



A Gaelic History of East Belfast

Gordon McCoy



Conn Approaches his Castle

Front cover:

Ballymacarrett in 1625. This is one of a series drawn by Thomas Raven to resolve boundary disputes and assess the economic potential for those who had acquired lands in the former south Clandeboye. The picture contains a salt marsh, a water mill, and is sparsely populated. The woods may have been deliberately planted for firewood and timber.

By kind permission of the North Down Museum.

The author:

Gordon McCoy was raised in Saintfield, County Down, and has been learning Irish since 1983, when he realised for the first time that it was a living language. He studied Celtic and Anthropology at degree level in Queen's University, Belfast, and remained there to complete a DPhil on Protestants and the Irish language in 1997. He then worked as Cross-community Officer for the ULTACH Trust for 18 years. He was appointed Irish Language Education Officer of Turas in 2015. He lives in Ballymacaughy in east Belfast.

Timeline of the Irish Language in East Belfast and North Down

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 527–597 | Life of Colm Cille. <i>Dál Fiatach</i> (Irish-speaking tribe of the <i>Ulaid</i> confederation) control region. |
| 600–900 | <i>Dál Fiatach</i> build raths at Lisnabreeny. |
| 668 | <i>Dál Fiatach</i> battle <i>Dál nAraide</i> for control of Belfast ford. |
| 1177 | Normans conquer east Ulster. The English language arrives. |
| 1500 | Clandeboye O'Neills in control of region. |
| 1605–1619 | South Clandeboye lordship dismantled. |
| 1619 | Death of Conn O'Neill, last lord of south Clandeboye. |
| c.1700 | Irish becomes extinct in area. |
| 1803 | Samuel Bryson begins to collect Irish manuscripts. |
| 1895 | Foundation of Gaelic League in east Belfast. |
| 1948–1966 | YMCA Gaelic Fellowship for Protestants. |
| 1981 | Modern revival begins in Short Strand. |
| 2012 | Turas established. |



The lordship of Upper Clandeboye and the Great Ards in early 1601.

The location of Conn O'Neill's castle at Castlereagh is included, together with some modern locations to aid recognition of the borders. The lordship was bounded by the River Lagan in the west, the Ravarnet River in the South and the Blackstaff River on the Ards Peninsula. Also indicated in green is the area controlled by Conn O'Neill immediately after the partition of Upper Clandeboye in 1605. Much of it consisted of the 'demesne' of Castlereagh, his power base, and the territory called the Sliocht Uí Néill ('descendants of O'Neill') to the south-west. The borders are approximate, given the complex and tangled nature of the various land settlements as well as the confusion caused by the proliferation of names of townlands (the basis for apportioning land), some of which cannot be identified. Although Conn controlled about one third of his former lordship in 1605, he held only 8 townlands 11 years later.

Should we call the language Irish or Gaelic?

Gaelic (Gaeilge) is the name the Irish language has for itself, so it is correct to use it. However, the term 'Gaelic' can also refer to Manx or Scottish Gaelic. Thus linguists tend to prefer the more precise terms 'Irish' or 'Irish Gaelic' to 'Gaelic.'



Clarens depon

Borris Balgove
or Mount Auger Hill

Enoghamore Tackamore

Burned Down

Brane money

Hill with a cane

Clonghuraghish

Clonchongeta

At the foot of the hill
there is a small
creek in a hollow

Longmagadeghy

Froestone

Along this river from
the town to Glanmire
there are many fox
holes and some water
holes or springs near
the side of the road
in both ex by garde

dxdee



Introduction

Irish Gaelic has had a long presence in east Belfast.

It is likely that the Irish language was introduced to Ireland sometime between 1000 BCE and the first century BCE. Irish speakers built raths (homesteads enclosed by circular earthen banks and ditches) in the Castlereagh hills sometime between 600 and 900 CE. Many of the descendants of the Normans, who conquered east Ulster in 1177, adopted Irish as their native language. From the late 1400s to the early 1600s, Irish was the language of the Clandeboye lordship which controlled the territory that would eventually become east Belfast.

Long after this lordship had collapsed and the last native speakers of Irish in the Belfast area had died, antiquarian scholars studied the old Gaelic manuscripts of this lost world. They valued Irish as an ancient, noble language, which, like Latin, was fitting for mottos and inscriptions on buildings.

Fears that the Irish language was becoming extinct across Ireland led to the formation of the Gaelic League in Dublin in 1893. The first meeting to establish the Belfast branch of the League was held in east Belfast two years later. Although political upheavals in the twentieth century led to a closer association of the language with Irish nationalism, both Catholics and Protestants alike continued to learn the language.

Map of Belfast Lough in 1569 by Robert Lythe

By kind permission of the National Archives

Belfast is depicted as a castle and a small number of cabins. The map is annotated by William Cecil, advisor to Queen Elizabeth I, who comments: 'Alonge this river by ye space of 26 miles groweth much woodes as well okes for tymber as other woodde, whch maie be brought in the baie of Cragfargus with bote or by drage.' He also refers to 'astell rai or graie' [Castlereagh] and the ruler of Clandeboye, 'Sir Brian Mach Felim' [Sir Brian MacPhelim O'Neill d. 1574].

Early Irish Settlements in East Belfast

Raths in the hills around Belfast, including a complex of nine in the district of Lisnabreeny (*Lios na Bruíne*, 'rath of the fairy dwelling') were constructed by Irish speakers between the seventh and tenth centuries. Irish names of these forts survive today, such as Lisnasharragh (*Lios na Searrach*, 'fort of the foals') and Shandon (*Seandún*, 'old fort').



Lisnabreeny rath

The people who lived in these raths were called the *Dál Fiatach*, one of the tribes of the *Ulaid*, a confederation of Gaelic tribes which gave us the name of Ulster (*Ulaidh's tir*, 'land of the *Ulaid*'). From the eleventh to the seventeenth centuries more open homesteads were constructed and named with the term *baile* 'settlement' (anglicised as 'bally'), such as Ballymacarrett (*Baile Mhic Gearóid*, 'MacGarrett's or MacCarrett's settlement') and Ballyhackamore (*Baile an Chacamair*, 'settlement of the slob land or mud flat').

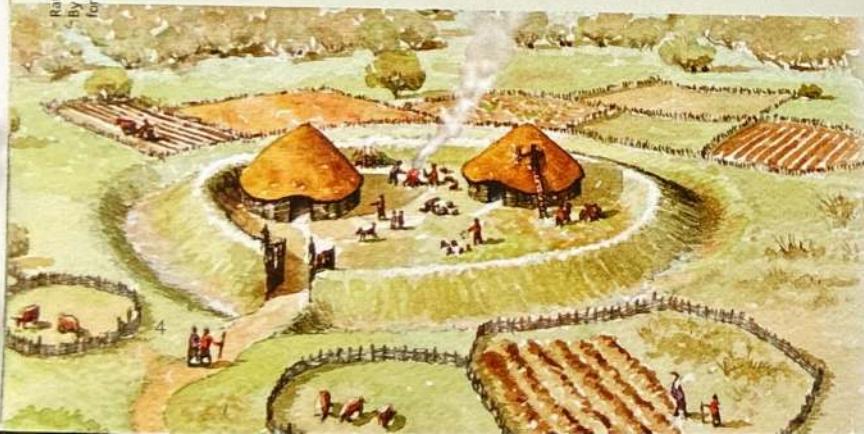


Lisnasharragh Primary School



Rath illustration by Philip Armstrong
By kind permission of the Department
for Communities

Other place-names in east Belfast with Irish-language roots include Glentoran (*Cluain Teorann*, 'meadow of the boundary') and Knocknagoney (*Cnoc na gCoininí*, 'hill of the rabbits'). Many of these place-names are townlands, or old Gaelic land divisions. There are over 9,600 townlands in Northern Ireland, averaging 240 acres in size. In County Down, the term in Irish for a townland was *baile bó* ('settlement of a cow'), indicating an amount of land which could sustain an annual tax of one cow for a Gaelic lord. Thus the size of townlands was often determined by the wealth of the land, although local political considerations also played a part.



The Clandeboye O'Neills



In 1177, the Anglo-Normans conquered east Ulster and ended the domination of the *Ulaid*. However, the Norman Earldom of Ulster was weakened by infighting, the ravages of the Black Death, and the havoc wreaked by the invasion of Edward Bruce in 1315.

The Clandeboye O'Neills expanded into large parts of east Ulster as Anglo-Norman power waned. The *Clann Aodha Buí*, or 'the family of Aodh Buí Ó Néill' ('yellow-haired Hugh,' who died in 1283), was a lineage of the powerful Tyrone O'Neills, which controlled not only Tyrone, but large parts of counties Armagh and Londonderry. The *Clann Aodha Buí* were excluded from the ruling dynasty of Tyrone and sought their fortunes in the east. By 1476 they were in control of Belfast Castle (which was near today's Castle Place), and by 1500 they controlled most of south Antrim and north Down.

The descendants of the Normans, families with names such as Savage, Jordan and White, retreated to the Downpatrick area and the southern part of the Ards Peninsula. By this time they were thoroughly Gaelicised; as Thomas Smith wrote, 'save the name remaineth nothing English.'

Dynastic struggles within the Clandeboye O'Neills led to the division of Clandeboye into two parts in 1555 — Lower (north) Clandeboye in Antrim, and Upper (south) Clandeboye in North Down, stretching from Bangor to Ballymacarrett to Crossgar. In 1584, this division was formalised by the English administration in Ireland. The River Lagan marked the boundary between the two Clandeboyes, with Belfast Castle, garrisoned by the English, controlling access between them.

The County Down/southern part of Clandeboye was called Upper Clandeboye because it was closer to Dublin. The Antrim part was further away from the capital, hence it was called Lower or Nether Clandeboye.

East Ulster in 1601

■ Wooded Area



East Ulster in 1601. Wooded areas are in green and territory controlled by Conn O'Neill is coloured yellow.

The Irish were different from the English in terms of clothing, laws, farming practices, political structures, and of course religious persuasion and language. These differences were often represented as 'barbarous' by English commentators. However, English settlers and adventurers were attracted by fertile Irish lands.

Gaelic Ireland threatened English interests on the wider European stage. Ireland's Gaelic lords and Catholic clergy were friendly with Spain, which was at war with England from 1585 to 1604. King Philip II of Spain was even told by a Jesuit, 'He that will England win, must in Ireland first begin.'

Queen Elizabeth I worried about the costs of garrisoning Ireland, and was more amenable to the schemes of adventurers who proposed 'plantations' or colonies of settlers – and if these pioneers were to finance their schemes, so much the better.

Gaelic lord and his retinue in *The Image of Ireland*, by John Derrick (1581).

Gaelic Life in 1600

Gaelic life in the opening years of the seventeenth century was mostly rural, with an agricultural economy based on cattle and corn.

The native Irish especially valued cattle, as they served as a currency as well as a source of food and clothing. Cattle could also be moved around in times of conflict, of which there were many in the 1600s.

Agricultural produce was traded for manufactured and luxury goods at ports of English settlement, like Carrickfergus. Belfast was a village with a small English garrison, which is likely to have traded with the native Irish population.

In the early 1600s, the majority of the native Irish population spoke only Irish. A minority learned English to trade at ports such as Carrickfergus. Some of the Gaelic lords spoke English; in 1583 Shane McBriar O'Neill was favoured by the crown to be 'captain' of three quarters of north Clandeboye as he was a 'modest man, and one who speaketh good English,' but most Gaelic lords could not read or write the language.



Gaelic Lordships and the Crown



Gaelic Ireland was divided into a number of lordships. Each lord protected his subjects from attack, for which he was compensated with labour, craftwork, and agricultural produce. Rivalries with neighbouring lordships often resulted in conflict, particularly with overlords who demanded tributes and troops from sub-lords.

The lord's authority was based upon his noble genealogy, which was carefully preserved by the *file* (poet). The *file* had a highly political role, stirring the troops during wartime and moving freely through rival lordships, negotiating and delivering messages. Other privileged members of the learned class included priests, physicians, musicians, lawyers and tax collectors.

The lord-in-waiting, or *tánaiste* ('the expected one'), was elected by the nobles of his family during the rule of the incumbent lord. He was chosen from the *derbfine* ('certain kindred'), a ruling class drawn from those who had the same great-grandfather.

Although crown law stipulated that Gaelic lords were required to have 'letters patent' (title deeds) to prove their territorial claims, Irish law was based upon oral tradition rather than documentation.

Some Gaelic lords made deals with the English to strengthen their position in a process called *surrender and regrant*. The lord surrendered his land to the crown and it was then regranted to him with letters patent recognised by crown law.

But the price for this transformation was high. The lord's eldest son now inherited his estate, not an elected member of the *derbfine*; the learned class had no place in the new system. Various crown fees were passed on to tenants and had to be paid as cash rents.

These rents could be raised annually, which had not been the case in Gaelic lordships; rents of agricultural produce were often left unaltered for many years.



Hugh O'Neill

The Nine Years' War (1594–1603)

In the opening years of the seventeenth century, crown control of Ireland was centralised in Dublin.

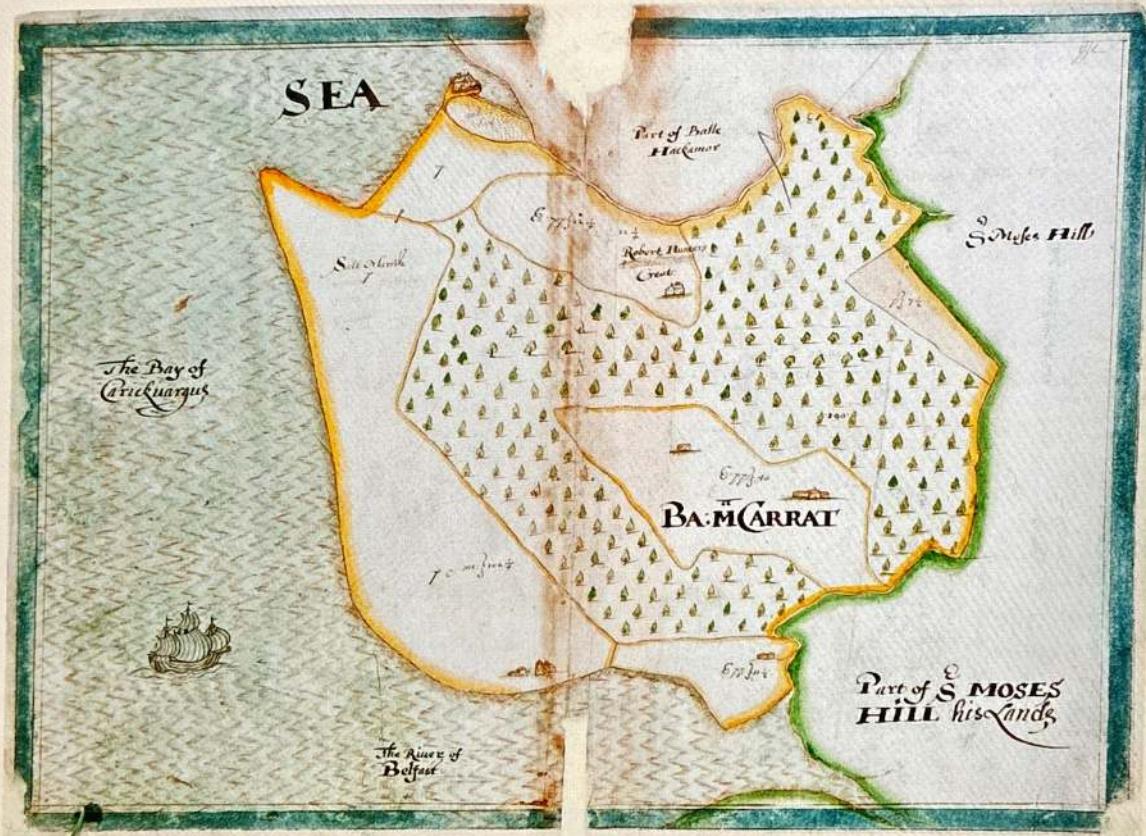
In the north, the English controlled the powerful garrison towns of Carrickfergus and Newry, as well as smaller, more isolated garrisons at Larne, Belfast, Strangford, Ardglass, Kilkeel, and Carlingford. These were supplied by the British navy, which controlled the sea around east Ulster.

The Tyrone overlord, Hugh O'Neill/Aodh Ó Néill, escalated localised English-Irish conflicts into an all-out war to end British rule in Ireland in the 1590s. Following some spectacular victories, the tide turned against O'Neill after the long-awaited Spanish 'Second Armada' was defeated at Kinsale in December 1601.

The governor of Carrickfergus, Arthur Chichester, and the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Baron Mountjoy, depleted Tyrone's forces with a 'scorched earth' campaign, burning crops and killing livestock, which caused a famine in Antrim and Tyrone.

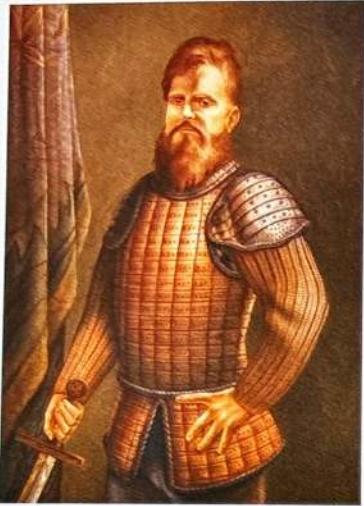
The lesser Gaelic lords often switched sides as they were 'ready to join the strongest sword,' according to Sir George Carew. A 1597 government report noted that the allegiance of the north Clandeboye lords 'will not stand fast longer than will serve their turn.'

South Clandeboye had rich farmland and valuable timber, of which there was a shortage in Britain. British adventurers cast covetous eyes on north Down in particular, because of its proximity to Britain and its poor defences.



Ballymacarrett in 1625
by Thomas Raven
By kind permission of the
North Down Museum.

The Inauguration of Conn O'Neill



In 1601, Conn O'Neill became lord of south Clandeboye.



According to the archaeologists Elizabeth FitzPatrick and Conleth Manning, Conn was inaugurated at a prehistoric mound near the Manse Road. FitzPatrick has delineated the main aspects of the inaugural ceremony, which was steeped in pre-Christian Gaelic tradition. The inauguration of Conn was likely to have been as follows:



Conn Approaches his Castle

Conn arrived on horseback in a procession. Then his noble clothes were removed and he put on a simple habit or robe.



The Inauguration of Conn O'Neill



The inaugural chair of Conn is the only remaining artifact of his rule. It can be seen in the Ulster Museum.

Photograph by Mark Docherty

He sat on a stone chair while the master of ceremonies performed a series of rites, moving in an auspicious clockwise or *deiseal* ('sunwise') direction.

The *slat an tiarna* ('the lord's baton'), a wand cut from a sacred tree at the site, was passed over his head and then given to him.

A single shoe was also passed over his head and then put on his foot.

His genealogy was recited, stretching back to Aodh Buí Ó Néill.

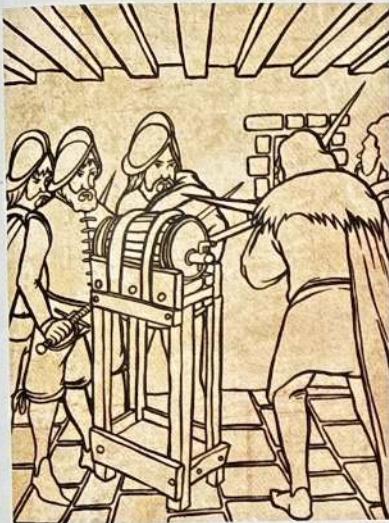
He was pronounced lord of Upper Clandeboye, and dressed in the fineries of a lord.

He gave his horse to his inaugurator as a sign of his generosity.

A celebratory feast was held for several days at Conn's castle — *An Caisléan Riabhach* ('the grey castle' or Castlereagh).

The Great Debauch

Drawings by Andrew Whitson



The Quarrel with the Belfast Garrison

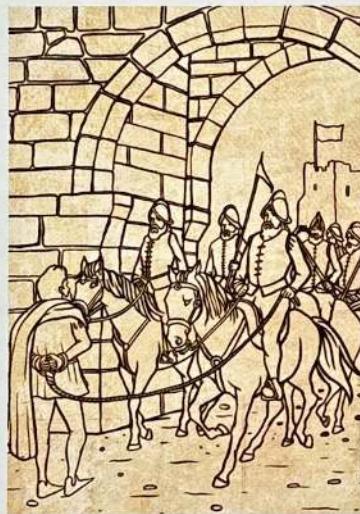
Conn had to choose between the demands of the overlord Hugh O'Neill and the English.

He initially sided with the English, but sometime between August and October 1601 he rebelled with the support of the Antrim McDonnells. When the revolt was crushed, Conn was captured and imprisoned in Carrickfergus. According to some accounts, Chichester pardoned Conn as he was weak and inexperienced.

If Conn was pardoned, then his final downfall is more likely to have begun with the 'great debauch,' as related in the *Montgomery Manuscripts*.

According to the *Manuscripts*, Conn sent his followers into Belfast to fetch wine for a feast at Castlereagh at the end of 1602 or early 1603. They were ambushed by the

English garrison and their wine taken from them. When his followers returned empty-handed, Conn was furious and sent them back to retrieve the wine. An English soldier was killed in the ensuing melee and Conn was later arrested for treason and imprisoned in Carrickfergus Castle. Some experts on the period are sceptical about the story of the drunken brawl, as this account did not appear in the state papers of the time. The historian Michael Perceval-Maxwell regards the 'great debauch' as 'more colourful than true.' The archaeologist Tom McNeill believes it to be a 'good story' and attributes Conn's imprisonment in 1603 to his 1601 rebellion.



Conn is Arrested



Conn's Wife Aids his Escape

In March 1603, Hugh O'Neill made peace with the English.

Queen Elizabeth I died and James VI of Scotland became James I of England. The end of the Nine Years' War had various and contradictory implications for the captive Conn. King James wanted to make peace with the Irish and there was a possibility that Conn may have been released.

However, Conn decided to escape, perhaps because of a rumour that Chichester planned to hang him and seize south Clandeboye for himself. In 1602 Chichester had indicated that he was prepared to 'temporize' with native lords until Hugh O'Neill was defeated, 'after which these petty lords will be dealt withal at pleasure.'

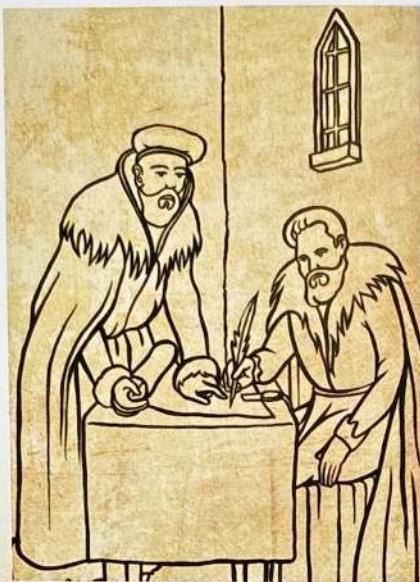
The *Montgomery Manuscripts* contain two accounts of how Hugh Montgomery, a powerful Scottish merchant, helped Conn to escape. The main account relates how Thomas Montgomery, a distant relative of Hugh, courted the daughter of Conn's jailor, and having gained access to Carrickfergus Castle, released Conn and took him to Scotland.

The Partition of Upper Clandeboye

The *Manuscripts* contain an alternative account by the Rev. Andrew Stewart, which portrays Conn as 'a drunken sluggish man' with a 'sharp, nimble wife,' Eilis, who smuggled a rope inside hollowed-out cheeses into Carrickfergus Castle. Conn escaped and hid in a Bangor church steeple until he was taken to Scotland by a Patrick Montgomery.

The *Montgomery Manuscripts* then relate how Conn was 'kindly entertained and treated with a due deference to his birth and quality....'

A counter-interpretation of Conn's escape is provided by historian Keith Haines, who believes the rescue tale to be a 'fabrication.' Rather, Montgomery kidnapped and conned Conn. Haines writes, 'The chances are that once ensconced in Scotland Conn was plied with both alcohol and threats until he agreed to sacrifice half of his estates.'



Conn's Pact with Hugh Montgomery

Hugh Montgomery promised to secure Conn's pardon for the treason charge in return for half of south Clandeboye.

They both travelled to London to petition the king to drop the charge.

Montgomery's ambitious plan was altered at the behest of James Fullerton, an influential courtier who persuaded King James to divide Conn's land into thirds, giving a third to

Montgomery, a third to O'Neill and a third to Fullerton's colleague, James Hamilton. The king was persuaded that no one individual should acquire too much land and power, especially 'such an Irishman,' as Conn was termed.

Conn returned to Castlereagh as an English-style landlord in July 1605. He had retained 68 townlands, including Castlereagh, but had lost much of north Down, including Bangor and Newtownards, which were settled by Scots.

Conn is often presented as the dupe or victim of Montgomery. Timothy McCall has an alternative theory. Conn was all too aware that he ruled south Clandeboye under the Gaelic law of tanistry, which was not recognised by crown law. Conn gave away land he could not control in order to consolidate his own interest in Castlereagh.



Conn meets King James I



The Downfall of Conn O'Neill

Conn had difficulties managing the transition from Gaelic lord to English-style landlord.

Some blame Conn's fondness for 'high living' and alcohol. Certainly, he was not adept at the cash economy and was a poor businessman. His son, Daniel, later charged Montgomery with having bought 8 townlands from Conn 'to the value of £15,000... for and upon the only consideration of £317'.

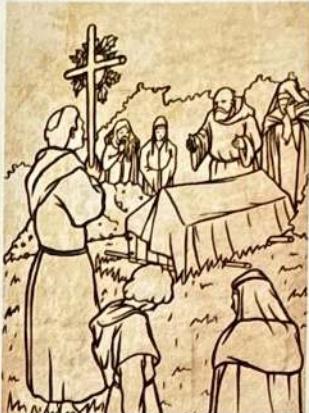
The decline of Conn O'Neill

In fairness to Conn, few Gaelic lords fared well under surrender and regrant. They were unable to adapt to a life of lawsuits, taxes, jostling for position at court, and evicting tenants who did not pay their rent. They were reluctant to abandon their paternalistic roles and would have been under pressure to support the Gaelic learned class, which was redundant and felt humiliated at the thought of having to labour on the land.

Conn began to mortgage, lease, or sell off his land piece by piece until he was left with very little. He lost control of his castle in 1608 and sold it to Sir Moses Hill in 1616, who initially repaired it, but eventually let it fall into ruins. In the last years of his life, Conn lived in various places near Dundonald and Newtownards. He owned at most only 8 townlands at the time of his death.

Conn lived to see his castle home fall into ruins, his woods felled, and his lands planted with an alien people with different laws, different farming practices, and a different language. Ultimately, Conn's downfall also heralded the end of the Irish language east of the Lagan as the language of culture, law, and administration. By 1700, the vast majority of the native Irish of the Belfast area could speak only English.

Townland	Date of Sale by Conn O'Neill
Ballyrushboy	25th April 1606 to Thomas Montgomery
Ballymaconaghy	22nd August 1606 to Hugh Montgomery
Ballynafoy	25th October 1608 to Sir Thomas Hibbotts
Ballymacarrett	2nd August 1609 to Col. David Boyd



Ballymaghan Church

At Motelands, on the Old Holywood Road, there once stood a medieval church, called *Ecclesia de Balymichgan* in the Papal Taxation of 1306.

The funeral of Conn O'Neill



Ordnance Survey Map of Motelands

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland map of 1948

The church was located in the parish of Holywood. The graveyard of Ballymaghan church is believed to be the last resting place of Conn O'Neill, who died in Holywood in 1619.

Several tombstones from the graveyard were used to build the old Moat House. In 1847, Rev. William Reeves wrote, 'There are no remains of the church or churhyard now to be seen, but it is known that they occupied the ground at present under the orchard which belongs to the Moat House.' The present Moat House was built in 1863 by Thomas Valentine, a linen magnate.

There was also a Norman motte in the vicinity, hence the names 'Moat/Motelands.'

A local legend relates how King William's army camped here on its way to the Boyne and many died of fever. After that, local farmers' horses and cattle refused to eat grass at the site.

The Lost Castle of Castlereagh



A typical County Down tower-house
© Caroline Devlin

Castlereagh is named after *An Caisleán Riabhach* ('the grey castle'), and was the headquarters of the Gaelic lordship of south Clandeboye.

It is probable that this was a tower-house similar to those that survive in the Lecale area of County Down.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the castle had disappeared — presumably the building was taken apart to provide stones to build local homes and other buildings in the area.

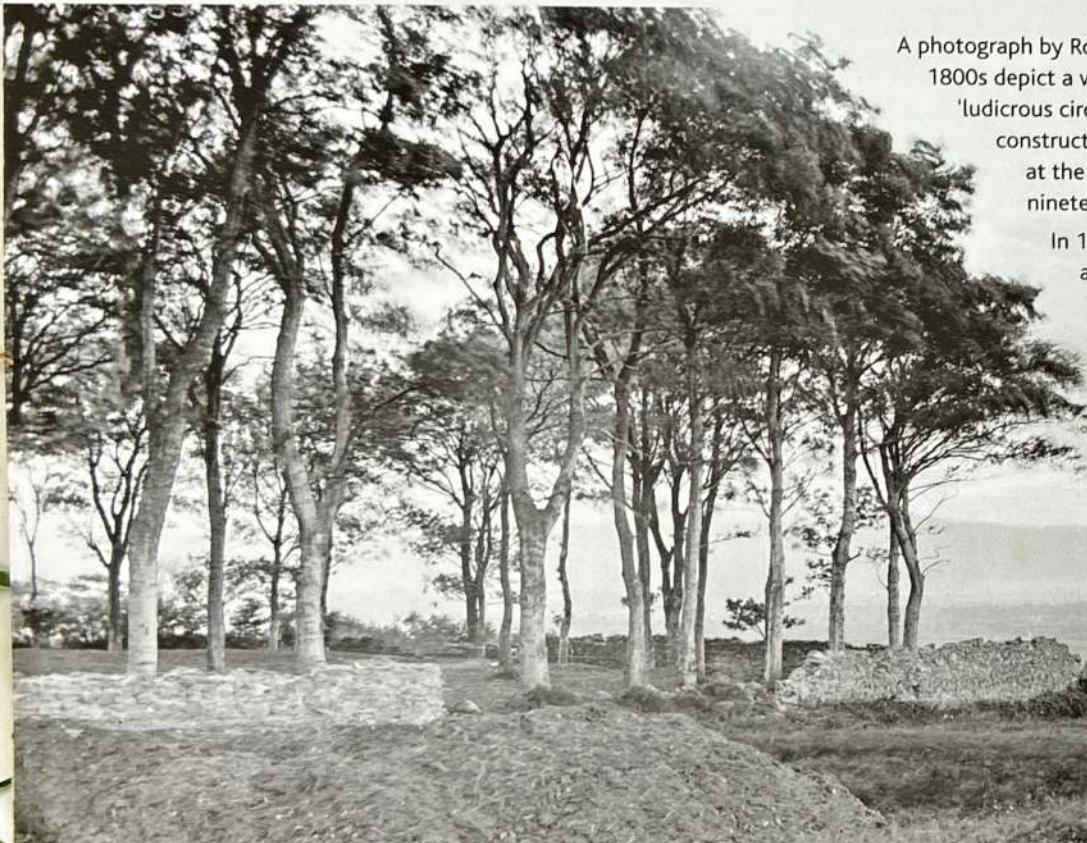
In 1823 George Benn's *History of the Town of Belfast* recounted a story that explained the destruction of the castle through a 'ludicrous circumstance.' The Marquis of Downshire ordered a wall to be built around the castle to protect it, but the workers used the stones from the castle to build the wall!



Illustration of castle site by J.W. Carey
From *Historical Notices of Old Belfast and its Vicinity* (1896)

A photograph by Robert Welch and a drawing of the site in the late 1800s depict a wall, but no castle. Archaeologists dismiss the 'ludicrous circumstance' tale and believe this wall was constructed by Moses Hill to enclose a garden or orchard at the site. This had also vanished by the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1984 Queen's University archaeologists conducted an excavation in the vicinity of the Orange Hall on Church Road to determine the exact site of the castle. The investigation proved fruitless. This was not an unexpected outcome for Gladys Douglas, a local schoolteacher, who had informed the archaeologist leading the excavation that the castle was actually located in the neighbouring field. A recent re-evaluation of the cartographic evidence by members of the Centre for Archaeological Fieldwork at Queen's University concurs with Douglas's local knowledge.



Photograph at castle site by
Robert Welch
By kind permission of National
Museums NI



Mosaic of Naomh Colmcille/St Columba
By kind permission of St Colmcille's Parish Church
Image by Dunbar Design

The ancient well of Saint Colmcille

This was a stone-lined structure near to the church, with stone steps leading to the water. The Shandon Golf Club filled in the well in the 1920s. An official letter from 1961 stated that a 'Holy Well' was in danger from nearby roadworks – the Knock dual carriageway!

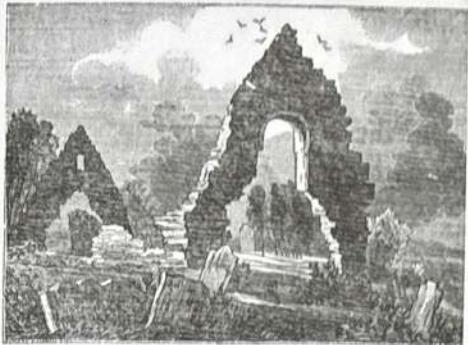


Illustration of Knock Church
from *Dublin Penny Journal*
Vol 4 (1835–1836), p.32.

Knock Burial Ground

Knock Burial Ground

Knock means 'hill' in Irish and is an abbreviated form of Knockcolumkill (*Cnoc Cholm Cille*, 'hill of St Colmcille').

Colm Cille, which is Irish for 'Dove of the Church,' was a saint credited with the spread of Christianity in Scotland.

It was believed that Colm Cille prayed at Knock on his way to Movilla Abbey (near present-day Newtownards) to be trained by Saint Finnian. Colm Cille was of noble O'Neill blood and his association with Knock would have endowed the church with considerable prestige. It is likely that the O'Neills of Castlereagh worshipped at *Cnoc Cholm Cille*.

After Conn's death, the church was used by the Church of Ireland for a short time, but was abandoned in favour of a new parish church at Knockbreda. The site continued to be used as a graveyard. According to a 1902 account, what was left of the church was destroyed to make room for graves.

A drawing from 1835 shows the east and west walls still intact.





LEFT TO RIGHT: Flooding at Conn O'Neill's bridge in early 1900s
By kind permission of National Museums NI

Connwater Bridge, 1603
by J.W. Carey. From *Historical Notices of Old Belfast and its Vicinity* (1896)

Conn O'Neill's Bridge, 2016
Gordon McCay

The Conn O'Neill Bridge

Local tradition suggests that this pedestrian bridge dates from the late sixteenth century or the beginning of the seventeenth century and was built for Conn O'Neill. The bridge lies at the confluence of the Knock and Loop rivers, where they merge to form the much larger and more dangerous Connwater River, which was prone to dangerous tidal surges.

It made sense to have a footbridge here as the river was passable. Yet no such footbridge appears on a map of the area until 1901. The bridge may actually have been built as an ornamental feature for the grounds of Elm Grove House, a large residence nearby. This was the conclusion of an Environment and Heritage Service report, which considered the bridge to have been constructed between 1860 and 1879. The bridge that exists here today may have been constructed on the location of its medieval predecessor.

Bryson Street

Sráid Uí Bhriosáin.

Samuel Bryson/Somhairle Ó Briosaín
1778–1853

Bilingual Bryson Street sign

A century and a half after the demise of Conn, the Irish language was extinct in east Belfast, yet individuals still collected, preserved, and translated old Irish manuscripts.

One such was Samuel Bryson, who gave his name to Bryson Street. Bryson was part of a long line of Presbyterians who rescued many important Irish-language manuscripts. Among the documents he saved is a version of the *Imitation of Christ*, written in a mixture of Classical and County Down Irish, and a funeral oration for Eoghan Ó Néill, a leader of the Clandeboye O'Neills, who was drowned in the River Bann in 1744.

Bryson owned a pharmacy in High Street. In the latter part of his life he moved to Ballymacarrett and lived in a house called *Cluan* which means 'meadow' in Irish. This is a reference to the former green fields of Ballymacarrett and is the source of the name of Cluan Place.

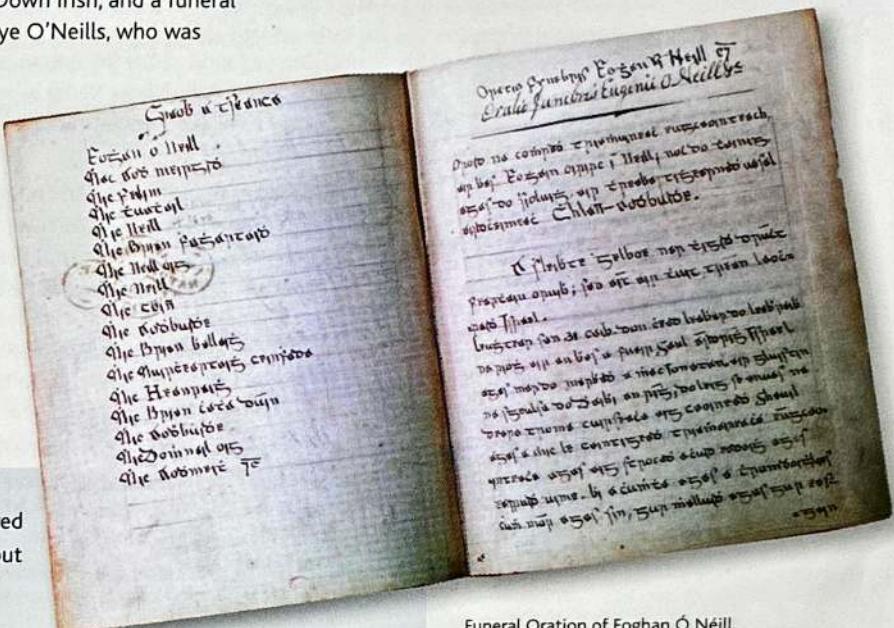
Many of Bryson's manuscripts can be found in Belfast Central Library. Until Belfast became very divided politically in the late 1800s, it was fashionable for Protestants of the city to study Irish.

The health of the Meath poet Aodh Mac Domhnaill suffered when he moved to Belfast to work on Irish manuscripts, but he was cured by Dr Bryson. Mac Domhnaill did not spare his praise:

Níl aicid ná támh dá leanann síol Ádhamh
Mar is fiosach ón lá far pheacaigh sé,
Nach ndéanfadh sé slán le aon bhuidéal amháin
Den mbiotáilte a d'fháisc sé as luibheanna.

Translation by Fionntán de Brún

There is no disease or pestilence that has followed the seed of Adam
That is known from the day he sinned,
That he cannot cure with a single bottle
Of the potion he pressed from herbs.



Funeral Oration of Eoghan Ó Néill.
By kind permission of Belfast Central Library.



The Red Hand of the Ulster Bank

Detail of Red Hand Design in Ulster Bank
By Dunbar Design

The old Ulster Bank on the Newtownards Road has a coat of arms which depicts a right hand surmounting the O'Neill slogan *Lamh Dearg Eirinn* (a simplified form of *Lámh Dhearg Éireann*, 'red hand of Ireland').



Laochraídh na Láimhe Deirge
By kind permission of the Royal Irish Academy

This symbol can be found above the entrance of the Merchant Hotel (the former headquarters of the Ulster Bank) as well as at St George's Market. The O'Neills may have adopted the symbol from their former enemies in Ulster, the *Ulaid*.

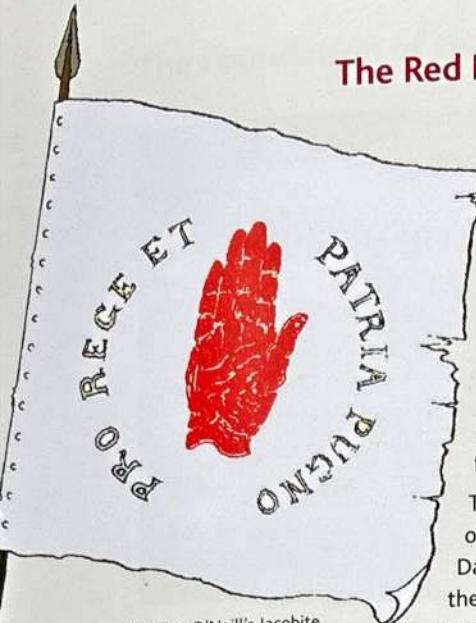
Katharine Simms has identified the first reference to an Ulster people 'of the red hand' to 1426–1427, the most likely period of the composition of a praise poem for the Magennis family of south Down, descendants of a tribe of the *Ulaid*. According to Irish law, a *fear láimhe deirge* 'man with a red hand' was someone who had perpetrated violence, but had not yet paid compensation to his victim or their kin. In Irish law a crime was the responsibility of the kin group of the perpetrator, who were fined for the crime.

The poem calls the Magennis family *laochraídh na láimhe deirge* ('heroes of the red hand') because they and their ancestors, the *Ulaid*, boasted that they had repeatedly slaughtered the men of the rest of Ireland without paying legal compensation. Thus the *Ulaid* were proud to be blood-stained 'outlaws.'



Former Connswater Branch of Ulster Bank,
431–437 Newtownards Road

The Red Hand Standard



The flag of Gordon O'Neill's Jacobite regiment. The Latin motto is *Pro Rege et Patria Pugno* ['I fight for king and country']. By kind permission of the O'Neill Country Historical Society

Another possible origin of the red hand is the motif of a victorious ancestral warrior resting his blood-stained sword-hand on a white battle standard.

This flag of the red hand appeared in a late 1600s dispute between the poets of the Magennis, O'Neill and Scottish MacDonald dynasties concerning the right to claim the red hand – the Magennis and MacDonald poets providing a suitable ancestral figure of their own.

The O'Neill poet's account stretches back to the Gaelic conquest of Ireland by the sons of Míl, including Ír and Éireamhón, who sailed from Spain to defeat the Tuatha Dé Danann. Before the defeated Tuatha Dé Danann left for the Irish underworld, they gave the victors three treasures to ensure protection for their people, one of which was a large standard bearing the symbol of a red hand. The red hand standard became the property of the descendants of Éireamhón, the O'Neills, as they later defeated the family of Ír (the ancestor of the Magennisses).

Despite this ancient claim, the first recorded use of a symbolic hand by the O'Neills appears in the seal of Aodh Reamhar Ó Néill/'Fat' Hugh O'Neill (d. 1364), which describes him in Latin as the 'King of the Irish of Ulster.' Later this image was adopted by the Clandeboye O'Neills; a seal discovered near Magherafelt is attributed to Muircheartach Ruadh Ó Néill/Red Murtogh O'Neill, ruler of Clandeboye from 1444 to 1468.

As the distinctive badge of the O'Neill dynasty, the red hand was invoked in the 16th-century battle cry *Lámh Dhearg Abú* ('red hand to victory').



Drawing of seal of Muircheartach Ruadh Ó Néill/Red Murtogh O'Neill
Irish Penny Journal (Vol. 1) May 29 1841, p. 381.



Wax impression of the seal of Aodh Reamhar Ó Néill, ruler of Tyrone 1345–1364.
Frontispiece of *The O'Neills of Ulster* (Vol. 2) 1907, by Thomas Mathews

John Feely ~ Preacher of the Gospel (Seán Ó Fithcheallaigh)

John Feely was born in County Sligo in 1801 and died in Holywood in 1860. His remains were interred on this site in the graveyard adjoining Ballymacarrett Wesleyan Chapel, which became Newtownards Road Methodist Church and then East Belfast Mission. A native Irish-speaker, for more than forty years he faithfully bore witness to Jesus Christ in service as an Irish Methodist missionary.



'In his death the Methodist Church has lost one of those links which bind the present to the past generation, and has lost a labourer, who, as an Irish-speaking preacher, can hardly be replaced these days.' Obituary, Belfast Newsletter, 27 September 1860.



EAST BELFAST
MISSION

THE METHODIST CHURCH IN IRELAND

'Is é an domhan mór mo phardíse'
'The world is my parish'
John Wesley

Plaque commemorating the life of John Feely in the Skainos Centre

They believed that preaching and publishing religious works in Irish would persuade Catholic Irish speakers to become Protestant (or at least improve their morals). Methodist preachers were noted for going on long preaching tours on horseback. Protestant evangelists of all denominations met with strong opposition from the Catholic clergy and community, and converts often recanted or emigrated.

John Feely was raised through Irish in Sligo and attended Maynooth College, but it is not certain if he intended to become a Catholic priest. He was converted to Methodism while working as a tutor for Methodist families in Ballintubbert, County Laois, and joined the Irish Mission of the church in 1821. He was a gifted orator and his appearances with the flamboyant preacher Gideon Ouseley drew large, if not always friendly, crowds – both of them wore black caps to protect their heads from missiles. Ouseley described Feely as 'the right kind of Irish preacher... he preaches from thirteen to fifteen times a week.' William Graham Campbell explained the effect Feely had on his fellow Irish speakers:

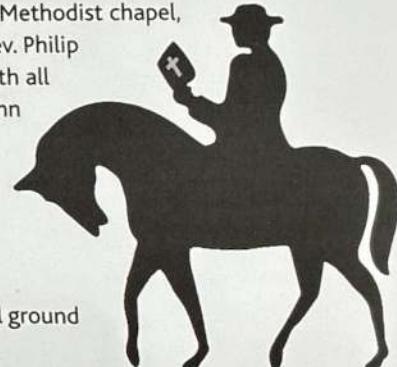
At one time, in Clonmel, a rabble of blood-thirsty men rushed into the Methodist chapel, at the time of holding an anniversary missionary meeting, while the Rev. Philip Garrett, the English deputation, was speaking. They interrupted him with all the signs of hostility and every appearance of murder, until the Rev. John Feely, who was at the meeting, rose and appealed to them in Irish, in such affectionate and powerful strains as completely disarmed them.

Feely worked throughout the west of Ireland and travelled north towards the end of his life. His last position was as a supernumerary minister (a supportive role, with fewer responsibilities) in Holywood, Co. Down.

Feely died in Holywood in 1860, and was interred in Ballymacarrett burial ground (on the present site of the Skainos Centre).

John Feely/Seán Ó Fithcheallaigh c. 1801–1860

Some Protestant evangelists considered the language barrier to be the real reason for the failure of the Reformation in Ireland.



The Foundation of the Gaelic League in Belfast



Upper Beersbridge Road

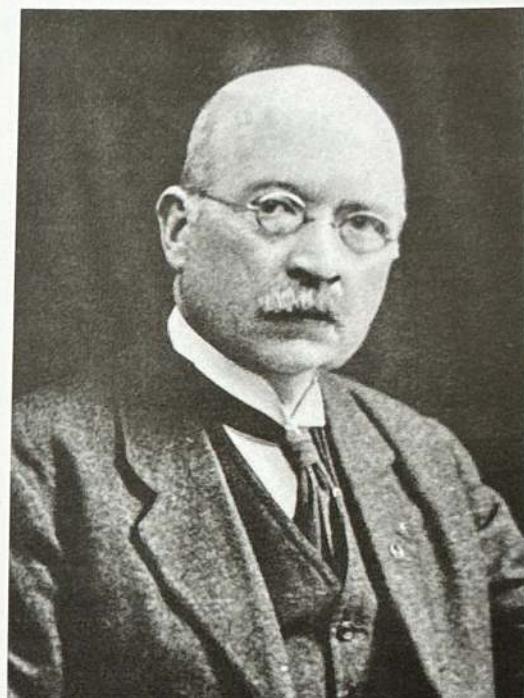
The decision to establish a Belfast branch was taken by Peadar Toner Mac Fhionnlaoich/McGinley (1856–1947), who learned Irish from native-speaking relatives from Donegal. He worked for the Inland Revenue, which transferred him to Belfast.

The meeting to establish the Belfast branch of the Gaelic League was held in McGinley's home, 32 Upper Beersbridge Road (now 370 Beersbridge Road) on 19 August 1895. A member of the Church of Ireland, Dr John St. Clair Boyd, was declared President and P.T. McGinley became Vice President.

The pair represented the inclusivity of the League, as Boyd was a unionist and McGinley a republican. McGinley was a fierce advocate of Ulster Irish, and established the *Ard-Scoil Ultach* ('the Ulster College') to train Irish-language teachers in the Ulster dialect, since the teachers hitherto only had the opportunity to learn Munster Irish.

McGinley's defence of Ulster Irish was one battle in the *Cogadh na gCanúintí* ('war of the dialects') which raged in the early years of the language revival between advocates of the three main dialects of Irish – Ulster, Connaught and Munster. A written standard for the language was introduced in 1958, but no spoken standard exists.

The Gaelic League was founded in 1893 in Dublin with the aim of reviving the Irish language.



P.T. Mac Fhionnlaoich
By kind permission of Conradh na Gaeilge

The Gaelic League in East Belfast

The image of the League in the early days was middle class and respectable.

Both Protestants and Catholics were involved, and advertisements for members were placed in the *Irish News* and *Belfast News Letter*. Belfast members included an army captain, Church of Ireland clerics, and Rev. Richard Rutledge Kane, Grand Master of the Belfast Orange Lodge.

The east Belfast branches met in Catholic primary schools. The Ballymacarrett branch of the Gaelic League met at St Matthew's School in Short Strand.

The involvement of Protestants (especially unionists) in the League diminished as the organisation became increasingly associated with nationalist politics. By 1916, the League was very Catholic and nationalist in ethos.

Gaelic League Branches included:

Bloomfield Branch	Craobh Bhláthghoirt
Breda Branch	Craobh na Bréadai
Knock Branch	Craobh Chnoc Cholm Cille
Bangor Branch	Craobh Bheannchair
Ballynafeigh Branch	Craobh Bhaile na Faiche
Carrickfergus Branch	Craobh Charraig Fhearghsa



Membership Card of Breda Branch, Gaelic League
By kind permission of Comhaltas Uladh de Chonradh na Gaeilge

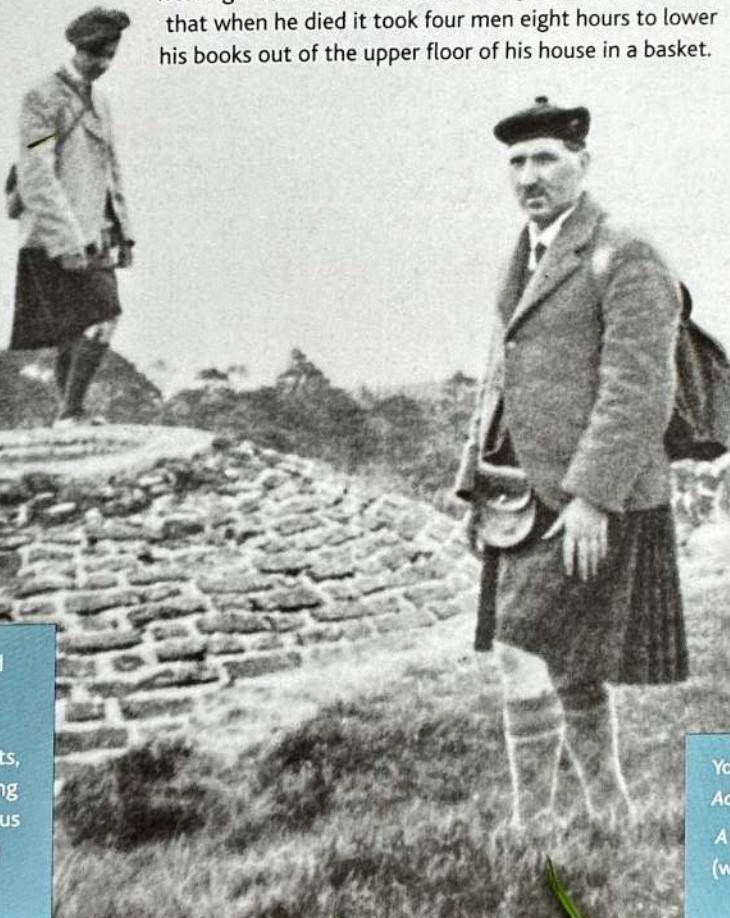
Hugh McMillan/Aoidhmín Mac Gréagóir 1884–1950

Between 1897 and 1904, No. 243 Albertbridge Road was the home of Hugh McMillan, who called himself Aoidhmín Mac Gréagóir in Irish.

He volunteered to teach Irish in the Ballymacarrett branch of the Gaelic League when he was 17 – a branch with which P.T. McGinley was closely involved. He never worked a day in his life and it is believed that he lived off a substantial inheritance. He travelled widely in the summer months, camping in continental Europe and in Irish-speaking areas of Ireland.

Mac Gréagóir eventually went to live in Ligoneil, where he preferred not to let his interest in Irish be well-known. He did not receive Irish-language letters at home, but collected them from a nationalist bookshop in the city centre. Mac Gréagóir became an expert in the Irish dialects of the Antrim Glens and Rathlin and published a book of Irish-language stories in Rathlin Irish in 1910.

Mac Gréagóir loved fishing, playing the bagpipes, and wearing kilts. He also loved collecting books, so much so that when he died it took four men eight hours to lower his books out of the upper floor of his house in a basket.



When Mac Gréagóir died the following were discovered in his house:
6 kilts, 5 bicycles, 14 tents, cameras, golf clubs, fishing rods, knives, and numerous bags of unopened tinned food.



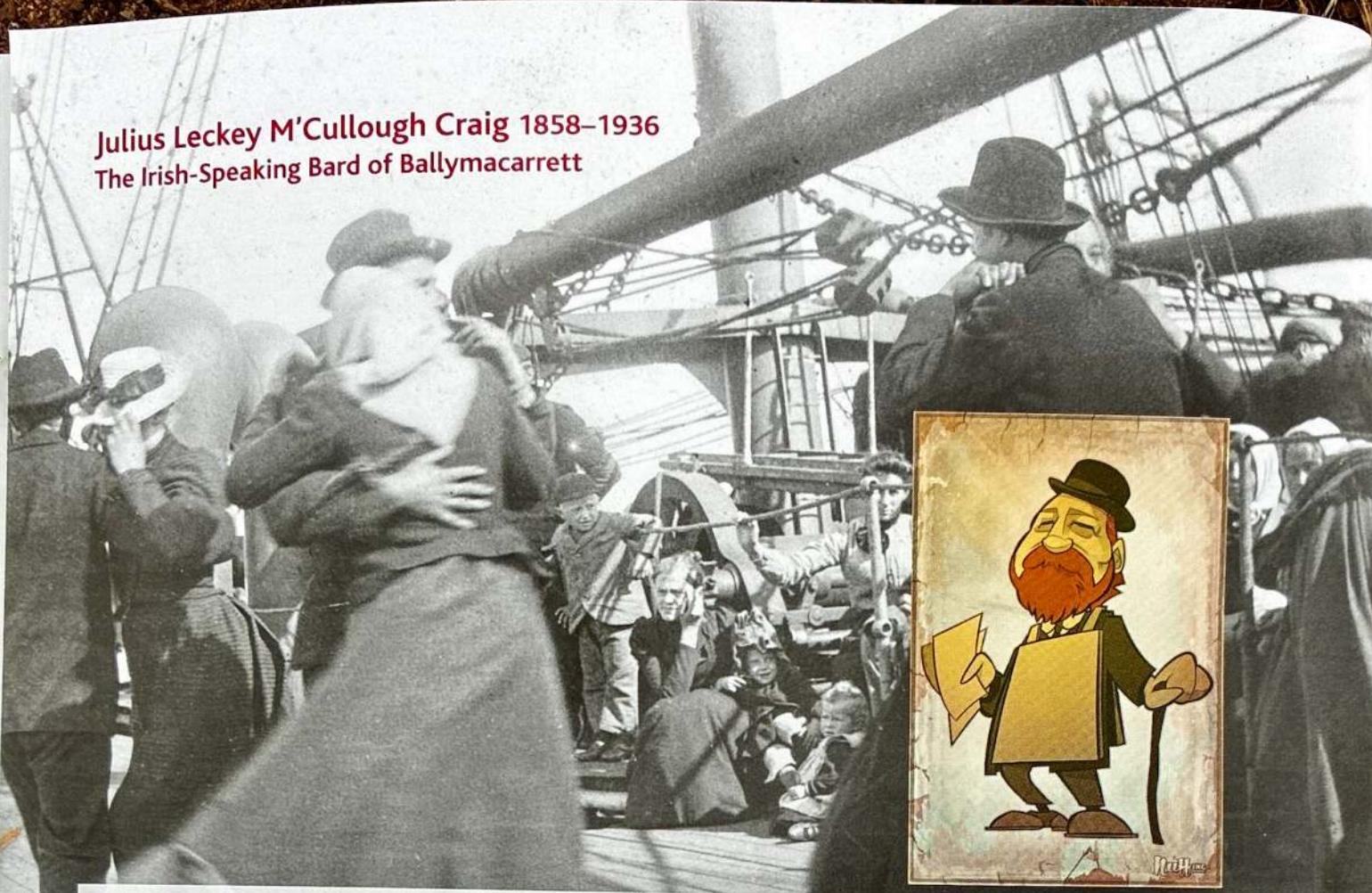
Aoidhmín Mac Gréagóir
By kind permission of Ciarán Ó Duibhín

You can read more about Mac Gréagóir in
Aoidhmín Mac Gréagóir:

A Little-Known Gaelic Scholar by Ciarán Ó Duibhín
(www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/~oduibhin/daoine/aoidhmin2.htm)

Julius Leckey M'Cullough Craig 1858–1936

The Irish-Speaking Bard of Ballymacarrett



'Julius Craig' by Colm Campbell. By kind permission of Eugene Dunphy

Julius Craig's family were from rural County Down and moved to east Belfast to make their fortune.

Their home at 97 Albertbridge Road was also 'Craig's Shop,' a general haberdashery. Julius took little interest in the business, for he considered himself to be an excellent poet, an opinion that was not often shared by his listeners. Following the death of his parents, his sisters took over the shop, but Julius decided to go travelling to sell his poetry and paintings. Craig's journeys were often on foot, and he wore an ill-fitting bowler hat pulled tightly down over flowing locks of red hair. This striking appearance was completed by sandwich boards, on which he pinned his poems, which he recited in a strong Belfast accent. He was a staunch unionist and Orangeman who learned the Irish language, which proved useful when looking for places to stay in rural parts of Ireland.

The introduction of paddle steamers in the early 1900s was a boon for Craig. They took day trippers to Kinnegar, Holywood, and especially Bangor, where crowds were drawn by the amusements, performing horses, comedians — and the performances of Julius Craig.

In 1918 he finally hung up his sandwich boards, having satisfied himself that he had saved eight lives on his travels, and praised 'the hospitality of Irish people of all creeds' who had given him 'the approval of 11,268 dinners and teas.'

You can read more about Julius Craig in *The Bard Of Ballymacarrett* by Eugene Dunphy, which was published in Belfast in 2018 by Lapwing Productions.

Dancing on the Bangor Boat, 1906

By kind permission of National Museums NI

The Censuses of 1901 and 1911

The online publication of the Irish censuses of 1901 and 1911 revealed that Irish speakers from the Gaeltacht lived in east Belfast.

The industrialisation of the city had attracted people from all over Ireland in search of work. Many local Protestants recorded themselves as Irish speakers. In 1911, for example, 518 Catholics and 175 Protestants indicated that they could speak Irish in the Pottinger electoral ward, which included many districts of inner east Belfast.

It is most likely that these Protestant Irish speakers were inspired by the Gaelic revival. Throughout Ireland far more young people indicated they spoke Irish in 1911 than in the 1891 census, before the revival had begun. The Rev. Richard Lyttle, a minister of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Moneyreagh, was an Irish-language enthusiast who organised classes in his district. This resulted in 1% of this predominantly Protestant community recording themselves as Irish speakers in the 1911 census.

It is possible that some people misunderstood the question about Irish, thinking that it concerned nationality or the dialect of English spoken in Ireland. In some cases, the forms of these 'Irish speakers' were amended by the census staff. Turas is researching the actualities of the census regarding the Irish language in east Belfast at this time.

Linda Ervine was inspired to learn Irish when she discovered that in 1911 her husband's grandfather had recorded himself as an Irish speaker. She realised for the first time that the Irish language had a Protestant tradition and was not simply a 'Catholic' language.

Census documents are available at www.census.nationalarchives.ie

CENSUS OF IRELAND, 1911.

Two Examples of the mode of filling up this Table are given on the other side.

FORM A.

No. on Form B. 39

RETURN of the MEMBERS of this FAMILY and their VISITORS, BOARDERS, SERVANTS, &c., who slept or abode in this House on the night of SUNDAY, the 2nd of APRIL, 1911.

NAME AND SURNAME.	RELATION to Head of Family.	RELIGIOUS PROFESSION.	EDUCATION.	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX.	BANK, PROFESSION, OR OCCUPATION.	PARTICULARS AS TO MARRIAGE.		WHERE BORN.	IRISH LANGUAGE.	If Dead and Death Date only; Birth date or Identical or Last seen.
						State whether he is Head of Family, or "Wife," or "Daughter," or "Son," or "Relative," or "Visitor," or "Servant," &c.	State here whether he is the son of "Friend and Wife," or "Friend and Son," or "Cannot Stand."			
John Ervine	Son	Presbyterian	Read & Write	26 —	Macharia <i>Hobson</i>	Married 15 7 7	County Down	Irish & English		
Mary Ervine	Daughter	Presbyterian	Read & Write	— 33		Married 15 7 7	County Down	Irish & English		
Thomas Ervine	Son	Presbyterian	Read & Write	14 —	Apprentice Iron Turner	Single	County Down	Irish & English		
Mariam Ervine	Daughter	Presbyterian	Read & Write	— 13	Kettler Carpenter	Single	County Down	Irish & English		
John Ervine	Son	Presbyterian	Read & Write	11 —	Scholar	Single	County Down	Irish & English		
Albert Edward Ervine	Sons	Presbyterian	Read & Write	9 —	Scholar	Single	County Down	Irish & English		
William James Ervine	Son	Presbyterian	Read & Write	7 —	Scholar	Single	County Down	Irish & English		
Nicola Ervine	Son	Presbyterian	Read only	5 —	Scholar	Single	County Down	Irish & English		
Lydia Ervine	Daughter	Presbyterian		— 2		Da	County Down	Irish & English		
11										
12										
13										
14										
15										
I hereby certify, as required by the Act 10 Edw. VII., and 1 Geo. V., cap. 11, that the foregoing Return is correct, according to the best of my knowledge and belief.										
I believe the foregoing to be a true Return.										
<i>John Ervine</i> <i>Signature of Head of Family.</i>										



Lieut.-General Sir William Porter MacArthur

KCB DSO, OBE, M.D., DSC, FRCP, FRCPI, DPH, DTM&H
1884–1964

William MacArthur was from Belmont Park in Strandtown and studied medicine at Queen's University.

He had a long and illustrious career in the Medical Corps of the British Army. He was wounded in the stomach at the Somme and invalided home in 1916. MacArthur's career reached its zenith in 1939 when he was knighted and appointed Director-General of the Royal Army Medical Services. He had more foresight than a parliament subcommittee which criticised him for stockpiling medical supplies as the situation in Europe worsened.

MacArthur became a fluent Irish speaker at an early age by conversing with native speakers during long summer holidays in Donegal. While studying at Queen's University, he established the Cumann Gaelach ('Gaelic Society') in 1906, which still flourishes today. Most of the learners of Irish in the Society's classes were Protestant, including MacArthur, as few Catholics attended the university. William hated the political connotations of Irish, so Cumann Gaelach members were forbidden from speaking about religious or political topics.

As an adult, MacArthur spent any available holiday time in the Gortahork Gaeltacht ('Irish-speaking district') of Donegal. He raised his two sons, Colán and Ian, in Irish. He wrote postcards to the eldest, Colán, in Irish from as far away as China while on a world tour with the Medical Corps. When living in London he employed maids from the Donegal Gaeltacht, with whom he spoke solely in Irish.

In 1956, the Cumann Gaelach celebrated its golden jubilee by publishing a special edition of their magazine *Fearsaid* ('sandbank'). The Society gave pride of place to a special message from its founder, An Ridire Uilliam Mac Artúir (Sir William MacArthur).

With permission from the Trustees of the Museum of Military Medicine

The YMCA Gaelic Fellowship

William McElheran/Liam Mac Giolla Chiaráin (1896–1977) lived and worked at 143 Albertbridge Road, where he had a hardware shop.

McElheran was a member of the Gaelic Fellowship, a society established in 1948 for 'Protestant ladies and gentlemen' to learn Irish in the YMCA headquarters in central Belfast. Parents could send their children to an Irish class in the city centre in the knowledge that they would not be drawn into interdenominational marriages or nationalist politics.

William McElheran invited the most serious learners to Irish-language social evenings in his flat above the hardware shop on the Albertbridge Road. They met on Monday evenings and everyone had a key so that they could let themselves in.

Since Belfast learners of Irish liked to travel to the Donegal Gaeltacht every summer, William decided to recreate a Donegal atmosphere by heating a piece of turf on an electric fire, putting it on a spade and twirling it around the room!

William McElheran married one of the learners, Elizabeth Rolston/Eilís Ní Raghnáill, and they spoke Irish to each other at home in Ballyhackamore for the rest of their married life.



Pictured in back row from left are William McElheran, Barry Kingham and John Pasker
Photograph from One Hundred Eventful Years 1850–1950: An Outline History of the City of Belfast YMCA

The Fellowship Split

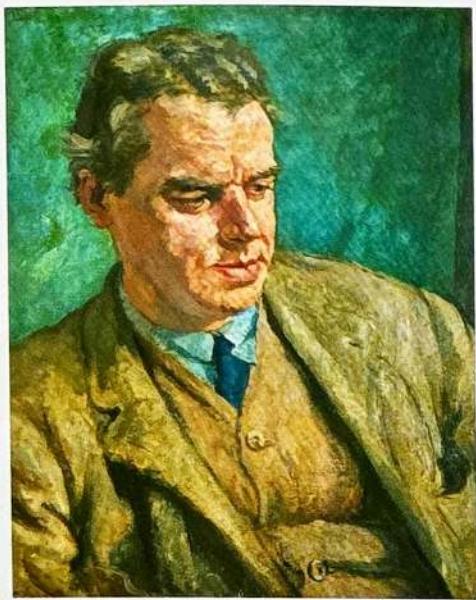
In 1961 a learner invited 3 Catholic Irish-speaking women to come to the YMCA to help some ladies who were falling behind.

The Fellowship secretary, John Pasker/Seaghan Pasker, was unnerved by the appearance of the visitors. He drafted a letter recommending that the Catholic visitors become associate members of the YMCA. Although he intended to read this out at a meeting, Isobel, Elizabeth's sister, preempted him by showing the letter to the Catholic ladies in the street outside the building. Although Catholics could join the YMCA as associate members, the ladies interpreted Isobel's demeanour and Pasker's letter as an attempt to drive them away. They never returned to the YMCA.

Drew Donaldson/Árnas Mac Domhnaill, a key teacher of the Fellowship, was furious, and called a meeting to bring the issue into the open. William, Elizabeth, Drew Donaldson and others who supported the Catholics left the Fellowship and continued to meet above the hardware shop. They were visited by Pasker, but Elizabeth recalled, 'It was a bit sticky with him.'

John Pasker's health suffered soon afterwards, which Elizabeth blamed on the split. He died in 1965. A year later the Fellowship ended due to a lack of teachers.

Joseph Campbell/Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil 1879–1944



Joseph Campbell
By kind permission of Roland Spottiswoode
Illustration from *Songs of Uladh* by John Campbell (brother of Joseph).

Loreto Cottage, at No. 32 Castlereagh Road, was the home of Joseph Campbell, who is best known as the composer of the song 'My Lagan Love.'

He was a poet, singer and playwright, steeped in Gaelic tradition, who learned Irish at his grandfather's farm in Flurrybridge, County Armagh, where Irish was still spoken as a native language. He joined the Gaelic League and used an Irish version of his name – Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil.

Campbell's cultural pursuits took him to London in 1905, where he worked as a schoolteacher and joined Irish literary societies. On his return to Ireland in 1911 he became involved in republican politics, gathering intelligence for the revolutionaries during the 1916 Easter Rising. He opposed the Anglo-Irish treaty to partition Ireland and was imprisoned by Free State troops from 1922–1923. Afterwards he found it difficult to obtain employment south of the border – he had fought on the wrong side.

Campbell believed that he was refused a post as an assistant librarian in Belfast because of his religious denomination, and in 1943 he wrote *Orange Terror*, a pamphlet which condemned sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Campbell emigrated to the United States of America in 1925 and worked on Irish academic issues, but was paid little as he had no relevant qualifications. He returned to Ireland in 1939 and spent the last five years of his life in rural Wicklow as a semi-recluse, criticising the Republic for its censorship laws and cultural stagnation.

Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil - del.



Two plaques have been erected in Campbell's memory. The Ulster History Circle placed one at his former home on the Castlereagh Road, which describes him simply as 'a poet.' The other is on Seaford Street, in the Short Strand district, which describes him as a 'Gaelic Scholar, Poet and Irish Revolutionary.'

The Morton Family Teaghlach Uí Mhortúin

The Mortons, an Irish-speaking Catholic family, lived at No. 3 Clara Street from 1945 to 1955.

Richard Morton was a teacher at St Malachy's Christian Brothers Primary School in Oxford Street. He was highly respected in the area as he helped local people with literacy problems to complete various official forms. Richard was self-taught in Irish, but his wife Bridget was a native speaker from the Glenties in Donegal. They reared their six children – Deirdre, Diarmaid, Antoine, Áine, Brídgin and Máire Róisín – entirely through Irish. Although they lived in a staunch unionist area, Richard never concealed his love for Irish and always called the children in for dinner in Irish.



The Mortons experienced little sectarianism. They stayed in the Donegal Gaeltacht during the summer, thus avoiding any problems which might arise during the Twelfth of July celebrations. There were also occasions which revealed local sensitivity. At one point during Coronation Day celebrations in the local park, the organisers sent the Morton children home to fetch more mugs. Only then, while the children were absent, did they sing 'God Save the Queen,' in case the children may have been uncomfortable with it.

At that time, only three or four families spoke Irish at home in Belfast. Few Protestants knew the Irish language even existed.

Diarmaid once listened at the door to hear what the locals said about them and was non-plussed to hear some boys saying, 'That's where the Mickeys speak Chinese.'

Photograph of children
Antoine, Diarmaid, Deirdre
Brídgin, Máire Róisín and Áine
By kind permission of Áine Downey



Deirdre Morton in Fearsaid: Iris lubhaile Chumainn Ghaelach, Ollscoil na Banríona (1956)

Deirdre Flanagan (née Morton) 1932–1984

Deirdre, the eldest child of the Mortons, showed great promise in Irish. She went to Queen's University to study Irish and never left – working in the Celtic Department for 30 years.

Deirdre became one of the greatest scholars of Irish place-names and helped to found the Ulster Place-Name Society. Her work has stood the test of time and is highly regarded by place-names experts today. In fact, it was Deirdre who solved the puzzle of the meaning of Belfast.

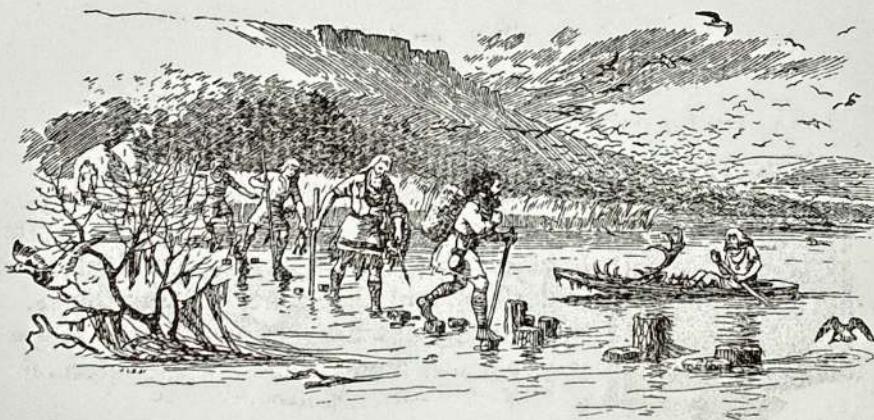
Béal Feirste puzzled historians for years. Benn's *History of the Town of Belfast* (1823, pg 4) notes the 'complex hypothesis':

'The utmost obscurity and perplexity, however, attend the derivation of the name. In "A map of Ireland previous to the thirteenth century," affixed to Seward's Hibernian Gazetteer, it is marked under the name of *Beala farsad*, which means, according to some, *hurdleford town*, while others have translated it, *the mouth of the pool*.'

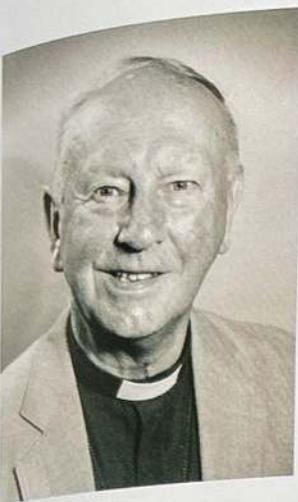
Even Irish speakers were puzzled – '*béal*' literally means 'mouth' and '*feirste*' is a sandbank ford, but how could a

sandbox ford have a mouth? The matter was complicated by the name of the River Farset—was Belfast called after the river? Deirdre discovered that the '*béal*' of *Béal Feirste* refers to the strategically important place beside the sandbank ford, the location of Belfast Castle and the medieval Chapel of the Ford (on the site of the present-day St George's Church of Ireland).

The sandbank appeared at times of low rainfall and low tide, allowing people and livestock to cross the Lagan. A bridge was completed, using the sandbank as a foundation, in 1688.



The Ford of Belfast in *Historical Notices of Old Belfast and its Vicinity* (1896)



Donald Caird
By kind permission of Aonghus Dwane

Donald Caird

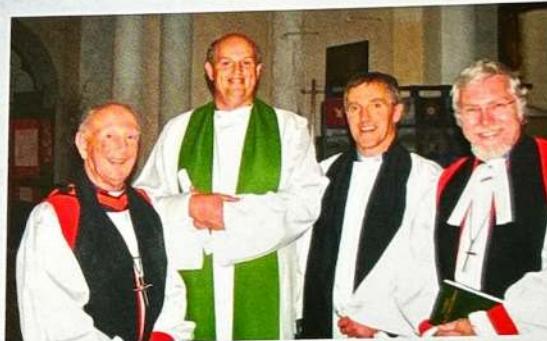
1925–2017

St Mark's Church of Ireland, Dundela, has had two Irish-speaking curates – Donald Caird and Coslett Quin. Caird was a curate at St Mark's from 1950–1953. He was friendly with C.S. Lewis and they met to discuss philosophy.

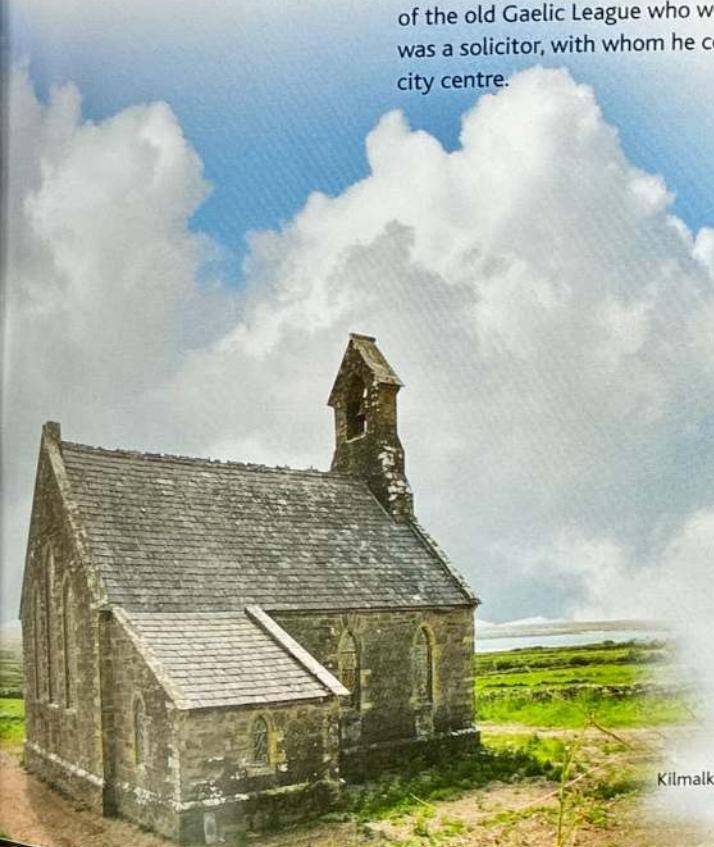
Donald (known to all his Irish-speaking friends as 'Dónall') was from Dublin and learned Irish in Kerry. He was very inspired by a Church of Ireland congregation which worshipped in Irish in Kilmalkedar. In Belfast, Donald was initially treated by some of the St Mark's congregation with suspicion. He wrote, 'I was known to be Irish speaking... The language you spoke was one of the numerous tell-tale signs of where your heart was politically and religiously... If I was unreliable in regard to politics, who could trust me in regard to religion!'

Although he found the 'hard-working, honest' people he met to be cautious, he eventually made many 'staunch friends.' Donald met the few remaining members of the old Gaelic League who were Protestant, including a Protestant lady who was a solicitor, with whom he conversed in Irish on a trolley bus heading for the city centre.

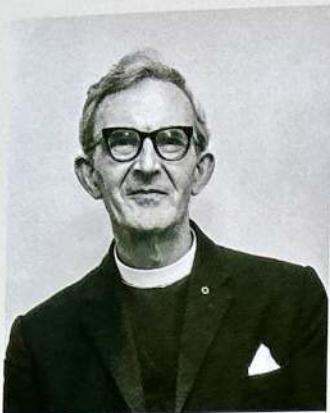
Later, Donald became Archbishop of Dublin. He translated hymns into Irish and ensured that the Church of Ireland always had a current Irish-language version of its *Book of Common Prayer*. Donald was very active in Cumann Gaelach na hEaglaise, the Irish-language society of the Church of Ireland.



Archbishop Caird at the launch of the Irish language version of the *Book of Common Prayer*, Downpatrick Cathedral, 2004.



Kilmalkedar Church



Canon Cosslett Quinn
By kind permission of Étайн Murphy

Cosslett Quin/Coslett Ó Coinn 1907–1999

Cosslett Quin was a rector in St Mark's from 1932 to 1935. Quin spoke a dozen languages, but his favourite was Irish, which he mastered by travelling to every Irish-speaking area in Ireland, often on a bike. These districts included Dungiven, south Armagh, Louth and the Glens of Antrim. When Cosslett spoke Donegal Irish to an Antrim man, the reply was, 'Cha dtuigim thu ar chor ar bith. Tha Gaelg chruaidh agat.' ('I don't understand you at all. You have difficult Irish.')

Da mbeann pheir, in Aird an Chuain
Brácais m'fhlaithe aite ó fhad bhuaibhim
de b'annraic leon gao dheit ar chuaist
Go gleannra ghuair Dia Domhnaigh
(Ais) agus
Eire lomadail eis ó Dhúine agus ó
Si n-á ceró go Trón is Eilean
De mbeann pheir i rithin na Dúine
Far a bhíodh mo chairdean uile
gleann eccl ann óis is cumas
Géan i georas i snaog na h-óige
Da mbeann agan buidé a rach
ar an t-óige ag corais cu an tsráid
ag déan le Dhu Gaeilge slán
Is go bhí agam báis fa Eireann

BELFAST BT8 8DT
CARRIVDUFF
CHURCH ROAD
COTTAGE

no sheachnallacht air in Tsair
Searadh sé go rír rán Ean Teag
Seoir Sé ó mo ndhaonra plean
Innealltar b'fhéidir
mais seoir an tsean tsair charr

He visited Rathlin in 1932 and published the fragments of Irish which he collected there.

Quin also collected a version of the Antrim Gaelic song *Aird a' Chuain* ('the hill above the harbour'). The song relates the homesickness of an Antrim man in Scotland and is the most well-known song composed in Antrim Irish. Versions of *Aird a' Chuain* are sung in both Ireland and Scotland. Cosslett was keen that the lyrics were sung in the original Antrim dialect of Irish, rather than the Donegal Irish which learners used.

Canon Quin's greatest achievement in the Irish language was to translate the New Testament into Irish for the Church of Ireland in 1970.

Cosslett's version of *Aird a' Chuain*

Liam Ó Dochartaigh 1921–2009



Liam Ó Dochartaigh

By kind permission of Colm Ó Dochartaigh

Liam Ó Dochartaigh was born and raised in Short Strand. He worked as a bus driver for 20 years and had the early shift – often getting up at 4.30 in the morning.

Ó Dochartaigh's interest in Irish began in the 1940s when he returned from a céili (Irish dancing session) and sat in the kitchen listening to a radio show in a language he did not understand, but recognised as Irish. He decided there and then to learn the language.

Ó Dochartaigh joined Cumann Chluain Árd ('the Clonard Society'), an Irish-language club in west Belfast, and became one of its *seanfhondúirí* ('old stalwarts'), who are treated with great respect by younger Irish speakers. For Liam, the Irish language was central to his identity. He told his son, 'The heart of culture flows from language, culture is the heart of your identity, and your identity is part of your humanity.'

While working with the Short Strand Tenants' Association, Liam was responsible for a number of streets having names with local historical connections, as well as Irish-language versions of these names. These include Lough Lea/Loch Lao and Clandeboye Gardens/Gairdíní Chlann Aodha Buí.

Before the 1980s, Ó Dochartaigh was seen as a little unusual for his interest in Irish. Yet he lived to see local children being educated in Irish and local signs appearing in the language.

Lough Lea Loch Lao

Lough Lea (*Loch Lao* in Irish), the old name for Belfast Lough, means 'lough of the calf' and was a reference to a bovine deity which was believed to inhabit Belfast Lough and the River Lagan.

Clandeboye Gardens Gairdíní Chlann Aodha Buí

'I was poor in Belfast and you were poor in Donegal. But I had a poverty of mind and you had a richness of mind because you had your own language.'

Ó Dochartaigh to a group of native Irish speakers in Donegal.

Naísccoil Mhic Airt

Locals who attended Ó Dochartaigh's Irish classes decided they wanted their children to be educated in Irish. In 1980 they formed a group called Tuistí agus Tachráin ('parents and children') and eventually established a naísccoil ('nursery') in the local community centre, Ionad Mhic Airt ('the McArt Centre'). This was the first Irish-language nursery school in Belfast to be outside the west of the city.



However, upon leaving nursery school, the children attended primary school, where they were taught through English. The parents campaigned for financial support for their children to travel to Bunscoil Phobal Feirste, the Irish-medium primary school in Andersonstown. The educational authorities were initially opposed, as Short Strand was not in the school's catchment area. However, they later accepted the parents' case and the first children enrolled in the school in 1984. This decision set a precedent for isolated nursery groups elsewhere.



Children at Naiscoil Mhic Airt
By kind permission of Frankie Quinn

When Ionad Mhic Airt was closed in the early 1980s, the nursery school moved to the Markets Community Centre, and from there to the lower Ormeau Road, where it is part of Scoil an Droichid ('the school of the bridge') today.

The example of the Short Strand nursery was followed by many Irish-language groups elsewhere. Even children whose parents did not speak Irish at home could send their children to Irish-language nurseries, as they could then progress to Irish-medium primary education with little difficulty.



The Turas Irish Language Project

In early 2011, a cross-community group of women from East Belfast Mission and the Short Strand Community Centre participated in a six-week Irish-language course. One of the participants was Linda Ervine.

Afterwards, Linda continued to learn Irish at the An Droichead ('the bridge') Irish-language centre in south Belfast. Word quickly spread that the wife of PUP (Progressive Unionist Party) leader Brian Ervine was learning Irish. The story appeared in the local media.

This media attention sparked local interest and a number of people contacted East Belfast Mission to enrol for Irish-language lessons. Classes were organised and the numbers of the learners gradually increased.

The initiative grew by leaps and bounds when Foras na Gaeilge (the cross-border body for the Irish language) awarded the Mission a grant in September 2011. This enabled Linda to become a full-time development worker on the project. The grant also helped her to pay teachers and run a series of events and classes, which included a very successful class for parents and children. Many of the classes in the initial years were led by the Irish-language teacher Mathew Caughey, who worked very long hours at Turas on a voluntary basis. Funding from the Community Relations Council allowed Linda to employ an education officer, Gordon McCoy in 2016, and an administrator, Carmel Duggan, in 2017.

The Turas project is unusual in terms of the Irish-language scene in that the majority of learners —70% — are Protestant. In the year 2017–2018 a total of 205 learners enrolled for 13 Irish-language classes. Of these learners 142 were Protestants and 57 were Catholics. Many Protestants travel long distances to learn Irish at the centre.

Turas has a very active cultural scene. Many events are run to raise awareness of Irish-language culture, including folklore, history, place-names and surnames. The Gaelic history of east Belfast is explored in bus tours and in a Conn O'Neill festival. Turas also has a choir, which is called upon to perform at special occasions. These events and activities are creating an Irish-language community in the east of the city.

Turas at 2018 St Patrick's Day Parade, Belfast



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- 1 The townland of Gilnahirk (*Giolla na hAdhairce*, 'boy/servant of the horn' (probably a drinking horn))
 2 The inaugural site of Conn O'Neill
 3 The castle at Castlereagh (*An Caisleán Riabhach*, 'the grey castle')
 4 Lisnabreenny rath (*Lios na Bruine*, 'fort of the fairy hostel')
 5 The townland of Knocknagoney (*Cnoc na gCoiníní*, 'hill of the rabbits')
 6 The burial site of Conn O'Neill (d. 1619)
 7 Canon Cosslett Quin
 8 Gaelic League Certificate
 9 St Colmcille
 10 The townland of Carnamuck (*Ceathrú na Muc*, 'quarterland of the pigs')
 11 The townland of Lissasharragh (*Lios na Searraigh*, 'fort of the foals')
 12 The River Merok, which could be derived from *mairk* ('land worth a mark' or 'boundary marker') in Ulster Scots, or from *méaróg*, 'standing stone' in Irish
 13 The Cregagh River (*Creagaigh*, 'the rocky place').
 14 The Connswater River, named after Conn O'Neill
- 15 The old Ulster Bank on the Newtownards Road
 16 The Conn O'Neill Bridge
 17 Aoidhín Mac Gréagóir
 18 Joseph Campbell
 19 Deirdre Morton
 20 The Loop River (from *lúb*, 'a bend')
 21 The Coat of Arms of the Clandeboye O'Neills, which displays the red hand of Ulster above a salmon, representing the Bann fisheries or the mythical Salmon of Knowledge.
 22 Dr Samuel Bryson
 23 A play, *Naomh Peadar ag an Teamhair* ('St Patrick at Tara') performed by the Ballymacarrett branch of the Gaelic League in 1899
 24. John Feely
 25 William McElheran
 26 The Glentoran River (now completely underground)
 27 Ormeau House, which was built by the 2nd Marquis of Donegall, George Augustus, a descendant of Arthur Chichester.
- 28 The Norman soldier represents Galwally townland (*Gallbháile*, 'the settlement of the strangers')
 29 The sandbank ford (*An Fhearsaí* in Irish) which gave Belfast its name.
 30 Belfast Castle, which was situated between Castle Place and Commarket.
 31 Donegall Pass, a path made through Cromac woods.
 32 The calf represents a bovine god, which gave its name to the River Lao, a calf', now called the Lagan (*lagán*, a 'low-lying district').
 33 William MacArthur
 34 The blackbird, the subject of the first reference to Belfast Lough in a poem, probably composed in a Bangor monastery around 800 CE.

Map by Andrew Whitson