

IRONWORK IN LIMERICK

Ironwork also has a long and rich history in Limerick. Patrick McDonnell's article on Limerick Iron Foundries 1806-1989 gives a great insight into the craft. There was a large iron making industry in the Sliabh Aughty area of East Clare where extensive native woodlands extended from near Tulla to Portumna. The remains of two blast furnaces can be seen at Whitegate and Raheen, near Tuamgreaney.

Iron ore was also mined near Askeaton and shipped to Limerick from where it was taken by road to Killaloe and again by boat to the furnace sites. Ore was also imported from England to Limerick and transported in to the East Clare blast furnaces. During the industrial revolution demand greatly increased and an iron foundry was set up on Clare Street by James Doyle in 1806. His was the first in Limerick to use the cupola furnace and began a new form of manufacture that would lead to numerous foundries producing all

sorts of products including kitchen ranges. Ironwork in Limerick would continue until 1989 with the closure of the Shannon foundry, which was by then the last remaining foundry in Limerick.

Today, Eric O'Neill, artist blacksmith, puts a new spin on ironwork, and is educating many others in the historical significance and practical learning of the traditional craft. He's currently teaching the first City and Guilds accredited blacksmithing course in the country at LCFE Cappamore, leads a Skills for work Programme which was part of the Skills for Work submission that won the Aontas Star Award last year, and is also teaching introduction evening classes to the craft of blacksmithing at the same venue, the only fully kitted out forge classroom in the country.

As an artist blacksmith, he is artist in residence at Cappamore Arts Studios, where he designs and completes ongoing projects and continue his "journey of self-development in my chosen medium." Eric's work is currently on show at Limerick Craft Hub, The Hunt Museum, Dartfield House Museum Loughrae, The Design and Craft Studio Charleville and at his own studio at Cappamore Library. He lectures on and demonstrates his craft countrywide, to educate all as to the importance of this little understood aspect of our cultural heritage. The most recent project Eric was involved with in this area was the restoration of Crecora Church's gates and railings.

You can take a look at more of his work on the website www.killuraghcraftworks.com.

