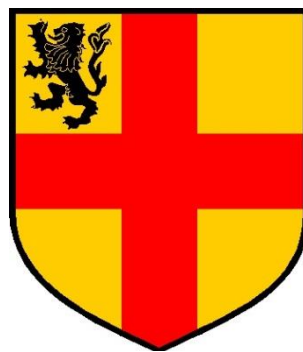


The Seal of Castlebar Urban District Council (Town Seal)

Background

Castlebar Corporation (established 1613) was entitled under its charter to create a seal that would be 'graved with such form and arms as shall seem best to the them [the Corporation], to serve forever the offices of the said Borough'. I was not able to find a copy of the Corporation's seal. Only transcripts of Castlebar's two charters exist in the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin. The Corporation was abolished in 1841 and so its seal would have gone with it.

J.F. Quinn noted in his *History of Mayo, Vol. 1*, that the Borough of Castlebar never had a coat of arms and the only arms he had ever seen adopted for Castlebar were those of the Burkes.



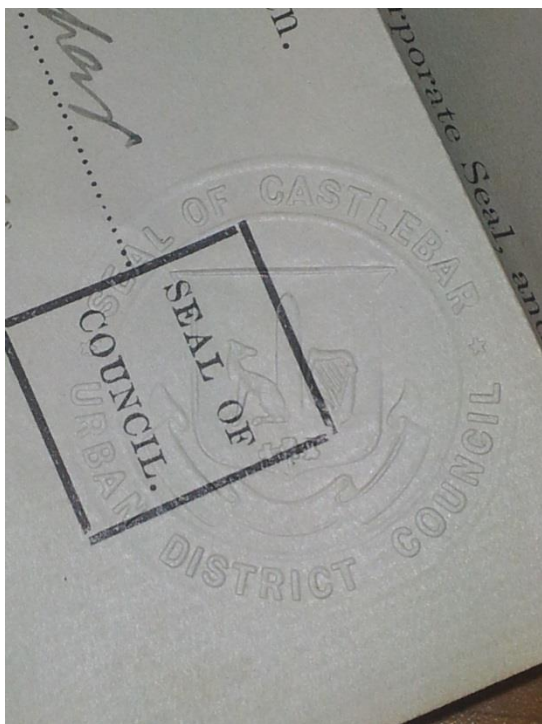
Burke crest

Castlebar Urban District Council Seal

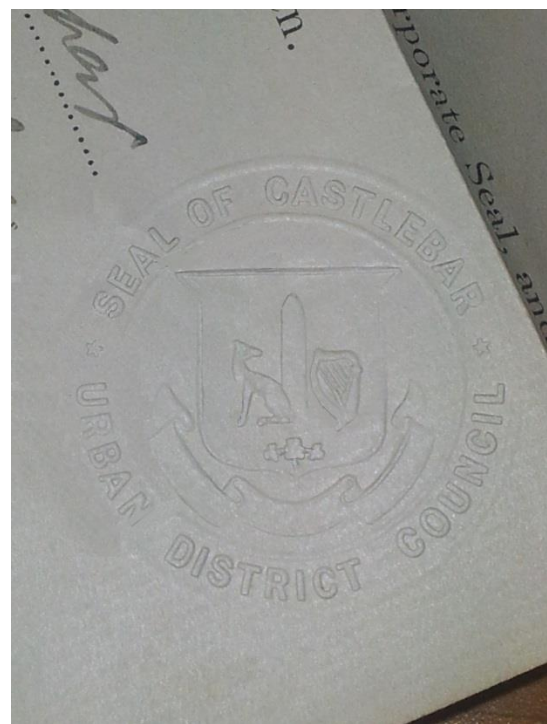
Castlebar UDC was established on 1 April, 1900. The first twelve man council was dominated by Irish nationalist councillors. All persuasions on the council resolved that the council would have a seal. Unionist councillor Alexander Larminie, supported by councillor Michael Quinn, called for a 'common' seal without any nationalist motto. The majority of the councillors were determined to stamp their nationalist outlook on the new seal. James Gavin, a councillor of Labour persuasion, proposed that General Humbert's head should adorn the seal. Councillor James Daly instead proposed that the new seal should include very overtly nationalist symbols and he specifically mentioned a round tower, a harp and shamrock with the wording 'Castlebar Urban Council' in Irish characters. These symbols had

been used by Irish nationalists for many decades, for example, on political literature and trade union banners. The majority of Castlebar UDC decided to support councillor James Daly's proposal. Reports on the council's debates and final decision on the seal can be read in the *Western People*, 28 January, 1900 and in the *Freeman's Journal*, 2 August, 1900.

While researching *A History of Castlebar*, I spent two days in the offices of Castlebar Town Council in Marsh House going through every UDC minute book from 1900-1954. Within the pages of one of the minute books from the late 1910s I found a Castlebar UDC document with the authority's embossed seal. This was the only instance I saw the seal.



Seal of Castlebar Urban District Council as it appeared on the UDC document



Seal after I succeeded in removing the ink box and lettering, almost pixel by pixel

Castlebar's Coat of Arms

The first flying of Castlebar's coat of arms took place at a public event on 30 August 1953. The country's Assistant Chief Herald, Gerard Slevin informed Castlebar UDC earlier that year that despite being the county town and the fourth largest in the province of Connacht, the Genealogical Office in Dublin had no record of a coat of arms for Castlebar. The UDC agreed that in preparation for the Irish culture festival *An Tóstal*, the town should design a shield

that would be displayed with those of other leading towns during the festival highlight in the capital in 1953.



Castlebar's coat of arms, first flown in 1953

The crest is full of symbolism. The original castle of the thirteenth century Norman settler De Barra (Barry) family is depicted in the top of the crest. Two yew trees are included because Castlebar is the county town of Mayo (the Irish *Maigh Eo*, meaning *Plain of the Yew Trees*). The five crosses represent the parish of Aglish which is the official name of the parish of Castlebar. The 1798 'Races of Castlebar' battle is commemorated with two crossing pikes in the top left-hand corner. For the town motto, local solicitor Michael J. Egan translated the French motto of the original De Barra family *Boutez en Avant* into the Irish *Ar Aghaidh*, which in English means *Forward*.

Noel Campbell,
March, 2015.