diligent. It never complains. It never "might do it tomorrow." It doesn't disappear for tea halfway through the job. It simply emerges, lowers itself into position like a tiny military device, and gets on with it. Rain permitting, it patrols the lawn with the single-minded focus of a parish woman straightening hymn books before Mass.The grass looks great.

Which only makes the guilt worse.

Because what exactly am I now supposed to do with the time that has been freed up? This is where the robot mower really becomes emotionally complicated. When you've spent years telling yourself you're too busy, too wrecked, too under pressure, the arrival of a machine that quietly removes one of your standing excuses is not entirely welcome.

You can no longer stomp around the place announcing that you'll be "out with the mower later" as though preparing for agricultural battle. You can no longer return indoors flushed and self-righteous, looking for praise and possibly a sandwich. You cannot dramatically inspect the grass height like a man responsible for national food security. The robot has stripped you of the performance of labour, and what remains is just… you.

Worse again, the robot mower seems to enjoy its work.

That's the part nobody tells you. It doesn't lumber or groan. It whirs. It potters. It moves with a smug serenity that suggests it has achieved a work-life balance entirely unavailable to the rest of us. It does one thing, does it well, and then goes home to charge itself. Frankly, it's become the most emotionally secure thing on the property.

And yet, despite my unease, I have grown fond of it.

This is how it starts. First you refer to it as "the mower." Then, before you know it, you're checking on it. Defending it. Wondering if it's all right in heavy rain. Giving it a name like Seamus, or Mick, or Mo Mowlawn. You begin speaking about it to visitors in a tone usually reserved for rescue dogs.

"There he is now," you say, with quiet pride. "He's after doing the front already."

The Irish relationship with technology is a complicated one. We love convenience, but we don't like appearing soft. We want the smart home, but we also want to maintain the fiction that we are still hardy, capable people who could light a fire with damp sticks and cut a half-acre with a rusty Flymo if the nation required it.

The robot mower exposes this contradiction beautifully.

It is both a luxury and a relief. It is both impressive and faintly ridiculous. It saves time, effort and back pain, but it also leaves you feeling like a member of the landed gentry who has somehow employed a very small, very efficient groundskeeper.

And perhaps that is the real issue. The guilt is not really about laziness. It is about identity. In Ireland, we still carry a strong belief that if a job can be done manually, then there is virtue in doing it the hard way. Suffering, however minor, still feels morally useful. We don't entirely trust ease. Ease feels suspicious. Ease feels foreign. Ease feels like the sort of thing that should probably be followed by rain, tax, or a cautionary tale.

So yes, I now have a robot cutting my lawn. Yes, I occasionally watch it through the window while doing absolutely nothing of value. Yes, a part of me suspects this is the first step towards full domestic uselessness.

But the lawn looks fantastic.

And if that is wrong, then perhaps I no longer want to be right.

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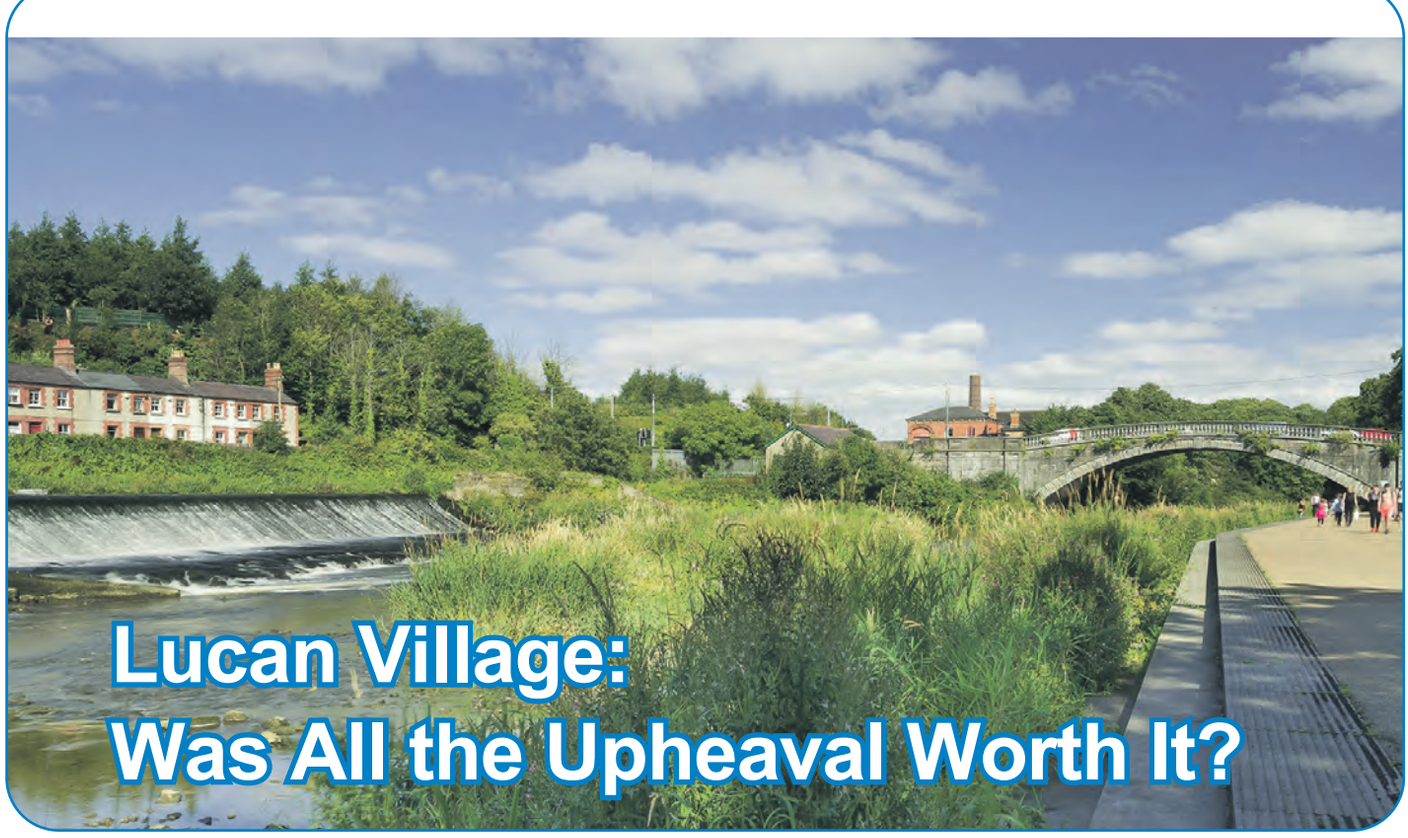

Lucan Village: Was All the Upheaval Worth It?

Every time there is a plan to improve a town or village, the same thing happens. First come the glossy drawings. There are always happy-looking people strolling about with takeaway coffees, a few carefully positioned bicycles, and enough neat planting to make you think the whole place is about to turn into a small corner of continental Europe.

Then comes the reality.

The barriers go up. The dust starts flying. Parking spaces vanish. Paths change direction. Traffic gets awkward. People start muttering. Someone swears blind the whole thing was better before. Somebody else says it was an accident waiting to happen. And somewhere in the middle of it all is the ordinary person just trying to get to the chemist, the post office or the coffee shop without having to do an expedition.

That is more or less where Lucan has been for a while now.

To be fair, the works are not just a quick tidy-up. This is a fairly major project covering the Village Green, the Promenade and the entrance to Lucan Demesne. The idea behind it all is simple enough: make the village look better, work better and feel more connected, especially around the Green, the river and the Demesne.

And Lucan is the kind of place worth making an effort with. It already has a lot going for it. It has a proper village feel, a bit of history, a river running through it and lovely mature surroundings. Not every suburban area can say that. Lucan has always had the bones of somewhere special. The frustration, perhaps, is that locals already knew that and did not necessarily need to be told.

Still, on paper at least, a lot of what is planned sounds sensible. Better access. More seating. Safer crossings. Improvements around the Green. A nicer connection down towards the river and into the Demesne. The kind of things that should make it easier for people to walk around, stop for a while and actually enjoy the place instead of just passing through it.

And that, really, is the point. Is Lucan meant to be somewhere you drive through on the way to somewhere else, or somewhere you might actually stop in, sit down, meet someone, browse a few shops and spend a bit of time? If the answer is the second one, then the public space has to be good enough to make people want to do that.

So why all the grumbling?

Because people do not experience villages as planning documents. They experience them as routine. They know where they usually park. They know where they cross the road without even thinking about it. They know the shortest way to the butcher, the pharmacy or the café. They know how to get around with a buggy, a shopping bag, a walking stick or a grandchild in tow. When works disrupt that, it is not just traffic that is affected. It is habit. And habit matters more than planners sometimes realise.

Then, of course, there is parking. In Ireland, parking is never just about parking. It is emotional. The phrase “parking relocation” may sound harmless in an official update, but to the average motorist it lands like a personal insult. People can accept change in theory. They are much less keen on it when it interferes with

the exact spot where they have been “just pulling in for two minutes” for the past fifteen years.

That said, there is a bigger question here. Villages that are pleasant, attractive and welcoming are rarely designed around making life as easy as possible for cars. There has to be a balance. If every inch of space is about traffic flow and parking convenience, then somewhere can quickly lose the very charm that made it worth visiting in the first place.

That does not mean the complaints are unfair. They are not. Local businesses need people coming through the door while the works are happening, not just promises that things will be great in the future. Older people need to be able to move around safely and confidently. Parents with buggies or bags want to know whether the finished version will actually make everyday life easier, not just look nice in photographs. Those are all reasonable concerns.

In the end, that is how the project should be judged. Not by the drawings, not by the speeches, and not by how impressive it sounds in a council update. The real test is whether it works in real life. On a wet Tuesday. When someone is in a hurry. When a parent is juggling children and shopping. When an older person wants to cross the road without feeling like they are taking their life in their hands. That is when you find out whether an improvement scheme is actually an improvement.

But there is another side to it too. The places people end up loving are often the places that went through a spell of disruption before anyone could properly appreciate the result. We all say we want character, atmosphere and lovely public spaces, but those things do not happen by magic. They take thought, money, work and, unfortunately, a fair bit of inconvenience while it is all being done.

So, was all the upheaval worth it?

The answer is probably this: it will depend on how it feels when it is finished. If the Green is more welcoming, the riverside more attractive, the Demesne easier to reach and the village centre nicer to walk around and spend time in, then most of the complaining will fade surprisingly quickly. People are very good at objecting to change and then, once it is done, acting as if it had always been there.

That is usually the giveaway that something has worked. The noise dies down. People start using the place naturally. Children run through it. Older people sit in it. Visitors admire it. Locals start saying, “Meet me by the new steps,” or “I’ll see you at the Green.”

And then, before long, even some of the people who gave out the loudest will admit, perhaps reluctantly, that it is actually a lot better than before.

In Lucan, that counts as rave reviews.

Moya Brennan

The Donegal Voice That Carried Irish to the World

Some singers are admired. Some are successful. A very small number seem to arrive with a sound so distinctive that the first few notes are enough to stop a room. Moya Brennan belonged to that rare company. As the voice of Clannad and through a long solo career, she helped shape what much of the world thinks of as the sound of Ireland: haunting, luminous, rooted in tradition but never trapped by it. Following her death on 13 April 2026 at the age of 73, the tributes made clear what listeners had known for decades — that Ireland had lost not just a singer, but one of its great cultural ambassadors.

Her legacy begins, of course, with the voice itself. It is one of those overused descriptions to call a singer "unique," but in Brennan's case it is simply accurate. Her tone could be whisper-light and then suddenly full of ache, clarity and atmosphere. Bono once described it as among the greatest voices the human ear has experienced, and that praise never felt like hyperbole. Brennan's singing with Clannad gave Celtic music an ethereal, modern reach without stripping away its soul. It was music that sounded ancient and contemporary at the same time, and her voice was the thread that held those worlds together.

What made her achievement even more remarkable was that she did not dilute her identity to find an audience. Brennan was raised in Gaoth Dobhair, in the Donegal Gaeltacht, and Irish was not an ornament in her music or a clever branding exercise. It was part of the grain of her life. She grew up in a deeply musical family connected to Leo's Tavern, one of the best-known musical hearths in the country, and from that local, Irish-speaking world came a body of work that travelled far beyond it.

That is why her role in promoting the Irish language matters so much. Brennan did not lecture audiences into admiring Irish. She persuaded them by making it beautiful, emotionally immediate and internationally resonant. Clannad's "Theme from Harry's Game" remains the landmark example: **a song in Irish that reached No. 5 in the UK Singles Chart and**

became the first Irish-language song to break so decisively into mainstream British pop culture.

That kind of cultural influence is easy to underestimate because Brennan wore it so lightly. She was never the loudest figure in the room, nor the sort of artist who needed to batter people over the head with declarations about heritage. Instead, she made Irish feel natural, musical and alive. For many listeners outside Ireland, Clannad was an early doorway into the language. For many within Ireland, especially those who may have associated Irish with schoolbooks, rules and guilt, Brennan's music offered something more seductive: the language as beauty, memory and belonging. That may be one of her finest achievements.

And then there was Donegal. In Brennan's work, Donegal was never just a birthplace in the biographical notes. Even when she became an international figure, Donegal remained central to how she understood herself. That bond was recognised formally when she was named Donegal Person of the Year for 2023 and honoured in 2024, but people in the county had long since claimed her as one of their own in the deepest sense of the phrase.

Her broader honours tell their own story. With Clannad, Brennan's career brought major international recognition, including a BAFTA, an Ivor Novello and a Grammy-winning legacy, while her own contribution was recognised in Ireland with an honorary doctorate from Dublin City University. Those awards matter, not because they define the artist, but because they confirm the scale of what she achieved: she took music shaped by family, place and language, and made it matter on a world stage.

Yet the phrase that keeps returning in tributes is "First Lady of Celtic Music," and it fits because Brennan combined authority with gentleness. There was no bluster to her art. She did not need it. Her power lay in suggestion, tone and emotional intelligence.

So what is Moya Brennan's legacy?

It is the legacy of a voice that sounded unmistakably of Ireland while speaking far beyond Ireland. It is the legacy of an artist who made the Irish language persuasive not by argument, but by artistry. In an era when identity is often performed noisily, Brennan did something far more enduring. She sang her inheritance with such grace that the rest of the world leaned in to listen.

Unexpected Item in the Bagging Area

The Great Supermarket Swizz or a Modern Miracle?

There was a time when going to the supermarket involved a simple social contract. You selected your groceries, joined a queue behind someone buying enough provisions to survive a mild apocalypse, and eventually a trained human being scanned your messages to the world in the form of ham, teabags, digestive biscuits and a suspiciously emotional amount of grated cheddar.

Now, of course, you are invited to do it yourself.

Self-service checkouts were sold to us as freedom. Speed. Efficiency. Control. No more waiting behind a trolley containing an entire branch of the vegetable kingdom and a family pack of toilet roll the size of a studio flat. In theory, they are a marvellous idea. For the shopper with six items, a bank card and a pressing desire to avoid small talk, they can be a blessing. Retail technology companies openly pitch self-checkout as a way to speed up lines, offer more choice and let fewer staff supervise more lanes at once, which is a beautifully polished corporate way of saying: yes, you are helping with the work now.

And that, really, is the heart of the matter.

Are self-service checkouts a good thing? Yes, sometimes. Are they also supermarkets getting us to do their work for them? Also, yes. This is what in the trade might be called a win-win, except only one side is saving wages while the other side is trying to remember the code for loose carrots.

The ideal self-service experience lasts about 42 seconds. You scan a loaf, milk, a newspaper, tap your card, and glide off feeling like a citizen of the future. The machine thanks you for shopping there in the tone of a hostage reading a prepared statement. You nod politely. All is well.

Then you buy a weighed item.

This is where the dream begins to wobble.

There you are, staring at a touchscreen full of tiny icons, trying to decide whether your purchase is listed under apples, fruit, fresh produce, seasonal, local, organic, loose, or “items beginning with a sense of personal failure”. The tomato you have known all your life suddenly becomes a philosophical problem. Is it salad? Is it veg? Is it technically fruit? What is a plum tomato, really, when a queue of irritated strangers is forming behind you?

The industry knows this is the weak spot. One retail tech firm now boasts about tools designed specifically to eliminate the hassle of manually searching PLU codes for produce. Which is a bit like a car manufacturer proudly announcing that its latest model is less likely to burst into flames.

And then comes the choreography.

Self-service checkouts are not really checkouts. They are performance art. You must scan in the correct order, place items in the correct area, and move with the caution of a bomb disposal expert. Put your basket down too early in the wrong tray bit and the machine behaves as though you have attempted a jewel heist. Pack too soon and it emits a warning noise that can turn a calm adult into someone suddenly trying to explain themselves to a machine.

“Unexpected item in bagging area.”

Unexpected by whom? It was a tin of beans. I scanned it. We have all seen it happen. It is not a mystery object fallen from space.

And the basket issue is a humiliation all of its own. The moment you place your basket where any normal person would place a basket, the machine goes into a kind of electronic moral panic. Lights flash. A distant staff member looks up. For one terrible second you appear to be the sort of character security staff discuss at briefing meetings.

Then there is the alcohol moment, perhaps the finest comic flourish in the entire system.

You scan a bottle of wine. The screen freezes. A warning

appears. Approval required.

Now, this is fair enough in theory. Shops have age-check policies, including Challenge 25 style rules, and staff approval is part of how age-restricted sales are managed. Lidl Ireland's help pages reference Challenge 25, and Aldi Ireland says staff must check that you look 25 or over when serving alcohol.

But theory and lived reality are two different things.

There is something magnificently absurd about a machine demanding age clearance when you are quite clearly heading not for the nightclub but for the pension. The hair is silver. The knees have opinions. The face has seen governments rise and fall. Yet still you must stand there waiting for a 19-year-old staff member to come over and silently confirm that yes, this person is indeed old enough to purchase a bottle of Rioja and half a bar of Dairy Milk.

It is, in its way, flattering. Annoying, but flattering.

As for Aldi and Lidl, the old assumption that they somehow heroically resisted self-service checkouts is no longer really true. Lidl Ireland clearly has them: its customer-help pages refer to paying at a "Self-Check-Out", and recent new Irish stores in places like Ballybough and Bundoran have specifically advertised self-service checkouts as part of the layout. Aldi Ireland also started installing self-service checkouts in selected stores in 2024 and later expanded them to selected newer stores.

So, the answer is not that Aldi and Lidl do not have them. It is that they came to the party a bit differently, and many shoppers still associate them with the old model: brisk, efficient human cashiers firing groceries through the till at speeds previously seen only in military logistics.

That, perhaps, is why self-service remains such a mixed blessing. It works brilliantly when it works. For a few items, it is often faster. For anyone in a hurry, it can be ideal. But it also shifts a surprising amount of effort onto the shopper. You become cashier, packer, codebreaker, age-verification supplicant and, in extreme cases, amateur diplomat negotiating with a touchscreen about the true nature of a loose onion.

In the end, self-service checkouts are like many modern conveniences. They are wonderful right up to the precise second they are not. They save time until they waste it. They make shopping easier until they turn buying two pears and a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc into a live-action puzzle game.

So yes, they are a good thing. And yes, supermarkets are absolutely getting us to do some of their work for them.

The modern customer, it seems, is not always king.

Sometimes he is just the unpaid trainee on till number six.

The Great Irish Coffee Delusion

How we made decent coffee easy to sell almost everywhere — and somehow forgot how to make it worth drinking – by Grumpy Bloke

There was a time when going for a coffee actually meant going for a coffee.

You met someone in a café. You sat down. You got a proper cup. Maybe even a saucer, if the place was doing well. You had a chat, watched people passing the window, and drank the coffee while it was still hot and actually tasted the way it was meant to taste. It was a small pause in the day. A civilised one.

Now, in Ireland, coffee can be bought from just about anywhere with a plug socket and a serving hatch.

A horse trailer. A petrol station. A corner of a shop that used to sell nothing more exotic than batteries and Tayto. A converted van parked in a lay-by with fairy lights and a sign promising "artisan coffee" as though that settles the matter.

And look, fair play to people. There's no denying the hustle. Ireland has taken to coffee-selling with serious enthusiasm. Give us a decent espresso machine, a blackboard menu and a milk fridge, and we'll have a new coffee business up and running before the paint is dry.

The only problem is this: selling coffee is not the same as knowing how to make coffee.

That's the bit that gets lost.

We've become brilliant at the appearance of coffee culture. We have the trailers, the takeaway cups, the flat whites, the oat milk, the little menus with words like cortado and piccolo on them. We have beans with lovely packaging and staff in aprons and enough reclaimed wood to build a small chapel.

But sometimes the coffee itself is pure misery.

Too hot. Too bitter. Too foamy. Too weak. Too burnt. Too expensive for the level of disappointment involved. It's often coffee made by someone who knows how to operate the machine, but not necessarily how to get the best out of it. And there is a difference. A big one.

A proper barista is not just a person standing beside a shiny machine. A proper barista understands timing, texture, balance. They know milk should be smooth, not stiff enough to plaster a wall. They know coffee should taste rich and rounded, not like someone whispered "Italy" over a cup of hot panic.

And that finer art — the actual craft of making good coffee — feels like it's being squeezed out by convenience.

That's probably clearest in the paper cup.

Because coffee used to be something you sat with. Now it's something you carry around while doing three other things. We buy it full of hope. We take a few sips. Then it goes into the car, comes into the shop, sits beside us through a phone call, and ends up half-finished in a cup holder getting colder and sadder by the minute.

There must be thousands of takeaway coffees across Ireland right now living out their final days untouched in cars.

We don't really drink coffee the way we used to. We consume it in theory. We like having it. Holding it. Buying it. We like the idea of it. But too often the moment itself is gone. The sitting down, the slowing down, the conversation, the enjoying it while it's fresh — all of that has been pushed aside by rushing, errands and cardboard lids that never quite fit properly.

Somewhere along the line, coffee stopped being a little ritual and became another item in the daily scramble.

And maybe that's why people feel nostalgic for real café culture, even if they wouldn't put it in those exact words. What they miss is not just "nicer coffee". It's the whole thing around it. The proper cup. The decent chair. The café hum. The barista who actually knows what they're doing. The sense that this drink was made with care and meant to be enjoyed there and then — not carried around like a warm accessory until it turns on you.

To be fair, there are still brilliant places doing it properly. There are excellent baristas all over Ireland, in cafés, kiosks and yes, even in some trailers, making beautiful coffee with real skill. You know the difference straight away when you get one. The coffee tastes balanced. The milk is right. Nothing is trying too hard. It just works.

But they can be hard to find among the flood of places now selling coffee because coffee happens to be sellable.

And that's really the story of it. Ireland made proper barista-style coffee easy for anyone to offer. That was the first leap. But somewhere in the rush, we confused access with quality. We decided that because coffee was now everywhere, it must also be good everywhere. It isn't.

So maybe what's needed now is not more coffee hatches, more trailers or more cups with minimalist logos on them. Maybe what's needed is a small return to standards. To slowing down. To professional baristas. To cafés that treat coffee as something more than a handy add-on to a scone and a sausage roll.

Because deep down, I think a lot of people are longing for the same thing: a real coffee culture again.

A proper coffee. In a real cup. Made by someone who understands the craft. Drunk sitting down, with a conversation, before it goes cold.

Which, in modern Ireland, now feels oddly radical.

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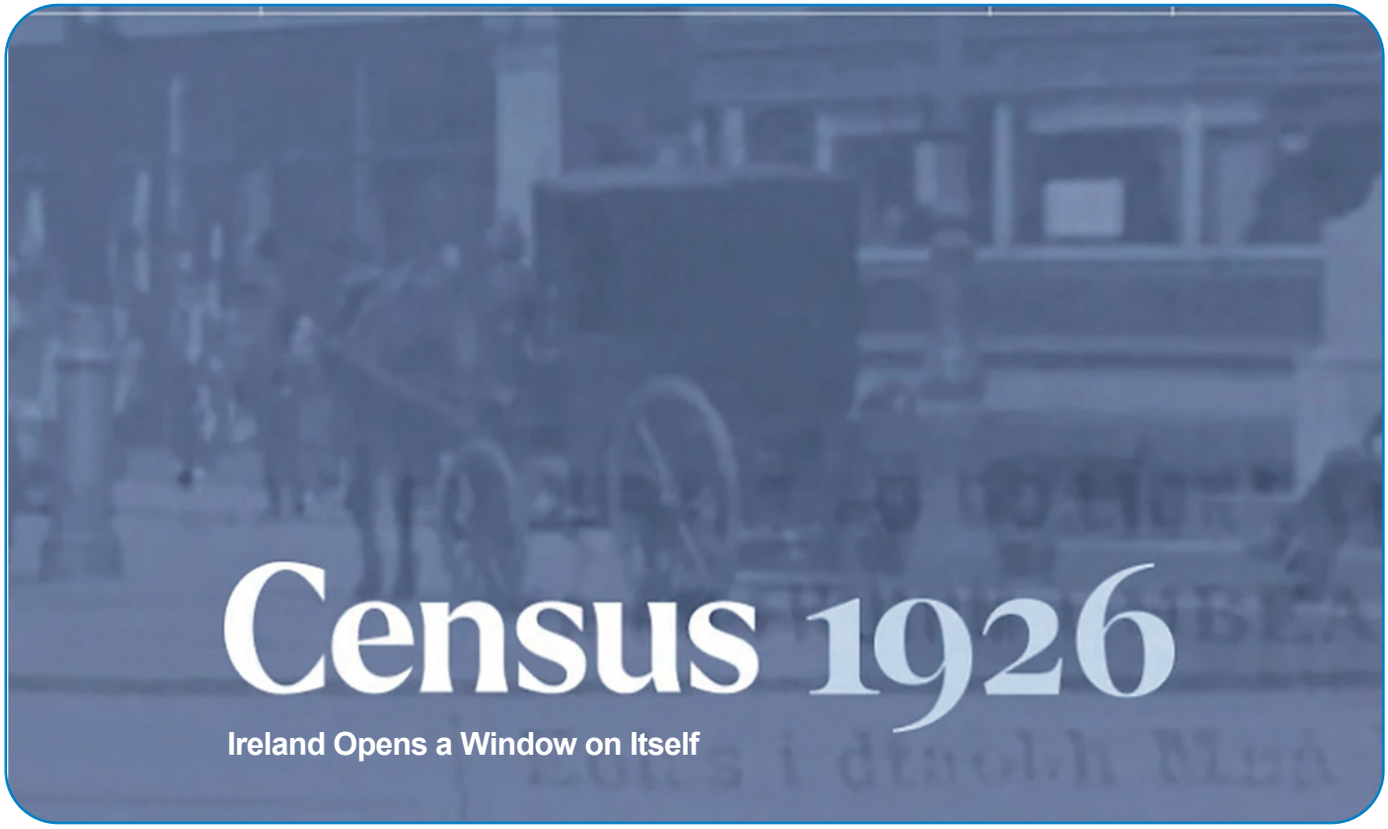

Census 1926

Ireland Opens a Window on Itself

The release of Ireland's 1926 census is more than a gift to family historians. It is the first full census of the Irish Free State, taken on 18 April 1926 and released exactly a century later, on 18 April 2026. The records are now freely searchable through the National Archives, with more refinements, corrections and analysis tools due to appear in phases over the coming year. Between the household forms and associated records, the project covers more than 700,000 returns and close to three million people, which makes it one of the richest snapshots ever opened up of everyday life in the young State.

What makes the 1926 census so fascinating is the sheer amount of detail in it.

This was not just a headcount. The household return records names and surnames, relationship to the head of household, age in years and months, sex, marital or orphan status, birthplace, religion, Irish-language ability, occupation, and employer. It also asked married women for the length of their marriage and the number of children born alive, while married men, widowers and widows were asked about living children and stepchildren under 16. There was even a question on the acreage of agricultural holdings. Alongside that were enumerators' returns for each townland or street, showing whether buildings were inhabited, how many families lived there, the head of each family, the number of males and females, and the number of rooms occupied. In other words, it lets us see not only who was here, but how they lived.

The next census after 1926 was the 1936 census, taken on 26 April 1936. Under Ireland's 100-year rule for census confidentiality, the 1936 returns are not due for public release until 2036. The CSO notes that censuses continued at ten-year intervals up to 1946, and that returns from 1926 onward remain closed for 100 years before transfer to public inspection.

So, what does the 1926 census tell us about Ireland?

First, it shows a country that was still small, young and marked by long population decline. The population stood at 2.97 million, down by just over 5% from 1911 and still part of the post-Famine demographic shrinkage that had defined

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Ireland for generations. More than 29% of the population was under 15, reflecting a high birth rate, while life expectancy at birth was only 57 for men and 58 for women. Dublin was already the largest population centre, but it accounted for 17% of the population, far less dominant than it is now.

It also shows an Ireland that was overwhelmingly Catholic, but not quite as monocultural as memory sometimes suggests. Roman Catholics made up 93% of the population, or 2,751,269 people. The remaining 7% fell into “Other Religions”, including Church of Ireland, Presbyterians, Methodists, Jews and others. At the same time, 18% of the population were recorded as having Irish-language ability, with the strongest concentrations in the west and northwest: Galway at 47%, Mayo at 37% and Donegal at 34%. The CSO notes that 1926 was significant because it marked the first recorded increase in Irish speakers after decades of decline.

In economic terms, the census describes a country still rooted in the land.

There were 1,307,662 people at work, and agriculture alone accounted for 672,129 of them, or 51% of the workforce. The figures include more than 206,000 sons and daughters assisting on family farms, as well as nearly 90,000 agricultural labourers not living on the farm and more than 36,000 who did. Industrial trades and manufacturing employed 186,617 people, about 14% of workers, with tailoring, smithing, and baking among the biggest individual trades. The message is plain enough: this was still a rural society, and the farm was not just a workplace but a family system.

Then come the occupational details that make the census feel vividly human. The large number of nuns really does jump off the page.

In the category of professional occupations, there were 9,489 nuns and postulants, as well as 1,111 Christian Brothers and other monks.

There were 5,266 female sick nurses and 10,604 female teachers, alongside 5,598 male teachers. These are not marginal numbers. They show how central religious life, education and care work were to the social fabric of the State.

The census also underlines how strongly women’s paid work was concentrated in service roles. In personal service occupations, there were 63,766 female domestic servants living in and another 23,787 living out, compared with 1,818 and 827 men respectively. More broadly, personal service counted 109,461 women against 18,381 men. That tells its own story about class, gender and the kinds of work open to women in 1926 Ireland. Much of female employment sat in domestic service, teaching, nursing and religious life rather than in the professions or management as we would understand them today.

What emerges overall is a portrait of an Ireland that was devout, rural, youthful and still poor by modern standards, but not flat or featureless.

It was heavily Irish born, with 97% of residents born in Ireland, and inward migration was very limited.

Yet Dublin already stood apart as the most diverse county, with a higher share of people born in Britain and overseas, and the

religious tables show distinct Protestant, Jewish and other minority communities across the State.

So, the 1926 census does not simply confirm the old image of a narrow, homogeneous country. It complicates it. It shows an Ireland shaped by church and farm, certainly, but also by towns, trades, migration, minority communities and thousands upon thousands of lives that do not fit neatly into a sepia stereotype.

The great value of this release is that it lets us move beyond vague nostalgia and national shorthand. We can now see the young State in granular detail: who lived in each house, how many rooms they had, what language they spoke, what work they did, how many children they had, and where they came from. For anyone interested in Ireland, that is not just an archive. It is a mirror..

STILL RUNNING ON DIESEL?

Ireland's Second-Hand Car Market Hasn't Read the Memo

The Irish second-hand car market is one of those places where theory and real life have a very public disagreement. In theory, we are all gliding serenely towards an electric future, charging elegantly at motorway hubs while discussing kilowatts and sustainability over oat-milk flat whites. In real life, half the country is still peering at a tidy 2018 diesel estate and thinking, "That'll do grand." And the numbers suggest that instinct is not entirely foolish. Ireland's used-car market remains busy: SIMI says imported used-car registrations hit 71,813 in 2025, up 16.6% on 2024, and by the end of March 2026 they were already up 39.2% year on year.

That tells its own story. The market for second-hand cars in Ireland is not some gloomy waiting room between the old world and the new one. It is a market with serious momentum, and it is still shaped less by ideology than by the old holy trinity of Irish motoring: price, practicality and whether the thing will get you to Galway and back without drama.

So, are diesel cars holding their value better than the rest? The careful answer is: better than used EVs, yes; better than every corner of the second-hand market, not necessarily. Done Deal's H1 2025 price index found that the broader internal-combustion market was still rising, with its main used-car index up 3.1% year on year, while used EV prices were down 2.8% annually. In other words, the great collapse in used EV values has eased, but diesel and petrol have generally held firmer.

Diesel's resilience becomes even clearer when you compare like with like. Done Deal's analysis of dealer-listed cars under five years old found that, by H1 2025, used EVs were already 14.5% cheaper than comparable diesels after adjusting for age, mileage and similar attributes. For 2022-registered cars, the median asking price in July 2025 was €33,950 for diesel, compared with €27,950 for EVs. By March 2026, that gap had widened further: reports based on the latest Done Deal index said used EVs were now about 11% below comparable diesel cars, with a typical three-year-old EV around €28,825 and a comparable diesel around €35,893. So yes, diesel is still retaining a stronger used-market price than EVs.

That does not mean diesel is storming ahead in the new-car market. Quite the opposite. SIMI says diesel accounted for 17.09% of new-car registrations in 2025, and by March 2026 diesel's share of the new-car market had fallen to 12.92%. CSO data also shows the combined share of new petrol and diesel cars dropped to 43% in 2025,

down from 54% in 2024. So, the new market is shifting away from diesel quite quickly. But the second-hand market is operating on a different timetable, because used buyers tend to care less about being on the right side of history and more about range, fuel economy on longer trips, and whether the purchase feels financially safe.

And that, really, is diesel's remaining strength in Ireland: familiarity. A diesel may not be fashionable, but it still feels legible. People know what it is. They know how far it will go. They know where to fill it. They know what a mechanic will say about it, even if the mechanic says it while inhaling through his teeth and charging you for something called a sensor. Diesel has the advantage of being boring in a reassuring way. It is the sensible raincoat of Irish motoring.

Electric cars, by contrast, still carry a residue of uncertainty, even as they become more common. The anxiety has not disappeared; it has simply become more specific. EY's 2026 Mobility Consumer Index found that 40% of Irish car buyers intend to choose an electrified vehicle in the next two years, which is a strong signal of momentum. But among hesitant buyers, 36% still cited uncertainty around charging and running costs, 31% said they lacked enough charging infrastructure nearby, 30% worried about upfront purchase prices and 30% were concerned about battery replacement costs. That is not anti-EV hysteria. It is practical caution.

In fairness, some of those nerves are rooted in ordinary Irish housing reality. If you have a driveway and can charge at home, an EV looks much more attractive. If you live in an estate where parking is a mild blood sport and the nearest reliable charger seems to be in another county, the calculation changes. The State knows this is the pressure point. Government said in February 2026 that Ireland had passed 212,000 registered EVs, and the charging network is being expanded: 53 new fast and ultra-fast recharging hubs with 175 charging points were announced for the national road network in June 2025, and a further 90 hubs were announced in October 2025. That is real progress, but it also tells you why some buyers still feel infrastructure is catching up rather than comfortably ahead.

The interesting twist is that used EVs are not failing in Ireland. Far from it. Cartell says 15,425 used EVs were sold in Ireland in 2025, up 31% from 11,754 in 2024. Their analysis points to improving consumer confidence, a bigger pool of ex-fleet and PCP-return cars, and better charging options as reasons why used EVs are becoming more mainstream. So, the market is no longer saying, "No thanks." It is saying, "Maybe, but only if the price is right."

Which brings us back to the central question. Diesel cars are not exactly roaring back like a triumphant king, but in the second-hand market they are certainly not dead. They are holding value better than used EVs because they still suit a lot of Irish drivers, particularly those doing longer journeys or lacking home charging. At the same time, the direction of travel is unmistakable: EV prices have become much more competitive, used EV sales are rising, and the infrastructure story is gradually improving.

So, is there still anxiety about electric cars? Absolutely. But it is no longer the old fear that the battery will expire somewhere outside Longford, and you will have to live in it. It is a more grounded anxiety about cost, charging access and convenience. Diesel, meanwhile, continues to enjoy the great advantage of every old Irish favourite: it may not be the future, but it still makes immediate sense on a wet Tuesday.

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