

***Ireland
West
Railway***



Resurrecting the County Mayo section
of the now closed railway line
built by the
Waterford Limerick and Western Railway

This guide is for users of graymac's IWR route for BVE Train Sim who might want to know a little about the original railway on which the route is based.

For latest IWR downloads and other information please visit

www.iwrsim.graymacimage.com

Notes for UK rail enthusiasts

Irish Railway operation is in many aspects similar to methods practised in the UK. These differences will be most apparent when using the train simulator.

The sign instructing the driver to sound the horn/whistle in Ireland is a rectangular board with reflector or light and black and yellow diagonal stripes.

Advance permanent speed restriction (PSR) warnings, as per UK railways, are not used in Ireland, large speed reductions being incrementally signed instead. PSR signs are yellow, octagonal, with black border and the limit shown in MPH.

AWS is not in use in the Republic, there being other in-cab systems in force. For the benefit of train sim users AWS has been fitted, although not true to prototype.

Irish passenger train drivers do not seem to have the need of signs (3-car, 4-car, S, etc) to tell them the stopping place at platforms as none are evident at Claremorris. Obviously they must know the right place and wish to keep it a secret.

Mile posts are of a different pattern to UK types.

This railway line closed in 1963. In order to re-open it today many automated crossings would be required. Some have been provided for this route, but many of the old gates have been left in situ to retain the Irish character of the line. A point of difference on crossings is that automated crossings cost the rail company an arm and a leg, whereas unmanned gates only cost the user an arm and a leg. The average number of crossings between Ballindine and Charlestown works out about one for every mile.

For a more comprehensive look at signs and signalling in Ireland refer to: <http://www.railsigns.co.uk/overseas/ireland1/ireland1.html> where there is an excellent illustrated guide.

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Origins of the line

The railway line between Ballindine and Charlestown is part of a larger scheme which began with the Waterford, Limerick and Western Railway (WLWR). The Waterford and Limerick Railway Act, passed in 1826, would seem to be the beginning. The company had extensive workings in the south west of Ireland (Munster), gradually extending northwards as far as Ennis, and by 1858 obtained an Act to extend yet further north to join the Midland Great Western Railway (MGWR) at Athenry with a further extension as far as Tuam, Co Galway, the Athenry and Tuam Railway (ATR), the line opening as far as Tuam in 1860. Several proposals were made from 1868 for further extension, but without result until 1894, when an Act was obtained allowing the Athenry and Tuam Extension to Claremorris Light Railway (A&TECLR) to be completed, terminating initially at Claremorris South station, just short of the MGWR station which exists today. 1895 saw the A&TECLR joining the MGWR at the present station. The A&TECLR goods yard facilities at Claremorris South remained open and active until 1925.

Two Orders were passed in 1898; The W&LR Claremorris to Swineford (sic) order and the W&LR Collooney to Swineford order, which allowed the railway to join the MGWR at Collooney, some six miles short of Sligo.

The WLWR was absorbed into the Great Southern and Western Railway (GSWR) in 1900. All the railway companies in the Republic came into public ownership on the formation under the Transport Act of 1944, passed in the Dáil (the Irish parliament) and providing for the formation of the State Transport Company called CIÉ (Coras Iompair Éireann), a process in many ways similar to the railway nationalisation in the UK which led to the creation of British Railways, although CIÉ also had responsibility for the national bus carrier, Bus Éireann, and the capital bus operator, Dublin Bus.

There is great interest in seeing the line re-open (see www.westontrack.com) and the section between Ennis and Athenry (for Galway) has re-opened this year (2010). No definite date is announced for further restoration, although the government has expressed intent there is lack of funding at present due to recessionary pressures.

Driving the Route

We relieve the Galway driver at Ballindine, on the boundary between Co Galway and Co Mayo and set the controls in the cab. The station we are about to depart from is the only one on this route which is fictitious and is adjacent to the main Galway road next to the N17 major road. A new station would have to be provided if the line were to reopen, unless Ballindine was not considered eligible as a stopping point. The former station, now privately occupied, stands 200 metres down the line. On the signal from the guard and with a favourable starting signal, we depart. The line is quite level, as here we are on the plains of Mayo. Passing the level crossing, over the local road to Scardaune, we can accelerate to the line speed of 60mph. The next crossing is over the main N17 Sligo to Galway road, note the derelict gate-keeper's lodge, long deserted. We pass by farm land to the next road crossing, over the minor local road to the townland of Garryowen. Watch out for the farm crossing just before it, and note the old line worker's hut. Maintaining our speed we traverse a steel fabricated bridge spanning the Robe River, as it makes its way through Co Mayo to feed into Lough Mask near Ballinrobe. After passing through some poorer quality land, planted with sustainable timber, we once again cross the N17, notice that the old gate-keeper's cottage here is in an even worse state of disrepair. Close the throttle, as we must soon reduce speed to 50mph max as we approach the industrial area of Claremorris. The line speed limits decrease as we pass to the rear of the modern industrial and retail buildings. On the right, before the road crossing and footbridge, stands the old Claremorris South station goods shed. This was the terminus of the line for a while before it became connected to the larger Midland railway station which we are now approaching. There is a tight right curve with a 10mph limit at the automatic level crossing by "The Nally Stand" pub. This pub is at the end of the main street, and is named after a stand in the national stadium in Croke Park, Dublin, built in 1952 as memorial to Paddy Nally, one of the GAA founders.

Entering Claremorris station on platform two (the original connected to platform three), we come to a smooth halt at the platform end. The signal will not clear before about 15 seconds prior to the starting time. The fine old signal box is redundant, signalling now controlled from Athlone.

Claremorris station, on the former Midland & Great Western Railway line to Westport, was considerably re-modeled in the 1950s partly in order to facilitate the large number of pilgrims who visit the shrine at Knock, which is about





Opposite, from top: Ballindine old station house; Derelict gate keeper's lodge, Site of Claremorris South station, the goods shed and an old water tower is all that is left; Claremorris MGWR station viewed from the old line.

Above, from top: Second overbridge after Claremorris; Crossing with gate lodge on R320 to Kiltimagh; Kiltimagh station viewed from Knock Road LC in the down direction.

10 km distant. Today Knock airport, which was opened in 1986, would see most of that traffic. In addition to the west coast line which joins the MGWR at Claremorris, there was once a MGWR branch line to Ballinrobe, closed to passenger traffic as long ago as 1930 and completely closed by 1960. The MGWR at Claremorris had extensive goods facilities until recently, but the last significant freight operation closed in 2006, a long-running contract transporting Guinness from Dublin to the West. Claremorris, which has grown significantly in recent years, is a thriving town, the largest one in south Mayo .

We leave Claremorris and join the single track main line to Westport for a short distance, before branching off to the right back on the Claremorris and Collooney Railway (C&CR). Past the junction, after the curve by the new housing and just after the first underbridge the limit is raised to 40mph, and after the second underbridge to 60mph. At the crossing of the N60 main road to Castlebar we will be traveling at maximum line speed. There is a 50mph speed restriction $\frac{3}{4}$ mile further on, followed by a 45mph limit at the start of the cutting where the Claremorris to Kiltimagh road passes over the line. Many road crossings are in place on the next three or four miles. Some of them have been left with the traditional pattern of manual gate, the type operated by a crossing keeper. On nearly all the crossings there is a keeper's lodge. Only one between here and Kiltimagh is inhabited, and that one, which has been refurbished and is occupied, would appear to be in private ownership. A number of crossings over minor rural lanes have farm type gates which should be opened and closed by those using the road. As often as not these are left open all the time.

As we pass over the R320 Kiltimagh road, on a bridge providing road users low clearance and a sharp kink in the road, we are half way to Kiltimagh. As we reach the next level crossing (with the occupied cottage) the line is fairly straight and passes an un-named lake, crosses over the Gweestion River and passes Cultybo Lough. The land here is not the best farmland, being rather boggy. After passing a plantation area, about a mile from Kiltimagh, we ease off the power, negotiate a bog road crossing, a local road crossing and yet another bog road crossing, and get ready to apply the brake to slow us down at the 40mph limit before the curve at Knock Road level crossing, Kiltimagh. We run into the station on what was formerly the down platform and come to rest at the end, in sight of

the building across the road which has been refurbished and now serves as the town hall.

Kiltimagh is quite a small town. In spite of its diminutive size there is plenty happening, and it is quite charming in its own way. The disused railway station and its buildings have fortunately been kept in a state of preservation for the sake of visitors. The former station house, on the down platform, is now home to a music school, the ground where the goods shed once stood is a pleasant public park, and the goods shed itself, together with an old CIÉ carriage, is now a museum. The signal box still stands, although former adjacent sidings are now Station Road, which is an industrial estate. Kiltimagh holds an annual festival to commemorate the celebrated blind Irish-language poet and musician, Anthony Raftery (Antoine Ó Rairteiri, 1784-1835), who died 63 years before the railway opened, so missed all the fun.

Two buzzes from the guard, and with a clear signal, off we go again. Past the new housing on the left, under the stone arched bridge carrying the Swinford road, see the new Park Hotel on the right, and then it's out into open country again. The land is more undulating here, and the railway follows the contours trying to stay as level as possible. This part of the route has more curves, and a 55mph maximum permitted speed. The first road crossing is at Pollronan Beg, with another crossing half a mile or so further on, at Pollronan More. A river crossing takes us over the Glóire River (Glory??). The next three kilometres are largely unpopulated until we reach the Kinaffe district. Houses and small farms are scattered widely in this area. It is a very pleasant rural part of the county indeed. Two further small road crossings, with a river crossing (Trimoge River) sandwiched in between, and we reduce speed for a 45mph limit at Ballyglass. There's another road crossing here serving half a dozen houses, on a tight S curve in the cutting. A further reduction to 40mph and we cross the main N5 Dublin road. After the tight right curve at the N5 crossing we can increase speed for the next mile-and-a-half. The line runs alongside the local road, and after two minor road crossings with a metal bridge over a culvert in between, we see the 40mph speed restriction sign and begin the approach to Swinford station. We shall draw up at the end of the down platform, coming to a standstill next to the old water tower.

Swinford is a small market town, typical of many such in the West of Ireland. Although most of the people today enjoy a good standard of living, it



Above, from top: Kiltimagh station house on the down platform; The line near Kinnafe; Swinford station in 2010; Approaching the bridge at the end of the main street in Swinford.

Opposite, from top: The Rathscanlan road bridge, Swinford; Looking toward Charlestown across the bog from Rathscanlan bridge; The bridge at Drumshinnagh, date shown inset; Mile post at Drumshinnagh. Mileage is from junction after Claremorris



wasn't always so. Like many places in the west there was considerable hardship and poverty, with much suffering during the famine times. There was a very large work-house in Swinford, reflecting the straitened state of the area in the past. During the building of the railway, in 1891 it was reported in the Connaught Telegraph, for the 3rd January, that some 2,000 men were in want of work, "Murphy (the contractor) engaged about 100 men at Swinford; fearing a riot, 40 additional policemen were drafted in from Ballinrobe". Notwithstanding, a very good station was built at Swinford, with a large goods shed and several sidings. Alas, the original buildings did not enjoy the same degree of care as those in Kiltimagh. The station house on the up platform is occupied and in good repair, but the rest had gone to ruin at the time this was written.

On the last section of this line through the Co Mayo we move on towards Charlestown. Departing the station we pass over the main N26 road to Ballina by a stone bridge at the end of the town's main street. Another stone bridge almost immediately carries us over the minor road to Aclare, which the railway follows for almost a mile. A metal bridge takes the line over a lane at Rathscanlan, after which all roads diverge. The railway continues fairly straight, passing more plantation. Grants were available to encourage land owners to plant timber, a useful way to get some return on otherwise unproductive land. The land is mostly cut away bog and this is the sparsest populated part of the route in Mayo, with little habitation at the edges of the line, although some small holdings and houses exist little further than a kilometre in either direction. Here there are no tight curves and no gradients to speak of. Two very small roads cross the line in the area known as Drumshinnagh. The first is a very rough narrow track over a level crossing, the second is a similarly poor track over a bridge spanning the cutting. The date of the bridge is visible on a stone in the parapet, it is 1898, the year the line opened for traffic. Speed restriction 50mph on the curve through this cutting. Then open up to 60mph max for a long straight over the bog. Note the stacks of peat by the bog tracks, awaiting collection. It is still harvested, but by machine nowadays, few would want the hard labour today of cutting it by hand. As we approach the small townland named Sonnagh, watch for the 50mph speed restriction near the metal bridge over the Sonnagh River. This river

feeds into the River Moy, one of Ireland's premier salmon rivers. Two miles from Charlestown and another arch bridge spans the cutting at Sonnagh, of a similar design to the bridge at Drumshinnagh.

The next signal is situated on a slight curve. Placed before this signal is a sign unfamiliar to UK rail enthusiasts. It is a horizontal red arm combined with a lower quadrant red arm, on a white post with a blue background, and it is called a 'sighting point marker board', to quote from the entry on www.railsigns.co.uk:

"A review of braking distances at semaphore distant signals revealed that many were deficient. As a short-term remedy, the 'sighting point marker board' was installed at certain locations c.2003. This board shows a representation of a semaphore signal (with its arm in both positions) on a blue background. When the train reaches this position, the driver must begin braking unless he or she can see that the distant signal ahead is 'off'."

This is the last three aspect signal on the route. The further signal down the line is a banner 'distant' signal, having the same purpose as those in the UK although slightly different in appearance. A signal at this point of the route cannot show a green aspect because the signal that follows is the permanent 'danger' red aspect located at the terminal buffer stop at Charlestown. Although the line went on to Collooney to join with the MGWR onward to Sligo it must be left to another time for this to re-open!

The last few metres into Charlestown take us over the Mullaghanoe River (another tributary of the River Moy) and into the station. As it is a terminus station, we have a permanent speed restriction of 10mph. Bring the train to a halt at the end of the platform. The passenger platform, and the platform to the right belonging to the former goods shed are the only fabric remaining of the original station at Charlestown. The goods shed, signal box and station building were all gone before the end of the 20th century. An original station sign still stands at the Sligo road end of the passenger platform. The line continued across the street, through what is now Cassidy's Suzuki garage, filling station and convenience store, and onward to Tubbercurry, keeping close to the N17 main road.

You may shut down the motor, apply the emergency brake, and go and have a well-earned cup of tea, you have just crossed the Co Mayo.





From top, left: Looking toward Charlestown from Drumshinnagh; The road bridge at Sonnagh; Bridge over the Mul-laghanoe river at Charlestown.

Above: Archive picture of Charlestown station from 1981, 18 years after closure. By the end of the 1990s all the buildings excepting the platform had gone. (This pic: © Michael Fox)

Below: Signs opposite the station platform end marking the start of Bellahy on the Sligo county boundary.

Bottom: Charlestown station in 2010.



As you go and get that cuppa, a bit of back-ground. Charlestown is on the border between Co Mayo and Co Sligo. Two main highways cross here, the road east to west between Dublin and Westport and that from top to bottom down the west side of Ireland between Letterkenny/Derry and via Galway and Limerick, on to Cork. It's a long way (and it doesn't include Tipperary, either). Charlestown is a market town and was built next to a very small town called Bellaghy, on the Sligo side of the county boundary. This is the story concerning the origins of Charlestown. In the 1840's, the land occupied by what is now Charlestown, was a bog. Stepping stones led to the long established town of Bellaghy, in County Sligo. It was to here the Mayo tenants of the Lord Dillon Estate had to carry their sacks of potatoes and grain on market days. Because they were Mayo men and tenants of Lord Dillon, they were forced to wait at the weighing scales until all the Sligo men on the Knox estate had their produce weighed.

The Mayo tenants complained bitterly to the agent of Lord Dillon, one Charles Strickland, who protested to the Lord of Sligo estate, one of the Knox family. He was rebuffed, but it was not until later, when Strickland was publicly insulted, that he swore vengeance "I will wipe out Bellaghy", said he.

With the consent of Lord Dillon (Charles Dillon) 14th Viscount, Strickland was instrumental in having the new Charlestown planned and built, and Bellaghy is now a just a few houses to the left of the railway station, attached to Charlestown. Strickland, a Yorkshireman, was as good as his word.

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