

there on a driving charge, was murdered as she drove back to Dublin on the dual-carriageway at Newlands Cross.

### Renovation and refurbishment works

**T**he courthouse was restored following damage by fire in the 1950s and in 1997 it was extensively refurbished and enlarged to accommodate four courtrooms. Imposing features of the building are the foyer and the spiral staircase with its decorative railings of brass and wrought iron, lit from an oval sky-light.

The panelled Victorian double-height courtroom, which has featured in many films and television programmes, was then also re-modelled. The original canopy and galleries remain, but the well (with its panelling) was removed to storage for possible reconstruction in a museum. Among the films in which scenes were made in the courthouse were the



appropriately named "The Irish R.M." and "The Great Train Robbery". As recently as 2002, the courthouse was used in the shooting of the film "Chasing the Dragon".

All Courts Service publications are available on our website [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie)

**T**he Heritage Series aims to increase awareness of matters of historical, architectural and cultural interest associated with the courts system in Ireland. Included in the series are features on court buildings, members of the judiciary and court staff, famous trials and other events and occasions.



COURTS SERVICE  
An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna

The Courts Service is indebted to Mr. Con Costello for most of the information and history provided in this leaflet.



# the heritage series

Produced by the Courts Service.

Naas Courthouse - a history



**N**aas Courthouse, with its classical Doric portico and pediment emblazoned with the heraldic harp, dominates the town's South Main Street.

Directory of Pigot & Co., as "a modern stone building". It was extended towards the front by John McCurdy circa 1860 and there were further improvements by County Surveyor John Brett a decade later.

### Architectural History

Richard Morrison was the architect of the original building, shown on George Taylor's road map of 1805 as the "new court house", and described in 1824 in the Provincial

In 1997, Deaton Lysaght Architects undertook extensive renovations which ensure that the building will continue to function as a courthouse for many decades to come.

Morrison's building stood well back from the pavement on a site, the property of Thomas Burgh, which had been chosen in 1797 for a Sessions House to replace the decayed 17th Century building further up the main street. Simon Vierpyle, a London-born sculptor and architect based in Dublin, was engaged to build the new Sessions House. He rented a house in Naas "for the purpose of an office in which to conduct the business of the building from", and he engaged a clerk and a watchman. The architect prepared plans, elevations, sections and estimates for the building, and he hired workmen to take down the old house on the chosen site. A kiln of brick, which cost the contractor £150 in preparation, was arranged, but then the town was overwhelmed by the Rebellion of 1798. In 1800, Vierpyle claimed £271.3.0 in

compensation for the money which he had lost in the sixteen weeks of preparation for fulfilling his contract, as "the building of the new Sessions House at Naas may not be proceeded in by the succeeding state of the country".

Morrison's courthouse had a double-height hall, with four free standing columns, flanked by two parallel courts, and an open-well staircase lit by a skylight. In the basement, there were cells for male and female prisoners, and two water closets, with an entry from outside the building. A narrow passageway from the rear of the courthouse led to the canal harbour and it also gave access to the new gaol when it was built in 1833.

*Naas courthouse circa 1920 (Photo courtesy of Mr. Stan Hickey)*



In McCurdy's improvements, the courthouse was extended towards the front, and a portico erected, perhaps that from the earlier building, with steps leading down to a granite paved forecourt, enclosed with curved railings on both sides.

### Famous Trials

A glimpse inside the courthouse was given in The Irish Times of March 18th 1876. Baron Dowse, presiding at the Naas Crown Court, the first occasion of his taking his seat as a criminal judge, congratulated the members of the Grand Jury on the condition of their county. He said that "as far as he could see, the county was entirely free from agrarian crime. In it there were no crimes of a serious nature, and the offences going before them were such as one might naturally expect on a county circumstanced as it was, but while it might differ in other respects from other counties, it presented no exception with regard to intoxication. In 1864, there were 1,119 convictions for intoxication at this time of the year, in the year 1865 there were 822, but in 1876 there were 1,343. The publicans take men in as long as they have money to spend, but as soon as their customers take plenty of liquor, and have no longer money to spend, they turn them out. He was told the whiskey was adulterated. Well, they had a very good analyst, and he told that the only adulteration he could find in whiskey was water". (Laughter).

Then the bench turned its attention to more serious matters. John Doherty from Kilcullen was indicted for bigamy. The prisoner pleaded guilty, saying that he had been forced into his first marriage when he was under age. He told the priest on his knees that he did not want to marry the girl, but the priest denied that charge. Both wives were then called, each of whom had one child. Doherty was sentenced to twelve months with hard labour.

James Dempsey from Kilcock was on a charge of manslaughter. In the heat of a quarrel with a fellow stable-hand, he had struck his mate and broken his neck. Dempsey pleaded that he could have done nothing but ran away, to which the judge replied: "You should have run away; but you will run away now for six months. You killed the man so you must go to gaol for six months with hard labour".

A longer sentence, but without hard labour, was awarded to another stable boy, who worked at Jockey Hall on the Curragh, for stealing trousers from a fellow worker. Baron Dowse wittily observed that it "would be an expensive pair of trousers, and it would be as well to abolish a few prosecutions of this kind with a view to economy".

Naas courthouse was again in the headlines on June 26th 1996 when the journalist Veronica Guerin, following her attendance