

Athboy is in County Meath, just a one hour drive from Dublin, and close to the heritage towns of Trim and Kells. It is also within easy driving distance of the major historical sites of Newgrange, Tara and Oldcastle.

If you are interested in further information regarding heritage sites and tourist attractions in Meath, please contact Meath Tourism. The staff will also be delighted to assist you in reserving accommodation should you wish to spend a night or two in the area.

Tourist Information Centre
 Railway Street, Navan, County Meath
 Telephone + 353 (0)46 73426

You may also wish to visit Meath Tourism's website: www.meathtourism.ie

Standing at the Edge of the Pale Athboy Heritage Trail

Meath

This Heritage Trail is an application of the Meath Brand Identity, financed by LEADER II, the EU Initiative for Rural Development, 1995-1999.



Meath Heritage

Always a visit to treasure



At the Yellow Ford

The town of Athboy began sometime during the sixth century A.D. as a settlement at the river crossing known as the Yellow Ford. The importance of the crossing meant that an established road network converging on the Yellow Ford had existed from early times. The town developed along these roadways.

The earliest inhabitants of Athboy were Druids who had settlements at the nearby Hill of Ward.

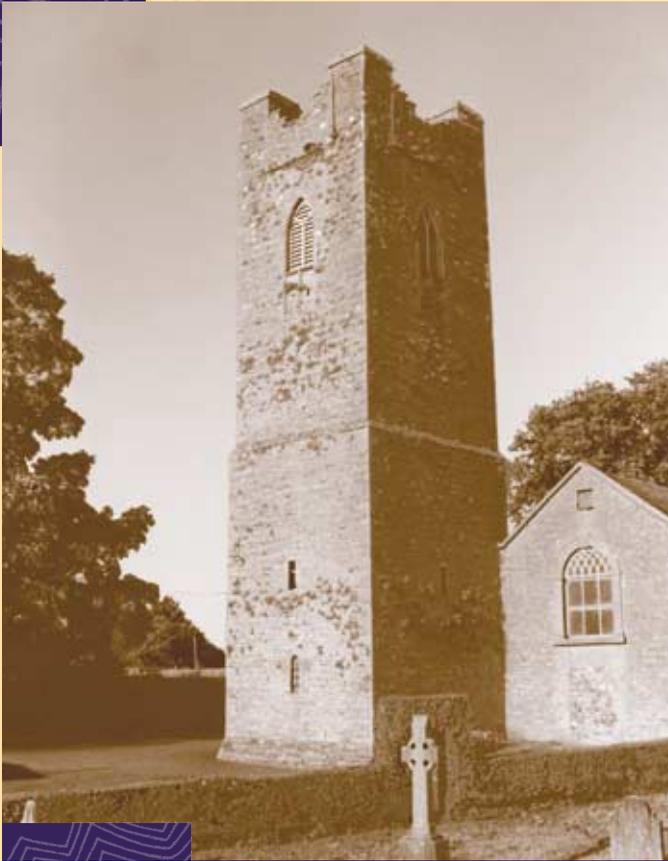
In 1180 the Anglo-Norman invasion reached Athboy. As part of their plan to capture key towns and fortify them with a wall and castle, the Normans walled a square extending from the river to the Roman Catholic Church, and from Scarlet Park to the backs of the houses on the northwest side of Main Street. Athboy was granted a charter in 1497 by Henry VII of England, and was by 1500 the most westerly stronghold of the Pale.

The Carmelite Order of monks arrived in Athboy in ca. 1300, establishing a charter house on land they were given outside the walls in nearby Danes Court. They also founded a hospital and an almshouse and built a church on the site of the present Protestant Church.

During the 1641 Rebellion, the town was captured by Eoghan Rua O'Neill. With Cromwell and the collapse of the Rebellion, much of the land ownership passed to adventurers from England. John Bligh, a Londoner, acquired large estates in the Athboy area. The head of the Bligh Family was named Earl of Darnley in 1725.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Darnley Family planned and carried out the development of the town, giving it the form which prevails today. It wasn't until 1909, after the Wyndham Act of 1903 had finally broken the power of the landlords, that Francis Walter, Earl of Darnley, auctioned the town of Athboy. The Darnley estate office, now the Kirwan Arms Hotel, was finally closed in 1948.

Take a few minutes to walk the Athboy heritage trail and experience some of the history and rich tradition which make the people at the Yellow Ford proud of their past and present, and confident in their future.



A Meeting of Histories

From invading Normans to Carmelite monks and a modern day library – the Church of Ireland grounds unite 900 years of Irish history.

Athboy

1. St James R.C. Church
2. The Old Darnley Lodge Hotel
3. The Church of Ireland Grounds
4. The Metal Footbridge
5. The Engine House of the Railway Station
6. The Fair Green
7. The Mall
8. The Bridge
9. The Macra Hall
10. School
11. The Market House
12. Remains of Athboy Castle
13. The Waxies Dargle



The Stations of the Athboy Heritage Trail

1 St James R.C. Church

Gaelic League

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 as part of a general Irish language revival at the end of the 19th century.

The League was also instrumental in rekindling an interest in Irish music and dance.

Completed in 1845 at the time of the great famine, the building was constructed under the direction of Rev. Fr. Rickard, P.P., whose remains are interred in the church.

Within the grounds stands a statue of Fr. Eugene O'Growney, one of the founders of the Gaelic League. He had a major influence in arresting the decline of the Irish language. The statue was executed by Seamus de Paor and was unveiled by the then President of Ireland, Sean O'Kelly, in 1956.



Records in Stone
Ireland's history can often be read in the stones of its churches.

The Church of Ireland Grounds

The church was erected in 1772. The tower, from a previous church built by the Carmelites, was incorporated into the building and still stands. The house which was the residence of the church sexton is now the town library. Part of the old wall of Athboy can be seen at the end of the cemetery – this was built by the Normans in the 11th century to protect the settlement.



The Darnley Family

The Darnleys were a prominent local family whose members represented Athboy in parliament on six occasions.

2 The Old Darnley Lodge Hotel

This was the estate office for the Darnley Family who owned the town of Athboy and surrounding land from 1770. The family had an enormous influence on the development of Athboy until the power of the landlords was finally weakened by the Wyndham Act of 1903. They eventually sold the town in 1909.

3 The Metal Footbridge

This footbridge crosses the 'Yellow Ford' – the river from which Athboy derives its name. It was at this point that the original street of Athboy crossed the river leading to the Fair Green and the Hill of Ward (*Tlachtga*), an ancient Druidic settlement.

5 The Engine House of the Railway Station

These fine stone buildings were part of the railway line which served Athboy for nearly one hundred years. Opened in 1864, the line ran from Athboy to Dublin. It was officially closed in 1957.

The Midland and Great Western locomotives were particularly known for their very distinctive livery – they were painted emerald green with vermillion coloured nameplates.

The station suffered severe damage from a bomb blast during the Civil War in 1923.



Fair Green

A sporting ground of the ancients.

6 The Fair Green

This is probably the oldest habitation site in Athboy. Situated close to the Druidic settlement of Tlachgta (the Hill of Ward), it is here that the inhabitants held their sports and contests. The green was donated to the people of Athboy by Lord Darnley in 1909. It was used as a site for the monthly cattle fairs until these were discontinued in 1955. The green was developed as a public park in 1999.

The Hill of Ward (Tlachgta)

Was one of Ireland's ancient royal residences. Once a year fair-like meetings took place here. These were a mixture of trading, athletic competitions and legal dealings.



A beautiful example of 19th century cut stone architecture.

The Mall

It was here that soup was distributed to victims of the famine. The soup was prepared in a huge pot which could be wheeled over the fire. To the rear of the Mall are the Athboy lodge stables and yard. These were owned by the Dyas family who also owned 'Mannifesto', the first horse to win the Aintree Grand National twice.

7

8 The Bridge

It was the erection of this bridge around 1400 which created the present line of the town. The river beneath the bridge was diverted to accommodate the operation of the water wheel for the nearby cornmill.

8

9 The Macra Hall

Formerly the courthouse, Macra Hall was built in 1863 as part of a complex occupied by the R.I.C. (Royal Irish Constabulary). This comprised of a barracks (now the Bank of Ireland) and a jail. Meath County Council purchased the building and used it as a courthouse until it was sold again in 1964. The Hall was then thoroughly renovated and has since become a centre of youth activity in the area.

Macra na Féirme
Generations of Ireland's farming community have gathered socially with Macra na Féirme, a nationwide club active in rural communities.



Gaelic Games

Many of Athboy's famous hurlers were introduced to the game at the primary school.

Athboy School

This fine stone building dating from 1885 was the primary school in the area until it was closed in 1949. It was then purchased by the Mercy Order who operated a secondary school there for another 13 years.

10

The Market House

Mc Elhinneys Bridal Boutique

This was formerly the market house where farm produce was bought and sold for many years. The weekly market was held on Thursdays and had an official weigher for the weighing of grain, potatoes and vegetables. In season, wool would have also been bought and sold here.

11

The Remains of Athboy Castle

Beneath this house lie the ruins of Athboy Castle. The castle, built in 1180 by the Normans, guarded the approach to the town from the west. The lane to the side of the house is the original street of Athboy which ran at right angles to present-day Main Street.

12

The Waxies Dargle

This was once an inn known as *The Ludwidge Arms*. It was a coaching inn with stable accommodations where horses were changed on the Dublin/Connaught run which ran via Killeshandra. Descendants of the Ludwidge family still live in the locality.

13

Also in the area

If you have enjoyed this heritage trail and are interested in seeing more in the area, you certainly will not be disappointed. The following heritage attractions are all within easy driving distance of Athboy:

The Hill of Ward (Tlachtga)

Tlachtga takes its name in honour of a Celtic goddess who died there. With Tara and Tailléan it is one of the three major residences of Ireland's royal ancients.

The sacred fires of Samhain were kindled at Tlachtga at the beginning of winter to ensure that man remained safe throughout the dark season. It is thought that the rites and rituals of Halloween originated here.

St Patrick, Vikings, Normans, and Cromwell – indeed all the major forces that shaped the development of Ireland – visited the area near Athboy, making it one of the great focal points of the county.

Rathmore Abbey

The abbey was built by the Plunkett family who owned the nearby Rathmore Castle. Dating back to 1400 AD it has a rich history full of romance, intrigue and treachery.

Ballinlough Castle Gardens

Ballinlough is a beautifully restored, old world garden with a splendid lakeside walk.