

Welcome to the award-winning Turlough Park House & Gardens, home to the National Museum of Ireland - Country Life.

For more than 350 years, this estate was the home of the Fitzgeralds, a family of Norman origin who came to Ireland in 1169.

By the 1600s, the Fitzgeralds were one of the most powerful families in Ireland and owned extensive lands in the east and south-west of the country. The Mayo connection began when a branch of the family lost their Kilkenny holdings during the mid-17th century Cromwellian conquest. They were 'banished' to County Mayo, receiving the Turlough estate in a land settlement.

At its greatest extent, the Fitzgerald estate spanned 3,440 hectares (8,500 acres). Individual families, paying rent to the Fitzgeralds, farmed most of the acreage in small parcels while life in the 'Big House' was made possible by a team of servants, outdoor workers and craftsmen.

For much of the 18th century, the Fitzgeralds' primary residence was Turlough House, built by Thomas Fitzgerald in 1722. The ruins of this structure can still be seen today, just inside the main entrance gates of the estate.

In 1863, Charles Lionel Fitzgerald commissioned celebrated architect Thomas Newenham Deane to draw up plans for the Turlough Park House we see today.

Charles Lionel also improved the grounds with an array of buildings and landscape features, including a glasshouse, vinery, a man-made lake with three islands, and a boathouse. Successive generations of the Fitzgerald family owned Turlough Park House until 1991, when Mayo County Council purchased the house, gardens and grounds, then comprising around 15.7 hectares (39 acres).

At around this time, the National Museum of Ireland was looking for a suitable location to house and display Ireland's National Folklife Collection. A number of different possible locations were considered. Eventually, the estate at Turlough Park was selected to become the fourth branch of the National Museum of Ireland and the only National Museum of Ireland site outside Dublin.

Today, the award-winning gardens of Turlough Park are maintained by Mayo County Council and the Office of Public Works (OPW).



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Opening hours

Sunday & Monday 1pm - 5pm
Tuesday to Saturday 10am - 5pm
Closed Good Friday and Christmas Day.

Shop and Café have extended opening each Sunday from 12pm.

General contact details

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www.museum.ie/country-life

Bookings office

Open 10am to 1pm, Tuesday to Friday
T: +353 94 903 1751
E: educationtph@museum.ie

Getting here

Via the N5 approximately 8km east from Castlebar
Sat. Nav: Latitude/Longitude 53.8840, -9.2125
Bus routes and times:
Bus Éireann +353 96 71800
Train routes and times: Castlebar Train Station +353 94 902 1222



About Turlough Park House

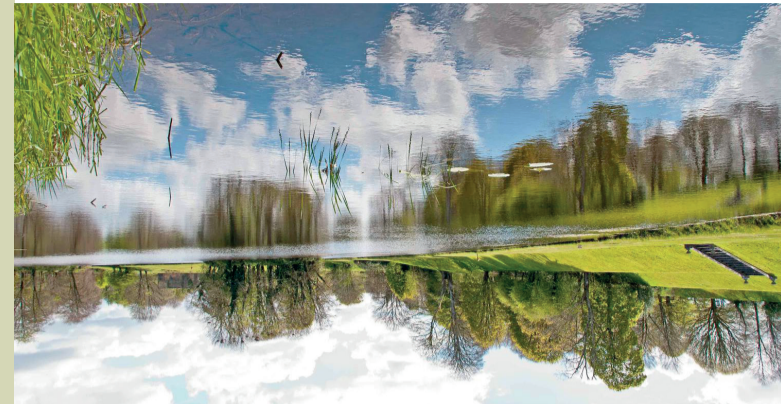
Turlough Park House can best be described as High Victorian Gothic style. It is constructed mainly from dark grey cut limestone with a cut-stone gutter running around the house. Above the centre of the symmetrical entrance, there is a large triple stained-glass window. At the right and left side of the marble columns at the entrance portico, the Fitzgerald family coat of arms surmounts the family motto - Honor, Probataque, Virtus (honour, virtue and probity). This motto is also incorporated into the design of the centre window. The keystone at the centre of the entrance portico has the date 1865. Below the centre window, an open porch is supported by six pillars set on plinths. Portland stone steps lead to the double front doors.

Formal hall

The formal hall of the house is two storeys high with an oak panelled ceiling and a Portland stone floor. There is an imposing cantilevered Portland stone staircase with ornate wrought iron balusters and a mahogany banister rail. The design of the wallpaper in the hall is called 'Shrewsbury Welby' and it is a reproduction of a period wall covering designed originally by the renowned English architect Augustus Pugin. The large fireplace has a white Italian marble mantelpiece with painted inlays.

The library

Located to the left of the hall, the library has carved oak-panelled walls and ceiling with bookshelves and cupboards on three sides. At the centre of this room is a large black Oporto Portuguese marble fireplace. Large French windows lead out to the side lawn. Supposedly, it was through these French doors that tenants would come to pay their rent, showing appropriate gestures of subservience to their landlord. An unusual feature of the house is the false door between the library and the drawing room. In the 1970s, the American writer Thomas Flanagan used the room to write part of his masterpiece, *The Year of the French*.



George Robert 'Fighting' Fitzgerald 1748-1786



The drawing room is furnished from the National Museum of Ireland's Decorative Arts Collection. The main focal points in this room are the wood panelled ceiling, large double-panel windows and a Cork and Italian red marble fireplace. The wallpaper in this room is another Augustus Pugin design, called 'Pineapple'. The room is furnished with an array of 19th century items, including the world's only Lyrachord piano, which combines a piano and a harpsichord; a tea service set dating from the 1830s; a marble bust of the Limerick opera singer Catherine Hayes dating from 1851; and an oak wall clock from around 1870.

One of the most colourful characters from the Fitzgerald's family history is undoubtedly George Robert, known as the 'Fighting' Fitzgerald.

Born in 1748, George Robert was educated at Eton but spent most of his adult life on or near the family estate at Turlough. Though he was well-educated and was once a visitor to the French King's court, George Robert was a notorious gambler, a serial duellist and general firebrand.

He is said to have once imprisoned his own father in a cave and manacled him to a pet bear during a family dispute. He was jailed, yet managed to escape.

Despite his eccentricities, George Robert carried out several improvements on the estate. Over a short time, he built a mill, planted thousands of trees, and improved farming techniques. His life was cut short in 1786 when, aged just 38, he was found guilty of being involved in the murder of a political opponent and was hanged in Castlebar.

Turlough Park House & Gardens - Points of Interest



1. Glass house

The original glass house was built between 1874 and 1875 and was heated by a saddleback boiler, still visible through the safety grill. Unfortunately, the glasshouse was destroyed by a violent storm in the 1930s. Mayo County Council rebuilt the structure in 2000. Today, it houses a variety of hothouse plants and serves as a central focal point for the gardens.

2. Stable block

The handsome stable block and service wing, now the museum café and gift shop, has a pointed arch entrance with blue painted double doors. Above the entrance, there is a clock and a stone bearing the inscription Anno Domine 1722. This stone predates the current house and so may have been part of the 18th century home, located at point 6 on the map.

3. Vinery

The Fitzgeralds would have grown grapes and other fruits in the vinery next to the stable block, which was heated by a cast-iron boiler. The vinery was probably built by Richard Turner Engineers and is contemporary with the house.

4. Model thatched cottage

This thatched 'house' was constructed to demonstrate the variety of materials, tools and techniques used in the building of vernacular houses across Ireland. This is a biodegradable structure made from sustainable locally-produced materials and reflects the variety of styles of thatched houses.

5. Sunken garden

The sunken garden, or corrie, is an ancient natural formation and was heavily planted with beech trees beginning in the 18th century.

6. 18th century ruin

Just inside the main entrance are the remains of the original Fitzgerald residence, built in 1722 by Thomas Fitzgerald. The family lived there until 1786.

7. Greenway

Opened in 2015, the Greenway is a 10km mainly off-road leisure route from Turlough to Castlebar, passing through woodland, riverside scenery and peaceful countryside.

8. Hydraulic ram

A hydraulic ram on the Castlebar River pumped water up to a timber-encased lead tank that supported the family's water supply. Commissioned from Green & Carter Vulcan Works in 1915, the ram was in use until the house was sold in 1991.

9. The gate lodge

The impressive gates at the entrance are original to the 1865 house. Once inside, visitors can see the gate lodge, where the estate's gatekeeper lived. Today, the building serves as an office.

10. River, lake and islands

Originally the site of a 'turlough' or temporary winter lake, the man-made lake and three islands, known as 'picnic islands', were created in 1865 by damming the nearby Castlebar River. The lake and islands enhanced the landscape of the house and were likely also quite useful for attracting and hunting wild fowl.

11. Boathouse

A rectangular boathouse with a pitched roof was constructed in 1865 on the edge of the lake. Today, all that remains of the boathouse is a stone foundation.

12. Woodlands

The woodlands feature several tree species including Beech, Oak, Chesnut, Holly, and Sycamore. While some of the trees were planted when the Fighting Fitzgerald was a resident in the 1700s, many were planted by Charles Lionel Fitzgerald to enhance the landscape for the 1865 house.

13. Oldest tree

Located near the Willow House, the oldest tree in Turlough Park is a large beech believed to have been planted by the Fighting Fitzgerald sometime in the mid-18th century. This tree has special 'Veteran Status' due to its age.

14. Willow House

The Willow House located at the rear of the exhibition galleries was constructed as part of a community arts project in 2017. It is made entirely of willow, using age-old techniques and provides a lovely, outdoor space.

15. Galleries

The National Folklife Collection is displayed in a purpose built, four-storey stone-clad block, designed by the Architectural Services of the OPW, and opened in 2001.

16. Terraces

A feature contemporary with the 1865 house, the terraces were constructed using soil excavated to create the manmade lake in front. Four terraces descend to the lake, interconnected by three flights of limestone steps.

17. Museum stores and laboratories

There are more than 36,000 objects in the National Folklife Collection. The vast majority of these are housed on site in purpose-built stores. There are also conservation laboratories.



The Art of Turlough Park

Visitors walking around Turlough Park will see several art pieces in the grounds. One such sculpture by Barry Linnane is called *Portal* and reflects the circle of life. The lakeside sculpture is *Raon an Tuthail*, by Colm Brennan, and is inspired by a childhood memory of rushes being cut with a reaping hook. In front of the house is a sculpture called *Counsellor II* by the prominent Mayo artist and educator, Brother Joseph McNally.