



ASHFORD CASTLE

EXCELLENCE SINCE 1228



The stately architecture of Ashford Castle, located deep in the heartland of County Mayo and set against a spectacular backdrop of forests, lakes and mountains, has witnessed enormous change since its foundation nearly 8 centuries ago. But Ashford Castle is more than a luxury hotel - it is a rare and precious fragment of Irish history. From the building of the tower house in the Middle Ages, the Castle walls have been witness to the triumphs and tragedies of all who have lived and worked there. Standing proudly on the shores of Lough Corrib, the story of Ashford Castle is an insight into the story of Ireland over the past

1228 – A fierce invading Anglo-Norman family, the *De Burgos*, come to the west of Ireland and conquer the native O'Connor's of Connaught. The De Burgo family build several castles throughout the province, one of these is the Castle of Cong (Ashford Castle.)

The original 1228 stronghold can be distinguished from the more recent construction by standing out in front of the Northwest corner (far edge of the car park) and examining the difference in stonework.

1589 – The De Burgo family faced certain downfall in desperate battle against invading English forces. Sent by Queen Elizabeth I, it was *Sir Robert Bingham* who pursued the native army right to the front doors of the castle.

The castle was subsequently used as a British fortress, and a fortified enclave was added. Remnants of the enclave walls can be seen most prominently in the gardens at the rear of the castle, but have been subject to extensions and remodelling throughout the castles different ownerships.

1715 – Ashford Estate establishes its name under the ownership of the *Oranmore and Browne* family. They built a fabulous house in the style of a French chateau which is now incorporated in the centre part of the castle. They used Ashford as a shooting lodge and holiday residence, with the passage of years and the intervention of famine and pestilence in Ireland the building and general property suffered sadly from neglect and fell into ruin.



1715 French Chateau addition by the Oranmore & Brown's

This addition of the castle can be seen most prominently in the reception and Oak Hall sections of the current castle. On the exterior of the castle you will note the large Georgian style windows and double headed eagles carved in stone on the roof representing the coat of arms of the Oranmore and Browne families.

1852 – The Ashford Estate is bought by *Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness*, of the famed Irish brewery soon after the beginning of the great famine. He works extensively extending the estate to 26,000 acres, and adding on two large Victorian-style extensions, bringing much needed employment into the local area. When Guinness came to Ashford he found the local population in a state of unbearable poverty. He immediately set about to mitigate their suffering by improving and cultivating the land.

1868 – Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness bequeaths Ashford to his son, *Lord Ardilaun*, he and Lady Ardilaun had a very special love of trees and shrubs. Nearly one million trees were planted across the estate. He wanted to connect all parts of the estate with walks and avenues lined with trees. A lover of architecture he had drawn up a master plan, with architect Joseph Fuller, by 1884 for the complete rebuilding in a Baronial style. For the huge extensions he used local stone.

The building additions to the castle under Guinness ownership can be seen most prominently in the George V restaurant and West Wing of the castle. Lord Ardilaun's



The old De Burgo castle, with later turret additions.



West Wing additions during Guinness ownership

new construction connected the 18th century building in the east with the two De Burgo towers in the west, upon this a coat of arms can be easily seen when viewing the West Wing from the castle gardens. Throughout the 1880's development continued with George C. Ashlin designing gateways and lodges for the estate.

Throughout the grounds you will notice a high population of evergreen and conifer trees, this was due to Lord Ardilaun's desire to keep the estate in colour all year round. He also lined many of the walkways with trees to create the lined avenues you can see today.

1939 – *Noel Huggard* buys the castle and establishes it as a first class hotel. At the auction of the Ardilaun's house contents Huggard and his wife bought numerous items, they bought anything they believed would be useful in the hotel including beds, linen, silverware and kitchen equipment. This enabled them to open the hotel very quickly. The hotel quickly became a 'trophy' honeymoon hotel because of its luxury, gardens and excellent food.



c.1950 prior to the addition of the East Wing.



1933 – Summer holidays for the Guinness Family.

Mr. Huggard grew the country pursuits on offer around the estate and soon became synonymous with angling and shooting.

1951 – Director John Ford comes to the west of Ireland to film what would become a movie classic, *The Quiet Man*. Many of the film's stars stayed at Ashford Castle during filming, and the grounds became a prominent backdrop to the film.

1970 - Ashford Castle is bought by *John A. Mulcahy* who doubles its size, building the golf course and developing the grounds and gardens.



Mr. Mulcahy's large extensions to the building can be seen in the east wing of the castle (to the right when looking at the main entrance to the castle). It can be easily made out due to the slightly yellow hue of the bricks used in the construction. He also acquired 11 identical chandeliers that can be seen in all their splendour in the George V dining room, each chandelier cost £11,000 when bought them from Waterford Crystal in c.1971.

The golf course was also established during this time by Mulcahy's close friend, Eddie Hackett, replacing what was the estate deer park.

1984 – President of the United States of America, Ronald Regan and his wife Nancy enjoy a stay at Ashford Castle as part of their Presidential Tour of Ireland.

1985 – A group of Irish American investors purchase Ashford Castle. Amongst these investors is Chuck Feeney, philanthropist & businessman, and Tony O'Reilly, former rugby union player & Irish media mogul.

2008 – Ashford Castle was purchased by a Galway developer.

2013 – Ashford Castle has been purchased by *Mr & Mrs Stanley & Beatrice Tollman*, and is now part of the 'Red Carnation Hotel Collection' and is one of the most luxurious resort hotels in the world, where high profile celebrities and public figures enjoy its charm. The estate is renowned for its activities, which include one of the largest equestrian centres in the country, fishing on Lough Corrib – the second largest lake in the country – and Ireland's first school of falconry.

Future renovations for the hotel include the addition of a private cinema screen, billiards room and cigar terrace. Refurbishment plans are also in place for the spa including an exterior extension to house a swimming pool.



East Wing extensions viewed from the garden and lake