Introduction

Burncourt is in the valley of the Galty and Knockmealdown Mountains off the M8 motorway between Cahir and Mitchelstown. It is part of the Burncourt and Clogheen parish and is close to the villages of Ballylooby and Ballyporeen.

The village is steeped in history and its name derived from the castle situated 650 metres east of the village centre, it was burned to its shell during the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland in 1650, later becoming known as "Burnt Court".

The Mitchelstown Caves are situated approximately 2.0 kilometres from Burncourt and were discovered in 1833 by a labourer quarrying on a small farm. Today the caves are a popular tourist attraction.

The stately Shanbally Castle was situated 4 kilometres outside the village. Built c.1820 for the 1st Viscount Lismore and designed by the architect John Nash. It was demolished in 1960 when the Irish Government of the time could no longer afford to keep hold of this type of lavish dwelling.

Burncourt and surrounding area has a population of approximately 300 people and is right in the middle of the Golden Vale agricultural belt; needless to say, then that farming is important to the many people living around Burncourt.

History

As mentioned previously Burncourt got its name from the local castle that was burned down by its owners around the time that Cromwell and his army were in Ireland claiming ownership of many other homes and castles. Burncourt Castle was originally called Everard’s Castle. The Everards had arrived in Ireland shortly after the Anglo-Norman invasion. When Richard Everard married Catherine Plunkett in 1620, his father Sir John Everard awarded him a large estate spreading across parts of Tipperary, Cork and Limerick. Two years later Richard was created a baronet.
Around 1639 Sir Richard sold much of his lands in co. Cork and co. Limerick and set about building a semi-fortified house. The house, one of the largest and probably the last of the gabled ended semi-fortified 17th century Irish houses to be built, was complete in 1641. The castle is three storeys high over a basement, originally having twenty six gables and seven chimneys.

In the 20th century Burncourt was excavated by archaeologists. They found a skeleton of a cow in a pit that extended under the eastern wall of the castle. The cow appeared to have been killed and dismembered as part of protection ritual to provide strength to the Everard’s fortress.

The Everards took up residence just as the 1641 Rebellion begun. In 1642 Sir Richard joined the Catholic Confederates at Kilkenny and became a member of the Supreme Council. Sir Richard’s wife Catherine remained at the castle. In 1649, as Cromwell’s troops advanced on the castle Lady Catherine deliberately set fire to her fortress to prevent it falling into the enemies’ hands. Everard’s Castle burnt to the ground and later became known as Burncourt. Sir Richard Everard went on to defend the city of Limerick against Cromwell’s forces, but was captured and hung in 1651 by Cromwell’s son-in-law, Ireton. Thereafter Burncourt was abandoned and never reoccupied.

In the early 18th century, the painter Anthony Chearnly built a two storey five bay house adjoining the Burncourt ruin and established a fine formal garden in front of the old castle bawn. The remains of this house now form part of the current farmyard buildings located close to the ruin. According to tradition Burncourt was seven years in building, seven years lived in and seven days burning.

Burncourt was particularly his hard after the famine of 1847; it was reported that the loss of people was a daily occurrence.

All that remains today of the Castle; it stands in the farmland now owned by the Maher Family

**Shanbally Castle**

Shanbally Castle when standing was situated just about 3 km from Burncourt, but the castle is no more, and that is a huge loss, both for the local community and Ireland.
Cornelius O’Callaghan engaged John Nash to design Shanbally Castle. The castle and estate were the property of the Earls of Ormonde (the Butlers: a powerful Norman ruling family) and whose principal residence was Kilkenny Castle.

The Estate comprised of 600 acres of farmland and 400 acres of woodland. The estate also included the estate manager’s house, and three houses which were known as ‘lodges,’ and these were occupied by caretakers. These were known locally as Finn’s lodge; Carey’s lodge, and Norris’s lodge, and the whole estate was surrounded by a high stone wall, which was known by the local people as the ‘demesne wall.’

The nearby Galty Mountains also formed part of the Shanbally Estate and guests at the castle hunted deer and pheasant on the mountain. To facilitate this hunting lodge (Mountain Lodge) was erected there in the 1920’s and has for many years now been a youth hostel, having been acquired by An Oige for hikers.

Even a reigning King and Queen of England were entertained at Shanbally Castle. When, as king and queen, the royal couple of Edward VII and Alexandra visited Ireland in 1915, they stayed in Shanbally Castle on their tour. (This was due to the Earls of Ormonde’s connection to the British royal family and their very powerful political position in Ireland for hundreds of years; the Pole-Carews attended the coronation of Edward VII and Alexandra in 1912.)

The Estate

A major part of the staff for the castle and estate hailed from nearby Glencallaghan and Clogheen, a house generally going with the job. Between the running of the estate farms,
gardens, stables and the main house itself (along with maintenance for other estate properties) there were many locals people employed.

**A Brief Family History**

The O’Callaghan’s held the lands at Shanbally for many generations. Thomas O’Callaghan of Shanbally married Sarah, the daughter of John Davis and his wife, the Honourable Ann Caulfield, daughter of the 2nd Viscount Caulfield. Thomas and Sarah’s son, Cornelius O’Callaghan was the member for Fethard in four parliaments in Dublin from 1761. The house remained in the hands of the O’Callaghan for several years.

After the last of the O’Callaghan male heirs had deceased the castle then passed through the female line. It escaped the phase of house burnings that took place during the War of Independence, although the IRA did use it in 1921 as a training centre. When peace returned, two daughters of the 3rd Marquess of Ormonde, Lady Constance Butler and her sister, Lady Beatrice Pole-Carew, occupied the castle almost until the time of its destruction. After the death of Lady Beatrice Pole-Carew in 1952, there was a five-day sale of the contents of the house. Lady Constance continued to live in a wing of Shanbally until her death 1949, well after World War II.

**A terrible decision**

As time passed by the influence and wealth of the family declined and in 1954, Major Pole-Carew sold the estate to the Land Commission, which acquired 750 acres of arable land and 250 acres of woodland, as well as Shanbally Castle.

The demolition had started in September 1959. The beautiful lawn trees at Shanbally were cut down and ‘rapidly carted away.’ the Land Commission had sold the castle to a Limerick firm who razed it to the ground in order to salvage materials from the ruins. A Limerick auctioneer sold these at public auction.

Finally, in March 1960, explosives had to be used to demolish what remained of the castle, as it had been so well been built. When the government apologists wrote that that the castle was in a dangerous state, Professor Gwynn: replied that ‘Shanbally Castle would not even have been a ruin if the Government had not authorised the removal of its roof and interior fittings.’ He went on about this wanton destruction ‘the slate and finely cut stone and the beautiful ornamented ceilings are already littering the ground,’ and reminded his readers that it could have been restored for a fraction of the cost of its destruction.'
A two-storey summerhouse down by the manmade lily filled lake is all that remains of a house and a demesne which, if the government had allowed it to survive, would today be one of the treasures of Ireland’s heritage.

**Mitchelstown Caves**

Mitchelstown Cave was discovered on the 3rd of May 1833 when a labourer named Michael Condon who was quarrying limestone accidentally dropped his crowbar into a crevice.

He stooped down to pull out a few boulders to retrieve the bar, next minute he found himself looking down to a vast series of underground chambers, passages and caverns.

News of his discovery quickly spread with large numbers of curious sightseers coming to visit this natural wonder. To preserve the caves natural state, guided tours were organised and for over one hundred years visitors were guided through the network of passageways by candlelight. This might sound terribly romantic and adventurous but was hardly an ideal day out for the faint-hearted. Electricity and footpaths were installed in 1972 making it the first cave in Ireland to be developed for the public.

**Glengarra and Rehill Woods**

Both are local to our village and both are state owned. In the past these woods along with the woodland...
nursery located between Burncourt and Clogheen were very important employers in the area, employing over one people between them during the 60’s and 70’s. My own Granddad and Uncles all worked in these forestry’s. Glengarra is the most famous of the woodlands as it is utilised by many hill walker and family for a day out and picnic.

**Burncourt Church**

The Roman Catholic Church that stands in the village was opened in 1952; it was built in the same grounds as the previous church. The existing church is known as the ‘Church of the Immaculate Conception’. Many local tradesmen were involved in its construction under the coordination of Pyne’s from Fermoy. It has seen many face lifts over the years. It is kept very well and is central to a lot of the large family gatherings down the years.

On December 31st 1999 a monument was unveiled by the oldest person alive at the time in the area; the monument had the names of all the people in the area for the new millennium. There is a time capsule buried under the rock and it can be removed in years to come to allow another generation to see what things were like for people at the turn of the new century.

![Church of the Immaculate Conception](image)

**Burncourt National School**

An application by Fr. Matthias Casey for funding of primary schools in Burncourt to the Commissioners of Education was received on March 17th 1841. The two schools were for separate Boys’ and Girls’ Schools. A blank application form was dispatched on early March 1841 by the Commissioners and this was returned by Fr. Casey at the end of March 1841.

Situated at the village of Burncourt in the Parish of Ballysheehan, town land of Burncourt in the Barony of Iffa and Offa West, County of Tipperary. Permission to make lease of site from Cornelius Lord Viscount Lismore of Shanbally Castle. Length of lease is to be three lives of 31 years at a rent of one shilling per year.

A further application December 1842 and this dealt with the teachers for the Boys and Girls schools. The teachers were already in place since March and April 1842 and this merely
sanctioned their appointments. Both schools were treated separately in the official documentation although both were housed in the same building.

**Boys’ School**

The proposed Boys’ School teacher was Philip McGrath. He was aged 36 and from the locality. He had not attended a Model School or had never taught in school but he was recommended by the trustees and he was also described as being ‘a native of the parish who has been to school’. The school opened in March 1842 and the school (Boys Section) is described as 44’ X 21’ or one classroom with an attendance of 142 males and this was expected to rise to 160. The donations from the scholars were also recorded in the archive as farthings (¼d) and halfpennies (½d) per quarter. Philip McGrath died in 1845 after just 2½ years in the job. A teacher named as M. Riordan was in place from 1846-47 but again, he was absent from May/September 1846 and a temporary teacher was appointed.

**Girls’ School**

The first teacher was in the Girls’ School was Margaret Kavanagh, aged 19 who lived to the north of the Main Road (N8) in Glengar town land. She wasn’t trained and had never taught in a school but was recommended by the Superintendent and the school opened in April 1842. The Girls’ School was 30’ X 21’ X10’ high and comprised one classroom with 48 girls in attendance. This was expected to rise to 120.

The teaching system included the use of monitors and the first of these in the Girls’ School were Margaret Riordan and Eliza Kavanagh. The monitors in the Boys’ School are not recorded as such although the Board of Education sent a letter in September 1845 to cancel the salary awarded to James Callaghan as a paid monitor in the school from October 1845 as he did not discharge his duties as such. A grant of £4 was made to Edward Flynn as a paid monitor from February 1st 1846, having acted in the place of the missing Callaghan!

The Famine hit the entire country and was equally bad in the Burncourt area. This must have a severe impact on the school including the teachers and pupils.

The history of Burncourt School from the 1850’s is recorded mainly from notes on payments and changes of personnel.

The Boys and Girls Schools were amalgamated in 1899 when the Board of Education recommended that Burncourt Boys NS be struck off the roll of National Schools from 31st Dec 1897 and from which date it has been superseded by Burncourt Mixed National School.

The roll books in Burncourt began in 1891 for the Boys’ School and 1887 for the Girls’ School. The longest serving principal Mr O’Callaghan began teaching in 1902 and continued
until 1947. His wife Mollie (nee English) taught alongside him and Mollie retired in 1940 as females were required to retire when they reached 60.

**New School**

The new school in Burncourt was opened in 1956. The land on which the school is sited was donated by Denis McGrath and he also gave the land for the new church and graveyard. The land was transferred from Denis McGrath’s ownership in 1955 to the trustees who are listed as Rev. Daniel Cohalan, Bishop of Waterford and Lismore, Rev. Canon Kelly, President of St. John’s College, Waterford and Thomas Power PP. The Minister for Education sanctioned a grant of £4,971, eight shillings and seven pence for ‘erecting the schoolhouse, and the finishing and furnishing thereof’. A sum of £828 eleven shillings and five pence was raised locally by voluntary contribution. The school was built by Pyne’s of Fermoy who had also built the church in 1952. The building was too small to house the numbers and the old school was retained until an extension was built in 1963. The present school is well maintained and fitted out and has three classrooms, computer room, Staff Room, Office and refurbished facilities through-out. Ms Sarah Walshe is the current School principal and is assisted by Ms Marie O’Brien and Ms Christina Blake; Sarah takes over from Mr Pat O’Callaghan who retired in 2014 after teaching in the village for 35 years. The School has just received funding and planning permission for three new classrooms and has also received planning permission to add an AstroTurf pitch to the East side of the school. In 2019 a New purpose built ASD Unit was officially opened. The education of the children is very important, and the school has received numerous awards for protection of the Environment, mindfulness, Science and Maths and Sport.

![The new extension was completed in 2012](image)

**Burncourt 2020**

Apart from the new changes in the School Burncourt has a thriving Community Council; even though small in numbers it manages to be the hub for many events including the annual Christmas Parties, Concerts, Festivals, Drama, Halloween Party, Communion Party, and Weekly Cards. The Community spirit is never more evident when after a burial of a local
family member the community council organise teas and refreshments for the family and travelling friends of the mourning family.

The village has seen many changes over the years; it still manages to hold onto two public houses and a shop but back through the years it was serviced by 4 shops and a Co-Op; the Co-Op was located opposite the Castle grounds where Creeds Store still stands today even though it is no longer used for anything.

The village is has grown and we see the well-groomed housing estate of Hillview which was built in 1983. There are also several new houses built on either end of the village which certainly adds to the village feel. Every effort should be made to extend a luminated footpath from the village to the Castle.

The largest club in the area is the Fr. Sheehy GAA Club; in recent years a Burncourt Celtic soccer club was formed, and the new field is located adjacent to the M8. The local Siul Eile walking group and Rhododendron Annual walking festival bring lots of people to the area to enjoy the surrounds and great entertainment.

What the future holds for Burncourt in 2022 - 2028.

Agriculture will continue to be an important business in the community, farmers change their approach and follow guidelines, the Government and Local Council have a big say in what can be achieved. Grant funding for reduction in carbon footprint needs to be in place, more encouragement of biodiversity on the farms must be encouraged and the introduction of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would make it more challenging and the ‘new’ farmer will embrace these. Many young people are third level educated now and find work in the various cities around Ireland and continue to other foreign parts. The majority of people commuting daily depend on the car as their mode of transport, the latest Electric Vehicle technology cannot be embraced in rural Ireland until the costs come down and the infrastructure improves, the Tipperary Council should embrace this as a challenge and roll out the required infrastructure along with other ideas that could include higher speed broadband, grants for house improvements and the encouragement of easier planning for ‘A’ rated housing. The Post Office has closed in the village and the weekly bus run to and
from Mitchelstown has ceased but people continue to be more independent themselves and less dependent on local support groups.

Burncourt has potential to grow based on its location; it is with easy reach of Cork, Clonmel, Limerick and to a lesser degree to Waterford. Dublin is reachable within two hours thanks to the new network of motorway that was completed over the last number of years. The improvement of the N24 would be a huge benefit.

I think Burncourt will always be an important base for the people who live there and the people who will come from there. Times will change and the community has changed with these times over the years and will continue to change.

Tipperary County Council should embrace a village like Burncourt and its steep history and wonderful landmarks. The Mountain Lodge in Glengarra Wood that has been brought back from ruin by the local Community Council. This should be an opportunity for the Tipperary County Council to extend a wonderful building within a natural environment encouraging people from all over to visit and reach out into the local countryside. This building was part of the Shanbally estate as is the original building that is now Kilcoran Lodge Hotel.

The beautiful mosaic covered caverns of Shanbally Castle still remain and these could be opened as part of a local government initiative, also there is still a tea house that remains standing and a wonderful Lily covered lake on the lands where the castle once stood.

Mitchelstown Caves have stood the test of time and will continue to excite visitors. The Old N8 should be upgraded to make it more of a cycling and pedestrian greenway. The hedges and hard shoulders are encroaching onto the road and with an easy fix this could become a real benefit to the residents of South Tipperary.

To Conclude Tipperary and especially Burncourt Village should be given the opportunity to lead the carbon footprint reduction, encourage more outdoor activities for people, develop walkways and cycle lanes. Open areas of heritage and encourage locals to protect these through schemes whereby young people learn from older skilled people. Build up a high-speed network of broadband and electrical charge points. Encourage more working from home and offer Community Councils and Groups materials to build working hub areas in their facilities to reduce long commutes and through this the development of employment opportunities in local communities.

South Tipperary is an area of great beauty that has been for the most part untouched but holds hidden secrets within the area that only need encouragement from the Council to the local residents
to open up endless opportunities for all to see and use. Let the new Development Plan be a target for this, the people are ready and with Tipperary Council on board the future is certainly bright.