

# Interpreting the natural and man-made heritage of the county

The Clare Heritage Centre Network (Clare Heritage Circle) represents the diverse nature of heritage in County Clare and interprets the archaeological, architectural, folklore and genealogical heritage as well as the natural heritage, flora, fauna and marine environment of the county.

For the first time, the community-based heritage centres have come together to network and exchange ideas in order to enhance their heritage assets. The network aims to pool resources and support each other to promote their resources, provide specialist training, market research, care of collections and raise standards in visitor service. The joint efforts of

by  
**Congella McGuire**  
Heritage Officer  
Clare County Council

the network have gained greater local publicity through the *Clare Champion* and *Clare FM* and greater tourist promotion.

The Heritage Centre Network was established May 2003. Membership is open to heritage organisations that have been developed by community organisations and function as community services. Group meetings take place on a regular basis at the various centres throughout the county.

In 2003, ten showcases were purchased, so that each centre could exhibit materials or artifacts at other centres throughout the county. The showcases provide for each outreach exhibitions and allow for the illustration of material that may otherwise not be available to the public.

In 2004 the *Clare Heritage Circle* promotional booklet was published, outlining the Heritage Centre County Trail and details of the eight centres in the network. The brochure provides valuable information for visitors to the county who wish to be informed and explore heritage at a local level in Clare.

Plans for 2005 include a staff training programme, the establishment of a joint web site and logo identity, the employment of a part-time education officer (which includes an education programme for primary and secondary schools and to cater for school tours) and a media campaign, along with efforts for joint ticketing, discounts and market research.

Funding to date for the network initiatives has been obtained from the Heritage Council, Clare County Council and network members themselves.



## QUICK REFERENCE DIRECTORY

The Burren Centre	065 708 8030
Clare Heritage Centre	065 683 7955
Clare Museum	065 682 3382
Dysert O'Dea	065 683 7401
East Clare Heritage	061 92 13 51 or 086 874 9710
Lahinch Seaworld	065 708 1900
Vandeleur Walled Garden	065 905 1760
Shannon Dolphins	065 905 2326 or 087 854 5450



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*Cuirimid fáilte romhat dul í dteagmháil le muintir an Chláir, áit a bhfuil fíorfháilte romhat.*

*Beidh baill den chiorcal oidhreachta an-sásta bualadh leat agus miniú a thabhairt duit at ghlóir an Chláir.*

We invite you to visit and interact with the people of Clare, where a great welcome awaits you.

All the members of the Heritage Circle will be delighted to meet you and explain the glories of Clare.



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*Ag iarraidh oidhreacht eisceachtúla ár gcontae a chur chun cinn*

# Clare Heritage Circle celebrates first year



After a year in operation the *Clare Heritage Circle* introduces the first edition of its county-wide newsletter.

The Circle is dedicated to promoting the heritage treasures of the Banner county. The heritage of Clare, which spans millennia, is interpreted by eight community groups, known as the *Clare Heritage Circle*. These groups are dedicated to recording and displaying our fascinating environment and human history.

The following are the members of the Clare Heritage Circle:

- ❖ The Burren Centre
- ❖ Clare Heritage Centre
- ❖ Clare Museum
- ❖ Dysert O'Dea
- ❖ East Clare Heritage
- ❖ Lahinch Seaworld
- ❖ Shannon Dolphins
- ❖ Vandeleur Gardens



Left to right: Cllr. Michael Hillery; Breda Considine, Dysert O Dea; Tomás Mac Conmara, East Clare Heritage; John Rattigan, Clare Museum; Sinéad MacSharry, Vandeleur Gardens and Congella McGuire, Heritage Officer

## Circling the world

The Clare Heritage Circle booklet was launched in June 2004. It subsequently received an award when it was placed in the top 50 out of 7,500 entries in the International Brochure competition.

## Clare Heritage Centre



The Clare Heritage Centre is housed in what was once St Catherine's church, which was built in 1718 by a first cousin of Queen Anne. Its main theme, Ireland in the nineteenth century, portrays a traumatic period of Irish history under such headings as land tenure, the famine, emigration, education, Irish language and others.

It is also an appropriate setting for some fine sculptural exhibits such as the original Tau cross. An exhibition from the National Gallery of Ireland, on the life and times of Sir Frederick Burton, a former director of the British National Gallery and a native of Corofin, is currently on display at the museum.

Phone: 065 683 7955

Open daily May 6<sup>th</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup> 10:00 to 18:00 hrs  
Genealogical centre open Monday to Friday 09:00 to 17:00 hrs, year round.

## Clare Museum

— exploring the Riches of Clare

The building within which the Clare Museum is housed was originally a Sisters of Mercy school and chapel. The convent was established in 1854 and much of the character of that building has intentionally been retained.

The section that is now the Clare Museum was constructed as a primary school in 1865 and the final portion of the convent complex, a chapel and classrooms, was erected in 1869.

Clare Museum was developed by Ennis Urban District Council in association with Clare County Council and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht & the Islands.

The museum was officially opened in 2000 by minister Síle de Valera and has since endeavoured to collect, store, record, interpret and display important historic and archaeological material relating to Clare's history and, via the establishment of the museum web site, has made the museum's collection accessible throughout the world.

In the exhibition, the history of Clare is explored using a unique thematic structure. Earth, power, faith, water and energy reflect 6,000 years of a varied, rich and exiting history.

Opening times October to April

Tuesday to Saturday  
9:30am to 1:00pm  
2:00pm to 5:30pm

Admission free



## Dysert O'Dea castle

Dysert O'Dea castle was built in 1480 by Diarmuid O'Dea (Lord of *Cineal Fearmaic*) and was badly damaged by Cromwellian soldiers in 1651 but enough stonework remained to restore the castle to its original size and height.

Today it features an extensive museum, a photographic display and an audio/visual presentation, which gives a worthwhile insight to the history of the famine, emigration in Ireland in the 1800s and the story of the famous battle of Dysert in 1318.

Nearby, visitors can browse all day through the archaeology trail and study the famous twelfth century St Tola's high cross, the Romanesque doorway in the monastery or take a walk to the forts, soup school or Rath church. Dysert O'Dea is the most archaeologically fertile area in western Europe.

The castle is situated 11km from Ennis on the Corofin R476 road.

Phone: 065 683 7401

Open daily May 1<sup>st</sup> to September 30<sup>th</sup> 10:00-18:00 hrs  
other times by appointment



## East Clare Heritage Oidhreacht Oirthear an Chláir



The East Clare Heritage organisation was founded in 1989 with the primary objective of ensuring the protection of the abundant heritage around east Clare. Just two years later President Mary Robinson officially opened the East Clare Heritage Centre at St Cronan's tenth century church, Tuamgraney. The heritage centre houses the oldest church in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England still in continuous use and is the only preserved building in Ireland to have a recorded association with Brian Boru.

Since then, the committee have published eleven editions of the acclaimed historical journal *Sliabh Aughty*, as well as six publications on local history. Other projects have included *Cathsaoireach*, the restoration of a famine graveyard in Tuamgraney. East Clare Heritage also provides guided boat trips to the famed Holy Island (*Inis Cealtra*) in Mountshannon and has published a book on its history.

Recent initiatives at the heritage centre have seen an impressive series of lectures, cultural workshops and Irish classes all aimed at creating a heightened awareness and a greater appreciation of our cultural heritage.

Telephone 061 92 13 51 or 087 874 9710

Open Monday to Friday 09:30 – 17:00 hrs year round

## Kilfenora

— rich in heritage & pride in place

For almost seven thousand years Kilfenora, situated on the most southern edge of the Burren, has been part of a rich heritage influenced by human life. Not only does the area boast some of the finest archaeological monuments in Ireland and a landscape that turns from acidic shale to powdered limestone, it also has an array of traditional music legacies and religious treasures.



Kilfenora is home to Ireland's first interpretative centre and the country's smallest cathedral, with its famous high crosses. The Burren Centre displays the unique landscape and human history of the unique Burren region in an imaginative fashion. The cathedral is that of St Fachnan, which is presently undergoing the final phase of refurbishment by the National Monuments Service. The high crosses to be found around the cathedral date from the twelfth century, when Kilfenora cathedral received its diocesan status in the synod of Kells (1152)

Open daily

March 15<sup>th</sup> to May 31<sup>st</sup> 10:00 to 17:00 hrs  
June 1<sup>st</sup> to August 31<sup>st</sup> 09:30 to 18:00 hrs  
September 1<sup>st</sup> to October 31<sup>st</sup> 10:00 to 17:00 hrs

## Lahinch Seaworld & Leisure Complex — ready for the challenge



The Lahinch Leisure Centre Complex was first developed in the nineteen-sixties by the Lahinch Development Association PLC.

The main feature of the proposed redevelopment of the Leisure Centre was to be the unique Seaworld Aquarium Interpretation Centre, designed to international standards, which display the wealth of marine life that inhabits the Atlantic ocean off the west coast in a thrilling array of interactive displays and educational exhibits.

Among the many features of the Seaworld Aquarium is the 'walk in, see through, underwater cavern' which allows visitors to experience life beneath the waves and observe sea creatures in their natural habitat.

The previously outdoor swimming pool was completely refurbished and roofed over to provide an indoor leisure complex. This includes a 25m pool, kiddies' pool, jacuzzi, steamroom and sauna; also, visitors can avail of the café and shopping facilities.

All in all, this makes Lahinch Seaworld & Leisure Centre the ultimate interpretation and leisure location.

Phone: 065 708 1901

Open daily, year round; contact reception for details

## Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation



The Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Foundation was set up to develop and provide educational awareness and conservation of the Shannon dolphins and other wildlife in the region. Since 2000, the SDWF have been carrying out dolphin research and monitoring in the estuary. Since 1993 we have identified over 140 individual dolphins in the estuary and ongoing research includes monitoring their movements and behaviour. The SDWF also carried out monitoring of the dolphin-watching tour boats and the impacts of the industrial developments of the dolphins.

Based in the Shannon Dolphin and Wildlife Centre in Kilrush, the newly-opened centre includes information, interactive activities and games for the enjoyment of all. These include skulls and skeletons of whales and dolphins and an extensive reference library for those wishing to study the Shannon dolphins and other wildlife in the area.

For more information see [www.shannondolphins.ie](http://www.shannondolphins.ie) or contact 065 905 2326 [info@shannondolphins.ie](mailto:info@shannondolphins.ie)

Open daily, June-Sept; other times by arrangement

## Vandeleur Walled Garden



The Vandeleur Walled Garden occupies an area of just over two acres and is completely surrounded by beautifully constructed stone walls. Once the walled garden of Kilrush House, it lay forgotten for any years. Kilrush House was the home of the Vandeleur family after they established their seat in Kilrush in 1687 when the Reverend John Vandeleur became rector of Kilrush. Sadly Kilrush House no longer stands. However, the 420 acres of the demesne are intact.

The garden has been redesigned for the twenty-first century. While remaining true to the original path systems, it is now home to many unusual and tender species, which thrive in the areas uniquely western latitude micro-climate.

Following extensive works to clear the garden overgrowth, replanting the borders began in the spring of 2000. The centre of the garden contains the nucleus of a plant collection and a variety of areas for the visitor to enjoy, including horizontal maze, unusual water features and tree collection.

The Vandeleur Centre facilities include gift shop, coffee shop, conference suite and plant sales area and remains open to the public all year round. It also plays host to a variety of events through out the year, which include family days, craft fairs and exhibitions.

Phone: 065 905 1760

Open daily, year round

Apr-Oct 10:00-18:00 hrs Oct-April 10:00-17:00 hrs