GALWAY HERITAGE MAPS
(1829-1841) & (1897-1913)
Preserving Galway's Coastal & Environmental History

These maps capture how Galway's coastline, waterways, land use, and urban form looked before modern development. This is crucial for:

1. Understanding historic shorelines, wetlands, and tidal areas

2. Identifying lost habitats (salt marshes, channels, islands)

3. Tracking human impact on marine and coastal ecosystems over time

The periods 1829–1841 and 1897–1913 cover major moments in Irish history:

a. Pre- and post-Famine Ireland

b. Industrialisation and harbour development

c. Expansion of fishing, trade, and maritime infrastructure

Galway Heritage Maps: Changing Shores, Living Seas

These historic maps of Galway, dating from 1829–1841 and 1897–1913, offer a rare window into how the city, coastline, and Galway Bay have changed over time.

Long before modern roads, quays, and seawalls, Galway's edge was shaped by tides, rivers, wetlands, and the Atlantic Ocean. These maps show a coastline in motion — with inlets, channels, marshes, and working waterfronts that supported fishing, trade, and daily life.

By comparing past and present landscapes, we can see how people have:

Reclaimed land from the sea

Altered rivers and shorelines

Built harbours, quays, and sea defences

These changes helped Galway grow — but they also transformed natural habitats that once supported marine life.

Historic maps are more than records of streets and buildings. They help us understand:
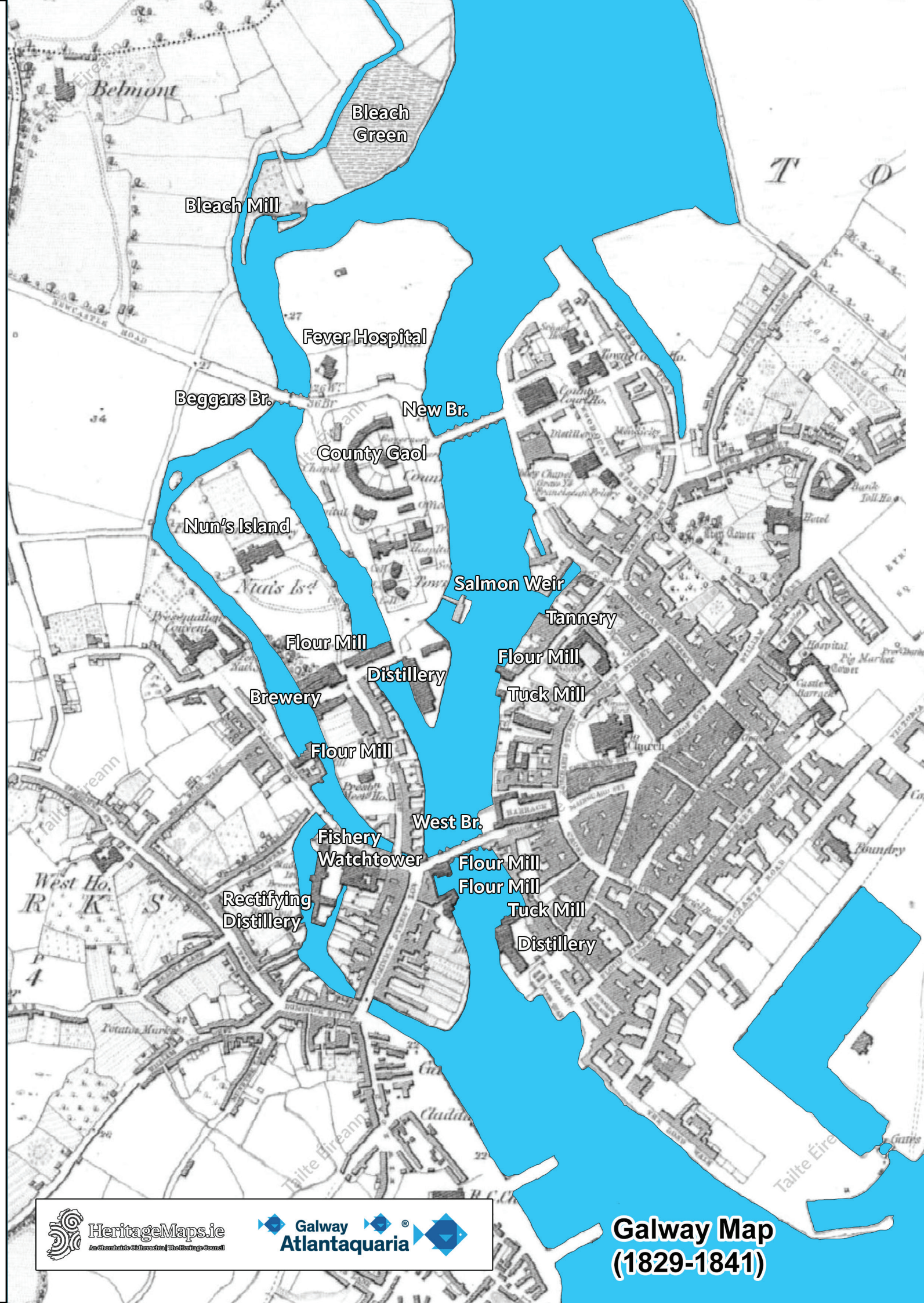
Where water once flowed

How coastal ecosystems have shifted

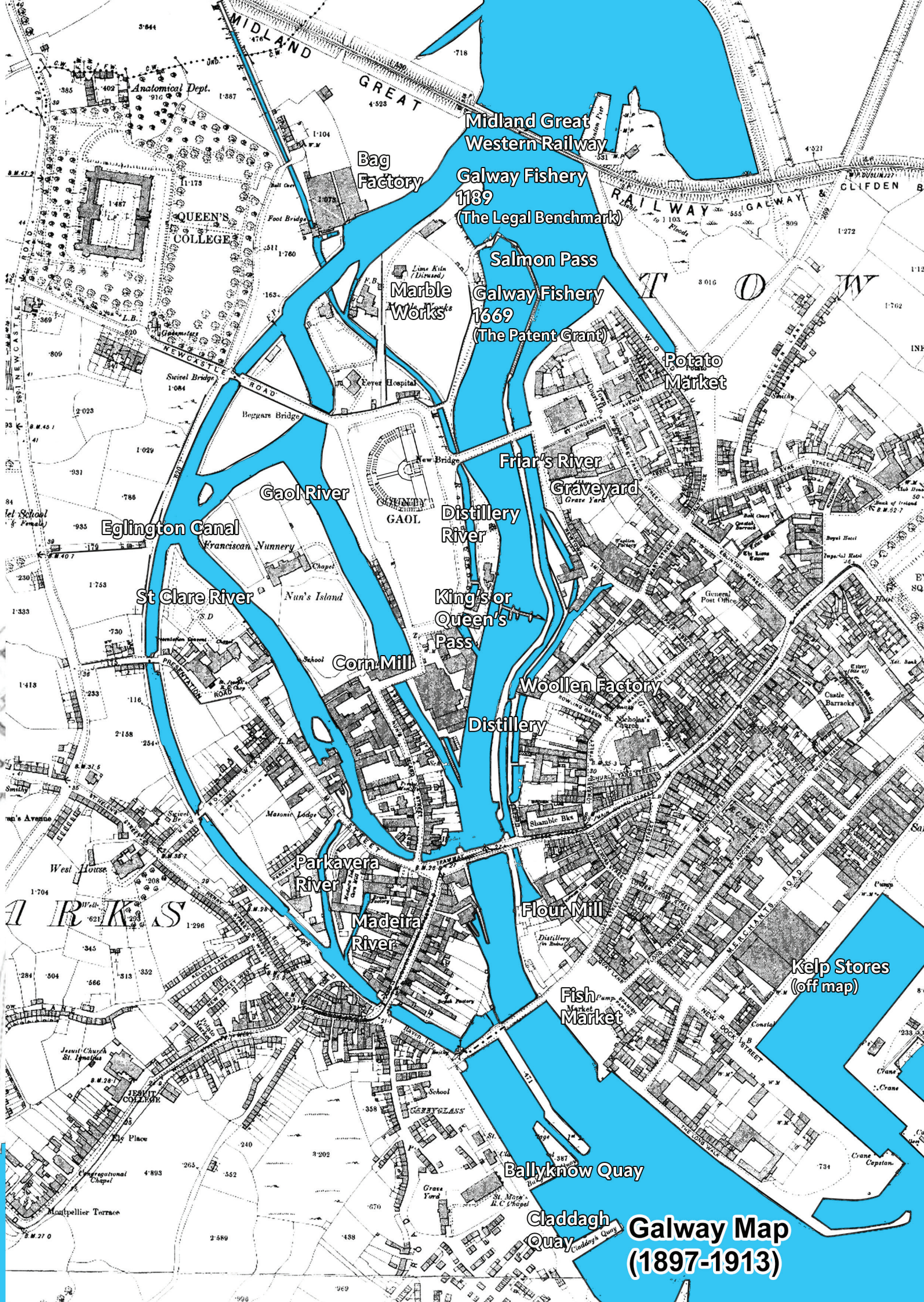*Why today's shoreline looks the way it does*

As sea levels rise and climate change reshapes our coasts, these maps remind us that Galway's relationship with the sea has always been changing.

By learning from the past, we can make better choices for the future — protecting the living waters of Galway Bay for generations to come.

HeritageMaps.ie
Galway Atlantaquaria

Galway Map (1829-1841)

Belmont
Bleach Green
Bleach Mill
Fever Hospital
Beggars Br.
New Br.
County Gaol
Nun's Island
Salmon Weir
Tannery
Flour Mill
Distillery
Flour Mill
Tuck Mill
Brewery
Flour Mill
West Br.
Fishery Watchtower
Flour Mill
Flour Mill
Rectifying Distillery
Tuck Mill
Distillery

Galway Map (1897-1913)

MIDLAND GREAT
Anatomical Dept.
Midland Great Western Railway
Bag Factory
Galway Fishery 1189 (The Legal Benchmark)
RAILWAY GALWAY & CLIFDEN
QUEEN'S COLLEGE
Salmon Pass
Marble Works
Galway Fishery 1669 (The Patent Grant)
Potato Market
Eglington Canal
Gaol River
Beggars Bridge
COUNTY GAOL
Distillery River
Friar's River
Graveyard
St Clare River
Franciscan Nunnery
Nun's Island
King's or Queen's Pass
Corn Mill
Woollen Factory
Distillery
West House
Parkavera River
Flour Mill
Madeira River
Kelp Stores (off map)
Fish Market
Jesuit College
Ballyknow Quay
Claddagh Quay

In the Flow of History
Galway's Rivers and Industrial Heritage

Galway City — Baile na Sruthán, the City of Streams — grew from a network of rivers, canals, and islands shaped by the powerful River Corrib. Flowing from Lough Corrib to Galway Bay, the Corrib is one of Europe's fastest rivers and the sole outlet of a vast western catchment. Its speed and volume powered mills, shaped settlement, and defined the city's bridges, industries, and neighbourhoods.

Over the past two centuries, Galway's natural waterways were adapted into a complex industrial system. Canals such as the Eglinton Canal and the Distillery River were engineered to transport goods, provide famine-era employment, and drive mills. Natural branches — including the Gaol, St Clare, Parkavera, and Madeira Rivers — created, connected islands and supported breweries, distilleries, flour mills, tanneries, and foundries.

Many of these rivers have changed, yet their influence remains embedded in Galway's streets, buildings, and place names. By tracing the flow of water, this StoryMap reveals how rivers shaped the city's economy, culture, and sense of place — and how their stories still flow through Galway today.

The Rivers & Canals
River Corrib
The River Corrib flows from Lough Corrib to Galway Bay and runs through the heart of the city. Though just over 6 km long, it is one of Europe's fastest rivers and carries an immense volume of water, shaping Galway's settlement, industry, and bridges. As the sole outlet of the Corrib–Mask catchment, its power drove mills, industry, and later electricity generation, making it central to Galway's history.

Canals and Mill Rivers
Galway's waterways include a network of natural rivers and man-made canals adapted for industry. The Distillery River and Eglinton Canal were engineered in the 19th century to power mills, transport goods, and provide famine-era employment. Natural branches such as the Gaol, St Clare, Parkavera, and Madeira Rivers were incorporated into this system, creating islands and supporting breweries, distilleries, paper mills, foundries, and sawmills.

Urban Channels
Smaller channels like the Friar's, Slaughterhouse, and Middle Rivers were altered, culverted, or redirected over time to serve early mills and later electricity generation. Together, these waterways formed an industrial network that quietly shaped the modern city.
From The Galway Waterways Foundation (GWF)

The Bridges of Galway
O'Brien's Bridge
The first bridge built in Galway City was O'Brien's Bridge. The bridge that stands today is not the original structure. The original wooden bridge was constructed in 1558, but it was later rebuilt and widened in 1852. The present bridge occupies the same site as the original. In 1889, it was named in honour of William Smith O'Brien, a former Member of Parliament and a member of the Young Irelanders, a revolutionary group.

New Bridge
New Bridge, later The Salmon Weir Bridge
1815 - 1820
This fine bridge is an important feature of Galway's expansive cityscape, constructed in 1818 as a means of linking the old Gaol (on the site of the present Cathedral) with the courthouse. The bridge also provides a connection with the main road to Connemara.

Wolf Tone Bridge
The third bridge built in Galway City was Wolfe Tone Bridge, constructed in 1887. A new bridge later replaced it in 1934. Wolfe Tone Bridge is located near the Claddagh. It is named after Theobald Wolfe Tone, one of the founding members of the United Irishmen, a republican society dedicated to ending British rule and establishing accountable government in Ireland.

Droichead an Dóchais
The opening of a new pedestrian and bicycle bridge over the River Corrib in Galway City, in front of the Cathedral, took place on 26 May 2023. Officially named Droichead an Dóchais (Bridge of Hope), it runs parallel to the current Salmon Weir Bridge

The Bad Times
The Fever Hospital and Workhouses in Galway, 1860–1900
The Fever Hospital and associated workhouses provided shelter for the city's poor, offering basic necessities like blankets, but conditions were harsh. Inmates wore rough workhouse clothing— gray frieze suits for men and calico gowns and petticoats for women. Dormitories lacked closets, relying on overflowing night buckets for sanitation.

During the Great Famine (1845–1852), Galway's workhouses became severely overcrowded. Inmate numbers rose from 460 in June 1846 to 1,302 by November 1847. Auxiliary workhouses and child-specific facilities were established at Newtownsmyth, Merchants Road, St. Helen's Street, Barna, Parkavera, Dangan, and the Fever Hospital in Moycullen. Despite saving many from starvation and exposure, workhouses contributed to deaths from epidemic diseases such as fever, cholera, and dysentery.

The Fever Hospital at Beggar's Bridge became particularly infamous, as destitutes begged on the bridge and some even committed crimes to secure shelter and food. The winter of 1846–47 was exceptionally harsh, with hunger deaths averaging 25–30 per week. By May 1847, epidemics were causing 100 deaths weekly, and over 11,000 inmates died in Galway workhouses during 1847–1848. Tragic scenes, such as children found dead in the streets, highlighted the human cost of famine and overcrowding.

Industrial Galway
Madeira Island was a key industrial hub in Galway, powered by the Madeira and Parkavera Rivers, hosting breweries, distilleries, paper mills, sawmills, and other factories. The Persse family distillery on Nun's Island, established in the 19th century, became world-famous, providing employment and supporting local artisans, though it went into liquidation in 1910.

Flour mills like Bridge Mills and Mill Street Mill were vital for grinding locally grown wheat and oats, supporting trade and the community; some also processed malt and wool. Other specialized mills included tuck mills (improving wool fabrics).

The area also contained tanneries, converting hides into leather, and lime kilns like the Fisheries Field Kiln (c.1820), which produced quicklime for construction, agriculture, and industry. Madeira Island thus exemplified Galway's diverse 19th-century industrial landscape.

Baile na Sruthán (City of Streams)