

Awards

Lucinda O Sullivan 'Great Places to Stay & Eat' 2016, 2017, 2018

John & Sally Mc Kenna's Guide 2015, 2016, 2017

CIE Tours International Awards of Excellence for consistently exceeding clients' expectations 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017

Recommended by Georgina Campbell's Ireland Guide 2014, 2015, 2016

Ennis Food Festival – winner of Ennis' favourite dessert 2017

Santa Rita Irish Restaurants Award for Best Customer Service in County Clare in 2012

Reviews

The Examiner 23 June 2018

Eoin English

You know something special is happening when your guide recites poetry inside a copse of trees which wrap protectively around a land-version of Skellig Michael – a stream of spring fresh water bubbling towards a holy well the only other sound in this remarkable landscape. Amidst the apparent barrenness of the Burren, there is indeed magic. You just have to know where to find it.

Cont'd.

I remember experiencing that Burren magic for the first time during a family holiday in Lahinch, Co. Clare in the late '80's, long before the Wild Atlantic Way, or Lahinch was famous for surf. I

remember how the moon-like karst landscape I had been studying for Junior Cert geography seemed to come to life as I lay face-down on its sun-baked clints to inspect Alpine flowers blooming in its deep grikes.

I remember, at the Cliffs of Moher, crawling slowly on all fours, in the days before health and safety policies, towards the steep, unprotected wild edge of Ireland to peer over. I remember caves and ancient dolmens, roadside stove-fried sausages, and Abba cassettes being played on the car stereo.

Two decades on, it was time to revisit old ground, to see these places anew with my own family. This time, without the Abba cassettes. It was a dark and bitterly cold evening, with the threat of sleet in the air, as we arrived at the Old Ground Hotel on O'Connell St in the heart of Ennis.

A welcoming turf fire crackled in the cosy reception area and it felt like we were home. Within minutes, I was sipping a freshly-brewed lungo from the coffee machine in our spacious top-floor junior suite. The Old Ground was built in the early 18th century as a private house. It's been a hotel since 1895 and has, since 1995, been part of Flynn Group, which also runs The Imperial in Cork, The Park Hotel in Dungarvan and the Newpark Hotel in Kilkenny.

The four-star property has been extended and refurbished over the years, but still retains all of its historic charm, with its narrow corridors and original exposed stonework in places, its carpets, heavy window drapes, old paintings, and quiet cosy corners where you can sink into a couch and get lost in a book. While it doesn't have a pool, it is the perfect base from which to explore the region. We drove 40 minutes north, into the heart of the Burren National Park, to meet Tony Kirby, a Limerick-born former civil servant who moved from Dublin to the Burren in 2002 to launch his walking tourism enterprise, Heart of Burren Walks.

An expert on the Burren, its history, heritage, flora, and more importantly, on its future, Tony offers a menu of hikes, from easy looped walks showcasing its limestone pavement, flower-rich pastures, and archaeological features, to more challenging coastal routes along pilgrimage trails, taking in ancient field systems and stunning views over Galway Bay and the Aran Islands.

Each walk can be tailored and adapted to suit different ages, abilities and endurance, varying from short 30-minute looped walks to three-hour hikes over limestone hills.

Given that our youngest is five, Tony suggested we tackle a section of one of seven way-marked walking trails in the Burren National Park. We parked at the gate to the Eagle's Rock route, near Carran, and walked over a vast expanse of karst landscape near the Clare/Galway border, dotted with dozens of soon-to-bloom Mountain Avens, or *Holtasoley*, the national flower of Iceland, bearing northwest up a slight incline towards the base of the imposing Eagle's Rock cliff.

We passed through a small stand of mature ash, oak, and hazel, and stepped into a sheltered clearing in which stands the remains of a stone oratory which marks the site of an early medieval hermitage associated with St Colman MacDuagh, who reportedly established a hermitage here in the seventh century. Tony recounted the area's rich historical, archaeological, religious, and spiritual significance, before we scrambled up a ridge to view the cave where St Colman and his manservant were said to have spent up to seven years meditating.

The entire walk was no more than three kilometres, and the 90-minute tour flew by, thanks to Tony's easy and informative style. A spontaneous poetry recital capped a memorable morning.

The afternoon was spent exploring the Ailwee Caves, a 25 minute drive west along a stunning stretch of the Wild Atlantic Way near Ballyvaughan, before a mini-blizzard cut short our stop at the Poul'nabrone dolmen – Ireland's oldest megalithic monument.

But not even a horde of possessed housekeepers could prevent us reaching Fr Ted's house – the real-life Glenquin House in the heart of the Burren which was used as the location for Craggy Island's parish house. Owned by the McCormack family, it is open – by appointment only – for afternoon tea. We had a 'these are small, but the ones out there are far away' moment as we tried to explain why Craggy Island isn't, in fact, an island.

Con'td..

This eclectic tourist trail is easily managed in a day on a good Old Ground breakfast. And it worked up an appetite for dinner too. We dined in the hotel's adjoining Town Hall Bistro, accessed from the hotel through its cosy wood-panelled pub, and it won us over before the food arrived. As the menus were distributed, our waiter said the children should feel comfortable ordering whatever they wanted if nothing on the menu appealed to them.

"It is a working kitchen after all!" she insisted. It was refreshing to have one of the finest restaurants in Ennis give us that option. The food matched the service. My fillet of beef, served with fondant potato and a deep and unctuous beef and red wine jus, was magnificent.

The Cliffs of Moher are just 45 minutes west and always worth a visit.

The warmth of the welcome, combined with the quality of service and food ensured it won't be another 20 years before I'm back on old ground.

www.flynnhotels.com

www.heartofburrenwalks.com

TRAVELPLUS

Irish Daily Mail weekend 14 April 2018

by Kevin Gleeson

Looking out across the rugged, windswept terrain of the Burren at a double rainbow coming to an end in some distant lakes, wild horses grazing on the sparse, smattering of green tufts between the rocks, my recent visit to this stunning landscape couldn't have been more different to the last time I was here. Then the mist was so dense you could hardly see your hand in front of your face. We're with Tony Kirby, founder of 'Heart of Burren Walks' who is our guide for the afternoon. Now I never used to be a fan of guided tours preferring to discover things on my own. But over the years I've come to appreciate the benefits of getting an insider's knowledge and Tony certainly has that in bucketloads. His passion for the Burren is infectious and to add to this further he even stops at certain points along our walk to recite small poems inspired by this otherworldly terrain which really helps to take your appreciation of its beauty to another level. With Arctic, Alpine and Mediterranean species of flowers and plants as well as 23 of the 27 different varieties of wild orchid found on the island of Ireland, should you visit during the height of the summer Tony assures us that most of the 140 square miles that the area covers will be blanketed in colour. It's no wonder so that the Burren has been designated one of the top 50 botanical sites on earth. Even during our visit in the depths of winter we were still lucky enough to find traces of this phenomenon that draws tourists and wildlife photographers from all over the world each year. Little pops of colour could be seen taking shelter in rocky crevices while others defiantly bared their petals against the elements. Glaciers, and the rather rock'n'roll sounding 'agri-vandalism', have scarred the landscape over the ages and left behind what visitors see in front of them today. Essayist and mapmaker Tim Robinson once said: 'The Burren's austere beauty is due to millennia of abuse,' Whatever is to blame this natural wonder is breathtaking. The infamous west of Ireland storytelling doesn't stop there. Our driver, also Tony, picks us up from the tiny village of Corofin after we've enjoyed some well-deserved pints of course. This Tony ferries tourists from mostly overseas between some of the best sites and hotels in the area. Hollywood actor John C Reilly, American news anchor Tom Kopple and, eh, Katie Price are just a few of the illustrious companions he has shown around this beautiful part of the country. Ever the professional and like a true gentleman, he refuses to include them in any of his humorous anecdotes. And speaking of the best hotels in the area the 4-star Old Ground in nearby Ennis is definitely up there amongst them. Offering the very warmest of welcomes to guests since around 1895 this magnificently restored 18th century manor house in the centre of town is perfectly located for exploring not only the Burren and the Cliffs of Moher but it is also a great base for visitors hoping to take in more of the Wild Atlantic Way. Cont'd..

The recently refurbished rooms and suites maintain the traditional feel found throughout the hotel but with the added luxury of modern, plush furnishings and Orla Kiely toiletries in the bathrooms. Back downstairs the Old Ground has exceptional food on offer in both the Town Hall bistro and their Poet's Corner bar. We opted for the Town Hall on our first night and the roasted fillet of pork with pistachio nuts and herb mousse, sweet potato puree and cider gravy was exceptional. As too was the value for money for such quality food. But the really exceptional thing on offer here has to be the service. You get the impression that everyone who works in the hotel loves doing so which results in the kind of service that just can't be faked. Overall a couple of nights in Ennis were quite the revelation. With so much of our country's famed natural beauty right on it's doorstep and accommodation befitting of any major destination I wouldn't hesitate to recommend a visit when looking for the perfect gateway to the West and all it has to offer.

- Stay in the 4-star Old Ground, Ennis.
Visit www.flynnhotels.com/Old_Ground_Hotel_Ennis/.
Rooms from €89pps.
See also www.heartofburrenwalks.com

Spring Getaways

Published on Friday, February 9th, 2018

The Munster Express newspaper - Michelle Heffernan Reports

Romantic Escape: The Old Ground, Ennis, County Clare

For an unrivalled romantic getaway, head out west to the four star Old Ground Hotel situated in the heart of Ennis in County Clare.

Built in the early part of the 18th Century, the property is steeped in rich art, architecture and history and has welcomed a host of famous guests, including the celebrated American pilot Charles Lindbergh. Indeed, hearing the mahogany 19th Century clock chime at the inviting reception, one can see why the rich and elegant lobby was once a cocktail bar for Pan Am airlines.



The entrance to The Old Ground Hotel in Ennis.

The Old Ground has been in the family of Flynn Hotels for over 20 years, and their tasteful refurbishments and restorations have turned this landmark manor house into an elegant and sophisticated hotel and dining experience. Cont'd..

Many of its 105 restored rooms boast original 18th Century features such as wooden beams and sash windows. The hotel's Town Hall Bistro and Brendan O'Regan Restaurant offer a choice of fine casual or formal dining, while the Poet's Corner Bar showcases the best of Irish "Ceol agus Craic" with their regular traditional Irish music sessions.

Just 40 minutes away is The Burren and The Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Geopark, known worldwide for its beauty, while the famous Father Ted Parochial House (Glanquin Farmhouse) can be found just half hour outside Ennis town. Current special offers include 'Three is a Magic Number' – a three night B&B stay with 1 evening meal from just €149 pps. Or for an extra special Valentines present for comedy lovers, enjoy tickets to the hilarious Foil Arms & Hog in the nearby Glór Theatre, plus two nights B&B and dinner for only €150 pps.

For more information on The Old Ground Hotel, visit www.flynnhotels.com or call 065-6828127

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.

Paulo 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.

Cont'd..

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 pâté 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.

RTE – Ed Leahy Review May 2013

O'Connell Street in Dublin is considered to be one of the widest main avenues in Europe. The Ennis equivalent, however, may be the narrowest stretch of road bearing the Great Emancipator's name. The Clare capital's main street might, however, boast a more impressive statue of the great Irishman, standing proud atop a, dare I say it, Nelson's Column, type pillar, keeping watch over the town below. The statue was unveiled back in 1865, almost 40 years after The Liberator was elected Member of Parliament for Clare in 1828, which led to Catholic Emancipation. No doubt, the unveiling of the statue and the election victory of 1828 led to great celebrations in the town centre and most likely in the manor house that now houses one of the county's best four-star hotels, The Old Ground.

Cont'd..



The manor house dates back to the 18th century, before being turned into a hotel in 1895, and still retains many features of the by-gone age, complemented by the contemporary conveniences of a modern hotel. A very warm welcome awaits and remains with you throughout your stay at the hotel with a very relaxing lounge area throughout the lobby, stylish and comfortable bedrooms and the hotel's own private contemporary art collection about The Old Ground's historic walls.



While staying at the hotel, make sure to take in a walking tour of Ennis town centre. The hotel can organise the Journey Through Time walking tour, which leads you around the atmospheric streets of the town, while revealing the intriguing characters and stories that shaped its history. The guide tells tales of famine and poverty, murders and hanging, and explains how some of Ireland's most powerful historical figures including O'Connell, Eamon de Valera and Charles Stewart Parnell were linked to the town.

Cont'd..



And after an afternoon pounding the narrow streets of the town, you will return to a different dwelling as the Old Ground comes alive at night, where you can sample the renowned culinary offerings of the hotel's restaurant, which has been included in the Bridgestone Guide for Ireland. The menu uses seasonal and locally produced ingredients, including St Tola's Organic Goat Cheese from Inagh, Miltown Shellfish and Burren Lamb.



The restaurant's excellent menu includes the signature dishes of pan-seared scallops with cauliflower and bay leaf sauce, herb crusted loin of Clare lamb with char-grilled cutlet and port juniper berry and redcurrant jus and strawberry and thyme mousse. After dining, a few pints of porter should be enjoyed in the lively Poet's Corner bar, where you will sample some genuine Clare hospitality and a great atmosphere to the soundtrack of a traditional music session.

Cont'd..



Ennis is the gateway to Clare's spectacular tourist attractions and the Old Ground proves the ideal place to base yourself if you want to explore the coast or the nearby Burren. The hotel actually organises 'Heart of Burren' guided walks from the Burren Centre in Kilfenora and will provide a packed lunch for the excursion. The walk takes you into the Burren National Park, along the famous Burren Way, passing between the two great limestone hills of Gleninagh and Cappanawalla and the Black Head Green Road overlooking Galway Bay. Other highlights include the region's renowned Arctic, Alpine and Mediterranean flora, limestone pavements and turloughs.



Elsewhere in Clare, located close to the Burren National Park, you can pay a visit to Father Ted's house for a cup of tea and some homemade scones. The 'Craggy Island' Parochial House is located half-way from Corrofin to Kilfenora, just out the road from Kilnaboy, the location for the legendary Channel 4 comedy series *Father Ted*. Further north towards Ballyvaughan, you can visit the Aillwee Caves, the oldest in Ireland, where a 30-minute guided tour of the fascinating caverns can be enjoyed. Or travel to the coastal town of Doolin to visit the Giant Stalactite at Doolin Cave, where you will come face to face with the northern hemisphere's longest free-hanging stalactite 70 metres below ground.

Cont'd..



A coastal drive will take you past some of the most spectacular scenery in Ireland and to the country's top tourist attraction, the Cliffs of Moher, which always impress as you look out from the summit, 700 feet above the ferocious Atlantic's edge. Golfers are also spoilt for choice in Clare with two of Ireland's best links courses located along the coast at Lahinch and Doonbeg. Travel further south to explore the dramatic Loop Head peninsula or take in a dolphin-watching excursion at Carrigaholt. For the brave, or the foolish (depending on the weather), a surf lesson will certainly provide a memorable adventure of your Clare visit. And while the Atlantic waters are likely to be close to freezing, there's no doubt that the open turf fire back at the Old Ground will welcome you home.

For more information about The Old Ground Hotel, visit www.flynnhotels.com.

Irish Independent Lifestyle August 2012

The Old Ground Hotel in Ennis, Co Clare, has an excellent break with a guided walk in the Burren region. From €169 pps, kids 'sleep and walk free'. You get 3BB1D plus lunch for the adults in its Town Hall Bistro and a surprise spa treat. www.flynnhotels.com

The Irish Food Guide 2010

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

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

Cont'd..

Lucinda O'Sullivan's Review

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.

The Bridgestone Guide's 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 Guide's 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 Guide's 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, Pdraig 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.

Cont'd..

The Bridgestone Guide's 100 Best Places to Stay in Ireland 2007

The Town Hall Bistro 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

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-thetop: 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

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.

Cont'd..

Jameson Good Food Guide 2006

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 recharge 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