



Reviews

Fodors 2014, 2015, 2016 Recommendation

Enter the original ivy-clad 18th-century manor house (which adjoins a new wing) and you'll see that old-fashioned charm meets contemporary élan at this winning entry to Ennis's hotel stakes—rest on the lobby's inviting brocade sofas as you study paintings on the wall from the hotel's striking collection of new Irish artists, including Donald Teskey, Cecil Maguire, and Mick O'Dea. In contrast to the period furnishings of the public rooms, guest rooms have an uncluttered but sophisticated style, with furniture painted in soothing shades of taupe or eau de nil, crisp white linen, flat-screen TVs, and deliciously large bathrooms. For dinner, go formal with a four-course menu in the Brendan O'Regan Room, or enjoy a casual meal in the Town Hall bistro—roast rack of Clare lamb with rosemary ratatouille, perhaps. Then adjourn to the Poet's Corner pub, which, set on Ennis's main street, is the very heart of the town's social life, with award-winning live Irish music sessions most nights.

Paolo Tullio – Irish Independent – November 2013

It's been a good few years since I was in Co Clare – could be as many as 30. The last time I went I was big into scuba diving and it was the pollock holes of Kilkee that prompted the visit. I remember that I managed to spear a good-sized pollock, which we took to the chipper and persuaded them to fillet and batter. Then we ate it with chips. It's as true now as it was then – there's nothing as good as fish straight from the sea.

What got me back to Clare was news from The Old Ground, a long-established hotel in Ennis that's making a name for its good food. A few years ago I'd have thought long and hard about making a drive to Ennis, but these days the trip's a doddle. I picked up Marian from Dalkey and once we'd hit the M50 it was motorway all the way. Where once you might have put aside a day to get to Ennis from Dublin, now you can allow two-and-a-half hours. The Old Ground has been a hotel since the 1800s and it has grown in a kind of organic way, by which I mean it's one of those buildings with all kinds of interesting nooks and crannies and endless corridors and staircases. You need a good sense of direction as you go through the various corridors to find your room, which in truth I found quite charming. The oldest part of the complex was once the town gaol and in this part you can find a huge function room and a fireplace dating from the 1500s. Underneath this room at ground level is the dining room, called The Town Hall, which once upon a time it was. You can get to it either through the hotel or directly from O'Connell Street, on to which the front door opens. I'll admit that like many people I do have my own prejudices. For one, I don't expect provincial hotels to do much by way of gastronomy. In my experience you tend to get cooking that was fashionable 10 years ago, walls that smell of boiled cabbage and over-familiar staff. So my expectations were not high. We got a table by the window and were able to watch the endless procession of cars sporting the Clare flag and still celebrating the hurling win by blowing their horns. "Will that celebration go on much longer?" I asked our waitress. "Oh yes, indeed, for months maybe," came the reply. Inside the restaurant was very busy, but despite this, the service was quick and efficient. Reading the menu was a surprise. If it wasn't for the local ingredients, this could have been a menu from any bistro in Europe. Far from being provincial, this was a very modern and very international menu, created, I guessed, by chefs who had done a lot of travelling. It turns out my guess was right. The chefs, I was told, had indeed travelled widely. Here's a few of the dishes to give you a flavour of what was on offer: pan seared scallops with a cauliflower and bayleaf sauce, Clonakilty black pudding and scallion purée; a crab plate with crabcake on coconut aioli, crabmeat paté on sourdough croute and grilled crab claws with lime and dill mayonnaise; coconut crusted tempura prawns with soy, ginger, chilli and pickled vegetables. These were starters, and only the scallops broke the €10 barrier by 50c. All of the others were around €8, which certainly looked like good value. It was much the same with the main courses – they were not the usual fare. I liked the look of the herb crusted loin of Clare lamb with a chargrilled cutlet, rosti potato, ratatouille and port, juniper and redcurrant jus, or the grilled halibut with a Portobello mushroom stuffed with crabmeat,



tomato and lemon beurre blanc, and a pancetta crisp. In fact, all of the dishes could easily have been my choice, something that doesn't happen to me that often. Marian began with St Tola goats' cheese parcels, followed with lamb for her main course. I started with the Clonakilty black pudding, followed by the halibut. The wine list was a simple affair, nothing fancy. Reasonably priced, the majority of the list was between €23 and €32. I spotted just one bargain, the Albarino, which at €25 is much less than you'd normally pay. We had a glass of white wine each, a pleasant dry white from the Veneto, made by Masi. When the starters arrived we were both impressed by the presentation. Marian's cheese parcels were served on a slate – the three of them with a small dressed salad and a Parmesan crisp. My boudin of Clonakilty black pudding was also served on a slate and was topped with a crispy hen's egg. That's a neat trick to pull off – a lightly poached egg is crumbed and deep-fried so it's crispy, but as soon as you cut into it, the runny yolk bursts all over the underlying black pudding. Delicious. The main courses were equally well presented. Marian's lamb came on a tear-drop shaped plate, with the loin, the grilled chop and a roasted tomato with a sprig of rosemary stuck in it. My halibut came on a plain white plate, topped with a slice of crispy pancetta with the Portobello mushroom atop that and the crabmeat atop that. The vegetables came separately and Dauphinoise potatoes, broccoli, baton carrots and cauliflower were all done well. With standards so high, we had to have desserts, so Marian picked the marbled raspberry cheesecake and raspberry sorbet, while I ordered the sticky fudge and pecan parfait. Both were very good, but the raspberry sorbet was truly extraordinary. All in all this was a meal that delivered far more than I would have expected, both in terms of skill in preparation and in presentation. We ended up with a bill for €93.55, but it would have been good value even had it cost more.

The Irish Food Guide 2010 - The Old Ground Hotel

We are big fans of Allen Flynn's hotel, which seems to us to marry the virtues of an old-style welcome with good comfort, especially in the modern rooms of the hotel.

The bar is a good space; the live music is fun at the weekends. John & Sally McKenna

The Irish Food Guide 2010 - The Town Hall Cafe

More bistro than cafe, perhaps, but whatever you decide about its style, one can't doubt that the THC is one of the key addresses in Ennis, and has been serving consistently excellent food for many years now. It's part of the Old Ground Hotel, and shares the same virtues of consistency, character and a particularly lovely Clare calmness that we find very winning indeed. John & Sally McKenna

Lucinda O'Sullivan's Review - The Old Ground Hotel

The Gardening Editor of the up market American magazine, Traditional Home, was visiting Ireland last year and what, of course, would be a gardens tour of Ireland if it did not incorporate the Burren. We then worked our way further down through County Clare and found ourselves in Ennis. "Let's go to the Old Ground." I said. She was flying out of Shannon next day. Well, was I ever in for a surprise. I had been there a few years earlier and I hardly recognized the place. It was, and is, just amazingly beautiful now - like a thoroughbred gorgeous Country House with all the modern conveniences of a Hotel. Read on.

The Bridgestone Guides 100 Best Places To Stay In Ireland 2009

The jewel in the little four-hotel empire of the Flynn family – they also have hotels in Kilkenny, Cork and Dungarvan - the Old Ground has that special hotel feel.

You know that feeling?

It's when a place has a true feeling of hospitality. It's when design hasn't won out over comfort. It's when the staff can recall your name. It's when you walk in the door, and feel you have been here before, even though you actually haven't.



That is what hotels are meant to feel like, and unfortunately it's something that so many simply don't manage to feel like, especially today's plague of developer-driven, designer-dogma joints.

But the Old Ground, with its fantastic centre-of-town location, does feel like that; it feels like an hotel, a venerable hotel, and that feeling is amplified by the excellent staff, the welcome and the comfort, and the good cooking in their Townhall Bistro.

The Old Ground also manages – somehow – to feel like the right hotel in the right town: it's a County Clare hotel, with a County Clare welcome, and we all say amen to that.

The Bridgestone 100 Best Places to Stay in Ireland 2009

Travelling around Co. Clare, we were struck by just how distinctively individual so many of the county's attractions are. The Burren Perfumery. Aillwee caves. The Magnetic Music shop and café in Doolin. The Burren Smokehouse. Unglert's Bakery. O'Loclainn's bar. The list of wonderful idiosyncrasies could fill this page, but we mention them because Allen Flynn's excellent hotel, The Old Ground, fits in perfectly with all these sports of nature in this lovely county.

The OG is an hotel where they look after you. Where comfort comes before style, but where there is also style aplenty. It is a place where kindly ladies serve you breakfast and call you "Dear", and we can never get enough of that. It is a place where there is true and generous cooking in their bistro, the Town Hall Café. In short, it has what every hotel needs, but it also has character, tradition, history, charm, and welcome, all in abundance. It's a classy place, in a classy place, a place that embraces you with hospitality, makes you feel fine.

The Bridgestone 100 Best Places to Stay in Ireland 2007

In the centre of the town of Ennis, and yet somehow set apart, The Old Ground is one of the great traditional, atmospheric hotels in Ireland.

The Old Ground Hotel is one of those few places which are blessed with an immaculate location. It's smack in the centre of Ennis, and indeed forms a large part of the definition of the town.

And yet, set in its own modest grounds, it also seems extremely private. This fabulous duality - in the centre of everything and yet set apart - gives it a unique ambience. Some years back, Padriag Treacy of The Killarney Park Hotel revealed to us that when he was building the KP, that this element of 'in the town but out of it' was just what he wanted to achieve, and his template for doing so was none other than The Old Ground.

Thankfully, Allen Flynn and his staff are the perfect team to further congratulate this unique setting and ambience with a quiet efficiency and personable style that makes TOG all of a piece. The newest rooms on the 4th and 5th floors are the best, we think, but wherever you find yourself in this distinguished old hotel, you feel just grand, looked after, right at home, in the centre of the mêlée, yet absolutely calm and collected.



The Bridgestone Irish Food Guide 2007 - Town Hall

The THC is a bistro related to the excellent Old Ground Hotel, and its funky style is a pleasing contrast to the more formal manner of the hotel. Good tasty cooking punches above its weights, and the staff have energy and the room has great character and verve.

John McKenna, The Bridgestone Irish Food Guide

The Bridgestone Irish Food Guide 2007 - The Old Ground Hotel

Every town used to have an hotel like The Old Ground: family-run, where the staff remember your name and remember your favourite room, and even remember what you like to drink. The replacement of these old coaching hotels with charmless, bland, chain-run bed factories makes the Old Ground even more precious. A darling address.

John McKenna, The Bridgestone Irish Food Guide

The Bridgestone 100 Best Places to Stay in Ireland 2006

We reckoned they had all gone to that great hotel in the sky, those kindly ladies, of advancing years, who march around the hotel breakfast room, taking your order, bringing your tea, and who call you 'pet' or 'love' or maybe even 'dear'. Well, if that is your idea of who you want to look after you first thing in the morning, then stay at the spik and span Old Ground Hotel. For there, amidst many other kindly staff who seem to be getting a great buzz from their work, you will meet the Breakfast Room lady who calls you 'pet', or 'love', or 'dear'.

Mind you, there are other reasons to choose the Old Ground . Ever since they created the new 4th and 5th floors last year, they have shown just how to do a hotel room that is classy, comfortable, and splendidly commodious without being at all over-the-top: these are some of the best rooms we have stayed in in Ireland recently, and the cooking in their bistro, the Town Hall, is very good.

John McKenna, The Bridgestone 100 Best Places to Stay 2006

Jameson Good Food Guide 2006 - The Old Ground Hotel

This ivy-clad former manor house dates back to the 18th century and, set in its own gardens, creates an oasis of calm in the bustling centre of Ennis. One of the country's best-loved hotels, the Old Ground was bought by the Flynn family in 1995 and has been imaginatively extended and renovated by them in a way that is commendably sensitive to the age and importance of the building. Despite the difficulties of dealing with very thick walls in an old building, major improvements were made to existing banqueting/conference facilities in the mid '90s, then an extra storey was added to provide new rooms. Again, this was a sensitive development and, as the famous ivy-clad frontage continues to thrive, the external changes are barely noticeable to the casual observer. Major refurbishment has also taken place throughout the interior of the hotel, including all bedrooms - which have good amenities and well-designed bathrooms - and an additional 36 new executive rooms opened in 2004.

The hotel's formal dining room is at the front of the hotel and has character, in an elegant old-fashioned style. Head chef Freddy Rynne takes pride in using local produce in enduring specialities dishes such as Burren lamb with rosemary & honey glaze or fillets of turbot with lemon & chive beurre blanc.



Georgina Campbell, Jameson Good Food Guide

Jameson Good Food Guide 2006 - Town Hall

Adjacent to (and part of) The Old Ground Hotel, the Town Hall Café has a separate street entrance and this contemporary space in no way feels like a 'hotel restaurant'.

The old town hall has been well restored and the restaurant is in an impressive high-ceilinged room with sensitively spare decor - large art works which will be loved or loathed, big pots and simple table settings allow the room to speak for itself.

Daytime menus are concise but varied, a mixture of modern bistro-style dishes and tea-room fare - just what people need to re-charge during a day's shopping it seems, as the cooking is good, service swift and value excellent.

In the evening it all moves up a notch or two, when a shortish à la carte menu comes on stream, offering about half a dozen choice per course. Baked Inagh goat's cheese, beer-battered monkfish with organic leaves and prime 10oz sirloin steak with a grain mustard & Irish whiskey sauce are all typical. Desserts from a daily selection. Not fine dining, but stylish and great value.

Georgina Campbell, Jameson Good Food Guide

Awards

- CIE Tours International Awards of Excellence for consistently exceeding clients expectations, 2014, 2015 & 2016
- Santa Rita Irish Restaurants Award for Best Customer Service in County Clare in 2012
- CIE award for best customer service in Ireland and the UK in 2011
- The Bridgestone 100 Best Places to Stay in Ireland 2009
- Recommended by Georgina Campbell's Ireland 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015 & 2016
- The Bridgestone Guide 2015, 2016