



Mohill Mo Scéal

Mohill – Maothail-Mancháin:
fifteen centuries of trade,
markets and fairs

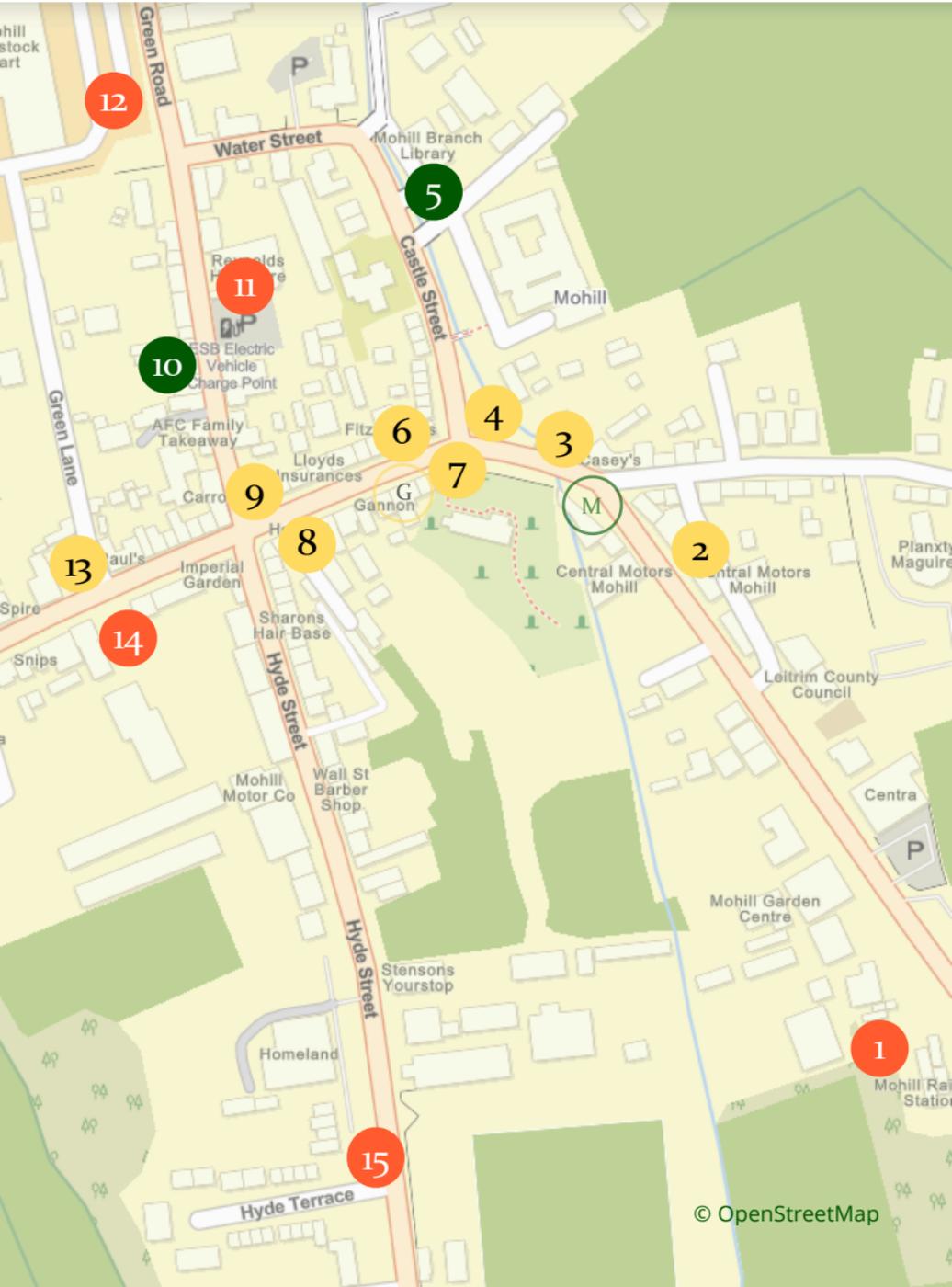
our people, our history, our stories





Mohill Mo Scéal

- 1 Mohill's narrow gauge railway
- 2 Jimmy Gilmartin, blacksmith
- 3 Cobblers and shoemakers
- 4 Turlough O Carolan (1670-1738)
- 5 St Manchán and early Mohill
- 6 Nan Fitzpatrick, international singer
- 7 Serving time with the Gibsons
- 8 Gannon's and Dunleavy's
- 9 Early's and John McGahern
- 10 Black & Tans, boycotts, murder
- 11 Glebe Street Ritz
- 12 Fairs and Monaghan Day
- 13 Northern Bank
- 14 Butter Market
- 15 From Workhouse to Hyde Terrace



12

5

11

10

6

4

3

9

7

13

14

8

2

1

15



*Mohill Mo Scéal – Mohill My Story – a
storymap of Mohill - Maothail-Mancháin*

This booklet accompanies a digital storymap (link opposite) telling the history of Mohill, County Leitrim. The digital version contains more information, multiple images and web-links. It also includes voice recordings, music and video where indicated by the icons below.



Images



Voice



Music



Video



Scan to access
Mohill Mo Scéal
digital storymap
or go to
[www.leitrim.ie/
visit/mohill](http://www.leitrim.ie/visit/mohill)

© 2026. Created by Fiona Slevin, Fionnuala Maxwell and Kim Taylor with input and contributions from a range of people; see digital storymap for rights, credits and acknowledgements. Comments and ideas welcome via mohillhistory@gmail.com.

This project is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and Leitrim County Council.

1. Mohill's narrow gauge railway

For over 70 years, Mohill was connected by rail to locations across the northwest and via Dromod to Dublin



The Cavan & Leitrim Railway ran between Dromod and Belturbet with stops at Derreen, Mohill, Rosharry, Adoon, Fenagh and Ballinamore.

The first commercial service, on 6 September 1887, carried pigs from Mohill fair. The line quickly became critical to Mohill's economy and connectivity by enabling efficient transport of live-stock and produce from the town's fairs and markets.

The line was also used by workers to commute to Mohill from outlying areas. For many departing emigrants, it became a site of sad farewells.

By the mid-20th century, modernisation had made the service increasingly redundant: passengers were few and it was losing money. It closed on 1 April 1959.

After decades lying empty, the station house has now been renovated and given new purpose.

Digital storymap

Hear locals cheer and sing as the last train leaves Mohill in 1959, and other songs and recordings of the era



2. Jimmy Gilmartin, blacksmith

When Jimmy Gilmartin's forge closed in the 1970s, it marked the end of a 1500-year-old trade in Mohill



As late as the 1930s, there were three forges in Mohill. One was on Station Road, operated by blacksmith, Jimmy Gilmartin.

Like all the blacksmiths before him, Jimmy was kept busy shoeing horses and donkeys, making wheels for carts and even forging metal gates. He also mended and made farm tools like slanes

for cutting turf or spikes for a harrow.

The forge was an important venue for locals to meet and trade and exchange news. The forge's fire, blasted by a large bellows at the centre of the forge, was hot enough to soften iron but also offered welcome warmth on a chilly day.

Jimmy Gilmartin was still working in the 1950s and 60s but demand for his skill waned as tractors, cars and buses replaced the old carts, asses and farm horses.

When Jimmy Gilmartin's forge closed in the 1970s, it ended fifteen centuries of the blacksmith trade in Mohill.



3. Cobblers and shoemakers

Key trades at a time when shoes and boots were hand-made, built to last and designed to be repaired

Frank Heeran

Frank Heeran operated out of a small workshop on Bridge Street up to the 1970s. The walls and floors were filled with boxes and shelves of spare parts. The pungent smells of leather, glue and resin hung over the crowded bench where Frank sewed, stitched and hammered.

Kate O'Reilly & Kate Cashin

Mohill had at least two female cobblers in the 19th and early 20th century.

Kate O'Reilly and Kate Cashin were both employed as shoemakers by the workhouse and made shoes for inmates and other locals.

Kate Cashin toiled at the workhouse for at least 25 years from 1885, and was still working at the age of 66.



Kate O'Reilly also had a long career. In 1913, somewhat to the surprise of the *Irish Independent*, O'Reilly could 'turn out a shoe unaided from start to finish'.



4. Turlough O Carolan (1670-1738)

One of Ireland's greatest composers, O Carolan was a travelling bard, but made Mohill his permanent home



O Carolan came to Leitrim in 1688. With clear musical talent, he was apprenticed to a harper after he lost his sight to smallpox. With the patronage of Máire MacDermott Roe and others, O Carolan entertained at many of the big houses of Ireland, including that of the Croftons of Mohill. He composed over 200 pieces and earned Europe-wide fame in his own lifetime.



O Carolan settled in Mohill after his marriage to Máire Maguire in 1720. They had seven children, but Máire died thirteen years after their marriage. O Carolan died in 1738 at the home of MacDermott Roe. His wake lasted four days and was marked by lavish hospitality and music.

The O Carolan statue in Mohill is the last work of eminent sculptor Oisín Kelly (1915-81). It was unveiled in 1986 by President Patrick Hillery.

Digital storymap

Listen to O Carolan's harp music and, for the first time in centuries, hear his lament for Máire, sung by Fionnuala Maxwell

5. St Manchán and early Mohill

The founding of a monastery by St Manchán in the 6th century established Mohill as a settled urban centre



St Manchán (d. 538 CE) founded Mohill monastery in the early 500s. Mohill's roots as a centre for trades and markets can be traced to this period, as can the parish name Moothail-Mancháin, and Monaghan Day, the fair traditionally held on St Manchán's feast day.

In the 12th century, Mohill monastery became an Augustinian priory. One noteworthy novice was Cathal Mac Raghnaill – Charles Reynolds – who travelled to Rome in 1535 and persuaded the pope to excommunicate Henry VIII.

When Mohill priory was dissolved in 1590, its lands were granted to John Crofton. His son Henry acquired more land, including 600 acres from Plantation. Henry built a castle and bawn around 1690, of which the base of a tower, a part-wall and two stone heads remain. Today, St Mary's church stands on the priory site.

By the late 1800s, the Croftons held 9,611 acres around Mohill. Though increasingly absent, they continued to earn revenue from town leases and fair green tolls. In 1749, the purchase by Nathaniel Clements of c.10,000 acres in Leitrim, entrenched British governance in Mohill and cemented the shift to anglicisation.



6. Nan Fitzpatrick, singer

Amongst the first female singers from Ireland to be recorded in the 1930s in America



Nan grew up in Drumshanbo North, between the parishes of Aughavas and Cloone. All of the family – parents James and Rosie Fitzpatrick and eight siblings – were highly musical. Her brother, Pee, established Fitzpatrick's Céilí House in Mohill and was a talented fiddle player; another brother, Phil, wrote the anthem 'Lovely Leitrim'.

In 1929, at the age of twenty, Nan followed her older siblings and emigrated to America. After an 'American Wake', with singing and dancing into the early hours, Nan set off from Mohill train station on the long journey to New York.

In New York, Nan met Frank Quinn, a native of Drumlish, who was already a recording artist. Nan was soon performing at social events and within weeks was being recorded at Columbia studios.

Digital storymap

Hear Nan talking about leaving Mohill; also links to Nan singing and more about her career



7. Serving time with the Gibsons

Violet Crowe was one of many young women apprenticed to shops in Mohill; she went on to own the business



When Violet Crowe finished school, she left her home in Dromod and went to work in Mohill. She was 14 years old when she was taken on by the Gibsons as an apprentice. The Gibsons – Sophia, Harry and Minnie – had a shoe shop beside the Church of Ireland and a drapery business across the street. As was the custom, Violet worked for three years without pay while serving her time, after which

she earned £1 a week. She and the other shopgirls lived above the shop. When the Gibsons retired, Violet took over the shoe shop and started her own drapery business with help from her sister, Anna.

Every Tuesday – a half-day for the shop – Violet rushed to get the train to Dromod to visit her parents. The linesman often held the train for her and young Cecil, as he knew her habits.

Violet married Ted Tuthill in 1955. A few years later, with two young children and Anna leaving the business, Violet closed the shop and moved to the family farm in Tullyoran.



8. Gannon's and Dunleavy's

Amongst the many traders in Mohill at a time when the town bustled with grocers, drapers, and hardware shops

Gannon & Co

Established by TJ Gannon in 1896, Gannon's drapery and footwear shop spanned two properties on Lower Main Street (*G on map*). It was notable for its polished wood interior and a suspended pulley system that transferred cash and receipts from one end of the shop to the other.

TJ's son Jim took over in 1940. Gannon's closed in March 2019.



Dunleavy's

Bridget and John Dunleavy opened their drapery shop on Main Street in the 1910s. Dunleavy's became known for their fine workmanship and stylish designs at a time when suits, hats, and wedding dresses were all hand-crafted. In the 1950s, Gerry and Mary Dunleavy took over the business.



9. Early's and John McGahern

Author John McGahern (1934-2006), was also a small farmer who lived outside Mohill and was a regular at Early's



John McGahern described Mohill and life here in the mid-20th century in his fiction and essays.

Mohill is our town . . . In its plain way I think it beautiful . . . I like the town best in winter, the outskirts glistening with frost, the excitement on the faces of people in from

Digital storymap
More about John McGahern; also Early's bar in 1984 according to a French journalist

the countryside for the late Saturday-night shopping, children and parcels being dragged under the street-lamps. When the shopping is done, they go to the bars to meet the people they know and to discover the news, each locality to its own bar. In early March, on a Thursday market day, once I see the bags of seed potatoes and bundles of cabbage plants – Early York and Flat Dutch, Greyhound and Curly – on the corner outside Luke Early's bar, each bundle tied with baler twine of all colours, I know the winter is almost over. I think of Mohill as one of the happiest towns in the world.

From John McGahern, 'County Leitrim: The Sky Above Us' in *Love of the World*, Faber & Faber, 2009
© John McGahern Estate



10. Black & Tans, boycotts, murder

During the War of Independence, the Black & Tans and IRA warred in Mohill; in 1923, a local doctor was murdered



Dr Paddy Muldoon

In March 1923, as the Civil War drew to a close, Dr Paddy Muldoon was

From 1919, IRA Volunteers conducted raids against state institutions, especially the constabulary (RIC). In response, Auxiliaries and 'Black & Tans' were drafted into Mohill: they took over buildings on Glebe Street and instituted a campaign of raids, beatings, burnings, harassment and shootings. The IRA enforced a boycott of the RIC and those who supplied goods to crown forces. The boycott permanently changed Mohill's trading landscape.

shot and killed at Bridge Street (*M on map*). Local priest, Fr Edward Ryans, was implicated in the murder, but the powerful forces of the IRA, church and emerging state all colluded to help the perpetrators evade justice.

Digital storymap

More about the revolutionary era and Belfast Boycott, plus links to a local 2023 film and booklet on the murder of Dr Muldoon



11. Glebe Street Ritz

Glebe Street was a busy place in the 1940s and 50s, especially on fair days given its proximity to the fair green



Glebe Street may have housed the barracks, but public houses on Glebe Street like Pee Kenny's and Tom McGovern's provided sustenance and entertainment, especially after a day's work at a fair. McGovern's was a pub and eating house and had a rare public phone. Along the street, Stephen Flynn managed the post office as well as running a taxi service and chip shop.

The Ritz Cinema

The Ritz Cinema opened in 1942 and became a favoured spot for socialising and romancing, especially on Sundays. Inside, there were three seating sections ranging in price.

Staff members included Babs Bohan, Patsy Bohan, and Tommy Joe Clyne who operated the projection booth. Across the street, the Ritz Café, run by John Bohan, was a gathering place before and after a show.

The Ritz burnt down in 1952. It recovered, but in the 1960s, film audiences declined and the cinema began to host occasional céilís and dances. It closed around 1969.



12. Fairs and Monaghan Day

For centuries, Mohill was a focal point for livestock fairs, serving as a gateway between the northwest and east.



In the 19th century, up to fifteen fairs a year were held on the fair green in Mohill. The largest was Monaghan Day, arguably the most significant date in the town year. Named for St Manchán, it was held annually on 25 February, the saint's feast day. As John McGahern observed, Monaghan Day was 'the traditional day poor farmers sold their winter stock and the rich farmers bought them for fattening'.



Local farmers depended on Monaghan Day for a major part of their annual income: great numbers of bullocks, heifers, weanlings and dry cows were traded, while pigs were sold the day before. The opening of Dromod railway station in 1862 boosted trading at all Mohill fairs with special trains despatched from Dublin and Mullingar to carry stock and passengers. The advent of Mohill station in 1887 made transport even easier.

Traditional fairs, including Monaghan Day, ended in the 1970s when a new livestock mart was built on the fair green.

Digital storymap
*Images and recollections
of fair days in Mohill with
links to articles*

13. Northern Bank

Formal banking was established in Mohill when the Northern Banking Company opened in 1867



The Northern Banking Company first operated out of premises west of the butter market. The current bank building – built around 1910 – is in a rarely found Art Nouveau style.

By 1881, Mohill had a second bank, the Hibernian Bank, suggesting a growing market for banking services amongst farmers and traders. The 1870s had seen the introduction of small loans for ordinary farmers

and traders, so that even small farmers could borrow amounts as low as £5 at low interest rates. Until the opening of the banks, a farmer or entrepreneur who needed finance was restricted to loan funds or unregulated money-lenders, or relied on credit from local shopkeepers.

The banks played an important role in handling remittance money sent home by emigrants in Britain and America. In the 1940s, such was the volume of remittance money going through the Northern Bank that the teenage son of one of the managers was sent from Belfast to help process the cash.

14. Butter Market

A weekly market for food and other produce spread from the butter market to the base of the town



For centuries, a market was held every Thursday in Mohill to trade pigs, animal skins, potatoes, oats, eggs and butter. On the streets, pedlars sold seasonal foods, crockery, clothes, and medicinal cures.

Some of the trade at the market was for export. Dealers bought pigs in Mohill and shipped them via Longford to England by rail. Buyers from Sligo and Mullingar bought butter and eggs from local women for



onward sale and export. Egg and butter sales could amount to over 60% of a farm's cash income, enabling rent to be paid and groceries and other goods to be bought in local shops. The volumes were such that in 1868, one emigrant from Mohill returned and set up as a butter and egg dealer.

Digital storymap
More history of the market; Larry Moran talking in 1991 about the butter market



15. Workhouse to Hyde Terrace

The workhouse and fever hospital are synonymous with the horrors of the Famine, but their role changed over time

Mohill workhouse opened in 1842 to provide relief to the destitute poor of the area. During the Famine of the late 1840s, it was overwhelmed by thousands of starving, desperate people seeking help. Conditions were horrific.

After the Famine, the role of the workhouse changed. From the 1860s, the number of 'inmates' was much reduced and comprised mostly women, children, older people and the sick. The fever hospital (opened in 1844) began to offer healthcare to all local people.

In 1921, Mohill workhouse was closed as part of a national drive for greater efficiency. Staff members were pensioned off and

inmates transferred, first to Manorhamilton, and in 1936 to Carrick-on-Shannon. Mohill's fever hospital evolved into St Manachán's District Hospital.



Hyde Terrace

The workhouse was torn down in the 1930s. Its stone was used to build thirty-six new houses on the site.

Hyde Terrace opened in May 1939, named for Dr Douglas Hyde, Ireland's first president and grandson of Mohill rector, Rev Arthur Hyde.





Mohill My Story: a storymap of Mohill, County Leitrim

Mohill – Maothail-Mancháin

First settled around 500 CE, Mohill was a major centre for markets and livestock fairs for over fifteen hundred years. Despite centuries of upheaval and displacement, the town retains ancient influences in its geography, built environment, society and culture. It also retains a deep sense of place and a vibrant, strong community spirit.

Go online for more

This booklet supplements a digital storymap (link opposite) that adds richness to Mohill's stories with added detail, images, music and song.

Scan to access
Mohill Mo Scéal
digital storymap
or go to
[www.leitrim.ie/
visit/mohill](http://www.leitrim.ie/visit/mohill)



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Tionscadal Éireann
Project Ireland
2040

Ár dTodhchaí
Tuaithe
Our Rural
Future



An Ciste um Athghiniúint
agus Forbairt Tuaithe
Rural Regeneration and
Development Fund



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
Leitrim County Council