

# WONDER WANDER BALLINASLOE



NATIONAL INVENTORY of ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe Galway County Council

## INSTRUCTIONS

### TAKE A 'WONDER WANDER' THROUGH BALLINASLOE:

- 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 in our architectural scavenger hunt, or simply relax and enjoy our carefully curated self-guided tour of Ballinasloe.
- Always remember to glance up, peer down, and never cease to WONDER!

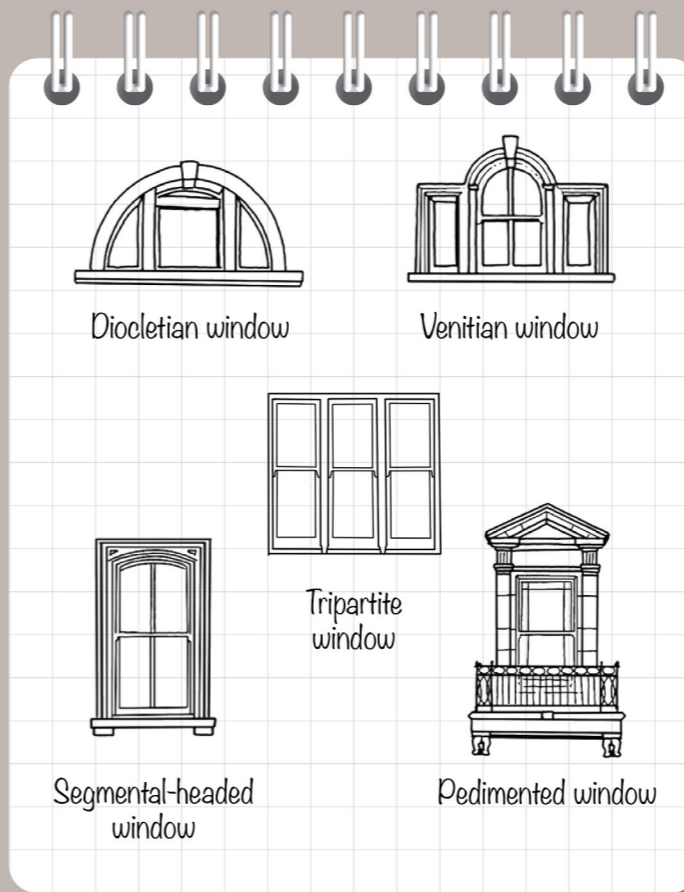


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## SCAVENGER HUNT

HOW MANY OF THESE WINDOW TYPES CAN YOU SPOT ON MAIN STREET?



## THE STORY OF BALLINASLOE

Located at an ancient crossing point on the River Suck, the story of Ballinasloe developed in the 12th century when a castle is said to have been built by Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair (Turlough O'Connor), King of Connacht.

By the 18th century it was a thriving market town, with generous streets and civic buildings of local limestone, laid out by the Trench family, later Earls of Clancarty. The annual fair, one of the oldest and largest in Europe, transformed Ballinasloe into a centre for the trading of livestock and for agricultural improvement.

The town continued to grow with the arrival of the Grand Canal in 1828, enhancing trade links between Dublin and the west. Development was further bolstered when the Great Midland and Western Railway opened a station in the town, in 1851.

Ballinasloe continues to be shaped by movement, meeting and exchange, and looks to the future while preserving a rich tapestry of architectural heritage.

In recognition of the special character of Ballinasloe, Galway County Council has designated an Architectural Conservation Area. Together with the diligent efforts of the local community, this designation helps in the management and enhancement of its unique social history and wealth of architectural treasures. It is hoped that this much loved town will continue to be valued, cherished and enjoyed by future generations.

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



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

## TICK THE BOX AS YOU WONDER

### 1. BALLINASLOE LIBRARY

In the 1850s the Sisters of Mercy acquired this terrace of houses for a convent. The chapel was added in 1864 to designs by James Kempster, who also served as County Surveyor and who shaped much of Ballinasloe's public architecture. Such was the respect he commanded that when Kempster died in 1893, shops across the town closed in his honour.

*Pop inside to view the painted ceiling of the former chapel, which was rediscovered during conversion of the building for use as the public library.*

### 2. TOWN HALL THEATRE

Built as the Ballinasloe Agricultural Hall, the building was home to the Ballinasloe Union Agricultural Society, a body dedicated to enhancing farming through technical improvements and practice. By the early 20th century variety performances and moving pictures were staged here. After a period of decline the hall was saved through local fundraising when it reopened as a theatre in the late 1980s.

*Further ahead is the former Presbyterian Church, which served as a place of worship for a small but notable protestant community during the mid-19th century.*

### 3. NO.29 SOCIETY STREET

This corner building, with its eye-catching chimneystack and cranked gable, was once Martha's Chip Shop, a much-loved Ballinasloe institution. Martha lived on Church Hill and was often seen carrying buckets of hand-peeled potatoes down to the shop.

*The building opposite, with the distinctive red brick frontage and large arched window, was the Central Cinema. Patrons were permitted to bring chips, served from Martha's, into screenings!*

### 4. ST JOHN'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

St John's stands on an elevated site which is believed to be a medieval motte. Originally built in the 1840s, the church was damaged by fire in 1899. The clock housed in its tower was gifted to the people of Ballinasloe by the Earl of Clancarty in 1901. Did you know that Galway time was typically 11 minutes behind Dublin time, until standardisation was introduced in 1916?

*It is said locally that an obelisk, which stands in the grounds of nearby Garbally Court, was originally intended as a spire for St John's.*

### 5. IVER'S LANE

Ballinasloe was a hub in the national network of horse-drawn stagecoaches that were operated by the Italian entrepreneur, Charles Bianconi, in the 19th century.



Stabling at the end of this laneway was used to change or rest tired horses. Notice the generous height of the archway to allow the stagecoaches access!

### 6. FORMER POST OFFICE

This late 19th century building borrows part of the neighbouring property to create the impression of a symmetrical façade. The use of brick is rare in Ballinasloe, a town which is dominated by traditional rendered buildings and the use of local limestone.

*As you continue along Main Street, you'll pass a row of 19th century shopfronts, one of which was the premises of the late Rory Kilduff, who was the last traditional saddle and harness maker in the town.*

### 7. BANK OF IRELAND

This former townhouse is said to have been built by the Earl of Clancarty. Have you noticed the massive chimneystack? It was designed to serve multiple fireplaces. A purpose-built banking hall was added to the rear in the early 20th century when the building was converted to a bank.

### 8. SUPERMAC'S

This is the birthplace of Supermac's! In 1978, Ballinasloe native Pat McDonagh opened his first restaurant here, and a local favourite began its journey to becoming a nationwide success.



*Supermac's occupies the ground floor of a 19th century building with distinctive windows on upper floors. Keep an eye out on Main Street for the many window types in our Scavenger Hunt.*

### 9. HOPSON'S LANE

This laneway was named after James Hopson, a 19th century bootmaker whose workshop once stood here. The entrance to the lane is marked by a decorative wrought-iron arch, which previously supported a lantern.



Gas lighting was introduced to the town in the mid-19th century after the Ballinasloe Gas Works was established in 1842.

### 10. ST MICHAEL'S SQUARE

Considered to be the historic heart of the town, the statue of a horse stands on the site of the old Market House. Once a focal point for commerce and trade, a potato and root vegetable market was held here during the 19th century.



Failure of the potato harvest during the 1840s brought famine and hardship to the people of the area. In response a fever hospital was built on Society Street, but within years significant deaths were recorded in a population already weakened by malnutrition and disease.

*A low wall at the junction of St Michaels Square and Main Street is known as the 'lazy wall'. A place where locals traditionally gathered to sit, socialize, and watch the world go by.*

### 11. ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

St Michael's is said to stand on the site of a medieval castle. The present church, which replaced an earlier chapel, dates to the mid-19th century and was built to designs by the Irish architect J. J. McCarthy.

Construction was delayed by the Great Famine and later revised with input from A. W. N. Pugin, who is best known for his work on the Palace of Westminster in London.

*Inside are stained-glass windows by leading Irish artists, including Harry Clarke. The window above the altar is by Frederick Settle Barff, also known as the pioneer of the Bower-Barff process of rust-proofing iron!*

### 12. FINNEGAN'S CORNER

The junction of Dunlo Street and Society Street has long been known as Finnegan's Corner, after Finnegan's drapery shop, which had stood here until the present bank was built in the 1920s. Also known as the 'The Irish House', Finnegan had a policy of only selling clothing manufactured in Ireland.



The pavement here was a favoured spot from which to take in the comings and goings of the town, and the phrase, 'Propping up the wall at Finnegan's Corner', developed into a local euphemism for idling!

*As you continue along Dunlo Street, look out for the former presbytery on your left, and near the end, on your right, the impressive limestone façade of the Garda Station that was initially built as two terraced houses.*

### 13. DOOLEY'S CORNER

This corner was known for Dooley's public house and grocery, a once lively market-day haunt. Many public houses also included a shop in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This was usually a hardware or grocery like here, but sometimes even included an undertakers!



*On the way to our next stop, you'll pass the former Free School for boys, with its limestone façade and arched doorways. A separate school for girls stood a short distance away on Brackernagh.*

### 14. CHARLES LE POER TRENCH MONUMENT

This monument commemorates Archbishop Charles Le Poer Trench, son of the first Earl of Clancarty. Designed by George Papworth in 1840, the monument is long rumoured by locals to house the remains of Lord Clancarty's hunting hounds, though this is now widely recognised as myth.



*Look out for the pair of gate lodges, set back from Harris Road. These flanked a 19th century entrance to Garbally Court, and were positioned to frame views across the Fair Green to St John's Church. Formerly the home of the Earls of Clancarty, Garbally Court was converted to a school in 1921.*

### 15. FAIR GREEN

The Fair Green has long been a place of gathering, sport and spectacle. It's best known for the annual horse fair where deals are struck over hand-slapping and the exchange of 'luck pennies'. The crowning of the King of the Fair was introduced in 1948, adding ceremony and celebration - a tradition that is said to have inspired the Rose of Tralee.



*In the months before the founding of the GAA in 1884, a hurling match held here was abandoned over differing interpretations of the rules, demonstrating the need for standardisation that went on to shape the modern game.*

### 16. EMERALD BALLROOM

For decades this was one of Ballinasloe's most glamorous venues, where many a local romance blossomed under the watchful eye of the parish priest. At the height of the showband era the ballroom hosted leading touring acts, including big names like the Miami Showband and Chubby Checker. Why not have a 'twist' or 'hucklebuck' hoedown before leaving!



# BALLINASLOE

## ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION AREA

# WALKING TRAIL

BÉAL ÁTHA NA SLUAIGHE

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



SRÁID AN CHUMAINN  
SOCIETY STREET

**Where do streets get their name?**  
Previously named 'Soldiers' Row' in reference to the barracks that stood at its western end, the street was renamed 'Farming Society Street', following construction of the Agricultural Hall in 1842. Home to the Royal Agricultural Improvement Society of Ireland, the name was later shortened to 'Society Street'.

**MAP LEGEND**

Architectural Conservation Area	Picture Clue Number
Walking Route, 2.3km	Parking
Trail Number	Scenic View
	Library

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