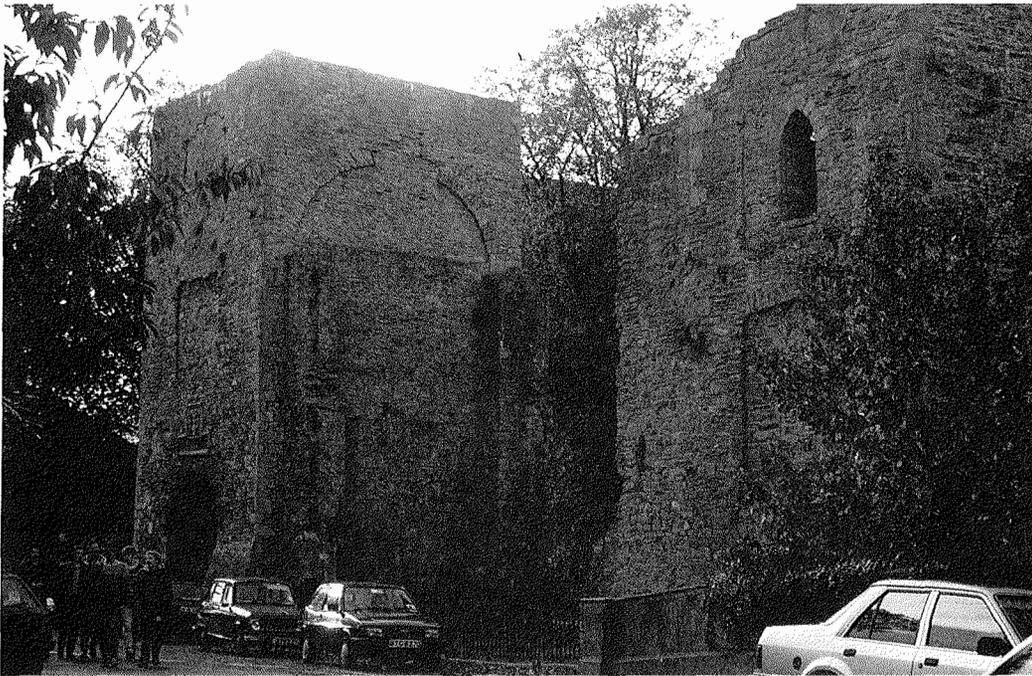


INFORMATION SHEET 17: Maynooth

Maynooth is situated nearly 25 kilometres west of Dublin on the wide, fertile lowland which stretches across much of counties Meath and Kildare. Today, Maynooth is a small, compact town with a formal street pattern, edged on its south side by modern housing estates.

One end of the wide main street leads to the long avenue to Carton House, home of the dukes of Leinster who were the landlords of Maynooth. The other end leads to Maynooth Castle, which dates back to the Anglo-Norman times, and to St Patrick's College, established two hundred years ago.

The name *Maynooth* (*Maigh Nuadh* - Plain of Nuadha) derives from the god Nuadu Necht, the grandfather or great-grandfather of Finn Mac Cumhaill.



Maynooth Castle 1996

The castle and its village

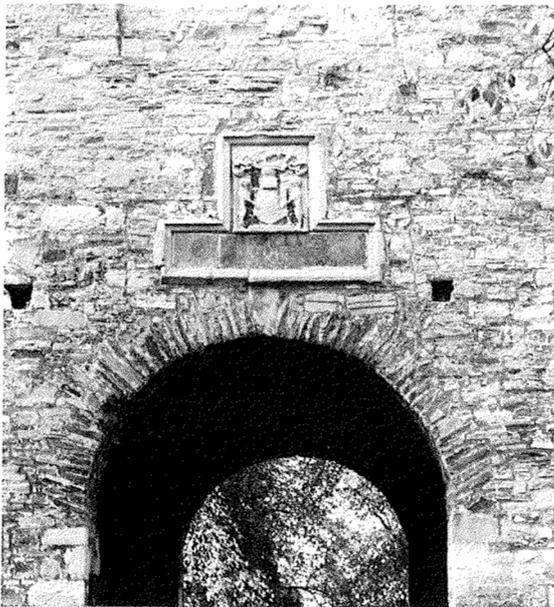
During the early Christian period, there were three monastic sites in the Maynooth area — Donaghmore, Taghadoe and Laraghbryan. Ruins of these monasteries still exist, but they lie some distance from the town of Maynooth.

The first known development in Maynooth was the castle built by Maurice FitzGerald, ancestor of the earls of Kildare. This was commenced soon after the area was granted to him in 1176 by Richard de Clare (Strongbow). As there is no major river or hill nearby to provide a good defensive site, the castle was built in the angle where the

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Lyreen River is joined by another very small stream. These waterways provided a moat on two sides of the castle complex.

In the early years of the settlement, there were two mills, a weekly market and an annual fair. Maynooth remained a small village, with houses clustered around the castle and near the river. It was not important enough to be chosen as the site for an abbey or friary, or to need town walls for defence. The small population must have sheltered inside the castle bawn in times of trouble. There was a chapel, but this was probably associated with the castle and it never became a focal point in the town. The nearest parish church was two km away at Laraghbryan. Maynooth Castle was of major importance as the fortress of the powerful Garret Mór FitzGerald, earl of Kildare from 1478 to 1513. It had a famous library and in 1515, the short-lived College of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Maynooth was built on an unknown site nearby. In the 1630s, the castle was again important briefly when it was elaborately rebuilt by Richard Boyle, earl of Cork. However, it was never reoccupied after it was damaged in the Cromwellian wars of the 1640s. Its ruined presence continued to loom over the village, but it no longer had any role to play in the development of Maynooth.

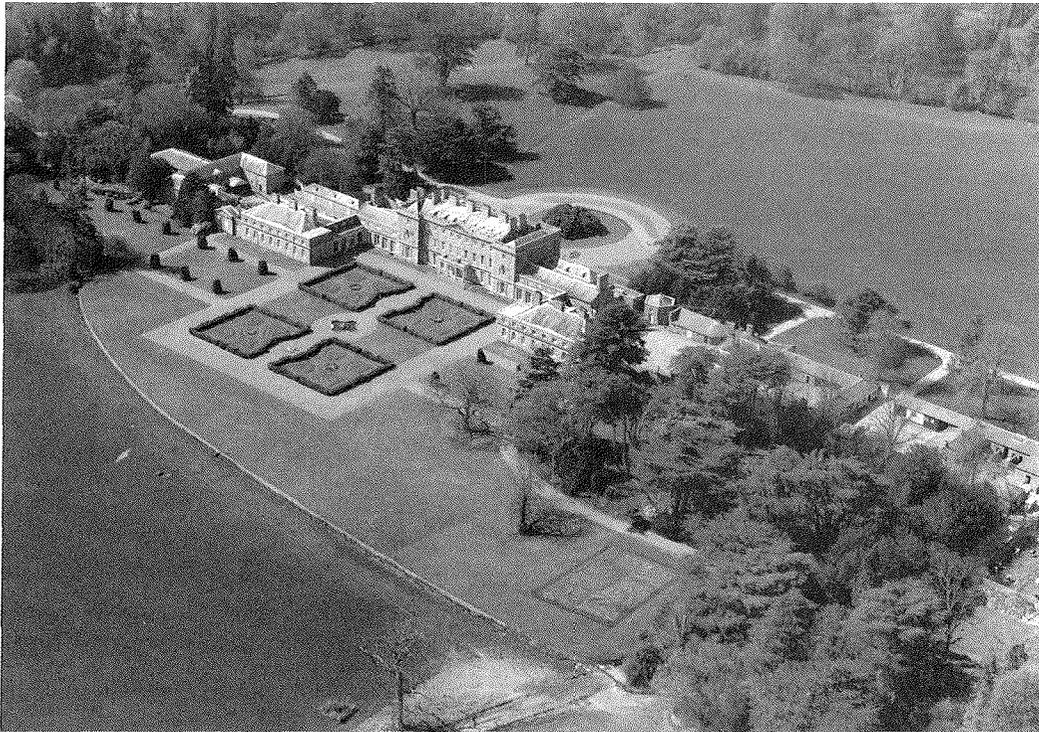


Gateway, Maynooth Castle

The market place was alongside the old castle, just outside the present entrance to Maynooth College. There was a second open space to the east of the market place where the main street widened almost to a square. By then, the nineteenth earl of Kildare had built a fine, wide avenue from the eastern end of Maynooth's main street across his parkland towards Carton House, the residence which he had rebuilt with great style in the 1740s.

A model village

All the same, the village prospered. New houses were built and there were weekly markets and annual fairs. As Maynooth was situated on the main route from Dublin to the west, it was a stopping place for travellers. By the time John Rocque surveyed the manor of Maynooth in 1757, there was a good bridge over the Lyreen River as well as a mill, a distillery, a bleach yard, an inn (the Kildare Arms) and the Church of Ireland church. A Roman Catholic chapel was tucked away in a side street and a charter school stood just outside the village in extensive grounds.



Carton House from the air (Irish Architectural Archive)

The earl also began to transform Maynooth's haphazard layout into the regular street pattern which exists today. The first block of new houses appears on the 1757 map, close to the entrance gates to the demesne. It was to take seventy years before the new layout, with an 24-metre wide main street and minor streets at right angles, was completed.



Main Street, Maynooth, looking West, c. 1900

(Lawrence Collection, National Library of Ireland)

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College and canal

Two other important factors began to shape the development of Maynooth. The first was the foundation of St Patrick's College in 1795. The first students were accommodated in the newly-built Stoyte House, which survives today as the central part of the front block of the college. By 1821, the first quadrangle of the new college was partly completed. During the nineteenth century, a second quadrangle was added (designed by the famous architect, A.W. Pugin), together with many other new buildings. At the turn of the century, the 250-foot tall chapel spire, one of the tallest in Ireland, was built. It remains a striking landmark.

From the very beginning, the college provided employment in Maynooth for both male and female workers. It also began to draw the focus of the town back towards the western end.



The Royal Canal looking East from Bond Bridge

Place, between the canal and Main Street, must have been a busy thoroughfare during the first half of the nineteenth century, but it lost its importance again after the arrival of the railway.

The second factor in the development of Maynooth was the construction of the Royal Canal, which was opened between Dublin and Kilcock in 1796 and extended to the River Shannon by 1817. A cross street, at right angles to the main street, linked the canal basin with the new William Bridge over the Lyreen River. This new bridge carried the realigned main route out of Maynooth to the west. Canal

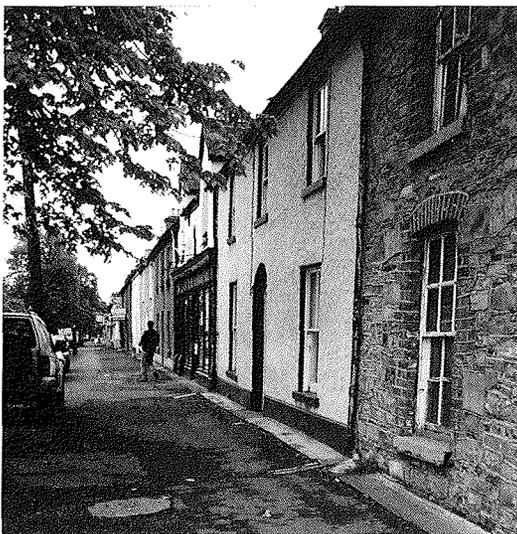
New focal points in the nineteenth century

In the 1770s, a market house had been built in the new square in the centre of the town. About 1820, this was replaced by a new courthouse. The market house and Maynooth's main pump (essential for daily life before there was a piped water supply), were also in Court House Square. The square must have formed a busy centre to the town.

The old Roman Catholic chapel, quietly sited in Pound Lane, was replaced by the fine Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the 1830s. This church was built on a more prominent site just outside Maynooth to the north of William Bridge. A boys' national school was opened in the old chapel. During the same period, the Presentation Order built a substantial convent and a girls' national school at the east end of the town.

Housing changes

Houses and cabins around the castle in the oldest part of Maynooth were swept away in the 1840s and replaced by a public parkland. Small terraces of houses and labourers' cottages were added in the back streets, such as Dillon's Row on the Dunboyne Road (on the site of the old Charter School). A few large houses were built around the edges of the town, including the parochial house next to the new church. Maynooth's newly built houses had stone walls and slate roofs. This meant that they were superior to those of many other nineteenth-century towns, where thatch was still common and mud-walled cabins lined the approach roads. Trees were planted along the wide main street, giving a gracious air to the main route through the town.



Houses in Main Street



Cottages in Double Lane

The railway

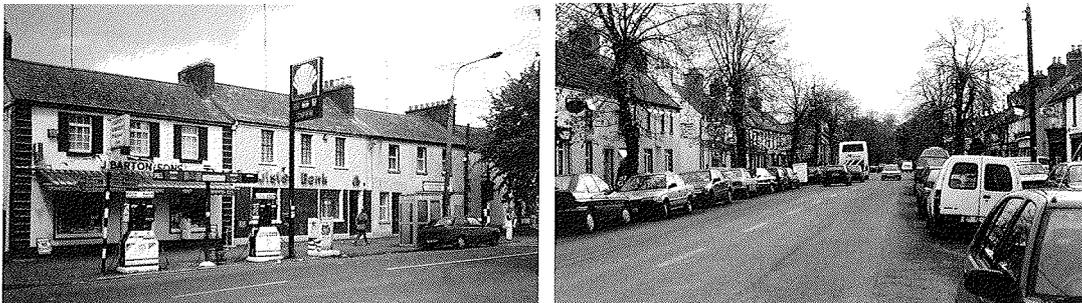
The first stretch of the Midland Great Western Railway opened from Dublin in 1847, making Maynooth only an hour's travelling time from the city. Maynooth was linked to Galway and Sligo by rail by 1862. The railway at Maynooth follows the course of the canal, but Maynooth railway station was built with an entrance from the second roadway that leads south from Main Street. Although this road runs from the market square in the middle of the town in the direction of Straffan and leads to the railway station, it remained of no great importance until the recent development of housing estates on the south side of the canal and railway.

Twentieth-century decline and revival

The population of Maynooth fell during the last part of the nineteenth and first part of the twentieth century. This decline was common in Irish towns at the time. Many of the poorer houses built in the early nineteenth century were abandoned. The courthouse was burned down in 1920 and the site remained vacant for some years. (A building containing a bus shelter and toilets was put up on the site in 1978, but this was demolished in 1995 and the open space was landscaped.)

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After 1960, two new factors came into play. Until then, almost all of the students in Maynooth College had been young men who were studying for the priesthood. In 1966, the college began to admit lay students, which led to a rapid expansion in numbers. New college buildings, including student hostels, were erected at the west end of the town. As Dublin grew, Maynooth came within commuting range of the capital. Housing estates sprang up to the south of the town and older property in the centre was renovated. The railway station, closed in 1947, was reopened for passengers in 1981. The population rocketed from 1,300 in 1971 to 6,000 in 1991 and then 9,300 in 1996.



Two views of Main Street, Maynooth in the 1990s

Meanwhile, traffic was steadily increasing on the Dublin–Galway road, which ran through the centre of Maynooth. By the early 1990s, the town presented a congested appearance, with its one shopping street, Main Street, choked by long-distance traffic. The new M4 motorway, which opened in 1994, has freed the main street of unnecessary cars. The old Presentation Convent has been converted to apartments. A large shopping, hotel and apartment scheme close to the town centre has provided facilities, including parking space, on a scale which is very different from the old.



Shops in Main Street



New shops in Courthouse Square