

Galway East Ecclesiastical Trail



Two driving tours of Galway East
with audio narration

Ecclesiastical Trail

Facilities available



Car Parking



Coach Parking



Disabled Access



Open to the public



Footpaths



Seating available

Galway East Architectural Walking Tours

- Athenry
- Ballinasloe
- Gort
- Loughrea
- Portumna
- Tuam

Brochures for each of these tours are available in Tourist Offices, Hotels and other outlets throughout County Galway. A printable version of the brochure, along with a detailed audio narrative for each tour are also available on-line www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding and www.galway.ie

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Introduction

Dear Visitor,

We welcome you to Galway East to explore its wealth of ecclesiastical built heritage of architectural, archeological, historical, artistic, and visual significance. We also invite you to enjoy the settings of these great buildings within their own unique and peaceful environments.

Twenty one ecclesiastical heritage sites are highlighted in this brochure, while a further twenty seven sites are mentioned in the text. All are shown on the accompanying map. These sites display the richness of the Early Christian, Medieval and Celtic Revival periods, and span over one thousand years of Irish heritage. The brochure also provides a short introduction to the Early Christian Period, the Later Medieval Period and the Celtic Revival Period.

This trail has something to offer to all interests and to all age groups. The sites that are highlighted are rich and varied, ranging from foundations associated with St Brendan the Navigator and St Jarlath, to Medieval finely-carved Romanesque doorways, windows, arches, and decorative tombs, to superb stained glass windows and finely carved church furniture of the Celtic Revival period.

The map contained in this brochure provides you with two marked driving routes, together with the location and categorisation of forty-eight ecclesiastical heritage sites. Twenty-one of these ecclesiastical heritage sites are included in the two trails.

If you wish to use more detailed maps we suggest that you use the Discovery Series of maps produced by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. Discovery Series Map numbers 38, 39, 40, 45, 46, 47, 51, 52 and 53 cover this area, and are widely available. If you have sat-nav in your car, you can enter the co-ordinates at the top of each site's page into your sat-nav system to help you find its location.

We hope that you will have a memorable and enjoyable experience exploring 'The Ecclesiastical Treasures' of East County Galway.

With our best wishes,

***East Galway Ecclesiastical
Heritage Steering Group
and Galway East Wayfinding Committee***

There is an excellent Audio CD featuring narration on each site on the Ecclesiastical Driving Trails by Dr. Peter Harbison. The CD and brochure are available in the Tourist Offices around County Galway, as well as Athenry Heritage Centre. Alternatively, you can download the audio for free from www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding. See also www.galway.ie

Listen to a brief description of each site on the CD as you drive to each location or on your MP3 player at each site.

Preface *Dr. Peter Harbison*

The material covered in this booklet spans a period of a thousand years and more, a millennium which saw considerable changes in the Irish church.

The sites chosen can be divided up into three separate and very distinct periods –

- a) Early Christian*
- b) (Later) Medieval*
- c) What is loosely described here as 'Celtic Revival' at the turn of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, although some of the items would not properly be covered by that description.*

The characteristics and historical background of each of these three categories will be discussed in an introduction before listing the main sites of each period.

*For an in-depth insight into the ecclesiastical heritage of Galway East, there is Dr. Harbison's excellent book :
"A Thousand Years of Church Heritage in East Galway"
available through Ashfield Press Publishing
www.ashfieldpress.com*



Early Christian Period

The Early Christian period may be broadly defined as having begun with the introduction of Christianity to Ireland by Palladius, St Patrick and others around the fifth century A.D., and finishing around 1200. The sixth century saw the development and spread of monasticism in the country, leading to the foundation of many monasteries which did not belong to any particular religious order. Until the close of the period seven hundred years later, these monasteries remained the keepers of Ireland's literary and historic heritage, and the fosterers of arts and crafts in the form of manuscripts and metalwork. These were the institutions which organised religious life in the country, and whose monks carried the word of God overseas to Britain and the European Continent, where their learning was highly appreciated.

Hallowed names are associated with the founding of these monasteries. Brendan the Navigator, Colmán Mac Duach, and Jarlath of Tuam, to mention but three of them are relevant to our purpose here. Because their early monastic buildings were made of wood, nothing has survived on site that can be dated back to the time of the founding fathers. Instead, what we find today are structures that are probably no earlier than the tenth century, but which belong largely to the twelfth. Each monastery would have had at least one church and even more if it became a pilgrimage site. Many had tall Round Towers like pared pencils standing on their ends, and the rare few had High Crosses. Some of the churches included in our tours are simple, almost severe, in their often

massive limestone masonry. Others - such as Clonfert, Kilmacduagh, Tuam and Drumacoo - bear finely-carved Romanesque ornament decorating their doorways, chancel arches and even windows of the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The High Crosses preserved in Tuam are among the most unusual contributions made by Ireland to the art of the European Middle Ages.

Early Christian sites featured in this guide:

- Clonfert Cathedral
- Drumacoo
- Kilmacduagh
- Tuam - St Mary's Church of Ireland Cathedral

Other Early Christian sites of interest in Galway East (marked on map, but not featured in this guide):

- Kilbennon
- Killeely
- Killursa
- Kiltartan

See map for **RED** and **BLUE** Driving Trails.
Listen to your CD in your car or download audio
to your MP3 player.

www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding

See also **www.galway.ie**

Clonfert Cathedral



Period: Early Christian

Route: Red Route (*see map*)

Clonfert will forever be linked with the name of the great navigator, Saint Brendan. His remains are traditionally believed to lie within the walls of the present Church of Ireland Cathedral, on the site of a monastery which he is said to have founded on his travels up the river Shannon. The great medieval travelogue, the *Navigatio Brendani*, tells of the adventures of his island-hopping Atlantic pilgrimage in search of the Promised Land of the Saints. It tells of his return to Ireland, where he died around 580 at his sister's convent at Annaghdown. Because of the originality and imagination of the narrative, the *Navigatio* was translated from Latin into many vernacular European languages, and it established Brendan's reputation as one of the best-known Irish saints in the Middle Ages.



It is no wonder then that the Cathedral where he lies has the most lavish Irish doorway in the Romanesque style, built around or before 1200 to allow pilgrims access to his grave. The doorway was inserted into the western wall of an earlier church. The church is constructed with large stones, and has long side-walls extending out beyond the gables. The doorway itself, carved in a sandstone (that has proved all too susceptible to weathering) has a tangent gable above, and is richly decorated with a variety of geometrical, animal and foliate designs.

The innermost order, with a figure - perhaps representing St Brendan - was inserted in the fifteenth century, probably at the same time that the slender tower was added above it, and the figure of a mermaid was carved on the chancel arch.

Unusually for pre-Gothic Irish cathedrals, Clonfert had transepts, of which one survives in a roofless condition. The Cathedral has undergone many changes down the years, and is undergoing a long process of conservation; that is being undertaken by the local church, the local community, the Heritage Council, Galway County Council and the DoEHLG. Behind the Cathedral is a fine yew walk, and a bishop's palace dating to around 1600. The Cathedral is in use as a Church of Ireland Parish Church.

Drumacoo



Period: Early Christian
Route: Blue Route

Drumacoo is an early medieval religious site in County Galway that is dedicated to a female saint, St Sourney, or *Assurnaidhe*. She is also venerated on the Aran Islands. It has the remains of a frequently-altered church with large, Cyclopean masonry, parts of which are no later than the twelfth century. It is best known for its decorative stonework carried out circa 1200 by a group of masons known as 'The School of the West' – note the pair of interior east windows, and a south doorway which is the church's most significant and beautiful feature. Its pointed gothic arch is decorated with undercut chevron, foliage and even the occasional lively monster. Adjoining is a tall 1830 building housing the 'cemetery' of the St George family. Nearby is a sunken well dedicated to St Sourney.



Kilmacduagh



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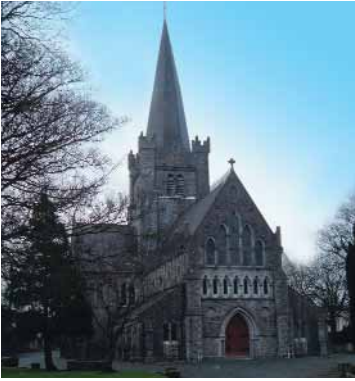


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Period: Early Christian
Route: Blue Route

In the seventh century, St Colmán Mac Duach founded the monastery bearing his name in South Galway, close to the foot of the colourful limestone scenery of the Burren. It is recognisable from afar through its 100-foot high Round Tower which leans two feet out of the perpendicular. Centuries older than its famous counterpart in Pisa, it is the tallest and best-preserved of its kind in Ireland. It overlooks a twelfth century cathedral which was greatly expanded in the fifteenth century. This is now a ruin with a blocked doorway. Not far away stands the unusual thirteenth century bishop's residence. Other churches survive at Kilmacduagh, the most charming of which is O'Heyne's Church, with its fine carved stonework of around 1200.



Tuam - *St Mary's Cathedral*

Period: Late Medieval

Route: Blue Route

Tuam was among Ireland's most important political and religious centres in the twelfth century. It was the power-base of the O'Connor High Kings of Ireland and also became one of the four Irish archbishoprics in 1152. The present Church of Ireland Cathedral now houses some of the greatest treasures from that period – fragments of four High Crosses, and the chancel of a late-twelfth century church. The chancel has a splendid sandstone arch with the largest span of any Romanesque church in Ireland. It bears wonderfully decorated voussoirs and capitals in a remarkable state of preservation, and also contains the original carved east windows. The remainder of the Cathedral is a largely limestone creation of the nineteenth century, although the adjoining Synod Hall was once the Cathedral's Late Gothic chancel.

*Architectural Walking Tour of this town available.
See www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding or pick up brochures from your local tourist office.*





Later Medieval Period

The old Irish church, well exemplified by Kilmacduagh, was in need of both religious and moral reform by the twelfth century. Rome looked suspiciously at its independence, and strove to bring it to heel by re-organising church life in Ireland into a diocesan system subject to the Pope, as was the case in the rest of Christian Europe. The drastic reform of the twelfth century eased out the old Irish monasteries, along with their culture and way of life, and created a new episcopal organisation based on dioceses and archdioceses. Tuam became the Archdiocese of the West, but other centres relevant to us here became bishoprics for a shorter or longer period of time, as was the case with Clonfert and Annaghdown.

The reform effort was strongly supported by new religious orders introduced into Ireland during the twelfth century – particularly the Cistercians and the Augustinians. The latter sometimes took over already-existing monasteries, but the Cistercians, as seen at Abbeyknockmoy, made totally new foundations on green-field sites. There they introduced a new style of monastic architectural layout, comprising a church beside an open cloister area, which was flanked on the other three sides by various domestic buildings. In the thirteenth century, these orders were followed by the Dominicans, and mendicant orders such as the Carmelites and Franciscans. It was the latter who were to become the great church builders, and the

inspirers of religious fervour in the fifteenth century. The greatest witnesses to their activities are the friaries which they built to Cistercian design, sometimes in towns, but more often in the Irish countryside. Typical are the long churches with flamboyant windows and a tower inserted half way along their length, and usually having two-storey enclosed cloisters adjoining them – features rarely found outside Ireland. Some even have decorative tombs inserted in their interior walls, as at Kilconnell.

Later Medieval sites featured in this guide:

- Abbeyknockmoy Cistercian Abbey
- Annaghdown
- Athenry Dominican Friary
- Claregalway Franciscan Friary
- Clontuskert Augustinian Abbey
- Kilconnell Franciscan Friary
- Meelick Franciscan Friary
- Portumna Dominican Friary
- Ross Errilly Franciscan Friary

Other Later Medieval Sites of interest in Galway East (marked on map but not featured in this guide):

- Abbey (Kilnaleghin)
- Ballinakill Abbey
- Creevaghbaun Church
- Dunmore Augustinian Friary
- Kilcorban Dominican Friary
- Loughrea Carmelite Friary
- Tuam - Templejarlath / St Jarlath's Church

Abbeyknockmoy

Cistercian Abbey



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Period: Later Medieval
Route: Blue Route

Abbeyknockmoy is the only medieval Cistercian house in East Galway, having been founded from Boyle in County Roscommon in 1190 with the help of Cathal Crobderg, king of Connacht. It conforms to the lay-out of a typical Cistercian monastery – a church on the north side of a quadrangle with lean-to cloister, off which were placed the kitchen and refectory on the opposite side to the church and a decorative Chapter-house in the eastern wing. The chancel of the church is stone-roofed. Now sadly locked for conservation reasons, it houses one of the rare Irish examples of a Gothic wall-painting; its colours have almost entirely faded, but it bore a Crucifixion scene and a figure of St Sebastian. Also present was a representation of the tale of The Three Live Kings and The Three Dead Kings, once inscribed with the words 'As you are now, so once were we; as we now are, so shall you be' - the moral of the story being that you should lead a good life.



Annaghdown Ecclesiastical Complex

Period: Later Medieval

Route: Blue Route

Scenically located on the eastern shore of Lough Corrib, Annaghdown is best-known for being the place where St. Brendan, the famous navigator, died around 580 – at a convent founded by his sister Briga. Nothing remains, however, from this early period, and the most significant buildings date from around the year 1200, by which time Annaghdown had become a Cathedral. It remained the seat of a bishop until the fourteenth century. Most important is the ruined Cathedral, with an ornamental north doorway and an east window which is the finest example of its kind in the Romanesque style anywhere in the country. Closer to the lake shore is a priory of the Augustinian canons founded in the 1140s, containing finely-carved fragments of what may have been the supports for the chancel arch of the church. Foundations of other churches survive, but not the Round Tower of 1238 – the last of its kind to have been built in the Irish Middle Ages.





Athenry *Dominican Friary*

Period: Later Medieval
Route: Blue Route

Athenry was among the finest, and most richly endowed, of the many medieval Dominican friaries in Connacht. Dedicated to SS Peter and Paul, it was founded by the Norman baron Milo de Bermingham, who also erected the stout castle close by. Re-edified in 1327, and restored after a disastrous fire around 1420. Many dignitaries financed its various building projects, including the now-vanished cloisters to the south of the church. Some of the walls of the nave and choir go back to de Bermingham's day, but most of the rest of the fabric dates from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the original church was enlarged by the addition of a new aisle and north transept. In the latter are fine (partially restored) niches, and there is also a traceried east window in the choir. Other notable features include the tombs inserted into the walls in the medieval period.

Architectural Walking Tour of this town available.

See www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding or pick up a brochure at your local tourist office or in Athenry Heritage Centre.

Claregalway

Franciscan Friary



Period: Later Medieval
Route: Blue Route

Medieval Franciscan friaries are one of Ireland's most original contributions to European architecture of the Later Middle Ages, and Claregalway is amongst the best examples. Founded around 1252, only 26 years after the death of the order's founder Saint Francis of Assisi, the friary's serried rows of tall lancet windows in the side walls of the choir belong to the earliest part of the building. The majestic traceried east window is a fifteenth-century addition, as is the friary's most prominent feature – the tall, slender tower inserted mid-way along the hall-like church. Dissolved by King Henry VIII around 1540, and later sequestered by the Elizabethans for use as a barracks, the friary was re-occupied at least twice by the friars, but is now just a stately ruin. Note the many medieval and later memorials in the walls and on the ground, including some interesting nineteenth-century occupational tombstones illustrating ploughs.

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Clontuskert *Augustinian Abbey*

Period: Late Medieval
Route: Red Route

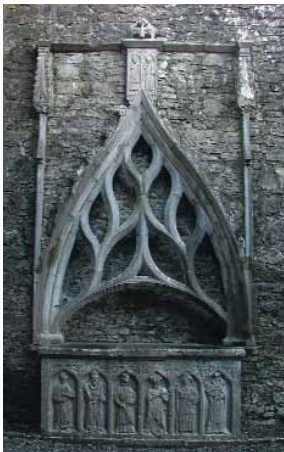
It was the O'Kelly lords of the area who invited the Augustinian canons to found a house south of Ballinasloe some time after 1140. Lancet windows in the choir of their church at Clontuskert show that the first major building phase of the existing church was in the thirteenth century, but it was its fifteenth century alterations and additions that make it famous, particularly the doorway at its western end. There, an inscription dates it to the year 1471, and of the many figures decorating the doorway, we can make out on top St Michael the Archangel weighing souls, John the Baptist, St Catherine of Alexandria, and a mitred bishop. On the sides of the doorway we find various emblems, including that of the pelican piercing its breast to feed its young, symbolising the church feeding its flock. When the State took over the building in 1971, it restored the east window and the very unusual rood-screen which bears the name JOHES (John), one of the rare instances where a medieval mason was allowed to sign his name on an Irish building.

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Kilconnell *Franciscan Friary*

Period: Late Medieval
Route: Red Route

Anyone travelling on the road from Athenry to Ballinasloe cannot but be struck by the friary at Kilconnell, one of the most perfect of the medieval Franciscan friaries in Ireland. Founded probably in the early fifteenth century, the long church had a tall and graceful tower inserted into it around the middle of that century. The carvings underneath its arch include an owl, perhaps a reminder to the friars to keep awake during their night prayers. But the most significant of the friary's features are the canopied tombs, particularly those in the north wall. The finest is that of circa 1500 near the western end, which has six named figures under arches on the bottom part of the tomb. These are St John the Evangelist, St Louis of Toulouse, The Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist, St James Major and St Denis of Paris. The representation of the two French saints are unique in Ireland, and perhaps suggest some pilgrimage link with France.



Meelick

Franciscan Friary



Period: Late Medieval
Route: Red Route

Meelick church was founded by the O'Madden family in the early fifteenth century. The fabric of the building largely dates from that period, and although the Franciscan friars who built it were ejected at the Reformation, they returned and used it until 1853, when the last prior died. After that, it was apparently abandoned, but it is now happily restored as a parish rather than a friary church. It houses some fine tombstones with excellent examples of seventeenth-century lettering, and a figure of St Francis which probably adorned a cloister that would once have stood to the south of the church. Renovation in 1985 brought the welcome addition of modern altar furniture which adds new life to the interior.

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Portumna

Dominican Priory



Period: Late Medieval
Route: Red Route

Standing close to Portumna Castle at the northern end of Lough Derg is a ruined medieval Dominican priory which originated as a daughter-house of the Cistercian abbey of Dunbrody in County Wexford. While some small parts of the church may have been built by the first owners in the thirteenth century, the friary in its present form is essentially a Dominican creation of the fifteenth century. Once dominated by a tower now only half its original height, its long hall-like church has fine traceried windows in the east wall and south transept. There is also an unusual west doorway, surmounted by a window. To the north of the church is an attractive cloister, partially restored in 1954. The friary was dissolved at the Reformation, and later came into the possession of the Earl of Clanrickard.

Architectural Walking Tour of this town available. See www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding or pick up brochures from your local tourist office.

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Headford - *Ross Errilly* *Franciscan Friary*



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Period: Late Medieval
Route: Blue Route

Nestling close to the Black River separating Galway from the neighbouring county of Mayo, Ross Errilly is one of the latest and most imposing of the many ruined Franciscan friaries surviving from late medieval Ireland. Founded probably in the fifteenth century, it is dominated by a tall central tower above the centre of the church, which has an unusual balcony on the first floor (probably for a rood screen). The church, over-cluttered with more recent tombs, has a fine traceried east window. What fascinates here are the extensive domestic buildings to the north, which include a cloister, a refectory with reading desk and a baking oven. There was also a stone tank to keep fresh fish for feeding, what must once have been a large and flourishing community. The friars were banished at the Reformation, but returned repeatedly – and who would blame them?



Celtic Revival Period

The nineteenth century saw the emancipation and rise of the Catholic majority among the Irish population, expressed in the ever-increasing size of their churches and the tallness of their spires, as seen here, for instance, in Tuam and Ballinasloe. But while the prevalent Gothic style could be seen as having forged links of continuity with the pre-Reformation churches and friaries, the tradition of Irish craftsmanship in decorating them had been lost in the intervening centuries. Thus, by the Victorian period, parish priests were looking to Italy and Germany to decorate their churches with furniture and stained glass windows. This appalled the Galway patriot and philanthropist, Edward Martyn of Tullira, who wanted Irish Catholic churches to be decorated with works designed by Irish artists and created by Irish craftsmen. He introduced English artists to come and teach Irish talent how to produce stained glass windows, a gradual process which can be followed chronologically in his own church at Labane. His efforts bore further fruit in the foundation of one of Ireland's most famous stained glass studios, *An Túr Gloine*, in 1903. It was given all the commissions for the windows in Loughrea Cathedral, the interior of which they made into a tingling coloured jewel. This was also a time when nationalist sentiment was reviving old Celtic motifs from Irish art of a bygone era, and this duly found expression in stained glass, ecclesiastical metalwork and weaving, of which East Galway – and Loughrea in particular – has some superb examples.

The great stained glass artist of the period, Harry Clarke, is happily represented in St Michael's

church in Ballinasloe. Its Church of Ireland counterpart, St John's, has well-crafted and strongly-coloured windows in a mode more reminiscent of the nineteenth-century tradition. Smaller churches, of both denominations, followed the lead of the larger ones, and some gems of stained glass which can come as a pleasant surprise to the unexpected traveller in this rural environment.

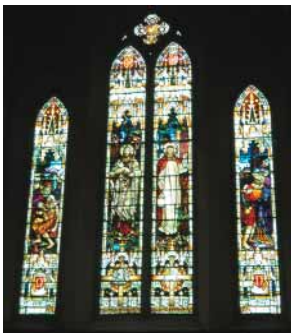
Celtic Revival sites featured in this guide:

- Ballinasloe - St John's Church of Ireland Church
- Ballinasloe - St Michael's Catholic Church
- Glenamaddy Catholic Church
- Killeenadeema Catholic Church
- Labane Catholic Church
- Loughrea - St Brendan's Cathedral
- Peterswell Catholic Church
- Tirneevin Catholic Church

Other Celtic Revival sites of interest in Galway East (marked on map but not featured in this guide):

- Ahascragh Catholic Church
- Ardahan Church of Ireland Church
- Aghrim Holy Trinity Church
- Ballindereen Catholic Church
- Belclare Catholic Church
- Clonfert: St. Brendan's Catholic Church
- Eyrecourt Catholic Church
- Fohenagh Catholic Church
- Gortanumera Catholic Church
- Gurteen Catholic Church
- Kilconnell Catholic Church
- Killererin Catholic Church
- Kiltormer Catholic Church
- Killure Catholic Church
- Peterswell Catholic Church
- Roevehagh Catholic Church
- Tuam - Catholic Cathedral of the Assumption

Ballinasloe - *St. John's Church of Ireland Church*



Period: Celtic Revival
Route: Red Route

The Church of Ireland church of St John stands on a knoll above the fair green in Ballinasloe, where the famous annual horse fair takes place. Originally built with subventions from the Board of First Fruits in 1818, the church was given its present cruciform shape with tower above the door when considerable renovations were undertaken in 1842. Restored after a disastrous fire in 1899, the church saw its south transept later made into a special Healing Chapel in the last century. The most striking feature of the interior is the four-light east window of 1928. Rich in colour and ornamentation, and inscribed with the words 'I am Alpha and Omega', it has two remarkable figures of Christ, one as The Good Shepherd and the other as The Light of the World, with the light from Christ's lantern in the latter cleverly falling on his long garment. The church is often locked, but the key is available locally.

Architectural Walking Tour of this town available. See www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding or pick up brochures from your local tourist office.





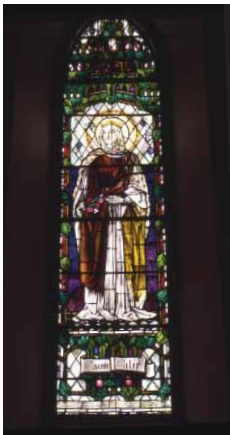
Ballinasloe *St Michael's Catholic Church*

Period: Celtic Revival

Route: Red Route

The original 1846 design for the main Catholic church in Ballinasloe was by the eminent Victorian architect J.J. McCarthy, but the Great Famine thwarted building plans, and it was a revised version by the famous English architect Pugin that was finally built in 1858. The church has many fascinating features, not least of which is its collection of stained glass. This includes St Patrick and St Rose of Lima of 1925 by Harry Clarke (the only windows in our area by this great master), St Bernadette and the local St Grellan by Earley (1940), and the colourful two-light Holy Family and Raising the Daughter of Jairus of 1958 by Patrick Pollen. The glittering tabernacle of 1926 is by Mia Cranwill, one of the best pieces of Celtic Revival metalwork, and beneath the altar on which it stands lies the figure of The Dead Christ of 1928 by Albert Power, sculptor. Harry Clarke's unique chancel arch canvas was painted over in the 1960s. The wooden roof in Gothic style is also a notable masterwork of its kind.

*Architectural Walking Tour of this town available.
See www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding or pick up brochures from your local tourist office.*



Labane *Catholic Church*

Period: Celtic Revival
Route: Blue Route

The Catholic church in Labane village played a significant role in the genesis of the remarkable Irish stained glass revival just over one hundred years ago. Its guiding spirit was the local Catholic landowner, Edward Martyn, who commissioned English artists such as Whall, Image, Virtue and Child – to design windows for the church in the style of William Morris's Arts and Crafts movement. He then engaged Child to establish a new stained glass school in Dublin where young Irish artists could learn their skills. They in turn put their skills into practice in the church at Labane. The Celtic Revival spirit at the time inspired the introduction of old Irish designs into windows painted by Sarah Purser, Ethel Rhind, Catherine O'Brien and Michael Healy, all part of the stained glass studio known as *An Túr Gloine* (Tower of Glass), founded by Miss Purser in 1903, and whose great showcase is Loughrea Cathedral. The unusual italianate baldachino covering the altar is by Michael Shortall, a Celtic Revival sculptor who also worked in Loughrea.



Killeenadeema *Catholic Church*



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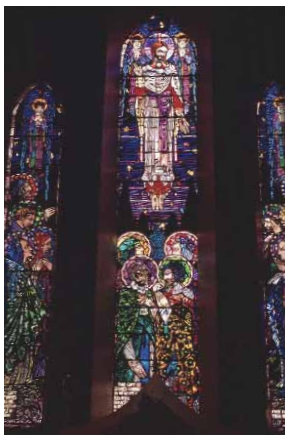


OPEN



Period: Celtic Revival
Route: Red Route

The bright interior of the T-shaped Catholic church at Killeenadeema, situated in a dominant location south of Loughrea, presents a rich panorama of coloured windows in the walls on either side of the altar which cannot fail to delight the visitor. The windows all date from around the 1930s or shortly afterwards, and were produced by the Harry Clarke Stained Glass studio and also, seemingly, Earley of Dublin. The patron saint, Dympna, armed with a sword, shares a twin-light on the left with St. Brendan, the famous sixth-century navigator. Next to it, on the left of the altar recess, is an attractive Annunciation with an Irish-language inscription, beside which is a charming Christ child with his parents, the Virgin in each case clad in a luminous blue gown. On the other side of the altar is a pair of windows featuring Christ laid in the tomb and a Resurrection. On the extreme right, and balancing the Irish saints on the left, are Patrick and Brigid, two of the three national apostles of Ireland. The whole ensemble in this welcoming church is a splendid example of the artistic surprises which can be found in unexpected places in East Galway – and which make a detour to see them well worth while.



Glenamaddy *Catholic Church*

Period: Celtic Revival
Route: Blue Route

The focal point of the village of Glenamaddy in North-East Galway is St. Patrick's Catholic church which was built in 1904, only a year after the completion of the rather larger Cathedral in Loughrea. But it was not until the 1930s that it received its main attraction. This is an impressive three-light east window of *The Ascension* in wonderful blues and reds and other colours. The upper part of the central panel shows a somewhat ethereal Christ among the stars being borne heavenwards by two assisting angels. Below, more down to earth and larger in scale, are four forceful apostles, each eyeing one another more than they do the Saviour, the two in front having wonderful Harry Clarke-style bearded faces and decoratively-patterned cloaks. They are, however, not the work of Harry Clarke himself, but were carried out by his Stained Glass studio shortly after his death, while his influence there was still all-pervasive. Most, but not all, of the tall male and female figures in the two flanking panels raise their eyes towards the ascending Christ. Other windows in the church, less rich in texture, are *The Annunciation* of 1952 by the Earley Stained Glass Studio, and a rose window by A.W. Lyons.



St Brendan's Cathedral, *Loughrea*



Period: Celtic Revival
Route: Red Route

The Catholic Cathedral of St Brendan in the town of Loughrea is the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of Clonfert. It is the greatest showcase of the artistry of *An Túr Gloine* (The Tower of Glass), one of the most remarkable stained glass studios ever to have operated in Ireland.

An Túr Gloine was established by Sarah Purser in 1902 and its birth coincided with the opening of St. Brendan's Cathedral. The foundation stone of the Cathedral was laid in 1897.

The decoration of the Cathedral was undertaken with the assistance of a vibrant financial patron, Edward Martyn of Tullira, who was born in the parish of Loughrea in the home of his maternal grandparents, the Smyths of Masonbrook. The willingness of the local bishop and clergy to allow enlightened artists to experiment in the new Cathedral has provided us with a legacy of tremendous beauty.

The Cathedral interior contains an amazingly varied richness of stained glass by different artists of *An Túr Gloine*. The porch spans the earliest and latest examples – Sarah Purser's St Brendan window (1903) and Patrick Pye's St Brigid window (1957). The apse has three windows by the inspirational A.E. Child. The baptistery at the back of the church has works by Child, Purser and a third artist Michael Healy, whose greatest works are in the west transept – The Ascension window (1936) and the Last Judgment window (1940). The rising star of Evie Hone can be seen in her colourful St Brigid window (1942) in the western aisle and in the great rose window - The Creation (1950) above the organ over the west doorway.

Our Lady's altar has a remarkable statue of the virgin and child by John Hughes. This statue portrays Our Lady as a youthful mother holding an energetic child. It is a stunningly natural depiction of simple beauty.

The interesting set of historical capitals in the cathedral representing the Evangelists, the life of the Titular St Brendan, and events in the history of the diocese. These are the work of Michael Shortall. Two of the capitals left uncarved by Shortall were completed in 2003 by Tom Glendon to mark the centenary of the opening of the Cathedral. This reminds us that the Cathedral decoration is ongoing because this is a building in constant use as a place of worship.

In addition the cathedral hosts many other notable works of art including the Stations of the Cross in *opus sectile* (1928-33) by Ethel Rhind.

The Clonfert Diocesan Museum is located in the grounds of the Cathedral. It contains some rare Irish Medieval wooden sculptures, as well as vestments and banners/hangings created by the *Dun Emer* Guild (which included the Yeats sisters). These must be counted among the most colourful of the Celtic Revival in Ireland.

Architectural Walking Tour of this town available. See www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding or pick up brochures from your local tourist office.



Peterswell *Catholic Church*

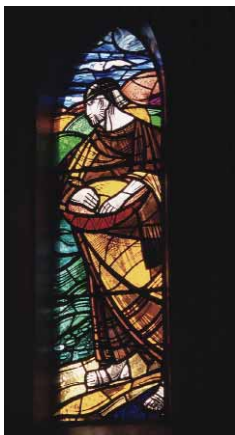
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Period: Celtic Revival
Route: Blue Route

The white-painted church at Peterswell, just off the Gort to Loughrea road, stands out against the background of the foot of the Slieve Aughty Mountains. The tower was added in 1947 to a simple, T-shaped church of 1840, the main treasure of which is a stained glass window of 1950 by Evie Hone, entitled *Our Lady of the Rosary*. Evie Hone was the outstanding Irish stained glass artist of the middle of the last century and, in her vibrant colours, she expresses here her devotion to the Mother of Christ after her conversion to Catholicism in 1937.



Tirneevin *Catholic Church*

Period: Celtic Revival

Route: Blue Route

Tirneevin lies slightly farther from Gort – the home of the seventh-century Irish king Guaire famous for his hospitality – than it does from Kilmacduagh, where he gave land for his brother, Colmán mac Duagh, to found a monastery. Both of these men feature prominently in a striking stained glass window by George Walsh, senior, of c.1975, which faces the entrance porch of the Catholic church at Tirneevin. Here we see the king with harp, top left, stretching out his hand to the saint at whose feet are dishes. These refer to the story that, when the Saint once went hungry in his hermitage before Easter, the plates on his brother's feasting table rose and flew through the air to Colmán who was puzzled as to how such rich fare came so suddenly out of the sky to him. But the plates were quickly followed by the king himself, who was surprised to find that they led to his brother, whose sanctity he immediately recognised and thereupon gave him land for his monastery. Also in the window are the saint's charming animal friends, a cock, a mouse and a fly, all of which play a part in his life-story. In the same wall is another Walsh window of *The Virgin and Child* and, beyond it, is the powerful Sower by the well-known artist George Campbell, which must be regarded as one of the most richly-coloured windows in the whole of East Galway.



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Useful Contacts

TOURIST OFFICES

Galway Tourist Office (Open all year): 091 537700

Oranmore Tourist Office (Open all year): 091 790811

Ballinasloe Tourist Office (Seasonal): 090 96 42604

Thoor Ballylee, Gort (Seasonal): 091 631436

Tuam Tourist Office (Seasonal): 093 25486 / 24463

To telephone from abroad, please use the prefix 00 353 and omit the first 0 in the local number.

WEBSITES

Fáilte Ireland West

The official Regional Tourism Authority for Galway, Mayo and Roscommon.

www.discoverireland.ie/west

Galway East Tourism

Tourism company for the Galway East region.

www.galwayeast.com

Galway County Council

Local authority service provider for Galway County.

www.galway.ie

Heritage Council

Statutory body for the identification, protection, conservation and enhancement of the national heritage in Ireland.

www.heritagecouncil.ie

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

www.environ.ie

Galway Rural Development (GRD)

Administrator of the Social Inclusion Programme and the National Rural Development Programme (LEADER), in its operational area of rural Galway (excluding City and Gaeltacht).

www.grd.ie

Further Reading

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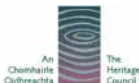
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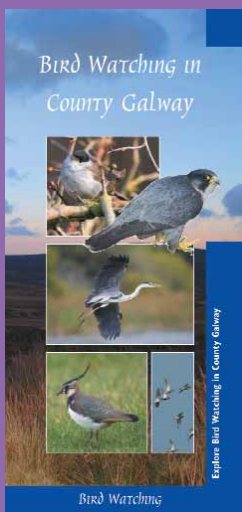
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Galway East Ecclesiastical Trail

The other publication in this series



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www.galwayeast.com/wayfinding