

THE HISTORY OF FENAGH

The Irish for Fenagh is 'Fiodhnach', which means 'The Wooded Place'.

Fenagh History Overview

The first confirmed record of human activity in Fenagh comes from the **Neolithic Period (6500-3300 BCE)**. Fenagh's court, passage and portal tombs (dolmens) are associated with this time.

The standing stones located around Fenagh likely date back to the **Bronze Age (3300-600 BCE)**. The standing stones would have been used to mark burial sites and boundaries. The Dolmen at Fenaghbeg is reported to be the burial place of Conall Gulban, an Irish King who died around 464 BCE.



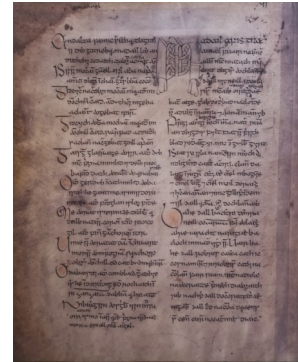
The **Iron Age (600 BCE – 500 CE)** marked the coming of the Celts from central Europe. They brought new languages, cultural practices and art forms to Ireland. Notably, they introduced the use of iron for making tools and weapons.

Christianity was introduced to Ireland in the **Early Medieval Period (500-1169 CE)** by St. Patrick. The Bell & Book of Fenagh are associated with this period.

The **Medieval Period (1170-1600 CE)** saw the establishment of the Abbeys which stand in Fenagh today.

Book of Fenagh & Shrine of St. Caillin

The Book of Fenagh was completed in Fenagh Abbey in 1516 CE. A copy of the book is now kept at the Royal Irish Academy. Consisting of both verse and prose, the Book of Fenagh details of the "life" of St. Caillin, the patron saint of Fenagh. In 2016, Fenagh residents celebrated the 500th anniversary of the Book of Fenagh, and a series of local and national lectures and events were held to commemorate the occasion.



The Shrine of St. Caillin (a decorated book cover used to hold the Book of Fenagh) is believed to have originated around 1536 CE. The Shrine had an inscription declaring that it was made by Brian O'Rourke (King of Bréifne). The



Bréifne territory included the modern Irish counties of Leitrim and Cavan, along with parts of County Sligo. The Shrine was badly damaged in the fire at St. Mel's Cathedral in Longford in 2010 and is undergoing conservation work at the National Museum of Ireland.

Bell of Fenagh (Clog Nā Rí)

The Bell of Fenagh was a hand-bell, which was used in Fenagh Abbey to call the monks to prayer. It was called Clog Nā Rí (King's Bell) because it was said to have been used to baptise kings. For baptisms, the bell was inverted and used to hold Holy Water (it's capacity was 1.5 pints). It remained in possession of the Coarbs of Fenagh Abbey until the 1700s. Unfortunately, it was lost in the fire at St. Mel's Cathedral in 2010.



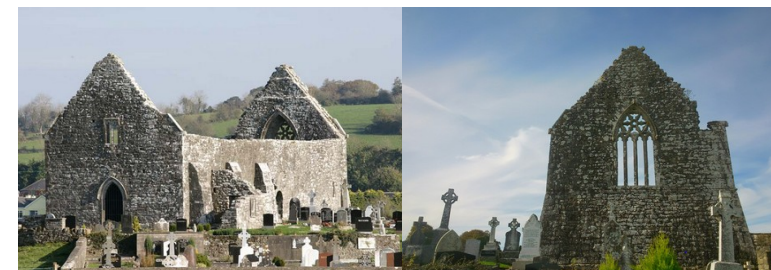
St. Caillin & The Abbeys

St. Caillin, the patron saint of Fenagh, founded a monastic settlement in Fenagh in the 6th Century. Legend has it that an angel was sent to Caillin to show him the site of the Abbey at Fenagh. When Caillin commenced the erection of the monastery, the King of Bréifne did not approve, and sent his son (Aedh Dubh) and warriors to drive Caillin away. Caillin converted Aedh Dubh and his men. Incensed, the King of Bréifne then sent his druids to destroy him, but Caillin turned the druids into stones. It is said that the standing stones of Fenagh are what remains of the druids.

Once the Abbeys were established, St. Caillin became famous as Fenagh was celebrated for its monastic school, which was said to have been visited by St. Patrick. In the Annals of the Four Masters, it is written that the monastery at Fenagh was "Celebrated for its divinity school, which was resorted to by students from every part of Europe." This shows what an important role Fenagh played in Irish and European history.

There are claims that many of Ireland's Kings are buried in the ancient graveyards adjoining the Abbey and the spiritual significance of being buried here lives on to this day. In a prophecy, St. Caillin claimed that anyone buried in Fenagh Abbey graveyard, and in full observance of the true faith, will go straight to heaven on their death. St. Caillin's mortal remains are in a vault attached to the south wall of the Abbey. His feast day is celebrated on November 13th.

Based on their architectural details, it is thought that the two abbeys in Fenagh today date from the 14th – 16th Century CE and were probably built on the site of earlier



churches. The only surviving elements of the early medieval foundation at Fenagh are the earthworks.

It is believed that community life continued in the abbeys until 1652 CE when Cromwellian soldiers almost completely destroyed it. The Abbeys were damaged again by cannon fire during the Williamite wars in 1690. The last service was said in the abbeys in 1729.



*St. Catherine's, Church of Ireland
(Protestant)*

St Catherine's Church was built between 1792 and 1802. The Church is dedicated to St. Catherine, the legendary 4th Century Saint. In the 20th century, the protestant population of Fenagh reduced in size and the church was closed from 1974 until 1988 and fell into disrepair. Thanks to grants from the Heritage Council and the National Lottery, the Church was restored and now is host to Easter Sunday services, Winter Solstice Services and is a picturesque wedding venue.

Priests from St. Catherine's Church would have originally stayed in the Rectory, located next door, which was built in 1827. The Old Rectory now has a new lease of life as a B&B.



Humbert Trail

The Humbert Trail / Tour d'Humbert passes through Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Longford. The route that General Humbert and his troops walked on their epic journey from Killala Bay in County Mayo to the scene of their final battle and defeat in Ballinamuck, County Longford in 1798. The 225 kilometre route runs through Fenagh. General Humbert led a French expeditionary force to help the Irish in their rebellion against British and Government Forces.



Selton Hill Memorial

The Selton Hill Ambush took place on the 11th of March 1921, during the Irish War of Independence. An Irish Republican Army (IRA) flying column was ambushed by members of the RIC Auxiliaries Division at Selton Hill, Gortagh. Six IRA officers of the Leitrim Brigade were killed. A memorial statue stands on Selton Hill (Fenagh to Mohill Road). A Centenary Exhibition took place in 2022.

Fenagh Lake Crannog

From the Humbert Trail, you can see a crannog in Fenagh Lough. A crannog is an ancient fortified dwelling constructed in a lake. Crannogs are usually round or oval in shape and vary enormously in size. They were often approached by a causeway from the mainland affording protection not only from unfriendly neighbours, but also from wild animals. Two bronze swords were recently found in Fenagh Lough.



Fenagh Visitor Centre

The building that is now Fenagh Visitor Centre was first opened as a Temperance Hall on 25 October 1912. It was burned by the Black and Tans in early 1920 and repaired and reopened around 1925. The hall was home to many events over the years, including GAA conventions, drama groups, dances, concerts and 25 card drives. Fenagh Fife and Drum Band held their practices here during the 1940s. It was used as a dance hall from the 1930s to the 1950s. It fell into disrepair and remained neglected and derelict until the early 1990s when it was restored by Fenagh Development Company. It was opened as Fenagh Visitor Centre in 2005 and now offers a Heritage Centre, children's indoor play area, café and meeting rooms.



Fenagh Visitor Centre
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