



LOUGHREA
Medieval Festival

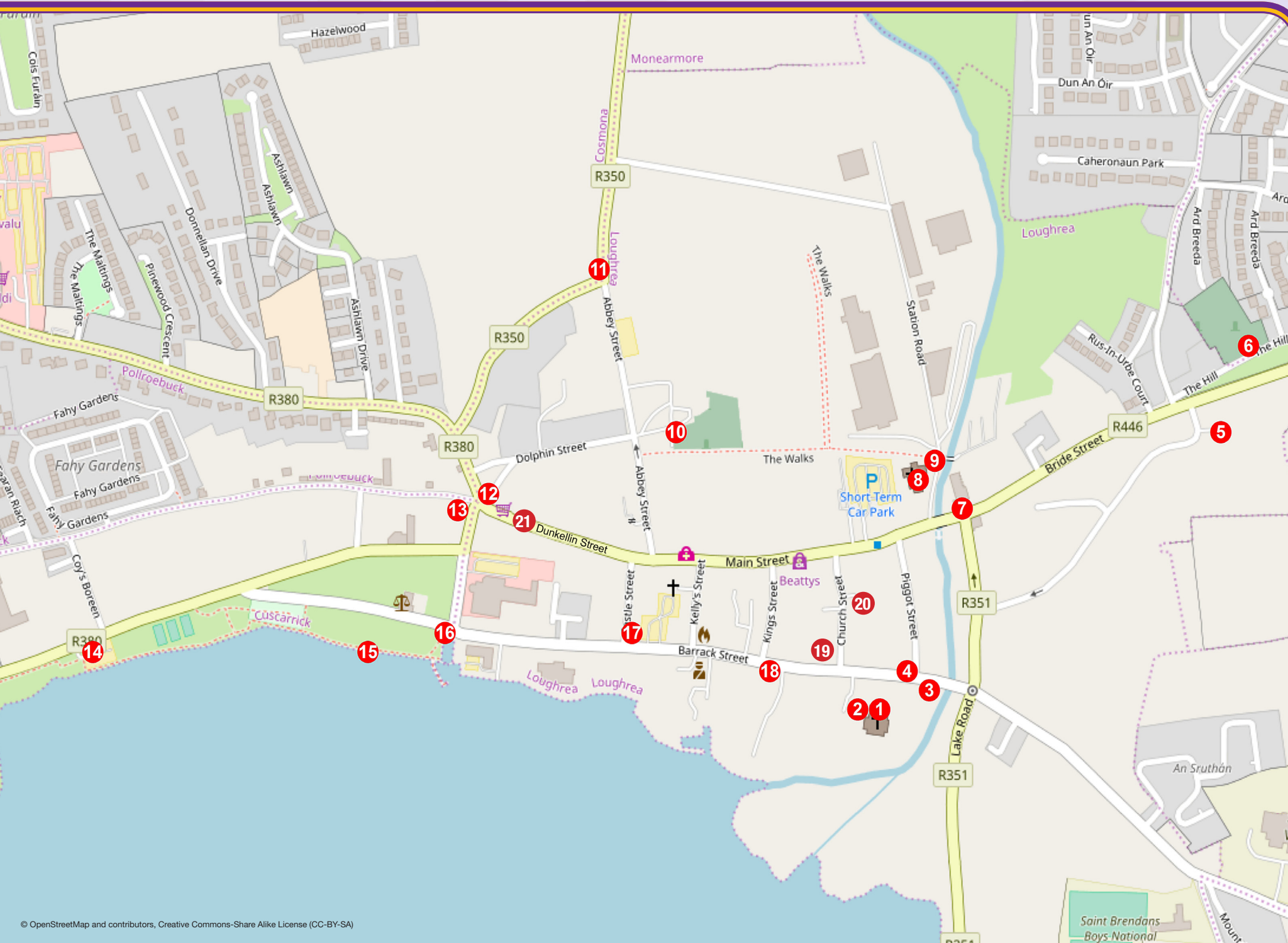
LOUGHREA HERITAGE TRAIL

Walking through history

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

53.1970, -8.5667

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 crafts people.



2. CLONFERT DIOCESAN MUSEUM

53.1970, -8.5671

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

53.1972, -8.5658

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

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

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 BRIGID'S CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD, GARRYBREEDA

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 Kildariensis Hiberniae Patrona".



7. RAILWAY HOTEL

53.1991, -8.5652

The hotel occupies a prominent place in Bride Street. Referred to locally as the Railway Hotel, it predates the arrival of the railway as it dates from the 1780s. Loughrea Railway Station opened on 1 December 1890 and finally closed on 3 November 1975. The hotel is currently known as O'Dea's Hotel.



8. PRO CATHOLIC CATHEDRAL / ST BRIGID'S CHURCH

53.1994, -8.5660

The Pro Cathedral or St Brigid's Church was built in about 1740 and altered in 1787. A font dating to 1780 can be seen at this site. It was the parish church before St Brendan's Cathedral was built. In 1836, Loughrea-born Fr Anthony Fahy, an Irish Missionary in Argentina and friend of Admiral Browne, was its rector. The Pro Cathedral is now a funeral parlour. Kilboy's Funeral Directors was established by Patrick Kilboy on 3 September 1903.



9. 'THE WALKS' AND THE MEDIEVAL MOAT

53.1996, -8.5657

A delightful walk, once known as 'The Mall' and 'The Clanricarde Walk and River', runs parallel to Main Street. 'The Walks' was constructed in 1691 by 'levelling the old mound that ran along the northern side of the town in the days of the fortification'. Loughrea has the only surviving functioning moat in Ireland, and this can be seen at its best along The Walks. This charming watercourse traces the medieval line of defence, though the existing walls are not of medieval fabric.



10. CARMELITE ABBEY

53.1999, -8.5704

In 1300, the Carmelites came to Loughrea and lived here until 1618. A new order arrived in 1643, though the abbey by now was almost destroyed. In 1672, Loughrea abbey was formally designated a Carmelite priory and novitiate. The remains of General St Ruth, commander of some of the Jacobite forces at the 1691 Battle of Aughrim, are said to have been interred here. A new church was completed in 1820, and almost completely rebuilt in 1897. The existence of the 'new' abbey beside the medieval ruin bears testimony to an almost continued presence of Carmelites in Loughrea since the 1300s.



11. CARMELITE MONASTERY OF ST JOSEPH, MOUNT CARMEL

53.2016, -8.5718

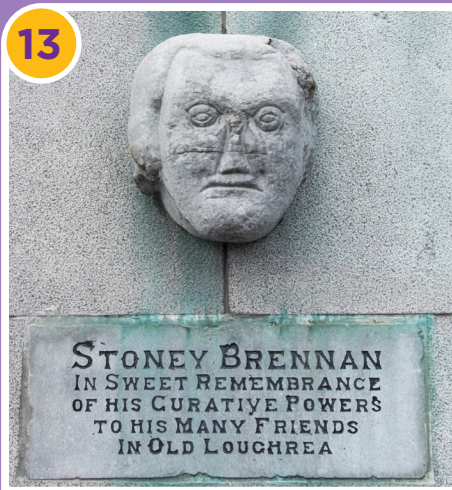
The Carmelite monastery was founded in 1680 by Eleanor Burke whose ancestors founded the Carmelite Abbey in the 1300s. The nuns resided in Barrack Street until Mount Carmel Monastery was built in 1831. Around this time, a national school was built close to the entrance gate. As they were engaged in teaching, the nuns did not become an enclosed order until 1859. Today, the Teresian Carmelite nuns who reside in the monastery are dedicated to a life of prayer.



12. WEST BRIDGE

53.1992, -8.5739

In 1574, Loughrea had 'three fair strong gates made like three castles'. One of these gates stood at the West Bridge where it crosses the town moat. Like the East Gate on Barrack Street, the gate at West Bridge marked one of the main entry points for traffic in and out of this walled town with its moat.



13. STONEY BRENNAN

53.1991, -8.5743

In the 18th century, during the penal times, local man Stephen 'Stoney' Brennan, according to legend, was hanged on Gallows' Hill at Mount Carmel for stealing a turnip. Stoney's commemorative stone-carved head is displayed on the wall at Millennium House, West Bridge.



14. LOUGH REA

53.1976, -8.5810

Lough Rea is fed by springs and a stream and has one of Ireland's few inland freshwater Blue Flag beaches. Some people say that the old town of Loughrea can be seen under the lake on a fine day! There are a number of man-made island dwellings, or crannógs, on Lough Rea. Four of the islands were excavated in the 19th century and man-made structures, artefacts and animal remains were uncovered. The lake hosts nationally important numbers of Shoveler (ducks) and Coot each winter. Across the lake, in Earlspeak, 2km southeast of Loughrea, are the remains of a 13th century deer park.



15. FAIR GREEN AND COURTHOUSE

53.1976, -8.5760

The Fair Green is now a large open space, but was totally covered by the lake until it was reclaimed in the 19th century. Fairs, where cattle, sheep and pigs were sold, were held here. The Bridewell, a holding area for prisoners before court appearance, was once located on the Fair Green and was demolished in 1969. The Courthouse is now the only building on the Green. Built from limestone in 1821, it continues to serve the town and district.

16. BOAT HOUSE AND MOAT

53.1978, -8.5746

Loughrea Angling Association was founded in 1938. The Association stocks the lake with wild brown trout; the lake also has populations of perch, pike, rudd, stickleback and eels. The moat marks the boundary between the medieval and the modern town of Loughrea.

17. SITE OF DE BURGO CASTLE

53.1978, -8.5712

The castle of Loughrea was built in 1236 AD by Richard de Burgo, Lord of Connaught. It is suggested that the castle conformed to the classic Anglo-Norman type, with its pigeon-house and enclosed park with wild beasts. By the early 1300s, the town of Loughrea had established itself around the castle. The town was fortified with a moat and wall and was laid out with burgage plots for development. James Hardiman, in *The history of the town and county of the town of Galway*, states that the foundations of the castle and the east fosse were all that remained in 1863. He also says that the keeps at the southeast gate and the northeast gate were demolished by public presentment about fifteen years prior to this, as they were considered obstructions in the principal street of the town.



18. TEMPERANCE HALL

53.1974, -8.5687

The Temperance Hall was constructed in the 1780s as a Cavalry Barracks. Enclosed by a defensive wall, the complex also included a hospital, infirmary and forge. In February 1900, Fr Jeremiah O'Donovan, a local curate, rented rooms in the military barracks to provide social, cultural and educational services for the people of the town and thus it remains today.



19. TOWN HALL

53.1974, -8.5678

Loughrea's Town Hall was built in 1862, on the site of a former Linen Hall. The Irish National Theatre Society, invited by Fr Jeremiah O'Donovan, performed *Deirdre, a legend in three acts* by Æ (George W. Russell) and *The Pot of Broth*, a farce in one act by W.B. Yeats at the Town Hall on Easter Monday 1903. The conversion of the town hall into a cinema, theatre and ballroom took place in the 1930s. Loughrea Town Hall and Cinema closed in the late 1980s.



20. OLD PARISH CHURCH / LOUGHREA LIBRARY

53.1981, -8.5671

In 1305, a 'church of Loghre' is believed to be largely the site occupied by the former Church of Ireland and graveyard. Two decorated grave slabs, dating from the 13th or 14th century, at the back of the church strongly point towards a medieval parish church. The current building, St Brendan's Church of Ireland, was built in 1821. The church closed in 1990 and was leased to Galway County Council for use as the town library.



21. MAIN STREET / DUNKELLIN STREET

53.1985, -8.5674

Loughrea's existing street plan closely follows that of a medieval layout. Many narrow properties on either side of Dunkellin Street and Main Street occupy burgage plots laid out in the 13th century. Mob Hill, between Dunkellin Street and Main Street, is the birthplace of Seumas O'Kelly (1881-1918), journalist, author and Abbey Theatre playwright; a plaque in his honour outside the *Leinster Leader's* offices in Naas, Co. Kildare, reads 'Seumas O'Kelly - a gentle revolutionary'.

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Quotation sources:

1. Anon, *Baile Locha Riach* (Loughrea Public Library, c 1900), 2.
2. Calendar of the Carew manuscripts, eds J.S. Brewer and W. Bullen (London: HMSO, 1867-1873), 1574.

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Useful websites:

www.loughreamedievalfestival.com
www.galway.ie
www.heritagecouncil.ie
www.irishwalledtownsnetwork.ie
www.heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org
www.discoverloughrea.com
www.loughreacathedral.ie
www.ocd.ie (The Abbey, Loughrea)
www.loughreacarmel.com

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www.heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org

