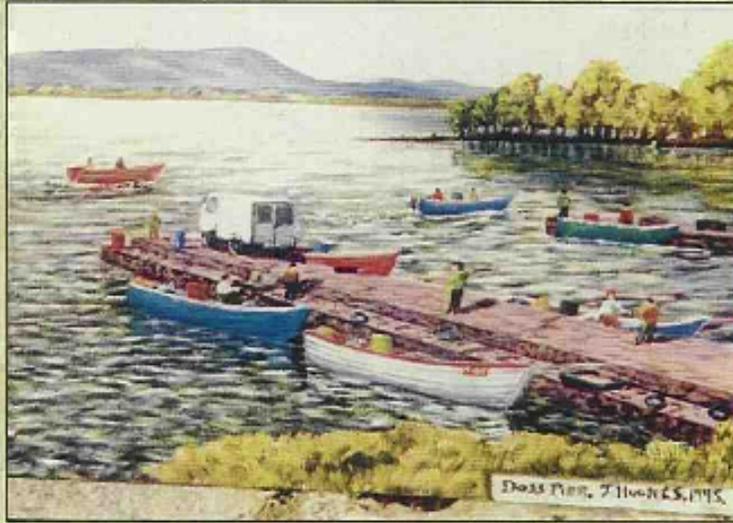


Quiet Places of The Lower Bann Valley



By John Hughes and Donal Barton.

Doss Pier, Co. Antrim.

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2004 - The book now appears to be out of print and so I have copied it in order to obtain a copy.

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INTRODUCTION

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In this publication, we are aiming to divert the attention of the traveller, native and visitor alike, to an area bordering on Counties Antrim and Derry. This area, most of which is known as the Bann Valley, holds many quiet, historic and interesting places. We begin our journey at Cranfield on the Randalstown side of Toome and the North East of Lough Neagh.

We visit some of the sites associated with the introduction of Christianity by Saint Patrick in the fifth century and introduce our readers to some of the characters who lived and died in the Bann Valley until the present time.

The area is the native place of the Nobel Poet, Seamus Heaney and is roughly one-hour's drive from Derry, Ballymena, Armagh and Belfast.

Picnics may be the order of the day in fine and reasonable Irish weather, but there are plenty of good Hotels, restaurants and pubs where rest and refreshments may be had.

Off the beaten track, these quiet little places offer thought provoking discussion and thus, awareness of history long ago. Read about and imagine the players on a stage, coloured by gory battles and terrible

events, gilded over by God-fearing people who struggled to know each other, especially from the Plantation of Ulster in the 17th century until the present day. Unfortunately, in this book we have only been able to touch on a fragment of the area's history.

This limitation may be an advantage, should it encourage the traveller to be more thorough in exploring the area for himself.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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In welcoming our readers to some of the quiet places of the Lower Bann Valley, we gratefully acknowledge the assistance given to us by the following.

Edward McCann, who put at our disposal books of historic interest and accompanied us to areas in South West Antrim and introduced us to many interesting people in our search for information,

Patrick McAteer and **Creggan GFC**, who allowed us to quote from their magnificent publication 'Kickam's GFC',

Fee O'Gorman, Principal, Creggan Primary School and his pupils, for permission to include the lovely poem 'My Sweet Lough Shore', composed by the children,

William J. Johnston, his wife Teresa and family who welcomed us to their home and furnished the information which enabled the feature on 'Doss' to be written,

Seamus Hughes, who provided the words o 'The Parish Down in Doss',

Sally McCorry, for the use of her poem, 'Masterpiece in Oak',

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Mick Graham, who relived the days when 'engaged in their manufacture and described vividly the process involved in their production,

Colm Lynn, who accompanied us around Portglenone, Innishrush, Clady and historic Greenlough, putting at our disposal a vast wealth of information concerning these places. Not forgetting his wife

Maureen who kindly supplied us with many cups of tea and liberal helpings of her tasty home baked oven bread,

The Reverend Father Reilly, P.P. Greenlough, who gave us patient advice and learned information,

Hugh Kilpatrick, his wife and family for their welcome and hospitality. Hugh recalled events which enabled us to revive, in words, the New Ferry and Ferry Town,

Paddy and Eamon Scullion, we thank them for information and advice,

We were welcomed at Ballyscullion Park, by **Richard Mulholland** and family, who illustrated the history of this remarkable house,

The Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, who allowed us to use from their publication, Irish Building Ventures of the Earl Bishop of Derry,

Fergal McGeehan, for allowing us to use from his history of the Church Island,

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Kathleen Madine, for putting her history of Bellaghy at our disposal,

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Barney Devlin and his son **Joe**, for their help in putting together a short history of their family and now famous 'Forge'. They also produced a number of valued photographs including the two concerning the concreting of roads in the area,

Frank Quinn, for his enthusiasm and help in ensuring that the article dealing with diatomite and The United Kingdom Peat Moss and Litter Co. Ltd. was produced. The two photographs showing the Diatomite fields and the surrounding area were reproduced with the permission of the 'Controller of Her Britannic Majesty's Stationary Office',

Charlie Shivers, the present owner of the Diatomite factory for updating us on the make up of the business park now in place there,

Reverend Father Oliver Kennedy and his staff for letting us have an up to date account of the Toome Eel Fishery and marketing methods,

Maurice O'Neill, editor, Ballymena Guardian, we are grateful for his advice and guidance,

Brian Grant, for his information and help,

Siobhan Kearney, secretary of the local group TIDAL, for providing the information regarding the future of Toome,

Tom Corr, for his foreword to the article on Toome in which he recalls some of his boyhood memories and his wife, **Kathleen**, who carried out that tiresome task of proof reading,

Dr. Dermot Devlin, for his advice and encouragement,

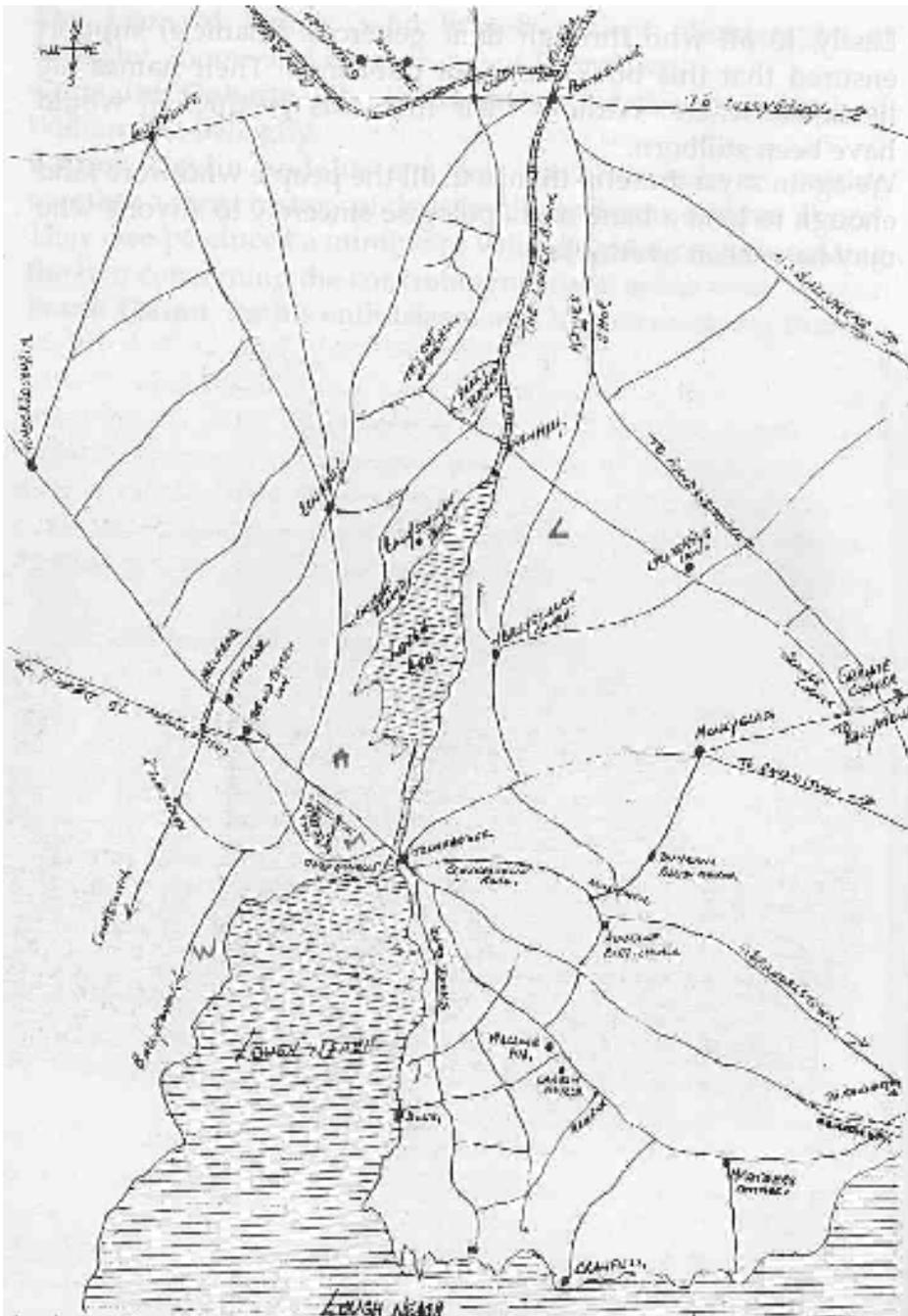
Graham Mawhinney, of Moyola Books and Ballinascreen Historical Society, for allowing extracts from books published by them to be used,

Joe Carroll, who spent many tedious hours coping with typesetting and corrections,

My wife Rita, for her patience and encouragement over many months during the writing and rewriting of this book,

Lastly, to all who through their generous financial support ensured that this book has been published. Their names are listed elsewhere. Without their help this production would have been stillborn.

We again say a grateful thanks to all the people who were kind enough to lend a hand and apologize sincerely to anyone who may have been overlooked



CRANFIELD

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We begin our journey in the County of Antrim and we intend to become acquainted with some of the quiet places on the south side of Toome and along both sides of the River Bann down to the town of Portglenone. We aim to go back in time and colour in fable and fact and perhaps unearth some information that may add to the already well documented events that have taken place in the area.

Cranfield, our first stop on this journey, can be reached by taking the Staffordstown Road out of Randalstown and proceeding on past McAteers, a well kept thatched cottage at Creggan. A mile or so ahead, a signpost at a road junction points to our destination. Cranfield consists of an old ruined church, graveyard and Holy Well plus a small picturesque harbour, from where local fishermen go out to fish Lough. Neagh for pollen and eels.



The McAteer Home, Creggan, Co. Antrim.
The McAteer Home, Creggan, Co. Antrim

A car park, picnic area and toilets have been provided by the Department of the Environment. These facilities should help to make the visitors stay a more pleasant experience. To arrive at Cranfield on a summers morning and find the Lough calm and placid, with the sunshine reflecting off the water like a million diamonds, is a wonderful experience. It is pleasant to be out in the open air, away from noise, fumes and traffic hold ups, exploring and enjoying a quiet place such as this. Now let us take a little time and get to know some of this old monastic settlement's history and the events that still take place here.

The word Cranfield translates into several forms, but appears in the recently published 'Place names of Northern Ireland' as "Creamhchoill", wild garlic wood. We find no mention of the Church until 1306 when in the 'Ecclesiastical Taxation' it is referred to as the Church of Crewhill, and valued at half a mark per annum, roughly 35 pence.

According to the 'Ecclesiastical Register' under the year 1584, the rectory of Cranfield was formally appropriated to the priory of St. John of Jerusalem. This monastic order, now known as the Knights of Malta. The chief house in the diocese in those days was the Priory of Templepatrick, which in turn, was under the control of the Preceptory of St. John the Baptist of Ards, County Down

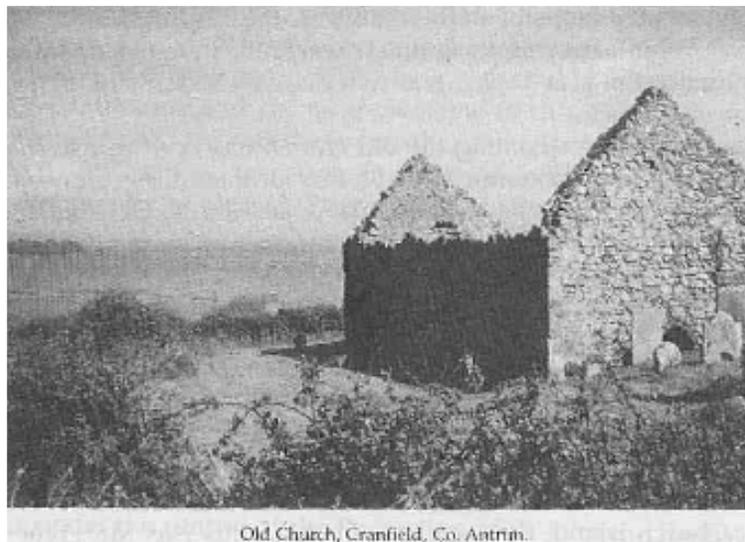
Another theory as to who was responsible for founding the church here, is that in the twelfth century St. Malachy, Bishop of Armagh was attempting to reform the Irish church, by introducing monastic orders from contemporary Europe, into Ireland. The native Irish church, it would seem, had developed in isolation in some respects from the rest of Europe, particularly from Rome. Instructions and commands were disregarded, particularly in regard to payment of taxes overdue. The Pope's decisions regarding suspension of Bishops for offences committed, were often ignored, replacements being shunned on arrival. In those days it took months for correspondence to reach its destination and on the new arrival being cold shouldered for this period of time, there was often little option open to him, but pack his bags and depart.

The Normans having, in the latter half of the twelfth century, extended their influence throughout East Ulster and paved the way for ecclesiastical reform, it seems likely that an order such as the Franciscans, Augustinians or the Dominicans could have founded the settlements here and on the Church Island. We may never learn who its founders were, one thing we do know is that in the year 1662 it was in a decayed state, with its best days long past.

The graveyard adjoining the old church has been in use as a burial ground for centuries and a few local families still use it. Headstone records go back to 1704, when Martha OHagan, the wife of Captain OHagan and the daughter of Brain O'Neill of Largy (This district lies between Moneyglass and Portglenone) who died on the fourteenth of February 1704, was buried here. It is a small piece of hallowed ground that contains many unmarked graves.

Mass would have been celebrated in Cranfield Church during its heyday and according to local tradition, during the penal days. All celebrations seemed to have lapsed until 1911 when the annual celebration was revived. As in the case of the revival at Church Island, the inspiration behind this was Mr. Francis Joseph Bigger, Nationalist M.P. and President of the Gaelic League. The Gaelic League had been established throughout Ireland to encourage people to become aware of their native language and culture; and how better to instill a sense of pride in people than to revive the ancient tradition of worship at places like Cranfield and Church Island. A report of the event in 1911 states, in spite of inclement weather, which forced many intending to travel by boat to Cranfield to remain at home, the day was a huge success. Apart from the large local attendance, the 8 am train from Belfast made a special stop at Staffordstown station to facilitate a large contingent traveling from the city.

Fr. Murphy celebrated the Mass which began at ten thirty and the large crowd was encouraged to perform the stations, the practice of which had lapsed for many years. At two o'clock the Aeridheacht began. Many beautiful airs were played and sung by, amongst others, The Millars, Mr. Frank McPeake, Mr. Will Gregor and Master McNally. Bands in attendance included the Belfast Pipers Band, Newbridge and the Slievegallion Hibernian Band. Hymns and songs were also rendered by the choir of Randalstown Church. The next report of Mass day at Cranfield was in 1920, this was to be the last celebration held, until revived in 1979 by Fr. McHugh then a curate in the parish. He is now Parish Priest in Ballintoy. As the twenty ninth of June is no longer a Holyday of obligation, the celebration is held on the Sunday which falls closest to that date.



Old Church, Cranfield, Co. Antrim.
Old Church, Cranfield, Co. Antrim



Harbour, Cranfield, Co. Antrim
Harbour, Cranfield, Co. Antrim

THE HOLY WELL

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St. Olcans well at Cranfield is thought to predate Christianity and as such places were considered sacred in pagan time, the Christian church wisely Christianise many of these customs. Indeed it may have been due to the wells existence that the monastic settlement was sited here.

The well still attracts people who believe it has miraculous powers of curing the sick. The custom is for the patient to bathe the affected part of the body with a small piece of cloth which has been dipped in the well, and then tie the piece of cloth to an overhanging bush, after some prayers have been said, as the rag decays the affliction is supposed to depart. The volume of rags adorning the bushes as shown in the photograph is testimony that belief in the healing power of the well water is still very much alive. There is quite a variety of stories testifying to how, over the years, people have been relieved of their ailments.

One of the most colourful pieces of local tradition connected with Cranfield concerns the amber stones that can be found in the well. The person who wears one of these stones, so the belief goes, will never die by drowning. They are supposed to bring luck to those who possess them. The local fishermen always carried them as a protection in their boats and like Gartan Clay, found at Gartan Lake in Co. Donegal, the birthplace of St. Colmcille, are kept in houses as protection against fire.

According to tradition the well overflows on the 29th June thereby raising the stones to the surface. They are in fact available throughout the year to anyone wishing to take up the challenge of fishing for them in water that is dark and thickly coated with algae, which would make the effort a daunting prospect.



The Holy Well, Cranfield, Co. Antrim

The Holy Well, Cranfield, Co. Antrim

Worshipping at Cranfield, Church Island and other holy places comes and goes in cycles. The important fact is that it never dies out completely. These old bits of hallowed ground seem to hold a special place in the hearts of the people and it is as if a magnetic force draws them back to worship there. We bemoan the fact that we know so little history of these places. This maybe to our benefit, because knowing exactly what did take place, might deny us the opportunity of using our imagination with the result that a great deal of the mystique and charm they hold for us would disappear. It is now time to take our leave of Cranfield and the hope is, that you may have for a while, shed the daily mask that must be worn and that life's stresses and frustrations will have vanished into the surrounding beauty.

My Sweet Lough Shore

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'Tis far away I'm bound today from my own dear Antrim home,
With an aching heart, I will depart across the raging foam;
To all of you I bid adieu, alas well meet no more,
Near Creggan green I'll not be seen, nor walk by the sweet Lough shore.

No more I'll see the Cranfield Cross, that place of holy fame,
To Cranfield Well I'll say farewell and to Marrions Pub the same,
To the fishermen in their painted boats I'll miss for ever more
As they lay their lines in the summertime near my lovely sweet Lough shore.

The little school where I learned the rule and the friends I love so dear,
The Tottens and the McElroys, OBoyles and McAteers;
The Dougans and the Devlins too, it makes my heart feel sore,

To Paddy's shop at three o'clock, along the road we'd race,
Past Tommy's and Jimmy's and Hughie's house and Father Gerry's place;
The little white washed cottage with the latch upon the door,
Oh I'll think of the days when we made our ways along the sweet Lough shore.

But time is passing swiftly by and soon I must leave,
Good-bye to the school and the river too and the football field near Creeve;
Before I die I hope and pray that I'll return once more,
No more to roam from my Antrim home along the sweet Lough shore

This poem was composed by the pupils of Creggan P.S. in 1989.

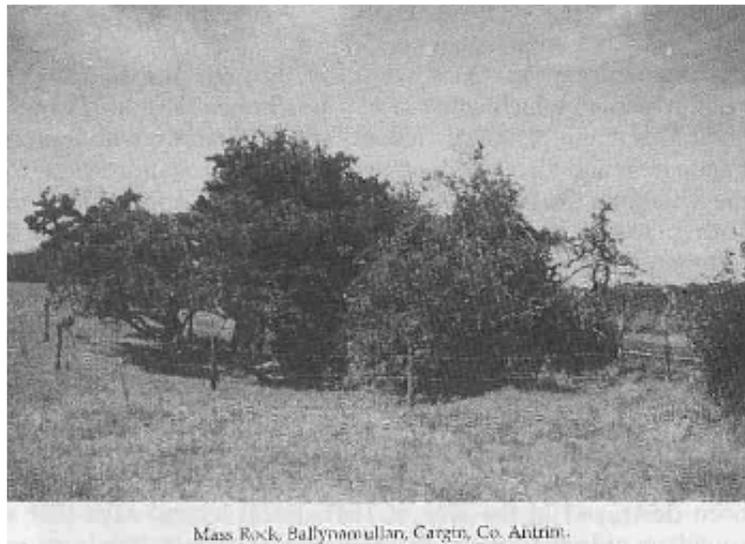
DOSS

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On our journey to Doss we pass through the hamlet of Staffordstown, which consists of a few houses and an Orange Hall. This small place was named after the family who built a Castle here and also a large mansion at Mount Stafford close to the village of Portglenone. Members of this family resided in both places. The Castle has long since disappeared and a farmhouse now occupies the site. A visitor looking at this pastoral scene would find it difficult to imagine that here, a bloody battle once took place. It appears from records, that when the surrounding land was being cultivated, fifteen pits of bones, some of which contained shin, thigh bones and trooper's spurs were discovered. This Castle, writes the Rev. James O'Laverty in his oft quoted and detailed history of the Diocese of Down and Connor, both ancient and modern, is said to have been destroyed in the war of 1641. Local legend says that a squadron of Irish Cavalry charged over a sharp incline from an unexpected direction and caught the defenders unprepared. As the fifteen pits of bones would indicate the garrison offered stubborn resistance before being overrun.

The Stafford Family were descended from Sir Francis Stafford, Governor of Ulster in the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1.

The land owned by this family here and at Portglenone, passed by purchase early in the 19th century into the hands of the Alexander family (The same mentioned in owner lineage of Portglenone house, now a Cistercian Abbey). Other than the place name no trace of this family is to be found in this area today.



Mass Rock, Ballynamullan, Cargin, Co. Antrim.
Mass Rock, Ballynamullan, Cargin, Co. Antrim

Our next place of historic interest is an old 'Mass rock' situated on the left hand side further along this road (past Ballynamullan Rd.). As the photograph shows it is now almost surrounded by hawthorn bushes. This would have been one of the many places of worship in the parish, until the relaxation of the Penal Laws (which forbade worship) that enabled the parish church in Cargin to be built in 1821. A

short distance further along we will arrive at this old church, which has now been superseded by a more modern one, recently erected. This building deserves a visit if only to admire the specially designed stained glass windows therein. A few yards beyond this point is situated "Mallon's" licensed premises, where refreshments and a warm welcome await the traveller. Here we join the Cargin Road and proceed directly to Doss, crossing over two roads where we are requested to yield to the unlikely event of oncoming traffic.

Doss, during spring or late summer, is another lovely and peaceful spot, with its small harbour, boats and wonderful views. The Lough, the largest in the British Isles, spreads out before us, and on the western shore lies Co. Tyrone, over shadowed by majestic Slieve Gallion which leads our eye along the Sperrin Mountain range into Co. Derry. This area is a vast bird sanctuary and according to season, various breeds of wildfowl can be seen and studied, especially by those equipped with binoculars. It is an ideal site for the artist to paint, while enjoying listening to the sounds of lapping water and bird song.



The Harbour at Doss, Co. Antrim
The Harbour at Doss, Co. Antrim

The small harbour and pier were put in place in 1947 as a result of a visit made by the owner Mr. W. J. Johnston and his wife Teresa to Lough Gill in Co. Sligo, in search of the poet Yeats "Lake Isle of Innishfree". Here they discovered a small pier built to assist the boatmen in ferrying tourists to and from the island. On his return to Doss, Mr. Johnston decided to put in place a small harbour that would give safe anchorage to boats and facilitate local fishermen in landing their catch.

The harbour was constructed by anchoring empty tea chests in the Lough and filling them with concrete. At the outset this was not a success as the chests came apart when filled. This problem was solved by putting a machine, used for strapping fish boxes, to good use in securing the chests with steel straps.

With the containers now safely in place the concrete was poured and the harbour completed. The reader should be reminded that when this venture was undertaken, building materials, while not rationed, were a scarce commodity and that no grants from Government, or aid was available from any source. Shortly after this splendid little harbour came into use an unforeseen problem surfaced, when the powers that be decided to lower the level of the water in Lough Neagh by two feet. This decision turned William Johnston's pride and joy into a dry dock. On the Ministry of Agriculture being made aware of the situation, they provided a grant to enable a concrete apron to be placed around the pier at a lower level. They also sent along a mechanical digger to deepen the harbour. The day was saved and the small fishing port, much to everyone's relief, was back in business. In those days 8 to 10 boats fished the waters of Lough Neagh from here. Today the number has been reduced to four.

Nearby in a field belonging to Mr. Johnston stands a large and gnarled oak tree, known locally as The Cabin Tree. The owner is certain that it has stood here for almost 400 years. This would mean that it is one of the last remaining oak trees that flourished in large forests throughout Ireland centuries ago. The oak tree is recorded as being able to live for over 500 years and it will be of interest the number of years this tree still has left of its life. Mr. Johnston considers the tree to be an heirloom and so proud is he of it that he commissioned a painting by local artist Margaret O'Neill which is prominently displayed in his home. The tree which stands majestically and alone by the shore at Doss, has over the years withstood many storms and witnessed many changes. It has seen ownership of the Lough change hands a few times and watched patiently from its vantage point, battles legal and otherwise that were waged by the fishermen for the right to earn a livelihood by fishing the Lough.

This tree could have been well named for as the owner explains, when clearing and reclaiming the land surrounding it, many house foundations were uncovered. The homes would have been of inferior quality as the foundation stones were located almost on top of the ground. These discoveries went some way to prove what old men had told him many years ago, that at one time, probably pre famine, Doss was a thickly populated area.



The Cabin Tree, Doss, Co. Antrim.
The Cabin Tree, Doss , Co. Antrim

Doss is situated in the townland of Portlee-West and in another of Mr. Johnston's fields adjacent to the rear of the farmyard is another "Mass Rock". It has been long forgotten and now lies neglected and overgrown.

MASTERPIECE IN OAK

[Top](#)

There it stands, gnarled in glory,
Aged, yet yearly young,
Strong, but succumbing to the Autumn winds
It humbly sheds its leaves.
Revealing, in the viewer's soul
Uncertain beauty in its twisted shapes.

Pregnant on the skyline, shaking or still
It commands our eyes to look.
Silent philosopher if we wish to hear
It lectures us to know though branches fall
Tall and staunch it still upward rises,
Giving unsung glory to the seasons.

Fast-bedded in life, ruthless, steely strong,
Greedy roots grasping more of mother earth,
Unstoppable, unseen, they set their claim
To their undisputed underground inheritance.

It struggles with life's parasites.

Of higher power, absorbing all,
Its stored-up knowledge never shared,
Hoarding the secrets of the birds,
Hearing, seeing all and judging nothing.
Bending in the breeze, this gentle giant,
A quiet sermon in a restless world.

Sally Mc Corry

THE PARISH DOWN IN DOSS

[Top](#)

On that oul' road that leads to Toome,
About a mile or so across;
I used to take my donkey there,
'Twas there I cut my moss.
I used to take my donkey there,
Through wind an' rain an' frost;
You all might know as well as me,
The Parish down in Doss.

Sure I never will forget the day,
I met big Kate Malone;
My heart it was both light and gay,
Kate weighed eighteen stone.
She said she had a pair of pigs,
A donkey and a goat; She said she had some money,
For to buy a little boat.

And if that we would speculate,
Just at a little cost;
We'd soon have boys to do our work,
In the parish down at Doss.

So I saddled up my donkey,
And I galloped into Toome;
To get some of the poteen,
They made down in the Doon.
Shure a Polis man arrested me,
He says "I'm at a loss,
As to how you got so far away,
From the parish down in Doss?"

So it's now that we are married,
And we live like man and wife;
Like britches on a Highlander,
I'll stick to her for life.
And now that we have got the blankets,
There's never a minute lost;
We've seven great big bouncing sons,
In the parish down in Doss.

John Carey

[Top](#)

It is now time to take our leave of Doss with its pretty harbour and Pollen Bay with its scenic views. The traveller returns to the first road junction and turns left along the Shore Road and enjoys a scenic journey of about one mile and a half before arriving at the main Belfast to Derry Road, on the outskirts of Toome. At the entrance to the Gloverstown Road, the Eight sided Fountain of Liberty, erected by John Carey, with its water pump and a hand holding an iron rod, on which is mounted a dedication plate announcing that the water is free to all, is to be seen. Further along this road we will pass another of the Carey legacies, a pair of whirley gateposts and well designed gates. About a mile further along is to be found the tomb where he was laid to rest in Duneane Presbyterian Churchyard, which is in keeping with the man. Three large tablets containing in excess of 1,500 words that includes quotation's from the Old and New Testaments as well as the history of his family from their establishment, right up

grasping arms with interlocking hands supporting the corners. This burial plot stands out in this quiet country graveyard and is well worth a visit.

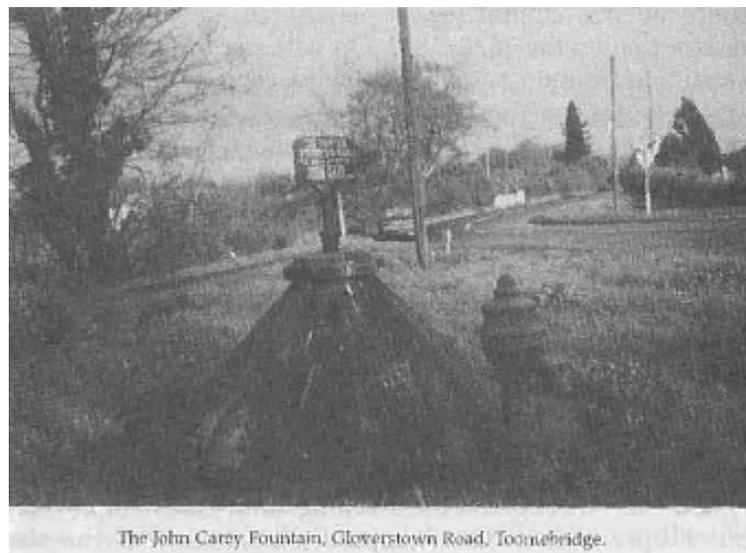
As we are now in Carey Country, before proceeding to our next stop at Duneane Parish Church of Ireland, it may be an appropriate time to learn a little more about this eccentric gentleman.

John Carey, the mystery man of Toome. Very little is known about his early life until 1800 at the age of 22, he was accepted into the Old College, Belfast, now the Academic Institution, where young men trained to become Presbyterian Ministers. In 1832 he was licensed to begin his ministry. During a short career in his chosen profession, he ministered to congregations at Brigh, Co. Tyrone and Brookvale, in the Co. Down. While holding this position he was arrested on suspicion of attempting to murder a clergyman of the same faith during a service he was conducting in his church, Third Rathfriland Presbyterian on the 26/2/1843. On witnesses coming forward to testify to his innocence, he was released.

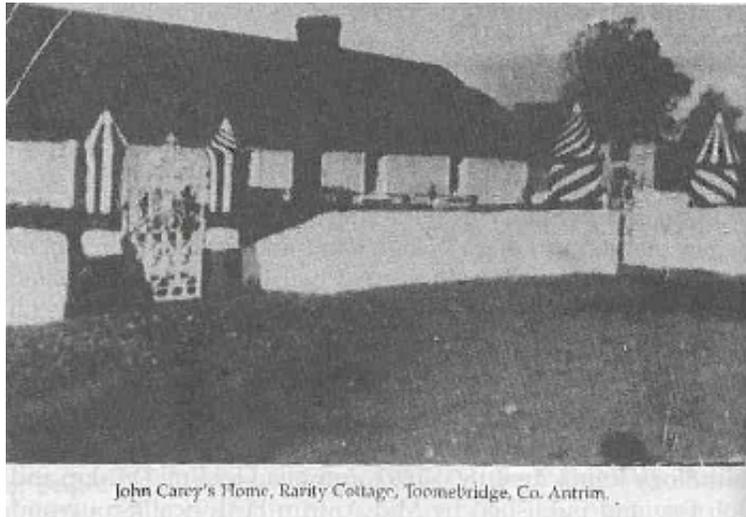
Following this unhappy incident, Carey went to ground for 7 years and several theories exist as to how and where he spent that period of time. Some say that he retired to his parent's home near Toome, others that he emigrated to seek his fortune in either America or Australia. He surfaced again in 1850 and took up residence in Rarity Cottage situated on what is now named Gloverstown Road. It soon became obvious that he had not wasted the lost years, as he had acquired considerable business and entrepreneurial skills, plus the drive necessary to put these advantages to profitable use. He refurbished the cottage and as can be seen from the photograph, he had a flair for designing gates and pillars, this ability we are told was used to good effect throughout the dwelling. John Carey employed a housekeeper named Kate Sheppard a loyal servant who also assisted in keeping his cost of living to a minimum especially by altering and mending garments on his behalf, when feasible.

She did not engage in or encourage tittle tattle, anyone asking pertinent questions relating to her employers past was given the silent treatment and kept at arms length. It was, from his coming to reside in Rarity cottage, that he made his mark in and around Toome. He lent money at exorbitant rates of interest, got involved in tendering for the eel fishing rights, began marketing Lough Neagh sand and many other money making ventures. He built a great hall which accommodated up to 1,500 people. He was a staunch supporter of liberal principals, campaigned for land reform, was firm in his Opposition to home rule and lived to the ripe old age of 91.

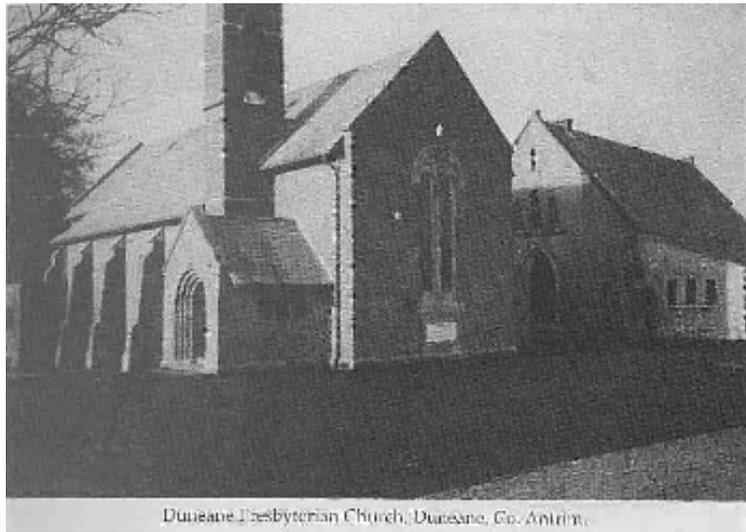
A great deal more interesting information regarding this flamboyant character is to be found in the commemorative anthology John Carey 1800-1891 compiled by Eull Dunlop and Bob Foy and published by Mid Antrim Historical Group and Antrim and District Historical Society.



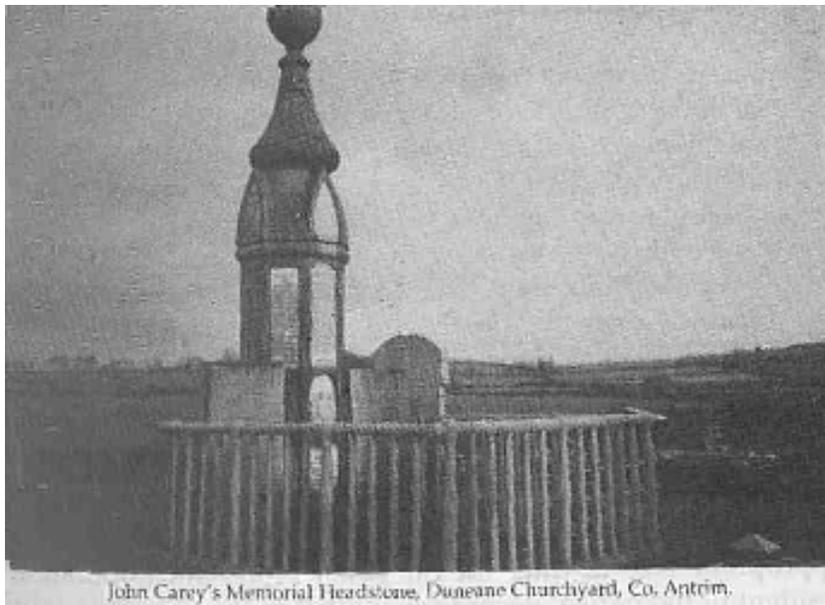
The John Carey Fountain, Gloverstone Road, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim



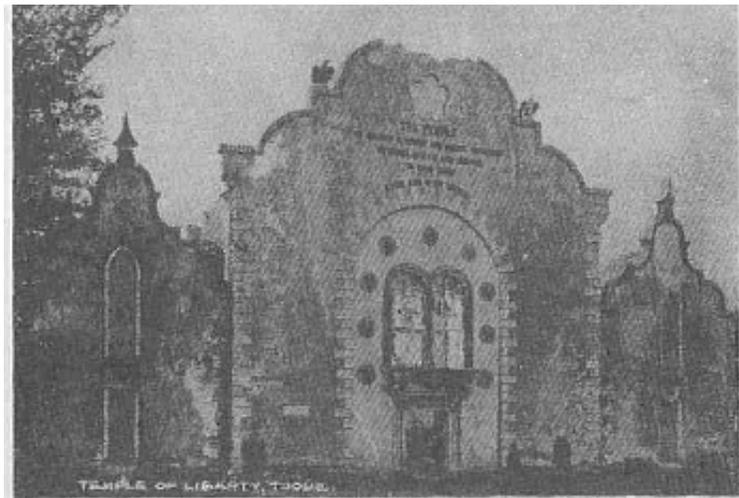
John Carey's Home, Rarity Cottage, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim.
John Carey's Home, Rarity Cottage, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim



Duneane Presbyterian Church, Duneane, Co. Antrim.
Duneane Presbyterian Church, Duneane, Co. Antrim



John Carey's Memorial Headstone, Duneane Churchyard, Co. Antrim.
John Carey's Memorial Headstone, Duneane Churchyard, Co. Antrim



The Temple of Liberty which was situated on Strand Road, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim, no longer in existence.

The Temple of Liberty which was situated on Strand Road, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim

The Church in Duneane

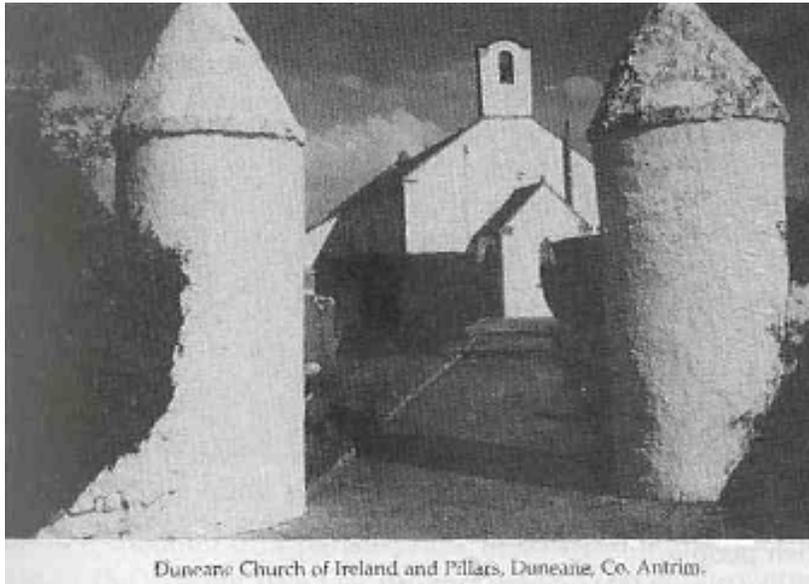
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The present Church of Ireland in the parish of Duneane (Fort of the two Birds), where Rody McCorly was finally laid to rest, is situated in the townland of Lismacloskey and according to local tradition occupies the site of an old monastic church.

In the Ecclesiastical Taxation list of 1306 the church at Duneane was valued at twenty shillings or one new pound per annum. At the dissolution of the monasteries in 1542, Duneane and Drummaul were in the possession of the monastery at Kells, Co. Antrim. In that same year it was noted as the vicarage Church of Duneane. In 1657 it was referred to as being conveniently situated near the middle of the parish and being in a ruinous state.

Following the siege of Derry in 1689, Major Dobbin a local landlord pulled down part of the building leaving it a more appropriate size to cater for the small Protestant population resident in the parish. Records show that in the year 1615 four townlands in the parish were the property of the Bishop and were managed by an Erenagh or lay tenant. The four townlands were Lismacloskey, Tamnamore, Cloghogue and Gortgill and commonly referred to as the four towns of Duneane.

Down through the years other repairs and alterations would have taken place and as the photograph shows this is a well maintained church and yard, approached from an entrance lane guarded by two very impressive pillars. The headstones in the graveyard make an interesting study and show that members of different Christian faiths have been laid to rest here. This is an historic place and well worth a visit.



Duneane Church of Ireland and Pillars, Duneane, Co. Antrim.

The Old Bog Chapel

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A report regarding this building which appeared in the Mid-Ulster Mail in 1930 states: Situated in the bogs of Ballyscullion is a relic of the Penal Days known as "The Old Bog Chapel" and nearby is the Mass Rock, on Higgen Hill, which served the needs of the persecuted clergy in even more remote days. Some fifteen years ago the little chapel was restored and almost rebuilt; hitherto it was a very humble structure indeed. Erected probably in the early years of the last century it was only 45 feet long by 27 feet broad when it first arose from the dark moss. A few trees soon clustered around its walls and a few graves were soon filled in the chapel yard. No cross crowned its gable, no bell ever tolled for its services. It was told by an O'Scullion long ago that a white cloth was waved when Mass was to be said and the people kept a look out for the signal.

In winter time the priest, who had to cross over the River Bann or Lough Beg from the Co. Derry side, often found the trip a hard and dangerous one. Internally, the Old Bog Chapel was simple and primitive. The altar was against the rear wall and made of wood, with a few adornments. This was provided some time after the church had been erected, by the then curate in the parish Rev. John Kearney, who later became parish priest in Buncrana, Co. Donegal. The floor was earthen and the Holy Water was contained in a homely bowl or basin, a plain wooden bolted barn door was at either end. Other details needless to enumerate, were on similar lines, all evidence of poverty and piety the continual help mates of so many of the Irish people.

Father Peter McNamee, P. P. Bellaghy, undertook its restoration in 1915 and the work was completed under the supervision of Mr. J. P. Brennan, Architect. The old walls were raised several feet and the body of the building lengthened by some 15 feet. A fine new roof replaced the old one which had become unsatisfactory through age and decay, and the sacristy was entirely rebuilt.

The late Francis Joseph Bigger M.R.I.A., in an article on the old chapel said "More suitable churches have now been built on every hand, some with lovely spires pointing to heaven, others with bell-encasing towers; even the old Chapel in the midst of the turf at Ballyscullion may give place to a more suitable or even a more beautiful building. Be that as it may, not one of those who built the new churches can ever surpass in holy life and pious hope those who in deep poverty and strenuous existence kept the old faith steadfastly burning by that old Mass Rock on the Lough shore".



The Old Chapel, Ballyscullion, Co. Antrim.
The Old Chapel, Ballyscullion, Co. Antrim

The first mention of a parish priest in Ballyscullion since the days of the visiting friars is of one Patrick O'Scullion, whose remains were interred in the Church Island in Lough Beg. His grave is at the South east corner of the ruined church and is covered by a flat stone. According to Fr. McLaughlin's historical sketches of the Bishops of Derry, to which was appended a list of priests of various parishes up to 1704; he was pastor of Ballyscullion and Termoneeny (now Lavey). "He was ordained in 1683 at Creggan, County Galway, by Teige Coho. His securities were George Downing, of the said parish of Termoneeny, gentleman and Owen McPeake of the said parish of Ballyscullion, gentleman".

Father O'Scullion who, of course, was local stock, resided in Ballyscullion. It would seem that he was the only priest of the family who officiated in the district to which they gave their name.

There is nothing to show whether any priests exercised direct charge of the parish over the greater part of the eighteenth century. Toward the end of the century, Rev. Rodger Mulholland resided at Roes Gift, Ballydermot, Bellaghy; his remains are buried at Castledawson. The next parish priest was Father Charles McCann a native of the townland of Lislea, near Kilrea. He was educated in France and took charge of the parish at the end of the eighteenth century. Father McCann purchased a farm in the Annagh of Letrim which embraced a half of Coney Island in Lough Beg. He lived for over twenty years in this homestead in the Annagh peninsula and was beloved by his parishioners. He was reputed to be a fine scholar and a capable administrator. It was as a result of his efforts that the old church in Bellaghy was completed in 1814. There are many memories in the locality of this good priest who was at a somewhat advanced age transferred to the neighbouring parish of Lavey. On his death his remains were laid to rest with those of his kin at Drumagarner, Kilrea.

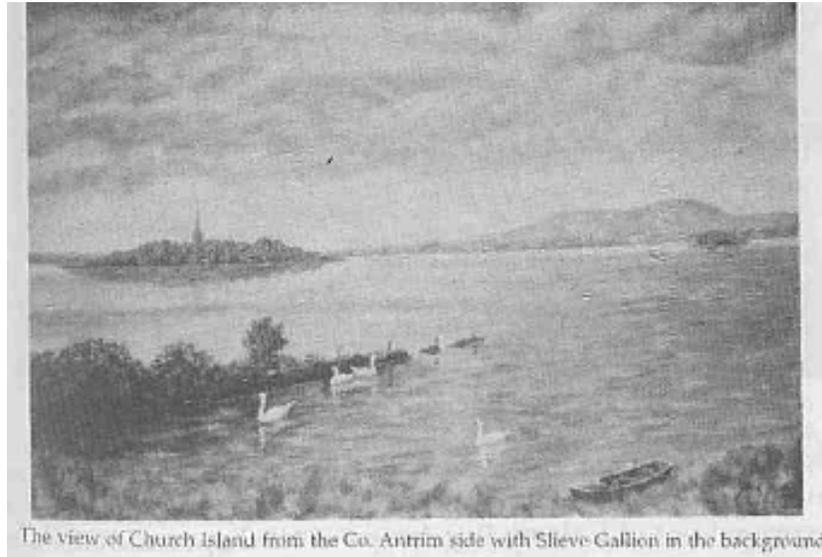
These are brief descriptions of a few clergymen who would have made the hazardous journey across the Bann weekly and in Father McCann's case, across Lough Beg to say Mass and attend to the needs of their flock in far Ballyscullion, Co. Antrim.

F. J. Biggers' hope, that, 'the old church may give way to a more suitable and beautiful one', has been realized. As the photograph shows the restored church has become surplus to requirements and the new church with its well kept hedges is both functional and beautiful.

Were he to travel through this lovely countryside today, he could not help noticing that most of the bogs that existed in his day have been cut out and the land reclaimed. The modern houses that are now in place would indicate that the strenuous existence has disappeared and he would witness a people with a spring in their step, who are eagerly looking forward to the dawn of the twenty first century.



The New Church, Ballyscullion
The New Church, Ballyscullion, Co. Antrim



The view of Church Island from the Co. Antrim side with Slieve Gallion in the background.
The view of Church Island from the Antrim side with
Slieve Gallion in the background, Co. Antrim

The Cross Keys Inn

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A pleasant surprise awaits the traveller who pays a visit to the licensed premises situated at 40 Grange Road, Ardnaglass, Toomebridge and known as the Crosskeys Inn. To get there from our present position in Duneane, continue along the road which leads us to Moneyglass Church; by the way, this building and grotto are well worth a visit. Turn right and continue along the main Toome to Ballymena Road until arriving at Grange Corner. At this point go left and on the way to the Crosskeys Inn a mile or so distant some wonderful vistas can be enjoyed. No one knows for certain the age of this building, which other than for minor repairs has remained virtually unchanged for hundreds of years. It is now a listed building and the present owners Eamon Stinson and family take pride in its appearance and decor.



The Crosskeys Inn, Co. Antrim.
The Crosskeys Inn, Co. Antrim

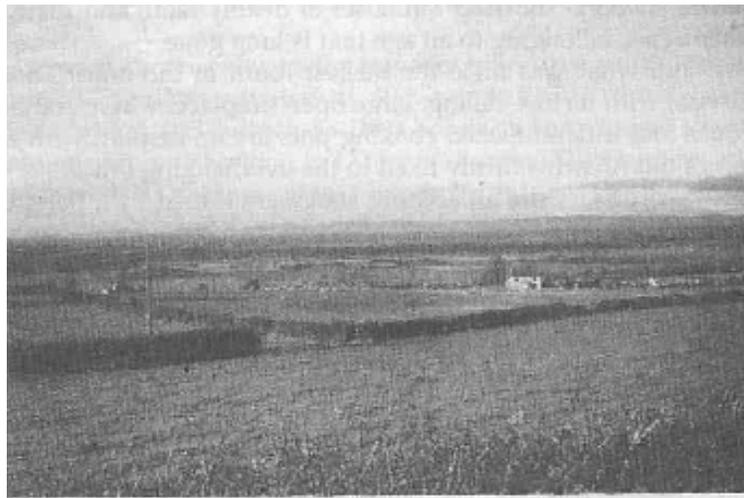
Over the years Eamon has acquired a fine collection of antiques and other items of interest, which include a selection of bottles recovered out of Galway Bay, lamps of all shapes and sizes, a shark's jawbone showing a fine set of deadly teeth and many other items, belonging to an age that is long gone.

Step into what was once the busiest room in the house, the kitchen, with its low ceiling, large open fireplace, where crane, crooks and different sized cooking pots are on display, with a pair of old firearms firmly fixed to the overhanging brace.

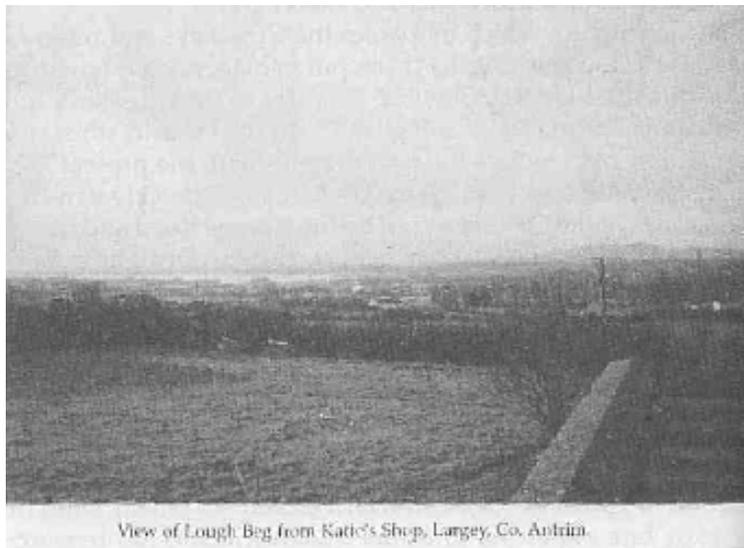
Study at your leisure an account statement issued by a Belfast liquor wholesaler on the 29th of February 1726 which shows brandy priced at ten shillings (50 new pence) for two gallons and rum priced at 5/10 (27 new pence) per gallon. How the Inn got its name no one knows. The name Crosskeys first appeared on the 16th March 1771 and has remained, though no such place name occurs in the area.

The history of coaching and the Crosskeys place in it, shows that a service between Belfast and Kilrea began about 1809. The premises being situated on what was then the main road, between Randalstown and Portglenone, it became a staging post, where passengers and mail were exchanged. In those days the local post office was also sited here.

Since then a road, which by passes the Crosskeys and referred to locally as the new line, has been put in place and is shown on the ordinance map as route B52. Nowadays the Crosskeys Inn is a popular venue for evenings of traditional music, song and craic. It is a place where the past mingles with the present and where the pressures of modern day living can quickly vanish. We now leave the Crosskeys Inn by the Grange Road and travel until we arrive at the halt sign; here we turn to our right, a short distance along we take the Kilcurry Road on our left and travel until we join the main Randalstown-Portglenone Road at Katie's shop. A stop must be made here to take in the wonderful view which includes the area along both sides of the River Bann where Culbann Brick were manufactured, Lough Neagh, Lough Beg, the Sperrin range of mountains, the River Bann and the great bog known as the 'Ferry Rough'.



View from Katie's Shop, Largey, Co. Antrim.
View from Katies Shop, Largey, Co. Antrim



View of Lough Beg from Katie's Shop, Largey, Co. Antrim.
View of Lough Beg from Katies shop, Largey, Co. Antrim

MANOR OF CASHEL PORTGLENONE

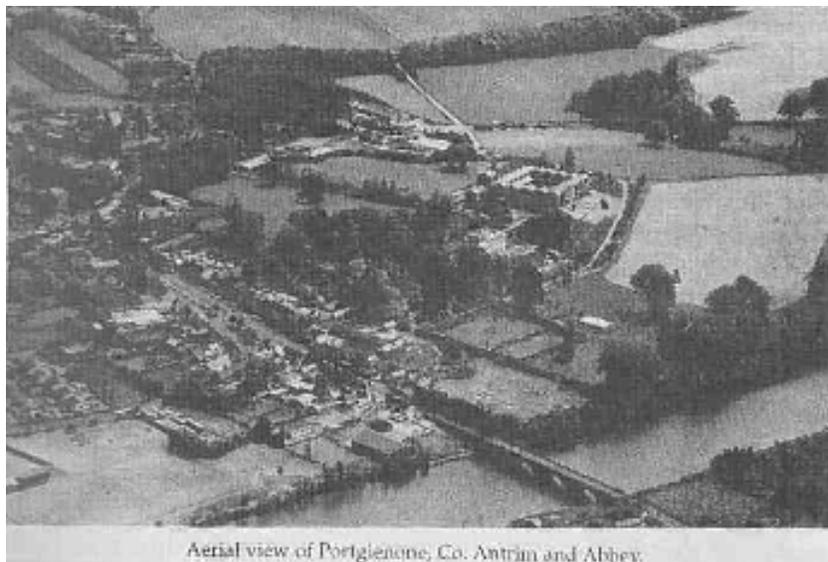
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To be a resident of that part of the Bann Valley in or adjacent to the town of Portglenone, is to be in the most delightful of areas, full of beauty, charm legend and folklore. Some of the races of people who came to Ireland would have settled in this hospitable spot. From Cesara, a niece of Noah who led her people here only to perish in the great deluge that followed. The Formorians came, then the Firbolgs who created the five Kingdoms or Provinces and where their boundaries met was considered to be the centre of Ireland. The De-Danaans were next and brought with them the Lia-Fail or the stone of destiny. They were followed by the Milesians or Scots who overcame the De-Danaans in a great battle, ably assisted by their women, who according to custom fought alongside their men folk. These people began the custom of creating Kings and were the first to use the Hill of Tara as a Royal Residence. Proof that many of these early colonisers lived along this part of the Bann Valley was revealed in the early 1850's when public works were being carried out to improve the drainage and navigation of the river, In a stratum of white clay covered by sand and pebbles, going down to a depth of from six to eighteen inches, were found a quantity of stone hatchets, bronze daggers, swords, spearheads and further down were arrowheads made from grey flint stone. These discoveries are preserved for posterity and together with ancient monuments existing in the area, testify to a way of life that was here long before the arrival of western civilisation. Tradition has it that St. Patrick on visiting Aileach of the

Derry, before recrossing the Lower Bann at Portglenone on his way to visit local chiefs in Dalriada. The area being populated, we can assume that he spent some time here preaching, converting and setting up Structures of worship that on his departure would continue to blossom into flourishing congregations.

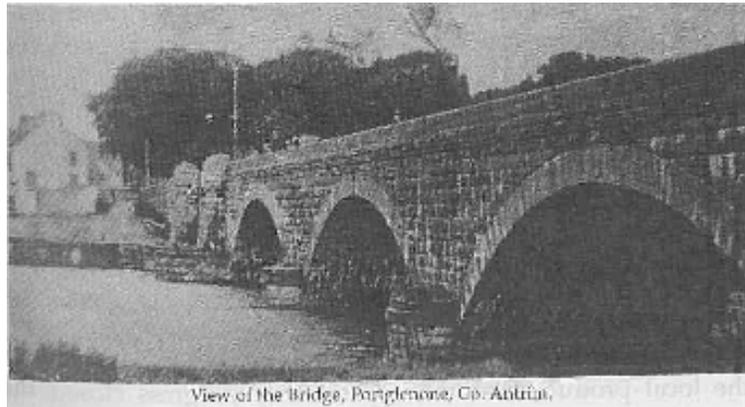
He was followed a century or so later, by another famous and saintly scholar, Saint Columcille, who also preached in Portglenone and its surrounding area. This was during a break in his journey from the island of Iona on the west coast of Scotland, to take part in the great convention of Drumceat held at Mullagh Hill close to Limavady. The hill is now part of the golf course attached to the delightful Radisson Roe Hotel, situated nearby. This great gathering which was attended by a large number of both church and civic dignitaries was called to discuss and hopefully resolve a number of problems. The three principles matters were, I. to have Scanlon, son of Prince of Ossuary, who was being held hostage by Aodh McAinmere, ruler of Ulster released unharmed. II. Introduce a law that gave girls the right to the same education as boys. III. The traveling bards and minstrels who were the main entertainers, were also the principal means of spreading news and gossip among the people. So powerful had they become that an effort was being made to curb their influence, reduce their numbers and restrict their right of passage. It was during his stay in the area that in all probability he appointed the O'Muhollands to the position as Co-keepers of Saint Patrick's Bell.

The first building of any consequence erected at Portglenone, (the Ford of Eoghan's Meadow), was the Castle built by John de Courcey in 1197 to guard the ford at this point. This was one of the four main passes into Co. Derry which had been in existence for many centuries, as the vast amount of weapons already mentioned would indicate. This building was occupied by many notable people such as, Brian Carragh O'Neill, Sir Francis Stafford, Governor of Ulster 1603, Charles Hamilton 1799 and St. John O'Neill. Dr. Alexander Protestant Bishop of Down and Connor in the early 1800's purchased a large area of land locally, together with the castle. In 1810 the Bishop had this old strong point demolished, and as the photograph shows, replaced by a more modern mansion on an elevated site some distance from the river. This house was enlarged in 1850 and on the Bishop's death had several owners including the Young's of Galgorm, Ballymena, before being purchased in 1948 by the Cistercian Order and is now referred locally as Portglenone Monastery. It is well worth a visit, as in addition to the religious services, there is a shop displaying a vast selection of items of all descriptions, a small garden centre and a cafe where light snacks may be had. This is an idyllic spot to spend an hour in quiet contemplation.



Aerial view of Portglenone, Co. Antrim and Abbey.

Aerial view of Portglenone and Abbey, Co. Antrim



View of the Bridge, Portglenone, Co. Antrim,
View of the Bridge, Portglenone, Co. Antrim

The Manor Court would have been held here, which was somewhat akin to a miniature local council. It was as much secular as ecclesiastical in its function; its jurisdiction was extensive and its authority real. All creeds had a legal right to attend meetings, it had power to assess taxes for the provision of schools, and the upkeep of roads. Applotters were appointed annually to assess taxes, together with overseers and supervisors to look after road making and repairs, along with collectors to gather in the cash and one or more constables to police the area. The Board of Guardians took over its duties in 1840, followed by the local councils, who now divested of some of their powers, are the local governing body.

The famine did not cause the same amount of hardship in this area as was the case in other parts of Ireland, nevertheless a percentage of the population, especially cottiers and very small farmers were lucky to survive the great hunger. In an effort to alleviate the problem, large numbers of men were put to work building bridges, demesne walls, road making, tree planting and draining areas liable to flooding. As a result of this hard and poorly paid labour a great many trees were planted, bridges built and many roads made.

For a period, a ferry service transported travellers across the river; on this being closed down, a wooden bridge was built. Richard Dobbs in his history of Co. Antrim in 1683, describes it as a spacious construction with seats from which locals and travellers could view the River Bann and its traffic at their leisure. This was replaced by a seven arch basalt bridge in 1824 and the present five arch structure in 1853.

As the railway by passed the area, and until the arrival of road transport caused its demise, the Port of Glenone was surely a busy place. Within living memory, a company named Cullan and Allen operated a thriving business situated to the rear of the 'Wild Duck Inn'. They imported seeds, fertiliser, coal, building materials etc. and exported potatoes, grass seed, livestock and other farm produce including Culbann Brick and the local product Diatomite. Eventually progress closed the port, and a shirt factory operated for some time in the main building; production has ceased and these premises now lie vacant and idle.

A marina is being constructed on the Antrim side of the river and when complete will be an asset to boating enthusiasts and a boost to the town's economy.

The village is a settlement on an east west axis to the bridge and the main street runs for about 60 yards before opening out into a large square which gives the town a very attractive appearance. Over the years markets and fairs were held here and the one still spoken of was the pre Christmas gathering known as 'The Margey Mor', or Big Fair. People came from the surrounding area to purchase beef, turkeys, geese and other Christmas fare in an effort to make the festive celebration a pleasant experience. These gatherings which were much enjoyed ushered in the Christmas season, but are now extinct and it is left to the large selection of shops, pubs, cafes and restaurants to supply an ever growing population with its Christmas needs.

Traditional music is well catered for in the district with over 150 children and adults receiving tuition in instrumental music under the auspices of 'Ceoiltoirí Eireann', a growing band of competent performers exists in the locality, some of which have gained All Ireland honours. Many members have appeared on television shows and give of their time entertaining patients in hospitals, convalescent homes etc. As a result they bring together all sections of our community in music and song and so keep alive the ideals of the founding members.



Saint Columcille

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As the anniversary of the Saint's death Fourteen Hundred years ago was celebrated during 1997, we feel that some facts regarding the great man should be included in this publication bearing in mind that he spent some time in the area.

The story of his birth, education and the reason for his going into exile are interesting and worth recalling. Saint Columcille's parents Felim and Eithne together with a number of the O'Friel clan, when journeying across the Gartan Hills in County Donegal rested in a valley called Altahoory Glen. Having made themselves comfortable a voice told them to move on as a group of pagan warriors was close by. They were also advised to go to the shore of nearby Lough Akilibon where they would find a stone flag and they were to carry it with them to the next resting place. Before the company departed, Eithne with the birth of her child imminent noticed one of the O'Friel's covering the blood stained spot where she had rested with bracken and rushes. Eithne assured them that their efforts were unnecessary as no one but an O'Friel would find that spot again, and when they did, what they would discover would give protection against fire or storm to dwellings in which it was kept and safe passage to travellers who had it in their possession. When the O'Friel's returned to the spot they found a beautiful white substance, which is now referred to as 'Gartan Clay' To this day only a member of the O'Friel family is privileged to collect and distribute this clay to those who believe in its protective powers.

The stone flag was carried across Gartan to the next resting spot called Dullnascro, where a Celtic Cross now stands, erected in 1911. The flag was laid on the ground and was covered with animal skins and there, among the lonely hills of Gartan the baby was born on the seventh of December 521 AD. A few days later he was baptised by an old monk called Cruitheachtan and given the name Crimthan, a word signifying 'Fox or Wolf', but long established, as a name which Kings or warriors bore in the past. Crimthan was fostered among the O'Friels of Kilmacrennan and for some time lived with the monk who baptised him. Because of his gentle and holy disposition his comrades changed his name to Colum meaning dove. Later Cille was added, because he was often to be found praying in his cell and from that day forth Crimthan became known as Columcille.

During his education he attended several places of learning, the first being Saint Finnen's at Movice,

then at a school founded by Saint Enna, at Arranmore; from here he passed to the great college of Clonard, on the Boyne, where Saint Finnen was in charge of the education of up to 3,000 students from every part of Europe. His final school was Mobhi at Finglass near Glasnevin, close to Dublin. This school was broken up as a result of the great plague that swept through Ireland in the year 544 AD.

Columcille returned to Ulster, where his cousin Prince of Ailech, gave him the oak grove of Derry where he established his first monastery. During the following fifteen years he founded monasteries at Kells, Swords, Dublin, Lambay, Tory Island and Durrow. It was at Durrow that he committed an act he was to regret. His old master Saint Finnen of Moville, had returned from a visit to Rome with a rare manuscript, a translation of the Vulgate of Saint Jerome. Finnen a true bookman, valued this document so highly that he did not wish anyone to copy it. Had Columcille controlled his impatience no doubt the Saint's enthusiasm would have become tempered by generosity, but Columcille could not wait. He wanted a copy for his new foundation, so he borrowed the book and secretly copied it, sitting up by night and working by candlelight. When Finnen became aware of this he was furious. He appealed to the High King at Tara for a decision regarding copyright violation. The King decided in favour of Finnen and his ruling was, that every cow owns her calf so every book owns its child, or copy, and so the right of copyright was established. Saint Columcille who had a temper was greatly angered by this decision.

An event which brought about his departure from Ireland took place during a Festival at Tara. The son of the King of Connaught lost his temper and killed another youth, thus violating the truce in force at this time. The murderer fled to Ulster and was placed under Columcille's protection. The High King had the boy seized and put to death. Columcille's anger again got the better of him and he raised his clan against the High King and a battle ensued which cost 3,000 lives. Legend has it, that in order to make penance he decided to leave Ireland and seek some desolate place from where he could no longer see his native land. Two years after the dreadful battle of Cuil-Dremne the Saint set out in a boat with a few companions to take the word of God to heathen places. His sorrow in leaving Ireland expresses the centuries of heartache this country has known from emigration.

On his way down Lough Foyle, Columcille is said to have composed the following words:

"Sad across Lough Foyle to me
Comes the sound of crying.
Clan of Conal, Clan of Eoghan
Both bemoan my flying.

Since I leave the Gaelic fold
Those to whom I love ever
I care not when I sleep tonight
Or if I waken ever"

Before embarking for Iona, his place of exile, he returned to his birth spot in Garten and while outstretched upon the flagstone he asked God to ease the pain of loneliness within him, such was his love for his homeland.

The significance of the Saint returning to his birthplace to seek solace for his loneliness was not lost on his people, because over the centuries, down to the present day, those who have to emigrate often come to the birthstone on the eve of their departure from Ireland to pray, so that their parting from home and loved ones will be easier to bear.

Saint Columcille died during the midnight office in front of the altar at Iona on the ninth of June 597 AD, aged 76. His relics were kept there until after many raids by the Norsemen on the island, they were brought and laid to rest with Patrick and Brigid at Downpatrick.

And to Bracknamuckley forest then rowed to pass the time.
Wild trout in rings were rising where a line curled with a fly;
Beyond the Clady's peaty run I rowed where salmon lie.

Past willows trailing branches in water rushing clear
Where a kingfisher upon its perch flew off as I drew near.
Then swallows skimmed the darkening waves as dusk fell with a chill,
And the setting sun was sinking red behind McMillan's hill.

Around me in a rising mist I could hear a stone age man
As he chipped the flint to make the tools that lie along the Bann.
And people here were singing as they watched the kiln burn,
And a wisp of smoke was rising where they made a poiteen run.

From the reeds a voice was calling---a spirit of the Bann!
It followed as I rowed away and pulled hard for the land.
A swan, they say, has powers beyond the sense of man,
On beating wings it left me cold shivers on my spine.

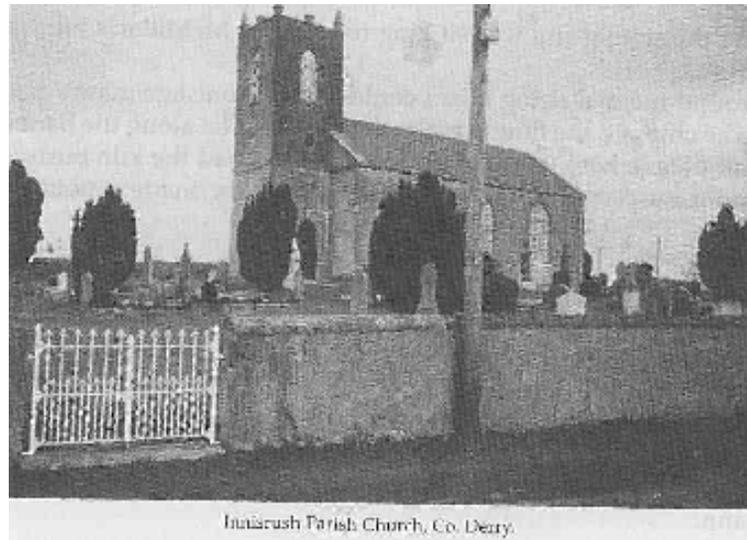
Here often from the a rising mist at dusk there glides a swan
And the creak of dipping oars is heard when night falls on the Bann.

By local poet William John McCann

Innistrush

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The traveller on his way to Innistrush leaves Portglenone by way of the bridge spanning the Lower Bann. On arriving at the hamlet of Clady the road to the right should be taken, which leads over the Clady River by way of Glenburn Bridge. At this point the road branching off to our left leads us to the village of Innistrush. Along the way is situated the local parish Church of Ireland erected by the Earl of Bristol; the outstanding feature of this building are the stained glass windows.



Innistrush Parish Church, Co. Derry.

Innistrush Parish Church, Co. Derry

The village of Innistrush took its name from an island that used to be situated in the middle of the Green-Lough. In its early days it was centred close to Innistrush House the residence of Hercules Ellis, The surrounding demesne consisted of about 80 acres of well drained land, which was partly enclosed by a stone and lime wall and partly by quick set fence or hedges. The Ellis family controlled an additional area of land and most of the business carried on here, as well as being in charge of gaugers, police and military personnel stationed hereabouts. There was a Police Barracks, butcher's and grocer's shop, a blacksmith, and premises licensed to sell beer, spirits etc. A woodworking business owned by John Clements that among its many products, manufactured good quality household furniture, some of which is still being used locally. On the industrial side, a scutch mill, bleach green and beetling engines, were all cogs in the wheel of linen production. The scutch mill and beetles were powered by

water obtained from the nearby Clady River. Electric power was also generated from this source and was used to provide light for the village. All that remains of these business ventures today is the licensed premises, with the result that the village now seems a quiet and tranquil place with no visible means of employment. Before leaving Innisrush and proceeding on to the Green-Lough, we should for the benefit of our younger readers try and explain what purpose scutching, beetling and the bleach green served in the production of linen. The fibre which was eventually turned into linen, is to be found on the outside of the flax stem which covers a hard inner core. Scutching removes this core leaving hopefully most of the fibre which is then spun and woven into cloth.

The scutching process was carried out by brave men holding fistfuls of flax stalks close to wooden blades travelling at a speed akin to the propeller of an aeroplane when in full flight. A dangerous trade! Beetling was another important and noisy process in the production of linen. Great lengths of cloth were wrapped around slowly revolving rollers while lengths of timber or beetles made from oak, beech or ash, pounded the material at a rate of up to four hundred blows per minute, hammering it to a fine glossy finish thus bringing out its natural lustre. This also helped to tighten the weave and eliminate small gaps in the cloth. Most of the attendants who spent years in these beetling houses would have ended their days 'Hard of hearing' or 'stone deaf', as no protection for ears would have been used.

The bleach green was a well manicured area of land on which the brown linen cloth was spread for an extended period of time until bleached white by the elements. This type of operation was eventually superseded by the use of chemicals. The cloth was washed and rewashed in huge machines until the proper colour was obtained.

The Green Lough

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The Greenlough from which the parish takes its name, was situated about one mile beyond the village of Innisrush on the road to Garvagh, opposite what is now the old Catholic Church. This historic Lough is supposed to have derived its name from the verdant hills which surround it. While boasting springs in its own right, most of the water therein came from an overflow out of a Lough situated on its northern side, called the Black Lough, which has now also disappeared. This strange name reflects the dark bog it was sited on.

At the end of the last century when farmers were trying to enlarge their holdings through drainage and by other means of land reclamation, both of these Loughs were drained by cutting a channel from ten to fifteen feet deep, which passed underneath the present roadway and emptied into the Clady River half a mile distant. In those days this was a difficult feat of engineering, which would have taxed the strength of an army of men, using picks, shovels, spades and a great deal of muscle power. Early in the 1800's this verdant theatre was used for various kinds of entertainment, particularly horse racing. This sport of kings was lavishly sponsored by the local gentry, who subscribed prize money, saddles, bridles etc. The race meetings were held over a period of four to five weeks on a Saturday, beginning on the first of August. The course which stretched around the entire Lough was well constructed and neatly laid out. The race goers came in their thousands from all over the North of Ireland. They used the hillocks surrounding the Lough as their vantage point, which must have transformed this arena into a very colourful place indeed. Many also enjoyed themselves at various other types of amusement in the valleys close by. The race meetings were well served by vendors of all sorts, selling liquors, fruit confectionery etc. These meetings ceased around 1814 due to quarrelling as a result of excess alcohol and party animosities. Additional facts, well documented in lore and legend concerning a 'crannog', situated in the centre of this Lough and its occupant Brian Carragh O'Neill, are of interest. The Crannog or artificial island was formed by using large oak beams and piles and holding them in position by way of mortise and pins. The interstices, when filled with a mixture of soil and gravel produced a solid floor. On this foundation Brian Carragh built a castle and reigned supreme in this island fortress until his death about 1586. Entry to this island castle was by way of raised causeway which would have touched down close to the rear of where the present licensed premises are situated. A drawbridge protected the Crannog from sudden attack from along this causeway and this entry point was strictly guarded,

the Brown, O'Neill, who founded the sept the Clan Domhnaill-Duin-Na-Bana during the fifteenth century and resided on the Co. Antrim side of the river.

Brian Carragh had seized land on the County Derry side of the Lower Bann from the O'Cahan Clan. This gave him control of territory stretching from the Ballinderry River in the south, to near Ballymoney in the north and close to Broughshane on his eastern side. A large proportion of the land on the County Derry side would have been of poor quality being made up mainly of bog, water and wood. Several commanders leading strong and well armed forces, crossed over the Bann in an effort to bring about his capture. All were unsuccessful, not due to resistance by O'Neill, but as one of these raiders, Marshal Bagenal reported, due to the fastness and strength of his country which makes it impossible to harm him there. The cost of defending this impenetrable country was affordable. A bodyguard of fifty foot and ten horse was his standing army, this force could be increased considerably when the danger threatened.

Image cultivation in those days does not appear to have been practised, or given the same gloss that is applied to its projection today. In Brian Carragh's case, he had either a poor propaganda department or cared little about his reputation. Being forced to live in such a hazardous country, and always on the defensive, may have helped to bring out the wicked side of the man causing him to rule with great severity.

One of the many stories collected by John O'Donovan in his topographical survey of the area in 1834 is worth recalling here. Brian it seems would never hang one man alone, and when he had condemned a man to death in this manner, the event would be postponed until he had found another to swing with him. He once found a man guilty and when a long period of time had passed he became anxious to complete the business. At last a stranger came to visit the Friars at a monastery nearby and Brian out riding one day viewed him. He sent a message to the Abbot requesting that he lend him the man, promising that he would send him one in return as soon as possible. The Abbot, fearing to disobey, sent the man, who was subsequently hanged alongside the convict. A short time later he found two others guilty, one of whom attracted his attention as being very handsome. Brian spoke to him saying;

"I'll forgive you, if you marry a daughter that I have" "Let's see her" replied the condemned man.

Brian sent for his daughter; but as soon as the youth set eyes on her he cried out, "Up with me! up with me!" "By the powers" said Brian "I'll not up with you, but she will go up instead"

He hanged his own daughter for her ugliness and spared the handsome youth. The young man, his life having been saved did not regain complete freedom. He was returned to the abbot in payment for the man Brian Carragh had borrowed from him previously to make up the quota for the double hanging.

These executions were carried out at a place known as 'Gallows Hill' which was situated on the opposite side of the road from the Lough on a great mound adjacent to the graveyard on its 'northern side. All evidence that this place of execution ever existed has long since disappeared, the soil having been removed and used as filling elsewhere. A stream draining the Lough now passes through where it once stood. Another of O'Donovan's stories which again entailed loss of life illustrates to perfection, Brian Carragh's trickery. "Cadhan O'Hineirghe (Koen O'Henery) a young lad of eighteen, set out one fine Sunday morning to attend Mass in Ballinascreen Church, at Straw. Along the way he was attracted to the nuts and fruit growing in abundance on the trees and bushes that lined both sides of the road. He delayed for some time gathering these delicacies that littered the ground and these he placed in a hidden spot, to be collected on his return. Having delayed longer than he had intended, on his arrival at the church he was dismayed to find that Mass had finished and the congregation blessing themselves on the way out of church. Cadhan did not enter, but returned to the spot where he had hidden the nuts and fruit. There he found a beautiful greyhound pup (Coilean Con) that had eaten all his gatherings. Cadhan was not sorry for the exchange for he was fond of dogs, especially greyhounds as in those days boys were allowed to hunt as they pleased. He brought home his prize and fed it all it wanted to eat and was amazed at its rapid rate of growth. In one week it grew to the size of a calf and began to show signs of a

ferocious temper. Cadhan, alarmed at its rate of growth refused to feed it, with the result that the hound began devouring sheep and cattle and in a short time grew to a monstrous size. When all the edible animals in the valley were eaten it turned its attention to the men, women and children, many of whom daily fell victims to its great appetite. The people became frightened and fled from the monster across the Bann for safety. Brian Carragh, in whose territory this wooded valley lay, offered as reward to any hero who would slay the monster, a grant of as much land as they could see in every direction. No one took up his offer, because the skin of the animal was impenetrable to any weapon then known to man. Cadhan, who had fed the monster in the early days, had noticed a soft spot or tubor on its belly. With this in mind he offered his services to Brian Carragh to slay the monster or perish in the attempt.

Cadhan was a spirited and hardy youth, distinguished for his dexterity in the use of spear and horse. He mounted his father's best steed and rode to the fort in the townland of Doon, where the monster always slept when its voracious appetite was appeased with the flesh and blood of human beings and cattle. He found the huge hound asleep in the fort with its bloated belly turned up towards the sun. Cadhan crept near and could see the tubor, an abnormal outgrowth of soft flesh, rise and fall as the animal slept.

Leaving his horse at a distance from the fort, he walked over and plunged his spear into the vulnerable spot; he then sprang from the fort to where his horse stood, a distance of about a mile and mounting, rode away at the speed of lightning. The space between the fort and where his horse stood is, to this day, called Leim an Fhir, (The Mans Leap). The monster howled and made two great springs after Cadhan; the first took it from the Fort to Magh Chaorthainn, where it uprooted a rowan tree and since then this spot is known as the Plain of the Rowantree. The second spring took it to Magh Chaolain, where its small guts fell out upon a stone and here the monster expired. To this day this place bears the name Magh Chaolain, the Plain of the Small Guts, and the capital of that district bore the same name, until the Drapers Company built a town there and re-christened it, Draperstown.

Cadhan, having accomplished his task, returned in great spirit hoping to claim his prize. Carragh, being a scheming trickster, conveyed him to a hollow not far from the foot of Slieve Gallion called Fallagh Eireann (hiding or covering of Ireland) and ordered him to stand in the very bottom of it.

"I have promised to give anyone who would slay the monster as much land as he could see around him in every direction". Cadhan looked around, but saw nothing except the sky and the top of Slieve Gallion, which belonged to the O'Henerys in any case. "Have this if you wish" said O'Neill before departing to a safer place". Cadhan who had risked his life for nothing received no sympathy for his effort. The local Christian belief was that when he collected the nuts and fruit he had profaned the Sabbath Day. The local Parish Priest and all the pious people in the valley, declared that he deserved to be treated worse for having neglected to hear Mass on a Sunday. They also affirmed, and it was firmly believed, that it was the devil who had left this infernal greyhound in the place of the fruit (for everything collected on Sunday, except donations to erect houses of worship, belongs properly to 'Old Nick') and God suffered him to do so and also suffered this evil to befall the Glen in order that young men might plainly see the danger of stopping away from divine service.

John O'Donovan records that a Dr. McRory of Kilrea and Old Harry McGuiggan of Tigarvil and Old O'Kelly of White Water, all told him this story with great gravity.

"The Doctor believes as much as I do, but all the rest, tell it as historic fact. Dr. McRory thinks that it must be founded on some amount of fact, but I think that it is a legend and fabricated, to account for the name of the district and some places in it".

Local lore has it that Brian, the Oppressor and destroyer of many people's lives within the large area controlled by him, met his end at the hands of his own people, who on besieging his castle, captured both him and his two sons, who were hanged on the gallows where so many people, on receipt of his justice, had ended their days.

Looking out from our vantage point across what used to be a Lough, with a crannog and castle situated

in its centre, it is difficult to imagine all the activities that took place here, from hangings to horse racing and the battles waged in an effort to hold onto land and a way of life. All is quiet here now, the great' fastness that was of such benefit to Brian Carragh and others in helping to keep the stranger at bay, are long gone. The land has been reclaimed and drained and the area now supports a thriving community.

Long may it remain so.

Clady

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It is now time to return through Innisrush to the hamlet of Clady, a cross-roads settlement close to Glenburn House. The village has both primary and secondary schools, a modern church of architectural quality, with a parochial hall close by. Several shops and other business premises, an up to date licensed premises where food and other refreshments may be obtained. A first class sports complex and a recently opened artist's supply shop and art gallery where a relaxing hour may be spent, viewing the interesting selection of pictures on display.

The Banks of Clady

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Around the banks of Clady, a lovely place to dwell,
With banks and braes and bonny glens, it's hard to bid farewell.
I remember when in childhood I sported round it's glens
With bonny lads and lasses, we were always best of friends.

But now those days are over, and the time is drawing near,
When I will leave this beautiful spot the ocean wide to steer.
But I'll not forget my native home when in a foreign land,
Nor the bonny Clady river that flows into the Bann.

I am going to America my fortune there to try,
And leave the banks of Clady; my comrades all, good-bye;
My mother told me to be wise and be an upright man,
And not forget her grey old locks when in a foreign land.

She told me to remember the days of long ago,
When she brought me to this river to see it ebb and flow;
But now I'm on Columbia's shore and leave her for a while,
And bid adieu to Clady banks and lovely Erin's Isle.

And when I land on Colombia's shore and meet the neighbours there,
I'll tell them of old Clady banks that are so rich and fair;
I'll tell them of the Corner which is now almost a town,
With McErlean's grand houses, no better can be found.

I'll tell them of the factories and the industry that's there,
Driven by Clady river that gives Kane's mill a share.
So, good-bye friends and comrades, I am finished with my song,
I hope you will all pray that I will keep away from wrong.

And when I am in America and at my daily toil,
I'll not forget these Clady banks where Glenburn waters boil;
Nor my own darling sweetheart that I have left behind,
May God protect and guard her until we are combined.

This poem was composed by Henry Lynn and was first published in 1937 by the Northern Constitution and permission has been kindly given by his son Colm for it to be included in this publication.

St Patrick's Bell

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On taking our leave of the Green- Lough and returning through the hamlets of Innisrush and Clady, before proceeding to the "Ferry Flough" and "New Ferry" the traveller might consider visiting the area where it is recorded that the world famous St. Patrick's Bell, enclosed in its equally famous bejewelled shrine, lay hidden for years.

It is recorded in the Annals of Ulster that the Bell existed in the year 552. An inscription on the shrine shows that it was made to protect the Bell at the expense of Donal McLoughlin, King of Ireland, for Donal McAmalgaid, Primate of Armagh, at the close of the eleventh century. The names of the artists who made the shrine are also shown. From the expensive materials so profusely lavished on it, it is clear that the Bell, the principal object of veneration, had been viewed as a precious relic of antiquity. The Bell is rough in form and workmanship. The shrine, is in gold, silver and precious stones and is firmly enclosed around the Bell, showing the great veneration its worshippers had for the memory of the Saint to whom it once belonged. So much so, that it was not to be exposed to the touch or even sight of the ordinary persons. The Bell and its custodians always played an important role during the inauguration of the O'Neills on the Leac-na-Righ (Chair of Coronation) at Tullyhogue near Cookstown.

Saint Coim-cille had recovered the Bell together with a goblet and a Bible from St. Patrick's tomb. On leaving his beloved Derry he entrusted these relics for safe keeping to the O' Mulhollands and the O'Meallians families. The O'Mulholland family, the name signifies the servant of Colmcille, (O'Maoil Chlainn) were a very old Sept or Clan, who controlled great areas of land in South Derry and South West Antrim. Their stronghold was probably situated in the townland of Shanemullagh near where the Village of Castledawson now stands.

This ancient family lost control of their lands at the time of the Plantation of Ulster, to one Sir Thomas Phillips who had been appointed Governor of County Coleraine, now Co. Derry. Phillips had already received large grants of land around Limavady and in Co. Antrim.

He retained his recently acquired grant of land in South Derry for a short time only selling on the townlands of Annaghmore, Aghrim, Ballymaguigan, Creagh, Derrygarve, Letrim, Tamniarn and Shanemullagh to Thomas Dawson, thus in 1633, creating the Dawson Estate. Having lost their lands, together with the a way of life that had existed for centuries, with the Brehon Laws, the Mulhollands were scattered and in 1659 Bryan Mulhollands was residing in Drumard, Cormac in Ballymacpeake and Bernard in Mayogall. These treasures are likely to have passed from one family to the other until the death of Bernard Mulholland in Mayogall in 1758. They emerged again from hiding in the early 1800's, in the custody of Henry Mulholland, the last of the hereditary keepers. Henry had studied for the priesthood but had not entered holy orders, becoming instead a schoolteacher in the village of Edenduff, Carrick.

On his death bed he sent for one of his former pupils Adam Mc Clean, then a successful businessman in Belfast, who had shown him great kindness and support in his old age. He bequeathed to him all he valued, a box, buried in the garden nearby. When it was unearthed it was found to contain a Bedell's Bible printed in the Gaelic language, St. Patrick's Bell and the shrine. These relics Adam Mc Clean treasured for the rest of his life, and on his death, his son sold them to a Dr. Todd of Trinity College, Dublin. Subsequently Dr. Todd's executors sold them to the Royal Hibernian Academy for the sum of £500 which was raised by public subscription and a government grant. A listing on the title page of the Bible helps to prove that it emerged from hiding out of the townland of Mayogall. It shows that Henry's father was Eamon who was residing in Co. Antrim when the entry was made in 1750. Another entry shows Eamon's father to have been called Bernard and his death is recorded as having taken place in Mayogall during 1758.

It is a remarkable fact that although for many years in destitute circumstances, the custodians of these priceless treasures never thought of selling them for financial gain. On the contrary in order to ensure their safety they were in the habit of burying them in a strong oak box, making sure it was removed when they changed abode.

Henry Mulholland died in the village of Edenduff-Carrick, an O' Neill! stronghold and naval port, which formerly existed within the grounds of the present O' Neill estate. He lies buried in a graveyard close to the castle: of the little village there is no trace. These treasures are now in safe keeping with the National Museum, Kildare Street, Dublin. Followers of St. Patrick are deeply indebted to the O'

Mulholland family, especially to the last custodian, for ensuring that these relics of Ireland's Patron Saint survived.

Culbann Brick

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We now leave Clady by the Glenone Road and continue on across the main Bellaghy to Portglenone Road at Smithstown Cross-roads. The journey is now through a lovely rural countryside of neat and well kept homes, populated mainly by McErlanes', Quinns', Dohertys', Cassidys' and McCanns'. This part of the Bann Valley that lies between the New Ferry and Portglenone, has had a long tradition of manufacturing a building material known as 'Culbann Brick'. A large number of families who lived alongside both sides of the river were involved in their production. This would have been somewhat akin to the business of growing and marketing cabbage plants that used to be carried on by farmers in the neighbouring parish of Lavey as a means of supplementing their income.

Mick Graham who lives on the Co. Derry side of the River Bann close to Portglenone bridge and who worked in the brickfields as a young man gives an interesting description of the effort required from teams of workers engaged in their production.

Bricks were made during the spring and summer months and a team of six people worked at each location. The white clay or Diatomite (see more about this subject later in the book) was dug and placed in the mixing hole, with an amount of blue clay obtained locally plus water being added. Two men with trouser legs rolled up and barefoot entered the pit and began the job of tramping the clays until they became a fine putty. This was called 'The Sour'. The mixture was then transported by 'The Wheeler Out' to a table where the bricks were formed. This was a wooden bench raised at one end, where the person known as the 'Striker Up' was positioned and who formed the 'sour' into lumps the size of a brick before rolling them down the bench to where the 'Moulder' was stationed (who in most cases were women). This person dusted sand over the lumps before forcing them into moulds one at a time. The mould was then carried out to the spreadfield by 'The Layer-off'.

On the brick being freed and laid on the ground to dry, the empty mould was returned into a tank of water close by the moulding table. The 'Layer-off' then picked up another load and so it went on until the day's quota had been reached. The team were paid a total of £1=0=0 when the day's production had reached 2000 brick plus 200 extra to cover rejects.

The bricks when semidry were built into low type walls called 'Hacks'. When they became firmer, the walls were raised in height into what was known as 'Double Hacks'. The next stage in the process was building them into cubes, each one containing from ten to thirty thousand brick. These were called kilns and could have measured from fifteen to forty feet in length by fifteen feet in width and were from eight to twelve feet in height. These stacks would have openings built in from end to end on the narrow side known as 'Eyes', the larger the kiln the more eyes were required. It was here the fires that transformed the clay into solid brick burned. Before firing commenced, the kiln was sealed by using a thin measure of the 'sour' as a plaster. A ten eye kiln would have five men constantly feeding turf into the furnaces. Two horse loads of peat were used in the firing every 1000 brick, which meant a considerable amount of time being spent in the bog cutting and harvesting this valuable asset. Most of the brick were purchased by local dealers and sold on to merchants in nearby towns and further afield, especially in Ballymena. They retailed at 30 shillings (£1-50) per thousand and a horse's cart carried a load of 500 brick. Production ceased in the middle of the 1930's; a more superior type of brick being mass produced by modern machinery caused their demise. Nevertheless they had their day and helped the local economy when a boost was needed. They were used extensively throughout the area and are still to be seen when buildings are being demolished.

The Ferry Flough

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left will lead us to the New Ferry . Along this road is to be found the Bulrush Peat works and what is left of a raised bog known locally as the Ferry Rough. As a walk through what was once a vast expanse of bogland is no longer feasible, a description of what it was like to harvest peat there in my young day may suffice to keep memories alive.

I was surprised, how a question posed during a recent conversation with a local person, Colm Scullion suddenly switched my trend of thought in a different direction.

"John, did you ever work at harvesting peat in the Ferry Flough?" he enquired.

"Yes, I was employed there during the summer for a few years in the 1940's" I replied, while being surprised at how quickly details of an experience that should have been long forgotten came flooding back to mind. I was soon mentally back in that vast expanse of bogland, where row after row of turf stretched out almost as far as the eye could see. I remembered it as a place of calmness and peace. Here silence reigned, broken only by the screech of snipe and the curlew's cry. On being questioned as to the amounts of peat harvested and for what purpose used, while having a cup of tea I related to him my experience there over half a century ago.

The bog known as the ' Ferry Fiough' is situated in the fertile valley of The Lower Bann, a few miles east of Bellaghy Village and in the townland of Ballyscullion close to the New Ferry It was along the road leading to the Ferry that one of the few entry points to the bog was located. The United Kingdom Peat Moss and Litter Company Ltd. who had also opened up bogs at Ballynease, Kellswater, Tyanee and here in Ballyscullion, for the purpose of manufacturing sphagnum peat moss which had several uses. Here the company erected a small office, still standing, and a "torture" machine known as the grinding mill, now occupied by Mawhinney Engineering.

My day began by leaving home each morning at eight am and cycling a distance of six miles to this place of back bending labour. As there was no usable water to be had in this expanse of wetland, a supply had to be carried in daily by each individual. Water was obtained at a house occupied by a family by the name of McCarroll, who resided at the junction of New Ferry and Ballynease Road. It says a great deal about this family's kindness that they allowed up to forty men onto their premises daily not to mention that the water containers were stored in a hedge close to their front gate each night.

From the water point to where we parked our bicycles was a journey of about three quarters of a mile. While travelling this distance the cycle was controlled by one hand only, the other one being used to ensure that none of the precious liquid was lost along the way. During a warm spell of weather the length of the working day was dependent on the quantity of water brought in each morning. Another factor was controlling the urge to quench your thirst and not to overdo tea drinking. The newcomer learned quickly that the can containing the water must be stored in a place where it could be observed at all times, otherwise the contents had a habit of mysteriously evaporating.

The bog had been opened up by cutting deep drains which flowed in an easterly direction and emptied into the River Bann. When the first was completed the drains were repeated at 120 yards intervals, a gap of 15 yards was left before the next one was made. The process was repeated down the bog. The 15 yard gap was used as storage space where the turf when saved was stacked. It was from within the 120 yard areas that the peat was taken.

During the late autumn or early spring a face of bog was cut in a northerly direction along this distance to a depth of three feet by 2 feet wide. The turf sods measured six inches by six inches and about two feet in length. When dug they were in a soggy state and were laid out in two rows abreast of each other, four turf deep. In the cutting process they were packed tightly together and having to withstand a certain amount of frost they fused into an almost solid mass that made pulling them apart a tiresome chore.

The 120 yard bank, or drain, was supposed to contain a certain number of tons of turf, for which we

were paid, at the rate of one shilling and sixpence per ton. We were paid this for footing 'the turf. This was when you had wrestled the turf free from the fused rows and five or six of them were grouped together, standing in the shape of a crow's foot. God help anyone who was caught laying a turf lengthwise on the ground and standing others around it. The punishment was having the boss-man entertain himself by demolishing your handiwork with his boot. Following this the turf were 'turn footed' before being built into small stacks. This was known as 'clamping'. The final phase was 'big stacking' which meant carrying the turf from within the 120 yard area by hand crates out onto the 15 yard gaps. They were built into large, neat stacks which were thatched to enable them to withstand winter storms.

A narrow gauge bogie line ran from the mill along a main artery up through the centre of the bog. At each 15 yard gap a branch line went up between the rows of stacks. In season each morning, teams of six men pushed two of the empty bogies up the main line. On arriving at the branch they would drag a large half inch steel plate that had been coated with grease on to the track. This acted as a turntable and points. It was a simple enough task to turn the empty wagon around and get it safely on to the new line. A much more difficult task awaited on the return journey when two men had to manoeuvre a loaded bogie onto the turntable and redirect it safely on to the main line. Failure to get it right the first time meant derailment with the result that a great deal of unpaid time was lost. When the turf arrived at the mill it was fed by hand into a machine, with an insatiable appetite, that pulverised the peat it into a fine powder, which was bagged and stacked in large piles awaiting transportation by lorry to the railway station at Toomebridge or directly to Belfast for shipment.

The working conditions in the grinding shed were atrocious. There were no means of extracting the fine peat dust and it was suffocating, especially at the bagging end of the operation. It hung within the shed in a thick cloud before settling on everyone and everything. I laboured in this place for a few weeks and on arriving home each evening my clothes and body would be saturated in this fine brown dust; body sweat seemed to act as an adhesive which meant that hard scrubbing had to be endured before this dust was removed.

Working in the turf bog has long been renowned for creating an appetite for food and the 'Ferry Rough' was no exception. In those days few of the people working there would have owned a timepiece with the result that our stomachs decided when it was time to eat. Yet for some unknown reason no one ever wished to chicken out and be the first to light a fire. Eventually the pangs of hunger would overcome someone and smoke could be seen ascending from a point in the bog. This acted like a factory horn, announcing mealtime, soon members of each group would quickly congregate around a blazing turf fire, boiling strong tea in blackened tin cans.

During and after the meal the war situation and other topics would be discussed. The local football scene caused great debate and argument among the supporters of different teams in the group. On days when there were no worthwhile events to discuss, yarn spinning would be indulged in, with every word uttered sworn as the truth. These were carefree interludes and one of the benefits of being engaged in piece work was that they could be made to last for whatever length of time one wished, as wasted time was your problem not the Company's. Some of the people who would enliven these gatherings were Pat Toner, Jim, John and Paddy Graffin, Terry Mulholland, Dan and Micky McPeake, Paddy Godfrey, Francie and Johnnie Regan, Charlie Carmichael, James Devlin, Mick McNally and last but not least that great yarn spinner Charlie Molloy.

Facilities, that a labour force today take for granted, were nonexistent. There were no toilet facilities or cooking utensils provided; the turf that fuelled the fires for tea making were provided free. As we know water was not laid on or means of shelter supplied. When the need arose to use the toilet, you took yourself off to a low lying area below the horizon line. All the peat harvested was by man power alone. No mechanical power other than the electric motors that propelled the grinding mill were used. It was a system of employment that suited my temperament and although the labour may have been muscle binding and backbreaking, men were given the opportunity to earn money which in those days was a scarce commodity.

Substantial amounts of peat were extracted from this bog, especially during the years of the Second World War. Nevertheless as it was taken from such a shallow depth and with the top sod containing the heather and other vegetation being replaced, little permanent damage was caused. Half a century later memories that remain are of comradery, fresh clean air and hard work in pleasant surroundings.

The New Ferry West

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Half a mile further along this narrow road we come to another crossing point on the River Bann called the New Ferry. Here is to be found ample car parking space and a shaded picnic area, where the traveller can rest awhile, away from the stresses and strains of modern day living, or perhaps enjoy a stroll along the river bank, listening to the sound of lapping water as the river glides gently by on its way to the sea.

During long summer evenings and especially at weekends this can be a busy and at times noisy place, as several varieties of motorised water sports are enjoyed by local enthusiasts. Fishing is another popular pastime enjoyed by visiting and local anglers. A large number of stands and shelters have been provided down river between here and Portglenone. Licences and permits, if required, can be purchased prior to arrival at Huestons Footwear specialists, Main Street, Castledawson. Angling is well catered for in this area, especially along this section of the Lower Bann.

During a sojourn at this idyllic spot it is possible to reflect on years gone by when an actual ferry operated here. The owner was a Miss Hamill, who lived in a sumptuous residence close by (now demolished). In those days a 'Walk on Ferry' boat, which accommodated two horses and their loaded carts, was in use. When the toll fee had been paid, the horsemen were responsible for manoeuvring this clumsy vessel across the river. This was achieved by hauling on chains attached to each bank, a tiresome operation requiring great physical strength in ordinary weather. During winter or when the river was in spate, or with a strong south westerly wind blowing out of Lough Beg, it took firm nerves and teamwork to keep the loaded ferryboat from breaking loose and drifting down river towards Portglenone. All types of farm produce including livestock and turf would have passed over the river via the ferry on its way to the weekly market in Ballymena.

There was also a passenger ferry conducted by a man named Philip Sexton, who lived nearby. This means of crossing the river was less stressful on travellers, as the person collecting tolls rowed the boat to the other side. Both means of crossing the river ceased operating many years ago and our informant, Hughie Kilpatrick, surmises that the development of the petrol engine was probably the main cause of the ferry's demise.

During the second world war the American Army put pontoon bridges across the river. These exercises required great numbers of men and large fleets of vehicles, to transport the pontoons, bridging equipment and the other materials required. On each occasion when the bridge was in place a large convoy of assorted vehicles would pass along it to test its durability. With the narrow roads hereabouts and the limited amount of space available at the riverside, this would have been a congested area during the time involved in carrying out the operation. While the bridge building was taking place aircraft (Fighter and Fighter Bomber) would spend hours carrying out dummy strafing runs at low level. These demonstrations of military power were very exciting, especially to young boys, who in those days were still living in an era that had not escaped from the age of the horse and cart and where motor transport had barely made its mark on the countryside.

Local history records that the Earl of Bristol, Bishop of Deny (more about this flamboyant person later) had in the 1790's planned to build a bridge over the River Bann at this point. Had he been successful it may have been a vital link in increasing the prosperity and trade of Bellaghy and the surrounding area. A short distance down river the visitor will notice a number of buildings, now in a dilapidated state. These were used by a company who excavated and processed a white clay found along the banks of the Lower Bann. The name of this special clay was Diatomite, which is to be found in very few places throughout the world. When its impurities were removed it was dried in brick form and transported by

boat to Toomebridge.

On the opposite bank, car parking and space for picnicking have also been provided, and as the photograph shows, a compact clubhouse catering for members needs had also been provided. Sad to relate, this building was destroyed by fire sometime ago.

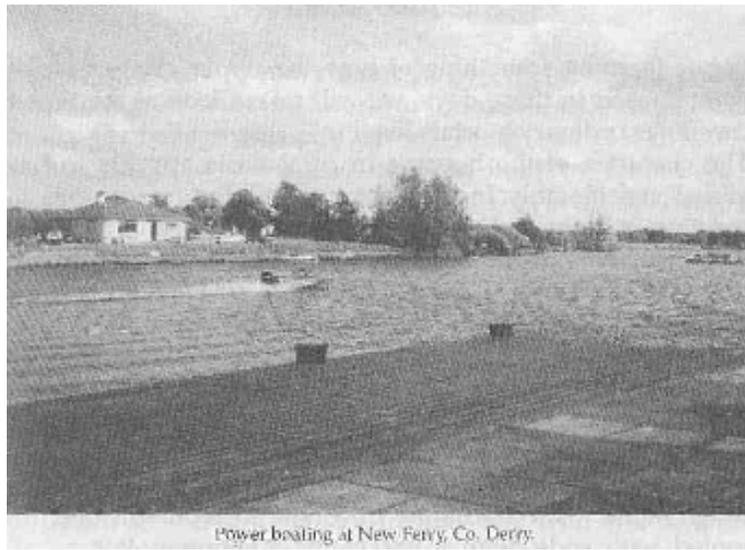
A short distance beyond this point was situated a hamlet of houses known as Ferrytown. There lived a close knit community of about twenty families; they existed without most of the amenities taken for granted today, other than a grocer shop run by a Mr. Murray. The village and its people disappeared quietly some years ago, was how one local resident described its going. A number of the inhabitants were employed by the Diatomite Company and its closure may have hastened the village's demise. Lack of amenities, such as running water, electricity and sewerage, may have also helped in closing its doors.

Very few boats of any size would pass through here now, on their way into or out of Lough Neagh, other than the pleasure cruiser 'The Maid of Antrim.' This elegant vessel operates out from the Antrim Marina, providing, afternoon and evening cruises on the Lough in season. Every fortnight there is an excursion across Lough Neagh passing through the lock-gates at Toome, and through Lough Beg. Here the traveller gets close to the vast variety of bird life to be seen, not to mention the marvellous scenery to be viewed from the top deck of the boat. The trip continues through lovely countryside to Portglenone where a stop is made before returning to Antrim. Twice during the summer, weather permitting a cruise goes all the way to Coleraine. A stop for lunch is made at Portglenone and as the journey is an all day affair passengers return to Antrim by bus. This is an excellent way to see some of the sights of the entire Lower Bann Valley and is highly recommended.

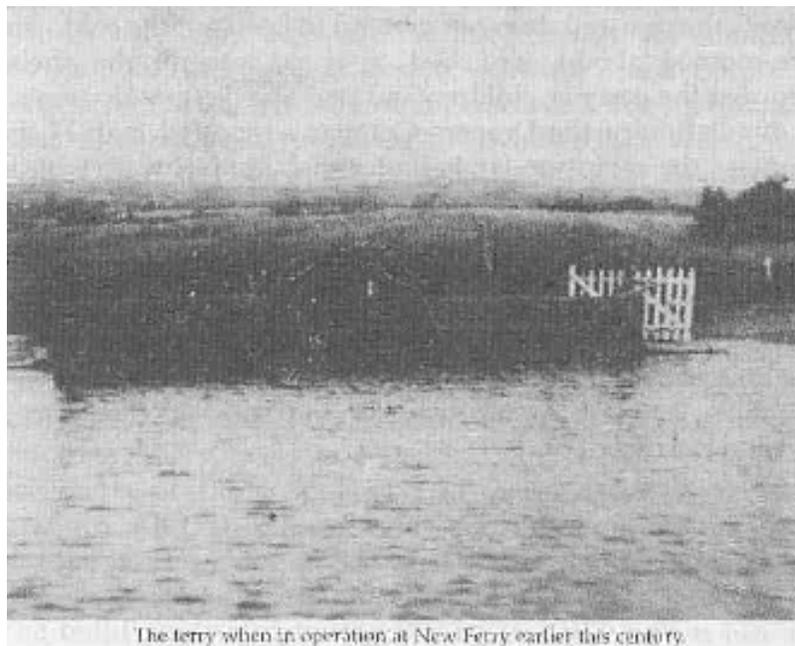


Ferry Town which disappeared overnight in the 1960's.

Ferry Town which disappeared overnight in the 1960s, Co. Derry



Power boating at New Ferry, Co. Derry.
Power boating at New Ferry, Co. Derry



The ferry when in operation at New Ferry earlier this century.
The ferry when in operation at New Ferry earlier this century, Co. Derry

Hovels

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Before learning something of how the upper class of society were housed in those days, we will take a look at the type of dwellings ordinary mortals lived in.

The character of the housing in rural areas appears to have varied considerably in different parts of the province in the early years of the eighteenth century. In 1729 Dean Swift wrote that the cabins of the Scots Irish in Ulster were as dirty and miserable as those of the wildest Irish, while reports of the London Companies show that towards the end of the century, housing conditions in parts of Co. Derry were deplorable. The hovels or Irish Cabins as they were known, featured in a detailed description given by William Tite in a report he presented to the Irish Society in 1836. He referred to them as a shed about 18 feet by 14 feet or perhaps less, built of sods or rough stone, with a window or a hole to represent one; it is roofed with sods, with a basket for a chimney. It generally admits the rain and does not pretend to keep out the cold. This one-roomed abode, wretched as it is, was all the shelter afforded the parents, children and perhaps the grandparents.

A deputation of the Drapers Company reported in 1817 that many of the cabins on lands under their control were without any means of letting in light, had a hole in the roof for a chimney, while in others the door served as an exit for smoke. Today we are pleased to state, the rural community enjoys excellent living conditions. This improvement has taken place during the latter half of this century; until then the majority of the houses had the thatched roof, bad drawing chimneys, were without electricity, or piped water and still had the "duhall" outside their front door.

Great Houses

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In the eighteenth century some large expensive and palatial mansions were built in Ulster. For instance Castle-coole House in Co. Fermanagh was erected in 1788/89 and cost £54,000, a fortune in those days. The mansion built by John Cole at Florencecourt also in Co. Fermanagh in 1764 is considered to be one of the noblest mansions in Ulster and to represent Mid Georgian architecture at its best.

Another great house builder was one Frederick Augustus Harvey, Earl of Bristol, who was created Bishop of the Derry Diocese in 1768. Today, his sanity might be called into question, because of his insatiable appetite for building expensive and fabulous mansions, not to mention churches, steeples, obelisks and statues.

It should be remembered here, that at this period, the province of Ulster, as in many parts of Ireland, had wild and beautiful scenery and large tracts of heavily wooded land. This man had come to own many acres and indulged his taste for building to the full, so much so that despite drawing a salary from his diocese of £20,000 per annum, it is recorded that he was often unable to afford to purchase the wine which would have helped him to digest his dinner. In addition to his other building programmes, he built two magnificent mansions in Co. Derry. Downhill was started in 1777 and was modelled on Blenheim Palace, Sir Winston Churchill's home in England. The Palace at Downhill was erected in territory said to have been entirely deserted before building began. A large number of peasants' houses had been built on the estate by the Bishop, but when De-Latocnaye (a Frenchman who published a book describing his travels in Ireland) visited here in 1796 the occupants of these cottages had never set eyes on their landlord. All that remains today are some ruins of the palace and the much photographed Mussenden Temple perched on a cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean.

The building erected by the Bishop in Ballyscullion has also disappeared; a brief description of this enterprise may help the reader to form a picture, of what had to be one of the finest houses ever constructed in Co. Derry.

It was while sitting astride a horse on the summit of a hill which overlooks Bellaghy Village and the surrounding countryside, that he selected the site for his next extravaganza. The venture was to become known as the ' Bishop's Folly 'and the hill is now known as the ' Folly Brae'.

The site chosen was located in the townland of Ballyscullion and overlooks Lough Beg.

Design of the palace was inspired by a house of similar style built by John Plaw on Bell Isle, Windermere, England. It was modelled on the Parthenon in Greece and was massive when compared to the Irish Cabin which measured 18x 14 feet. It was 350 feet long by 100 feet deep.

The dome was roofed with glass and was supported and surrounded by 22 Pilasters of the Corinthian order, fluted and 28 feet high. The portico rested on 6 columns 30 feet high of the same Corinthian order. The entrance hall was 24 feet square, with a double corkscrew staircase of Portland stone and lighted from the dome above and was ornamented by admirable statues of Apollo of Belvedere and the Vatican Mercury; the busts of Cicero, Demosthenes, Seneca and Pericles, all of fine statuary marble, and were placed in niches in and around the Hallway. A number of busts and statues were also in niches, along the stairs and lobbies.

The drawing and dining rooms measured 36 feet by 24 feet, the library 67 feet by 24 feet and were

located on the first floor. The Bishop when writing to a friend described it thus:

I have one room called Augusta to which the Duchess of Brunswick has been so good as to contribute the chief furniture; it is 67 feet long by 24 feet wide by 24 feet high with an admirable copy of Elegant Guidos Aurora in the centre - this room is a jewel and commands such a view of wood, water, steeple, spires, hills and mountains as are imaginable. A bridge of nine arches built by Lord O'Neill fronts my centre window and from one of the windows I see a wood of ancient full-grown oaks, for which I gave the proprietor £1000. All this amuses me from a distance of 3000 miles as much as if I were on the spot."

(The bridge referred to would be the one at Toome and was built with stones out of the castle there.)

"Sometimes as now I can write, talk and think of nothing else, as my weekly bills amount to £130, all spent among masons, carpenters, stonecutters, limeburners, all to the most valuable and industrious part of the community."

All the rooms referred to were ornamented with fine paintings as were a number of bedrooms, which were on the second floor. In 1796 he purchased from a Mr. Hope in Amsterdam, paintings to the value of, £3,700; this amount of money spent as he said, left him very little else to buy in the way of art. From a small room on either side of the hallway, corridors led to two picture galleries; they each measured 82 feet by 25 feet, one to house the paintings of the Italian school, the other those of the Flemish school. Two large square offices each 110 feet are to be ranged in front of the galleries.

All these are to be faced with cut stone, from the quarries near Dungiven. This stone was used because it resembled Portland stone in colour and would have been much cheaper to obtain. The offices will be joined to the house by a semi-circular colonnade like that at St. Peter's in Rome only closed, because of the climate. The mention of the statue Apollo Belvedere is interesting. The Bishop was one of the very few people allowed to have casts or copies of this sculpture made. But then as he wrote to Lady Erne in 1777:-

"The Pope has granted me permission to take a model from the Apollo - a favour rarely granted but to crown heads - I suppose His Holiness is so accustomed to consider mitred ones on a footing with them, that in my case he made no distinction, I will venture to say that few heretics are on as good a footing with him."

One could go on and on in trying to build up a picture of this great edifice. We will end by quoting from one of the last descriptions to survive. It was recorded by a man named William Blacker of Carrickblacker, Co. Armagh, after a visit there in 1796, and he wrote:

"At the time I speak of, the house appeared as if dropped from the clouds into a large field completely in a state of nature. I have already mentioned the building was a rotunda crowned with a noble dome, the top or apex of which was of glass giving light to the interior. A handsome balustrade surrounded the lower part of the dome. The frieze around the building below the balustrade contained a quotation in large and conspicuous raised letters adapted from Virgil's Georgics, of which this is a translation:

'Here is a verdant plain;
I will place a temple of marble
Beside the waters, where the vast
Bann strays in sluggish windings
And clothes his banks with tender reeds.'

The design of the building was by a Michael Shanaghan of Cork and it cost £80, 000 to erect, a colossal sum in those days. We will end this short history of the great house, the Bishop and his follies, by quoting from a letter written to Lady Erne in March 1787 in which he describes his views from the house:

The situation is beautiful and salubrious beyond all description, yet I must say something of it. Imagine to yourself then, my dear Mary, a globular hillock of gravel carpeted with green grass that declines at the end of half a mile to the banks of the River Bann or rather Lough Beg, the small lake; this Lough Beg terminates at both ends of the River Bann -southward which you may be sure is the front of my house. The river again, after being decorated by Mr. O'Neill's new bridge at Toome, ends in Lough Neagh; this is finally bounded by the immense ridge of the conical mountains of Mourne - such is my prospect from the south. On the east which can be seen from my eating room, the River Bann with a background of the Antrim Hills, together with a few hundred acres of my estate, and a bridge I am on the point of building will serve to amuse our eyes when we are not using our knives and forks. On the western side, we have County Derry, a wooded county with an elegant village and mansion of Mr. Dawson together with a serpentine river of two miles length, which will decorate my view from the drawing room. (The view towards the north was not mentioned.) Going on he added;

"I propose, dear Mary, if you ever write to Lady Londonderry press her to recommend my spire at Magherafelt to her husband who has the chief property in the parish - she reproached me in a letter sometime since, with not having solicited her influence - the church is directly in front of my best room about three miles distant and if the spire is made a handsome one - will greatly enliven my prospect, put it to her - she is much inclined and will do the business if she can".

A tower and spire were added to the church in 1790, but no additional decorations, to make the spire more handsome are recorded. Imagine the height his best room must have been above the ground to enable the church in Magherafelt to come into view.

The Bishop, in fact, disliked Ballyscullion. Arthur Young a noted traveller and writer visited the house and was told by the Bishop that he had been a fool to build on such a wet spot. The Bishop acquired the demesne and property at Ballyscullion at various times. Correspondence in 1774 shows that even before he started to build at Downhill he was interested in buying property in Ballyscullion. The site and land was controlled by Lord Massereene, who was in prison in France at that time. An arrangement for sharing the property was arrived at with Lord Massereene's agent but it was not until 1787 that the deal was completed and he started to build. The remainder of the property in the area was purchased in 1791 from Mr. Richard Williams to whom it had been conveyed by Mr. Connelly. The price paid was £1,730-18-0 for the plantation and timber and £1,590-2-6 for Bellaghy houses, gardens, orchard and demesne. It is recorded that in 1791 Paul Brown was paid for care and management of the plantation.

The Connellys who had purchased the Bellaghy estate consisting of over 32,000 acres, from Company of Vintners in 1734 came from Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. They went on to own estates in 13 counties and became one of the wealthiest and influential families in Ireland. They built the great Georgian mansion at Celbridge, Co. Kildare.

The Bishop had plans to build other ornamental structures which he thought would enhance the view and improve his prospect, some of which were erected, some not.

The first project was a pagoda within the estate that would be superior to the one planned for Kew Gardens in London, this never got off the drawing board. The second structure was an ornamental obelisk; this was built and blown down in the great wind of 1839. Another obelisk was built in Castledawson at Station Road and was dismantled when the Methodist Church was built there. A battlemented tower with a needle spire was erected on the ruins of the old Catholic Church on Church Island; the spire is supposed to be off plumb. This was not caused by poor construction, but by an aircraft that had been involved in a collision with another plane overhead, touching it when crashing onto the island, during the Second World War. This like the others was not built from a religious motive, merely as a decorative one, which he thought would enhance his view from the palace.

The Earl had obtained £100 from the Company of Drapers towards building a steeple and spire at Ballinascreen " and before the end of the year I hope to have 4 or 5 spires within the sight of Ballyscullion, built chiefly at the expense of other people", he wrote.

The parish Church of Ireland in Bellaghy was erected by him in 1794, replacing a church that had been there since 1625. Another project which he had planned, but unfortunately never came to fruition was to build a bridge across the River Bann at New Ferry. Had this taken place it would have been a great benefit to Counties Derry and Antrim and a fitting memorial to the Bishop.

The Earl believed in the equality of all people and his ideas on work were simple -"If you employ the idle they will not riot -If you fill their bellies they will not open their mouths". He took a keen interest in having roads made in the area and firmly believed that coal seams existed in Ballyscullion and around Lough Beg. His lack of religious fervour led to tolerance for all, unusual in Ireland then and today. In politics he took part in the volunteer movement of the 1770s and appeared at the Irish Parliament in Dublin escorted by a troop of light dragoons dressed in lavish regalia. He strongly supported their demands for relief of Catholics from the penal law statutes. He travelled widely accompanied by a large retinue of servants dressed in unique uniforms. He stayed in the best hotels, which became known as the Bristol Hotels - a name by which they are still known today. Such was the man who wore all English Coronet and an Irish Mitre and who left us a memorial on the Church Island, (Iniscille).

We will now take our leave of the Bishop and his dream world, where he indulged himself to the full, a world in which his vivid imagination was given free rein in an effort to fulfil his yearning for beauty and glory.

He died in an outhouse of a cottage on the road from Albano to Rome on the 8th of July 1803, the peasants being unwilling to admit a heretic prelate to die under their roof. By his will he left all his Irish property to his second cousin, Harry Bruce who was created a baronet in 1804.

He is buried in Ickworth, England in the grounds of another huge mansion, which was being erected at the same time as the one in Ballyscullion. The then Catholic Bishop of Derry gave a subscription towards a monument in his honour erected there. The reader may question "what happened to the palace in Ballyscullion?" Its downfall was that the government of the day placed a tax on glass in windows etc. This increased the cost of upkeep to such an extent that small parts of the building and some contents were auctioned off and the remainder demolished.

The collection of pictures, statues, carvings, mosaics and mouldings were removed to Downhill. The portico and pillars was purchased by Dr. Nathaniel Alexander, then church of Ireland Bishop of Down and Connor and presented by him to St. George's Church in High Street, Belfast where they still stand. For his own house in Portglenone, Dr. Alexander bought mantelpieces and a pair of Scagliola Columns with temple of the winds Capitals and corresponding pilasters. These columns and pilasters, brown and yellow in colour, still stand in the entrance hall at Portglenone Abbey. Four or five mantelpieces from Ballyscullion also remain in the house. They are of white marble, some having coloured inlays; others carved centre tablets and side panels.

The staircase was removed to Shane's Castle at Randalstown. There is now little evidence to be found that such a huge building ever existed here, other than the ivy covered remains of old walls in Ballyscullion Park. A full-length portrait of the Earl of Bristol is displayed in the National Gallery in Dublin and people who view it agree that he cuts an imposing figure.

Ballyscullion Park

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We will now turn our attention to the house built close to the Bishops Palace, Ballyscullion House, where the present owner of the estate Richard Mulholland, who together with his wife and family, reside. According to Mr. Mulholland, the Bishop's closest relations, the Harvey Family were not interested in inheriting his property here, with the result that he bequeathed his Irish estate to his second cousin Harry Bruce, who was created a Baronet in 1804.

designed Belfast City Hall.

Life for the Bruce Family would have been pleasant, with servants and workmen looking after the estate and attending to their every whim.

Their smooth existence disappeared when the family lost its wealth during the Wall Street Crash in 1929. Mr. Bruce died shortly thereafter; Mrs. Bruce and her daughter continued to live on for a period of time in Ballyscullion House, though in greatly reduced circumstances.

Prior to the outbreak of World War Two, the estate consisting of house, farmyard and 500 acres was purchased by Sir Harry Mulholland at a cost of £5,000. The new owner quickly set men to work renovating and furnishing the house to its present grandeur. During the period of the renovations and the years leading up to the end of the war a number of valuable items, including a period Rolls Royce with solid tyres and wooden wheels disappeared, none of which have ever been recovered. At the outbreak of the Second World War, as was the custom with the gentry, the Mulholland Family offered the use of the house and grounds to the War Office. Their offer was refused without reason. A few months later on a beautiful spring morning, they were greatly surprised when a detachment of Army Personnel arrived and commandeered the house. Until the end of the War the family lived in a recently erected cottage within the grounds.

The first fully equipped battalion of troops to be stationed here arrived shortly after the evacuation of the Allied Armies from the beaches at Dunkirk. There were consignments of American troops stationed here also; the first arrived during 1942 and after a lively and exciting few months went on to take part in the invasion of North Africa. These soldiers were from the Southern United States and wore at least one revolver, cowboy style at all times. The second and last contingent were men belonging to the now famous 82nd Airborne Division, who had recently received a serious mauling in the Italian theatre of war. They were being rested before taking part in the D Day landings on the 6/6/1944.

At this time with food rationing in operation Lady Mulholland an expert gardener, was endeavouring to produce as much food as possible by the way of vegetables and fruit from their walled garden. When informed that the Americans proposed building a factory to repair, wash, and repack parachutes within the garden, she refused to surrender her place of production and for a period the future of the garden remain doubtful until her husband was successful in persuading the Yanks to site the building in a field adjoining the main driveway. A much more suitable site!

Due to the secrecy that existed at the time regarding the building and for what purpose it was to be used, the district abounded with hearsay and rumour which ranged from a condom making factory to the production of rocket propellant fuel!

The various grades of stones used in the factories construction, were transported in American Army Vehicles from Thompson Bros. quarry situated in the townland of Rocktown, now occupied by the Keenan Family.

With the 82nd Airborne Division being billeted throughout South Derry and East Tyrone, and their Commander Matthew Ridgeway having his headquarters in Moyola Park, Castledawson, we can be sure that many high level meetings took place here in planning the part the 82nd Airborne Division would play in the forthcoming D Day operation. Mr. Mulholland, the present owner, recalls his grandmother telling him that when these high-level meetings took place a dinner, to which they were invited, would follow. Special furniture, to suit the occasion, would be brought from Robinson & Cleavers store in Belfast, together with all the cutlery, glasses and silverware required. Coloured servicemen, suitably attired for the occasion, acted as waiters. No expense was spared even in wartime. History records that this division was cut to pieces in and around St. Mere Eglise, France, when they missed their drop zone. With the result that many of the young men who spent a few months here in 1943/44 would not have returned to their homeland.

After the war, Ballyscullion House was returned to the Mulholland family who have occupied it since.

To help in coping with post war scarcities, mushrooms were grown in what became known locally as the parachute factory. Farming being the main occupation, until in 1993 the farmyard buildings were converted to six luxury holiday dwellings. This latest venture has been successful in attracting visitors from throughout the E.E.C. and Countries further afield.

The house itself is a large Georgian Colonial dwelling with an impressive portico supported by sandstone pillars. It is surrounded by lovely countryside and overlooks the River Bann, Lough Beg, Lough Neagh and Church Island with its 'off plumb' needle spire. This building is clearly visible when travelling from Toomebridge through the Townland of Creagh towards Castledawson. It is situated on an elevated rise and is almost surrounded by a stand of trees, which shows off to perfection the white colour it is painted.

Church Island and Lough Beg

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On leaving Ballyscullion House, the traveller may wish to visit Lough Beg and the Church Island. By taking the first road on the left known as Ballydermot Road and travelling about a mile, he will come to a point where the island is in full view. (Car parking here can be a problem, as space has not been provided for this purpose). A decision has now to be taken as to whether the journey of three quarters of a mile or so out to the Island is to be made. (A roadway and parking space close to the Island would be a great boon to locals and tourists alike) During suitable weather it is a pleasant and rewarding journey, providing Arrell's bull is not grazing there. The strip of land between the road and the Island is known locally as the strand. Lough Beg lies about a mile and a half north of Toomebridge and stretches from the sand pits in the south to near the New Ferry in the north. During the winter when its waters are at their highest, it would cover an area of nearly 3,000 acres. It is a bird watcher's paradise due to the large variety of birds that frequent it during any one year. It lies on the migratory path of birds coming to and leaving Ireland. During the winter months, thousands of waterfowl are to be found there; despite disturbance and death from shooting, their numbers do not seem to be diminishing. It is one of the great bird and wildlife habitats in this part of Ireland. (Anyone wishing to enjoy bird watching hereabouts should first of all read and study that wonderful book by Gordon D'Arcy, 'Birds at Lough Beg'.)

Some rare species of sub-aquatic plants and great selection of woodland flora, and a few species of wild orchids are to be found there.

So far, the waters of the lake are free of serious pollution and it is vital that they remain so. The powers that be, should see to it that no industrial development that might injure or destroy these wetlands, or pollute the waters, is granted permission to function.

Innis Cille or Church Island

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From all early age, I was made aware of this place by a man named John Keenan. While travelling from Maghera to his home, he would call at our house, to rest his weary legs and have something to eat. My mother knew of the great interest he had in his beloved 'Church Island'. She was also aware that he did everything possible to have the Island looking at its best on the day of the annual pilgrimage which took place on the first Sunday in September. It was his fervent wish that on his death he would be laid to rest there and had marked the spot where he wished his grave to be sited. He told us children that St. Patrick had visited the Island accompanied by St. Thaddeus and a community of monks and founded a settlement there. It was St. Patrick he said, that left the imprint of his knee in a stone where he had knelt to pray. To this day people go there to be cured of minor ailments. John Keenan loved the Island and the surrounding waters. He was a man blessed with great belief in the hereafter; sad to say he did not get his fervent wish, for on his death he was not laid to rest on the Island.

St. Patrick it is known crossed the ferry at Toome and passed close by along the north west shore of

dates back as far as the fifth century. There can be no doubt however that St. Thaddeus came to the Island and founded the monastic settlement and who gave the Island its original name, 'Inis Taoide'. (Toide being the Irish for Thaddeus) A mound of stones adjacent to the inner wall of the church is said to indicate his burial place. The earliest references to 'Inis Toide' are to be found in the 'Annals of Ulster', 1129. Such references indicate that the monastic settlement was well established on the Island early in the twelfth century and it would not be unreasonable to assume that its foundation goes back a few centuries before these references at least. There is little information available on the life of the monks on Church Island, although no doubt fishing supplied a great part of their diet. It is known, in later years at least, that they were of the Dominican Order. The Island itself consists of seven acres of land much of which is wooded; even the lofty Church spire is almost hidden by foliage in summer. The walls of the Church are three feet in thickness and built of local stone. Lying in an east-west direction, the Church measures 52 feet in length and 21 feet in width. The door is on the south side and the windows of the Church measure one inch in width on the outside and yet five inches wide on the inner wall; a feature intended perhaps to increase the amount of light getting into the building, yet reducing the effectiveness of possible attack from the outside. It would seem unlikely that Church Island escaped the ravages of the Norsemen as they made their way up the Bann into Lough Neagh. The Church on the island was the first in the parish and continued to act as the parish Church until its burning in the seventeenth century. It is also of interest to note that a portion of land on the County Antrim side of Lough Beg, referred to as 'Far Ballyscullion' is still part of the parish and was once owned by the Monastic settlement on the island. When the Church was functioning, a Scullion used to go down to the edge of the water and blow a horn to call the faithful from the other side of the water to Mass.

During the fifteenth century, the parish was still referred to as Inis Toide; it was only after the Scullions became hereditary Erenaghs of the Church and its lands, which lay between Bellaghy and Lough Beg that both the townland and the parish adopted the name and became known as Ballyscullion. The Church was in ruins by the year 1603 and obviously was not used as the parish Church thereafter, yet in the troubled year of 1798 when woman and children from the area, were forced to take shelter on the islands of Lough Beg, Mass was often celebrated within the roofless walls of this ancient Church.

In the year 1642 the Church, already close to ruin, was taken over by the military and a regiment of soldiers billeted there. An officer with the soldiers at that time, by the name of Payne-Fisher wrote a brief description of the church in verse:

"To this sad Church my men I led
And lodged the living among the dead.
Without we keepe a guard within
The chancells made our magazine.
Soe that our Church thus armed may vaunt
She's truly now militant."

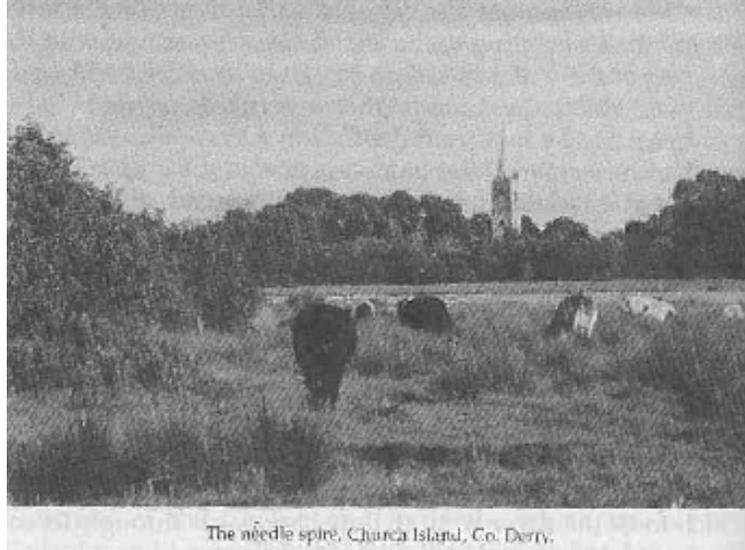
Today this area of ground is seldom completely surrounded by water, yet this has not always been so. In living memory, the only method of getting to the island was by boat but with the lowering of the water in Lough Neagh in the 1930's and again in the late 1940's, the water on the western side receded. Today it is accessible by foot from the County Derry side, yet in bad weather, the swollen River Bann can surround the island. Proof that it was an island may be found in Reverend Hill's history of the McDonnells. On page 379, he quotes from a description of County Antrim written by Richard Dobbs esq. This author on describing Lough Beg, states:

"That on looking back on Lough Beg, towards the upper end of which there falls into it a river, out of the County of Londonderry, which is extremely big, furious and rapid after great and sudden rains. The river is called Moyola water"

He goes on to describe how the force of the water coming down at great speed from the Sperrin Mountains causes fast floods, which force the River Bann to flow backwards through Toome into Lough Neagh and again Mr. Dobbs states:

"Yet afterwards little by little getting vent at the lower end of Lough Beg, the Bann River keeps its usual course to Coleraine".

He further states that he has been particular in observing this in the year before the great rebellion in Ireland. This would mean that the Moyola was flowing into Lough Beg in the year 1640. It would also mean that until the River Moyola was diverted onto its present course the Church Island would have been permanently surrounded by water and could have been truly referred to as an island.



The needle spire, Church Island, Co. Derry.
The needle spire, Church Island, Co. Derry

This might also explain why such an insignificant drain known as the 'Sluggan Sheugh' became the dividing line between the two parishes and the dioceses of Derry and Armagh. Here surely is proof that this stream was once the bed of the Moyola River.

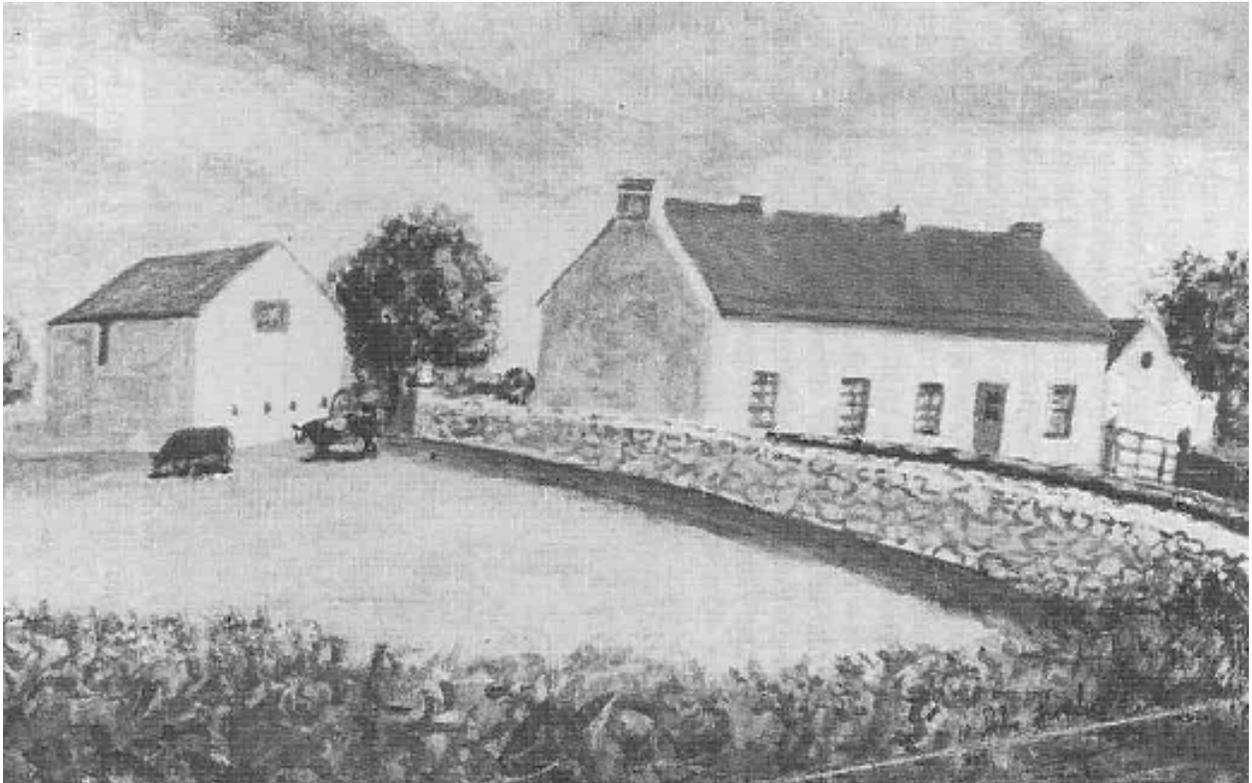
The feast day of the founder of the monastic settlement on Church Island, St. Thaddeus falls on the seventh of September. According to a report which appeared in the a local paper of the pilgrimage held on the first of September 1911 it says, Mr. John Keenan, a local gentleman, previously referred to, acted as secretary and worked most energetically and successfully in furtherance of the project. Mr. F. J. Bigger M.R.I.A. who lived in a house named Ard Ria situated on the Antrim Road in Belfast, and a well known authority on ancient Irish customs, also gave practical encouragement and valuable aid. This year 1911, though unable to attend himself, he kindly sent his contingent of pipers who in their ancient Irish costumes discoursed an excellent Irish programme. The Bellaghy flute band ably conducted by Mr. M. Vaughan also rendered suitable selections. Much credit is due to Mr. Keenan, the organiser of the celebration for the success achieved. Another gentleman who has taken much interest in the Annual Celebrations is Mr. Henry McErlane of Letrim, Castledawson.

The late Cardinal O'Donnell acknowledged John Keenan's effort by sending him a Benedictory message in Irish. It is ironic that when he died in 1941 his remains were not laid to rest on the Church Island. In memory of John Keenan, we publish a poem, written by a man, who was born in the house closest to the island on the County Derry side. He was a sailor with the initials J.McC. and who died in San Francisco, U.S.A. Like John Keenan we are sure he to would have wished to have been laid to rest there. This is his cry from a distant land:

THE SONG OF CHURCH ISLAND

By mountains and valley, by lake shore an island,
Where the Banns crystal waters flow down to the sea,
By bogland and meadow, by woodland and highland,
I've wandered full often o'er brake fen and lea
When the pale autumn moon lit up the Church Island
Or lay mirror'd deep in the Loughs crystal tide,

Where clear in its depths shone the fame of my fathers
 Where the dust of my kindred repose side by side
 Oh! calm is yon lake, and thrice calm is yon river;
 I've gazed on the Tiber and roamed by the Clyde:
 I've seen the Ohio roll forth in its splendour,
 But my heart longs to stray where the Bann waters glide
 But the friends of my childhood are scattered and silent,
 Like leaves of the forest when autumn winds blow
 Some sleep their last sleep in the shade of yon island,
 Where shamrocks grow green and the Bann waters flow
 And soon I shall follow across that lone border,
 Where eternity's hill tops loom mystic and drear;
 But Lough Beg and the Island shall n'er hold the stranger
 For the hopes of my youth time are withered and sere.
 Yet Erin Mavoureen, still green be thy valleys,
 Thy mountain and woodland, thy boglands and lea;
 And calm may they sleep in the wave-washed Church Island,
 Where the Banns crystal waters flow down to the sea.



The neat thatched cottage on the way from the Church Island to Bellaghy (from a painting by J. Hughes now in the possession of Seamus Murphy).

The neatly thatched cottage on the way from the Church Island to Bellaghy (from a painting by J. Hughes now in the possession of Seamus Murphy), Co. Derry

Bellaghy

[Top](#)

Prior to the plantation of Ulster, during the seventeenth century, the main settlements in Co. Derry would have been at Derry, Banagher, Ardstraw, Dungiven, Limavady, Loughillsholin, Maghera and Church Island. These would have been mainly monastic settlements, no towns or villages existed as we know them today. Fortified Rathes were common in the area. (see publication Rathes and Ruins, compiled by Deirdre Speer and illustrated by Muriel Bell). These were wealthy farmsteads, similar to the one that stood on the hill where the Bellaghy Bawn was built. They were usually circular enclosures of about 30 metres in diameter surrounded by a ditch outside and an inner earthen bank, which an attacker had to surmount before the farmyard and dwelling was reached. Most types would have had the use of a souterrain. These were underground passages where food was stored and in an emergency

danger threatened, they would have taken refuge there and helped to defend the place. The way of life for the Irish people under Brehon Laws would have been constant and unchanging for centuries. On the defeat of the Northern Irish Clans at the battle of Kinsale, Co. Cork, Hugh O'Neill and what was left of his army retreated northward until finding sanctuary in the great forest of Glenconkeine, in Co. Derry. There the Earl remained awaiting reinforcements of men and materials promised by the King of Spain. When this assistance failed to materialise he emerged from the forest, at Lough Lug, which was then situated between the Loup and Moneymore, Co. Derry. From there he travelled to a place named Tougher, about five miles distant from Dungannon, where he surrendered himself to Sir William Godolphin and Sir Garret Moore at 9 am on the 23rd of March 1602. On the following evening, Tyrone and the people having charge of him reached Mellifont in Co. Louth where he knelt in front of the Lord Deputy Mountjoy and made penitent submission.

With the Irish people now defeated and leaderless, a decision was quickly taken to resettle a large portion of Ulster. To ensure success to the venture, a number of London's Commercial Companies were notified that tracts of land in Ireland were available on favourable terms. When applications were received from the companies wishing to take part, the offer was over subscribed. With there being only 12 portions to allocate, it was decided to determine the outcome by way of lottery. This took place in London on the 17/12/1613 and was presided over by an Alderman Cockaine. Rowland Smart, the city's official sword bearer, drawing the lots.



Main Street, Bellaghy as it was in the early 1950s, Co. Derry

The Vintners Company were successful, being awarded in excess of 32,000 acres. This area of land stretched from Lough Beg in the south, to outside Maghera in the north, the rivers Bann and Moyola being part of its eastern and western boundaries.

Other companies who had been granted land, built towns such as Draperstown, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Moneymore. Salterstown was planned as a main town in the area, probably because it was close to Lough Neagh and supplies in those days being more easily transported by water. Somehow this plan went astray and Magherafelt took its place, with Ballyronan becoming its supply port and going on to become a thriving depot and manufacturing town, until the Bann drainage scheme in the 1850's, and the coming of the Railway in 1856, caused its demise.

The company of Vintners built Bellaghy, which translates into "The mouth of the marsh or mirey place". Before the different drainage schemes were carried out on the river Bann, it seems that during the winter months and other periods of inclement weather, it was possible to get close to the township by boat, so it was well named. The village was initially called Vintnerstown having been established by the new owners. They perceived its situation close to the area of the Lower Bann, as being ideal for trade.



Main street, Bellaghy at the turn of the century, Co. Derry

Thomas Raven's map shows the settlement in 1622 to have consisted of twenty-five houses that ranged on either side of a wide street. The houses were mostly of the timber-framed type and appear to have been a decent size, with accommodation on two floors, with an attic lighted by dormer windows. The roofs were slate or the, with chimneys of stone or brick in the centre of the ridge. All were detached with large gardens to the rear. A few houses of a different type are also shown on the plan and from the method adopted by the draughtsman to indicate the roof, it is quite clear that these houses were not slated; presumably they were thatched. Three of the houses were situated at one end of the village street; others were scattered here and there in an irregular manner. It would appear that the occupants of the slated houses held a higher position in life, as their names were recorded on the plan, while the others were not. The thatched dwellings were, perhaps, occupied by a mixture of native and plantation stock. Today this is known as Castle Street and leads up to the 'Bawn'.

During the 17th and 18th centuries the villagers were engaged in farming, fishing, iron smelting and other trades, as the following list of occupations shows; Lodging house Keepers, Inn Keepers, Spirit merchants, Masons, Grocers, Bakers, Butchers, Blacksmiths, Police Constables, Surgeons, Teachers etc.

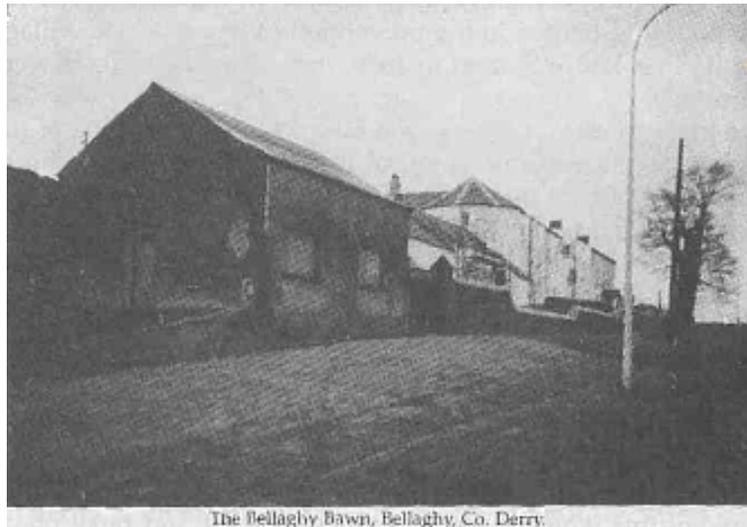
1852 saw the opening of a dispensary; it provided a service for the poor and helped in the prevention of diseases. The village got its first Police Station in 1836, in which five constables were housed.

The great forest of Glenconkeine was cleared and some of the timber was turned into charcoal to be used in the smelting of iron locally. Some was used in building the City of Derry and large amounts were sent to London to be used for the same purpose. When the linen industry was established, a great deal of part time employment was created through the introduction of in house weaving and spinning.

The village was expanding and taking shape, houses and other buildings were erected to meet at a crossroads in the town centre. A large and well-designed manor house was built at the junction of the Maghera, Guladuff Road. It was occupied by the person responsible for administering the Bellaghy Estate. In its hey-day this would have been an important and busy place; visits by tenants would have been frequent, some to renew leases and pay rents, others to offer excuses and plead for a extension in time to enable them to settle their outstanding debts. Yes, there would have been many poor people who would have gone through the manor gate with fear in the hearts. This building is now the local Police Station.

From the village's foundation, the population had continued to increase. The census taken in 1841, prior to the outbreak o famine showed the head count to be 739. The number of families was 143 who occupied 123 houses. The classification of these dwellings were as follows, 6 of Class 1, 52 of Class 2 59 of Class 3, with 26 shown as Class 4. The families were engaged in the following occupations, 29 in

agriculture, 75 in trade and manufacturing, with the remaining 39 engaged in various other forms of earning a livelihood, none were shown as being unemployed. By 1851 the population was 608 and by 1891 it had fallen to 447. This was a reduction of almost 40% in 50 years, which could be attributed to famine and its aftermath, emigration.

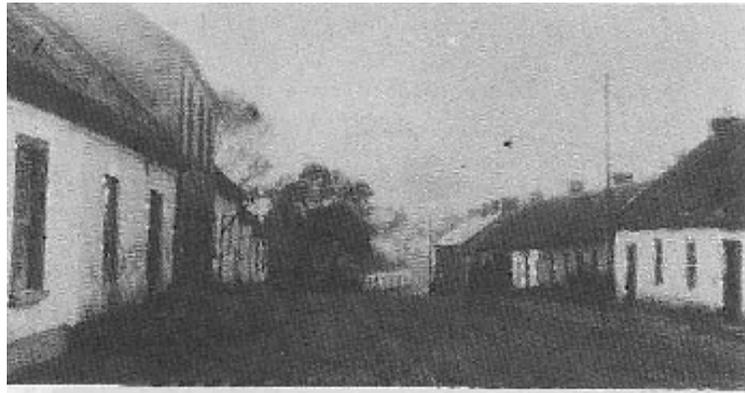


The Bellaghy Bawn, Bellaghy, Co. Derry.
The Bellaghy Bawn, Bellaghy, Co. Derry



Another view of Castle Street, Silas Overland, the father of Jim standing by his horse and delivery vehicle.

Another view of Castle Street, Silas Overland the father of Jim standing by his horse and delivery vehicle, Co. Derry



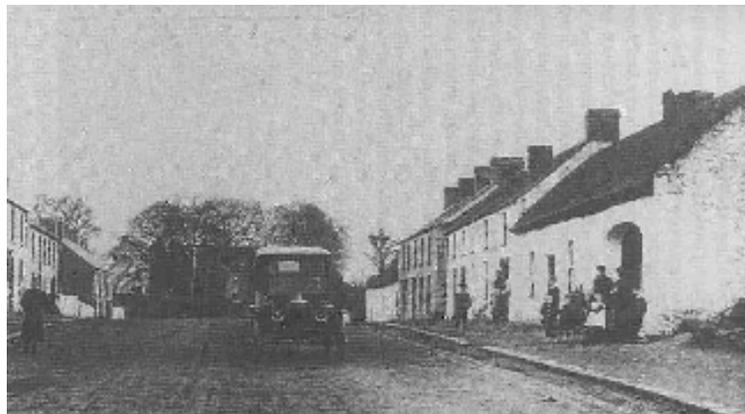
William Street, Bellaghy as it was early this century.

William Street, Bellaghy as it was at the turn of the century, Co. Derry

Today the village has expanded, its population has increased and a large number of first class houses have been built. It is well served by modern shops, schools, medical dispensaries and houses of worship. Recreational facilities are in place and the local GAA club has provided a first class sports complex that caters for all ages.

There may be several reasons as to why Bellaghy did not become the dream town the Vintners had planned, the main one being that the trunk roads and the railway line went elsewhere. This drawback left it struggling to compete with others that were fortunate in getting these aids to commerce and prosperity.

Today Bellaghy, a quiet and tranquil place, is well placed to attract families, who wish to lead a pleasant and unhurried life and yet have all the amenities required for modern day living. The Bawn has opened its doors to tourists and the village is located in centre of the Heaney Country, which in itself will become a huge attraction.



Castle Street, Bellaghy and the arrival of the motor car.

Castle Street, Bellaghy and the arrival of the motor car, Co. Derry

The Bawn

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In its early days, this building was described as a fortified house, with an unusual feature consisting of two round towers, built of red brick each having a convex dome roof. There was a gatehouse and sally port and an adjoining deer park consisting of some 202 acres. The first occupant was Henry Jackson who had been appointed by the vintners company to manage the estate. After a short time when little development had taken place, Jackson's services were dispensed with and on the 9th of May 1616, a lease on the lands was agreed with John Rowly. On the death of Mr. Rowly the following year, a man named Baptist Jones took control. This person had been a tenant of Sir Arthur Chichester near

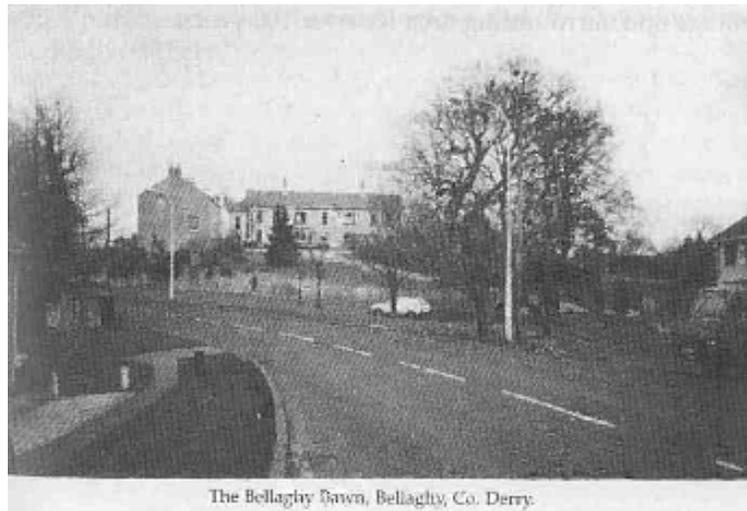
(Due to slow progress on this mission, he had been dismissed.) When he passed away in 1623, the Bawn was garrisoned by 76 well-trained and armed men, and it was considered to be the finest in the country and favourable headway was being made in resettling the vast estate.

Henry Conway MP took up the lease in 1625 and was still in control during the ten-year war, which began on the 23rd of October 1641 when the Irish made a concerted effort to regain their lands.

When attending a supper given in his honour by Lady Caulfield and her son, Sir Phelim O'Neill seized his hosts and took possession of the fort at Charlemont, Co. Tyrone, thus the signal for rebellion was given. Within a few days, Ulster had risen and garrison towns such as Coleraine, Carrickfergus and Belfast became havens for Planters and their families. These towns survived the Irish sword, Bellaghy did not! Cormac O'Hagan who commanded a sizeable muster of men captured Moneymore and Magherafelt. He then proceeded to attack the fortified house belonging to Edward Beare situated in the townland of Aughagaskin. These premises had become overcrowded due to housing the families and defenders of Magherafelt. After a short but violent engagement, during which a number of his men were killed, O'Hagan decided to bypass this strongpoint. On his way towards Bellaghy, skirmishes took place especially at Dawsons Bridge (Castledawson), but success was attained and the village and fortified house were captured and destroyed.

Henry Conway, it would seem, survived the destruction of Bellaghy as he is credited with rebuilding the fortified house, adding a massive circular tower and defensive walls around the farmyard, similar to those erected by British Colonialists who founded settlements in the midst of the native people of North America (is how one local historian has described it).

The present house or castle was added by the Earl of Bristol in 1791. On his death, the property passed to the Bruce family and was lived in for a period of time by an Admiral Bruce until his death in 1863.



The Bellaghy Bawn, Bellaghy, Co. Derry.
The Bellaghy Bawn, Bellaghy, Co. Derry

Very little is known regarding a family by the name of Hill who occupied the place for a short while. Dr. Thompson, who originated from Coagh, Co. Tyrone, bought the property in the late 1800s and carried on an extensive medical practice for a number of years. He died in 1944 and was succeeded by his daughter, Dr. Thomas. On her death in 1987, Dr. Lowry, who lives adjacent, purchased the property.

It now belongs to the Department of the Environment who have repaired and restored the complex.

A room has been set aside and named after Bellaghy's most famous son, Seamus Heaney. Here, books, manuscripts, artwork and other items donated by the poet are displayed. An excellent video, showing a short history of the village and outlying district and narrated by the poet should not be missed. Much

more is planned and within a short time it is hoped Bellaghy and its Bawn will become a Mecca for tourists. In passing it should be noted that the previous three families connected with this building, Doctors Thompson, Thomas and Lowry, have attended to the medical needs of the people in the village and surrounding area for over 100 years.

Roe's Gift

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"Roe's Gift", is situated in the townland of Ballydermot, on a hill known as Stintons Brae, about a mile west of Bellaghy on the road leading to Castledawson. The Reverend Simon Roe was rector of this parish and on his daughter marrying John Downing, son of Adam Downing; he presented the residence, which he had acquired from the Skeffington Family, to his daughter on their marriage. The happy couple then named it Roe's Gift.

With a man such as John Downing now in control, Roe's Gift would have developed into a much larger complex than exists today. Troops, cavalry and all the other personnel required for this type of operation would have been billeted there. It would have been on a smaller scale than the Bellaghy Bawn. Never the less, it would have been strongly fortified to resist attack.

We will now learn a little about the family whom the Reverend Roe purchased from, the Skeffingtons and the Downing Family who lived there.

The Downing Family

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The traveller should not depart from Bellaghy without paying a visit to the Church of Ireland graveyard. Several interesting and historical tombs, vaults and headstones are to be found there. The principal one being the resting place of the Downing Family on which is inscribed a short history of these people.

They were descended from an ancient Devonshire Family in England. Downing Street, the residence of the Prime Minister has been named in their honour. This family at one time controlled vast tracts of land belonging to the Bellaghy Estate. They were one of the top links in the chain of Immediate Lessors, a greedy method of letting and re-letting land that brought hardship to unfortunate tenants existing on the lower rung of society. They were left with the almost impossible task of producing the amount of food needed to feed their families and pay the extortionist rent the system demanded.

On the tomb, the inscription records the services and lauds the virtues of Adam Downing who had acquired considerable estate in the area, and reads:

'In this place are deposited the remains of Adam Downing Esq., descended from an ancient family in Devonshire and honourably allied to this Kingdom, being married to Anne, daughter of John Jackson of Coleraine. He gave signal proof of his courage at the Siege of Derry and the Battle of the Boyne, where he commanded an independent company. In consequence of which he was appointed by Government in the year 1715 one of the Commissioners of Array. Soon after he was made Lieutenant Colonel of Militia Dragoons and on the 18th of January, in the same year, Deputy Governor of this county.'

He was an active magistrate, a humane landlord, a hospitable neighbour and a pleasing companion. His door was always open to receive his friends, his purse to relieve the poor and distressed. He died on the 15th of December 1719 in the 53rd year of his age, universally lamented, sacred to the memory of a man so respectable; this marble is erected by John Downing Esq. his eldest surviving son, who wishing to be thought worthy of such a father, and to inherit his loyalty and public spirit. In the time of the Scottish Rebellion in the year 1745 raised, at great expense, an Independent Company of his most reputable men to the defence of his King and Country. This was when Bonnie Prince Charlie was endeavouring to reclaim the Scottish Crown and it was feared he would land in Ireland.

His son, John, who succeeded him, had married the Reverend Rowe's daughter, left two sons, the eldest was named Alexander Clotworthy Downing, who became a minister and was rector of Leckpatrick Parish in County Derry. His wife was named Tamison Downing and died aged eighty in November 1817.

The second son Dawson Downing married Catherine, daughter and heiress of George Fullerton of Ballintoy Castle County Antrim. Downing Fullerton became the family name and descendants still own property there.

Local tradition has it that they treated their tenants harshly, and when Colonel Downing was travelling about the district he was preceded by outriders who kept yelling out, "Clear the road for Colonel Downing!" and any unfortunate person found loitering was, whiplashed by these men on their way past.

The naming of the street in London after the family came about in the wake of Charles the Second shortly after his restoration, appointing Sir George Downing as his Ambassador to Holland with secret instructions to force the Dutch into a declaration of war.

As a result, Louis the Fourteenth of France with England combined would invade and overwhelm that country. Everything did not go as planned, and within a few months so unpopular had he become that he had to flee for his life. On his return to London, he was lodged in the Tower. In time, he succeeded in regaining the Royal favour and died a rich man, possessing among other properties the lands bordering St. James Park, on which Downing Street with the Prime Minister's house and other Government offices were subsequently built. He was succeeded in his title by his son, grandson and two great grandsons, of whom another Sir George, who died in 1749, left a big endowment to Cambridge College. When the college was being built, it so happened that his relative, Downing Fullerton was dismantling the Castle in County Antrim and the trustees of Downing College, Cambridge purchased all the oak panelling, staircase etc., which were incorporated into that building.

The Skeffington Connection

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The Skeffingtons were of ancient Norman extraction and had risen to power under Henry VIII, who had appointed Sir William Skeffington, as His Majesty's Commissioner to Ireland in 1529. A descendant, Sir John Skeffington, married Mary the only daughter of Sir John and Margaret Clotworthy. (Sir John Clotworthy's father in the seventeenth century had received vast grants of land in and around Antrim, formerly under the control of the O'Neills). As an only daughter and heir, she became mistress of Antrim Castle in 1655. Her husband succeeded to her father's title and became second Viscount Massereene. When they returned to Antrim from honeymoon Sir John found himself Lord of some 45,000 acres stretching from Dunluce in the north to County Tipperary in the south. Though a member of the Irish Parliament for the County of Antrim, he preferred the domestic bliss of Antrim Castle to the rough and tumble of Parliamentary business in Dublin.

This relaxing lifestyle was suddenly shattered during 1689 when a Jacobite Army under the Command of Lord Tirconnell broke through the Protestant defence line at Dromore, County Down sweeping all resistance before it on its march to Derry. With this army bearing down on Antrim Town, Lord Massereene quickly packed his bags and together with his wife fled to catch the Derry boat to England. The garrison at Antrim Castle followed their Lordships' example and promptly deserted their posts. Lieutenant General Hamilton finding Antrim and its Castle undefended took possession of, not only the Castle, but also Lord Massereene's plate and other valuables that one of his servants was kind enough to point out the place of concealment. The loss of property was later estimated at three thousand pounds, give or take a spoon or two! Lord Massereene's son, Colonel Clotworthy Skeffington was of a different calibre to that of his father. He raised a regiment in which Colonel Downing and Captains John and Richard Bickerstaff from 'Roe's Gift' served. Arriving outside the gates of Derry hotly pursued by the Jacobite Army, he found himself and his militia locked out. Skeffington a man of considerable military skill and daring, shot at the sentry stationed on the walls and threatened to burn

and the siege was lifted.

Retreating from Derry, Tirconnells Army recrossed the Bann at Portglenone on its way to the battle of the Boyne, burning everything in its path including the town of Newry on its way out of Ulster.

Lord Massereene contributed a substantial sum of money towards the defence of Derry. He could well afford to, among the many enterprises he had going for him was the right to fish the Rivers Bann and Foyle, leased from the Irish Society. When the ports of Coleraine and Derry fell to McDonnell of Antrim and his Redshanks, 60 tons of prime salmon cured and ready for shipment was discovered. This consignment of fish was valued at £15 per ton, a claim for compensation against the Government was lodged. When certificates were produced and the claim substantiated by officers serving under Skeffington's command, a payment of £900 was awarded by order of King James the Second. This was a liberal decision, bearing in mind that the claimant was doing his utmost to overthrow the King.

The Forge

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"The Forge", a poem written by Nobel Prize Winning Poet Seamus Heaney, has certainly brought the Hillhead and its blacksmiths shop to prominence. A small building that housed a school in 1829 has now become a Mecca for young schoolchildren, students, tourists and lovers of poetry.

All arrive here hoping to get a whiff of the atmosphere and relive the experience so brilliantly described by the great poet, who as a young man, then living in the area, had first hand-knowledge of the forge and what took place there. The Devlin Family, who have been engaged in this business for at least 150 years, commenced trading along the banks of the Moyola River in a place known as Purgatory, an apt name for a forge. This was close to a turbulent salmon pool made famous by poachers. In the late 1840's when the boundary wall was being built around the Moyola Estate, nine families including the Devlins were resettled in and around the Hillhead. Their next-door neighbours the Mann Family also settled there. The family of the late Hughie Gallagher was another. The Devlins became owners of the schoolhouse there, a single storey building measuring 20 foot 10 inches by 15 foot 9 inches. The present owners' great grandfather converted one-half into living quarters and the remaining part was used as a blacksmiths forge He ingeniously installed a half loft, which was used as the sleeping quarters. On examining the building today, one might be of the opinion that it was impossible to create extra living space in such a small area. Until it is explained that the floor which was then on a level with the main road outside was four foot lower than it is today. Both the road and the shop floor have been raised considerably, thus reducing the headroom within.

The Devlin Family were recognised as being experts in all facets of their trade. Their clientele was huge and drawn from a wide area, especially during the Second World War. They were wonderful raconteurs, who at the drop of a hat could concoct funny but harmless stories. The busier they seemed to be the closer amusement and laughter was to the surface. Indeed some of this article has been written with tongue in cheek, because when dealing with these mirth making people it is a sensible ploy not to accept as gospel everything one is told.

This small workshop produced a stream of expert craftsman, some of whom plied their trade much further afield.

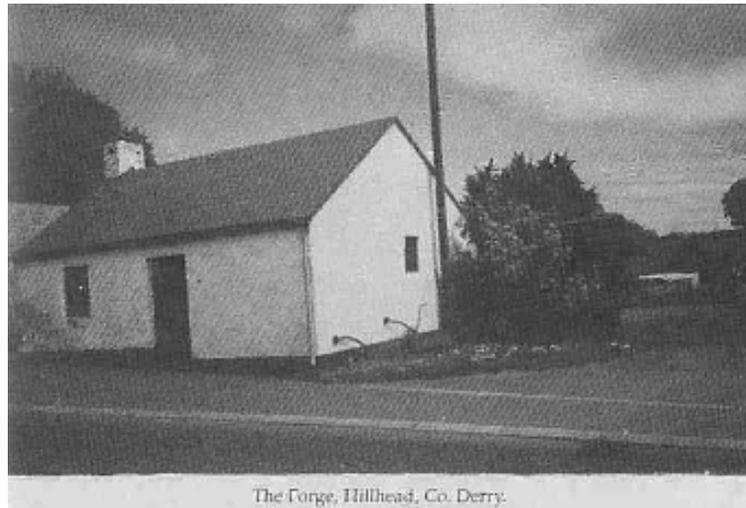
The forge is mostly silent now, the days of controlling temperamental horses and inhaling acrid smoke given off by their burning hooves is long gone. The ring from the anvil is seldom heard today unless Barney Devlin is back there demonstrating the art of making horseshoes, tempering steel, or bending pig iron, while cheerfully explaining what is now history to appreciative audiences. All of this activity is due to the keen observations of a young man many years ago.

One of the Devlin Family pastimes is promoting and taking part in drama. Over the years Barney together with his brother Frank were involved with several companies, one of which involved the poet Seamus Heaney. They eventually established a local group known as the 'Forge Players'. This company

has produced and staged a varied selection of plays. Their success at drama festivals throughout the country is well known and in the process, they have turned out some excellent performers in the acting profession. Long may their success continue.

As the photographs show, we are now in South Derry of the concrete roads, which were laid down during the late 1920's and early 1930's. This was during another period in our history when unemployment and hunger was rife. Many miles of roadway were made mostly in areas where the ground was soft and foundations poor. The roads were a vast improvement on what had been before and withstood a great amount of wear and tear, especially during the Second World War. They are still there, now covered with tar macadam or asphalt.

The thatched building in the pictures was built in 1832 and later became known as 'Montgomery's Pub', it has been renamed as 'The Old Thatch Inn' and is a place where excellent food and refreshments can be had and is well worth a visit. It is now owned and run by the McLarnon Family.



The Forge, Hillhead, Co. Derry.
The Forge, Hillhead, Co. Derry

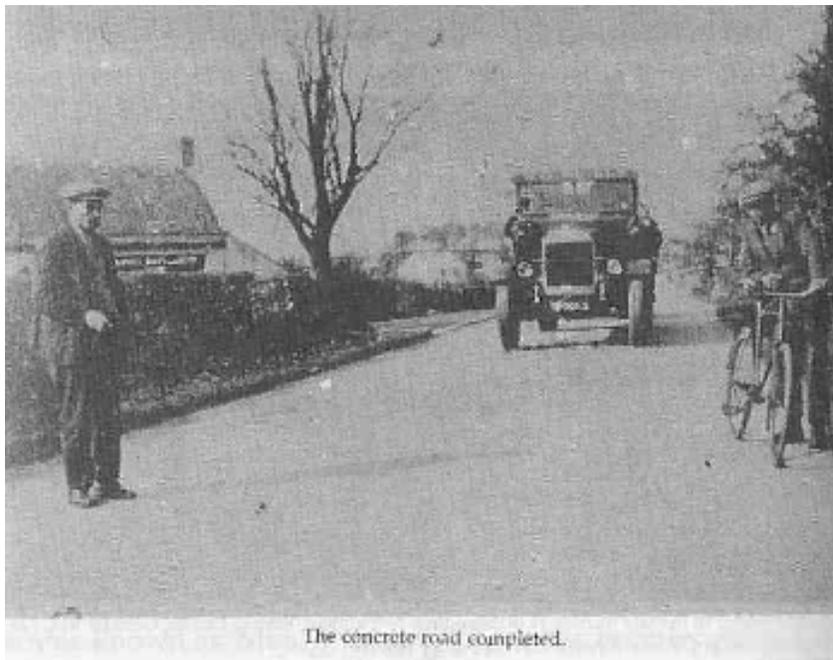


Devlin's Forge in the late thirties: (L-R) Standing: Not known, Barney Devlin, Geordie Rea, Pat Duggan (Creagh). Front: Johnnie Devlin, Nancy Devlin.
Devlin's Forge in the thirties: (L-R) Standing Not known, Barney Devlin, Geordie Rea, Pat Duggan (Creagh), Front: Jinnie Devlin, Nancy Devlin



Preparing the Hillhead Toome Road for concrete, 1929, beside what is now "The Old Thatch Inn".

Preparing the Hillhead Toome Road for concrete, 1929, beside what is now "The Old Thatch Inn"



The concrete road completed.

The concrete road completed

The Old Airfield

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On their way to Toomebridge, the traveller could take a slight detour and travel by way of the disused airfield, situated in the townland of Creagh. On leaving the 'Thatched Pub', we cross over the main Belfast to Derry road and join the Creagh Road. Following this road, we will pass through what was once a hectic and at times a noisy place. This airfield was one of the 26 such bases built during the Second World War under the auspices of the Air Ministry and the Ministry of Aircraft Production. In those days, it was a huge undertaking and vast numbers of men were employed in its construction. With so many other sites engaged in war work you could be excused for thinking that the thousands of men required would not have been forthcoming. You would have been mistaken, for in the case of the Creagh Airfield men came from all over the British Isles attracted to employment like bees to honey, and in a short time the place was a hive of activity. These men created a viable airfield on a site that was thought by many to be unsuitable, by digging a vast network of drains, prepared foundations to lay down miles of concrete runways, a perimeter taxiway, a huge number of aircraft hardstands, bomb stores, petrol dumps, aircraft hangars and countless other buildings. This work had all been carried out

in the western side of the river in the townland of Derrygarve.

There were vehicles of all sizes, makes and colours engaged in carting the materials required from a wide surrounding area. Many of these vehicles needed a good deal of running repairs to keep them operational. Should you be able to visualise the tons of stones, sand, gravel and cement that went into the vast acres of concrete, plus the amount of brick, blocks and other materials that were used to erect the buildings, you may begin to understand why so much manpower was required. The reader must also bear in mind that in those days, spades, picks and shovels were the main implements used in completing this task. Today these tools of torture are almost extinct.

Over thirty people lost some amount of land and six families had to leave their homes to enable the construction to get underway.

Work began on the 1/1/1942 and one year later, on the 1/1/1943 RAF personnel began arriving. At this time, building work was still in progress and it was July before the airfield was put to much flying use. It opened as an Operational Training Unit (O.T.U.) on the 10th of July 1943 when a detachment of eight Wellington Bombers arrived from the parent station at Nutts Corner, Co. Antrim. The O.T.U. was in this case engaged in transport crew training. However, its stay was a short one of only two months.

The American Army Air Force, who at this time had become involved in a bombing campaign over occupied Europe and Germany, were in need of storage, repair, training and retraining of aircrew facilities. They were given use of twelve air bases here. In six of these, the U.S. presence was subsidiary to the RAE. The remaining bases that came under their full control were Greencastle (near Kilkeel), Mullaghmore, Toome, Clontoe, Maghaberry and Langford Lodge. Toome and Clontoe were used as Combat Crew Replacement and retraining centres. Retraining was necessary due to the fact that most of the American air crews had done all their training in the cloudless skies of the southern United States and as a result were totally unprepared for the type of weather they would encounter over the British Isles and Northern Europe. They were also unfamiliar with RAF Flying Control Procedures and most of the knowledge required for successfully operating in a war zone. No doubt these were factors that needed attending to. However, bombing missions had unearthed a more serious problem. This was the high loss ratio of bombers and aircrew due to action by enemy fighters, which were not expected to operate with such deadly efficiency at high altitudes. This problem caused unescorted daylight bombing to be suspended for a period until a long-range fighter escort became available. In the meantime, intensive retraining in all aspects of flying, navigation, bombing and self-preservation was required.

The retraining programme was carried out by using B-26 Marauders and A-20 Havocs both medium bombers. Around 40 of these were based here. The retraining on heavy bombers, The B-17 Flying Fortress and The B-26 Liberator was carried out at Clontoe Airfield situated a few miles to the south west further along the Lough Neagh shore. As training facilities were not duplicated at each airfield, it meant an interchange of aircraft and personnel took place. The result of this was that all types of aircraft both fighter and bomber could be seen landing and taking off from the Creagh's runways on an almost daily basis.

From September 1943 until November 1944 the Creagh meadows as they were known locally, vibrated to the roar of aero engines almost non-stop as flying went on by day and occasionally by night. Jeeps and other vehicles sped around the narrow roads, sometimes recklessly. To be in charge of horse transport became a dangerous and dreaded occupation.

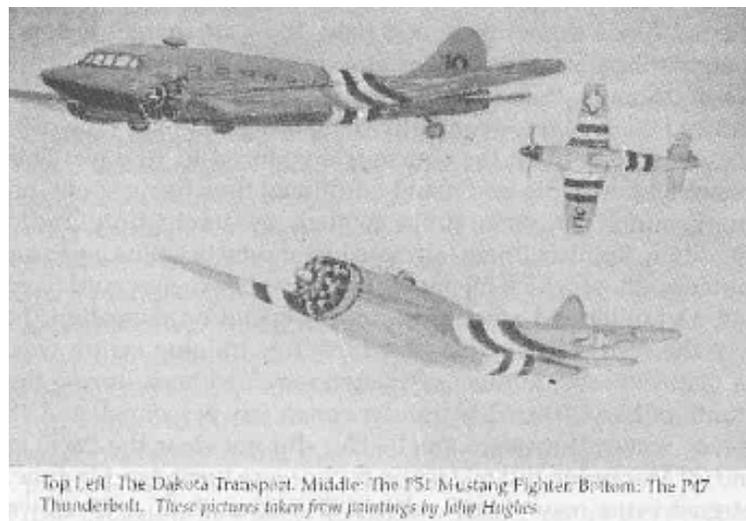
What began as a 30-day course for the young airmen was reduced to 15 days, eventually demand for trained crewmen became so great that the course was reduced to 10 days. This meant longer flying hours and additional time being spent on the ground, studying subjects such as navigation, radio operation, bombardment, airmanship and tactics plus air to air gunnery. All of which meant that these young men would have had a very limited amount of time to spend on recreation. To give the reader some idea how busy this training centre was, we will show the number of airmen retrained here, during

the month of May 1944, 62 Marauder crews, (six personnel) and 48 Havoc crews, (four personnel). This did not clear the backlog and 70 Marauder and 60 Havoc crews were turned out in June. August set a new record when 112 B-26 and 42 A-20 crews departed and so it went on. In the summer of 1944, veterans of 24 missions on their way back to the United States, stopped off for a period to meet fresh combat crews and pass on experience gained.



Some of the aircraft that were to be seen daily in the sky around the airfield. Top left: The Spitfire and bottom right center the Liberator

Some of the aircraft that were seen daily in the sky around the airfields.
Top left: the Spitfire and bottom right center the Liberator



Top Left: The Dakota Transport. Middle: The P51 Mustang Fighter. Bottom: The P47 Thunderbolt. These pictures taken from paintings by John Hughes.

Top left: The Dakota Transport, Middle: The P51 Mustang Fighter. Bottom: The P47 Thunderbolt. These pictures taken from paintings by John Hughes.

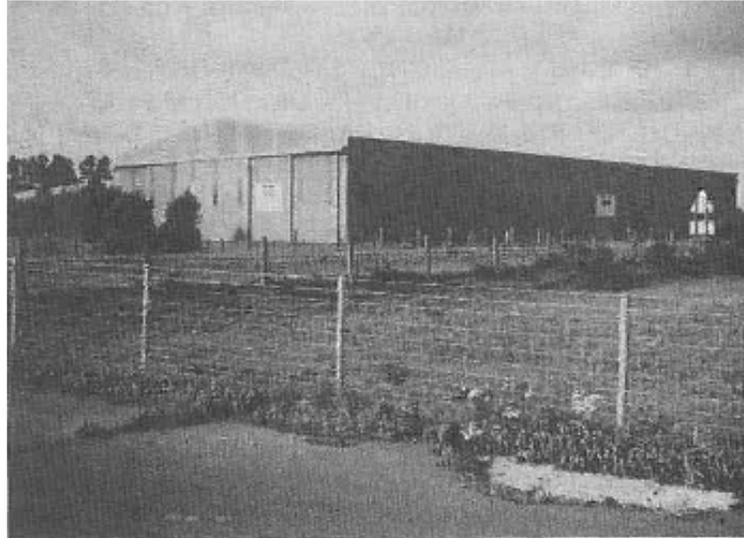
What the Combat Command's Historical Officer wrote of Clontoe, would apply equally to the Creagh, and I quote:

"This is the cross-roads where returning veterans of 24 missions meet the fresh combat crews coming from the States. For veterans, this period of instruction is an interlude in the journey back home. For new crews this is the last stop in a crowded 10 days of final instruction before assignment to a combat group."

As you journey along this road, you will find little indication that this was once a very busy airfield and a place where around 2000 airmen lived and worked. As the photographs show one of the four hangars is still there now occupied by a brick company. On the opposite side of the road is situated, what was then the hub of the operation, the radio control tower, now the home of Mr. Henry Mackle and family. To stand anywhere around the airfield today it is difficult to comprehend all the hard labour and loss of sweat that went into constructing it, how busy it was when operational, and the number of young men

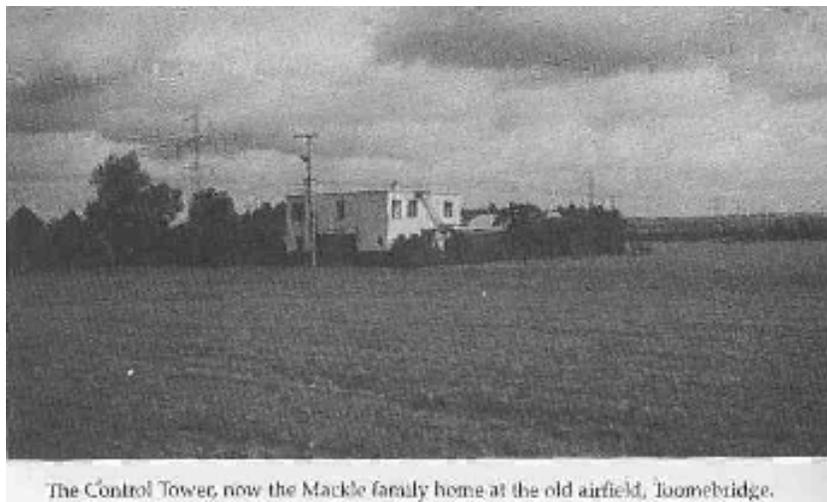
from all over the world, who landed and spent sometime here. Those who survived the war would be old men now, yet when they were driving around the Creagh, at times recklessly in their jeeps they seemed like warriors who would never grow old, let alone die.

This is a very brief description of what took place here 50 years ago. Should the reader wish to learn more about the aircraft and the servicemen stationed here, it is to be found in the book, Toome's Wartime Airfield by John Hughes and published by Moyola Books of Orrs Corner, Labby, Draperstown.



A re-sheeted hangar now occupied by Northern Brick Co., Old Airfield, Toomebridge, Co. Antrim.

A re-sheeted hanger now occupied by Northern Brick Co., Old Airfield, Toomebridge



The Control Tower, now the Mackle family home at the old airfield, Toomebridge.

The control tower, now the Mackle family home at the old airfield, Toomebridge

Tom Coor's Foreword

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As an introduction to our article on Toome, Tom Corr, paints a vivid picture of how schoolboys spent their leisure time in and around the area all those years ago.

"Reared, as I, was on the Newbridge side of Toome, the Bann Valley was, and still is, home to me. The space and freedom of the Lough shore and the canal bank will always be close to my heart, for our young days were spent to a large extent in exploring their sporting possibilities in our spare time, of which we seemed to have had an unending supply.

Having learnt to swim in the Lough, we progressed to the canal at Toome, which was of course deep, but whose banks were easily reachable, even for beginners. Then came a young Scotsman, named Mellroy, who had been trained in the baths in Glasgow. He suggested we should put up a record by swimming the Bann itself. My brother was to go first, I was to be next, and our friend would protect us from the rear. 'Lo all behold', it worked, and to nail down the record, we swam the return trip, with our guardian angels working overtime!

The river also fed us, for we caught many a dinner of Perch, a little fish with more than a fair share of bones, warming ourselves on the colder days in the blacksmith's forge, a fascinating place fifty yards from the quay.

Then there was the tennis court opposite the hotel. A group of us asked permission to rejuvenate the lawn, which had been sadly neglected, and having marked the court with liquid lime and erected a slightly dilapidated net, we played the whole season, courtesy of the hotel owner.

Winter brought a fresh idea from Brian Grant, who suggested we borrow his father's loft, put an old stove in it, and run a weekend club, with darts and cards and board games. The coal for the stove was the main problem. It was solved by the Station Master, who said we could collect any coal that fell from the railway wagons, subject to strict rules about train times. The club ran successfully at a weekly fee of three pence for one whole winter.

The Fair Hill, opposite the barracks, was a great centre of community activity on several fronts. Football in the summer evenings, handball at the back of the village hardware store, and a focal point for visiting entertainers, like circuses and cinema shows in tents, lit in those days by flaring paraffin lamps, and all the fresh air you wanted blowing up from the river".

I could go on about Toome Fair on Easter Monday, the Gaelic matches on the east side of the village, the white faced clay workers unloading the bags of Diatomite from the carts on to the railway wagons, but this is only my foreword to the story of Toome, the main work of compiling the history of the Bann Valley, a task calling for resolution and patient research, qualities well to the fore in my friends, John Hughes and Donal Barton. Over to you, John and Donal:

Torn Corr

Toome

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Toome would owe its existence to being situated on the northeast corner of Lough Neagh and on another of the four passes leading into Counties Derry and Tyrone.

Artefacts recovered during the Bann Drainage Schemes prove that Toome and its surrounding area have been populated long before the arrival of Christianity to Ireland in the sixth century. St. Patrick who is credited with founding the monastic settlement on the Church Island may have crossed over the River Bann here on his way west. The crossing was by ferryboats, which were located at the mouth of the river, south of the village. Two vessels one large the other small were adequate to cope with the business. This was only means of getting over the river until Lord O'Neill bridged the Bann in 1792. From that point in time, the village became known as Toomebridge. Shortly after the completion of the bridge, the owner let it out at an annual rent of forty-five pounds. The leaseholder in an effort to show some profit on his investment, imposed a toll for the privilege of crossing over the bridge.

The charges were as follows:

wagons, five shillings (25 new pence),
coach, two shillings and sixpence (12.5 new pence)
chaise, one shilling and sixpence (7.5 new pence)
horse and gig, one shilling (5 new pence)
travelling cars loaded, sixpence (2.5 new pence)

unloaded, three pence
A person on horseback, two pence
On foot, one penny
A bullock, cow, sheep, or pig one penny.

A person on horseback running away paid ten shillings (50 new pence), a person on foot and on the same mission paid five shillings, (25 new pence).

The exorbitant amounts of money charged for the last two items, would suggest that moving to greener pastures must have been a thriving line of business for the toll man.

George Henry Bassett in his book, County Antrim 100 years ago a guide and directory 1888, writes, "Toomebridge is in the parish of Duneane, Barony of Upper Toome a little over 36 miles by rail north west of Belfast and a population of less than 150 people. It is situated on the Derry Central Railway Line which connects with the main Belfast to Derry line at Cookstown Junction outside Antrim". This line went from Toome through Castledawson and on to Magherafelt. A branch line here carried traffic through to Moneymore and Cookstown. From outside Magherafelt a spur line served stations at Desertmartin and Draperstown. The main line continued through stations situated at Dergnagh, outside Knockloughrim, Maghera, Upperlands, Kilrea, Aghadowey and Macfin, where it linked up again with the main Belfast to Derry route. The railway began operating in 1856 and made a great contribution to the communities it served for the next hundred years. Today there is little evidence remaining to show that it ever passed through the village, other than the bridge that carried it over the River Bann into Co. Derry. It entered Toome by crossing over the main Belfast to Derry road between the Staffordstown and Shore Roads and went over the Strand Road on its way out. The village could have been compared to an American Cow town as the line ran across the main street close to where the public toilets are now located. The Railway Station was busier than most, with all kinds of supplies arriving daily, such as hardware, building materials, bread, coal, newspapers etc. The outgoing traffic would have been on a much greater scale, consisting of farm produce such as potatoes, seeds, hay and farm animals, together with great quantities of sand and gravel. In season, many tons of fish such as eels, pollan and salmon were exported by train.

The local diatomite Company helped to keep the station a busy place, as a steady stream of horse transport carted their product to the railway yard to be loaded and transported to the docks in Belfast. It goes without saying that the railway attracted a steady passenger trade, as fares were reasonable and it was a comfortable and relaxing means of travel. Sadly, the arrival of modern buses, that collected passengers at many points along their routes, helped in causing the demise of the railways.

In those days the village boasted two hotels, one owned by Mary Kennedy and known as Kennedy's Hotel and was situated adjacent to McCann's shop. Comfortable accommodation at reasonable rates for tourists, anglers and sportsmen were advertised. The other establishment, The O'Neill Arms Hotel, belonged to James Alexander, who offered special accommodation for anglers and gentlemen coming to Loughs Neagh and Beg during the duck shooting season. This hotel is now owned by the McConville family and caters for a wide variety of tastes, which includes a special welcome for tourist and traveller.

Today the village is a neat and tidy place with a selection of modern shops and other types of business, taking care of the peoples' needs. A modern schoolhouse and a church are in place. The McAteer family have recently put in place an ultra modern private nursing home situated at 62-66 Main Street, which will be an excellent asset to the area.



Mainstreet, Toomebridge today. It was at this point the railway crossed over the street.

Sand and Gravel

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The sand and gravel referred to was and still is found in large quantities in Lough Neagh. This proved to be the prime choice of builders and concrete manufacturers, so, what began in a small way is now a thriving business and a great asset to the area.

A Mr. Carey began the business of taking sand from the Lough, followed by a Mr. Ellis, Mr. O'Neill and Mr. Catherwood; this was in the days of horse and cart. These pioneers were in turn followed by Andrew Hutchinson, Scott Brothers, Walls Brothers, The Maddens, McCanns and others.

Boats, with collapsible bottoms, were introduced to lift and carry sand from all over the Lough before dumping it close inshore. Machines were put to work, that sucked the sand off the bottom and mixed with water forced it through a large pipe onto the shore. From there it is loaded onto lorries for transport to its destination. The location where the sand is brought ashore is mostly along the Strand Road outside the village and close to the boundary of the disused airfield.

Several industries producing products requiring a high percentage of sand or gravel in their manufacture and employing a large number of people are now in place there. Namely, Creagh Concrete Products Ltd., Macrete Ireland Ltd., Redland of Northern Ireland Ltd. and Scott Toomebridge Ltd.

Diatomite

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Diatomite was first discovered in lands adjoining the River Bann in the townland of Ballynease near Portglenone in or about the year 1855. Locally it was referred to as Bann Clay and used in the manufacture of bricks for the building trade, known as Culbann Brick.

In 1898, the Grant Brothers of Toomebridge on finding deposits on their lands, took its uses further, in that they developed its insulating properties. The machinery used to reduce the Diatomite to powdered form was housed in a factory erected by them on a site situated to the rear of where the present RUC Station now stands. They operated a successful business here until 1914 when they sold out to the United Kingdom Peat, Moss, and Litter Co. Ltd., which was owned by a Mr. James Stott, an Englishman who settled in Toome and on his death was laid to rest in Duneane Parish Graveyard.

At this juncture "The United Kingdom Peat Moss and Litter Co. Ltd" was sold to a company named Kenyon who were involved in insulation. This change took place during 1947.

In 1968 Jack McBride, a 'Glens Man', who was attached to the Ballymena Observer and who finished his days in the newspaper profession with the Irish News, describes in an article his introduction to

Diatomite. It was while out walking near Toomebridge, he noticed several men engaged in what seemed to be turf cutting and as he approached the bank he was surprised to see the 'turf' were a whitewash colour and stacks nearby were even whiter.

On enquiring, "What sort of peat is that?" He was informed rather sharply by one of the cutters, "That's not peat, that's Diatomite!" or what is pronounced "Kieselguhr" in German. Kiesel means gravel and Guhr is earthy sediment fermentation. Going on, he begs to be excused for becoming a bit technical as he explains that Diatomite is an unusual kind of stuff. In the first place, Diatoms are microscopic unicellular plants belonging to algae, a class of flowerless plants living mostly in water, seaweed and the green scum found on ponds being the best known.

Diatoms are also distinguished by the complex structure of their cell walls, which are usually strongly impregnated with silica, a flinty mineral that, next to oxygen, constitutes about 27% of the earth's crust. The individual cells of Diatoms are called frustules and, in fossil form are generally white or grey in colour, and resemble clay.

They are used as polishing powders, absorbents for nitro-glycerine in the manufacture of dynamite and are used in the preparation of some of the best dentifrices. Their principal use is now in the making of non-conducting and soundproofing materials.

Jack McBride, who went for a walk along the banks of the River Bann, thinking Diatomite was turf, ended up with a great deal of knowledge on the subject.

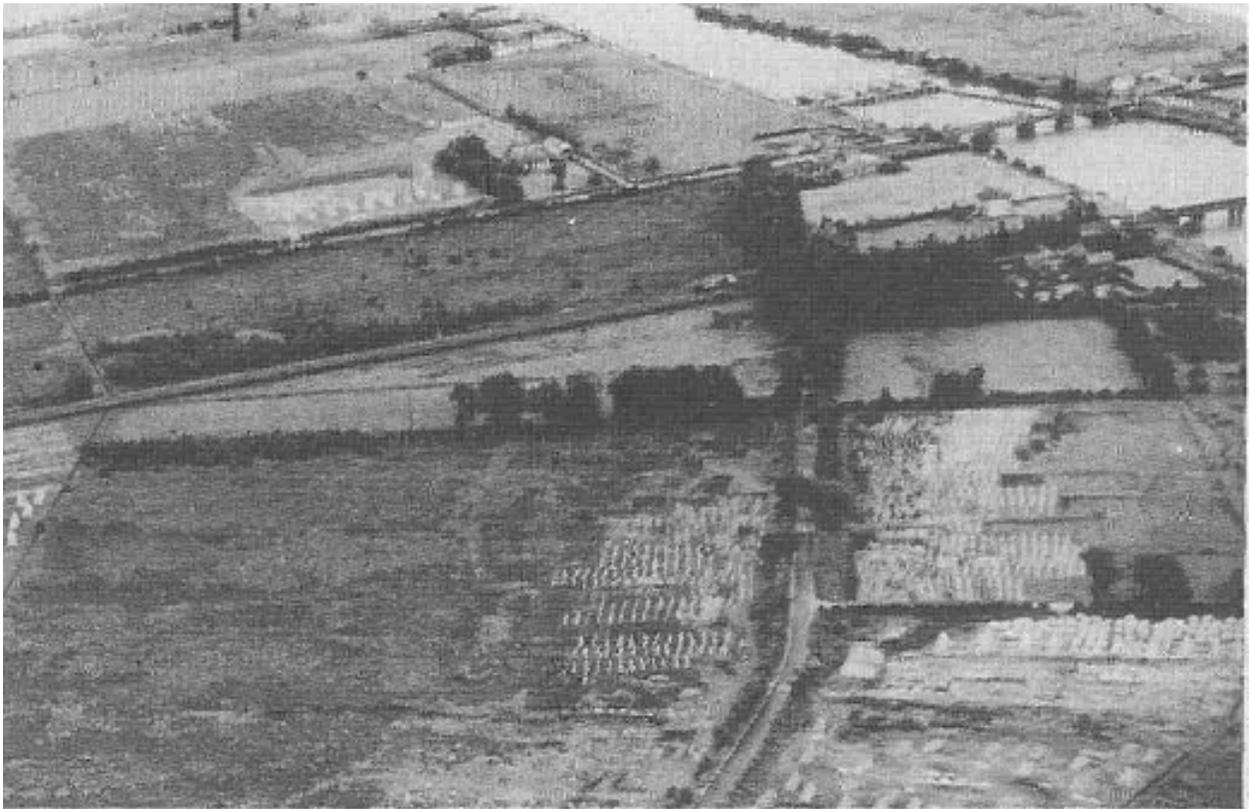
The Quinn Family have been for many years involved in mining, milling and marketing of Diatomite and the business of producing and marketing sphagnum peat. Prior to the arrival of the United Kingdom Peat Moss and Litter Co. Ltd., from England in 1913 this family had been involved in the manufacture and marketing of 'Culbann Brick'. The Quinns joined the recently arrived company and over the years, three brothers namely Patrick, Frank and Dan and later Dan's son Frank Junior gave excellent service in promoting its interests. Dan was responsible for the production of sphagnum moss, while Frank had charge of the Diatomite business, he was also a Director and General Manager of the United Kingdom Peat Moss and Litter Co. Ltd. Frank retired in 1968 and was succeeded by his nephew Frank Junior who had joined the company in 1958 and who managed the business until his retirement in 1995.

The United Kingdom Peat Moss and Litter Co. Ltd. began business in the area in 1913 and as we already know, they opened up several bogs for the manufacture of sphagnum peat moss. They also began digging, harvesting and milling Diatomite, but within a short space of time, their deposits of this mineral had been used up. To remain in business they purchased deposits and a factory belonging to the Erin Diatomite Co. Ltd., of Glasgow, which was then based in the townland of Glenone close to Portglenone. Such was the demand for this product, that within a short time these deposits ran out.

Frank Quinn the Company's General Manager then began a search for larger and better quality seams of Diatomite. In this he had much success, as he found a large areas of the mineral in the townland of Creagh, together with deposits on land belonging to Mr. Hunter of Brecart, also on lands the property of Frank, Neill and John Grant all of Toomebridge. In addition to obtaining a lease on all these deposits, he purchased the Grant Brothers factory and as a result, the company moved headquarters from Glenone to outside Toome. In addition to the discoveries already mentioned, valuable areas of Diatomite were located in the townlands of Kermegran, Aughnahoy, Tyanee, Lislea, Portglenone, Gortgole and Tamlaght, all of which border on the River Bann.

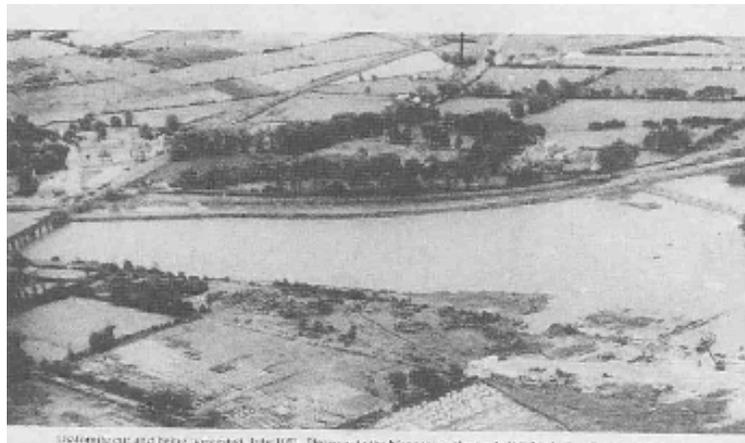
The clay when properly dried was transported from these outlying fields by boat along the River Bann to the sand quay at Toomebridge. The vessel, named The Slaney, had a carrying capacity of 100 tons and was crewed by John Francis Doherty and Harry Downey. The cargo was unloaded by crane onto horse and carts and in later years tractor trailers and taken to the factory for grinding. The transport to the docks in Belfast was initially by rail and later by lorries belonging to the Ulster Transport

Authority, from there the Diatomite was shipped to England.



Another scene of the Diatomite Fields in 1951. Please note the railway line, Diatomite Factory, two Bridges and the Eel Fishery.

Another view of the Diatomite Fields in 1951. Please note the railway line, Diatomite factory, two bridges, and the eel factory



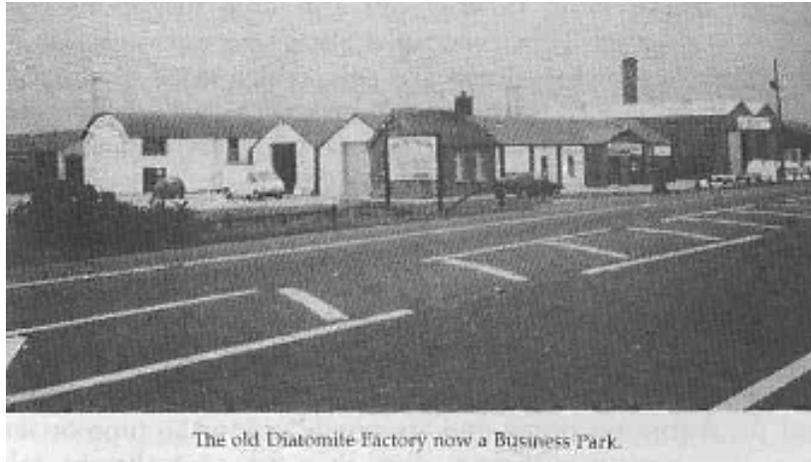
Diatomite cut and being harvested, July 1951. Please note the Marquee in the football field during carnival street

Production peaked during the years of the Second World War at 6,000 tons per annum, this was made up by 4,000 tons milled and 2,000 tons dug, bagged and exported direct from the clay fields and known as wet clay. Due no doubt to competition from new products arriving on the market, demand for Diatomite by 1968 had fallen to 2,000 tons, by 1994 it was down to 600 tons. In the later years in an effort to sustain production, insulation products were manufactured at the factory. With the company's remaining deposits in the area beginning to diminish, it was decided to cease operations. So after a period of almost 80 years, production of Diatomite came to an end. During those years a workforce of approximately 20 people were employed on a full time basis, rising to over 100 during the spring and summer months. This helped to boost the local economy especially in the lean years between the two world wars when employment in the area was almost non-existent.

The company disposed of its local assets, the land being sold to local farmers and the factory complex

to a progressive business company. The mill and outbuildings have been renovated and turned into a business park, which now houses a number of small companies, such as Plumbing Supplies, Coach Builders, Concrete Products, Plant Hire, Car Sales, Control Panels, Double Glazing Manufacture, The Gallery, Commercial Vehicle Sales and Storage Facilities.

These companies are presently giving additional employment in the area, and it is hoped that more jobs will be provided in the near future.



The old Diatomite Factory, now a business park

Lough Neagh and its Eels

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Since time prehistoric, local people have enjoyed the right to fish the wide variety of species existing in Lough Neagh. That was the position until various Kings, Queens, Lords and Earls deprived the fishermen of these rights. Thus a dispute, that began in the 16th century and continued through the upheavals of the Plantation of Ulster, lasting until the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Co-operative Society, which was formed in 1965, purchased in 1971 the remaining shares belonging to the Toome Eel Fishery Company (Northern Ireland) Ltd.

So after many battles legal and otherwise, a problem that had lasted for over three hundred years had been brought to an end, and the fishing resources of this great expanse of water were again under local control.

Lough Neagh, the largest fresh water lake in the British Isles covers an area of 153 square miles. It is bounded by five of the nine counties of Ulster and measures approximately 24 miles in length by 12 miles in breadth. Its shores are documented in history as being one of the earliest known inland sites of pre historic man in Ireland. Eight rivers flow into the Lough with only the River Bann flowing out and here the Toome Eel Fishery is situated. This river outlet allows for the migration of those species such as salmon and eels, which must spend part of their lives in both fresh and salt water. The eel, which is the subject of this chapter, has an unusual life cycle, beginning as larvae, deep in the Sargasso Sea. This is an area of water situated in the Atlantic Ocean about 1000 miles east of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. They rise to the surface there as elvers and are dispersed by currents, especially the Gulf Stream, which carries them northwards towards the Irish Coast and into the River Bann. The journey takes up to a year before they reach Lough Neagh, where a great many of them move into the incoming rivers and streams. During the nine or ten years they remain in these waters, they grow into brown eels and in reaching maturity, change colour to silver. When it is time to migrate they congregate in huge numbers in Toome Bay to await the weather conditions that will enable them to begin the long journey back to their birthplace in the Sargasso Sea.

They travel on the 'dark side of the moon' with a southwesterly gale blowing out of the Lough and the River Bann in spate. Traps belonging to the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Cooperative capture a

percentage of the eels on their outward journey to the sea.

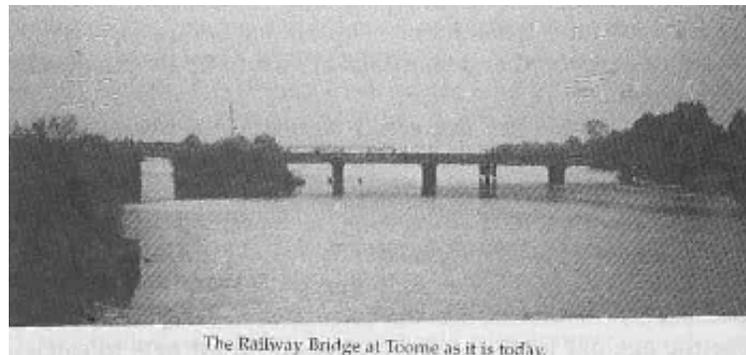
The Co-operative run by Father Oliver Kennedy operates the largest commercial eel fishery in the UK and probably in Europe, with annual catches of some 550 tonnes of brown eels and some 250 tonnes of silver eels, worth in excess of 4 million pounds sterling. The fishery is strictly controlled to preserve stocks for future generations. The annual influx of elvers is carefully monitored and shortfalls are made up by purchasing from elsewhere.

The elver intake has decreased dramatically over the past decade, which is a very worrying trend. Unfortunately, this coincides with increased demand for elvers from the growing number of commercial farms using recirculating technology to grow eels and this development has pushed prices sky high.

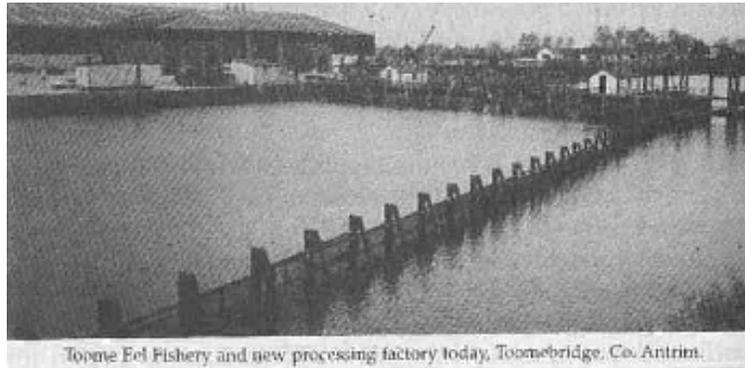
Eels are fished from the beginning of May until the end of October by 180 licensed boats each crewed by two men who use the age old long line techniques and draft nets to catch a maximum of 112 pounds per day. The catch is transported daily in numbered tanks on the Co-operative's lorries to Toomebridge, where an impressive building has been recently erected, consisting of suites of offices, visitors complex and a large processing unit.

On arrival, each tank is handled separately to ensure individual fishermen are credited for their catch. The sorting systems is swift and simple, eels are graded for size and undersized specimens consigned to drains, from where they find their way back into the Lough. Eels for market are weighed in 30-pound lots packed into large polythene bags with ice placed in cardboard boxes, and on the same day sent to the airport for transport, mainly to the Netherlands and Germany. Father Oliver Kennedy says, our eels have the perfect fat content for smoking and are highly sought after on the continent. His aim, now the new factory is ready, is to undertake primary processing in Toomebridge and to ship cleaned instead of live eels. This will be a major undertaking and a great care will have to be taken with the precision and quality of cleaning, he explains.

At the end of the day, it will mean more financial benefit for our fishermen, and that is what the Co-operative is all about. This venture has been a huge success and plays a major role in the economy of the area.



The Railway Bridge at Toome as it is today.
The Railway bridge at Toome as it is today



Toome Eel Fishery and new processing factory today. Toomebridge, Co. Antrim

Rody McCorley

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"There's never a tear in the blue, blue eyes,
both glad and bright are they.
As Rody McCorley goes to die on the
bridge of Toome today".

During the rising of 1798, the United Irishmen, in retreat from the battle of Antrim, made a stand here on the bridge at Toome, and in an effort to keep General Knox and his Yeomanry from attacking them from the Co. Derry side, two of the bridges nine arches were destroyed. The General and his troops eventually crossed the river, and defeated and captured most of what remained of the defenders. This resulted in one of them being hanged on the bridge the following year. The young man's name was Rody McCorley and the historian Francis J. Bigger's report of this sad event makes interesting reading, extracts from which are quoted here.

"After the insurrection was over, Rody must have escaped the Yeomen for sometime, being concealed in safe houses in Antrim, Derry and Tyrone awaiting his chance to escape to America. He was captured however in the following spring at Ballyscullion on the shore of Lough Beg by Samuel Finneston a local Yeoman. Members of the Dumbartonshire Fencible Regiment who were stationed at Toome at this time brought the prisoner to Ballymena where he was court marshalled and sentenced to death by hanging. Rody now in chains was marched from Ballymena to Toome, and lodged in what was then a Barracks, situated in the first building on your right on entering Moneyglass Road. From here, he was taken to the place of execution on the bridge. The scaffold was a rudely constructed affair; a stout post was sunk into the ground and from it at the top, a bar protruded at the right angles over which the rope was thrown. This post was fixed in such a position to enable it to be swung around and out over the river to enable those attending to view the hanging body from both sides of the river. There was a large platform at the base on which the masked hangman stood to fix the rope. The execution took place on the day of all days Good Friday and was witnessed by a huge crowd of sympathising friends and neighbours. Rody was attended by Father Hugh Devlin, who ministered to him as far as the situation permitted. The body was subsequently buried underneath the roadway where traffic going through would pass over it. The body of Rody McCorley lay in this unsanctified bed for over fifty years. Many a traveller trod lightly on the spot during those years, breathing an inward prayer as they passed by. The children never played there, and all talked ceased until the resting place was passed.

During 1852 a decision was taken to replace the bridge by a more modern structure. A large gang of men were engaged in the construction and cutting a new course for the river. The foreman was a giant of a man from Portglenone, a nephew of Rody's by the name of Hugh McCorley. He knew where the remains of the body lay and making sure, with all the activity that was taking place nearby it was not disturbed, he regulated the work to suit his plans. Then came the day to put his thoughts into action. It was a Holiday of Obligation celebrating the feast day of the Saints, Peter and Paul, on the 29th day of June. The remains were found intact not one bone was missing. Reverently they were dug up and placed in a coffin, which was carried shoulder high slowly through the village. The procession passed Gallows Hill, another execution spot on the Randalstown side of Toome, across the bog, by the old Road to Duneane Graveyard; there the remains were laid to rest in the McCorley family plot on the eastern side of the church. Never before was such an assembly of people seen in Duneane, not only did the workmen attend, but the people from a wide surrounding area were there to do him honour and celebrate his Christian burial half a century after his death. Francis J. Bigger states that two simple stones mark the McCorley burial ground, one is of slate the other sandstone."

They bear the following inscription:

THIS STONE BELONGS TO JOHN MCCORLEY
HERE LIETH THE BODY OF
FELIX MCCORLEY WHO DIED
THE 13th of APRIL 1768
AGED ELEVEN MONTHS ALSO
ANN MCCORLEY WHO DIED
JUNE the 1st 1769 AGED 4 YEARS

I.H.S.
THIS IS TO THE MEMORY
OF ROGER MCCORLEY
WHO DEPARTED THIS
LIFE MAY 12th 1772
AGED 61 YEARS

It will be noted that Rody McCorly's name is on neither. Sad to say these two simple stones have long since disappeared, whether or not they were in position during Mr. Biggers time he does not say. Today no one seems to be able to give the exact location of the family burial plot. Mr. Bigger in his short history of this sad episode states that the site of the execution is to be found in a field with a grassy bank sloping down to the river and that the owner Francis Grant is prepared to donate a site free of charge to enable a suitable memorial to be erected there. He is of the opinion that a large Celtic cross should be raised on the site of the scaffold, which could be seen by everyone travelling by river, road or rail, on the main arteries between Antrim and Derry. Mr. Grant's offer was taken up and a suitable cross was erected on the riverbank to the rear of the police station. Sad to say this memorial was attacked and partially destroyed during 1969. A fitting memorial has been re-erected and stands on the opposite side of the road from the RUC station.

The Future

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The people of Toomebridge in an effort to meet the needs of the twenty first century have set up an association called TIDAL, Toomebridge Industrial Development Amenities and Regeneration Group. In order to improve the image of the village TIDAL set about finding out what the residents thought was needed. As a result of the information obtained, the Toome Area Plan was produced, being funded by the Antrim Borough Council.

The development priorities for the area contained in this plan are currently being translated into action. The first project is a building to be known as Toome House, which will stand alongside the church on the Main Street. This building will provide services including a health centre, crèche, playgroup and training area. There will be units available for businesses to rent. It is anticipated that this venture will be completed in 1998.

It is planned to give the village a face-lift and perhaps, theme it in a particular style. Alongside this, an Urban Development Programme would be used to tidy up areas of the village, which are derelict and visually untidy. In an effort to create employment TIDAL have carried out an economic appraisal into the need for industrial development in the village and discovered there is a huge potential. Outline planning permission for a 16.4 acre site has been obtained which it is hoped to begin developing within the next twelve to eighteen months.

To increase the areas tourist potential a number of plans are being considered. It is intended to redevelop the areas along the banks of the canal and River Bann, with the provision of a small jetty and docking facilities. It is hoped to redevelop the old railway bridge as a walkway with lights and hanging flower baskets. These are plans, which will be in place, before any major effort is made to attract tourists on a grand scale.

Due to the present traffic situation in the village the association has taken on the responsibility of

lobbying to have a by-pass put in place. A report has been prepared which highlights and advocates the need for this road to be built immediately.

Conclusion

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Our journey has regrettably come to an end. We thank you for travelling with us to these quiet places of the Lower Bann Valley. We hope you have had the interest to either, partially or completely traverse our route, beginning at Cranfield and continuing to Portglenone. Returning to Toomebridge via Greenlough, Clady, New Ferry, Bellaghy, Hillhead and the old airfield

This particular area has many wonderful vantage points, is rich in history and we hope that you have discovered most of these on your journey. To observe a sunset from around Doss or along the rim of the valley is a never to be forgotten experience. We sincerely hope that this pleasant excursion, which lies just one hours drive from Belfast and Derry, will not go unnoticed to visitors from abroad and just as important, visitors from the rest of Ireland.

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