

The History of Roscommon Castle

- Once upon a time there was an English King, Edward 1, who built a castle in Roscommon. It was in the year 1269.
- The castle he built was beside a lake and a large moat was dug around the castle and filled with water from the lake. It had two gatehouses which contained drawbridges. It also had large gates at the entrance to each gatehouse.
- Many buildings such as barns, mills, stables, granaries and other workshops were found on castle grounds. A lot of activities happened inside the outer walls of the castle.
- Inside the castle walls you would find a kitchen, hall, pantry and buttery, a bake house and lots of store rooms, where food and other supplies were kept. Toilets, called garderobes, were built into the thick castle walls.
- It was very important that the castle was protected from any intruders. A murder hole, an opening in the roof, was put in so the soldiers could drop hot oil on or shoot arrows at attackers.
- The castle also had large walls, arrow loops and gun loops where soldiers could watch for intruders and shoot out to protect the castle.
- The O'Connor family who lived in Co. Roscommon were in control of the area and were very powerful Gaelic Kings in Connacht.
- The O'Connor family enjoyed having a good time and had lots of parties. They enjoyed listening to music. They liked to be entertained by minstrels and bards. They supported harp music especially.
- Both the English and the Irish spent many years fighting over who owned the castle. They had many fights during these years and the castle was burned down many times.
- After many years an English man called Sir Nicholas Malby took control of the castle and made some changes to it.

- He built an L-shaped building into the castle. This L-Shaped building was used for accommodation and it included a gatehouse into it.
- He converted a defensive castle into a luxurious and comfortable house for living in. He replaced the arrow loops with large windows. Big fireplaces with roaring fires kept his house cosy.
- Malby created many gardens around the castle to help transform it into a grand living house. He added an orchard and kitchen garden to supply the house with fruit and vegetables. Stables and workshops were also a part of this new design.
- He filled in most of the moat and used it for a garden and fish pond.
- He made sure that the castle was still protected by keeping the large wall and towers. It was very important that the castle was still defended. Because the fighting continued between the Irish and English.
- Once two mischievous Irish men, O'Connor and Mac Dermott were found guilty of betraying the English King. They began a fight and Roscommon Castle and town was burnt down.
- The castle changed ownership between the Irish and English many more times through many battles.
- Finally after many years a wealthy English family, the Capels were given the title of the Earls of Essex. This family was given ownership of the castle but they decided not live in it. They lived in England so the castle fell slowly into ruins.
- Today the castle is in ruins but is still one of the largest buildings in County Roscommon and even in Ireland. It has one of the largest gatehouses in Ireland. Some of the stones from the castle were used to build the Old Jail (Stonecourt) in Roscommon Town.

The O'Connor Family

- There are O'Connor families all over Ireland. The O'Connor's in Co. Roscommon get their name from Conchobah, a King of Connacht who died in the year 971.
- In the O'Connor family there were 11 High Kings of Ireland and 26 Kings of Connacht since the time of Christ. Turlough Mor O'Connor was High King of Ireland in the year 1119.
- His son, Roderic (or Rory) was High King after him. Rory was the last of the Irish High Kings. He died in the year 1198, before Roscommon Castle was built. Turlough and Rory are both buried in Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly.
- Hugh O'Connor was King of Connacht when Roscommon Castle was built. He attacked the castle many times and the O'Conors held control of the castle for over 200 years.
- Clonalis House in Castlerea is the family home of the O'Conors.
- The O'Conors kept their Catholic faith and stayed at Clonalis all through the Penal Laws, when other Gaelic families left Ireland.
- Clonalis is the only house open to visitors that is old Irish, unlike Strokestown Park House, for example, whose family came after the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland.

Design a Coat of Arms

The O'Connor Coat of Arms



The sword stands for justice and military honour.

The arm, wearing armour, stands for a person fit for leadership and high deeds.

The helmet stands for wise defence and security.

The tree, an Oak tree, stands for antiquity and strength. The Oak tree was the most noble of the Chieftain trees.

The lions stand for courage.

The crowns stand for the O'Conors, Kings of Connacht and their association with Rathcroghan.

The harps stand for Ireland.

The green colouring stands for hope and loyalty in love.

The shamrock stands for time without end, eternity.

The motto 'Ó Dia gach cúcabrach' means from God every help.

The County Roscommon Coat of Arms



The Blue background stands for truth and loyalty.

The Sheep's head stands for the long tradition of sheep farming in the county.

The Crown stands for Rathcroghan and the association of the O'Connor's, Kings of Connacht, with the county.

The Oak Leaf with acorns stands for growth and continuous fertility. It also represents Douglas Hyde, first president of Ireland, born in Co. Roscommon. He wrote under the pen name of 'An Croabhin Aoibhinn', which means little oak.

The Green in the triangle represents 'Ros' meaning wood, from Ros Comain - the Irish name for Roscommon, which means the wood of St. Coman.

The Gold Cross stands for the Abbeys in Roscommon, St. Coman and the Cross of Cong, which was made for High King Turlough Mor O'Connor in 1123.

The words 'Constans Hiberniae Cor' are latin and they mean *Irish, steady, firm, unchanging, constant and unwavering.*

Plan of Roscommon Castle

