

Arklow Tidy Towns
'Enhancing your town'

Historical Walk: No 1
The Bluewalk Tour
Arklow Town Centre



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1: Parade Ground is Arklow's town centre. It takes its name from a parade area attached to the former militia barracks that stood close by for over 200 years. During this time Arklow had a local military garrison and the open area was used to parade horse cavalry and musters of troops recruited from the neighbourhood for the British regiments of the line. The last large scale military parades took place in the 1940's during the war years. Parade Ground is dominated by two buildings in particular, the local branch of the Bank of Ireland and the Church of Saints Mary and Peter



2: Bank of Ireland was constructed in 1868 and was the largest commercial building in the town. The decision was taken to locate here because of its proximity to the police barracks and the new railway station. It was felt too that the farming community would patronise the bank on fair and market days. The adjoining Arklow Tourist Office was the former stable where the bank managers horse and trap were kept. Second and third floor were apartments for the manager's family and house staff. There was even an area, (now the bank car park) for a vegetable garden to supply the bulk of the fresh vegetables for the bankers family.



3: Father Michael Murphy & 1798 Memorial: By Kelly Freeman and sculptor George Smith, the statue commemorates the Rebellion of 1798 and the decisive Battle of Arklow on June 9 of that year. Although construction began in 1898 the memorial was not completed until 1908. It was funded from public subscription. Central to the memorial is a representation of Fr Michael Murphy of Ballycanew Co Wexford who was killed in Upper Arklow at the battle. His role in the engagement was relatively small. In the cultural ethos of 1898, those handful of Roman Catholic priests who were active in the Rebellion received undue prominence and thus it was a minor figure received the pedestal of honour. Panels below the main figure honour more important insurrectionists like Wolfe Tone one of the national leaders of the Rising, Anthony Perry and Esmond Kyan took a prominent part in the Wexford and Arklow battle.

During the memorial's construction an error was made in the placing the profiles. Tone is in the Perry panel while Perry is in the Wolfe Tone panel. It was decided to leave them in situ as to try moving them might lead to their destruction. The memorial epigraphs are in three languages:- Gaelic, English and French, the latter reflecting the support that revolutionary France gave to the United Irishmen during the Rebellion of '98



4: Church of St Marys and Peter; The first Catholic church erected on this site was in 1811, a single storied, thatched and mud-walled building. By 1850 the church was far too small and an appeal was made to build a chapel fit for the new liturgical practices of a resurgent Roman Catholic Church. Designed by Peter Byrne, who completed many church commissions in the mid 19th century, the church of Saints Mary and Peter is in a severe Latin style, within and without. The striking ceiling was completed by Italian artisans and represents the four evangelists. The fine Carrera marble altar and stained glass window of the Passion were presented as memorials by a local business family in the 1860's. There are at least three burials of local priests in the floor. Much of the cut stone material to construct the church was originally surplus building material destined for railway construction. It was bought at bargain prices and shipped to Arklow by the local fishermen who brought the rough cut granite blocks from Dun Laoighaire in their boats. The Avoca mining company also donated stone and construction materials. Within the cupola there is a bronze bell dedicated to Rev John Redmond who presided over the main construction phase of the church. The bell depicts a relief showing scenes from the life of St Patrick. For the last 175 years the church has been a focal point for Arklow and its Roman Catholic community.



5: St Mary's Terrace: Originally nothing more than an access track to adjoining fields, the road is first depicted on military surveys in the disturbances of 1798 when the track was enlarged to serve a temporary military camp. Along its present line, as far as the site of the railway station, there was considerable fighting during the Battle of Arklow. With the construction of the Arklow Chapel on Parade

Ground the former track became a short cut from the Fishery and became known as '*New Chapel Lane*' With the building of a church school (Established Church of Ireland) in 1816, it was known to the Anglican community as '*School Lane*' later as '*Marlborough Terrace*'. Then, for a time after 1866 as '*Station Road*' until finally it was renamed officially *St Mary's Road* in 1923.



6: St Marys Convent and Church: The former Convent building (now private apartments) was a convent and school of the Sisters of Mercy. They originally came to Arklow in 1866 to do what they could to alleviate the sufferings of cholera victims in the Arklow Fishery quarter during a severe epidemic in that year. As a result, they were invited to make a permanent foundation. For

several years the nuns lived in private housing and rented a former net loft as a school. In 1881 this handsome granite-faced building was commenced on the site of a former landlords school. It was completed in 1883 as the nun's residence, a school room was added in 1888. Education was the forte of the Sisters and generations of Arklow girls were educated here. Up to recent years there was a boarding school for girls. Adjoining the convent is the now empty convent chapel where as many as forty nuns attended religious services during the hay-days of Catholic religious zeal during the late 19th and first half of the 20th century.



7: Marlborough Hall :In 1876 the ground landlord of Arklow, William Proby, 5th Lord Carysfort conceived the idea to build a 'New Arklow'. This encompassed removing the warrens of thatched cabins that formed much of the housing for the poorer sections of society and providing much needed new schools and public buildings. Carysfort achieved some of

his vision and it is best expressed in this section of St Mary's Road. Marlborough Hall was to be designated the Arklow Town Hall. It was named after John Spencer Churchill 7th Duke of Marlborough and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland who officially open the Carysfort scheme. For nearly fifty years the street was called '*Marlborough Street*' in his honour.



8:Carysfort Schools: These charming buildings still retain their Victorian elegance. In the original scheme were a boy's and a girl's school with the teacher's houses separating the two. The schools functioned up to the 1970's when a replacement Carysfort school was built at a new location. Since their closure the school buildings have been put to a variety of uses.



9: Arklow Fever Hospital and Physicians House; Since 1816 there was a fever hospital in Arklow. These were necessary buildings in an age before good public health. Typhus, Typhoid, Measles and a host of life threatening ailments ensued that the Fever Hospital was in constant use. Cholera struck Arklow with devastating results

several times in the 19th century, the last occasion in 1866 with the loss of over 100 lives. Primitive as it was, the Fever Hospital was instrumental in saving many lives. The hospital building, of which no trace now exist, was constructed of timber and designed to be burned if a particularly virulent outbreak occurred. It was located at the rear of the Physician's House



10: Arklow Railway Station. The station has existed since 1866 with little alteration. It is the proud winner of several '*best kept stations*' awards. The railway bridge visible from the platform is the apex of a man made hill. Both bridge and hill are called after the *Navvy's* or *Navigators*, the term used to describe the hardy labourers who created Ireland railway system. Originally it was

planned to put the station by the river bank in the centre of Arklow but the railways company and the ground landowner could not agree a price. After the stations construction St Mary's Road was depicted on some maps as '*Station Road*'.



11: Tom's Lane and Arklow Public Library: There is no agreed reason for the name *Tom's Lane*. One suggestion made was that the lane was named after a Thomas Redmond, who was employed for a time as a watchman for the security of the town houses during their construction and who had a hut in the

laneway .

Arklow Public Library and library book store is housed in a former Technical School building. The school, which was considered the most modern of its day, and incorporates Art Nouveau features in its exterior décor, was opened by the Lady Carysfort in 1915. As befits a seafaring community many of the courses were structured around maritime themes.



12: St Mary's Terrace: A fine stand of eight town houses built in 1880. They were designed as residences for the professional classes of Arklow who wished to live near the railway station. These houses replaced a line of bedraggled thatched cabins. A few still retain the traditional door scrapes and steps to protect the hall ways from detritus in the days of horse transport.



13: Upper Main Street: The street is an extension of the Main Street. It is intersected by the railway line. Several houses and cabins were demolished for the railway cutting and its bridge. Like the Main Street, Arklow's Upper Main Street was predominantly a street of small shops and merchants premises. In the second house from the corner (now a doctor's

surgery) the Rev Henry Eaton lived. He was responsible for bringing the Royal National Lifeboat to Arklow. He also played a decisive roll in securing adequate humanitarian aid during the Great Famine



14: Arklow Militia Barrack site:

Directly across the road from St Mary's Terrace are the fragmentary walls of the former Arklow Militia Barracks. Built in 1717, the barracks was the most important military structure in County Wicklow. It played an important role in suppressing the rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798. From 1826 the barracks became the

station for the Irish Constabulary, later 'Royal' Irish Constabulary, a quasi-military force. In 1922 the barracks were vacated by the British. It later became a centre of conflict in the Irish Civil War (1921-1922) when it was burned. In the 1930's the ruined shell was finally demolished and a dance hall built on its site. In the wall remains can be seen granite plaques bearing the initials **W:R** and an arrow motif signifying '*War Department*'. A Victorian post box is still set into the wall. The area is currently awaiting redevelopment.



15: Arklow Ormonde Cinema:

Unfortunately now unused, the former cinema exterior is a protected structure reflecting its late 1930's décor. For generations in a pre-television age the *Ormond* and *Paramount* cinemas, Arklow's the two 'picture houses' were among the communities principal social outlets. Film shows ran nightly, with matinees on Sunday afternoons.

Both cinemas changed programme, usually every 48 hours, so as to keep a high audience turnover.



16: Ormond Castle: The medieval heart of Arklow and its old core area is centred around the courthouse and castle. Immediately to the left of the court building is the last remnant of one of the six towers of Ormond Castle, built in the early 13th century by the Butlers of Ormond. The castle had a chequered history until its final destruction by Oliver Cromwell in 1650.

Thereafter its compound became the quarry and enclosure for the later military barracks. The castle tower is reputed to be haunted by a ghostly drummer boy who came to an untimely and grisly end in the tower dungeon.



17: The Court Building: An architecturally austere building, Arklow Court House is typical of the town court houses of Ireland constructed in the 1840's, when new judicial institutions were introduced. It was not deemed necessary to provide holding cells at the time, as the adjoining barracks had adequate prison space, thus the court is unusual in a functioning building in that it has

no cells within. For many years the court jointly served as the Arklow Town Hall. The open foreground and surround has witnessed many turbulent events over the last century and a half on Ireland's long road to independence. A new modern Town Hall on Main Street is currently under consideration



Arklow Town Centre
Parade Ground and St Mary's Road

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