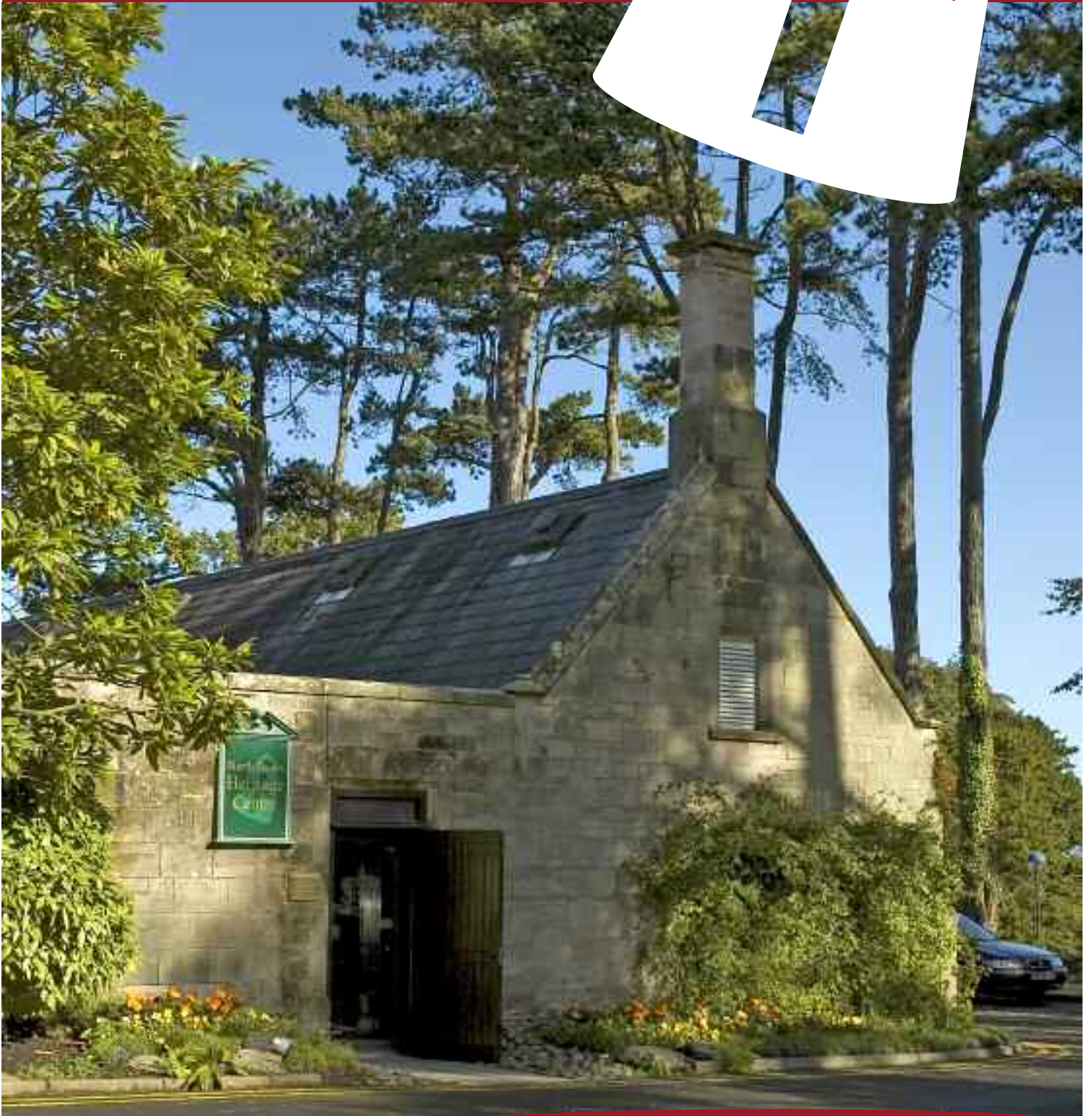


# The Bell

The Journal of North Down Heritage Centre



Autumn-Winter 2004



# 1984 2004



Welcome to a special edition of 'The Bell', the journal of North Down Heritage Centre! It is twenty years since the Mayor at that time, Councillor Mrs Hazel Bradford, officially opened the new venture of North Down Borough Council. The thinking behind it was to improve the quality of facilities for visitors to the area, which had in many ways been in decline in the 1960s and 70s, by putting to imaginative use potentially very attractive old out-buildings of the Town Hall, Bangor Castle (1852). A piece of wisdom in the museum world is that if you have an attractive and historic building, make it your first exhibit, and our visitors, locals and tourists, do appreciate the atmosphere of the buildings, and the tranquil setting of Castle Park.

How successful has the Heritage Centre been? It is tempting to quote the words of Mao Tse Tung when asked about the significance of the French Revolution : "It's too soon to say". Of course we are taken up with our week-to-week activities : temporary exhibitions; crafts days for children; 'living history' sessions; working with the franchisee to run the restaurant efficiently; answering almost daily queries on all manner of local topics, etc. But the role of stewardship of artefacts in public trust renders twenty years a very short time – the 'Bangor Bell', our finest object, is 1,200 years old. The unique and much-admired folio of maps by Thomas Raven is nearly 400 years old. What will happen to these and many others over the ensuing centuries? This is a question found nowhere else in the diverse range of responsibilities and problems local authorities shoulder.

In 1984 North Down Heritage Centre was a fresh venture. In 2004, we can at least safely say that it has become embedded in the community. School classes, play groups coming to see the beehive, tourists from scores of countries, painting tuition classes, bus parties from retirement homes, charities using the venue for events, walkers with our park nature trail – wouldn't you miss us if we weren't here?

## Why is it the Heritage Centre and not the Museum?

What's in a name – quite a lot in this case. It proved much easier tactically for the Council to call the project a Heritage Centre and obtain grant from the Dept. of Economic Development in the early 1980s, than term it a Museum and take on the Dept. of Education! Because the role as a tourist attraction was heavily emphasised, and the Borough was clearly in need of higher quality attractions, this approach succeeded! In 1993, we attained Registered Museum status and to all intents and purposes are run on the same basis as the other local authority museums.

## How many visitors are recorded?

Over the last ten years the average annual figure is about 47,000 – about 900 people per week. Some museums are now beginning to employ the term "users", and counting those who make e-mail inquiries for information (more and more common) and who attend "outreach" activities – in our case, for instance, slide shows in retirement homes. And, of course, 'virtual' visitors to a website – ours being the first among smaller museums in N. Ireland. But it is believed since 1984 around  $\frac{3}{4}$  million actual visits have been made!









## Have you tied in to other Council functions?

Very much so! Most importantly, our Arts section. Because North Down has no Arts Centre, several of those functions since 1984 have been undertaken in the Heritage Centre: a venue for performing arts, most notably musical events and the major annual festival of Irish writing, 'Aspects', which began in 1992. Also, tuition classes and visual arts exhibitions. Our Parks section colleagues, as well as keeping the flower borders and Victorian courtyard spruce, are often on hand to guide children round adjoining Castle Park. Of course, the helpful staff at the Tourist Information Centre, Tower House (1627 – another historic building!) are always directing people our way and seeking help with enquiries at the counter. Community Development and Community Relations staff frequently overlap with us, while the Council's new Countryside Officer has been pleased to find that our mission statement doesn't neglect the natural heritage!







## Twenty Years: *The Highlights*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1984</b> Opening, 16 October. First prestigious exhibition, Colin Middleton paintings</p> <p><b>1985</b> Also begin running summer exhibitions, Tower House</p> <p><b>1986</b> Second phase opens, featuring Jordan Far Eastern collection</p> <p><b>1987</b> Provision of historical background for Bangor's "Twinning" with Bregenz, Austria (7th century missionaries Columbanus and Gall)</p> <p><b>1988</b> Venue for "Highway" with Harry Secombe – 4m. watch nationwide.</p> <p><b>1989</b> Third phase opens – restaurant by day, events by night.</p> <p><b>1990</b> Production of audio-visual show to mark tercentenary of Battle of the Boyne with commentary by Walter Love and David Capper.</p> <p><b>1991</b> First weekly tuition classes – watercolour, drawing, oil painting, photography</p> <p><b>1992</b> 'Aspects' Irish writing festival commences</p> <p><b>1993</b> 'The Bell' commences appearing (quarterly – roughly!)</p> <p><b>1994</b> Central role in Council's massively successful 'D-Day' commemorations</p> <p><b>1995</b> Major donation of glass plate and nitrate negatives, by Mr Gaw, Portadown</p> <p><b>1996</b> Acquisition of Bangor officers gorget – Ulster Volunteers, ca 1780</p> <p><b>1997</b> Organization with Ocean Youth Trust of yacht voyage to Iona – early Christian links.</p> <p><b>1998</b> Donation by Royal British Legion of magnificent and unusual Memorial Book</p> <p><b>1999</b> "A Century of Photographs" to commemorate Millennium sells 2,000 in 7 weeks!</p> | <p><b>2000</b> First 'Viking Day': activities in 'living history' and crafts for schools</p> <p><b>2001</b> Combine with Neighbourhood Social Workers – events for Chinese community, Chinese New Year</p> <p><b>2002</b> Events to commemorate 150th anniversary of the Town Hall, Bangor Castle</p> <p><b>2003</b> Jordan collection reopens in new location: new donations after 35 years with Council!</p> <p><b>2004</b> Twentieth anniversary, 16 October!</p> |
|--|--|
- Footnote Only one highlight per year has been chosen, to demonstrate a cross-section of our activities.

### What Else Happened in 1984?

-  The new North Breakwater won the Best Concrete Structure award.
-  Bangor's new lifeboat house was opened – also by Councillor Mrs Hazel Bradford.
-  The last three dwelling houses in Castle Square were demolished
-  The first moves were made to 'twin' with Bregenz
-  Glenlyon River Park was created and opened in Holywood
-  Stephen Martin featured in Britain's Olympic bronze medal hockey team.

### and elsewhere it was the year of:

-  the miners' strike
-  the Grand Hotel, Brighton, bombing
-  John McEnroe and Martina Navratilova as winners at Wimbledon
-  "Ghost Busters", "Beverly Hills Cop" and "Romancing the Stone" (and "1984"!!)
-  a long hot summer
-  no. 1 records for Wham!, Band Aid, Stevie Wonder and Jim Diamond (who?)



# Walking Orlock

Denis Mayne

The townland of Orlock lies east of Groomsport village between Balloo Lower and Portavo. (IGR J558 838). Orlock Point, the northern portion of the townland, projects into the North Channel at the mouth of Belfast Lough where the Copeland Islands lie a mile to the east.. The foreshore is owned by the National Trust, a gift from the Ker family, the local landlords of Portavo,

## Standing Stones.

I approached the shore through the stile at the southern, Donaghadee, end of Orlock point and made my first discovery. To the north of the remnants of a private garden is a standing stone (IRG J5645 8295) situated about 15 m. from the foot of the raised beach and the same distance from the high tide mark. It measures 1.20 m. high and its width varies between 0.50 m. and 0.80 m. The stone is not made of the local greywacke and its roughly oval and smooth appearance suggest that it has been rolled by the sea or ice, possibly a basalt immigrant from the Antrim side of the lough. Although this stone stands close to the National Trust path it was not listed in the official Sites and Monuments Record held by Protecting Historic Monuments. The practice of erecting such unmarked stones began in the Early Bronze Age (2,500 – 1500 B.C.). Some were erected as grave markers while others probably commemorate a significant event or person. This practice of erecting standing stones has continued to the present day as demonstrated by the spate of stone raisings about the country commemorating the beginning of the present millennium. About ½ mile to the north of this stone is another (J5609 8347) which is



*Standing stone, Portavo side of Orlock Head 1930s*



remarkable in that it stands on the shore and is washed twice a day by the tide. Greatly puzzled for some days by this I eventually discovered an informant who explained that the stone had been put up in the 1960s or 70s to mark the burial of one of a pair of porpoises that had been washed up on the shore. The other grave is identified by an upright piece of cut sandstone at the edge of the high tide mark.

## The landlord, smuggling and the Coastguard

In his excellent book, *Portavo*, Peter Carr names several local people who have family memories of smuggling at Orlock. Such activity was common place all round the Irish coast in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but it is rare for there to be archival evidence of a district magistrate and large land owner strenuously obstructing the Revenue in their attempts to curb smuggling as appears to have been the case with David Ker, the landlord of Portavo in the early 1800s. When the Coastguard was being set up in the 1820s Mr. Ker successfully blocked the building of a station on the Copeland Islands<sup>1</sup>. In a Customs Outport Establishment book of the time a double page was prepared with the heading Copeland Isl. written in immaculate script. This has been carelessly scribbled out and Donaghadee inelegantly scratched in as though by an irritated clerk<sup>2</sup>. A small vessel in which the men lived was afterwards moored off the island, but Mr. Ker would not suffer it to remain there and only agreed the islands be visited twice a month by the Donaghadee station. As a contemporary report noted, this did not prevent the smuggling of tobacco, rum brandy etc to a considerable extent for the islands afforded a convenient receptacle for illicit goods, from which they could be transported at leisure to the mainland<sup>3</sup>. Ten years later Mr Ker tried to frustrate the Customs once more in their plans to establish a station at Orlock Point. This time the Customs were more determined and following an inquisition of 1833 the Customs were put in possession of half an acre of land<sup>4</sup>. David Ker was so incensed he refused to accept the £5 annual rent and after his father's death Richard Ker claimed back rent of £60 from the Customs<sup>5</sup>. The coastguard cottages were built by 1837 and stand today on the ridge of the raised beach with a commanding view of the Copeland Islands<sup>6</sup>.

## The Coach Road

Perhaps the most impressive and certainly the most puzzling of the Orlock enigmas is the so called Coach Road. This is the remains of an old roadway built by David Ker in the 1830s. Beginning at the north at Sandeel Bay it terminates at the edge of Portavo Bay to the south. It appears to have been built as a continuation of the Groomsport to Orlock road that ran along the coast before turning abruptly to the south at Sandeel Bay. Near the end of my present researches I was most fortunate in being contacted by Patrick Brow who had been reared at Orlock and who has proved a most informative and obliging guide to the area. Patrick holds a Masters in Engineering Geology which makes him well qualified to make judgements on the building of the road, The National Trust path follows the course of the road along the northern coast passing through two rock cuttings before



*The mysterious tunnel, Orlock Head.*

continuing along a low causeway that crosses marshy land. Patrick pointed out the mark of a quarrymans spike on the rock face of one of the cuttings confirming that the passage through the rock was not a natural formation. About half way round the Point is a tunnel measuring 5 m. long by 2.5 m. high and between 3m. and 4m. wide. The tunnel is marked on modern Ordnance Survey maps as Natural Tunnel. Patrick refutes this. He showed the two spike marks on the walls that clearly demonstrate the tunnel was worked by men. He explained that the evidence for the modern construction of the narrow gorge south from the tunnel is in the smoothness of the sheer sides which have not suffered weathering over geological time. Another significant factor is the soil balanced on the top of the sides of the gorge which presents a perpendicular face as though it had only just been cut. With slippage over time it will settle on the edge at an angle of 45 degrees. Patrick's conclusion is that the walls could not have been cut more than 200 years ago.

The gorge opens onto a stony cove bordered on the far side by a 6m high cliff on the top of which can be clearly seen the profile of the road cut through the rock. In 1930 a local farmer recalled how his father remembered a massive railroad style embankment traversing the cove and an embankment here is also noted in the Ordnance Survey Memoirs<sup>7</sup>. There is no trace of this embankment now. From here much of the road has been cut through the live rock with the sides rising to 3m. in places and the width varying from 2.50 m. to 5.50 m. The road runs is so close to the sea that where there are breaks between the rock cuttings where natural gullies open to the sea all evidence of the road has been washed away. The length of the road from the tunnel cove to its abrupt southern termination at Portavo Bay is 610 m. of which 414m. have been cut through the live rock.

Although local tradition holds that for a while the road was ridden over by David Ker in his coach, crossing over inlets that were then bridged<sup>8</sup>, I do not believe that the road was ever completed.



While both the OS Memoirs and local memory refer to the embankment across the cove by the tunnel there is no mention of such an embankment where the road terminates on the cliff edge at the north. Also, while the majority of the surviving road remains levelled with stone rubble now sealed by grass and earth, some 34 m. from Portavo Bay there is a stretch of rock-cut road that runs for about 54 m. where the rock floor is fully exposed and without any vestige of grass cover. The rock is deeply corrugated and would be quite unnegotiable by horse drawn vehicle. It is unlikely that only in this cutting the surface material would have been washed away so thoroughly.

If the road was used then I would suggest that somewhere before it reached Portavo Bay the route struck out up the raised beach and over the fields to the county road. There are several places where this could have been accomplished.

Of course the most puzzling question is what was the purpose of building the road on such an extraordinary route so close to the sea where it must have been realised that it would not survive for long? Peter Carr discusses several possibilities<sup>9</sup>. 1. the road was for transporting quarried stone (impractical route); 2. it was some kind of a folly; 3 it was a convenience for smugglers. ("It was 'common knowledge' that smugglers made habitual use of it"<sup>10</sup>). Also the possibility that it was not completed following the acquisition of land for a coastguard station adds weight to the smuggler argument. But Peter Carr admits that the possibilities are not mutually exclusive. I have heard another curious story told by Capt. Ker, the late occupant of Portavo, who said that family tradition held that the road had been built by his ancestor for his wife who disliked seeing the poverty of the peasants and preferred not to be looked at by them (Frank Capper, pers. Com.). The road remains an enigma without any reasonable explanation, perhaps because reasonableness was not part of the concept.

## The Rath

Patrick's parents home is called Rath House and he volunteered to show me where he believed the rath to have been situated. The feature presents as a small rise of ground on top of a spit of land that extends seaward from the tunnel. I have to admit that for the one and only time I am cautiously sceptical of Patrick's interpretation of a topographical feature. Rathes are the remains of Early Christian farmsteads built from about 400 AD to 1,000 AD. They are circular in construction and enclosed by a bank and outer ditch. When I walked the site I could find no evidence of either a ditch or a bank, although the vegetation was dense and features might have been concealed. The position of the site on a narrow coastal promontory is an unusual place for a farm even allowing for much of the features having been destroyed during the excavation of the gorge to the tunnel. Could it be another type of archaeological monument? Promontory Forts built in the Iron Age enclosed areas of land much larger than that available on any of the Orlock promontories. A small cairn? A return to the site in the early spring when it is less thickly covered by plants could be useful.

It is intriguing that the modern dwelling is called Rath House because such sites are more usually referred to as 'forts' in the country and were designated as such on the first Ordnance Survey six inch maps of the 1830s. A field in which a rath stood in Balloo Lower is called 'Fort Field' and a similar site at Ballymacormick Point is known as 'Danes Fort'.

## A wooden floor on the sea bed

Some years ago an amateur diver Noel Kirpatrick exploring the inlet beside the tunnel discovered rows of iron bound interconnected wooden slabs lying on the sea bed<sup>11</sup>. Colin Breen of Ulster University Maritime Archaeology Department suggests that these boards may be connected to a W.W.2 submarine fuelling station that is reputed to have been situated close to Orlock. My late father-in-law had also heard of such a station when he worked in Londonderry for the Admiralty during the war.

Set upright in the shingle of the same cove above the low water mark is a row of five wooden slabs. Each measures 0.76 m. (30 inches) wide by 0.065 m. (2 1/2 inches) thick, composed of double sheets of wood bound by angle iron, with a large oval metal plate holding a pair of metal rings. (As they are partially buried their lengths remain unknown). Whether these are the same type of boards that line the floor of the cove can only be ascertained by the inspection of the submerged boards by a diver.

Local people have interpreted the four visible slabs as part of the door of the hold of a Kelly's coal boat that is said to have sunk close by. This has been a deduction made by association with the large quantity of coal that used to be washed ashore during northerly storms. However there appears to be no report of a coal boat having been sunk in this area. Also Kirpatrick describes the wooden slabs forming a 'man made floor' out to a depth of around 40 feet and makes no mention of seeing anything of a sunken boat.

## World War 2 and Orlock Point

Orlock Point was first identified as an important situation for military defence of Belfast Lough in 1912 when it was established as a Port War Signal Station (this and the following information has been gleaned from Bill Clements' *Defending the North*)<sup>12</sup>. At the outbreak of W.W.2 an electrically controlled cable was laid across the Lough between Black Head and Orlock Point with the purpose of detecting submarines as they passed over it. Orlock was also the command post for the Royal Navy Extended Defence Officer whose duty was to control an electrically operated minefield also laid across the entrance to the lough. A cable can still be seen stretching out from Sandeel Bay. On the rocks can be seen the remains of two brick artillery search light enclosures which once had armoured glass shutters. Two 6 inch (152 mm.) BL guns were mounted at Orlock, both protected by concrete gun houses. One of these gun houses has been adapted as a private residence with the naval PVII mounting surviving as a feature on the patio. The other gun house has been removed or engorged by a large new dwelling although the ammunition house remains as



a garage. The generator house which provided power for the whole station was hidden behind a rock face below the gun houses. It was demolished a little while ago as it had become an attraction for riff-raff. Orlock Point and the four other defence batteries around Belfast Lough were the only coast defences in the army where women were employed in operational roles. This arrangement had been agreed between the OC Fixed Command in Northern Ireland and the senior ATS officer in Northern Ireland. As it happened they were man and wife. The purpose of the arrangement was to release men for other duties elsewhere but it also relieved the boredom experienced by men on these stations by providing opportunities for mixed 'recreational' activities as related in an anecdote by Sir Charles Brett in his book *Buildings of North County Down*<sup>13</sup>

### Sources

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- 5 PRO (Kew) CUST 41/42
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- 7 Day & McWilliams 1991 p. 21; Carr, Peter *Portavo: An Irish Townland and Its People Part One: Earliest Times to 1844* (Dundonald 2003) p.271
- 8 Ibid
- 9 Ibid p. 273
- 10 Ibid p. 270
- 11 Kirkpatrick, Noel *Take a Second Look Belfast 1993* p. 114.
- 12 Clements, Bill *Defending the North: The Fortifications of Ulster 1796-1956 Newtownards 2003*.
- 13 Brett, C.E.B., Merrick, Anthony C.W., *Buildings of North County Down Belfast 2002* p. 181

## An Eerie Coincidence

Anyone engaged in the sphere of museums will know that you can never tell who will appear out of the blue with what objects or tales to tell. Matters may be purely routine for weeks on end: budgets, staff rotas, maintenance requirements, invoices, and then.....

In the spring of 2004 your editor had been asked by Mike King, Curator of Down County Museum, to write an article for their yearbook. As the theme was to be Down Military history it was agreed a piece on the magnificent World War One Memorial Book, donated to the Heritage Centre by the local branch of the Royal British Legion in 1998, would be of interest. This superbly-made book records, with photographs, all men of Bangor and district who were victims of the conflict. My angle on it was to take a short period, the summer of 1917, and see how the local newspaper the 'Co. Down Spectator' reported the deaths of those who were lost then, and put the times in context by examining how it was recording the war in general, and the everyday local happenings which of course continued much as usual. One of the men who was killed was Rifleman John Savage, son of well-known local builder and Urban District Councillor James Savage, "Mount Herald". (The Savage family continued to live at "Mount Herald", at the corner of Clifton Road and Ballyholme Road, until about 1980, after which it was demolished.) Quite an account of his last action was printed.

About two weeks after the submission of the article, a lady phoned up. She had been over from London clearing a house in Newtownards and wondered if we would like a very large quantity of family papers, photographs, etc. belonging to cousins of her late mothers. They had been lying untouched since 1976 ... it turned out this was an archive of the Savage family, and when it was all assembled the newspapers reporting John's death were there, as were a bundle of letters of condolence .....



*Rifleman John Savage*



# Looking back

In 1997, not long after I joined NDBC, I was involved in the Shamrock and Thistle festival, celebrating our links with Scotland and, more specifically on this occasion, the links of our Christian ancestors from the monasteries at Bangor and Iona.

Ocean Youth Club were booked to take a group of young people from the Borough who represented different religious backgrounds and, in the spirit of St. Columba who died 1400 years previously, retrace the journey to Iona. The group was accompanied by Rev. Willis Cordiner of the Clergy Fraternal.

The trip proved to be a great success, with favourable weather and good team spirit on board. Although I was unable to accompany the group personally, I enjoyed hearing first hand at a reunion of the events of the trip. I was impressed by the value of the experience for each member of the group. I think it was something which they will remember for a long time to come.

In the same year (1997) I was able to bring together the Science Discovery Bus from the Ulster Museum with many other folk involved in environmental education and have our first ever Environmental Discovery Day for local schools.

Workshops were provided for approximately 200 primary school children.

There were workshops on recycling by Mr Cairnduff who was able to make the most amazing and effective things from waste materials, - musical instruments from coke bottles and bicycle wheels, furniture from cardboard boxes and kites from crisp packets.

Children were fascinated by Phelim Breen and his observation beehive. He is, of course very well known in The Heritage Centre and has brought the bees here every summer for many years.

The Science Discovery bus, which sadly is no more, was a wonderful portable mini museum of fossils, semi precious stones from South America, smells of the rain forests and more. It proved to be a transportation to another place and climate with lots to see and handle.

Ulster Wildlife Trust worked with us to provide excellent guides for outdoor games and education including a bat workshop.

It was always very satisfying to see the look of enjoyment on the children's faces at the Environmental Discovery days.

On a couple of occasions I have organised a Heritage Bus Trip for elderly folk of the Borough. The target group was elderly folk living in sheltered dwellings or nursing homes, who were no longer able to get out and about independently. We were able to accommodate 15 folk, a few of whom were in wheelchairs.

The bus took a tour of local historic places of interest such as the Abbey, the harbour, Groomsport via Six-Road-Ends, where we



*Archaeology Day - now a very popular annual event*

were received at the cottages to see and sample freshly baked soda bread. After a few more stops with Mr Ian Wilson giving an informative commentary, we returned to Castle Garden Restaurant for a delicious lunch.

It was a wonderful opportunity to enable those who were housebound to reminisce and enjoy a day out together.

**Heather Curran, Education Officer**



# Bangor,

## the shadow of a great name

by Kenneth Robinson



The legend of Bangor runs through many of the stories that have survived from mediaeval Ireland. The antiquarian Sir James Ware referred to "Bangor, alias the vale of angels... it took its name from a beautiful choir (ban chor)" We can trace this angelic connexion back to a life of St. Patrick written by Jocelin of Furness, a Benedictine monk who was probably invited over to Inch abbey by the Norman conquistador De Courcy in the 1180s. Jocelin relates that when St. Patrick visited Bangor, he found it flooded with heavenly light, the venue for a multitude of the heavenly host singing "the psalmody of the celestial choir". In hagiography angels are always a sign of sanctity and divine favour, and Jocelin makes his St Patrick prophesy the great works of St Comgall, Bangor's founder, and of his successors.

Of course, it is quite probable that Bangor as a placename goes back to pre-Christian times. The Dindsenchas, or the lore of high places, an early Irish topography, gives an alternative explanation:

Inver Bicne, why is it so called? Not difficult that, Bicne MacLoeghaire, Conall Cernach's servant, died there while driving the kine that were brought out of Scotland after the great cattle disease that befel in the time of Bresal Bodibad, named "cow destruction" ... Bicne died when driving them ashore, and 'tis there that (in grief for him) the cattle shed their horns. Whence Bennchor Ulad, "the Horn casting of Ulster" is said and Inver Bicne, Bicne's estuary is named.

Another version of this story appears in Geoffrey Keating's History of Ireland. An Irish king, returning from Britain after a successful cattle raid, slaughtered a great number of the beasts, so that their Beanna or horns so covered the place that it was known as Magh Beanncoir.

In modern times, the poetry and romance of Celtic legend have been confirmed rather prosaically in the annals of the British House of Commons. In 1809 it published a report on marine communications between Britain and Ireland:

the situation of Bangor... is distinguished very particularly by the two conspicuous headlands which form the entrance into the bay; the western, or Wilson's point projects into the loch considerably further than that on the eastern side, consequently in sailing from the Copeland towards Bangor Wilson's point marks distinctly the situation of the harbour



The cows' horns of the legends are probably a reference to this geographical feature. There is a similar feature at Beanna strand in Co. Kerry. The love of story telling, however, embroidered a physical feature into the high deeds of an Irish cattle baron. Such stories concerning placenames abound in the Ulster cycle of epic tales. In the words of Matthew Arnold, thank goodness the Celt is "always ready to react against the despotism of fact"

To such a place renowned in pagan lore came St Comgall to set up his church. "The little places that were occupied by twos and threes, they are ruama "Romes", with multitudes, hundreds and thousands". A legendary spot had to be thronged by fabled numbers of religious. The sainted greats of the early Irish church enjoy a tradition of promoting Christianity on the grand scale. The Tripartite Life of Patrick credits the national saint with 370 episcopal ordinations, 5000 ordinations of priests and 700 church foundations. Or compare this from the Book of Lismore: "the saints of Ireland came to Finnian of Clonard to learn from him, so that there were 3000 saints along with him, and from them, as the learned know, he chose the twelve bishops of Ireland. And the learning and the writings declare that no one of these three thousand went from him without a crozier, or a Gospel or some well known sign: and round those reliquaries they built their churches and their monasteries afterwards". Clonard would have needed an army of scribes and ecclesiastical outfitters to supply such a demand! The Martyrology of Oengus tells us that there were 900 monks at Bangor, 600 at Antrim and 500 at "Connor of the combats". In St Bernard's Life of St Malachy we read that Bangor produced "many thousands" of monks and that Oengus's 900 were slaughtered by Norse raiders in one day. The Life of Comgall claims that he ruled over 3000 monks in the associated abbeys and cells of the monastic family of churches. The Irish Litanies increase this number of 4000; by comparison Mochoe of Nendrum reigned over a paltry "nine times fifty".

The question of Bangor's swarms was first raised by Patrick Fleming in his *Collectanea Sacra*, written in 1667. Fleming did not think thousands of monks living in a single monastery implausible. The ultimate source for the idea of these fabled swarms comes from the home of the monastic ideal, the deserts of Egypt. St Columbanus wrote of the Egyptians and their legend of holy living. Even the heroes of Bangor's golden age indulged in their own myths which they tried to emulate. Some of these Egyptians, or perhaps just their sainted relics, made it to Ireland, and were honoured at their hermitage known as the "Desert of Ulster".

Bangor became the centre of the cult of its founder. The power of the mediaeval holy man drew followers and wealth to the church that could lay claim to him. Hence arose the battle between Armagh and Down over the copyright to St. Patrick. As his reputation grew the promoters of the cult strove to identify the very spot where the saint lived, the tree he liked to preach under or the bed on which he lay. St Malachy returned to Bangor in the twelfth century because of its ancient reputation. There are more modern examples of this hero worship. A tree in the grounds of

Bangor Castle is venerated by Orangemen for its associations with the Duke of Schomberg. The good people of Newtownards have lately raised a statue to their own martial hero, Blair Mayne. Such saints are the symbols of their devotees' power: "Protected by Finnian of Movilla are all the Ulaid... the Dal nAraide (S Antrim & N Down), the noble, the amiable are protected by Comgall". The promoters of the cult collected these traditions of their patron saint into books of "legends", which were read on the anniversary or feast day of the saint. These stories of the saints often attempt to outdo one another in descriptions of extremes of suffering or wonder working. They are rather written to impress than edify.

The mediaeval map of the world, the *Mappa Mundi*, shows four places and two rivers in Ireland. These are the twin pillars of the ancient Irish church, St Patrick's Armagh and St. Brigit's Kildare, Dublin, the centre of English rule, and Bangor, renowned in Europe through the efforts of its hagiographers. Despite the incomplete nature of the evidence, it is clear that Bangor's house of monks held a revered place in Ireland. A work entitled the *Triads of Ireland* lists the chief religious places; Armagh is the "head" of Ireland, Clonmacnoise the "dignity", Clonard the "wealth" and Kildare the "wealth". Ranked eighth, Bangor enjoys the soubriquet the "seniority" of Ireland. In a land where tradition is paramount it is a fitting tribute.

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## The 'Co. Down Spectator' index

Another commemoration this year is the centenary of the local paper! In the Heritage Centre vaults are most of the original papers, and best of all, the years 1916 – 24 are unique to us. Not even the British Library (and certainly not the 'Spectator') has these volumes. We recently had them indexed by Ellen Elder, along the lines of the S.E.E.L.B. local newspaper indexing system. The juxtaposition of world and parochial events is startling: "Ward Park Ducks Devoured by Otter"; 'Battle of Jutland'; 'Trial and Execution of Roger Casement'; 'Mixed Bathing at Pickie'; 'Proposed Tunnel Under Irish Sea'; 'Black British Soldiers in Abbey Street'; 'James Bell (23) drowns at Ballyholme' (all 1916)

Of course, before radio and television local papers carried national and world news. And as by the time of the Second World War censorship was very much stricter, the papers of this era are a Pandora's box of fascination.

One longs to look for the full story behind these intriguing entries: "Lusitania diamonds – fisherman's catch"; 'Birching for miscreants in Bangor'; 'Lord Kitchener still alive, says sister'; 'Ice cream prohibited'; 'Schools close for blackberry picking'; 'Women Smokers Blamed for cigarette shortage'. 'Goat chases woman – Greyabbey Court Case'.

It is intended to have these unique volumes sent to the British Library for microfilming.



# Favourite Buildings in the Borough

by Marcus Patton



*'Glenbank' (centre), 'Seacourt' (top) and the Victorian/Edwardian townscape, about 1935.*

If you are asked to name your favourite food it is probably not some exotic piece of nouvelle cuisine that comes to your mind, but more likely a comforting childhood dish like syrup pudding or buttered scones. The grandness of the chef and the rarity of the ingredients are not likely to figure heavily on your choice. In the same way a selection of favourite buildings is highly personal, and not largely dictated by considerations of greatness.

I was brought up in Bangor, but as I have lived elsewhere for many years, my vision of the town is still largely coloured by impressions of it as it was before bombs and developers decimated the main streets, and while it was still possible to walk out into a countryside where sticklebacks darted in streams, frogs jumped in dells and the seashore had more pondlife than plastic flotsam.

The buildings that loomed large in my life were ones like Barry's Amusements, with its fairy-story turrets and the wonderworld of ghost trains and the penny-in-the-slot tableaux of executions. It

was only later, when it was about to be demolished, that I found out it had been built as the Grand Hotel about 1895 and had at one time been "the Largest and Best Appointed Hotel in the Town", boasting no less than three upright pianos (that was in the days before piped music).

Cinemas were important, although when you were in the darkness watching Davy Crockett or Moby Dick it didn't much matter if you were in the fake mediaeval Tudor Cinema in High Street or the palatial Tonic in Hamilton Road. However when the multi-coloured Compton organ rose up from the floor in the intervals at the Tonic the subtle shades of John McBride Neill's art deco interior told of much greater sophistication. I was very familiar with the great curves of Snowcrete and rustic brick on the outside of the Tonic too, for I went to school in the old golf club beside it, by then known as Connor House. We didn't know that the reason it had a verandah was because members had wanted to watch the progress of their pals on the green in front, because



by that time the course had been built over with streets and houses; but it made a very pleasant and happy school.

I rarely went to the nearby metropolis of Holywood, but was always impressed by the jazzy frontage of Tog's Ices on the Main Street, so much flashier than Caproni's which seemed to be more interested in putting on dances than selling ice cream. The Maypole was always intriguing, and the gables and chimneys of the Tudor Houses on their elevated site seemed more impressive than our own Bangor Castle whose chimneys had been shaved off.

In those days there were thatched cottages near Bangor, notably the little fishermen's cottages on the shore at Groomsport, which I photographed in their state of dereliction with my box camera; and another little cottage on the road to Donaghadee which is still standing but no longer thatched - and looks likely to disappear altogether to make way for a much larger house a-building behind it. Happily, Cockle Row still survives as a reminder of what was once a common type of house in the borough.



*Villa built in 1915 by James Savage for Alderman Tyrrell, corner of Shandon Drive and Seacliff Road. Cost : £1770. Now much extended!*

Living in the Metroland of Baylands, I was vaguely aware that its little cottages, many with diamond-shaped slates and brightly painted verandahs, set in their neat gardens with hydrangeas and privet hedges, had a distinct charm. The car has since taken its toll by demanding concrete parking bays and garages, and plastic windows have replaced so many of the original designs. Those years ago, the only change was a very modern house at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Third Avenue: Henry Lynch Robinson's flat-roofed design of 1951, with its porthole door and enormous glass staircase window, seemed the epitome of space-age modernism. While enjoying a row in one of Laird's boats in Bangor Bay one could admire the grand houses of Princetown Road with their rolling manicured lawns, and the old pine trees that whispered

over Pickie Pool. Seacourt and Glenbank were then still private houses and secluded behind tall walls, making the end of the Marine Gardens towards Stricklands Glen quite mysterious.

Going back to Bangor and looking at it with an architect's eyes I am mainly struck by how much has been altered and lost, with seemingly no thought for retaining the gracious or glamorous character of what had been there. A building does not have to be listed to be worth looking after, and even a modest building looks so much better when its original features have been kept. Not so long ago, one could walk along the seafront from Ballyholme Esplanade to Stricklands Glen and enjoy a practically unbroken Victorian and Edwardian townscape. Now it is broken up by unsympathetic apartment blocks and gap sites, and many of the old gardens are built over or tarmaced.

The few buildings that have survived unaltered are a pleasure to see and something which Bangorians should treasure. The Royal Ulster Yacht Club, Vincent Craig's late Victorian pile, is still remarkably intact. Bangor Castle likewise, although every year more of its parkland seems to disappear under new building, often of a very mediocre quality. The Ulster Bank at the top of Main Street by James Hanna was threatened with demolition but thankfully reprieved - probably because I threatened to remove my overdraft from it if they proceeded with demolition plans. Ernest Woods' Carnegie Library in Hamilton Road seems to have a question mark over its survival at the moment, but it is a fine building that deserves to be cherished. And the intricate nearby Masonic Hall still stands with its mysterious symbols and open Bible.

Bangor has many groups of buildings and streetscapes that are undervalued. With its "chaste villas" and elegant public buildings, it used to be a "pretty and convenient watering place". It may never attract bathers in the same numbers, but if its older houses are cared for and restored they will continue to attract visitors and residents.

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The Centre is open daily (except Mondays)  
10.30am - 4.30pm Sundays 2.00 - 4.30pm

