Ballycastle Heritage Trail

Ballycastle Heritage Trail Map

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CASTLE STREET

Ballycastle Workhouse / Dalriada Hospital

Corner Coleraine Road and Leyland Road

The Fever Hospital, the only standing remains of the Ballycastle Workhouse.

The Ballycastle Poor Law Union was formed in 1840 to provide support for the poorest people in the area. In the following year, they began the building of the Poor Law Institution, or Workhouse, which opened in January 1843.

Workhouses were intended to provide shelter for people who had no source of income. In return the 'inmates', as they were called, were expected carry out manual labour and follow strict rules. Families were separated with men, women and children being housed in separate wings. Life in the workhouse was deliberately made harsh and uncomfortable to discourage the poor from relying on the support of the Poor Law Union.

The Ballycastle workhouse was initially built to accommodate 300 inmates. During the Irish Famine (1845-1849) space was made for an additional 30 inmates, and a Fever Hospital for 40 patients was also added.

In 1901, there were 69 inmates resident in the workhouse, ranging in age from 8 months to 90 years. Only 21 were adult men, the rest women and children. Most of the inmates were patients in the hospital; only 20 were considered able to work.

The workhouse closed and the building was transformed into the Dalriada Hospital in 1923. It was replaced by the present hospital built on the same site in 1967.

Why do you think there were so few adult men compared to women and children in the workhouse?

Dalriada Hospital.

Members of staff at Ballycastle workhouse, c. 1890-1910.

Ballycastle Presbyterian Church

1 Castle Street

The McIlroy family grave, Ballycastle Presbyterian Church.

A Presbyterian congregation has existed in the Ramoan area since 1646. By the 1750s, there were around 400 Presbyterian families, many employed in the mines and other developing industries of Ballycastle. However, it was not until 1826 when a specific congregation was formed for Ballycastle.

The Presbyterian Church was erected in 1828, and the first minister to be ordained there was Mr Samuel Lyle, on 4th March 1829. He is remembered in one of the two stained glass windows flanking the pulpit.

The original church was a small square building. It has been enlarged twice to accommodate the growing congregation, once in the 1870s, and again in 1895. During renovation works, the congregation met at Ballycastle's Methodist Church. After the creation of the Ballycastle railway, the church was used increasingly by visitors holidaying in the town.

The present church hall was built in 1886, known as the Lecture Hall, it was used as the Castle Street school until 1968. A minor hall was added in 1968 but was badly damaged in an arson attack in 1995 and subsequently replaced.

Did you know that the first Presbyterian minister of Ramoan was Reverend Daniel McNeill? He had previously been vicar of the Ramoan Church of Ireland.
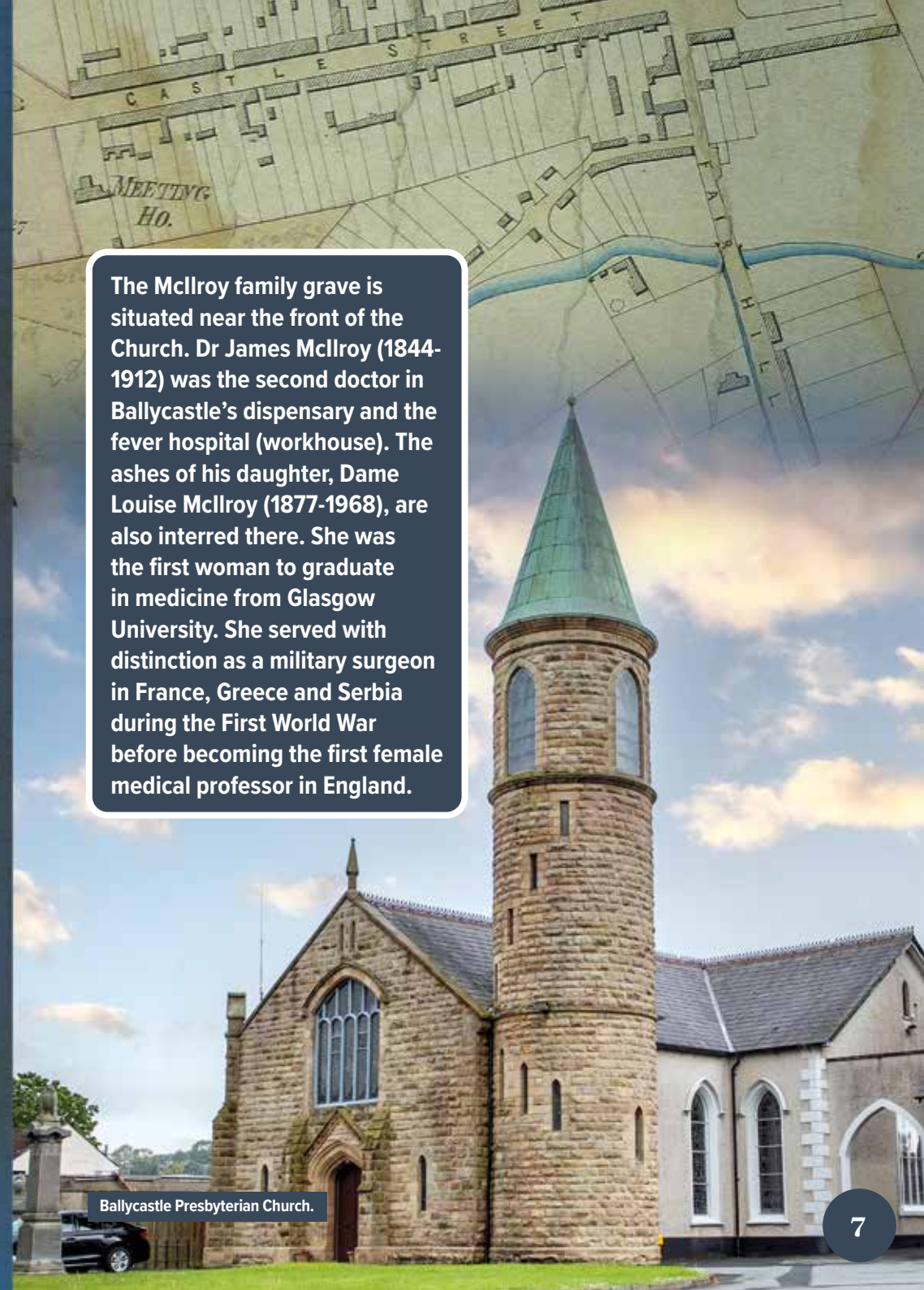
The McIlroy family grave is situated near the front of the Church. Dr James McIlroy (1844-1912) was the second doctor in Ballycastle's dispensary and the fever hospital (workhouse). The ashes of his daughter, Dame Louise McIlroy (1877-1968), are also interred there. She was the first woman to graduate in medicine from Glasgow University. She served with distinction as a military surgeon in France, Greece and Serbia during the First World War before becoming the first female medical professor in England.

Ballycastle Presbyterian Church.

Ballycastle Museum / Courthouse / Shambles

59 Castle Street

Ballycastle Museum.

The building now housing Ballycastle Museum was constructed in 1735 or 1736 to be used as the manor courts, administering justice locally for Ballycastle.

Court sessions were held on the upper floor, while the ground floor was used as a shambles, or open market for selling meat. In 1816 the court and market house was the only public building in Ballycastle. At the back of the shambles were the court's gaol cells, two above ground and two below. Shackles could still be seen hanging from the walls to the rear of the building during the early 20th century.

The courthouse continued to be used into the 1980s, when it also served as a public library and a credit union office. The ground floor of the building was used as a shambles until the 1850s when it was taken over as Sharpe's Grocers. In 1921 it became a hardware store run by the McAlisters, and then became the office for the Urban Council in 1929. The ground floor was opened as Ballycastle Museum in July 1987.

What is the modern meaning of the word "shambles", and why do you think we use it this way?

Castle Street c.1900. Courtesy Barbara Harding.

Did you know that Castle Street used to be known as Main Street? Most of the important businesses in the town were based there.

Hooks for hanging meat can still be seen inside the museum, dating from the buildings use as a shambles.

Much of Ballycastle Museum's collection, including this shop sign, originally came from An Tuirne Beag (The Little Spinning Wheel), a shop and workshop promoting traditional crafts on Anne Street from 1903-1982.

The Diamond / Holy Trinity Church of Ireland / Site of Castle / O'Connor Monument

The Diamond

Ballycastle's Diamond is home to some of the town's best-known buildings – it was also the site of the castle that gave the town its name, *Baile an Chaistil* – the townland of the castle.

There may have been a number of castles built on the site of the Parish centre and Co-op carpark from the 15th century. The most recent, was built by Randal MacDonnell, Earl of Antrim, between 1609 and 1625. A date stone believed to be from that building is now in Ballycastle Museum.

The castle was a large square structure, with battlements and turrets. It was in ruins by the time Col. Hugh Boyd developed the town in the 18th century, but the ruins were not removed until 1855 when the stone mason, John Johnston, was paid £10 to demolish what was left. The work took him a full fortnight.

Sketch showing the MacDonnell Castle remains behind Holy Trinity Church dating to before 1855, courtesy John and Valerie Nicholl.

Did you know that John Johnston's £10 would be worth around £1,400 today?

Date stone from the Ballycastle Museum collection.

Old postcard showing the Ballycastle Diamond, Chronicle and Constitution Archive, courtesy Coleraine Museum.

THE DIAMOND, BALLYCASTLE.

Holy Trinity Church of Ireland was built by Col. Hugh Boyd in 1756, but it was not consecrated until 1765, on the day of Hugh Boyd's funeral.

Inside are monuments remembering members of the Boyd family, many of whom, including Col. Hugh Boyd, are interred in the family vaults below the church. The church served as the Boyd family chapel, only being formally given to the Church of Ireland in the 1950s.

O'Connor Monument.

Holy Trinity's octagonal spire sits on a square tower which shows the time in two different ways. The west face includes a clock showing the official time, while a sundial on the south face shows Ballycastle's natural time, running 20 minutes later than Greenwich Mean Time.

In the centre of the Diamond, the O'Connor monument was built in 1899 in memory of Dr George O'Connor (1817-1897). Dr O'Connor served as the first doctor in Ballycastle's dispensary, and the fever hospital (workhouse), providing care for 53 years. He was also the medical officer in Ballycastle for the Royal Irish Constabulary, railway and coastguard. The monument was carved by local stonemasons Andrew Verdon and Charles Darragh (who had previously worked on St Patrick's and St Brigid's Roman Catholic Church).

Holy Trinity Church of Ireland.

Did you know that the term Diamond is typically used to describe the town centre of Ulster towns built during the 17th and 18th centuries? Which other towns do you know with diamonds?
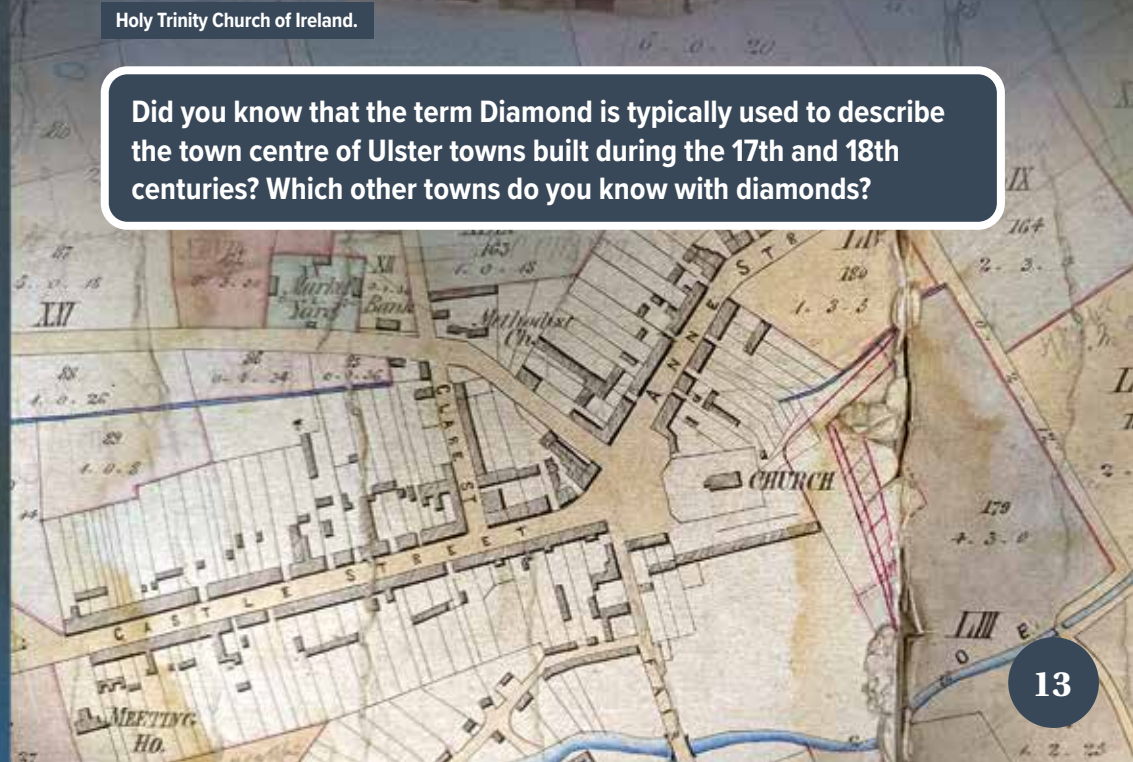
The Market Yard

Market Street

Market Street was only developed in 1833. It was originally known as the New Line. A building needed to be demolished in the Diamond to allow access to the street from the town centre.

Markets in Ballycastle were originally held in the Diamond, and below the courthouse (downstairs in today's museum). In 1858, a new market yard was opened on the New Line. It was originally entered through two impressive gates, only one of which survives. The other gate was demolished in the late 1950s to make way for the construction of the Fire Station.

Markets were held every Tuesday. The large size of the Market Yard demonstrates how important the markets were to life in Ballycastle, Rathlin and the surrounding area.

The Northern Bank, which had first opened on Ann Street, moved to the New Line to take advantage of the business in the Market Yard in 1863, only moving back to Ann Street in 1970. In 1893 the Royal Irish Constabulary barracks moved from Castle Street to opposite the gates of the Market Yard. It was attacked in 1920 and 1922 by members of the Irish Volunteers during the turbulent times leading up to and after the partition of Ireland.

Why do you think there was a need to open a purpose-built market yard in the 1850s?

The remaining gate to the Market Yard.
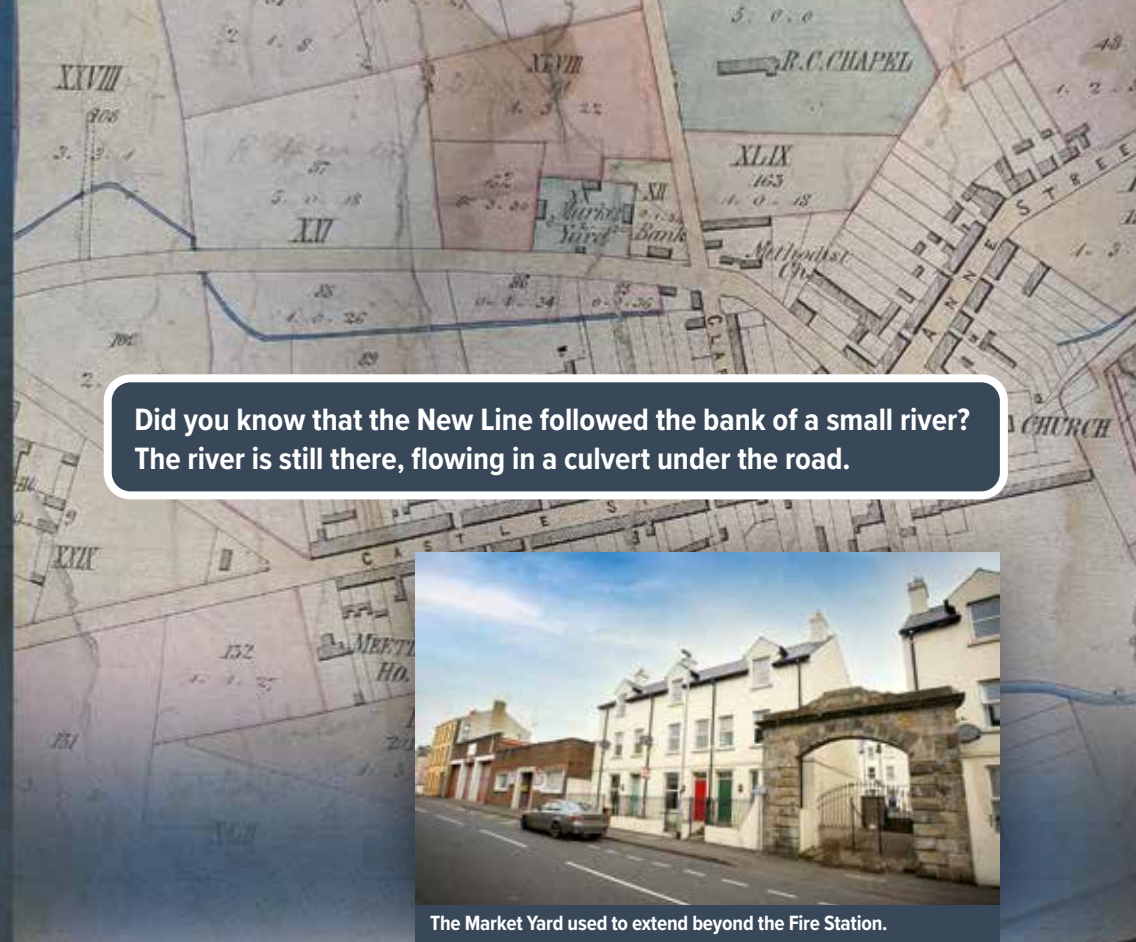
Did you know that the New Line followed the bank of a small river? The river is still there, flowing in a culvert under the road.

The Market Yard used to extend beyond the Fire Station.

The Market Yard in the 1940s or 50s.

St Patrick's and St Brigid's Roman Catholic Church

10 Moyle Road

Until 1825, Ballycastle was part of the Roman Catholic parish of Armoy. Chapels were built in Fairhill Street and Glenshesk, but they were not large enough for the growing Catholic congregation.

The Spire of St Patrick's and St Brigid's Church seen from the corner of Castle Street and Clare Street (outside the museum), sketched by Hugh Thomson in 1898, courtesy Coleraine Museum.

In 1869, 5 acres of land on Moyle Road (then known as Clare Road), was donated by Mrs Amy Boyd. She also gave £50 towards the cost of building a new church.

Built in a 12th century Gothic style, the church was designed by Fr Jeremiah McAuley, curate at Cushendall, who was also a qualified architect. The foundation stone was laid in 1870 and the church was completed and dedicated to St Patrick and St Brigid on Sunday, 9th August 1874.

Charles Darragh, a local stonemason from Carey, dressed the first stone for the church in 1870, and the last stone of the spire which wasn't added until 1890. He also worked on the O'Connor memorial in the Diamond, and is said by some people to have carved the face on the sea stack off the Pans Rocks.

Further extensions were carried out at St Patrick's and St Brigid's Church in 1993, giving the church its cruciform shape and allowing for almost 1,000 parishioners.

> Did you know that Mrs Boyd's £50 would be worth the equivalent of almost £7,500 today?

> Why do you think the Roman Catholic Church was built away from the centre of the town?

St Patrick's and St Brigid's Church.

Station Road / Site of Train Station / Bleach Works

Station Road

Station Road linked Ann Street and the Diamond with the railway station which opened in 1880. Run by Ballycastle Railway Company, the railway linked Ballycastle to Capecastle, Armoy, Gracehill, Stranocum, Dervock and Ballymoney where it joined with the main line running to Belfast and the rest of Ireland.

The railway provided a valuable freight route for the coal mining operations at the coast, as well as opening the town up as a tourism destination for the emerging middle classes. Ballycastle began to welcome more and more tourists and benefited from the crowds of passengers that arrived for fair days and markets.

Did you know that after the railway closed down, the train carriages were turned into holiday accommodation?

Ballycastle Railway carriages being used as holiday accommodation after 1950.

At its peak, the railway carried over 85,000 passengers a year. However, by the 1940s, the amount of traffic had started to decline. The last train left Ballycastle on 2 July 1950. Traces of the old line and station buildings are still visible.

The now ruinous sandstone building near the corner with Ann Street was constructed sometime between the 1860s and 1900. It is said to have been made using re-used stone from the dismantled castle in the Diamond. The building may have been used as the bleach works for locally made linen. The slope down to the Tow River and the area now covered by the playing fields was used as a bleaching green, where cloth was spread to dry and be whitened by sunlight.

Why do you think train use started to decline in the 1940s?

Railway lamp from the Ballycastle Museum collection believed to have been used on the last train to leave Ballycastle in July 1950.

The bleach works.

Third class ticket from Ballymoney to Ballycastle, dated 2 July 1950, courtesy Ballymoney Museum.

Boyd Manor House

Corner of Quay Road and Mary Street

The Boyd Manor House was built around 1739 by Colonel Hugh Boyd (1690-1765). He was responsible for turning Ballycastle from a quiet market town and fishing village into a centre of industry, including coal mines, salt works, and a glass works.

In the yard behind the manor house, Hugh Boyd built a brewery, tannery and soap-works. The goods made in Ballycastle were exported from Boyd's harbour on the other side of Mary Street.

After Hugh's death, the manor house had a mixed history. By 1832 it was lying derelict, home to almost 20 poor families with three rooms used as schools. The Boyd family returned in the 1850s and the house was extended, including large formal gardens to the rear.

The last of the family to live in the house was Kathleen Isabell Boyd (1865-1944). After her death, the house became a Dr Barnardo's Children's Home (1947-1984) and then a nursing home for the elderly before being sold to developers.

Old postcard showing the Boyd Manor at the bottom of Quay Street, courtesy Impact Printing.

Did you know raw animal skins are turned into leather in a tannery? Tanneries commonly soaked the skins in urine as part of the process. Would you want a tannery in your back yard?

The Boyd Manor.

Boyd Harbour / Tennis Courts

Mary Street

When Col. Hugh Boyd started to develop different industries in Ballycastle, he knew he would need a way to export the produce. In 1737 he chose a spot where the Tow and Margy rivers enter the sea to begin construction of a new stone and timber harbour.

When it was finished in 1744, the harbour could fit more than sixty ships at any one time. Between 1745 and 1755, an average of 7,000 tons of coal was exported each year.

After Hugh Boyd's death, the harbour was not maintained. It was damaged in a storm and began to silt up, being unusable by 1832. It was used as a town dump, and later filled in and used to graze ponies. In 1898 it hosted the first Ballycastle Lawn Tennis Championship and remains in use today as the town's tennis courts and bowling green. The stone wall between Mary Street and the tennis courts is Boyd's original harbour wall.

Mid-20th century postcard showing the Ballycastle Tennis Courts.

Tennis racquet dating to 1938 from the Ballycastle Museum collection.

Did you know that Hugh Boyd set up a special bakery which sold bread to his labourers at half the usual price to make sure he had enough people working on the construction of the harbour.

Ballycastle Tennis Courts.

Glass House

## Glass House Island, Promenade

Colonel Hugh Boyd had owned shares in a Dublin glass house – a place where glass was manufactured – since 1726. In 1755 he built a glass house in Ballycastle on the site between the harbour and the sea which is still known today as the Glass Island.

The glass house was a circular building, 18 metres (60 feet) in diameter with a tall conical chimney. Its outline can still be seen on the ground.

Glass production required sand and coal – two resources that were available locally. The Ballycastle glass house principally produced glass bottles, although there were plans to make window glass as well. It is thought that some of the window glass in Holy Trinity Church may have been made locally.

In 1775 the glass house was leased to an English glass worker, Benjamin Edwards. However, he did not have the guaranteed cheap supply of coal that had been available to Boyd and six years later, he closed the glass works down and moved the equipment to his new workshop in Belfast. The chimney of the glass house was demolished in 1877.

Photograph of the remains of the glasshouse chimmney taken before 1877 by Robert Welsh.
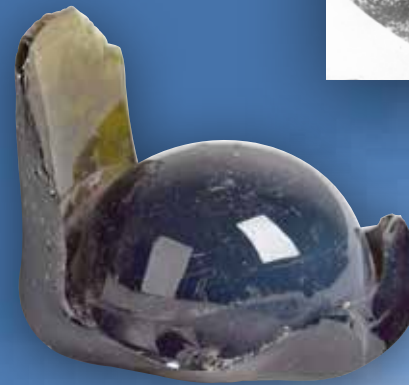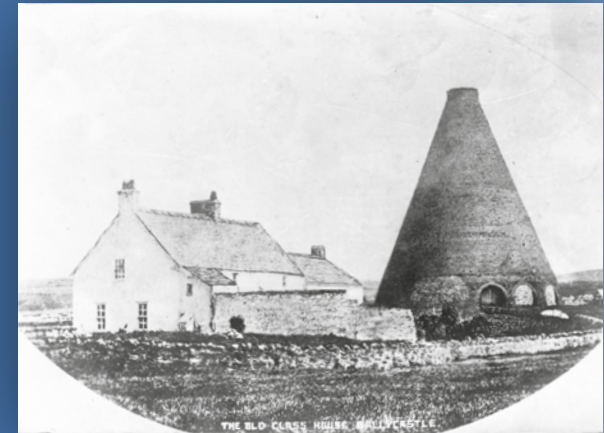
Rare fragment of Ballycastle glass from the Ballycastle Museum collection.

Did you know that the sand used to make Ballycastle glass was taken from the hollow between the sixth tee and the large sand bunker of Ballycastle Golf Course?
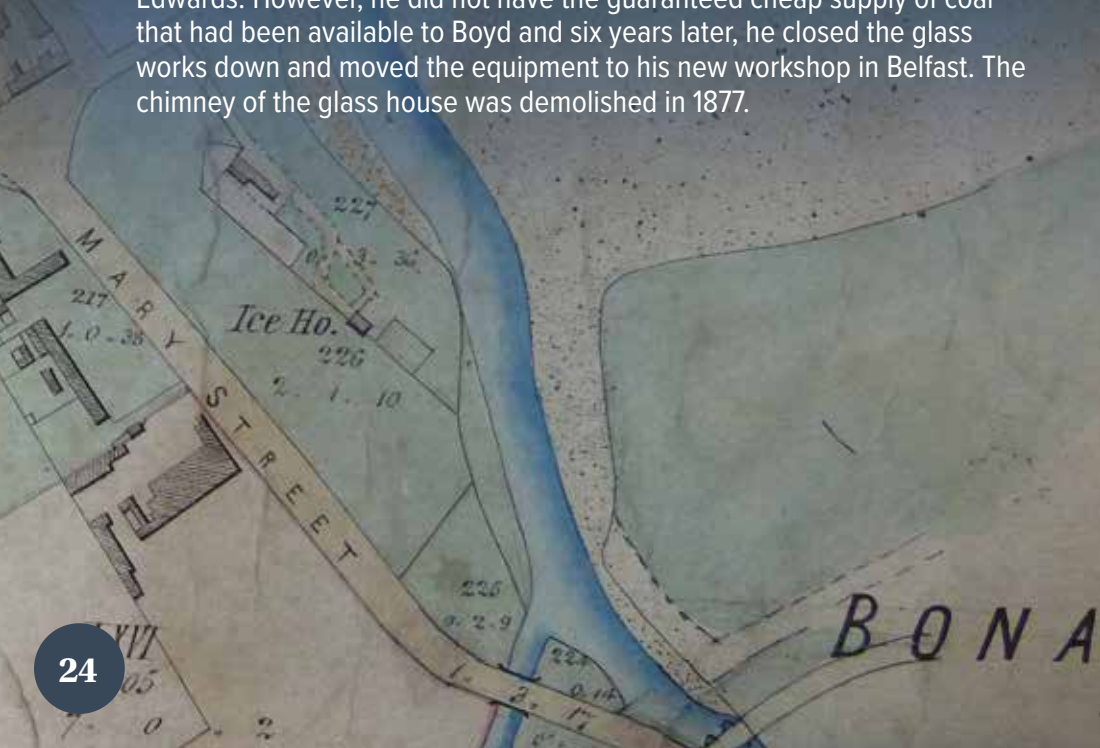
The remains of the glass house chimney visible on the Glass Island.

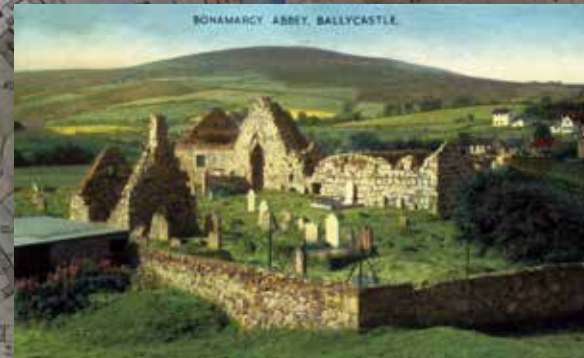# Bonamargy Friary

Cushendall Road

Bonamargy was built as a Franciscan friary at the foot of the Margy River around 1485 by Rory McQuillan. The McDonnells took control of the site around 1558. The famous chieftain Sorley Boy McDonnell and several of his descendants – the later Earls of Antrim – are buried in the family vault built onto the side of the church.

The gatehouse, church, friary dormitory and McDonnell burial vaults are still well preserved, as are many historic gravestones, several Commonwealth war graves and a monument marking the location of a cillín.

Perhaps the most famous resident of Bonamargy was the reclusive prophetess, Julia McQuillan, known as the Black Nun. She sought shelter here in the 17th century and her ghost is commonly said to haunt the site. The body of Julia McQuillan is said to be buried under the small Celtic cross at the entrance to the church.

20th century postcard from Ballycastle Museum collection showing Bonamargy Friary.
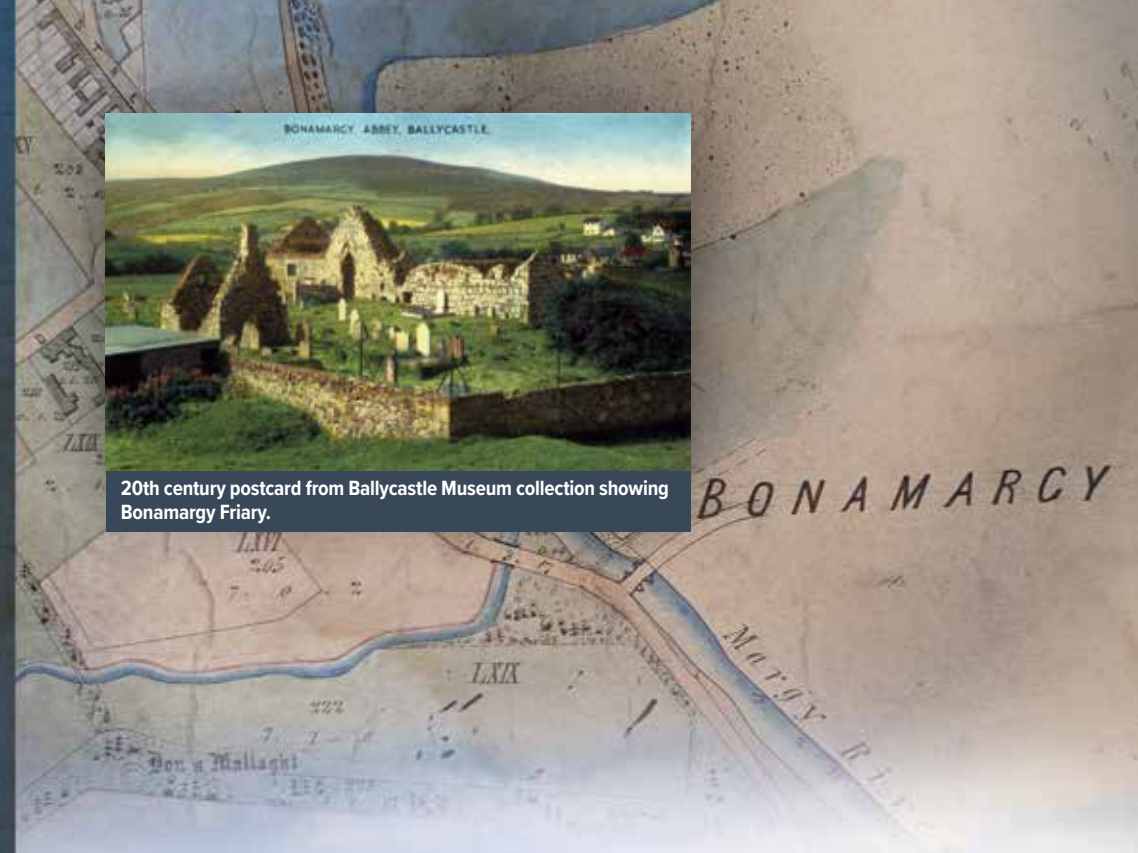
Did you know that a cillín was an unmarked and unconsecrated area used for the burial of unbaptised babies, criminals, and unknown strangers such as shipwreck victims?
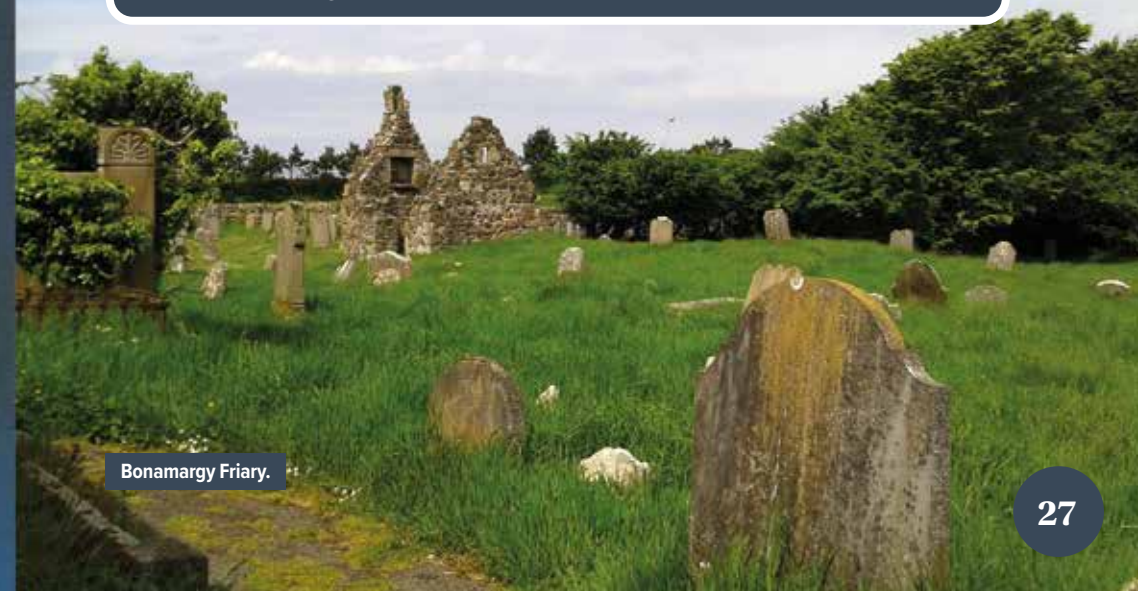

Watercolour painted by J.W. Carey in 1896 showing the funeral procession for Sorley Boy McDonnell traveling from Dunineny Castle to Bonamargy in 1590, now in the Ballycastle Museum collection.

Bonamargy Friary.

Pans Rocks / Devil's Churn
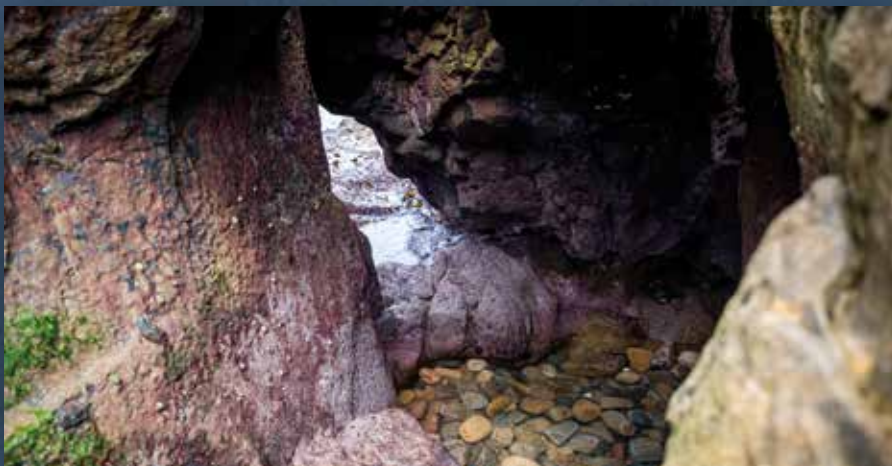
Carrickmore Road

Salt production in Ballycastle dates back to 1629. The salt water was put in large flat pans made of iron and heated so that the salt crystalised and the water evaporated. At least two salt pans operated along the coast east of Ballycastle. Remains of one of them can still be seen near the Pans Rocks which was named after the industry.

The salt was needed to preserve meat, fish, butter, cheese and eggs for transport. It was expensive to produce, and imports of salt were heavily taxed. It is thought that six tons of coal would be needed to make one tonne of salt. That is why the salt pans were located next to the collieries.

The steps cut through the rock known as the Devil's Churn may have been made to allow water to be drawn from a natural sea cave rather than direct from the ocean.

Nearby the Devil's Churn, there is a face carved into a stack of rock jutting out of the sea. It has attracted a lot of different folklore over the years, but was most likely carved by local stone mason Charles Darragh in the late 19th century.

The Devil's Churn.

Carved face in the rock stack.

Why don't we commonly need to use salt to preserve food today?

The Pans Rocks.

Ballycastle Collieries

Carrickmore Road

A colliery is a place where coal is mined. Coal was already being mined along the coast towards Fair Head for local use before the 18th century. However, when Colonel Hugh Boyd took control of the colliery in 1735, he opened three new mines between Pans Rocks and Carrickmore, creating a large surplus of coal.

The collieries were linked to the harbour by a horse-drawn tramway which allowed the coal to be easily and cheaply shipped to Belfast and Dublin. Until the expansion of the Ballycastle collieries, most coal for large cities had to be imported at great cost from England.

Until 1865, up to 15,000 tons of coal was exported from Ballycastle every year. Coal production continued until 1967 when Craigfad, the last of the mines was closed. The adits, or entrances, to some of the mines can still be found in the overgrown rock faces along Carrickmore Road.

The adit, or horizontal entrance, to one of the Ballycastle mines.
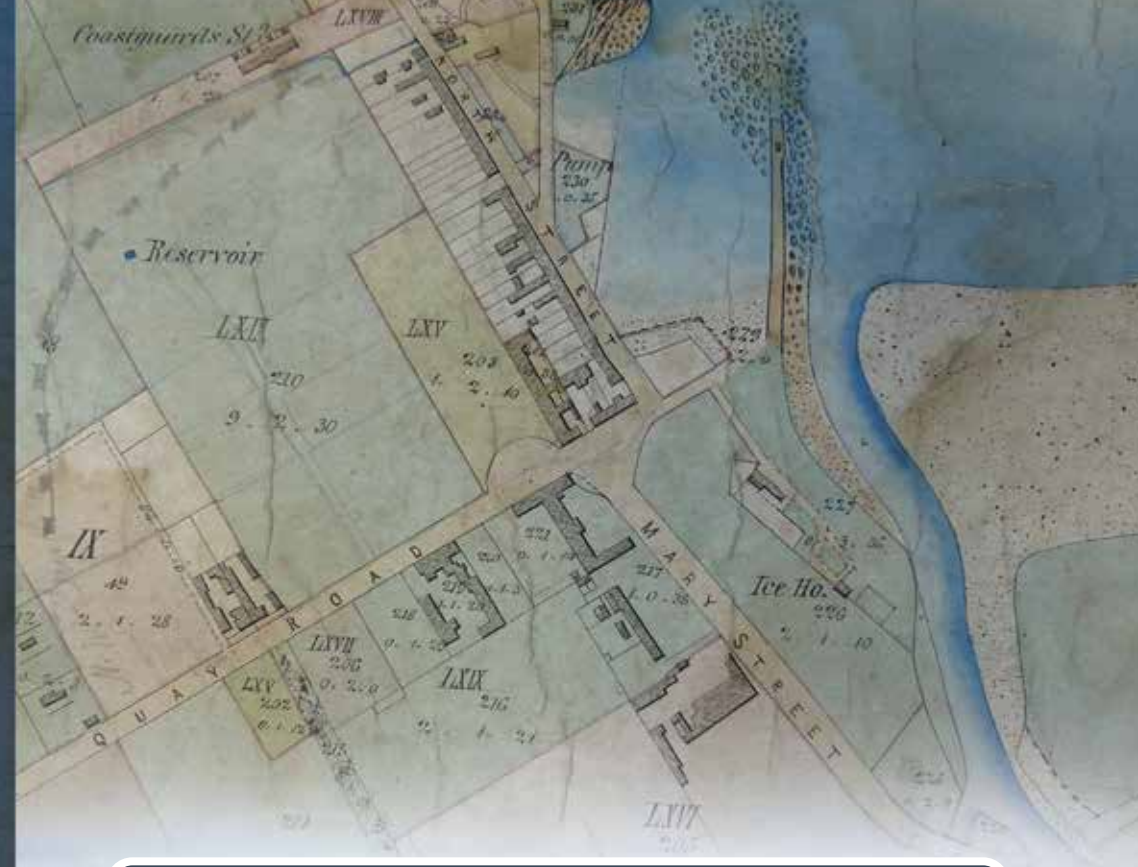
Why was coal so important in the 18th and 19th centuries?


Ballycastle collieries.

Glentaisie

Princess Taise shown on the Glentaisie banner, carried at the first Feis na nGleann (1904), now part of the Ballycastle Museum collection.

Glentaisie is the northernmost of the nine Glens of Antrim, situated below Knocklayd. It is named after the legendary Princess Taise, who was given the lands as a wedding gift from her father, King Dorm of Rathlin.

According to legend, during her wedding to Conghal, heir to the Kingdom of Ireland, King Nabgodon of Norway arrived trying to claim her as his own bride. A great battle was fought, and King Nabgodon was killed.

The glen was the site of another battle too, fought on 2nd May 1565. The Battle of Glentaisie saw the defeat of James McDonnell by Shane O'Neill. The battle began in the area of the Ballycastle Diamond and continued up along the glen towards Armoy as the McDonnells fled.
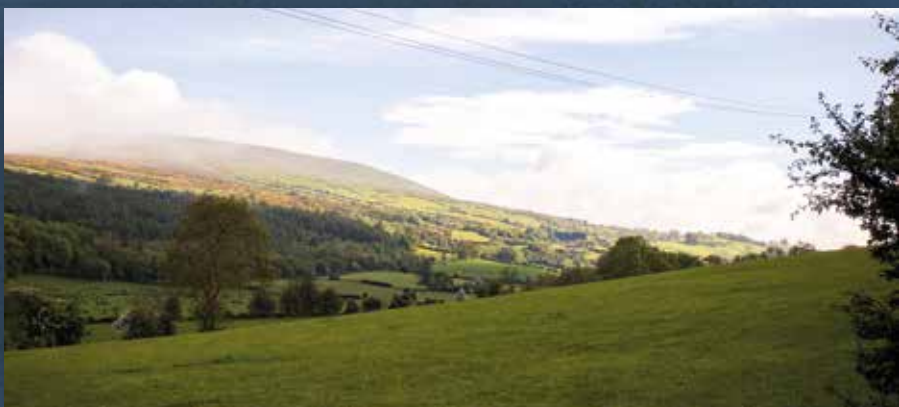
Glentaisie with Knocklayd in the distance.

Did you know that James McDonnell died of wounds following the Battle of Glentaisie? His younger brother, Sorley Boy, became the chief of the McDonnells and took control of the area in the following years. Sorley Boy's son, Randal, became the first Earl of Antrim.
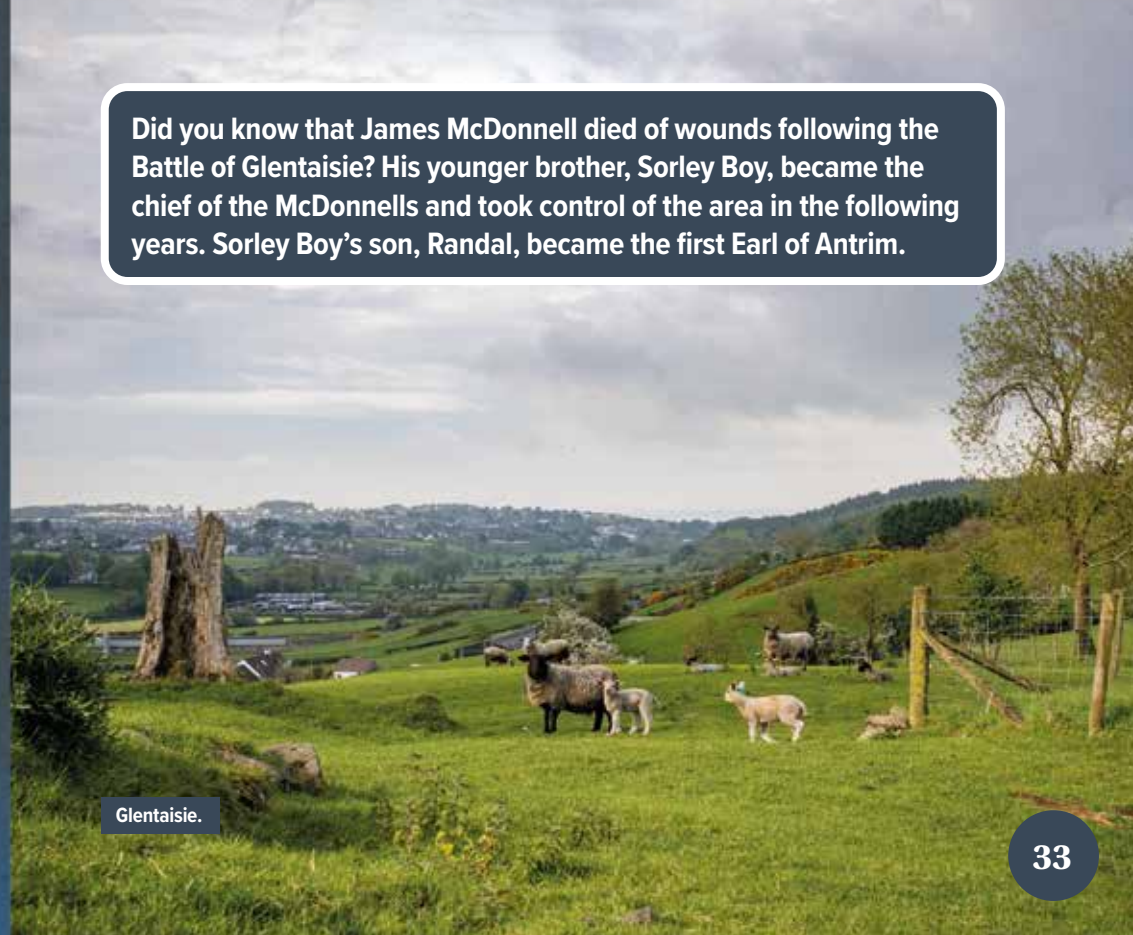
Glentaisie.

Dunineny Castle
Clare Road

Dunineny Castle was built by around 1600 by Randal McDonnell to watch out over ships approaching Ballycastle harbour, then known as Port Brittas. The McDonnell castle was probably built over the top of a much earlier prehistoric fort which had been re-fortified by an English garrison in the late 16th century.

In 1603, Hugh McNeill was made Constable of Dunineny, responsible for collecting taxes in the Ballycastle area. However, the castle was built on a site exposed to the weather with little access to water. Hugh McNeill and his family lived at another site, Clare Castle, located around 800 metres to the southwest.

Dunineny means Fort of the Fair, or Fort of the Assembly. It is thought that the Lammas Fair was originally held at Dunineny before being moved down to the Ballycastle Diamond as the town began to grow.

Duninenny Castle.

Did you know that the Hugh McNeill was the great, great, grandfather of Colonel Hugh Boyd?

Dunineny is sometimes spelt Dunaneny, Dunineaney, Dunaneeny, Dunanonigh, or Dún an Aonaigh. Why do you think there are so many different versions of the spelling?
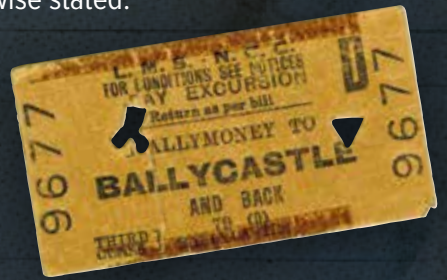
Dunineny Castle.

All images ©Ballycastle Museum unless otherwise stated.

A Few Recurring Names

Thoughout this trail you will come across the names of several important families who have impacted on the history of ballycastle.

During the mid 1500s, the McDonnells of Islay had siezed control of much of North Antrim, notably under the chieftain Sorley Boy McDonnell. His son, Randal, was formally granted these lands by King James I in 1603 and given the title of Earl of Antrim in 1620.

In 1605, Hugh McNeill was created the Constable of Dunineny. He and his descendants became responsible for controlling the local area and collecting rents and taxes on behalf of the McDonnells. Hugh's great-granddaughter, Rose McNeill, married Rev. William Boyd, and their son, Colonel Hugh Boyd, inherited the Ballycastle estate in 1711.

Col. Hugh Boyd did much to develop Ballycastle into an industrial centre before his death in 1765. The Boyds would remain a prominent family in the town until the death of Kathleen Isabell Boyd in 1944.

The background map used throughout the guide shows the Boyd Estate, drawn up in 1876, now in the Ballycastle Museum collection.