

Kells Historical Trail Highlights

Headfort House

Thomas Taylour came to Ireland from Sussex in the 1650s as Assistant Surveyor to Sir William Petty to work on the Down Survey. He purchased extensive lands around Kells. In the 1760s his great-grandson, the Earl of Bective commissioned the architect George Semple to design Headfort House. A school since 1949, the house importantly boasts the only intact Robert Adams interior in Ireland. The heritage rooms have been restored under the aegis of the World Monuments Fund. Tours of the Heritage Rooms and formal garden at Headfort House are available for groups of visitors during school holidays by arrangement. Please contact the Kells Courthouse Tourism and Cultural Hub. Tel: +353 (0) 46 92 47508 or alternatively the Headmaster's office directly for more details. Tel: +353 (0) 46 92 71116



Headfort House

Spire of Lloyd

Known by some as 'Ireland's Inland Lighthouse', the Spire was designed by Henry Aaron Baker (designer of the King's Inn, Dublin) in 1791 for the 1st Earl of Bective in memory of his father Sir Thomas Taylour. The Spire stands on the site of an ancient hill fort. The community park (known locally as 'The People's Park') includes a children's playground, picnic benches and space to walk and for children to play. The Spire stands approximately thirty metres high and on a clear day from the top, one can see magnificent views of the surrounding countryside as far as the Mourne Mountains in County Down, Northern Ireland. In the 19th century the Spire was built to guide horsemen home from the estate's hunting grounds between Kells and Virginia. In front of the Spire is a Pauper Graveyard, a place in which many victims of the mid-19th century famine were laid to rest.



Spire of Lloyd

Outdoor Leisure in and around Kells

Cycling and Walking

Boyne Valley to Lakelands Greenway

Ireland's newest greenway provides a 30km car-free walking and cycling pathway starting at Blackwater Park in Navan in the heart of the Boyne Valley and travelling along the former Midland Great Western Railway. Meet the locals as the greenway journeys through the rural picturesque villages of North County Meath, passing the beautiful architecture of the station houses, gates and rail line, finishing just outside Kingscourt. Ireland's most walking friendly greenway has 2 walking loops and 2 beautiful parks for you to enjoy forest trails or buggy friendly loops. The closest points to Kells are Gibbstown Station (12kms from Kells) or Blackwater Park, Navan (15kms).



Boyne Valley to Lakelands Greenway

Walking

Girley Bog Eco Walk

Drewstown Woods, near Kells
OS Sheet 42, N695 711, 3.5 miles
(6km) / 1½ - 2 hours / Easy terrain /
GPS: N53.68483 E-6.94971

Ringfort and Blackwater River Looped Walk

(Kieran Flanagan's Way)
1 mile (1.5 km) / 40 mins / easy terrain
GPS: 53° 43' 56.99222" -6° 54' 22.2834"

Kells Type Trail

Church Lane
Annual festival celebrating typography and lettering as an art form. Each year one word is interpreted in a series of art installations.



Girley Bog

Kells Walk-About Tour Guides

Commence at the Kells Courthouse, Tourism & Cultural Hub
An enjoyable way to experience Kells' monastic past. Payment by donation to the guides.
T +353 (0) 46 924 7508

Threshing Field Walk & Museum

Moynalty
0.7 miles / 30 mins / Easy terrain
GPS: 53° 47' 17.07722" -6° 53' 23.0568"

Spire of Lloyd Tours

Book a guided tour at discoverboynevalley.ie



Moynalty

St. John's Cemetery

St John's cemetery is located on the site of Kells Priory Hospital. Don't miss the carving known as The 'Abbess of St. John' which is thought to be associated with the Knights Hospitaller of St. John, of Jerusalem.



St. John's Cemetery

Presbyterian Church

One of the two Presbyterian churches in Meath, the Kells church was built in 1871 on lands donated by Thomas Taylour, 3rd Marquess of Headfort. The majority of the church's members at that time were Scottish families working on the Headfort Estate.



Presbyterian Church

The Archaeology and History of the Hill of Lloyd

The Spire stands on the site of what is thought to be an ancient Iron Age ring fort where recent geophysical scans of the hill show a massive hillfort of concentric ditches ringing the summit of the hill. It can be best appreciated looking across the field from the Kieran Flanagan Way.

The Hill was known as 'Mullach Aiti', translating to the current day 'Lloyd'. The Hillfort's purpose was to guard the approaches from the Kingdom of Bréifne (Cavan) to the ancient Kingdom of Midhe (Meath).



Festivals

St. Patrick's Day (with Kells Silver Band est. 1848)
Every St. Patrick's Day 17th March
familyfun.ie/kells-st-patricks-day-festival

Hinterland Festival of Literature & Arts Kells – June
hinterland.ie

Kells Type Trail June – August
facebook.com/KellsTypeTrail

ABLEFEST Music & Arts Festival – July
facebook.com/ablefest

Moynalty Steam Threshing Festival | Every August
moynaltysteamthreshing.ie

National Heritage Week | Nationwide, Every August
heritageweek.ie

Culture Night – September
discoverboynevalley.ie

Féile Siamsa Glas – September
discoverboynevalley.ie

Samhain Festival of Food & Culture
foodcultureireland.ie

Golf

Headfort Golf Club

Headfort, Kells A82 E330
Kells boasts two world-class golf courses (one designed by Christy O'Connor Jnr.) in one amazingly beautiful location. Set in the former parkland of Headfort House - visiting players are very welcome.
T +353 (0) 46 924 0146
W headfortgolfclub.ie



Headfort Golf Club

Fishing

Kells Anglers Association

Carrick Street, Kells A82 V0V3
The Kells Anglers Association was established in 1893 and owns the fishing rights of circa 14 miles of the Blackwater River, Kells. Day permits for visitors are available from: The Flying Sportsman.
T +353 (0) 46 924 1743
W kellsanglers.com



Fishing

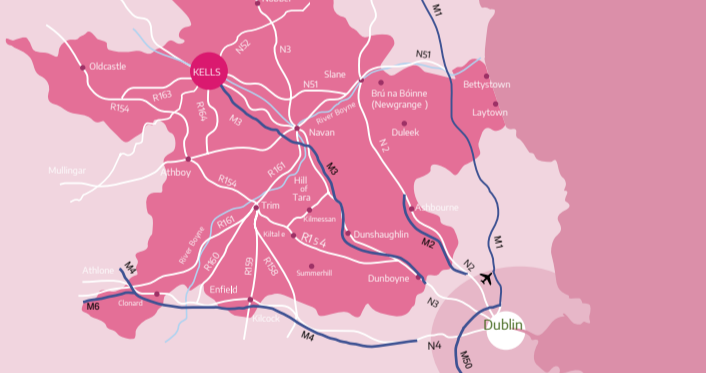
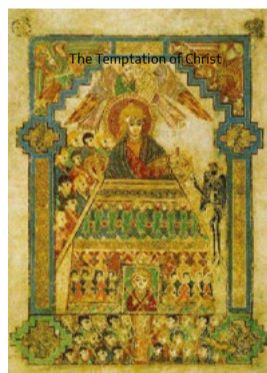
The Book of Kells

The world-famous Book of Kells is the crowning glory of the Celtic illuminated manuscript art form, and one of the most important early medieval treasures of Western Europe. Written in Latin, it contains the full text of the Four Gospels of the New Testament Bible.

The Book of Kells may have been written entirely at the monastery in Kells or more likely begun in Iona in Scotland and completed in Kells where it remained for the best part of 1,000 years.

In 1653 it was sent to Dublin for safe-keeping by Charles Lambert, Governor of Kells and it was later donated to Trinity College by Henry Jones, Bishop of Meath where it remains to this day.

You can view a high-quality facsimile copy of The Book in the Kells Courthouse Tourism and Cultural Hub, the Church of St. Columba on the Monastic Site or in the foyer of the Headfort Arms Hotel.



KELLS GPS: 530 43' 36.48" N -60 52' 24.98" W

Kells, County Meath, is a 45-minute drive from Dublin airport and Dublin City via a (M50/M3) motorway link or a regular express bus service. This designated heritage town offers the visitor a range of activities and attractions and its excellent location and road links makes it an ideal and welcoming place to stay when exploring the Boyne Valley and other nearby destinations.

From angling, golf and walking to the remains of an ancient monastery, Celtic crosses and award winning accommodation and dining, Kells is an ideal destination for every member of the family.

For more information on our town visit
discoverboynevalley.ie

Kells Courthouse Tourism and Cultural Hub

Headfort Rd, Kells, Co. Meath, A82 RY62
(located opposite the Market Cross on the R147 entering Kells from Navan)
Free admission. For opening hours see website.

T +353 (0) 46 924 7508

E kellscourthouse@discoverboynevalley.ie

W discoverboynevalley.ie



This project has been funded by Fáilte Ireland and Meath County Council and supported by Kells and District Tourism Network and Boyne Valley Tourism.



Discover Kells Heritage Town

Original home of the Book of Kells

A treasure trove of fascinating history throughout the ages...



discoverboynevalley.ie

Fáilte go Ceanannas Mór Welcome to Kells

Welcome to the Heritage Town of Kells. Situated on the River Blackwater in the heart of the Boyne Valley, the town and its environs have a rich archaeological, monastic and natural heritage. As the birthplace of Ireland's Ancient East, the Boyne Valley is renowned for its heritage wonders and Kells is proud to be part of that story.

Ceanannas Mór, meaning 'Great Fort', was a royal residence before St. Colmille (Columba) established a religious settlement here in the middle of the 6th Century.

He was exiled from Ireland after a dispute which led to the battle of Cúl Dremhne in Sligo. Sailing to Scotland, he established a monastery on the island of Iona, which became a renowned centre of learning for many centuries, and remains a place of spiritual retreat today.

We invite you to discover the many fine examples of early Christian architecture here, including High Crosses, towers, churches and of course, as the original home of the Book of Kells, a visit to view a high-quality facsimile copy here is a must.

Kells and the surrounding area also offers many other activities to enjoy including world-class golf, some of the finest fishing in Ireland, horse-riding, adventure parks, gardens, greenways, walks, cafés, pubs and restaurants, festivals and art exhibitions. Kells also enjoys a direct motorway link (M3) and bus connection to Dublin City and the Airport making it an excellent place to stay. We recommend that you spend a few days here to relax and enjoy the warm céad míle fáilte (one hundred thousand welcomes) and the rich history of this unique and fascinating town of Kells in the Boyne Valley.



Acknowledgements to: The Board of Trinity College Dublin



Kells

Kells Historic Trail



Kells Monastic Past

Diarmait mac Cerbaill, High King of Tara is said to have granted the 'Dún of Ceanannus' to St Colmcille in the 6th Century to establish a monastery. In 804 the Columban community on the island of Iona returned to Kells to escape the Norse raiding parties. The present church on the monastic site was built in 1778 and renovated in 1965.



Round Tower

Dating from the 9th Century, the Round or Bell Tower (cloigtech in Irish) has five windows, each of which looks out over one of the five ancient roads that leads into the town of Kells. Standing at a height of approximately 100 feet tall, it dominates the surrounding countryside as a powerful symbol of Christianity. Used as a bell-tower and a place of sanctuary, it stood witness to countless bloody attacks by Vikings and native raiders alike.



High Crosses

The High Crosses in Kells are among the most important in Ireland. There are three High Crosses and a Cross base on the monastic site. The biblical scenes depicted on the crosses may have been used for religious instruction, but it is thought that their main function was to proclaim the importance of the Kells ecclesiastical site.



St. Colmcille's House

Dating from the 9th Century, it is thought that this stone oratory may have been built to house the relics of St. Colmcille which were brought from Iona. It is also believed that the Columban monks brought the Book of Kells here when they moved from Iona. The roof is barrel-vaulted with three small chambers in the roof space. The Columban community thrived and Kells became a centre of art, education and craftsmanship up to the 12th century. Both the 'Annals of the Four Masters' and the 'Down Survey' mention an underground passage joining St. Colmcille's House to St. Columba's Church.

1 Kells Courthouse Tourism & Cultural Hub

Here you can experience an exhibition on Kells and the Boyne Valley, which includes a facsimile copy of the Book of Kells. In addition, the renowned Toradh Gallery 2 hosts an annual series of exhibitions, workshops and talks by local, national and international artists. The courthouse was designed by prominent Irish architect Francis Johnston. Johnston also designed the General Post Office and Nelson's Pillar in Dublin, Townley Hall, County Louth and the front entrance to Slane Castle. Free Admission.

2 Market Cross

The famous 9th century Market Cross, the "Cross of the Gate" was originally located at the Eastern Gate of the monastery. It signified that a fugitive could claim sanctuary once inside the boundary of the monastic area. The Market Cross is currently located outside the Kells Courthouse. Damaged in the 17th century by the army of Oliver Cromwell. Local belief has it that the cross was also used for hanging Irish rebels after the 1798 rebellion. (The rebels were referred to as Croppies, or Croppie Boys, because of their agrarian roots, or possibly for their fashion of cutting or cropping their hair short in the then new revolutionary French fashion).

3 St John's Cemetery

St. John's Graveyard is associated with both the Crutched Friars (Freres Cruciferi) and with the Knights Hospitaller of St. John of Jerusalem. The former, a medieval Italian order devoted to the Holy Cross, had a priory in Kells in about the 12th century AD until the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s. The carving known as the 'Abbess of St. John' may be associated with the Knights Hospitaller of St. John who owned land in Kilmainhambeg, now part of Headfort Golf Club. Established in the 12th century to provide medical care to Christian pilgrims to the holy land, the Knights later became a military order active on the crusades. Their original work is reflected in the contemporary St. John's Ambulance and the Order of Malta first aid service.

4 Kells Town Hall

Kells Town Hall was originally designed as a bank in 1853 by William Caldebeck and later became the town hall in 1974.

5 Parnell Garden

This is where Charles Stewart Parnell (1846 - 1891) addressed the people of Kells about land rights for Irish tenants on 11th April 1875.

6 Oliver Ushers Auction Rooms

Originally a brewery where Ireland's first lager, Regal, ("Lager" spelt backwards) was brewed in the 1930s. It was later rebranded as Harp. Trading in antiques and fine art auction business over 40yrs.

7 The Monastic Site

At the medieval monastic site, located at the centre and highest point of the town, are the round tower and three high crosses. There is also a belltower and sundial. There are interpretative panels inside the church.

8 St. Colmcille's House

This is a stone oratory dating from the 9th Century, to house the religious relics of the monks. Access can be arranged through Kells Courthouse Tourism & Cultural Hub.

9 Kells Printing Works

A rare and intact printing works, dating to the late 19th century, was re-discovered in Kells in late 2016. The collection was generously donated, carefully conserved and restored by master craftspeople and will be housed in the new Kells Printing Works on Church Lane (former Sawmills) due for completion in 2025. The new centre will host print educational programmes, training and an opportunity for visitors to Kells to experience and celebrate lettering as a modern art form tying in with the legacy of St Colmcille and the world famous Book of Kells.

10 Churchyard Wall

The churchyard wall marks the boundary of the original monastic site and was rebuilt in 1914.

11 Bective Square

In the centre of the square stands a bronze sculpture of an oak tree, designed by local artist Betty Newman - Maguire which symbolises St. Colmcille's love of the oak. Legendary actress Maureen O'Hara was honoured with the Freedom of Kells in 2012 and is commemorated by a sculpture on Bective Square.

12 Presbyterian Church

One of only two Presbyterian Churches in Meath, built in 1871 on the lands donated by Thomas Taylour 1st Marquess of Headfort.

13 St. Colmcille's Well

There is a patron day held annually on the eve of St Colmcille's feast day, June 9th. Why not sit and throw a coin in the well, make a wish or say a silent prayer.

14 Spire of Lloyd

The Spire of Lloyd stands on the site of an iron hill fort. The community park (The People's Park) includes the "Paupers Graveyard", in which many victims of the mid-19th century famine lie buried. (4 mins drive from Kells.)

15 Headfort House & Bridge

Headfort House contains the only intact Robert Adams interiors in Ireland. (4 mins drive from Kells.)



Kells Courthouse Tourism & Cultural Hub



Kells Town Hall



Headfort Bridge



Headfort House



St. Colmcille's House