



Lesson Plan 6: Ballyragget Castle

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



This lesson is part of a series of 8 lesson plans based on the “Explore the Nore” poster and River Nore Heritage Audit. It is aimed at 4th, 5th & 6th classes in primary schools. The project is an action of the Kilkenny Heritage Plan, and is funded by the Heritage Office of Kilkenny County Council and the Heritage Council. For further information contact dearbhal.ledwidge@kilkennycoco.ie. Tel: 056-7794925. www.kilkennycoco.ie/eng/Services/Heritage/

■ Learning objectives

HISTORY

Strand: Local studies;

Strand unit: Buildings, sites or ruins in my locality;

Strand unit: My locality through the ages

Strand: Life, society, work and culture in the past; Life in medieval towns and countryside in Ireland and Europe

Content objectives

- develop an understanding of chronology, in order to place people, events and topics studied in a broad historical sequence
- use imagination and evidence to reconstruct elements of the past

Skills and concepts to be developed

- time and chronology
- change and continuity
- synthesis and communication

■ Learning activities

Ballyragget Castle

Lesson plan: this section is designed to accompany a wider lesson on Norman history and castles in Ireland. The photo of Ballyragget Castle in the poster offers a classic picture of a fourteenth-fifteenth century castle in Ireland known as a Tower House.

Social History

Important and wealthy people lived in castles. Unlike the lives of ordinary people, stories from their lives were written down. We thus know a great deal about the people who lived in the tower house at Ballyragget and how its use changed over time:

- It was built in 1495 by Maighread Ni Ghearoid the countess of the Mountgarret family.
- It was the favourite residence of the celebrated Lady Margaret Fitzgerald, Countess of Ormonde, who was known to order her armed retainers ‘to ravage the property of such of the

neighbouring families as she deemed to be her enemies' (Lewis 1837).

- it was under the guardianship of Queen Elizabeth in 1600
- It reverted to the Mountgarrets who lived there until 1788.
- In 1798 it served as a British military post
- in 1963 it was modified for use as a sawmill and timber store!

History of the Normans in Kilkenny

The Normans are an integral part of the history of Kilkenny. Castles were often built by Anglo-Norman families during medieval times as a means of protection, status and power.

Construction of Ballyragget Castle

Castles offered great protection for wealthy Old English Lords and families from the Gaelic Irish but were expensive to build. The stone had to be quarried from nearby fields and master craftsmen and building labours were needed to cut the stone and construct the castle. There are five levels or floors inside the castle. See extra source material on life inside a castle.

The castle windows

Most castles have very small windows! This was done for defensive reasons because larger windows offered access for attacking soldiers to enter into or shoot through. The small narrow windows are known as arrow slits or gunloops. The people inside the castle would shoot their arrows or fire guns onto their enemies below!

The castle battlements

The castle looks like a rook piece from a game of chess (link to educational games). This is no coincidence and the rook piece used be known as the castle piece. The distinctive stone formation on the roof of the castle are known as its battlements, because these were defensive elements of the castle. The castle also did not stand isolated like it does today. It was once surrounded by a high stone wall for extra protection, known as a bawn wall, but this no longer survives.

Design your own castle!

Would you like to live in a castle? How would it look? Draw your own castle and let's see!

Is there a castle near to where you live?

■ Linkage and Integration

Link to science in terms of bat preservation: Strand: Environmental awareness and care

Strand unit: Environmental awareness

Link to geography in terms of where rocks come from and why they are used in buildings

Strand: Natural environments

Strand Unit: Rocks and soils

Link to environment - bat conservation in old buildings

Link to environment – stones, geology and quarries – where did stones come from to build the castle?

VISUAL ARTS

Strand: Drawing

Strand Unit: Making Drawings

Strand: Construction

Strand Unit: Making Constructions

■ **Differentiation**

School trip to Burnchurch castle (A National Monument in State care) – this can be visited for free although it is not possible to go inside for safety reasons. There is plenty to see from the outside though!

Identify castles in your area by looking at old maps. Do you live near a castle?

■ **Resources**

River Nore Poster

Nore Heritage Audit Vol. 1, pages 19-20

Nore Heritage Audit Vol. 2, pages 27-30

External references:

<http://www.itsabouttime.ie/primary/pdfs/M2.pdf>, p41-42

<http://www.itsabouttime.ie/primary/pdfs/M7.pdf>, making an old building

<http://www.archaeology.ie/media/archeologyie/PDFS/Irish Field Monuments.pdf>, p20

<http://www.castlestories.net/Ireland/County-Kilkenny/Ballyragget-Castle.html>,

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/history/handsonhistory/HOH_Castle_activities.pdf

■ **Evaluation**