Lough Key

Still standing there majestic, a Gothic masterpiece,
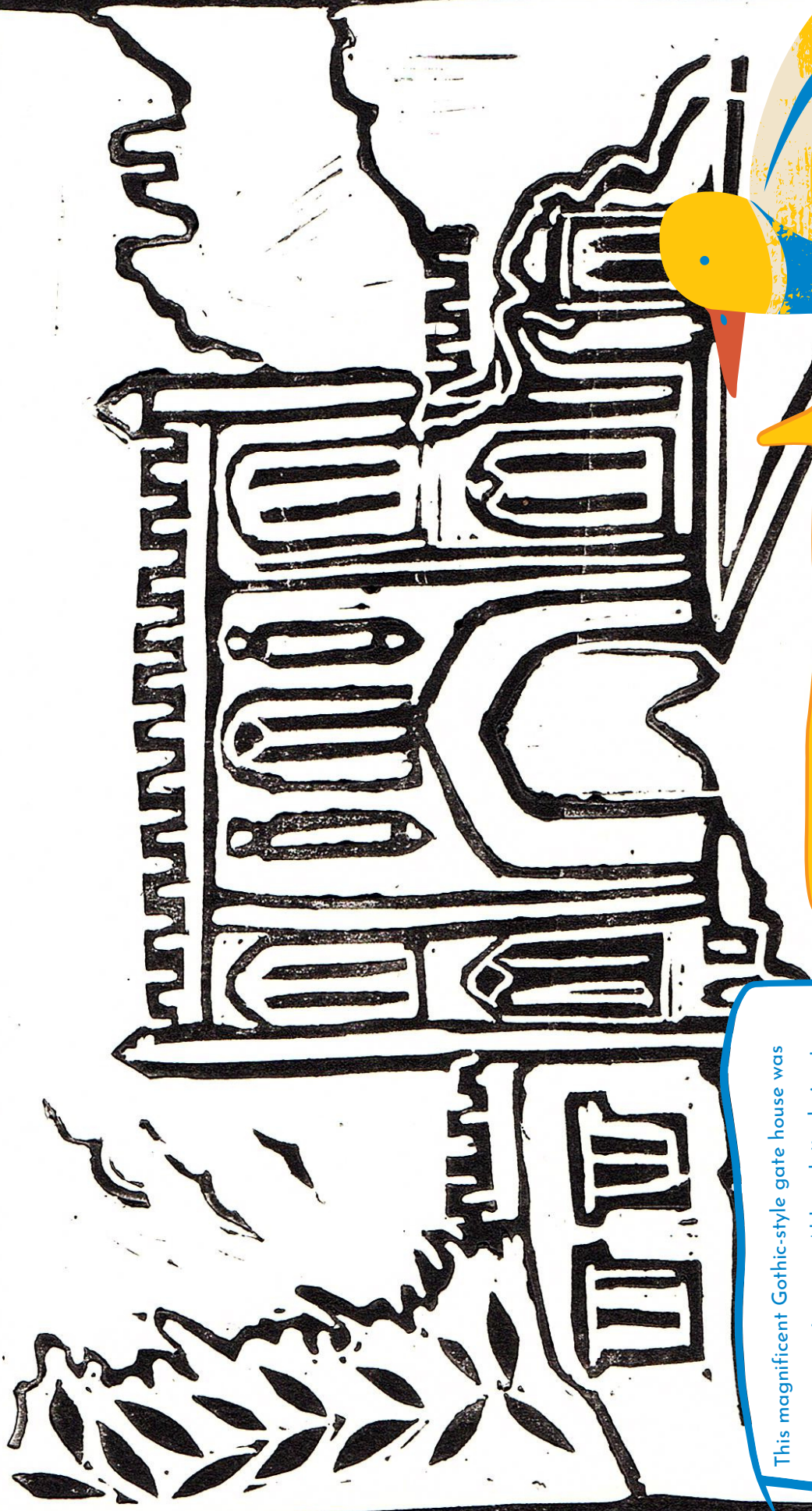Intricate window panes all gone, its life as a gate-lodge ceased,

This magnificent Gothic-style gate house was built in the early 1800s. Although its design is credited to architect John Nash or his draftsman Humphrey Repton, the gate house is not like any other buildings on the Rockingham Estate.

Rockingham Gate House at Lough Key Forest Park

This magnificent Gothic-style gate house was built in the early 1800s. Although its design is credited to architect John Nash or his draftsman Humphrey Repton, the gate house is not like any other buildings on the Rockingham Estate. Every inch of the limestone has been punch dressed, (a form of chiselled stone design). This can be seen from the plinths at the base of the gate house up to the highest parapet, and includes the beautiful vaulted ceiling of the archway through which carriages passed, and the bollards guarding each side of the roadway leading up to the entrance.

Lough Key

1. Lough Key (Gate House)

1

The Gate House at Lough Key

Still standing there majestic, a Gothic masterpiece,
Intricate window panes all gone, its life as a gate-lodge ceased,
And yet its structure still suggests a portal to promise and wonder,
Through its hand-carved limestone arch that time can't pull asunder.

Lough Key

Where a turreted tower throws its gaze across water
The kingdom of Moylurg meets the shores of Lough Key

This very appealing structure was built in the
1830s. It is known by several names.
On the tourist map of Lough Key Forest Park
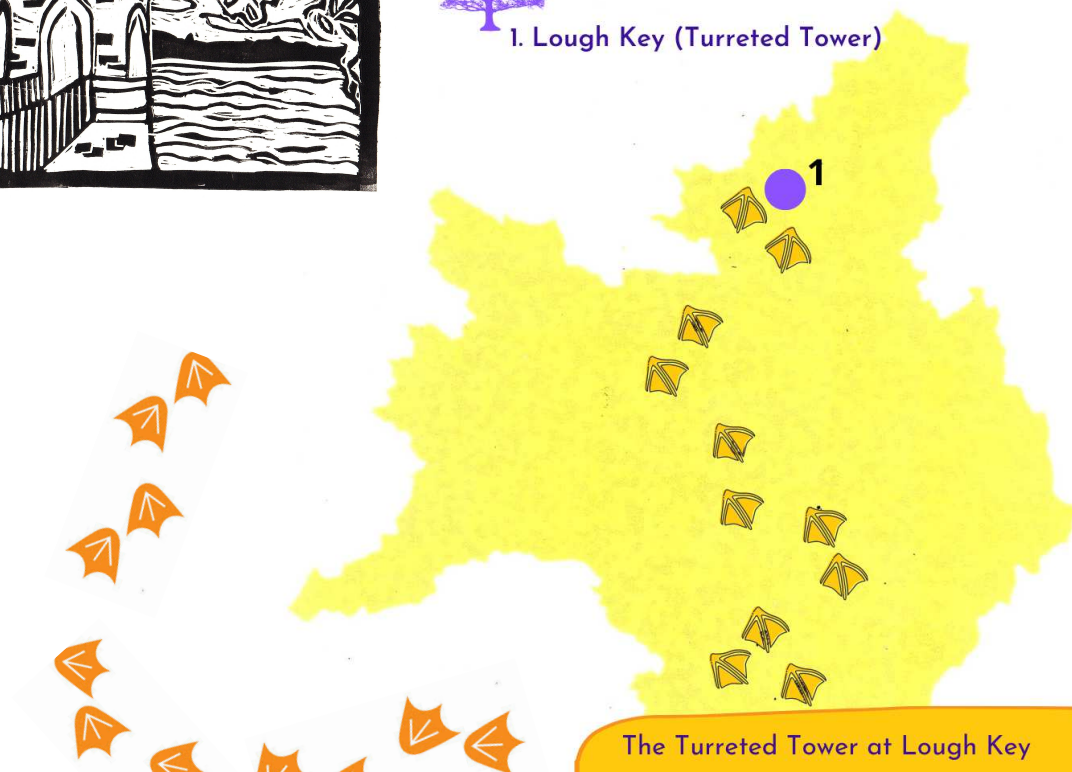it is marked as "Temple".

The Turret on the Lake's Edge at Forest Park

This very appealing structure was built in the 1830s. It is known by several names. On the tourist map of Lough Key Forest Park it is marked as "Temple". Other names include the Fishing House, the Fishing Temple, and the Gazebo. Crossing a wooden footbridge, we reach the circular turreted tower which sits high above the lake edge, its arched windows opening on to the water. As in a fairy tale, the windows of this little fishing temple look directly across the lake to Castle Island, where the original home of the McDermot clan still stands.
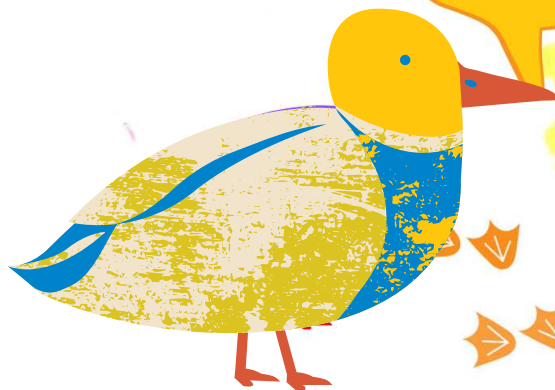
Lough Key

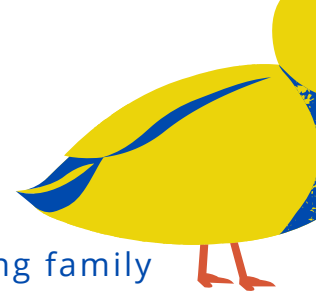1. Lough Key (Turreted Tower)

1

The Turreted Tower at Lough Key

Where a turreted tower throws its gaze across water
The kingdom of Moylurg meets the shores of Lough Key
A fishing house folly built as an ornament
At this place, the heartland of MacDermot Chiefs

The Turret on the Lake's Edge at Forest Park

Lough Key Forest Park was formerly known as Rockingham, the King family estate since Cromwell's time. The original name of this area of great natural beauty was Moylurg, the homeland of the MacDermots who ruled this region until then. The turreted gazebo we write about here had a direct view across the lake to the MacDermot castle on Castle Island.

The landscaping of Rockingham was originally designed by John Sutherland. In the 1830s several Follies were added to the architecture of the demesne. Follies were buildings designed by architects and landscapers of that era, mainly as decorative features. Information about Rockingham's turret on the lake's edge was very hard to find. In her book "Rockingham, A Little Guide to the Big House", Tríona Mullaney-Dignam writes:
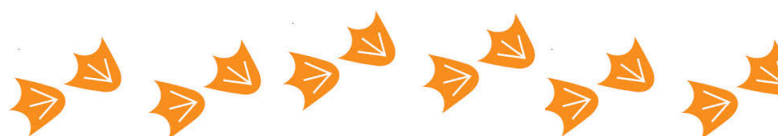
"Inside the demesne a number of follies were added to the landscape in various places. These included the estate chapel in 1836, a fishing temple or gazebo, a castle-styled hunting lodge called Cloontykilla Castle in 1839, and the rebuilding of the old MacDermot Castle on Castle Island".

The perfect Turret that was built high over the waters of Lough Key in Forest Park is marked on the park's tourist map as "Temple". Fishing temples were a feature on many English estates, sometimes used for shelter or for dining. Locals know this structure as 'the Gazebo' or the 'Fishing House'. Tríona Mullaney-Dignam refers to it above as fishing temple or gazebo'. As an authority on Rockingham, Tríona suggested that the ladies of Rockingham may have used the Turret for resting in the afternoons while enjoying the lovely views over the lake. She suggests they may also have used it for fishing. The image of ladies fishing elegantly from the windows lends itself really well to the imagination!

And lend itself to the imagination it does, as when Tríona overheard some little girls call it a 'Princess Castle' !

All of this seems to bring this particular piece of history right into the present. Unlike the other more ancient and serious sites, it is known by several names. Your family may even have a name of its own for it…. We can probably agree on one of the dictionary definitions of "Temple" - a place devoted to a special purpose.

Rockingham Gate House at Lough Key Forest Park

Rockingham Demesne was originally known as Moylurg, the seat of the local McDermot ruling clan, whose castle stands on Castle Island.
The magnificent Gothic-style Rockingham entrance gate is thought to have been designed by John Nash. John Nash was one of the most influential architects of the 18th and 19th centuries. He was the personal architect of King George IV of England. The King Family of Boyle commissioned him to design a new mansion on the shores of Lough Key at Rockingham estate. John Sutherland, a very famous landscape architect of the time, is credited with the design of many of Rockingham's lodges, in or around 1810. Some of the follies and lodges completed after his death may have also been his original designs.

The Gate Lodge is not like any other buildings on the estate. This building, with its crenellated parapet and limestone dressings differs hugely from the other more classically designed lodges associated with the demesne. The Tiara gate lodge on the N4 route is an example of a contrasting style. A notable feature of the fine stonework is the extensive use of punched limestone dressing. Every inch of the limestone dressing has been punch dressed from the plinth at the base through to the highest parapet, including the vaulted ceiling of the carriage arch and the bollards which line the roadway.

Rockingham House was twice destroyed by fire. The first fire, in April, 1863, destroyed the interior of the house and its family records. It was, however, rebuilt and "restored to its former splendour" two years later. (Tríona Mullaney-Dignam in "Rockingham" A Little Guide to the Big House).

After major modernisation took place in the early 1950s, a second fire in 1957 once again completely destroyed the house, and it was sold in 1959 to the Irish State. The remaining walls of the house were demolished in 1971. The disappearance of much of the historical architecture of Rockingham gives extra importance to the original gate houses, a living testament to the beauty and craftsmanship of cut stone.

Though its windows have been broken and it stands dilapidated today, this beautiful entrance gate still sends out a strong sense of entering or leaving something special – going somewhere or having been somewhere of significance!