

Celtic Life & Heritage
Foundation

presents

Bunratty Castle
County Claire, Ireland

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Can anyone guess how many castles there are in Ireland?

Over 475 castles or confirmed ruins of castles.

Ireland boasts so many castles because of its history. Many of what we call castles today were really fortified homes for Irish chieftains and were built for defense against other chieftains. These tended to be a solid tower structure. When the Anglo Norman Settlers arrived they also built fortified homes originally the motte and bailey style but were large and square.

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.

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation



Bunratty is located in the west of the Republic of Ireland at the end of the Shannon River, Ireland's largest river.

The first structure was built on the site in 1250, a simple earthen mound with a strong wooden tower on top. The lands were then granted to Thomas De Clare who built the first stone castle. In 1318 Richard De Clare (son of Thomas) was killed in a battle between the Irish and the Normans and the castle and surrounds were completely destroyed. The castle was restored for the King of England, but then destroyed again in 1332 by the Irish Chieftains. It was again restored in 1353 and again attacked by the Irish but remained in Irish hands from then on.

The present structure was built in 1425. The last resident owner, the Studdart family, left the castle in 1804 to enjoy a more luxurious "modern" home and the castle fell into disrepair until 1954 when Viscount Lord Gort purchased it. In partnership and help of the Office of Public Works, the castle was opened to the public in 1962 as a national Monument. It is the most complete and authentically restored and furnished castle in Ireland.

(Information from Shannonheritage.com:

<http://www.shannonheritage.com/BunrattyCastleAndFolkPark/BunrattyCastle/>)

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Do you notice anything about the placement of the windows?

Windows were built starting on the second level to make it harder for people to get in. There are also no balconies to climb up on or hand holds to grip.

Why do you think the windows were so narrow?

During a siege ladders were used to scale the walls of a castle. Narrow windows allowed for only one person to come in at a time and the castle could defend against only one better than many. Windows were also built for archers to be able to shoot out.

Because castles are made of stone, the ground must be suitable for building such a heavy structure. They were also built near water and a food source.

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Why do some castles have drawbridges?

A drawbridge is used to gain access to castle between the motte and bailey.

Often times castles were built on a high mound of natural rock the motte. Other times the motte was man-made and the dirt used to build the mound was taken from the ditch surrounding the castle. This created another natural defense.

A drawbridge was used to connect the motte across the ditch that could be raised as a defense mechanism.

This style of castle was built in Ireland starting in the 11th century.

http://www.castlesandmanorhouses.com/types_03_motte.htm

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Why do you think the doors are so narrow?

For Defense. The smaller the holes (doors & windows) in the walls, the harder the access.

Why are narrow clockwise staircases a good defense?

Tight spiraling staircases moving clockwise was a defensive strategy based on most people being right-hand dominant. The attacker would be walking up the stairs. The right hand carried the sword which would be impeded by the wall, forcing them to the left wall and fully open to attack from above. The defenders, which were higher on the stairs, were able to be half shielded by the wall of the stair and have their right hand open to the air. The narrow staircase allowed for only one man abreast, limiting the ability of a large army to take the castle.

Why do you think the walls are so thick? Both for insulation and defense.

Why do you think the windows are so narrow outside but wide on the inside?

Openings were harder to defend than solid walls. The interior of the windows opened up into the room. It allowed enough room for an archer to position himself off to the side of the opening, thus lessening his exposure to attack. It also made it more difficult for an arrow to penetrate the interior of the room or for an enemy to scale the walls and get inside the castle. The exterior of the windows were narrow, some even narrower than the ones shown here. That made a more difficult target for attacking archers.

The Great Hall



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Who do you expect to see when you first get inside the castle?

Anyone first entering the castle were met by soldiers in the Great Hall. If the person was an expected guest with permission to be in the castle, they would be escorted to the right room. If they were not, then they would most likely have been placed in the dungeon through a door in the Great Hall until the Lord of the Castle decided their fate.

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

In early times the Irish did not wear a lot of body armor, as feuding clans tending to raid more than battle. After the twelve century armor began to be used as the English wore it and battles became more common rather than the raids of prior.

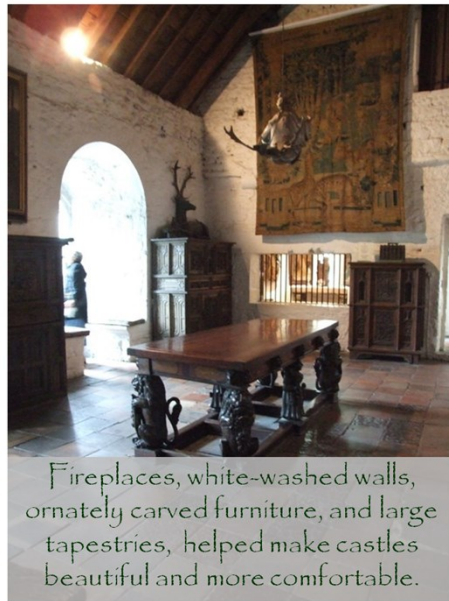
Depending on the wealth of the wearer, armor could be as simple as leather padding or more complex such as the metal armor shown in the picture.

Irish did wear helmets and shields were very common, typically oval some made from hide covered wicker and some of bronze.

Although not a favored weapon, when used the Irish tended to use the long bow (about 4-5' long) with flint or bronze tipped arrows. Swords and Spears were the most predominate weapons.

*(A Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland 1906, via
www.libraryireland.com/SocialHistoryAncientIreland)*

Castle Comfort



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

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation



The table here was salvaged from a wreck of a Spanish Armada ship

How did castles stay warm?

There was a fireplace in almost every room. Over twenty fireplaces. Typically large fires were on the lower levels with smaller higher up, keeping the castle warm.

Thick walls insulated the castle, keeping cool in the summer and warm in the winter

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation



The beds used in castles had much of the same comforts in a modern bed... mattress, pillows, covers.

What else might be in this bedroom?

- Writing Desk
- Fireplace
- Rugs / Tapestries
- Chairs
- Chamber Pot

Kitchen



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

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.

The regular kitchen in many castles were placed outside the great hall for fire safety. Animals would be tethered near the kitchen for slaughter and the kitchen garden was close by for fresh herbs and vegetables.

How did kitchens get their water?

Some castles piped water directly into the kitchen, others had to bring water up from a well. Dishes were washed in stone sinks.

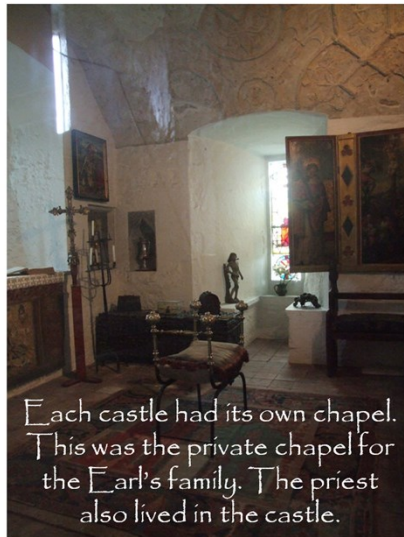
In the Middle Ages (500-1500 AD) breakfast was a very simple meal with dinner served between 10am-12pm and the first large meal of the day.

A typical traditional Irish breakfast today includes: Bacon, pork sausages, fried eggs, white pudding (meat dish of port meat/fat, suet, bread and oatmeal formed into a sausage) and black pudding (made primarily from pork blood and oatmeal along with meat/fat), potato and vegetable along with Irish soda bread or brown bread¹.

(Information from: http://www.medieval-castles.net/castle_architecture/kitchens.htm)

¹<http://www.discoveringireland.com/the-full-irish-breakfast/>

Chapel



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



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

The castle chapel was intended for prayer and used by the members of the castle household.

Belief in fairies, leprechauns, pookas, and banshees was common in Ireland as recent as the 1800's. Fairies, unlike American views, were considered evil; leprechauns were a mischievous male spirit; a pooka was a fairy in the form of dark horse/yellow eyes; and banshees wailed warning of approaching death.

*(Information from Religion and Folklore in Ireland via:
<http://www.maggieblanck.com/Mayopages/Irishancestors.html>)*

Walking Upstairs



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



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Even the top of the castle was built for defense.

How many defense techniques can you see in the picture on the right?

- Narrow door
- Narrow stairs to get to the very top of walls, allowing only one person at a time to walk up
- Open stair side (can be pushed over)
- Crenelated roofline, opening for shooting / sighting / shielding

Top of the Castle



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Walls were built for soldiers to stand watch on and see above the castle buildings for defense.

Standing Guard

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



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Why did guards walk the top of the walls?

The roof top of any castle offered up the best view to keep an eye on all the goings on of the lord's kingdom.

It was especially important to see enemies coming and sound the alarm so the village people could run to safety and soldiers could collect their weapons and be ready to defend the castle.

It Takes a Village to Build a Castle



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

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Why were villages around castles?

Building a castle was a huge undertaking. Many, many people, helped. There were stone masons, ship captains, carpenters, and iron workers. Merchants supplied woolens for clothes and cattlemen supplied hide for leather. Building a castle took a very long time. The workers needed places to live and food to eat.

What advantages did the village have by being close to the castle?

Mainly for defense against attackers; castles had soldiers to fight; safer to be in numbers with a small army than alone with little defense.

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

How did the houses get white?

Walls were often covered with a layer of whitewash made from lime or seashells.

The type of building material depended on the area houses were built. Stone was readily available in the north and west, where clay predominated in the east and south-east.

What is a thatch roof made of?

Ideally wheat or rye because it was clean, uniform in length and easy to prepare. If those were not available whatever fiber was available: oat straw, barley straw, reeds, rushes, flax, or marram grass.

The fiber material was fixed on a layer of sod on top of rafters.

<http://www.museum.ie/en/collection/faq/faqs-architecture.aspx#faq1>

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.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

What differences do you see between the interiors of these two homes?

Why the differences? Who do you think lived there?

The wealthy ordered and transported fine furnishings, where the poor had to make due with what they could make from their surroundings.

What did they eat?



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

They raised many animals.



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

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

What did they use each for?

Cattle, goats, and sheep provided milk, cheese, and butter. Sheep and cattle provided wool and leather for clothing. Pigs were the most prized meat for food. Chickens laid eggs for food and were used as food as well. Both oxen and horses helped move heavy loads, pulled the plows and were used for transportation and in battle.

In early Ireland wealth was determined by cattle, as money was not used. Historically Ireland relied mostly on livestock vs. crop production for food².

²<http://www.meath.ie/CountyCouncil/Heritage/Archaeology/MeathFieldMonumentsAdvisorScheme/File,34711,en.pdf>

Farming

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



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation



The Irish were also farmers. After the forest was cleared and the water was drained the land was suitable for planting crops for the family to eat. The farmers grew grains and vegetables.

What did the Irish grow?

Common vegetables cultivated in kitchen gardens were: Cabbage, leeks, onions, parsnips, and carrots. In coastal areas a seaplant called duilesc (English: dilleesk) that grows on sea-rocks was eaten as well¹.

The potato was introduced in Ireland in the second half of the 16th century and has heavily influenced Irish cuisine, so heavily relied upon that the potato famine (1845-1851) killed over a million people and an additional million emigrated out of the country, many coming to America.

Colcannon is a popular Irish dish consisting of Potatoes and cabbage.

¹(*A Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland*, 1906 via;
<http://www.libraryireland.com/SocialHistoryAncientIreland/III-XVII-8.php>)

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.

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Nobles had additional buildings which included a stable yard.

Horses were yoked to the equipment to work the fields.

In the 1700's wooden ploughs were used and required 4-6 horses to pull them if the ground was not drained.

In the early 1800's when England was at war with Napoleon, Ireland increased grain production as an export.

Ireland's Farming History via

<http://www.meath.ie/CountyCouncil/Heritage/Archaeology/MeathFieldMonumentsAdvisoryScheme/File,34711,en.pdf> to England.

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

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Cereal grains are typically oats and barley.

This is a thatched cover for food and harvest storage. It is kept off the ground so critters do not get to it and the rains would not ruin the harvest. Food was also stored in the corn barn.

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



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Why do you think they did this?

What were the advantages?

What were the disadvantages.

Heat for both animals and humans, protection from the elements. If dairy cows, they needed to be milked daily and stayed warm and dry.

Harnessing Water

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



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

What were mills used for?

Water moved paddle wheels which turned stones, in the case of Bunratty they were grinding stones inside the miller's house. The people had an easy way to make flour for baking bread. Other mills were used in the woolen industry to improve the quality, sheen, and also to spin the fibers into thread for cloth weaving¹.

How does a watermill work?

Watermills were well established in Ireland by the early 7th century². Water is diverted through a channel or pipe. The force of the water turns the wheel rotating the axle driving the mill or other machinery.²

How did the advent of electricity effect the use of the watermill?

In early 20th century electricity made the watermill obsolete in most places³.

¹Water power in Ireland: <http://www.oracleireland.com/Ireland/about/waterpower-type.htm>

²A *Smaller Social History of Ancient Ireland*, 1906 via;
<http://www.libraryirelandSocialHistoryAncientIreland/III-XXI-2.php>

³Operation: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watermill.com/>

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



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

What do you think would be in the village square?

At Bunratty Castle, the village square consists of:

Pub – included a kitchen for those that did not have kitchens in their home

Blacksmith

Doctor

Artisan

Potter

Pawn Broker

Linen and wool works

Grocer

Hardware

Hotel

Terraced housing for workers – like small apartments

All Villages had a Chapel



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

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

The priest provided spiritual support and guidance to his parish.

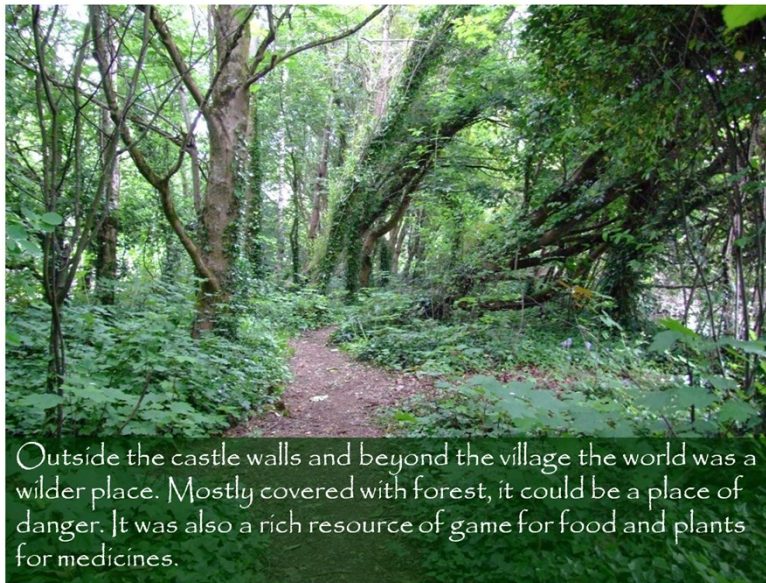
Originally, the Celts were pagan, but with the coming of St. Patrick, among other Catholic monks in the 5th century, Ireland converted to Catholicism¹.

Monasteries and abbeys were dedicated to preserving the classical learning and the Irish priests were so successful that they spread out to Europe and restored much of the classical learning and books that would have been destroyed in the Dark Ages².

¹http://www.wesleyjohnston.com/users/ireland/past/pre_norman_history/christianity.html

²*The Context and Development of Irish Literature, Washington & Lee University via:*
http://ireland.wlu.edu/lecture/ch1_3.htm

Outside the Village: A Wilder World



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.

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

What dangers would villagers find?

Most dangers were other humans, or weather related.

Ireland was completely covered by glaciers during the ice age, so the only native animals on the island were those able to cross from the mainland before separation of the Irish Sea between Britain¹.

There no large predators on the island, the last predator being the grey wolf which was hunted to extinction. Only 26 land living mammals (13% of those found in Europe) live on the island and three amphibians. Only four fresh water fish are found in the streams with the seasonal addition of trout and salmon swimming upstream to spawn. There are many bird species (470) with some of those migrating².

Domesticated animals were all brought by humans²: cattle, pets, horses, etc.

¹*Encyclopaedia Britannica:*

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/293754/Ireland/23014/Plant-and-animal-life>

²<http://animals.pawnation.com/indigenous-animals-ireland-5197.html>

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.

© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Castles were very expensive to maintain and some simply fell into disrepair and then ruin.

Conflicts and war caused many castles to be partially destroyed, unlivable, and abandoned.

Partial Ruins

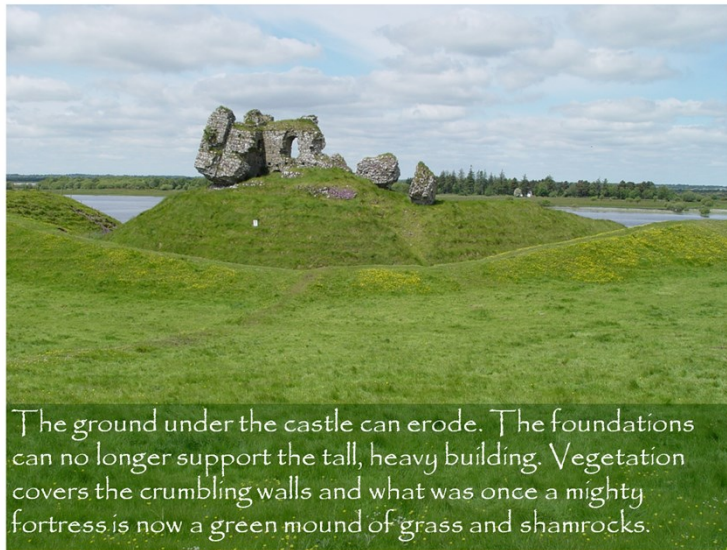
What was once a
might tower with
many chambers,
today may be in
complete ruins.
Sometimes only one
wall is left standing.



© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Seen here is the solar of Trim Castle. It was later converted to guest rooms, then fell into disrepair in the 16th century.

Complete Ruins

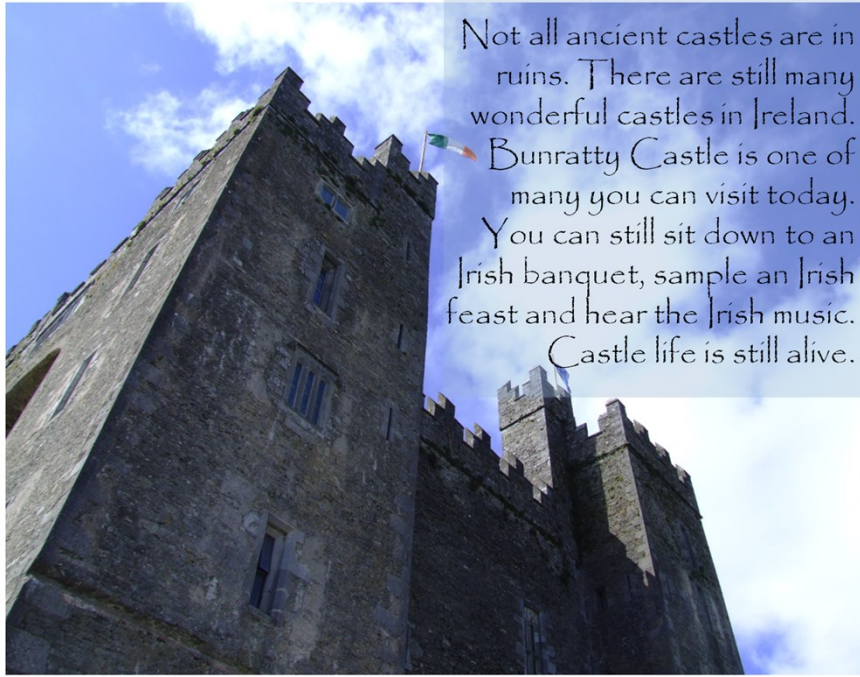


© 2014 Celtic Life & Heritage Foundation

Wind and rain erode the stones and gravity pulls the walls down. Sometimes the erosion will eat away the ground that supports the very foundation of the walls.

These are the ruins of Clonmacnoise Castle next to the Clonmacnoise Monastery in County Offaly, Ireland. It was built in the 1200's for the purpose of guarding passage along the river Shannon, visible in the background.

This is a motte and bailey castle with the motte (mound) still clearly evident under the castle ruins. Over time the upper portions of the walls tumbled down and were covered over today with grass. If left undisturbed, the plants will take over and turn what was once a structure built by man into a mound of grass and shamrocks.



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.

The End

Celtic Life & Heritage
Foundation