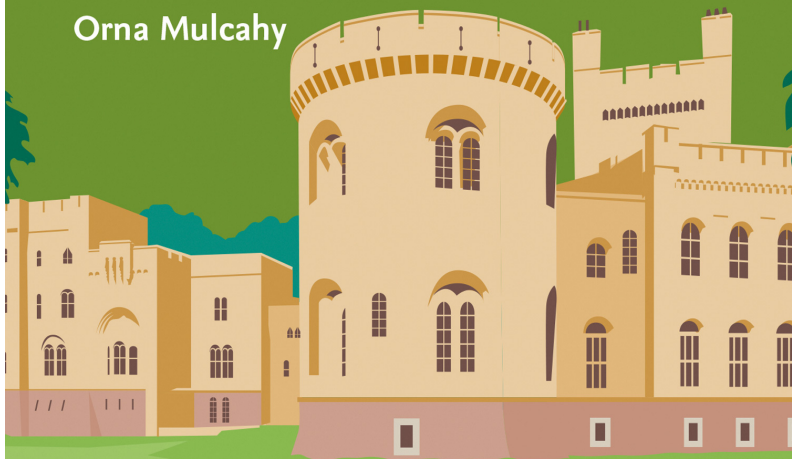


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IRISH CASTLES

Orna Mulcahy



Ireland's most dramatic castles and strongholds

Orna Mulcahy
Irish Castles
Серия «Collins Little Books»

Аннотация

A handy guide to around 140 of Ireland's most dramatic castles and strongholds, all of which are open to the public, with structures from across the whole island of Ireland. A handy 8-page map of all locations featured is included. Historical background and architectural details for each of the castles, accompanied by a beautiful colour photograph. Includes all major sites. Contains an introduction on Ireland's castles – history, description of classification of building type with examples. Includes details on the property's custodianship, a description of the gardens where relevant, location, website and phone number.

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Orna Mulcahy

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About the Publisher

Introduction

There's a special romance to Irish castles, whether it's the ruined stronghold of an ancient Irish clan perched on a rocky clifftop, the monumental tower rising inside a town's medieval walls, or the castellated fancy of a Victorian tycoon reflected in its own glassy lake.

Combined with the country's dramatic scenery of craggy coastline, rolling green countryside, ancient woodlands, and loughs, Ireland's most famous castles are set in dreamy locations beloved by generations of tourists, film-makers, and brides. Think of the majesty of ruined Dunluce, etched against the sky on the north Antrim coast; the thrilling bulk of Blarney Castle, home to the Blarney Stone, which is said to give those who kiss it the gift of fluent talk; or the splendour of Ashford Castle in Cong, County Mayo, the setting for film director John Ford's sentimental tribute to Ireland, *The Quiet Man*, starring John Wayne.

It's not known exactly how many castles dot the island of Ireland but it's likely to be in thousands. A high number of fortifications reflect a rebellious history reaching back to the twelfth century and lasting all the way to the 1920s, when many of Ireland's aristocratic homes were abandoned or burned during the War of Independence.

Ruins abound: fortresses destroyed by cannon fire tell of

Cromwell's rampage through Ireland in the late 1640s; the shells of once grand castles, built in prosperous times and then abandoned.

This book provides a guide to 140 or so Irish castles and strongholds, many of them dating back to Norman times and earlier, some of them far more recent, but all selected for their historical or architectural significance.

Some are ancient monuments, standing strong after nearly a thousand years; others mere piles of stones in once strategic settings. Many, like grand Malahide Castle on the outskirts of Dublin and Dublin Castle in the centre of the capital, have been carefully restored and are open to the public. Others can only be viewed externally and from a distance. One or two are twentieth-century replica castles, such as Doonbeg on the County Clare coast – now owned by US President Donald Trump.

Castles first appeared in Ireland with the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the twelfth century. Land distributed by King Henry II of England was parcelled out to royalists who built fortified towers to protect themselves from the native clans. These castles were built in strategic positions, and consisted of a large square or rectangular tower, known as a keep, surrounded by a large curtain wall. Other defensive measures were a moat, portcullis and drawbridge, and battlements.

By the beginning of the thirteenth century, stone castles began to appear, many built on the orders of King John. Amongst the earliest of these is Dublin Castle, built in 1204.

The fortifications of Carrickfergus in Antrim and Trim in County Meath (once known as the Royal County) also date from this period. By the middle of the century, castles had spread throughout Ireland, built by Anglo-Norman families, who quickly integrated themselves, marrying into native families and becoming *Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis*, meaning “more Irish than the Irish themselves”.

From 1400 onwards, native Irish chiefs began to build their own castles, adopting the tower house design, with battlements offering commanding views of their territories.

In 1429, Henry VI, King of England (and Lord of Ireland) granted ten pounds to any of his subjects who built a small defensive tower in the area surrounding Dublin – called The Pale – which included the counties of Meath, Louth, and Kildare. This resulted in a proliferation of “ten pound” castles of a fairly basic design, many of which survive today.

The Irish Rebellion of 1641 and the Confederate Wars that followed set the native Irish and old English Catholics against English Protestants and Scots Presbyterian planters in a bloody conflict through the land that saw castles seized and their occupants murdered. Cromwell’s invasion of Ireland in 1649, and subsequent conquest, quelled the rebellion with a swathe of violent conquests through the land that left many of Ireland’s castles either destroyed or confiscated and given to “planters” loyal to the English monarchy.

The 1700s saw a revival in building, with a move from the

fortified tower to a more domestic style in architecture. Earlier castles were either incorporated into new country house designs or sometimes left at a distance from the new structure.

Throughout the eighteenth and particularly in the nineteenth century, many such properties were extended again, or replaced entirely, this time with the help of fortunes built in the great industrial cities of England or further afield.

The Victorian Irish had a penchant for castles, and this produced a proliferation of battlements, towers, and turrets added to homes originally built in the plain Irish Georgian style. Brand-new castles were built in the romantic style, from Kylemore Abbey in Connemara to the dramatic Glenveagh Castle in County Donegal.

But in the aftermath of the Irish Famine many estates were sold or broken up. The 1920s brought a further wave of unrest, with several great Irish homes being burned out by rebels during Ireland's War of Independence.

Many of the castles featured in this book are open to visitors. Some operate as hotels or guest houses, while others can be viewed by appointment or on certain open days of the year. However some remain privately owned and their inclusion in this book does not imply a right of public access. It is always advisable to check with the specific attraction in advance. Telephone number and website, where available, are listed in the property description.

Location Maps

Northern Ireland

Numbers in **bold** indicate the page where the property can be found

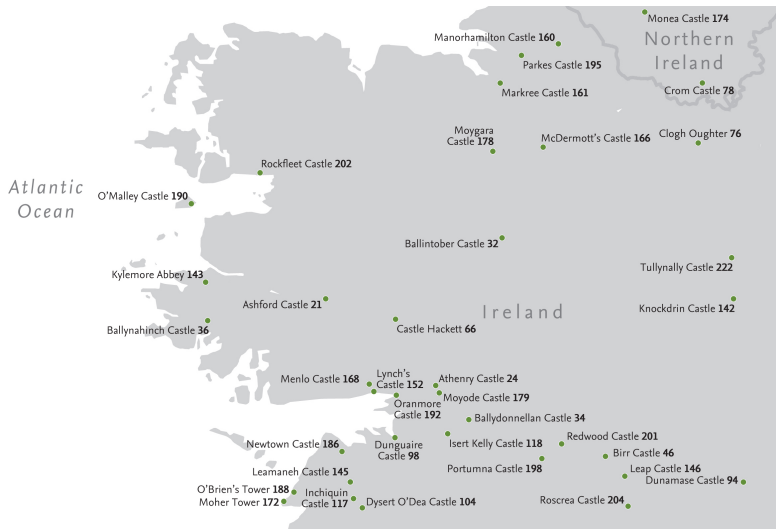


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West Central Ireland

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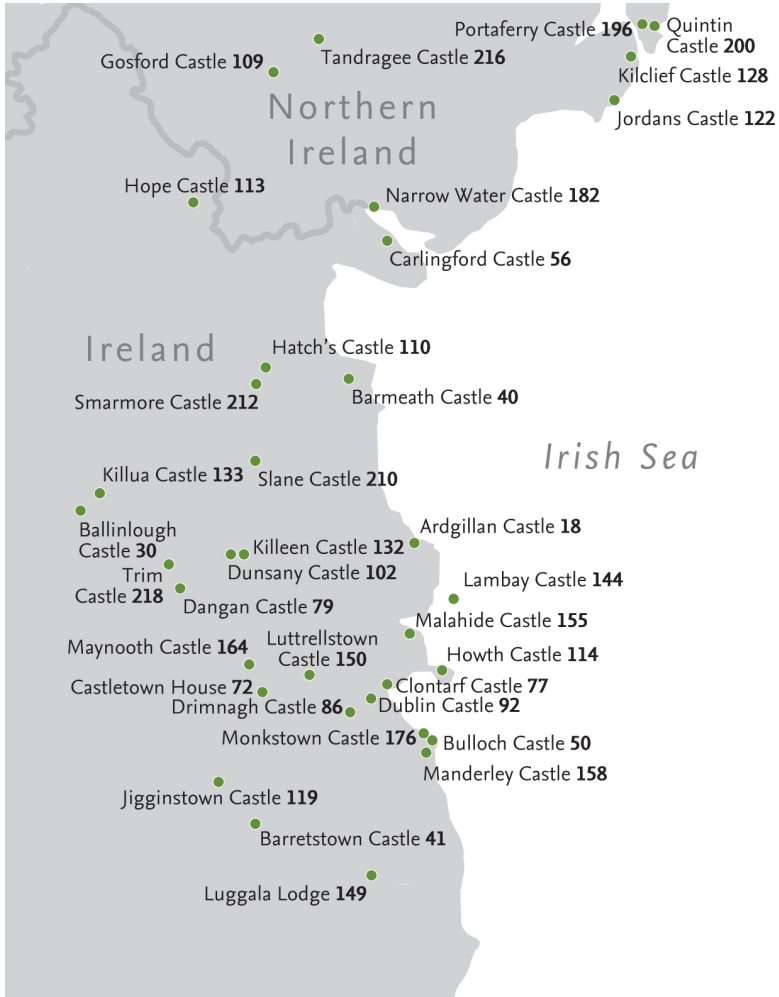
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Southwestern Ireland

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[Southeastern Ireland](#)

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An Culu

DROMORE, GREENANE, KENMARE, COUNTY
KERRY

A picture-perfect castle overlooking Kenmare Bay, An Culu looks like a particularly well preserved medieval castle or, at the least, a Victorian Gothic revival masterpiece, but in fact it dates from the 1990s, when it was built by an English businessman smitten with history. The first castle to be built in Ireland since Victorian times, it comes with all the architectural detail one might expect: a moat and a drawbridge, turrets and towers, a grotto-style swimming pool in the dungeon, and gas-fired torches that can be activated by remote control in the entrance. An Culu took three years to build, using teams of craftsmen from all over Ireland and the UK, as well as local stonemasons and joiners. It's surrounded by forest managed by the Irish Forestry Board, Coillte.

An Culu is privately owned and cannot be visited.



Ardgillan Castle

STRIFELAND, BALBRIGGAN, COUNTY DUBLIN

+353 1 849 2212 | www.ardgillancastle.ie

Dating from 1738 and with considerable embellishment in the 1800s, Ardgillan Castle sits in a parkland setting in North County Dublin, with views over the sea. Ardgillan was originally built as a large country house, and the castellations were added in the 1800s. It was built by the Taylor family, whose ancestor Thomas Taylor had moved to Ireland from England in 1660 to be the Chief Examiner of the Down Survey of Ireland, the first detailed national land survey in the world. This survey was necessary after Cromwell's Irish campaigns, which ended much land ownership for Catholics, providing opportunities for Protestants such as Taylor, who was able to buy up over 20,000 acres in Ireland. The Taylor family owned the property for over two centuries, but it is now owned by the State and is open to the public all year round for tours, refreshments, and activities. It sits in 194 acres of grassland and woodland, including walled, ornamental, and rose gardens.





Ardo Castle

ARDOGINNA, COUNTY WATERFORD

www.ardmorewaterford.com

Ruined and romantic, Ardo Castle stands on a clifftop, looking out to sea, near the pretty seaside village of Ardmore in County Waterford. Dating from the seventeenth century, its eclectic collection of towers, walls, gates, and turrets matches its string of owners and their fortunes. The first owner mentioned was a Fitzgerald, of Norman stock, whose heir, it is said, was caught stealing a gold cup and hanged. In the eighteenth century, the castle was owned by a Jeremiah Coughlan, whose wife is said to have supported her extravagant lifestyle by helping local smugglers. The ownership passed to Marshal McMahon who was President and Marshal of France in 1873. Finally, the castle was purchased by the McKenna family, who lived in it for some years until the end of the First World War, after which it was abandoned.



Ashford Castle

ASHFORD CASTLE ESTATE, CONG, COUNTY MAYO,
F31 CA48
+353 94 954 6003

An awe-inducing baronial castle on Lough Corrib, close to the village of Cong, Ashford Castle was once owned by the Guinness brewing family and is now a luxury hotel with a plush, romantic interior. The earliest segment of the castle dates back to the early thirteenth century, when it was built on the edge of a monastic settlement by the de Burgo family. Defeated in battle in 1589, they lost their home to Lord Ingham, Governor of Connaught, whose family held it for over three hundred years. It was not until 1715, when the castle was acquired by the Browne family, that it became the Ashford estate, with the castle extended in the French chateau style. The castellated wings and the bridge entrance were added by the Guinness family, who acquired Ashford in the mid nineteenth century and extended the estate to 26,000 acres.

Askeaton Castle

HIGH STREET, CROOM, COUNTY LIMERICK

www.limerick.ie

Askeaton Castle stands on a small island in the river Deel in County Limerick. Started in 1199 and now a ruin, it was one of the castles of the Fitzgeralds, the Earls of Desmond, who arrived with the Norman invasion but who adopted the local language, laws, and culture to become “more Irish than the Irish themselves”, it was said. The Fitzgeralds ruled Munster from this castle for several centuries, until the English forces ate away at their support and drove them out in the late 1500s. The castle was destroyed by the forces of Cromwell in 1652, when it was defended by confederate Catholic forces.

The castle has a fine banqueting hall, with interesting architectural windows built above wine cellars and kitchens, testament to the importance of entertaining to the Irish nobility. Close by are two other ruins of interest: a fourteenth-century Franciscan friary founded by the Fitzgeralds, destroyed by an English commander in 1579 after failing to take the castle itself, and the 1740 Hellfire Club, where rich men were said to have gathered for entertainments and excesses of various kinds.



Athenry Castle

GORTEENACRA, ATHENRY, COUNTY GALWAY

+353 91 844 797 | www.athenryheritagecentre.com

This is a fine restored thirteenth-century castle in the medieval walled town of Athenry, about fifteen miles from the city of Galway. The castle was built by the Anglo-Norman lord, Meyler de Bermingham, c. 1237, after he was granted lands following the Conquest of Connaught. Having built an imposing tower surrounded by defensive walls, he then set about developing the town, adding a parish church, a priory, a hospital, streets, houses, and a marketplace. By the end of the thirteenth century, Athenry was a wealthy and important market town with trading links to England and the Continent. Town walls were built in 1316 to protect the inhabitants from the warring Irish, but over the next two centuries the town declined.



Augher Castle

also known as SPUR ROYAL CASTLE, AUGHER,
COUNTY TYRONE

Augher Castle is a tower house built around 1615 by Thomas Ridgeway, a Devon man who served as Treasurer of Ireland and who assisted in the Plantation of Ulster. For this he was awarded 2000 acres of land in County Tyrone and later a title, the Earl of Londonderry. He built Augher Castle on the site of an older fortress but he didn't spend much time there, and political ambitions found him often in London. Augher Castle was burned in 1689 by the Jacobites as the Siege of Derry was under way. It was originally a square, three-storey Plantation castle, with an unusual triangular tower in the middle of each of its sides. The castle was restored around 1832 by Sir James Richardson-Bunbury, who added two castellated wings, transforming the old castle into a Georgian mansion house. The house remains in the Richardson-Bunbury family today.





Ballea Castle

CARRIGALINE, COUNTY CORK

Situated on a cliff overlooking the Owenboy river in Carrigaline, south of Cork City, Ballea dates from the fifteenth century, when it was home to the McCarthy family. Extended in the seventeenth century by the McCarthys, the castle eventually fell into disrepair until around 1750, when restoration work was undertaken by the Hodder family, who owned Ballea until the early 1900s. The castle has been modernized in more recent times and is now a private residence.



Ballinacarriga Castle

DUNMANWAY, WEST CORK

Situated on a high rocky outcrop overlooking Ballinacarriga Lough in West Cork, Ballinacarriga tower house is believed to have been built by the O'Muirthile (Hurley) family, with the date 1585 carved into the wall on the fourth floor. But there is evidence that the castle was originally an older McCarthy stronghold. Inside, at the second-storey level, carving in the window embrasure is of a female figure accompanied by five roses, thought to be of Catherine O'Cullane, wife of Randall Hurley, and her five children. The castle and lands were confiscated and granted to English settlers after the family joined the rebellion of 1641 against the English settlement of Munster. The castle passed through various families and some religious carvings suggest it may also have been used as a church. It has been unoccupied since the early nineteenth century.

Ballinlough Castle

CLONMELLON, COUNTY WESTMEATH

+353 46 943 3234 | www.ballinloughcastle.ie

Built in 1641, Ballinlough is the ancestral home of the Nugent family, who claim lineage back to Brian, the fourth king of Connacht. Legend goes that he had one daughter and 24 sons, twelve of whom are said to have been baptized by St Patrick. The coat of arms over the front door is that of the O'Reilly clan: the family changed their name from O'Reilly to Nugent to avail of a dowry in 1812. Since then several generations of Baronet Nugents have occupied the house, making them one of the very few seventeenth-century Irish Catholic families who still live in their original family home. The castle was extended in the late eighteenth century, when a new wing was added to the design of the talented amateur architect Thomas Wogan Browne, who was responsible for Malahide Castle on the outskirts of Dublin. Today Ballinlough is best known as the venue for the popular Body & Soul festival which takes place in the grounds in the month of June. The house is also available as a venue for weddings and events, and the extensive grounds are also open to the public.

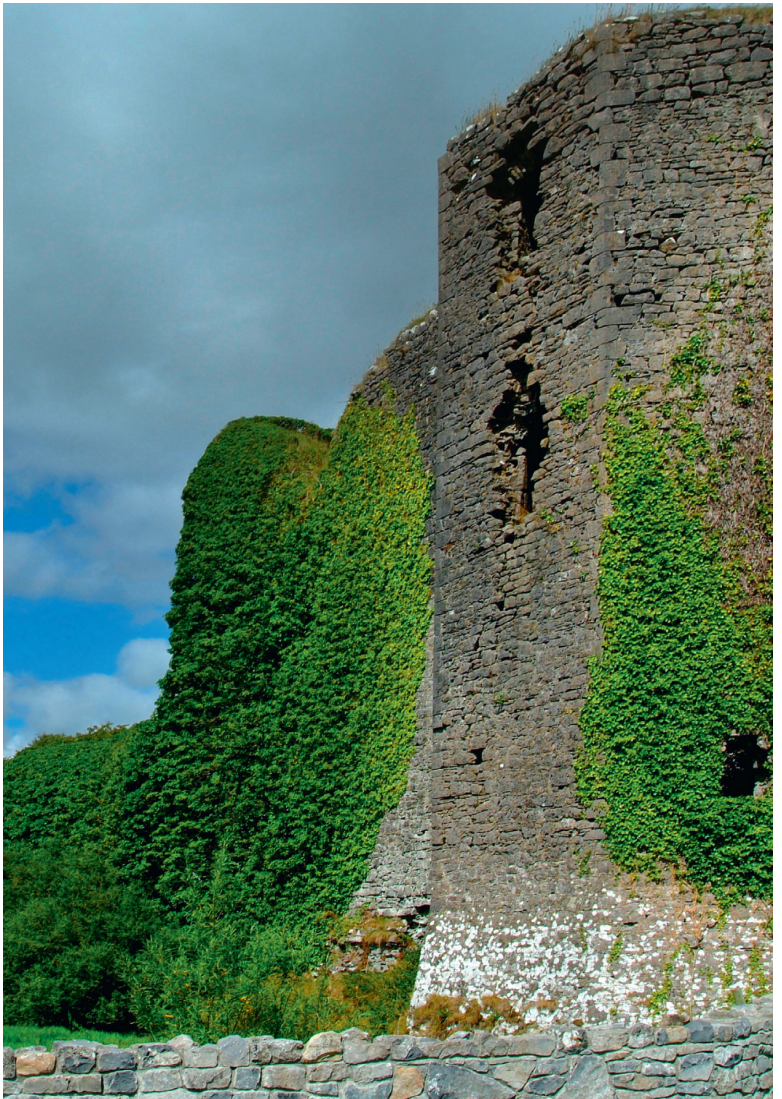


Ballintober Castle

BALLINTOBER, COUNTY ROSCOMMON

www.roscommon.ie

A large moated castle with a central courtyard, or bawn, of 1.5 acres, Ballintober dates from around 1290. It was built on an imposing scale, with enormous corner towers and small projecting turrets. It is thought the builder was William de Burgo, and that the castle's large area was intended to permit an Anglo-Norman settlement within its walls but, within a few decades of being built, Ballintober came into the possession of the O'Connor clan and was the seat of the O'Connor Don until 1652. In 1598, the castle was taken by Red Hugh O'Donnell, who used cannons to bombard it and forced Hugh O'Connor Don to renounce his allegiance to the Crown. In 1641, it became a centre of Catholic resistance and it was confiscated in 1652. The castle and lands were restored to the O'Connors in 1677 and they remained there until 1701, when the castle was abandoned and fell into ruin.





Ballydonnellan Castle

LOUGHREA, COUNTY GALWAY

All that remains today of the stronghold of the powerful O'Donnellan clan, who controlled lands between Lough Rea and Ballinsloe, is a ruin of a fifteenth-century tower and the substantial house grafted onto it in the mid eighteenth century. Ballydonnellan Castle is likely to have been built some time after 1412, an early fortress on the site having been destroyed by fire. The entire edifice was still standing when it was mapped in the 1890s, but had fallen into decay by the early twentieth century and is now in ruins. Fragments of its former glory, such as fine plasterwork, can be glimpsed through the ivy that has all but engulfed it.



Ballyhack Castle

BALLYHACK, COUNTY WEXFORD

+353 51 389468 | www.heritageireland.ie

A well-preserved fifteenth-century tower house that stands guard over the Waterford Estuary, Ballyhack Castle is thought to have been built, circa 1450, by the Order of Knights of the Hospital of Saint John of Jerusalem, a military order founded at the beginning of the twelfth century at the time of the Crusades. The castle is open to the public, having been partially restored, and visitors can see a classic murder hole that allowed for attackers to be assaulted from above with cascade of rocks. A permanent exhibition displays objects relating to the Crusades, the Normans, and medieval monks.

Ballynahinch Castle

RECESS, CONNEMARA, COUNTY GALWAY

+353 95 31006 | www.ballynahinch-castle.com

Surrounded by woodlands in the heart of Connemara with a backdrop of the Twelve Bens mountains, Ballynahinch Castle was built in the eighteenth century by the powerful Martin family, who produced Humanity Dick Martin, an MP so named for his championing of animal rights, but also known as Hair-Trigger Dick for the several people he killed or wounded in duels.

The castle is set on the banks of the Owenmore river, renowned for its fly fishing, and it was this that attracted the Indian prince and cricketer Ranjitsinhji (“Ranji”), who fell for its romantic setting in the 1920s. He renovated the castle and built fishing huts and piers along the river, and he lived at Ballynahinch until his death in 1933. The castle has been run as an up-market hotel since 1946 and has recently been entirely refurbished by its current owner, the businessman Denis O’Brien.



Bargy Castle

TOMHAGGARD, COUNTY WEXFORD

One of a number of fortresses built in the fifteenth century by the Rossiter family who settled in Ireland following the Norman invasion, Bargy Castle was confiscated by Cromwell in 1667, in response to Rossiter's part in the defence of Wexford. The castle was then granted to William Ivory, who sold it to the Harvey family. They held it until the mid twentieth century, when it was bought by General Sir Eric de Burgh, a former Chief of Staff in the Indian Army, and the grandfather of musician and songwriter Chris de Burgh. The singer lived there as a child with his parents Charles and Maeve Davison, who ran the castle as a hotel.

The castle is a private residence and cannot be visited.





Barmeath Castle

DUNLEER, COUNTY LOUTH

+353 41 685 1205 | www.barmeath-castle.com

Originally the site of a medieval tower house with sweeping views over Dundalk Bay, Barmeath Castle was enlarged in the mid eighteenth century, with the addition of a substantial residence that has been home to the Bellew family for generations. The impressive castellated façade was enhanced in the 1830s with the addition of a portcullis entrance, and a turreted curtain wall that encloses a large courtyard. The castle is surrounded by ten acres of the gardens originally laid out by English landscape architect and astronomer Thomas Wright. The gardens, which have been restored in recent years, include an eighteenth-century archery ground surrounded by Irish yew.

The castle is available to rent on Airbnb.



Barretstown Castle

BALLYMORE EUSTACE, COUNTY KILDARE

+353 45 864 115 | www.barretstown.org

A tower house with a Gothic Victorian addition, Barretstown was first recorded in a 1547 inquisition held after the Dissolution of the Monasteries, when it was listed as the property of the Archbishop of Dublin. It was confiscated by the Crown and subsequently leased to the Eustaces, a distinguished family who had arrived in Ireland at the time of the Norman invasion and who gave their name to the town that grew up around it – Ballymore Eustace. The castle has had a number of wealthy international owners including cosmetics tycoon Elizabeth Arden and billionaire retailer Galen Weston, who gifted it to the Irish State. Since the mid 1990s, the 500-acre estate has been run as a camp and respite centre for seriously ill children and their families, by a charity founded by the late actor Paul Newman.

Barryscourt Castle

BARRYSCOURT, CARRIGTWOHILL, COUNTY CORK

A typical fifteenth-century tower house, Barryscourt Castle was for centuries home to the Norman De Barry family. There is evidence that this site has been occupied for as long as one thousand years. Phillip De Barry built a castle here in 1202, but the present tower dates from around the mid sixteenth century.



Belfast Castle

ANTRIM ROAD, BELFAST, BT15 5GR

+44 28 9077 6925 | www.belfastcastle.co.uk

The original Belfast Castle, built in the late twelfth century by the Normans, was located in the heart of the city, around Castle Place and Donegall Place. It was the stronghold of the first Baron Chichester (better known as Sir Arthur Chichester), but was burned down in 1708, leaving only street names to mark the site. The Chichester family decamped to the suburbs and today's Belfast Castle was built in the mid nineteenth century by the third Marquess of Donegall, who designed it in the Scottish baronial style. The castle cost a fortune to build, and was designed by Charles Lanyon of the architectural firm Lanyon, Lynn and Lanyon. After Lord Donegall's death and the family's financial demise, the eighth Earl of Shaftesbury, who had married into the family, completed the castle, which was subsequently presented to the city of Belfast. It is now used for civic functions and private events but it does have an interesting visitor centre telling the story of the surrounding area from Stone Age times. The grounds also include an adventure playground for children.





Birr Castle

TOWNPARKS, BIRR, COUNTY OFFALY

+353 57 912 0336 | www.birrcastle.com

In 1620, Sir Laurence Parsons built a new castle on the site of an older building, and then extensively refurbished it in the 1640s. The nineteenth century saw Birr become a great centre of scientific research, when William Parsons, the third Earl, built a great telescope in the grounds. His wife Mary, whose fortune helped him to build the telescope and make many improvements to the castle, was a keen photographer. Her perfectly preserved dark room is one of the many fascinating aspects of the castle's superbly decorated interior. The castle grounds are open to the public and have been enhanced to include a Science Centre.

Birr Castle remains the private residence of the Parsons family.

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