

The Walled Town Crier

An Irish Walled Towns Network
bi-monthly magazine.

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
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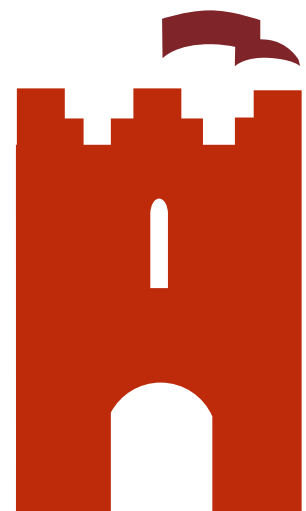


Naas from the top of North Main Street (John Devoy memorial at Poplar Square), looking south.
Image: Gail Connaughton, © Fáilte Ireland.

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Project Manager's Message

Hello everyone and welcome to the February 2025 edition of the Walled Town Crier.

It's a whole new year! I know that many of you have been busy with grants applications over the last month or so and I'm looking forward to a new crop of funded projects in 2025.

It's especially exciting that 2025 will mark the 20th anniversary of the founding of the network. It's an achievement very much to be celebrated and we're planning to do just that later in the year.

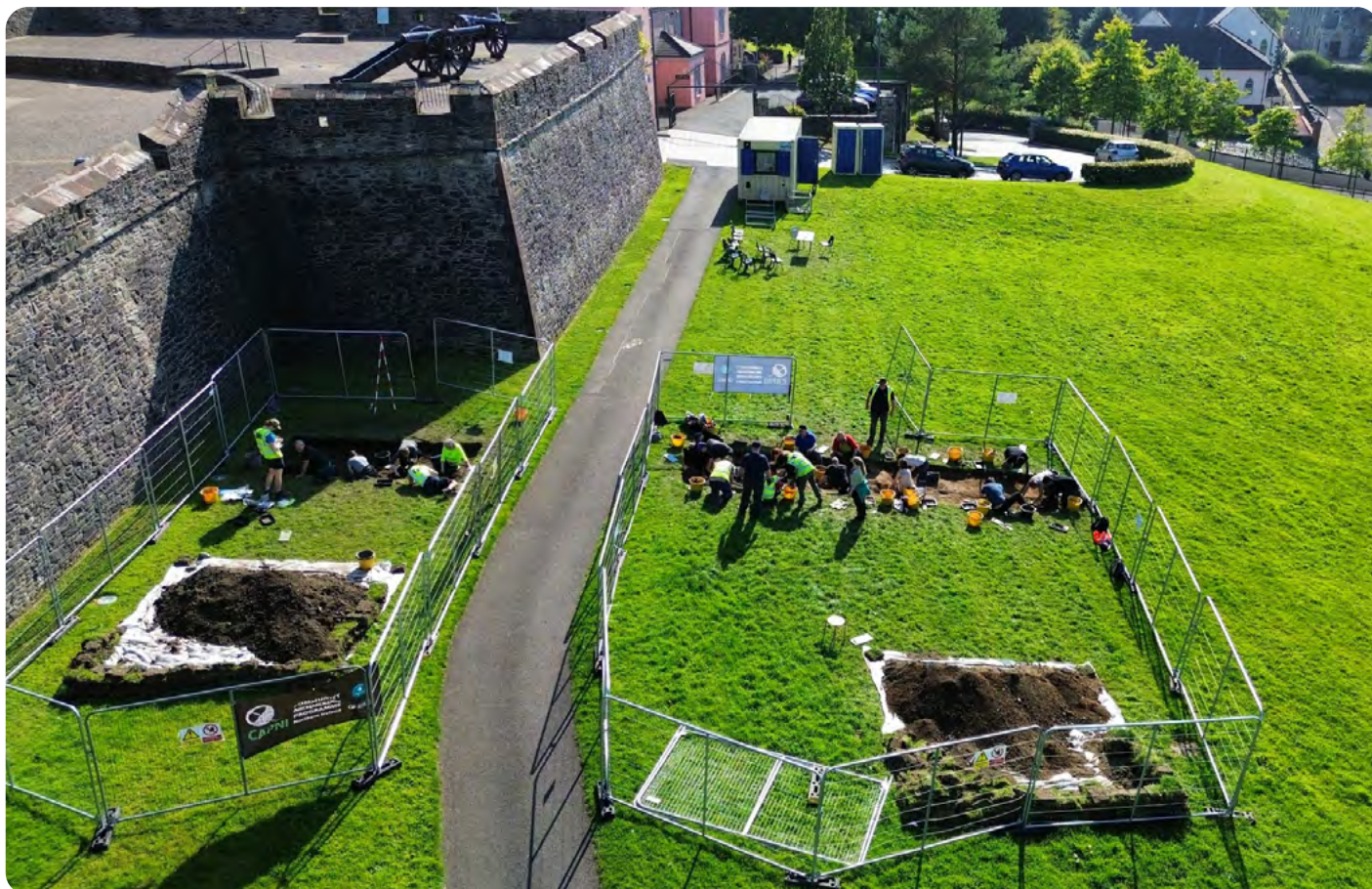
Our AGM is coming up on 25th February and I look forward to seeing many of you there.

Meanwhile, in this issue we're getting to know Naas, Co. Kildare and introducing our newest member town: Athboy, Co. Meath. A very warm welcome to our new town reps in Athboy – we look forward to working with you this year and for many years beyond.

Warmest Regards,

Eimear

Eimear O'Connell,
IWTN Project Manager



In sunnier times. A great image of the CAPNI (Community Archaeology Programme Northern Ireland) excavations outside Derry city walls at Nailor's Row, which took place in September 2024. Image: Friends of the Derry Walls, via [Facebook](#).

Getting to Know Naas



Naas Canal Festival (Inland Waterways Ireland) in 2024 saw some 23 boats docked in Naas Harbour.
Image: Aishling Conway, via [Kildare Post](#).

Kildare's county town, Naas is located about 30 kilometres southwest of Dublin, at the end of a branch line of the Grand Canal. Its closeness to the capital and easy access to the M7 motorway make it a popular commuter hub and it has the largest population of any Kildare town.

The name Naas – in Irish *An Nás*, *Nás na Ríogh* or *Nás Laighean* – means a place of assembly and the town was an important gathering place from Gaelic times. Then, as now, it was a strategic stop on the main south/southwest routes across the island. Until the 10th century it was the seat of the Kings of Leinster (hence,

Nás na Ríogh, the assembly-place of the kings, and *Nás Laighean*, the assembly-place of the Leinstermen). Pre-Norman settlement here is likely to have taken the form of a ringfort, or *dún*, and there is a reference in the Annals of the Four Masters to *Dún Nás*.

A monastery, dedicated to St. Feichin, was founded at Naas in the 7th century. There is some suggestion that the curved line of Corban's Lane in the town may follow the boundary of that monastic enclosure.

The Gaelic settlement at Naas was conquered by Richard de Clare in 1175 and granted by him to his Baron, Maurice Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald's home lordship was in Pembrokeshire, in Wales,

and he brought Welsh settlers to Naas with him to help build the medieval town. Dedications to St. David that survive to the present day (St. David's Church, St. David's Castle) reflect this Welsh connection.

The Anglo-Norman town of Naas was laid out in a typical medieval pattern, with a long central street – now North and South Main Street – having smaller streets or laneways branching off it at right angles. Two mottes, known today as the North and South Moats, are the remains of earth and timber fortifications dating to the early Anglo-Norman settlement. The North Moat is thought to have been built by Maurice Fitzgerald, perhaps on top of the earlier royal *dún* or ringfort. It is still a landmark in the town. The South Moat survives within an area of public park near Naas General Hospital. In 2001, an excavation close

to the mound uncovered the remains of a very large defensive ditch.

The town grew quickly. Naas was granted a weekly market in 1186 and an annual fair in 1226. The market place was most likely situated at the north end of South Main Street, close to St David's Church. The Fair Green was near the South Moat. By the end of the 13th century there were at least three religious foundations in or just outside the town – a Dominican and two Augustinian friaries. Naas was granted a charter by King Henry IV in 1409 and a murage grant (the right to collect tolls for the purpose of building town defences) by King Henry V in 1414. Further murage grants were made in 1451 and 1468. The fifteenth century also saw the construction of a number of tower houses within the historic town. Only one of these, St. David's Castle, survives today.



The North Moat. Image: Sharon Greene, Abarta Heritage, via [The Medieval Walled Towns of Kildare](#).



The remains of the South Moat. Image: Sharon Greene, Abarta Heritage, via [The Medieval Walled Towns of Kildare](#).



Detail from a conjectural reconstruction of medieval Naas by Sara Nylund. Courtesy of Kildare County Council, via [The Medieval Walled Towns of Kildare](#).

Despite the numerous murage grants recorded for Naas, there is some debate about whether a town wall was ever actually built. No known above-ground remains of the wall survive today, although some evidence for defensive structures has been uncovered in various archaeological excavations carried out to enable construction projects in the town between 1990 and the present day. The existence of defences of some sort - whether these took the form of a stone wall or of earth and timber embankments - is strongly suggested by the form and layout of the town, with burgage plots extending to either side of the main street. In addition, there are references to six gate houses in Naas: North Gate, Watergate Castle, Corban's Castle, Green Castle, West Gate and Iago's Gate. Unfortunately these had all been removed by the nineteenth century and their former locations are not known with any certainty.



St. David's Castle during recent conservation works. Image: [Fergal McGirl Architects](#).

St. David's Church, Naas. The current building dates to 1830 but there has been a church on this site since the 13th century and a lot of medieval fabric was incorporated into the 19th-century reconstruction. Image: Kildare Union of Parishes.



Kildare Library and Cultural Centre.
Image: Kildare Library Service.



We do know that the North gate and Corban's gate were removed in 1680. It is likely that any remaining defences were demolished over the course of the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. The arrival of the canal and the railways and the development that accompanied them saw the town expand beyond its medieval boundaries. Continuous development right up to the present day has likely led to the loss of large parts of the town's archaeological record.

Naas today is a busy and still-expanding town. The area has a strong association with horse-racing; Naas and Punchestown race-courses are both located nearby. There is an annual food festival, and a fantastic new library and cultural centre, which opened in the renovated 18th-century Town Hall in 2024.

Text prepared by the IWTN Project Manager based on information contained in the following two documents: [The Medieval Walled Towns of Kildare](#), by Sharon Greene (Abarta Heritage for Kildare County Council, 2023); [Medieval Naas: Conservation and Management Plan](#) (7L Architects and Research+Dig for Kildare County Council, 2022). Please see those documents for more detailed information and for references to historic and academic sources.

Introducing Athboy, Co. Meath



Athboy c.1900, Robert French, from The Lawrence Collection, National Library of Ireland.

A very warm welcome to our newest member: Athboy, Co. Meath. Located on the western side of the county, close to its border with Westmeath, Athboy is a small town with a long history.

Tlachtga (known locally as the Hill of Ward) to the east of the present-day town is thought to have been an important gathering place from as early as the Bronze Age. Archaeological excavations at the site have shown evidence of activity there from the Bronze Age right up to the early medieval period. It is particularly associated with the celebration of Samhain.

When the Anglo-Normans arrived in Meath, the king of Bréifne was reportedly killed at

Tlachtga during a meeting there with Hugh de Lacy. De Lacy – who ruled Meath from Trim Castle – granted Athboy to William de Muset in 1171. It subsequently passed to the Tuites, de Loundres, Prestons and Browns.

The earliest reference to a Norman fortification at Athboy is in 1212, to a ‘castle’ – which may have been a motte and bailey rather than a stone building and is likely to have been located at or near Tlachtga. The first reference to the fortification of the town itself is a murage grant dating to 1306. The town was incorporated as a borough in 1337. Documentary sources suggest that by the 17th century the walls were no longer serving a defensive purpose.

Lord Justice Pelham, writing in 1579, described Athboy as “a very ancient and well-built town for one street” and the description still rings true today. Although the town has developed beyond its main street, the wide central thoroughfare, running northeast-southwest, is still its most characteristic feature.

One substantial section of the town wall survives, forming the southern boundary of St. James’s Church of Ireland church and of the property to its east (now a hotel). The section includes a small mural tower. Elsewhere, the line of the town defences can be traced in property boundaries on either side of the main street.

[Athboy 100](#) was a local history project based around the centenary of the 1916 Rising, which has since developed into an active community group. The group has developed a heritage trail in the town, in collaboration with Athboy Tidy Towns, as well as a series of online resources.

Athboy is a fourth IWTN member town for Meath County Council (following in the footsteps of Kells, Navan and Trim). We look forward to working with the local authority and with the Athboy100 community group on many interesting projects the town in the years to come.



Hill of Ward, Athboy, during the Púca Festival 2024. Courtesy Fáilte Ireland.

News and Updates

AGM 2025

The Irish Walled Towns Network AGM for 2025 will take place in Cashel on Tuesday 25th February and promises to be a good day out. Contact Project Manager for details.



IWTN Interpretation & Events Grants 2025

The IWTN Interpretation & Events Grants Scheme 2025 is now open for applications, with a closing date of **19th March 2025**. Applications are invited from Irish Walled Towns Network members. Full details available [here](#).



Digital Humanities & Visualising Heritage in Kilmallock

ICOMOS members may be interested to note that the members' webinar on 11th March will feature our own Limerick and Kilmallock town rep, Sarah McCutcheon, Local Authority Archaeologist with Limerick City and County Council. Along with researcher Caroline Wilhelmsson from UCC and Professor Andrew Wilson from the University of Bradford, Sarah will present on recent digital survey and community-engagement works in Kilmallock as part of the Kilmallock-Derry-Bradford digital humanities project. See ICOMOS Ireland communications channels for details.



New E-zine Page on Website

We've added a new e-zine page to the IWTN website, so that you can easily find all the past issues of the Walled Town Crier in one place. Browse it [here](#).



CHARTER Recommendations

The CHARTER European Cultural Heritage Skills Alliance has published its 12 Recommendations for Securing an Innovative and Enterprising Heritage Sector. Read the document [here](#).



Living Spaces

Living Spaces is a European peer-learning programme for local and regional authorities to learn how to plan and implement high-quality built environment policies and projects. As part of that work, a catalogue of good practice examples has been compiled – many of which feature heritage-led urban regeneration projects. Consult the catalogue [here](#).



Community Heritage & Adopt a Monument 2025

A reminder to our community members that both the [Community Heritage Grants](#) and [Adopt a Monument Programme](#) for 2025 are currently open for applications. These schemes close on 14 March and 21 March respectively.



Social Media

Thanks to everyone as always for sending on social media content. Please continue to use the hashtag **#IWTN** on all network-related posts and to tag the relevant Heritage Council account:



@HeritageHubIRE



TheHeritageCouncil



@theheritagecouncil



Repair and repointing works have recently been completed to a section of Dublin's city walls at Cook Street. These works were overseen by Dublin City Council and carried out by specialist contractors Oldstone Conservation with professional advice from 7L Architects and Frank Myles, archaeologist. Works were part funded under the Department of Heritage, Housing and Local Government's Community Monuments Fund.

Image: Dublin City Council/
The Liberties Dublin, via [Facebook](#).

Contact Us:

Please do get in touch at iwtn@heritagecouncil.ie if you would like us to promote news or projects happening in your walled town over the coming months.

www.irishwalledtownsnetwork.ie



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The IWTN is funded by the Heritage Council and delivered in partnership with Local Authorities and community groups.