Ferns first came to prominence when the resident King of Leinster, ‘Dermot McMurrough’ brought the first Normans to Ireland in 1169 to help him to fight his battles (they never left). However his successors eventually surrendered the Castle when Chieftain Donagh McMurrough did so in 1449. The present Castle site can be dated on architectural grounds to c.1220 indicating that it was built during the period of the Norman Marshall family control of Ferns. The Castle remained the ‘caput of the manor’ until 1360 when it was lost back to local Chieftains, the Kavanaghs, who in turn held it until about 1540 after which it was staffed by a succession of English Governors. Over its lifetime the Castle was sacked, damaged and modified several times.

The Chapel's magnificent vaulted ceiling is borne by moulded ribs resting on corbels in the form of capitals. Three windows light the interior of this 13th century architectural gem which is regarded as the finest of its kind in Ireland. It is possible to climb safely to the top of the 3 storey S.E. tower and enjoy the spectacular view of the surrounding lush countryside. The strategic importance of this Castle can only be fully appreciated by viewing the area which it commanded.
**Tapestry (1a)**

**Stitching the past…**

Ferns Tapestry project, located in the Castle Visitors’ Centre, is an exciting community-led initiative showcasing the history of Ferns in stitch work, from the arrival of St. Aidan in 598 A.D. to the coming of the Normans in 1169. The Tapestry, comprising of 25 panels, measures 50ft x 2ft approx was officially launched by President Mary McAleese on 22nd July 2004.

**New Church (2)**

The foundation stone of this new Church of St. Aidan was laid on the Feast of St. Aidan, 31 January 1974. A plaque listing the names of parish priests, from 1644, is on the wall to the right of the altar. Four parish priests named Doyle indicate the influence of the original Danish invaders on the population of Co. Wexford, while the presence of the Norman names such as Lambert and Rossiter also reflects that Co. Wexford was subject to a number of invasions.

**Haughton’s Plaque (3)**

An individual who tried in difficult circumstances, to keep the peace in Ferns in 1798 during the rebellion with the British, was Joseph Haughton. Haughton was a Quaker who operated a merchant’s premises in the centre of the village. He refused to sell rope to a Yeoman, knowing that the rope was being purchased in order to hang rebels. However, as troubles increased in Ferns, he managed to keep the peace with all the antagonists. He provided humanitarian assistance to both sides at great personal risk, when savagery and rampant sectarianism was the norm and humanitarian actions were in short supply. He is commemorated by a plaque on the wall of his former premises, now Centra supermarket. The Quakers had a most honourable record throughout the 1798 Rebellion.
Cathedral Graveyard (4)

Originally a 6th century habitation, the old cemetery located adjacent to St. Edan’s Cathedral, contains the remains of some extremely important historical figures, most famous of these being Diarmuid MacMurrough, King of Leinster. Also interred here is the late Fr. Ned Redmond who, as a student in France, was credited with saving the young Napoleon Bonaparte from drowning, thus altering the course of European history. It is reputed that, in the same grave, lie the charred remains of Fr. John Murphy, executed leader of the rebel forces in the rebellion of 1798.

Grave of Diarmuid MacMurrough (4a)

In the cemetery, a broken granite shaft of a High Cross with a distinctive fret pattern decoration is reputed to mark the grave of Diarmuid MacMurrough (d.1171), the deposed King of Leinster. Originally a High Cross, during the Cromwellian invasion the Cross was destroyed and only the shaft remains. Diarmuid MacMurrough is most famous for having invited the Normans to Ireland in 1169 A.D.
St. Mary’s Augustinian Abbey (5)

In 1158, Diarmuid MacMurrough founded an Abbey in Ferns ‘for the health of my soul and my ancestors and successors’. Its foundation charter included an entitlement to a ‘portion of all beer brewed in Ferns’. Through the winter of 1167/8 MacMurrough took sanctuary in the Abbey whilst he awaited the arrival of his Anglo-Norman allies. The Abbey was suppressed in 1539 and the property and 630 acres of land reverted to the King of England. It is located within the original monastic enclosure of St. Aidan. Parts of the barrel vaulting of the chancel, showing some plain ribs, are still intact. Behind the chancel are the sacristy and the sacristan’s room overhead. There is a narrow winding stair to the top of the belfry.

St. Edan’s Cathedral (6)

The Church of Ireland Cathedral (said to be the smallest Cathedral in Europe) stands on the site of the early 13th century medieval Cathedral, which was built by Bishop John St. John at the same time as the building of the Castle. John St. John was the first Norman bishop of Ferns, d.1243. It was situated within the bounds of the monastery founded by St. Aidan in the 6th century. The Cathedral was largely destroyed by the O’Byrnes of Wicklow in 1575. Ordered by Queen Elizabeth 1 to rebuild the Cathedral, in 1577 they reinstated a small part of the nave. On the inside of the present building, some internal pillars of the original structure can be seen built into the north and south walls. This area was again rebuilt in the early 1800’s, as commemorated in the date 1817 over the door.
Ruins of Medieval Cathedral (7)
Ruins of the remainder of the Bishop John St. John cathedral (1220) lie to the east of the present Cathedral, where some of the original Gothic tracery is still to be seen.

High Crosses (7a)
The heads of four High Crosses, dating to the 8th or 9th centuries, show the importance of Ferns as an early Christian monastic site, more than anywhere else in South Leinster. In the grounds of the Cathedral there are three heads, un-decorated apart from raised mouldings at the edge. The original bases have survived but the missing shafts have been replaced by concrete. Another head is found in the ruins behind the Cathedral together with a stone with a raised cross. For detailed information, see Peter Harbison’s book on Irish Crosses.

St. Mogue’s Cottage (8)
St. Mogue’s Cottage in the Cathedral grounds is largely of 18th century origin with a 19th century addition. It was thatched until 1938 when the thatch was replaced by a tiled roof. Said to have been originally used as housing for clergy, it subsequently housed a sexton. It is now used for parish and community meetings and functions and is used by FAS (the national training agency) as their headquarters in the community. After a major restoration project, including re-thatching, it was officially opened by President Mary McAleese in 2004.
**St. Peter’s Church**

(9)

Built in the time of Murchadh O’Lynum circa 1055 the remains of this church are located at the Northern entrance to Ferns, adjacent to St. Mogue’s Well. The Romanesque window in the south wall and the two Gothic lancets in the east wall indicate an earlier date but it is now thought that these were taken from the medieval church at nearby Clone and from the Cathedral and re-used in St. Peter’s Church.

**St. Mogue’s Well**

(10)

St. Aidan, first Christian Bishop of the Diocese of Ferns, was born in Co. Cavan in the year 560A.D. Mogue, still a popular name in the area, is a derivative of the old Irish name ‘Maogh-Óg’, meaning the young Aodh. In time this became Aodhaghan and later Aidan. On his return from Wales, having studied under St. David, he established his first monastic settlement on land granted to him by King Bran Dubh in Ferns. Legend has it that whilst building his monastery his followers complained that no water could be found, whereupon he ordered them to dig in a certain area, and a well of crystal clear water was found named Tiobraid Maodh-Og or St. Mogue’s Well. The entrance to the well, now underneath the road, was built in 1847. Note the carved heads on this structure taken from the nearby Medieval church at Clone. The waters from the Well are said to have curative powers.
St. Aidan’s Monastery of Adoration (11)

In 1990, on the site of the old Roman Catholic Church (built 1826), the Sisters of Adoration built a convent, a church of perpetual adoration and individual stone hermitages. With the exception of the altar, Tabernacle and Crosses, all the materials came from local sources. Here you can experience the solitude and the quietness of the 6th and 7th centuries with the comforts of modern living.

Monument to Fr. John Murphy (12)

Born in Tincurry, Ferns in 1753, Fr. Murphy was the primary leader of the Rebels in the 1798 insurrection against British rule. It was in Ferns and its hinterland that the spark that was to become the conflagration of 1798 was lit. The terrorising of the local peasantry and the burning of nearby Boolavogue chapel by the Yeomanry formed the catalyst for the bloody rebellion that was to follow. Fr. Murphy, hitherto a pacifist, was so enraged by the treatment of his parishioners that he urged his people to "die like men defending themselves, rather than to fall with folded arms under the enemy’s sword". The ensuing battles between the Yeos and the Rebels at such places as The Harrow, Oulart and Vinegar Hill, are commemorated in song and story. Following major defeats for the Rebels, he was captured and executed and part of his dismembered body is believed to be buried in the old cemetery adjoining the Cathedral. Thousands on both sides died in this Rebellion which had many causes and outcomes.
A walk through Ferns is a walk through ancient history

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