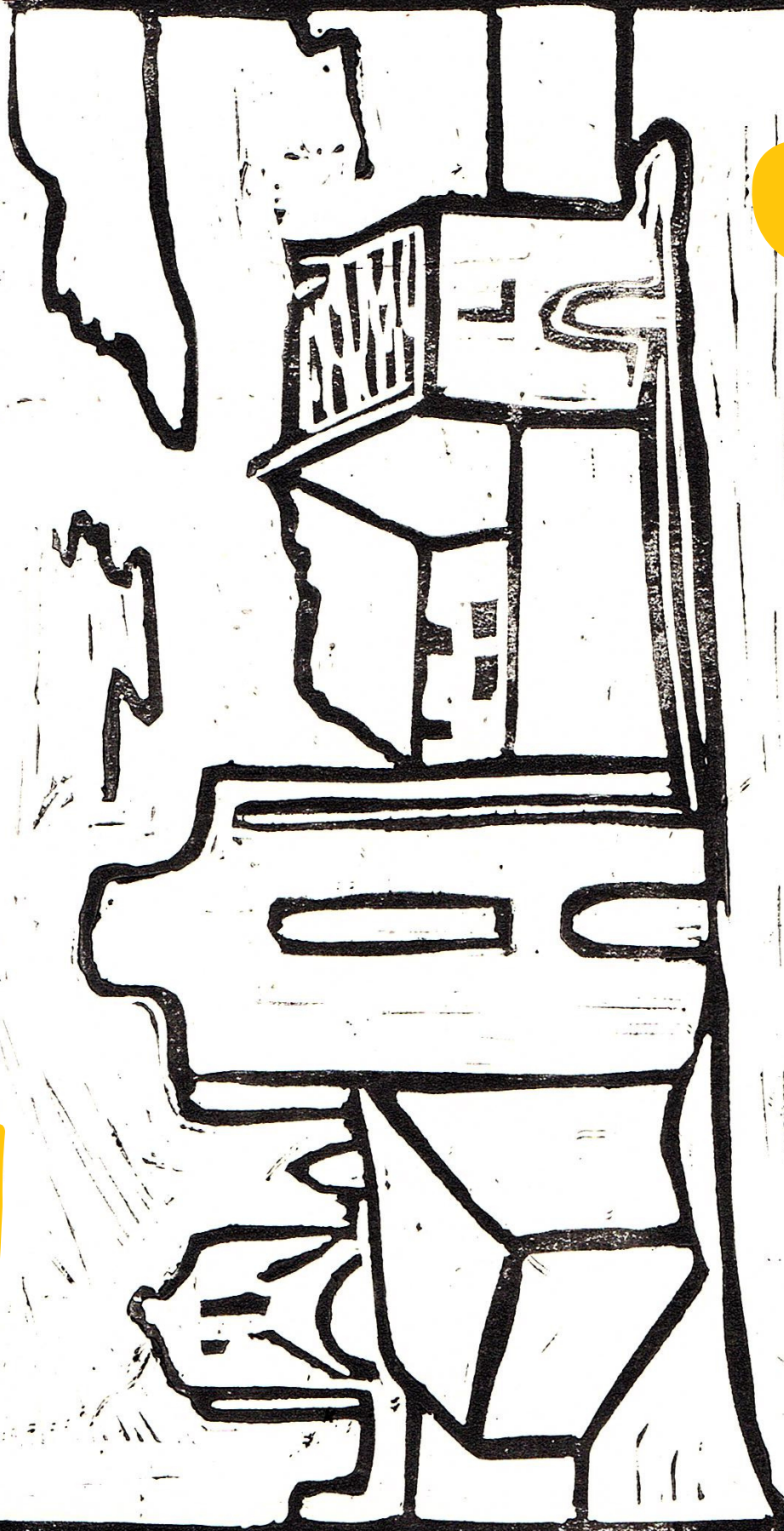


Boyle Abbey



The first successful Cistercian Abbey in Connacht was founded in 1161 on the banks of the Boyle River, where the monks lived their self-sufficient way of life,

Where the Boyle River flows near the town of that name,
For four hundred years the monks made their home



Boyle Abbey

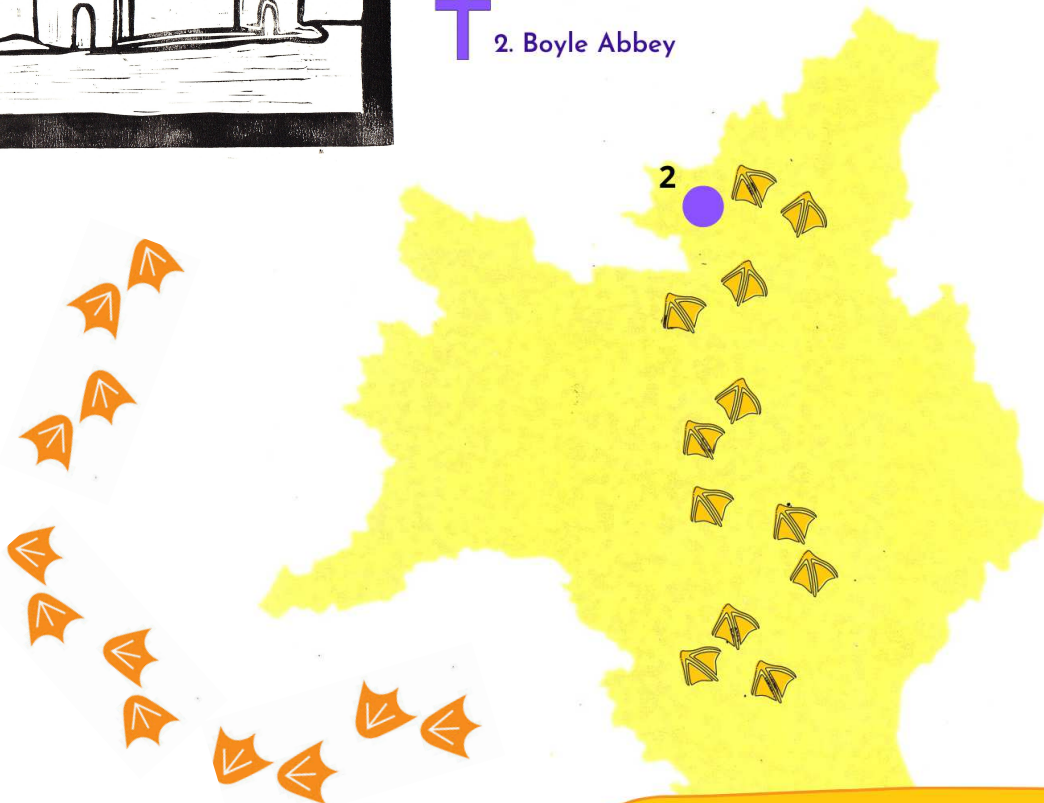
The first successful Cistercian Abbey in Connacht was founded in 1161 on the banks of the Boyle River, where the monks lived their self-sufficient way of life, and the monastery became a famous centre of learning for more than 400 years. Military occupations eventually destroyed the abbey which lay in ruins for centuries. A major restoration was completed in 2011, conserving much of its magnificent architecture and creating a superb example of an early Irish Cistercian church.



Boyle Abbey

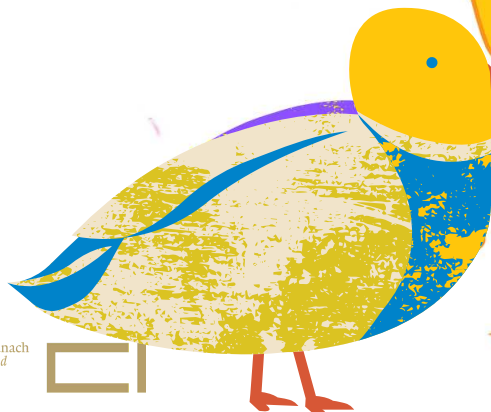


2. Boyle Abbey

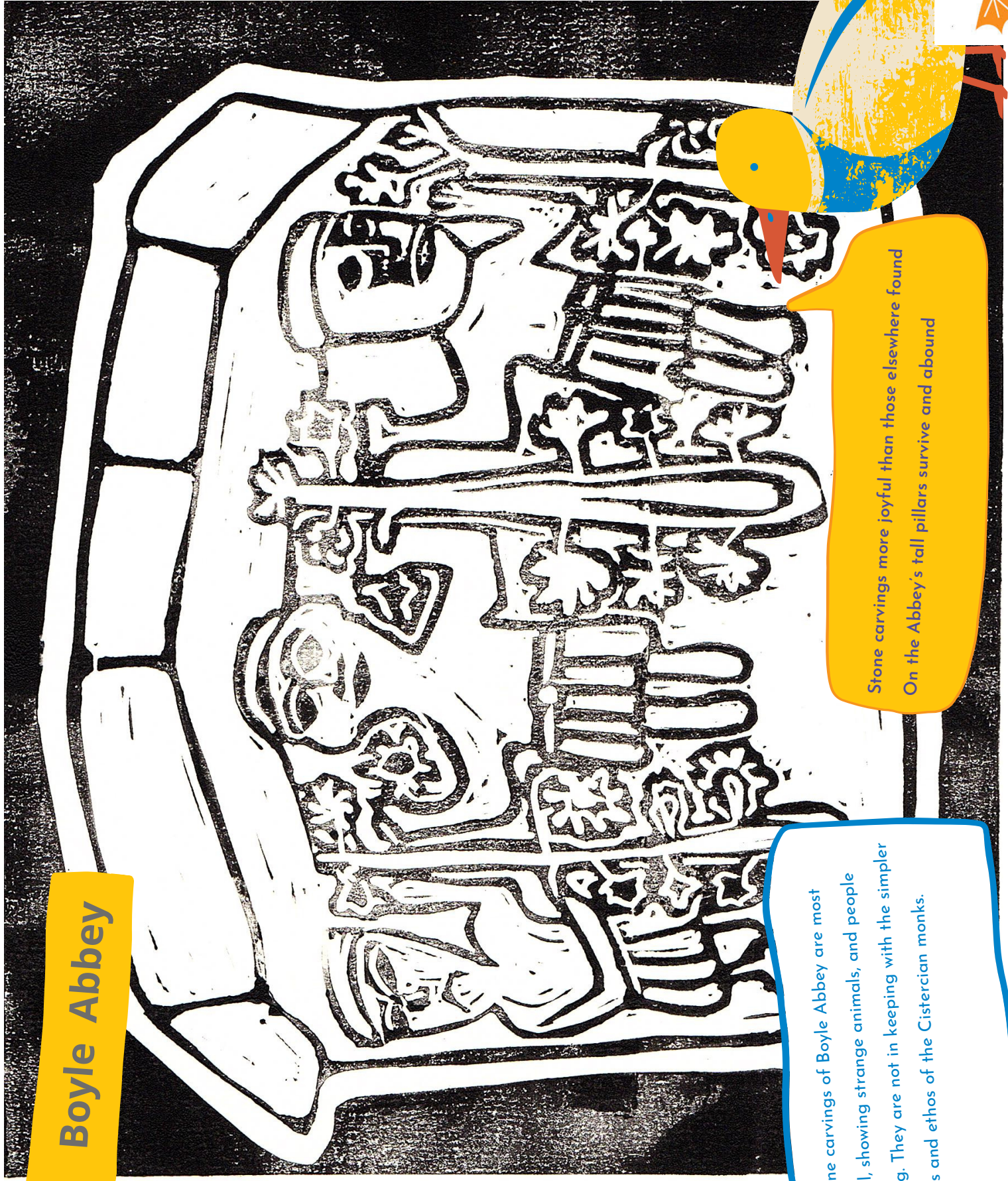


Boyle Abbey

Where the Boyle River flows near the town of that name,
For four hundred years the monks made their home
They taught and they farmed and fished and milled grain,
At their famed place of learning until Cromwell came.



Boyle Abbey



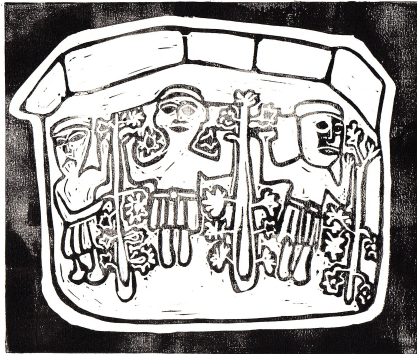
The stone carvings of Boyle Abbey are most unusual, showing strange animals, and people dancing. They are not in keeping with the simpler designs and ethos of the Cistercian monks.

Stone carvings more joyful than those elsewhere found
On the Abbey's tall pillars survive and abound



Boyle Abbey Stone Carvings

The stone carvings of Boyle Abbey are most unusual, showing strange animals, and people dancing. They are not in keeping with the simpler designs and ethos of the Cistercian monks. Architect Paul McMahon describes their style as “the Architectural School of the West”, as they occur in several abbeys west of the Shannon, and are much more elaborate than the plainer styles of architecture seen in most Cistercian settlements in Ireland, Britain and France.



Boyle Abbey



2. Boyle Abbey (Stone Carvings)



The Stone Carvings at Boyle Abbey

Stone carvings more joyful than those elsewhere found
On the Abbey's tall pillars survive and abound
Despite sieges and armies who plundered and ruined,
These jewels of carved stone adornment endure.



Boyle Abbey

In the mid-12th century, Cistercian monks were invited to come to Ireland from France. Their mission was to build monasteries and to try to reform the Irish church which had fallen away from its Christian roots. Although they founded their first abbey in Mellifont, Co. Louth, and many other abbeys across Ireland, the Cistercians had found it difficult to settle in Connacht. With the patronage of ruling families in the region, including the McDermots, Boyle would become their first successful foundation in Connacht.

The building of Boyle Abbey began in the year 1161 on the banks of the Boyle River. The monks chose this location to support their self-sufficient way of life, and out of respect to some existing religious structures that were on the land. By tradition the Cistercian monks were farmers and fishers and millers of grain, so the river was vital to them. In 1161, they began work on Boyle Abbey, which was consecrated in the year 1220. For more than 400 years, the monastery was a renowned seat of learning. The monks were, however, driven out of the monastery in the 17th and 18th centuries, when it was converted into a military barracks.

The worst of these attacks happened during Oliver Cromwell's invasion of Ireland, when the monks were put to death, a military garrison set up, and the abbey destroyed. Villagers were unable to restore the structure, which continued to decay for centuries. Evidence of that destruction can still be seen, but a long painstaking restoration of the abbey was carried out over several years, using traditional tools and methods, and completed in 2011, creating one of the most impressive examples in Ireland of an early Cistercian church. Stone carvings and ornamentation on the pillars with strange animals and people dancing are an unusual feature, not usually associated with this type of abbey. They showed a more joyful side of the Irish spirit, which retained links to its pagan and Celtic roots and festival.

Today, Boyle Abbey can be seen and experienced in the finely preserved historic abbey buildings that remain, and in the preserved artefacts held in the 16th century restored gatehouse.

