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The Main Guard, Clonmel.
Image supplied by Marie McMahon, Tipperary Museum of Hidden History.
Hello everyone and welcome to the October 2022 edition of the Walled Town Crier.

As the days draw in and we approach the festival of Samhain, a reminder to you all to pick your sloes and blackberries now before the Púca befouls them on Halloween night!

A tradition of autumn harvest celebrations survives in many of our historic towns and villages and the IWTN member towns are no exception. From Clonmel Apple Fest to the Kilkenny Fruit Tree Project, towns around the network have been making the most of nature’s bounty this season.

On that note, we’re delighted to announce that Nature and Biodiversity in Historic Towns will be the focus of this year’s annual IWTN conference, taking place in Athlone on 23 and 24 of November. We have all of the details in this issue.

Also in this issue: we’ll be getting to know Clonmel, taking a look at an ancient tradition in Carrick-on-Suir and hearing more about Halloween festivities in Derry. There’s also a note on some upcoming changes to the IWTN social media pages.

I look forward to meeting many of you in person in Athlone. In the meantime, enjoy this month’s issue.

Warmest Regards,
Eimear

Eimear O’Connell, IWTN Project Manager.
Getting to Know Clonmel

With thanks to Marie McMahon, Managing Curator Tipperary Museum of Hidden History and IWTN Town Representative for Clonmel.

If the IWTN were in the habit of handing out awards based on town names, Cluain Meala – the meadow of honey – must surely be in the running for ‘most poetic’. Town representative Marie McMahon, from Tipperary Museum of Hidden History, has kindly provided us with the following text, so that we can all get to know Clonmel a little better.

Situated on the banks of the River Suir and framed by the undulating mountains of the Comeraghs and Slievenamon, Clonmel is a vibrant, bustling town with a wealth of historical and cultural amenities. The Main Guard, originally the courthouse of the Ormond Palatinate, is one of the town’s most distinctive landmarks. Built in 1675 by James Butler, Duke of Ormond, and located at the heart of the town, the building has served many functions over the centuries – market house, barracks, public house, and now museum.

The West Gate mirrors the Main Guard on O’Connell Street. Built on the site of a medieval town gate, the Tudor Inspired structure was built in 1831 by a merchant named Joyce. A curious relief portrait in stone adorns the west side of the gate, depicting the writer Lawrence Sterne inscribed ‘Born in Clonmel, 24th November, 1713.’
The Walls

On 8 April 1298, Otho de Grandison, Lord of the Manor of Clonmel, was given a ‘murage’ grant allowing him to raise money through local taxes to build a town wall. This, and a series of further grants in the 14th century, were likely intended to replace an existing earth-and-timber wall dating to William de Burgo’s governorship in the early 13th century. An encircling wall was an essential step in the development of any medieval town, protecting it from attack but also controlling access to its markets. When completed, Clonmel’s walls enclosed an area of 14 hectares. The walls were 7.5-8.5m high, 1.5m thick and surrounded by a 7m wide fosse or ditch. There were five gates in the medieval walls: the North, South, East, West and Water Gate. The present West Gate was built on the site of the original medieval gate. In addition to the defended gates, there seem to have been some nine towers built along the walls. A substantial phase of rebuilding of the masonry defences also appears to have taken place in the
15th century, when “lately contructued great walls, towers and fortifications” are mentioned in a roll of Henry V (1413–22). The area outside of the town walls where the native Irish lived was known as Irishtown and - as is the case in many towns in Ireland – is still known by that name today.

Cromwell and the Walls

The first Cromwellian troops arrived outside Clonmel in February 1650. The defending Irish commander, Hugh Dubh O’Neill, wrote immediately for help and was told that if he could hold out for ten days the full force of the Irish Confederate Army would march to his aid. Two months later, O’Neill was still alone but was now facing Cromwell himself with a force of 14,000 foot soldiers, 600 horsemen, plus artillery. O’Neill commanded a garrison of just 1,600. On 16 May, Cromwell’s cannons smashed open a massive breach in the walls and the following day his infantry flooded through. It was a trap. O’Neill and his garrison were waiting for them inside. As the Cromwellian infantry tried to flee they were pressed back by their own advancing cavalry. Cromwell lost between 1,500 and 2,500 troops that day alone – the single biggest loss ever suffered by the New Model Army. Despite his victory O’Neill knew the defence was hopeless and that night he and his men secretly escaped from the town. The Mayor of Clonmel, John White, had agreed the plan and surrendered Clonmel to Cromwell without telling him that O’Neill had escaped. When Cromwell found out, he was furious and demanded to know why he had not been told – to which the Mayor replied that he had never asked.

The Walls Today

The defences having been comprehensively reinforced with bastions and ramparts in the late 17th century, Clonmel experienced an industrial revolution in the the 18th and 19th centuries. Whole stretches of the walls were demolished to allow for the expansion of the town and the construction of mills and warehouses. The best surviving stretch of walls today can be seen at Old St Mary’s churchyard. The wall extends for some 200m along the north and west sides and includes three 15th century towers and gives a wonderful character to the town.

Clonmel’s many attractions

Clonmel today is a vibrant and bustling town. It has benefitted from public realm works at the former Kickham Barracks site, making it a very attractive town to live, work in or visit. As
well as its many historic monuments – some of which have been mentioned above - it has a well-established culture and arts scene, with the Clonmel Junction Arts Festival in July, Apple Festival in September, South Tipperary Art Centre, The Narrow Space, South Tipperary Art Group and many local seasonal events coordinated by local communities in association with Tipperary County Council.

The town has an eclectic range of shops, eateries and galleries, as well as the TUS digital campus, a high-spec sports track, slalom river course and numerous sports fields. Tipperary Museum of Hidden History is a state-of-the-art visitor experience. Completely re-imagined and redesigned in 2019, the new Museum brings Tipperary’s rich hidden history vividly to life through characters, stories and one of the largest museum collections in Ireland. A ‘Butler Trail’ app has been created by Tipperary Tourism to identify unique architectural structures dotted across Tipperary, including those in Clonmel.

**PM Note:** The original text has been edited for inclusion in the ezine by the IWTN project manager. Any errors or omissions PM’s own.
We’re delighted to announce that the IWTN annual conference will take place on 23 and 24 November in the Radisson Blu Hotel, Athlone. This will be our first in-person event since we launched our current Action Plan in February 2022 and we’re very much looking forward to seeing as many of you as can make it.

Our theme this year is ‘Nature and biodiversity in historic towns’. It’s a timely topic, and one that I know there’s been a lot of interest in from around the network.

We’re going to be talking about the Anglo-Norman settlement and how that impacted the natural environment, about rivers and the archaeology of the Shannon, about wall flora and the importance of green corridors in historic towns. We’ll also be looking at key nature-friendly projects in some of our member towns: soft-capping of the historic masonry walls in Castledermot, St. Brigid’s monastic garden in Kildare and an exciting art project in Kilkenny that focused on the natural and cultural heritage of the River Nore.

On day two we’ll have the opportunity to tour the historic walls and Athlone Castle in the company of experts, looking at their history, ecology and conservation.

Athlone is where the IWTN started, some 17 years ago, and we hope that this year’s annual conference will be an opportunity for all of us to reconnect after the necessary distance of the last couple of years. We’re looking forward to sharing lunch, chatting over coffee and exchanging updates on plans and projects from around the network.

Attendance is free and booking is required. Please register via the Eventbrite link below, where you’ll also find accommodation and transport information.

**Book conference tickets**

See full programme on following page.
IWTN Annual Conference

Nature & Biodiversity in Historic Towns

Athlone, 23-24 November 2022

Wednesday 23 November

10.00 Welcome and Opening Remarks
   IWTN Chair

10.20 How the Anglo-Norman settlement impacted landscape and biodiversity
   Michael Corcoran, Archaeologist

11.00 The archaeology of the River Shannon
   Christy Cunniffe, Archaeologist

11.40 Break

12.10 Urban biodiversity: the importance of green corridors and stepping stones
   Lorcán Scott, Wildlife Officer, The Heritage Council

12.50 Walls as habitats: the wonderful world of wall flora
   George Smith, Ecologist

1.30 Lunch

2.30 Soft-capping of historic masonry: spotlight on conservation works in Castledermot
   Aoife Howard, Conservation Engineer

3.10 Designing a monastic garden in the heart of Kildare town
   Mary O’Connor, Kildare Heritage Centre/Fiona McGowan, Ecologist

3.50 A magic, moving, living thing: art, ecology and archaeology on the River Nore
   Mary Conroy, Artist

4.30 Closing remarks

Thursday 24 November

10.00 Welcome and Opening Remarks

10.20 The history of Athlone and of its defences
   Harman Murtagh, author of the Historic Towns Atlas for Athlone

11.00 A guided tour of the town walls and historic monuments of Athlone, including:
   - Conservation works to the town walls - Melanie McQuade, Heritage Officer
   - The history and development of the walls - Harman Murtagh, Historian
   - Biodiversity and vegetation management - Ecologist [TBC]
   - Athlone Castle and visitor centre - Carmel Duffy, Athlone Arts & Tourism

1.00 Lunch and farewell
Awakening the Walled City: Halloween in Derry

The party that became Europe’s biggest Halloween festival.

Halloween, 1985: 50 people turned up for a fancy dress party in Derry city’s Castle Bar. The party became an annual event, and then a fancy dress parade and in 2019, an estimated 140,000 people attended what was by then a week-long festival. Billed as Europe’s biggest Halloween festival, it regularly features in international lists of ‘best places to spend Halloween’ and attracts visitors from all over the world.

In common with many such events, the festival was forced to pivot to an online programme in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, it was the first large-scale public event on the island of Ireland to return to in-person programming, but operated a reduced programme in line with public health guidance – and without its iconic parade. This year the festival, and the parade, are back with a bang.
The programme’s reach now extends out across the region to Strabane and over the border to Buncrana, bringing with it the benefits of increased visitor numbers, but the historic walled city is still at the core of the festivities.

“Awakening the Walled City” is a trail of events and installations focused within the historic core. It incorporates the history and stories of the city’s heritage landmarks. Storytelling and the traditional folklore associated with Halloween feature prominently.

In the words of the organisers: **Derry is renowned the world over for its warmth and hospitality throughout the year but as our city comes alive once more to toast Samhain, we hope you will join us in 2022 to soak up the stories, the culture, and the farewell to Summer. The 400-year-old fortified ramparts of our city will be no match for the darkness of the spirits that are awakened.**

Derry Halloween runs from 28–31 October. The full programme of events is available [here](#).
An ancient tradition revealed in Carrick-on-Suir

Viewers of RTÉ News on 1st September last will have spotted a fascinating news story from IWTN member town Carrick-on-Suir. Record low water levels in the River Suir at that time resulted in a flat stone, known locally as Kenny’s Flag or Leac na Tine, being exposed to dry air for the first time in living memory. When this happens, tradition dictates that a fire is lit on the rock at low tide.

Local fisherman, Ralph O’Callaghan, who lit the fire on this occasion, spoke about how the story of the tradition had been handed down in his family from generation to generation. Despite the fact that the stone had not been uncovered in his own lifetime, or perhaps even in his father’s lifetime, it was often spoken about and water levels were carefully watched.

Local historian and writer, Michael Coady, spoke about the historic importance of water levels to the many mill-based industries in the town and of the lighting of the fire on leac na tine in times of drought as a type of ‘rainmaking ritual’, which might encourage water levels to rise once more.

The full report can be viewed here.

IWTN Social Media

In line with a new Heritage Council approach to social media communications, we will be discontinuing the IWTN Facebook and Twitter accounts from Friday 04 November next. IWTN news and updates will continue to be shared via the main Heritage Council accounts and network members can continue to forward items that they wish to share to the IWTN Project Manager at iwt@heritagecouncil.ie.

Thank you for all of your support for the IWTN social media presence over the years. We hope that you’ll follow us over to the main Heritage Council accounts to continue the conversation.

Heritage Council Facebook
Heritage Council Twitter
Heritage Council Instagram
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

Watercolour image (undated) showing Suir Island and the Quay of Clonmel from Newport Bridge. Image supplied by Marie Mc Mahon.