

Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

presents

Bunratty Castle County Claire, Ireland

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Castles in Ireland

Castles come in many shapes and sizes. Some were very large and grand for the kings of the land. Others were built for defending the countryside. Still others were simply grand homes on large estates of rich nobleman.



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Bun na Raite Castle County Claire, Ireland




Ireland has over 475 known castles. Today we are going to look at life in and around Bunratty Castle in County Claire, Ireland.

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Getting into the Castle

It is not easy to get into a castle. Castles were built for defense. You could only come in with permission from the guards.



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Doors into the Castle

Large doors could be opened in the outside castle wall whenever the army needed to move soldiers in or out quickly or for wagons, or livestock. These large doors

would be closed if an enemy approached.



The castle keep was different. There were no doors or windows on the ground floor.

A draw bridge, when closed, sealed off the small narrow entrance high up on the second or third story.



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Designed for Defense



Tight spiraling staircases moving clockwise, narrow doors, and tall slits for windows with wedge-shaped sills, helped limit an enemy's entrance.



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The Great Hall



Anyone first entering the castle was met by soldiers in the Great Hall. Another line of castle defense.

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Armor & Weapons



Right off the Great Hall was the weapons room. It was filled with armor, swords and shields, bows and arrows, crossbows, and other weapons.



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Castle Comfort



Fireplaces, white-washed walls, ornately carved furniture, and large tapestries, helped make castles beautiful and more comfortable.

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Castle Comfort

The beautiful heavily embroidered and beaded dress lying across the bed showed the wealth and high position of the noblewoman. Castle Keeps were filled with treasures of art and jewels along with gold and silver.



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Kitchen



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The one very warm place in the castle was the kitchen. Turtle shells were used as both bowls and lids.

This was the private kitchen of the Earl and his family and guests.

The garbage shoot allowed unused scraps of food to be dumped into the water surrounding the castle where it fed the fish before the tide helped sweep it away.

Chapel



Each castle had its own chapel. This was the private chapel for the Earl's family. The priest also lived in the castle.



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Walking Upstairs



Getting to the top of the castle not easy. Everyone had to walk single file up many, many stairs.



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Top of the Castle



At the top the roofs of the castle buildings were clearly visible.

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Standing Guard

Most importantly, the view of the surrounding countryside was unobstructed. It was hard for an enemy to approach a castle unnoticed.



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It Takes a Village to Build a Castle



Building a Castle took a very long time.
Villages formed around castles where the workers lived.

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Village Building Materials



There were a lot of stones in Ireland. Most buildings and fences were made from stone. Roofs were made of slate or thatch. Thatch had to be added to every year. Slate lasted for centuries. The richer the villager the bigger and more elaborate was his house.



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Interiors

The inside of the houses changed based on wealth and social standing. Poorer people had very simple houses, rich people had very more refined houses.



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What did they eat?



When a village first formed the villagers ate fish and game they caught.

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They raised many animals.



After they became settled the people raised livestock for food and clothing.

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Farming

The Irish also grew crops to feed their families and animals.



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Farm Equipment



The blacksmith made plows and scythes to work larger fields. At first oxen were used to plow the land. Once draft horses were brought to Ireland, they replaced the oxen as work animals.

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Harvest Storage



Cereal grains were an important crop both for people and animals. Once harvested and dried, the cereals were stored off the ground and in barns. Cats patrolled the area to prevent mice from eating all the grain

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Humans and Animals Together



Along time ago, some Irish lived with animals inside the house. One end of the house was for a dairy cow, the other end of the house was for the people



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Harnessing Water

Water was an abundant resource in Ireland. People harnessed the water to help create an energy resource before electricity.



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Village Square

Not everyone who lived in the village worked on building the castle. Nor did everyone become a farmer. There were many other people who through special skills provided services and products to the village people. These people became the village merchants



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All Villages had a Chapel

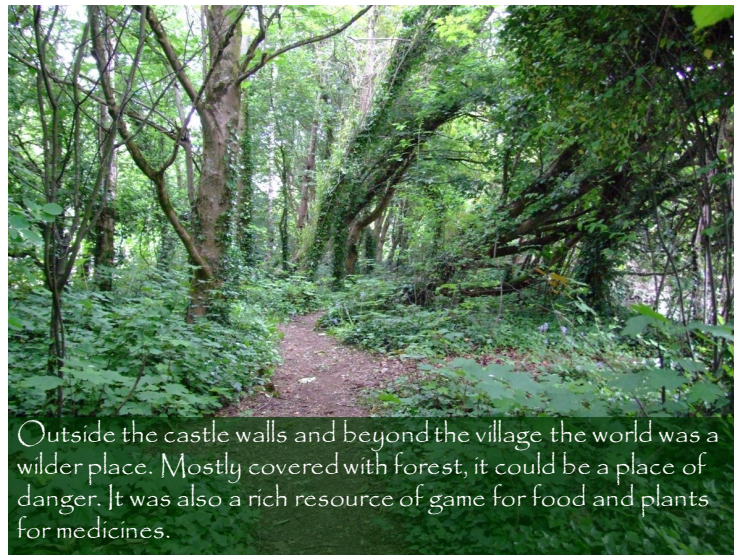


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Every village had a chapel, in addition to the one in the castle.

The priest provided spiritual support and guidance to his parish.

Outside the Village: A Wilder World



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Outside the castle walls and beyond the village the world was a wilder place. Mostly covered with forest, it could be a place of danger. It was also a rich resource of game for food and plants for medicines.

Castle Ruins

Even large castles built of stone do not last forever.



Over time, the stones are worn down by rain and wind. Seeds fall into the crevices and begin to take root. Unattended castles begin to disintegrate.

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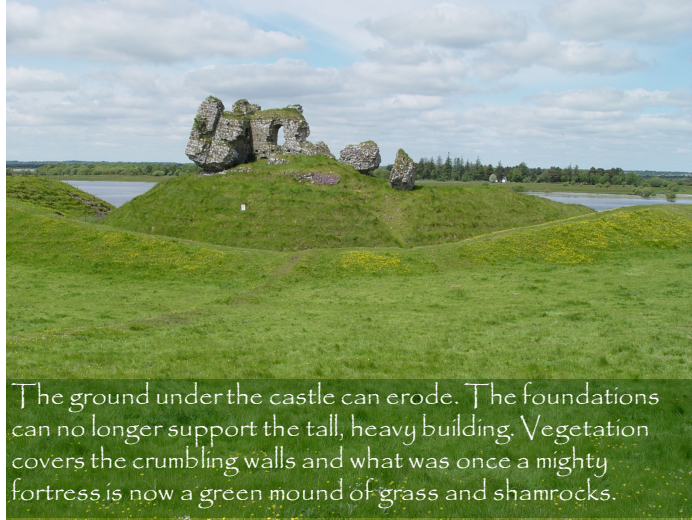
Partial Ruins

What was once a might tower with many chambers, today may be in complete ruins. Sometimes only one wall is left standing.



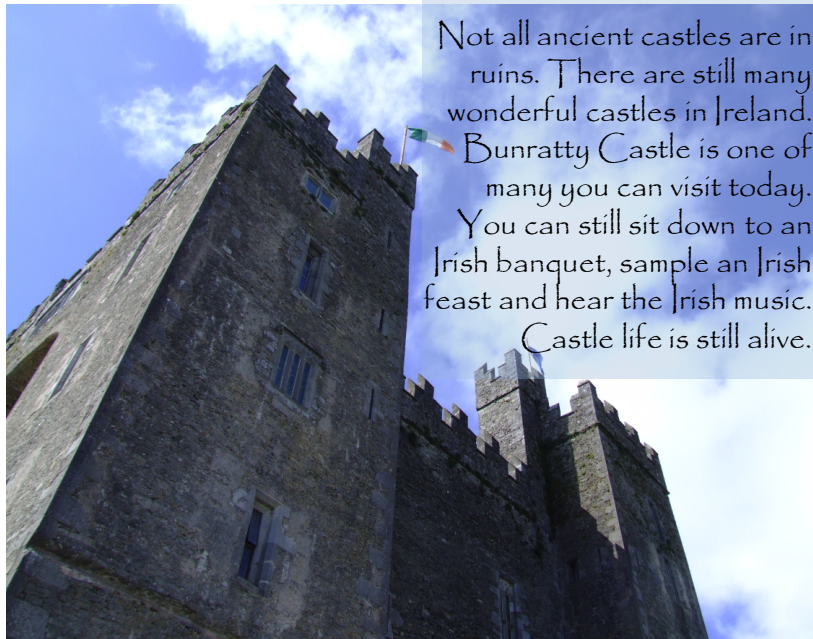
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Complete Ruins



The ground under the castle can erode. The foundations can no longer support the tall, heavy building. Vegetation covers the crumbling walls and what was once a mighty fortress is now a green mound of grass and shamrocks.

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Not all ancient castles are in ruins. There are still many wonderful castles in Ireland. Bunratty Castle is one of many you can visit today. You can still sit down to an Irish banquet, sample an Irish feast and hear the Irish music. Castle life is still alive.

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The End

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