

"Townlands"

Mr. Ivan Coffey 13th September 2017

The speaker Mr Ivan Coffey gave a talk entitled, 'Townlands around Newtownards'. The high level of interest in the subject was reflected in the large attendance at the meeting. They were not disappointed with Mr Coffey's presentation which looked at the origins of townlands, how they got their names and what the names meant.

Townlands are essentially local land units. Their sizes vary and many are subdivided into smaller units, often called quarter lands or plough lands. Townlands were a feature of the Irish landscape from very early times. Despite having the word 'Town' in their name they were in existence as units of land before Ireland had any towns or cities.

The Normans who invaded Ireland in the second half of the 12th century began to use the townland for civil and administration purposes. They were grouped together to form parishes, the parishes were grouped together to form baronies and these were grouped to form counties. They were used for such purposes as units of measurement, for determining land valuation and the levying of taxes. Although we hear little about townlands today, they still play an important role in civil administration. Parliamentary constituencies are based on townland boundaries. When the borders of constituencies are adjusted this usually consists of the transfer of a number of townlands from one constituency to another.

The townlands gained their names from many sources. Place names have evolved from the languages used by the succession of peoples who established themselves in Ireland over the centuries. Townland names therefore, may be of Gaelic origin, of Norman origin, Viking, Scottish or English. Names of Gaelic origin include Carrowdore which means the water quarter. An Anglo-Norman example of a townland name is Ballyrickard which means the townland of Richard while English names include Longlands and Milecross.

Within the borough of Ards and North Down many of the towns and villages were originally local townlands. Groomsport means the fort of the gloomy fellow, Portavogie, the place of the bog, Cloughey the stony or rocky area and Kirkubbin, Gobbins church.

Mr Coffey ended his talk by looking at some of the townlands close to Newtownards. He used bus routes from the town as a means of looking at townlands in different areas. On the bus route to Belfast for example, you pass through Ballybarnes, the townland of the gap and Killarn which means

Farnan's church. On the road to Bangor you pass through townlands such as Conlig which means the stone of the hounds while Whitespots means the quarter of the crooked leg!

On the bus to Donaghadee the traveller would pass through townlands such as Drumhirk, the townland of the boar, Granshaw, the townland of the grange or barn and Ballygrainey the townland of the sun. On the road to Greyabbey you pass through Ballyreagh, the townland of the ram, Ballyewry, the townland of the yew tree and Mount Stewart, originally Temple crone, Cronan's church.

The above are only a sample of the rich heritage of townlands to be found around Newtownards. They are a reminder of a history dating back to earliest times and reflect the different people who have lived in this area over the centuries.