

Westport, Croagh Patrick, Castlebar and Surrounds

Louisburgh, Mayo (Cluain Cearban)

This is fishing village in Clew Bay, with excellent sandy beaches at Cloghmoyle and Old Head. The town gets its name from the fact that it was laid out by the 1st Marquess of Sligo. He had a relation who fought against the French at the Battle of Louisburgh in Canada. The town is home to the Granuaile Visitor Centre, dedicated to the life and times of Grace O'Malley (1530-1603), the **Pirate Queen** and the most famous of the O'Malley clan. The centre also includes a **Famine Exhibition**.

Farther to the southwest is a fine strand at Carrowniskey. There are good views of the mountains in the Murrisk country, with Croagh Patrick to the east, and the Mweelrea (Cnoc Maol Réidh – the smooth, bare Hill) range to the south.

A little to the west of the village is **Roonah** Quay (Rua an Agha – the field of rough land), from which access is possible to Clare Island. This is 4 miles in length; the cliffs on its north-west side are particularly striking. The highest point on the island, Knockmore (Cnoc mór – High Mountain), 1,520', has a precipitous descent to the Atlantic.

Newport, Mayo (Baile Uí Fhiacháí – O'Feehan's Town)

This is an angling centre, on the Newport River, which flows into Clew Bay. The fine Church is in the modern Irish-Romanesque style, with a notable east window. Lying around the village are numerous drumlins of geological interest. Newport is the gate to pristine territories to the west. Carrigahooly Castle, a four-sided tower overlooking one of the numerous sea-creeks, was one of the renowned Grace O Malley's strongholds. A fine glen leads westwards along the coast, passing Burrishoole, near the southern extremity of Furnace Lough, and continuing to Mulrany and the Curraun Peninsula.



Pikes - Weapons of War

Cushcamcarragh (Coiscéim Charrach – the Rocky Step), to the north-west of Lough Feeagh (Loch Fíoch – the Wood-surrounded Lake), attains 2,343 ft., and is seen to the north of the road. North-east of Newport lies Lough Beltra (Béal Trá – the Entrance to the Beach), overlooked on its eastern side by a range of hills. On the road out to Achill, there is a mural on the gable end of a house depicting the arrest of **Father Manus Sweeney** who led the Achill contribution to the 1798 Rising. **He was later executed.**

Westport, Mayo (Cathair na Mart, The Stone Fort of the Oxen)

This was an important town, before the advent of railways. It has a canalised river, with bridges and quays, laid out in 1780. Lofty, deserted warehouses are witnesses to its former greatness, as a distributing port.

Westport is today a fishing centre, situated on the banks of a stream, which flows into Clew Bay. The bay, of striking beauty, has an island for every day of the year. The novels of George A. Birmingham (the pen-name of James Owen Hannay, 1865-1950, the Anglican Rector of The Holy Trinity Church, in Westport) give local colour and insight. **W.M. Thackeray** came to Westport, in 1842, and described the scenery around Clew Bay as the '**most beautiful in the world**'. The modernised, early Georgian mansion of Westport House (1730), designed by Richard Cassels and James Wyatt, stands at the wester end of the town. Within the beautiful demesne is an attractive modern Anglican Church.

Croagh Patrick (Cruach Phádraig - St. Patrick's Mountain)

This famous holy mountain of Ireland rises to a height of 2,510 feet in the Murrisk district of Connemara. It is a landmark for miles around Clew Bay. The full ascent takes about an hour. The first vantage points are readily reached and, from these, the panorama is unsurpassed. From the summit, the serried masses of hills in the south and the interlacing islands across the expanse of Clew Bay make the climb worthwhile.

On the south side of the summit is a steep precipice, on the edge of which St. Patrick stood and rang his bell, banishing snakes from Ireland (they have never returned). Legends are easily dismissed or made into caricatures, especially when it is found easier to mock than to think. Legends can require scholars to unravel. Croagh Patrick has been a sacred hill to Irish people since the time of Patrick and long before. The annual pilgrimage is held on the last Sunday of July. It is a difficult enough climb in bare feet.

Caislean an Bharraigh (Barry's Castle) referred to as Castlebar



The town of Castlebar is situated close to Castlebar Lough. Several smaller loughs lie to the southwest. To the south-east of the town, and traversed by the Claremorris Road, is the district known as the Plains of Mayo.

Foundation

Castlebar is named after a Norman adventurer, de Barrie, who built a castle here in 1235 (Castle Barry). By 1400, the De Burgo Clan had taken over. The Normans integrated well with the Irish and adopted the Irish language and laws. Back in England, French remained the language of the Norman rulers up to the early 13th century. By the 1500s, when Middle English had replaced French in the English court, Irish Normans retained little loyalty to London

In 1574, Edmond De Burgo (**Éamonn na Féasóige**, Bearded Éamonn) was hanged, following a mock trial at Donomona Castle. His estate was confiscated by George Bingham, Governor of Connaught, under Elizabeth I. In 1613 King James 1st of England granted him a charter of incorporation. Under this, Castlebar had a Portreeve (a bailiff or mayor, charged with keeping the peace in a port or market borough in early England) and a 15-member corporation. The town could also to elect two members to the Irish House of Parliament.

In 1691 the town, being the main British Outpost in Connaught next to Galway, was made a Garrison Town. Over the years, several regiments of the English Army were posted here, including the Welsh and Scottish Fencibles, the 69th Regiment and later the Connaught Rangers.

The Lucan and Spencer Connections

The area is especially associated with the Bingham family, who resided here from 1584, in The Lawn House. In 1776, Charles Bingham was granted the title Earl of Lucan or Lord Lucan. In 1776 his daughter married a son of Judge Spencer. The Spencer family built a summer residence at Spencer Park. **Lady Diana Spencer** was a great- granddaughter of this Spencer.

The Third Earl of Lucan was notorious, in how he treated his tenants during the Famine. He was known as the **Great Exterminator**, because he and his infamous **Crowbar Brigade** evicted so many tenants for non-payment of rents. These latter either died of starvation or, if they could raise they money, emigrated. The downward trend in the population, in this area, has only been relatively recently reversed.

The Fourth Earl reduced rents, provided sites for schools and a Catholic Church. In 1888, he donated The Green, formerly the family cricket pitch, to the townspeople.

The Mall

The Mall was once the cricket ground of the Lucan family, who still own a significant amount of property in the area. Lucan Street is close to the Tourist Office. Some tenants in Castlebar still pay rent to the Lucan Estate, or at least they were - until the last and most notorious Lord Lucan disappeared after the murder of his children's nanny in London, in 1974.

Daly's Hotel was founded in 1785. It was originally a Coaching Inn. The mail coach from Ballinasloe to Westport used stop here. It still retains some of the features from the **Elizabethan Era** e.g. the stonework around the doorways, the overdoor gas-lamp, oak paneling and fireplace in dining room.

James Daly who, along with Michael Davitt, **founded The Land League here in 1879**, owned the hotel in the late 19th century. Across the road once stood the **Hanging Tree** where the Priest, Fr. Conroy, was hanged in 1798. John Wesley laid the foundation for the Methodist Church in 1785. A monument depicting **Lir, the Celtic God of the Sea**, commemorates the rebel Ernie O'Malley, in a manner also remembering Grace O'Malley.



The Courthouse

The courthouse was built in 1834. It has some interesting architectural features around the windows and has **classic Greek Doric columns** – one of the first such features made from wrought iron to be used in

Connaught. Nearby is the birthplace of a famous **Soprano and prima donna**, Margaret Burke Sheridan. Next to this stands the recently renovated Garda Barracks. This building was once the British Cavalry Barracks.

As we move around the Green there are four **Georgian Houses**, once homes of English Civil Servants. On the site of the County Council building, the County Infirmary was built in 1834 and was in use until 1932. **Dr. Anthony Mc Bride**, brother of executed 1916 leader Major John Mc Bride, was resident surgeon here in the early 20th century.

Christchurch

The Anglican Church is one of the oldest buildings in the town. The foundation stone (situated inside the main gate) was laid in 1739. The church was renovated in 1828. The churchyard contains the gravestone of the Fraziers Fencibles, a Scottish Regiment killed in action, in 1798. This is the only remnant of the 1798 period left in the town. ['Fencible' means 'local defence force.']

There is a memorial to **Major General George O'Malley**. He was a member of an aristocratic family, who resided at Ballinvilla. He served with the British Army in North America, Egypt and around the Mediterranean. He was also wounded twice in **the Battle of Waterloo**, in 1815. He died in 1847. He was buried in the family plot in Murrisk Abbey.

1798 Memorial



"In grateful remembrance of the gallant French soldiers who died fighting for the freedom of Ireland on 27th August 1798. They shall be remembered forever".

The French, who landed at Killala in 1798, occupied the town after some resistance. After the defeat of the English garrison, their retreat was so precipitate that it became known as the **'Races of Castlebar'**. A monument was erected in 1948, to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the 'Races of Castlebar'.

Beside it is the grave of John Moore, from Moorehall, elected **the First President of Connaught**, following the capture of Castlebar by Franco-Irish forces. He died in captivity awaiting deportation, in Waterford Harbour, in 1799. His remains were reinterred here in 1961. The ceremony was attended by the President Éamonn De Valera and was given the full honours of Church and State.

Ellison Street

Ellison Street is named after the **Rev. Ellison, Church of Ireland Rector** in Castlebar and land agent for Lord Lucan in 1798. General Humbert and his troops captured Ellison, along with the Protestant Bishop, Joseph Stock (1740-1813) from Killala. Bishop Stock wrote an account of the rising called 'Stock's Narratives'.

Just off this street is Cavendish Lane - so called after **Lord Frederick Cavendish**, who founded the Connaught Telegraph newspaper on St. Patrick's Day, 1828. **This is the oldest provincial paper still published** in Ireland. The paper has as the motto: "Be Just and Fear Not." It was always pro-nationalist and supported O'Connell's Repeal Movement in the 1840s, the Tenants' Rights movement in the 1850s, the Land League and, later again, Home Rule for Ireland.

Market Square

Market Square was originally known as Shambles Square. **A shambles**, or slaughterhouse, once stood beside the river. It was the main trading area. Stallholders had to pay tolls to the landlord. There was also a Crane here, for weighing farm produce. The lessee of tolls and customs, for Lord Lucan, was Anthony Faulkner. Several court cases took place over **unjust levies, weights and measures**.

The Foresters' Hall stood where Fiona's Ladies Fashion shop now stands. The Foresters were an organisation founded in Dublin, in 1877, by members of the revolutionary Irish Republican Brotherhood. It was a benevolent society, whose aims were to foster the welfare of its members. It later evolved into a social club. It had its own town band in the 1930s.

The Linen Industry

Planters (ie Protestant settlers, granted lands previously owned by Gaelic Catholics) were brought into the region, from Northern Ireland, in the 1770s. They were to establish a new loyalist, Protestant population and to develop flax-growing and linen industries. The town's Linnenhall was the clearing-house for the linen industry. It was constructed in 1790. In 1798, **General Humbert** also held a victory ball here, following the successful outcome of 'The Races of Castlebar'. Fr. Ulick Bourke, called '**The Father of the Irish Language Movement**', was reared in Linnenhall Street. It was he who recruited the famous author **An tAth Peadar Ua Laoghaire** (Fr. Peadar Ua Laoghaire) to the cause. A plaque in Fr Bourke's honour was erected by the local branch of **Conradh na Gaeilge** (the Gaelic League).

In Tucker Street, where Al Muretto, the Italian Restaurant now stands, was The Rooney Hall, so called after **William Rooney** one of the founders of the United Irishman and Cumann na Gael (The Society of the Gael). This was later absorbed into the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Meetings of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Na Fianna (The Warriors), Cumann na mBan (The Womens' Society) and other republican bodies were held here. New Antrim Street was originally called Shruiffaun (Sruthán or small stream - pronounced with Mayo Irish accent), a name still used by many older residents. It was so called as a small stream runs underneath the street.

Main Street and Staball Hill

In 1798, 'The Year of the French', an important event in the town's history took place. A battle, in which Lord Cornwallis was defeated, took place on the Main Street Bridge. The English had been chased down the hill by the Franco-Irish forces. Local people cheered them, shouting: "Stab them All." The name Staball exists to this day.

Further up the street, on the site of Paddy Fahy's and Humbert Inn, was Geevy's Hotel. It was here that General Humbert stayed while in Castlebar. A banquet was held after the rising there and it was here that John Moore was declared first President of Connaught.

Pontoon Bridge



A short channel connects the two lakes, Conn and Cullin. Across this stretch of water, a bridge of one arch carries the road. The bridge is called **the Pontoon**. The view from here is uniquely beautiful. The towering form of the **Nepin mountain** rises to the west side and reaches a height of 2,646 feet. Near the bridge, on a rock overhanging the lake, is a rocking-stone of granite, nicely poised, evidently a deposit of the **glacial age**. The town of Pontoon is well known as an angling centre.

Turlough Round Tower



The 9th-century Tower stands next to a ruined 18th-century church and a graveyard still in use. The Tower is a few km out of Castlebar, on the main road to Ballina, which branches off, to the right, at the north end of town - just after the Sacred Heart Home. The road to the left goes to Pontoon and Crossmolina. The Round Tower is one of the most complete and best-preserved. It served as a place of refuge against Viking raids. Intruders could be spotted from far off, from a window high in the structure. The Tower was entered through a high door, accessed with a ladder.