

BIRR

TOWN TRAIL & RIVER WALKS

ROUTE 1 (1.2km)



1 EMMET SQUARE was laid out in the mid 18th century during the Georgian period. Its central focus was the Cumberland Pillar erected in 1747 and originally surmounted by a statue of the Duke of Cumberland, victor of the Battle of Culloden (1746). The statue became unpopular, was tilting dangerously and was removed in 1915.

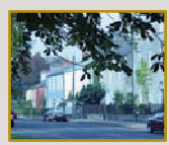


2 O'CONNELL STREET is an excellent shopping street with some traditional shop fronts which survive here and nearby in Connaught St. as well as in Main St. where some façades hide 17th century features.

3 CHURCH LANE This was once a narrow main road linking Birr Castle, the old churchyard and market areas with Main St., Connaught St. and beyond. The large stone obstructing the way further on prevented carts from leaving the markets without paying tolls. The car park to the right is sited on an old corn and wool market area.

4 ST BRENDAN'S OLD CHURCHYARD is on the site of St. Brendan's early Christian monastery at Birr where Cáin Adomnáin was passed into law in 697 and where the Macregol Gospels were illuminated in the 9th century. The churchyard played an important part in the religious and military history of Birr and was used in the attack and defence of Birr Castle during the 17th century sieges.

5 BIRR CASTLE DEMESNE is open to the public and is internationally famous both for the variety of plant life in the gardens and for the Great Telescope, the largest in the world for over seventy years. Ireland's Historic Science Centre celebrates Irish scientists like those of the Parsons family. Although Birr Castle itself remains the private home of that family, the Demesne is open to the public daily throughout the year.



6 OXMANTOWN MALL is a much admired streetscape planned in the early 19th century by the 2nd Earl of Rosse. Fine Georgian houses face a tree-lined walk and Oxmantown Hall, a Victorian building in the centre, opened in 1889, was recently restored to modern standards as Birr Theatre and Arts Centre. St. Brendan's Church of Ireland opened in 1816 was built to John Johnston's design in the Gothic Revival style. Close to the church Mary Ward was killed in the first recorded automobile accident in 1869.

7 EMMET STREET leads back to Emmet Square. On the right is the Wesley Chapel or Methodist Church built in 1820. John Wesley visited Birr nineteen times during the 18th century.

ROUTE 2 (1.1km)



1 EMMET SQUARE was laid out in the mid 18th century during the Georgian period. Its central point was the Cumberland Pillar erected in 1747 and originally surmounted by a statue of the Duke of Cumberland, victor of the Battle of Culloden (1746). The statue became unpopular, was tilting dangerously and was removed in 1915.

2 JOHN'S MALL is an attractive streetscape with fine Georgian houses and public monuments. John's Hall was built for the 2nd Earl of Rosse in 1833 as a mechanics' institute to commemorate the death of his 26-year old son, John Clere Parsons. Close to the hall are the Seffin Stone of prehistoric significance and a Russian cannon captured during the Crimean war. The central plots laid out in the 1870s are known locally as 'The Chains'. The statue of the 3rd Earl of Rosse is the work of John Henry Foley. A small Gothic style building was originally a Presbyterian Church, built in 1885.



3 BIRR CIVIC OFFICES & ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH Birr Civic Offices and Birr Library are now sited in the lovely Gothic Revival building designed in the mid 19th century by A.W. Pugin as a convent for the Sisters of Mercy founded here in 1840 by Catherine McAuley. The chapel, superbly restored as a magnificent library, houses local treasures including a facsimile of the Macregol Gospels scripted and illuminated in Birr about 800 AD, the original of which is now in the Bodleian Library,

Oxford. St Brendan's Roman Catholic Church is a fine Gothic Revival church designed and built by Bernard Mullins and opened in 1826. The interior is very attractive with some fine stained glass windows. Adjacent is the town's children's playground.

4 CAMCOR RIVER To the left at the old bridge is the Camcor Park with an Active Age Outdoor Gym. Slightly further on, the attractive River Walk branches to left and right with Birr Leisure Centre to the left. The River Walk to the right skirts the weir, Mill Island, the millrace and the old Birr Mill now housing Birr Technology Centre with excellent modern facilities for information technology industries. The walk arrives at the Old Bridge which once supported several houses and into Market Square.

5 MARKET SQUARE & CASTLE STREET The heart of the medieval town was in this area for centuries. Castle Street, once the industrial hub of the town, led directly to the original gate of Birr Castle which was many times destroyed during the sieges of the 17th century. A market house once stood in Market Square where the Maid of Erin monument now commemorates the Manchester Martyrs, three nationalists executed in England in 1867. Looking up Castle Street on the left is Crotty's Church, opened in 1839 and a visible reminder of the Crotty Schism which divided the Roman Catholic community in mid 19th century Birr.

6 MAIN STREET is an excellent shopping street leading northwards from the Market Square. It is a very old thoroughfare but was first recorded on a map in 1691. Two of the narrow lanes survive and the footprints of several houses, especially those near Market Square must date from at least the 17th century. Continue up O'Connell Street to Emmet Square.

ROUTE 3 ROUTE 1 & 2 (2.3km)

Welcome to **Birr**

ACTIVITIES & ATTRACTIONS

Birr Castle Demesne & Ireland's Historic Science Centre

Ireland's Historic Science Centre, Telescope and Gardens.
www.birrcastle.com
057 912 0336

Birr Civic Offices and Library
Displaying a facsimile of the Macregol Gospels / Summer Tourist Office 057 912 4900

Birr Theatre & Arts Centre
www.birtheatre.com
057 912 2911

Birr Leisure Centre
Indoor heated swimming pool and fully equipped gym
www.birrleisurecentre.ie
057 912 0343

Playground Wilmer Road

Skatepark Roscrea Road

Birr Outdoor Education Centre
The ideal base for orienteering, hill walking, canoeing, rock climbing, wind surfing and nature studies.
www.oec.ie/birr
057 912 0029

Skydive Ireland and Ormand Flying Club
Birr Airfield
www.ormandflyingclub.com

Birr Golf Club
18-hole course
www.birrgolfclub.ie
057 912 0082

Wilmer Tennis Club Glebe St.
Excellent hotels, restaurants and other accommodation
www.destinationbirr.ie

Clonmacnoise Monastic Site
www.discoverireland.ie/offaly

Lough Boora Parklands
www.loughbooraparklands.com

Slieve Bloom Mountains
Irish glens, forest walks, streams, waterfalls, prehistoric sites and legends.
www.slievebloom.ie

River Shannon
Nearby for cruising and fishing
www.shannoncruising.com

Angling
Many excellent rivers in the area
www.fishinginireland.info

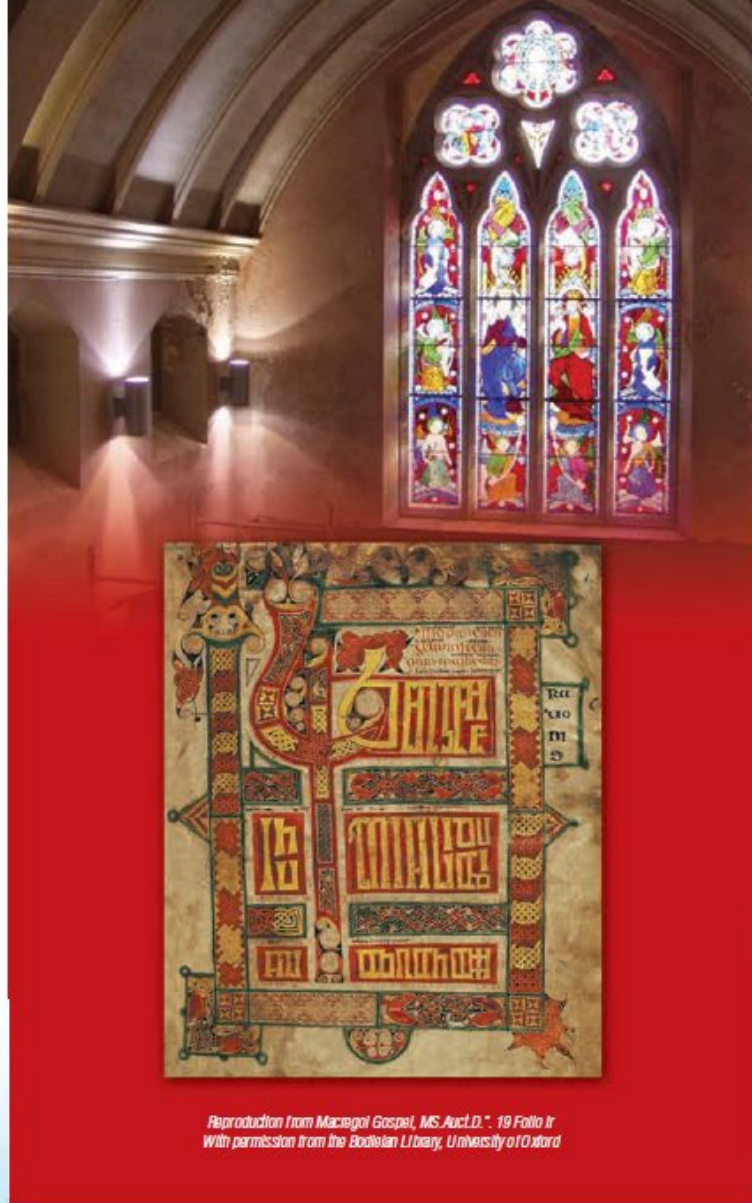
For further information on Birr and surrounding area
www.discoverireland.ie/offaly
www.offaly.ie/heritage

Or contact

Birr Tourist Office
(May to September) 057 912 0110

Shannon Development
Regional tourism and economic development authority 057 912 4000

Mid Ireland Tourism Ltd.
(Tourist Information October To April) 057 912 0923



Reproduction from Macregol Gospel, MS.Auc.LD. 19 Folio 1r
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BIRR

TOWN TRAIL & RIVER WALKS



BIRR IN THE HEART OF IRELAND

History of Birr

Birr is situated on the River Camcor. The placename 'Birr' originated in an Irish term probably used to describe its riverside position. During the medieval period Birr was in the kingdom of Ely O'Carroll ruled for centuries by the O'Carroll dynasties.

There is evidence of prehistoric activity in the general area, but the first recorded indication for a settlement in Birr dates to the 6th century AD when a monastery was founded by St. Brendan of Birr. Here Cáin Adomnáin, a law for the protection of women and children, was passed at a large assembly in 697 AD and the scribe Macregol made his celebrated copy of the Four Gospels about 800 AD. Also associated with the monastery may be the Faddan More Psalter discovered in a bog in Birr parish in 2006.

An Anglo-Norman castle was built at Birr in 1208. Birr may then have been under Anglo-Norman control until the early 14th century when the Gaelic-Irish O'Carroll dynasty re-established themselves in Ely O'Carroll and from then until the late 16th century Birr was a major O'Carroll stronghold.

Sir Laurence Parsons was granted Birr Castle and 1,277 acres of land in the Plantation of Ely O'Carroll in 1619. The town of Birr, also in the past called Parsonstown, developed under Sir Laurence's guidance. Birr Castle was besieged in 1642 and 1690, but the town emerged from a turbulent 17th century into a period of growth and renewal. Birr was enlarged in a number of phases from the mid 18th to the early 19th centuries. Emmet

Square (1747) represented the earliest phase of Georgian Birr. Later phases produced Oxmantown Mall (c. 1816), Wilmer Road (c. 1817) and John's Mall (c. 1833).

Besides its many fine buildings, the town had a busy economic and social life. In the 19th century, Birr was a hive of scientific discovery. The Third Earl of Rosse built the giant telescope, his wife, the Countess Mary, was a pioneering photographer and their son Charles Algernon Parsons invented the steam turbine engine. Industries included milling, glassmaking, distilling, textiles and printing.

Birr Workhouse was opened in 1842 before the Famine and still stands largely the same as when it was first built. Crinkill Barracks within a few hours march from the River Shannon was built 1809-1812. It was burnt to the ground by Republican forces in July 1922. Birr also gained fame as the venue for the first ever All-Ireland Hurling Final between Tipperary and Galway held on 1 April 1888 and now commemorated by a sculpture in the car park to the right of the road to Roscrea. The town has enjoyed a celebrated record in hurling over the years. Birr remains in essence an extremely pleasant and well-preserved Georgian town.

Birr Vintage Week & Arts Festival in August is one of Ireland's most popular festivals.

