The Walled Town Crier

An Irish Walled Towns Network bi-monthly magazine.

The IWTN is funded through

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council

A scene from 'Checkmate!': an epic live chess battle between the Connaught and Leinster sides of Athlone, which took place during Heritage Week.
Image: Athlone Arts & Tourism.

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Hello everyone and welcome to the October 2026 edition of the Walled Town Crier.

Since our last issue went out, we've had Heritage Week, September events, our annual conference and we're already into grants drawdown season. Time is flying!

This month we're introducing a new series: IWTN People. It will focus on the people who make up the Irish Walled Towns Network and the work that they do. Leading by example, we kick off the series with the current Chair of our Management Committee, Mr. Paul Moynihan.

We also have an extract from our new booklet *Irish Walled Towns Network 2005-2026: Highlights from the first 21 years*, which was launched at the recent IWTN Annual Conference in Waterford. It was great to catch up with so many of you on the day.

And, of course, there's our usual round up of news and updates from within and without the network.

Warmest Regards,
Eimear
Eimear O'Connell,
IWTN Project Manager

Limerick's Dancing the Walls of Limerick Festival continues to go from strength to strength, bringing a spirit of community celebration to Old Clare Street and Johnsgate village. Image: Limerick City & County Council.

IWTN People: Paul Moynihan

Paul Moynihan speaking at the IWTN Annual Conference 2026.
Image: Browne's Photography.

Introducing the Chair of the Irish Walled Towns Network.

As readers will know, the IWTN is governed by a Management Committee, which includes representatives from the Heritage Council; the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities, Northern Ireland; Fáilte Ireland; and representatives of four member towns, at least one of which must be in Northern Ireland. The Chair of the Management Committee is appointed by the Heritage Council for a term of 2 years and may serve 2 consecutive terms.

Our current chairperson is Mr. Paul Moynihan, who formally took up his role at the IWTN AGM 2026 earlier this year. I asked Paul a couple of questions about his own professional background and how he got involved with the Irish Walled Towns Network.

You recently retired after a long career in local government. What sparked your interest in heritage? And how did that lead you to the IWTN?

After 43 years working in Local Government, I finally decided to retire in August last year, with every intention of doing as little as possible. So, when the request came in the following weeks to take over the chairmanship of the Irish Walled Towns Network it represented something of a contradiction with my intentions.

With the then Mayor of Drogheda Borough District Cllr. Michelle Hall at the IWTN AGM 2026. Image: Jenny Callanan.

I worked the majority of my career with Cork City Council and served as Director of Services for 10 years, the huge bulk of that time in the Corporate Affairs Directorate. Council meetings, Data Protection, FOI, property and facilities management were some of the functions in my remit, functions that many might not find to be overly exciting. But it was my involvement in the Decade of Commemorations Programme that both sparked an interest in heritage and genuinely gave me such great satisfaction.

The journey to this country's independence was truly an epic one and Cork played a huge part in that struggle. For me therefore, it was hugely important that key events and happenings would be marked, respected and celebrated in an inclusive programme that commemorated the turbulent and transformative time that led to the foundation of the modern Irish state. And whilst acknowledging the work and professionalism of the historians and acknowledged experts in the field, for me it was the creativity, passion and active participation of communities that made the Commemorations Programme accessible and relevant to the ordinary citizen.

The Commemorations Programme clearly illustrated for me that interest and curiosity in our history is not confined to a finite group of professionals and experts. Rather, having that group facilitate and feed the public interest and curiosity in creative (and often eclectic) local interpretation serves to increase appreciation and ownership of our heritage and can be surprisingly impactful. This was a parallel that I saw when the possibility of involvement with the IWTN came about.

What do you see as the value of the IWTN? What contribution can it make?

We have recently launched a new booklet celebrating 21 years of the Irish Walled Towns Network. That collection of projects – from conservation, to community engagement, to research, training, interpretation and more – really illustrates how much the network has achieved since its foundation, and the breadth of projects it supports.

The need to protect and preserve our heritage is a must. Delivering on that requires both commitment and expertise and we are blessed within the Network in this regard. Resourcing is also essential and the reality will always be

that the case for heritage funding will compete along with services like health, housing, policing, etc.

I said in my foreword to the booklet that it is the people involved who make the network such a success, and that continues to be true. Local authority archaeologists, heritage officers, architectural conservation officers and other local authority personnel; members of the management committee; members of community organisations; all give generously of their time and experience to help make the places in which they live and work better for everyone. Their efforts have built, and continue to build, enormous appreciation and goodwill towards our shared urban heritage – increasing awareness of its value and broadening community participation in its celebration and protection.

Public appreciation and prioritisation of our history and heritage will always be critical to ensure that a strong political commitment is maintained to support heritage amidst a myriad of competing demands. In this regard, building on the goodwill that the has already been established, and continuing to interpret and communicate the value of our heritage will be an essential element of work for the Network going forward. Telling our stories, celebrating our projects and sharing our experiences will continue to be important means of doing this.

Thanks, Paul. We're looking forward to profiling some more of the people who make the IWTN what it is over the coming issues.

With Ian Doyle, Eimear O'Connell & Rose Ryall, launching the new IWTN booklet 'Highlights from the first 21 years'. Image: Browne's Photography.

IWTN 2005-2026: Highlights from the first 21 years

At the Irish Walled Towns Network's annual conference in Waterford recently, we were delighted to launch our new booklet showcasing highlights from the network's first 21 years.

The booklet brings together 33 individual projects, one for each of our member towns, across the full spectrum of activities that the network supports. There's everything from conservation works to plans and studies; festivals and events; interpretation, both physical and digital; training; community engagement; research; knowledge exchange; and more. We've chosen four of the featured projects below to give you a flavour of what the publication contains.

Athenry Town Wall. Image: Irish Walled Towns Network.

Athenry, County Galway

CONSERVATION WORKS TO ATHENRY TOWN WALLS

Through its annual Conservation/Capital Projects grants scheme, the Irish Walled Towns Network funds conservation works to surviving sections of town wall in our member towns. The fourteenth-century town walls of Athenry are of exceptional archaeological and architectural interest and are among the best-preserved medieval town walls surviving in Ireland. The town retains almost 1.5 kilometres of the original wall, which once extended to 2.5 kilometres in length, and its defensive towers are some of the most important landmarks in the town. The town wall is one of a number of significant medieval structures still standing in Athenry. Since 2008, Galway County Council has undertaken an annual conservation works programme to Athenry's town walls, supported by the Heritage Council through the Irish Walled Towns Network. In 2020, this work was awarded Best Heritage Project at the All-Ireland Community and Council Awards.

Carrickfergus, County Antrim

CHARTING THE CHANGES AT CARRICKFERGUS MUSEUM

In 2018, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council worked with Carrickfergus Men's Shed to produce a series of 3D models of Carrickfergus, based on historical mapping. The Charting the Changes models were designed to be

Model making workshop in progress. Image: Carrickfergus Museums.

Aboard the AK Ilen. Image: Abarta Heritage.

Youghal Medieval Festival. Image: Matt Brooker Photography.

used for educational purposes, both within school workshops and as part of museum exhibitions. Thanks to the rich cartographic sources available for Carrickfergus, it was possible to produce three models, focusing on the town within the walls: the first model shows the town in the 1560s, the second in the 1600s and the third in the 1800s. The project was led by the Carrickfergus Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI), a joint funding project by Heritage Lottery Fund and Mid and East Antrim Borough Council. Support was also provided by Carrickfergus Museum. The fact that the models were produced in Carrickfergus by members of the Men's Shed generated a great sense of community interest and community ownership of the project.

New Ross, County Wexford

AK ILEN FLAG EXCHANGE

In August 2020 the Ilen, a 56ft wooden trading ketch, sailed upriver from Waterford to New Ross with a delegation from Waterford City & County Council on board and bearing an Irish Walled Towns Network flag. This event was part of the Kingship project, a series of voyages between coastal walled towns, in collaboration with Ilen Marine School. These voyages highlighted the historic trading links between coastal towns. Over the course of 2020, the Ilen – sailing from her home port of Limerick City - visited Galway, Kinsale, Waterford and New Ross, exchanging Irish Walled Towns Network flags in each location.

After the New Ross exchange, the flag was raised outside the Dunbrody Famine Ship Visitor Centre and Wexford County Councillors took the opportunity to join the return journey downriver to Waterford. View a short video from the day HERE.

Youghal, County Cork

YOUGHAL MEDIEVAL FESTIVAL

No round-up of Irish Walled Towns Network highlights would be complete without Youghal Medieval Festival. Now in its nineteenth year, this one day festival is a true community effort. It regularly attracts 10-12,000 visitors, and a visitor survey carried out in 2023 calculated that the one-day event generates a return of over €860k to the local economy. The same survey found a very high visitor satisfaction rate, with 98% of those interviewed saying that they would come back the following year. There was also very positive feedback on the sustainability and waste-reduction measures put in place by the festival's organisers, Living Youghal and Cork County Council. From battle re-enactments, to incredible costumes and the chance to experience medieval village living, the festival is a colourful celebration of the medieval heritage of Youghal town.

You can download the full document or read online HERE.

We're immensely proud of all that the network has achieved over its first 21 years, and we're looking forward to the next 21!

News and Updates

IWTN Annual Conference 2026

A great day out was had by all at the IWTN annual conference 2026, which took place in Waterford on 22 September last. The theme this year was 'Animating Our Historic Towns' and our hosts were Waterford City & County Council and Waterford Treasures Museums. We were also treated to a walking tour around sites on Waterford's medieval walled circuit, led by archaeologist Dave Pollock.

Visiting sites on Waterford's walled circuit. Image: Eimear O'Connell.

Attendees at the conference in Waterford's Medieval Museum. Image: Browne's Photography.

Award winners at last year's ceremony. Image: The Heritage Council.

Finalists announced for National Heritage Week Awards 2026

Finalists have been announced across seven award categories for the National Heritage Week Awards 2026, each representing an outstanding contribution to Ireland's heritage.

The winners of all categories will be unveiled at the National Heritage Week Awards ceremony on **29 October 2026**. More details via heritageweek.ie.

Community Monuments Fund 2027

The Community Monuments Fund for 2027 is now open for applications.

The fund aims to help owners and custodians to conserve, maintain, protect and promote local archaeological monuments and historic sites. 120 sites are expected to benefit in 2027. Read more about the fund and how to apply HERE.

Kilpipe Church, Co. Wicklow. Image: National Monuments Service

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Toil and Trouble

Kilkenny's Toil and Trouble festival is back for 2026. We profiled the inaugural festival, commemorating the 700th anniversary of the Kilkenny witch trials, in 2024. It has now become an annual event and continues to go from strength to strength. For more details.

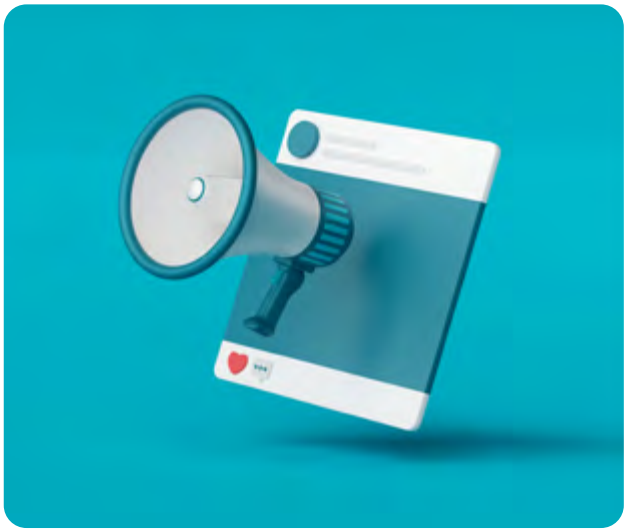
More Irish than the Irish themselves?

Tipperary Museum of Hidden History's annual lecture series runs from 7th November 2026 to 3rd April 2027. This year's theme is the arrival of the Anglo-Normans (also known as the English!) to Ireland in the 12th century. There's a great line up of speakers. For more details.

Festivals and Events in Member Towns

We had some fantastic festivals and events in member towns over the summer season, with record attendance at many of them – helped by the good weather. Huge congratulations to all of the organisers. The last IWTN-funded event of the season was the Seán Corcoran Series Arts and Heritage Day in Drogheda on 6 September, where a Cake Dance led by Edwina Guckian was a highlight of the programme.

The cake in question. Image: Eimear O'Connell



Social Media

Thanks to everyone as always for sending on social media content. Please continue to use the hashtag **#IWTN** on all network-related posts and to tag the relevant Heritage Council account:

@HeritageHubIRE

TheHeritageCouncil

@theheritagecouncil

Walking Tour of Kells ACA during Heritage Week. Image: Meath County Council.

Contact Us:

Please do get in touch at
iwtn@heritagecouncil.ie
if you would like us to promote news or projects happening in your walled town over the coming months.

www.irishwalledtownsnetwork.ie

The IWTN is funded by the Heritage Council and delivered in partnership with Local Authorities and community groups.

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council