



6th Oct: 2020

Re Draft County Development Plan 2021-2027

Military History experts and amateur enthusiasts - from Ireland and abroad - are always amazed and delighted to discover the range of Napoleonic fortifications located here in Offaly at Shannonbridge, Banagher and Lismagh (Meelick). The last mentioned is a shamefully ^{and almost inaccessible} neglected Martello Tower less than 200 yards from the Victoria Lock. The Martello Tower at the bridge in Banagher and the Lismagh one are the only two out of about 60 or so constructed at inland locations by the British. The rest were at coastal locations.

Under your heading "Tourism and Quality of Life" in your full page spread in last week's Offaly Independent 3/10/2020, I wish to propose the development and protection of our Napoleonic fortifications as an aid to developing further our county tourism potential.

Best wishes in your endeavours,

Jim Madden

BANAGHER

Heritage Trail

The Riverside

- 1. Martello Tower
- 2. Cromwell's Castle & The Shannonside Park
- 3. Fort Falkland
- 4. Fort Eliza
- 5. The Bridge
- 6. The Marina
- 7. Limestone Sculptures
- 8. The Johnny McEvoy Wood Sculpture

The Town

- 9. The Shannon Hotel
- 10. Crank House
- 11. Cill Righnaighe or The Church of Rynagh
- 12. Ivory's House
- 13. La Sainte Union Des Sacres Coeurs Convent
- 14. The Barnes-McCormack Memorial
- 15. St. Rynagh's Catholic Church
- 16. Hill House
- 17. St. Paul's Church (Church of Ireland)

Some places of interest within a 20 min car drive from Banagher

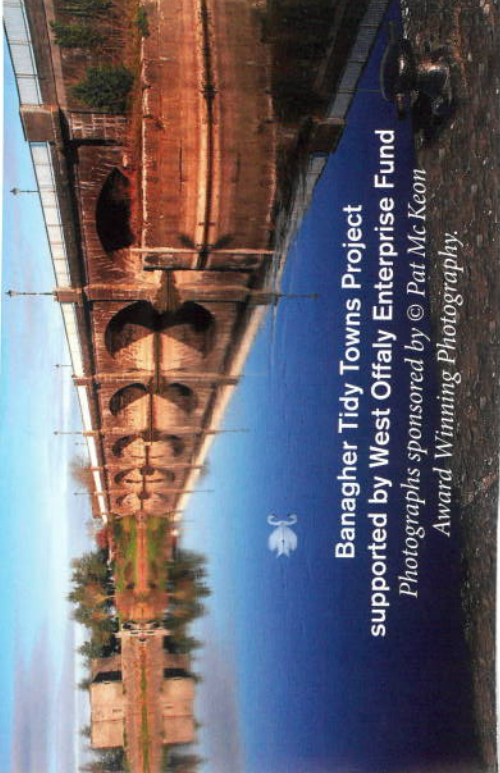
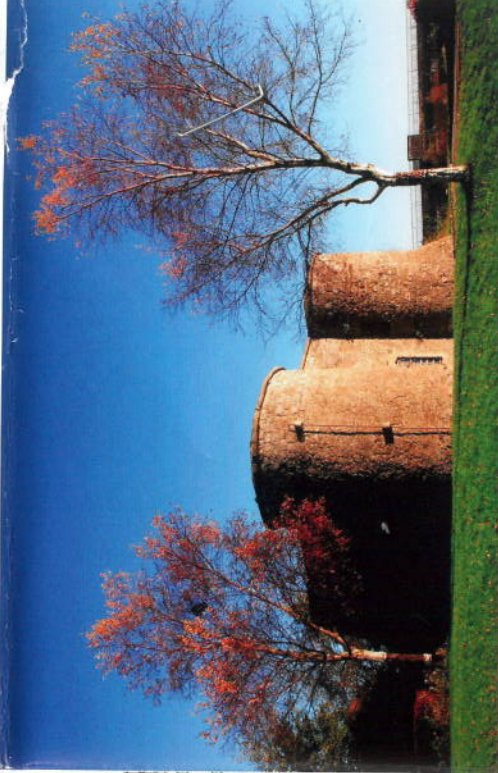
- Clonmacnois, Ireland's most famous monastic site
- St. Brendan's Cathedral, Clonfert with its famous Romanesque Doorway and the adjacent Emmanuel House of Providence Prayer Centre. One mile away is St Brendan's Catholic Church where a 14th Century wooden statue of the Virgin and Child is honoured.
- The historic Belmont Mill and Art Centre:
- The village of Kinnitty and its Castle and the Sliabh Bloom mountains:
- The extensive Napoleonic Fortifications at Shannon bridge and the nearby Árd Chiaráin Ursuline Prayer Centre:
- The Lough Boora Wetlands and Lakes with Nature and Sculpture Trails:
- Cloghan Castle, Luskagh, Banagher a former strong hold of the O'Madden Clan:
- Victoria Lock and the Little Brosna Wetlands in the Luskagh area.
- Birr Castle containing the famous telescope, scientific exhibitions and internationally renowned gardens.
- The 15th Century Meelick Franciscan Church still in use.
- The Village of Shannon Harbour on the Grand Canal.



BANAGHER

Heritage Trail

Text By Jim Madden, M.Litt.



Banagher Tidy Towns Project
supported by West Offaly Enterprise Fund
Photographs sponsored by © Pat Mc Keon
Award Winning Photography.

Banagher is close to early monastic sites in the mid-Shannon region. It is located at a shallow crossing point on the river and was probably settled in early Christian times. Borough status was conferred on the town by a Royal Charter of Charles I in 1629. By then the power of the local clans, the MacCoughlans in Garrycastle and the O'Maddens in Cloghan Castle was in sharp decline. The Armstrong family, descendants of Cromwellian settlers, now held sway here until the 19th century.

Banagher before the famine had a population of 3000 and was a noted centre for the malting and brewing industries. With the coming of the railway in 1884, its cattle and horse fairs were among the largest in Ireland. Banagher Concrete is now the town's main employer and the horse fair is still held every September.

With the Shannon, the Brosna, the Little Brosna and the Grand Canal all on our doorstep, Banagher today is a paradise for boating, fishing and other outdoor pursuits.

The Riverside

1. Martello Tower

The British authorities in Ireland feared an invasion by Napoleon and so between 1804 and 1815 they built about 50 Martello Towers mostly around the coast. This tower is one of only two built inland. The other Martello Tower is located at Lusmagh, four miles downstream. The invasion was expected from the Galway direction as the French would most likely march eastward crossing the Shannon at Banagher or Shannonbridge on their way to Dublin.



2. Cromwell's Castle and the Shannonside Park

This castle was originally built in the 1650s and was greatly enlarged about 1805. Note the large and more regular stones in the upper walls. One can take a pleasant circular walk around the park which incorporates the castle, pitch and putt course and clubhouse, swimming pool, the original Canal House and the disused Canal Lock.



3. Fort Falkland

Fort Falkland was built about 1624. It was called after Henry Cary, Lord Falkland who had come to Ireland as Lord Deputy in 1622. The building was strengthened in the early 1800s and provided with firepower.



4. Fort Eliza

This 5-sided structure known locally as The Sal (Salt) Battery is located 400 yards out Crank Road. It too was upgraded from an earthworks structure to include a moat with cut-stone walls, a drawbridge, ammunition



5. The Bridge

The 7-arch bridge was completed between 1841 and 1843. It forms a county boundary line between Offaly and Galway and a provincial boundary between Leinster and Connacht. A fragment of the earlier 1685 bridge is still visible between Cromwell's Castle and the 7th arch.



6. The Marina

This facility has been gradually developed since the 1960s. The Banagher Railway Station, which was the terminus for the Clara to Banagher branch line from 1884 to the 1960s, occupied the area where the private residence, the boatyards and the sub-aqua clubhouse now stand.



7. Limestone Sculptures

The four sculptures – three similar ones by the same renowned sculptor Clíodhna Cussen stand in Library Square – were completed in 1999. The theme of her creation is a celebration of the River Shannon. The sculptures feature the people, animals and birds that use the river. The 13th century Bishop O'Duffy and St. Adhamhnán are also depicted. The artist states that 'the design of the sculptures has evocations of the great oak trees that covered Uíbh Fhailí long ago and of the stone sculpted crosses and abbeys of the Shannon Region.'



8. The Johnny McEvoy Wood Sculpture

Sculpted by Paradzai Havatitye it was unveiled in 2011 by the singer/songwriter himself, who was born in Banagher in 1945. "Banagher you'll be my town until the day I die."



The Town

9. The Shannon Hotel

Anthony Trollope (1815-1882) the English novelist and inventor of the post box stayed here from 1841-1844 while working as a Post Office Surveyor's Clerk. Here Trollope began his first published novel "The McDermotts of Ballycloran" in 1843. After his marriage to Rose Heseltine from Rotherham in June 1844 he transferred on promotion to Clonmel. It was in the Shannon Hotel too that James Pope-Hennessy wrote his celebrated biography of Trollope in 1969/70.



10. Crank House

This is a good example of a bow-fronted Georgian town house dating from the 1750s. Once the town's Technical School and then a malthouse and grain store for Wallers, today it houses a tourist office,



11. Cill Ríghnaigh or The Church of Rynagh

St. Rynagh (Regnacia) was a sister of St. Finnian of Clonard. From Clonard she moved to Clonmacnois and later to Banagher to become Abbess in the 6th century of a religious house probably located on this site. The surviving structure dates from the 17th century. Here in 1852 Thomas Cooke, a Birr antiquarian discovered the shaft of the Banagher Cross now in the National Museum, which depicts Bishop O'Duffy who was killed by a fall from his horse in 1297. Among the notables buried here are Sir John MacCoughlan, members of the Armstrong family, and the Fox sisters, Mary (d.1845) and Anne (d.1847) whose generosity was instrumental in bringing the L.S.U. sisters to Banagher in 1863. The last recorded burial here was in 1943.



12. Ivory's House

It was in this house directly opposite what remains of the L.S.U. Convent that Anthony Trollope worked as a post office surveyor's clerk 1841-1844. The post office at that time was located next door; it was demolished in the 1980s.



13. La Sainte Union Des Sacrés Coeurs Convent

Accompanied by their founder Abbé Jean-Baptiste Debrabant (1801-1880), Mother Anatolie Badger and three other L.S.U. Sisters arrived in Banagher in July 1863 to set up the first school of the Order in Ireland. For the next 144 years (until 2007), the Order provided unbroken service in the field of education to this community. In 2007 Banagher College Colaiste Na Sionna under the control of the Offaly Vocational Education Committee was established.



14. The Barnes-McCormack Memorial

Unveiled in 1963 it commemorates Peter Barnes, Banagher and James McCormack, Mullingar both members of the Irish Republican Army. In a controversial trial they were accused of being involved in the deaths of five people in an explosion in Coventry in 1939. They were convicted and subsequently hanged in Winson Green Prison, Birmingham in February 1940. The monument, sculpted by Desmond Broe, Dublin, features images of the two men, a female head representing Ireland and symbols of the four provinces.



15. St. Rynagh's Catholic Church

St. Rynagh's Church was built in 1825/26. The belfry and spire were added in 1872. Michael Tierney, conservation architect, planned the reordering of the church in 2013. The stencilling and gilding is the work of Andy Regan while the tabernacle was created by



door-liners. The marble and stone work is by Pádraig Curley also from Banagher. The altar, tabernacle pillar, ambo and baptismal font in Dublin granite were sculpted by Michael Ryan. The Stations of the Cross (1959) are by Sligo artist, Bernard McDonagh. The Madonna and Child (1974) was carved by Imogen Stuart and donated by local lady Nan Egan, Garbally. The Adoration Window, installed in 2013, had been in the old convent chapel since 1904.

Cuba Court: The Brontë and other literary connections (no map location)

Cuba Court – now sadly demolished – was built around 1730 for George Fraser former Governor of Cuba and is assumed to have been designed by Sir Edward Lovett Pearce, a leading architect of the time. The 1629 Charter of Charles I gave Banagher a Royal Free School which came to be located in Cuba Court. Arthur Bell Nicholls was a nephew of the Headmaster of the Royal School Rev. Dr. Alan Bell (1821-1839) and he grew up here. After Trinity College Dublin, Arthur became assistant clergyman in Haworth to the Rev. Patrick Brontë (originally Prunty from County Down) whose daughter Charlotte the English novelist he married in June, 1854. Part of their honeymoon was spent in Cuba Court. In the 20th century Captain Landon and his family lived here until 1934. In addition to Arthur Bell Nicholls, other well-known past students of Banagher Royal School were Sir William Wilde pioneering surgeon, antiquarian and father of Oscar Wilde, the brilliant playwright and poet, and William Bulfin author of 'Rambles in Erin' and 'Tales of the Pampas' which describes his experiences in Argentina



16. Hill House

Charlotte Brontë died in March 1855 when she was expecting a child. Her husband Arthur Bell Nicholls then looked after his father-in-law Rev. Patrick Brontë until Patrick's death in 1861. Shortly afterwards Arthur returned to Banagher and settled in Hill House with his aunt Harriett Bell and her daughter Mary Anna. Arthur and Mary Anna his cousin were married in 1864. Arthur died in 1906 aged 87 and Mary Anna died in 1915 aged 85.



17. St. Paul's Church (Church Of Ireland)

St. Paul's was built in 1829 and was extensively renovated in 1990. Its outstanding feature is the magnificent Window of the Resurrection which was originally intended for Westminster Abbey, London. It commemorates the Bell family. Two other windows honour the Burdett and Armstrong families. There is also a fine collection of wall plaques inside the main doorway which pays tribute to once-prominent local people. The organ was built by Conaghers of Huddersfield. It is a two-manual, piped instrument with foot-pedals. Arthur Bell Nicholls, his wife Mary Anna and other relatives are buried

