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**CLARE ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM**

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**Acknowledgements:**

Text by Peggy Smith, with assistance from The Museum’s Curatorial Committee.

Photography and design by Everything Orange!
The Town Trail introduces visitors to many of Clare’s most interesting buildings, focusing on the built heritage. These range from the Castle in the 11th century, to a few in the 19th century, with the majority from the 15th to the 17th centuries (and most having later modifications).

Many are timber-framed buildings, some with the local decorative technique called pargeting, and others with Georgian or Regency, or indeed brick, facades. Over 130 buildings are listed (6 Grade I, 12 Grade II*) and there are two scheduled ancient monuments, Clare Castle and Clare Common.

Information posts and brass markers

The trail is built around seven Posts (each with 3 faces), strategically placed around the town, together with the markers. The Posts provide general orientation to the buildings nearby and this booklet explains the buildings at the markers, along with comments about other interesting buildings along the Trail. Not all of the information on the Posts is repeated in this booklet.
The Trail begins in the Inner Bailey of Clare Castle and takes you through the Outer Bailey, to Market Hill. It then goes north around the Church up to the edge of Clare Common, and back towards the Church to the High Street. From the High Street you will be directed down Clare’s grandest street, Nethergate. You will cross the Stour at the early iron bridge, walk along one of the railway walks alongside the ‘New Cut’ of the Stour, into Clare Priory, then finally back to Clare Castle Country Park.

A route map can be found inside the rear cover of this booklet.

A few of the listed buildings are indicated by brass markers in the pavement pointing to the building. They are numbered throughout this booklet.
Start the Clare Town Trail at the Clare Castle Inner Bailey

Clare Castle was built in the 11th century by Richard de Bienfaite at the manor given to him by William the Conqueror. It had earth ramparts around 2 baileys. Its now-ruined stone keep was built in the late 12th century, on a very high motte. The motte affords wonderful views over the Park, the town of Clare, and into Essex, and is well worth a separate visit. The railway arrived in the 1860s and lasted about 100 years.

From the Post take the pathway opposite the Station building north into the Castle's Outer Bailey.

Near the foot of the steps up to Lady's Walk at the moat is the spot where the famous Clare Reliquary Cross was discovered in the 1860s when the path was widened for the railway. This 15th century gold cross and chain may have belonged to Cecily of York, the mother of Kings Edward IV and Richard III.

The Outer Bailey in 1906.

Outer Bailey and Station Road

The Outer Bailey now contains the playground, a bowling green, and the Clare Social Club. Even the fire station is on land that was once part of the Bailey. Behind the playground the Bailey rampart has been cleared, but on the rampart on the far side of the Bailey, the vegetation has been left to encourage wildlife.

From the Post, exit the Outer Bailey and follow Station Road (on the right-hand side) up the hill.

Cross the very busy A1092 to the west side of Market Hill to where the former workhouse was located until the 1830s at Nos. 1-3, across from The Old Bear and Crown.

The Old Bear & Crown

Look back across the A1092 to the Old Bear & Crown, an important timber-framed building of the 16th century with 18th century additions. Inside are interesting carvings and horizontal ceiling beams stretching diagonally into the building's corners, known as 'dragon' or dragging beams. The beams supported the first floor overhang, known as a 'jetty', sometimes with exterior carvings of small animals, which are still in place here. The Old Bear & Crown once had jetties on all 4 sides, but the walls have been moved out and filled in to increase interior space. Many other timber-framed buildings in Clare still have jettied first floors. The building may have been the early wool hall and has been used for various businesses. It was a hotel throughout much of the 20th century.
Saddler’s Cottage

Look to your right across the road to see Saddler’s Cottage (once including what is now Café Clare), an important hall house with gables at the 2 cross wings, of the 14th to the 17th century. It stands on the site of the medieval moot hall. The central part retains a hearth in its floor; its smoke escaped through roof vents (before a floor was added to make it 2 storeys). It was the home of a 19th-20th century harness- and saddle-making family.

Walk north along Market Hill towards the War Memorial and Church, passing No. 4, an 18th century building which stands above an important cellar with pointed gothic arches made of imported limestone, possibly built in the 13th century. Long the subject of speculation, the cellar’s purpose was probably to keep dry the goods of a merchant. Further along, No. 6 was probably once the Angel Inn.

Market Hill

A market existed in Clare from the mid-11th century, once stretching from the edge of the Castle at the south, up to well north of the Church at the beginning of Common Street where there is another Post. It was also a much wider open space. Imagine no buildings from the Co-op to Saddler’s Cottage at the foot of the Castle, and from the Town Hall side of Market Hill all the way to the west side of the High Street. The buildings now here were an early medieval infill facing Market Hill. Later on the Trail you will see the one remaining outbuilding that went with these Market Hill buildings. In later centuries, yet another line of shops and buildings added a parallel row of infillings right down the middle of the modern A1092. Redevelopment in the 1830s removed most of these to form a pig and poultry market, but some lasted until the 1880s.

The War Memorial, dedicated in 1921, lists the 32 Clare men who died in World War I. The 5 World War II men were added later.

Cross from the War Memorial to the shop on the corner and look across to The Bell.

The Bell

The Bell Hotel, an important inn for travellers since the 16th century, was once known as The Green Dragon, and the road in front of it Dragon Hill. There are interesting carved beams inside. The main one has ‘folded-leaf’ ornamentation. The section along Cavendish Road (the A1092) was once a chandlery, making soap and candles, but this burned down in 1826. Behind The Bell was the
19th century cattle market, and more recently sometimes the start of the Thurlow Hunt. To the right of The Bell stood a medieval mansion, the Maiden's Head, now with a much-altered roofline and split into 4 houses.

Across the road is a brick building (partly painted). It was once one of Clare’s ‘stone’ houses (the local stone being flint), but in the 19th century it was refaced by the brickmaker John Jarvis, in his own bricks. This was once the Wagon & Horses pub, which served as the World War I recruiting office.

Walk north on Church Street, on the west (Church) side.

12-15 Church Street, the Crisp weaving family

Look across to the house of the important family of weavers, the Crisps, in the 17th century. The family issued trade tokens as small change during the period of metal scarcity after the Civil War. The weaving rooms for making bay and say cloths were at the rear.

Church Street was once Rotten Row, or Queen Street, and briefly Honey Hill.

The northern churchyard once held a pub, The Six Bells, where Clare’s bellringers drank.

Immediately to its right and over the fence and wall you can see the former shed for the Clare fire engine.

The Grove

The front gardens at the Grove and northwards used to be part of an open space, where wagons full of wool would marshal for the journey to Calais for import into France. This gave the street its name, Callis Street. Callis is a corruption of Calais. An earlier name had been Gosford Street, because the road crossed a stream known as the Gos, which is now culverted beneath it. The Gos flowed into the Chilton Stream (behind the houses), a tributary of the Stour. The clarity of Chilton Stream water is thought to be the origin of the town name, Clare.

The 15th century Grove is one of the earliest Clare houses built as a dwelling. It was originally a hall house with 2 cross wings, but a later owner added two more gables and yet another cross wing, giving it the distinctive 5 gables. The important 16th-century royal physician Thomas Wendy was born here. He served Henry VIII, witnessing his will. He was at the deathbeds of Henry, Mary I, and Edward VI, before serving Elizabeth I. Grove House became a grammar school in the late 19th century, and later was owned by a wheelwright.

Just past the Church, cross to the east side. Follow the street, past the row of houses to the first house that is set back.

Continue north to just before Ship (once ‘Sheep’) Stores and cross the road to the next Post at the foot of Common Street.
Common Street

Up the hill to the west lies Clare Common which is worth a separate visit. It was leased for pasturing to the poor people of Clare by Queen Catherine of Aragon in the early 16th century. The Lower Common is still used for pasturing, so visitors must beware. The Upper Common is now arable and allotments. During the World Wars the whole Upper Common was used for allotments.

6 The Old Library

Now walk back towards the centre, past the Old Library. This was once the south wing of a large 15th century mansion known as Holboroughs, which stretched back to Common Street and along Common Street as deep as it was wide. It was a maltings, but after dilapidation only its original south wing survives. This served for meetings of the Parish Council, and later as the local library.

Walk around the Old School Community Centre.

This was a Victorian Church of England school, built in the Gothic Revival style, opening in 1862, where a farmhouse and granary had been. It was in use until a modern primary school opened in 1974. Since its refurbishment in 1990 it has offered halls for hire, a pre-school and the Town Council Office.

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Continue south to the Cock Inn passing the 17th century Globe Inn. The Globe was refronted in the 19th century. It was built on land that belonged to Holboroughs.

7 The Cock

Formerly a butchers, with its slaughterhouse at the rear. It also served as a school at one time. It may date from the 15th century, but it was first mentioned as an inn in 1636. The attached section at the north was an extension.
High Street

The next post stands at the north end of the High Street, formerly Heigh Road. This formed the western side of the early market place. Here the Clare Baptists opened their new church in 1859. Its former location had been on Cavendish Road (A1092) where their old cemetery remains.

Cross the High Street to the east (Church) side.

Church Farm

Look across to Church Farm which is still a working farm. Like many other Clare buildings, Church Farm’s first floor is jettied. Some of its beautiful interior wood panelling with a linen-fold design is now in the V & A Museum.

The Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul is a grand gothic ‘wool’ church built in the 13th to the 15th centuries, probably on the same spot as an earlier church of St Paul. It is well worth a separate visit to see its lofty nave, its 15th century font, its carved parclose screen with the symbols of Catherine of Aragon, its eagle lectern, its green woman in the south porch, and its sundial reading ‘Go about your business’. Its size is most impressive when you consider that medieval Clare never had more than 600 inhabitants. It was declared to be ‘a good Church’ in Daniel Defoe’s Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain in the 18th century and is included in Simon Jenkins’ England’s Thousand Best Churches in the 20th century. It is Grade I listed.

Look across from the Church’s west door to the medieval guildhall, now a doctor’s surgery. Its first floor is jettied.

The path next to it leads to the cemetery opened in the 1880s, with a chapel for non-conformists. From along the path Church Farm’s 17th century dovecote can be seen.
9  **The Ancient House**

Ahead is Clare Ancient House, deservedly one of Suffolk's most photographed buildings, noted for its pargeting, the decorative plastering technique found often in Clare and East Anglia, especially in villages where houses were not brought up to date by aspiring residents. Part 14th and part 15th century, and possibly originally serving as a shop on the market, it has also been a priest's house, a workhouse, a bakery and a poulterer's. Nearly pulled down to be rebuilt in the US in the 1930s, it was purchased by a local businessman and became the Museum in the 1970s. The oriel window facing the Church has heraldry supported by two wildmen, and the arms of the Hameldon family, a family who, unfortunately, seems to have had no known connection to Clare. The town Museum is in part of the Ancient House.

Next door along the High Street, the modern solicitors’ office was built as a billiards room for the then owner of Sigors, in the 19th century.

10  **Sigors House**

Look across to Sigors House, for many years serving as the Vicarage, but once the home of the retired London merchant Joshua Brise in the 18th century. This boasts one of Clare's very early house names, although the source of the name is not altogether clear. It may relate to the 14th century bailiff at the Castle's farm on the Common (then 'Erbury') named John Segors. One of its interior beams has been dated to 1360, but much of the current building was built in the 16th century with later alterations. A room named after Queen Elizabeth reflects the possibility that she stayed there once while hunting in the country around Clare. It has a magnificent carved overmantel.

11  **13-15 High Street (Gilberds)**

Walk southwards and look across to 13-15 High Street, the remaining part of a much larger timber-framed mansion, Gilberds, another home of wealthy inhabitants including one of the main Clare butchers, and for a while of the brewer of Nethergate Brewery, which was founded in 1986 in nearby Bloomfield Court, before it moved from Clare. The Court was once the location of an important forge, responsible for much local wrought-iron work.

To your left is the last remaining example of the outbuildings for Market Hill buildings (this one for no. 7). Notice its flint ground floor, weatherboard upper floor and small window. Much of this side of the High Street once looked like this.
Continue again south to face the Swan Inn.

**12 The Swan Inn**

Look across to The Swan. A house on this spot was referred to as ‘Quylters’ in a 14th century document, but the building here is 17th century. It has long been an inn for travellers to Clare. Its sign, an impressive solid 9-foot piece of oak, probably began life under an oriel window (a form of bay window) in the Castle. Its symbols link the de Clare family to The Wars of the Roses. The chained swan was a symbol of King Henry IV who was on the throne when a member of the de Clare family married a member of the royal family in 1406. Anne Mortimer, descendant of the de Clares, was Countess of March and her arms are at the right hand end of the sign. Richard of Conigsburgh’s royal arms are at the left. Their son was Richard, 2nd Duke of York, father of Kings Edward IV and Richard III. The Swan Inn sign commemorates the marriage of Anne and Richard of Conigsburgh in 1406.

Next south, ‘Hudgies’ has been an ironmongers since the 19th century, when its sign advertising ‘oil and colourman’ referred to a dealer in paints, both artistic and architectural.

**13 The Half Moon**

Look across to The Half Moon, yet another inn for travellers, of the 15th century. The Half Moon is half of the former Moone Inn, which once stretched to the end of the High Street. Among its recent roles in Clare are as an auction house and lately as an Abbeyfield house for the retired. Recent inspection has revealed that it has an impressive 15th century chimney. In the 19th century coaches for London left from Half Moon Yard.

At No. 1 Deli, once part of the Moone Inn, the owner has recently uncovered a 13th century well in the back garden. Inside is a vertical beam with the carved head of a bearded man, dating from medieval times.

At the end of the High Street you are at a particularly hazardous place to cross the busy A1092. Turn right and walk down the right-hand side until you can see the sign for Nethergate Street on the opposite side of the road. Don’t cross yet.
Look across to Broadway, at 1 Nethergate Street. It was once the Bull Inn. Broadway and Tudor Cottage next door on Malting Lane are both 15th century. They use a shallow form of pargeting.

Look back and across Malting Lane at the wide 16th century timber-framed Trinders, with its carriage entrance. It was formerly the Boar and Griffin inn. This later became part of a very large 19th century ‘department’ store that reached back along Well Lane as far as the present Post Office, then known as Commerce House.

Immediately behind you at first-floor level at 37a and 38 Nethergate Street there is some modern pargeting showing a huntsman, his dogs and a pheasant with Clare Castle motte and keep in the background.

Walk along to ‘Stonehall’ showing the date MCCCIX [1309]. The current building has a 16th century frame, and was considerably reconstructed in 1931, when it served as the offices of Clare Rural District Council. It is now a doctors’ surgery.

Carefully cross the A1092 at Stonehall.

As you walk down Nethergate Street you pass Boat House Mews on the left, a new development where there was once a coach-building business, then a car repair shop and petrol station.

27-32 Nethergate Street

Look across the street to the terrace of 6 brick houses. These were built in the 1890s, occupying 4 former ‘cottage gardens’ on land that had belonged to the Church. In 1877 the Charity Commission ordered that proceeds from land sales to the railway were to be used for new housing here.

Looking next across Nethergate Street are several sizeable houses, one with a large carriage entrance, which probably belonged to some of Clare’s important clothiers of the 15th century and later.
Nethergate House

Nethergate House is one of the most important of Clare’s six Grade I listed buildings. It was built in the 16th century, but its 17th-century owners, the important clothiers the Crosse family, raised the roof of the central section. Long side wings go back towards the Stour. 20th-century residents include the early archaeologist of monasteries Sir William St John Hope, who did work on Clare Priory, and the novelist C P Snow. It is often compared to Paycocke’s in Coggeshall. There are connections between the owners of Paycocke’s and the Horrold clothier family in Clare. In the late 19th century an important grammar school was here before it moved to Clare Priory and at intervals it has been a hotel. Residents have claimed it has three ghosts, including a young Dutch girl.

Richmond House, a 16th century house refronted in the 18th century, was once split into three tenements. Note the impressive chimney.

No. 19 Nethergate Street has been a pub under at least three different names, The Rose and Crown, The Seafarer, and The Clare Hotel. In 1866, while it was the Rose and Crown, it burned down. Clare’s fire engine at the time could only squirt the outside as it had no hose and no suction; its wheels were not suitable to run on a road, so it had to be transported to the fire on a trolley and taken off when it reached the fire.

The White House

This 18th-century plastered house was possibly similar to Nethergate House in the 17th century. The White House Cottage, attached to the left-hand side, was originally its stable which extends back. In the 20th century, it was the home of the author and painter Sir John Verney. The very extensive lawn to its right behind the flint wall once contained an orchard and the houses of weavers, a fellmonger, and a wheelwright, but the land was sold to the owner of Cliftons, who cleared it in order to improve his view to the river.
Nethergate Street

Nethergate Street, with its wide verges, large houses and upward sweep, is the most elegant entrance into the centre of Clare.

The Red House, an 18th century Georgian frontage built on a 17th century house, was known as Bracknell House when it was a boarding school for 16 girls in the 19th century.

Netheridge

Netheridge stands at right angles to the street, timber-framed and plastered, with modern pargeting. It dates from the 15th century, with 16th and 17th century alterations. It was divided into tenements by the 17th century owners, the Crosse family who lived across the street in Nethergate House. By the 19th century there were 10 tenants. No. 14, its southwest wing, included a bakery and was a separate house, Olive House.

Cliftons

This Grade I listed, timber-framed building of the 16th century, has especially fine Tudor, moulded red brick, chimneys. It was refronted and enlarged in the 18th century. It is named after one of Charles II’s courtiers who settled in Clare to collect the Clare farm revenues that he had been given after the Restoration. It was sold to Joshua Brise of Sigors House, whose son Shadrach remodelled Cliftons. His nephew Thomas Ruggles, the barrister, historian of the poor and friend of Arthur Young, opened a ‘School of Industry’ here in 1787, where poor children knitted stockings, which failed to sell.

Thornton House

Thornton’s is a 16th century farmhouse, with 19th century ‘gothic’ windows. Inside are moulded beams, and the gable on the townside has carved bargeboards with folded-leaf ornamentation (possibly not visible due to shrubbery). Once named Hoberds after an early owner, later Verandah House.

The Trail now takes you left onto the Ashen Road, but there are interesting farmhouses of the 15th and 16th centuries a short distance further along Stoke Road, Stour House and Riverside. Across from Stour House, the recent estate sits on an area that probably once formed the industrial end of medieval Clare. An impressive tile and brick kiln was found there during pre-construction investigations. Its last firing has been dated to the mid-16th century. Its location is marked by a small plaque
Immediately after the bridge, turn left into the railway walk of Clare Castle Country Park. This can be muddy in wet weather.

Walk alongside the New Cut of the Stour. This canal/channel, built to drive a mill, was already in existence in the 14th century.

About 400m metres along and before you reach the old railway bridge you are at the picturesque back door of Clare Priory. Go through the door and follow the path to the Priory Post.

Clare Priory
Clare Priory is well worth a separate visit with its medieval infirmary, now serving as the Roman Catholic church. Services are in the award-winning 21st century extension. The ruin of the old Priory church reveals its impressive size. Inside there are plaques to some of the important people buried there, especially Joan of Acre and Lionel of Antwerp.
Retrace your steps to the wooden gate and turn right into the Park, over the old railway bridge, across the car park to The Old Goods Shed, which used to accommodate wagons on a track that passed through the building.

*Beyond the car park you will see the motte and ruin of the keep on your left.*
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