

A thick, pink dashed line forms a large, irregular arc that starts in the top left, curves around the top right, and then descends towards the bottom center, framing the title and the castle illustration.

Swords Tidy Towns **Heritage Trail**



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ST COLMCILLE'S WELL

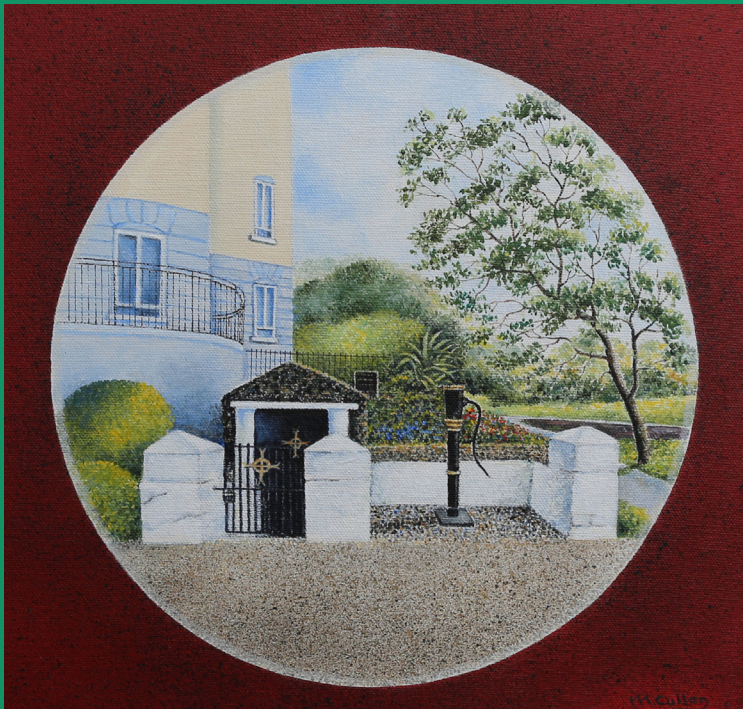
Who was St Colmcille and why is he such an important figure in our local history?

St Colmcille was born in Gartan in Donegal in AD 521 into the influential O'Neill family. In his youth he was sent to study at several monasteries, and later became ordained.

He became so passionate about spreading Christianity throughout the land, that he turned his back on a life of privilege. Because of his devotion to the faith, he became known by the Latin name St Columba (dove) or as St Colmcille (dove of the church). He founded many monastic settlements in Ireland.

One of these was at Kells where the famous illuminated text "The Book of Kells" was produced. He became the patron saint of the city of Derry because he founded his first monastery there in AD 546. Later he travelled to Scotland and established further monastic settlements, the most famous of which was on the island of Iona. It was there that he died on June 9, AD 597.

This date has become his feast day. Along with St Patrick and St Brigid, he is one of our three national saints.



Original painting by Matt Cullen

The area now known as Swords is said to have derived its name from the Irish word "Sord" from the clear waters blessed by St Colmcille in AD 560. This well had been an important source of water for the area before his time, and remained so until recent times. However, after his blessing many were said to have been cured of their ailments, particularly those with sore or afflicted eyes.

In 1991/1992, Swords Historical Society restored and re-dedicated St Colmcille's Well, and has maintained it since then. In 2015, Swords Tidy Towns decided to enhance the area around it by planting flowers. We have a flower bed next to this monument, which we maintain. We have also installed two benches and another flower bed in front of it. Fingal County Council provided 50% of our funding for this project.



Photo by George Mongey, 2019.

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THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE

The Old Schoolhouse restaurant/pub was the site of the first junior school for the town. Children up to 7 years old attended it before going on to The Old Borough on Main Street, which was built for the poor children of Swords and its surrounding area.



Old Schoolhouse (1980s) Photo by Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin



STT at work (2018)



ST COLUMBA'S CHURCH AND TOWERS

Standing in the grounds of St Columba's Church of Ireland is a round tower, which can be seen from Swords castle. This 10th century tower is the only remaining upstanding feature of St Colmcille's monastic settlement, which he founded in the 6th century on a high ridge near the River Ward.

ST COLUMBA'S CHURCH OF IRELAND

After the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII in the 16th century, the monks were forced to abandon their ancient way of life at Swords monastery, and leave the abbey church to decay. By 1791 it had fallen into ruin.

The Georgian Church of St Columba was built on the foundation of the old abbey church in 1811. It was designed by Francis Johnston, who was also the architect of the General Post Office in Dublin city. It is neo-gothic in style. Today this church is still used by congregations of the Church of Ireland.



Photo by George Mongey

Sexton Lodge

The attractive, Victorian Sexton's lodge standing in the grounds of Columba's Church was built in 1870 at a cost of £140. It has a roof of Welsh slate.



Photo by George Mongey

The New Old Borough School

Across the road from St Columba's Church is the new Old Borough School, replacing the original 1809 school, which closed in 2000.

This is a mixed Church of Ireland primary school.



Photo by George Mongey

What was the purpose of the Round Tower?

The Irish name “cloig-theach” meaning “bell house” would suggest its main use. It also served as lookout post or beacon for approaching monks or pilgrims coming from afar. In times of attack it could be used as a place of refuge for the monks and the safe storage of valuables. The present entry is now just 70 cm above ground level, but originally it would have stood several metres above this. Retractable ladders would have been used to gain entry to the tower. Round towers were often seen as symbols of the prestige and wealth of the ecclesiastic communities and their patrons. In its early history, the monastery possessed considerable wealth, and the town of Swords rose into importance as a result. It was subjected to attacks from Vikings and Irish chieftains alike.

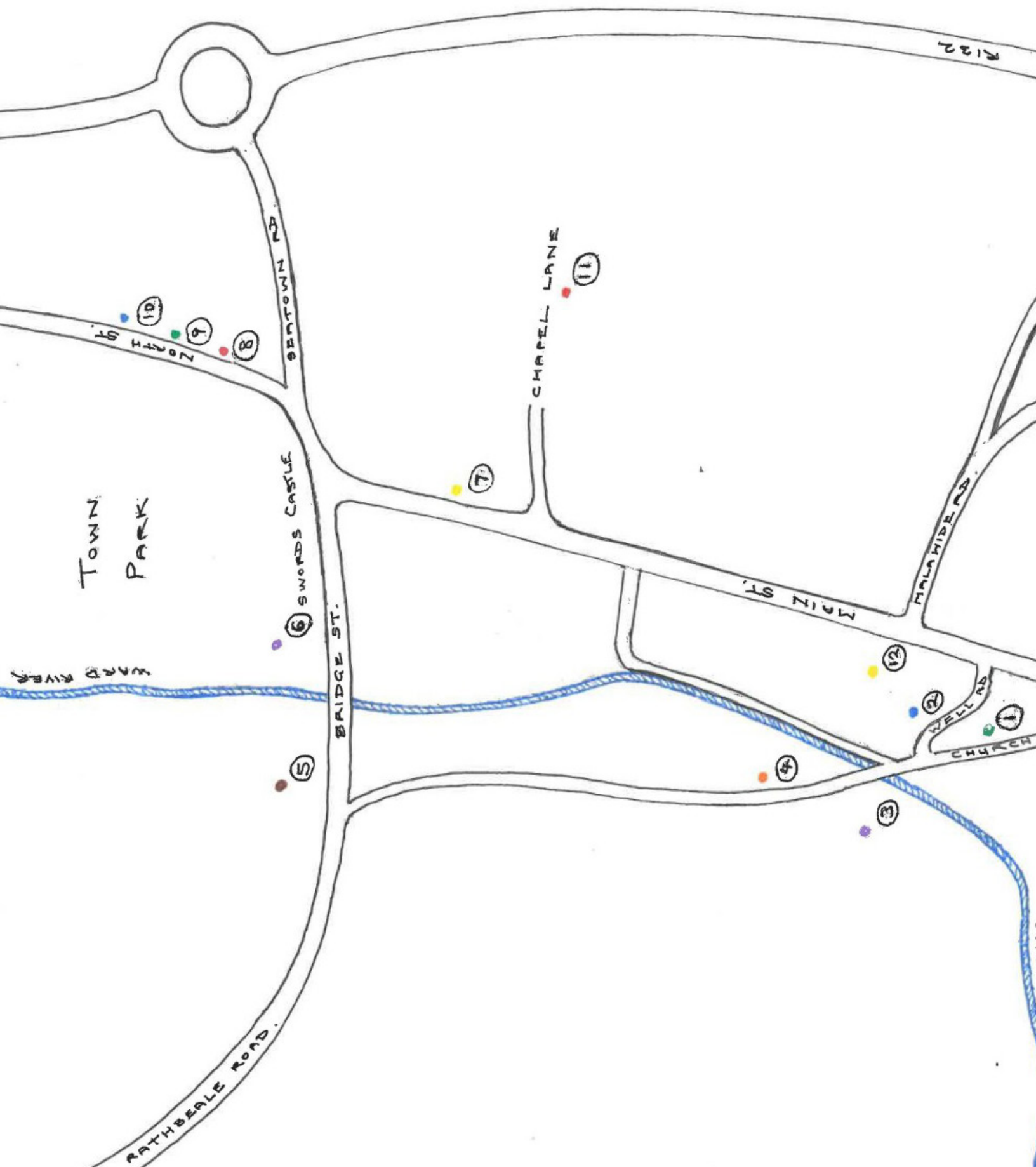


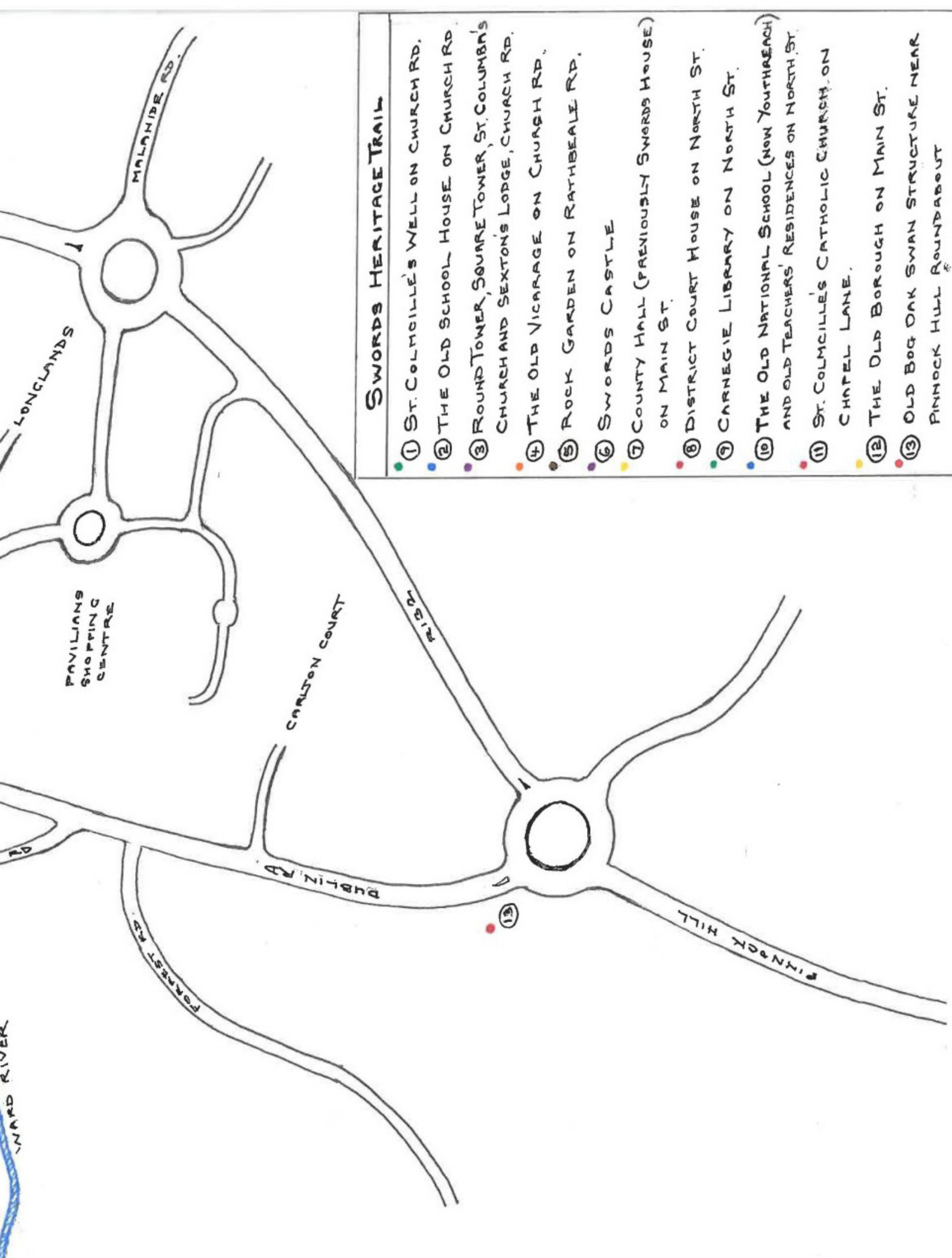
This 10th century Round Tower is 26 metres (85 feet) tall. Its entrance, which is almost level with the ground, has two modern stone steps added. Its top section was reconstructed at a later date. Four large arched windows in this upper storey face the four cardinal points of the compass.

The cross at its top was placed there by the Henry Scardeville, Vicar of Swords (1682 – 1704). Some websites maintain that he wished to show that this was a Christian site rather than a pagan one.



Photo from Fingal Archaeology and Heritage





SWORDS HERITAGE TRAIL

- ① ST. COLMCILLE'S WELL ON CHURCH RD.
- ② THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE ON CHURCH RD.
- ③ ROUND TOWER, SQUARE TOWER, ST. COLUMBA'S CHURCH AND SEXTON'S LODGE, CHURCH RD.
- ④ THE OLD VICARAGE ON CHURCH RD.
- ⑤ ROCK GARDEN ON RATHBEALE RD.
- ⑥ SWORDS CASTLE
- ⑦ COUNTY HALL (PREVIOUSLY SWORDS HOUSE) ON MAIN ST.
- ⑧ DISTRICT COURT HOUSE ON NORTH ST.
- ⑨ CARNEGIE LIBRARY ON NORTH ST.
- ⑩ THE OLD NATIONAL SCHOOL (NOW YOUTHREACH) AND OLD TEACHERS' RESIDENCES ON NORTH ST.
- ⑪ ST. COLMCILLE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH ON CHAPEL LANE.
- ⑫ THE OLD BOROUGH ON MAIN ST.
- ⑬ OLD BOG OAK SWAN STRUCTURE NEAR PINNOCK HILL ROUNDABOUT

The Brian Boru Connection

After his victory against the Vikings at Clontarf, Brian Boru (or Brian Boroimhe), High King of Ireland, was killed while praying in his tent by the Viking, Brodir. *(He in turn met a gruesome end at the hands of one of Brian's relatives, according to a Norse saga.)* Brian's son, Murrough, was slain during the battle. Both bodies were taken in solemn procession to the monastery at Swords, where they were waked overnight. Obviously,

this abbey must have been held in high esteem, for the High King of Ireland to have been brought there. On the following day their remains were then carried to the abbey of Duleek, and finally onto Armagh. Due largely to the financial support of Brian Boru, Armagh had become the most important religious centre in the country. It was here that they were laid to rest.

The Square Tower

Next to the Round Tower stands this 14th century stone belfry, the only remnant of a demolished medieval abbey building, which was erected in the later medieval ages. This belfry is usually referred to as the Square Tower or Norman Tower. It used to be connected to the old, original abbey. A new bell was added in the 1700s, and was inscribed "L.D. Molesworth 1721". This family is associated with Brackenstown House in Swords.

It is no longer open to the public. What lies behind its two doors? One leads into the basement level, and the other opens into a spiral staircase that allows access to all the other floors of the tower.

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THE OLD VICARAGE

This was first erected in 1675. By the 18th century it had been allowed to decay. In 1872 it was rescued and modernised with a new wing added for the use of carriages. In the 1990s it was converted into apartments. Part of the original building was retained.



Photo by Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin.

RATHBEALE ROAD 5

The Rock Garden was inspired by the previous use of this site as a quarry, which was worked out by the 1940s. STT and Fingal County Council collaborated to turn this empty field into a valuable amenity for our local community. The official opening was in 2017. Enjoy the sculpture and the rock garden.



Photo by Andrea de Roeck.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.

Across the road, you will see a disused post box from the reign of King Edward VII. This was preserved when work began in 2018 on the new CareChoice nursing home nearby.



SWORDS CASTLE

6

The castle buildings that we can see today have been built over a period of 500 years, showing the different styles, modifications and re-uses.

Swords Castle was actually built as an ecclesiastical manor house in 1200 AD for the first Anglo-Norman Archbishop of Dublin, John Comyn.

He was not only an important religious figure, but was also a powerful feudal lord. His palace was an administrative centre for the collections of rents and taxes, and was a court of justice. He had the power to try most types of criminal

cases, and to impose punishments ranging from the stocks to the gallows. Keen to increase the income of his estate, he established a town, attracting new settlers with the same privileges as citizens who lived in Dublin.

Swords grew to be one of Dublin's largest boroughs. Its main street became aligned to the castle.

How did Swords Castle become a ruin?

One of his successors, Archbishop Alexander de Bicknor, had his own brush with the law when he was accused of misappropriating funds for his own benefit. He may have allowed the castle to appear run down so that he could downplay his assets, as it was actually used from time to time by later archbishops.

A document from 1326, which formed part of the enquiry into his case, gave a description of Swords showing that it had all the features of a manor house such as a hall, a chamber for the archbishop, a kitchen, all of which were in disrepair. The walls were

of stone and roofs were of shingle. There are few records of Swords Castle for the next 300 years. Some of the earlier damage might have been due to attacks between 1315-1317 by Edward, the brother of Robert the Bruce of Scotland, who saw Dublin as a second front in their battle against England.

In the mid to late 15th century a considerable amount of building was undertaken at Swords Castle. The North Tower and the walls on the West and North West sides were built and crenellated. The knights and squires chamber was

altered from 3 to 2 storeys, and the impressive gatehouse was probably rebuilt at this point in time. However, during the 15th and 16th centuries it appears that the fortunes of the archbishops had taken a down turn due to poor leasing practices.

During the 1500s, Swords Castle fell into ruin until 1583, when it did receive some repairs thanks to the forty Dutch Protestant families fleeing from religious persecution in the Low Lands. They were placed there by Sir Henry Sydney, Lord Deputy of Ireland. He wrote that it did his heart

good to see how they repaired the 'quite spoiled old castell'.

No records show exactly when Swords castle passed out of the ownership of the Archbishops of Dublin. It did come into the possession of the Cobbe family of Newbridge House after 1830.

They used the land for farming and planting an orchard. Can you spot the oldest surviving apple tree near the chapel? It is an old Bramley dating from the 1890s.

Modern Times

In 1985, Dublin County Council obtained the land from the Cobbes. In the 1990s the new Fingal County Council began the restoration work, part of which was a Fas training scheme in masonry and carpentry for local people. The chapel has been restored and tiles, similar to those found by the Fanning Archaeological excavations in the early 1970s, now grace the floor.

In 2009, Ryans pub was demolished to give a clearer view of the castle. Since 2016, the "Enabling and Conservation Works" have made significant improvements to this important site.





Photo by Fingal Archaeology and Heritage

The Gatehouse was repaired, and the crumbling wall repointed. In 2019, three 200-year-old houses, which were blocking the view to the Easter Tower, were finally knocked down under strict archaeological supervision.

An important part of the Enabling Works was the conservation work on the East Tower, which had a pronounced lean and extensive cracking.

The Architecture Department received the Heritage and Conservation Award for this innovative work. It combines modern and traditional methods to conserve as much of the medieval fabric as possible.



Photo by Fingal Archeology and Heritage

Modern Times

A concrete plate ties the three remaining walls together, and a traditional lime-based shelter coat protects the vulnerable masonry. This innovative work earned the “Engineers Ireland Excellence Award” in 2019.

Best of all, the castle which had been neglected and out of bounds for decades, was opened to the public in 2015. Community Archaeologist, (now Heritage Officer), Christine Baker, organised an “Archaeofest” aimed at families to welcome them back into their main heritage site.

The first Community Dig took place that summer too. Since then there

have two more digs, which have revealed hidden walls, human remains which predate the castle, animal bones, medieval pottery, clay pipes etc.

They have shone a spotlight on the lives of the people who once inhabited this fascinating site. The castle now has a visitor centre within its grounds with information boards and helpful, knowledgeable staff. Family festivals such as the Summer and Halloween festivals are now held there annually. Their three Fingal Fleadhs were so successful that Swords was chosen be the venue for the 2020 Leinster Fleadh.

FINGAL COUNTY HALL 7

Fingal's modern County Hall was designed by Bucholz and McEvoy Architects, and was completed in 2000. It was awarded "Irish Concrete Society Award" in 2001.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.



Swords House 1976, Photo by Patrick Healy

County Hall was built on the site of Swords House, the former manor house of the Taylor family. This Anglo-Norman family arrived in Swords from France in the 13th century. It was once the home of a man beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1992. That man was Francis Taylor, born in Swords in 1550.

In 1595 he was elected as Dublin's mayor. He married the daughter of a prominent family, the granddaughter of a Lord Mayor of Dublin. He was an ardent Catholic, and refused to convert to the Protestant faith despite extreme pressure. He was jailed for 7 years in 1614 without charge or trial because of his religious faith, and died there. A statue of Francis Taylor and his grandmother-in-law, the Blessed Margaret Ball, who had died for her faith in that same prison in 1584, stands outside St Mary's Pro-Cathedral in Dublin city. She too was beatified in 1992.



Photo by Caoimhghin Ó Chroidheáin

Later, John Taylor took part in the unsuccessful Catholic Confederation Wars. The forces he had gathered at Swords Castle in 1642 were defeated in that year, and he was exiled to Connaught. His brother became the owner in 1664.

Swords House stayed in the possession of the Taylors until the 19th century. In 1833, Jane Elizabeth Taylor married a Forster, and their son inherited the house. He became a colonel in the British army, and allowed WWI British soldiers to stay at his home. He was the final

owner of Swords House. He died unmarried in 1915 and the line ended.

As the years passed, the house became derelict until it finally burned down in the mid-1980s. It was acquired by Dublin County Council, and turned into a park before being chosen as the site of Fingal County Hall offices.

Swords House was of red brick and cut stone. The first floor was underground, and a flight of steps led up to the front door on the second floor.

Swords District Court House was designed in the Classical style by Alexander Tate in 1845, and built in the following year at a cost of £425. It is a detached single-storey building with a double-height central block, flanked by two single-storey recessed wings. The walls are of coursed limestone, and the steps are made of granite. This courthouse is still in operation today. Criminal hearings, family law cases and special hearings are held here.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.

CARNEGIE LIBRARY 9

The redbrick Carnegie Library was built in 1908. This former library building is now home to Swords Historical Society. It was designed by Anthony Scott, hired by local authorities who availed of Carnegie Trust grants.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.

Who was Andrew Carnegie (1835 to 1919)? He was a Scottish-American philanthropist, who had made a tremendous fortune in the American steel industry, becoming one of the richest Americans in history.

During his last 18 years, he gave away 90 percent of his fortune to charities.

10 OLD NATIONAL SCHOOL

Now the site of Youthreach, the Old National School dates back to 1890, as do the two teacher residences next door on North Street.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.

The residences are now part of Fingal Community College. In 1967 the new National School on Chapel Lane opened for the Catholic pupils of Swords. A building boom in the 1970s required a new school to be built in Brackenstown called St Cronan's National School.

ST COLMCILLE'S CATHOLIC CHURCH

11

The land for this church on Chapel Lane was donated by the Taylor family of Swords House (now the site of Fingal County Hall). This neoclassical church was built in 1827 at a cost of 1820 pounds. Over the years it has been altered several times.

In 1879 the two storey vestry at the rear was added on, and the facade was altered in 1924. During the 20th century, the large influx of people into the greater Swords area led to the establishment of two new parishes at Brackenstown and River Valley. Visit the nearby graveyard of the church to discover some interesting headstones. Famous Irish patriot, A.J. Kettle, known as "Parnell's Right Hand Man" is among them. An unusual example is that of Patrick Carey, who died on 19

March, 1879, aged 30. His father planted a tree in his memory near the grave. Over time the headstone became embedded into the tree.



Photo by George Mongey, 2020.

12 THE OLD BOROUGH

When the Act of Union came into force on January 1801, the Irish parliament was abolished. There was now a single parliament in London for the whole of the United Kingdom. The Borough of Swords was disenfranchised, and lost its two representatives. By way of compensation, a grant of £15,000 was allocated, and a board was established to provide a National School for the poor of Swords of all denominations. The money, which

remained after the school was built in 1809, was invested to cover the running costs. The architect was Francis Johnston, who designed the GPO in Dublin city. It finally closed in 2000, and the new, mixed Old Borough School opened opposite St Columba's Church. Catholic pupils had already moved to other schools such as St Colmcille's. The Old Borough became a pub and boutique hotel with little change to its exterior.



Photo by Caoimhghin Ó Croidheáin.



Photo by George Mongey.

13 ART WORK AT APPROACH ROAD

As you enter or leave the town of Swords, watch out for the distinctive art installation at the Pinnock Hill roundabout. This was an initiative of Colm Rigney, District Supervisor of Parks, and was implemented by Fingal County Council's Operations Department in 2018. The Bog Oak Sculpture is 4-metres high. Its raw material, which came from The Bog of Allen, is about 5000 years old.



Photo by George Mongey

Its creator is Brian O'Loughlin, a well-known bog oak artist from Rathangan, County Kildare. It depicts two golden-beaked swans in full flight heading towards the Swords Estuary. As swans mate for life, they represent loyalty.



Photo by George Mongey.



Photo by George Mongey.

The surround of the bog oak was built from limestone kerb stones, taken from renovation works elsewhere in Swords. The rose bed was cut as a circle to mimic the nearby roundabout. At the top is a Calla Lily, the gold being the stamen. It represents peace.

