



Cultivating Change in Veterinary and Farming Practices

Aleen Cust Memorial Symposium 2025

Friday 4th July 2025 | 9:00am – 5:00pm
Mountbellew Agricultural College, Mountbellew, Co Galway
H53 WE00



Aleen Cust. Image courtesy of James Moran, Athleague.



Aileen Cust

Trailblazer | Ceannródaí

A Vet, Ever and Always

To book the conference please visit...

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/aleen-cust-memorial-symposium-tickets-1396540834229?aff=oddtcreator>

CVE Credits

4.5 CVE credits have been approved by the VCI for this event



The conference was funded by the Commemorations Unit, Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, Heritage Office, Galway County Council, Atlantic Technological University and University of Galway and the Aleen Cust Society. Various heritage organisations, vintage clubs and community groups in the county of Galway assisted in the development and delivery of the conference including Mountbellew Vintage Club, North Galway Vintage Club, iCAN Galway County members.



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council



Ollscoil
Teicneolaíochta
an Ailbantaigh
Atlantic
Technological
University



**An Roinn Cultúir,
Cumarsáide agus Spóirt**
Department of Culture,
Communications and Sport

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Mountbellew Agricultural College, Mountbellew, Co Galway
H53 WE00

Cultivating Change in Veterinary and Farming Practices

9:00am – 10:00am	Registration Tea/coffee and scones Chairperson: Joanne Perry, Veterinary Inspector, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
10:00am – 10:15am	Official opening Dr Orla Flynn, President, Atlantic Technological University (ATU)
10:15am – 11:00am	Dr June Fanning, CVO, DAFM 'Am I a Pioneer?'
11:00am – 11:30am	Coffee Break and view community heritage and vintage exhibitions
11:30am – 12:30pm	Dr John Flaherty 'Advocating Change: Farming Societies and the Circulation of Agricultural Information in the Nineteenth Century.'
12:30pm – 2.00pm	Lunch and view community heritage exhibitions
2:15pm – 3.00pm	Mairead McGuinness, MEP and Former European Commissioner for Financial Stability, Financial Services and the Capital Markets Union 'I Am a Trailblazer.'
3:00pm – 3:45pm	Erica Borge 'Everyone Thinks I'm German.'
3.45pm – 4.00pm	Tea/Coffee
4:00pm – 4:45pm	Dr John Cunningham 'The Most Comfortable of the Labouring Class? Herds and Shepherds in Galway and Roscommon c.1900.'
4.30pm – 5.00pm	Closing Remarks by Dr Edna Curley, Principal, Atlantic Technological University, Mountbellew Agricultural College Campus and Brendan Gardiner, Aleen Cust Society



The Aleen Cust Memorial Society

The Aleen Cust Memorial Society is a small group of retired and semi-retired veterinary practitioners, Ascinta Kilroy, Brendan Gardiner and Donal Connolly, who came together in July 2021, with a single ambition to remember a courageous and determined Irish woman, born at Cordangan, County Tipperary in 1868.

Aleen's life story is well chronicled with many exciting publications and events. The centenary year of her admission to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (which had been delayed for years because she was a woman) was celebrated in 2022 with the Inaugural Aleen Cust Summer School in Mountbellew, where she had held a post with the Galway County Council (1905-1915). Dr Mary Temple Grandin, a world-renowned animal welfare expert and autism exponent, graced this conference and celebrated a birthday with the Galway woman who minded her in the US when she was an infant and who had long since returned from the US.

Such strokes of amazing luck were a feature of our searches and visits to sites of past association with the Cust family and locations

where Aleen worked. Other gems of discovery were a series of photos of Aleen as a teenager, never seen before and found in a book at Cordangan. A handwritten entry of a four-day fishing trip to Lough Mask with some of the local gentry in 1913, in a diary now known as the 'd'Arcy Diary', was found among the cookbooks held in the kitchen of Angela d'Arcy, whose household had participated in the fishing party. Our most memorable moment, however, was the discovery in December 2021 of Aleen's grave in Jamaica by our society member Brendan Gardiner. The grave was restored in 2022 and a fitting memorial was erected on the site at St Andrew's Church in Kingston. A moving ceremony took place at the graveside in December 2022, led by the local pastor in the company of the Irish Consul, Brian Denning, and our local historian, Marie Gilooley from Roscommon.

The work of the Heritage Office of the Galway County Council, in particular Marie Mannion, whose brainchild is this publication and whose passion has driven our campaign with intensity and resources, is gratefully acknowledged.

From a very early age, Aleen Cust had a dream, an impossible one to come true for a girl at that time, to be a veterinary surgeon. Whenever she was asked what she intended to be, she replied: "a vet, ever and always". The memories of this extraordinary veterinary surgeon, who was the pioneer, the trailblazer, the first female veterinary surgeon to practise in 1900 in Ireland, Britain, Continental Europe and the rest of the world, will be treasured in the minds of our generation and many future generations, fulfilling the single mission that brought us together in 2021.

Cumann Cuimhneacháin Aleen Cust

Is grúpa beag de chleachtóirí tréidliachta atá ar scor agus leathscortha é Cumann Cuimhneacháin Aleen Cust a bhunaigh Ascinta Kilroy, Brendan Gardiner agus Donal Connolly, i dteannta a chéile i mí Iúil 2021, agus aon uailmhian amháin acu is é sin go gcuimhneofaí ar bhean mhisniúil dhiongbháilte de chuid na hÉireann, a rugadh sa Chorrhdhaingean i gContae Thiobraid Árann in 1868.

Tá neart cur síos déanta ar shaol Aleen in go leor foilseachán agus ag imeachtaí spreagúla. Sa bhliain 2022 rinneadh ceiliúradh ar chomórtha céad bliain ó ligeadh isteach í i gColáiste Ríoga na Tréidliachta (rud a cuireadh siar ar feadh na mblianta toisc gur bhean a bhí inti) nuair a tháinig Scoil Samhraidh Aleen Cust le chéile den chéad uair sa Chreagán, áit a mbíodh post aici le Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe (1905-1915). Bhí sé d'onóir againn go raibh an Dr. Mary Temple Grandin, saineolaí ar leas ainmhithe agus bean atá i bhfách leis an uathachas agus cáil dhomhanda uirthi, i láthair ag an gcomhdháil seo agus rinne sí ceiliúradh ar a breithlá leis an mbean as Gaillimh a thug aire di sna Stáit Aontaithe nuair a bhí sí ina naíonán agus atá tagtha ar ais ó na Stáit Aontaithe le fada.

Bhí iarrachtaí den ádh, ar nós é seo, ag baint lenár gcuardach agus leis na cuairteanna a thugamar ar shuíomhanna a raibh baint acu le teaghlach Cust agus ar áiteanna ina mbíodh Aleen ag obair. Seoda eile fionnachtana ab ea sraith grianghraf d'Aleen agus í ina déagóir, nach raibh feicthe riamh cheana agus a fuarthas i bhfolach i leabhar sa Chorrhdhaingean. Fuarthas cuntas lámhscríofa i ndialann ar a dtugtar Dialann D'Arcy anois ar thuras iascaireachta ceithre lá in 1913 go Loch Measca in éineacht le cuid d'uaisle na háite in 1913, i measc na leabhar cócaireachta a bhí coinnithe i gcistin Angela d'Arcy, a raibh a teaghlach páirteach sa ghrúpa iascaireachta. Ní dhéanfaimid dearmad go deo, áfach, ar an ócáid ar aimsigh ball den Chumann, Brendan Gardiner, uaigh Aleen in Iamáice i mí na Nollag 2021. Athchóiríodh an uaigh in 2022 agus tógadh leacht cuimhneacháin oiriúnach ar an suíomh i

Séipéal Naomh Aindriú in Kingston. Bhí searmanas corraitheach ar siúl cois na huaighe i mí na Nollag 2022, faoi stiúir an tsagairt áitiúil agus i gcomhlúadar Chonsal na hÉireann, Brian Denning, agus ár staraí áitiúil, Marie Gilooley as Ros Comáin.

Táimid go mór faoi chomaoin ag an obair atá déanta ag Oifig Oidhreachta Chomhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe, agus go háirithe ag Marie Mannion, a chuimhnigh ar an bhfoilseachán seo agus ar thug a paisean spreagadh dár bhfeachtas le diongbháilteacht agus le hacmhainní.

Ó bhí sí an-óg, bhí aisling ag Aleen Cust, ceann nach bhféadfaí a thabhairt chun solais i gcás cailín ag an am sin, is é sin a bheith ina tréidlia. Aon uair a fiafraíodh di cad a bhí i gceist aici a dhéanamh, d'fhreagraíodh sí: "a bheith i mo thréidlia, choíche agus i gcónaí". Ní dhéanfaidh ár nglúin ná go leor de na glúnta atá le teacht, dearmad ar an tréidlia urghnách seo, bean a bhí ina ceannróaí agus ar an gcéad tréidlia mná le dul i mbun cleachtais in 1900 in Éirinn, sa Bhreatain, ar Mhór-Roinn na hEorpa agus sa chuid eile den domhan, rud a shásaíonn an uailmhian amháin sin a thug le chéile muid i dtosach sa bhliain 2021.



Aleen Cust

THE
ALEEN CUST
MEMORIAL SOCIETY

Ascinta Kilroy

Sunrise 1952 ~ Sunset 2024



“I have the most interesting life” Ascinta Kilroy would often say. “I was a quiet little girl. But all I ever wanted to be was a vet.”

Ascinta reached her goal of becoming a vet in 1974, graduating from UCD as one of only two women in her class. It was one year after the removal of the marriage bar, which meant that married women were no longer prevented from working in the public sector. Her achievement also came a half

century after Aleen Cust, the first female vet in Britain and Ireland, was finally allowed to call herself ‘veterinary surgeon’. This privilege that had been denied to Aleen for the previous twenty-two years.

Ascinta would spend the following fifty years committing herself to what her father, also a respected vet, simply called ‘the service’. During this time, her path was not yet free of the obstacles faced by those who went before her. There were stories of farmers who, uncomfortable with the sight of a female vet coming onto their land, would open gates to release their animals. It has been Ascinta’s personal commitment to this service that obliges us now, in the aftermath of her passing, to view her professional life through a broader historical lens. And yet, she herself gave little time to such considerations. For Ascinta, being a vet was not a badge of identity. It was, like every other aspect of her interesting life, an engaged pursuit that drew from a deep well of passion and was fueled by a raw energy always directed towards its source: nature, people, life.

Ascinta was her own person. She spoke for herself, never of herself; and she never let her struggles, of which there were many, define or confine her. Hers was a curiously ambiguous stance – a single-minded yet light-hearted conviction that was outwardly stoic while remaining inwardly sensitive. This unique position perhaps made most sense to her children, who looked up at her with admiration and awe, recognizing all these singular characteristics embodied in one truly formidable individual. With time, we grew to understand the forces that drove her: a willful intent to bring to fruition something not yet fulfilled, aligned with the joyful sense of deliverance from all that has been realized.

This attitude became a way of life for Ascinta, a pursuit of the new (new people, new activities, new challenges) grounded in a loyal appeal to the old (family, friends, experiences). In the end, everything came together as a very distinct outlook on the world: a way of being that drew the past into a full engagement with the present and projected this energy forward towards the future.

It is perhaps in this sense that one might describe Ascinta as being “ahead of her time”. For what does this expression mean but to be acutely attuned to life’s possibilities – to be equipped with that rare ability to see a patch of color in the shadows and make it the dominant tone of your picture. The result was a special type of presence and energy – a life force, in the truest meaning of the term – that could not and cannot be easily narrated. Quite simply, with Ascinta, the gap between the person and the profession, the commitment to the work and the passion which drove it, often disappeared, like sand being gently kissed by lapping waves.

It is now, however, with her death that this space reopens, allowing Ascinta to finally become the central character in her own very interesting story.

Robert Kilroy



Donal Connolly

MRCVS

I graduated from Dublin in 1974 and came to work in Gort, Co. Galway as a mainly large animal practitioner and have been in the same place for over fifty years. Aleen Cust was unknown to me until around 1995-1999 when I was researching for my thesis during a degree course at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). My topic was 'Change, feminisation and the implications for the veterinary profession: issues affecting the veterinary profession at the end of the twentieth century'. To my surprise, under my nose was an amazing story of an exceptional woman who had been forgotten.

When the course was over I too quickly forgot about her until in 2013 during an initiative known as the Gathering, the Roscommon Lamb Festival held a two-day conference on their hidden treasure, Aleen Cust. Because of my earlier work, I was invited along with the Presidents of the various veterinary bodies to be a speaker. Once the conference was over she slipped off the radar again until 2021 when Brendan Gardiner and myself came together to have this lady remembered for the centenary year of her admission to the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) in 1922.

Interestingly, in the 1920s, three women qualified from the Dublin Veterinary School. One, Katherine Hueffer, graduated in 1927. While a student, she met her future husband, the painter Charles Lamb (1893-1964). They married and moved to Carraroe, an Irish-speaking area in Co. Galway. Katherine was particularly interested in horses, a vital means of transport in Carraroe during the Second World War. Her veterinary practice, which she maintained until 1947, was known as 'Humanity Dick' after the former local MP Richard Martin. We were joined in our endeavours by Ascinta Kilroy and became the 'Aleen Cust Memorial Society'. Ascinta was interesting as she was one of only two girls to graduate in my class of 1974 (2/60). Aleen Cust died in 1937, but from 1934 to 1974, only forty women entered the profession in Ireland.

Donal Connolly

2025



Brendan Gardiner

MVB MRCVS

I graduated from Dublin in 1973. I always wanted to be a veterinary practitioner but my childhood dreams would not have materialised without Donough O'Malley who introduced free upper second-level education commencing in September 1967. I entered Veterinary School in September 1968. After graduating, I practised as a locum for a period and in 1976, I set up my own veterinary practice in Mountbellew. I retired in 2018.

In early 1975 while attending to a sick animal on a farm in Moylough an old farmer (probably in his 90s) asked me "Did you know Miss Cust?". He remembered her riding into Mountbellew on a white horse where she regularly held veterinary clinics.

That was the first time I realised how important Mountbellew was in the life of this first female Veterinary Practitioner. After retiring in 2018 Donal Connolly who for a long period was perplexed as to why this courageous pioneering woman had been forgotten about, asked me to help him correct this historical wrong and thus the 'Aleen Cust Memorial Society' was born.

Donal, Ascinta Kilroy (RIP) and myself are very proud of what we have achieved so far but we still can find no answer as to why the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (London) and the ordinary veterinary profession members (now predominantly female) still have not acknowledged publicly the injustice that was done to her.

The fight goes on.

Brendan Gardiner

2025

The Determined Achievement of a Lifelong Ambition

Aleen Cust fought the educational, social and political establishment of the late 19th and early 20th century to realise her lifelong dream.

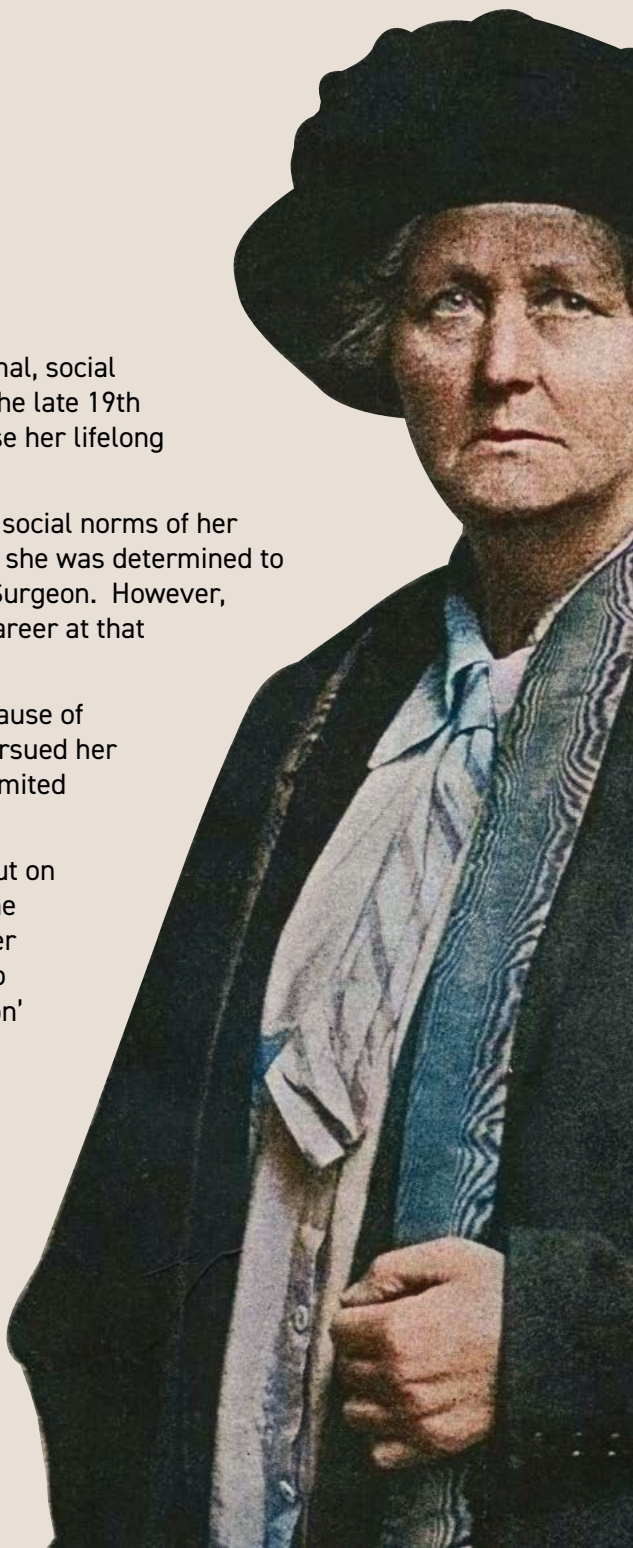
Rebelling against the expected social norms of her aristocratic family background, she was determined to have a career as a Veterinary Surgeon. However, this was legally a 'male only' career at that time.

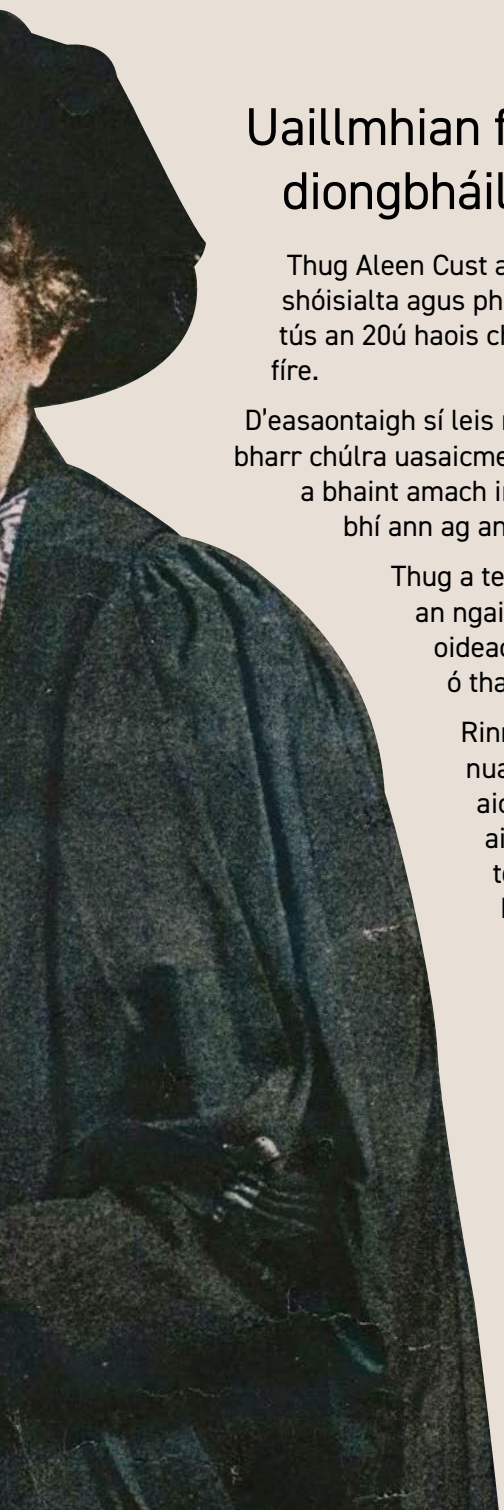
Ostracised from her family because of her chosen career path, she pursued her education living frugally on a limited budget.

Aleen excelled in her studies but on completion of her education, she was denied the right to have her qualifications recognised and to use the title 'Veterinary Surgeon' because she was a woman.

Aleen Cust in her Academic Dress,
circa 1927.

Aleen Cust ag caitheamh feisteas
acadúil, circa 1927.





Uaillmhian feadh saoil fíoraithe go diongbháilte

Thug Aleen Cust aghaidh ar an mbunaíocht oideachais, shóisialta agus pholaitiúil ag deireadh an 19ú haois agus tús an 20ú haois chun a rún feadh saoil a thabhairt chun fáire.

D'easaontaigh sí leis na gnásanna sóisialta a raibh súil leo de bharr chúltra uasaicmeach a teaghlaigh, bhí sí meáite ar ghairm a bhaint amach ina Tréadlia. Ba ghairm 'd'fhir amháin' a bhí ann ag an am de réir an dlí, áfach.

Thug a teaghlach cúl droma di mar gheall ar an ngairm a roghnaigh sí, thug sí faoina cuid oideachais agus í barainneach lena cuid airgid ó tharla buiséad teoranta a bheith aici.

Rinne Aleen éacht ina cuid staidéir ach nuair a bhí a cuid oideachais críochnaithe aici ní raibh sé de cheart aici go dtabharfaí aitheantas dá cuid cáilíochtaí agus an teideal 'Tréadlia' a úsáid mar gur bhean a bhí inti.

D'aineoinn an réamhchlaonta sin, d'éirigh léi, le díocas agus diongbháilteacht, gairm a bhaint amach ina cleachtóir tréadlia fíorinniúil, cleachtóir ar tugadh aitheantas di ar fud na hÉireann agus na Breataine de bharr a cuid scile.



Initial Alleen Cust portrait sketch.

Inspiration and Description of the Alleen Cust Portrait

by Jennifer Cunningham

When an ad hoc group of three veterinary surgeons, Donal, Ascinta, and Brendan, came to visit my studio to commission a portrait, I was intrigued. We had many interesting chats, and I got on particularly well with Ascinta, who was quite artistic. I had hoped to have her at one of my Art workshops in Galway. Sadly, that was not to be.

They told me about Alleen Cust, a brave and courageous woman who worked extremely hard to achieve her dream of becoming the first female veterinary surgeon in Ireland, England, and Europe. She decided to become a vet despite her mother's objections.



Aleen Cust portrait with background elements being added.

I'm a neurodiverse artist with autism, so I have a personal interest in people who do not follow the beaten path, women who dared, and women who did stuff anyway, even when they were told it was impossible. I have loved portraiture and had the opportunity to paint from life for many years at the R.H.A. in Dublin.

I have an interest in montage, in juxtaposing disparate elements to work together, often combining traditional media with new technologies.

I felt it was important to subtly allude to Aileen's life history in her portrait without overstating it, so when Donal mentioned that they had some old veterinary books, I jumped at the chance to make copies and include them in the background. These books contained beautiful etchings and engravings similar to the type that Aileen would have studied. I made sure to include the diagrams of large animals, as Aileen specialised in this area.



Aleen Cust portrait with layers of acrylic washed over the illustrated collage background.

I wanted to create tension between Aleen's rich inner and outer worlds, so I used complementary greens and purples with washes of gold and other colors to bring out the colour in her portrait.

I then washed layers of acrylic over the collage and sanded it back so that there was an inherent ambiguity in the portrait itself as though clouded by memory.

Thanks again for the wonderful opportunity to paint someone so memorable, her story will inspire me in my own practice for many years to come.

Jennifer Cunningham



The completed Alleen Cust portrait.



Artist Jennifer Cunningham with her portrait of Alleen Cust, 2025.

Biography



Jennifer Cunningham has won numerous awards for her work including the Agility Award, the Visual Arts Bursary Award, several Galway County and City Artist Bursaries, the Thomas Damann Travel Award and Taylor Art Award.

She has exhibited both nationally and internationally. Solo shows include 'All that Surrounds Us' in the Ashford Gallery, R.H.A

and 'After the Future' in the Galway International Arts Festival (2018) which received over 30,000 visitors and a five-star review in the *Irish Times*. Commissions include poster design for Cúirt (2019) and Galway International Arts Festival (2020 and 2021).

Jennifer working in her studio.

Photo credit: Declan Colohan photography.



Bruce Vivash Jones

I first became aware of Aleen Cust in 1989 when Connie Ford asked me to read her draft manuscript of Aleen's life. I realised that she was not only the first British woman to achieve veterinary surgeon status but was exceptional in her behaviour and her proficiency in veterinary medicine.

In 2012 in a book identifying notable veterinarians of the Twentieth-Century I was able, with pleasure, to include Aleen, bringing her story to greater public attention.

My interest increased as I studied the unfair treatment she suffered from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons who first banned her from entry to the College in 1900, and then totally ignored her after she gained entry in 1922, only as a result of an Equalities Act of Parliament. I then learned of the activities of the Aleen Cust Memorial Society in Ireland and their work to recognise her 2022 Centenary Year and celebrate it: which the RCVS, after being informed, chose to ignore. In fact they have never apologised for their behaviour, which is strange – because it could only act in their favour.

Another factor in my interest in Aleen was my late wife, Barbara, badly missed, who was also a member of the profession. She established, in the early 1950s, a successful single-handed practice and finally retired after 21 years. She remembered how over those years the RCVS paid little attention to their women members: she would have supported with me any efforts to remember Aleen Cust. The struggle is not yet over.



Mairead McGuinness

Mairead McGuinness was first elected to the European Parliament in 2004 and served 16 years as an MEP. In those years she represented 20 counties in Ireland - from Donegal to Offaly, Louth to Mayo - as constituency boundaries changed over time. She served as first vice-president of Parliament.

In October 2020, she was appointed European Commissioner for financial services, financial stability and Capital Markets Union.

Her work focused on ensuring stability of the financial system, reviewing financial regulation as well as dealing with refocusing the financial system towards investments in a more sustainable economy and society.

She is an avid supporter of citizens being more “financially savvy” and has worked on improving levels of financial literacy among citizens of all ages. In the European Parliament, she was an active member of a number of committees - Agriculture and Rural development Committee, Budget, Environment, Petitions, Food Safety and Public Health. She held responsibility for dialogue with National Parliaments and with Religious and Non-confessional Organisations.

Ms. McGuinness was awarded an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Science by University College Dublin (UCD), in recognition of her achievements as a member of the EU Commission and her contributions to the Agri-Food sector in Ireland and the European Union.

Mairead holds a degree in Agricultural Economics from UCD and a Diploma in Accounting and Finance.

Prior to becoming an MEP, she was an award-winning journalist, broadcaster and commentator for 24 years.

Lecture Title:

‘I Am a Trailblazer.’



Dr June Fanning

CVO DAFM

Dr June Fanning CVO DAFM has had the privilege of working in the Department for over 20 years in a number of roles across the laboratory and inspectorate service.

As Chief Veterinary Officer, Dr. Fanning has responsibility for animal health, animal welfare, veterinary public health, and food

safety policy areas of the department, Responsibilities also include operational controls across these areas as well as in animal by-products, animal medicines, border controls, imports of animals and products of animal origin, and support of exports of animals and products of animal origin to existing and new markets.

Lecture Title:

'Am I a Pioneer?'



Dr John Cunningham

Prior to his recent retirement, Dr John Cunningham, was an Associate Professor in History at the University of Galway. He is joint editor of *Saothar: Journal of Irish Labour History* and PRO of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society.

His current project is a biography of Tom Glynn (1881-1934) of Gurteen, Co. Galway, who was a leader of labour movements in Australia and South Africa.

Lecture Title:

'The Most Comfortable of the Labouring Class? Herds and Shepherds in Galway and Roscommon, c.1900.'



Dr John Flaherty

John Flaherty is a drystock farmer from Kilflynn in north Kerry. He is a graduate of the History Departments of The University of Limerick and Mary Immaculate College. His Masters research focused on the veterinary folk cures of north Kerry. This work generated an interest in the history of formal veterinary medicine and led to PhD on the evolution of the

Irish veterinary profession since the late eighteenth century. For this project extensive interviews were carried out with farmers and veterinarians on the changes in farming and animal health over time.

John is a member of the British Agricultural History Society and a Council member of the Kerry Archaeological and Historical Society. His current research interests include farming societies and agricultural writing and publishing in nineteenth-century Ireland.

John regularly contributes to history publications, both locally and nationally, and is enthusiastic about disseminating agricultural history to a popular audience.

Lecture Title:

'Advocating Change: Farming Societies and the Circulation of Agricultural Information in the Nineteenth Century.'



Erica Borge Nicholas

Erica has worked in mixed practice in Tulla, Co.Clare for nearly 30 years and has been a partner or a practice owner for most of that time.

She studied veterinary in Dublin in the old vet college on Shelbourne road, although she originally came to Ireland from South Africa.

Erica developed an interest in alternative medicine while at university and studied human homeopathy part time over a four year period at the Burren School of Homeopathy in Gort . She also studied Veterinary Homeopathy through the Homeopathic Practitioners Teaching Group earning the MFHom qualification in 2007.

Erica runs the Irish Society of Veterinary Homeopaths which holds seminars once or twice a year. Erica's main work is in conventional cattle practice but she uses homeopathy also when it is indicated. She has a keen interest in surfing and can be found in Lahinch or anywhere on the west coast when not working. She also loves music and brings her guitar to local singing sessions in Clare. Erica is in the process of moving her clinic to a bigger premises in Tulla.

Lecture Title:

'Everyone Thinks I'm German.'



Joanne Perry

Joanne Perry is a native of Boyle, County Roscommon and joined Galway County Council as a Local Authority Veterinary Inspector in 2016 after working in small and mixed practices in Galway and Roscommon. Joanne remained in that role until the government decision to transfer all local authority veterinary inspectors into the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine came into effect in January 2025.

She graduated in veterinary medicine from Kosice in Slovakia after a previous career as a Senior Software Engineer and Logistics Analyst working throughout USA and Europe. She now lives with her family, their two dogs and an ill-mannered herd of native Irish Dexter Cattle in Connemara.

Role

We are all familiar now with the story of Aleen Cust, thanks to the trojan work of the Aleen Cust Memorial Society, and with the fact that she holds the title of Ireland's first female Vet as well as Ireland's first female Veterinary Inspector (employed by Galway County Council in 1905). When I joined the local authority veterinary service in 2016, little did I think my name would be associated with the demise of the service ! However, the fact remains, I was the last permanent Veterinary Inspector employed by Galway County Council and given that last year a government decision to amalgamate the local authority veterinary service into the DAFM, there are unlikely to be any more.

Across the span of 120 years, the window of time between Aleen and I , and where this invaluable local authority veterinary service

existed in Ireland, society has changed, the veterinary profession has changed, and even women have changed. However one ideal that never ages is the idea of trailblazing women and pioneering vets raising standards and challenging boundaries for the betterment of veterinary medicine, veterinary public health and animal welfare.

I had the honour of helping to launch the Aleen Cust School Workbook alongside the society and Marie Mannion, Galway County Council Heritage Officer, two years ago and of giving a talk to the primary level children in attendance. The thought of talking to the children terrified me far more than a bunch of vets or wealthy CEOs in my previous career. I survived though and it did however confirm that we are all capable of sowing little inspirational seeds in our local communities and of empowering our little people and instilling the type of self-belief a trailblazer like Aleen Cust must have held.

In our modern world we need our trail blazers more than ever and can learn many lessons from those who have gone before us. Now, finding my feet in the Department of Agriculture in a post transfer world, I guess I should follow my own advice and aim higher than having my name associated with the demise of a service!

Links to interesting Aleen Cust online material...

<https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/category/people/aleen-cust>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MmW38pkSp18>

https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/beogalway/episodes/2022-09-27T13_42_29-07_00

https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/beogalway/episodes/2022-09-30T05_00_00-07_00

https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/beogalway/episodes/2022-09-30T04_00_00-07_00

https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/beogalway/episodes/2022-09-27T13_44_45-07_00

https://www.podomatic.com/podcasts/beogalway/episodes/2022-09-30T01_29_14-07_00

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Aleen Cust

Trailblazer | Ceannródaí

The first woman to become a veterinary surgeon in Ireland and the UK
was born in County Tipperary, Ireland.

Remembered in Galway and Roscommon for her charm, integrity,
intelligence and a highly capable practitioner.



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