



**SKIBBEREEN** is a busy market town located on a bend of the Ilen River. The Irish name for the town, an Sciobairín, means a small inlet for docking boats. In the medieval period this area was dominated by the Gaelic MacCarthy Reagh who occupied a nearby castle. A settlement existed by 1631 when, according to local lore, a group of refugees fled here from Baltimore following the infamous slave raid by Algerian Pirates. The town's growing importance is evident by the charters it received in 1657 and in 1675 when two English settlers, William Prigg and Samuel Hall, obtained the right to hold a market. By the 18th century Skibbereen had a thriving textile industry producing woollen cloth, linen, and handkerchiefs. The town's other industries at this time included bolting mills, porter and beer breweries and an extensive whiskey distillery. The town also had an important market where coal, fish, milk, and livestock were bought and sold. The Ilen River was navigable for large ships as far as Oldcourt, two miles below the town, and for smaller vessels as far as the town centre where ships docked at Levis' Quay.

By the 1830s the town's fortunes were in decline following the boom years of the Napoleonic Wars. The appalling humanitarian crisis of the Great Famine in the mid 19th century hit Skibbereen and its hinterland very badly. Some 28,000 people died of starvation and associated diseases in the Skibbereen Poor Law Union between 1845 and 1850. Up to 10,000 were buried in common grave pits in Abbeystrowry graveyard 1km west of the town where a monument has been erected to their memory.

The arrival of the railway in 1877 made the town less remote and heralded a new era of prosperity. Its importance as a commercial centre in the past is reflected in the many fine shop fronts that still line its streets. Today the tradition of a market continues every Saturday in the old Fair Green. The town is also renowned for its vibrant arts and cultural scene and is home to the Uillinn Arts Centre.

### SITES TO SEE (refer to map overleaf for locations)

- Old Gas Works (Skibbereen Heritage Centre):** built in 1867 to a design by R. Lee, to provide lighting for the town. It now houses the award-winning Heritage Centre with excellent exhibitions on the Great Famine and the unique natural heritage of nearby Lough Hyne.
- Steam Mill:** originally built as a flour mill in the early 1840s. During the famine (1845-52) it housed a much needed temporary soup kitchen.
- Railway Bridge:** built c. 1893 to enable the extension of the Cork, Bandon and South Coast Railway to Baltimore.
- The West Cork Hotel:** first opened in 1902, this fine example of late Victorian architecture reflects Skibbereen's rise as a tourist destination following the arrival of the railway in 1877.
- Former Lady's Well Brewery Store:** built c. 1880 as part of the Murphy Brewery network. It was built adjacent to the railway line in order to facilitate deliveries from the Lady's Well Brewery in Cork city.
- Abbeystrewry Church of Ireland:** built in 1827 with a contribution from the Board of First Fruits, this gothic style church was substantially rebuilt in 1890 to plans by Cork architect, W.H. Hill.
- Church Hall:** designed by W.H. Hill in 1907, this building, with its contrasting render and stone facade, small window openings and emphasis on high quality craftsmanship, is a rare example of early 20th century Arts and Crafts style architecture
- Wesleyan Methodist Chapel (now the Church Restaurant):** red brick building with limestone detail, built in the Gothic style in 1833. Alterations were carried out in 1860 and 1897. The building was extensively refurbished after a fire in 2006.
- Masonic Lodge:** originally built in 1863 as a lecture hall for holding public meetings, it was purchased by the local masonic

lodge in 1869. It was subsequently altered for its new use by local architect Richard Lee. The facade, with its masonic insignia, is symbolic of an ancient temple.

- Water Pump:** erected c. 1880 to provide a fresh water supply to the inhabitants of the town.
- O'Leary's Jewellers:** as a young man, the Fenian leader Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa ran a general shop here.
- Former Bank:** an elegant building constructed in a classical style c.1920. This style reflects stability and importance that the banks built at this time sought to convey.
- Bank of Ireland:** built as a bank and manager's house in 1877. The red brick palazzo-style building, with limestone detailing, was designed by Millar and Symes of Dublin.
- Post Office:** an elegant purpose-built post office, built in 1904. It features a brick façade with fine limestone detailing and a Dutch-style curved gable in a distinctive early 20th century style.
- Maid of Erin:** this monument, depicting Ireland as a woman, was sculpted by Cork sculptor John Maguire. It was erected to commemorate those who died in the Irish fight for freedom in 1798, 1802, 1848 and 1867. The monument was unveiled by Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa in 1904.
- Town Hall:** a striking Victorian town hall, built in the mid-19th century and featuring a three-storey clock tower. The clock was donated by local landlord, The O'Donovan, in 1873.
- The Rock, Windmill Hill:** this former Fair Field is situated on a rocky eminence overlooking the town. The exposed site has a unique series of features including six rock-cut platforms with niches and features in side walls, some of which were revealed by the recent archaeological excavation by Prof. Brighton of the University of Maryland (2015). Their function is unclear but it may be associated with the manufacture of textiles, powered by a windmill as the place name suggests. What is more unusual

### SKIBBEREEN POST BOXES

The modern postal service dates back to 1840 when the Penny Post was introduced to Britain and Ireland as part of the Royal Mail Service. Postage became relatively cheap and popular and a network of post offices and accessible post boxes was developed.

Skibbereen retains a number of interesting historic cast-iron postboxes. The example to the left, located on North Street, is a rare Penfold pillar box. These were manufactured between 1866 and 1879. Only about 150 of these boxes survive in Ireland and the UK.

The two examples on the right, both located on Bridge St., are known as wall boxes. This type of post box first appeared in 1857. The box on the left dates to c. 1905 and bears the insignia of Edward VII. With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922 many of these boxes were simply painted green and continued in use. The second is an Irish Post & Telegraphs box dating to c. 1940.



is that the platforms and side walls were re-used as small dwellings in the early 19th century.

- Old Protestant burial ground (known as Abbeymahon):** Appears to have come into use c. 1830 and is unusual as it is not associated with a church. Many local prominent families were buried here.
- Catholic graveyard (known as Kilmahon):** located at the site of a mass house that was in use from Penal times until the late 1820s. The earliest gravestone inscriptions date from the early 1800s but many of the graves are marked by uninscribed stones.
- St Patrick's Cathedral:** Former centre for the Diocese of Ross, this neo-classical church was built between 1826 and 1832 to a design by Cork Architect, Rev. M.A. Riordan. The high quality of workmanship and imposing design reflect the growing confidence of the Catholic Church in the 19th century. Originally a T-shaped building, major renovation and extension works completed in the early 1880s transformed it into the present cruciform shape. It features a marble relief sculpture (c. 1833) by Waterford-born Sculptor, John Hogan.
- Mercy Convent, Chapel and School:** a classical-style convent and school built for the Mercy Order c.1860. In the mid-19th century, religious orders spread throughout Ireland where they were actively engaged in much needed educational and vocational training. The chapel was built in 1867, and was designed in the French Gothic style by renowned architects E.W. Pugin and G.C. Ashlin. The Mercy order closed the convent and school in 2003.
- Courthouse & Bridewell:** a classical style courthouse built in 1826 and refurbished in 1923 and 1956. This imposing building of cut limestone was designed by prominent Cork architect, George Pain (c. 1793-1838), who designed numerous courthouses and churches in the early 19th century.

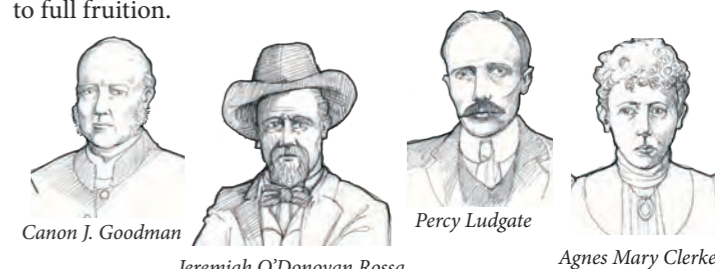
### FAMOUS PEOPLE

**Canon James Goodman** (1828-1896), was a Church of Ireland clergy man, uilleann piper and collector of traditional Irish music. He was appointed vicar of Abbeystrewry in 1867, a position which he held until his death in 1896. In 1879 he was appointed Professor of Irish in Trinity College Dublin dividing his time between Skibbereen and Dublin. Today's traditional music repertoir owes much to this man. His priceless archive is now housed in Trinity College Dublin.

**Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa** (1831-1915) was a prominent member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, which were better known as the Fenians. He lived in Skibbereen, was a founder of the Phoenix National and Literary Society that later merged with the IRB. Jailed in 1865, he was released in 1870 and went to the US where he spent the rest of his life fundraising and promoting the cause of Irish Nationalism.

**Agnes Mary Clerke** (1842-1907), eminent author of astronomy, was born in Skibbereen in 1842. She has the honour of having a lunar crater named after her.

**Percy Ludgate** (1883-1922), born in Skibbereen, worked as an accountant in Dublin where he developed a novel calculating machine, a forerunner of modern computers. Unfortunately, Ludgate died at a young age of 39 before his ideas could be brought to full fruition.



## Map of SKIBBEREEN Historic Town



Traditional shopfront



Produced by  
CORK COUNTY COUNCIL  
COMHAIRLE CONTAE CHORCAÍ



see website: <http://www.purecork.ie/map>

Design and images by Rhoda Cronin-Allanic 2017



# SKIBBEREEN

## Historic Town



1. Old gas works, now Skibbereen Heritage Centre



3. Railway Bridge



4. West Cork Hotel



6. Abbeystrewry Church



7. Church Hall



2. Steam Mill



5. Brewery Store



Some 28000 people died in the Skibbereen area during the Great Famine of 1845 to 1850



8. Wesleyan Chapel



9. Masonic Lodge



10. Old Water Pump



11. O'Leary's



12. Former Bank



13. Bank of Ireland



14. Post Office



16. Town Hall



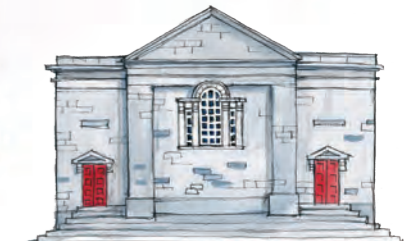
17. The Rock as it looked in c.1900  
(based on a Lawrence Collection photograph)



20. St Patrick's Cathedral



21. Convent



22. Courthouse



18. Old Protestant burial ground



15. Maid of Erin



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