



The Industrial Revolution further transformed Arklow through exploitation of the Avoca Valley's rich mineral resources. Growing trade made the traditional ferryboats inadequate, prompting the construction of a permanent bridge linking the north and south shores. In 1756 a seventeenth-century wooden bridge was replaced by the Nineteen Arches Bridge, designed by Andrew Noble. It remains the longest handmade stone bridge in Ireland and, despite later remodelling, is still one of the town's most picturesque features.

During work by the Urban District Council in 1997 near Ferrybank Bridge, numerous human remains were uncovered. These were initially thought to be victims of the bloody but unsuccessful Irish Rebellion of 1798, which is commemorated by a sombre memorial near the Heritage Museum. The remains, however, probably date from 1200–1300, with seventeen burials of adults, teenagers and infants. Eugene O'Curry noted in the Ordnance Survey Letters that 'an ancient graveyard with the site of a church was found on the north side of the bridge of Arklow', which may suggest that this was the burial-ground discovered in 1997.

Arklow's industrial development culminated in the establishment of the Kynoch munitions factory in 1895. Pyrite, a

sulphide mineral found along the Avoca River, was essential in gunpowder manufacture. Covering more than 400 acres, the factory employed over 4,000 people at its peak, many of them poorly paid women and boys, believed to be less careless than adult men. Nevertheless, on 22 September 1917 an accidental explosion killed 27 workers and hurled residents from their beds with the force of the blast. The explosion is captured as an image of a mushroom cloud over the waters on a heritage plaque in the grounds of the Arklow Bay Hotel. The event remains one of the town's defining tragedies. Today, the former factory site has become a wetland rich in bird and plant life, contributing greatly to Arklow's natural environment.

The Arklow Pottery factory (1934–98) represented a more peaceful industry. Located on the South Quay, it was opened by Minister for Industry and Commerce Seán Lemass as a statement of a modern Ireland able to compete with Britain. Initially employing 200 people, including 30 specialists from the Staffordshire Potteries in England, the firm grew steadily despite wartime difficulties. Part of its appeal lay in its use of Irish raw materials. Today its ceramics are highly collectible pieces of modern material culture, carrying stories from living memory.



Above: **Fig. 14—The Kynoch munitions factory (J. Rees collection).**

Right: **Fig. 15—Hollow-ware makers in the Arklow Pottery, c. 1950s (J. Rees collection).**

Far right: **Fig. 16—Arklow Heritage Museum (E. Bermingham).**



Arklow Heritage Museum

This year, 2026, marks the 50th anniversary of the museum in the Bridgewater Centre on Ferrybank and its preservation of Arklow's seafaring heritage. Its collection is among the most important of its kind in Ireland, linking the town and its people to their maritime past. Exhibits include reminders of the bravery of the Arklow fishing fleet, which aided survivors of the sinking of the RMS *Lusitania* off Kinsale in 1915. The museum also houses artefacts from Ireland's first RNLI lifeboat station, founded in 1826; the original figurehead of the *Asgard II*, a carving of Gráinne Mhaol; and many objects linked to the ships that made Arklow famous. Passionate about outreach to schools and groups, the museum offers visitors an insight into the global footprint of the small town of Arklow.

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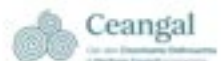
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Further reading

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Right: **Location map.**

Cover: **Arklow Castle by John Faulkner, c. 1874, courtesy of Arklow Shipping (E. Bermingham).**





Introducing Arklow

When Van Morrison sang *The Streets of Arklow* in 1974, he may not have known the rich history that those streets hold. This guide highlights what Van could not—some of the best heritage sites and stories of the town.

Arklow is a coastal town in County Wicklow, some 70km south of Dublin, and is situated at the mouth of the Avoca River. The Irish name, *An tInbhear Mór*, means ‘the big estuary’. Its position has made it an important centre for trade, fishing and maritime activity.

Human settlement in the area dates back to prehistoric times. Neolithic flint scatters suggest early activity, while records from the National Museum of Ireland describe a possible Bronze Age mound at Ferrybank, discovered in 1839, although the artefacts are long lost. Some historians debate whether Arklow was the settlement marked as *Manapii* on Ptolemy’s second-century AD map, likely linked to trade with Roman Britain. Irish annals further suggest that around AD 431 both St Patrick and Bishop Palladius landed at *Inbher De*, though the accuracy of these accounts is uncertain.

More permanent development began after 827 with Viking settlement along the estuaries of Wicklow and Arklow. From a likely Viking *longphort* or raiding base emerged the settlement of *Arnkelis-lág*—‘Arnkel’s wet-meadow’—from which modern Arklow developed.

Above: **Fig. 1—Arklow Castle reimagined (Sarah Nylund).**

Right: **Fig. 2—Sites in Arklow (J. Maguire).**

Norman Arklow

The ruins of Arklow Castle stand as witness to the successive waves of conflict and change in Irish history, beginning with the Anglo-Norman invasion. While archaeological evidence suggests that a fortification likely existed prior to 1185, it was the grant to Theobald FitzWalter—founder of the Butlers/Earls of Ormonde—that solidified its role as a strategic stronghold. Positioned to command the river and estuary, the site remained a volatile



Above: **Fig. 3—View of Ormonde castle at the ‘Alps’ (J. Rees collection).**



Left: **Fig. 4—Medieval Ham Green pottery sherd found during excavation of the castle (Dylan Duane Roche @ TVAS (Ireland) Ltd).**

Below: **Fig. 5—Wooden stake from the river (Dylan Duane Roche @ TVAS (Ireland) Ltd).**

flashpoint; it saw the assassination in 1282 of Art and Murtaugh MacMurrough, leaders of the Wicklow MacMurrough clan, ordered by the justiciar of Ireland, Stephen Fulbourne, and shifted between Irish and Norman control throughout the fourteenth century.

The castle’s medieval chapter was violently closed in 1650 when Oliver Cromwell ordered its destruction, leaving behind the fractured masonry visible today. However, the site found new utility in the early eighteenth century when the original rubble was repurposed on the site of the castle to construct one of the earliest British military barracks in Ireland. These barracks remained in use until their eventual destruction in 1922 during the War of Independence. Recent excavations as part of the Arklow WWTP project (licence no. 21E0637) have finally begun to reveal the site’s stratified history, yielding a wealth of eighteenth-century artefacts and earlier medieval remains.

The most significant archaeological evidence recovered during monitoring consisted of fourteen oak timbers embedded in river gravels. Dendrochronological analysis dated Timber 2 to c. AD 1154, which pre-dates or coincides with the Anglo-Norman consolidation of Arklow in 1185. Who knows what else may be buried beneath metres of infill at today’s riverwalk?



One of the changes brought to Ireland by the Anglo-Normans was the introduction of European religious orders such as the Cistercians, Dominicans and Augustinians. Many churches were constructed, often remaining in use for centuries before being replaced on the same sites.

St Mary’s Park on Main Street was once the graveyard of a pre-Reformation church, believed to lie beneath the modern car park. Probably Anglo-Norman in origin, its construction date is unknown, though its elevated position may suggest an earlier medieval phase. Following Henry VIII’s Dissolution of the Monasteries, it remained in use as a Protestant church, was replaced by St Mary’s (c. 1705–1810) at the defunct abbey, then by another St Mary’s (1810–1900) opposite St Mary’s Park, and finally by St Saviour’s Church (1899–present) on Coolgreaney Road.

There is less ambiguity surrounding the Dominican Abbey of the Holy Cross at the foot of Main Street. No trace of the monastery survives above ground, apart from the adjoining Abbey Cemetery and its rose garden. Among the surviving memorials are a fine example of a Denis Cullen headstone and another scarred by a small cannon-ball. At least two burial phases were identified based on pottery assemblages, with the stratigraphy confirming continuous burials from the twelfth to the eighteenth century.

The abbey was referenced in James Ware’s *The antiquities and history of Ireland* (Dublin, 1705), which states that Dominican friars arrived in Arklow in 1264 at the invitation of Theobald FitzWalter IV.

Above: **Fig. 6—View of the barracks, 1899 (J. Rees collection).**

Right: **Fig. 7—Denis Cullen headstone in the Abbey Gardens (Y. Whitty).**

Below: **Fig. 8—The Abbey Rose Garden, on the site of the Dominican abbey (Y. Whitty).**



In 1414 Pope John XXII granted an indulgence to pilgrims visiting the abbey, leading eighteenth-century Dominican scholar Thomas Burke to imply that a relic of the True Cross may once have been housed there. The abbey was suppressed in 1539 and leased by Henry VIII to Edmund Duffy in 1540. The Dominican friars abandoned the abbey permanently after the suppression, leaving only the townland name of Abbeylands to recall its existence.

The Industrial Revolution and beyond

As the Tudor and Stuart dynasties secured the British throne, trade across the Irish Sea became central to Arklow’s economy, increasing the importance of maritime infrastructure. The sea had always shaped the town, but growing commercial demand made fishing and shipping essential industries. By 1836 Arklow was one of only six Irish ports whose fishermen depended solely on the sea for their livelihood. These families were part of the ‘Fishery’, perhaps better understood as a communal identity than a fixed location, not unlike the *contrade* of Siena in Italy. Throughout much of the nineteenth century this community sustained a thriving oyster trade with Britain, until the Fishery itself fell victim to industrial expansion and gentrification.



While the Fishery may have declined, shipbuilding continued into the twentieth century with the pioneering company of John Tyrrell & Son. The Tyrrell Boatyard, established in 1864, was responsible for many iconic vessels, but two outstanding examples

are the *Gipsy Moth III*, which won the first solo Transatlantic Yacht Race in 1960, and the brigantine *Asgard II*, a training vessel of the Irish Navy, which was named after the craft used in the Howth gunrunning of 1914 to equip the Irish Volunteers.



Katherine Tyrrell also deserves honourable mention. Born in Arklow in 1863, she regularly sailed aboard the family schooner and developed a love of the sea. In 1885 her father bought the *Denbighshire Lass*, of which Katherine effectively became captain. After his death, she took over the business and proved an excellent master. The law did not recognise female shipowners or captains, however, and Katherine fought a long campaign to change it, succeeding in 1899.



Above left: **Fig. 9—Interior of St Mary’s in the nineteenth century (J. Rees collection).**

Left: **Fig. 10—The Nineteen Arches Bridge, 1910 (J. Rees collection).**

Top: **Fig. 11—Arklow port c. 1910 (J. Rees collection).**

Above: **Fig. 12—The Tyrrell Boatyard (J. Rees collection).**

Right: **Fig. 13—Katherine Tyrrell (courtesy of John Mahon).**

