

A VISITOR'S GUIDE TO:

INCH ISLAND

County Donegal €1



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An introduction to Inch Island

Inch Island – a wildlife haven, isolated beauty spot and place of great historical interest – offers a host of attractions for visitors and tourists to explore and enjoy...

The jewel in the crown of romantic Inishowen, County Donegal, Inch Island on Lough Swilly covers 399 acres – and is approximately three miles wide by three miles long. It is equidistant from Burt, Fahan point and Rathmullan, being about a mile away from each.

Inch boasts some of the most fertile land in Inishowen – its scenery is both beautiful and captivating and has sparked the imagination of generations of writers and poets.

Inch is connected to the mainland by two embankments – ‘Inch Bank’ being the main link, bearing Inch’s only public road, which was completed in 1855 at a cost of around £60,000.

The second land-link is the ‘Farland’ into which sluice gates were installed a year later, also at a cost of £60,000. Both embankments were part of the Lough Swilly reclamation project carried out by William McCormack, a leading

building contractor and MP for Derry City.

With the completion of the scheme in 1859, the reclaimed land appears to have come into the ownership of McCormack in partnership with Thomas Brassie and William Wagstaff.

McCormack’s interests were then bought out by his two partners in 1863, who decided to till the unclaimed land to create one large farmland, now known as the ‘Griannan Estate’.

Visitors to Inishowen, Donegal, cross onto Inch Island to study the many standing stones and observe Inch Lake – a migratory home for a wide variety of wildlife. Inch is possibly most noted for its remoteness and the beauty of its views down the Swilly. It is also just a short drive from Buncrana, Derry City and Letterkenny.

On pages 6 and 7 of this guide you will find a map – a simple guide to finding Inch’s historical sites and places of interest.

Places of interest on Inch...

INCH FORT & PIER

One of the last two forts defending Lough Swilly travelling east, Inch Fort was completed in 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

The fort was built to accommodate two officers, five NCOs and 80 soldiers, but never actually housed a garrison of this size. Indeed in 1823, after eight years of peace, the garrison comprised a total of just eight men: two gunners and six soldiers from a line battalion.

In 1776 the Alexander family from Broom Hill, Derry built salting sheds at the site of Inch Fort to service Inch's flourishing herring industry.

Fishing from Inch Pier has a long history dating back to the time of the first charter granted by James II in 1611 to James Brown to run the ferry from Inch Island to Fahan and Rathmullan. Generations of the Brown family have been involved in fishing from Inch Pier ever since.

OUR LADY OF LOURDES

The building of Inch's Roman Catholic Church, Our Lady of Lourdes, was started on St Patrick's Day, 1922.

The foundation stone was laid by Reverend Michael O'Mullen on Ascension Thursday, 1923.

The land was purchased in 1907 and contains the local graveyard.

STANDING STONES

There are many standing stones and ancient burial sites on Inch, some dating back as far as the Megalithic and Iron Age periods (See map on next page).

INCH MASONIC HALL

Inch Masonic Hall was built in 1846, and renovated in 1914. The original Grand Master of the lodge was a certain 'Guy Nowe'.

Travelling back to Inch Island by horse and car with his new wife, following their wedding in Derry in 1848, and prior to the construction of the 'banks' – Nowe misjudged the flow of the tide. Both he and his bride drowned. Their bodies were later washed up at 'Baylett' in a field known today as 'Guy Nowe's field'.

INCH CASTLE

Inch Castle was at the centre of the famous dispute between two O'Donnell cousins – Donal and Rory – over the Lordship of *Tir Connaill*. The latter was killed when Donal hurled a stone down from the battlements during an attack on the Castle. Donal became *Lord of Tir Connaill* but remained in power for only two years as he was subsequently killed by Rory's brother in 1600.

The Castle originally belonged to the O'Dohertys, and it was an O'Doherty,



Inch Castle



The Kings Grave, standing stones

the then Lord of Inishowen, who imprisoned Donal in the castle in the first instance.

Inch Castle was built to guard the waters of the Swilly and to protect the heartlands of the O'Dohertys who resided at Elagh (about 4kms from Derry) 'til the fateful year of 1600. Inch Castle was part of a network of defensive castles built by the O'Dohertys and was thought to be impenetrable.

In the early 1600's there were over 400 houses on Inch and the island was considered the wealthiest district in Donegal. It was the loss of Inch Island that drove Sir Cahir O'Doherty into rebellion against the state.

INCH PRESBYTERIAN CHAPEL

In 1832, 22 families formed the nucleus of a Presbyterian church on Inch. At this time, the first minister, the Reverend Sam Armour was ordained on 1st March 1832 and appointed to the island. Prior to this Presbyterians had to travel to Burt for worship.

INCH CHURCH OF IRELAND

The Church of Ireland was erected in 1776 and extended in 1869. Due to dwindling patronage it closed its doors in 1956. The church, now in ruins, still displays some fine architecture.

INCH LAKE

Inch Lake is the most important wetland in the northwest region of Ireland, being of international importance for wintering herds of whooper swans – up to 1,750 have been recorded in the month of October. Flocks of up to 500 bewick swans also visit the rich farmlands surrounding the lake. Up to 400 mute swans, flocks of Greenland white-fronted geese, greylag and occasional pink-footed geese winter are also to be spotted in the area.

Among the many varieties of wintering ducks species are mallard, widgeon, teal, goldeneye, pochard, tufted duck, scaup, shoveler, pintail and shelduck. Many species of waders also visit.

Nesting species include great crested grebes, coots, moorhens, dunlin, redshank, lapwing, red breasted mergansers, pochard, tufted duck, common, Arctic and sandwich terns.

Key to Inch Island:

1. Standing Stones "Kings grave"
Two large standing stones
2. Inch Fort & Pier
3. Our lady of Lourdes Chapel
4. Inch Masonic Hall
5. Inch Castle

6. Inch Presbyterian Chapel
7. Inch Church of Ireland
8. Inch Lake
9. Duck pond
10. Inch House Built in 1730
11. Brown's beach
12. Millbay beach
13. St Michael's Hall



Inch Island





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