



With special thanks to the Strabane History & Heritage Advisory Group for their assistance in this project.

This information is available upon request in a variety of formats.

Please note the map is for illustrative purposes only.

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### Further Reading

A Legacy On Glass – A Selection Of Images From The Cooper Collection

By The Banks Of The Mourne – A History Of Strabane

George Sigerson – Poet, Patriot, Scientist and Scholar

The Fair River Valley – Strabane Through The Ages

Upon This Rock - An Illustrated History Of Christ Church, Strabane

These and other publications are on sale at Strabane Visitor Information Centre.



### About The Trail

Approximately 3.5 miles / 5.5 kilometres in length, this trail provides a glimpse into Strabane's past and is part of a wider journey of discovery which we invite you to enjoy while here. Your journey begins on Railway Street at the Alley Arts & Conference Centre and finishes at the back of the same building.

Please note only some locations have full access (FA); others are accessible during specific opening hours (OH); by appointment (BA); or only with the owner's permission (WP).

Trail users should exercise caution when crossing roads and use pedestrian crossing points where available. The map provided is for illustrative purposes only.

**Illustration below : 1940s Strabane**



# STRABANE HERITAGE



A self-guided walking tour of Strabane



**Welcome to Strabane**, 'An Srath Bán' in Irish, and meaning the Fair River Valley. Bounded by the scenic beauty of the Sperrin Mountains, Strabane rests at the meeting point of three rivers - the Mourne, the Finn and the Foyle - and is a town steeped in history and heritage.

### 1. Where Dreams Go - Ambrose Sculpture, the Alley Courtyard, Railway Street

Among the influences inspiring the artist Martin Heron were beliefs held in our Celtic past, a time when pigs represented fertility and prosperity, and were held in great reverence. The sculpture's location - once a thriving pork market - was also an important influence, as were the writings of Flann O'Brien. Ambrose the Pig - a character within his novel 'An Béal Bocht' (The Poor Mouth) is the name fondly attributed to the sculpture. **OH.**

### 2. Donnell & Sigerson Commemorative Blue Plaques, Railway Street (Entrance To Library)

Ezekiel J. Donnell was born at Ballee in 1822, emigrated to America at eighteen, and moved to New York in 1854 where he became a successful cotton merchant. Donnell was an advocate of public education and to this end he donated one million dollars towards the building of a library - a bequest recognised in the opening of the Donnell Library Centre in the New York Public Library in 1955.

Dr George Sigerson was born at Holy Hill in 1836. He was a leading figure in the Irish Literary Revival, a founder member of Feis Ceoil, and advocated for the establishment of the Sigerson Cup - an intercollegiate Gaelic Football competition. He also presided at the first meeting of the Irish Senate in 1922. Strabane's local Gaelic Athletic Association is named in his honour. **FA** to plaques.

### 3. Myles After Myles Sculpture, Railway Street

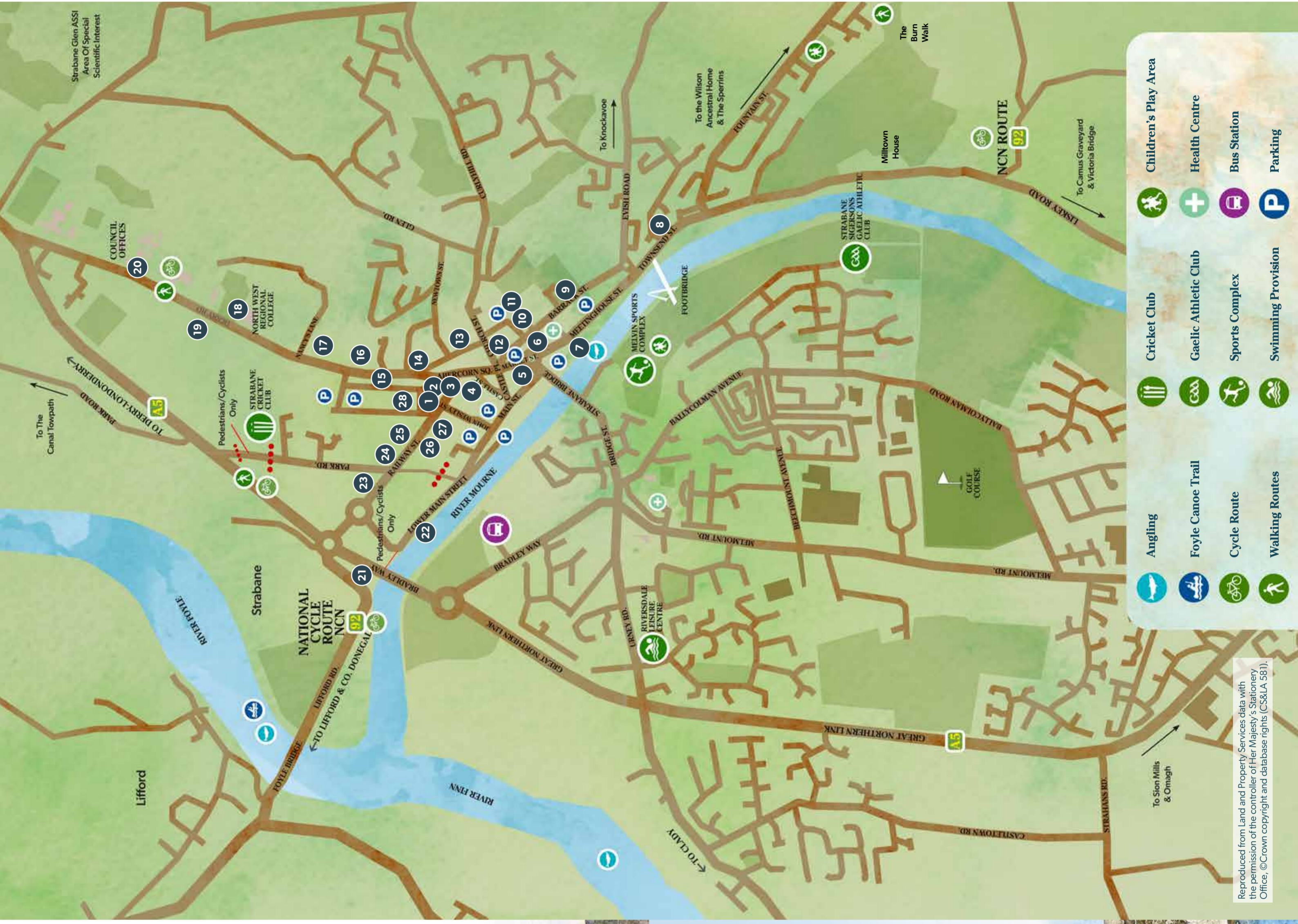
This sculpture of acclaimed writer Brian O'Nolan in his iconic coat and Fedora hat was created by Holger C. Lonze. The figure is resting against 2.5 metre high first editions of his most famous books - An Béal Bocht, At Swim-Two-Birds and The Dalkey Archive. The iconic book cover drawing by Sean O'Sullivan for An Béal Bocht, one of the greatest Irish language novels of the twentieth century, is perforated into the sheet metal and is illuminated at night. **FA.**

Brian O'Nolan is today considered a major figure in twentieth century Irish literature. His novels were published under the pseudonym Flann O'Brien. His first, 'At Swim - Two Birds', published in 1939 is regarded as a masterpiece. Another of his outstanding works is 'The Third Policeman' which was published posthumously.

### 4. Abercorn Square- Departure Sculpture

Abercorn Square once played a central role in the town's commerce - especially so on the main fair days, May 12th and November 12th. The Square was also the venue for the pig, butter, and poultry market. These, however, were to disappear as did many of the buildings which gave the Square its character. Gone is the Humphrey's Memorial, the coffee stand and the old Pagoda, which in turn has been replaced by a modern equivalent.

The Departure sculpture was designed by Richard Livingstone and symbolises the provision of sustenance, the exchange of ideas and emigration. In relief on the sail can be found the names of persons of note associated with or from Strabane. These are Sir Guy Carleton, John Dunlap, President Woodrow Wilson, Dr George Sigerson, Brian O'Nolan, and Cecil Frances Alexander. **FA.**





**5. Gray Printers, Main Street**  
Preserved by the National Trust, Gray Printers has remained largely unchanged since the early nineteenth century with its unique Georgian façade, distinctive bow windows, elegant glazed doors and quaint cobbled yard. Housing original nineteenth century presses, Gray Printers is a remarkable survival from an epoch when Strabane was an important publishing centre. **BA** to printing press exhibition.

James Wilson, grandfather of President Woodrow Wilson, is reputed to have worked at Gray Printers prior to emigrating in 1807. James was from the nearby townland of Dergalt and his ancestral home can still be visited today. **BA** to interior.



**6. Welch Commemorative Blue Plaque, Upper Main Street**  
Robert Welch was born in Strabane in 1859. In 1875 he went to Belfast to train as a photographer and established his own photography business there in 1883. From the 1880s to the 1930s Welch built up a fine collection of negatives of Belfast street scenes which today provides a valuable record of the changes in Belfast over this period. In 1900, he was awarded a Royal warrant from Queen Victoria. He died on September 28th 1936. **FA.**

**7. Dunlap Commemorative Plaque, Meetinghouse Street**  
John Dunlap (1747- 1812) was born here in a large thatched cottage which once stood in the location marked today by a plinth and plaque. Dunlap went to America as a child of 10 years and went on to play an influential role in the birth of the United States as a nation. Dunlap was a founder of The First City Troop of Philadelphia, acted as bodyguard to George Washington, and became official printer to the U.S. Congress. It was in this role that he printed the American Declaration of Independence. **FA.**

**8. Our Lady's Grotto, Townsend Street**  
Originally this was the site of St John's Church. Consecrated in 1821 St John's was the first post Reformation Catholic Church in Strabane. By the late 1800s the building had fallen into disrepair. Services were transferred to the chapel in the Convent of Mercy until work was completed on the Church of the Immaculate Conception. Afterwards the land lay derelict until permission was given to convert it into a Lourdes Grotto. This was officially opened on October 29th 1950. Key features include a baptismal font which was said to have been from the old monastery (founded AD 586) at Camus. The font had been rescued from the River Mourne by volunteers. Local tradition claimed it had been thrown into the river during the Dissolution of The Monasteries. **OH.**

**9. Church Of The Immaculate Conception & Museum, Barrack Street**  
The Church of the Immaculate Conception was dedicated at a ceremony in September 1895 by the Bishop of Derry, the Rev. Dr. O'Doherty and attended by Cardinal Logue, the Catholic Primate of All Ireland. The architect was William Hague from Dublin. The building is described as being of cathedral proportions and Gothic in style, cruciform shaped, and built of rough sandstone. It is dominated by a spire and a bronze cross.



The church's altar and marble communion rail were built by James Pearse, father of Patrick Pearse, who was executed for his leading role in the 1916 Easter Rising. **OH.**



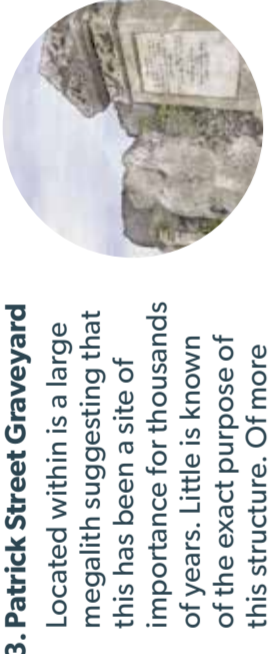
**10. O'Nolan Commemorative Blue Plaque, Bowling Green**  
The son of Michael O'Nolan and Agnes Gormley and one of twelve children, Brian O'Nolan (Flann O'Brien and Myles Na gCopaleen) was born in the Bowling Green on October 5th in 1911. The O'Nolan's lived a short time also at 'Tulach Na Greine' on the Derry Road and in Ballycolman Avenue before moving to Dublin. **FA** to plaque.

**11. Flood Wall Sculpture & Birthplace of Sir Guy Carleton, the Bowling Green.**  
**Flood Wall Sculpture** - This Bob Sloan creation consists of part of the old flood wall which was replaced after succumbing to the power of the River Mourne during the 1987 flood. Carved at the centre of the frieze are two motifs. The first depicts the ferry crossing established on the River Mourne in 1629. The second, a castle turret, represents the three castles which once existed at different points in time. Moving outwards from these motifs are 6 individual bronze plaques celebrating some of Strabane's most influential persons among which is Sir Guy Carleton. **FA.**

**Sir Guy Carleton** - Born September 1724 on the site now occupied by the nearby police station, Carleton was to become a leading figure in North America, representing King George III in negotiating the transfer of Long Island and New York to George Washington, and later in defence of Canada against the Colonies in 1766. Carleton was an astute administrator. As governor of Quebec he secured French neutrality during the 'War of Independence'. **WP.**

**12. Christ Church, Bowling Green**  
Designed by Derry architect John Kennedy the building was constructed at a cost of £6,500 on what was believed to be the former site of the area's first castle. The foundation stone was laid in November 1874 by the Duchess of Abercorn and dedicated by Bishop Alexander in October 1879. The church was built in early Gothic style, in cruciform shape, with a 3 bay nave. The east window depicting the Last Supper was presented by world renowned hymn writer Cecil Frances Alexander (and wife of Bishop Alexander) **OH.**

**Cecil Frances** was born in Dublin in 1818 and moved with her family to nearby Milltown House in 1833. In 1848 a collection of her works was published under the title "Hymns for Little Children". This included 'All Things Bright And Beautiful', 'Once In Royal David's City', and 'There is a Green Field Far Away'. Proceeds from sales helped fund a school at Derry Road in Strabane for the Derry and Raphoe Diocesan Institution for the Deaf and Dumb which Cecil Frances founded. In 1850, Cecil Frances married the Church of Ireland clergyman William Alexander in Strabane. He later became Bishop of Derry and then Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland. Cecil Frances died in Derry in 1895.



Located within is a large megalith suggesting that this has been a site of importance for thousands of years. Little is known of the exact purpose of this structure. Of more certainty, however, is the presence here of a church building belonging to the Church of Ireland from the early 1600s until the opening of nearby Christ Church.

The oldest memorial with a legible inscription in the graveyard commemorates George Home who died in 1672. Many of the memorials date back to the seventeenth century and commemorate families that originally came from Scotland. One of the graveyard's more renowned residents is John 'Half-Hanged' McNaughten. McNaughten was executed in 1761 for killing Mary Ann Knox of Prehen and is interred in an unmarked grave. **BA.** Contact Strabane Visitor Information Centre.

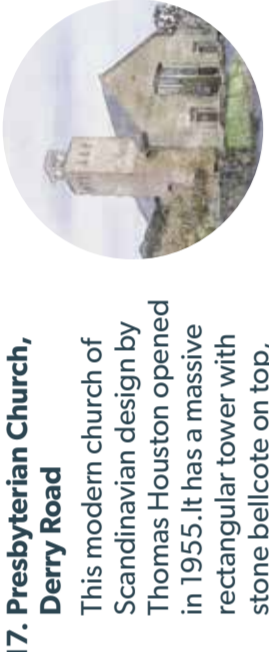


**14. Maunder Commemorative Blue Plaque, Patrick Street**  
Strabane born Annie Maunder (Russell), 1868-1947, was one of the first women to be made a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. She joined Royal Greenwich Observatory in London in 1891 and was assigned to the solar department assisting Walter Maunder - her future husband. Although forced to resign after marrying Walter due to the conventions of the time, Annie worked with him in other ventures where she earned a reputation as an expert in eclipse photography. In spite of her expertise though, conventions again dictated that Annie's work could only be published under her husband's name. In more recent years Annie's contribution to science is more widely recognised. The Maunder Crater on the Moon was named after Annie and her husband. Annie is also celebrated in her own right with the launch by The Royal Astronomical Society of the Annie Maunder Medal for Outreach. **FA** to plaque.



**15. War Memorial, Derry Road**  
The war memorial was erected in remembrance of those from the area who made the supreme sacrifice in both World Wars. Its dedication took place on the May 9th 1969 at an event hosted by The Royal British Legion. The unveiling ceremony was conducted by the Duke of Abercorn, with the dedication service being led by Archdeacon L.W. Crooks. Cannon E. Lovell assisted. **FA.**

**16. Shirt Making & Abercorn Factory, Derry Road**  
By the latter half of the nineteenth century Strabane was the third most important shirt manufacturing centre in Ireland. James Kennedy had set up the first shirt factory in Barrack Street in 1848 and by the time he sold it in 1888 it had some 1,000 employees. By 1870 there were five other shirt agents in Strabane. Gourlie & Sons opened at this site in 1865. Ownership of the factory has since changed hands on a number of occasions. The most recent shirt making enterprise to operate from here was Grosvenor Shirts whose handmade products were aimed at London's luxury market. **WP.**



This modern church of Scandinavian design by Thomas Houston opened in 1955. It has a massive rectangular tower with stone bellcote on top, and a large mullioned window at the gable end flanked by doors in recessed stone frames. The local Presbyterian congregation dates back to 1659. The first indication of a meetinghouse dates from 1693 at Meeting House Street. In September 1871 a new church opened for worship at Upper Main Street but this was destroyed by fire on Christmas Day 1938. Its bell is housed in the tower here. **OH.**



**18. North West Regional College, Derry Road**  
This building dates from 1937 when it opened as a technical college. It was designed by James Lawson, cost £21,000 and claimed an initial enrolment of 726 students. The report of the opening highlighted the advances made with this new building with emphasis placed on 'exceptional sanitary conditions, with hot and cold water throughout' and lit 'by electric light'. **WP.**



**19. Sacred Heart Church, Derry Road**  
This Romanesque style church was completed in 1939 and dedicated on October 29th. Dr Neil Farren, Bishop of the Derry Diocese, led the dedication ceremony and was supported by Dr MacNeely, Bishop of Raphoe. The opening of the church brought to an end a near 100 year use of a room in the nearby Strabane Workhouse for the celebration of Sunday Mass. **OH.** Very close to here at the Tullacor Mass Rock there can be found an even older tradition of Mass celebration. Here clandestine ceremonies had been held during the Penal era of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

**20. Strabane Workhouse, Derry Road**  
Only part of the workhouse survives and houses offices of Derry City and Strabane District Council. The workhouse first opened in 1841, having cost £8,000. It initially had capacity for 800 persons, however by 1848 the intake was 1,079 inmates. Poor Law rules were strictly adhered to. Families were segregated. Residents could not leave without permission. All those who were able-bodied were required to work, and misdemeanours were severely reprimanded.



The workhouse was formally closed in 1948. A paupers' graveyard lies to the rear of the site and is marked by a plaque. **OH.**

**21. Let The Dance Begin Sculpture , Lifford Road**  
Made from stainless steel and bronze, this Maurice Harron artwork consists of 5 figures approximately 18 feet high. Two dancers stand poised, ready to begin. On the Strabane side is a musician holding a fiddle; on the Lifford side a drummer. Between them stands a musician with a fife. Known fondly as the "Tinnies" the "Let The Dance Begin" sculpture was installed to mark the new millennium.



It symbolises community regeneration and reconciliation through a shared cultural vision in an area where music and dance are great unifying art forms. Previously, the local landscape here was dominated by a military border checkpoint. **FA.**

**22. Looking Towards Old Strabane Bridge**  
Today there are 3 bridges which span the river Mourne, the oldest being old Strabane bridge which dates back to 1783. Like similar bridges this was built of solid stone, with piers filled with rubble and shuttered until the key stone was set in place. It has a series of 7 semi-circular arches of heavy stone. Prior to the existence of bridges to cross these river highways, travellers had to wade over at low water or use a ferry where they existed. Ferries were known to operate on the rivers at Lifford in the 1620s and in Strabane in the 1630s. However, local flooding events have unearthed log boat structures indicating that this area was an important crossing point much earlier than this. **FA.**

**23. The Railway, Railway Street**  
In the early twentieth century Strabane's railway was catering for thousands of tonnes of merchandise and a large passenger trade. Development of the local network had begun in the 1840s and by the late 1920s the railway had 5 platforms, was served by 4 companies, and connected Strabane to Derry, Enniskillen, Dundalk, Omagh, Belfast, and Donegal. February 14th 1965 marked the end of the railway era in Strabane when the last timetable train pulled out of the station.



The area around the Lesley and Pavilion retail parks now occupy the site once dominated by Strabane Station and supporting infrastructure. **FA.**

**24. Knockavoe Hill From Railway Street**  
Knockavoe is associated with one of the most significant confrontations between local traditional enemies, the O'Neill and the O'Donnell. This took place on June 15th 1522. The O'Neill had gathered with the aim of delivering a decisive blow over their rivals. However the O'Donnells struck first, attacking the O'Neill encampment at Knockavoe. It was reported in the Annals Of The Four Masters - whose authors enjoyed the patronage of the O'Donnells - that the O'Neill were heavily defeated with the loss of nine hundred men. **WP** to Knockavoe summit.

**25. O'Doherty's And The Farmers' Home, Railway Street**  
In 1928 Charles O'Doherty & Sons designed and built the first ever diesel rail car in Europe. The business had been established on Railway Street in 1908 by Charles O'Doherty with the aim of manufacturing horse drawn carts and traps. It then evolved to coach building with the advent of the combustion engine.

The Farmers' Home dates from the nineteenth century. This long established licensed premises (illustrated above right) acted as a centre for patrons visiting markets and fairs, provided lodgings for children being hired at the hiring fairs and served also as a staging post for coaches. **OH.**



**26. Herbert Cooper, Railway Street**  
Around 1913, London born Herbert Cooper took over J.A. Burrow's photographic studio which was located on the site now occupied by the Housing Executive premises (Opposite the Farmers' Home). From then until his death in 1960, Cooper compiled one of the most extensive photographic archives in Ireland. The Cooper Collection is considered a national treasure, and resides in the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.



**27. Methodist Church, Railway Street**  
Strabane Methodism can claim close links with John Wesley in that he stopped here at least on three occasions. George Brish, one of Wesley's Irish born itinerants is also recorded as preaching near here as early as 1774. By 1813, Strabane became a separate circuit with 640 members and the following year had built its first church in Patrick Street. The current church building, costing £1,200, was officially opened on December 7th 1900, with the Rev. Hugh McGahie presiding. **OH.**

**28. Strabane Canal Basin, Canal Street and Dock Street**  
The canal opened on March 21st 1796 at a cost of £9,593 and expanded the town's commercial importance by creating a navigable route to Derry-Londonderry. Many industries grew up around the quay area including a brewery, a boat repair yard, and a grain mill. Exports out of Strabane included agricultural produce while iron, coal, and timber were imported in. The advent of the railway eventually consigned the canal to history. New life, however, has been breathed into the canal towpath at its lower stretches (illustrated below) near Ballymagorry, which now serves as an important heritage and walking amenity. **FA.**



**Strabane Through The Millennia C2500BC** Evidence of early settlement provided by the Patrick Street graveyard megalith.

- 586** Foundation of a monastery at Camus
- 1522** Battle of Knockavoe.
- 1573** Turilough Luineach, the O'Neill chieftain, builds a castle in Strabane.
- 1603** John Browne receives a patent to establish a ferry over the river to Lifford.
- 1613** A charter of incorporation is granted by King James I to the Strabane Corporation.
- 1689** The army of King James II establishes a hospital in Strabane at the time of the Siege of Derry.
- 1771** First issue of Strabane Journal or General Advertiser published.
- 1841** Completion of Strabane Workhouse.
- 1921** Establishment of Northern Ireland as a legal entity.
- 1922** Customs post on Strabane- Lifford border established.
- 1950** Clipper Carillon Showband formed.
- 1965** Last timetable train pulls out of Strabane station.
- 1987** Strabane Flood devastates town.
- 2000** Installation of the 'Let The Dance Begin Sculpture.'