



# Exploring TULLAMORE

An illustrated guide to Tullamore

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map on page xx



O'CONNOR SQUARE

B



CHARLEVILLE CASTLE

# Tullamore

(*An Tulach Mhór*), meaning the big hill, a well preserved town of about 14,000 people and is a fine example of provincial town planning at its best. The hill probably refers to the hilly ground behind the junction of O'Moore Street and Cormac Street which was the home of the town's windmills.



Tullamore, situated in the heart of Ireland, has been the county town of Offaly, formerly known as King's County, since 1832. The town nestles in the old plain of *Magh Lena* with the esker ridge (*Eiscir Riada*) to the north, known

locally as the Ardan Hills. The town is in the ancient district of *Fear Ceall*, meaning 'men of the woods' or 'men of the churches' and either would be apt in the early Christian period. To the west is the great Shannon river marking also the county boundary of Offaly and to the south the Slieve Bloom mountains. On the east can be seen the stump of an old volcano known as Croghan Hill.

Approaching the town from the Kilbeggan side, at the Arden Hills, one can see the sculptures of Maurice Harron which tell the story of the region. They are placed beside the town bypass, but looking to the west and the great monasteries of Durrow and Clonmacnois. The Harron figures are symbols of the scholarly and saintly traditions of the county and are located beside one of the old five great roads of Ireland. These eskers or gravel ridges also provided the identifying line for the division of Ireland into *Leth Cuinn* and *Leth Moga* in early Christian times.



Tullamore is centrally located between Dublin in the east and Galway in the west and with improved roads and rail is about 75 minutes from either place. In earlier times it was perhaps the north-south line of monastic centres that was more emphasised with Durrow, Rahan, Lynally, Birr among many others. Tullamore is in the old parish of Durrow, famous for the Book of Durrow (now in Trinity College) and the ninth-century high cross.

Durrow is not to be confused with a town of the same name near Abbeyleix. The town is also part of the old kingdom of Meath, but a walk along the Grand Canal east of the town to the beautiful 26<sup>th</sup> lockhouse is to find oneself in the old kingdom of Leinster. Until the colonisation of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries Tullamore was part of the lands of the O Molloy family, a surname which is still common here.

The old town between the canal and railway was for the most part built by the new settlers, mainly from England, Scotland and Wales over the period from 1700 to 1900. The old county town from the 1550s to the 1830s was Daingean, then called Philipstown, after Philip II of Spain, husband to the last Catholic queen of England, Mary. It was here that the new settlers based the county administration structure which still survives. It was Philip II who provided the basis for the old county name of King's County. As a name imposed on the area as part of the English

expansion it was discarded in revolutionary Ireland of 1920 for the name Offaly (*Uíbh Fhailí* – the descendants of Failge, possibly a contemporary of St Patrick). After 1620 Tullamore was largely owned by the Moore family and later the Burys, earls of Charleville, who built the great house known as Charleville Forest or Charleville Castle between 1800 and 1812. Earlier castles can be seen close to the Grand Canal on the western side of the town at Srah (1588) and Ballycowan (1626).

The town is around four hundred years old and grew steadily from the 1700s when a barracks and the first Lord Tullamore's big house were built in the town.

The streets are spacious and the houses, some of which date from the 1740s, are well finished. The public buildings erected over the period 1789 to the 1900s are particularly good, especially the courthouse and former jail in Cormac Street close to the railway station. On the southern side of the town, beyond the courthouse and on the same road, is the demesne of Charleville with its famous Gothic castle and oak wood. To the north of Tullamore on the road to Kilbeggan is Durrow Abbey with its high cross now housed in the old abbey church. The place was home to the Book of Durrow until the seventeenth century when it was removed to Trinity College, Dublin.

Much of the early growth of Tullamore was due to the barracks built in 1716 and later to the extension of the Grand Canal to the town in 1798, followed by a rail connection to Dublin in 1854 and to the west in 1859. The growth of the town after the 1850s was due to expansion in distilling and milling. Tullamore is associated with good food and drink for several centuries past. The town's distilling history is over 200 years old and for much of that time is connected with Tullamore D.E.W., the famous Irish whiskey. Now it is home to the **Tullamore D.E.W. Visitor Centre** situated beside the Grand Canal at Bury Quay in a bonded warehouse erected in 1897. It was also associated from the late 1940s up to 1985 with the development of Irish Mist, the hugely successful liqueur,



The new settlers made a significant contribution to the street architecture and especially important was the Quaker family of Goodbody who established a tobacco factory here in the 1840s. At this time also Catholic business families were emerging such as Daly, Egan and Williams. The Molloy family are now remembered for the famous Tullamore cut stone. The founder of the Williams business family was Daniel E. Williams. Of Welsh origin he was born in the Quaker town of Mountmellick in 1848 and came to Tullamore as a penniless boy in the 1860s. It was Daniel E. Williams who developed the Tullamore D.E.W. brand of whiskey in the early 1900s and exported it all over the world. He called his fine new house of 1900 Dew Park and it can still be seen on the Birr road as one drives towards Charleville Demesne or Birr. His marketing and blending operations he conducted from a fine two-storey house (still standing) in Patrick Street and new warehouses to the rear of which a few buildings survive. The whiskey was made in the B. Daly distillery across the road and was where Williams worked as a young man.

So by the 1900s the town depended on the production of foodstuffs such as barley for distilling, local brewing at the Egan's brewery and for sale to Guinness together with cattle production and building materials. Buildings were sometimes in cut stone until the 1930s. This craft industry has its successor in the quarrying of building gravel and the manufacture of tiles and blocks. These native industries have stood the test of time but are supplemented by new businesses and entrepreneurs from the U.S. (Covidien), Germany (Sennheiser) and Italy (Zannini) to name but a few. Other native products include the famous Tullamore sausages, mineral waters, candles and numerous organic foods. The butcher shops in Tullamore present their products remarkably well.

Shopping is good in Tullamore with some family businesses still surviving in the town centre and shopping centres at Bridge Street, Columcille Street and Church Road. For larger items there is the Cloncollig Centre (Tesco, Aldi etc) at the eastern bypass. There are about 60 restaurants and pubs in the town catering for a wide range of tastes.



THE 1897 BONDED WAREHOUSE NOW THE TULLAMORE DEW HERITAGE CENTRE WITH THE CANAL IN THE FOREGROUND.

The good news of recent times is the announcement of a **new Tullamore D.E.W. distillery** to be built at Clonminch and to be completed by 2015. Currently the export market for Irish whiskey is for some one million cases and is growing rapidly. Tullamore is known throughout the world, so enjoy your stay and make it memorable with a souvenir from the visitor centre or buy a book on the town's history at the **Offaly History Centre** situated beside the Tullamore D.E.W. Visitor Centre.



# TULLAMORE D.E.W. VISITOR CENTRE

Tullamore is famous for its whiskey, Tullamore D.E.W. After the visit a courtesy taste of several blends of Tullamore D.E.W. is provided. The visitor centre and tourist information are housed in this bonded warehouse once used for the storage of whiskey before the tax needed to be paid on it. For further information see [www.tullamoredew.com](http://www.tullamoredew.com).

THE TULLAMORE DEW HERITAGE CENTRE



## OFFALY HISTORY CENTRE

The Offaly History Centre is situated at Bury Quay, Tullamore [www.offalyhistory.com](http://www.offalyhistory.com) beside the Tullamore D.E.W. Visitor Centre and incorporates the Laois/Offaly Family History service known as Irish Midlands Ancestry. It is also the home of the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society (founded 1938 and reestablished in 1969) and contains an extensive collection of material relating to the archaeology and history of the county. The building, once a wine warehouse, now contains much of interest to historians of County Offaly with some 15,000 books and some 50,000 photographs. A public reading room is available each Thursday night and by appointment and an extensive array of local studies and copies of old photographs are offered for sale. The Society provides a website where access to over 1,000 items of history is available free and is regularly updated. On Facebook upwards of 2,000 pictures of Offaly events and news can be viewed on open access at Offaly History. Lectures and other events are held monthly. Offaly now has an impressive array of published literature available from this centre and from local bookshops in Tullamore and elsewhere. Four or five publications are added each year to the growing list of material. If you want to equip yourself with the histories and photographs of Offaly this is the place to start. If the online 1901 and 1911 censuses have a family history craze going it can be pursued here back into the nineteenth century by perhaps fifty to eighty years – see [www.irishmidlandsancestry.com](http://www.irishmidlandsancestry.com) or email [info@offalyhistory.com](mailto:info@offalyhistory.com) and also at Roots Ireland.





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BURY OR WHITEHALL BRIDGE FROM ST BRIGID'S PLACE

## WHAT TO DO IN THE TULLAMORE DISTRICT

Tullamore is an easy-going place where you will not be rushed while the tourist product on offer is simple and authentic. Tullamore is a good base for the whole of Ireland because of its central situation and enjoy good bus and rail connections. A week in one of the larger hotels with a railway ticket/car hire and golf package is a quality and good-value holiday. In the vicinity of Tullamore are places of beauty and interest not much commercialised, if at all.

To the west are **Srah castle**, **Ballycowan castle**, **Lynally monastery**<sup>1</sup>, **Rahan Abbey**, **Lemanaghan**, the **shrine of St Manchan** at **Boher church**<sup>2</sup> and the **monastery of Clonmacnois**. Nearer is the town of **Clara** with its fine Catholic church and industrial history. Clara has a visitors' centre focusing on the history of Irish bogs and with a strong children's programme. In the vicinity are the villages of **Ferbane** and **Ballycumber**.

- 1 Srah, Lynally and Ballycowan are best viewed from the roadside as they are not open to the public
- 2 The shrine was stolen in 2012, but recovered soon after and new arrangements are being made for its safety.

To the north are the **high cross at Durrow** monastic site, **Locke's distillery** in Kilbeggan and at Mullingar is **Belvedere House**, once owned by Colonel Bury of Charleville Forest, Tullamore. Both Locke's distillery and Belvedere House are important visitor attractions, open to the public. East of Durrow and north of Tullamore is the monastery of St Hugh at **Rahugh** and the village of **Tyrrellspass**, an estate village, designed by a woman said to be gifted with 'a masculine intelligence', Jane countess of Belvedere. For Tyrrellspass and Rahugh one can take the old road to that estate village north of the canal and Whitehall bridge or travel via Kilbeggan. Attractive guides to the county and to its heritage are available at the tourist information point at Tullamore D.E.W. Visitor Centre and in the town's hotels.

On the eastern side of the county are **Geashill** (an estate village of Lord Digby); **Daingean**, the pre-1835 county capital, **Rhode**, **Cloneygowan**, **Clonbullogue** and the town of **Edenderry** with its attractive market house of Lord Downshire and a Quaker meeting house. Near Daingean is **Croghan Hill**, an extinct volcano. This is a modest climb and worth doing for the view and part of a history of some 250 million years and more. At Kiladerry, Daingean and on the way to Rhode and Croghan is the grave of the saintly Fr Mullen and said to have curative powers for the faithful.

BALLYCOWAN CASTLE DATING TO THE 1620S AND WEST OF TULLAMORE

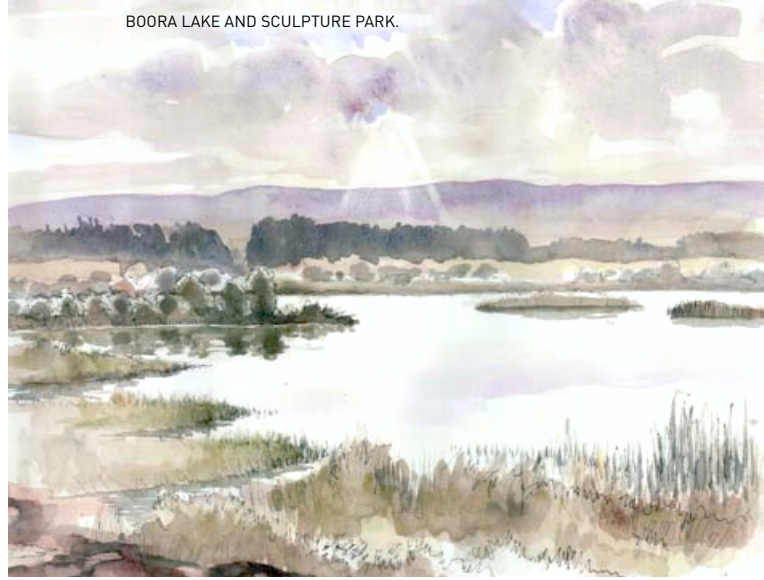


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The county has attractive and authentic towns and villages including **Birr, Banagher, Belmont mill and artist studios** and **Shannon Bridge**.<sup>3</sup> In **Mucklagh** Catholic church on the road to Kilcormac and Birr can be seen the former Tullabeg altar of the 1940s designed by Michael Scott and made in native oak with carvings by Laurence Campbell. Further south is the town of **Kilcormac** with its wonderful 1860s Catholic church, medieval pieta and on the back road from Kilcormac, or via Blue Ball (an old inn), is **Boora Lake and Sculpture Park**. This has a short and beautiful free guide – *Sculpture in the Parklands* and a website of the same name. These places are on the route to **Birr** with its Georgian town, **Birr castle gardens** and **science museum**. Birr was described by Mark Girouard as the Georgian town at its best and is a must see. The town library is in a former Pugin convent chapel where a facsimile of the MacRegol Gospel, an early Christian manuscript, can be seen. A good town trail is available. The village of Crinkill nearby was for over 100 years associated with the army. There is an information panel at the site of the former barracks and another at Crinkill military cemetery. To the south also are the villages of **Shinrone** and **Moneygall**, now famous following the visit in 2011 of US president, **Barack Obama** to the home of his ancestors. In between is the monastic site of Seir Kieran, burial place of the kings of Ossory. To

the south also are the great houses of **Kinnitty Castle** (now a hotel) and **Emo House** near Portlaoise. Beside Kinnitty Castle is a high cross associated with the Drumcullen monastic site. Along the way between Laois and Offaly is the Slieve Bloom range of mountains with many fine places to stop for

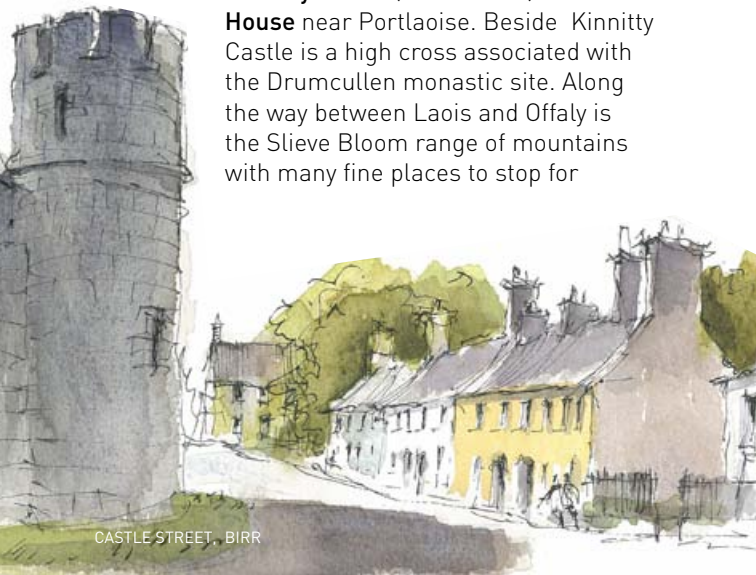


refreshments, as at Cadamstown, Kinnitty (see the mausoleum in the shape of a pyramid behind the Protestant church) and Clonaslee.

Every place has its story worth exploring. The internet is making it possible to track these stories, but is no substitute for getting out there and asking people about the history and places of interest in their native place. You will find good hotels, bed and breakfast, coffee shops, pubs and restaurants along the way all wanting to be helpful. Better to stay awhile for the relaxed atmosphere of the hidden Ireland with its fishing, golf, walking and touring.

## Durrow Abbey, High Cross And Early Christian Slabs.

At Durrow is a beautiful ninth-century high cross, early Christian slabs and St Columille's holy well. All can be viewed about three miles north of Tullamore on the Kilbeggan road (N52). A monastery was founded here by Columille in the mid-sixth century. The seventh-century illuminated manuscript, the Book of Durrow, can be seen in Trinity College, Dublin and was in the Durrow



CASTLE STREET, BIRR

monastery until the mid-seventeenth century. Unlike Kells there is no clamour to 'bring the book home' and instead local energy was devoted to having public access, as of right, secured and the place made presentable to the public in place of the Gothic ruined appearance of the 1990s, much commented on in the *Rough Guide to Ireland* at the time. The ninth-century high cross is now indoors in the 1730s church in the demesne and access is generally available each day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Durrow Abbey house dates from the 1830s and is owned by the state, and is now leased to a charitable foundation. The house was destroyed by the IRA in the early 1920s. It was rebuilt in 1926-7 for Otway Graham Toler at a cost of almost £40,000 in the domestic Tudor style. The high cross was removed to the interior of the eighteenth-century church in 2004. The church has now been adapted by the Office of Public Works to exhibit these sculptures so important to the early Christian history of the Tullamore district and to Ireland. The church has been handsomely restored and was opened to the public in 2012. Lord Norbury, son of the 'Hanging Judge', was shot here on New Year's Day 1839 and buried in the days after 'the Great Wind' - as if God himself was expressing his anger at this wanton outrage on the rights of property! The second Church of Ireland church at Durrow (1880s) can be seen from the N52 and is now a private house but with access to the graveyard retained for the public.



New Image  
here maybe

**Also in Durrow is the fine Gothic-style Catholic church of 1831** with a substantial graveyard adjoining. This church has a splendid interior with plaster vaulting and was carefully restored in the early 1990s. At the entrance is a tall tower with battlements. The corner pinnacles of the church are embellished with crockets or knobs. In the entrance hall, but moved from its place of honour in the church itself as part of the 'reordering' process in the 1990s, is a memorial to Father James O'Rafferty, parish priest of Tullamore from 1820 to 1857. O'Rafferty was a man whose support was necessary to gain the local parliamentary seat and he did much to secure the coming of the Mercy sisters to Tullamore as their second house after Baggot Street, Dublin. The Stations of the Cross in French terra cotta were made by the artist, Robert de Villiers and intended for the church of Cardinal Verdier in Paris. No longer required they came via a Sandymount church to the Jesuit community chapel at Tullabeg in the 1940s. After the Jesuits departed from Tullabeg in 1991 the Stations were donated to Durrow, then in course of renovation.



## TIHILLY HIGH CROSS

Three miles outside Tullamore on the Clara road north of Kildangan (not signposted, but opposite the entrance to Coleraine House) is Tihilly Cross. A monastery was founded here in the sixth century. The ruins of a medieval church survive together with a high cross nearby set in a round base beside an early Christian slab. Access is by permission only from the owners of the land, Mr and Mrs Don Fox, whose house adjoins the public road immediately to the front of the monastic site. This is a wonderful, quiet and peaceful place, captivating in its simple beauty. The cows grazing nearby and sometimes a bull help to keep the area clean and free of strangling growth. The stream and the pair of ancient ash trees that frame the site add to its beauty. These ash trees are among the oldest in the country and for some are more exciting than the high cross. This monastic site has lately been the subject of a study as to what is the best for the place in terms of the preservation of the cross.

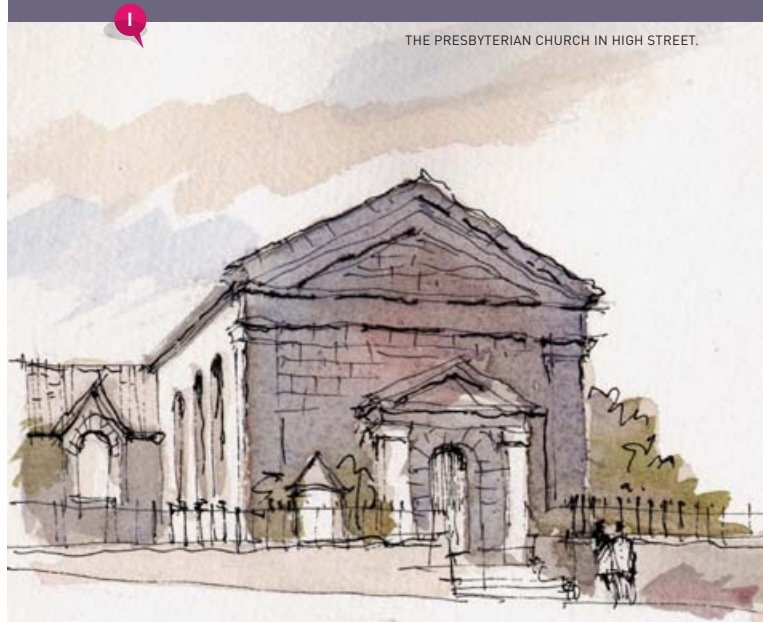
## TULLAMORE'S LINK WITH CHANDLER, ARIZONA

Tullamore created a special link with the town of Chandler in Arizona in 2009. The link was born of the desire to emulate Chandler as an attractive and vibrant hub for new service industries. The link is cultural too with several representatives of Irish heritage studies in Chandler coming to Tullamore each year.

For further information on Tullamore see the website [www.offalyhistory.com](http://www.offalyhistory.com), also that of Offaly County Council ([www.offaly.ie](http://www.offaly.ie)) and Tullamore D.E.W. as noted above. Facebook and YouTube also have much to offer and the virtualist can look at Offaly History (Facebook) among many windows on the world of the midlands. Just key in the county name and town names for a wealth of information and activities.

Local histories, historical journals, maps and old photographs can be purchased at local bookshops and at Offaly History Centre, Bury Quay, Tullamore (057 9321421, [info@offalyhistory.com](mailto:info@offalyhistory.com)). The visitor who wants to know more has every assistance in this information-laden age. We should not complain at the apparent abundance. In the early 1970s there was virtually nothing available on Tullamore history to purchase. Now there is much of Offaly interest, but it serves to light the many gaps in historical research waiting to be filled. You can be part of that process by sending your pictures and stories to [info@offalyhistory.com](mailto:info@offalyhistory.com).

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN HIGH STREET.



# TULLAMORE TOWN WALK

The Victorian ideals of a healthy and informative walk are back. A good place to start the Tullamore walk is from the town square, but for parking and a stop at the Tullamore D.E.W. Centre beside the canal it is best to start from there.

All-day parking and lesser/cheaper periods are available near the Tullamore D.E.W. and Offaly History Centres off Patrick Street and Kilbride Street. Taking the walking tour after the Tullamore D.E.W. visit should enhance the experience and knowledge of an Irish country town and how it developed over centuries. The route can be varied to allow for 20 minutes or up to 2 hours as suits. The short tour will bring you to the town square and back. The longer tour is highlighted on the map. A car or bikes will help with visits to Durrow, Charleville, 26<sup>th</sup> lockhouse, Srah Castle, Clonminch cemeteries, Lynally and further afield.



D.E. WILLIAMS BUILDING

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## PATRICK STREET

Patrick Street, south of the car park at the Visitor Centre, is the oldest street in Tullamore. However, there is no evidence of this now save for the three or four 1750s houses that survived the air balloon fire of 1785 when upwards of 100 thatched houses were destroyed in the first 'air disaster'. The present Garda station (2002) was built on part of the site of the first military barracks in the town of 1716.

Part of its star-shaped fortifications survive in the line of wall west of the garda station. The two best houses in the street are the **D. E. Williams building** of the 1750s and the later Georgian house of c. 1800, now **Hanlon's butchers**. The Williams building and some surviving stores to the rear was where Tullamore D.E.W. whiskey was first blended about 1900. Beside this house is De Brun's pub with a 1742 date-stone and opposite is Smyth's pub, once a millhouse owned by Michael Molloy who established the Tullamore Distillery in 1829, as is shown on the fine gates beside the Tullamore Credit Union building.



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THE NEW FRONT TO THE BRIDGE HOUSE COMPLETED IN 1910 FOR P. & H. EGAN LIMITED.

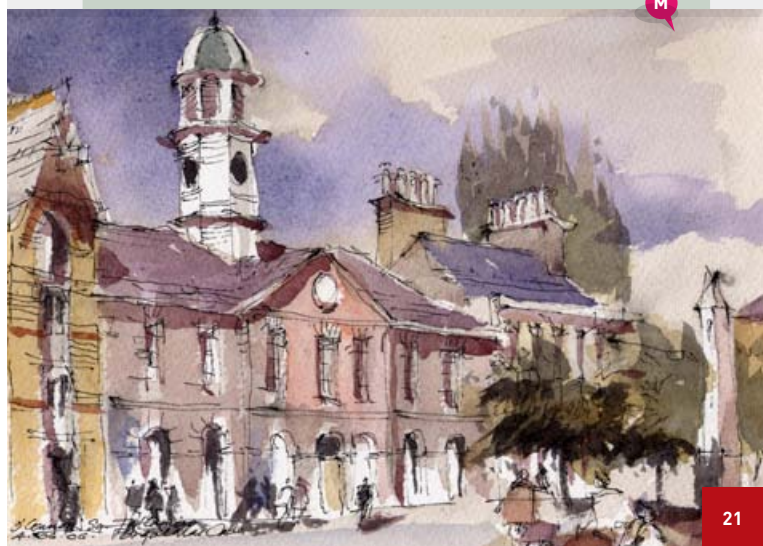
## BRIDGE STREET/ BRIDGE HOUSE

The Tullamore river bridge in Bridge Street neatly divided the old town in half. It was probably as a river crossing the town was established after 1620 and it was 100 years later when the first houses were built here. The contemporary Menary's shop was built in 2000 on the site of a 1786 hotel. For almost 100 years this was the epicentre of all Tullamore trading activity and known as **Hayes' Cross** after the name of the hotel proprietor. The present-day **Bridge House** is a fine construction in Tullamore stone dating to 1910. This was the centre of that other great Catholic business family, that of Patrick and Henry Egan, in the town from the 1850s until the 1960s. Curiously the Egan firm lasted just three years longer than that of Williams' at 116 and 113 years respectively. Near the entrance to Distillery Lane and Bridge Shopping Centre can be seen a 1747 date-stone in the Douglas jewellery shop. The owner in 1770 was complained about for not having a chimney wide enough to admit a boy to clean it. At **Distillery Lane** is the Bridge Hotel with its Irish and Italian restaurants, sauna, swimming pool and at Bridge Street the Palace nightclub. At the western end of Distillery Lane as one approaches Main Street are some remains of the first distillery in Tullamore, including an old ship's engine (currently

hidden from view) and later used in the distillery. When shopping in the Bridge Centre one is walking on layers of distilling history where malthouse men laboured in the Flanagan/Molloy/Daly/ Williams distillery to get the grain and the mash right and 'still men' to keep the stills fired up for the three charges involved in making an Irish pot still whiskey. The first distilling is recorded here from 1782. Beer was made nearby from the 1800s to about 1914 and is recalled today in the formerly Egan-owned **Brewery Tap** in the Square.

## O'CONNOR SQUARE

The centrepiece here is the old **market house** where the founder of Methodism, John Wesley, speaking here in 1789, noted the existence of the new building designed to serve as a market house and courthouse. Some of the houses, such as that of Gray-Cunniffe, are from the 1740s. Wrong-doing was punishable with a stay in the stocks which were located here in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the square is the **war memorial** (erected in 1926) to those from Tullamore and Offaly/ King's County who were killed in the First World War. To the south of the square is **Tanyard lane** dating from the 1760s. Most of these eighteenth-century houses were built by hatters, wig-makers, wool merchants and candle makers.





## OFFALY COUNTY LIBRARY AT O'CONNOR SQUARE

This 1930s centrally-situated building (modernised and enlarged in 2012) has an important local history collection that is readily available during library opening hours. The collection is important and the serious student of local studies can spend many a happy hour here. The hours of opening are available at the front door of the library and on [offaly.ie](http://offaly.ie). In 2012 the library was greatly improved and expanded with the emphasis on bringing the books both digitally and in hard copy to the people. It is a happy coincidence that what is now a bookish place is also the site of the marriage in the 1770s of Benjamin Yeats with Mary Butler - ancestors of William Butler Yeats.

## HIGH STREET

Like O'Connor Square the finest houses in the town are located here – a fact that Arthur Young, the great but impractical agriculturalist, noted as long ago as 1776. Among these are the following: Sambodinos building about 1750 and the Round House further up on the right of the same decade; Dempsey's pub and the house opposite are about 1780s. The Hoey & Denning building was remodelled in 1870 in the Italianate style with Tullamore cut stone. Across the street, now Donal Farrelly Solicitors, is a very tall cliff-like house of 1780s erected for a professor of Trinity College who married the barrack master's daughter next door. O'Neill Daunt, the nineteenth-century patriot and writer, was born here in 1807. At the top of the street is the Presbyterian church of 1865 and across from it, a house of about 1750 and a former boarding school where the famous De Burgo O'Malley chalice was found in the attic in the 1890s.



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THE MASSY HOUSE  
IN HIGH STREET OF  
THE 1750S, LATER A  
BOARDING SCHOOL  
AND NOW ANGELO'S  
TAKE-AWAY.

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## CORMAC STREET

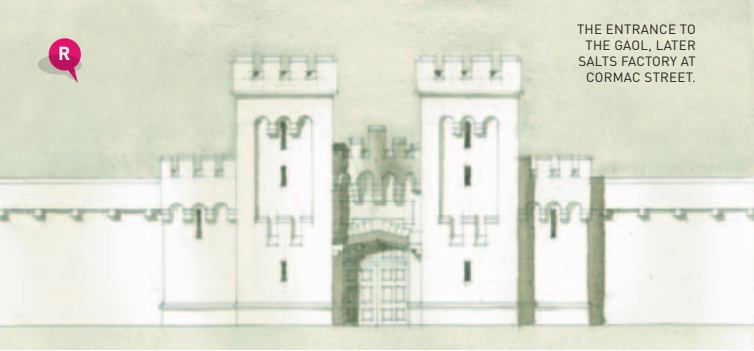
At the junction of O'Moore Street and Cormac Street is a pair of houses with four bays to each street. Beside this large house and in Cormac Street is the birth-place of the architect Benjamin Woodward. Across from it is the home of the builder of much of Cormac Street, Thomas Acres, and which is since the 1990s the offices of the town council. Behind the terrace, but best seen from the town park further up Cormac Street is Acres Folly, erected about 1814 to commemorate the Wellington victories in the Peninsular War. The finest building in Tullamore town is undoubtedly the county courthouse erected in 1835 to a design of J.B. Keane. Both it and the adjoining Gothic-style jail were destroyed in 1922 during the Civil War. The courthouse was rebuilt and the façade of the gaol retained with its date-stone and entrance gates still surviving. The monument



THE OFFALY COUNTY COURTHOUSE OF 1835.

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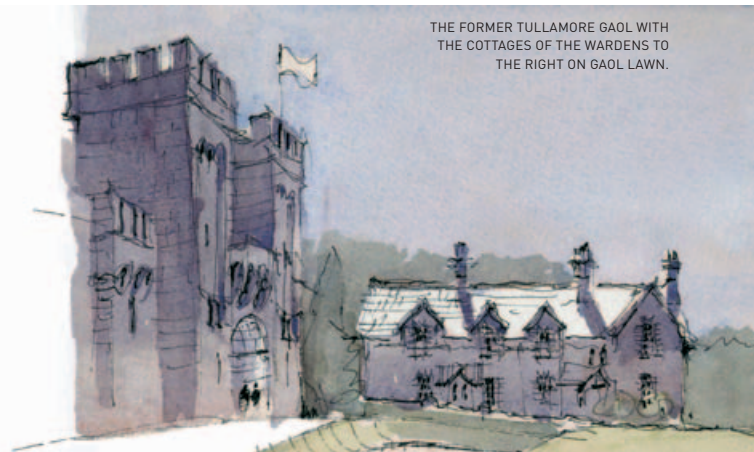
THE ENTRANCE TO  
THE GAOL, LATER  
SALTS FACTORY AT  
CORMAC STREET.



at the front of the courthouse commemorates all who fought for Ireland in the 1919-23 period. One of the last public hangings in the gaol took place in 1865 and the second-last of a woman (Mary Daly) in Ireland in 1903. The ruined gaol was redeveloped as a textile mill in the 1930s and was the most important employer in Tullamore up to the 1980s.

Opposite these public buildings is Lloyd Town Park which connects with the lower end of Main Street allowing one to turn back at this point and walk directly back to the car park at the Tullamore D.E.W. Centre. In the town park is the old Kilcruttin graveyard in use from the 1700s to the late 1800s. Almost 2,000 Famine victims were buried here, close to where the Burgess mausoleum is located. Nearby are two tombstones of members of the King's German Legion, a regiment stationed in Tullamore in the period 1803-9 and associated with the 1806 'Battle of Tullamore' – an altercation over a woman leading to several deaths, including that of Rifleman Koch. In the grounds of the town park and close to the skate board park is a monument to Irish ex-service men and women and erected in 1986.

THE FORMER TULLAMORE GAOL WITH  
THE COTTAGES OF THE WARDENS TO  
THE RIGHT ON GAOL LAWN.



## CHARLEVILLE ROAD AND DEMESNE

*(for drivers, cyclists or walking enthusiasts)*

South of Cormac Street is the 'new' railway station of 1865 and the modern-day and award-winning offices of the county council (2002). Further on the left with all the trees to the front is Dew Park, built in 1900 by Daniel E. Williams. The family continued to live here until 1986. Near the junction with Charleville View can be seen the walled **Charleville Demesne** where access on the avenue is permitted by the owners. To the right is the **great king oak** said to range in age from 500 to 900 years old. The tree is featured in Thomas Pakenham's choice of some sixty notable trees of Britain and Ireland. At the end of the long and winding avenue (laid out by the landscape gardener John Claudius Loudon in about 1812) is one of the finest Gothic houses in Ireland – **Charleville Forest** or Charleville Castle as it is now called.

## CHARLEVILLE CASTLE/FOREST

Charleville Castle was designed by Francis Johnston and its owner, Charles William Bury, first earl of Charleville. It is open to the public (by appointment) and is considered to be one of the finest Gothic houses in Ireland. The fairy tale style castle was designed in 1798 and completed over the years 1800 to 1812. This magnificent building was vacant from about 1912 to 1970. The main rooms with their spectacular ceilings have for the most part survived the years of lying empty.



A VIEW OF CHARLEVILLE  
CASTLE FROM THE GARDEN

The castle is now lived in again and efforts are being made to preserve and restore it to its former glory. From the tall circular tower can be seen the four neighbouring counties. Charleville demesne includes the best extent of surviving oak wood in Offaly. Its avenues offer some of the finest walks near Tullamore matched only by the tow paths of the Grand Canal. County Offaly with Waterford and Wicklow have now the greatest extent of surviving native woodlands. The walks in the demesne are open to the public courtesy of the Hutton Bury family. All that is requested is that visitors respect the beautiful grounds, bring home litter, and keep to the footpaths.



THE GREAT 'KING OAK' AT THE ENTRANCE TO CHARLEVILLE DEMESNE.

Charles William Bury commenced building his castle in 1801 and completed the job in 1812. Perhaps in deference to the oak trees he called his house not Charleville castle but Charleville Forest for already there was one giant tree known as the 'King Oak' dominating like a watch tower. 'No one knows who planted the tree - king or peasant - or whether it sowed itself. But it seems to be a descendant of the great forests of common oak (*Quercus robur*) that once straddled the soggy green plains of central Ireland. Estimates of its age begin at 400 years; it might be double that. With a girth of 26 feet below its lowest branches, it is one of the oldest, largest and best-preserved oaks in the country'. The Bury family believed that if a branch fell, one of the Burys would die, so they supported the great arms with wooden props. Of course there was nothing they could do to protect the trunk. In May 1963 a thunderbolt splintered the main trunk from

top to bottom. The tree survived, but the head of the family, Colonel Charles Howard-Bury (famous for his Everest climb and 'Abominable Snowman'), dropped dead a few weeks later (see Thomas Pakenham, *Meetings with remarkable trees* (London, 1996), pp 26-27.

Others think the 'King Oak' may be as much as 900 years old. If the estimated age is correct, the King Oak would be a worthy candidate for the oldest living plant in Ireland' [see E. Charles Nelson and Wendy Walsh, *Trees of Ireland* (Dublin, 1993), p. 125.



THE MASONIC LODGE AT O'MOORE STREET.

## CORMAC STREET, BACHELORS WALK AND CHURCH STREET

The walker who is not yet minded to return to his car via Main Street or High Street can now take the Bachelors Walk from the top of High Street to Church Road and Church Street. This will bring him through O'Moore Street past the masonic lodge of the 1880s and the contemporary Tullamore Court Hotel. He will then pass the newly built (2011) St Columba's/ Colaiste Choilm boys school and turn left for Bachelors Walk/New Road. A view of the ancestral home of the Moores of Charleville at Croghan Hill was, possibly, intended by the designer Loudon. Another reason was that the Bury family could get to their church (1815) without going through the town.





## ST CATHERINE'S CHURCH OF IRELAND CHURCH

This is one of the finest of the Protestant churches in the diocese of Meath and was designed by Francis Johnston, the architect of Charleville Forest house. The church was completed in 1815 and is situated on Hop Hill, a natural mound near the town, once thought to be the big hill of Tullamore. The building is not usually open outside of services. Inside is the fine monument to Charles Moore, first earl of Charleville who died in 1764 by John Van Nost the younger. In the crypt, now sealed off, are the coffins of the Burys of Charleville from Charles William (died 1835) to Colonel Bury of Mount Everest fame of 1963. Most pathetic is the small coffin to Lady Harriet, the child of eight who was killed on the stairs at Charleville in 1861. Her parents were both dead and she was in the care of her uncle, Alfred Bury (the fifth and last earl).

Also in the church are memorials to parishioners who served and died in the First World War, some members of the Bury family and several rectors.

South of O'Moore Street and on the Killeigh/Portlaoise road are the two cemeteries at Clonminch and between them the first railway station of 1854 – now a private house. A keen walker taking the Chancery Lane route beside the former railway station could go direct to the big shopping stores in Cloncollig. But most people will want to go via Bachelors Walk to Church Street passing the Tullamore/Church Road shopping centre on the right and to the east the great Hop Hill St Catherine's Church. On the Geashill/Cloncollig road is the **new municipal swimming pool** (2008) and the Tullamore Retail Park with several multinational stores.

In Church Street and its connected O'Carroll Street is the old Charleville School of 1811 and the former County Infirmary of fifty beds, built in 1788 and now comprising apartments behind the façade. Here it

was said in 1801 that a machine for restoring life to persons apparently drowned was in course of being installed. The first Protestant church was built here in 1726 of which the date-stone is in the Offaly History Centre. Looking beyond Church Street to Church Road can be seen St Catherine's church. To continue up Church Street will take one to 'Hayes Cross' and back to the Tullamore D.E.W. Visitor Centre via Patrick Street. Another course is to go into the Market Square of the 1820s and emerge into Harbour Street on the right. The great spire of the Catholic church (209 feet high) will serve as a beacon.



The **Catholic church** is worth exploring for its modern style. It dates (excepting the tower and spire) to 1986 and was built after a disastrous fire destroyed the old church of 1906. There was an earlier church on this site dating back to 1802. The new church has a fine interior and is of architectural interest for its steeply pitched timber structure portal frames and ceiling. The building was designed by Edward Smith and Partners, architects. The exterior of the church is somewhat unsuccessful and was compromised by the desire to retain parts of the old church and the tower and steeple. On the other hand, as one commentator noted of the interior:

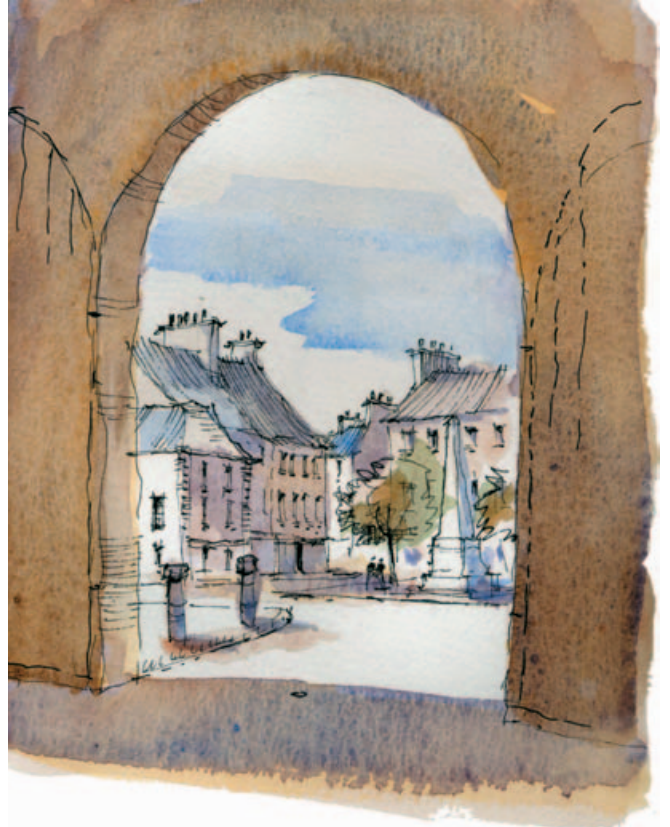
It is a breathtaking feat of engineering with soaring cruck-arches in laminated wood supporting the side aisles and reaching on upwards into the clerestory to support the roof. The potential for beauty inherent in mathematically-inspired structures, often reserved for bridges, is here applied to a church. The feeling of space is uplifting and the furnishings are of consistently high quality (Lawrence, 2009).

There are **ten windows designed by Harry Clarke but mostly executed by his Studios** and also contemporary stained glass. The large windows in the new church of 1986 are by Dublin Glass and Paint Company and were executed for Tullamore while almost all the others were brought from elsewhere including the Harry Clarke-designed windows which had originally been in Rathfarnham Castle in Dublin. The church also houses **the largest mechanical-action church organ in Ireland** – a gift from the great cathedral church in Copenhagen. Books on the church which marked the rebuilding in 1986 and its centenary in 2006 are available in local bookshops or from Offaly History at Bury Quay, Tullamore. The interesting study (Lawrence, 2009) of the windows of the church and others in the county can be viewed in Offaly History Centre, Offaly County Library and at [offaly.ie/heritage](http://offaly.ie/heritage).

Leaving the new church one can head out the front or back doors to Chapel Street or **Store Street**. Behind the high wall in Store Street is the old canal harbour of 1800 and to the north the site of the former hotel (now the Parochial House of 1976)

and the footbridge over the canal. Nearby is the attractive and original Bury bridge at the junction with the line into the harbour. Along the canal on the northern side (about one kilometre east) one can during the summer months visit the restored **26<sup>th</sup> lockhouse**. Again the enthusiastic walker can take either bank of the canal and return the other side. Out the Daingean Road is a house known as 'The Beeches' (opposite a left turn for the Grand Canal and Digby bridge) where the writer Brian O'Nolan/ alias Flann O'Brien lived from 1920 to 1923 and who later based his famous *The Third Policeman* novel on his experience in the midlands and the 'unrequited love affair between a man and his bicycle'.

Taking the canal walk west will bring one back to the Tullamore D.E.W. Visitor Centre via the Kilbeggan bridge. All that survives of the old 1830s Mercy convent and school are some date-stones in the wall of the new 1960s Mercy convent chapel. Near the footbridge at Convent Road was where Lord Cornwallis disembarked with his troops in 1798 – on the way to defeat a French invasion in the west.



VIEW OF O'CONNOR SQUARE FROM THE COUNTY LIBRARY



At Kilbeggan bridge one has the option of walking down **Columcille Street** and back to the car park via Patrick Street. Columcille Street has some good buildings such as the Boyd Barrett **Allied Irish Bank** of 1949 and beside it the **Tullamore Shopping Mall**, formerly the great Scally shop erected in 1912. Dolan's Pharmacy has been in use as a pharmacy on the same site since 1795. North of the Kilbeggan bridge are the **GAA football and hurling grounds**, the contemporary **Midland Regional Hospital** (2007) close to the important Scott and Good hospital of the 1930s and to the right after the tennis club 'the paupers' graveyard' to cater exclusively for the dead from the workhouse after 1852. From Kilbeggan bridge along the canal bank is but a short distance back to the car park.





# QUIZ

## FOR THE CHILDREN

How high is the spire of the Catholic church?

When was the balloon fire?

Where in Tullamore are members of the King's German Legion buried?

## FOR THE ADULTS

Name the architect of the courthouse.

Where is the market house and who spoke there in 1789?

Where was the first Tullamore railway station located?

Name an Irish writer who lived for a time in Tullamore.

## USEFUL WEBSITES

[www.tullamore-dew.org](http://www.tullamore-dew.org)

[www.discoverireland.ie/offaly](http://www.discoverireland.ie/offaly)

[www.offalyhistory.com](http://www.offalyhistory.com)

[www.offaly.ie/heritage](http://www.offaly.ie/heritage)

[www.birrcastle.com](http://www.birrcastle.com)

[www.destinationbirr.ie](http://www.destinationbirr.ie)

[www.slievebloom.ie](http://www.slievebloom.ie)

[www.loughbooraparklands.com](http://www.loughbooraparklands.com)

[www.sculptureintheparklands.com](http://www.sculptureintheparklands.com)

[www.belmontmill.com](http://www.belmontmill.com)

[www.shannonregionfisheries.ie](http://www.shannonregionfisheries.ie)

**Clara visitors centre:**

*email, [claraguides@environ.ie](mailto:claraguides@environ.ie)*

**Clonmacnoise:**

*email, [clonmacnoise@failteireland.ie](mailto:clonmacnoise@failteireland.ie)*

For books on Offaly call to Offaly History Centre, Balcony Books or Midland Books – all in Tullamore town or see Offaly History on Facebook and the web. On Facebook see also Tullamore, Offaly History, Offaly Heritage, Daingean Heritage to name but a few.

Getting to Tullamore and travelling about:

Trains run at frequent intervals from early morning see *[irishrail.ie](http://irishrail.ie)*; buses see *[kearns.ie](http://kearns.ie)* and *[buseireann.ie](http://buseireann.ie)*. By train is about 70 minutes maximum and by car about 75 minutes from Dublin with a similar time to Galway. Locally there are upwards of 100 taxis, google *[tullamoretaxi](http://tullamoretaxi)*. For walking in the Slieve Bloom mountains and villages with an experienced guide see *[slievebloom.ie](http://slievebloom.ie)* for contact details.



