

# The Walled Town Crier

An Irish Walled Towns Network  
bi-monthly magazine.

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council

Fethard Town Walls (south wall) viewed from the riverside Valley Park.  
Image: Liam Mannix.



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# Project Manager's Message

## **Hello everyone and welcome to the August 2023 edition of the Walled Town Crier.**

Judging by the photos, you all seem to have managed to have good weather for your Heritage Week events this year – despite it being the wettest summer in living memory. The Child of Prague must have been working overtime!

Sincere congratulations to all involved in organising Heritage Week events this year, large and small. Even the smallest events take a huge amount of organisation and commitment and it's a testament to the good will and energy of everyone involved that the week was such a huge success. This issue features a round up of just some events from those that took place around the network.

Our regular 'Getting to Know..' feature focuses on Fethard this month, which coincidentally is also where the IWTN Management Committee held their July meeting. Thank you to all at Fethard Horse Country Experience and the Fethard Historical Society for your wonderful hospitality.

I'm continuing my town visits over the coming months – and have been really enjoying getting out and about to member towns. If I haven't already been in touch to schedule a visit to your town, I will be soon. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy the latest issue of the Walled Town Crier.

Warmest Regards,

Eimear

**Eimear O'Connell, IWTN Project Manager**



Members of the IWTN Management Committee enjoying a tour of Fethard with members of Fethard Historical Society. Image: Eimear O'Connell.



# Getting to Know Fethard



Fethard Festival in the Valley Park.  
Image: Liam Mannix.

**The south Tipp town boasts the most complete medieval town wall in Ireland. Over 90% of the original 1,125m stone wall survives.**

Fethard takes its name from the Irish Fiodh Ard, meaning high wood. The town sits on a low hill above the Clashawley River, which flows – via the Anner – into the Suir. The name suggests that the hill was once wooded and there is little evidence for any substantial pre-Norman settlement in the area.

In 1201, William de Braose (who already had large land holdings in Wales, England and Normandy) was granted extensive lands in what is now Tipperary by King John of England and it is likely that the town of

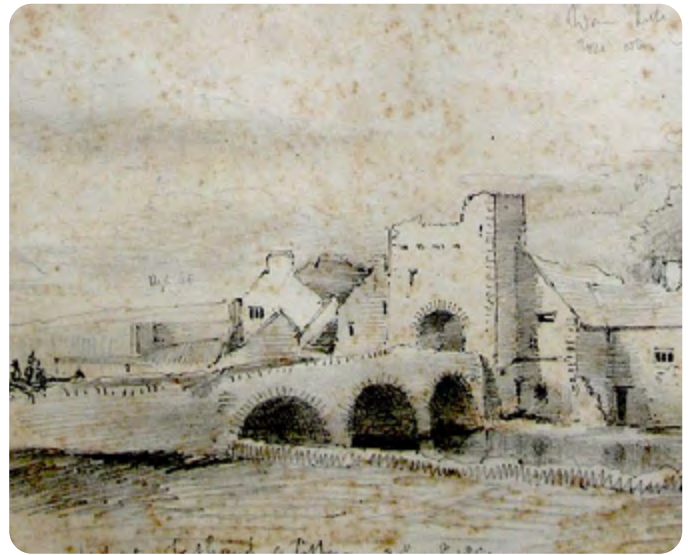
Fethard was established under his instruction. The town was planned systematically: on high ground above the river's flood plain, with a central market area and a regular street pattern, and surrounded by farmland.

De Braose fell out with King John in 1208 and his lands in Ireland were confiscated. Fethard was subsequently granted to the Archbishop of Cashel (it is documented as part of the archbishop's possessions by 1215) and it remained part of the archbishops' estates until the 16th century.

The town walls date from 1292 when King Edward I of England gave a murage grant towards the enclosure of the town and the protection of its citizens. In 1376 a further



Detail from 1703 Plan.



West Gate at Fethard, 30th Oct 1857' by George Victor Du Noyer shows the West Gate still standing at that date. Image in the collection of the RSAI.

murage grant specifically mentions a stone wall. This might suggest that the earlier 13th-century enclosure was constructed of earth and timber, rather than stone. Further murage grants were given in the 15th century. A 1467-8 grant refers to repairing the walls following attacks by rebels. It is possible that the circuit was also expanded at this time.

Fethard's town walls are 1.5-7.8m in height and constructed from blocks of limestone. The walls were battlemented and had five towers, only two of which survive. There were five gates (4 main and 1 postern) into the town. Three of the gates' names survive - Water Gate, North Gate and Wicket Gate. Only North Gate still stands today.

The town was granted a royal charter by Edward VI in 1552-3, allowing it to elect a corporation, and thus to govern its own affairs, without direct interference from the Crown. The Everard family – landowners, politicians and later lawyers – rose to prominence in the Fethard during this period and were to play a significant role in the development of the town in the 16th and 17th centuries. Two almshouses were built in the early 17th century – one of which survives as the Tholsel building today – as well as a large new house for the Everard family, the south side of the main street was rebuilt and the market square was widened. Cromwell marched on Fethard in 1650 and described it as having “a very good wall with round and



The surviving North Gate, as it stands today. Image: Eimear O'Connell.

square bulwarks, after the old manner of fortification”.

Cromwell entered the town through the East Gate, having sheltered in the Augustinian Abbey outside the walls overnight. There remains a tradition in Fethard to this day that one shouldn't ‘go out the way Cromwell came in’ and for this reason funeral processions still take an alternative route to avoid the eastern entrance.

Having prospered since its foundation, Fethard's fortunes declined in the 18th century. The 19th century saw the loss of many of the town's significant medieval monuments, but





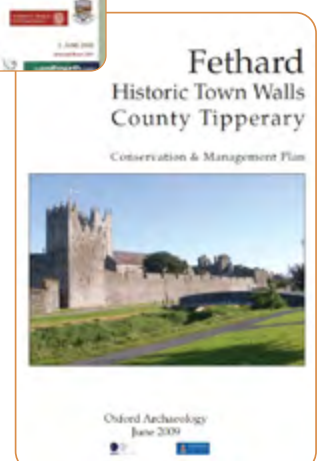
Today the location of the former East Gate is marked by East Gate Park, opened in 2020. The park flanks the surviving eastern section of the town wall. Image: Eimear O'Connell.

on the other hand, the absence of large-scale development in the town in the 20th century meant that many more survived.

In the 1980s, in common with the rest of Ireland, Fethard experienced high unemployment; there were a large number of vacant buildings in the town centre and the town's many medieval monuments had fallen into disrepair but the growing interest of archaeologists in the town prompted a group of locals to found the Fethard Historical Society. The Historical Society was officially launched in 1988. This was followed, in 1990, by the founding of the Friends of Fethard. The Friends of Fethard took on the conservation and repair of a section of town walls bordering the Clashawley River as their first major project. The restored section of walls was officially opened by then-president Mary Robinson in 1993 and this moment is recalled by locals as the beginning of heritage-led regeneration in Fethard.

The Friends of Fethard and the Fethard and Killusty Community Council worked on a number of community projects over the following decade. They also became members of the Wales-based Walled Towns Friendship Circle. When the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) was launched in 2005 by the Heritage

Council, Fethard - with its long history of community-focused heritage projects - was ideally placed to take full advantage of the ongoing support, technical advice, training and funding on offer. A suite of three plans for Fethard was initially funded by the IWTN in 2007: A Public Realm Plan, A Conservation Management Plan for the town walls and a Feasibility Study for the Tholsel. These three documents became the basis for all future regeneration work in Fethard.



With funding from the Heritage Council through the IWTN and the local authority, successive sections of the town's medieval wall have been conserved and repaired.

The town's major project of recent years has been the establishment of the Fethard Horse Country Experience in the 17th-century Tholsel building, which opened in 2017. The development of a visitor facility in the Tholsel and the development of an Equestrian Visitor Centre were two separate objectives

of the 2008 IWTN-funded public realm plan. Funding from South Tipperary LEADER, Tipperary County Council, Fáilte Ireland (via Ireland's Ancient East), Coolmore Stud and the Andrew Lloyd Weber Foundation was used in the conservation of the building and the installation of a state-of-the-art interactive visitor experience. The process was managed by Fethard Business and Tourism Group, a subcommittee of the Community Council. The operation of the visitor experience is now managed by Cashel Palace Hotel.



Exterior and interior views of the restored Tholsel building. Images: Fethard Horse Country Experience.





Holy Trinity Church.  
Image: Liam Mannix.

A great place to start any visit to Fethard is the Valley Park where the lovely River Clashawley flows beside the town walls. The park is rich in biodiversity, with kingfishers, heron and trout all frequent visitors.

As well as the walls themselves, the surviving North Gate and the beautifully-restored Tholsel building, other sites to see in the walled town include Holy Trinity Church and graveyard. This 13th-century church is still used for worship today – though intermittently -and contains grave slabs from the 16th century.

The town's Augustinian Friary was abandoned after the Reformation, but the friars returned in the 19th century and partially rebuilt their monastery. The church and the surrounding graveyard contain heraldry dating to the 15th century.

The town is also home to two surviving tower houses - Edmund's Castle, which is connected to the town wall, and Court Castle dated to the 15th century – and to two Sheela-na-gigs. The 'Doc on One' podcast *A Tale of Two Sheelas* (RTÉ Radio 1) is recommended listening for anyone interested in the theft of a third example from Kiltinan church, near Fethard, in the 1990s.

Visitors won't lack for food or drink options either – including, but not limited to, Mc Carthy's Pub (and Undertakers), which has been in operation since the 1840s.

*Text adapted by the IWTN Project Manager from the following sources: Fethard - A Guide to the Medieval Town, by Dr. Tadhg O'Keeffe published by Fethard Historical Society; IWTN Website Text, by Liam Mannix; Ballybrilliant: Heritage-led Regeneration in Five Irish Towns published by the Heritage Council. Any errors or omissions PM's own.*



Mc Carthys of Fethard.  
Image via Mc Carthys of Fethard on Facebook.



# Heritage Week around the Network



## National Heritage Week

A Heritage Council programme

It has been a busy Heritage Week around the network, with some fantastic events taking place. Here we've rounded up just a selection of the many events on offer.



Technically a week ahead of Heritage Week but we couldn't leave **Youghal Medieval Festival** off this list. The festival continues to go from strength to strength, with visitor numbers increasing every year. This year they even managed to find some sunshine in what was a wet weekend for many.



Images of Youghal Medieval Festival 2023 by Matt Brooker Photography, via Living Youghal.



In **Athenry** they also managed to escape the worst of the downpours. This is one of the network's longest-running Walled Town Days and it really does have something for visitors of all ages. This year's event was a resounding success, drawing an impressive crowd of seven and a half thousand attendees.

Images of Athenry Walled Town Day 2023 by Hany Marzouk.



It was fantastic to see **Fethard Festival** back up and running this year too. It's been missed!



Still image from video footage of Fethard Festival 2023 by Robert Ahearne.  
Image via Fethard Festival on Facebook.

In **Westmeath**, there was a walk led by the team currently preparing a Conservation Management Plan for Fore town walls, as well as a whole series of events in Athlone. Poetry in the Castle proved particularly popular.



Heritage Week events in Fore and Athlone.  
Images: Westmeath Heritage, via Facebook.





And in **Limerick**, both Limerick City and Kilmallock hosted tours of the town walls and medieval monuments.

Heritage Week events in Limerick and Kilmallock.

Images: Sarah McCutcheon and Kilmallock Tourism Development.



Tour of Kilkenny City Walls at Talbot's Tower. Image: Kilkenny People.



Heritage Week event at Navan Town Wall. Image: Clare Ryan.

There were tours of **Kilkenny's City Walls**, **Navan Town Wall**, and of medieval **Castledermot**, where Castledermot Local History Group also unveiled a new interpretation panel at Carlow Gate. And in **Navan**, the Solstice Arts Centre's theatre was fully booked for a wonderful seminar on 'Navan: Its People and its Past'.



Members of Castledermot Local History Group with their newly-installed interpretation panel. Image: Sharon Greene.

At the 'Navan: Its People and its Past' seminar in the Solstice Arts Centre, Navan. Image: Clare Ryan.



Last, but certainly not least, **Loughrea Medieval Festival** took place on the weekend of 25-27 of August, with a whole array of fantastic talks and events on offer.

There was a great turnout for Saturday's walking tour. Image: Galway County Heritage Office, via Facebook.



Congratulations to all involved on a fantastic Heritage Week for the IWTN.



# News and Updates

## Grants 2023



Time is flying so here's a quick reminder that grants drawdown dates for 2023 are: **9th October for Events and Interpretation Grants** and **17th November for Conservation/Capital grants**.

## Kells Mural Tower

One of the projects being funded under our Conservation/Capital grants scheme in 2023 is this lovely mural tower in Kells, Co. Meath, which I had the opportunity to visit recently. It's a real hidden gem in the town – tucked away behind a row of terraced houses - and it's great to see it getting a bit of conservation-focused attention. We're looking forward to seeing the 'after' photographs.



Mural Tower, Kells, Co. Meath. Before conservation works.  
Image: Eimear O'Connell.



Recent soft-capping works in Castledermot.  
Image: Eimear O'Connell.

## IWTN Soft Capping Training Day

An IWTN training day on the soft-capping of historic masonry will take place in Castledermot on Thursday 5th October 2023.

This will include the opportunity to view recent soft-capping works to a section of Castledermot's town wall, discuss soft-capping techniques, take part in hands-on demonstrations and tour the heritage sites of Castledermot. Lunch and refreshments will be provided.

Detailed itinerary to follow. For now, please save the date, and I look forward to seeing many of you there.



## Adopt a Monument Conference

The Adopt a Monument Conference 2023 will take place in Tullamore on 29th September. Highly recommended for anyone interested in learning more about community archaeology and hearing about successful community archaeology projects.

For full programme and booking details click [here](#).



Moygara Castle, Co. Sligo.  
An Adopt-a-Monument project.  
Image: the Heritage Council.

## Social Media

Thanks to everyone as always for sending on social media content. Please continue to use the hashtag **#IWTN** on all network-related posts and to tag the relevant Heritage Council account:



**@HeritageHubIRE**



**TheHeritageCouncil**



**@theheritagecouncil**

The IWTN is funded by the Heritage Council and delivered in partnership with Local Authorities and community groups.

### Contact Us:

Please do get in touch at [iwtn@heritagecouncil.ie](mailto:iwtn@heritagecouncil.ie) if you would like us to promote news or projects happening in your walled town over the coming months.

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



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Waterford's City Walls looking impressive on a recent visit.  
Image: Eimear O'Connell.