

Bruree -

A Very Special Place

Brú Rí - Áit An-Speisialta



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Published by the Bruree-Rockhill Development Association

BRUREE

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Bruree has, until recent times, been part of the "hidden Ireland". It is a little off the main tourist trails, but the village enchants those who take the trouble to discover its charms. The Bruree-Rockhill Development Association, with the support of a community who take great pride in where they live, are working hard to place Bruree prominently on the tourism map.

The origins of Bruree are shrouded in the mists of time. Its name comes from the Irish Brú Rí - Home or Palace of Kings - and the locality was the seat of Kings until at least the end of the 12th century. Its royal connections date from pre-Christian times and at various times it was the seat of the kings of Cashel, or Munster. There are many archaeological remains in the locality from this period, including numerous ring forts and a tumulus. From more recent times there are the ruins of two de Lacy castles and the site of the medieval church of St. Munchin.

More recently the village is known as the place where Eamon de Valera, freedom fighter, politician, statesman and President grew up. The humble cottage in which he lived is now preserved and open to the public and the national school which he attended now houses a museum dedicated to his memory.

The village of Bruree is situated on the right bank of the River Maigue in the lush green pasture land of the Golden Vale, roughly at the centre of the province of Munster. It is only 35k (22 miles) from Limerick city and 75k (46 miles) from Cork city. It is just 2.5k (1.5 miles) off the main Cork-Limerick road and the small detour will be well rewarded. As you enter Bruree from the West you will be treated to a spectacular view of the village. Down river is the magnificent stone-built mill, with its cast-iron wheel. Across the river, on the hillside, the village forms a back drop to the bridge and the river as it flows over the weir. All the visitor attractions are in close proximity to the village. Leave your car and take the time to see the village and its environs at a relaxed pace, on foot. The effort will be well worthwhile.

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Top: (left) *Eamon de Valera* aged 4½, (right) *de Valera* aged about 12.
 Bottom: (left) *Elizabeth Coll*, *de Valera's* grandmother, (right) *Pat Coll*,
de Valera's uncle.

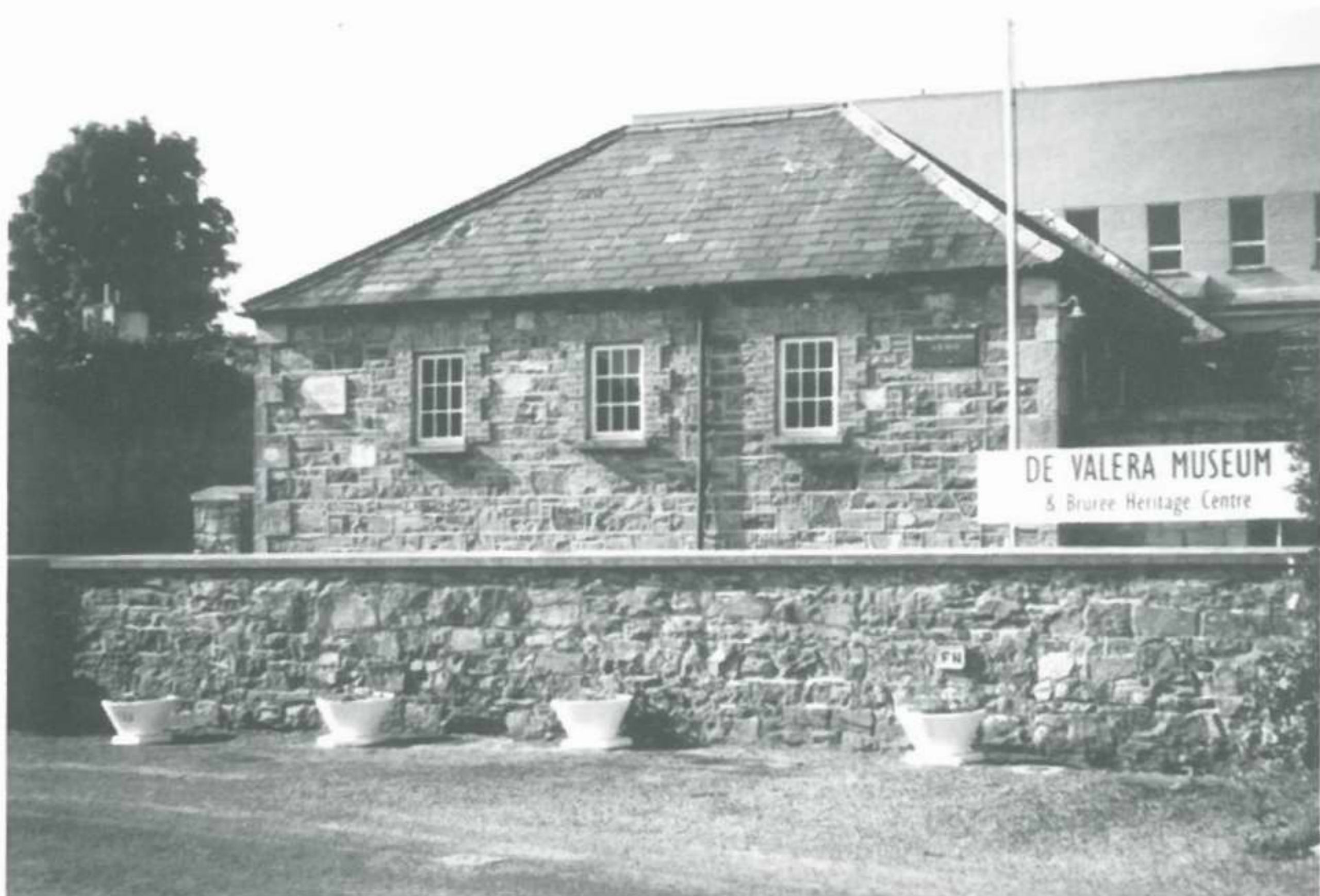
THE DE VALERA CONNECTION

Mention Bruree and the first thing that comes to mind for most people is Eamon de Valera, a name which dominates Irish history for the greater part of the twentieth century.

Eamon de Valera was born in New York in 1882 of an Irish mother, Catherine Coll of Bruree, and a Spanish father, Vivion de Valera. On the death of his father in 1885, his mother sent the young de Valera to Bruree to live with his grandmother, Elizabeth Coll. He attended Bruree National School before going on to the Christian Brothers in Charleville, and to Blackrock College, Dublin. He was awarded a BA degree from the Royal University of Ireland and later studied at Trinity College for a short while.

In 1916, de Valera led the Volunteer contingent at Boland's Mills in Dublin. His death sentence commuted, he spent time in prison in England. On his release, a life in politics was inevitable and he quickly rose to prominence. Following the War of Independence, de Valera opposed the Treaty (1922). He eventually founded a new political party, Fianna Fail, which came to power for the first time in 1932. He founded the Irish Press newspaper and was Chancellor of the National University of Ireland. De Valera was the author of the 1937 Irish Constitution and is credited with maintaining Ireland's neutrality during the Second World War. He became President of Ireland in 1959 and was re-elected in 1966 for a second term. Eamon de Valera died in 1975 at the age of 92.

Eamon de Valera had fond memories of his many happy years in Bruree and often spoke of the locality and of his many friends there. See where he lived and went to school, the roads he walked, the many places which have changed little from the time when they were part of the everyday life of "the boy from Bruree". This is the area credited with forming de Valera's character, with shaping the ideas of a man destined for greatness. He often spoke of Bruree and referred to it as "Áit an-speisialta" - a very special place - hence the title of this guide.



Top: *House at Knockmore in which de Valera grew up.*

Bottom: *Bruree National School, now the De Valera Museum and Bruree Heritage Centre.*

DE VALERA MUSEUM

On October 8th., 1972, President Eamon de Valera arrived in Bruree to officially open the Museum named in his honour. The boy who had spent his early life in Bruree was being honoured by his own people. The Museum is housed in the National School in the village, the school which de Valera himself attended. The stone building, which was built in 1862, is part of the complex which also contains the Parish Community Centre and the local dispensary.

In recent times the Museum has been expanded and completely refurbished and upgraded, while still retaining its original exterior. It is now a state of the art, visitor friendly, attraction, with almost twice the space of the original museum. Graphic panels, tableaux and a specially commissioned audio-visual tell the story of de Valera and the area in which he grew up. It has been re-named the De Valera Museum and Bruree Heritage Centre and was officially opened on February 22nd, 1997 by President Mary Robinson.

The Museum displays contain a unique collection of de Valera memorabilia, much of it donated by the man himself. It includes locks of his and his grandmothers hair, a headline copybook and other school books used by him, a jacket, rosary beads, spectacles, medals, photographs, letters, a bronze bust by Seamus Murphy and many more personal items. The Museum also contains models of the school and of de Valera's home as well as a collection of stone and bronze axes and folk items such as household and farm implements. The history of the area is outlined with information on the important historical sites, some of the other famous people connected with Bruree and the lifestyles of the people of the area earlier this century.

Spend time in the Museum and get to know Eamon de Valera and his life and times. Discover the rich heritage and history of a little place with a great past. Reminisce, if you are old enough, and marvel, if you are not, at the folk exhibits which have long since been replaced in home and on farm by modern labour saving devices.

THE DE VALERA HOUSE

Eamon de Valera arrived by donkey and cart to Knockmore, Bruree on Monday, April 10th., 1885, having travelled by boat and train from New York. He spent his first night in an old thatched house and next day the whole family moved to a newly built cottage nearby. New it may have been and a vast improvement on the old house, but it was still a simple labourer's cottage. Here the young de Valera spent the happy years of his boyhood.

At the fireside in this house, young Eddie would have listened to the tales of his mother's native land. Here he learned his first words of Irish. Indeed, it is here also that he would have had his first contact with politics in Ireland. His uncle Pat would, no doubt, have discussed the ins and outs of the country's problems with neighbours and friends. Pat Coll was a farm labourer and from him young Eddie learned many of the skills of farming.

It was from this small but happy home that the young de Valera left each morning to attend school, first at the National School in the nearby village of Bruree and later at the Christian Brothers School in Charleville. This was about 11k (7 miles) away and on many occasions de Valera walked that long journey morning and evening. He showed excellent promise at Charleville and in 1898 he won a scholarship to prestigious Blackrock College. From there he proceeded to University. His holidays during this period were, in the main, spent at the cottage at Knockmore.

On graduating from University he took up various teaching posts, including at Rockwell and Belvedere Colleges and became Lecturer in Mathematics at Carysfort College. In January 1910 he married Sinéad Ní Fhlannagáin and set up home in Dublin. From this time onwards he was seen less often in Bruree. However, he still made time to visit his old home, both privately and as Taoiseach and President of Ireland. He always visited the cottage in Knockmore, though, in later years, these visits often aroused much public and media attention.

DR. RICHARD HAYES

A contemporary of Eamon de Valera, Richard Hayes was born in Bruree in 1882, the son of the local schoolteacher. He attended school in Bruree and Rathkeale and went on to study medicine. He fought in the 1916 Rising and was imprisoned in England after the surrender. He was elected to Dail Eireann for East Limerick and supported the Treaty. Not cut out for politics, Hayes resigned his seat in 1924 and devoted himself to medicine and history. He served as dispensary doctor in various places and was also, for a time, on the staff of the Mater, Coombe and Galway Hospitals.

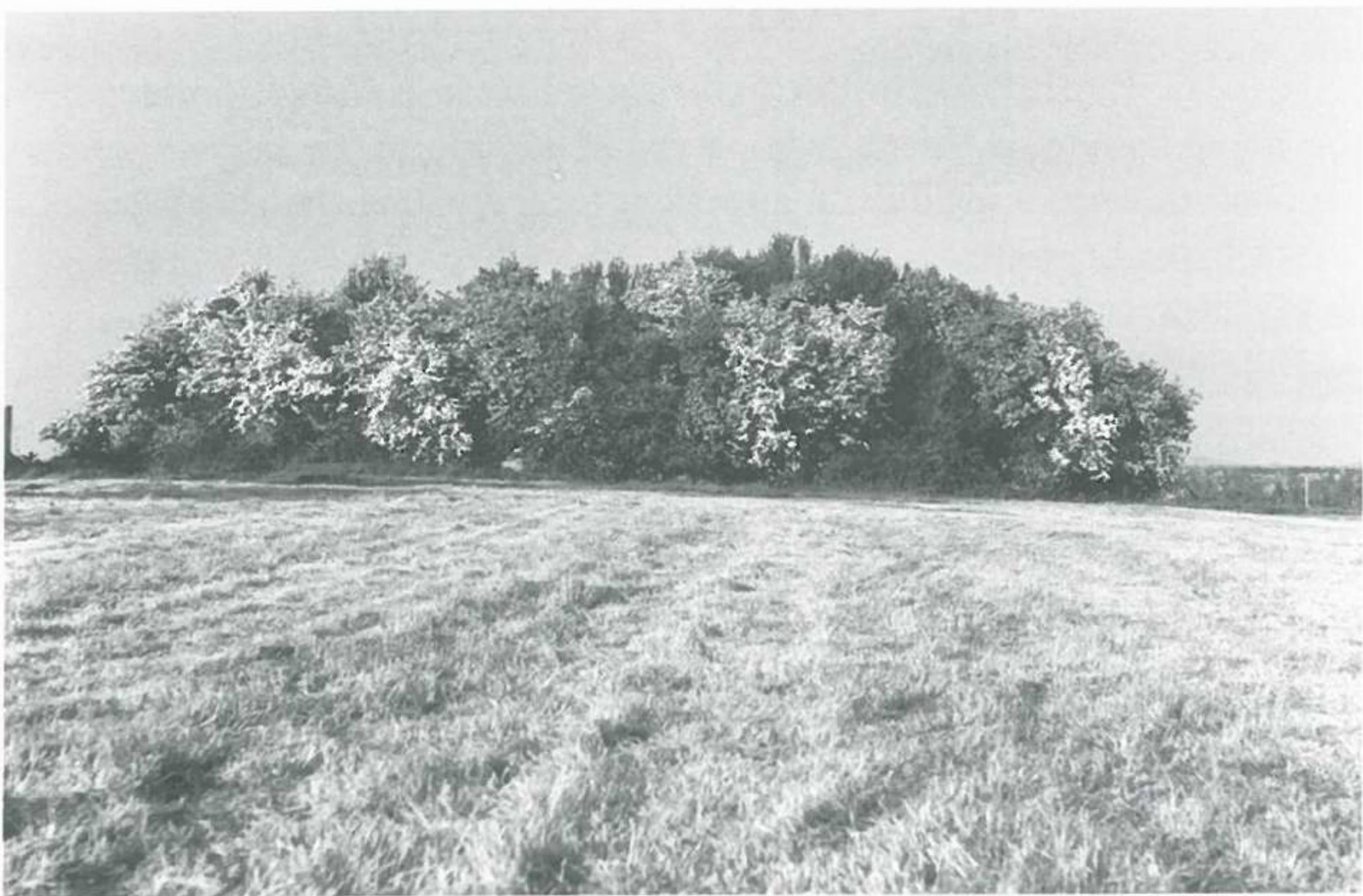
Richard Hayes was the author of a number of important works on the "Wild Geese", including *Ireland and Irishmen in the French Revolution* and *Irish Swordsmen in France*. The French Government made him a member of the Legion of Honour. He was a director of the Abbey Theatre and was made Irish Film Censor in 1944. Richard Hayes died at Dun Laoghaire in 1958.

FR. EUGENE SHEEHY

The Parish Priest in Rockhill-Bruree had an enormous influence on the young Eamon de Valera, who served Mass for him. Fr. Eugene Sheehy's nationalistic sermons laid the foundations for the young altar-boy's future as one of Ireland's greatest leaders.

Known as the "Land League Priest", Fr. Sheehy spent time in prison in 1881 as a result of his activities on behalf of that organisation. He was involved in founding the G.A.A. and formed a club of that fledgling organisation in the parish. In Easter 1916, he visited the G.P.O. in Dublin to give spiritual comfort to the Volunteers fighting there.

Eugene Sheehy was born in Broadford, Co. Limerick in 1841 and studied for the priesthood in Paris where he was ordained. He was appointed Administrator to Rockhill-Bruree in 1884 and Parish Priest in 1886. He resigned due to ill-health in 1909 and moved to Dublin where he died in 1917.



Top: (left) *Dr. Richard Hayes*, (right) *Fr. Eugene Sheehy, P.P.*
Bottom: *Knockduha tumulus*.

THE MILL

Mills and milling have been associated with Bruree since at least the 17th century and probably much longer. The current mill, which is Bruree's best known landmark, is more recent, dating from 1850 approximately. The huge wheel, driven by water from the river diverted through the mill-race, powered the machinery in the mill which ground the grain. The wheel, which is 27 feet in diameter, is the largest in the region and one of the largest in the country and is still in working order. This is the only remaining one of three wheels which were turned by the waters of the river Maigue earlier this century. The other wheels, which were upriver from the bridge, were dismantled many years ago. In their heyday, the mills employed up to 400 people. The Mill, from early this century, belonged in turn to Cleaves of Limerick, Bruree Co-operative Creamery and Golden Vale Co-operative and is now privately owned.

Water from the river Maigue was directed along the mill race towards the wheel. The water filled, in turn, each of the "buckets" on the outside of the wheel. The weight of the water caused the wheel to turn. As the wheel turned the buckets alternatively filled and emptied, ensuring that the wheel kept turning as long as the water was left flowing. So well balanced is the wheel that it takes a relatively small amount of water to put the wheel in motion. A system of cogged wheels, belts and gears enabled the circular movement of the wheel to drive the machinery within the mill.

In recent years the area around the mill and mill-race has been paved and stepped. It is now possible to walk alongside the mill-race, to get a close-up view of the wheel and of the waterfall below the weir on the river Maigue. This is truly a lovely spot to relax for a while and listen to the peaceful sound of the water tumbling over the rocks and the waterfall on a balmy summer's evening. During the winter, when the river is in flood, the water cascades over the rocky promontory beside the mill which normally stands far above the river.

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Top: *The Mill at Bruree.*
Bottom: *Ballynoe Churchyard.*

BRUREE HOUSE

Bruree House was bought in 1868 by John Gubbins. It was here that he bred two winners of the English Derby, Galteemore (1897) and Ardpatrik (1902). John Gubbins was one of the leading owners and breeders in horse racing in Britain and Ireland for many years. The House later became the residence of the daughter of the Duke of Westminster, Lady Ursula Vernon. It is now owned by Sr. Consilio and is one of the Cuan Mhuire treatment centres for people with drug and alcohol related problems.

BRUREE'S CASTLES

Overlooking the village of Bruree is a very imposing structure, situated in Ballynoe Churchyard. The ivy covered ruin, about 70 feet high, is all that remains of a 13th or 14th century castle. It is one of two castles close to Bruree which belonged to the Norman de Lacy family. This single tower, because of its position overlooking the surrounding countryside, was probably used for defensive purposes. The second de Lacy castle is about half a mile down the river valley and is probably built on the site of a much older fortified residence. Historians believe that the ruins date from two very separate periods.

PARISH CHURCHES

The Catholic Church of the Immaculate Conception was officially opened on April 26th, 1925. It was built from locally quarried limestone and replaced one which had been in use since the early 1830's. The older Church was used as a dance-hall and is now a Shannon Development advance factory.

The Catholic Church of St. Munchin in Rockhill was built in 1842 and is supposed to be close to the site of a Mass Rock dating from Penal days.

The Church of Ireland chapel in Ballynoe Churchyard dates from the early 1800's and has not been used for services for many years. Glebe House, approximately half a mile from the village, was built in 1813 and was the residence of the local Vicar.



Top: *Church of the Immaculate Conception, Bruree.*
Bottom: *Church of St. Munchin, Rockhill.*

ST. MUNCHIN

The parish of Rockhill-Bruree is dedicated to St. Munchin, or Mainchín ("little monk"), who is also the patron saint of the Diocese of Limerick. He founded a church on a hill over-looking the village, in what is now Ballynoe churchyard. No trace of this church now remains. St. Munchin's Well is situated on the opposite bank of the river at the end of Main Street. There is no longer any water in this well, the site of which is marked by a group of large boulders. St. Munchin's Feast Day is January 2nd and up to the beginning of this century religious ceremonies were held at the well on this parish holiday.

THE RAHEENS

The Raheens are two ring forts to the west of the village on the steep slope on the left bank of the Maigue. They are both roughly circular in shape, though their shape is hard to distinguish as they are overgrown with bushes. The one nearer the village is the smaller, approximately 30 m. (100 ft.) across. The larger is about 46m. (150 ft.) in diameter. Both date from the time when Bruree was the seat of kings and are reputed to be the oldest of Bruree's Royal residences.

KNOCKDUHA

The shape of the tumulus at Knockduha, also on the west side of the village, is more easily distinguished than that of the Raheens. This is probably an earthen burial mound, a supposition reinforced by the presence of a pillar stone at the centre of the mound. The tumulus is approximately 37m. (120 ft.) in diameter.

LIOS OLIUM OR LISSOLEEM

The largest of the forts in the locality, Lios Olium, is also to the west of the village and also on the left bank of the river. It is reputed to have been the residence of King Oilíoll Ollum, a second century King of Munster. The fort (which is not visible from the public road) is approximately 92m. (300 ft.) in diameter and, though overgrown, is in an excellent state of preservation.

BRUREE'S KINGS

Much of the early history of Ireland is gleaned from legend and folklore and what is fact and what is fiction is a matter of debate. One thing is certain, however, and that is that Bruree was a very important place in ancient times. As a royal seat, Bruree may be over 2,000 years old. It was one of the seats of the kings of Munster and may even be older than the royal seat of Cashel. Kings of Munster spent a part of the year in Bruree. Legend has it that Bruree was the seat of Oilioll Ollum, a second century king of Munster, who is reckoned to be the ancestor of many of the kings of Munster. He is reputed to have received his nickname, Ollum (meaning "bare ear") during an encounter with the goddess Áine in which she bit off his ear.

One of the descendants of Oilioll was Fiacha Fidhgeinte whose descendants, in turn, gave their name to the territory of Uí Fidhgeinte. Bruree was the royal seat of this territory, which covered an area roughly corresponding to the current Diocese of Limerick. Another supposed descendant of Oilioll Ollum, Donovan, while occupying the royal seat of Bruree, conspired in the murder of Mahon, king of Munster, in 976. Mahon's brother, Brian Boru, took revenge for his brother's murder, killing Donovan and his co-conspirators and levelling the royal fort in Bruree.

THE DE LACYS

The Norman de Lacy family was associated with Bruree for well over 400 years. The family became landowners in Bruree in 1290. The de Lacys came to regard themselves as Irish and took up arms against England and fought in the wars in Ireland during the 16th and 17th centuries. The family lost their lands in the Cromwellian plantations of the 1650's. Members of the family left Ireland with the Irish nobility and soldiers after the fall of Limerick in 1691 (the Flight of the Wild Geese). Some of the de Lacy family later served with great distinction in the armies of Spain, France, Hungary, Poland and Russia and received many high honours in their adopted countries.

BRUREE - A WALKING TOUR

On a fine day Bruree is a lovely place to take a couple of hours off and stroll to each of the landmarks mentioned in this guide. I would suggest that you park your car in the village and start your tour by visiting the De Valera Museum and Bruree Heritage Centre.

When you have completed your visit to the Museum it is just a short walk to the Mill. Turn right outside the Museum gate and travel along St. Munchins Terrace to the Mill. Relax here for a while and don't forget to take some photographs.

We return along St. Munchin's Terrace to continue our tour. Cross the seven arched bridge over the Maigue and travel up the laneway to the left to visit Ballynoe churchyard.

When you leave the churchyard continue along the road, taking the bye-road to the left. A couple of hundred yards on, on the left, you will see Glebe House. Travelling along this road, which rises fairly sharply, you come, at the top of the rise, to Knockduha Tumulus, beside the road on the left. As you stop to get your breath back, take in the magnificent views of Counties Limerick, Cork, Clare and Tipperary. You can return to the village from here by the same route, but it is worthwhile taking the longer way back. Walk onwards until you reach the main Cork-Limerick road at Rockhill Cross. The Church you can see on the hillside on the other side of the road is St. Munchin's Church, Rockhill.

Turn right onto the main road and take the next right (at O'Rourke's Cross) to return to the village. On your way in you will pass Bruree Creamery, founded in 1912. Further on you will see, in on your left, Lotteragh Lower castle dating probably from the 13th or 14th century. The first area over-grown with bushes on the left of the road contains one of two forts known locally as the Raheens. The second fort is nearer the village and is also over-grown. Both are on a steep slope on the banks of the Maigue and are quite large. As you come towards the village, you will be afforded some lovely views of the Mill and the village with the river Maigue in the foreground. Stop at the new park and stroll along the riverbank. Again, don't forget to take a few photographs of the village from this viewpoint.

As you walk through the village there are a few landmarks to look out for. The group of boulders in the upper car park on the right mark the site of St. Munchin's Well. From here you can see, across the river, Ballynoe

churchyard. A new park area here, beside the river, is a nice place to relax. The road to the right leads to Bruree House (now Cuan Mhuire) and continues onwards to Charleville. Across the street from this road is a narrow laneway which leads to the old converted Catholic church. The wrought iron gates bear the name of the buildings owners, Shannon Development. Further up the village you will come to the Church of the Immaculate Conception, set in its grounds on the left.

Further along again, you will come to the site of Bruree Railway Station. The railway line first ran through Bruree in 1862. The station finally closed in 1967. The line ran under the arch on the right of the current road and the road crossed the track via the bridge.

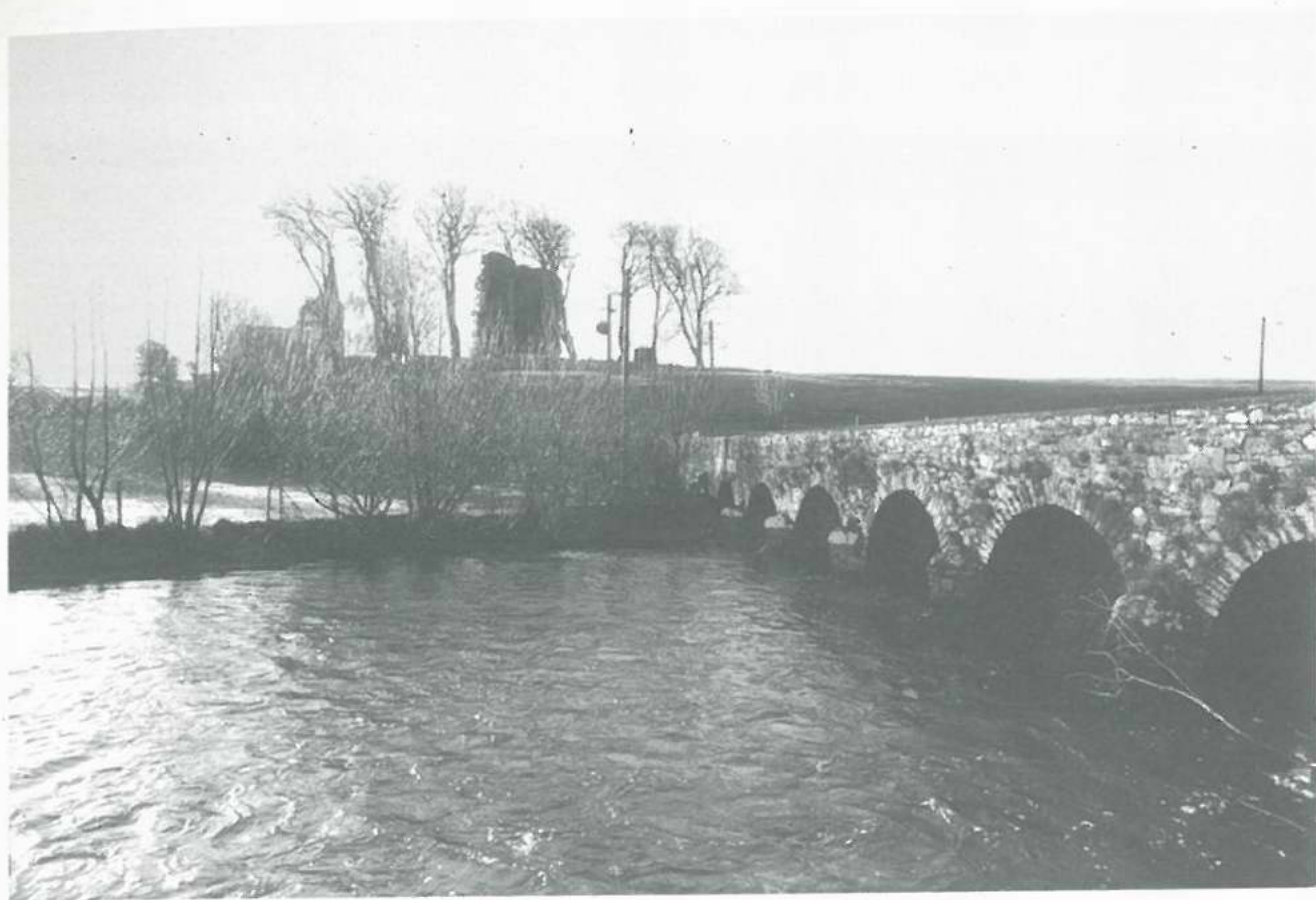
The road continues onwards towards Kilmallock, but we will turn left at the next cross. Here you will see a cast iron water pump from which the cross gets its name, i.e. the Pump Cross. In the days prior to rural water schemes the countryside, and indeed the towns and villages, were dotted with these pumps. People could be seen visiting these pumps several times a day with white enamelled buckets to draw water for domestic use. Roughly three-quarters of a mile from the cross you will come to the restored De Valera House. This is open to the public.

We have now reached the end of this tour. Details of longer walks can be had at the De Valera Museum and Bruree Heritage Centre.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit to Bruree and that it will not be long before you return. Don't forget to tell your friends about this "very special place."

Slán go fóill!

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THE MAIGUE

The river Maigue has been the focal point for settlements in Bruree from ancient times. The ring forts, the de Lacy Castles and the modern village are all in close proximity to the river. However, the village is on the opposite bank of the river to the older settlements.

The river Maigue flows through County Limerick to eventually join the river Shannon north of Kildimo. The river valley is, in the main, beautifully wooded and encompasses many large estates between Bruree and the Shannon Estuary. The river valley was immortalised by the Maigue Poet, Andrias MacCraith, in his poem which includes the lines “Cois Máighe na gcaor na gcraobh na gcruach.....” This paints a picture of river banks brightened by berries (caor), lined with overhanging branches (craobh) and fields of haystacks (cruach).

Bruree fits very well into this picture of the Maigue valley.