

Kildalton

A CELEBRATION | 25TH JUNE 2022

Teagasc Kildalton reaches its half-century

Alumni reflect on the excellent education (and food) they experienced at the college.

Gerard Griffin
Kildalton.



Tim Ashmore
Kildalton.



Claire Bambrick
Kildalton.



"Thoroughly sound and modern systems of agricultural education must precede any considerable or rapid progress towards a high rate of efficiency in our chief industry,"

—Sir Horace Plunket, 1901, pioneer of the Irish Cooperative movement.

The words of Sir Horace Plunket are as relevant today as they were 120 years ago. A sound agricultural education is the bedrock on which our largest industry is built.

Our farmers, who feed the nation and supply the demands of our export industries, more often than not, start the journey towards their future careers at an agricultural college.

The doors of Kildalton Agricultural



John Walsh, recently retired farm manager, with college principal Tim Ashmore.

College opened 50 years ago in 1971, when the Department of Agriculture purchased Bessborough House, with its 360ac, for 250,000 Irish pounds.

This was the year when Ireland introduced decimal currency (in February), RTE made its first coloured broadcasts and 29 young farmers made up the first intake of students in the country's newest agricultural college.

It was not the first time the building had welcomed students. Between 1940 and 1970, the Oblate order ran it as a seminary.

Over the three decades, 360 priests were ordained in Bessborough House,

Kildalton. The Oblates had their own bakery and were keen farmers. They ran a dairy herd and kept cattle, pigs and sheep, along with poultry and tillage.

By 1970, the numbers joining the order had dwindled and the Oblates sold the facility. The order left behind ideal infrastructure for an agricultural and horticultural college, with accommodation, classrooms and a working farm. Kildalton Agricultural College was founded.

Later, in 1972, the Horticultural College opened with 18 students and in 1986, the Equine College opened with four students.



Weanlings grazing at Kildalton.

Fast forward 50 years, and Kildalton has in excess of 1,400 students coming through its doors.

Student life was a little different in the early days when compared to the experience of today's students. John Monahan, now a farmer in Co Carlow, was a student in Kildalton in the early 1970s.

"At the time, numbers studying horticulture were equal to the numbers studying agriculture, and horticulture modules were delivered to agriculture students, the college glasshouses being a new innovation at the time, and all students spent time looking at these new technologies.

"Students did farm specials in the evenings, rotating around the different enterprises; sheep, beef, pigs, tillage and dairy."

Irish agriculture has evolved rapidly over the past 50 years. This development was accelerated by Ireland joining the EEC in 1973, and the access to markets and supports which came with it.

Life in Kildalton has also changed over the years. The college has specialised in the main farm enterprises most relevant to students who attend, and the structure of the courses has changed to reflect the needs of modern agriculture.

Students' free time and social life has also evolved over the years. Nearby Waterford has a large student population and the strict curfews and lights out by 10:00pm are a thing of the past.

"My year in Kildalton Agricultural College put me on the career path that I have enjoyed so much in my professional life," says Andy Doyle, tillage editor with the *Irish Farmers Journal*.

"During my time there in 1973/74, I

was encouraged to apply for a scholarship to study agriculture in UCD, which I did. I'm eternally grateful to Eamon Tully for his part in that.

"At the time, Kildalton was delivering primarily boarding, full-time courses. It was a combination of classes and practical experience and we were all allotted practical duties on the farm. The experience was broad – we were given access to all enterprises, including pigs and sheep, as well as crops, cattle and dairy.

"While people had their home-based preferences, the broader exposure gave us a better understanding of other opportunities and the shared challenges across agriculture. Having to do the work was good too. I will always remember the long walks to check on the mainly Texel sheep flock, which always seemed to be in the fields furthest away.

"Having come from a boarding school, two things hit me about Kildalton – the relative freedom and the good food. We received excellent tuition across all enterprises."

Mary Cahill (now Delaney), from Dunnamaggin in Co Kilkenny, won a scholarship to Kildalton from October 1976 until May 1977. She was the first woman boarder.

"Though we lived relatively close to the college, I had just finished my Leaving Cert and I think my parents Patrick and Philomena felt that staying there would encourage a sense of independence.

"There were some other women students who were not boarders and being a small minority certainly taught us how to stand our ground.

"The experience was great socially and academically, and while my preference was for all things to do with cows, we got an excellent education in all aspects of agriculture. The food

List of courses

- Certificate in agriculture Level 5
- Advanced Certificate in Crops and Machinery Management level 6
- Advanced Certificate in Dairy Herd Management level 6
- Professional Diploma in Dairy Farm Management level 7
- Certificate in Horticulture level 5
- Advanced Certificate in Horticulture level 6
- Certificate in Horsemanship level 5 (Equitation)
- Certificate in Horsemanship level 5 (Stud Management)
- Advanced Certificate in Horsemanship level 6 (Equitation)
- Advanced Certificate in Horsemanship level 6 (Stud Management)

Kildalton College facilitates Waterford Institute of Technology in delivery of:

- BSc in Agriculture
- BSc in Agricultural Science
- BSc in Land Management
- BSc in Forestry
- BSc in Horticulture
- BSc in Food Science

Kildalton College facilitates University College Dublin in delivery of:

- BSc in Agricultural Science (Dairy Business).

was like you'd get at a top hotel."

After completing the course, Mary farmed at home with her parents. "Nothing could faze me after the year at Kildalton," says Mary.

She married Michael Delaney in 1986 and Patrick, the youngest of their four children, attended Kildalton for two years. He completed the Level 6 course in dairying in 2013. The family's dairy herd has grown from 30 cows in the 1970s to 100 today.

"There have been many innovations since I was there," concludes Mary. "But placement onto farms as a way to see leading farmers practising what is taught in the college is something which I see as hugely beneficial, as well as seeing the enterprises on the college farm."

To commemorate the half-century milestone in Kildalton's history, a celebration event is planned for the 25 June 2022.

Attendees will get the opportunity to walk through the five decades of education, both in the buildings where the life of students and staff will be displayed, and externally through the beautiful grounds showing life down through the decades in the agricultural, horticultural and equine units.