



1958 - 2008

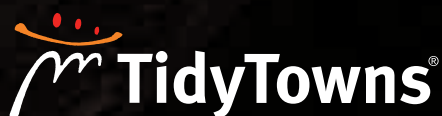


# THE TIDY TOWNS OF IRELAND

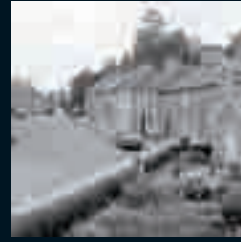
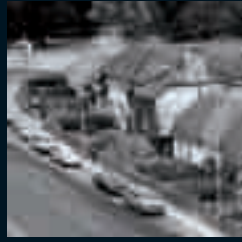
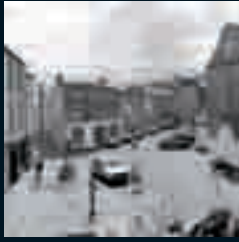
*Celebrating 50 years*



Comhshaol, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
Environment, Heritage and Local Government



**SuperValu**



Comhshaoil, Oidhreacht agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
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**SuperValu**

*'Better keep yourself clean and  
bright; you are the window through  
which you must see the world'*

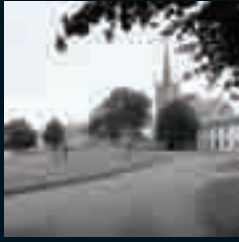
- George Bernard Shaw

In the past half-century, hundreds of towns and villages throughout Ireland have participated in the national TidyTown competition. Originally launched by Bord Fáilte as an initiative to encourage the fledgling tourism industry, the competition quickly became a rallying cause for communities throughout the country, determined to maintain and improve their local environment.

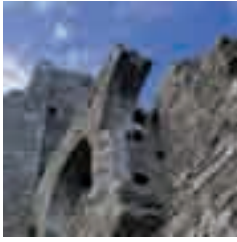
In 1995, responsibility for TidyTown passed from Bord Fáilte to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The Department has been organising the competition since, with the support of national sponsor SuperValu.

As the challenges facing the environment have changed, so too has the competition, and today, sustainable development, biodiversity and waste management join landscaping, litter control and overall tidiness as key competition criteria.

This publication, focusing on the winning entrants since the first competition in 1958, is dedicated to the many thousands of volunteers who have made Tidy Towns the national institution it is today.







## CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF WINNERS

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Editor: Linda Daly  
Email: ldaly@whitespace.ie

Photographic editor: Conor McCabe  
Email: cmccabe@whitespace.ie

Sub-editor: Eithne Dunne  
Email: edunne@whitespace.ie

Client services director: Katie Kennedy  
Email: kkennedy@whitespace.ie

Photography: Conor McCabe, except: archive photos, courtesy of Fáilte Ireland; Tidy Islands, courtesy of Billy Flynn, ecologist, Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants, and Fáilte Ireland; Tidy Gaeltacht, courtesy of Declan O'Doherty and Michelle Doherty.

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## ADARE, CO LIMERICK

winner, 1976

# A little bit special



**DESPITE THE FACT** that the population of Adare has trebled since it won the national Tidy Towns title in 1976, the place has managed to retain charm by the bucket load, as anyone who has visited in recent years will confirm.

With its thatched cottages and Tudor-style houses, not to mention its park, river-bank walk and 13th-Century abbey, it has more than a little in the way of heritage.

Founded by the first Earl of Kildare in the early 14th century, the Augustinian Priory in Adare has a varied past, having been suppressed during the Henry VIII years, given to the local Church of Ireland in the early 19th Century and then converted into a schoolhouse.

A century later, the Franciscan friary was founded by the seventh Earl of Kildare, but almost 200 years later in 1647 it found itself under attack and burned. Its remains are located inside the demesne of Adare Manor, and include a choir, cloisters and nave.

Adare Manor itself is an architectural masterpiece, which was home to the Earls of Dunraven for 250 years. Set on 840 acres of land along the River Maigue, the 18th-Century manor was designed in a Tudor-Gothic style. The Dunravens are generally considered responsible for the modern village that is Adare today.

It is this heritage that the people of Adare have worked so hard to maintain over the years. Mary Liston Byrne, honorary secretary of the Adare Tidy Towns and Development Association, was born and reared in the town.

“In 1976, Adare had a population of just 500; today it’s more like 1,500.” Byrne says the fact that it was a more manageable size made it easier to maintain in those days. “It was such a small community back then, but the town’s individuality and charm has thankfully been preserved as much as possible up to today.”

Situated just 17km from Limerick on the N21, the main road from Limerick to Kerry, Adare enjoys an accessible location. While many people visit the town because of its aesthetic appeal and architectural features, many also come for the multitude of amenities in and around it. Also, Adare has no shortage of hotels and guesthouses.

A major attraction in Adare for those with wedding bells in mind is its 13th-Century Trinitarian Abbey. “The abbey is very popular for weddings, internationally as well as nationally,” says Byrne. “We get a lot of Americans in particular coming to get married there.”

In recent years, while there has been a decline in the residential population in the main body of the town, there has been a great increase in the size of the business





community and a lot of development as a result in the hinterland around Adare.

“When these changes began happening, there were submissions made to the county council to put preservation orders in place so any new development would adhere to the existing character and heritage of Adare.”

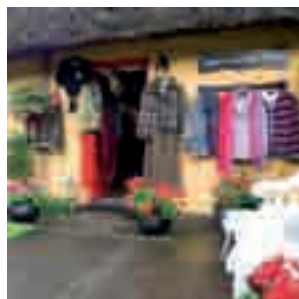
According to Byrne, these efforts paid off, as developments around the town have been tastefully done and are very much in keeping with the older features.

“We still have the thatched cottages, the 13th-Century buildings, the abbey and the churches, and a lot of work goes into preserving those,” she says.

The park in Adare adds to its charm, as does the walk alongside the River Maigue. The river-bank walk is a TidyTowns project. The heritage centre in the town includes a tourist office, library and restaurant, and visitors can get a real feel for the place through the audio-visual displays. Adare also boasts fantastic equestrian facilities and golf amenities.



Adare, c.1976



## On the Tourist Trail

### Adare Heritage Centre

The centre offers a novel way for visitors to learn the history of Adare and its surroundings. The story is told through re-enactments and audio-visual presentations in numerous languages.

### Adare/Desmond Castle

Overlooking the River Maigue, this large square tower is one of the focal points of Adare. Guided tours are available during the summer months.

### Equestrian/polo facilities

Adare has a number of facilities for horse and polo enthusiasts.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## ARDAGH, CO LONGFORD

winner, 1989, 1996, 1998

# Small but perfectly formed

A TRADITIONAL ESTATE village, Ardagh features spectacular stone walls and Tudor-Gothic cottages, among other important architectural features.

Most of this architecture can be traced back to designs done by a Victorian architect for the Fetherston family (who owned and ran the estate around which the village grew up) in the mid-1800s. The village's centrepiece is a stunning Gothic clock tower.

A designated heritage village, it was here that St Patrick appointed St Mel one of the first Irish bishops. Ardagh also features in Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Ardagh Heritage Centre — in the old schoolhouse — has a unique selection of attractions. Put in place with the help of funding from both the EU and Bord Fáilte (now Fáilte Ireland), it tells the tale of Ardagh in terms of history, literature and storytelling. In doing so, it draws on the rich fabric of Ardagh life through the ages, including its association with Goldsmith, Sir Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth.

The village's architecture, heritage and other aesthetic attractions have combined to bring in both national and international visitors, including the more discerning tourist, over the years.

Ardagh has changed extraordinarily, as most rural towns and villages have, since the Celtic tiger. It has come a very long way since it first entered the Tidy Towns competition in 1958.

With a population of roughly 200, Ardagh has always belonged to the smallest category of the competition, but this has not been reflected in the size of its achievements over the years.

No one knows more about this than Seamus Kenny,



who was Tidy Towns chairman in Ardagh for approximately 15 years in the Eighties and Nineties.

As Kenny explains, it was a slow process — the people involved with the Tidy Towns in Ardagh worked to improve the place bit by bit over many years before the awards started pouring in.

“We had a protracted evolution. When Ardagh first entered the Tidy Towns in 1958, it was a somewhat tired rural hamlet.”

But the hard work paid off and, in 1967, the village started reaping the rewards when it won its first category award. Since then, Kenny and his successors have obviously been doing something right, as the village scooped the national title in 1989, 1996 and 1998.





Its hat trick of national TidyTowns wins, combined with its win in the British Airways Tourism for Tomorrow Environmental Awareness competition in 1998 and several European awards, meant the village got more attention than ever before. “It became a desirable place to come and live, which created a certain amount of new housing,” says Kenny. When completed, he adds, this new housing will probably see the village’s population increase by 100pc.

“We have had a good foundation to build on,” says Kenny. “It took 25 years to restore all the walls and old houses, many of which were semi-derelict. “We created some open spaces and planted over 3,000 native broad-leaf trees — it was all about enhancing and renewing what we had inherited.”

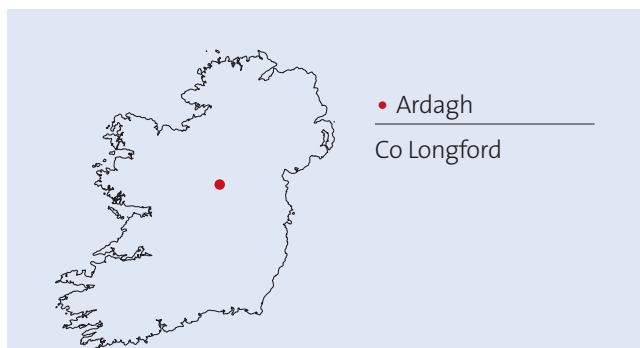
However, local planners have been very careful to monitor developments around the village, as it’s very important that locals are not overwhelmed.

Because of this, Ardagh still maintains its close-knit village feel, with pubs, a grocery store, a post office and above all a great sense of community at its heart. “Its character as a rural idyll is still dominant,” says Kenny.

Those involved in the TidyTowns in Ardagh are very active. There is now a successful restaurant in situ as part of the visitors’ centre, which, Kenny says, has proven a great facility for tourists who come to find out about the village. Many of these are surprised at just how small the place is, considering its architectural wealth. “[Ardagh] is an architectural gem; maybe there is a lot to be said for the worthiness of small places!” says Kenny.



Ardagh, c.1989



## On the Tourist Trail

### Ardagh Heritage Centre

Built in 1898 as the old schoolhouse in Ardagh, Ardagh Heritage Centre is home to a unique selection of objects, featuring many stories from village life down through the ages.

### Lough Naback

Fishing enthusiasts can make the most of Lough Naback, which holds a good stock of wild brown trout.

### Ardagh Neighbourhood Park

Walkers, flora lovers and art critics will delight in a visit to this park, which features over 2,000 native Irish trees and a sculpture by Eamonn O’Doherty.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## ARDMORE, CO WATERFORD

winner, 1992

# The stunning south-east



**SITUATED ON THE** most westerly point of the South East Coastal Drive that stretches to Tramore, Ardmore is an attractive and picturesque coastal town with a rich monastic heritage.

As one of the oldest Christian settlements in Ireland, having been founded by St Declan in 416AD, Ardmore has some distinguishing historical features. Its oldest building, the round tower, which dates back to the 12th Century, is one of the best-preserved examples of its type in the country.

St Declan's Cathedral, with its Romanesque sculptures depicting Biblical scenes and a very early image of a harp, dates back to the 9th Century when Ardmore was an ecclesiastical settlement. Meanwhile, St Declan's Oratory is believed to house the grave of St Declan.

The long, sandy beach is perhaps Ardmore's greatest asset and the destination for many visitors to the village. In addition to this, the many scenic walks around Ardmore attract nature lovers seeking some tranquility and fresh air. The cliff walk around Ardmore Head has some notable historical features dotted along the route such as St Declan's Hermitage and St Declan's Well.

Walks around Goat Island and Whiting Bay are also popular. The beaches around Ardmore are perfect for sea angling,

especially for bass. For those interested in hill walking, the Comeragh mountains are close by and the Comeragh Mountain Walking Festival is held each year in October. St Declan's Way, which follows the footsteps of St Patrick from Cashel to Ardmore, passes through the Comeragh Mountains.

Padraig Mac Suibhne, chairman of the Ardmore Tidy Towns committee, says the historical monuments attract many tourists each year, especially those from other countries. "Heritage events, such as tours of the round tower and cathedral, are held to promote the town's historical lineage," he says.

With a population of 500, this number swells to 1,000 in the summer months due to the people holidaying and visiting beaches in the Ardmore area. There are a lot of holiday homes and mobile-home parks around Ardmore. "The camper-van population also come in the summer, as do day visitors," says Mac Suibhne.

Sea kayaking has become a popular pursuit for those wishing to explore Ardmore's coastline. The town also has a small but vibrant fishing community and a boat cove where boats are moored each summer. The five golf courses located near Ardmore are an additional boost to the town.





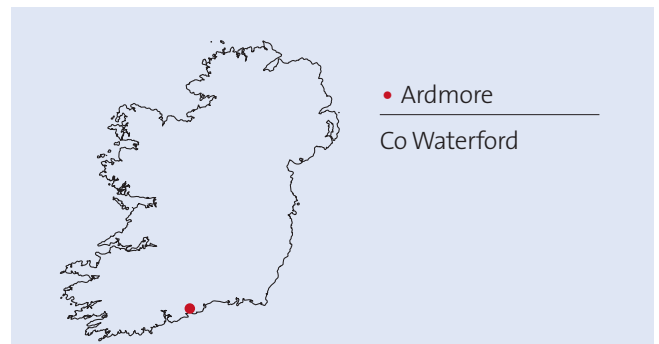


In terms of enticing those seeking a more relaxed way of life, Ardmore is an attractive coastal location to live and work in. Less than one hour away from the cities of Waterford and Cork and close to Youghal and Dungarvan, it is also a good choice for commuters.

Mac Suibhne says: “It has its benefits from a location perspective. Some ready-built industrial units are also available in the area for small enterprises to rent.”

The overall winner of the TidyTowns competition in 1992, Ardmore TidyTowns continues to progress a number of landscaping projects, including the planting of native trees.

Along with the town’s historical built legacy, it is a place of natural beauty. As Mac Suibhne suggests — it’s definitely a place everyone should visit “at least once”.



• Ardmore  
Co Waterford

## On the Tourist Trail

### Ardmore Round Tower and Cathedral

A 12th-Century monument to Irish monastic life, the round tower is one of the best-known structures of its kind in Ireland.

### Ardmore Bay

A long, sandy beach, Ardmore Bay captures the imagination of visitors and residents alike.

### Grange Castle and Gardens

Restored by the heritage services, this late 15th-Century tower house lies on seven acres with parklands and walkways.

### St Declan’s Way

This 94km walk to Cashel features majestic views.

### The Look-Out Post

This single-storey, one-room building was erected by the Government in one day in 1940 and used during World War II to log passing ships and aircraft.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## AUGHRIM, CO WICKLOW

winner, 2007

# On top form

**RESTING IN A** breathtaking hillside valley in south Co Wicklow, the 2007 national winner of the Tidy Towns competition, Aughrim, is a vibrant and growing town. It lies close to natural attractions such as the Vale of Avoca, the Meeting of the Waters, the Wicklow Way and Glendalough.

Poised at the junction of several mountain valleys, near where the Ow and Derry rivers meet, the name 'Aughrim' comes from the Irish 'Eachdhruim', which translates as 'the horse ridge'.

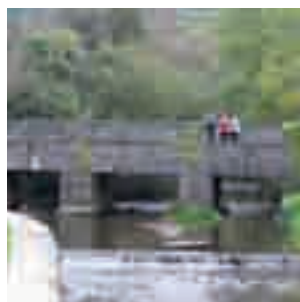
Originally an estate town, Aughrim was traditionally an important business centre and particularly famous for its wheat milling. Dominant buildings including mills, forges, churches, market houses and bridges retain Aughrim's link with bygone days.

Because the town is located close to a granite quarry, this particular stone was used extensively in the locality in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Most of the buildings and structures in Aughrim were built with granite, which has given the town its unique look and its nickname, the 'granite village'.

Aughrim is steeped in history, and has links with many historical figures. In 1798, General Joseph Holt of the United Irishmen was engaged in a battle with Hunter Gowen of the Crown forces at Rednagh Bridge.

As Aughrim is situated in a very scenic woodland area, it has become a haven for walkers. Other local tourist attractions include the Sean Linehan Walk, a man-made 4km walk that follows the meandering flow of the Ballycreen Brook, which was created in memory of one of the founding members of Aughrim Tidy Towns.

Barry Moules, treasurer of the local Tidy Towns committee,



says being named overall winner of the Tidy Towns competition in 2007 helped put Aughrim on the map. "All of the hard work was finally rewarded, which proved that success in the Tidy Towns competition is possible no matter what." He adds that each and every individual in Aughrim has played a role in its regeneration.

Bernard Keating, chairman of the Aughrim Tidy Towns committee, says new and expanding businesses are having a 'rejuvenating' effect on the built environment because construction is staying in sympathy with the existing character of the town. "Almost all business premises have had facelifts in recent times. The new stone wall under construction by Wicklow County Council on the approach to the village from the Arklow side is also in keeping with Aughrim's character," he explains.





With the increase in tourism, service businesses are also expanding in Aughtim. In addition, because the town is located inside Dublin's commuter belt, many people are relocating there for a more relaxed quality of life.

Aughtim has experienced a large increase in population, due to five new housing developments. The figure currently stands at 1,700, but is rising rapidly. A country market is held every Saturday in the Pavilion Grounds, and there are several other focal points where new residents can mingle and get to know each other.

Aughtim TidyTowns Ltd was formed in 1987. In 1992, the committee decided to purchase eight acres of land in the town and set about fundraising for this purchase. This land is now the location of the National Disabled Angling Facility, which includes a four-acre lake.

Keating explains: "The facility, with its specially constructed wheelchair-accessible fishing points, was completed in 1996. Ten years later, the new 3,000-sq ft Pavilion was finished and it's now a meeting place for the community and many of its different organisations." In 2007, a new bowling green was also constructed on the site. "Intense fundraising, along with LEADER funding from Wicklow Rural Partnership, was needed to meet the great costs incurred."

Children in Aughtim are also encouraged to embrace civic pride. The town's primary school has Green Flag status, an organic garden, a composting facility and a wormery. Recycling is high on the school's agenda. "The school children are, as far as is practicable, included in the various activities of TidyTowns," Keating explains.

With the next generation of Aughtim residents on board, its continued success looks assured.



Aughtim, c.2007



## On the Tourist Trail

### Rednagh Bridge

Located south of Aughtim, Rednagh Bridge was the site of an engagement during the 1798 rebellion.

### Sean Linehan Walk

This man-made walk, created in memory of one of the founding members of Aughtim TidyTowns, meanders for 4km along the Ballycreen Brook.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).







## BALLYCONNELL, CO CAVAN

winner, 1971, 1974

# A heroic tradition

A CO CAVAN town named after a legendary Celtic warrior is nowadays making its own heroic efforts as a tidy town, prospering community and very desirable tourist destination.

Ballyconnell is situated on the junction of four townlands — Annagh, Cullyleenan, Doon and Derryginny — in the parish of Tomregan. It is just one mile from the border with Northern Ireland.

The town is the reputed burial place of Conall Cearnach, a 1st-Century chief of the Red Branch Knights, who it is claimed was in Jerusalem at the time of the crucifixion and who died here when attacked by Connaught men.

Like many places featured in legend, Ballyconnell is beautifully located beneath Slieve Russell on the River Erne.

Its name comes from the Irish 'Bél Átha Conaill', which means 'The entrance to Conall's ford'. There is a double court tomb in the town, dating from about 3,000BC.

For visitors to Ballyconnell, places of interest include the 17th-Century Church of Ireland church, which is surrounded by earthen fortifications. There are also two diamond-shaped redoubts here, which date from the war between James II and William of Orange in 1689.

Another curiosity is a replica of the Killycluggin Stone, which is on the outskirts of the town. The original is now on display in the National Museum in Dublin and the stone is believed to date from the Iron Age and the time of Conall Cearnach. Interestingly, the Celtic motifs inscribed on the stone are comparable with inscriptions found in Switzerland and nowhere else.

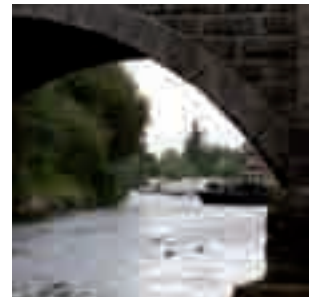
Downriver from the town is Lough Garadice, which is described as a jewel in Ireland's waterways network, as it is dotted with wooded islands that are said to be very good spots for fishing.

In sporting history, Ballyconnell was the birthplace in 1885 of the first GAA football club in both the county and the province, hence the name of the club today — Ballyconnell First Ulsters.

A more recent claim to fame for the town was its victory in the TidyTowns competition in 1971 and again in 1974, when it shared the national title with Trim, Co Meath.

Every summer, floral displays decorate the streets and the bridge over the river.

Local businesses take part in an 'adopt a road' scheme whereby they each take responsibility for allocated



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stretches of the town's streets and approach roads, says committee member James Masterton, owner of the local SuperValu store. The store does its bit by sponsoring the transportation of the town's communal lawnmower.

Thanks to major public and private investment, Ballyconnell has seen new businesses opening and now has a growing population.

Much public investment has gone into the Shannon-erne Waterway, formerly known as the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell or Woodford Canal, which was originally built in 1860.

It was effectively reconstructed before it reopened in 1994 and the canal is busier with tourist traffic today than it ever was as a commercial waterway. Investment is continuing — for example, a new footbridge is to be built at the moorings in Ballyconnell.

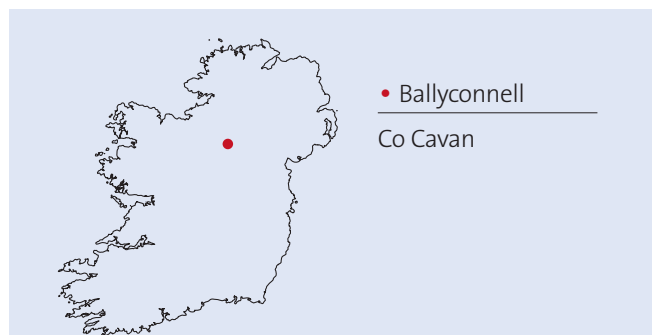
The Woodford river in Ballyconnell also represents a good spot for walkers, as it takes them as far as Annagh Woods. The river is navigable by cruiser and links to the rivers Shannon and Erne. Fishing enthusiasts can take advantage of the many good spots along the Woodford.

There are various sites of archaeological interest in and around Ballyconnell, such as the promontory fort at Ballyhugh.

Outdoor types will be pleased to note that the Ballyconnell area is a popular destination for both cycling and walking.



Ballyconnell, c.1971



## On the Tourist Trail

### Shannon-erne Waterway

The Shannon-erne Waterway was reopened in 1994 for canoes, boats and cruisers.

### Archaeological sites

Numerous sites of archaeological interest are dotted around Ballyconnell, including the promontory fort at Ballyhugh.

### Mountain biking

Visitors can avail of cycling and walking holiday packages around Ballyconnell.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## BALLYJAMESDUFF, CO CAVAN

winner, 1966, 1967

# Blue skies all the way



**BEFORE WINNING THE** national Tidy Towns award two years in a row, in 1966 and 1967, the greatest claim to fame of Ballyjamesduff was that it featured in a song composed by a drainage inspector. That drainage inspector, Percy French, was no ordinary civil engineer and his song, *Paddy Reilly*, put Ballyjamesduff on the map, says Savina Donohue, administrator of the Cavan County Museum.

While Percy could still find Ballyjamesduff on a map and while it is still the case that the “grass it is green around Ballyjamesduff and the blue sky is over it all”, the town has changed substantially since the 19th Century. Indeed, there is one feature in the town that the songwriter wouldn't recognise — the Percy French statue in the centre. This is modelled on local shopkeeper Fintan Cronin, because no one knows what Percy French actually looked like!

Another change is that the town's former St Clare's Convent now houses the award-winning Cavan County Museum, and yet another is that Ballyjamesduff has the highest proportion of manufacturing workers (38pc) in Ireland, according to the 2006 census.

Another notable statistic is that Ballyjamesduff can boast having the highest pub-to-person ratio in the country, with the town having approximately one pub for every 34 residents.

The Cavan County Museum was established in 1996, 30 years after Ballyjamesduff won the first of its two national Tidy Towns awards. The permanent and temporary exhibitions cover an eclectic mix, with displays including: the Pig House, an exhibition of historical costumes including British Army uniforms; a history of Cavan GAA; a look at the life of female religious; a Famine gallery; a 'folk-life' gallery; a 17th-Century gallery, which examines the bloodiest century in Ireland's history; and a medieval gallery featuring one of the most extensive collections of Sheela-na-Gigs in the country.

For anglers, Ballyjamesduff is an excellent base for those wishing to fish on Lough Sheelin, where the average brown trout landed weighs 3lb and specimens of 10lb or more are landed regularly. Indeed, scientists reckon the lake holds an estimated 100,000 trout, with at least 40,000 of these between 2lb and 4lb. In 1990, in one outing, one lucky (or very skilful!) angler landed four trout weighing 16lb.

For those who prefer their nature appreciation on dry or semi-dry land, Ballyjamesduff is an excellent location to investigate the flora and fauna of Ireland's bog lands, where the plants include the insectivorous sundew. “We also have a very beautiful seven-acre garden,” says Donohue, “with a lovely children's playground among other quality facilities.”





Since 1966 and 1967, when Ballyjamesduff won the national Tidy Towns title, the town has undergone many changes, says Peter Shaffrey, who was a member of the committee that led the town to victory.

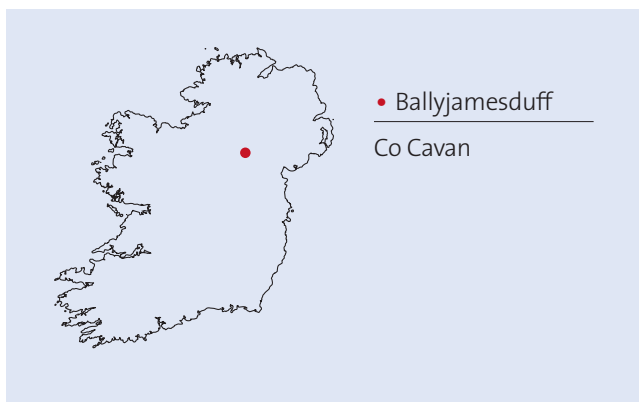
"The Percy French Hotel is gone now," he says. "But there are many more people employed in the town as a whole, and our new residents from abroad have added some diversity to the town." He says that, in the past decade, the number of houses in Ballyconnell has more than doubled, but there is still a strong sense of place and community. These were qualities that helped it win its two national awards 40 years ago, says Shaffrey.

"When we won the award it was a recognition of the hard work we had put in. For instance, Ballyjamesduff has eight approach roads, and we had to work very hard to ensure these approaches were well maintained and looking their best."

Whether Percy French would recognise the town today is a moot point, but its surroundings still retain their intrinsic beauty. There is a lot more to Ballyjamesduff today than green grass and blue skies — it's a modern town with a very fine heritage that is enjoyed and celebrated by its community.



Ballyjamesduff, c.1967



## On the Tourist Trail

### Cavan County Museum

The museum showcases Cavan's diverse heritage, culture and history, with archaeological finds from the Stone Age to the Middle Ages. These include a three-faced pre-Christian Corleck Head and a 1,000-year-old dug-out boat. A display of 18th-20th Century costumes is also provided. The museum is located on spacious grounds and gardens, and hosts the Lakeland Quilt Fair.

### Fishing

The nearby lakes of Nadrageel, Sheelin and Lackan provide good coarse fishing for enthusiasts. Boats are available to hire.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## CARLINGFORD, CO LOUTH

winner, 1988

# It was 20 years ago today...



**SITUATED BETWEEN SCENIC** Carlingford Lough and the Mourne mountains, Carlingford boasts a marina, a number of pubs, several fine B&Bs and a new hotel and is particularly popular with weekend visitors from both sides of the Irish border. Indeed, from early times Carlingford's inviting lough attracted many visitors who were not always very welcome, with both the Vikings and the Normans leaving their marks in 9th and 12th Century respectively.

It was also the scene of heavy fighting through the years due to its strategic location as a trading port, which almost brought the town to its knees on many occasions. However, its decline resulted in it missing out on the heavy industrialisation that occurred in many other towns, and today, Carlingford's medieval past is still clearly visible.

A listed heritage town, it boasts many historical buildings, such as King John's Castle, which was built in the late 12th Century and enjoys a stunning view of the north pier of Carlingford Lough. Another attraction is Taaffes Castle, a fortified town house built around the 17th Century. One of the town's architectural features, the Thosel, still remains, as does the Mint, established in 1467.

Carlingford is also within an hour's drive of many historic locations including the megalithic tomb at Newgrange, the standing stones at Proleek, the ancient hill of Tara, Mellifont

Abbey and the site of the Battle of Boyne, which changed the course of European history. It is ideally located for visits to the spectacular Mourne Mountains and Strangford Lough and visits to the Giant's Causeway, a world heritage site.

If activity holidays are the preferred choice, there is plenty to choose from in Carlingford, with various land and water activities on offer. These include canoeing, kayaking, rock climbing and archery. Walking the old medieval streets is itself a pleasurable activity and, if a long walk is in order, the Tain Way — a national waymarked walking route covering a 40km circuit of the Cooley mountains — would satisfy anyone.

Despite being such a major tourist draw in its own right, Carlingford's victory in the TidyTowns competition 20 years ago acted as a springboard for many positive changes.

"When we got that recognition in 1988 the whole tourism drive gathered momentum," says Gerry McGarrity, secretary, Carlingford TidyTowns committee. "The effect of the TidyTowns win is well recognised and it's always mentioned in any town gatherings we have. It was part of what put Carlingford on the map."

McGarrity recalls the buzz and sense of civic pride and community involvement that was felt around the town after





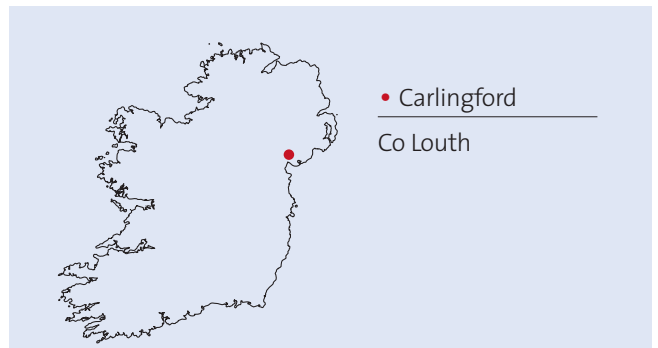
the win. “Subsequent to the win, Carlingford was made a heritage town.” This has led to ongoing work to conserve Carlingford’s rich history, with Louth County Council, the Heritage Council and the Irish Walled Towns’ Network commissioning a conservation management plan in 2007.

Since the win, the committee has also been at the forefront of ongoing improvements in the town, working closely with the council on many urban renewal projects. The council also helps out by providing extra outdoor staff for events during peak tourist season and grants for flowers, shrubs and public facilities.

The challenge for today is involving new arrivals to the town and successive generations of school children into ongoing TidyTowns activities so that the success to date can be maintained long into the future.



Carlingford, c.1988



## On the Tourist Trail

### Templetown blue-flag beach

One of the most popular beaches in the county.

### Cooley mountains

Nature lovers can enjoy a walk in the Cooley mountains and take part in walking festival weekends.

### Holy Trinity Heritage Centre

A restored medieval church, Holy Trinity houses Carlingford’s history from the Viking times to the present day, and also hosts regular concerts.

### King John’s Castle

Built in the late 12th Century, the castle enjoys an excellent view of the north pier of Carlingford Lough.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).







## CASTLETOWN, CO LAOIS

winner, 2002

# Doing it for themselves

CASTLETOWN IS AN attractive Georgian village of about 200 people, just off the main Dublin-Limerick Road. However, it has its roots in Norman times. Built around a triangular fair green, it gets its name from the castle that once stood there, at what was a commanding and strategic position.

Built by Hugh de Lacy for Robert de Bigarz in 1182, only fragments of the foundations and walls from the old fortress remain, but in the castle's heyday, this was an important Norman borough.

In the early part of the 16th Century, the castle was garrisoned by Sir Oliver Norris, son-in-law of the Earl of Ormonde, in order to curb the power of the Fitzpatricks.

It was subsequently taken by the Fitzpatrick family in 1600 and burned to the ground to prevent the English seizing control of it.

Thankfully, things are much quieter today and the Laois village nestles beside the upper reaches of the River Nore in peaceful, verdant surroundings.

The river is one of its greatest attractions, and the waterfall provides a welcome diversion in the warmer months, when hundreds of people flock to the river bank to picnic and swim. Just south of the village, in Churchtown, lie the ruins of a medieval church.

The impetus to keep the place looking its best comes purely from the pride the locals take in their village. Each week a tidy-up night is held, when villagers spend time weeding, kerbing, painting or adding to the general appearance of the place in some way. This huge level of community involvement complements the work of the dedicated TidyTown committee.



The selection of Castletown as the tidiest town in Ireland in 2002 was the culmination of many years' work. It had scooped the Tidiest Village award in 2001 and had been just a few points off the leaders for a couple of years.

"From the time we started, our mark went up a little bit each year," recalls Muriel Wall-Coughlan, secretary of the Castletown TidyTown committee. "There is a great community spirit here. Our focus is on keeping the place beautiful for our community. If others want to enjoy it, that is great, but winning is just a bonus," she says.

There are secondary benefits to entering the TidyTown competition, says Wall-Coughlan, in that it teaches





young people respect for their surroundings and the environment.

“It is a wonderful competition to take part in. It gives a community a focus and a reason to look after the environment. Even teenagers here are very conscientious about litter. You would very rarely find a piece of paper on the ground. People just don’t do it any more. There’s a whole atmosphere that has built up around the place.”

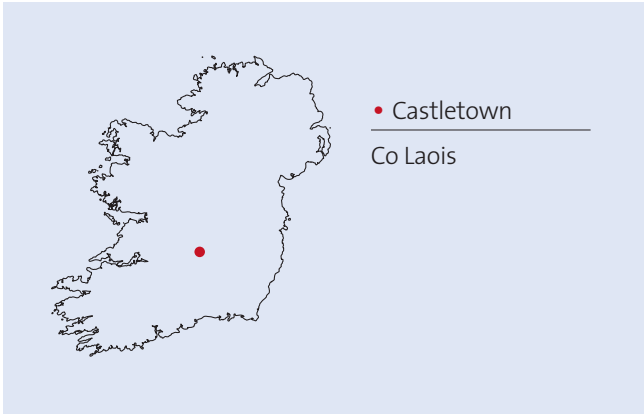
In the few years since Castletown won the national TidyTowns title, about 40 new houses have been built in the environs of the village. But there has been a concerted effort to keep any developments on a scale in keeping with the traditional layout and new residents offer a welcome boost to the TidyTowns effort.

While the committee is looking forward to having a good showing for many years to come in the TidyTowns competition, the level of work required to win is breathtaking, according to Wall-Coughlan.

“We hope to stay somewhere near the top, but our biggest driver is to keep the place beautiful for the people who live here.”



Castletown, c.2002



### On the Tourist Trail

#### Historical remains

In the 12th Century, Hugh de Lacy, a famed Norman noble, had a castle built here for Robert de Bigarz, and Castletown was the centre of an important Norman borough. Fragments of the castle remain to this day.

#### River Nore and waterfall

Castletown sits by the upper reaches of the Nore, so both residents and visitors alike can enjoy a swim in the refreshing water or a picnic by the nearby waterfall.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## CLONAKILTY, CO CORK

winner, 1999

# On the map



A VIBRANT USE of colour, excellent landscaping and some of the finest beaches in Europe are among the attributes of Clonakilty, Co Cork. Located on the south-west coast of Ireland, the bustling market town is home to smart B&Bs, top restaurants and beautiful attractions.

One of Clonakilty's claims to fame is that political leader Michael Collins was born there in 1890. A memorial statue of the Big Fella was unveiled by actor Liam Neeson in 2002. The west Cork town is steeped in history, and it and the surrounding areas were regarded as the heartland of Fenianism in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries.

Complementing this sense of history is a long list of heritage attractions in and around Clonakilty, including the ruins of Timoleague Abbey, a 14th-Century Franciscan abbey, the restored site at Lios na gCon ring fort and the Drombeg stone circle. Clonakilty Museum is also well worth a visit, with its display of Michael Collins memorabilia.

Today, Clonakilty and the surrounding areas are known for their sandy beaches, which include Inchydoney, Long Strand and Red Strand.

A delightful tourism attraction in Clonakilty itself is the West Cork Model Village, which depicts Irish life in the

Forties. The old west Cork railway line is portrayed in miniature in the village. Some of the more unusual activities available to visitors and tourists alike include archery, clay-pigeon shooting and whale and dolphin watching.

Clonakilty has a wide selection of indigenous businesses, including art galleries, an organic food shop, furniture stores and fashion stores. A particularly famous export is Clonakilty black pudding.

A true tourist destination, it is one of the best examples of how success in the TidyTowns can transform a community. "TidyTowns has been the catalyst for the development of Clonakilty," says Mayor Seamus O'Brien. "I've no doubt about it. In 1999 we were named Ireland's tidiest town, and from talking to other towns that had won it, the message came across loud and clear — if you win it, your town will never be the same again, because it's on the map. That's exactly what happened. Not alone did it attract people to come to the town to visit, but in our case, it attracted people to come and live here permanently."

In addition to the many new residents, tourism to the west Cork town has grown exponentially. "In 1995 when I started, we had about 400 beds in the town and the surrounding area. We now have about 4,400," says O'Brien. "Attractions range from the historic — Lis na gCon fort, the home place







of Henry Ford — to the modern — water sports and whale and dolphin watching.”

Town clerk Nicola Radley agrees that the recognisability of the TidyTowns brand, both domestically and internationally, has been instrumental in the growth of the town. “There’s a strong partnership approach taken between the TidyTowns committee, the Town Council and FÁS.”

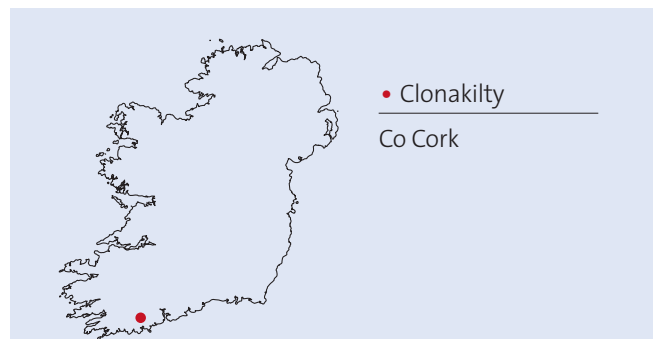
In addition, ongoing liaison with schools brings hands-on support and provides a steady supply of volunteers. “We have a school litter-warden patrol,” says Radley. “Every day of the summer holidays, we have children who come out on a rota basis voluntarily and work with members of the TidyTowns committee and town council staff to sweep up various parts of the town.”

Occasional projects come along that receive special recognition. “One of our housing estates, Parkview, was specially commended in the TidyTowns report in 2007, largely because of a project we undertook whereby we built natural stone seating and planting areas and we got all the children in the estate to come out with the gardener and help. It’s projects like those we’re trying to take an innovative approach to, to keep interest alive in the town.”

By keeping support for the TidyTowns broadly based, everyone is able to identify the advantages it brings. “Business people always contribute, because year after year, they see it adding to our economic success,” says Radley.



Clonakilty, c.1999



• Clonakilty  
Co Cork

## On the Tourist Trail

### Lios na gCon

An impressive ring fort reconstructed on its original site, Lios na gCon is a popular tourist destination. Visitors can venture underground in an original souterrain, see the thatched central round house and enjoy the craic by campfires.

### Clonakilty Museum

The museum boasts a range of exhibits, including some from the War of Independence.

### Michael Collins Centre

This centre commemorates Michael Collins, who was born at Woodfield.

### Beaches

Clonakilty is close to several beaches, including Inchydoney, Long Strand, Red Strand and Owenahincha.

### Model Railway Village

This model village provides a good family day out, with the old west Cork railway line portrayed in miniature.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## DUNMANWAY, CO CORK

winner, 1982

# Keeping up the good work

**THE BIRTHPLACE OF** the famous Sam Maguire, the man who gave his name to the All-Ireland senior football trophy, Dunmanway in west Cork oozes charm.

Sheltered by mountains on three sides, this 17th-Century planned town won the Tidy Towns competition in 1982. Its two original squares have survived the test of time since then, which is testament to the town's ability to combine the modern with the traditional.

The history of Dunmanway can be roughly divided into four periods: the early days until the coming of the Normans; the period of the McCarthy domination; the period of foreign power up until the middle of the 19th Century; and the time from the middle of the 19th Century until the present day.

Sir Richard Cox, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, was the town's most important patron in the early 18th Century, and he regularly held market days and fairs in the town at that time. A famous poem has been penned about Cox, who upon hearing that a preacher allied to a rival, John Wesley, was due to visit Dunmanway, decided to duck him into the local lake. However, when he went out on a boat to practice, he fell into the water and drowned.

The linen industry became very important for the town by the middle of the century. In the 1840s, Dunmanway was hit by famine. After that, it faced more upheaval during the War of Independence. In 1921, 17 British troops were killed by the IRA at the Kilmichael Ambush near Dunmanway.

The town is well known for the Ballabuidhe Races and Horse Fair, which is held every August. The race days comprise about 30 races, varying from trotting to sulky, and there are also flat races for ponies and horses. Horses are not the only attraction during Ballabuidhe. The selling and buying of wares, along with free entertainment and



sideshows for children, are also a part of this festival.

The town hasn't rested on its laurels since it scooped the main Tidy Towns prize back in 1982. Instead, it has harnessed local pride to continue to work hard at maintaining the town.

In 2002, the 20th anniversary of the town's big win, the committee used the commemoration to regenerate interest in the competition. "There was a series of public meetings and the committee went to schools in the town and the surrounding parishes. Then, with the local engineer, a survey was done and a three to five-year development plan put together." The support of agencies such as FÁS, Muintir Na Tíre and West Cork LEADER has proved extremely helpful in renewing interest in improving the town.







Indeed, in Dunmanway, success has come thanks in large part to an innovative approach to local government being piloted in the town. In the absence of a town council, an inter-agency group was established in 2005 to allow the community drive its own management and development.

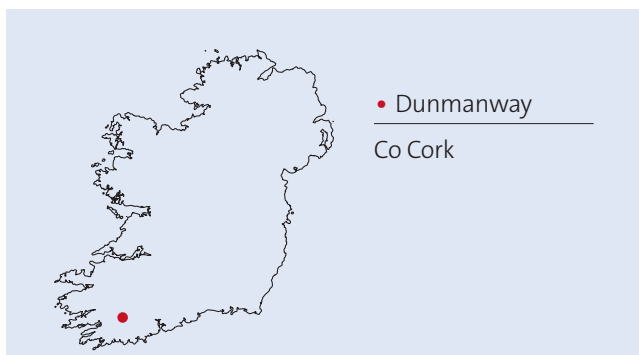
Declan Hurley of Dunmanway TidyTowns says: “Since 2006, West Cork LEADER, the Vocational Educational Committee, Cork County Council, the Enterprise Board, Cork County Childcare, Teagasc and An Garda Síochána have sat down at a table on a monthly basis to discuss Dunmanway.”

As with so many other towns in the region, housing developments and new residents have brought substantial change. But while growth always offers new challenges, the rising population has also provided a wider support base and, through a large drive in recent years the group managed to raise substantial funding from the local community to use in the development and upkeep of the town. “A lot of the old furniture in the middle of town had deteriorated, so that was replaced,” says Hurley.

Dunmanway is the geographical heart of west Cork and as such is ideally positioned to act as a base for those visiting the south-west, with many major towns within a half hour’s drive.



Dunmanway, c.1982



• Dunmanway  
Co Cork

## On the Tourist Trail

### Ballabuidhe Races and Horse Fair

Held every August, the race day features some 30 races, ranging from trotting to sulky.

### Neaskin Lough

One of five small lakes in west Cork, Neaskin boasts a mixture of brown trout.

### Ballynacarriga Castle

A four-storey castle, thought to pre-date 1585, with a very colourful history.

### Dunmanway Lake

Just a few hundred metres from the town centre, the lake is a good spot for fishing and canoeing. There is also a garden and picnic area here.

### Gardens

Dunmanway boasts a number of colourful gardens that are open to the public.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## ENNIS, CO CLARE

winner, 2005

# A concerted effort

ENNIS, THE COUNTY town of Co Clare, is situated on the banks of the River Fergus and is 37km from Limerick and 67km from Galway, with Shannon International Airport just 24km to the south.

One of Ireland's most picturesque towns, Ennis was named Ireland's tidiest town in 2005. With a population of around 30,000, this meant it was one of the largest towns to ever win the overall title.

The town dates back to the 13th Century, when it was originally settled around the site of a Franciscan Friary on the island or 'inis' in the River Fergus that gave it its name.

The friary had been founded in 1240 by Donnchadh Cairbreach Ó Brien, King of Thomond, and its magnificent ruins survive to this day. Its most outstanding feature is its east window, which dates from restoration work carried out about 50 years later. Its tower wasn't added until the 15th Century. Situated on the bank of the river, the friary has an impressive history as a seat of learning. In its day, it housed up to 350 monks and 600 students.

While the original town was completely destroyed by fire, the more permanent medieval town that was built to replace it provides the template for the existing streets and alleys of the town centre.

The original market square that served as the medieval town centre is now marked by the imposing statue of 'the Liberator' Daniel O'Connell, who also gave his name to the modern main street.

O'Connell is one of the most famous figures from Irish history associated with Ennis, being elected to the British Parliament to represent the county in 1828, and



successfully agitating to repeal the draconian Penal laws imposed on the majority Catholic population. Indeed, it is said that Clare is known as 'the Banner county' because of the banners carried by the large crowds that attended his monster rallies.

Another famous figure associated with Ennis and honoured with a statue outside the current Court House is Éamon de Valera who represented the county until 1959, becoming Taoiseach and later President of the Irish State. Charles Stewart Parnell, the 'uncrowned King of Ireland', also allegedly turned the first sod of the now sadly defunct Ennis-Kilrush train line, otherwise known as 'the west Clare railway' and immortalised in song by Percy French.

With its narrow, winding streets and colourful shopfronts







and pubs, Ennis is a joy to walk through, embracing, as it does, both its past and present. One of its most striking modern buildings is the Glór, an Irish music centre, which has hosted a multitude of drama, traditional music nights and comedy shows since it opened in 2001.

Winning TidyTowns provided a great boost for the town and Margaret Neylon, secretary of the TidyTowns committee, says the secret of its success was the close relationship forged with Ennis Town Council as well as the sterling work of TidyTowns committee chairman Donal Griffin.

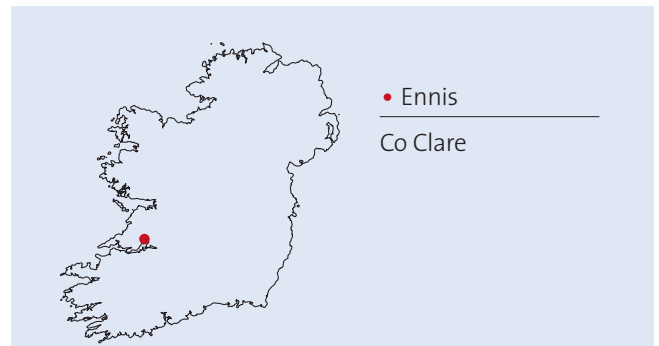
The committee hasn't rested on its laurels since, running a number of environmental programmes such as the 'Ennis Environmental Challenge'. This featured a range of waste-prevention initiatives including the introduction of litter-free zones, the employment of extra resources and the use of mobile CCTV cameras. The aim of the programme was to generate a community-wide responsibility for and ownership of the appearance and tidiness of Ennis.

The town has also picked up more awards along the way, most notably a gold medal in the prestigious European Entente Florale competition.

"Rather than looking at what other towns are doing, we concentrate on our surroundings and amenities. The objective is to make Ennis a pleasant place for everyone," says Neylon.



Ennis, c.2005



## On the Tourist Trail

### Walking tours

Ennis walking tours provide visitors with the opportunity to experience the winding streets of medieval Ennis, featuring tales of murders and hangings, riots and famine, as well as the mythological legends of banshees and Biddy Early.

### Dromore Wood and Visitor Centre

Some 1,000 acres of woodland, Dromore was established as a nature reserve. It has both historical and archaeological aspects.

### Clare Museum

With over 400 artefacts, telling a story that dates back over 8,000 years, the Clare Museum is a worthwhile visit.

### Glór Irish Music Centre

This modern centre was built in recognition of heritage and contributions to Irish traditional music. It hosts the Glór Summer Music Festival, which brings Irish musicians, singers and dancers to the town.

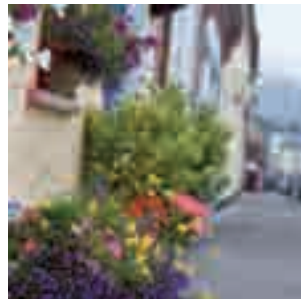
For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## GALBALLY, CO LIMERICK

winner, 1994

# Village of tradition



**A PICTURESQUE VILLAGE** in the Glen of Aherlow, Galbally is surrounded by the Aherlow river, at the foot of the Galtee mountains. Situated in a quiet country valley, with miles of unspoilt countryside around it, it enjoys a sense of seclusion. Yet, located just nine miles from Tipperary town, 24 from Limerick and less than 50 from Cork, Galbally is still highly accessible.

With the mountains to the south and the Slievenamuck Ridge to the north, the Glen provides excellent woodland trails and a magnificent vista for visitors to enjoy.

Close to Galbally, on the road to the glen, is the ruin of the Franciscan Moor Abbey, which was founded in the 13th Century by the King of Thomond. The abbey took some 300 years to complete and was burned a number of times during the course of construction. In 1473 it had to be rebuilt completely after it was burned to the ground.

The site was inhabited until the mid-18th Century, and it is believed three of the friars here were martyred in the 16th Century. Legend has it that when they were beheaded, no blood came from their necks. Today, only the church survives.

Nearby is Duntryleague Hill, where there is a rare example of a passage tomb. This suggests influences from Brittany — these tombs can date back as far as 3,500BC.

Yet another ancient site is Darby's Bed, which lies on a hill-top site near the village. This passage grave dates back an impressive 5,000 years, and is thought to be the resting place of Olill Olum, one of the early kings of Munster. According to legend, Diarmuid and Gráinne rested on the bed as they fled from Fionn MacCumhaill.

One of Galbally's most popular exports is the song *The Galbally Farmer*, which tells of the trials and tribulations of a worker there. In the centre of the village lies a statue of a soldier, which was erected in memory of the local people who took part in the War of Independence in 1921. The area had its fair share of action during that period, and the statue provides a link to very different times.

Apart from the man-made heritage sites, archaeologists can enjoy the Glenciff Gorge, created by a glacial overflow, to the north of the village.

Modern-day tourist attractions include horse-riding facilities and a number of golf courses that are within easy reach of the village. Galbally's accommodation offering includes hotels, B&Bs and self-catering thatched cottages.

Galbally has deep traditional Irish roots, and the GAA has a strong presence there. Irish culture is encouraged in the





locality, with plenty of opportunities to get involved in traditional Irish music, language and set dancing.

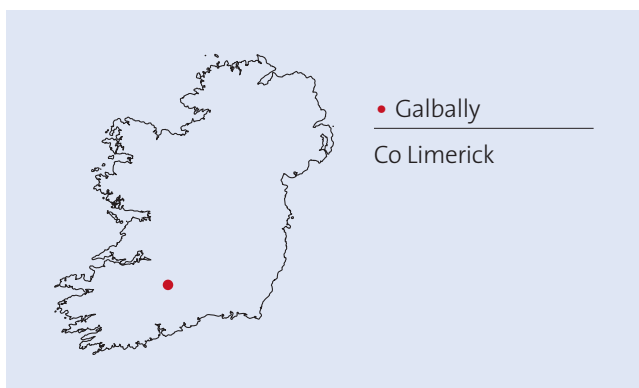
The village has featured many times in the TidyTowns competition since 1958, and in 1994 it was named the overall winner. The community council, backed by FÁS workers, continues its efforts to maintain the high standard set that year and the village is an enthusiastic participant to this day.

In recent times, many areas around Galbally have benefited from the worthy efforts of the community council in the area. Low stone walls have been built, flowerbeds planted and landscaping completed.

Limerick County Council along with Ballyhoura Development also restored the old gates to the graveyard. A green area with picnic seating has been provided in the parks opposite the Moor Abbey and trees have also been planted. A new community hall is set to honour the sports people of Galbally at the green area known as Priest's Cross.

With such community commitment and the support of local agencies, Galbally's ongoing success comes as no surprise.

Theresa Lee, supervisor of the FÁS project and based at Canon Hennessy Community Centre, best sums it up: "All the houses are very well kept because locals put in an extra effort." That, at the end of the day, is the spirit of TidyTowns in action.



## On the Tourist Trail

### Galbally Village of Tradition and Garden Fête

An annual event, this five-day festival features historical talks, evening entertainment and of course the garden fête on the final day.

### Hill walking

With the Galtee mountains as its backdrop, and located in the Glen of Aherlow, Galbally is a great starting point for quality hill walking.

### Darby's Bed

Two miles from Galbally, Darby's Bed is a megalithic passage grave dating back almost 4,000 years. According to fable, the grave belongs to Olill Olum, one of the early kings of Munster.

### Horse-riding

Situated close to the Galtee mountains and the Glen of Aherlow, there are plenty of horse-riding and trekking opportunities in and around Galbally.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## GLASLOUGH, CO MONAGHAN

winner, 1978

# Estate of the art



**SITUATED IN THE** fertile Blackwater River basin, Glaslough is a charming and historic estate village located 10km north-east of Monaghan town.

The Monaghan bypass means visitors can reach the village in an hour and a half from Dublin and, as the town rests on the border with Northern Ireland, it is a gateway to the North.

With 300 inhabitants, Glaslough has retained its estate ambience. Large walls, a village green and Scottish-style stone houses are still visible, and many of its stone houses date from the early 19th Century.

It is most renowned for having grown up around the 1,000-acre Castle Leslie demesne and its picturesque Glaslough Lake, which gives the village its name. The Scottish baronial castle, which was built in the 1660s, has welcomed everyone from poets to politicians over the years.

The estate, which boasts stunning grounds, has the honour of being one of just 30 Irish castle estates that are still run by the original family.

Nearby Donagh graveyard contains the ruins of an early Christian church and high cross. This is the burial place of

the McKenna chieftains, and is the only cemetery in the Diocese of Clogher to be home to four headstones from the 17th Century. Three of these headstones are dated 1666.

Stone carvings at the graveyard were made by the McKay family, who were the official stone cutters for the Leslies. Their work can also be seen in Errigal, Clones and Tydavnet graveyards.

Glaslough benefits from equestrian facilities — a bonus for riding enthusiasts either living in or visiting the area, who can enjoy cross-country and all-weather rides.

This is one of many reasons international visitors are attracted to Glaslough — some come to experience a stay at its castle or other accommodation options around the village, while others come to make use of the many facilities and activities available in the area.

Those with an interest in architecture will enjoy the many well-preserved stone buildings and monuments in the village, including the Leslie Memorial. This was built by Sir John Leslie in memory of his brother Charles, from whom he inherited the Castle Leslie estate.





Due to the rich topographical landscape surrounding Glaslough, farming remains a strong source of employment in the locality. When approaching the village, tracts of wooden plantations help conceal it from view, giving Glaslough the aura of a sanctuary tucked away from the strains of modern life.

Visitors will not be short of things to do — activities available in the area include everything from cookery lessons to music.

According to Michael Fitzpatrick, treasurer of Glaslough Development Association, the Glaslough TidyTowns committee continues to build on its TidyTowns success in 1978. As new times bring new challenges, its priority these days is to work with all the relevant bodies involved in the ongoing development of the village to ensure it retains its village charm and ambience for future generations.



Glaslough, c.1978



• Glaslough  
Co Monaghan

### On the Tourist Trail

**Donagh graveyard**  
The burial place of the McKenna chieftains contains the ruins of an early Christian church and high cross.

**Local amenities**  
Visitors to Glaslough can avail of equestrian facilities, cookery lessons and spa treatments, or simply enjoy the lakes, streams and countryside around it.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## GLENTIES, CO DONEGAL

winner, 1958, 1959, 1960,  
1962, 1995

# Northern light

**POISED AT THE** north-west edge of the Blue Stack mountains, the town of Glenties is not only a five-time winner of the Tidy Towns, it was also the first town to win the competition when it began in 1958.

Known as 'Na Gleanntaí' in its original Irish form, what is most striking about Glenties is its positioning in the heart of the Donegal Highlands, where two glens converge into one, and it is enveloped by mountains on three of its four sides.

The town is surrounded by rich wildlife and woodland, and Glenveagh National Park just a short drive away.

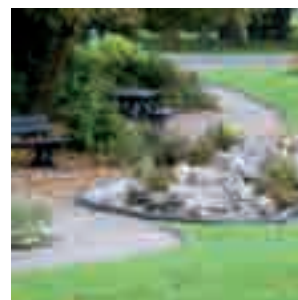
Glenties is 26 miles from Letterkenny and 20 miles from Donegal town, so it is often part of the route taken by visitors to the county.

Located six miles from the ocean, it is distinguishable by its broad linear main street with its vibrantly coloured buildings and floral displays, reflecting the dedication of residents to excelling in the Tidy Towns competition.

Due to its proximity to the ocean, the town attracts many tourists each summer. The breathtaking Narin Strand at Portnoo is about 20 minutes by car, making the Glenties area a haven for beach lovers, families and golfing enthusiasts.

There are many scenic walks around Glenties to explore by foot, bicycle or car. The Blue Stack mountains entice hill walkers and have pathways for outdoor enthusiasts to explore.

The local Owenea river is known as one of the best sources of salmon in the country. The tranquility of Donegal's bogs and lush landscapes is accessible from



the many walks around the Owenea. East of Glenties nestles the beautiful Lough Finn, at the foot of Aghla mountain.

The Gap Trail in Glenties is another popular option for walkers. This purpose-built walking and cycling trail follows the old railway line, which served a Bord na Móna turf-extraction facility. It crosses the Owenea river and the Blue Stack waymarked way, passes through forestry and concludes at the beautiful Lough McHugh.

In the town itself, the St Connell Cultural and Heritage Museum houses an extensive collection of artefacts, along with a room dedicated to the former Co Donegal railway line that linked Glenties with Stranorlar from 1895 to 1952.





Visitors will be attracted to the museum, as it includes prison cells of the late 19th-Century courthouse and many other historical artefacts from the devastating famine that rocked south-west Donegal. The facility is open throughout the year and guides are available by special request.

The accompanying heritage centre was also originally named after St Connell Caol, who established a monastic settlement in the 6th Century on the nearby Inniskeel Island, north of Portnoo.

Glenties hosts two annual festivals. It has a Harvest Fair Festival, which is held in September, and a Fiddler's Festival, which had its 25th anniversary in October 2007, attracting fiddlers from all over Ireland and Europe.

The MacGill Summer School and Arts Week has been held in Glenties every year since 1981. The school was founded in honour of local writer Patrick MacGill, who was born in the region circa 1890. Each year, it attracts people from all fields of public life to speak on topics of interest on the island of Ireland.

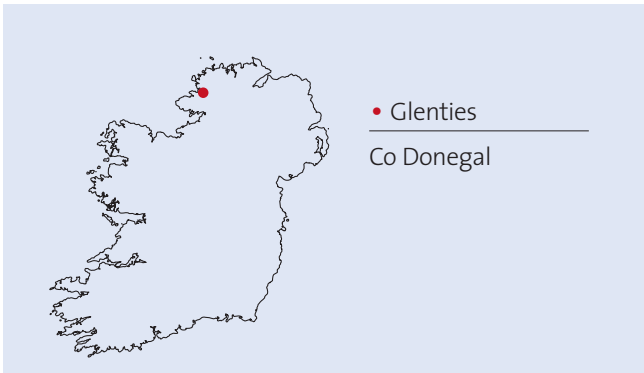
The Glenties area is home to some family businesses that go back many years. There is also a significant farming community in the locality, some of which is devoted to organic farming and various other sustainable land-use methods.

Mary Thompson, secretary of the local TidyTowns committee, says there has always been a strong community approach to TidyTowns, and that is the reason it has won the competition a record five times.

It also explains why the town is still one of the highest-scoring towns in the country 50 years after taking that very first title.



Glenties, c.1958



**On the Tourist Trail**

**St Connell's Museum and Heritage Centre**  
Featuring a number of rooms, exhibitions at St Connell's include a wildlife exhibition and a commemoration of the Famine.

**Sheskin More**  
Regarded as one of Ireland's most important nature reserves, Sheskin More covers an area of 1,000 acres.

**Famine graveyard**  
For historians out there, Glenties is home to a famine graveyard, the grounds of which were repaired in 1997.

**The Gap Trail**  
A purpose-built walking and cycling trail, the Gap crosses the Owenea river and ends at Lough McHugh.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).







## KEADUE, CO ROSCOMMON

winner, 1993, 2003

# Reaping the rewards



NESTLED UNDER THE Arigna mountains and on the border of counties Leitrim and Roscommon, there was a time when the small village of Keadue was practically forgotten — it was certainly not the two-time national TidyTowns award-winning location it is today.

“Back in the Seventies, a short film was shown in the cinema in Carrick-on-Shannon depicting some Irish towns and villages that were below standard — unfortunately Keadue was one of them,” says current secretary of the TidyTowns committee in the village, Paraic Noone.

Apparently, this cinematic experience was the catalyst for much change in the village, which has a population of less than 150 people; in the same year, a TidyTowns committee was set up and measures were put in place to revitalise Keadue’s tired appearance.

Almost two decades later, in 1993, all this hard work and dedication was to pay off; Keadue took home the TidyTowns national title, laying to rest those ghosts of the Seventies.

One of the key features that swung it for the village, according to Noone, was the building of the O’Carolan Heritage Park in honour of the famous blind harpist and composer Turlough O’Carolan, ‘the last of the bards’.

“O’Carolan was born in Nobber in Co Meath but he moved down here when he was young. His remains are buried just beside Keadue village,” Noone explains.

Mrs MacDermott-Roe of Alderford House near Ballyfarnan village was O’Carolan’s patron, and he composed many airs in honour of her and her clan. He died at Alderford in 1738 and is buried close to the ruined 12th-Century church in the old graveyard of Kilronan overlooking Lough Meelagh just a mile from the village. The Keadue O’Carolan Harp Festival is held annually in August in O’Carolan’s memory. There are also plans for a National Harp Centre in O’Carolan’s name.

The children’s amenity area includes swings and a slide; of course, visitors can also choose to go for a swim in peaceful Lough Meelagh.

Beside the lake, visitors will find the Holy Well of St Lasair, who founded the original church in the 6th Century. Devotions are performed here every year on the first Sunday in September.

Also near Lough Meelagh is an excellent example of a court tomb. The 5,000-year-old site was a major archaeological find and is easily reached by a short walk through the forest. The immediate area around Keadue also boasts at least four other sites dating back to 3,000 BC.



Keaoue  
2000  
Crestview



A walk through the bluebell woods could reward you with a sighting of a spectacular ruined castle — Kilronan — built by the Earl of Kingston in 1876, replacing the original castle belonging to Colonel King Tennison.

In fact, the various walkways in Keadue give exceptional views of some of the historical and geographical features of the village: five crannógs, seven majestic sequoia trees, three promontory forts and the tallest conifer in Europe, a giant spruce.

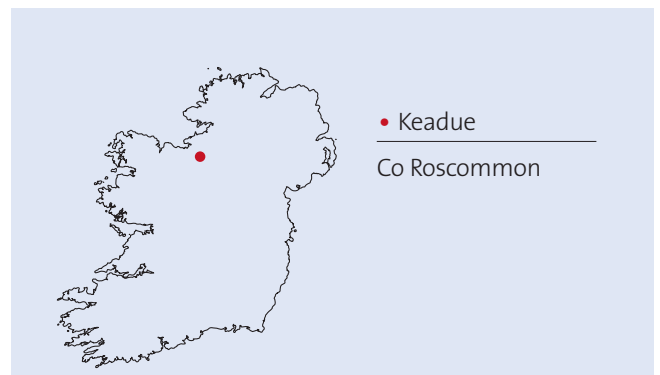
With such an abundance of history, amenities and the drive of a hard-working community, it was no surprise that in 2003, Keadue once more had the honour of taking home the national title. Noone says “When we first won the TidyTowns, people said there was nothing more we could do to improve Keadue, but we had other ideas!”

In the decade between the two wins, the committee and local volunteers cleaned up the approach roads, carried out work around Lough Meelagh, erected the harp sculpture in the village and developed walkways including the Historical Way and the Arigna Miners’ Way.

It was enough to secure first prize once again, but even with these two honours under their belt, Noone says the population of Keadue refuses to become complacent, and few would bet against Keadue taking the title for a third time.



Keadue, c.1993



• Keadue  
Co Roscommon

## On the Tourist Trail

### O’Carolan Heritage Park

The best-known tourist attraction in Keadue, the park lies in the centre of the village. Opened in 1993, it is named after famous harpist and composer Turlough O’Carolan. Keadue’s O’Carolan Harp Festival is held annually in August.

### Holy Well of St Lasair

Located beside the picturesque Lough Meelagh. Also here is the 5,000-year-old court tomb, and the immediate surroundings of Keadue have other historical sites, including promontory and ring forts. Lough Meelagh itself has several crannógs.

### Kilronan Castle

Originally built in the 1700s, this castle was rebuilt in 1876 by the Earl of Kingston.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## KENMARE, CO KERRY

winner, 2000

# Style and substance

KENMARE, CO KERRY is located in one of the most spectacularly beautiful parts of the country. Cradled under the Cork and Kerry mountains, the town's name comes from the Irish 'neidín', meaning 'little nest'.

Hugely popular among tourists, who flock in their thousands to the town during the summer months, causing it to swell to five times its population, Kenmare has a wealth of attractions.

It was founded in 1670 by the famed British economist, scientist and philosopher Sir William Petty. His descendant Sir William Petty-Fitzmaurice, second Earl of Shelbourne and first Marquis of Lansdowne, commissioned the present design of the town, which was completed in 1775.

There is an interesting history attached to the Sheen falls area. The first Earl of Kerry built a cottage there, which he and his family used for many years after as a fishing and shooting base. This cottage later evolved into the summer residence of the Marquis of Lansdowne and was popular with the gentry for its hunting and salmon-fishing opportunities. The bridge over the falls, with its distinctive stone arches, was built in 1777 and remains unchanged to this day.

As a memory of Ireland's pagan past, a druidic stone circle resides in the town and has been preserved and highlighted by the Tidy Towns committee.

Kenmare pier is also a beautiful amenity, offering families and tourists the chance to sit down and picnic together or even enjoy a little cruise around Kenmare Bay.

Reenagross National Park, developed by the Marquis of Lansdowne from a sandbank and a waterlogged piece of



his estate almost 200 years ago, is another beautiful natural amenity in the area and features numerous species of birds and an impressive array of wild flowers.

In 2000, Kenmare, which has a population of approximately 1,700, took home the top prize in the Tidy Towns competition after many years of hard work.

"It wasn't something that happened overnight," explains Noel Crowley, chairman of the Kenmare Tidy Towns committee since 2004. "It was a gradual process."

Although there had been a committee in the area since the Seventies, it was with the arrival of Archdeacon Michael Murphy to the area in the late Eighties that the town got a real push.





FISH

Coffee to go



Fr Murphy had already overseen the national win of neighbouring town Sneem in the TidyTowns competition and he brought great expertise and enthusiasm to Kenmare.

Crowley believes the moving of ESB lines underground made a huge difference to the town aesthetically and may have helped clinch the prize in 2000. "That was one of the major jobs we took on during that period and it made all the difference as you entered the town."

Although Crowley admits that Kenmare enjoys the benefit of being beautifully constructed architecturally, plenty of work still went into winning the national prize.

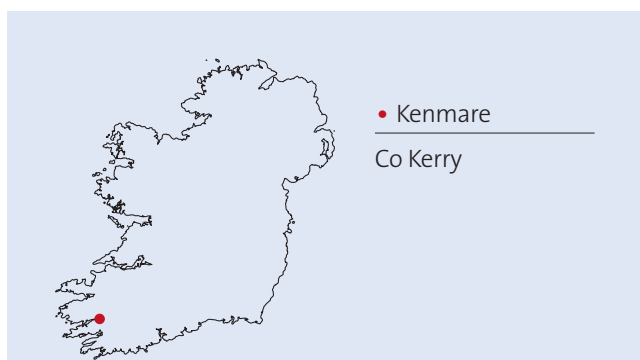
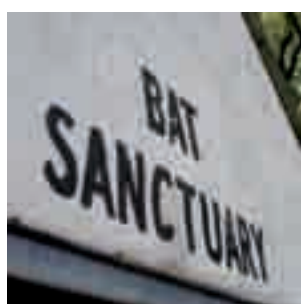
"We did a lot of extra landscaping, planted new flowerbeds and improved the heritage trail that was already in place. We live in such a beautiful place — between the Ring of Beara and the Ring of Kerry — so we just worked on highlighting what we already have."

Of course, given its extreme popularity among tourists, Kenmare also has a vibrant, cosmopolitan atmosphere, which lends to the overall attractiveness of the town. "Kenmare is very well-known for its restaurants," says Crowley. There are also some five-star hotels in the town.

According to Crowley, the local community has been extremely supportive of the TidyTowns committee and has got behind all of its initiatives.



Kenmare, c.2000



• Kenmare  
Co Kerry

## On the Tourist Trail

### Lace Museum

This unusual museum houses an interesting collection of old lace.

### Water sports and horse riding

Kenmare is renowned for its water-sports and horse-riding facilities.

### Kenmare Art Gallery

An innovative gallery, focusing on contemporary Irish art, particularly that from the Beara Peninsula.

### Visitor farms

The Kenmare area offers visitors several traditional, working farms to investigate at their leisure.

### Killarney National Park

Lies to the north of Kenmare and covers over 25,000 acres of woodland and mountains.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## KILKENNY CITY, CO KILKENNY

winner, 1985

# The marble effect



KEEP KILKENNY BEAUTIFUL steered Kilkenny to a deserved victory in the Tidy Towns competition in 1985, a terrific achievement for the historic city and ample reward for the committee's hard work since its foundation in 1982, building on the work of its predecessors over many years.

With its majestic Norman castle at its heart, its cobbled streets and reputation for good food and entertainment, Kilkenny is drawing in an increasing number of visitors, residents and business owners.

While some may come to sample the night life, many more come to soak up the sense of history that envelops the city. Not surprisingly, the castle is the No 1 draw in Kilkenny and one of the most-visited attractions in the south-east. The city also boasts Rothe House (a 16th-Century merchant's home) and two cathedrals.

The influence of the Normans on Kilkenny is plain to see, not just in the castle and the four medieval abbeys, but also in its distinctive layout, complete with the arched pathways and steps, which all visitors will be familiar with.

The Thosel ('the marketplace'), which now serves as City Hall, dates back to 1761. Erected by Alderman William Colles, it housed the city's market for many years. It features a

double-length arcade, above which sits a Georgian council chamber room. There is a clock tower on the steep roof, and the Kilkenny coat of arms is displayed on the southern wall. The original building was badly damaged in a fire in 1987, but was subsequently completely restored.

One of the aforementioned abbeys is the Holy Trinity Church, better known as the 'Black Abbey'. Founded in the 13th Century for the Dominicans, who wore black habits (hence the name), the abbey boasts some architectural gems, including its stunning stained-glass windows.

Another worthy stop for visitors is the Shee Alms House on Rose Inn Street, the purpose of which was to take care of the local poor. Founded in 1582 by Sir Richard Shee, this Tudor building is one of the last remaining examples of its kind in Ireland. It was recently restored and now accommodates the Kilkenny Tourist Office.

The historic attractions of Kilkenny don't end at the city boundaries either. The Castlecomer demesne — featuring a coal mine, visitor centre and fishing lake — just to the north of Kilkenny, is currently undergoing development.

The city itself is quite compact, another draw for the visitor who wants to get a feel for the place on foot. Those who





time their visit carefully can catch one of the many local festivals, including Rhythm'n'Roots in May, the Cat Laughs Comedy Festival in June and the Arts Festival in August.

The main event space in the city is called The Workhouse Square, a covered outdoor space with access from the main street and the shopping mall. The other event space is called The Goods Shed Square.

Apart from its historical and architectural strengths, the city is also considered a craft centre of excellence, with many individually owned boutiques.

Reflecting Kilkenny's ever-growing appeal, a new initiative started recently to engage a social partnership with all the players and stakeholders in its night-time economy. Called 'Kilkenny City Cares', it encourages a quality night-time offering in a well-serviced and attractive environment. Those involved include Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce, Kilkenny Borough Council, An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive, City Vintners, Festivals, Fáilte Ireland, the Small Firms Association, Kilkenny Tourism and Kilkenny Hotels.

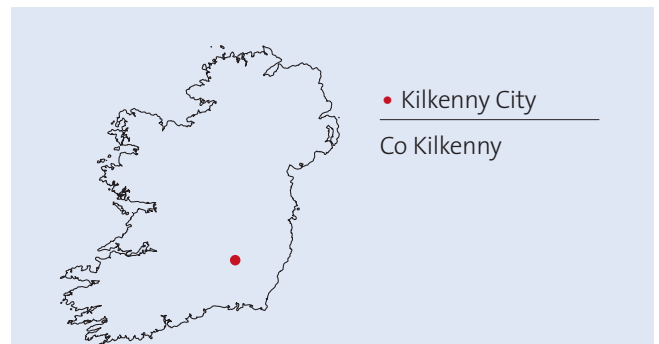
Kilkenny City Cares is encouraging a responsible trading programme and code of good practice for clubs, off-licences and late-night retail outlets. "Kilkenny is the third most visited place in the country and the numbers can double at the weekend," says Alison McGrath, chief executive of Kilkenny Chamber.

According to McGrath, one of the key groups wanting to return to live and work in Kilkenny are graduates. "Some relatively large businesses have set up and expanded here."

In addition to Kilkenny being the national Tidy Towns winner in 1985, the city was also named the Academy of Urbanism's European Great Town for 2008 last November. It was up against St Andrew's in Scotland and Winchester in England.



Kilkenny City, c.1985



## On the Tourist Trail

### Kilkenny Castle

A 12th-Century castle that was remodelled and restored in the 19th Century. Thousands of tourists visit to sit in the grounds and enjoy the facilities.

### National Crafts Gallery

Located in Castle Yard across from Kilkenny Castle, the gallery boasts an array of craft exhibitions.

### Rothe House

Open to the public, Rothe House is a 16th-Century merchant's home. It comprises three separate townhouses and three interconnecting courtyards, and houses a museum collection of unique artefacts and period costumes and paintings from Kilkenny and around Ireland.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## KILSHEELAN, CO TIPPERARY

winner, 1975, 1979

# A Suir thing



A PLEASANT STOP for the weary traveller, the village of Kilsheelan is on the main Waterford Road about five miles outside Clonmel in Co Tipperary. It is a particularly beautiful spot — the village is camped beside the River Suir and surrounded by woodland and rich pasture fields. On the Waterford side are the foothills of the Comeragh mountains and on the Tipperary side, Sliabh na mBan.

Immediately across the river is Kilsheelan Wood, part of the beautiful Gurteen le Poer demesne, through which the East Munster Way walking trail passes. The demesne was part of the estate of the le Poer family, whose baronial house stands on the banks of the Suir, opposite the village. The present structure, which replaced an earlier house, was built in 1866 by Samuel Roberts for Edmond, first Count le Poer.

The village was in the international spotlight in 2005 when singer Marilyn Manson married model and actress Dita von Teese in Gurteen Castle. German artist Gottfried Helnwein now lives in this neo-Gothic building, which took over 30 years to build, and features a dolmen in its grounds.

The history of Kilsheelan is central to its character and development. “When the Norman invasion occurred in the 12th Century, Kilsheelan was quickly observed to be rich and

strategically important. This stretch of the Suir became the main merchandise route from Clonmel to Waterford and the sea,” explains Robert Crotty, secretary of the Kilsheelan Tidy Towns committee. “You could say Kilsheelan was born in 1192, as in that year Prince John of England granted the area to the De Burgo family, which built two defensive mottes — one in the village itself where the Grotto of the Blessed Virgin Mary now stands and another a few miles north in Ballyboe.”

Also of interest to visitors are the ruined church and graveyard of St Síoláin. Some of the headstones date from the 17th Century and the beautifully decorated doorway is Hiberno-Romanesque, somewhat similar to that of Cormac’s Chapel on the Rock of Cashel. This church has been unused since the 1540s.

The Kilsheelan area, and Co Tipperary in general, is horse-riding country, and is internationally famous for its bloodstock breeding programme. The world-famous Coolmore Stud is located close to Kilsheelan in Fethard.

Any account of Kilsheelan would be incomplete without reference to its river. “The River Suir is an outstanding feature of the Kilsheelan area, offering salmon and trout fishing and lovely walks and picnic areas along its banks.





There are a number of pubs and lots of B&Bs in and around the village,” says Crotty.

The Kilsheelan/Kilcash GAA Club is an important focus for local people. At the start of the new millennium, an investment was made to revamp the club. A new complex with a meeting room, four dressing rooms, referee’s room, kitchen and toilets was built by local man John Cloona.

The Parish of Kilsheelan and Kilcash claims to have some influence on the founding of the GAA and the formation of rules for the game. Before the foundation of the GAA in 1884, it is fairly certain that the games of hurling and football were played in the parish, according to the Kilsheelan/Kilcash official GAA website.

Kilsheelan’s location makes it ideal for anyone working in Clonmel or Waterford, so it is no surprise that new development would be planned for the area.

Kilsheelan won the TidyTowns competition twice, in 1975 and 1979. “The village has been involved in the competition right from the start, and the management of it has been handed down from parents to children. Everyone living here has great respect for the village. It has evolved with the competition,” says Crotty.



Kilsheelan, c.1979



• Kilsheelan  
Co Tipperary

### On the Tourist Trail

**Gurteen le Poer**  
A picturesque demesne situated on the outskirts of Kilsheelan, Gurteen le Poer took some 30 years to build in the 19th Century.

**St Sheelan Church**  
Some remains of the ancient church from which Kilsheelan gets its name still exist within the town.

**Scenery**  
Located by Sliabh na mBan and the Comeragh mountains, Kilsheelan and the surrounding area is ideal for walkers or visitors who want to soak up the scenery.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).







## KILTEGAN, CO WICKLOW

winner, 1973

# A rural retreat

**SITUATED IN THE** Garden of Ireland, Co Wicklow, the picturesque village of Kiltegan has a lot to offer both visitors and residents alike.

The rural Wicklow village has a population of just 200 and, despite some recent development work, retains its inimitable charm and character with aplomb.

Kiltegan owes its origins and indeed its very name to an early missionary called St Tegan. He was one of seven followers St Patrick left with St Fiace at Domnagh-Fiace or Minbeg in the Parish of Clonmore during the 5th Century.

Having evangelised south Carlow and the locality around Rathvilly, St Tegan built a church on a site about a mile from the present village of Kiltegan. This area is known locally as 'old Kiltegan' and a cemetery can still be found there.

Unfortunately, no traces of the actual church remain but an ancient holy water 'stoup' did survive. About 90 years ago this was placed outside St Tegan's Oratory (which is Kiltegan food market today) and it remains there to the present time.

One of the chief attractions of Kiltegan is Humewood Castle, a Victorian mansion set in an estate of 450 acres just outside the village. It was built in 1867 and has a combination of stepped gables, battered buttresses, chimneystacks and spires. It forms an enchanting foreground against the backdrop of the beautiful mountain scenery of Co Wicklow.

Over the years, the castle has provided a luxurious and discrete hideaway for many internationally famous, actors, politicians and businessmen.



The quietness of Kiltegan is what holds much of the appeal for those who live there. It probably also explains the presence of the St Patrick's Missionary Society, also known as The Kiltegan Fathers, who are located just outside the village.

The St Patrick's Missionary Society was set up in 1930 as a retreat for missionary priests working in Nigeria. It was headquartered in an old house on 20 acres donated by tea merchant John Hughes, and has grown since then — in large part thanks to the help and work of the locals.

The society today has 307 priests and volunteer priests from Ireland, Scotland and England working in nine African





countries as well as in Brazil, Grenada in the West Indies, Ireland, the US, England, Scotland, Wales and Italy.

Spiritually minded visitors are welcome to stay with the Kiltegan Fathers to take some time out from the hectic modern lifestyle.

At the moment, Kiltegan has several B&Bs dotted around it — these are mostly patronised by tourists who wish to use the area as a base from which to explore Co Wicklow.

The nearest golf course is in Baltinglass, six miles away, but there are plenty more within easy driving distance of the village.

There has been no industrial development in the village, which is still a farming community at heart. It sports two pubs and a shop as its main commercial premises, with most inhabitants travelling to work in the surrounding areas.

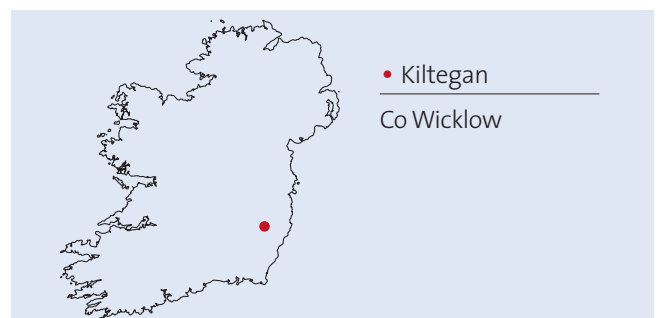
Similar to many other towns, Kiltegan has been subject to residential development, but this is something the TidyTowns committee has kept a close eye on.

“There have been developments going on for the past 10 years and there are developments under way at the moment,” says John Timmins of the Kiltegan TidyTowns committee.

Timmins is hopeful that the people who come to set up home in Kiltegan town will get involved in their local community; he says this could be just the extra boost Kiltegan needs in order to scoop its second national TidyTowns award.



Kiltegan, c.1973



## On the Tourist Trail

### Ancient holy water stoup

A feature that was added outside St Tegan's Oratory some 90 years ago — the oratory is now the local food market, but the stoup still stands.

### St Patrick's Missionary Society

Based just outside the village, the society welcomes spiritually minded visitors to take time out to reflect.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## KINSALE, CO CORK

winner, 1986

# Making waves

**THE JEWEL IN** the crown of scenic west Cork, the harbour town of Kinsale is a heritage town with an important place in Irish history.

Founded by the Anglo-Normans in about 1177, it started life as a small walled area close to the water. Over four centuries later, it was the location of the infamous Battle of Kinsale. Not only that, but the Old Head of Kinsale is thought to have been the site for some of the earliest settlers in Ireland.

Kinsale went on to become one of the most important harbours in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, with a brisk trade in wine and salt. It was also a significant naval base in those times.

The garrison town features a long waterfront and narrow, winding streets, with Compass Hill rising sharply to its rear. It is home to some interesting architectural juxtapositions, with both Georgian and Dutch-influenced homes dotted throughout the town.

The River Bandon, which enters the sea at Kinsale, rises in west Cork and flows east through Bandon to Innishannon, before turning south for the last leg of its journey. The ancient fortifications of Charles Fort and James Fort stand guard over the narrow entrance to the town from the sea.

Today, visitors to Kinsale won't encounter a battle, rather a multitude of restaurants, sailing and sporting activities to keep them occupied. In recent years, the town has become almost as well known for its gourmet restaurants as for its scenic situation.

In fact, Kinsale has transformed itself over the past two decades. The 1986 Tidy Towns win could be seen



as a turning point for the town, as the accolade quickly became a springboard for significant rejuvenation and development.

That year, Kinsale entered the Entente Florale, a European initiative aimed at improving the quality of life for local communities. On the back of the effort that went into preparing for this prestigious international competition, Kinsale scooped the overall Tidy Towns competition, while winning a medal in the Entente Florale.

Kinsale didn't rest on its laurels. The following 12 years it won the county Tidy Towns award, scooping the regional award in 10 of those years.





MICHAEL O'HERLITHY



O'Herlithy's  
B & B  
Rooms - In Suite

It also won Ireland's Best Kept Towns, an all-island competition where top towns from TidyTowns and Northern Ireland's Best Kept Awards compete against each other, and a European prize for tourism and the environment.

Dan Cummins of the TidyTowns committee remembers the 1995 win clearly. "We were up against the likes of the Germans, the Swiss and the English and we won. It was the success of 1986 that acted as a catalyst for that win."

He says winning the overall TidyTowns award meant a great deal to Kinsale. People began to take renewed pride in their properties, and tourism and investment followed. As with all tourist locations, appearance is paramount. Maintaining the cleanliness and character of the place was instrumental in gaining its global reputation for hospitality.

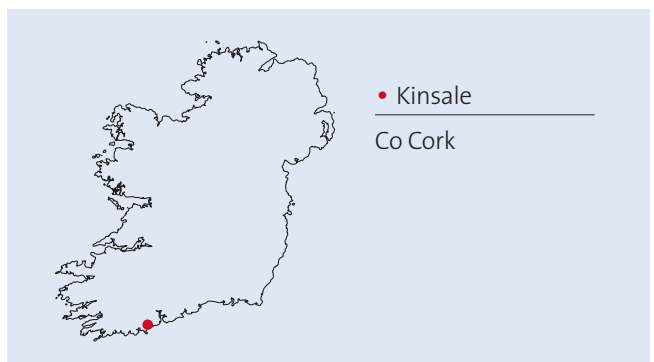
"It's a better-known town internationally now because of the efforts of bodies like the town and county councils, the TidyTowns committee and the Kinsale Chamber of Tourism," says Cummins.

Great effort has also gone into ensuring the tourist town is not blighted by unsightly development. One initiative that has won international kudos is the planning clinic organised by the town council for the past 20 years.

Cummins says the people of Kinsale have contributed hugely to the TidyTowns effort over the years. "There are people who are not directly involved with the TidyTowns, the Chamber of Tourism or the council but they maintain their places to an exceptional standard. We're grateful to them and the sponsors down through the years."



Kinsale, c.1986



## On the Tourist Trail

### Charles Fort

Built in the late 17th Century, Charles Fort is one of the largest military forts in the country. It has been associated with some of the most momentous events in Irish history, including the Civil War.

### Desmond Castle

Built in the 16th Century, since 1997, Desmond Castle is a major visitor attraction in the Kinsale area.

### James Fort

Holding a commanding position across from Charles Fort, James Fort was completed in 1607 and also has its place in the Irish history books.

### Water sports

Kinsale is regarded as a top-class centre for sailing and water-sports activities.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



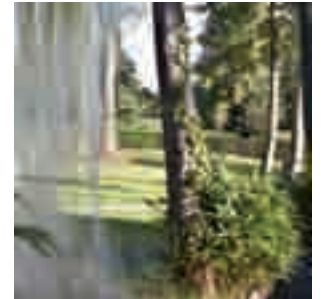




## LISMORE, CO WATERFORD

winner, 2004

# History in the making



A **HERITAGE TOWN** with a rich history, Lismore scooped the overall TidyTowns title in 2004. Founded by St Carthage in 630AD, the town was originally a monastic settlement and then an ecclesiastical university. Evidence of its ecclesiastical heritage can be seen in the castle, cathedral and churches that adorn the Co Waterford town today.

Perhaps the most famous site in the region, Lismore Castle is situated in the Blackwater Valley overlooking the river. Work on the structure first began in 1127 and some of this still remains, but the bulk of the current castle dates to the early 17th Century.

St Carthage's Cathedral is built on the site where St Carthage originally founded his church, monastery and school in 636AD. Some of the earliest artefacts, four memorial stones in the west wall, date back to the 9th Century. At this time the school was famous throughout Europe for the evangelising work of the Irish saints who had studied here.

The school suffered under the Vikings during the 10th Century. During the 12th Century a cathedral was first built on the site and some Romanesque fragments survive from this period. Recently, two pieces of painted stone from this time were recovered from the cathedral during

construction work. These are now kept in the cathedral library.

In the 17th Century the cathedral was razed during the Cromwellian invasion, and rebuilt in 1663. During the 19th Century, entrance gates, new ceilings and decorations, the tower and the spire were added to give the structure much of the appearance it has today. The cathedral also houses a unique 16th-Century monument of the McGrath family.

Relics of the past have been a big draw for tourists over the years, and in 1996 the Lismore Mochuda Development Company was set up to promote tourism and employment opportunities in the town. One of its most ambitious projects was the Millennium Park, which was completed in conjunction with Waterford County Council. The park is a quiet and scenic retreat where people can relax and take time out in the heart of the town.

Other developments championed by the Lismore Mochuda Development Company include an enterprise centre for businesses and the establishment of an annual international cultural event, the Immrama Festival, which celebrates travel writing and music. The festival is inspired by





one of Lismore's most famous daughters, renowned travel writer Dervla Murphy.

Visitors can appreciate the best in pottery and plasterwork at the town's heritage centre, where there are some fine practitioners perfecting the craft. The centre has an award-winning audio-visual display of Lismore history. There are also several shops specialising in arts, craftwork and embroidery throughout the town.

Another thing Lismore is known for is music and entertainment. St Carthage's Cathedral is the place to go to hear choral music, while the Community Festival takes place in the first week of August each year and features entertainment and music in many venues throughout the town.

The nearby Knockmealdown mountains form an impressive backdrop to this bustling town and offer a great opportunity to get away from it all and sample some raw nature.

A more poignant excursion for visitors is the Famine graveyard, where thousands of peasants were laid to rest on grounds donated by the Duke of Devonshire.

St Carthage's Catholic church is another worthwhile trip for visitors. Erected between 1881 and 1884, it contains some interesting stained glass of the Celtic Revival, notably a set of three windows commemorating saints associated with Lismore — Cathaldus, Carthage and Colman.

A relaxing place for visitor and resident alike is the aforementioned Millennium Park, which sits right in the centre of the thriving southern town. It hosts a number of interesting features as well as some beautiful plants and trees.

Participation in the TidyTowns led to Lismore's designation as a heritage town, which has saved it from much obtrusive building work. Tourism is one of the main industries in the town, and this has offered renewed impetus to keep the TidyTowns drive going.

After progressively working its way to the highest levels in the competition, winning the overall title in 2004 brought immense gratification to the community of Lismore and was a deserved reward for many years' hard work.



Lismore, c.2004



## On the Tourist Trail

### Lismore Castle Gardens

Boasting a historic past, Lismore Castle Gardens were once owned by Sir Walter Raleigh. The gardens lie within the 17th-Century defensive walls of Lismore Castle and have some great views of the building. Set on seven acres, they are home to a fine selection of flowers, shrubs and plants as well as several pieces of contemporary sculpture.

### Ballysaggartmore Towers

Imposing Gothic-style buildings, the towers near Lismore enjoy a pleasant woodland setting.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## MALAHIDE, CO DUBLIN

winner, 1990

# A coveted location



SITUATED IN NORTH Co Dublin, and benefiting from a mixture of high-quality developments and a stunning natural environment, Malahide has evolved to become one of the plushest and most sought-after locations in Ireland. In a highly accessible location just 18km from Dublin City and 8km from Dublin Airport, it has a long and eventful history.

There is evidence of settlers in the Paddy's Hill area overlooking Malahide estuary as far back as 6,000BC, and it is believed that the Vikings arrived there in 795AD. The Danes followed suit in 897AD. In fact, McTurkill, the last Danish King of Dublin, retired to Malahide in 1171, and the Normans took over in 1185.

The name Malahide comes from Mullach Íde, which means the sand hills of the Hydes. The Hydes were a Norman family from the Donabate area. From the 12th Century onwards, Malahide developed around Talbot Castle (now known as Malahide Castle). In 1547, it was considered one of the chief haven towns of Ireland due to its safe harbour.

By the turn of the 19th Century, there was a village, as well as the Yellow Walls cotton mill and Killeen Terrace ribbon factory, a bank, a coal yard, a saltworks and more. In 1831, the population had reached 1,223. Fifty years later, cod liver oil was being exported to England from here, and the Scott's Emulsion brand (which still exists today) with its

trademark of a man with a large cod on his shoulder is believed to have been based on a fisherman from Malahide. It was with the arrival of the railway that Malahide became the popular residential area and tourist resort it is today.

Despite considerable development in the intervening years, Malahide has managed to retain its old-world charm, so it's not hard to see why the maritime village is so popular among residents and tourists alike. Its population has come a long way since the 19th Century — today, about 25,000 people call it home.

The town benefits from a treasure trove of heritage and architectural delights, one of the most significant being the aforementioned Malahide Castle. Set on 250 acres of parkland, the castle was a fortress and private home to the Talbot family for almost 800 years. The first Talbots arrived in Malahide in 1170, and over the years 30 different generations lived at the castle.

Once surrounded by a fortified wall, the castle has had its fair share of eventful times. In 1534, it was targeted by Wicklow raiders, and in 1641, it was attacked by Cromwell. At the turn of the 18th Century, the castle was renovated and underwent structural changes; throughout that century, additions continued to be made.





The portraits of generations of the Talbot family that adorn the walls tell their own story of Ireland's stormy history. One of the more poignant legends concerns the morning of the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, when 14 members of the family breakfasted together in the great hall, never to return, as all were dead by nightfall.

In 1973, the castle and its 268-acre demesne were purchased by Dublin City Council and are now open to the public. The castle contains an extensive collection of Irish portrait paintings, most of which are from the National Gallery. Private banquets are held in its great hall.

The sea has played a significant role in the development of Malahide, and the construction of the marina, which has 350 fully serviced berths to its credit, has helped establish it as a popular location among water-sports enthusiasts.

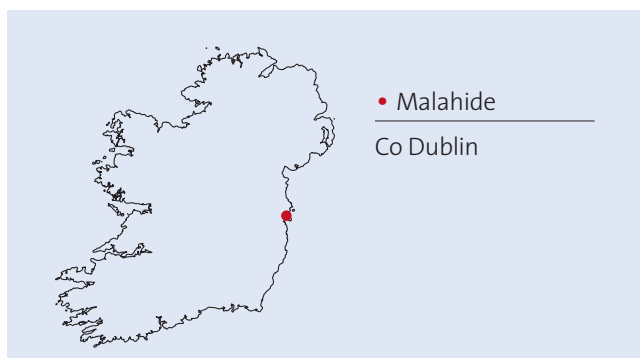
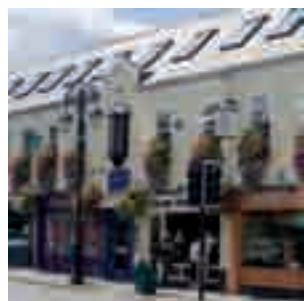
Ronan Kelly, chairman of Malahide TidyTowns, grew up in the area. He says that, while it has developed enormously since his youth, it has managed to retain its village feel. "I remember when the marina was initially being built and everyone thought it was going to be terrible, but when it was finished nobody could believe how beautiful it was, and still is."

Having to contend with a growing population in the intervening years has not deterred the Malahide TidyTowns committee from continuing its hard work. The competition has been a prominent event on the Malahide calendar, and the town won the ultimate accolade in 1990.

As Malahide settles nicely into its new status as one of the most desirable residential locations in Ireland, Kelly is confident that it will maintain its strong position in the TidyTowns competition.



Malahide, c.1990



## On the Tourist Trail

### Malahide Castle

One of Dublin's top tourist attractions, Malahide Castle lies on 250 acres of parkland and features botanic gardens, one of the world's most significant doll's houses, Tara's Palace and a craft shop and restaurant.

### Malahide marina

With 350 berths, Malahide marina is an international mooring destination. It has a fully equipped boat yard and marina centre.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## MALIN, CO DONEGAL

winner, 1970, 1991

# Cutting edge



**SITUATED IN THE** north-west of Ireland, the town of Malin lies in one of the most scenic locations in the country, just four miles north of Carndonagh and eight miles south of Malin Head — a conspicuous landmark for sea farers.

Malin is a worthy destination for tourists. On the renowned Inishowen Peninsula, it overlooks the beautiful Trawbreaga Bay where visitors and residents spend many a summer, and indeed winter, day.

Mountains, lakes and rivers are all within a stone's throw of Malin. There are two great lakes nearby — Lough Swilly and Lough Foyle. The former is a deep lake, which in the past sheltered large British Navy ships, while the latter is wide and imposing.

Dating back to the end of the 17th Century, the town is approached by a 10-arched bridge, which was constructed in the 18th Century. It is close to some of the highest sand dunes in Europe, and is just shy of the aforementioned Malin Head, which is the most northerly point in Ireland. The original triangular green in Malin is still intact, and has won awards for its high standards. It is planted with sycamore, cherry and lime trees.

The name Malin means 'brow' in Irish. There are two

churches in the town; the Presbyterian church dates back to 1717, while the Catholic church was built towards the end of the 18th Century.

While not to be confused with Malin Head, Malin does enjoy access to this stunning area with its majestic views and rock formations. The Wee House of Malin is a cave in the hillside at Malin Head, thought to be the home of St Muirdealach, where legend has it that no matter how many people entered the cave it always had room for more.

The surrounding peninsula offers many stunning views and high vantage points, most notable of which is the Grianán of Aileach, home to a circular fort. Those stunning views include the Gap of Mamore to the Erris Hills, which look down over Lough Swilly and across to Lough Fanad.

Malin, Malin Head and the surrounding area have a range of tourist facilities, including self-catering accommodation and B&Bs.

Equine lovers can take advantage of the horse-riding opportunities in the area. The terrain around the town itself is enjoyable to cross, and visitors can also of course







make use of the surrounding beaches and take rides out to the bay.

Malin is a seasoned veteran of the TidyTowns competition, having won in 1970 and again in 1991. At the time of its first win, Malin was commended for its “general concern to develop and enhance the essential quality of the town”.

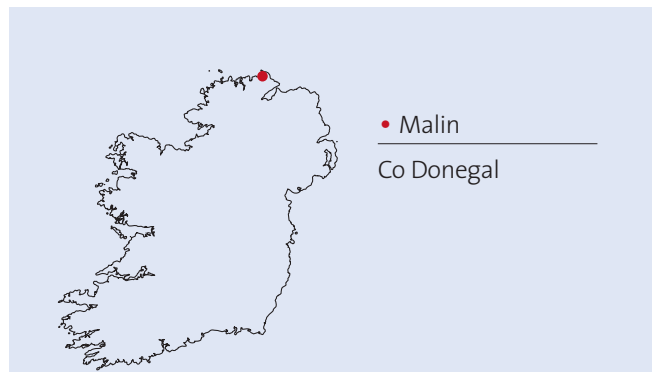
The town has continued to enhance its natural features throughout the years, without over-emphasising them.

In its win in 1991, Malin was praised for its high standard of litter control, while Malin Development Association was recognised for its “trojan efforts” and “enthusiastic community”.

When former President Mary Robinson visited the town in 1992 to unveil the plaque to mark its national win, she spoke of her affection for the town and recalled many childhood days spent in Malin and the surrounding region. “For me, the sun always shone when we came for holidays in Donegal,” she said.



Malin, c.1991



• Malin  
Co Donegal

## On the Tourist Trail

### Inishowen Peninsula

This dramatic piece of land is well worth a visit just for the scenery alone, but if golfing is more your thing, there are numerous courses to choose from, all boasting spectacular views.

### Trawbreaga Bay

Malin is located on the Trawbreaga Bay, an area of ornithological importance, which has been declared a wildlife sanctuary.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## MOUNTSHANNON, CO CLARE

winner, 1981

# Not just a pretty place

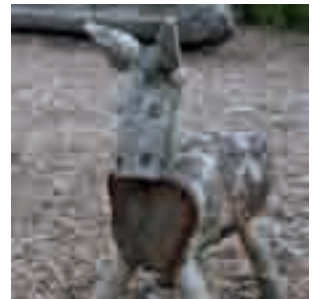
SITUATED ON THE shores of Lough Derg, Mountshannon in Co Clare has a long and well-deserved reputation as one of Ireland's prettiest villages. This is thanks in no small part to its unusually uniform layout — the village was a planned settlement established in the 18th Century — and the retention of a number of its original buildings.

Mountshannon enjoys strong links with history, and there are some great archaeological sites nearby, including ring forts, famine graves, holy wells and even a wedge tomb.

Indeed, Mountshannon has been popular with tourists for many years, attracted by its beauty and the fact that it is a hopping-off point for the monastic settlement, Inish Cealtra (Holy Island). The village is very popular in summer with cruisers that moor at the harbour. Situated on a hill, Mountshannon enjoys impressive views of Lough Derg.

With the tourism element of Mountshannon so strong, it comes as no surprise that the village is extremely popular among outdoor types. There is a wide range of tourist facilities in and around the area.

Golfing enthusiasts can enjoy a spot of golfing at the nine-hole golf course and 18-hole pitch and putt



courses about one mile from the village.

Many initiatives have been undertaken in recent years to increase tourist numbers to Mountshannon, including the development of a number of forest walks. The area in and around the village is heavily wooded, which naturally facilitates woodland walks and cycles.

About three quarters of a mile outside the village, the Woodpark features some magnificent examples of flora and fauna, along with carvings and sculptures from local artists.

As an added bonus, the forest walks have given Mountshannon a significant boost. One of the more exciting developments has been the creation of a maze in the centre of the village inspired by Inish Cealtra. Aistear Iniscealtra Public Park really is the focal point of the village, and includes a large green area and amphitheatre, as well as a lakeside 'look out' area. Once again, carvings and pieces of sculpture add something special to this public park, as do the replica historical artefacts on view.

"It reflects the history of spirituality in Ireland. As well as helping with tourism, it has protected a green area of about four acres in the centre of the village from development. We have people coming from around the





country who are interested in it," explains Paul Bugler, chairman, Mountshannon Community Council.

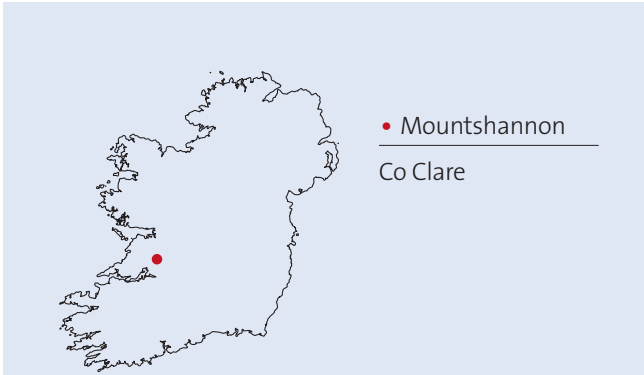
There are many folklore superstitions in Co Clare, among them the belief in Mountshannon that money should never be handed over on 1 May, or as residents refer to it, New Year's Day. The thinking behind this is that if you part with your money on this particular day, you will be doing so for the rest of the year.

Swimming and water-sport activities are another popular attraction the town has to offer, and thanks to the many prestigious awards (including a blue flag) for the upkeep of their harbour along the Shannon water system, the summer months are always packed full of fun activities for residents and tourists alike.

Mountshannon won the Tidy Towns competition in 1981 and the positive effects of that victory were felt for some time after, according to Bugler. "There was a massive community effort in 1981, and that gave rise to a huge amount of work for the following 15 years. It was a great bonus to win it. There was a feel-good factor that allowed us to do a huge amount of things outside of Tidy Towns but which all fitted into the loop. We are very much trying to regenerate that," says Bugler.



Mountshannon, c.1981



### On the Tourist Trail

**Lough Derg**  
Overlooking one of Ireland's largest lakes, Mountshannon is a stomping ground for some of the country's most avid fishermen. It is also a popular sailing centre, thanks to its harbour. Visitors can choose from a wide range of lake-based activities and hire motor boats, rowing boats or sailing boats.

**Inish Cealtra (Holy Island)**  
Boats to Inish Cealtra leave from Mountshannon, and visitors can take the 2km trip to view the 'island of monastic cells', which date to the 7th Century.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## MULTYFARNHAM, CO WESTMEATH

winner, 1977

# Steeped in history

A CHARMING OLD-style village in the centre of the magnificent Westmeath lakelands, Multyfarnham is a place that has stood the test of time. This traditional hamlet has many strings to its bow, with its greatest claim to fame being its Franciscan friary.

Founded almost 800 years ago, the friary at Multyfarnham attracts many visitors each year and for a long period was a famed centre of learning. Its colourful history includes a rebuild of the church and tower in the 15th Century and the removal of its roof in the 17th Century.

Between 1590 and 1617 the friary was raided six times and burned to the ground twice. In 1839, a new friary was built, and, following years of persecution, the friars moved back to the town and maintain a presence in Multyfarnham to this day. A seraphic college was opened at the friary in 1899, and this became an agricultural college in 1956, remaining open until 2003. Wilson's Hospital School, a seven-day boarding school, is located nearby.

Today, thousands of visitors each year can enjoy the wonderful, secluded friary garden with its 14 intricate life-size Stations of the Cross. The delightful modern stained glass by Richard King is also a feature, displaying four swans with silver chains around their necks, in commemoration of the Children of Lir.

Modern Multyfarnham provides self-catering holiday cottages, a good atmosphere and quality eateries. This is not surprising considering the town's location near Lake Derravaragh, which for the most part is narrow. Almost 8km in length, it is ideal for boating, fishing and bathing.

Close to Multyfarnham is Belvedere House Gardens and



Park, one of Co Westmeath's most appealing attractions. It opened to the public in early 2000 following a major restoration project involving EU funding, the Irish Tourist Board and Westmeath County Council.

The restored Belvedere House is an 18th-Century hunting/fishing lodge designed by the renowned German architect Richard Castle for Robert Rochfort, later first Earl of Belvedere. A fascinating walled garden, designed by Ninian Nevin in 1857, contains one of Ireland's finest collections of rare and special plants.

The estate is made up of 160 acres of parkland with 6km of magnificent woodland and lakeshore walks. Several follies adorn the landscape including Ireland's largest, The Jealous Wall.



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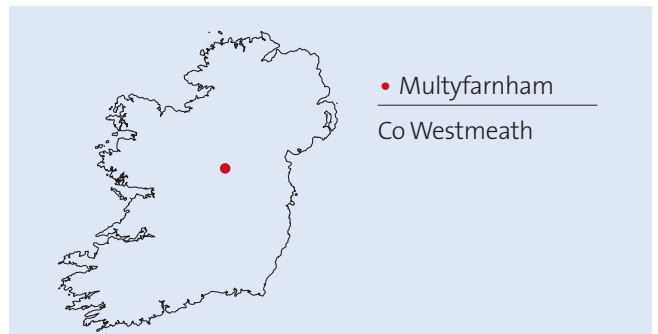
The Stable Block is home to a modern visitor centre with multimedia show, exhibitions and cafe. Adjacent to the centre is the animal sanctuary and children's play area. There is also a delightful tram which provides guided tours around a section of the parkland on selected days throughout the year.

Like many midlands towns and villages, Multyfarnham is emerging from a period of unprecedented residential growth. This has meant good times for many of the village's businesses, which continue to offer a quality, local service.

According to the chairman of the Multyfarnham Tidy-Towns committee, Conor Murtagh, this sudden growth has also presented a challenge for the local Tidy-Towns committee, but it remains undeterred and is redoubling its efforts to return Multyfarnham to a position where it can seriously compete for the national Tidy-Towns title it won in 1977.



Multyfarnham, c.1977



• Multyfarnham  
Co Westmeath

## On the Tourist Trail

### Franciscan Friary

The friary in Multyfarnham is a must-see for visitors who can escape into the history of the place, and enjoy a peaceful wander among its gardens and sculptures.

### Lough Derravaragh

An ideal location for coarse and trout fishing, Lough Derravaragh is renowned for its pike and wild brown trout, and lies just outside the village. Boats are available to hire just 4km from Multyfarnham.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## NEWTOWNCASHEL, CO LONGFORD

winner, 1980

# Location, location, location

**NESTLED ON THE** north-eastern shore of Lough Ree on the river Shannon, Newtowncashel has sometimes been described as an island parish — surrounded as it is by water on one side and bog land to the north and east.

Certainly, its unique location has come to the attention of Tidy Towns judges; in 1980, the village took home the national award. One of the draws of the village is its historical and indeed mythological links to an ancient time, which imbues it with its unique character.

Newtowncashel looks out on two lake islands, Inch Clearaun, which houses an ancient monastic settlement dating from the 6th Century, and Saints' Island, which is connected to Newtowncashel by a causeway and is the location of an Augustinian church dating to the 13th Century.

It is said that Inch Clearaun was named after Clothra, the sister of Gaelic Queen Maeve, and that it was here the fearless and infamous queen was finally killed while bathing in the waters of Lough Ree.

Water abounds in this beautiful midlands village, and one of its most popular amenities is Barley Harbour, a landing point for cruisers on the eastern point of Lough Ree and a fantastic place for holiday makers in the summer.

“It was built in the Sixties by Longford County Council,” explains Sean Farrell, chairman of the Tidy Towns committee in Newtowncashel. “It really is a highly attractive facility and was very imaginative for the time.”

Elfeet Bay near Newtowncashel provides a pleasant amenity for walking, boating, picnicking and fishing along the Lough Ree shoreline.



Not far from the village is the Corlea Trackway Visitors Centre, which interprets an Iron Age bog road built in 148BC on the bog lands close to the Shannon.

The road is the largest of its kind to have been uncovered in Europe; it was excavated over the years by Prof Barry Raftery of University College Dublin. Inside the centre, an 18-metre stretch of preserved road is on permanent display in a specially designed hall with humidifiers to prevent the ancient wood from cracking in the heat.

The workshop of renowned bog-oak sculptor Michael Casey and his son Kevin nestles right beside the harbour. Drawing on the village's bog-land links, their highly artistic





work is dotted throughout Newtowncashel. Visitors can come to their workshop and learn about the story of bog wood — told through video, photographs, charts and finally the spectacularly finished pieces of sculpture.

Started in the Seventies by Fr Sean O'Rourke and Garda Gabriel Starkin, the Newtowncashel TidyTown's committee quickly found its feet and has thrived in the village ever since, adding to and highlighting the village's unique and quirky features.

Although Newtowncashel is relatively small, Farrell says there is a variety of local groups of which the TidyTown's committee is one of the most active.

Throughout the years, the Newtowncashel TidyTown's committee has worked hard on improving the village, and one of its biggest projects has been the rehabilitation of the Ballyrevagh quarry nearby.

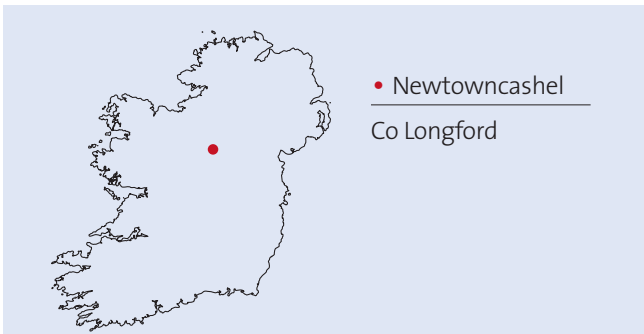
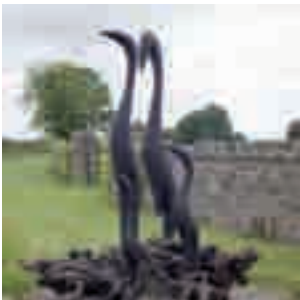
"For a long time, it could have been described as an eyesore," Farrell explains. "However, in 2000, we set about rectifying that and enlisted Michael Casey and rock sculptor Dolores Nally as well as FÁS personnel to work on it."

This resulted in the creation of some beautiful rock carvings at the quarry as well as a walking trail, christened *Tóraíocht Dhiarmada agus Gráinne* (the pursuit of Diarmuid and Gráinne) after the legendary Celtic figures who fell in love and eloped, finally finding refuge in a wood beside the Shannon.

"We actually won a special amenity award for that," explains Farrell, "and it was a huge boost to the village when it was completed."



Newtowncashel, c.1980



• Newtowncashel  
Co Longford

**On the Tourist Trail**

**Newtowncashel Heritage Centre**

This traditional Irish farmhouse features a parlour, kitchen and bedroom. On display are tools from the Thirties and machinery from the turn of the 20th Century.

**Bog-oak sculptures**

Newtowncashel is decorated with various outstanding bog-oak sculptures, crafted by wood sculptor Michael Casey. They include *Herons on Bog Yew Root* (pictured above). Father and son sculptors Michael and Kevin Casey own a workshop and studio beside Lough Ree.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## RATHVILLY, CO CARLOW

winner, 1961, 1963, 1968

# Thrice as nice



**SITUATED IN NORTH** Carlow on the Slaney river, close to counties Wicklow and Kildare, Rathvilly is a relatively small village, with a population of just over 800.

Historical remnants and reminders of a time gone by are everywhere. Rathvilly comes from the Irish 'Ráth Bhile', which means 'ring fort of the trees' and takes its name from a nearby motte, which offers panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

History interacts with contemporary life in the village centre, where a monument commemorating executed IRA volunteer Kevin Barry is the central feature. Barry studied in what is now the Phoenix Centre — a former primary school that serves as a community hall for local groups and as a general meeting spot. Rising up behind the memorial is St Patrick's Catholic Church with its attractive stonework and railings, forming a striking focal point in the centre of the village.

Another reminder of a bygone era is the local railway station. Opened in 1886, it was closed to passenger traffic in 1947 and finally closed altogether in 1959. However, it has been kept in pristine condition since then and people are still welcome to visit it to catch a glimpse of a time when the pace of life was very diff-

erent. Just a few hundred yards down the road from the village, it is one of the key features that has kept Rathvilly so high on the Tidy Towns scoreboard over the years.

Regarding local attractions, the Lisnavagh estate owned by the McClintock Bunbury family for 10 generations, is close to Rathvilly. The estate has evolved to include 1,000 acres of woodland, parkland and farmland as well as the main house, a Gothic revival mansion. The house boasts extensive gardens, which were laid out by Daniel Robertson in the 1850s.

Today, the gardens are used to host a number of events and functions, while the Victorian farmyard is home to a growing number of small businesses. The estate enjoys panoramic views of the Wicklow hills and Mount Leinster.

Rathvilly's Tidy Towns legacy is impressive. It has taken home the overall prize on three occasions — 1961, 1963 and 1968 — and in 2008 celebrates 50 years in the competition. It has also won 11 regional awards during that time.

Peg Kehoe of the Rathvilly Tidy Towns committee says the village has seen "big-time change" since the Sixties when





it was decorated three times as national TidyTown winner.

“We now have several new housing estates, as a lot of people commute to Dublin,” she says, although she adds their presence has not taken away from the village because they have been designed to a high standard. “They have been finished off to the last.”

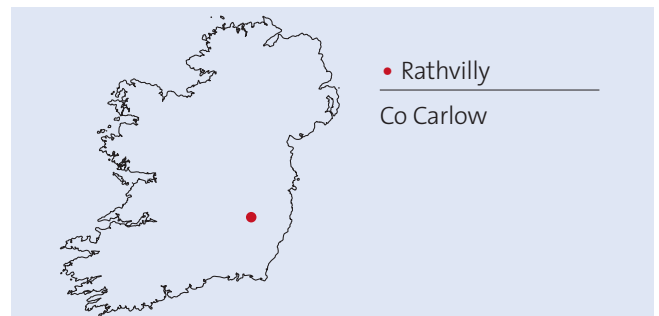
Kehoe says the village of Rathvilly is kept clean and tidy, not through one single project, but through “small acts” such as planting flowers, recycling and keeping litter at bay.

In addition to routine cleaning, says Kehoe, “We have a community clean-up day every year, usually on Good Friday, and we tend to get a really good turnout for that.

“There are about 11 committee members, but when push comes to shove, the rest of the local community gets involved.”



Rathvilly, c.1961



## On the Tourist Trail

### Rathvilly Motte

This large motte was most likely built to defend the crossroads leading to Lisnavagh where it stands.

### Lisnavagh Estate

This local attraction includes 1,000 acres of woodland, parkland, farmland and Lisnavagh House.

### Horse-riding

Some great trekking facilities are available in and around Rathvilly.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## SNEEM, CO KERRY

winner, 1987

# Ringing the changes



A **LONG-STANDING** favourite destination for visitors of all ages, Sneem in Co Kerry is making a deliberate effort to be family friendly.

As well as winning the national Tidy Towns title in 1987, the village has won awards for its sculpture park and other public works of art such as its *The Way the Fairies Went* installation, its 'Garden of the Senses', which is designed for the visually impaired, its Wild Bird Garden and the Kerry Geopark, the area north of Kenmare Bay containing Ireland's highest mountains and freshwater lakes. Kerry Geopark also contains a treasure trove of prehistoric heritage, including standing stones, forts, holy wells and Ireland's biggest assembly of ancient rock art.

The town itself is at the head of the Sneem river estuary, up against the base of Knockmoyle mountain, and the one stone bridge in the centre of the village is the narrowest point on the Ring of Kerry. Sneem's name in Irish, 'An tSnaidhm', translates as 'the knot'; tour guides passing through have nicknamed it 'the knot in the ring' because it is here that travel can be slowest on a day's itinerary.

Lucky, then, that it is such a pretty town to look at — Sneem was an early and enthusiastic adopter of the multi-coloured approach to Irish vernacular streetscapes, with

the result that the town's shop fronts and house exteriors are painted in almost every bright hue imaginable. There are also plenty of good reasons to stop here — the village has a fine collection of pubs and restaurants for those needing refreshment and there is plenty to see and do.

One of Sneem's distinctions is that it has two fair greens, one on either side of the river — a fact recorded in an 1841 survey of the area — and these form the basis of the town's two triangular 'squares'. The overall layout of this compactly built village suggests an hourglass figure.

The locals claim the Sneem Fair is the oldest in Ireland and the only one to be held on St Patrick's Day, when the town is filled with local colour as crowds of people from across south Kerry visit to do their market business and enjoy the annual parade.

In addition to the two fair greens, which are well landscaped and adorned with sculptures relating to local characters and events, there are plenty of other gardens to visit, as well as the Garden of the Senses and the Wild Bird Garden already mentioned. There are also very pleasant walks along the river, with new riverside walks due to be built in the near future.





WELCOME TO  
**SNEEM**  
Fáilte chuig  
An t-Sneamh

An added attraction for children is the playground, and by the river there is also a dedicated barbecue area, which is used by visitors and locals in equal measure. This has proven a great venue for local community groups organising summer socials and/or fundraising activities.

For those making more than a short stop, there are plenty of activities available including pitch and putt, tennis, horse-riding, cycling and sea kayaking. The sea kayaking makes for a great family day out, giving you the opportunity to explore the Sneem river estuary and its little islands, which are notable for their sub-tropical flora. Plants that would not survive elsewhere in Ireland grow here.

In addition to the St Patrick's Day Fair, the busiest days in the village are at the end of July during the Sneem Family Festival, which boasts a host of activities and diversions for children of all ages.

With its newly completed water-treatment plant and sewerage scheme, there are no barriers to the town's future development, except to ensure its long-term sustainability as a community and much-loved tourist destination.

This is an issue close to heart of the Sneem Development Cooperative Society, which will continue to keep a watchful eye on future developments. Thanks to the commitment and tremendous community spirit in this close-knit town, it continues to have the co-operation of locals in keeping it tidy, and the national TidyTowns award in 1987 has provided a great platform on which to build over the years.



Sneem, c.1987



• Sneem  
Co Kerry

**On the Tourist Trail**

**Garden of the Senses**  
Full of colourful, plants and flowers, this garden was designed so the aromas hit the visitor immediately.

**Kerry Geopark**  
The Geopark area has some of Ireland's highest mountains and a host of prehistoric heritage.

**Ring of Kerry**  
Sneem lies along the Ring of Kerry, and visitors must pass through the village to complete the ring.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## TERRYGLASS, CO TIPPERARY

winner, 1983, 1997

# A river runs through it



**WATER, AND THE** River Shannon, continue to play an important role in the past, present and future development of Terryglass in Co Tipperary, which has twice won the national Tidy Towns title in 1983 and 1997.

The layout of the village is harmonious in nature, with no one building dominating. Where other villages have brightly painted exteriors, the dominant element in Terryglass is stonework.

The Catholic church dates back to 1886 and was designed by Daniel O'Connell, grandson of 'the Liberator'. The church's graveyard was donated to the village on the condition that the gravestones be of uniform size so that, at least in death, rich and poor would be equal.

The town sits on what was once an important fording point across the Shannon, although now it is a quiet rural backwater, ideal for a relaxing holiday.

In the 6th Century, St Columba founded a monastery here that was internationally famous as a centre of learning for five centuries. It was here that *The Book of Leinster*, now held by Trinity College Dublin, was produced circa 1150. The remains of one of the abbey's walls can still be viewed.

There is also a garrison wall in the village, which was constructed during the Elizabethan period as part of defensive measures to prevent rebels in Connaught from attacking the Pale.

Another survivor from the ancient past is Old Court Castle, which was built during the Norman era, and where according to legend a chieftain named O'Connell died after the castle was visited by a banshee who came gliding across the lake.

The town's name in Irish is 'Tír Dhá Ghlais', 'the land of two streams', which is thought to be a reference to two wells, which have been maintained and preserved by the local community. The wells would have provided the monks with fresh water as an alternative to the brackish waters of the Shannon. Officially, they are named after saints Augh and Columba, but they are known locally as the 'eye well' and the 'headache well' because of their supposed curative properties for improving sight and easing migraines.

Today, however, the jewel in Terryglass's crown is its marina, which can have 40 or more boats moored during the summer months. Tours of Lough Derg set sail from this point.





PJ Starr, who has been involved in the Terryglass TidyTowns committee since 1967, says it's hard to believe now that the harbour was once a dump filled with debris until locals cleared it out and used a digger to create a road to the facility. Landscaped and extended in the Nineties, the marina is a great picnic location offering spectacular views across Lough Derg, which provides great fishing for enthusiasts.

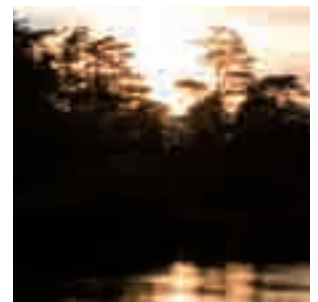

The quay features a bronze sculpture of John Weaving, a legendary Shannon boatman who died in 1987 and who considered Terryglass his favourite port of call.

The pubs in the village provide excellent fare made with fresh, locally sourced ingredients. In addition to local B&Bs, there is also self-catering accommodation available.

Mairead Tierney, landlady at Paddy's Bar, says her family moved to the village a number of years ago and they have no regrets about the decision. "It's a great place to live and to rear children," she says. "Because it is a bit off the beaten track, the roads are quiet enough for you to cycle safely and there are lovely forest walks and lots to do. I'd really recommend it as a place for a relaxing holiday."



Terryglass, c.1983

• Terryglass  
Co Tipperary

**On the Tourist Trail**

**Lough Derg**  
Home to a range of fish, including roach, pike and perch.

**Terryglass marina**  
Developed in recent times, the marina caters for the cruisers that stop off on the River Shannon.

**Eye Well and Headache Well**  
Both wells are thought to have curative properties. The first is located at the quay, while the second can be found further up the village.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).



## TRIM, CO MEATH

winner, 1972, 1974, 1984

# Where old meets new

A **SMALL TOWN** on the banks of the river Boyne, Trim in Co Meath abounds with heritage. The town got its name from an ancient ford that crossed the Boyne, where St Patrick, soon after proclaiming Christianity in Ireland, built a church on land granted to him by the son of the High King.

Trim once had the oldest and largest religious settlements in the country, and is dominated by the medieval Trim Castle, which was built by the de Lacys in the late 12th and early 13th Century. It was once a powerful symbol of Norman strength in Ireland.

The castle is architecturally interesting, with a three-storey central tower of cruciform shape. Hugh de Lacy began the epic construction around 1173, and some 20 years later Walter de Lacy took up the job.

Excavations of the castle took place in the Seventies and later on in the Nineties, and various archaeological gems were discovered.

There are fascinating ruins surrounding the castle, and numerous stone relics in St Patrick's Cathedral.

St Mary's Abbey is the ruin of an Augustinian monastery founded in the 12th Century and later a focal point for pilgrimage. Originally part of the abbey, the Yellow Steeple is the most prominent of the Trim ruins, and dates to 1368.

The Newtown Monuments comprise a large medieval cathedral, two monasteries and a small church, and date from 1206. On the church walls, you'll find the late 16th-Century altar tomb with effigies of Sir Luke Dillon and his wife.

Trim's heritage lives on through those ruins, and each year



it attracts thousands of tourists who come to take in the history of the place. However, time has not stood still here, and alongside the heritage are many modern additions.

Recent developments in the town have included an upgrade of the An Bhoinn riverbeds and a landscaping project of Linear and Pratt Parks. The sports and leisure centre has many state-of-the-art facilities, including a football pitch, gym and 25-metre swimming pool.

Golfing enthusiasts are presented with plenty of choice at clubs in Trim and the surrounding area, with no shortage of beautiful rolling parkland courses within easy reach.

Business tourism in the town has also developed over the past few years, and the town gets its fair share of domestic





and international tourists, given that it is within easy reach of Dublin by car and rail.

The jewel in the tourism crown, Trim Castle is the main attraction, drawing visitors from far and wide. Guided tours are given from April to October.

Trim featured in the Oscar-winning 1994 film *Braveheart*, which starred Mel Gibson. The town's links to the arts also extend to literature — Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver's Travels*, was presented with the Vicarage of Laracore in Trim in the early 1700s.

Trim has scooped the national Tidy Towns award no fewer than three times. Residents pride themselves on this achievement and continue to work on a number of schemes in the area.



Trim, c.1974



### On the Tourist Trail

**Trim Castle**  
One of Ireland's most popular tourist destinations, Trim Castle was built around 1172 and featured in the film *Braveheart*.

**Trim Visitor Centre**  
The centre boasts an impressive multimedia exhibition, showing the historical background of the town.

**St Patrick's Cathedral**  
The cathedral features a 15th-Century church tower.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).







## TYRRELLSPASS, CO WESTMEATH

winner, 1969

# A magical touch



A BEAUTIFUL GEORGIAN village situated in south Co Westmeath in the heart of the midlands, Tyrrellspass is a TidyTown's gem noted for its rich history, abundant green areas and pleasant surroundings that have inspired several literary works.

Its name derives from the Anglo-Norman family that owned several castles in the area, the most important of which was in the village itself.

In its present form, Tyrrellspass is an estate village largely created by Jane, Countess of Belvedere. In the 19th Century, she built a series of houses to serve as an orphanage in the village, to benefit the local poor. In recent times, they have been renovated and restored to become 10 housing units.

As an example of how history and modernity can co-exist, many of the original features of the orphanage have been meticulously restored, while at the same time, the new units have the latest in sustainable energy and green technology. These include a wood-pellet boiler and high-quality insulation.

Tyrrellspass Castle is located to the west end of the village. The only remaining castle of the Tyrrells (cousins

of William the Conqueror), who came to Ireland around 1169, it was home to the Tyrrells of Fartullagh for many decades.

The 15th-Century construction was restored in the Seventies. Some of its original features still exist, including the spiral staircase and one of the original roof beams. Medieval banquets held in the castle offer a magical taste of a bygone era.

In 1597, the town was the site of the Battle of Tyrrellspass, which saw Captain Richard Tyrrell, heading up a small Irish force, wipe out a large Elizabethan army.

Fast forward over 400 years, and Tyrrell would hardly recognise the town that is named after his family. In the 21st Century, it has attracted a huge number of new residents, and enjoys a strategic location, adjacent to the M6 Dublin-Galway Road. For many years, the village dealt with heavy volumes of traffic, but the new M6 bypass has rejuvenated it enormously.

Just 50 miles from Dublin, it is a thriving centre of business activity, and has a number of manufacturing firms, retail outlets, hotels, restaurants and pubs.



GROCERY

TILLIES

NICE DAY FOR  
A GUINNESS





Among the most striking features of Tyrrellspass are its village green and old water pump, which was restored in recent times. A drinking fountain feature, complete with marble seats, was installed, and the green is now more accessible to passers-by.

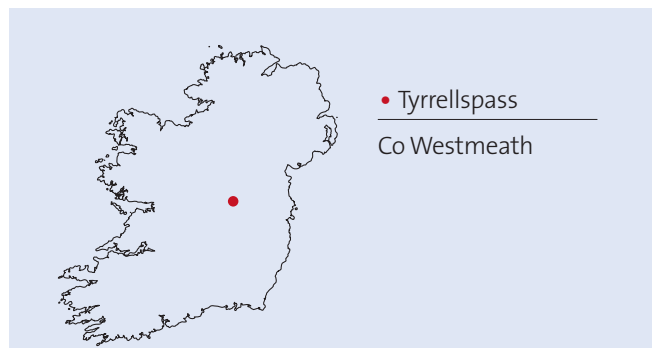
The main street has a number of interesting old houses, as well as some unusual shop fronts, and development in the village has mainly consisted of one-off houses or small schemes.

The location of Tyrrellspass in the lake district of Ireland also holds it in good stead, and means it enjoys easy access to Loughs Ree, Owel, Ennel, Sheelin and Derravaragh among others. Golfers will not be left out either, with no shortage of nine and 18-hole courses within a short drive of the village.

With its combination of natural beauty, aesthetic appeal and community spirit, Tyrrellspass is a true Tidy Towns champion.



Tyrrellspass, c.1969



## On the Tourist Trail

### Tyrrellspass Castle

Located on the edge of the town, this historic castle was built by Captain Richard Tyrrell.

### Golfing facilities

Bounded by mature woodlands and covering gently rolling terrain, there are some quality courses around Tyrrellspass.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).





## VIRGINIA, CO CAVAN

winner, 1964, 1965

# A strategic position

**FOUNDED IN THE** early 17th Century and named in honour of Queen Elizabeth I of England, Virginia in Co Cavan is close to Lough Ramor on the N3. Once a strategic staging and resting point for coaches travelling between Enniskillen and Dublin, it is now regarded as a commuter town with its proximity to trading towns both east and west.

Virginia has a strong historical past. The Marquis of Headfort used the area for sporting activities from the 17th Century right through to the first half of the 20th Century. The Headfort family was one of the great landowning families in Ireland. They were given the title of Marquis in return for their support for the Act of Union in 1800. A number of generations of the family stayed at their 100-acre country estate in Virginia, which they owned for two centuries.

Virginia is simple in terms of structure. There's a single main street and a very prominent Church of Ireland church at the fork in the road — where right leads to Cavan town and left to Ballyjamesduff – and the church frontage presents a stunning view seen through the yew and lime trees as you approach from the main street.

Proximity to Dublin has been central to the recent development of the town, says David McCormick, joint secretary of the Virginia Development Association. "Virginia is going through a transition phase. New housing developments



have been built and a lot of retail properties have sprung up. Business is no longer confined to the main street; many have developed to the rear of it. There is a natural progression towards entrepreneurialism with new businesses such as clothing shops, interiors stores and beauticians being established."

Lough Ramor and Deerpark Forest are major attractions for visitors, he continues. "Lough Ramor is important for its plant and animal life. Both the lake and forest are great public amenities and the reason many people visit."

The lake is one of the largest in Co Cavan, at about 7km long and 1km wide at its narrowest point, and feeds into the Blackwater and Boyne rivers. It is popular with anglers and a wide variety of fish species are to be found, including pike, roach, hybrids, trout and eel.

Opened in 1999, Ramor Theatre is an impressive restored building, which was originally a Catholic church, on the main Cavan-Dublin road. The 200-seat venue runs a full programme of events, including drama, music and dance, and there are also art exhibitions in the wine bar.

Virginia is host to several festivals and events. The annual Virginia Street Fair, held on the last Sunday of June, is a reconstruction of the town's original 'fair day', with







animals, street traders, craft demonstrations and entertainment. Visitors can see Cavan's largest display of vintage vehicles and participate in traditional Irish music and dancing.

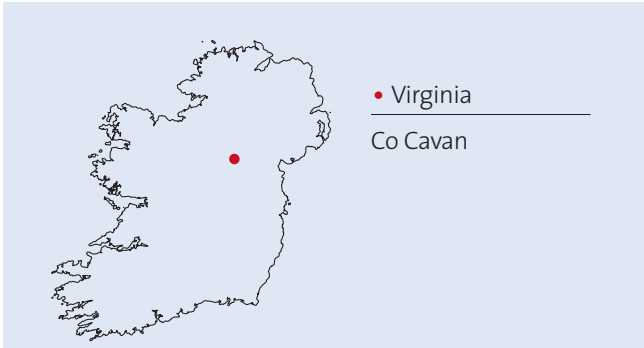
Virginia Agricultural Festival in August is one of the biggest agricultural shows in Ireland. It comprises more than 450 classes with over €50,000 in prize money. Apart from being a showcase for livestock, there are classes for garden produce, home industries, fruit, flowers, photography, hand-writing, dogs and other pets.

Another special event is the pumpkin festival in October, where there is a candlelit display of carved pumpkins on the main street with judging of best-carved and decorated pumpkins, live music and street entertainers. There's also an outdoor organic and farm-fresh food market.

Four miles north of the town is Killinkere, the reputed birthplace of American Civil War general, Philip Sheridan. The Killinkere Whit Jamboree is a major festival, which takes place annually over the June Bank Holiday weekend.

Visitors to the Virginia area can also take part in some traditional Irish activities including cutting turf in the bog, playing hurling, making a súgán rope and enjoying a céili.

Times may have changed since Virginia had consecutive TidyTowns victories in 1964 and 1965, but the Virginia Development Association is as committed as ever to ensuring the town is maintained to the highest standards and will emerge from its period of change to take the overall title once again.



## On the Tourist Trail

### Lough Ramor

Important for its plant and animal life, Lough Ramor is one of the largest lakes in Co Cavan and is popular with anglers.

### Deerpark Forest

This scenic woodland area is ideal for walks.

### Virginia Street Fair

Held on the last Sunday of June each year, this is a reconstruction of Virginia's original fair day. Animals are traded on the street, craft demonstrations are held and traditional Irish music is played.

### Virginia Agricultural Show

One of the biggest shows in Ireland, this takes place every August.

### Ramor Theatre

Running a full programme of events, the theatre is a popular destination, with concerts, musicals, drama, operas and ballets held throughout the year.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).







## WESTPORT, CO MAYO

winner, 2001, 2006

# A worthy port of call

**NESTLED IN THE** shadow of Croagh Patrick overlooking Clew Bay, Westport in Co Mayo is one of Ireland's most charming towns and twice winner of the Tidy Towns competition.

Designed in the 18th Century by James Wyatt, Westport has many outstanding features, not least the beautiful, tree-lined boulevard known as The Mall, which runs parallel to the Carrowbeg river.

Wyatt, along with architect Richard Cassels, was also responsible for designing Westport House in the 18th Century. Set amid lakes and stunning gardens, the property was, and still is, owned by the Browne family, descendants of the 16th-Century pirate queen, Grace O'Malley. O'Malley, or Granuaile as she was known, was the Queen of Connaught who ruled the seas around Mayo. She had several castles, and it was on the ruins of one of these that Westport House was built.

Westport's current town architect is Simon Wall, who works closely with property owners to ensure the overall look is consistent. He reintroduced traditional sash windows and has an input into the colour schemes of any new planning applications.

"Over the past few years the town has certainly developed," says Eithne Larkin, chairwoman of the Westport Tidy Towns committee. Development, shop fronts and signage in Westport have been carefully co-ordinated to create a comfortable environment to either visit or live in.

The hospitality sector is a thriving part of Westport business life, with a number of new hotels and retail outlets underlining the town's potential as a tourist destination.

"Flowers are important; we go for long-term planting, not seasonal varieties, and have a dedicated gardening



team with the town council. The Tidy Towns committee works closely with the town foreman and gardener," says Larkin.

The committee is particularly active in the area of waste management. For example, it appointed two members to work with schools in the Race Against Waste Small Change programme, and organises seminars and workshops for businesses. It also works closely with the Western Regional Fisheries Board to remove litter from the river all year round.

Tourism is crucial to Westport, and its population of over 5,000 is increasingly multicultural, with many foreign nationals working in the service industry. "Westport is very cosmopolitan with all different types of restaurants, shopping and good entertainment. The town leisure





centre got an award in 2007 because of its refurbishment to facilitate people with disabilities — there is a hoist in the swimming pool and all signs are in Braille,” says Larkin.

“We have our own chamber of commerce and we work with it to actively attract new businesses.”

A fascinating collection of heritage items associated with Westport and the immediate area is to be found in the Clew Bay Heritage Centre located in the quay area, where 19th-Century warehouses have been converted to restaurants.

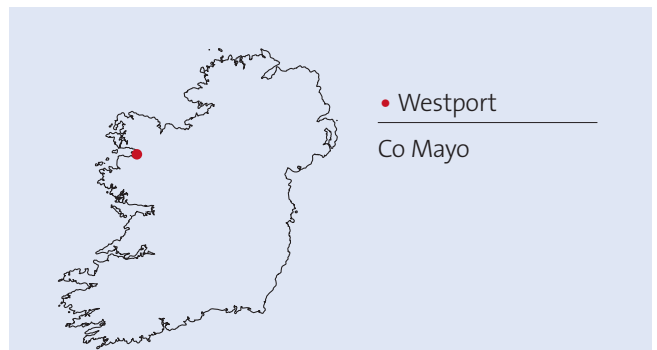
There’s a lot on offer when it comes to activities, says Larkin. “There are quite a few equestrian centres and the fact that there are so many swimming pools is a huge seller for wet days. Anybody can use hotel pools in Westport. There’s a new children’s playground and a bouncy castle and slide at the quay in summer. Visitors can climb Croagh Patrick or do sea fishing in The Mall.”

The Croagh Patrick Visitor Centre is at the base of the mountain and opposite the National Famine Monument. Crafted in bronze by John Behan, this dramatic sculpture depicts a coffin ship with skeleton bodies in the rigging.

A new sculpture, erected by the town council to mark Westport’s second victory in the TidyTowns, has pride of place in the town’s fair-green area. Designed by Shane Holland to reflect his own design of the TidyTowns trophy, this sculpture is a fitting addition to a town so synonymous in the public mind with the national competition.



Westport, c.2001



• Westport  
Co Mayo

## On the Tourist Trail

### Croagh Patrick

Westport lies at the foot of Croagh Patrick, the destination for thousands of pilgrims every year. The ascent of the mountain is a tough one for pilgrims, but many still climb barefoot in memory of St Patrick. It is believed the patron saint of Ireland spent 40 days and 40 nights fasting on the summit. There is a small church at the top of the mountain, which also has great views of Clew Bay.

### Westport Heritage Centre

The centre features an interactive scale model of the town and a wealth of historical information.

### Leisure facilities

With several equestrian centres, swimming pools, good fishing opportunities, a new children’s playground and a bouncy castle at the quay, there is no excuse for boredom in Westport, whether you are young or old.

For more, see [www.discoverireland.ie](http://www.discoverireland.ie).







AGENTS

McGreevy's

FOODSTORE

PUB





Oth Cliath  
DUBLIN N5

Cathair na h-Éireann  
TOWN CELEBRATIONS

Cais. an Bhorraigh  
CASTLEBAR

B. an Róba  
BALLINROBE (N 84)

Newport N

Westport House  
and Country Estate

FOXFORD  
WOOLLEN MILLS





## THE GAELTACHT

# A lasting legacy

*Ireland's Gaeltacht holds an incalculable historic value for our nation, but the various regions are more than just a link to the past — they are modern, vibrant centres for residents and businesses alike. Every year the Tidy Towns competition recognises the Gaeltacht with its own special category*

**MAINTAINING THEIR INIMITABLE** mix of culture and natural beauty has been a priority for the various Gaeltacht regions over the years. But, along with stunning sea and inland views, they have benefited from a pro-business community.

The Gaeltacht was first officially recognised in the early years of the Irish State as part of a public policy to revive the Irish language. Today, the population of all the Gaeltacht regions stands at just under 100,000.

The largest Gaeltacht in Ireland is to be found in Connemara, Co Galway, although there are also significant Irish-speaking areas in counties Donegal, Cork, Kerry and Mayo. The vast majority of our Gaeltacht areas are scattered around the west and south coast (and on islands), but there are also Irish-speaking areas in Co Waterford and even as close to the capital as Ráth Cairn and Baile Ghib in Co Meath. (These came about when the government resettled families from Connemara, Mayo and Kerry in the Thirties). This means that no matter where you live in Ireland, you are not all that far from a Gaeltacht.

Overall employment has grown steadily throughout the regions, with modern manufacturing sectors, such as pharmaceutical and medical devices, and services sectors performing very strongly. A diverse range of modern sectors continue to flourish, including globally traded services, engineering, food processing and high fashion. Businesses range from small firms to companies employing hundreds of people, and include multinationals from Canada and the EU among them.



This is not surprising, considering that a number of services have been developed by Údarás na Gaeltachta, including enterprise units and multifunctional centres. Attractive financial packages are available for businesses setting up in the regions as well as firms that wish to expand.

With regard to the natural environment, the Gaeltacht areas are filled with natural beauty, with many located amid great mountains, lake-filled valleys and craggy coastlines. For this reason, the tourism sector is an important feature of the regions, and continues to thrive.

One example of a Gaeltacht village that has grasped Tidy Towns with both hands is Carraig Airt, a small but busy holiday village in the Barony of Kilmacrenan in north Co Donegal. Situated on the shores of Mulroy Bay at the mouth of the Rosguill Peninsula, it is surrounded by sand hills and woodland, making it one of the most remote and scenic parts of the country.

The village, which marked its centenary in 2002, once





formed part of the estates of the Earls of Leitrim, who had a seat at the nearby Mulroy House. William Clements, the third Earl of Leitrim, was assassinated in nearby Cratlagh Wood in 1878 by men from the neighbouring peninsula of Fanad.

One of the highlights of Carraig Airt is the beautifully maintained Strand Park, which borders the shoreline behind the houses on the main street. Designed by Angela Gallagher, it has won several awards over the years, due to its combination of mature and manicured lawns, shrubbery, seating and picnic areas and the stone wall that encloses it. It also features an enclosed area full of roses and some eye-catching features such as the pansy cart.

The natural stone walls throughout the village are a very attractive touch, as is the wrought-iron lighting on the main street. Overall, the village has maintained an old-world feel, helped perhaps by its traditional signage, Victorian-era hotel and Celtic cross, which is dedicated to the fourth Earl of Leitrim.

Carraig Airt and its hinterland are largely agricultural, and rely considerably on passing trade and tourism during the summer months. One good reason for tourists to stop by in August is the annual Carraig Airt festival, which features a wide variety of local arts and crafts, floats and lots more.

The village is home to three churches, all maintained to an extremely high standard. The Church of Ireland boasts a distinctive tower and beautifully restored clocks, the Catholic church sits majestically on the edge of the village and the Presbyterian church is surrounded by gardens.

Joy Buchanan of Carraig Airt TidyTowns says tourism has been vital in the social and economic life of the village. Carraig Airt has been the winner of the Gaeltacht award for four out of the past five years, so Buchanan knows exactly how important maintaining the look and feel of the village has been in sustaining that success.

“There’s a great community spirit here, we have a good team and everyone does their bit. We make an appeal at the beginning of the year for any houses that need painting and things like that, and people are very co-operative,” says Buchanan.

It is this cohesive approach and sense of community that will continue to ensure Carraig Airt remains one of the Gaeltacht’s many success stories.







## THE ISLANDS

# Remote control

*With rocky shores, spectacular beaches and a treasure trove of heritage, Ireland's islands maintain some of the country's strongest cultural customs today. For that reason, the islands have always been recognised in a separate category in the Tidy Towns competition*

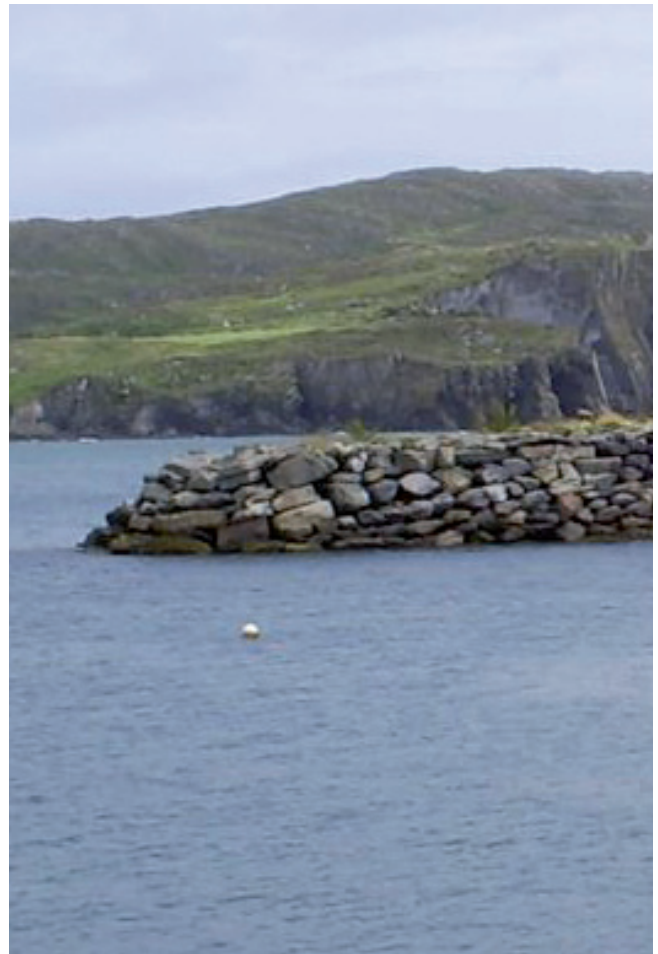
**THERE ARE SOME** 33 off-shore inhabited islands dotted around Ireland's coast, and many more deserted gems too, each with its own distinct characteristics, attractions and history.

Sherkin, Co Cork, has long been the most successful island in Tidy Towns, with nearly a decade of consecutive victories in the Tidy Islands section of the competition up to 2006.

Located in Roaring Water Bay, Sherkin is the ancestral home of the O'Driscoll clan whose ruined castle is based just above the pier. The O'Driscolls were a powerful clan in Baltimore and the islands. Translated from Irish, the name Ó hEidirsceoil means 'bearer of news'. According to historical evidence, which dates back to the 8th Century, the O'Driscolls were kings of the Corca Laoighde, and they are included in the Gaelic genealogies.

A 15th-century Franciscan abbey lies near the ruins of O'Driscoll Castle. This was founded by either Finnen or Dermot O'Driscoll for the Franciscan Friars of Strict Observance. Consisting of a nave and chancel, it also has two chapels. The main doorway of the church is rather unusual because it is in the south wall, instead of the west wall as is more usual. In 1537, the abbey was destroyed by angry seafarers from Waterford, apparently because the O'Driscoll clan had stolen and drunk 100 tonnes of their wine.

Present-day Sherkin isn't a bad spot for a few drinks either, and it has become a real tourist destination during the







summer months. With a population of just over 100, the island is 4.8km long by 2.4km wide. It has three sandy beaches, and is a vantage point for spotting seals, otters and even dolphins. Sherkin comes alive during the summer.

It is a 10-minute trip from Sherkin to the mainland, and there are daily sailings throughout the year. Some companies provide tourist trips, which sail around the islands and allow passengers to focus on the sea life surrounding it. Trained guides give organised tours.

A tarmac road leads from the harbour at Abbey Strand to the south-west end of the island, and another runs from the abbey past the castle to the dock on the north-eastern end of the island. To the west is Kinish harbour, while there is also a good road to Cow and Silver Strands, both of which have fine, sandy beaches. The lighthouse is a distinctive landmark on the island, and an important beacon for sailors making the trip to it.

On the land, there are a number of eateries and some quality accommodation so tourists can enjoy a longer stay. Some overlook the harbour, and traditional music sessions and family activities such as the Sherkin Family Regatta provide quality entertainment. Every May, a Celtic music festival is held on the island.

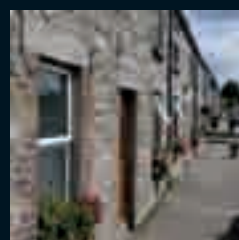
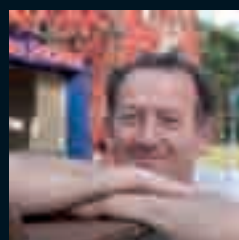
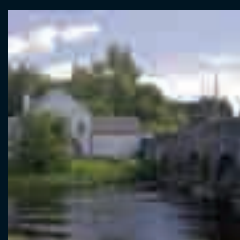
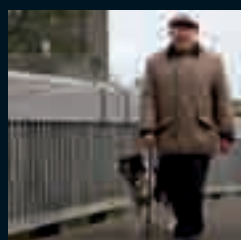
The roadsides of Sherkin are lined with wild plants, and this makes the journey around the island a real treat. From the pale wall pennyworts to bright and bushy fuschias and the stimulating colours of the stonecrops, the walls and ditches of the island are a true asset. There are also many large wet areas on Sherkin, which are full of various wild species. Everything from bird boxes at the brightly coloured National School to fragrant roses in the island's gardens add that special touch. Many walls on the island have vertical stone alignments, making them unique and very attractive.

It's not surprising with such a natural environment that Sherkin has attracted a number of artists to live there. Their work is displayed at the Island Crafts and Information Centre in Baltimore.

The TidyTowns competition has been an important feature of island life on Sherkin. Says Dan Reilly, a resident on the island: "Every man, woman and child on the island is involved. If they see litter they pick it up. There's a very conscious effort made in keeping it tidy."

There is an increasing awareness that Sherkin, and all the islands around Ireland's coast, offer a unique and wonderful life experience, and participation in TidyTowns can help sustain and enhance these unique qualities for residents and visitors alike. Long may life on the islands continue.







Cover image: Granite sculpture of a heron in Terryglass, Co Tipperary, erected in recognition of the village being named national winner of the TidyTowns competition



# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF WINNERS

1958	<b>Glenties</b> , Co Donegal	1983	<b>Terryglass</b> , Co Tipperary (NR)
1959	<b>Glenties</b> , Co Donegal	1984	<b>Trim</b> , Co Meath
1960	<b>Glenties</b> , Co Donegal	1985	<b>Kilkenny</b> , Co Kilkenny
1961	<b>Rathvilly</b> , Co Carlow	1986	<b>Kinsale</b> , Co Cork
1962	<b>Glenties</b> , Co Donegal	1987	<b>Sneem</b> , Co Kerry
1963	<b>Rathvilly</b> , Co Carlow	1988	<b>Carlingford</b> , Co Louth
1964	<b>Virginia</b> , Co Cavan	1989	<b>Ardagh</b> , Co Longford
1965	<b>Virginia</b> , Co Cavan	1990	<b>Malahide</b> , Co Dublin
1966	<b>Ballyjamesduff</b> , Co Cavan	1991	<b>Malin</b> , Co Donegal
1967	<b>Ballyjamesduff</b> , Co Cavan	1992	<b>Ardmore</b> , Co Waterford
1968	<b>Rathvilly</b> , Co Carlow	1993	<b>Keadue</b> , Co Roscommon
1969	<b>Tyrrellspass</b> , Co Westmeath	1994	<b>Galbally</b> , Co Limerick
1970	<b>Malin</b> , Co Donegal	1995	<b>Glenties</b> , Co Donegal
1971	<b>Ballyconnell</b> , Co Cavan	1996	<b>Ardagh</b> , Co Longford
1972	<b>Trim</b> , Co Meath	1997	<b>Terryglass</b> , Co Tipperary (NR)
1973	<b>Kiltegan</b> , Co Wicklow	1998	<b>Ardagh</b> , Co Longford
1974	<b>Trim</b> , Co Meath <b>Ballyconnell</b> , Co Cavan	1999	<b>Clonakilty</b> , Co Cork
1975	<b>Kilsheelan</b> , Co Tipperary (SR)	2000	<b>Kenmare</b> , Co Kerry
1976	<b>Adare</b> , Co Limerick	2001	<b>Westport</b> , Co Mayo
1977	<b>Multyfarnham</b> , Co Westmeath	2002	<b>Castletown</b> , Co Laois
1978	<b>Glaslough</b> , Co Monaghan	2003	<b>Keadue</b> , Co Roscommon
1979	<b>Kilsheelan</b> , Co Tipperary (SR)	2004	<b>Lismore</b> , Co Waterford
1980	<b>Newtowncashel</b> , Co Longford	2005	<b>Ennis</b> , Co Clare
1981	<b>Mountshannon</b> , Co Clare	2006	<b>Westport</b> , Co Mayo
1982	<b>Dunmanway</b> , Co Cork	2007	<b>Aughrim</b> , Co Wicklow

