



# Exploring Fingal

Comhairle Contae  
Fhine Gall  
Fingal County  
Council



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



## WELCOME

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Fingal has always been a place where people have come to visit and to live. Over 10,000 years successive generations of people from the first farmers to the Vikings have left their legacy in the landscape around us-in the churches, towers and holy wells in towns and villages; in the big houses and stone tombs; on the islands and along our coast.

Included in this leaflet are some familiar and many not-so-well known sites to explore.

## HOW IT WORKS:

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The sites are arranged as a circuit of the county-along the coast and through the heart of rural Fingal. Some sites are fully accessible, others less so and a small number are not publically accessible but are prominent in the landscape.

Where facilities such as car parking are available this is highlighted but some sites are a little off the beaten track, over stiles, through fields or by beach!

## GETTING TO FINGAL:

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By train from Pearse/Tara/Connolly station heading northbound

Dart all stations from Howth Junction to Howth or Malahide.

Northern commuter line all stations from Malahide to Balbriggan  
[www.iarnrodeireann.ie](http://www.iarnrodeireann.ie)

By bus from Lower Abbey street nos 31, 31B, 33, 41  
[www.dublinbus.ie](http://www.dublinbus.ie)

By car Dublin airport is in Fingal, M1, R132, R122



## 1. BALROTHERY MEDIEVAL CHURCH & GRAVEYARD

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Located on high ground to the west of Balrothery village, the surviving residential tower dates to the 15th century and is similar to that at Lusk. The graveyard contains a significant collection of 18th century inscribed gravestones as well as a reused millstone. Look out for the stone heads!

*Access: From village via steep hill to church.*

*No access to interior.*

*Nearby: Balrothery Castle, Inch Mound, Standing Stone*

## 2. STANDING STONE, BALROTHERY

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At almost 2m in height this is the only recorded standing stone in Fingal and it dominates the green space of Cloich Choirneal estate. Standing stones were monumental markers of burials, routeways or territories of the Iron Age/Early Medieval period. Markings on the base of the stone were at one time thought to be ogham but have since been interpreted as the marks

made by a plough.

*Access: From Balrothery village by car or on foot*

*Nearby: Balrothery medieval church and graveyard, Balrothery castle*

## 3. ARDGILLAN CASTLE, BALBRIGGAN

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Built by the Rev. Robert Taylor in the 18th century it was originally known as Prospect House. The site was a wooded hill that was cleared by out-of-service soldiers from Bangor Co. Down. The workers were paid a penny a day, and given sleeping

accommodation, one meal a day and a tot of Bushmill's rough whiskey. It became Ardgillan about 1815 and remained in the Taylor family until the 1960s. The house and grounds, now managed by Fingal County Council have been restored and are open to the public.

*Access: By car and onfoot from Skerries or Balbriggan.*

See [www.ardgillancastle.ie](http://www.ardgillancastle.ie)

*Facilities: Carparks, demesne walks, guided tours, tea rooms, playground.*

*Nearby: Barnageeragh beach.*

## 4. BALBRIGGAN FACTORIES

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In 1780 the firm of Smyth & Co. was established in Balbriggan where it traded for over 200 years. One of its employees was Thomas Managan, who along with his brother was the first to perfect lace stockings. Their customers included the Empress of Austria, the Czarina of Russia and Queen Victoria of Britain. The remains of Balbriggan's industrial heritage can be seen in the buildings at the heart of the town.

*Access: Can be viewed from Railway Street.*

[www.visitbalbriggan.com](http://www.visitbalbriggan.com)

*Nearby: Balbriggan harbour*

## 5. NEWHAVEN HARBOUR, BREMORE

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Just south of the headland of Bremore is Newhaven harbour once known as Orde or Horde. In 1560 a grant was made for the building of a 'quay or harbour and fisher town' at Bremore. By 1684 Newhaven had its own customs station. Nowadays the remains of a stone pier extend from near the base of the cliff out into the sea for over 60m and can best be seen at low tide.

*Access: 1.5km walk along the beach north from carpark at Balbriggan Martello Tower.*

*Nearby: Bremore Passage tombs, Bremore Castle*

## 6. SKERRIES MILLS

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The current 19th century mill complex occupies the site of a watermill mentioned in the 16th century as 'the watermill of Holmpatrick'. The complex is an L-shaped building with a mill race, mill pond and is overlooked by two restored windmills. It was used as a bakery until 1986. Restored by Fingal County Council it opened as a

visitor centre in 1999.

*Access: On foot from Skerries*

*Facilities: Carpark, guided tours, café, Saturday farmer's market.*

See [www.skerriesmills.org](http://www.skerriesmills.org)

*Nearby: Kybe well, Holmpatrick church*

## 7. MARTELLO TOWER, SKERRIES

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One of twelve Martello Towers along Fingal's coastline it was built in the early 1800s to protect against the threat of Napoleonic invasion. Disarmed in 1874, Skerries Martello was subsequently used as a home, coal depot, tearooms and eventually became the focal point of Red island holiday camp from the 1950s until the early 1970s.

*Access: From Skerries by car or on foot. No access to interior. Facilities: Carpark, playground.*

*Nearby: Skerries harbour, beaches*

## 8. BALDONGAN CASTLE, SKERRIES

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Dating from the 15th century, tradition has it that Baldongan was a friary, a nunnery and a school for daughters of the gentry. In 1642 it was besieged by the Confederate army, the castle being reduced to ruins. Despite what the name suggests, the last remains of the castle were actually removed in the 1970s. What survives is the medieval church. Surrounded by a walled graveyard, it consists of a nave and chancel, with a tower to the west. A double bellcote from where the bells would have rang out, tops the tower. Thirteen counties can reputedly be seen from the top.

*Access: From Lusk by car c.5km; From Skerries by car 3.6km. By foot across field.*

*No access to the interior of the tower.*

*Nearby: St Mobhi's medieval church and graveyard*

## 9. LUSK CHURCH AND ROUND TOWER

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Lusk was a major ecclesiastical centre associated with Saint Mac Cullin. The round tower, one of only two in Fingal, was a symbol of status. The church of Lusk was burned by the Vikings in 827 and 856. In 1053 hostages were taken from the church and in 1069 it was burnt again. The medieval residential tower contains the effigy tomb of Marian Sharl and her husband Christopher Barnewell, with whom she had five sons and fifteen daughters! It was erected by her second husband in 1589.

*Access: From village via laneway to graveyard, church and round tower.*

*Keyholder: Kelly's Garage*

*Nearby: Rogerstown estuary*

## 10. LANESTOWN CASTLE, NEWBRIDGE DEMESNE

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One of a series of towerhouses that dot the Pale, Lanestown or Lanistown was owned by the de Bathe family until around 1600. Like many of the towerhouses of Fingal it has a barrel vaulted ground floor, a garderobe, and fireplaces. There is evidence on the outer wall for an adjoining building, long since removed. In 1797 Mr

Cobbe, the proprietor of Newbridge Demesne used this castle as his dining hall 'but after this time it was no longer kept up'.

*Access: On foot, across park, from entrance to Newbridge Demesne. No access to interior.*

*Nearby: Newbridge House, Donabate*

[www.newbridgehouseandfarm.com](http://www.newbridgehouseandfarm.com)

## 11. NEWBRIDGE HOUSE, DONABATE

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The lands of Newbridge and Lanistown were purchased by Sir William Handcock in 1698. The present house was built in 1747-52 for Dr Charles Cobbe, Archbishop of Dublin. Originally attributed to Dublin's foremost architect Richard Castle, recent research indicates it was in fact

designed by English architect James Gibbs, an acquaintance of the Cobbes. Gibbs however never visited Ireland and the building was overseen by George Semple. The west wing was built in 1765 while the formal gardens were replaced in the 1770s by parkland. While the Cobbe family still retains an apartment there, Newbridge is managed by Fingal County Council and is open to the public.

*Access: On foot or by car from Donabate village*

*Facilities: Carpark, farm, guided tours, playground, demesne walks*

[www.newbridgehouseandfarm.com](http://www.newbridgehouseandfarm.com)

*Nearby: Donabate medieval church*

## 12. STELLA'S TOWER, PORTRANE

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Today an ivy covered ruin with a distinct brick chimney, the Inquisition of 1541 described the tower house as 'having divers buildings including a threshing house, hemp yard and haggard. Jonathan Swift wrote to his beloved Stella (Esther Johnston) who was living there in 1712. The last inhabitant was Lady Acheson who died in 1735.

*Access: On private land and not publically accessible. Visible from the road on the approach to Portrane from Donabate.*

*Nearby: St Catherine's medieval church and graveyard, the Burrow*

### 13. LISSENHALL MEDIEVAL BRIDGE, SWORDS

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Dated to 1450-1550 the arched bridge at Lissenhall is one of Fingal's oldest and was until the 1980s, part of the main Dublin-Belfast road (R132). In the 19th century, expansion of the road network, and bridge improvement led to the development of many stopping points for coaches.

*Access: Off R132 north of Swords at turn to the Emmaus Centre.  
Nearby: Swords Castle, Collections Resource Centre of the National Museum of Ireland*

### 14. ST COLUMBA'S, CHURCH ROAD, SWORDS

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St Colmcille is said to have founded the church at Swords in the 6th century. It grew as a powerful ecclesiastical centre, to become a plebia or mother church. Ecclesiastical sites were not only centres of spirituality but major centres of economic power. The bodies of Brian Boru and his son Morrough, were overnighed in Swords church after the Battle of Clontarf in 1014, having been conveyed in solemn procession from Dublin en route to Armagh for burial. Incorporated into the base of the medieval square tower is an earlier carved slab.

*Access: From Church Road, Swords.  
No access to the interior.  
Nearby: Swords Castle, St Colmcille's well*

### 15. SWORDS CASTLE

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The castle at Swords was built by Archbishop of Dublin, John Comyn as his manorial residence around 1200. It was never a castle in the accepted sense but an episcopal palace. The curtain walls form an irregular polygon enclosing over an acre. Excavation of the chapel in the 1970s unearthed a 14th century tile pavement, part of which is on display in the National Museum of Ireland. Recent excavations uncovered burials that appear to predate the building of the gatehouse. A National Monument, Swords Castle is in the care of Fingal County Council with conservation works ongoing at the site.

*Access: Currently not open to the public but visible from Main Street, Swords.  
Nearby: St Columba's church, round tower and St Colmcille's holy well*

### 16. BRACKENSTOWN CANAL, SWORDS

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Once part of Brackenstown estate, and recorded as a medieval fishpond, this 'old pond' is in fact a canal. The remnant of extensive landscaping undertaken by Robert Molesworth in the early decades of the 18th century it was a model landscape which reflected Whig philosophy, Italianate design and 'a farmlike way of gardening', ideals also reflected in Castletown and Carton demesnes.

*Access: Across playing pitches to rear of Hilltown housing estate, west Swords.  
Nearby: River Valley Park*

## 17. MALAHIDE CASTLE



Home of the Talbot family from 1174 until 1976, Malahide Castle is an example of the evolution of architecture and fashion throughout the ages. The core of the building is 12th century, the first floor now containing the 'Oak room', lined with 16th century panelling. A turret that encloses a staircase known as Puck' staircase, is where a small bearded ghost keeps watch. Now owned by Fingal County Council the house and demesne are open to the public.

*Access: By foot or car from Malahide village*

[www.malahidecastleandgardens.ie](http://www.malahidecastleandgardens.ie)

*Facilities: Carparks, guided tours, demesne walks, playground, sports facilities, Avoca.*

*Nearby: Malahide demesne church*

## 18. ST MARNOCK'S CHURCH, PORTMARNOCK



Reputedly built on the site of an earlier church this medieval church was in ruinous condition by the mid-16th century. Near to the church is the site of a holy well, which was described as a circular pool with sixteen stone steps down into it. An ogham stone, with the fingerprints of St Marnock on it, reputedly stood beside the well in the 19th century but was broken up for building material. Despite being held in esteem by local fishermen and sailors for foretelling the coming of storms, there is now no trace of the well.

*Access: Through stiles from Strand Road, south of the Stables.*

*Nearby: Velvet Strand*

## 19. AUSTIN COOPER'S VAULT, KINSEALY CHURCH



Within Kinsealy medieval church is a family vault that contain the remains of Austin Cooper 'a learned Irish antiquary and lover of art and literature'. As paymaster to the Pensioners and Civil and Military Establishments in the late 18th century, Cooper travelled Ireland recording monuments and historical sites. His close friends included another noted antiquarian,

Gabriel Beranger. Cooper was also a state lottery agent, winning £20,000 on one of his own tickets, which allowed him to buy Abbeville as his country home. Abbeville is most famously associated with former Taoiseach Charles Haughey.

*Access: By car from Kinsealy. Limited on-road carparking*

*Nearby: Abbeville House, St Doulaghs Church*

## 20. ST DOULAGHS CHURCH, KINSEALY



The present working church has elements dating from the 12th to 15th centuries as well as 19th century additions. The vaulted stone roof is at 68 degrees, the steepest in Ireland. It is similar in style to that of the pre-eminent Romanesque church, Cormac's Chapel at Cashel. Associated with the 7th century anchorite, St Doulagh, there is a 'hermit's cell' in the entrance hall, reputed to be the burial place of the founder. Remnants of an ecclesiastical enclosure survived in the form of a bank south of the graveyard into the 1970s and have lately been mapped through geophysical survey. By the roadside is a short-armed granite cross that was formerly in the graveyard.

*Access: By car from N32 north on the R107 for 1.3km. Access to interior by arrangement*

*Nearby: Abbeville House, Kinsealy church*

## 21. ST DOULAGH'S WELL, KINSEALY

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St Doulagh's well located in the grounds of St Doulagh's church. Claimed to be the original place of baptism for the people of Fingal it is enclosed by an octagonal building. A fresco painted internally in 1609 by Mr Fagan of Feltrim was visible into the 19th century but unfortunately no longer survives. Adjacent is St Catherine's well which was thought to cure leprosy.

*Access: Via steps from St Doulagh's Church.  
Nearby: St Doulagh's Church, Kinsealy church,  
Abbeville House*

## 22. HOWTH PORTAL TOMB (AIDEEN'S GRAVE)

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This portal tomb or dolmen is located high on the hill of Howth, just below Muck Rock. A large roof stone rests on two portals over a partially collapsed chamber with a partially collapsed doorstone. In the late 18th century Gabriel Beranger drew the 'cromlech' at Howth and recorded the legend that it was a capstone thrown by Fionn Mac Cumhaill from the bog of Allen. According to another local legend it was the resting place of Aideen who died of grief for the loss of her husband Oscar in the Battle of Gabhra.

*Access: By foot through woodland at Deer Park Golf  
Facilities: Carparking in Deer Park Golf  
Nearby: Howth Castle, Shielmartin & Dun Hill cairns*

## 23. CAIRNS, HOWTH HEAD

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The stone cairns on the summit of Howth are associated in legend with Crimthann, a pre-Christian chieftain. Following an expedition across the sea he returned to Howth with a golden chariot and chess board, an all-conquering sword and spear. His

bones are said to be buried in the valley between Dun Hill and Shelmartin which are marked by stone cairns. Another cairn site is at Kilrock. All are on walking trails and have spectacular views of Dublin Bay to the south and Fingal's coastline to the north.

*Access: By foot via trail paths  
Facilities: Two carparks; Howth Looped Walks  
[www.fingaldublin.ie/walking-cycling/howth](http://www.fingaldublin.ie/walking-cycling/howth)  
Nearby: Aideen's Grave, Howth Castle*

## 24. HOWTH CASTLE GATEHOUSE

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Howth Castle, the seat of the St Lawrences, has stood on the north side of Howth Head for over 800 years. The illustrious deeds of the Lords of Howth are recorded in the 16th century Book of Howth, a compilation of annals, historical tales and legends, now in Trinity College, Dublin. The medieval tower house and gate house have been added to throughout the years. Extensive gardens, famed for their rhododendrons, contain a golf course. Today the castle is the private residence of the Gaisford St Lawrence family.

*Access: The access for Deer Park Golf runs directly by the gatehouse. Tours for educational groups and recognised bodies by arrangement  
[www.howthcastle.ie](http://www.howthcastle.ie)  
Nearby: Howth portal tomb, Howth Transport Museum*

## 25. ST. MARY'S ABBEY, HOWTH

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The original church at Howth was founded by Sitric, the Viking King of Dublin around 1042. In 1235, the church of St Nessian was moved from Ireland's Eye to Howth and rededicated by the Archbishop of Dublin to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The upstanding remains date mainly to the 14th and 15th centuries. The western gable has

a triple bellcote with a stairs for access. In the southeast corner of the abbey is the chantry chapel which contains the tomb of Christopher St Lawrence, 13th Baron of Howth, who died in 1492 and his wife, Anna Plunkett of Ratoath.

*Access: On foot from carpark at Howth harbour. Via steps down into graveyard. Nearby: Howth Martello tower, Howth harbour, Ireland's Eye*

## 26. ST MARGARET'S HOLY WELL

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Enclosed by a brick wall with upper stone masonry, it resembles a tank more than the traditional well. Gated with steps in the wall, there is an extensive plaque along the west end, according to which, Sir John Plunkett of Dunsoghley who died in 1582, enclosed the well for a bath. The structure however appears to be of much later date.

In the 19th century it was frequented for its medicinal qualities where 'tepid water may be seen to be bubbling up from the bottom every minute'.

*Access: By foot from church carpark in St Margaret's village.*

*Facilities: Carpark nearby*

*Nearby: St Margaret's medieval church and graveyard*

## 27. DUNSOGHLEY CASTLE

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Dunsoghley Castle is one of the pre-eminent towerhouses of Fingal, built in the 15th century by Thomas Plunkett, a chief justice of the King's Bench. It has four projecting corner towers, the prison being in the smallest turret. Exceptional is the original oak roof which is preserved over the second floor. To the south is a small chapel. The plaque over the doorway is inscribed with the instruments of the Passion, and the date 1573. Dunsoghley Castle is a National Monument.

*Access: By arrangement with the OPW [www.opw.ie](http://www.opw.ie).*

*Through private property*

*Nearby: Dublin airport*

## 28. HOLY WELLS, ST CATHERINE'S PARK

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Located within St Catherine's Park, this is an unusual example of two wells side by side. Tradition has it that the water from the larger well was drunk and the water from the smaller well was used to bathe sore eyes. It was also said that the wells can never run dry nor can the water be brought to the boil. A carved stone head that used to be fixed to the canopy of the larger well has since disappeared.

*Access: By foot through St Catherine's park*

*[www.fingalcoco.ie/community-and-leisure/st-catherines-park](http://www.fingalcoco.ie/community-and-leisure/st-catherines-park)*

*Facilities: Carpark, demesne walks, sports pitches*

*Nearby: St Catherine's church*

## 29. LADYSWELL, MULHUDDART

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This holy well is a natural spring, now enclosed in a vaulted structure, with two inscribed stone finials on the roof. There are supposed to be nine cures in the water. In 1749 Isaac Butler described the well 'about midway ascending to ye church is an excellent well, it is carefully walled and several large trees about it.

Here on 8th September a great patron (pattern) is kept with a vast concourse of all sexes and ages from many miles, upwards of eighty tents are pitched here, furnished with all kinds of liquors and provisions for ye reception & refreshment of ye company'.

*Access: Public path, Church road, Mulhuddart*  
*Nearby: Mulhuddart medieval church*

## 30. CORDUFF RINGFORT

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Marked as fort on the 1837 Ordnance survey map it is believed to be a ringfort, essentially a farmstead of the first millennium AD. The ringfort is planted with trees and large boulders have been set along its upper edge. It is now criss-crossed with paths and known locally as a fairy fort.

*Access: Public pathway within Corduff Park*  
*Nearby: Mulhuddart church, Ladyswell holy well*

## 31. ROYAL CANAL

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The Royal Canal built to connect Dublin with the Shannon, was known as the Rival canal or the Cobblers canal in reference to Mr Binns, a retired shoemaker and member of the Board of the Grand Canal. He fell out with the other board members and set up a rival canal company. Works commenced in 1790 but were slowed considerably by two miles of deep sinking between Blanchardstown and Clonsilla. This set-back effectively bankrupted the company and it was eventually sold to the Midland & Great

Western railway to build a railway alongside. It was while walking along the canal that William Rowan Hamilton (1805-65) discovered quaternions, a revolutionary mathematical concept that he carved into the stone work at Broombridge. He was the director of the observatory at nearby Dunsink.

*Access: By foot [www.walks.iwai.ie/royal/](http://www.walks.iwai.ie/royal/)*  
*Nearby: Dunsink Observatory, Royal Canal way.*

## 32. BALLYBOUGHAL GRAVEYARD

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Located down a lane within the village, the graveyard contains the remains of the medieval Ballyboughal church. It has a triple bellcote on its western gable, a carved head on the arch of the east gable and the church has a window dating to c.1300. A reference from 1302 says that St Patrick's bachull or staff was kept there for a period. Baile Bachaille from which the village derives its name means 'town of the staff'.

*Access: By car or foot from Ballyboughal village*  
*Nearby: Westpalstown medieval church and graveyard*

### 33. HOLLYWOOD MEDIEVAL CHURCH

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It is thought that the place named Hollywood refers to the forest covered hills which once surrounded the area and were used for worship by the druids. There was an earlier church on the site which probably pre-dated the Anglo-Norman invasion. The present church dates from 1275 and belonged to the Priory of Llanthony in Wales. There are spectacular views of the county south to the Dublin and Wicklow mountains.

*Access: By car c.4km south of the Naul; c.3km west of the M1. Steep slope down into graveyard by foot.*

*Nearby: Naul Village*

### 34. MEDIEVAL SCULPTURE, GARRISTOWN LIBRARY

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Fragments of this medieval effigy were excavated in the graveyard of Garristown church. It portrays a female with a heavy woollen skirt, falling in regular folds, which is raised to reveal a smock underneath. Her feet rest on a tasselled cushion. Two smaller fragments were also discovered and a side slab of the tomb chest. The slab has been dated to the 15th century.

*Access: Dependant on library opening hours*

*[garristownlibrary@fingalcoco.ie](mailto:garristownlibrary@fingalcoco.ie)*

*Facilities: Library. Nearby: Garristown church and graveyard, Garristown windmill*

### 35. GRALLAGH MEDIEVAL CHURCH & GRAVEYARD

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The church of Grallagh was dedicated to St Michael. The remains of the medieval parish church, which was built before 1306 are visible by a bank of earth and stone. Within the graveyard is a holy well dedicated to St MacCullin which reputedly cures a variety of ailments. Outside the graveyard is a large boulder known as the holy stone. Reputedly a cure for backache.

*Access: By car just off R122 north of Oldtown Clonmethan and south of turn for Garristown R130*

*Nearby: Garristown village*

### 36. THE NAUL

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Naul meaning 'cliff' is perched above the river Delvin, Fingal's border with Meath. Within the village is a medieval church and graveyard. Nearby, although on private land is the Black Castle associated with the Cruise family- film star Tom Cruise is a descendant! An Anglo-Norman motte and the ruins of Westown

House can be viewed from the road to Grallagh. A focal point is the Séamus Ennis Cultural Centre outside of which is a statue of the famous uileann piper. To the north of the village are the megalithic mounds at Fourknocks, to the south Fingal's only hillfort at Knockbrack.

*Access: By car via R122 or R108*

*Facilities: Séamus Ennis Cultural Centre café*

*[www.seamusenniscentre.com](http://www.seamusenniscentre.com)*

*Nearby: Fourknocks passage tombs*

# FINGAL 2014

to BELFAST



MEATH

M2

M3

M50

N4

DUBLIN

LEIXLIP

LUCAN

