

The Walled Town Crier

An Irish Walled Towns Network
bi-monthly magazine.

The IWTN is funded through



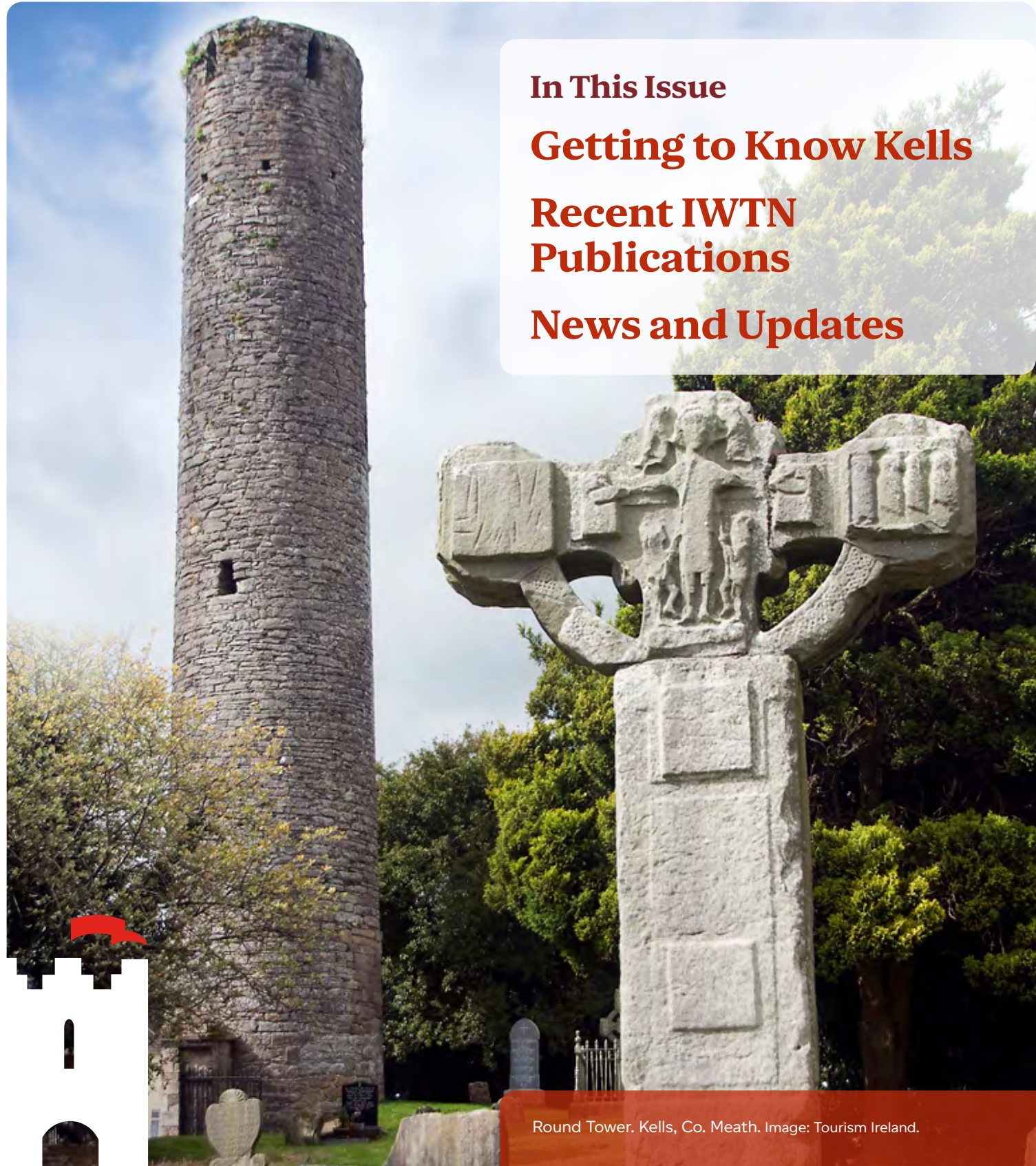
An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

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Project Manager's Message

Hello everyone and welcome to the February 2024 edition of the Walled Town Crier.

Spring is in the air as I hit send on the first Walled Town Crier of 2024 and there's lots to look forward to this season.

In our regular 'Getting to know...' feature, we're getting to know Kells, Co. Meath, with an exciting update on the new National Typography Centre, currently under construction in the town.

We also shine a spotlight on some recent IWTN-funded publications, taking us from Waterford to Navan, via Tipperary and Kildare.

And there are plenty of dates for your diary in our 'News and Updates' section. These include three upcoming IWTN events as well as other items that may be of interest to our members.

I hope you enjoy the latest issue of the Walled Town Crier, and that you're getting a chance to enjoy some of the Spring sunshine too.

Warmest Regards,

Eimear

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



View of the Derry Walls from Brooke Park on a Spring morning. Image: Friends of the Derry Walls via [Facebook](#).

Getting to Know Kells



'St. Columba's Shrine' is a recurring feature of the annual Kells Type Trail. Image: Kells Type Trail via [Facebook](#).

The name Kells derives from *Ceanannas Mór*, meaning 'great residence'. In the pre-Christian era, Kells was a royal residence associated with the legendary Conn Céadchatach and Cormac mac Airt.

In 550 St. Columba, also known as St. Colmcille, established a religious settlement at Kells. In 563 he founded another settlement on the island of Iona off the coast of Scotland. Iona was raided repeatedly by Viking fleets and in the early 800s the community of St. Columba's monastery on Iona were granted lands at Kells as a haven from invaders.

The first church at Kells was completed by 814 and the relics of St. Columba were relocated there from Iona in 878. The community of St. Columba at Kells is famously associated with the Book of Kells, written around the year 800. Debate continues about whether the book was written in Kells or Iona, or partly in both, but it was certainly housed in Kells until the seventeenth century, when it was moved to Dublin for safekeeping.

Although Kells subsequently became an important Anglo-Norman walled settlement, the town's earlier monastic heritage is its most recognisable feature today. The tenth-century



St. Columba's House. Image: Liam Mannix/IWTN.

round tower survives to a height of 25m, forming a landmark in the town as do several ninth- and tenth-century high crosses. A stone-roofed oratory known as St. Columba's House, dating from the ninth century may be the oldest surviving structure in Kells.

At the time of the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1169 however, it was Kells' location within the Kingdom of Meath, that gave it strategic importance.

The Walled Town of Kells

Chris Murphy, Historian

After receiving the blessing of England's Henry II in 1172, to conquer by any means necessary the ancient Kingdom of Meath, by 1176, the Cambro-Norman knight Hugh De Lacy had defeated all comers and retaken the entirety of the previously much fragmented province.

To assert his new authority, De Lacy immediately set about building a number of stone fortresses around Meath, including a major wall around Kells which would surround the town for the next five and a half centuries.

The exact line and extent of the first walls



Drawing of Hugh De Lacy by Gerald of Wales. Image: Supplied by Chris Murphy.

is today unclear, but a murage grant of 1326 records they then enclosed an area of about 40 acres in total. With a large internal tower and five imposing gateways overlooking the major roadways into the town, it was one of the most impressive early Norman fortifications in Ireland, second only in De Lacy's new palatine, to Trim Castle.

Located in the very north-western corner of

the English crown's control of the area known as the Pale, the defences of Kells would be repeatedly tested to the limit in the centuries that followed.

After De Lacy's assassination at Durrow in 1186, his son Walter granted borough or town status to Kells, and in 1204 King John granted Kells the right to hold annual fairs. Walter died in 1241, and with no male heirs surviving him, in 1301, the powerful English magnate Roger Mortimer, 1st Earl of March, assumed control of the vast De Lacy Meath estates after his marriage to Walter's great-great grand-daughter, Joan de Geneville.

Having loyally served King Edward I, the notorious Longshanks, Hammer of the Scots, in his northern campaigns, the Scots would have their revenge against Mortimer, when in December 1315, a combined Scots-Irish army led by Edward Bruce, brother of Scotland's king Robert, laid waste to Kells; with Mortimer last seen riding hard for Dublin as the town burned to the ground according to the only surviving account.

Emboldened by the 1315 attack, the O'Reillys of Breifne made repeated raids on Kells and its agricultural hinterland in the decades that followed, and in order to raise taxes to improve the town walls, in 1326 Kells received the first of a number of royal murage grants.

With little respite from the Irish raids, the arrival of the Black Death in 1348 saw plague ravage the already besieged urban populations of towns like Kells, with many fleeing to England. The ever-persistent threat from the Irish beyond the Pale was again reinforced in 1398, when Roger Mortimer, the great-grandson and namesake of the disgraced 1st Earl of March, was murdered and dismembered within sight of the walls of Kells while out riding.

Isolated and lacking crown support, by 1430, Kells was recorded as "an ill walled town, still belonging to the King of England, seated on the frontier of the wild Irish". The Mortimer Meath estates were later inherited by Edward, Duke of York, with Kells drawn into the English Wars of the Roses when Edward's opponent, his Lancastrian cousin King Henry VI, sent a letter

directly to the elected men of Kells calling for their loyalty.

After deposing his cousin, the newly crowned King Edward IV increased taxes on Kells in 1468, resulting in a petition to Edward from the traders and townsfolk in 1472, with many there after deserting Kells due to the lack of support against the incessant Irish raids.



Down Survey map of Kells (1656-1658). Image: Supplied by Chris Murphy.

Not until the reign of Henry VIII would Kells finally be properly reinforced, as the Tudor king set about his reconquest of Ireland following the failed Fitzgerald rebellion in the 1530s. Titling himself as King of Ireland, Henry's mother was the last surviving sister of Edward IV, and thus, he now also claimed the extant title of Lord of Meath, which he divided into the counties of Meath and Westmeath, with Kells now the chief town of Meath.

The wars of religion which followed under Henry's heirs, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth, would spill over into the reign of their Stuart successors, and by the time Oliver Cromwell finally ended all Catholic resistance in Ireland, the Down Survey of 1655 records that a century of violence had left the Barony of Kells "almost wholly depopulated, and of present in great waste and uninhabited".

Purchasing the town, and as much of the surrounding land he could from Cromwell's Puritan soldiers eager to leave Ireland after the restoration of the Stuart monarchy in 1660, it was the chief engineer of the Down Survey,



Kells Mural Tower. Image: Eimear O'Connell.

one Thomas Taylor of Sussex, who saw the potential for Kells. Under the authority of his great-grandson, Thomas, the 1st Earl of Bective, the majority of the surviving walls were removed in 1750s, their secrets recycled into the foundations and walls of the new Kells that came after.

Today a mural tower – conserved with IWTN funding in 2023 – is the most visible of the surviving sections of Kells' once extensive medieval defences.

Kells Today

Kells today is a thriving small town. It is home to some 6,600 people – a number that almost doubled between the 1996 and 2022 census – and its location within commuting distance of Dublin via the M3 motorway has come with both the advantages and challenges common to commuter towns.

Central to the success of Kells in approaching some of the town's challenges has been a strong community involvement in town regeneration projects.

Kells Local Heroes was established in November 2011 in the midst of the economic recession with an objective to re-invigorate local commercial activity and improve the cosmetic look of the Town.

Following a well-attended Town Hall meeting in the Headfort Arms Hotel, a catalogue of ideas was put forward by members of the public aimed at bringing about positive change and - thanks to the kind generosity of one local businessperson who donated an office for the group's use – Kells Local Heroes was up and running.



Kells Streetscape View. Image: Liam Mannix/IWTN.



Kells Courthouse Tourism and Cultural Centre. Image: Liam Mannix/IWTN.

The first priority was the look of the streetscape and after 66 derelict and unsightly properties were identified, a painting programme got underway to brighten up the town's image. The results transformed the look of Kells in the eyes of locals and visitors.

Other projects soon followed aimed at strengthening the sense of community in Kells.

Kells joined the Irish Walled Towns Network in 2015 and in 2018 the town was awarded €50k under the competitive 'Kick Start' fund to carry out repair and restoration works to street-front properties on John Street and Castle Street.

The publication of "Kells: Solving our own problems" in 2019 has seen and will continue to see projects developed in the coming years. A Conservation, Management and Interpretation Plan for the walled town was produced in 2020.

The former Kells Courthouse, built in 1802, was converted to a heritage centre in 2000 and more recently re-opened as Kells Courthouse Tourism and Cultural Hub. This retains an exhibition and information space on the ground floor, with a multipurpose community space on the first floor.

Kells hosts no-less than three annual festivals: Hinterland Literature and Arts Festival in August, Samhain Food and Culture Festival in November and Tailteann Festival of Sports and Sports Writing in December. Until 2020 (when the festival moved online) it also hosted

the Guth Gafa Documentary Film Festival. In addition to all of these, Kells is home to the annual Kells Type Trail and Colmcille Illuminations.

Kells and Type

Kells Type Trail was started in 2010 by local typographer – and Kells Locals Heroes member – Mark Smith. The trail, which takes place in August each year, sees lettering-based art displayed in local shopfronts and public spaces throughout the town, forming a town-wide exhibition. The theme for the trail varies each year and exhibitors range from professional artists and typographers to community groups and school children.



Kells Type Trail exhibit. Image: Kells Type Trail via [Facebook](#).



Kells Type Trail exhibit. Image: Eimear O'Connell.

In keeping with the theme of lettering and type, in 2016 a disused printer's workshop, complete with a working nineteenth-century Wharfedale press, was discovered in Kells. The workshop had been left untouched since the death of its owner in 1983.

Today the press has been restored – with funding from the Heritage Council and others – and the former Sawmills building in the town is in the process of redevelopment as a National Typography Centre. Works on the National Typography Centre are expected to be complete by the end of 2024 and the new centre will house the restored Wharfedale press. The centre will offer training opportunities as well as exhibition and studio space.

To quote Mark Smith: *“The aim would be to establish a Centre of typographic excellence, building on our heritage of lettering as an artform dating back 1400 years or so to the Book of Kells.”*

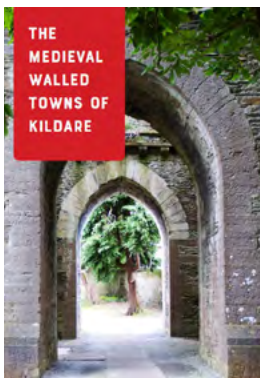
Text relating to The Walled Town of Kells by Chris Murphy, Historian. Remainder by the IWTN Project Manager, with many thanks to Ken Murray, Kells Local Heroes and Mark Smith, Kells Type Trail, for their input. Any errors or omissions PM's own.

Architectural rendering of the new National Typography Centre at Kells Sawmills. Image: via [OC+C Architects](#).



Spotlight on Recent IWTN Publications

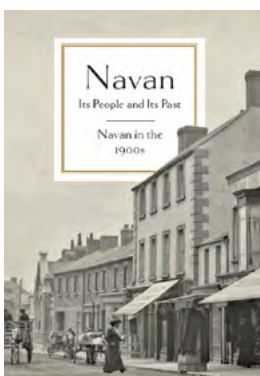
In this month's issue, we're highlighting some of the fantastic publications funded through the Irish Walled Towns Network Interpretation & Events Grants Scheme in recent years.



Hot off the presses is this guide to **The Medieval Walled Towns of Kildare**. Produced by Abarta Heritage for Kildare County Council in 2023, the guide features text by Sharon Green (one of whose many hats is that of IWTN Town

Representative for Castledermot) and design by Sarah Nylund. High quality photographs and illustrations, along with the well-researched text, make this lovely booklet a delight to read.

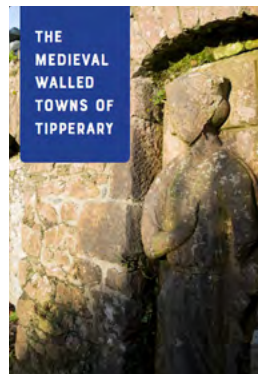
Available for download [here](#).



'Navan: Its People and its Past' is a collection of late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century photographs of Navan town from the Lawrence and Eason collections in the National Library of Ireland.

This booklet was published by Navan and District Historical Society for their Navan Its People & Its Past seminar held in the Solstice Arts Centre during Heritage Week 2023. The seminar was partly funded through the Irish Walled Towns Network Interpretation and Events Grants Scheme 2023.

Available for download [here](#).



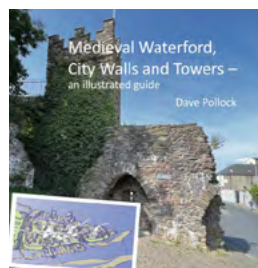
The original that kicked off the series, this guide to **The Medieval Walled Towns of Tipperary** was produced by Abarta Heritage for Tipperary County Council in 2022.

With text by Sharon Green and design by Sarah Nylund, the booklet focuses on the towns of Carrick-on-Suit, Cashel, Clonmel and Fethard.

Available for download [here](#).

An accompanying online Storymap was produced as a follow-up to the booklet in 2023.

Available for download [here](#).



Last but not least. This beautiful Illustrated **Guide to Medieval Waterford, City Walls and Towers** was produced by Waterford City and County Council with funding from the

Irish Walled Towns Network Interpretation and Events Grants Scheme in 2022.

Written and illustrated by Dave Pollock, the booklet proposes three walking routes – the compact tour, the medium tour and the grand tour – each taking in key sites in Waterford's medieval town and defences.

Combining concise text, contemporary photographs and detailed reconstruction drawings, this guide will help visitors to recognise and understand Waterford's impressive medieval monuments as they survive today, while also picturing what they looked like in medieval times.

Available for download [here](#).

News and Updates

Grants 2024



IWTN Interpretation and Events Grants 2024 are currently open for applications. The closing date is 20 March. Please note that this has been extended to accommodate the March bank holiday. For 2024 the scheme will continue to emphasise Walled Towns Days, small festivals, conservation training & physical and online interpretation.

IWTN Pocket Forests Workshop for National Tree Week

Join us in Buttevant on Friday 8th March for a hands-on demonstration of how to plant a 'pocket forest' using the Miyawaki method. Pocket forests are ideal for urban sites. They can be as small as 6m squared (about the size of a parking space) and are a really effective way of helping to restore urban biodiversity.

Register [here](#).



IWTN AGM 2024

Our Annual General Meeting for 2024 will take place on 21 March at the Swift Cultural Centre in Trim. As well as the business of the AGM, we'll have the opportunity to catch up over a cuppa or a meal - and to visit some of Trim's impressive medieval defences. I look forward to seeing many of you there.

IWTN/GLAS TFB Joint Event: Managing Vegetation on Historic Masonry

A stakeholder forum aimed at developing best-practice guidance for managing vegetation on historic masonry will take place in Athenry on 11 April. Save the date if this is something you'd like to participate in. Register your interest by emailing iwtn@heritagecouncil.ie



Old Town: New Place



The National Built Heritage Service (Dept. of Housing, Local Government & Heritage) is holding a symposium to raise awareness of the cultural significance of Irish towns and to support the development of specialist skills within Local Authorities and practitioners dealing with built heritage character. Old Town: New Place will take place in Kilkenny on Monday 4 March 2024. Details and registration [here](#).

This event is an action of the National Policy on Architecture/New European Bauhaus and in support of Town Centre First policy and the new THRIVE funding scheme under the ERDF Regional Programmes.

OPW Stonemasonry Apprenticeships

Members and/or their networks may be interested to know that the Office of Public Works (OPW) National Monuments is currently offering training opportunities for an Apprentice in the Craft of Stonecutting & Stonemasonry in each of the following locations: Foxford, Co. Mayo, Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny and Mallow, Co. Cork. The closing date for applications to all three positions is 5.30pm on Thursday 29 February 2024.

Further details [here](#).



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

Originally developed as part of the Kells Colmcille 1500 celebrations in 2021, the Colmcille illuminations have become an annual Kells event – on show during Heritage Week and to mark Colmcille's birthday on December 7th.



Contact Us:

Please do get in touch at 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



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



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