Welcome to Loughrea (in Irish ‘Baile Locha Riach’, meaning town of the grey lake), located in east County Galway, approximately 30km southeast of Galway City. Loughrea is regarded as dating from 1236, when Loughrea Castle was built by the Anglo-Norman, Richard de Burgo. However, there is evidence of earlier settlement with the remains of several sites and monuments in the area, including ringforts, souterrains, enclosures and crannógs. The town was fortified due to its strategic location. Its defences consisted of a town wall and a moat to the north, east and west, with the lake acting as a natural defence to the south.

This walking tour of Loughrea, comprising twenty-one heritage sites, starts at St Brendan’s Cathedral, Barrack Street, and finishes on Main Street/Dunkellin Street. Each site is specified by its coordinates and shown on the map below.

1. **ST BRENDAN’S CATHEDRAL**
   - The Cathedral of St Brendan is the cathedral church of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Clonfert. The foundation stone was laid on 10 October 1897. Built in a Neo-Gothic style, it was designed by architect William Byrne. The cathedral was completed in 1902 and is now a treasure house of Celtic Revival art. The cathedral features stained glass windows from the influential studio An Túr Gloine, comprising Michael Healy, Evie Hone and Sarah Purser, and carvings by John Hughes and Michael Shortall. Metalwork and timber carvings were carried out by local craftspeople.

2. **CLONFERT DIOCESAN MUSEUM**
   - The Clonfert Diocesan Museum, in the grounds of St Brendan’s Cathedral, houses an important collection of objects of ecclesiastical interest. The oldest chalice of the collection, the Matheus Macraith Chalice, is nearly 500 years old. The collection of carved wooden figures includes the Kilcorban Madonna (c. 1180 AD), the oldest surviving wooden statue in the country. The museum houses a selection of embroidered banners and vestments made by the Dun Emer Guild. The banners were designed by Jack B. Yeats, his wife Cottie, George William Russell and P.C. Smith. The collection also includes a variety of objects from the penal times.

3. **TOWN GATE**
   - Coordinates: 53.1972, -8.5655
   - This well-preserved town gate, also known as Latimer Gate, dates from the 15th century and was originally a castellated structure. It is the only remaining gate through which the medieval town was entered.

4. **POTATO MARKET**
   - Coordinates: 53.1974, -8.5662
   - A 1791 survey of Loughrea records a Potato Market on Barrack Street. The existing weighing scales are remnants of Loughrea’s importance as a market town.

5. **ST BRIGID’S WELL**
   - Coordinates: 53.1999, -8.5605
   - The Holy Well at Bohercom, dedicated to St Brigid, is a natural spring well, one of many wells in the locality. It is said that the well was on the site of an Early Christian monastery, c. 6th – 10th century. At this site, ribbons were once tied to a nearby bush, and at least one eye cure is remembered.

6. **ST BRIDGID'S CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD, GARRYBREEDA**
   - Coordinates: 53.2008, -8.5600
   - The name Garrybreeda is derived from the Irish ‘Garraí Bride’ and means the field of Brigid. It is suggested that this is the site of an Early Christian monastery, c. 6th – 10th century. The ruins of Loughrea’s medieval parish church date to c. 13th – 15th century and can be seen at this site. This church once housed the Shrine of St Brigid’s shoe, a bronze slipper that is said to have contained the original slipper worn by the saint. The slipper, now in the National Museum of Ireland, bears the inscription “Loch Reich Anno Domini 1410. S. Brigida Virgo Kildarensis Hiberniae Patrona”.

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In 1836, Loughrea Railway Station opened on 1 December 1890. The railway as it dates from the 1780s. Loughrea Bride Street. Referred to locally as the railway line is known as the ‘The Walks’. This charming watercourse traces the medieval line of defence, though the existing walls are not of medieval fabric.

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