



FERMOY (*Mainistir Fhear Maí*), situated on the River Blackwater, is one of the chief towns in North Cork. This area came to prominence in 1170 AD when a Cistercian monastery (*Castrum Dei*) was founded here. The Cistercians operated a ferry across the river linking, East and South Cork with North Cork and its agricultural hinterland. By the time of its dissolution in 1541, the monastery was already in ruins, but the river crossing remained important. Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork, built a bridge here in 1625 but it was destroyed by a flood just three years later. It was replaced by a new bridge in the 1680s.

The town that we see today owes its origin to a Scottish entrepreneur, John Anderson, who purchased land on both sides of the bridge realising its development potential. Anderson moved to Cork around 1780, and in 1789 established the first mail coach service in Ireland. The mail coaches relied on a road network with safe river crossings. Anderson had the existing 13 arch bridge widened and strengthened in 1797 and began to invest heavily by laying out a planned town with new churches, a hospital, a hotel, schools, elegant houses, and commercial buildings centring on a main square. The elegance of Fermoy's architecture can be attributed to the distinguished Cork architect Abraham Hargrave who designed many of these buildings. The new streets had their names inscribed on carved stone plaques at junctions, many of which can still be seen. The economic success of the town was a result of Anderson convincing the British Army to establish a military base here, with two substantial barracks constructed on the north side of the town. He then developed the town's commercial and industrial base to provision the garrison of over 3000 soldiers. As a result, Fermoy, by mid 19th century became the largest town in County Cork. Samuel Lewis (1837) records extensive flour-mills, paper-mills, and a public brewery, with a large malting establishment attached to it. The staple trade of the town was in corn and butter. Fermoy's impressive historic footpaths relate to Anderson's interest in transport. Paved paths were created under the provisions of an Act of Parliament in 1808. In the 1846, sections of roads in the town with steep inclines were lowered, as famine relief work, to reduce the gradient for horse-drawn transport, leaving raised footpaths that are still in use.

Today, Fermoy is a bustling commercial centre on the banks of the Blackwater River. It retains its unique historic streetscapes and many traditional shop fronts making it an attractive place to visit and explore.

Sites to see (Please refer to map overleaf for locations. Sites marked with an asterisk are outside the area covered by the map)

- MARKET HOUSE:** Built in 1807 to regulate the town's fairs and markets, replacing an earlier market house, it frames the south side of the town square. When it functioned in the 19th century the ground floor had open arcading where market transactions took place. The upper floors were used as assembly rooms and for other municipal functions.
- STONE CLOCK:** An unusual relocated stone clock is set low on a wall of a corner building on New Market Street to the rear of Market House. It is thought to be associated with a Police Barracks which once stood on the site.
- AIB BANK:** Built in 1932, this three-storey brick building features limestone details including ionic columns on the ground floor. The chamfered corner contains an elaborate entrance doorway.
- PEARSE SQUARE EAST:** A block of three buildings built by Cork architect Arthur Hill in a "whimsical Queen Anne" style. One has the date "1908" in a stucco surround.
- FORMER BANK OF IRELAND:** This eye-catching building on the corner of the street was built in 1925. It is a rare example of a neo-Tudor style with asymmetrical elevations enlivened with oriel and mullioned windows, multiple gables, and finials.

6. FERMOY MILL: Five-storey water-powered corn mill built by M.D. Reid in 1802. It was extended in the 1840s to become one of the largest flour mill complexes in Ireland at the time. It was later taken over by Furlongs. The weir [25] diverted water from the river which turned two waterwheels that powered the mill; one of the wheels survives. A fire occurred in the 1960s and much of the complex was later demolished. The surviving portion of the mill was converted into offices.

7. FAIR GREEN: The site of Fermoy's regular fair. It was a very busy place with animal pens, butchers and a dairy adjacent.

8. CARRIGABRICK CASTLE: Ruin of a circular late-medieval tower house on a cliff top overlooking the Blackwater River. It was built by the Anglo Norman Condon family.

9. CARRIGABRICK VIADUCT: Built in 1872 by the Duke of Devonshire who leased it to the Great Southern and Western Railway. He commissioned the railway line to facilitate the delivery of fresh fish to Billingsgate Fish Market in London. Five stone piers carry iron lattice-works spanning the River Blackwater. In 1965 it featured in a scene in the WW1 film, the Blue Max, when an aeroplane flew under it.

10. WORKHOUSE: Built on a 17-acre greenfield site to the east of the town. It opened in 1857, replacing a temporary one [35] accommodated in the West Barracks [34]. It cost £18,000 and could accommodate 700 people. Unusually, it does not follow the typical design of workhouses and its architect is unknown. In 1863 Turkish baths were added to the site. It is now part of the community hospital.

11. FERMOY COURT HOUSE: Built c. 1805 by John Anderson and Archibald Grubb. It is prominently sited closing the vista from Patrick Street. The restrained classical style reflects an air of authority. The Gibbsian style door adds elegance to the façade.

12. WESLEYAN CHURCH. This former Wesleyan church is an interesting reminder of the religious diversity that was once associated with Fermoy. It was built in 1820 in a classical style. The round-headed openings add variety to the façade and the red brick surrounds add diversity of colour and texture. Note the octagonal cupola on the roof.

13. YOUNG'S SHOP: Former butchers' shop retaining a wonderful rare example of a tiled shopfront in the Art Nouveau style.

14. SAINT JOSEPH'S PRESENTATION CONVENT: Former convent built in 1840's for the Presentation Order which accommodated a chapel and national school. The convent is now privately owned. The school continues to educate the children of Fermoy. Richmond House, adjacent to east, was originally built as a private residence. In 1922 it was purchased by the Presentation Order and now returned into a private residence.

15. MANOR SCHOOL: Founded in 1803 as Fermoy College by the Rev. William Adair and continued as a boy's school until 1926. Now a private residence.

16. LORETO COLLEGE: Originally a dwelling house called Laurel Hill. It was taken over by the Loreto Sisters who extended it in 1853 to accommodate a girls' secondary day and boarding school. Architect George Ashlin designed the neo-Gothic style wing, including a chapel and residential range, in 1868.

17. ST. COLMAN'S COLLEGE: Built as the diocesan secondary school for boys for Cloyne diocese in 1856. Large three-storey building, in an Italian-Romanesque style.

18. ST. PATRICK'S CATHOLIC CHURCH: This impressive building was originally built in 1811 and enlarged with transepts in 1841. It was remodelled in neo-Gothic style in 1867 by Pugin and Ashlin, who added the towered spire. This was the Pro-Cathedral for Cloyne diocese until 1919 when Cogh Cathedral was built.

19. VICTORIAN HOUSES, O'CONNELL PLACE: Built c. 1900, these terrace of houses retain much of their original character.

20. BISHOP TIMOTHY MURPHY MEMORIAL CATHOLIC SCHOOL: Built by Irish Christian Brothers in 1904 and designed by Cork architect Samuel Hynes. Statues in front are of Bishop Murphy and Fr. Michael Kennedy c.c.

21. ST. BERNARD'S HOLY WELL: Adjacent to the pleasant riverside walkway, Barnane Walk, is a pair of open springs enclosed by a stone wall.

22. CISTERCIAN MONASTERY (site of): Founded in 1170 AD, the ruins were removed by John Anderson to make way for his new town. It was laid out in a formal manner around a cloister. The Grange area to north of the town was part of the abbey's farmland.

23. GRAND HOTEL: An imposing building on Ashe Quay overlooking the Blackwater. The façade, in two blocks is unified in a decorative scheme which employs oriel windows and elements of classicism and Art Deco. The western block was originally a Gentleman's Club which was incorporated into the Hotel in the 1960's.

24. FERMOY BRIDGE: The crossing on the River Blackwater is the heart of Fermoy town. This elegant structure of seven segmental arches was built by Joshua Hargrave in 1864-6 to designs by Oliver Lyons. It replaced a thirteen-arch bridge built in 1687 and widened in 1797 by John Anderson.

25. WEIR: This impressive stone weir spans the river adjacent to and under the bridge, diverting water to the large corn mill [6] on Mill Island. The pond created behind the weir and the cascade were popular with rowers and led to the foundation of Fermoy Rowing Club in 1884.

26. FERMOY HOUSE (site of): Built by John Anderson in the 1790s, designed in a typical neo-Classical style, picturesquely located on the north bank of the river. Demolished in the 1960s, and now only the fine entrance gate and carriage sweep remain.

27. ABERCROMBY PLACE: An attractive pair of Tudor-revival villas, built 1840-1843 to a design by Charles Anderson. The elevations are typical of the style, featuring bay and oriel windows framed in limestone ashlar, carved barge boards and a row of tall Tudor chimney stacks.

28. ST JAMES'S PLACE: Terrace of three-storeyed redbrick town houses built c. 1800. Note the sash windows, limestone quoins, curved brick corner and iron railings.

29. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH: Handsome small church in the Gothic-revival style. Building commenced in 1822 and was completed by 1839.

30. ADAIR INFANT SCHOOL: Charming former primary school with a date plaque of "1836" on the porch entrance.

31. CHRIST CHURCH, CHURCH OF IRELAND: Overlooking the main square and bridge, it was designed by Abraham Hargrave and was consecrated in 1809. An interesting feature reflecting the military presence in the town are the tall doors which allowed troops to parade their company colours (flags) inside without being lowered.

32. EAST (OLD) BARRACKS (site of): Built in 1801-1806, this was the first of the two large barracks in the town. It had three long ranges of tall buildings arranged around a large square parade ground with a cavalry barracks and Infirmary to the north.

33. BEECHFIELD CEMETERY: It was opened in the early 1800s to replace the burial ground attached to Cistercian monastery. Some chest and table tombs remain in situ, but most headstones are now lined up against the west wall.

34. WEST (NEW) BARRACKS: Built in c. 1810, with three long ranges of tall buildings arranged around a large square parade ground. Only some associated buildings still survive within the barrack walls.

35. UNION WORKHOUSE (site of): In the 1840s the western half of the West Barracks was converted into the Union Work House. **36. UNION WORKHOUSE BURIAL GROUND:** Enter via an arched gateway in the south wall. No burial markers survive but a recent cross commemorates its use as a famine burial ground in 1847.

37. MILITARY CEMETERY: Entered through the arched gateway in the north wall of the Union Workhouse burial ground [36]. The cemetery contains an interesting selection of scattered headstones belonging to soldiers and their families. An interesting one is the white marble cross for Jimmy Durham, a Sudanese drummer, adopted by the Durham Light Infantry, in the north west quadrant.

38. RAILWAY STATION: Built c. 1860 in an Italianate style for the Great Southern and Western Railway.

39. GOODS SHED: Built to service the Fermoy to Lismore Railway, which opened in 1872. Built of course limestone walls with a barrel-shaped corrugated iron roof.

A Garrison Town

In the early 19th century the British and French empires were at war (The Napoleonic Wars 1803-1815). In Ireland the 1796 attempt by the French to land an army in Bantry Bay and the 1798 Rebellion had forced Britain to increase its military presence throughout the island. Anderson offered the army part of his lands on the north side of the river rent free and in 1804 built a permanent barracks known as the East (old) Barracks (32) to house 1,400 soldiers and 100 cavalry. By 1809 a second barracks (New or West Barracks) was built, and the two barracks housed a combined force of 3,300 men. Fermoy also had the advantage of commanding an important crossing point on the Blackwater and was just a day's march from Cork where troops could embark for the wars on the Continent.

A panorama painting of c. 1825 shows the new town square in the foreground and across the river the two imposing barracks dominate the scene, with Anderson's large mansion standing on the north bank of the river. Anderson employed the Cork architect Abraham Hargrave for much of his building works in Fermoy, including the barracks. Hargrave had a flourishing business that included the construction of many of the county's finest country houses.



An artist's reconstruction of part of the West Barracks (34)

Both barracks were built with long ranges of accommodation blocks around three sides of a square parade ground; they were both open on their south side. The East Barracks had a second range of buildings on its north side to accommodate a cavalry detachment. The barracks were enclosed by a high stone wall with imposing arched entrance gateways. On the roadside to the north was a Military Hospital and each barracks had an adjacent cemetery [33 & 37]. The scale of the complex was impressive, one can imagine how imposing it must have been to walk into the centre of the parade ground enclosed by these massive buildings.



Artillery insignia on a headstone in the West Barracks cemetery.

Samuel Lewis, writing in 1837, noted that 'the whole establishment is adapted for 14 field officers, 169 officers, and 2816 non-commissioned officers and privates with stabling for 152 horses' ...'the supply of whom affords employment to tradesmen and artisans of every kind.' In the 1840s the western half of the West barracks was converted into the Union Work House, a clear indication of the worsening economic condition of the area at the time. In the late 1830s/early 1840s the barracks accommodated a branch of the Ordnance Survey who were carrying out a massive mapping project of the whole country.

Both barracks were burnt in 1922 and nearly all of the buildings subsequently demolished. What survives are sections of the impressive enclosing walls and the arched entrance gates. Also surviving are some of the ordnance stones that marked the limits of the military area; these are inscribed with the arrow symbol of the Ordnance Department of the British Army. A terrace along the south side of the West Barracks was built in the 1860's as a recreational hall and library for the officers which has been converted into apartments. The site of the East Barracks is now occupied by the grounds of Fermoy GAA Club and the West Barracks by Fermoy Rugby Club.



Ordnance Survey benchmark symbol

FERMOY Historic Town



Entrance arch of West Barracks [34]



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FERMOY Historic Town



1. Market House



2. Stone Clock



3. AIB Bank



6. Fermoy Mill



8. Carrigabrick Castle



10. Work House



12. Wesleyan Church



13. Tile detail,
Young's Shop



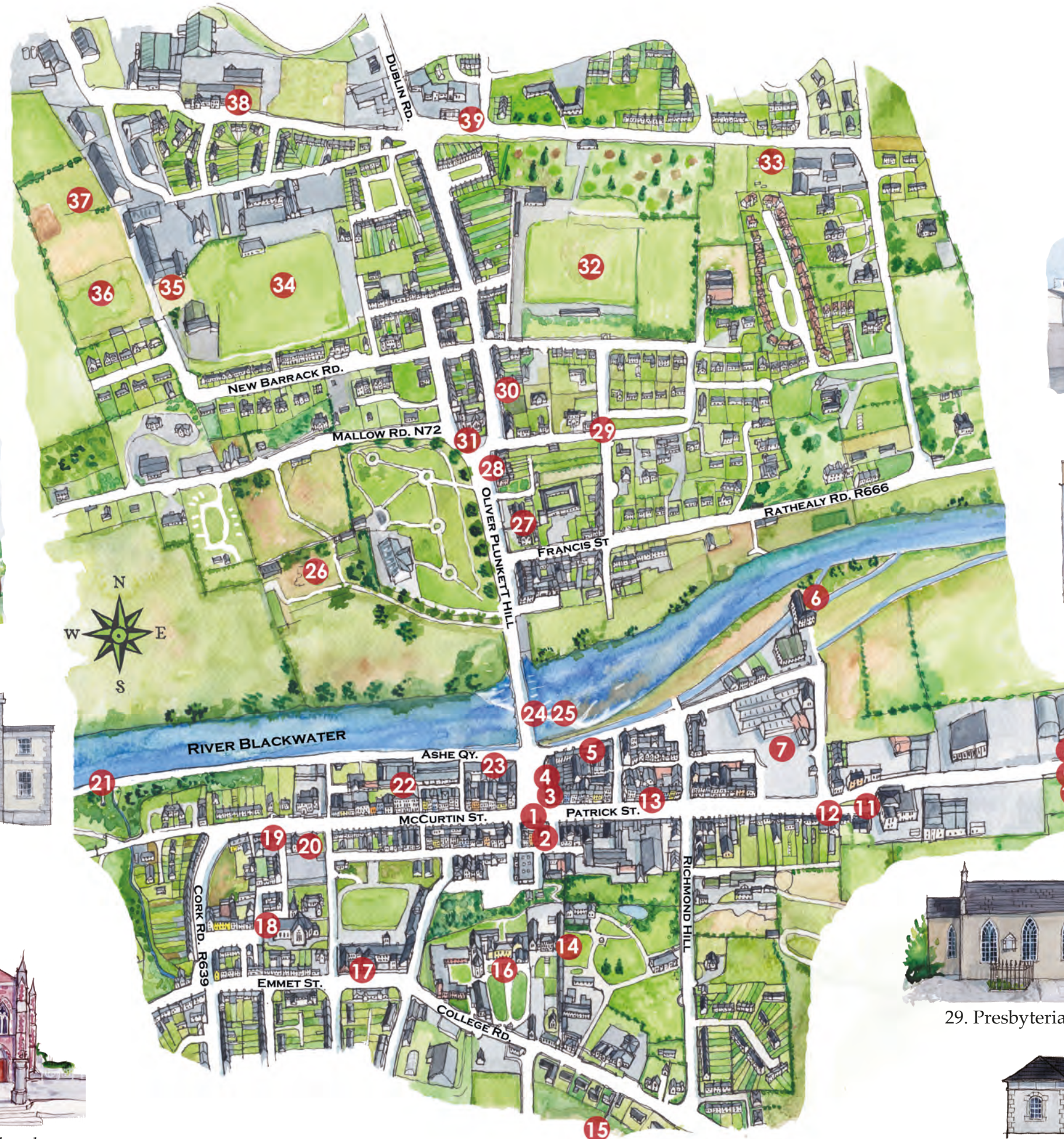
11. Court House



17. St Colman's College



18. St Patrick's RC Church



23. Grand Hotel



24. Fermoys Bridge



28. St James's Place



29. Presbyterian Church



30. Christ Church



38. Railway Station

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