

Walking Whid/ Walking Story

Oein DeBharduin,
inaugural recipient of the Thinking on Tuam residency

Walking Whid - a Culture Night 2020 event



Hello my name is Oein DeBhairduin, I am the current holder of the 'Thinking on Tuam' residency and this is the Walking Whid, the Walking Story of Tuam, brought to you by the kind support of Creative Places Tuam.

In the bronze age era, approximately 1500 B.C. it is believed that there was a gravel burial ground located near the River Nanny, at a site close to the bridge of present day shop street. This large burial mound was also accompanied by a natural hill, that still exists today as Tullindaly hill. It is thought by many that this is where Tuam got its name, that of Tuaim Da Ghualann or 'the tumulus of the two shoulders'.

However this definition is disputed by some, who feel the title did not rise from these 'two shoulders' but two other hills, which also host a wide array of ancient sites, known as Knockma or Castlehacket which exist on the lands west of Tuam.

Officially the town can trace its history back to 526 A.D. when Saint Jarlath, a noble man and priest of the local kingdom, set out, by the instruction of St Benan to leave the monastery of Cloonfush and set up a new school and monestry where ever his chariot wheel broke. Saint Jarlath must have been delighted at the wheel breaking at Tuam, not



only were the grounds fertile and the river unprone, to flooding it was only 4 kilometres from Cloonfush.

Sadly, no relics remain of St Jarlath which support in part the theory that Tuam may have been plundered by the Vikings, which resulted in the later building of the round tower of Killbannon.

There are tree sites associated with Saint Jarlath, 'TempleJarleth', which you will visit on this walk, 'Toberjarlath' which is one kilometer south-east of the centre of Tuam and Templenascreen.

The now lost relics of Saint Jarlath were sent for reinternment to Templenascreen on the 6th of June, which has since become his feast day.

Over the years, Tuam has been in a very auspicious placement in relation to geography and the socio-political environment – to the west of Tuam is the Clare River and between it, and Lough Corrib, were the lands of Mag Seola, the territory of the O'Flahertys.

In 1051 when Aed O'Connor overthrew the O'Flaherthys Tuam became an increasingly important foothold and seat of power When Aed O'Connor overthrew the O'Flahertys in 1051, Tuam became a vital foothold and ultimately the seat of power, made all the more potent by the creation of Tuam as the Arch-Diocese for Connacht.

Sculpture – The broken Wheel of Saint Jarlath

The broken wheel of Saint Jarlath has become an sustained icon and embelum for Tuam, it being represented on the crest of Tuam as well as within the many organisations, school emblems and services of the area. Along with being a modern town, with a beautiful bouquet of diversity and a wide array of peoples Tuam is also the home to the highest population of Travellers, per population in the country. For the primary home of Travellers to have the symbol of a broken wheel, it seems almost ironic, however some say the wheel is broken, others see it, that in part, a piece of that wheel, that circle, remains somewhat lost



and perhaps forgotten about. Few would doubt however, that all things can be repaired.

The sculpture was revealed in 2001 as part of the beautiful work of a Tuam Tidy Town project and was sponsored by Joe O'Toole.

Cathedral of the Assumption

Behind the sculpture you have no doubt noticed the imposing building that is the Cathedral of the Assumption, and in relation to when it was built it would be the second cathedral of Tuam. You are very much welcomed to walk around the Cathedral, with the next stop being just outside its main entrance.

On the 3rd of April 1827 Doctor Oliver Kelly, who was then a Roman Catholic Archbishop, laid the first foundation stone for the Cathedral.

The grounds had been donated for such use by a Oliver Burke of Carraghleagh. Costing twenty thousand pounds its construction was completed in 1836. The cost, in terms of modern inflation, would come to 2.4 million.

Local lore holds that many of the builders of the site worked at a reduced rate, or for short periods of time, for free as an act of penance.

The cathedral was designed by Dominic Madden and was dedicated by the Archbishop McHale on 18 August 1837. While designed by Dominic Madden the building of it was over seen by Andrew Egan and Company, who was also responsible for building other period buildings in Tuam, most which are still standing today such as the St Jarlath's College, the Presentation Convent, the Corralea Court Hotel, the Town hall, the Railways Station and Toghermore house.

Andrew Egan died in 1863 at the young age of 53 but was said to of not only taken much joy in the building of the Cathedral he was very much hands on in its construction and was known for his good sense of humour.



I would invite you to walk around the building and pay particular notice to many of the archways above the windows. It is said that some of unfortunate residents of Tuam were selected, for the uneasy blessing, with having their faces modelled by the stonemasons into gargoyles, which was very much part of a declining European custom at the time.

Please pause until outside of the entrance to the church.

Saint Jarlath's College

To the left of the church you will notice the building that is St. Jarlath's College.

The college itself was founded in 1800 by Oliver Kelly, under the patronage of the then Archbishop of Tuam, Edward Dillon.

In its early years it seems that it was primarily used as a preparatory school for Maynooth seminary, however not much more is known about the school at the time bar fulfilling a large gap in the educational requirements in Tuam and indeed Connaught itself.

A few years after founding the collage, Oliver Kelly was promoted to the office of Archbishop and continued in part to oversee and develop the college. This included the purchase of the bankrupted FFrench bank, which was funded largely on the backing of the napoleon war.

The acquisition of the building also allowed the College to become one that facilitated boarders, a tradition that continued until 2006.

The building still stands and can be seen, left of the Wheel of Saint Jarlath.

In 1834 Dr Kelly died and Dr. John McHale was appointed as his successor. This was at the time a contentious selection however, with McHales keen interest in Irish History, language, patriotism and Irish nationalism.



McHale was to have a profound and stabilising effect on the college, ensuring its survival, including that of surviving the famine, in which student numbers dwindled to 16.

In 1858 a new building was built to facilitate the fresh resurgence in students and the required accommodation for additional professors. Over the next six decades there was also the completion of a study hall, oratory, gym and swimming pool, including the installation of electricity in 1927.

A new wing was added in 1950, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the college and following the implementation of free education and increased bus routes in the 1970's there was a large shift towards day students.

Adjacent to St Jarlath's College are the sporting fields, to date St Jarlath's have recorded at least 12 Hogan Cup wins. In 2000 the local Christian Brother School St Patricks College decided to amalgamate with St Jarlath's, a process that took several years to complete.

Next you are invited to visit the Mercy Convent and Presentation Convent which are accessible, via a gate way at the right of the Cathedral.

Please pause until outside of the Convents.

Mercy Convent

In 1846, at the invite of Bishop McHale, the Sister of Mercy opened a convent in Tuam. The first sisters to arrive were Mother Mary Alphonsus Ryan, Sister Mary Clare Maher and sister Mary Magdalen Maher who came from the Carlow House of the Order. They arrived on the 2nd of January that year.

A House of Mercy was immediately opened and girls from impoverished families were cared for and employed at laundry-work and needle work as a means of generating income during the famine.



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A boarding school for young ladies also opened along side the house of mercy but did not develop much until the ravishing of the famine began to ease. The current house of mercy was built in 1861, with an additional weaving room added in 1866.

Presentation Convent.

The convent was established in 1835, with several premises added over the years including 1849, 1855 and 1927. The Presentation Convent School attached to the convent opened in 1855 to student numbers around 300. A secondary school for girls opened at Currylea in 1972.

You are now invited to return to the road opposite to the one which hosts the sculpture of the Wheel of St Jarlath. Please pause until you are at that site.

The Palace

The Palace, which now acts as a restaurant for Supervalu and the administration of O'Tooles supermarket, was built in 1720 by Church of Ireland Archbishop Synge. The site used was originally that which hosted the remains of the 'wonderful castle' of Ruairi O'Connor, the last high king of Ireland, which was built in 1164. The castle was acquired in 1574 and he used it as the bishops palace. The wonderful castle was repaired in 1647, in which one of its outer enclosure walls was used as the front wall of two public houses on shop street.

The domestic quarters and stables of the palace can be seen as a collection of buildings across the road to the right of the palace, they were build in 1808 and were converted into a community centre in 1956. While currently the offices of the Tuam & District Mental Health Association Community Employment Scheme, the building also served to originally home Gaelscoil Larlath in its early years.



1916-1966 Monument

The 1916-1966 monument was originally commissioned in 1966 in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising. On the 24th of April 2016, on the exact centennial anniversary of the Easter Rising.

You are invited to enter the carpark and walk toward the left of the palace, in which you will find the Chair of Tuam. Please pause until you are at that site.

Chair of Tuam

You will notice the remains of the outer wall of the ‘wonderful castle’, which is also the site of a prehistoric burial mound.

A 1500BC Bronze Age Urn was mound by workmen on this site in 1875.

On the 30th of March 1613, Tuam received a royal charter from James the 6th, which allowed for Tuam to have two representatives in the Irish House of Commons, which continued until the Parliamentary was abolished in 1800. The charter also allowed for the establishment of a formal town council, with an elected sovereign, which later became known as a Mayor. The sovereign was to be sworn into office at the site of the chair, as a means to also attempt to legitimise his position among the Tuam natives who remained opposed to British influence.

A physical chair was placed within the space by the late Cardinal Tomas O'Fiaich and was revealed in may 1980. The title of ‘chair of Tuam’ is of course not to be confused with the local and regional three-legged corner chair, known also as a Tuam Chair, which was know to have been in widespread in use in Connaught and especially Sligo, from 150 years ago, but are considered much older.

You are invited to return to the site of the 1916 Monument. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.



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The Bible School and Georgian House

By this time you may have noticed that this walk has yet to really deviate away from religious or church related buildings, this of course, is due to the sheer history of Tuam and its religious orders but also an indication of how centrally placed Tuam was in relation to the national politics for quite a significant amount of time.

For those that may be feeling a bit wary at the topic at this stage, don't worry – there's more to follow!

Immediately across from the monument are two buildings worthy of note, the first was originally a Bible School until 1920 after which a Mr Jim Cummins re-established it as a drapery business and next to that is a three story building that once served as the Palace View Hotel until 1892. The top story of the building was added in the early 1900's.

According to the 1901 census the building originally had 7 windows, in which none of the original panes survive, leaving only the fan above the front door intact. The road outside of the house is two feet higher than when the building was first built, leaving the lower level with a slightly squat appearance.

You are invited to stroll down the road until you get to Geraghty's Shop. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

Geraghty's Shop

Geraghty's Shop was originally built in the early nineteenth century as a Bianconi coach house. It was also the home of Tom Ffrench, who was a member of the Connacht rangers who was killed at Gallipoli in 1915. There remains a plaque on the wall remembering the purchase of a cap from the shop in 1946 to John Wayne, who used it, along side Maureen O'Hara, in the film 'The Quiet Man'.

You are invited to stroll down the road until you get to the town square. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.



Tuam Town Hall

One of the first things you may have noticed about the square of Tuam, is that it is in fact laid out in the shape of a triangle. This I have always felt really encapsulates much of the warm spirit of Tuam: performing as it must, but people never quite getting what they expect.

The Tuam town hall was built on land donated by the Hancock family in 1857, and was restored and extended in 1884. After an ambush when two RIC officers, Burke and Carey, were killed in July of 1920. In retaliation many buildings in Tuam were set alight, some lost, including that of the town hall. The hall itself was restored in 1926.

You may also notice many plaques on the town hall, most are due to the wonderful work of the Old Tuam Society, in fact most of the plaques around the town owe their existence to the society.

The first plaque is in memory of all Tuam men who fought in wars, the second a marker to remember Bobby Burke who worked tirelessly for the poor and gifted Toghermore House to the state in service to the poor and hungry before leaving Tuam for Africa in the 1950's.

One of the plaques is to John J Waldron, who was a member of the fore mentioned Old Tuam Society.

The last is of a Major Richard W. Dowling, an American Civil War soldier who died aged 30, from Yellow Fever in 1867. Currently his plaque remains the only memorial to a Confederate Army Soldier in the Republic.

The 1930's records of the Irish Folklore Commissions, the Schools Collection, there is a record from a Teacher named Eibhlín Halliday, which states that there was a stone in Tuam Square that once stood on, was said to put a person astray. It was called foidin mearbhall. Following an incident, in which three men on return from a wake, found themselves back at the wake again, the stone was moved. Local lore suggests it was placed at the front step of the town hall. Incidentally, the primary access to the town hall, is now at the side of the building.



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The Sculpture

Across from the town hall is a bronze sculpture, crafted by Cathy Carman that was revealed in 1994. In direct contravention to the common witty remark, that such a thing represents the twisted, two faced sense of local spirit, the beautiful artwork in fact represents the entwining history of Tuam, being both an ancient site and contemporary home, linked by the wheel and supported by three motifs at the base, that of the town's coat of arms, the crown of the high kings and the high cross. A symbol of a people who look back in remembrance and forward in hope.

You are invited to stroll down Shop Street until you get to the bridge at the bottom of the road. Shop Street would be the road to the right, of the square, having already come down Bishops street from the 1916 monument. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

Waterslade House

Waterslade House is a townhouse that was built in 1650 and was remodelled in 1810 by the Burke family of Knocknagur, Tuam.

Noteworthy past residence are Augustus Burke who was a famous painter, Lieutenant Colonel Theobald Burke 13th Baronet of Glinsk, and Thomas Henry Burke, Undersecretary of State of Ireland who was murdered in the Phoenix Park, Dublin in 1882 by the 'Invincibles'.

In 1839, when Daniel O'Connell visited Tuam for the opening of the National Bank, which took place at the site of the current Bank of Ireland on the Dublin Road, he was entertained by the family of Doctor Prendergast who was then the owner of Waterslade house.

Since then the house has passed from Doctor Prendergast, to his son Richard until it was auctioned and sold to another Tuam native James McDonnell, who passed it onto his nephew James, who then passed it to his son Stephan. In 1962 it was sold in auction to Doctor Midie



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Farrell who passed it to his sister Kathleen who had a pharmacy on the square until she passed there in 1982.

Bridge House

On the other side of the bridge is the Bridge House, which was built in 1837 by a Charles Blake who opened it as a brewery in 1840 and according to records, produced five thousand barrels of malt liquor and six hundred quarts of malt. The brewery closed in 1892.

The stone balustrade on Shop Street Bridge was originally intended for ill fated Menlo Castle, but was instead installed on the bridge as the style in the end was not to the liking of the Blake family who were the traditional inhabitants of the castle.

You are invited to stroll to the left of the bridge to the little Mill. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

The Little Mill

The 'Little Mill' as it is known locally, was transformed into a Museum in 1978 to enable its preservation. This was led out by a teacher named Tony Claffey and his students from Saint Patrick's Secondary School.

The project won 'Best European Project' when presented in Brussels.

The mill operated as a corn mill from 1720 – 1964, and has been both a museum and tourist information centre since.

The current park area came into being in 1961 when the Corrib Drainage Scheme lowered the riverbed of the River Nanny, which feeds the mill by 5 and a half foot. This greatly reduced the water to the mill, which resulted in the need to install an electric engine in order to keep the mill going.



The mill closed three years later.

The park also includes some millstones, that in the past were worked in the mill, the Millers house, the remains of the mill wheel and a peaceful area to sit.

Interestingly enough the park also possesses a large famine pot, that was used to make food to feed the people during the famine. Local custom once had that if food was left in the pot by locals, then they themselves would never know any hunger. This tradition was quickly adapted to the touching of the side of the pot with a wooden spoon, for fear that the gifting of food would of encouraged rodents to the area.

You are invited to stroll to another little park on the road across from the little mill. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

The Annemarie McHugh Remembrance Park

The Annemarie McHugh Remembrance Park was built in 2003 in memory of Annemarie McHugh who passed during the terrorist attack on the twin towers on the 11th of September 2001. Annemarie worked on the 84th floor of building 2. The stonework, which is central to the park is reflective of the twin towers themselves.

Since 2015, a small ceremony has taken place with Annemaries family and many Tuam Tidy Town members in remembrance of her life.

Richard M. Daley Mayor of Chicago and his wife visited the memorial garden in 2009. Ms Elizabeth A Sunday American Consul to Ireland visited it on 11th of September 2017.

If you exit the park and continue to stroll up the road to your right until you reach the top of the hill, you will come to our next stop. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.



Chapel Lane

During the times of the penal laws, 1695 to 1829 there were a series of laws and directives to attempt to force Irish Roman Catholics and Protestant dissenters into accepting the Anglican Church, official state established Church of Ireland.

Chapel Lane is the site of an earlier Roman Catholic Church used, mostly in secret or under great pressure in Penal times and prior to the building of the earlier visited Cathedral of Assumption.

While all that remains of this church is the gable ends and re-established archways the little, largely overlooked site should not be downplayed in its importance in the rebellious spirit to the past residents of Tuam. Since the penal times Tuam has become an ever developing haven for diverse faiths and none.

If you continue to the very top of the hill and take a right, you will have first site of Templejarlath on High Street. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

Templejarlath

Templejarlath was Tuams first church. The inhabitants of a monastery in Tobberjarlath were transferred to this side in 1032. If you follow the pathway that curls around the site you will see that the outer enclosure was extended to include the Cathedral of St Mary's, which took place in 1127.

Templejarlath has been repeatedly burned; 1244, 1262 and 1355. It was even the local parish church for a while from 1302-1306. According to records, it was in ruins by 1672.

It is the only ruined church, predating the 12th century, that has survived in Tuam out of six: Tobberjarlath, the first Saint Mary's Cathedral, Abbey of the Holy Trinity, Saint John's Abbey, Tempnascreen.



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If you continue down the High Street Road you will get to our next stop of St Mary's Cathedral. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

St Mary's Cathedral

The Cathedral was founded in 1127 A.D. by King Turlough O'Connor and was for over five hundred years the most important ecclesiastic seat in Connacht.

Three different cathedrals were built in the twelfth, fourteenth and nineteenth century.

The present cathedral, which incorporated the older cathedral into its form, features an original Hiberno-Romanesque chancel arch was built, by Sir Thomas Newenham Deane and completed in 1878.

Interestingly the archway was constructed with six concentric carved arches, supported by inward leaning columns meaning that a key stone was not required. St Marys Cathedral also hosts the beloved High Cross of Tuam, a beautiful synod hall and many engraved motifs – including one which is said to represent the green man, the embodiment of divinity in nature.

Directly across the road from the church is a plaque of the Abbey of the Holy Trinity. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

Abbey of the Holy Trinity

The abbey of the Holy Trinity was founded by William de Burgh in 1204 which was used as the cathedral after the original Saint Mary's collapsed in 1184. After the Reformation, in 1574, it was granted to Thomas Lewes. By 1672 it was in ruins, with many of its stones taken for building locally. The last of the foundations were removed in 1972 to facilitate a new road.



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Next, if you travel southerly along the Galway road you will pass the railway lines and a row of houses, continue along the road until there is a left turn, this is Church view. Continue along church view until you come to a yellow building and the train station. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

Church View House

This building dates from 1835 and is now called 'Bru Bride', having operating since 2009 as a training centre. It also hosts the western Traveller and intercultural development group.

Previous to this it was a cultural centre, a law firm, the offices of Coca-Cola and a private residence. On this site there was a stream known as Sruthain Bhride, that once ran through the grounds but after successive drainage schemes it no longer flows.

Across from this building is the Tuam Train Station and Grove house. Please feel free to pause until you are at that site.

Tuam Railway Station

Tuam train station was opened in 1860 as part of the Waterford, Limerick and Western line route between Sligo and Limerick and was a major stop between Claremorris and Athenry.

It was the only station along this route with two platforms and passing loop bridge.

In 1901 the station was purchased by the Great Southern and Western Railway. The station closed, along with the entire route in 1976, however freight trains for an acrylic fibre company and the Tuam Sugar Factory used the line, ensuring it remained open until the 1990's.



Closing

While this is the final stop on Walking Whid/ Walking Story of Tuam, it should not be considered the end of the story.

What we have considered and viewed today is only a scraping of the lore and history of Tuam and in the months that follow myself and Creative Places Tuam very much warmly invite you to participate and collaborate in the journey.

The history of a place should not be measured by the weight of its buildings, nor the age of its roads but by the tales, stories and sharings of its people.

Take care.

Thank you for sharing the journey.

This Walking Whid is inspired by the history and story of Tuam. We would like to credit Michael Waldron & Tuam Tidy Town's Tuam Heritage and Nature Trail published in 2015 for text referenced in the Whid. Please [click here](#) to read this Heritage and Nature Trail. Other resources used for this work were sourced from an assortment of Journal of Tuam Society (JOTS) publications, and Oein's memories of stories told.

