



# BALLA WALKS



## Balla Past and Present

# WALKING GUIDE

Explore and Discover Balla

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**WALKS**

- W1 Heritage Walk**  
Distance: 1.4km  
Duration: 15min
- W2 Town Park Walk**  
Distance: 4.5km  
Duration: 50min
- W3 Dawn Oak Walk**  
Distance: 3.3km  
Duration: 40min



### WALKS

#### W1 Heritage Walk

Distance: 1.4km

Duration: 15min



### WALKS

#### W2 Town Park Walk

Distance: 4.5km

Duration: 50min



**WALKS**

**W3 Dawn Oak Walk**

Distance: 3.3km

Duration: 40min



## 1 Heritage display in Balla Community Resource centre

The community centre serves the locality. It organizes classes for yoga and slimming classes. It has a range of facilities, including the provision of child-care, and a hall for groups and a commercial kitchen 'hub'. Balla community won the 2018 'Pride of Place' award which recognised the great community and environment of Balla. An invaluable visual introduction to the history and heritage of Balla are the exhibition boards found in Balla community centre. Poster boards include;

1. **Balla and St.Mochua.** A poster relating to the foundation of Balla.
2. **The Round Tower.** This poster is an imaginative reconstruction of the ancient round tower found in the old Balla graveyard.
3. **The Blessed Well.** This poster shows the importance of the Holy Well and pilgrimage in the past life of Balla.
4. **Patrick.W.Nally.** This poster commemorates the life of the 19th century patriot Patrick William Nally.

5. **The Gentry.** This poster highlights the importance of the gentry particularly the Lynch-Blosses for the heritage of Balla.

6. **The Maple Hall.** Maple Hall to Community centre. The poster illustrates the progress from the early RC Church to the later CRD building.

## 2 The Old Grave Yard

The graveyard is at least 200 years old, graves found here date from at least between 1800, 1815 and 1850.<sup>1</sup> People wanted to be buried with their ancestors so over the years the graveyard filled up and a new graveyard was needed. One of the oldest graves is of Fr Cannon who according to folklore was buried underneath an altar.<sup>2</sup>

Newspapers tell us by 1900 the graveyard was full and a new grave yard required.<sup>3</sup> The graveyard was used during the introduction of the Penal laws (1695-1829) and the Great Famine (1845-1849).



The graves are a memorial to the lives and struggles of the people of Balla and surrounding districts.<sup>4</sup> Famous people living at the time of the graveyard include Daniel O'Connell, 'The Liberator.' (1775-1847).

### 3 The Round Tower

The round tower found in Balla is not well known, but it has many interesting features. Parts of the tower, particularly the doorway date probably from between 1100-1200.<sup>5</sup> Ireland and Balla was a land of saints and scholars. Here was a thriving monastery, an economic centre and a place with a school of education and learning. The local people and monks made up a community of farmers and traders.

The tower was built as a refuge in times of trouble, often due to Viking raids. During 1179 the settlement was burnt down by raiders after the Norman invasion of Ireland.<sup>6</sup>

The top of the tower is gone and it is a mystery, concerning what happened to it. Perhaps it may have been removed because towers were often used for ringing bells. The

Ordnance Survey letters of 1837 to 1838 tell us the tower was used as a belfry for the local church and it was referred to as the Clogas Bhalla.<sup>7</sup> The bell is now in St Cronan's placed there by Fr Tom Reidy after 1913.<sup>8</sup>

During this time from the year 410 onwards the fall of the Roman Empire took place. Between 800 and 1150 many Viking invasions of Europe occurred. Famous people living at this time included King Alfred of Wessex (871-899). He was reputed to have been educated at Mayo Abbey.<sup>9</sup>

### 4 Medieval Altar and Evil Eye

Near the round tower are the remains of a church with a late medieval stone altar built between 1200 and 1400.<sup>10</sup> At one end of the altar is a stone block with a carving on it known as 'the evil eye.'<sup>11</sup> This is a site of great antiquity and its purpose and meaning is unknown. This was made of the same stone as one of the walls which has an old inscription. The tradition of the evil eye is often recounted in Irish folklore.<sup>12</sup>

Local people living here included those who had lived here





for centuries and Norman settlers, who were associated with the De Burgo family.<sup>13</sup> They built towers and castles in the area and established markets and towns.

The Norman invasion of Ireland took place from 1169 and reached Mayo by the 1230's.<sup>14</sup> Other major events in the Middle Ages included The Great Plague (1347-1351) and The Crusades (1096-1291). Significant people were the Kings of England; Richard The Lionheart (1157-1199) and Edward I (1272-1307). Finally Robert the Bruce of Scotland (1274-1329).

## 5 Blessed Well and Rest House

The chapel beside the well was a house for the sick. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century pilgrimages took place to the Blessed well in Balla.<sup>15</sup> Stone inscriptions found inside the ruins give a date of 1696 to the place.<sup>16</sup>

A visitor estimated at 20,000 the vast amount of people who assembled here in 1825 on Garland Sunday.<sup>17</sup> After 1879 the shrine at Knock became a major pilgrimage site which led to the decline of visits to the well.

But a tradition has remained of saying prayers here and people came here to be cured of ailments. It was a place of festival as well as piety.<sup>18</sup> Thousands of people came here and had a large festival after the pilgrimage. They often came from Connemara.<sup>19</sup>

The area saw the times of the Penal Laws, a time of outdoor worship, from the 1690's. A time of the Great Famine (1845-1849) and the 1880's Land League. Famous people include Charles Stuart Parnell (1846-1891) who visited Balla and a son of Mayo and Straide, Michael Davitt (1846-1906). An influential Prime Minister of Great Britain was William Gladstone (1809-1898). He was in favour of Home Rule for Ireland.

## 6 St Patrick. Croagh Patrick - Heritage trail

Along with St Cronan who died in 637 traditions about St. Patrick (c385-461) are present even today.<sup>20</sup> During ancient times there was a road marking the pilgrim's way from the east going to Croagh Patrick. It was the road crossed by St Patrick on his way through Balla and Loona.<sup>21</sup> A church in



Loona has associations with Patrick, it was believed Patrick built a church here (c440). The Croagh Patrick Heritage trail links up to the places of Balla and Murrisk on towards Clew bay.<sup>22</sup>

This walk-way passes near the holy well and the market square of Balla. As part of the Balla Camino trail it follows an ancient route taken from pagan times. The Celtic Camino route is linked to an ancient pilgrimage way in northern Spain, the Santiago de Compostela.<sup>23</sup> Now providing at least 25km of the walk way before going to the St James's pilgrimage route in northern Spain.<sup>24</sup>

At the time Patrick passed through the trail Christianity was being established throughout Ireland, along with monastic settlements onwards from the fifth century. This time saw the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in England from c450 onwards. Prominent people at this time were Columba (521-597) and the historian Bede (673-735) who mentions the West of Ireland in his writings.<sup>25</sup>

## 7 St Cronan's Church - Bell & Gates

The main church in the town is St Cronan's which opened in

1918 and is known locally as the Church on the hill.<sup>26</sup> After 1900 a new church was needed for Balla, and a foundation stone was laid in 1913. It took a feat of engineering and many years hard work to build the church.<sup>27</sup>

The construction costs were great and the church, both inside and out, is a monument to the past. A gift to the future generations of Balla. An ancient bell and gates were placed outside the Church and the gates were taken from Castlemacgarret.<sup>28</sup>

A local priest Fr John McDermott went to America to raise funds for the building of the new church. He participated in a cruise in Chicago and died in 1913 after raising more than 3,000 pounds for the new church.<sup>29</sup>

Workmen built the stone exterior while artists and craftsmen created statutes and stained glass windows. People donated generously to the building of the Church.<sup>30</sup> The centenary of St Cronan's was celebrated in 2018.

Major events took place during the building of the church, including the First World War (1914-1918) and the Spanish flu of 1918. At this time the Irish movement for independence was gaining ground. Famous people living



at this time included Eamon de Valera (1882-1975) and Michael Collins (1890-1922). Along with the British Prime Minister Lloyd George (1863-1945).

## 8 Funeral Home and Community Room

During the 1990's a new funeral home and a community room were built for the local people of Balla.

The Community room was formerly Balla National school and the school had been built and opened in 1835.<sup>31</sup> The old school was transferred on lease to Balla Community Council who developed it into the Community Room/ Funeral home.<sup>32</sup>

The place is a focus for the community at large, where people can meet and celebrate people's lives. The convening of The Second Vatican Council had taken place (1962-1965). Famous people then living were Winston Churchill (1874-1965) and William B Yeats the poet (1865-1939).



## 9 The Nally monument

The square has a monument with a high cross, it commemorates the life of a 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist Patrick William Nally. The monument including the High Cross was unveiled by Dr Marcus Ryan on the 7<sup>th</sup> January 1900.<sup>33</sup> It is a noted feature and land mark of Balla.

Patrick Nally (1855-1891) was a famous sportsman, athlete and patriot. He was associated with the foundation of the Balla GAA club in 1886 and attended St Jarlath's College between 1869-1870. He died of illness in Mountjoy jail on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1891, in his thirties he had been imprisoned for conspiracy.<sup>34</sup> His memory is celebrated by the construction of a sports stand, the Nally stand opened in Croke Park in 1952.

Several significant events took place at the time including the founding of the Gaelic Athletic Association (1884) and the Fenian movement (1858).

World events included the American Civil War (1861-1865). Famous people living at this time were James Joyce (1882-1941) and Queen Victoria (1819-1901).



## 10 The Fair

An ancient fair was present in Balla for centuries and fairs in Balla date back at least to 1699.<sup>35</sup> At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the square in Balla included the market place.

Market days were on Tuesdays throughout the year and six or seven fairs took place every year. Cattle, sheep, pigs and horses were sold and it was one of the biggest fairs in Connacht.<sup>36</sup>

The fair would extend from the bridge at the furthest end of the village up to the fairgreen. The railway grounds were used as a centre with stalls, where you could buy clothes, shoes and other commodities.<sup>37</sup> A community of farmers from the surrounding areas sold their produce and local traders sold their goods at the fair. These occasions were a big social event for the local communities and for people of all ages.<sup>38</sup>

Balla had a Co-op mart from 1972, it was taken over by North Connacht Farmers Co-op in 1990.<sup>39</sup> Today it is thriving and owned by Aurivo, and is one of the largest

livestock marts in Ireland.<sup>40</sup> People come to it from all over Ireland.

Events in the world taking place during this time include the end of the Cold War and the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Famous people then were John F Kennedy (1917-1963) and Seamus Heaney (1939-2013).

## 11 Rodney River

The Rodney river flows through the Balla area and is a part of the Moy valley river system. A Balla river project was created by 2018 to raise awareness of the river and its place in the environment of Balla.<sup>41</sup> The project highlights the importance of the river Rodney in the heritage and economic life of the district.

Coarse fishing takes place on the river. A famous local sportsman was William Maxwell (1792-1850). He was a Church of Ireland rector who wrote a book relating to fishing in Balla called 'The Wild Sports of the West.'<sup>42</sup> Recreational fishing is popular throughout the UK, Europe and Ireland.



## 12 Dawn Oak Project 2000

A project was undertaken by the people of Balla to replant the woods in Balla for the year of 2000, the new millennium. The landlords of Balla the Lynch-Blosses had given their wooded estate, of more than 179 acres for the benefit of the local community. During 1929 the Balla Town Improvement Association took over the estate.<sup>43</sup>

During Christmas 1998 a great storm led to many ancient trees in the woodland being destroyed. The project aimed to replace the lost trees.<sup>44</sup> Over 2000 new oak trees were planted at the time of the new millennium on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000. This planting was a world record, attended by Mary McAleese President of Ireland.<sup>45</sup> The whole community came together and planted it. Events in Ireland at this time included the signing of the April 1998 Good Friday Agreement. From 2001 the war on terror took place in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both George W Bush and Barack Obama were Presidents of the United States.

## 13 Balla Golf club

The Golfers Union of Ireland Handbook of 1928 gives 1922 as the institution date of Balla Golf Club.<sup>46</sup>

A milestone in the history of the club took place during the spring of 1981 when a section of five acres was fenced off where the clubhouse stands today.<sup>47</sup>

During the eighties the club expanded and by 1990 the full eighteen holes were opened. Now Balla has a unique par three course, covering in the region of thirty acres. Nowadays the amount of golfers has increased, so the golf course is well used by the public.<sup>48</sup>

Ireland has a distinguished record in producing world class golfers they include Pádraig Harrington and Rory McIlroy. A famous golfing event in Ireland includes The Irish Open which was revived in 1975.



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## Balla Secondary school. Athavallie House

The land lord mansion in Balla was called Athavallie house, a long creeper-clad house surrounded by a demesne of woods. The Lynch-Blosses presided over the family estate.<sup>49</sup>

An important event in the foundation of the secondary school in Balla was the arrival in 1897 to Kiltimagh of a small group of St. Louis Sisters.<sup>50</sup> By 1918 Athavallie house had become the property of the Congested Districts Board and it was from the Board that the sisters rented it in late December 1918.<sup>51</sup> It was brought in 1919. The so-called convent school after 1921 became a separate foundation of the Sisters of St. Louis.<sup>52</sup>

The St. Louis Order decided to leave Balla and the local community once again rose to the occasion in 1975 and made the decision to purchase the school at a cost of £37500.<sup>53</sup> It was then a community secondary school. The school has been going from strength to strength ever since. Famous events in Ireland at this time included the establishment of The Irish State in 1922 and in the world, the First World War (1914-1918), and the Second World War (1939-1945). Famous people at the time included Taoiseach Sean Lemass (1899-1971).

15

## Holy Trinity church

Balla has an original Protestant Church of Ireland building but it is now in ruins. It existed intact between 1865 until 1965, but even so its Achill stone tower is still a landmark of the landscape of Balla.<sup>54</sup>

Unfortunately the church was demolished in 1965 and the stained glass windows were taken to Armoy church, County Antrim.<sup>55</sup> The church was closed because of the declining numbers of the Church of Ireland congregation.<sup>56</sup> By the 1920's the Lynch-Blosses had sold up and left Balla for good so the main benefactors and users of the Church had gone.<sup>57</sup>

Nowadays the local community of Balla have not forgotten the church. The No Name Youth club restored the graveyard and removed bushes and ivy from the church ruins.<sup>58</sup> The graveyard revealed graves of the Lynch-Blosse family and local residents, the Pakenhams, who lived in a gatehouse.<sup>59</sup> A gathering hosted by the club on June 9 2013 was held at the grounds of Holy Trinity to commemorate the church.<sup>60</sup>

Local organisations and Balla school were present, along



with an ecumenical service and the attendance of the Taoiseach Enda Kenny.<sup>61</sup> The church was built by the local landowner Sir Robert Lynch-Blosse, 10<sup>th</sup> Baronet (1825-1893).

and dressing rooms were officially opened.<sup>67</sup> The club has gone from strength to strength over the years. Subsequently the Balla GAA club has made a huge contribution to the Mayo County teams over the years.<sup>68</sup>

## 16 Balla GAA Club

Balla has a long tradition of the GAA and the club was formed back in 1885.<sup>62</sup> A famous person associated with the foundation of the GAA in 1884 was a Balla man, Patrick William Nally.<sup>63</sup> After a time of great activity the Balla club went into decline until the early sixties when it was revived again.<sup>64</sup> During 1980 Balla club became county champions for the first time in the history of the club when they defeated Kiltimagh in the County final.<sup>65</sup>

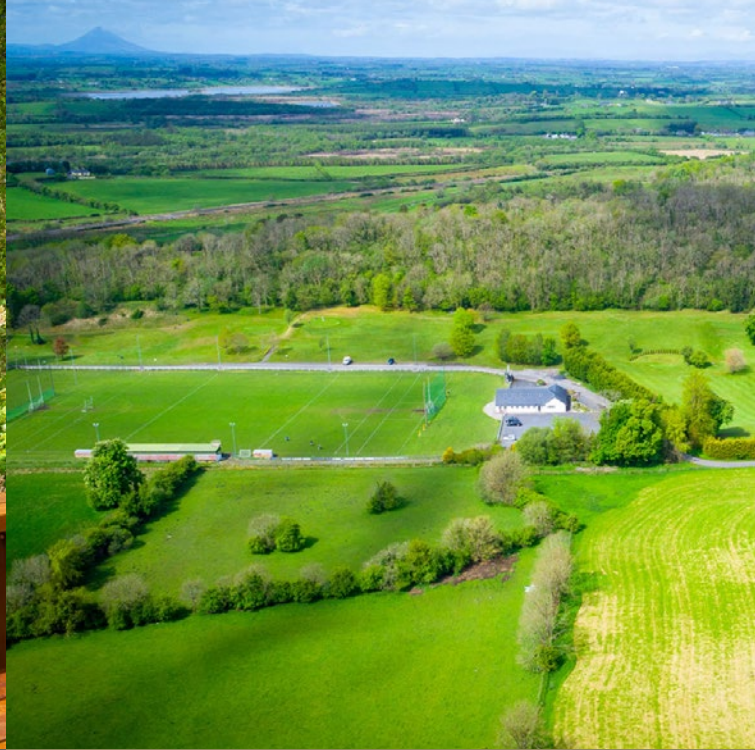
The annual general meeting of the club held in November 1982 was a milestone in the history of the club. Funds were raised and the club sought outright ownership of the land they used so they could build and improve the grounds and club.<sup>66</sup>

On Sunday March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1984 the P W Nally memorial pitch

## 17 Victorian Cartwell Sweller

This construction is basically a channel of two stone walls, with a space where a cart or coach could go through. The channel would be filled with water. The purpose of the channel was the following: often the wood of carts or coaches would expand due to heat. The rims and the spokes of the wheel would come out of place. A solution to this was provided by the Cartwell Sweller, and the wheels would be soaked in the water found in the channel. All cartwheels could be soaked in this place.<sup>69</sup>

The sweller was used constantly in the lands of the Lynch-Blosse estate. This is a great example of a Victorian sweller. Local people were often recruited as coachpersons for the Lynch-Blosses.



## 18 Swamp Cypress

The swamp cypress tree is found in Balla community woodland part of Balla Town park. This tree is quite rare. A deciduous conifer tree often called the Bald Cypress.<sup>70</sup> The Latin name of the tree is called *Taxodium Distinchum*.<sup>71</sup> The tree can reach up to 150 feet in height and it has a brilliant autumn colour. The tree can live for more than 500 years.<sup>72</sup>

The tree can grow in swamps although in Balla it is found in moist soil and the tree is native to North America, particularly the southern states of the USA including Louisiana.<sup>73</sup> Perhaps the Lynch-Blosses brought the trees to Balla.<sup>74</sup> The existence of the tree shows the richness of plant and tree life in the Balla Town parks. Famous Irish poets who wrote about nature include Patrick Kavanagh (1904-1967).

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**DRAFT V07**  
(work in progress)



**Balla Past and Present**

*WALKING  
GUIDE*

Explore and Discover Balla