



All that is historic, picturesque, and beautiful in this grand Lough Corrib region, with its sacred islands, its ancient battle grounds, raths, and tumuli; its splendid ruins of castle and abbey, contrasted with the results of modern civilization; its magnificent scenery of mountain and lake, with the ever-changing lights on the purple hills, and the glorious sunsets peculiar to the West – scenes so full of interest for the antiquary, the historian, the poet and the painter, the politician and social economist – for all who love nature and truth."

Wilde's Lough Corrib, Sir William Wilde 1867

Glenlo Abbey & Estate



The name "Glenlo" or "Glenlough" comes from the Irish "Glean Lacha" meaning "Glen of the Lake". It describes the gently sloping lands north and south of Lough Corrib, and Glenlo was the original name of the house sited on the 140 acre estate in the townland of Kentfield.

The Glenlo estate was built in 1740 in the style typical of families of social standing and wealth. It included farming land, a walled orchard, kitchen garden and flower garden, ownership of part of the river Corrib and natural wetlands.

The house was built to capture the dramatic views from the low hills of Bushy Park as they slope to Lough Corrib and across the river to the ancient villages of Menlo and Anglinham.

The location was coveted - with Connemara to the west, it sits a comfortable distance from Galway city yet close enough for easy access.

Mature native and prize non-native trees lined the estate's private avenue, and stood tall over the north of the estate and inside the walls of the garden.

They were a magnificent site - but many fell during the hurricane of 1839, known as 'The Night of the Big Wind' when a storm blasted the country without warning.

Glenlo Abbey remained a country residence for over 240 years. The grand house and estate was home to three families along with their servants, coach men and farm labourers.

The original owners, the Ffrench family, followed by the Blake family and finally the Palmer family resided here.

Each family, merchants of commercial importance in Galway city, provided jobs for local people on the estate as well as Galwegians employed in their businesses in the city.

Previous Owners

The Tribes of Galway



The tribes of Galway were 14 merchant families of Anglo-Norman descent who founded and dominated the city's commercial, political, religious and social life from the 13th to 19th century.

Within the fortified city walls, the tribes progressed with their independence creating an almost mini-state where they influenced both church and state affairs.

Medieval Galway was a city for "kings and princes" - a city of enormous wealth with trade links with Spain, France and Portugal.

The tribes stayed away from the native Irish who lived outside the city walls - almost without exception...

... During the Irish Confederate Wars (1641-1653), a common Catholic faith united them to fight the English Army headed by Oliver Cromwell.

But in 1651, the city, the last Irish city to fall, was besieged by Cromwellian forces.

The besiegers called the 14 merchant families "tribes" - a title intended to be derogatory.

Yet the families proudly adopted the title of "tribes", comparing the fourteen tribes of Galway to the seven tribes of Rome.

And Glenlo Abbey has been home to two of the fourteen tribes of Galway.

The Ffrench Family 1740-1855



Glenlo Abbey was built in 1740 by a well-known Galway banker and member of Ffrench family - one of the fourteen tribes of Galway.

The Ffrench family were descendants of a knight who accompanied William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings in the Norman conquest of England.

The family held a position of authority in Galway city and county with some members elected city Mayor. Others acquired estates throughout the county.

The Ffrench family resided at Glenlo Abbey for 115 years. During their time on the estate, the land was used to producing wheat, barley, potatoes, flax.

The stone chapel was built for the private use of the lady of the house in 1790 - but the chapel was never consecrated as the lady of the house died during its construction.

The chapel was finally completed during the restoration of Glenlo 190 years after Lady Ffrench's death.

The Blake Family 1855-1897



Another "Tribe of Galway", the Blake family were also very well-known and held state positions in Galway and Connaught over the centuries.

The family, of British extraction, were said to be descendants of Sir Aplake, a Knight of King Arthur's round table.

They first arrived in Ireland during the reign of Henry II accompanying the infamous Strongbow who headed up the first Anglo-Norman migration in 1169/70.

They went on to own estates throughout Connaught including Menlo Castle, a mansion now in ruin on the banks of the river Corrib.

Thomas Blake purchased Glenlo and the estate in 1855. Glenlo had been leased before Blake's arrival.

In 1846, Glenlo had been advertised in a newspaper - The Galway Vindicator - described as a "most desirable residence".

The advert described "accommodation a family of distinction can desire, in which are included, three Reception rooms, and nine sleeping rooms".

It also described: "Dairy, Turf and Coal Lock-up Houses, with very appropriate and well-built offices, Stewart's Apartments Garden, Farm Yard".

The Ffrench and Blake family tombs can be seen today in the grounds of Bushy Park church (St. James' Church). The large and prominent tombs indicate the wealth and position the families held.

The Palmer Family 1897 – 1984



The Palmer family purchased Glenlo in 1897 - they were wealthy land owners operating flour and maize mills in Galway city.

Milling in Galway city was a major industry with up to 30 mills operating by the mid-19th century - providing employment to hundreds of people.

Water powerfully flowed through Galway city as it does to this day.

Its energy was generated by itself as it flowed from the Lough Corrib - one of Ireland's largest lakes - to the river Corrib which is just two miles long.

The power of the river was harnessed and a milling industry developed in the 19th Century.

The Palmers also ran a brewery called "The Nuns' Island Brewery", named after its location next to the Poor Clare Convent. - And they branded their "T Palmer's Superior Porter" as "equal to Dublin".

The mills of Galway suffered greatly with the arrival of the railway - which brought free trade and cheaper products from the US.

The small factories could not compete with progress - and the mills were empty and quiet by the turn of the 20th century.

The Palmer family had sold much of their land to support their milling business and lost their fortune.

The family then focused their attention on farming the estate at Glenlo.

Jeffrey Palmer, the second generation of Palmers to live at Glenlo, fought in the First World War

After returning from the battle field, he married one of Ireland's first commercial models, Evelyn McNamara from Limerick.

Evelyn was famed for her beauty and was the main model for Palmolive shampoo.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Jeffrey and Evelyn Palmer opened their home to paying guests and were able to maintain the estate.

Many distinguished guests stayed at Glenlo during this time including judges from Dublin working at the Galway courthouse.

Trevor Wardell, grandson of Jeffrey Palmer, was the last of the family to live at Glenlo, had a dairy and organic farm.

However, the costs of running the estate and maintaining the old house were escalating and this attributed to them deciding to sell Glenlo Abbey, which they did in 1984.

Glenlo Abbey and Lough Corrib

Lough Corrib, one of the great lakes of Ireland, spans over 42,000 acres across 33 miles.

Locals say it has 365 islands - one for every day of the year - but the truth is it has more than 1000 islands.

It is designated a Special Area of Conservation, due to the importance of its natural habitat and wild flora and fauna on a national and European level.

Lough Corrib is, quite simply, a haven for wildlife.

Ancient log boats have been discovered on the lake's bed - one dating back to 2,500 BC.

The waters have lapped over a Viking boat with spears and battle axes stashed on board - a glimpse of historical importance as well as vast beauty.

Roads were almost non-existent in Connemara until the early 1800s therefore Lough Corrib was the main route for trade linking north Connemara, Ashford, Maam, Oughterard, with Galway city and the sea.

The Glenlo estate meets the river Corrib at a historical point of the river - the Friars' Cut - which dates back 1000 years.

It was formed when the Friars of Clare-Galway made a wide canal to shorten their journey to Galway city.

Steam Boats

Rowing boats and small sail boats were used to transport goods and people on the Corrib - even though journeys were dangerous in unpredictable weather.

Steam boats took to the Corrib in the 1850s - increasing travel speed and safety.

They worked the Corrib between Maam and Galway and grew in popularity as a tourist trade developed and thrived.

Day trippers were entertained by bands playing lively music and passengers who could afford it were wined and dined on board.

The Galway-Clifden railway was hit as new roads were built - and the steam boats suffered the same fate.

Reliable lorries and buses could transport goods and passengers - and the First World War halted the tourist trade.

Today, only one waterbus - The Corrib Princess - operates on Lough Corrib and offers guided tours of the lake.

The Corrib Princess docks on the eastern corner of the Glenlo estate.

Rowing on the Corrib

Rowers have left their wake in the waters of the Corrib for centuries - and still do today.

In days gone by, rowing was popular with courting couples who would rent boats in Woodquay and paddle up river to Menlo Castle.

The more adventurous - and fittest - went as far as Glenlo Abbey and Friars' Cut.

Competitive rowing on the river Corrib began in 1864 when the Corrib Rowing Club was established.

Since then, several other rowing clubs - including school and university clubs - have flourished and Galway enjoys a top position in Irish rowing.

The annual regattas are a lively affair. Held further down river at Menlo Castle, the regattas pride themselves as among Galway's most colourful events.

Fishing

The unspoilt waters of Lough Corrib, and famous Mayfly fishing, have lured anglers from all over the world for centuries.

Famed for its wild salmon and brown trout, Lough Corrib is one of the best game fisheries in the world

If fishing in Galway takes your fancy, then you have to meet Jim Riddell who is our resident Ghillie. He has fished Lough Corrib since he was a child and can bring small groups out onto Lough Corrib to fish for Trout, Salmon, Pike, Perch and Bream. Reception will happily make the arrangements for you.

The Galway-Clifden Railway

The Galway to Clifden railway ran from Galway city through the Connemara mountains all the way to the coastal village of Clifden - 48 miles of magnificent scenery.



Before it opened 1895, Connemara had endured many years of harsh weather, famine and hardship.

The government funded the railway construction to encourage trade in a bid to help the region prosper.

The railway brought with it easy access to Galway and the rest of the world.

Connemara mined lead and green marble, fish and other agricultural products could be quickly dispatched to market and the region prospered.

The railway line was a hit with tourists and Connemara became a holiday destination for the rich and famous.

A four day weekend was advertised in London - and wild Connemara salmon caught in the morning could be severed to the wealthy in London the following evening.

Sadly, many of the passengers on the train were emigrating - the railway their first stage on a journey that scattered Irish people worldwide.

Roads improved in the 1930s - and this was the beginning of the end for the railway.

The last train left Clifden in 1937.

The railway line ran 800 meters through the Glenlo estate along the bank of the river Corrib.

Today, guests are welcome to walk along the old railway line where once the great steam trains bisected what's one of Europe's most remote and beautiful regions.

Now, the noise of the steam train is replaced by peaceful bird song and lapping of the lake shore.

Recent History



The Bourke Family

The Bourke family purchased Glenlo Abbey in 1984.

The Bourke's began a major restoration project as the main house was in need of repair and the abbey was in ruin.

They brought the buildings back to their former grandeur - with new and interconnecting buildings which went on to form the five star hotel.

The farmland became a nine hole parkland golf course and driving range with walking and jogging routes where guest enjoy the exceptional beauty and peacefulness of the Glenlo estate.

Glenlo Abbey opened as a five star hotel in 1992 and soon established a national and international reputation as a luxury country retreat within Galway city and a desirable wedding and function venue.

The Lally Family



In 2013, the Lally Family took over Glenlo Abbey Hotel and Golf Course.

Drawing on their expertise in the hotel and hospitality industry and their passion for excellence, the family has greatly invested in Glenlo Abbey.

Facilities have been upgraded, including the golf course and driving range and the hotel has been refurbished to create the opulent environment reminiscent of the great country house Glenlo Abbey once was.

The Pullman Restaurant aboard the Orient Express



The story of The Orient Express – the most famous train journey in the world - begins in 1883 and went on to capture the imagination of the world.

The original Orient Express ran between Paris and Istanbul and was instantly associated with style, luxury, culinary excellence and romance.

It was the inspiration for many books and films through the 1930s, carrying the rich and famous including royalty and film stars.

In 1997, Glenlo Abbey Hotel acquired "Leona" - car no. 208.

Leona dates back to 1927 and formed part of the original Orient Express and travelled through Europe and, later, the UK.

The legendary Sir Laurence Olivier was among the famous passengers.

He, along with other great actors, used the Orient Express train and Leona to travel from London to Brighton during the great revival of Shakespeare theatre.

Leona's last journey was a historic one - she was used as part of the Sir Winston Churchill funeral cortege in 1965.

Photos of the day show Sir Winston Churchill's coffin being carried aboard the train at Waterloo Station bound for Handborough Station before its final movement to Balydon cemetery.

Leona then retired from service - but that is not where her story ends.

In 1974, Leona - along with other carriages of the original Orient Express - was used in Sidney Lumet's classic film "Murder on the Orient Express"... an adaptation of Agatha Christie's novel of the same name.

The film starred great stars of the silver screen - Albert Finney, Lauren Bacall, Ingrid Bergman and Sean Connery.

Leona spent the rest of the seventies and eighties in rail yards before being transformed into a restaurant at Elsenham Station, Essex, along with "Linda" - a 1954 carriage.

Both carriages were purchased by Glenlo Abbey Hotel in 1997 and transported to the Glenlo estate where they sit less than 300 meters from the original Galway-Clifden railway line.

The Pullman has recently been awarded an AA Rosette for 2014/2015. AA Rosettes are awarded solely for the quality of a restaurant's cooking.