

CARRICK-ON-SHANNON 400

A community comes together to celebrate

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Introduction

In 2013, Carrick-on-Shannon will celebrate the 400th anniversary of the granting of a town charter by James I. The establishment of the town is set against a rich historical tapestry. Carrick-on-Shannon Heritage Group Ltd, chaired by John Bredin, work tirelessly to identify and manage heritage sites in Carrick-on-Shannon. These include the world renowned Costello Chapel, St George's Heritage & Visitor Centre, Carrick-on-Shannon's heritage "gem", the Workhouse Attic Memorial, and the Famine Garden of Remembrance. In 2011, the Group efforts expanded to offer community based history programmes. This piece tells the story of how local people through an interest in history have come together to contribute to the planned Carrick-on-Shannon 400 celebrations.

As a history story it may help set the scene by providing an overview of the past, commencing with the Celts, the Monastic settlements and the Gaelic order. Then consider the reign of Elizabeth I, the imposing of geographical boundaries and the James I plantation of Ireland all providing the lynchpin to understand contemporary Ireland. Gaelic and Planter traditions have both shaped the development of Carrick-on-Shannon over the last 400 years. The story then fast forwards to the present, to focus upon current community effort to acknowledge the past, reflect upon a shared history and look towards the future. Carrick on Shannon is a town which is vibrant, progressive, well serviced and can respond to the needs of local

residents and visitors. The current active promotion of Carrick-on-Shannon may assist the town to continue to flourish and will perpetuate the sense of pride, apparent to both local people and visitors alike, into the future.

The Past

To begin, Celtic settlement existed throughout Ireland, when Monastic settlements brought Christianity to County Leitrim in around 432AD. St Toghert founded an early Celtic monastic settlement at Kiltoghert under the patronage of O'Rourke of Breifne. The O'Rourke chieftains were Lords of Uí Breifne in the territory of the Uí Ruairc Clan. In the 7th Century this territory in the Kingdom of Connacht extended as far as Kells in Meath and to Drumcliffe in Sligo. From the 7th Century onwards the twists and turns of history undermined the O'Rourke status. By the 15th Century the Kingship of Breifne had divided into rival East and West faction. In 1457, the Maguires of Fermanagh defeated and dissolved the kingship of East Breifne. Tiernan Óg O'Ruairc and his descendants became known as the O'Rourkes of the Dromahaire line. These were the Chieftains of the remaining Breifne. In 1536, Bain Ballach Mór built Leitrim Castle, a O'Rourke stronghold. One of the earliest written records pertaining to Carrick-on-Shannon appears in the *Annals of Loch Cé* in 1530. In Irish, Cara Droma Ruisc or the weir of the marshy ridge is cited as a ford across the Shannon. O'Donnell of Tyrconnell utilises the ford to carry out a raid on O'Rourke lands. Evidently

protection, conflict and power struggles were on-going within Gaelic society. Shortly afterwards the English influence began to take root within Ireland. In 1583, Breifne lands were to under a go a geographical transformation. The Elizabethan Lord Deputy, Sir John Perrott imposed new boundaries to form a 'shire'; the County of Leitrim came into being. The tumultuous Nine Year War (1569-1604) and the defeat of the Gaels, including O'Rourke at the Battle of Kinsale (1601) witnessed the collapse of the Gaelic order. Even the Gaelic Chieftains, who resisted such as, O'Sullivan Beare, who made an epic journey with 1,000 followers to join O'Rourke in Leitrim, were eventually defeated. O'Rourke's stronghold castle was lost to Sir Oliver Lambert in March 1603.

From 1621 to 1622, the plantation of Leitrim witnessed the granting of approximately 35,000 acres of land to Scottish, English, and Irish native undertakers. New names such as Griffith, Coote and Blundell for example appeared and received large tracts of land. In 1611, O'Rourke lands were granted to Maurice Griffith. A fort and wooden bridge were in place by 1623. Carrick-on-Shannon was made into a Royal Borough, with a Corporation, by Charter granted by James I in March 1613. A c1683 description of Carrick-on-Shannon states there were fourteen resident families governed by a provost and twelve burgesses. It had a large wooden bridge and strong castle in the possession of Sir Oliver St George.



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The St George family were of Anglo-Norman descent and held lands at Hatley St George in Cambridgeshire, England. The family originally came to Ireland in the 1620's with Captain Richard St. George. Various members of the St. George family settled in Athlone, Kilkenny and Carrick-on-Shannon. Eventually the St. George family became the main landlords in Carrick-on-Shannon. As a result of the Act of Union (1800) the Borough of Carrick-on-Shannon, formed nearly two hundred years was dispelled. Unions were established, the forerunner to the current day County Council system. It is around this time the physical characteristics of the town, recognisable today begin to take shape. Buildings and Architecture, such as, Hatley Manor, St George's Terrace, The Courthouse (now The Dock) and the Stone Bridge appear. It is at this point we fast forward to the present.

The Present

In 2011, Carrick-on-Shannon Heritage Group Ltd with assistance from Leitrim

County Council successfully secured funding from The International Fund for Ireland to implement the Twin Traditions Initiative (TTI). The TTI is a two year reconciliation project and is timed to coincide with the Carrick-on-Shannon 400 celebrations planned for 2013. The completion of various history projects working with both adults and young people in community and school settings are designed to build new cross-community and cross-border relationships, essentially to contribute to the wider sustainability and the peace process for present and future generations. The TTI also receives support from Fermanagh District Council and County Leitrim Enterprise Board.

The first TTI project to be progressed is the adult history programme. A core group of fifteen individuals with various levels of interest in history have come together to produce a commemorative booklet to be published in 2013. Dr. Georgina Laragy, through a series of lectures, equipped the participants to research historical documents and

compile the gathered information into a written piece. The participants have a diverse range of interests. These include: the oldest families in Carrick-on-Shannon; the 1641 Depositions; the march of O'Sullivan Beare; the Workhouse; the Erne Waterways; mining; assisted emigration; the Famine; the Land Wars; the musical influences throughout the 400 years; Landlords; the Flying Boats of the Second World War; and perhaps the most gruesome, the Gaol and hangings. The projects are accessing historical documents, that in some cases have not seen the light of day for over one hundred years, which have been stored in the National Library of Ireland, the National Archives and the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland. Dr Gerard MacAtasney, a familiar contributor to articles and books on Leitrim, has been engaged by the project. Essentially, he is guiding the participants to finalise their written piece to publication standard. It is hoped the publication will encourage the reader to challenge perceptions, appreciate how historical divisions occurred, and



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to develop an understanding of difference to enhance respect for others. It is clear without the personal commitment of the participants the project may have fallen by the wayside.

A second element of the TTI initiative, a photography exhibition 'The Present' was held in The Dock during Heritage Week 2012. The exhibition presented images taken by four national school pupils, the Community College and wider members of the community. A professional photographer was appointed to provide photography sessions. A request was made to take photographs on the 1st May 2012 to reflect everyday life in Carrick-on-Shannon and the surrounding area. The submitted images provided an insight into the way young people and adults view and feel about Carrick-on-Shannon and where they live. The exhibition was launched by Cathaoirleach of Leitrim County Council, Enda Stenson, who stated that these images convey the message that County Leitrim is a good place to grow up. The group invite

people to submit further images and old photographs to form part of an expanded exhibition planned for 2013.

The Twin Traditions have more projects planned for 2013, part of a wider effort, combining inputs from Leitrim County Council, County Leitrim Enterprise Board, the Chamber of Commerce, Leitrim Tourism, schools and community groups, to pull together and make something special happen during 2013. The official launch of Carrick-on-Shannon 400 on the 21st June 2012 by Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar T.D. recognised Carrick-on-Shannon's efforts, in establishing itself as one of the most progressive and fastest growing inland resort in Ireland. Sinead McDermott, Leitrim Tourism stated on the day "quite simply there have never been as many people coming to Carrick-on-Shannon". This surely indicates there is already something special about Carrick-on-Shannon.

The Future

During 2013 a full programme of

activities such as The Millennium Choir Performance; John McGahern Summer School; Carrick Water Music Festival; Shannon Boat Rally; Literary Heritage Week; and Session on the Shannon; to name a few, offers a feast of activities. It is also the year of 'The Gathering' designed to encourage friends and relatives living abroad to return home for a visit. Today to walk through Carrick-on-Shannon town there is a blend of imaginatively restored historical buildings which sit comfortably among the modern twist of street furniture, sculptures, and waterfront park.

The hotels, restaurants, shops, sporting association, leisure centre, marina, schools, cinemas and vibrant arts scene offer something for everyone. The people of Carrick-on-Shannon are looking forward to seeing everyone during 2013, especially to join us in celebrating the 400 years since our foundation.

Everyone is welcome.