Manorhamilton Heritage Trail

Introduction

Nestling at the centre of the North Leitrim Glens sits Manorhamilton, a town rich in history, heritage and architecture and surrounded by the unspoiled beauty of lovely Leitrim.

Tullaghan On an elevated site overlooking the town stands Hamilton's Castle. This is now the only visible reminder of the Scottish nobleman. Sir Frederick Hamilton. who, in the 1622 Plantation of Leitrim by King James 1, was granted 6500 acres of land in this area and stamped his name on our town. Within five years of the building of the castle in 1634-1636. the nucleus of the town was established consisting of 20-25 stone houses, at least one inn. two cornmills. a Protestant Church and a population of one hundred. Since that time a trail of built heritage can be traced, each century adding further treasures.

Our heritage has been gifted to us from the past and comes with a duty of conservation and a commitment to pass it safely on to future generations. We wish all those who use the Manorhamilton Heritage Trail the pleasure of enjoyment in the richness of our past.





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1 Hamilton's Castle

In the 1620's Plantation of Leitrim forty eight English and Scottish settlers were granted land. One of these was Frederick Hamilton from Paisley in Scotland. Hamilton took possession of his grant in 1622 and he and his wife, Sydney Vaughan, left the glamour of the English Court to live in Leitrim. For the next ten years Sir Frederick continued in his army career, fighting with Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden in the Thirty Years War. On his return in 1633 he chose a strategic site and laid plans for the building of a proper town and castle.

The castle was constructed between 1634 and 1636. It replicated the design of Rathfarnham Castle in Dublin. It was 30m. long, 25m.wide and 15m. high surrounded by a bawn wall 4 metres high with two storey towers on the four corners. Within 5 years the town of Manorhamilton had 20/25 stone houses, a population of 100, a Protestant Church, at least one inn and two cornmills. During the Rising of 1641 the Castle was besieged and defended three times. On January 30th, during one of the sieges, the town of Manorhamilton was burned and the townspeople were given shelter within the bawn walls. The troubled years between 1641 and 1643 saw atrocities on both sides and the gallows at Hamilton's Castle claimed 58 victims.

In 1645 Hamilton's wife, Sydney, died and Hamilton remarried the following year. His new bride was Agnes Hepburn. Sir Frederick returned to Scotland in 1647 and died suddenly in Edinburgh in the November of that year. Following his death, his Castle still held a military presence but its end was nigh and in 1652 it was burned to the ground by a strong party of native Irish from North Connacht and Ulster.

★ On Leaving Hamilton's Castle turn left onto Castle Street. The houses on the right, date to 1890 and were the work of The Mc Lynn builders from Sligo. The water trough on the left is reminiscent of an era when horses were the mode of transport for people and goods. A further reminder of times past is the animal pound at river level. It dates to the first half of the 18th century and is recorded on the first map of Manorhamilton drawn by James Leonard 1749. The pound was used for confining wandering animals and the owner had to pay a fine to have them released. Buckard's Bridge spanning the Owenbeg River separates Castle St from Séan Mac Diarmada Street.

The Courthouse on the right was built in 1819 and replaced an earlier Sessions House.

2 Courthouse

For almost 400 years courts have been held in Manorhamilton. In the early 17th century, the King granted Frederick Hamilton the right of jurisdiction over his tenants. The location of that court is unknown but the 1749 map of the town shows the court located at the Session's House (now The Mountain View) on Main Street.



The Courthouse on Seán Mac Diarmada Street was built in 1819 at a cost of £2400. It had a courtroom, two jury rooms and three prisoner cells. Apart from servicing the courts, the building had many other uses. The Grand Jury, forerunner to the County Council, held their meetings there up to 1898 and when the Grand Jury was replaced by the Rural District Council, the building facilitated their meetings up to 1925. It witnessed the election count for the famous and fractious 1908 election and provided offices for solicitors Ray and Londsdale in the 1920's. That period also saw a military presence there as both

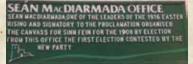
the British Army and the R.I.C. occupied it in the 1920/21 period. When independence was achieved in 1922 the Free State troops moved in. The early years of the 20th century also heard the Courthouse echo with music and laughter when it became a venue for plays, concerts, meetings and dances.

In 2001 the Courthouse was vacated and plans to renovate and extend it fell victim to the recession.

Across the street the green plaque on Keenan's butcher shop marks the location where Séan Mac Diarmada had his office during the 1908 election. From here a weekly newspaper called the **Leitrim Guardian**, was published, the first edition appearing on July 20th 1907.

Adjacent to this building is the Bank of Ireland.

3 Bank of Ireland



Built c.1890 by Carney Cross Templeman, the then postmaster, the building continued to host the postal services up to 1917. It was purchased by the National Bank on September 27th of that year. The National Bank and the Provincial Bank amalgamated nationally with the Bank of Ireland in the 1970's.

Moving towards the junction, stand and admire the carved milestone, erected c1840, set on the footpath at the corner of Main Street and New Line. Unfortunately, the inscription on the milestone has been eroded.

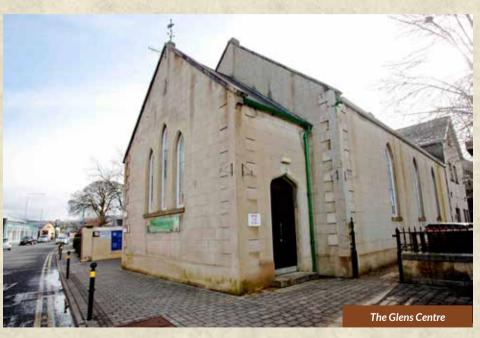
Turn left into the New Line, originally called Coach Road and later Chapel Street. Built in the



mid 1840's, its original purpose was to facilitate business to and from the Workhouse. Advancing a few metres into the street, pause a moment to picture a well muffled group gathered here in the 1800's awaiting the arrival of the Enniskillen/Derry Bianconi Coach. Charles Bianconi had an office and workshop here in 1856.

4 The Glens Centre

Built in 1821 this building was the third Methodist Church in Manorhamilton. the first being located on Riley's Row in 1792 and the second on the Teapot Lane in 1804. The third church came into being as a result of a split in the Methodist community in 1816. The preference of the majority of the Church members was to have a distinct Church unto themselves and this group remained in Teapot Lane. The others, wishing to remain under the umbrella of the Church of England, proceeded to construct their new place of worship on Wesley Place, with its entrance from Main Street. The members resolved their differences in 1878 and



all worshipped together in this third church until 1964 when another church was built close by on New Line. The vacated premises fell into disuse until it was taken over by the Leitrim Glens Development Company in 1993

The memorial, on the right past the Glens Centre, records the death of IRA Commandant Phil Gilgunn who was shot in the Civil War period of 1922. This shooting occurred outside Manorhamilton Post Office which was then located on the opposite side of the street where the butcher shop is now.

The Sculpture Centre on the left, undertakes creative work in the main material processes used in contemporary arts and crafts, stone, wood, metal, ceramics, pottery, glass, paint and etching, digital media and photography.

Next to the Gilgunn monument is Baytree House.

5 Manorhamilton Dispensary

This attractive stone building originally known as the Dispensary dates from 1893. The dispensary system was established under the Poor Law Act 1838. The country was divided into 130 divisions called unions. By 1852 Poor law unions had been divided into a number of dispensary districts each with a dispensary and medical officer. The Boards of Guardians were responsible for the administration of the dispensaries and for the appointment of dispensary doctors. In 1863 the dispensary doctors were made registrars of deaths, births and





marriages. Following the Anglo Irish Treaty in 1921 Boards of Guardians were abolished and replaced by County Boards of Health. These became responsible for hospitals and dispensaries.

The 1970 Health Act replaced the old dispensary system with the new General Medical Services (GMS) scheme in which patients could choose their doctor. Dr Tom O Carroll was the last dispensary doctor appointed in Manorhamilton to work under the old system.

Just past the Community Centre is the Bee Park

6 The Bee Park

When William Sydney, 3rd Earl of Leitrim, died in 1878, his estate went to his 2nd cousin Henry Clements of Ashfield in Cavan. He, in turn, passed it on to his son, Henry John Clements. Henry John leased the Bee Park to the North Leitrim Agricultural Society in 1907 for an annual rent of £20. It was a condition of the lease that the park continue to be used as a showground and recreational park. In the late 1800's and early 1900's cricket was a popular sport here and the accompanying photo shows a cricket team of that era. This gradually gave way to a variety of other games –football, handball, soccer, hurling, tennis. The Agricultural Show continues to be held here annually in keeping with the terms of the 1907 lease.



Leaving the Bee Park, St Clare's Roman Catholic Church on the left displays all the magnificence of 19th century architecture.

St. Clare's Church

7 St. Clare's Roman Catholic Church

This beautiful limestone-faced church was built in 1883 by the then Parish Priest Dr. John Maguire. The architect was William Hague of Cavan and the contractor James Clarence of Ballisodare. On Saturday January 26th 1884 a severe wind storm caused the roof to cave in. Fundraising commenced immediately, both at home and in America and a Belfast firm carried out the work of rebuilding.

The spectacular stained-glass windows are the work of the famous artist William Earley and Monsignor Soden, who was Parish Priest from 1915–1942, was responsible for the beautiful mosaic in the sanctuary.



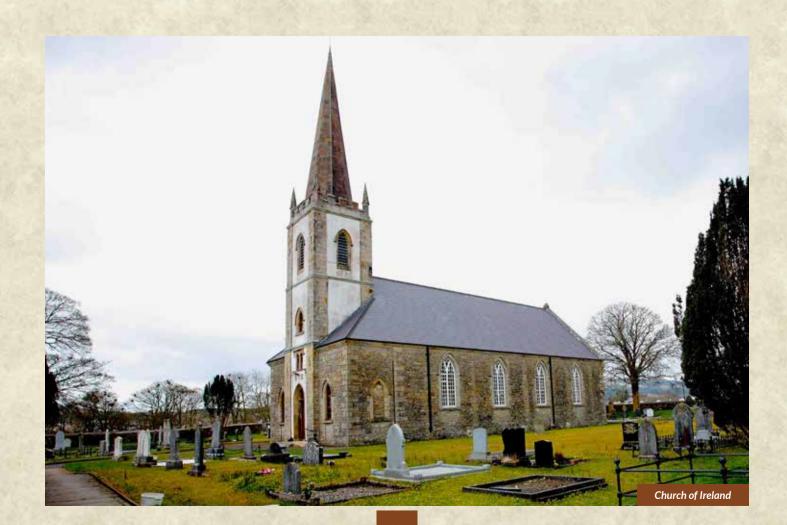
To the left of the Church is the Parochial House built in 1889 when the parishioners invited their Parish Priest, Dr. Maguire, who, up to that time had resided in Glenfarne, to come and live in Manorhamilton.

On the hill opposite St. Clare's R.C. Church is the **Church of Ireland** parish church. From its elevated position, it has looked down over the town of Manorhamilton for over two hundred years. The surrounding Star Fort wall is of an even earlier time.

8 The Star Fort Site

As we climb the hill towards the Star Fort. its sturdy walls remind us of the necessity of fortification in earlier times. The building of Star Forts evolved during the age of gunpowder when cannon came to dominate the battlefield. Their design is attributed to Michelangelo and was first used in the defensive earthworks of Florence in 1475. Since its construction in the 1600's, the Star Fort in Manorhamilton has had within its sturdy walls both military detachments and prayerful church goers. The British barrack building scheme of the 18th century, saw the construction, by Sir Ralph Gore, great grandson of Frederick Hamilton, of a barracks on this site. This was in use for about 35 years from 1716 on. Following its demolition, the site was used for the building of the present Church of Ireland in 1783





The Church of Ireland

This Church, built to facilitate 350, is substantially unchanged since its foundation. Although it lacks the beauty of stainedglass windows, it can boast a superbly crafted oak ceiling and the church is the custodian of an historic silver chalice dated 1596. The inscription on its base tells us that James, son of Sorley Mac Donald, had it made. It is thought that he donated it to the Franciscan monastery at Bonamargy (near Ballycastle) and from there it made its way through the O Donnell family to the Abbey at Cloonaquin near Manorhamilton. It then went missing for some years and on being found again, it was dismantled. Only the base was kept. The cup and stem were discarded and replaced by a suitably inscribed communion cup. It was then presented to the Church of Ireland by Nathaniel Clements, 2nd Earl of Leitrim, in 1839, in memory of his son, Robert, who died that year.

The Masterson School

At the entrance gates to the Church stands the Masterson School. Built in 1860, this attractive stone building has been modernised over the years. Its name pays tribute to the memory of John James Masterson, a wealthy local man, who in his generosity and cognisant of the value of education, made an annual bequest of £26-6-6 to the school in 1819.



Having visited the Star Fort site, retrace steps to the Sligo/ Enniskillen Road [N16} to continue the trail. The iconic HSE building, just ahead on the left, dominates the skyline and stands on what was once the Workhouse site.

9 The Workhouse Site

On the raised ground overlooking the Enniskillen Road is the Workhouse site. Looking towards it we are reminded of the abject poverty that prevailed in Ireland in the early 1800's. This was a time when farmers' holdings were small and held at the whim of the landlord. Many of these landlords were absentees who lived in England and employed bailiffs to collect their rents.

Manorhamilton Workhouse

The Workhouse system grew from the passing of the Irish Poor Law Act in 1838. Ireland was divided into 130 unions, each union to have a workhouse governed by a Board of Guardians. Manorhamilton Workhouse was built in 1842 at a cost of £6400. The contractor was Sligo builder James Caldwell. The original buildings were the Porter's Lodge, the Workhouse and the Infirmary.



All those who entered the Workhouse did so through the Porter's Lodge and it was here that the Board of Guardians held their weekly meetings. The Workhouse itself was a cold dismal place devoid of any comforts or stimulation. Here families were separated, food was scarce and disease rampant. Although built to accommodate 500, the system struggled to cater for 1000 starving inmates, or as they were called 'paupers', at the height of the Great Famine of 1845 to 1849. In the years following the Famine, the dreaded word 'workhouse' changed to 'County Home' and its last residents were transferred to Carrick-on-Shannon in 1936. The site was then used for the building of Our Lady's Hospital in 1954 and the HSE offices which were officially opened in 2007.

The Fever Hospital

Fever in Famine times was a constant threat. Following the Famine and remembering the cholera epidemic of 1832, the health authorities deemed the building of a fever hospital in Manorhamilton essential. Built in 1850 at a cost of £900, with the construction carried out by Mr. Mullen, it is now the only remaining building of the original Workhouse complex. In 1955 it became St. Joseph's Secondary School and served the educational needs of the area up to the opening of St. Clare's Comprehensive School in 1972.

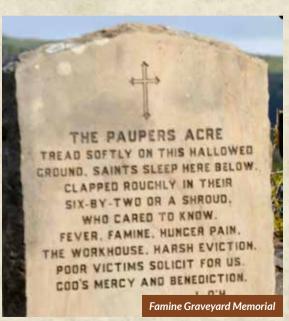
The Famine Graveyard.

At the entrance to the Famine Graveyard is the evocative poem by Lily O Hagan,

'The Paupers Acre

Famine, Fever, Hunger Pain, The Workhouse, Harsh Eviction'

These words bring forcibly to mind the horrors of Famine times. Three



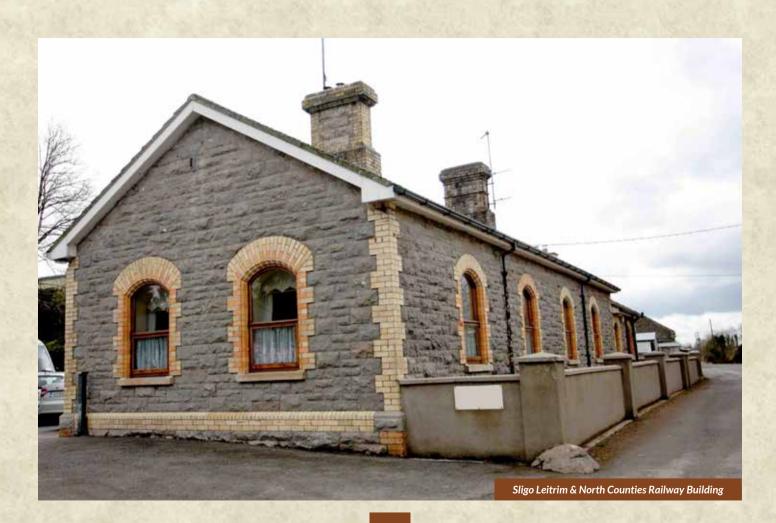
graveyards surrounded Manorhamilton Workhouse, an indication of the high mortality rate among the inmates at that time. In 1987, due to the work of the local ICA, this area opened as a memorial plot in memory of all the Famine victims. A quiet area to the rear of the plot, the Marian Garden, is the resting place of stillborn babies, the little angels of another time.

Leaving the Famine Graveyard memories linger of those who lost their struggle for life through famine and disease. Re-join the Sligo/Enniskillen Road, turn left, walk 300 metres to Manorhamilton Mart, which was once the vibrant hub of Manorhamilton Railway Station



10 The Railway

The Sligo Leitrim & Northern Counties Railway was the brainchild of the influential local landlords of Sligo/Leitrim and it came to fruition through their support, particularly that of Arthur Loftus Tottenham of Glenfarne Hall. The railway was built in stages starting from the Enniskillen end and reached Manorhamilton on December 1st 1880. The first train to cover the entire route from Enniskillen to Sligo did so on November 7th 1882. Like most projects, the final cost of the railway



construction exceeded the initial estimate and went from £300,000 to £346,334. From day one the company had financial difficulties. Despite this, the railway was the lifeblood of the area it serviced and in its heyday 85 of its 135 employees were based in the engineering works in Manorhamilton.

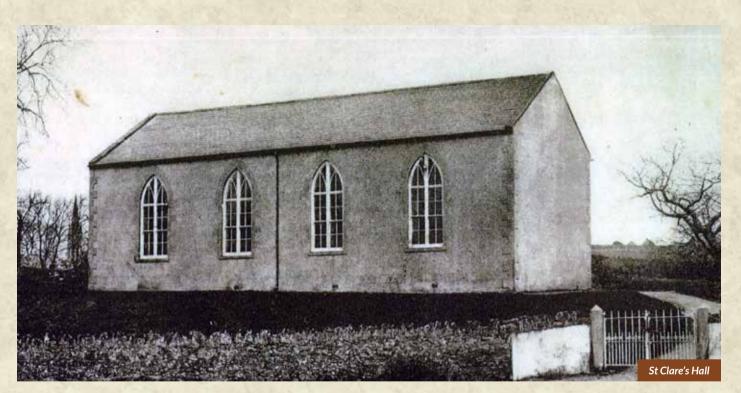
The partition of Ireland in 1921 and the Civil War of 1922/23 posed major difficulties for the railway company. Stories of custom's checks, smuggling, the burning of railway property and the derailment of trains are legion. The battle for survival, bravely fought by this, the last privately owned railway in Ireland, was lost with the closing of the G.N.R. through Enniskillen. The last passenger train, the 7.20 p.m. from Enniskillen to Sligo, made that final journey on September 30th 1957.

Returning towards the town centre take the left-hand fork at the **Station Road roundabout**. On the brow of the hill is the **old primary school**, now in use by the HSE and a little further on the **Technical School** which, after its time as a centre of education, became the army base and is now in private ownership The terrace of houses on the right comprises of St. Clare's Terrace named after the patron saint of the parish and Congress Terrace which dates from the 1932 Eucharistic Congress in Dublin. The little terrace on the opposite side of the road is of an older vintage and dates back to the late 1800's.

On entering Main Street take the first turn on the left into **Ferguson Street**. Before reaching the bottom of the hill, the old **cast iron water pump**, still functional, on the right is another reminder of times past. Continue left over Whitaker's Bridge to **St Clare's Hall**.

1 St Clare's Hall

Built in 1810 by Rev. Francis Maguire P.P., this was the Catholic Church up to the building of the new church in 1883. The lease was granted by Nathaniel Clements, 2nd Earl of Leitrim. Known as the 'kindly Earl', Nathaniel died in 1854 and was succeeded by his son William Sydney. This 3rd Earl is remembered as the 'notorious Lord Leitrim'. On a Sunday morning c.1860 he closed the church, denying the Mass goers entry. However, he was forced, at gunpoint, by John O'Donnell of



Larkfield House, to reverse his decision. Following the opening of the new Catholic Church, St. Clare's functioned as a classical school up to 1912. Thereafter it served as a parish hall and social centre up to 1969.

Immediately after the execution of 1916 signatory, Seán Mac Diarmada, 200 soldiers of the Sherwood Foresters under Captain Jackson, were billeted in St. Clare's Hall on May 13th and 14th 1916. The damage they caused, estimated at £15, became the subject of a report by local M.P. Francis E. Meehan in the British Parliament at Westminster.

Turn back towards the town. The two-storey residence on the corner of the L 6176 was in the early 1900's, the Boys' National School. Crossing over Whitaker's Bridge look out for the plaque on the old building immediately after the white cottage. The plaque bears the name James Conningham and the date 1779. This was once a mill and to its rear was one of Manorhamilton's tanyards. The adjacent building housed the Girls' National School up to 1940. The ruins of the Church of Ireland and its surrounding graveyard occupy the site on the corner of the Commons.

12 Old Protestant Church

This 17th century ruin was once the first Protestant Church in Manorhamilton and it had the distinction of being the second oldest building in town. The little church measured 60 ft. by 18 ft. (18m by 5.4 m) and consisted only of a nave. In the late 1630's Bishop Bedell of Kilmore diocese

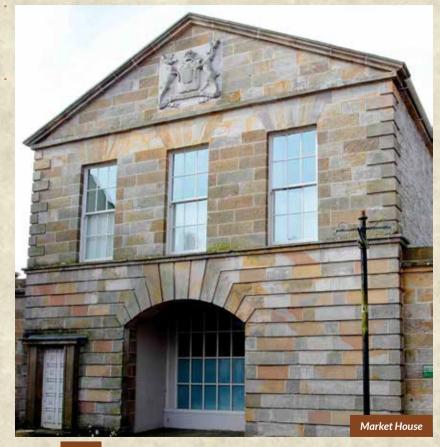


visited his flock in Manorhamilton and plans for the building of the church were most likely drawn up then. It served its worshippers up to the building of the new church in 1783 and the grounds were, thereafter, used for burials

On reaching Main Street turn left. Recessed from the street is the Market House.

13 Market House

The coat-of-arms on the Market House is that of the Clement's family. It was chosen by Robert Clements, 1st Earl of Leitrim in 1795. The Latin inscription. 'Patriis Virtutibus' translates to 'By Ancestral Virtue' and was taken from a poem by Virgil. The Market House was built in 1834 by Nathaniel, 2nd Earl of Leitrim. at a cost of £800. The builder was James Creddan of Enniskillen and the site was one repossessed from a tenant. Andrew Mac Master. Up to 1951 the town clock occupied the highest point on the building but in that year was removed for safety reasons. The 5th and last Earl of Leitrim came to witness the event. Saturday September 28th 1844 saw crowds gather at the Market House to enjoy the first Manorhamilton Agricultural Show.



Across the street the coat of arms on Gilbert's Pharmacy catches the eye.

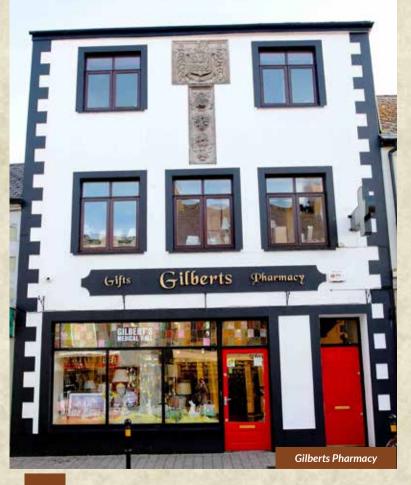
14 Gilbert's Medical Hall

Since its establishment in 1904, Gilbert's Medical Hall has served the pharmaceutical needs of North Leitrim. Its founder was William R.S. Gilbert, a Westport man. The stone plaque on the building bears the coat-of-arms of the O'Neill family, earlier residents on this site, and the initials S.O.N are those of Sarah O'Neill. The motto reads 'Lámh Dhearg Éirin'. 1885 saw the rebuilding of this house following the eviction of a long sitting tenant, Tom Connolly, and his young family.

Further along on the same side of the street we come to the **AIB**

15 A.I.B.

On this site was the thriving drapery business founded by John Dolan c.1880. Due to a major fire in 1891, the present building was constructed. It became a well-known political house. John's son,



Charles Joseph, was elected Irish Parliamentary Party M.P. for North Leitrim in 1906. At that time he was the youngest M P in the House of Commons. His tenure with the I.P.P. was short-lived and he stood, unsuccessfully, for Arthur Griffith's Sinn Féin party in the 1908 election. John Dolan's second son, James Nicholas, was elected Sinn Féin TD for Leitrim in 1918 with the largest majority in the country – 17,000 votes as against his opponent's 3000. In his political life, James N. served not only as a TD but as Leas Ceann Comhairle, Parliamentary Secretary and Chief Whip. The Munster & Leinster Bank bought the Dolan premises from James N.in 1923 and opened for business on December 28th that year.

16 Biddy's Bar

This was originally the home and business premises of Francis E. Meehan who is listed in the trade directories as a wine and spirit merchant and grocer. In olden times a horse and cart journeyed from this premises to Derry to collect the whiskey supplies. Francis F. Meehan was the Irish Parliamentary Party M.P. for North Leitrim from 1908 to 1918 and was the last North Leitrim M.P. to serve at Westminister.



Across the street is the entrance to **Teapot Lane** which opened c1800 to create a shortcut to the flaxmill on the Sligo side of the town. What a folksy name for a street known by other names – Meeting House Lane, Preaching Lane and officially, St. Patrick's Terrace. Notice the **chasse roue** at street level on the corner of the Manor Chemists. Its purpose, in times past, was to protect the building from damage by passing carts. Further along this street stands the town's second Methodist Church.

Old Methodist Church and Masonic Hall

In 1804 the first building on the Lane was the Methodist Church. Built at a cost of £300 it had capacity for 300. The Methodist community worshipped here until a split occurred in the group about 1816. A new church (now the Glens Centre) was built in Wesley Place to facilitate those who wished to follow the teachings and methods of John Wesley. In 1878 the Methodist community re-united and, from then, worshipped in the new church. In 1880 the Teapot Lane church was bought by the Freemasons and their sign, the square and compass, can be seen



over the door. By the mid 1800's six houses had been built opposite the church and in one of these the Minister lived.

On reaching the end of the Lane turn right. The elegant two storey building on the left was, for over a century, the **Church of Ireland Rectory**. On reaching the Sligo Road turn right towards the town.

18 Jaks Casino

The mid 1800's saw the construction of the New Line and Sligo Road. By 1846 the first building had been erected on a plot of land leased from Lord Leitrim and it is now Jak's Casino. It was then The Commercial and Posting House Hotel. Posting houses provided services for stabling and exchanging post horses. The first proprietor of the hotel was Robert Robinson. In the following years it had further owners – John Meehan in 1870, Hannah Berrell c.1900, German hotelier Joseph Jeiter c. 1906 and the present owners, Mc Governs, in 1911

Having reached journey's end, we hope you have enjoyed the experience of following Manorhamilton's Heritage Trail.





Acknowledgements

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