



Left: Ringfort overlooking the Jack Daws Glen at Toor near Hollywood.

Below: Viking grave-slab from Killegar, near Enniskerry.

Right: Viking lady's brooch, from Three-Mile Water, near Arklow (courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland).

## Vikings

By the year AD 800 Ireland had become a favourite target of the Scandinavian warriors known as Vikings. They arrived by sea in their sturdy ships in search of loot. The churches on the coastline were easy targets, being vulnerable and containing plenty of valuable gold and silver objects, such as chalices and shrines. The Vikings were also on the lookout for another valuable commodity — people. At this time the slave trade was thriving, and the monks and other people captured in these raids were sold into slavery.

Over time the Vikings, who called themselves Ostmen, or men from the east, began to settle down at certain coastal sites. Gradually these developed into the first towns in Ireland. The most famous of these Viking towns was Dublin, which was founded in the year 917. The Vikings also founded towns at Waterford and Cork. It appears that they established small towns or communities at Arklow and Wicklow as well, though there is little evidence to show this. The large towns like Dublin and the smaller communities at Arklow and Wicklow became important ports, where many exotic goods were brought into Ireland from Britain and mainland Europe. Shipbuilding was also an important industry at these towns. There were many benefits for those people living in the countryside near these new towns. The inhabitants of these towns needed food to eat, and timber to make their houses and ships. The farmers who lived in the hinterland of the towns were only too glad to supply the townspeople with food and timber.

When the Vikings first arrived they brought with them their own religion and gods. Over time they converted to Christianity. Archaeological evidence for this can be found at a few old graveyards in the north of Wicklow. For example, at Killegar near Enniskerry are a number of decorated stones that were used to mark the graves of Viking people who were buried in this Christian graveyard. On these stones are unusual decorations, not used by the local Irish but fashionable amongst the Viking inhabitants of Dublin.



### Credits and Acknowledgements

Editors—Cara Murray and Chris Corlett  
 Text—Chris Corlett (©)  
 Photographs—Chris Corlett (©)  
 Layout and Design © Catherine MacConville and Nick Maxwell  
 Printed by Ruon Print, Wicklow  
 To order this guide please contact:  
 The Heritage Officer  
 Wicklow County Council, Wicklow  
 Tel: 0404-20100/ 20191  
 Email: dburns@wicklowcoco.ie  
 Published by Wicklow County Council as an action of the County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2004–2008  
 Date of publication: September 2007.  
 ISBN ????????????



## Early Christian Wicklow — sites to visit

Outlined below are a number of Early Christian sites in County Wicklow that may be suitable for visiting. If you are considering visiting any of these sites you should check that the site is accessible and suitable for your group prior to your visit. There may also be other sites in your local area that may be suitable for visiting such as local graveyards. Information on archaeological sites in your local area may be found in the Archaeological Inventory of County Wicklow and in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) maps. Both are available in your local library.

It is important to note that any sites located on private land must not be visited without the landowner's permission.

### Glendalough Monastery

The site of an Early Christian monastery founded by St Kevin in the 6th century. The remains include a number of stone churches, a round tower and crosses and are located in the beautiful 'Valley of the Two Lakes'.

Address: Glendalough, Bray  
 Telephone No: 0404-45325/45352

### Opening arrangements:

Date	Day	Time
Mid-October–mid-March	Daily	09:30–17:00
Mid-March–mid-October	Daily	09:30–18:00
Last admission 45 mins. before closing		

### Baltinglass Abbey

Baltinglass Abbey, a daughter house of Mellifont Abbey, was founded in 1148. Fragments of the 12th-century church and traces of the cloister remain. The nave is aisled with alternate square and cylindrical piers, with unusual designs on the bases and capitals. There are also the bases of two Romanesque

doorways. The tower was erected in the later medieval period but replaced in the 19th century by a narrow neo-Gothic one.

### Raheen-an-Chluig, Bray Head

A small 12th- or 13th-century church on the northern slopes of Bray Head. The remains of a door and round-headed windows are still to be seen. Short walk from car park to north side of Bray Head.

### St Valery's Cross, Fassaroe

This small granite cross is situated just outside Bray, off the M11. It is probably 12th-century in date and has an unpierced ring with a crucifixion scene on one side and two human heads on the other.

### Kilcoole Church

This plain 12th-century church, dedicated to St Mary, is a nave and chancel structure. The graveyard has some fine 18th-century tombstones.

### St Mark's Cross, Blessington

This 4.2m-high granite cross stands in the cemetery but was moved from nearby Burgage.

### Aghowle Church

This 12th-century church occupies the site of an early foundation of St Finnian of Clonard. The church has an interesting west door, an unfinished granite cross and a stone basin. It is situated 8km west of Shillelagh, 400m down a country lane.

### Castletimon Ogham Stone

Situated on the side of the road, 11km south of Wicklow town, take the turn for Kilbride off the Arklow–Brittas Bay road. The stone is inscribed with the words NETA CARI NETA CAGI.

### Delgany Ecclesiastical Remains

Situated in Delgany village, the remains consist of the foundations of the nave and chancel of a church, which remained in use until c. 1789. There is a portion of a granite high cross in the graveyard, which contains several early 18th- and 19th-century headstones.

### Donard Ogham Stone

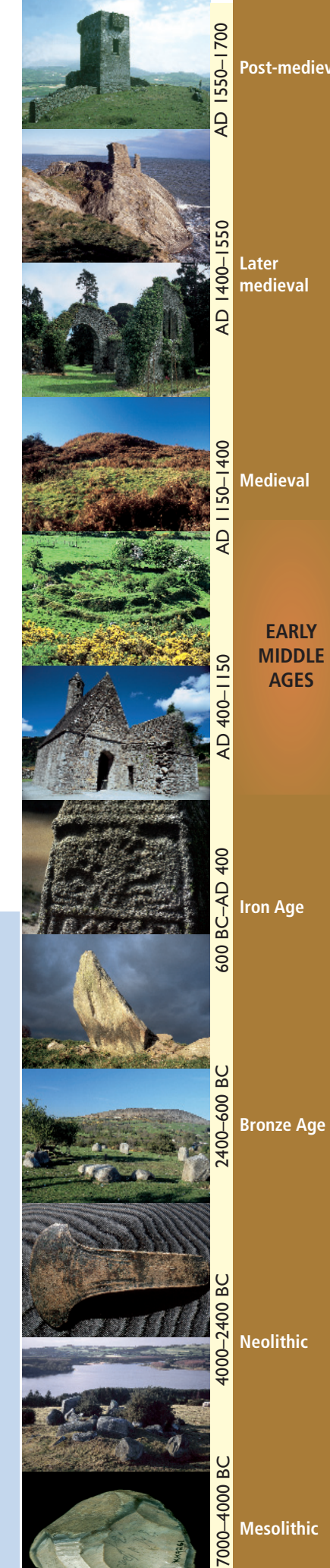
Now located in the village green in Donard Village, it has been moved from its original location; it is a rectangular block of stone with an inscription which reads 'IAQINI KOI MAQI MUC....'.

### Church Mountain Passage Tomb and Church, Ballymooney

About 6km south of Hollywood on the summit of Church Mountain is a circular cairn of stones, probably the remains of a passage tomb. The centre of the cairn has been hollowed out to form an enclosure in which there are the foundations of a church and a well.

Information on all sites provided by Glendalough Visitors Centre, based on the OPW National Monuments of County Wicklow, unless otherwise stated.

Wicklow County Council accepts no liability for any injuries suffered or damage incurred by those who use this information pack. Neither is any liability accepted by Wicklow County Council for any loss or damage sustained by any party visiting or exploring any of these suggested sites, nor do Wicklow County Council accept any liability or responsibility for any damage to property or goods caused by any persons visiting or exploring these mentioned sites.



AD 1550–1700 Post-medieval  
 AD 1400–1550 Later medieval  
 AD 1150–1400 Medieval  
 AD 400–1150 EARLY MIDDLE AGES  
 600 BC–AD 400 Iron Age  
 2400–600 BC Bronze Age  
 4000–2400 BC Neolithic  
 7000–4000 BC Mesolithic

# County Wicklow

in the early Middle Ages





Ogham writing on a stone in Donard village.

### The dawn of history (AD 400 – 1150)

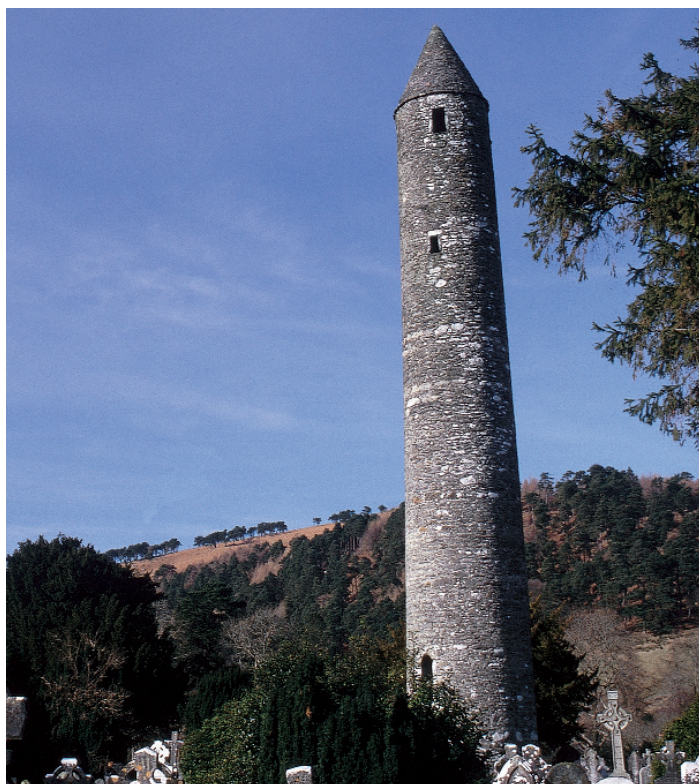
The earliest years of human settlement in Ireland are known as the prehistoric period, simply because writing was not used to record people, places or events. This changed, however, not long after the year AD 400, in other words 400 years after the birth of Christ. It was during this period that Christianity was brought to Ireland, some say by St Patrick. These earliest Christians also brought writing to Ireland for the first time. Very few books survive from this time, but early examples of writing can be found in the most unlikely places — on stones. These are called ogham stones, and the writing consists of lines carved across the corner of the stone. The lines make up the letters of an inscription recording the name of a local ruler. Such ogham stones are found in only a few places in Wicklow, namely Castletimon, Donard and Knickeen in the Glen of Imaal.

It was the monks who first began to write down the names of people and places and some of the major events that took place during these early years. In particular, the monks wrote about important saints and their churches, for example St Kevin and Glendalough. These early writings also mention the names of various tribal families and their rulers, including the *Uí Mail*, who gave their name to the Glen of Imaal in the west of the county.

### Evidence for the earliest Christians

The event that dominates this period of Irish history is the arrival of Christianity, which began to take root in Ireland nearly 400 years after the birth of Christ. In the year 431 Pope Celestine sent Palladius as the first bishop to the Irish believing in Christ. This was around the same time that St Patrick came to Ireland, and it is of course St Patrick who is most commonly associated with the conversion of the pagan Irish to Christianity.

Many of the churches and graveyards in Wicklow have early origins. While some were established or founded shortly after St Patrick's time, over the next few hundred years many more



Round tower at Glendalough.

churches were established throughout Wicklow. Today the most famous of these is Glendalough, which was founded by St Kevin, who was a member of a powerful ruling family in Leinster. Over time Glendalough became famous across the whole island of Ireland, and many of the ruling families of Wicklow and Leinster wanted to be buried at the graveyard there. As a result, many of these families gave money to the monastery, which allowed the monks there to build many churches and, most famous of all, its round tower.



An early stone church at Glendalough, sometimes known as St Kevin's Kitchen.

Today there is no shortage of tall buildings in our towns and villages. A thousand years ago, however, there were no towns or villages, and no tall buildings. In fact, the tallest building in Wicklow at that time would have been the round tower at Glendalough, which is the only example from the county. Only the wealthiest churches in the country could have afforded to build a round tower, and there is no doubt that some of the money needed to pay for them would have been donated by the local ruling families. Anyone visiting Glendalough around 900 years ago must have been amazed to see such a building for the first time. Sometimes these towers were used as a place of safety if a monastery came under attack. They were also used as places to store valuable books and relics. The main purpose of round towers, however, was as a bell-tower, though it is most likely that they were designed to show the world the wealth and status of a monastery such as Glendalough.

Not all the churches in Wicklow were as wealthy as Glendalough. Many did not have the sponsorship of powerful kings, and did not have the money to build elaborate churches or round towers. Many of the old graveyards in the county started life over a thousand years ago as local churches. Today the old churches are abandoned and in ruins, and sometimes their remains have completely disappeared. The earliest church buildings were built of wood, and all traces of these structures have entirely vanished. By the year AD 1000 these wooden buildings were replaced by churches built in stone. Around the year 1150 a large stone church was built at Aghowle, near Shillelagh. The door of this church is beautifully constructed and is one of the finest examples in the country.

Today, these old graveyards seem very peaceful and quiet, but over a thousand years ago these were very busy places. At this time there were no towns in Ireland, and it was the local church that became the centre of the community. People travelled from many miles around to visit important monasteries such as Glendalough to



Door of church at Aghowle, near Shillelagh.



St Mark's Cross, Burgage, Blessington.



St Kevin's Cross, Glendalough.



Inscription on the cross at Delgany.

see the relics of St Kevin. These important monasteries were also colleges where people would go for their religious training if they wanted to become a priest, a monk or a nun.

Other stone monuments or objects can be found today at some old graveyards. These can provide very useful evidence to show how old a graveyard is, even if there are no remains of an early church building at the site. For example, large stone crosses can sometimes be found at old graveyards. A very fine example of this is St Mark's Cross at Burgage, near Blessington. This cross stands in a modern cemetery, but it originally came from an older graveyard nearby that was partly flooded in 1940 by the Poulaphuca Reservoir. The largest stone cross in Wicklow is St Kevin's Cross at Glendalough. Both St Mark's Cross and St Kevin's Cross are very large, but they are plain and do not feature any decoration. Very few of the Wicklow crosses have any decoration, which is commonly found on crosses elsewhere in the country. At least one cross from Wicklow was decorated, however. The cross itself is missing, but its base can be found at Oldcourt, near Bray. The cross was brought here over 200 years ago, and it is not known where it originally came from, though it was supposed to have been found under a hedge nearby. The decoration on the base of the cross shows scenes from the Old Testament. At a time when very few people could read or write, these carvings may have been used to teach people some of the stories from the Bible. In the old graveyard in Delgany is the shaft of a high cross,

the top of which is missing. The surviving shaft is important, however, because it carries a rare example of an inscription in Irish, asking for a prayer for two people. The name of the first person is no longer readable, but the second person mentioned is Odran, who is described as a wright, that is, someone who worked in timber or perhaps stone — perhaps the man who carved the cross.

### Defended settlements

During this period many Irish farmers felt it necessary to defend their farmsteads within ringforts. Ringforts consist of a circular area enclosed by a large earth and stone bank with a deep outer ditch. The digging of the outer ditch provided the material to build the bank, and also formed an obstacle for attackers intending to scale the bank. It is unlikely that everyone lived in their own ringfort or could afford to build one for themselves. Instead, it seems that they were built by the wealthier farmers. Within the ringfort was the farmer's house and farm buildings where many of the farm animals could be kept safely overnight. At this time people did not use money as we do today. Instead, a person's wealth was displayed by how many farm animals they had, in particular cattle. If people wanted to buy something they traded it for animals rather than money. Understandably, then, farms at this time were very protective of their animals.