



# Monthly eNewsletter

May 2020

Hi everyone,

Another month in lockdown and another UAS Newsletter has come together. As I write, there is talk of parks and historic sites beginning to open again. This is great news for all of us who like to be outside and enjoying our heritage, however, we must all continue to keep safe to prevent any return of the virus. To help you continue to enjoy heritage closer to your home, Harry Welsh (Survey Group Co-Ordinator) has allowed me to publish an activity he sent round the Survey Group getting them to survey their own home and research its history. Also in this issue, we have a piece of research by David Irving about the location of the Black Abbey in the Ards, mostly done from his own home. Our final article this month is a piece by Stephen Cameron and Philip Macdonald on the site of a mill near Ballygally, Co. Antrim.

I hope you enjoy this issue and do let me know if there is anything you would like to see in the next issue.

Best wishes,

Duncan

*Editor*

## Survey Group

As we are unable to get out and survey sites at the moment, it might be a good idea to challenge ourselves by doing a short

personal project. This has been designed to make us think about surveying and researching, just as we normally do, so there should not be anything here that we are not familiar with. It is hoped that you will give it a go and have some fun in doing so. If you need any advice or help, just let me know. Who knows what you might find?



### Brief:

Carry out some research into the area in which you live, in particular the house that you live in, and put together a short report or presentation that you can either keep for yourself, or share your findings with the rest of the group at some point.

### Method:

#### Research

Describe the property in which you live:

- What are the materials of construction? (brick walls, timber and slate roof, two floors, approximate dimensions etc.)
- When was it built?
- What is the address? Include townland and county, Irish Grid reference.
- Try to make a plan (even a sketch)

What was there before your property was built? (consult the ordnance survey maps for this and go back to the First Edition (c. 1834).

Who lived there (if anyone) before you? (for older properties, consult the census returns or Griffith Valuation). What did they do for a living?

What was the land used for in the area over time? (farmland/ industrial/ housing etc).

Try to get old photographs of the area (local history books are good if you have any)

Are there any archaeological sites/historic buildings in the area (look in the sites and monuments record/map viewer for this)

Have a look around your flower beds etc for artefacts (remember you are just gardening). You might find pottery, flints, metal items. Clean and record these, photograph them if possible.

### Report

Put together your report or presentation (perhaps in the survey group report format). You should include:

- Introduction
- All the information/data you have been able to find
- Include any plans, sketches and photographs
- Discussion
  - How important is the site and how has this changed over time?
  - What is the bigger picture? (development of the area/ county)
- Add your references (books/websites you have used)

### Notes

- You should be able to source the information you need online, including the Ordnance Survey maps.
- If you need specific parts of these maps, let me know, as I have most of these on the hard drive and I can send you a digital copy.
- Have a look at some of our online survey reports for ideas on layout

### Websites

[www.placenamesni.org](http://www.placenamesni.org)

[Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record](#)

[Historic environment map viewer](#)

Jstor (you can access some articles for free, members can get access to a limited collection of journals, contact us for details)

### **Health and Safety**

Don't forget your health and safety

- Do not spend too long at your computer screen without a break.
- Make sure your workstation is positioned correctly.
- If you are working around the house and garden (and distracted), watch out for trips and falls.
- Why don't you try a risk assessment?

*Harry Welsh*

*Fieldwork Coordinator*

## Online Activities

At the moment we can't travel Dublin, but we can still visit parts of the Kingship and Sacrifice exhibition in the National Museum of Ireland - Archaeology, Kildare Street: [https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Archaeology/Exhibitions/Kingship-and-Sacrifice?fbclid=IwAR3Cdy3WyG0r3-xluWJfuy-QXPegCLI7AXGSer\\_97TcaTZj\\_lo03W1Fcmtg](https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Museums/Archaeology/Exhibitions/Kingship-and-Sacrifice?fbclid=IwAR3Cdy3WyG0r3-xluWJfuy-QXPegCLI7AXGSer_97TcaTZj_lo03W1Fcmtg)

We also can't travel to London, but the British Museum has made many exhibitions and objects available online: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection>

For those of us that weren't able to attend the UAS field trip to Jersey, we can now explore the country's heritage through their online Historic Environment Record: <https://her.jerseyheritage.org>

### **i-Player**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/b03ycspm/taisce-shean-uladh-treasures-of-ancient-ulster> 2013 Irish language with English subtitles, The Treasures of Ancient Ulster, 4 episodes

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p017bcfn/sir-mortimer-and-magnus> 1974 Interviews between Magnus Magnusson and Sir Mortimer Wheeler - on various historical/archaeological subjects 6 short episodes.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b051h0gy> Time Watch Guide about the Mary Rose with Dan Snow. On iPlayer for about a month.  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b052vcbg> Time Watch Guide about Roman Britain with Alice Roberts. (Will be on iPlayer after showing on BBC4 Thu 28 May at 00.30).

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/group/p05xxp5j> Civilisations - art history 9 episodes.

### **My4/All4**

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/secrets-of-egypts-valley-of-the-kings>  
Series about recent discoveries in the Valley of the Kings. 6 episodes available currently.

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/time-team> Time Team - 96 episodes.

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/time-team-specials> and 3 Specials.

<https://www.channel4.com/programmes/britains-ancient-tracks-with-tony-robinson> 7 episodes.

### **Random websites**

An interesting website with news of cultural crime

<https://news.culturecrime.org/>

The Megalithic Portal - always worth a look [https://](https://www.megalithic.co.uk/)

[www.megalithic.co.uk/](https://www.megalithic.co.uk/)

Summer Solstice at Stonehenge is live-streaming, see [http://](http://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=7)

[www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=7](http://www.megalithic.co.uk/article.php?sid=7)

## The Location Of The Black Abbey In The Ards

I had promised Duncan a small article on Black Abbey and the lost Parish of St. John in the Ards, typically the laptop with 99% of my work on got fried by a power surge, so that's now out the window. I thought what I'd do instead is give you a peek inside the chaotic/ non-linear way that discoveries sometimes happen.

Most of the Survey Group are aware of my work in Greyabbey Bay and on Chapel Island it was while I was in the early stages of my archaeological adventures (6 years ago) that I came across the story of The Black Abbey. Most people would have accepted what the books and everyone else say, The Black Abbey is in Blackabbey TD. Me, I wasn't so sure and began tracking down as many of the sources quoted in books etc., it was through this method that I was able to track down a copy of the founding charter in the *Monasticum Hibernia*.

In the meantime, I had been walking around Blackabbey TD, looking at maps trying to figure out where lakes and bogs once lay, reading about Innishargy on its hilltop surrounded by a lake and generally trying to figure where there was a suitable site for an abbey. The more I looked, the more I became convinced that I was looking in the wrong place. Some of the more unusual factors taken into consideration include how far the sound of bells and singing would travel, remember that the monks' activities were controlled by bells, sites which offered a visual dominance (you want people to see what you paid for) and most importantly freshwater.

Having come to the conclusion that The Black Abbey was somewhere else, I put it to the back of my mind and continued with finding new features in the Bay.

Fast Forward two years.....

I was out with the dogs one day when I bumped into a lady who rented the field with the motte in, she was tending her vegetable beds at the time, we got chatting and it turned out she had an interest in history. A month or so later I was invited for tea, scones with homemade butter so creamy it was criminal, homemade jam and an interesting discussion about the preserved land surface at Roddens. At this point she fully introduced herself as Prof. Val Hall of QUB and told the story of how P. Patel and team excavated the site in the mid-sixties. There was however a minor niggle, she couldn't understand why the site was called Roddens Port. It didn't take long to find out that the TD had been sold to Charles Rodden by the Montgomerys in 1615, Charles was granted a license for a port around 1618 and the port was active by 1620. The port survives as an open box at the edge of the boulder field with a raised area on its northern side, there are also the remains of a wooden feature which may be another landing place of later date.

It was during this period that I began to notice some oddities in the road and field layout at Roddens, some are linked to the bunker system in Roddens Hill and under the fields between Roddens and Ballyhalbert, others are older and suggested a settlement of some type. Then the founding charter for Black Abbey popped into my head.

If you accept that the translation of the charter in the *Monasticon* is correct then the location of The Black Abbey is fairly clear, the charter lists the townlands that the abbey is surrounded by, it does not say anything about it being in a townland. Conversely, the charter for The Grey Abbey states that it is in Greyabbey TD then lists the additional townlands.

If you look at the townlands listed as surrounding The Black Abbey there is a curious hole, at Roddens. To me, it looks like this was the location of The Black Abbey.

A few months later I summoned up the courage to visit Roddens House, I got to have a good look around the outside and noticed a few pieces of re-worked stone but didn't see anything that



screamed monastic. Unfortunately, I was refused permission to explore the surrounding fields limiting me to what could be seen from the road, which to be honest was inconclusive. The only thing that stood out was the yellow sandstone Roddens House is built from, odd pieces of it can be seen in several field walls but there does not appear to be a local source other than glacial randoms.

Meanwhile over on Chapel Island I'm still finding new features. On this particular day I'm walking the eastern shore and spot a piece of sulphur yellow sandstone which looks worked, then another and then a door jamb. Now I must admit to being excited, I have long had doubts about the building on the ridge being the chapel, so without thinking I broke one of the protections by lifting the mullion to photograph it, the only time I have deliberately boo-booed. In the end I found twenty or so pieces of the yellow sandstone and several other pieces which looked out of place, including a square-ish lump of marble which could have been a saddle quern, part of a WW1 bomb and some hard-white coral. There are some obvious built features in the area, some of which date from WW1&2, a couple appear to me to be standing stones, and a line of large stones which continues onto the island linking up with the revetment that runs around much of the island.

That evening I sent off a mea culpa worried about picking up the mullion, as I sat mulling it over I wondered if the yellow part was significant, Roddens House is yellow sandstone, the remains on the shore are yellow sandstone, Grey Abbey House is yellow sandstone, the remains of The Grey Abbey are well weathered so all I can say is that it is pale sandstone.

There is still a lot of work required before I could say with 100% confidence that I have found The Black Abbey. The fact that I cannot read Latin, Irish or French means there are some big gaps in the timeline and my anxiety problems limit me to online material which denies me PRONI and the like. If somebody with the linguistic skills and patience wants to continue with this feel free, if the laptop is fixable I'll share everything I've found out so far.

*David Irving*

## Watermill site, probable wrack road and ford at Ballyruther Farm, near Ballygally, Co. Antrim



Map showing the position of the watermill (A), cutting associated with the wrack road (B) and ford associated with the wrack road (C) (after the OS 1967 revision of the 1:2500 survey).

The hitherto unrecorded sites of a watermill, a cutting associated with a probable wrack road and a ford, have been discovered during fieldwork by one of the authors (SC) on Ballyruther Farm, near Ballygally, Co. Antrim. This report briefly describes the sites and is based upon a visit to the site undertaken by the authors in January 2009. All three sites are located within the northern half of a field used for pasture on Ballyruther Farm. The field is roughly rectangular in shape and located on a steep slope overlooking the Coast Road. Locally known as the 'Cove Field', the field is currently used for pasture. It is bisected by the eastnortheast-west southwest aligned cutting associated with the probable wrack road. The area to the north of the probable wrack road, which contains the watermill site, shows no evidence for cultivation. The remainder of the field (to the south of the probable wrack road)

contains a series of relict spade cultivation ridges, set approximately 2.0 metres apart from each other and aligned down slope in an eastnortheast-west southwest direction. The southeastern corner of the field has been subject to several episodes of slope failure which manifests itself in a series of erosional scars and slumps. The line of a possible former field boundary, which coincides with a crest in the slope of the field, is represented by three thorn trees and a large recumbent stone that are all aligned on the same northnorthwest-southsoutheast axis. This possible former field boundary is not featured on either the 1857 revised edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" series (Sheet 30), or any later cartographic sources. The 1833 Ordnance Survey 6" series for Co. Antrim did not include field boundaries.



### Site A: The watermill (Irish Grid Reference D35490999)

The watermill is located on the edge of the field, immediately adjacent to a stream that flows westsouthwest to eastnortheast along the ditch which defines the field's northern boundary. The stream is fast-flowing being supplied by two separate streams whose confluence is located in the northwestern corner of the field. Neither of these 'feeder' streams follows a natural course, instead they have been diverted and incorporated into the defining ditches of the local field system.

The field in which the watermill, cutting associated with the wrack road and ford associated with the wrack road are located, looking northeast.

Presumably, this act of diversion coincided with the laying out of the current field system and suggests that the watermill does not predate the field system.

At present, the site of the watermill consists of a denuded mound, located immediately adjacent to the stream, and a dried-up channel which diverts from the stream immediately to the west of the mound and follows a curving line around the south of the mound for a distance of about 13.0 metres. Some evidence for a stone-built structure in the stream bed immediately adjacent to the mound, and a stone-built retaining wall on the northern edge of the mound itself are observable. Apart from these, and a small cache of broken roof slates that is visible immediately adjacent to the western end of the dried-up channel, no structural remains survive suggesting that the watermill building was comprehensively dismantled rather than allowed to fall into ruin. The absence of any watermill building on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" map indicates that this probable act of demolition had occurred by 1833.



The mound upon which the watermill building was built (background) and the leat channel (foreground), looking north. One of the authors (SC) provides a scale.

The mound is made up of redeposited clay. It is approximately 10.0 metres long, and has a level summit which is approximately 2.0 to 3.0 metres wide. The mound's western end is level with the ground surface of the field, but the steepness of the field's slope makes its eastern end approximately 1.5 metres higher than the adjacent part of the field. The mound is overgrown with small trees and bushes and the area around it has been poached by stock gaining access to the stream. No grass grows over the mound and it is susceptible to erosion. Much of the mound's northern side appears to have been eroded by the stream when it has been in flood. It is suggested



The mound upon which the watermill building was built (background) and the westernmost part of the leat channel (foreground), looking northeast.

that the watermill building would have been built upon the top of the mound.

The dried-up channel is about 0.5 metres wide with steep sides and a relatively flat base (maximum depth approximately 0.3 metres). It is visible for a distance of about 15 metres, but appears to run out to the east of the mound - in an area where the poaching by animals has been particularly damaging. It is probable that the dried-up channel would have formed the leat and tail race of the watermill located upon the top of the mound.

It is difficult to reconstruct the form of the mill from the surviving remains. It is reasonable to suggest that the mill's wheel was located adjacent to the mound in the dried-up channel, which would have formed the mill's leat and tail race. Given the longitudinal alignment of the mound, the wheel was presumably mounted onto the side of the building, rather than a gable end. The apparent remains of a denuded stone structure within the stream at a point opposite the mound poses a problem of interpretation. If this was the remains of a wheel pit then either the mill had two wheels, or the stream and leat have been misidentified. Alternatively, it is possible that the apparent stone structure represents elements of the mill building that have collapsed into the stream.



The leat channel from the mound, looking southeast.

A further problem of interpretation is posed by the absence of evidence for a mill pond in the immediate vicinity of the watermill. Although one of the 'feeder' streams flows through a small pond (not visited) at Laidside Farm approximately 190 metres to the northwest of the mill site, as Laidside Farm is not represented on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6" map, it is unlikely that its pond was associated with the watermill. Given the amount of water draining through the stream it would probably not have been necessary to construct a mill pond in order to guarantee a constant flow of water.





The denuded remains of a stone structure within the stream adjacent to the mound, looking north.

On archaeological and cartographic evidence alone, the precise date of the watermill is uncertain. Given that the stream which supplies it is integrated into the current field system, then the construction of the mill cannot pre-date the laying out of the current field system. The date of the field system itself is unknown, although it is reasonable to assume that it does not pre-date the late sixteenth century. As the cartographic evidence indicates that the mill had been demolished by 1833 (see above), then the mill probably dates to some point between the late sixteenth and early nineteenth century. It is tempting to suggest that the watermill is one of those recorded as being in 'Ballyrather' in a 1635 Inquisition Post-Mortem as being formerly owned by a David Buthill de Glandrine and who had been succeeded by a Randolph Buthill (Inq. Ulst. Antrim Car.I (40)). Randolph Buthill is presumably the Randle Brittle whose house and parcel of 'Ballruder' / 'Ballrudery' are respectively depicted on the extant copies of the maps of the Parish of Cairncastle and Barony of Glenarne that were prepared as part of the Down Survey c.1656-68 (NISM No. ANT 035:087).



The cutting associated with the wrack road, looking up slope (westsouthwestwards).

#### **Site B: Cutting associated with the probable wrack road (between Irish Grid Reference D35510997 and D35460995)**

Part of a probable wrack road passes through the field. Today, the line of this road can be traced from a point on the Coast Road (Irish Grid Reference D35541003), across the ford noted below (Irish Grid Reference D35520999), to a gate through the western field wall of the field containing the watermill site (Irish Grid Reference D35420994). The path of the road is clearly demarcated in the field by an approximately 3.0 metre wide cutting which is visible for a distance of about 60.0 metres. That the cutting is deepest where it passes through the crest of the slope suggests that it was deliberately cut in order to reduce the maximum gradient of the wrack road. Such an arrangement would ease the work of traction animals bringing loads up from the coast. The presence of a slight up-cast bank on the southern side of the deepest section of the cutting is consistent with this interpretation. Given the steepness of the route, it is considered unlikely that periodic episodes of

maintenance, which might alternatively have formed this feature, would be necessary if the cutting was a gradually-formed hollow way.

### Site C: The ford (Irish Grid Reference D35520999)



The ford, looking westsouthwest.

Where the probable wrack road crosses the stream that defines the field's northern boundary, a ford of large stone slabs had been built. Although the area around the ford is now overgrown it was possible to take some photographs of the feature. The ford consisted of at least six or seven large flat slabs neatly laid as lintels over a channel with an estimated depth of at least 0.15 metres. During the course of the site visit it was not possible to ascertain how the lintel slabs were supported, or whether the base of the channel also consisted of laid slabs.

Dating the ford is difficult. It is first marked on the 1906 edition of the Ordnance Survey's 6" map, but undoubtedly, significantly pre-dates the early twentieth century. Discussions of the ford's date are inextricably linked to considerations of how and when the current field system was laid out. The path of the stream, and by extension the line of the field boundary, becomes irregular towards the lower, eastern end of the field where the ford is located. As the stream's natural course has been diverted elsewhere to, in part, define the field boundary, it could be argued that it is unlikely that the ford predates the laying out of the current field system. However, the irregularity of the stream's course at this point raises the possibility that, if only in this part of the field, the line of the boundary deviated from its straight alignment to incorporate a pre-existing natural stream. If the ford pre-dated the laying out of the current field system then it may have been perceived as a feature worth incorporating into the field system when it was laid out. Consequently, no great confidence can be placed upon the date of laying out the field system as a terminus post quem for the construction of the ford. As previously noted, the date of the field system itself is unknown, although it is reasonable to assume that it does not pre-date the late sixteenth century.

## Conclusions

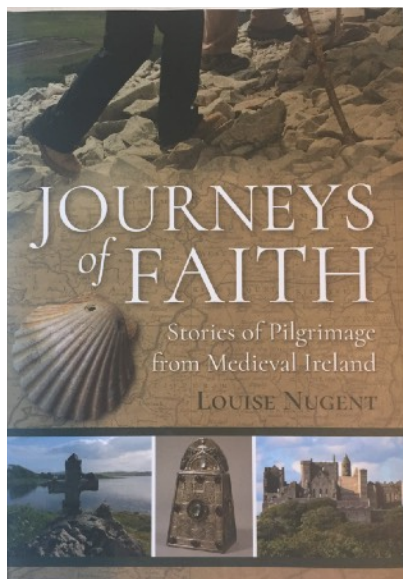
The three sites described above form an important element of the post-medieval landscape of Antrim and are deserving of a more accurate survey than that performed by the authors in 2009 – perhaps, in due course, they could be tackled by the Ulster Archaeological Society's Survey Group. With or without further survey, it is desirable that the sites are incorporated into the Sites and Monuments Record and a copy of this report has been submitted to the Historic Environment Division of the Department of the Communities to facilitate this. The discoveries themselves represent an excellent example of the potential for discovering hitherto unrecorded archaeological sites within the Ulster landscape. It is the authors' hope that the account of the watermill, probable wrack road and ford at Ballyruther, as well as being of intrinsic interest to the wider archaeological community, will inspire members of the Society, once the current restrictions are lifted, to put on their boots and explore the countryside with a view to discovering sites themselves.

## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Miss Jenny Crawford (Ballyruther Farm) for kindly providing access to the site. The assistance of Maura Pringle (formerly Queen's University Belfast) and Colm Donnelly (Queen's University Belfast) in the preparation of this account is also gratefully acknowledged.

*Stephen Cameron (County Antrim Archaeological Society) and  
Philip Macdonald (Macdonald Archaeological Consultancy).*

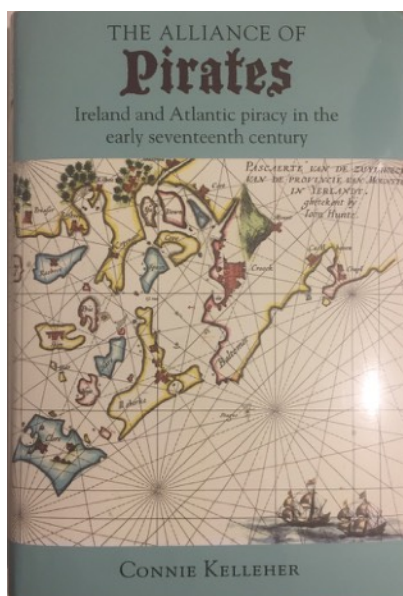
## New Books



### **Journeys of Faith: Stories of pilgrimage from Medieval Ireland - Louise Nugent**

Columba Books, €26.99

This very interesting book looks at the Irish tradition of religious pilgrimage from the Middle Ages to the modern day. It explores the landscapes of pilgrimage and how routes have become embedded in societies and communities. Nugent does discuss the international trips that some pilgrims made, such as to England, Rome, or even Jerusalem. But the majority of the book focuses on the experiences of the many: the local pilgrimages within Ireland to sites like Crough Patrick, Trim, Claregalway, or Dublin. This emphasises that it wasn't just the wealthy and elite who were making these trips, but the majority of Irish society was part of this tradition. Nugent clearly discusses the experience of pilgrimage, from the motives and preparations for pilgrimage to performance and prayers that occurred at the sites of pilgrimage. This book is well thought out and illustrated throughout with colour images of the sites and objects discussed in the text. It will have a wide appeal, covering medieval life and religion to modern religious practices and landscape archaeology.



### **The Alliance of Pirates: Ireland and Atlantic piracy in the early seventeenth century - Connie Kelleher**

Cork University Press, £27

This is an excellent book providing a wide-ranging discussion of pirates and pirating in the Atlantic. It focuses on the pirates who based themselves in the secluded harbours of Ireland, but these men and women travelled the Atlantic and had contact further afield. Kelleher looks at contemporary accounts of pirates (mostly through court depositions), the sites and landscapes associated with them, and the artefacts they used, all these aspects bring the stories to life and help us understand the life of the pirates. The book is well presented and extensively illustrated in colour. It will be of interest to a wide audience as it presents an exceptionally interesting social history. Many people are aware of pirates from popular culture, but this book provides a historical perspective which is more fascinating than the stories.