

WONDER WANDER ENNIS



NATIONAL INVENTORY
of ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR
CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL

INSTRUCTIONS

TAKE A 'WONDER WANDER' THROUGH ENNIS:

- Wander through our streets, find the picture clues and delve into the stories that our town tells through its rich architectural heritage.
- Take ten minutes to spot the features on our architectural scavenger hunt, or simply relax and enjoy our carefully curated self-guided tour of Ennis.
- Always remember to glance up, peer down, and never cease to WONDER!



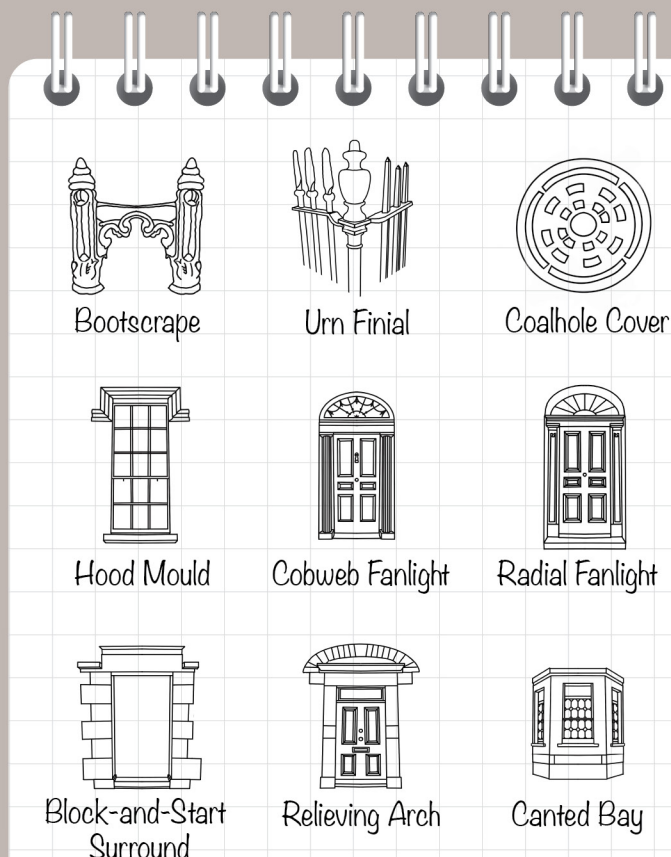
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SCAVENGER HUNT

HOW MANY OF THESE
FEATURES CAN YOU SPOT
ON BINDON STREET?



THE STORY OF ENNIS

The O'Briens, Kings of Thomond and descendants of Brian Boru, established a stronghold here in 1210. A Franciscan friary under the patronage of Donnchadh O'Brien was founded in 1240 and it became a renowned centre of religious and intellectual life in the following centuries.

Ennis was incorporated in 1612 and its weekly fairs and markets transformed the town into a bustling trade centre. The population increased in the mid-1600s with the arrival of Irish Catholics who had been displaced by Cromwell's forces. The 18th century was a relatively stable period for the town, and it prospered as a centre for brewing, milling, and textile manufacture.

In 1828 Daniel O'Connell's election in Clare heralded a new era for Catholics that culminated in the following year with the introduction of Catholic emancipation throughout Ireland and Great Britain. A series of devastating

famines in the 1840s brought starvation, emigration, and a period of decline for the town. Charles Stewart Parnell, who founded the Land League with Michael Davitt in 1879 to bring about land reforms, famously addressed a crowd in Ennis in 1880.

Éamon de Valera, former Taoiseach and President of Ireland, was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1917 for East Clare and went on to represent the constituency until 1959. Ennis continued to grow and develop throughout the 20th century, with the arrival of new industries and increased commercial activity. Today it is well known as a thriving cultural centre with a lively traditional music scene.

Want to learn more about Ennis Architectural Conservation Area and other Architectural Conservation Areas in the county? Contact Clare County Council's Conservation Officer.



With special thanks to the local community for their assistance in developing the trail.

TICK THE BOX ☒ AS YOU WONDER

1. O'CONNELL MONUMENT ☐

Carved from a single block of Irish limestone, this monument stands on the site of the old courthouse, at which Daniel O'Connell's election victory in the 1828 Clare by-election was announced. His election challenged the laws that excluded Catholics from becoming Members of Parliament (MP), forcing Britain to concede to Catholic emancipation in 1829. O'Connell became the first Catholic MP in Ireland since 1689.



2. O'CONNELL'S MEDICAL HALL ☐

Once found in towns and villages across Ireland, this vitrolite shopfront with its sleek chrome detailing is a remarkable survivor of 1930s Art Deco design. A type of pigmented glass, vitrolite was a versatile material that was often used to



transform existing shops into cutting edge premises at the vanguard of consumer fashion. Can you spot the rendered cornice and curved end that are the fragments from an earlier 19th century shopfront?

The covered passageway beside the Medical Hall is Friary Bow. A term that is thought to be unique to the town, these are said to be named for their bow-shaped arches. How many more bow-ways can you spot in the town?

3. ENNIS FRIARY ☐

Built under the patronage of Donnacha O'Brien in 1240, the Franciscan friary was a renowned centre of learning until the Reformation in the 16th century. Its 15th century bell tower showcases some superb sculptural ornamentation including the carved heads of a bishop, a king and two rams!



At the corner of the building is a curious masonry feature that was designed to discourage people from urinating in the street. Public urination, especially near pubs and busy thoroughfares, was a common problem prior to the provision of public lavatories in the late 19th century.

4. FORMER ABBEYFIELD HOUSE ☐

Built around 1750, this was home to Marcus Patterson, a politician who in 1770 was elevated to Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas, one of the courts which sat in Dublin's Four Courts. The building changed hands on a number of occasions and by the late 19th century was used by the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC).



5. STEELE'S ROCK ☐

This quirky monument to unrequited love is dedicated to a colourful character, known locally as Honest Tom Steele. He is said to have sat on this rock in romantic pursuit of Miss Matilda Crowe who lived across the river in Abbeyfield House in the early 19th century (see stop 4). A Protestant landlord who supported Catholic Emancipation, Honest Tom was a close friend of Daniel O'Connell and is buried beside him in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin.

6. THE COURTHOUSE ☐

Built in 1850 to designs by the Ennis based architect Henry Whitestone, this impressive neo-classical set piece is one of the finest courthouses in the country. The cast-iron lamp standards at the base of the monumental portico are

highly ornamental and incorporate stylised sea creatures.

The adjacent public park, now named in honour of the Clare athlete Tim Smythe, was once the town's fair green. The ramp that survives on the eastern side of the green was used for the loading and unloading of goods and livestock.

7. FORMER ERASMUS SMITH HOUSE ☐

Erasmus Smith, an English merchant who had acquired lands in Ireland during the 17th century, used his great wealth to build schools, like this one that was established in 1777. The school closed in 1890 and was later leased to the Ordnance Survey. By the 20th century the building was returned to educational use by the Sisters of Mercy, who remodelled the principal elevation and built the adjoining chapel.

Return along the southern side of College Road and follow the stone wall to reach our next stop.

8. FORMER BULLHALL HOUSE ☐

Built overlooking the River Fergus in the late 18th century, this former house was later used as the Clare Club. Gentlemen's clubs could be found in most large towns in the late 19th century and provided a convivial private setting for members to socialise.

9. HARMONY ROW ☐

Bilingual street signs featuring traditional cló gaelach script were introduced in the early 20th century. Used as a typeface until the 1960s, a small number of these cló gaelach street signs survive in the ACA, such as here on Harmony Row. Can you spot any others as you wander the route?

10. FORMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH ☐

Built in 1856 to designs by Joseph Fogerty of Limerick, this former Presbyterian church was remodelled in the 1970s by the architect Anthony O'Neill for use as a public library and museum. O'Neill's modernist and functional designs are also evident in four other branch libraries in the county, at Kilrush, Newmarket-on-Fergus, Ennistymon, and Shannon. Before leaving Ennis why not visit the Clare Museum, housed in a former convent building on Arthur's Row.

Pause and enjoy our Bindon Street scavenger hunt. Laid out in the early 19th century, the generous proportions of these fine terraced houses contrasts with the scale of the buildings found in the narrow and densely packed streets and bow-ways of the medieval core. The five red



brick houses to the west of the street were built with capital raised by a public subscription scheme known as a 'tontine'.

11. FORMER PROVINCIAL BANK ☐

This bank was built in 1864 to designs by William George Murray, architect for the Provincial Bank of Ireland. In addition to a banking hall, manager's office, and strong room, the building also provided accommodation for the bank manager's family.



12. BINDON BLOOD MAUSOLEUM ☐

Standing within the grounds of St. Columba's Church of Ireland this limestone mausoleum, built in the form of a pyramid, references the imagery and symbolism of Ancient Egypt.



13. ENNIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE ☐

Opened in 1938, the stripped-back classical design of this former vocational school is typical of educational building in post-independence Ireland. Students were taught practical subjects such as domestic science, woodwork, and rural science, as well as Irish, English and maths.



On your way to the next stop keep an eye out for the Maid of Erin monument, a sculpture by P.J. O'Neill that commemorates three Irish Nationalists who were executed in Manchester in 1867.

14. WATER WHEEL ☐

This restored mill wheel and mill race once formed part of the Ennis Mills, one of two corn mills that were powered by the River Fergus. Place names such as 'Mill Road' and 'Cornmarket Street' are reminders of the industry concentrated in this area during the 18th and 19th centuries.

15. FORMER CORN STORES ☐

Now converted for residential use, this multi-storey former corn store is one of a number of warehouses that were constructed in this area in the early 19th century. Grain dust is highly explosive and many corn and flour stores were constructed with brick vaulted floors, rather than timber, as a means of fireproofing.

On your way to the next stop, keep an eye out on Parnell Street for the narrow laneways and bow-ways which are a feature of Ennis' medieval core.



16. MCPARLAND'S ☐

The modest and unassuming facade of this building hides its early origins. Raise your eyes to the diagonally-set chimneystack on its gable end, this is a typical feature of 17th century domestic architecture. Harriet Smithson, an acclaimed actress and wife of the composer Hector Berlioz, spent her youth here during the early 19th century.

McParland's stands on the corner of Chapel Lane, which led to a small stone-built penal chapel that was built here in 1735. Following Catholic emancipation in 1829, a new cathedral was built on a prominent site at the junction of O'Connell Street and Station Road. Why not visit the cathedral when you finish the trail?

17. FORMER BANK OF IRELAND ☐

Set on the corner of Bank Place and O'Connell Square this former bank was built in the 1870s by Sandham Symes, architect to the Bank of Ireland. Its limestone dressings and window detailing are similar to those also found in the design of the Ballina and Enniscorthy branches. Once boasting three banks, this short thoroughfare which is aptly named 'Bank Place' had become the town's banking quarter by the late 19th century.



ENNIS

ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREA

WALKING TRAIL

INIS

WANDER THE ROUTE USING THE PICTURE CLUES OR BREAK IT UP AND WONDER...

SRÁID UÍ CHONAILL O'CONNELL STREET

Where do Streets get their names?

Originally known as Gaol Street, the old county goal once stood on the site that is now occupied by the former town hall. It was renamed O'Connell Street in the early 20th century in honour of Daniel O'Connell, whose monument stands at the lower end of the street.

Have a look around and try and find the more unusual street names.

MAP LEGEND

- Architectural Conservation Area
- Walking Route 2.8km
- 1 Trail number
- 1 Picture Clue Number
- P Parking
- 📍 Scenic View

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