

FIRST 400 YEARS OF ATHLONE CASTLE

Name: _____

ATHLONE
CASTLE



Caisleán
Áth Luain



CHANGES TO THE CASTLE

Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair's castle

Toirrdelbach Ua Conchobair or King Turlough O'Connor of Connaught recognised the importance of Athlone as the primary mid-Shannon crossing point. In 1129 he built a wicker bridge and the first castle.

What was the castle made of?

This Castle was destroyed in 1131.
Who or what destroyed it?

Norman Motte

In 1169 the Anglo-Normans, under the command of Strongbow arrived in Ireland.

In a space of 30 years they conquered over half of the Island. To be able to better control their territory, the Normans built numerous castles.

One of those castles was probably the built on this site.

What were the three elements of the Norman motte and bailey Castle?

John de Gray's stone castle

In 1210 King John of England ordered the construction of a stone royal castle in Athlone.

Shortly after the central tower was completed it fell killing nine men.

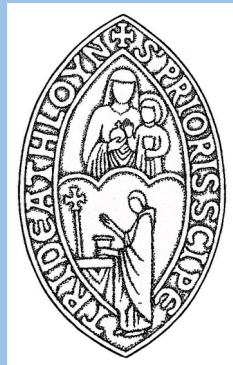
Look at the ceiling, one of the falling stones above you bears the note of this tragedy.

Try to find it and write down the source of the inscription.

A _ _ _ _ S OF C _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ E

Athlone Castle was built on land belonging to the monks of the nearby Cluniac priory.

This is the impression of the 14th century prior's seal



Have a look at the coins on display .

They are called King John's pennies and were used during the time the stone castle was built in Athlone.

King John was the first English ruler to issue Irish coins. They had an image and the name of the king on one side. For most it was the only time they saw what their king looked like.

On the other side you can see a cross. It was useful when breaking the coin when payment of half a penny was required.

How much money can you see here?



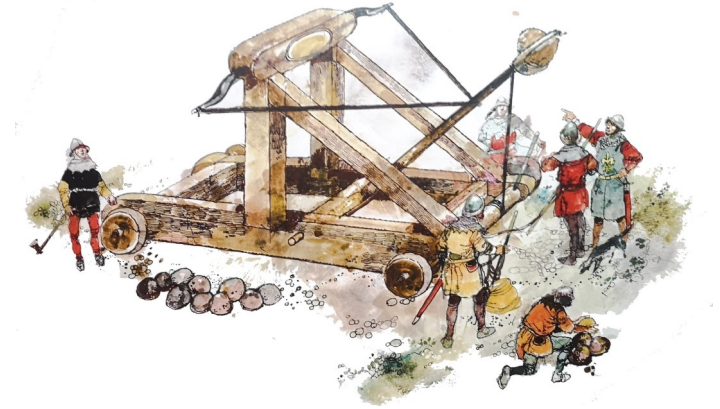
WARFARE IN MEDIEVAL TIMES

In the 13th century money was spent on the development of Athlone castle. It became an important legal and administrative centre, where taxes were collected, and courts were held.

The castle was also a military stronghold and so was built to withstand the attack.

What materials and features made the this Anglo-Norman castle so strong?

There are some boxes/platforms all around the top of the Keep- these are called **machicolations** and were used by the soldiers protecting the Keep. When they were made, the bottom of those boxes would be open, so that the castle defenders were able to see all the way below and use their bows and arrows and later guns to shoot downwards at the people attacking them.



Records from this period show that Athlone castle had numerous weapons in its inventory, some of which are replicated here. Can you find them?

M _ _ _ _ _ L

C _ _ _ _ _ W

L _ _ _ _ _ W

These would have been used to defend the castle during attacks and raids.

The most popular weapon was the Longbow. The sharp arrow shot from a longbow was strong enough to go through metal armour! But you needed a lot of practice and strength to use the longbow. Boys as young as 4 were training to become archers.

How many arrows per minute could a skilled archer fire?

DEVELOPMENT OF ATHLONE TOWN

During Medieval times the town developed. It was granted the right to hold fairs and markets.

In 1606 the Corporation of Athlone (town council) led by the sovereign (mayor) was established. It governed the town until 1840. Gatehouses and town-wall fortifications were constructed between 1570 and 1653.

Find the two sets of locks to discover what those gates leading into the town were called.

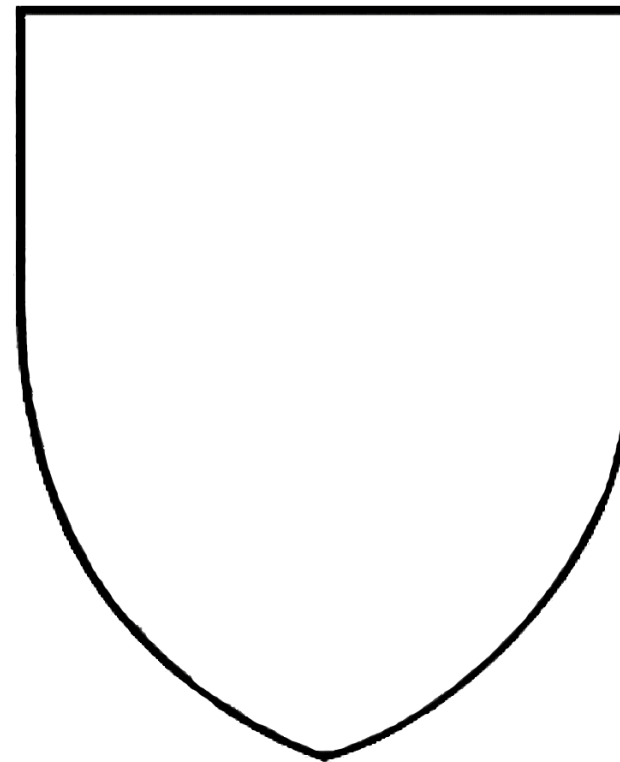
N _ _ _ H G _ _ E, D _ _ _ _ N G _ _ E

New settlers brought capital and improvements, building houses of brick and stone, while poorer 'Irishtown' suburbs of thatched cabins developed beyond the walls. Athlone possessed a noted eel fishery. Milling, brewing, distilling and hat manufacture were other economic activities.

Have a look at the three Armorial Plaques on display here.
Being granted Coat of Arms was quite an honour as it testified to ones higher status and wealth.
For merchants, displaying an armorial plaque over the doors of their business was a great way of showing potential customers that their services of high quality could be relied on.

Design your own Coat of Arms!

Think what qualities and values you want to represent



Choose your colours:

Yellow/Gold– Generosity
White/Silver– Peace, Sincerity
Black– Constancy
Purple– Royalty
Green– Hope, Loyalty
Blue– Truthfulness

Choose your heraldic animal:

Bear - Protectiveness
Bee - Industriousness
Dog - Loyalty
Eagle - Leadership, Decisiveness
Dragon - Defender, Treasure
Hawk - Eagerness
Fox - Cleverness
Lion - Courage
Raven - Constancy
Snake - Ambition
Tiger - Fierceness, Valor
Unicorn - Extreme Courage
Wolf - Constant vigilance

Do you want to know more?
For more information on exhibition and educational programmes, contact Athlone Castle:
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