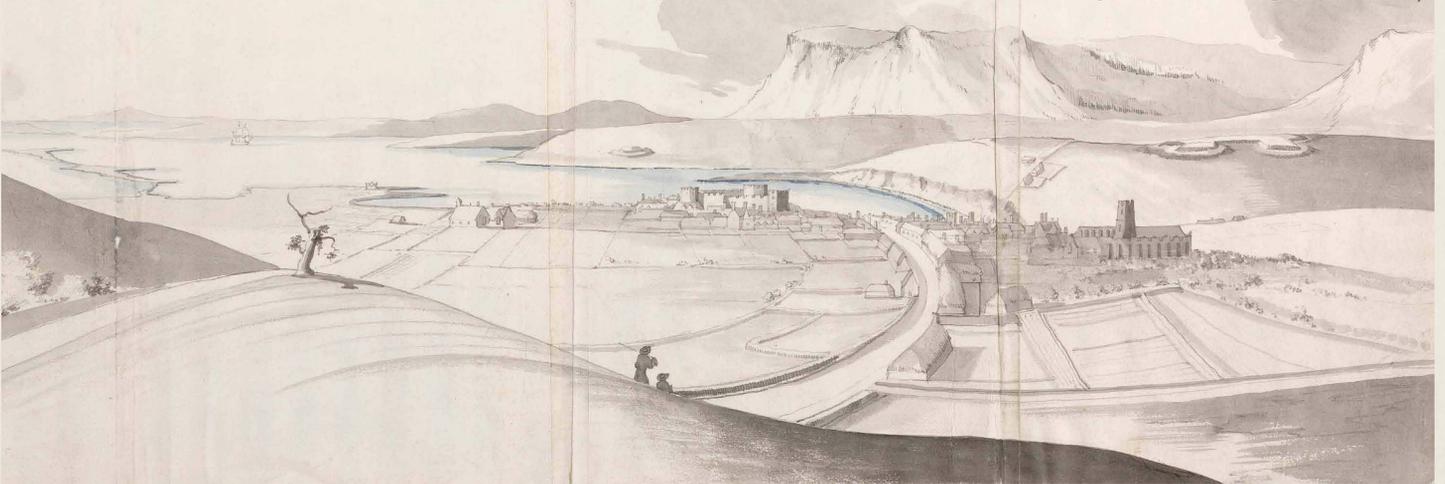


# THE BOROUGH OF SLIGO

## PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Along the great Atlantic littoral, Sligo lies on the ancient route-way between Connacht and Ulster, located on the only fordable site where the river Garavogue drains Lough Gill into Sligo Bay. Hemmed in between mountains, lake and sea, the town developed on a prime strategic site, with an historic role in controlling communications, and was a contested site in medieval and early modern periods



Phillips' Prospect of Sligo 1685

The historic town is dominated by steep hills on the north and south of the river, and this led to the development of an irregular street pattern running along the axis of the curving Garavogue, which becomes tidal below its lower reaches.

Indications suggest the existence of a small early Gaelic settlement on this ford, where a bridge is mentioned in 1236. However, the construction of a castle and Dominican priory by Maurice Fitzgerald after 1242 marks the beginnings of a true urban centre.

The morphology of the Anglo-Norman town is still evident today. The older streets at the core are slightly sinuous, indicating their medieval origin. Later development occurred southwards, up High Street, along the main road out of Sligo. On the north bank of the river, the high steep hill of Forthill made development difficult until after 1600. Fairs and markets were well developed by the mid 1560s and the Market Cross, now home to Lady Erin, dates from this time.



Market Cross

A notable period of expansion and growth saw Sligo elevated to a county town in 1603, which resulted in the erection of a gaol and sessions house. St. John's church is thought to date from this period. A 1682 survey records twelve streets and lanes, along with mills, tanneries, and barracks, indicating pronounced urban growth.

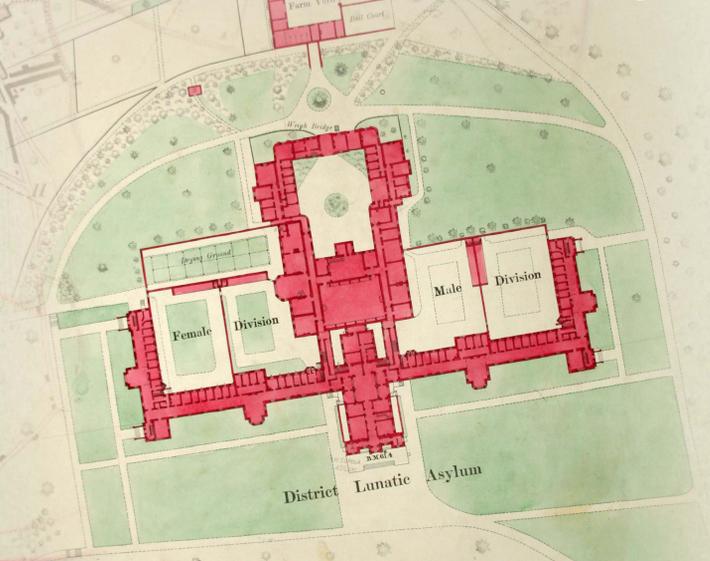
During the 18th century, Sligo evolved into a substantial town; new streets were laid out and several notable public buildings were erected, including a new sessions house, jail, and a large infirmary. Col. Wynne enclosed a new market yard to the west of High Street in the early 1720s, and the booming linen market led to the erection of a linen hall around 1760.

The nineteenth century saw much physical change in the Borough's urban fabric, as the town expanded south-eastwards and on the north side of the river. A new Mail Coach Road was built around 1804, and in 1833, Temple Street was constructed. Wide approach roads, notably Pearse Road, and Markievicz Road, were laid out, opening up the town to larger coaches, and new streets were laid out around the quays, and to the west of the medieval heart. The Old Bridge, surviving since medieval times, was demolished and replaced by Hyde Bridge in 1847.



Borough Boundary stone

Many large institutional buildings date from this period, such as the County Infirmary and fever hospital, constructed on the Mall, and the District Workhouse and Lunatic Asylum, at Ballytivnan. A substantial new county gaol was erected to the east of the town in 1815, and in 1847 a constabulary barracks was erected along Chapel Street. The Town Hall was constructed in 1865 on the site of the old Stone Fort, and a new courthouse was constructed in Teeling Street in 1878 on the site of the original building.



Plan of the Lunatic Asylum 1875

A handsome new Methodist chapel was built on Wine Street in 1832, and the Presbyterians constructed a meeting-house on Church Lane in 1828. Calry church was erected on the Mall in 1823, to cater for the growing number of Church of Ireland parishioners. The old Catholic mass house near the priory was replaced in 1875 by a new Cathedral erected on the southern side of Temple Street. A small Catholic quarter evolved in this area, with the addition of a Bishop's palace, a large diocesan college, Summerhill, in 1899 and a temperance hall in 1904.

By the 1890s a more affluent and cleaner town was emerging. A modern sewage scheme had been laid out and piped water was brought to the town. However, there still remained the mass of thatched cottages of the poorer labouring class on the periphery of the town, a situation that persisted for another four decades.

Major topographical change was to come in the Nineteen Thirties and Forties with the construction of over 1,000 local authority houses, and these terraces are one of the most characteristic features in the town today.

Sligo managed to establish itself as the major retail and distribution centre of the north-west during the Sixties and Seventies, and increased traffic resulted in the construction of Hughes Bridge in 1986, the first new river crossing since the 1660s. The Nineties saw welcome regeneration along the banks of the Garavogue, and the addition of large shopping centres have added much to the commercial life of the town.

The commercial and regional importance of Sligo was recognised by the government at the start of the 21st century, when it was designated as a regional centre for growth and investment. The controversial construction of an inner relief road in 2005, whilst helping to relieve the overwhelming traffic volumes, nevertheless had an enormous impact on the physical layout of the town, severing the western suburbs from the historic core. However, its necessity underlined Sligo's historically strategic importance as a prime nodal and bridging site, seven centuries after the Norman Fitzgerald's took possession of the first bridge over the river Garavogue in the 13th century.

