

# ROSCREA WALKING TOUR COMPANION



Compiled by Dick Conroy

## ABOUT THE COMPANION

This Companion should be used in conjunction with the Roscrea Town Walking Tour Map. See the "Other Things to Do and See" section.

### 1 ROSCREA CASTLE AND DAMER HOUSE COMPLEX

The history of this complex is extensive and is best learned by taking the tour. You can enter the complex and visit the formal garden for free, but a fee is payable to tour the buildings. There has been a castle on the site since 1213. Originally a Motte & Bailey style, it was replaced by the stone castle you see in 1260 and Damer House within the walls was constructed between 1722 and 1727.

### 2 MARKET SQUARE

So called because as you look to the pub called Market House, the site of the town's Weigh House was in the middle of the road. It was demolished and a fountain that was in front of Shaws was moved to make way for traffic. There was much animosity towards the moving of the fountain which resulted in a baton charge by local constabulary in the 1920's to force the issue. It was relocated to Rosemary Square where it remains to this day. The AIB bank is a wonderful example of early business establishment architecture. The façade of the town's buildings is worth observing – make sure to look at the upper stories – they demonstrate the varying styles in vogue through their construction.

### 3 MADDEN'S CORNER AND BARRACK HILL

As you walk up the town you will notice many lanes leading both left and right to the rear of the Main Street. If you exit through any one of them you will see how the town was once laid out. At this corner (3), you are outside the birthplace of the very colourful character Daisy Bates – a lady that became famous for her social work with the Aboriginal People of Australia. She wrote many pamphlets and books about the Aboriginal people and in 1934 was awarded C.B.E. for her work on their behalf. Across the street (where the Credit Union is) was the old RIC Barracks – if you look closely at the stone wall at the road you will see where steps which led down to the road have been blocked up, owing to traffic dangers! As you head up Green Street, of architectural interest are the canopies over the doors. A community memorial garden to Daisy Bates is at the left as you face the library. The Library's, Fire Station's and LIDL's location was known as Gort na Faugh or the Giant's Hollow up to the early 20th century. This is traditionally known as the field of battle on the 29th June (842 or 845 A.D.) when Roscrea people inflicted a heavy defeat on the Vikings, who attacked the Aonach Éile – the great fair/market day of the area.

### 4 BUNKER'S HILL AND GROVE STREET

As you head east from the Library, the road on which you walk was only created in the 1980's – the houses here are known as the Crescent and were originally in a cul-de-sac prior to the realignment. If you turn left, you will travel up the continuation of Grove Street known locally as Bunker's Hill, again with the terrace-houses of canopied doorways. Anecdotally, Bunkers Hill is named after the American Battle in which many residents from this area took part and hence the origin of the name. Further up Bunker's Hill lies the Roscrea Railway Station with its now defunct spur line to Birr – the last train was on 30th September 1960 – the other line between Ballybrophy and Limerick via Roscrea & Nenagh still operates. Right turn and you will come back to Main St. We are going to continue straight (East) passing by the now empty pharmaceutical factory and the one of our newer buildings – Tesco. You may catch a glimpse of our next destination behind it!

### 5 MONASTIC REMAINS OF ST. CRONAN'S CHURCH, ROUND TOWER AND THE BLACK MILLS

This complex of buildings is an illustration of Roscrea's historical evolution. The oldest building you see is the tower (10th Century), closely followed by the Gable and its High Cross across the road, that dates from the 12th century. The Book of Dimma – a manuscript copy of the gospels, was written here – according to legend, in one day a miracle was instigated in which the sun never set until the book was completed! The Church of Ireland was built in 1812 using, among others, scavenged stone got from the ruins of the Abbey that was attached to the Gable. A tour is available from the Black Mills which houses the original cross and is highly recommended.

### 6 CASTLE STREET

As we enter Castle Street – the Roscrea Travel premises comes to view. This was once the White Hart Inn, a famous hostelry where, from the middle window on the first floor, Daniel O'Connell, addressed a crowded square. In 1829 it is said that his voice rang out loud and clear around the town from this natural amphitheater. The first public conveyance from Dublin to Limerick, via Roscrea, stopped at The White Hart Inn in 1760 when the stagecoach took four days; later this was reduced to three days – what an ordeal!

### 7 TEMPERANCE HALL AND JAIL

Turning to your left we head up Rosemount. The terraced houses on the right were built circa 1930 on a field that was owned by a local tannery and where the circus used to perform. The Church of Ireland School dates from 1974. The Temperance Hall was built about 1815 as the Bridewell (Jail) 'having three day rooms, twelve cells and two airing yards with a hall which is used also for a chapel'. In the late 1800's it was put up for sale and there was a proposal to buy the building as a town hall, which never materialised. As you head down you will pass old schools and the defunct courthouse.

### 8 THE GLEBE PARK

On the left you will see what was once the Maltings, now home to Dunne's Stores. The old name for this crossroads was Barnagutta, the dirty (muddy) gap; the meaning becomes clear when you realise that this was the trek used by the carts and coaches of travellers who came in by the high ground of Corville and reached the Limerick side of the town via some part of Carrick! Ballyhall (An Baile Thall – the Town Over There) one of the first settlements to be built following the castle's establishment, is on the right. Henry Howley, a carpenter who helped Robert Emmet in his 1803 rebellion and was subsequently hanged at Kilmainham Jail, Dublin, on September 20<sup>th</sup>, is

reputed to have been born here. An image of him is viewable in the national gallery's online collection and more information is available on Wikipedia. The Glebe Field, originally a walled garden attached to the Glebe House facing the park was owned by the Church of Ireland. The Glebe House, formerly the rectory, was built in 1812 for the small sum of £875. The open space has been developed as a town park and children's playground.

## 9 THE FANCY FOUNTAIN IN ROSEMARY SQUARE

The Fountain was originally constructed in the 1800's and located in Main Street – just outside Shaw's Department Store. It was relocated following a baton charge from Main St. in 1929 (see Market Square (2)), this fountain now resides in Rosemary Square. The street to the right (Rosemary St) and the Square are said to be named after Rose & Mary, two daughters of Joseph Damer who opened this convenient 'passage to the Cashel road'. This was the location of Fairs in more modern times prior to the establishment of Marts, where farmers brought their goods and animals to town for sale once a month. This created a platform for not only the farming community to sell their wares to the public but other "pop-up" stalls also attended generating a bazaar and carnival atmosphere. In times past (see No. 4) it led to the raid by Vikings already mentioned.

## 10 ST. CRONAN'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

Heading to our next location we pass through The Valley – the lowest point of Roscrea. Further up the hill is the now empty convent and its stately home of Ayr Hill. Construction of the Catholic Church you see today was begun around 1844 to replace the previous one – the nave of which remains and is now the Legion Hall and Parish Offices near the Abbey. Prior to the Famine times the town's population was 9,000 – about twice what it is now! Churches soon got overcrowded and new ones were built. Wander around and admire the architecture from various periods.

## 11 THE FRANCISCAN FRIARY AND ABBEY HALL

This friary now in ruins was built in 1470 but eventually abandoned in 1579 – under duress – monasteries were ordered to be closed by Henry VIII! This friary was the venue for a pilgrimage of the Third Order of St. Francis in June 1911 when 15,000 attended Mass celebrated in the ruin and afterwards walked in procession to Mount St. Joseph Abbey. The Abbey Hall is a much more recent construction being started in 1920. It has been a place of entertainment hosting dances, plays and meetings and is the home of Roscrea Musical Society who have put on a production every year since their foundation in 1940.

## 12 BURGEOO BRIDGE

As we walk down to our next stop, part of the Mill on the left was the town's gasworks – the source of Roscrea's street lighting for many years. Fifty yards further on we come to the gates of Parkmore convent – once a guest house for girls run by the Sisters of C.S.M – then a small hotel in the 1940's and 50's and is now a retirement home for the elderly. Wander in a few yards and sit on the bridge. From here the old mill race can be seen as you face the road. This house was Sans Souci Villa, the residence of the Egans, the leading Catholic family in Roscrea during the first half of the nineteenth century. They had an extensive brewery, the warehouses of which, just around the corner on the Limerick Road, have long since been demolished and replaced with what is now part of Parkmore Nursing Home. We are now at Burgoo Bridge. There is no certain explanation of the name but there are three possibilities: Is Burgoo a corruption of Borough or Burgess? Does it mean a boggy or marshy place? Or, as is believed, that as so many from the area served in the British Army in India, with Burgoo being a type of Indian food made from maize and milk and the diet of these soldiers, that people began calling the area Burgoo as a result.

## 13 MOUNT ST. JOSEPH

Just 3kms further on is Mount Saint Joseph Cistercian Monastery, once home to Richard Heaton, botanist, famed for being the first to chart The Burren Plants & their uniqueness. Lovely walks through the grounds await exploration.

## 14 CHAPEL LANE AND GANTLY ROAD

We now reach Chapel Lane – named after a pre-famine church now long gone. The newest road in Roscrea – Gantly Road – opened in 2008 and is 310 metres long – lies to the right of this and would bring you back to Green Street and the Birr Road. It is named after a locally born Superintendent who was the first Garda to die in the line of duty. The Garda (Police) Website states: *"On 21st January, 1948, Chief Superintendent Gantly was leading a party of Gardai from the Detective Branch, Dublin Castle in a search for escaped prisoners at the Hammond Lane Foundry, Dublin when he was accidentally shot."*

## 15 MONAINCHA MONASTIC SETTLEMENT

A walk of 5km (each way) from the town, so would possibly be best driven to, the settlement was originally built on an island in the middle of Lough Cré – long since drained – this settlement became famous in the Middle Ages as a place of pilgrimage – long before Lourdes, Fatima etc. On your way to it you might like to visit St. Anne's Centre – the location of St. Cronan's first monastery – here in the ruins lies the remains of Michael Haas of the film "Philomena" fame. Thousands of pilgrims came to Monaincha Monastic Settlement seeking cures for their ills. Its name is derived from the Irish "Inis na mBeo" – the Island of the Living – Insula Viventium was what Gerald Cambrensis called it when he declared it to be the "31st Wonder of the World". Rumour had it that you couldn't die there!

## REFERENCES & RESOURCES

Roscrea and District (1977) and Roscrea Tourist Trail (1977) by George Cunningham.

Much more detail about the town and its people can be had by visiting [www.roscreathroughtheages.org](http://www.roscreathroughtheages.org) –and

<http://saintcronanroscrea.ie/31-wonders-of-roscrea/> is also worth a visit as is [www.roscreaonline.com](http://www.roscreaonline.com) which contains up-to-date news of happenings in the locality. There are two other resources: <http://www.heritagetrails.ie/explore/monaincha-heritage-trail/> explores Monaincha while <http://www.heritagetrails.ie/explore/roscrea-heritage-trail/> explores the town both have maps and commentary.

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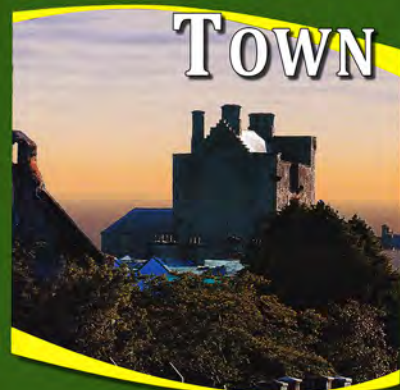


Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil  
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"Few places for the size can boast of more interesting antiquarian remains, than Roscrea."  
( Thomas Lalor Cooke: *The Early History of the Town of Birr*, Published 1875)

# ROSCREA TOWN



DISCOVERIRELAND.IE/LAKELANDS

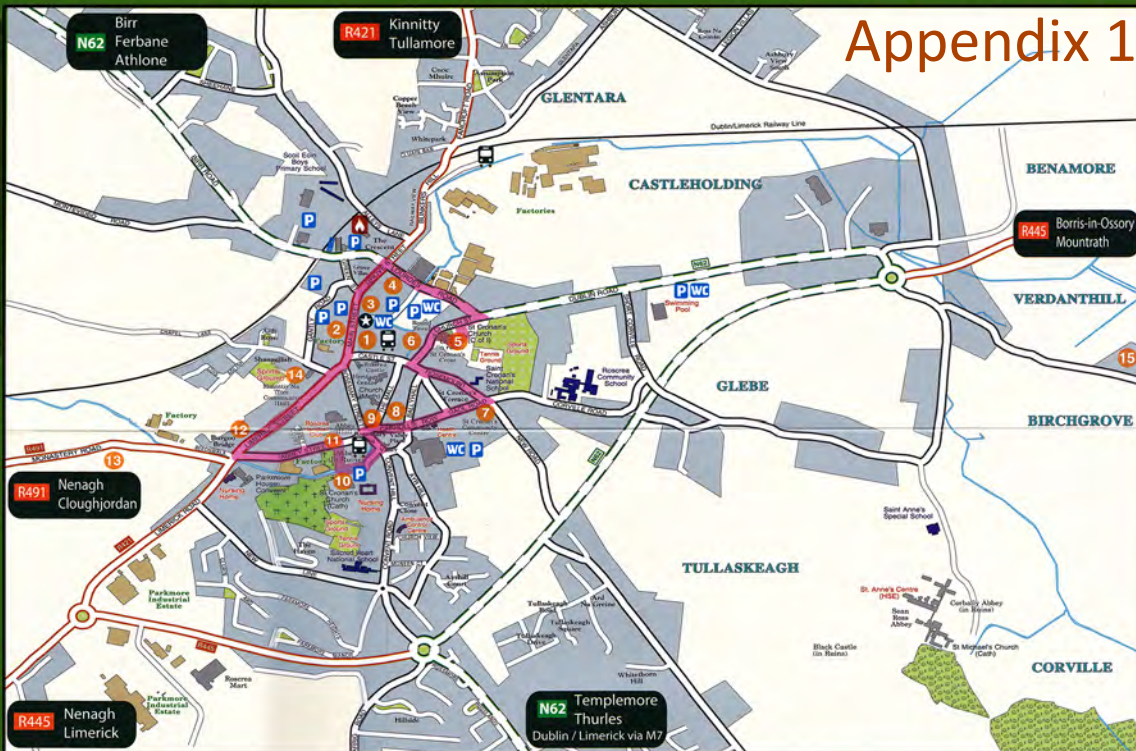
Make sure and get your free copy of the "Roscrea Walking Tour Companion" to explain the different sites on the map

Roscrea

LAKELANDS & inland WATERWAYS



## Appendix 1



### Other Things to Do and See

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| 1 Roscrea Castle & Damer House Complex | 6 Castle Street, Round Tower, Black Mills | 11 The Franciscan Friary and Abbey Hall |
| 2 Market Square                        | 7 Temperance Hall and Jail                | 12 Burgoon Bridge                       |
| 3 Madden's Corner and Barrack Hill     | 8 The Glebe Park                          | 13 Mount St. Joseph                     |
| 4 Bunker's Hill and Grove Street       | 9 The Fancy Fountain in Rosemary Sq       | 14 Chapel Lane and Gantly Road          |
| 5 St. Cronan's Church                  | 10 St. Cronan's Catholic Church           | 15 Monaincha Monastic Settlement        |

### Roscrea

Nestled as it is on a crossroads on the important ancient route to Tara – the Slí Dála, and perched on the high ground between the Devil's Bit and Slieve Bloom mountain ranges, Roscrea boasts a long and proud heritage stretching back over six thousand years. Indeed, during the recent construction of the M7 new evidence of settlements were unearthed at Derrymore & Camblin. It is no wonder then that with its area being populated for many millennia, claiming as it does the title of The Oldest Inland Town in Ireland - existing as a town for 1,500 years having so many historical buildings in evidence throughout the town that a wonderful "sense of place" and belonging exists here.



# LAKELANDS & inland WATERWAYS



## DRIVING ROUTES

### Red Route

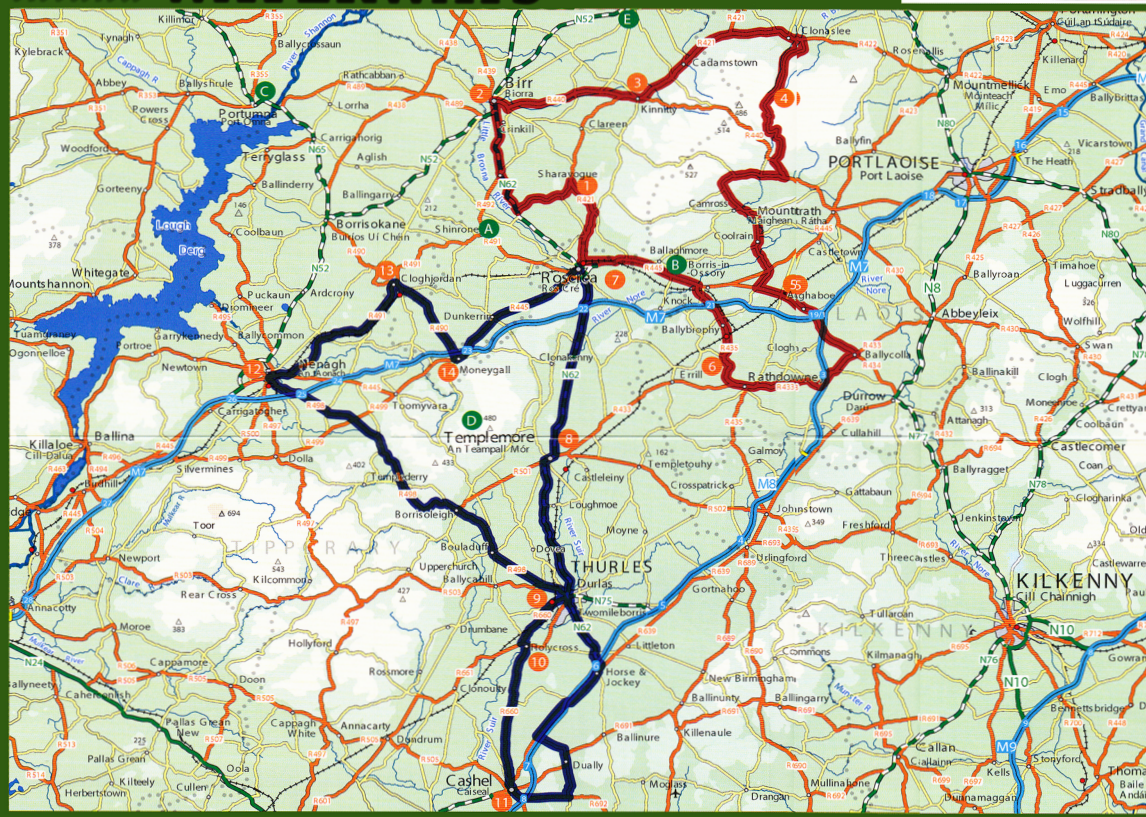
1. **The Leap Castle** with its 'Smelly Ghost' is a good start – an appointment must be made for a tour. 2. **Birr Castle** and **Demense** with its old Telescope and Gardens is a must. 3. **Kinnitty Castle** – if you haven't had lunch, once an old-world home, now a Hotel. 4. If you want a picnic there is no nicer spot than the **Slieve Bloom** area: lots of walks for all. 5. **Monicknew Wood** has a nice picnic area. Just relax in the fresh air! 6. **Donaghmore Workhouse** – linked with Saints Kieran & Canice. It lies on an old pilgrim route from Clonmacnoise going south. 7. If you have decided not to walk to **Monanicha** on your walk about Roscrea, now is your chance to see it. Make sure you have sensible shoes as the access can be muddy! Described long ago as the '31st Wonder of the World' – it was a place of pilgrimage from all over Europe as it had the belief that nobody could die on the island – and so was known as 'Inis na mBeo', the Island of the Living from which its Monanicha name is derived.

### Blue Route

8. **Carden's Wild Domain** – Templemore offers a 17 acre Park for a picnic and walks with lake and old castle. Although you can't visit inside, see the Garda Training Depot as you head for stop 9. It was once a soldiers' barracks. 9. **Thurles** awaits – you might on your way want to detour a little to see the ruins of the **Butler Castle in Loughmore**. **Thurles** has a museum dedicated to the national game of hurling. **Thurles** is the home of the GAA where it was founded in 1884. The Source is a Theatre for Performing Arts and is worth a visit. 10. Just outside the town of **Thurles** lies **Holy Cross Abbey** – now restored and a place of devotion and pilgrimage. 11. **The Rock of Cashel** is your next stop and is famous throughout the world. **Bog Boora** – a regional headquarters of **Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann** – our traditional music organisation lies just beside the Rock. It is a venue for Concerts and other performances. 12. Returning by way of the motorway or the old N7, we once more enter **Thurles**, this time heading for **Nenagh**. **Nenagh Castle** awaits and also it is the seat of Genealogical Research for North Tipperary. 13. Leave **Nenagh** and travel to **Cloughjordan** where you will find Ireland's Old Village. Stop and wander around to view an alternative lifestyle. 14. Leaving **Cloughjordan** we return to the N7 and visit **Moneygall**, the ancestral home of President Barack Obama. You will be able to see the house from which his ancestor left, have a cup of tea or indeed a pint of the 'black stuff' (not if you're driving!) before returning to **Roscrea**.

### Optional Sites to Visit

A **Shinrone** could lay claim to President Obama too. His **Moneygall** ancestor's ancestors are all buried here in the local Church of Ireland. The Kearney Family originally came from **Shinrone**. You can visit Bellefield House and Garden and spend an hour admiring it. 8. **Ballymore Castle** can be visited by appointment. It belongs to the type of castle that was more a fortified tower house and an outpost than the larger type castles you see around. It has the reputation of being haunted too! C If you go to **Portumna**, you can cross the Shannon and go to Galway or visit the wonderful Portumna Forest Park, but I would suggest that instead, you follow the Lough Derg Road. This road takes you through such lovely villages as **Dromineer**, **Garryknedy** & **Terryglass** before ending at **Ballina** & **Killalee** where, if you wish you can cross the Shannon again and if you turn right, you will be able to journey back to **Portumna** on the opposite side of the lake. Spectacular scenery lies around every corner with Viewing Points and Parking available at especially impressive places. D The Devil's Bit Mountain lies just outside **Templemore**. You may wish to visit it when on your Blue Route. You can drive to within a half mile of the summit. Walking to the peak and up the Rock with its Cross, gives spectacular views of the countryside. On a clear day you can see past the Shannon and the town of **Templemore** lies like a model village in the distance behind you. If you wish, you travel past **Birr** and through the Bog of Allen. You will see the works and the Briquette Factory at **Cloughan** and can travel on the Bog Train at **Blackwater** and have the workings of the bog explained. Further on is **Clonmacnoise** – well worth a visit while not too far from it is a lovely 'restored' bog area – **Lough Boora** – where you can decide to either walk the pathways – sometimes a guided walk is available – or hire a bicycle and cycle the myriad of pathways that exist.



- 1 The Leap Castle
- 2 Birr Castle
- 3 Kinnitty Castle
- 4 Monicknew Wood
- 5 Aghaboe Abbey
- 6 Donaghmore Workhouse
- 7 Monanicha

### Other Things to Do and See

- A Shinrone
- B Ballymore Castle
- C Portumna Forest Park
- D The Devil's Bit Mountain
- E Bog of Allen

- 8 Carden's Wild Domain
- 9 Thurles GAA Museum
- 10 Holy Cross Abbey
- 11 The Rock of Cashel
- 12 Nenagh Castle
- 13 Ireland's Old Village
- 14 Moneygall

### Roscrea TOWN

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