BALLYMONEY OLD CHURCH
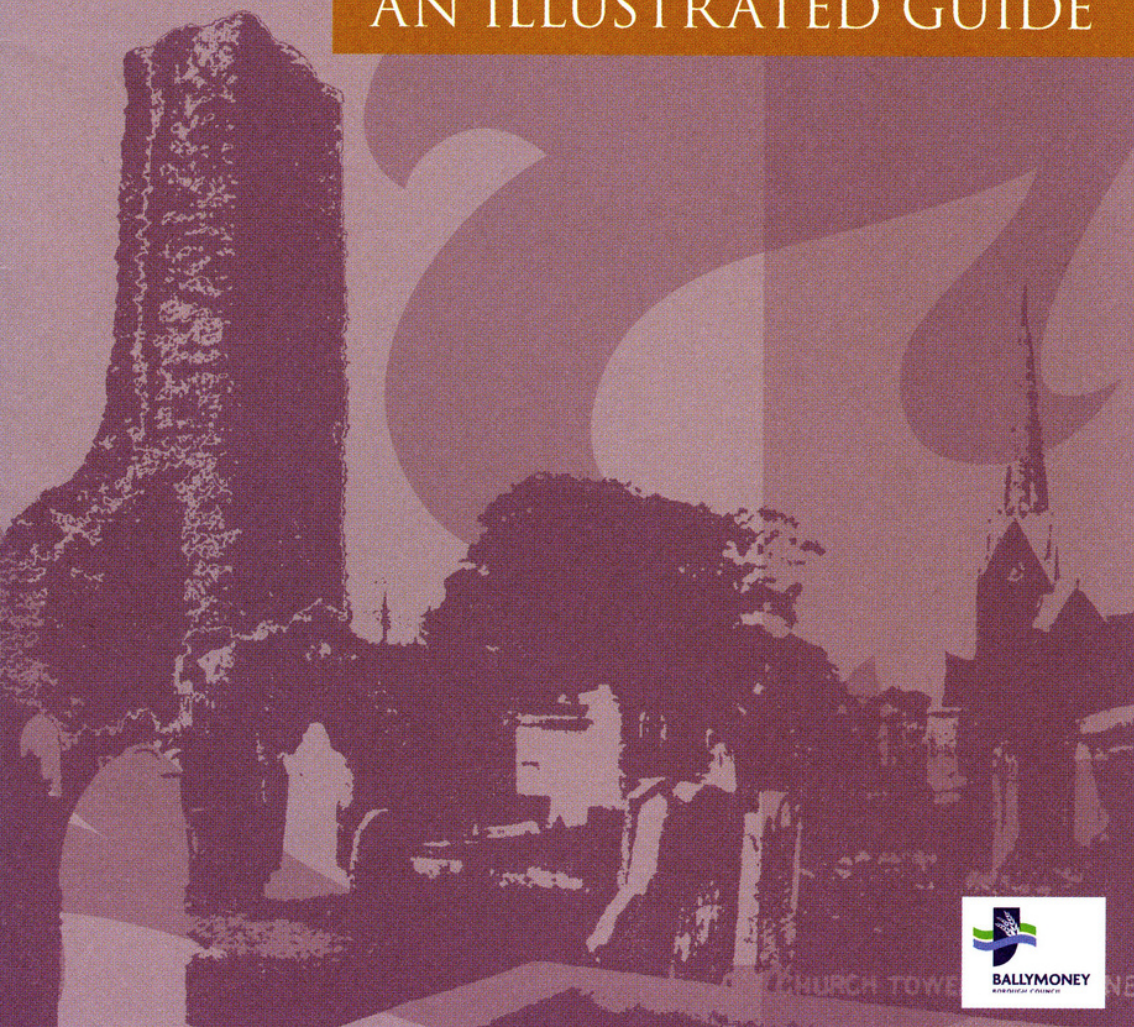# GRAVEYARD

AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE

BALLYMONEY
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Ballymoney Old Church Tower

BALLYMONEY OLD CHURCH GRAVEYARD

Ballymoney Old Church Graveyard is dominated by the old tower. This is the oldest building in Ballymoney and all that remains of the church which was built in 1637.

Previous to 1637, the earliest record of a church in the Parish of Ballymoney is found in the records of the taxation of Pope Nicholas in 1306. In 1414, the church was dedicated to St. Mary. Later this was changed to St. Patrick.

The Ulster Visitation Book of 1622 stated that there was a ruined church in the Parish. At this point in history, the population of the area was growing fast with Scottish settlers arriving from across the Irish Sea. In support of his new tenants, Sir Randall MacDonnell, Earl of Antrim, paid for the reconstruction of the much needed church. Within its aging walls is a slab that reads:

'THIS CHVRCH VAS BYLDED TO THE GLORYE OF GOD 1637'.

Soon after being built, the church was destroyed in 1642 during the Irish Rebellion. The rest of the town was also burned by the rebel armies. The tower, as it is seen today, is all that is left of the church which was re-built and used for worship until 1782.

Recent restoration work, part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, has helped to preserve this important building, ensuring it will be a Ballymoney landmark for generations to come.

THE DESCENDANTS OF TODAY'S BALLYMONEY

Surrounding the church tower are the graves of generations of Ballymoney families - Adams, Galloway, Cameron, Hamilton, Leslie, Moore, Small, Stewart and many, many more. The oldest discernable headstone belongs to the Camac family and dates back to 1610. Others may be older still, but their names are now lost, destroyed by the centuries of weather and erosion.

This graveyard was the only major cemetery in Ballymoney until the late nineteen century. Subsequently, despite its association with an Anglican church, individuals from other churches were also interred here. The vast proportion of burials would have been members of Ballymoney's Presbyterian congregations.

In the 1840s, the new road to Coleraine split the graveyard in two. Despite the protests of local families, several headstones in its path were lifted and the bodies exhumed.

The Old Church Graveyard and Tower are now the responsibility of Ballymoney Borough Council.

MAP OF BALLYMONEY OLD CHURCH GRAVEYARD

Entrance gate at Church Street

THERE ARE MANY INTERESTING HEADSTONES THROUGHOUT THE GRAVEYARD AND WE HAVE SUGGESTED EIGHT FOR YOU TO LOOK AT.

Please have respect for the graves. This is holy ground and should be treated with reverence. Please take your litter home with you. Please keep your dog on a lead and do not permit it to foul the graveyard.

GRAVES OF INTEREST

1 George Hutchinson

2 Thomas Boyle

3 Nivin Agnew

4 Alexander Gamble

5 James Henry Jnr.

6 Thomas Stewart

7 Camac

8 William Reynolds

The Old Church Graveyard is open every day 9.00am–5.00pm

1. GEORGE HUTCHINSON

Died 1 July 1845

A magistrate who helped to quell the United Irish Rebellion in this area. He is thought to have executed many men, including Alexander Gamble (Grave 4 on map). Many believe that Hutchinson's ghost haunts the town.

2. THOMAS BOYLE

Died 9 February 1827

"To the memory of the late Thomas Boyle of Toop who lived in the fear of God and by all appearances died in his favour!"

5. JAMES HENRY JNR.

Died 1728 or 1729

This stone commemorates the lives of the Henry family of Bravallen. It records that James Jnr. died following a duel. Duels were common in Ireland and were fought by gentlemen to settle a disagreement. Honour was satisfied when blood was drawn, unless great offence had been taken and it was agreed to fight to the death.

6. THOMAS STEWART

Died 16 February 1760

A clear inscription and a good example of its period. Not all stone masons used the common spellings and here we find Thomas Stewart and 'dowghter in law Ienet Stewart who departed this life Iwly 15th 1770'. Typical is the postscript, buried here 'also seven of her children'.

3. NIVIN AGNEW

Died 24 July 1690

The second oldest legible headstone, laid shortly after the Battle of the Boyne. Ireland was in turmoil during this period and both James II, in 1689, and William III, in 1690, based their forces in this area.

4. ALEXANDER GAMBLE

Died 25 June 1798

A United Irishman, hanged because he refused to inform on his comrades. He was executed on 25 June 1798 in the Diamond and buried at the foot of the gallows. Eighty five years later, on 14 September 1883, Gamble's body was unearthed by workmen and his grandsons reburied his remains here.
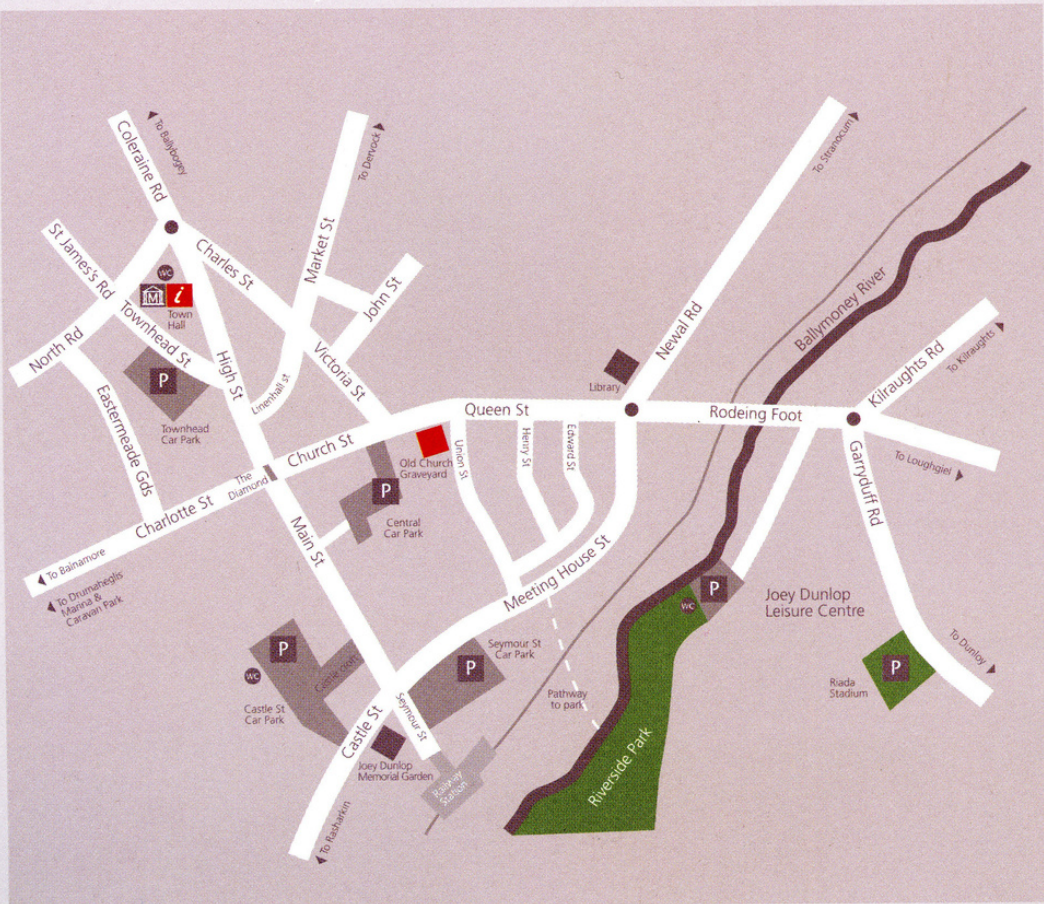

7. CAMAC

Died 1610

This stone was lifted from its original position in the 1840s when the main Coleraine to Ballymena road split the graveyard in two. This is the oldest legible headstone in the graveyard and suggests the existence of a burial ground long before the church of 1637.

8. WILLIAM REYNOLDS

Died 2 June 1784

William Reynolds was a surgeon in the Ballymoney Volunteers, a local militia recruited from the upper and middle classes in the 1780s-1790s. As the British army were fighting abroad in America and France, the Volunteers were a 'home guard' force formed to protect Ireland against invasion. William Reynolds was buried with full military honours.

The Old Church Graveyard is open every day 9.00am-5.00pm

FOR FURTHER DETAILS or if you have any
comments, please contact:

Tourist Information
Ballymoney Town Hall
Townhead Street
Ballymoney
Co. Antrim BT53 6BE

Visit the Ballymoney Borough
Council websites at
www.ballymoney.gov.uk
www.visitballymoney.com
www.ballymoneyancestry.com

Tel: (028) 2766 0230
Email: townhall@ballymoney.gov.uk

BALLYMONEY
TOWN HALL
ARTS, MUSEUM & TOURIST INFORMATION

BALLYMONEY
BOROUGH COUNCIL