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Cast a stone and you'll hit a Hollywood extra

Whether fantasy settings or stand-ins for Berlin, Normandy or Tudor England, Ireland has a string of film locations to visit, writes **Eleanor Fitzsimons**

MENTION "on" and "location" in the average bar and you'll evoke misty-eyed reminiscences about the day the Duke rode into Cong to shoot *The Quiet Man* or the time your man's granny in Dingle was an extra in *Ryan's Daughter*. But the story doesn't end there. Over several decades, tax breaks, relatively unspoilt landscapes and the services of a well-trained Army reserve contributed to the transformation of familiar parts of Ireland into somewhere else entirely in the name of cinema. In this film buff's paradise you can hardly cast a stone without hitting an extra – especially if you're in a pub where the regulars are eager to regale you with their star-studded stories.

Ballymore Eustace

KING ARTHUR

■ In 2003 Keira Knightley, Clive Owen and Ioan Gruffudd decamped to the picturesque Co Kildare village to film the Hollywood epic *King Arthur*. Much of the action took place in a local field chosen to host a kilometre-long mock-up of Hadrian's Wall. This imposing replica – the largest film set built in Ireland – took a crew of 300 more than four months to build. Locals were drafted in as Saxon warriors for boisterous battle scenes. Parts of the set were later re-created at Pinewood Studios, outside London.

Ballymun

BLOODY SUNDAY

■ Paul Greengrass's acclaimed film *Bloody Sunday* used pre-regeneration Ballymun, in north Dublin, as the Bogside in 1970s Derry – meaning that locals recruited as extras were dressed in the bell-bottomed trousers and tank tops of the era. Shooting was not without its hazards. In *The Story of Irish Film*, Arthur Flynn reports that local thugs replaced rubber rocks used in a riot scene with real ones and urinated in a tea urn.

Cliffs of Moher

THE PRINCESS BRIDE

■ The spectacular Co Clare cliffs featured as the vertiginous Cliffs of Insanity in Rob Reiner's 1987 film *The Princess Bride*, in which the Dread Pirate Roberts doggedly pursues Fezzik, Vizzini, Inigo Montoya and Buttercup to their edge. In the absence of computer-generated imagery the stunt sequences were real. Locals still recall the audacious stuntman who dangled over the cliffs – which did not rest on their laurels. Earlier this year they featured in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, providing the exterior shots for dramatic cave scenes.

■ Parking €8. Atlantic Edge exhibition: adults €4.95, family of six €13.95. cliffsOfmoher.ie

Curracloe

SAVING PRIVATE RYAN

■ Steven Spielberg's location team reportedly surveyed almost every centimetre of coast in western Europe before deciding that Ballinesker Beach, at Curracloe in Co Wexford, most closely resembled Omaha Beach, in Normandy. Pristine, dune-framed Ballinesker admirably doubled as the 1944 site of the D-Day landings – the French original is a protected monument where filming is banned – during which thousands of American GIs faced terrifying danger as they emerged from the sea. Army reservists – veterans of Mel Gibson's *Braveheart* – provided cannon fodder for the bloody battle scenes. Curracloe's electricity supply was upgraded to facilitate filming, which lasted two months. Traces remain of the replica military installations constructed along the beach.

Drimnagh Castle

ELLA ENCHANTED

■ Dublin's impressively intact Drimnagh Castle – which was also used to great effect in *The Tudors*, the lavish US television series starring Jonathan Rhys Meyers – doubles as a magnificent fantasy castle in the 2004 tween flick *Ella Enchanted*. Inhabited until 1954, the building is an outstanding example of a feudal stronghold and the only Irish castle still surrounded by a flooded moat. Director Tommy O'Haver said of filming here: "It's the land of fairies. There's something magical about just being in Ireland, and it seemed to have everything we needed except for blue skies. It rained a lot, so we used the computer to create that perfect, unbelievable blue." Pity it wasn't a permanent change.

■ Drimnagh Castle, Dublin, 01-4502530; open Wednesday noon-5pm and Sunday 2-5pm between November and March and on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday noon-5pm between April and October

Kilmainham Gaol

THE ITALIAN JOB

■ In *The Italian Job* – Peter Collinson's 1969 classic, not the 2003 remake – Michael Caine plays dapper mobster Charlie Croker, recipient of instructions for a daring bullion robbery from a criminal mastermind who runs a gangland empire from his prison cell. The exterior shots of the prison are of Wormwood Scrubs, in London, but the interior shots of Noel Coward's cell were filmed in Kilmainham Gaol, in Dublin. A funeral scene shot just outside Dublin required half a dozen black horses, which were speedily arranged. It is said that, as rain set in, the horses started to turn grey and brown; inventive dealers had painted the six animals black.

■ Kilmainham Gaol, Inchicore Road, Dublin 8, 01-4535984, heritageireland.ie/en/Dublin/KilmainhamGaol. Open Monday-Saturday 9.30am-5.30pm and Sunday 10am-6pm until March. Last admission 90 minutes before closing. Adults €6, families €14

Six-Mile-Bridge

THE SERPENT'S KISS

■ The recently flooded Co Clare village was involved in a drama of a more cinematic sort in 1997. In Philippe Rousselet's film *The Serpent's Kiss* a celebrated Dutch landscape gardener, played by Ewan McGregor, is hired by a wealthy merchant to create an extravagant garden for his beautiful wife. An ensuing love triangle involving the couple's daughter makes for complex, steamy viewing. This film is also notable for introducing McGregor to fellow petrol-head Charley Boorman. Pete Postlethwaite, who played the merchant, was said to slip off from time to time to meet fellow *Sharpe* actor Sean Bean in Caseys bar.

Smithfield

THE SPY WHO CAME IN FROM THE COLD

■ Martin Ritt, who in 1965 turned John le Carré's novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* into a film starring Richard Burton, believed that cold, grey Dublin was much more reminis-

cent of cold war Berlin than that relatively inaccessible city itself. He commissioned a 50-man team to transform then-derelict Smithfield into the bombed-out German capital, complete with Checkpoint Charlie, watch towers and shops. The *New York Times* commented: "It looks as though Mr Ritt has slipped in with a handheld camera and started recording the movements of a British secret agent at the Berlin Wall."

Trim Castle

BRAVEHEART

■ Mel Gibson made his 1995

film *Braveheart* almost entirely in Ireland, having abandoned filming in Scotland after just six weeks, to the outrage of Scottish nationalists. The switch was put down to the availability of 1,700 Army reservists who were willing to play extras in battle scenes. Fifteenth-century Dun-soghly Castle, near Finglas in Dublin, provided the exterior for Edinburgh Castle. York Castle, stormed by marauding Scots, was ably portrayed by Trim Castle, in Co Meath. This magnificent edifice, the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland, was built over 30 years by Hugh

de Lacy and his son Walter. It was remarkably well constructed, as much of it still survives and is open for guided tours.

■ 046-9438619 or heritageireland.ie/en/midlandseastcoast/TrimCastle. Weekends only until Easter, excluding the weekends before Christmas and New Year's Day. Adults €4, children €2, families €10

Wicklow Gap

REIGN OF FIRE

■ Rob Bowman's 2002 movie *Reign of Fire* – at €70 million the most expensive film shot in Ireland – required a colossal

fort to be constructed above a complex of old lead mines in Wicklow Mountains National Park. In the film, deadly dragons have over-run Earth in 2020, and survivors seek shelter in an old castle while Matthew McConaughey and Christian Bale fight the winged terrors. Many of the aerial shots are of the Sally Gap and Wicklow Mountains. Ballinascorney Quarry, near Blessington, was turned into a blackened wasteland, and the grounds of the ruined Black Castle, in Wicklow town, doubled as a graveyard.

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Ready for their close-ups, clockwise from above: John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara in *The Quiet Man*, Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*, Keira Knightley in *King Arthur*, Anne Hathaway in *Ella Enchanted* and a scene from Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*. Photographs: Jonathan Hession/Touchstone Pictures and Jerry Bruckheimer Films, David Appleby

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