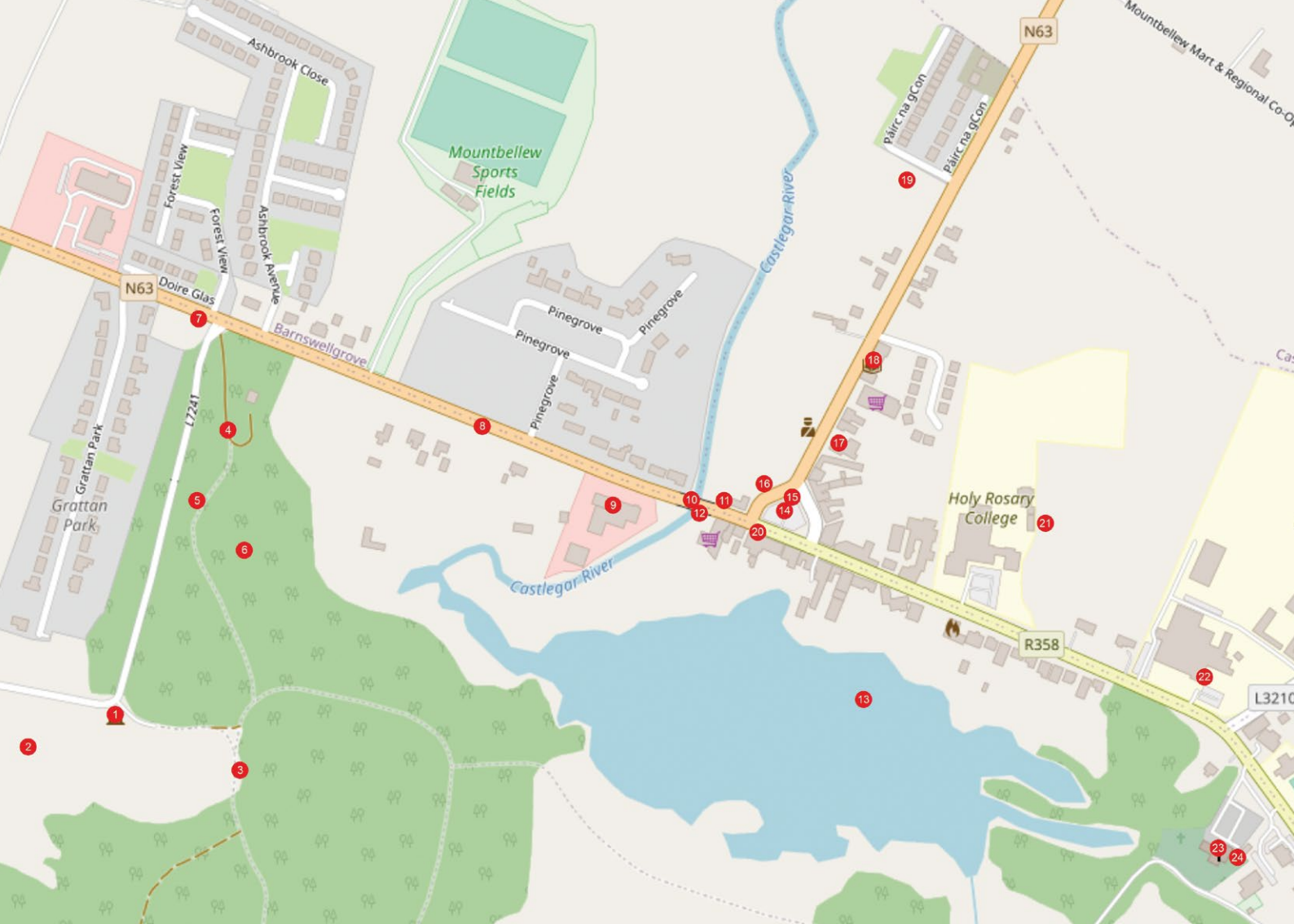
POCKET GUIDE

TO THE HERITAGE OF

MOUNTBELLEW

COUNTY GALWAY

mountbellewheritage**tourism**network.com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Mountbellew Mart & Regional Co-Op
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Grattan Park
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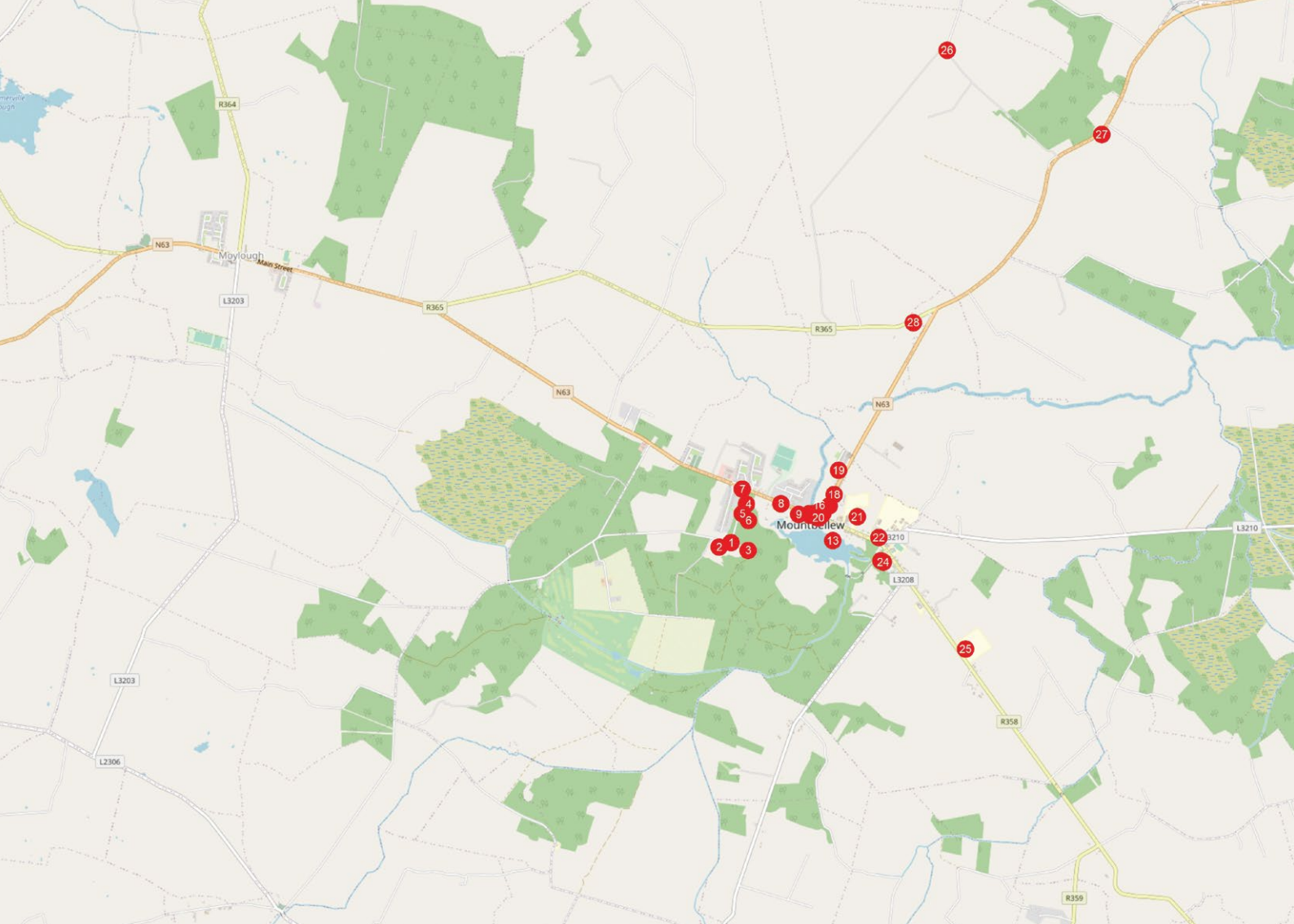
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16
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19
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21
22
24
25
26
27
28

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MOUNTBELLEW | COUNTY GALWAY

STOP 1	OLD FORGE MUSEUM
STOP 2	THE WALLED GARDEN
STOP 3	SITE OF BELLEW DEMESNE HOUSE
STOP 4	FOREST WALKS
STOP 5	THE ROCKY BRIDGE
STOP 6	THE BOATHOUSE
STOP 7	THE GATE LODGE
STOP 8	HA-HA WALL
STOP 9	CORN MILL
STOP 10	THE BRIDGE AND MILESTONE
STOP 11	BIANCONI COACH STOP
STOP 12	THE BELLEW RIVERSIDE PARK
STOP 13	THE PLEASURE LAKE
STOP 14	THE SQUARE
STOP 15	BOBBYJO SCULPTURE
STOP 16	COL. THOMAS J. KELLY
STOP 17	BANK OF IRELAND
STOP 18	THE TOWN HALL
STOP 19	THE MALTHOUSE (SITE OF)
STOP 20	THE MARKET HOUSE
STOP 21	DOWER HOUSE
STOP 22	FRANCISCAN BROTHERS AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
STOP 23	ST. MARY'S RC CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD
STOP 24	MEMORIAL PARK
STOP 25	THE WORKHOUSE
STOP 26	CARROWNAGAPPUL BOG
STOP 27	THE BALLINLASS EVICTIONS MEMORIAL
STOP 28	AUGHIART GRAVEYARD

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INTRODUCTION

The Bellew family of Williamstown, County Louth, were granted lands in the Parish of Moylough, Baronies of Tiaquin and Killian, County Galway, under the Acts of Settlement, patents dated November 26, 1677 and March 21, 1678. They founded the town of Mountbellew and established a demesne and residence here. The Irish form of the placename is 'An Creagán' which translates as 'A Rocky Place'. It was Sir Christopher Bellew (1763-1826) who was the main catalyst for the town's development. He energetically promoted the Tuesday Market, opened the Market House and encouraged good agricultural practice on his estate and in the locality, building up the local economy. He invited the Franciscan Order to the town in 1824 and provided education through the opening of a school for boys. His estate and house provided employment for local people and the town developed as a vibrant centre of trade and communication. We invite you to explore the heritage of our town and visit the many points of interest which are detailed in this booklet.

Welcome to our town.

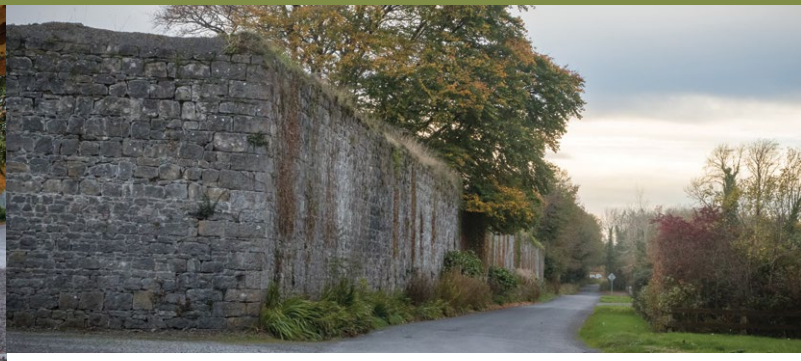
From the Mountbellew Heritage & Tourism Network.

1

OLD FORGE MUSEUM

ITM Co-ordinates: 566066 746590

Built in the early 1800's by the Bellew family this is where iron implements were forged for the estate. Since 1996, the forge has been developed as a local Museum and exhibition space and is now filled with artefacts that relate to life on the estate and in the local area in the past. The objects include a working bellews, forging tools, agricultural and household implements.



THE WALLED GARDEN

ITM Co-ordinates: 565975 746557

2

Once part of the Bellew estate, this walled garden dates back to the eighteenth century. Covering 4.2 acres (1.7 hectares), it is enclosed by a 6 metre high limestone wall and was designed as a kitchen and ornamental garden. Surviving features include a furnace room, glasshouse, store room and growing rooms. The ruin of an external glass house is evident along the west wall. A two storey gardener's house dating to 1820, with a pitched slate roof, is built into the exterior of the south wall.

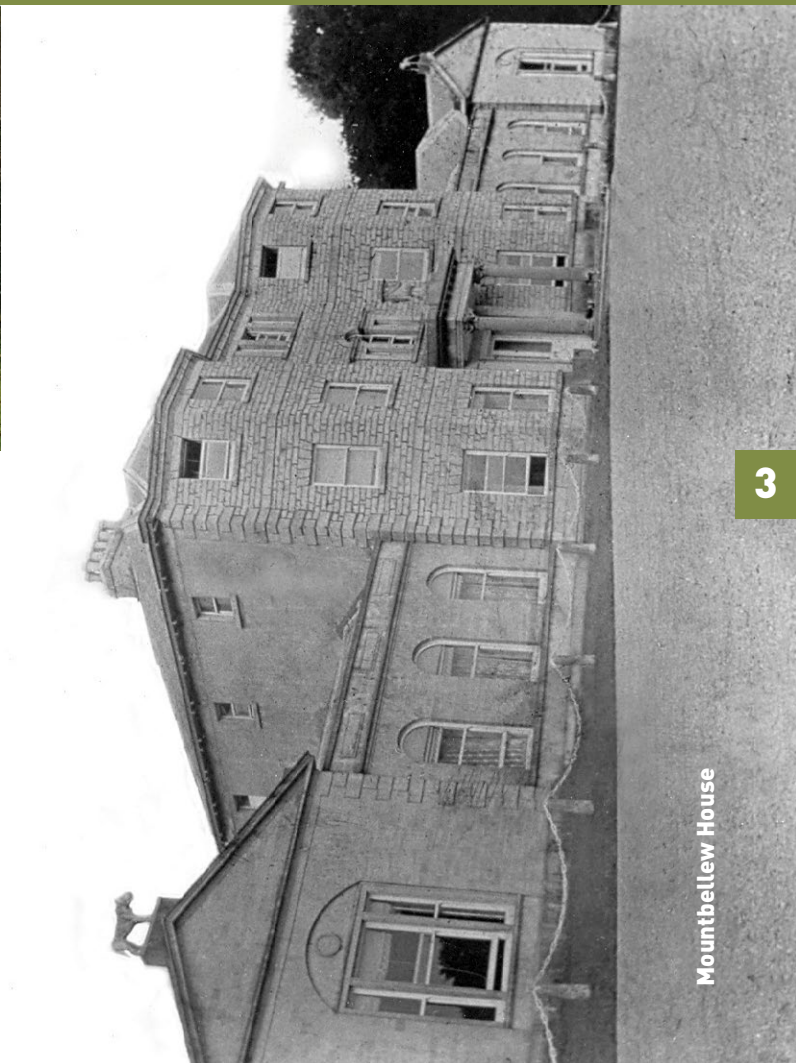
The Walled Garden is currently undergoing conservation works, spearheaded by Mountbellew Heritage & Tourism Network Ltd with funding from the Heritage Council's 'Adopt a Monument' Programme, Galway Rural Development LEADER programme and Galway County Council.

3

SITE OF BELLEW DEMESNE HOUSE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566196 746531

The three storey Mountbellew house was completed in 1786 for Michael Bellew. In 1817, Michael's son Christopher employed the famous architect, William Morrison to carry our extensive renovations on the house and Hely Dutton as landscape designer to enhance the grounds. Christopher filled the house with artworks and had the largest library collection in Galway at that time. The house remained the Bellew family home until the early 1900s. Following an unsuccessful attempt by a group of local people to have the house converted into a district hospital, it was demolished in 1939 and the stones were used to repair local roads.



Mountbellew House

3

FOREST WALKS

ITM Co-ordinates:
566186 746885

Within the Coillte Forest Recreation Park are three walking trails of varying lengths. The trails map can be downloaded at **https://www.coillte.ie/site/mountbellew/** You can wander through a diverse forest containing both exotic and native trees with a wonderful understorey of woodland flora. The Rocky Bridge, Millrace, Boathouse and an artificial lake, known as the 'Pleasure Lake' all add to the interest of these walks. Facilities include picnic areas and a car park.

THE ROCKY BRIDGE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566153 746812

Set today within the Mountbellew Coillte Forest Recreation Park, this single-arch pedestrian bridge was originally part of an access route to the former Mountbellew House. Built c.1850, it is made of cast-iron. The arch is decorated with an open oriel motif, while rose motifs are found between the open lattice work of the upper rails, which flank the timber deck.

6

THE BOATHOUSE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566202 746760

Built in the early 1800's this boathouse was in use by the Bellew Family to house their boats for use on the adjoining 'Pleasure Lake'. Restored to its former glory in the 1990's, it is unused today but gives us a glimpse into the leisurely pastimes of the Bellews.

7

THE GATE LODGE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566156 747001

This attractive cut stone fronted house was once a gate lodge at the entrance avenue to the Bellew Estate. It was a single-room lodge, where most likely the gate keeper lived. His duties would have included the opening and closing of the main gates to allow the family and their guests to enter and leave. It has been renovated in recent years and is known locally as 'Andy's House' named after the last gate keeper, Andy McLaughlin.

8

HA-HA WALL

ITM Co-ordinates: 566451 746887

Located today beside the main road into the town is a stone lined, recessed channel. This is a former feature of the Bellew estate. It formed a sunken fence to prevent livestock moving between the fields while allowing an uninterrupted view of the landscape from the Demesne House.

9

CORN MILL

ITM Co-ordinates: 566587 746804

Known locally as 'the New Mill', this former corn mill was completed in 1922 by the Mountbellew Co-operative Agricultural Society Ltd. Powered by two turbines driven by water from the nearby Castlegar River, this source of power also produced electricity for the town. In January 1924, a fire destroyed much of the mill. During reconstruction a sawmill was added nearby. Further modernisation works were carried out in 1932 and the Co-op Society continued to operate the Mill until it was sold to the Farrell family in 1959. Today the building is in use as an agricultural and hardware store.

THE BRIDGE AND MILESTONE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566669 746809

This five arch bridge was built by the Bellew family in 1810 and the town became known as 'Mountbellew Bridge'. Built from local rubble limestone it has been finely cut to create the arch stones. Large triangular piers known as 'cut waters', cut the flow of the water to prevent damage to the bridge walls. The carved limestone milestone, set into the parapet of the bridge, dates to c.1760. Two sides are inscribed with the distance from the bridge in Irish miles to four towns: 'Dublin to Mount Bellew Bridge 79M, To Galway 23, Tuam 12, Dunmore 12'.

10

11

BIANCONI COACH STOP

ITM Co-ordinates: 566703 746808

In the early 19th century the horse-drawn Bianconi carriage and postal service had a stopover in Mountbellew. The horses were rested and changed in the stable buildings close to the bridge. The house next to the river was later the home of 'Egan's Shoe Repairs' who mended footwear for the local people.

12

THE BELLEW RIVERSIDE PARK

ITM Co-ordinates: 566677 746795

In the late 1990's the Mountbellew and District Development Association in conjunction with the local Community Employment Scheme developed this Riverside Park as a local amenity. They installed bridges, picnic benches and pathways. The large arched memorial stone at the entrance to the park was originally part of a flour mill, built by the Bellews in 1775. The inscription summarises the Bellew family's origins and connections with this town. The park was officially opened in 1999 by the late Deirdre Kiernan (nee Grattan-Bellew) and her husband Gerry.

13

THE PLEASURE LAKE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566847 746600

This artificial lake was designed by Hely Dutton, a landscape designer, for Sir Christopher Dillon Bellew between 1813 and 1816. As well as an attractive visual feature, the family used it for fishing and boating activities. Over the years the vegetation at the lake edge has developed, so that the open water today occupies a much smaller area than it did originally. The lake supports a great diversity of fresh water flora and fauna and is a wonderful natural heritage amenity for the town.

THE SQUARE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566766 746797

A duck pond once stood in the area occupied by the town square today. It was removed in the early 19th century when the first houses were built. Vibrant public fairs and markets were held here and in 1837 Samuel Lewis noted 'An excellent market is held here on Tuesday for all sorts of agricultural produce, livestock and some manufactured good. Fairs are held on May 7th, June 9th, July 25th and Sept. 29th'. Horses, cattle and sheep were all traded as crowds of people gathered from the surrounding countryside and villages to enjoy the day and socialise.

BOBBYJO SCULPTURE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566774 746811

This life-sized, bronze sculpture of the famous racehorse 'Bobbyjo' was created by John Coll, one of Ireland's most prominent figurative sculptors. Commissioned by Mountbellew & District Development Association, it was unveiled in March 2002. Bobbyjo was owned by the Burke family of Mullaghmore, Moylough and he won the Jameson Irish Grand National in 1998 and the Martel Aintree Grand National in 1999, along with several other successes.

16

COL. THOMAS J. KELLY

ITM Co-ordinates: 566745 746825

Thomas J. Kelly was born in this house in 1833. At the age of 18, he emigrated to New York and fought in the American War of Independence. He later became Chief Organiser of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. While in Manchester, England in 1867, he was arrested. While being transferred to jail, supporters attacked the prison van. Kelly escaped, along with Timothy Deasy. During the incident, a policeman was killed. Three men were arrested for the murder and executed. They became known as the 'Manchester Martyrs'. Kelly died in 1908 and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery, New York City. The Kelly house in Mountbellew was passed to Kitty O'Grady, who lived there for over 60 years. It is now being renovated to house a café and an apartment.

17

BANK OF IRELAND

ITM Co-ordinates: 566823 746867

Built around 1880, this five bay, two storey over basement building is still the main financial service point for the town. Although modernised inside, the exterior is much the same as it was in the late 19th century, with the only visible additions being an ATM and a wheelchair ramp. Designed by Millar and Symes, Dublin, architects for the Bank of Ireland, its brick walls contrast to the 19th century limestone buildings of the town. Wrought iron railings separate the building from the street.

18

THE TOWN HALL

ITM Co-ordinates: 566860 746953

Originally a Temperance Hall, opened in 1906 by Canon Ronayne, this building has since been the setting for various local functions throughout its storied existence. These include its use as the location for a World War I recruitment drive for the British Army by the Connacht Rangers as well as Sinn Féin dances. Today it functions as a Community Hall and is used by a variety of groups.

19

THE MALTHOUSE (SITE OF)

ITM Co-ordinates: 566896 747140

In the 18th century a large malt house stood on this site. Local farmers brought their barley to be malted as one of the main ingredients for beer and whiskey manufacture. The barley was first 'steeped' in water for 54-60 hours until it was swollen. It was then spread on the malting floor where it was allowed to sprout. A temperature of about 50-58 degrees Fahrenheit was needed with the maltster turning the grain regularly with a wooden shovel. When ready, it was dried in a kiln and then stored in air-tight bins, to mature for a number of weeks, before being sent to the distilleries. The site is currently being developed for residential housing.

20

THE MARKET HOUSE

ITM Co-ordinates: 566738 746775

Christopher Dillon Bellew set up a market in Mountbellew in the late 18th century and a Market House was built as part of the expansion of the demesne possibly in the early 1820s. It was the only building in the Square on the south of the town recorded on the 1st edition 6-inch Ordnance Survey map. Later it was converted into a smithy by the Bannerton family and later still became the town garage and petrol station. It still retains some of its original architectural features such as the unusual circular window.

DOWER HOUSE

21

ITM Co-ordinates: 567038 746782

The Dower House became the home of Olivia Emily Nugent on the death of her husband Christopher Dillon Bellew in 1826. It was possibly designed by the architect, Dominick Madden c.1827. In 1934, the Sisters of the Holy Spirit and Mary Immaculate, an American congregation, established St Philips Convent in the house and in 1944 they opened Scoil na Coróine Muire, a Girls' Secondary School. In September 1965, Archbishop Walsh asked the nuns to admit boys, but they were not interested in developing co-educational facilities and left Ireland shortly after. The school was replaced by the Holy Rosary College. The house was sold in 2017 and is currently a development site.

FRANCISCAN BROTHERS AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE

22

ITM Co-ordinates: 567203 746621

In 1818, Christopher Dillon Bellew invited the Franciscan Order to the town and in 1824, as the largest single subscriber, he laid the foundation stone of their school. Free primary schooling for boys was provided and later preparatory classes for entrance to teacher training college began. In 1904, an agricultural college was established with the financial help of Sir Henry Grattan Bellew and the Department of Agriculture. The first agricultural show was held here in 1904 and the tradition still continues. Today, Teagasc (the Agriculture and Food Development Authority), Galway Mayo Institute of Technology (GMIT) and Galway/Roscommon Educational and Training Board co-operate in the delivery of courses in the college.

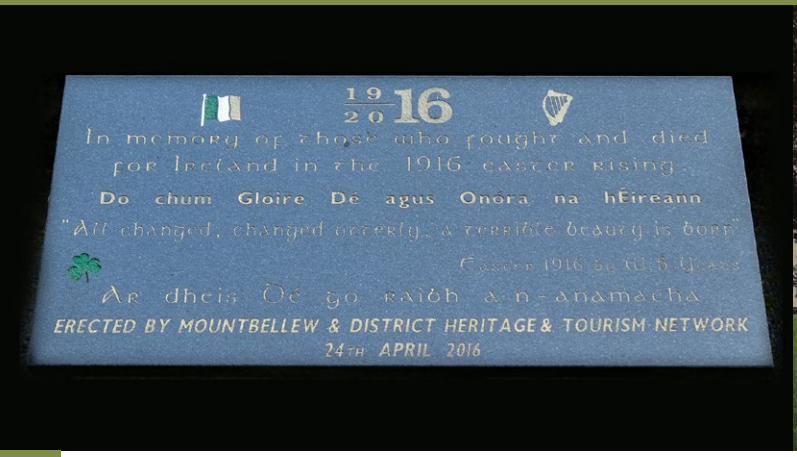
ST. MARY'S RC CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD

23

ITM Co-ordinates: 567216 746443

A church of reparation, designed by Dominick Madden for Christopher Dillon Bellew was opened here on Christmas Day 1822. The church was later gifted to the local community by the family and rebuilt and dedicated to the Virgin Mary in 1888.

St. Mary's is a cruciform-plan, limestone Gothic Revival style Church with a graveyard to the north and west. It has many fine features, including a cross groin stone vault roof in the entrance porch and over the transept crossing and a wooden minstrel-style gallery.



MEMORIAL PARK

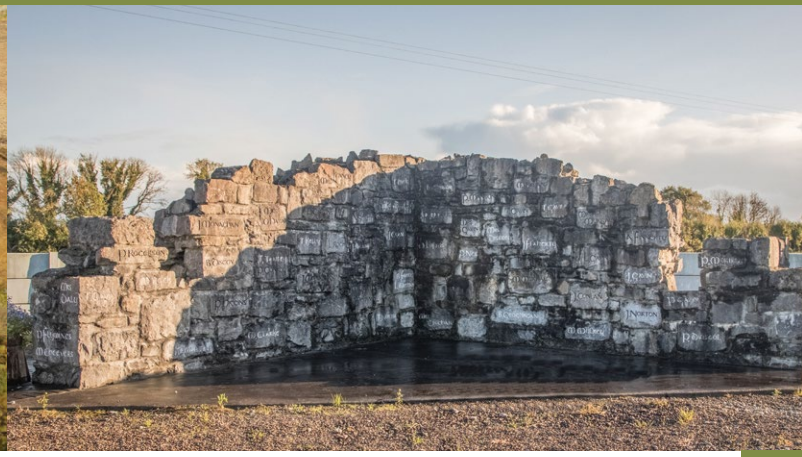
ITM Co-ordinates: 567236 746433

Located to the rear of St. Mary's RC Church is a memorial park dedicated to those who died in WWI and the 1916 rising. The WW1 memorial was unveiled on November 11, 2014 and the 1916 memorial was unveiled on April 24, 2016 for the centenary of the Rising. Both plaques were funded and erected by Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network with assistance from the Galway County Council Heritage Office.

THE WORKHOUSE

ITM Co-ordinates: 567863 745761

The site for a workhouse was donated by Michael Grattan Bellew in 1850 to the Board of Guardians. The plans for the building were designed by George Wilkinson, who was responsible for most Irish workhouses. The building was T-shaped, with separate female and male wings and a third housing a fever hospital. Many of the inmates are buried in the graveyard to the rear of the building. The workhouse was shut in 1919 and in 1930 it was leased to Galway Vocational Educational Committee and today operates as a Secondary School.



CARROWNAGAPPUL BOG

ITM Co-ordinates: 567753 750357

Located just outside the town is one of the best examples of a raised bog west of the River Shannon. Because of the extent of the remaining high bog in Carrownagappul and its unique flora and fauna it has been selected to be part of 'The Living Bog' project - the largest raised bog restoration project ever undertaken in Ireland. The Mountbellew Heritage and Tourism Network are working with the National Parks and Wildlife Service on the 'Galway's Living Bog' project to restore the bog and develop visitor amenities.

http://galwayslivingbog.com/

THE BALLINLASS EVICTIONS MEMORIAL

ITM Co-ordinates: 568936 749703

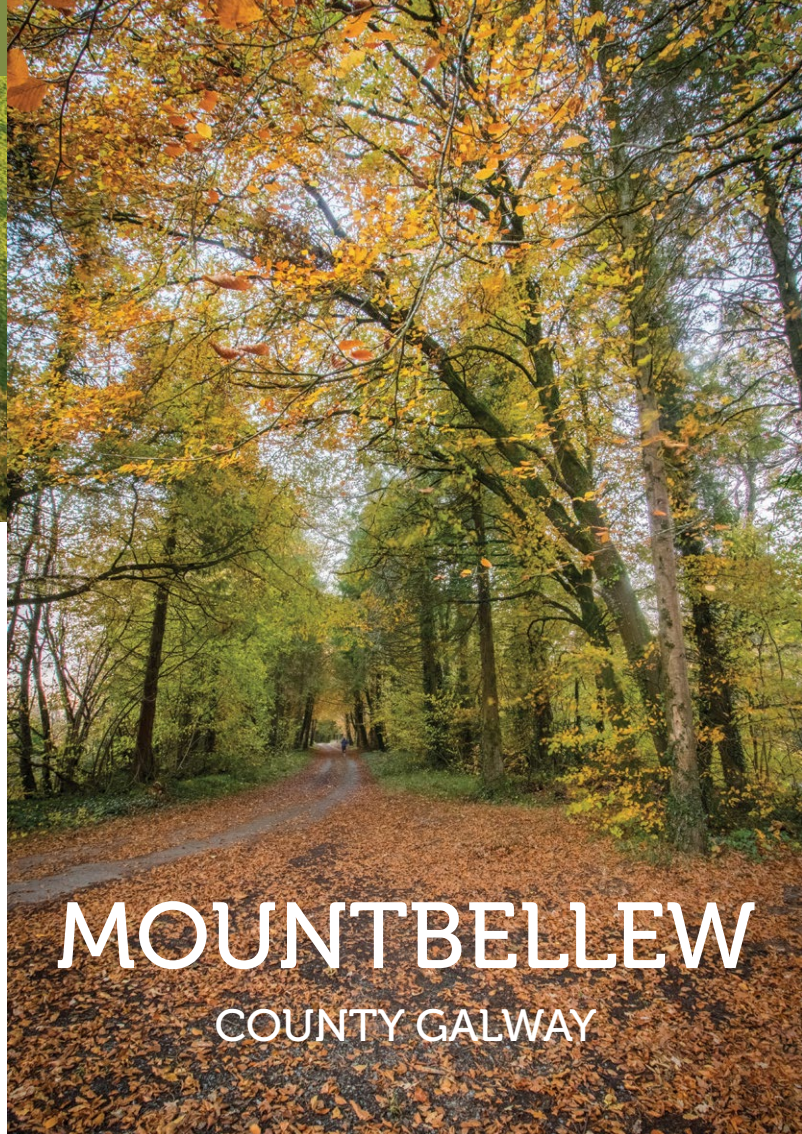
This memorial was erected in 2011 to commemorate the mass eviction that took place in Ballinlass Village on March 13, 1846. Sixty-one families, a total of 270 people were evicted by Mrs Marcella Gerard nee Netterville, who owned up to 15,000 acres in the area. It was claimed that she wanted to turn the site of the village into a grazing farm. The case was investigated in the House of Lords, but the eviction order was not rescinded. Most of the families eventually emigrated. The names of the evicted families are inscribed on the memorial, which represents a ruined cottage.

28

AUGHIART GRAVEYARD

ITM co-ordinates: 567479 748269

An L-shaped grassy bank in the corner of this graveyard is thought to be the foundations of a medieval parish church, which could date back as far as the 13th century. The graveyard also contains many 18th and 19th century grave slabs. There are also several partially buried uninscribed gravestones which mark the graves of famine victims brought here from Mountbellew town and district, by Rev. Jerome Ryan, a Franciscan brother. He carried the bodies here on an ass-drawn cart and local folklore records he buried up to fourteen bodies per day.



MOUNTBELLEW

COUNTY GALWAY

Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

MOUNTBELLEW
HERITAGE & TOURISIM

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

Ireland's Hidden
HEARTLANDS

THE LIVING BOG
RAISED BOG RESTORATION PROJECT

Galway's Living Bog
Carrownagappul Bog, Mountbellew

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022

An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán
Department of Tourism, Culture,
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media