

A Tour of Glenveagh Castle



Páirceanna Náisiúnta
National Parks

A Guided Tour of Glenveagh Castle

Welcome to Glenveagh Castle.

The castle was built in the 1870s by John George Adair, a wealthy business man and land speculator from County Laois. The building's original role was as a hunting lodge, so you will see a strong hunting theme as you walk around. Adair is infamous for the Derryveagh Evictions of 1861, when he evicted the 244 people (46 families) who were living in the area at the time. Many of these people lived the rest of their lives in the local workhouses and 150 emigrated to Australia. After his death in 1885, Adair's American wife, Cornelia Ritchie continued to spend time at the castle, adding the round tower in 1901 and introducing a large herd of Red Deer.

The second owners of the castle were the Kingsley-Porters who bought it in 1929. Arthur Kingsley-Porter was a professor at Harvard University and used the castle as a base to study Irish history and mythology. He acquired the wealth to do this from his father who was a successful banker. Arthur's disappearance following one of his regular walks on the Donegal island of Inisbofin in 1933 remains a mystery to this day.

The last owner of the castle, a student of Kingsley-Porter and fellow American was Henry McIlhenney. After renting the castle for a few consecutive summers, Henry finally bought it in 1937 and used it as a place to entertain all his wealthy friends and art collectors from across the world.

In 1983, Henry gave the castle and grounds to the Irish state as a gift. The castle is now a museum and everything you see is exactly the way it was left in 1983.

Entrance Hall

The shells on the wall were added by the Kingsley-Porters in the early 1930s. They are mussels and periwinkles from some of the local beaches here in Donegal.

The wooden deer heads were made in Germany and the deer theme is continued throughout the castle, reflecting its original use as a hunting lodge. Glenveagh is still home to the largest herd of Red Deer in Ireland.

Sitting on the chest is a painted wood figure of the Taoist god, Xianan.

The strange looking chair is over 100 years old and is a weighing chair, originally used to weigh jockeys before a horse race. As a joke, Henry McIlhenny would ask his guests to be weighed on arrival and then again on the way out at the end of their stay. This provided a lot of amusement and was a measure of his hospitality.

Music Room

Musicians from all over the world including the famous Yehudi Menuhin performed in this room for McIlhenny's guests.

The instruments on display here include a traditional Irish harp by John Egan and a square piano, both made in Dublin in the early 19th Century. Originally, a baby grand piano sat in the centre of the room.

The Gordon Clan tartan on the walls provided cladding to improve the room's acoustics.

The turf bin was originally a tea chest and the table lamps were originally tea urns.

Drawing Room

This is the largest room in the castle and was the main reception room. The fireplace is about 250 years old and was made in the style of Robert Adam, a talented eighteenth century interior designer from Scotland. Beside the fireplace is a “pole-screen”, used by ladies to prevent their wax-based make-up from melting.

The large mirror in the centre, known as a pier-glass, was used to make the room look larger and brighter. The small mirror at ground level, known as a petticoat-mirror, was traditionally used by ladies to make sure their petticoats covered their ankles and feet.

The decorative table in the middle of the room is a French-style marquetry table from the early 1800's. Every part of the design is an individual piece of wood, carved and then inlaid. The Killybegs carpets, made here in Donegal are well known across the world and can even be found covering the floors in the White House in America.

Finally, the Gothic bookcase dates to the 1790s and still displays the original hand-blown glass.

Study

As well as being a great art collector, Henry McIlhenny was a distinguished art historian and this is where he would occasionally work during his summer visits to Glenveagh. It was here that he met with his Butler Paddy, House Keeper Nellie and Estate Manager Julian Burkett on a daily basis to organise the running of the estate and most importantly, decide the day's menu!

Dining Room

The Dining Room was one of the busiest rooms in the house, used four times a day. The food was always of a very high quality and the gourmet recipes using fresh produce from the gardens and dairy earned Glenveagh its reputation for fine food and generous hospitality.

The dinner set on the table is known as the “green stag dinner set” and was made in Salzburg, Austria. The large landscape paintings “Morning” and “Night” are replicas of works by Edwin Landseer. The originals now hang in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The white door in the corner is a “sham door”. It was added to provide symmetry to the room. Opposite, behind the screen, a door leads through to where the Pantry and kitchens used to be. The Butler would stand behind the screen and observe the table by looking into the convex mirror, known as a “butler mirror”.

The whiskey decanter was given to Henry McIlhenny as a gift in 1951. He enjoyed it when occasionally a guest would drink a little too much and try to leave through the fake door!

The table in the window is where guests would enjoy afternoon tea. It was originally made to hold a coffin during a wake.

Library

This room reflects the style of the Kingsley-Porters. The four paintings are by their friend, George Russell, a famous Irish artist. The landscape in the corner depicts Muckish Mountain. The name Muckish is derived from Irish Gaelic and means “shaped like a pig’s back”.

The wooden statue of St Jerome is over 500 years old and is one of the oldest objects in the castle.

All of the books originally belonged to Henry McIlhenny and include lots of history; biographies; gardening books and American first editions of modern classics such as Orwell’s 1984 and Animal Farm.

Henry McIlhenny decided to leave this room as a memorial to Kingsley-Porter.

The Bachelors’ Corridor

Along the corridor are bedrooms for the male visitors. On the walls are a selection of three watercolours (circa 1919) by a young American artist Carol S. Tyson. These three bedrooms are themed the French, the Italian and the Indian.

The Balcony

The last stop of the tour brings you back to the starting point. This has been altered to facilitate tours. Originally the upper section was male staff accommodation. The ground floor was the carriage room. In Mr. McIlhenny's time it was altered to become an armory and a flower-arranging room.

Fresh flowers would be arranged in up to 72 vases with colours to match the décor of each room.

In 1975 Henry McIlhenny sold most of the land of the estate to the Government to create a National Park. As he never married or had children, in 1983 he denoted the Castle, contents and Gardens as a gift to the Irish Nation.

*Thank you for visiting Glenveagh Castle and National Park.
We hope you enjoyed your visit.*

Slán abhaile!



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