

## **Belturbet Public Art Commission: Contextual and Historical**

The Irish for Belturbet: Béal Tairbirt, meaning "mouth of the Tairbert". It is located on the [River Erne](#), which is linked to the [Shannon-Erne Waterway](#) and the [River Shannon](#). The Shannon is the longest river in Ireland. The Erne is also connected to the [Black Pig's Dyke](#). The Erne has long been the main source of commerce for the town. It once contained three ports and was linked to Belfast via the Ulster Canal. It contains many existing features and connections that are historic record. Today the river and the town of Belturbet is predominantly a tourist destination. The original steering wheel of the Steamship Belturbet is displayed in the main reception area in the Belturbet Railway Centre as a memento to the steamships that sailed the Erne in the 1800s'. The wheel also commemorates the connection with the railways. The various vessels carried goods and passengers on a regular service between Belturbet and Enniskillen. On occasions excursions were operated in conjunction with the G.N.R. Railway. Special excursion trains operated from Amian St. Station in Dublin to Belturbet where passengers boarded the steamship at the Quay, downstream of Killconny Bridge. The rope wear marks can still be seen on the bollards.

When the Anglo-Normans tried to conquer [Cavan](#) in the early 13th century, [Walter de Lacy](#) built a [motte-and-bailey](#) on Turbet Island, which is situated upstream of Killconny Bridge. The Fort was probably made of wood and it has not survived. However the steep mound of earth where it was built is well preserved. It is accessible to the public via a walking trail around the fort. There is also a path around Turbet Island with access at both ends via two footbridges. In the late 16th century the local [O'Reilly](#) chieftains built a castle opposite Turbet Island. This has not survived. It is thought to be the first castle to have been built in County Cavan. The Corporation of the Borough of Belturbet was established on March 30th 1613, under a Charter from [King James I](#). His 'Kingstone' or coat of arms still exists in Belturbet. It is on display in the Railway Centre. The Charter placed the corporation in the charge of thirteen Burgesses, one of whom was elected annually to the office of Provost by the other twelve. The burgesses were also empowered to return two members to the parliament in Dublin. This right was forfeit at the act of Union. The two members affected were compensated in the amount of £1,500 each. During the [Plantation of Ulster](#) in 1610 two thousand acres of land around Belturbet was granted to the English "undertaker" Stephen Butler. He soon established a thriving urban centre. The prosperity of the town relied heavily on its position on the River Erne. Belturbet was described in various surveys as being the 'only town of any note in the counties Cavan or Monaghan'. In October 1641 the town was seized by the Irish Confederate as part of the [Irish Rebellion of 1641](#). Belturbet was the site of one of the massacres of planters, in which over two dozen were said to have been thrown from Killconny Bridge and drowned. In March 1653 Belturbet, under Viscount McGinnis of Iveagh, was the last town in Ireland [to fall to Cromwell](#); the final Irish stronghold at nearby [Cloughoughter](#) held out a further month.

Belturbet was a garrison town from 1610 until 1922. Many of the original fortifications remain and are in good repair. The town retains much of its original lay-out. The Main Street was originally called Butler St. It leads to the 'Diamond', which was originally called Market Square. This is where Butler built his castle in the 1700's. The substantial remains on the corner of Bridge Street are in retail use. Church Street leads up to both the Catholic Parish Church and the Parish Church of Ireland Church. Both churches dominate the sky-line. The C O I stands on a 17C Star Fortification Site. Parts of the church date from that century. It was one of the first Anglican churches to be built in Ireland, reputedly using materials from the nearby [Drumlane Abbey](#). The Abby is also connected to the River Erne. In the 1650s the proto-[Quaker](#) leader, [William Edmondson](#) was detained at Belturbet and put in [the stocks](#). The Ducking Stool was another punishment device. The parish church was damaged by lightning in the 1720s.

The town was a constituency represented in the [Irish House of Commons](#) from 1611 to 1800. Between 1725 and 1793 Catholics and those married to Catholics could not vote. They also had to vacate the town boundaries before dark.

In 1760 [John Wesley](#) passed through and noted:

*"...a town in which there is neither Papist nor Presbyterian; but, to supply that defect, there are Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, and common swearers in abundance".*

[James Somers](#) a soldier in the local garrison won the [Victoria Cross](#) during World War One. He is buried in Cloughjordan Co.Tipperary.

Belturbet Railway Station was opened on 29 June 1885 by the Great Northern Railway (Ireland) Company. It connected the broad gauge branch to Ballyhaise railway station on the Clones to Belfast and Cavan line. It also served the narrow gauge Cavan and Leitrim Railway to Dromod and the Arigna coal mines. The entire complex finally closed for all services on March 1959. It lay derelict until 1995 when it was purchased by the local Community Development Association. It was then restored to its former glory. A community and tourist facility called the Railway Centre was opened to commemorate this aspect of the town's history.

[Andrew Grene](#) (1965–2010), a civil affairs officer with the [United Nations](#), grew up largely on a small farm outside of Belturbet. After initially working as a speechwriter for [Boutros Boutros Ghali](#), he transitioned to international policy at UN Headquarters in New York. He then became a political affairs officer in the field. He worked in the Central African Republic, Eritrea and Ethiopia. He assisted in the peaceful devolution of power from Indonesia to an independent [East Timor \(Timor Leste\)](#). His last posting was in Haiti, where he worked for three years as a senior member of staff. He was SASRSG to [Hedi Annabi](#) at the time of the earthquake of January 12, 2010, in which he and many of the UN mission lost their lives. He was laid to rest in the family plot in Belturbet church of Ireland graveyard. The funeral was attended by delegates from the President of Ireland,

the Chief of Staff and the Foreign Minister. The Department of Foreign Affairs dedicated the annual [Andrew Grene Conflict Resolution Scholarship](#) in his honor. [The Andrew Green Foundation](#) is a charity also founded in his memory. It is dedicated to assisting Haiti through education and microfinance. Belturbet has been adversely affected in many ways by its proximity to the border with Northern Ireland, most evidently in during the recent 30 years of civil conflict. Two young people, Geraldine O'Reilly, Staghall, Belturbet and Patrick Stanley, from Clara, Co.Offaly, were killed by a 'no warning' Loyalist car bomb on 28 December 1972. In 2006 Cavan County Council, with the assistance of Justice for the Forgotten, commissioned a monument to commemorate their deaths at the site of the bombing on the Diamond.

Belturbet is also situated within the [Geo Park](#) which connects Cavan and Fermanagh. The Geo Park is unique in Europe as it contains some 22km of [ribbed moraines](#) this is the largest geological feature of this kind in Europe. There are multiple geographic, historical and scenic sites contained within the Geo Park. It is also an important attraction for those interested in engaging in a variety of outdoor pursuits.

Whereas the Marble Arch Caves provides the focal point or 'Gateway' to the Geo Park in Fermanagh, Belturbet provides a key Gateway to the Geo Park south of the Border. Belturbet is also the main town close to [Castle Saunders on](#), which is in the process of being developed as an [International Scouting Centre](#). The restoration of the Ulster Canal as far north as Clones will, eventually, reconnect Belturbet and the Shannon Erne Waterway to the Ulster Canal. Although this will reinstate the historic trading route with Belfast, in the future the waterways will focus on leisure rather than trade as the main source of commerce. Both the Geo Park and the Erne Waterway, which links Belturbet to the wider Geo Pars as well as the International Scouting Centre, are key resources in defining and positioning the cultural identity of Belturbet into the future.