An Illustrated History of

Limavady

(Léim an Mhadaidh)

and the Roe Valley

from Prehistoric to Modern Times

Douglas Bartlett

Published by Douglas Bartlett
Second edition
©2017 Douglas Bartlett
First edition published 2010

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, scanning, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owners and publisher of this book.

Designed by April Sky Design, Newtownards
(www.aprilsky.co.uk)
Printed by GPS Colour Graphics Ltd, Belfast

ISBN 978-0-9565683-1-1

Front cover photograph: The Broighter Gold, a collection of gold artefacts that were found near Limavady in 1896.

Contents

Acknowledgements 7

Introduction 9

1 The Prehistoric Period 11

The First Inhabitants 11
The First Farmers in the Roe Valley 13
The Metalworkers 16
The King's Fort and the Rough Fort 17
The Broighter Gold 20

2 The Coming of Christianity 25

The Missionaries: St Colmcille and Drumceatt, St Canice, St Aidan 25
The Vikings 32
The Clans of the Roe Valley 32
The Norman Influence 34
The Revival of the O'Cahans 36
Tales of the Clans: Laura O'Donnell and Finn McQuillan, Finvola, The Legend of the Dogleap, O'Cahan's Rock, The Town of the Ears 37
The Dungiven Costume 40

3 The Plantation Period 43

The Ulster Plantation 44
Dowcra in Derry and the Roe Valley 46
The Flight of the Earls. 49
Plantation Plans. 50
Plantation Settlements: Eglinton, Ballykelly, Dungiven, Ballycastle, Magilligan 54
Limavady and Sir Thomas Phillips 60
The 1641 Rebellion 67
Cromwellian Ulster. 71
Life in 17th Century Limavady. 72
James II and William of Orange 76

4 Peace, Linen and Revolution – The 18th Century 81

Catholics, Presbyterians and the Penal Laws. 81
Life in Limavady in 18th Century 85
Linen in the Roe Valley 87
Other Industries 91
Denis O'Hampsey 93
Duncrun Cottier's House 96
Roe Park House 98
Downhill Palace. 99
Streeve Hill House. 101
Cushy Glenn 101
Revolution and the United Irishmen 102

5 Progress and Poverty – The Roe Valley in the 1800's 107

The Martello Tower. 107
William King and The Elgin Settlement 109
Ballykelly: John Steinbeck, The Ordnance Survey of Ireland 113
Eglinton 119
Dungiven 120
Drenagh House and Charles Lanyon 121
Bellarena or Ballymargy House. 122
The Famine and Limavady Workhouse 123

John Mitchel and The 1848 Revolutions 134
William Makepeace Thackeray and Peg of Limavady 137
Life in Limavady in the 19th Century 139
The Londonderry Air and Danny Boy 153
The Railway comes to Limavady 157
J.E. Ritter and the Hydroelectric Power Station 160
National Schools 171
Limavady's 19th Century Built Heritage 180
William Ferguson Massey, Prime Minister of New Zealand 185

Conclusion 191

Select Bibliography 193

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my three children Tara, Ryan and Manon for their heart warming support and encouragement as I worked at this project. Tara was involved in the important early stages, reading through the content for me, with a critical eye. As the book progressed, my younger daughter, Manon, was often called upon to rectify errors caused by my careless computer skills and she helped out with research, on occasion too. Ryan has not only taken many of the photographs featured in the book, but has also spent many long hours painstakingly proof reading the final draft.

The original work, published in 2010, was also proof read by my good friend Hunter Mc Clelland and by my dearly missed brother Graham, who passed away in May 2016. They brought a very reassuring thoroughness to the proof reading process, of a type and standard which is rarely found these days. In addition to proof reading, Hunter also took the time to improve the quality of many of the images used in the book, some of which were in need of upgrading.

Photographs/graphics/artwork credits

The Bridgeman Art Library, Reverend J. Blair, T. Candon (by kind permission, copyright photograph of Ulster History Park and with acknowledgement to Omagh District Council), Father M. Collins, D. Corr, Limavady Community Development Initiative, photograph (former Limavady Workhouse), J. Cowan, Environment and Heritage, "Crown copyright, reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office", photographs/illustrations (old Banagher, Bovevagh, Drumachose

and Walworth Churches, Ancient Cross, Dungiven Priory Chancel, O'Cahan's Castle, Audley's Castle, Watchman's Hut, Reconstructed Rath), Mr and Mrs J Dixon, D. Forrest, Reverend H. R. Given, D. Harper, Father O'Hagan, R. Irwin, D. Larmour, photograph (Burning of Lundy), Limavady Borough Council, (C. R. Phillom's 1699 map loaned by B. Brown), J. Lueg, McCausland's Drenagh Estate, photograph (Drenagh), C. Mc Fetridge, (Website Design), H. Mc Elwee, (Crannog and Plantation Castle drawings), Canon S. McVeigh, Manor Architects, photograph (Moneymore model Plantation village), D. Miller, photograph (The Lodge), Millersville University's website (www.millersville.edu), National Museum of Ireland photographs (The Broighter Boat and The Broighter Hoard "These images are reproduced by kind permission of the National Museun of Ireland"), The National Trust, photographs (The Rough Fort, Martello Tower, by kind permission), The Newry and Mourne District Council, photograph (John Mitchel statue, by kind permission), Northern Newspaper Group, North West Independent Hospital, photograph (Church Hill House), Penguin Books: front cover of The Red Pony by J. Steinbeck, reproduced by kind permission, Penguin Classics 2000, W. Purcell, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, permission granted by The Deputy Keeper of Records for use of various maps/illustrations (Ballykelly, Dungiven, Ballycastle, Limavady, Phillips document and Limavady Canal), Roads Service, 'By permission of the Royal Irish Academy copyright RIA'., drawings (three flanker towers, Walworth Bawn), J. Simpson, photograph (Thomas Nicholl taken by Reverend T. Simpson), Ulster Museum, (Largentea Pottery, Dungiven Costume, photographs reproduced courtesy the Trustees of National Museums Northern Ireland), Ulster Folk and Transport Museum images and photographs (Duncrun Cottier's House by kind permission), Reverend A. Wilson, Western Education and Library Board.

The author has made every effort to find copyright and to acknowledge copyright where it is known to exist, but would be pleased to be made aware of any omissions.

Introduction

The past has left its mark on the area in and around Limavady. In deserted locations, ancient stones, once set down by Prehistoric people, can still be found, almost undisturbed by the passing of the centuries. Here and there the ruins of early Christian churches can still be traced, lying quietly in out-of-the-way corners. Celtic ringforts and the later Plantation settlements too, go remarkably unnoticed, in a region steeped in history.

This book is intended to serve as an explanation and a reminder of the history which still survives around about us in our former Borough of Limavady. It takes the story from the earliest of times to the start of the 20th century, and places Limavady into the context of the wider world. The significant contribution the Roe Valley and its people have made to that wider world is highlighted. From the missionary, to the politician and on to the revolutionary, the area has fostered more than its share of figures who have each, in very different ways, made telling contributions on a broader canvas. The Drumceatt Convention alone would be enough to make the area important, without the Danny Boy heritage or the Broighter Gold, and yet that leaves aside Ritter's early hydro-electric development in Limavady, the exceptional musical gifts of Denis O'Hampsey and the local connections with John Steinbeck, to mention but a few aspects. This modest little town is the centre of a region that has made an important impact on more than just Irish, British and European History. It has an undeniably impressive past that glitters with significant artefacts, figures and places, all along its story. This is indeed, a past worth sharing.

1 The Prehistoric Period

The First Inhabitants

Currently the earliest evidence we have of people living in Ireland comes from a site on the banks of the Bann at Mountsandel, Coleraine. These people, from the Mesolithic period, were hunting and gathering their food in and around the Mountsandel area, some time between 7,900 BC and 7,600 BC, or well over 9,000 years ago, in other words. Their ancestors are thought to have arrived here from northern Britain, by crossing the land bridges or narrow seas that existed then. They had chosen their site well. It provided a year-round supply of everything needed to survive.

The River Bann and the open seas nearby were teaming with salmon, flounder, sea bass and Lough Neagh eels, all of which could be harpooned in season. Autumn provided a plentiful supply of nutritious hazelnuts, crab apples and water lily seeds to eat. Sailing out of the Bann estuary they could easily find a valuable supply of flint, either close at hand in the area around Portrush, or a little further along the coast in the other direction, at Downhill beach. The precious flint was then skilfully shaped into the spear and arrowheads essential for hunting the wild pigs that roamed around the Mountsandel locality. Trapping the over-wintering wild fowl, such as widgeon, teal, coot and capercaille, along with eagle, goshawk, red-throated diver and songbirds,

Left: Limavady's location in relation to known Mesolithic sites

added further variety to the diet of these early Irish people.

While these people were semi-nomadic, shelter became important, particularly during the winter months. Research initially carried out by the archaeologist Dr Peter Woodman in 1976 and further substantiated since, found that huts were built there at four different times during the site's period of occupation. They were simple huts built by driving saplings into the ground in

Below: Mesolithic hut reconstructed in the former Ulster History Park

a rough circle.

These saplings were then bent over and lashed together to form a domed roof. Lighter branches may have been interwoven to add strength and rigidity before this was covered with bark, or perhaps deer skin.

Grass turfs lifted from inside the shelter were then used to further protect it against the biting north winds. The huts were around six metres wide with a bowl shaped hearth in the centre and were capable of housing up to a dozen people.

These people may well have had as much free time as peoples living in more 'civilised' societies. Indeed it is very likely that they found the time to practice their own particular rituals and beliefs and art forms, though nothing of this has yet been retrieved in Ireland. Similarly, although these first known Irish people were living only a short distance from the mouth of the river Roe and the Roe Valley, no direct evidence currently links the area around Limavady to these Mesolithic people.

The First Farmers in the Roe Valley

There is, however, a clear connection between the Roe Valley and the early farmers who came to Ireland. Around 3,500 BC, family groups began arriving in Ireland by sea with their domesticated pigs, sheep and cattle, in the period known as the Neolithic, or New Stone Age. In order to find grazing for their animals, they quickly opened up the extensive forests that they found here. We know they were able to fell trees very effectively with porcellanite axes, but they may well have used a variety of methods, including setting fire to the trees, or ringbarking them. When the pastures they created were no longer of use, the animals were simply moved on and the same process was started all over again somewhere else.

Although there were relatively few farmers, it is easy to imagine how their methods had a heavy and immediate impact on the landscape at the time and also indeed on the semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers who might have been searching for food in the area. However, these original inhabitants, the Mesolithic people, would still continue their semi-nomadic lifestyle for some time to come, living side by side with this new farming community.

The newly arrived farmers quickly established a settled way of life here. They built houses and burial places, kept cattle and grew crops, and began trading goods such as pots and axes. One of the oldest known examples in Britain, or Ireland, of a house from this period, has been found at Ballynagilly near Cookstown. It was a rectangular dwelling, six metres by six and a half, made of split oak logs set upright in trench foundations and

with post supports, which possibly held up a thatched roof. Similar houses from the same period have been found in central Europe and it seems Ireland was becoming one of the new destinations for people beginning to move steadily westward. Excavations in 2002/3 to build the by-pass around Limavady turned up evidence in the Killane area, of a seven metre by four metre Neolithic site. A few small post-holes and pits were found in one corner of the site. Flint artefacts, dated to around 3,000 BC, were found, as well as a hammer stone and an anvil stone. It would seem that there was a small building, perhaps a wooden hut with wattle walls and a thatched roof, on the site. This would probably have been occupied on a seasonal basis, in the summer months or early autumn, when these Neolithic people went fishing for salmon and eels in the nearby river.

This settled lifestyle meant that these people were able to learn new skills and would eventually make their own distinctive 'Ulster' pottery style. Some corn was now grown in Ulster, though cattle were of prime importance and had to be protected each night in a stockade from predators like wolf, bear, fox and lynx. With the hard, dense, porcellanite rock only being found at Tievebulliagh near Larne and on Rathlin Island, specialist axe factories grew up at these two places, in this period. We know that porcellanite axe heads were exported from both sites to places as far apart as Dorset and Inverness. Perhaps, in trying to cut through the dense forests of oak, hazel and thorn in the Roe Valley around 5,000 years ago, a farmer or two was lucky enough to be using one of the highly polished and much prized porcellanite axe heads that had been made at Tievbulliagh or on Rathlin Island.

However, there is more substantial evidence than that of the presence of these first farmers in our area. The practice of building burial sites for their dead was evolving in this period and we are fortunate to have surviving examples of these in and around the Valley and its hinterland. Several types of burial tombs were built across Europe, but Carnanbane Court Tomb, near Banagher Old Church, is an example of the 'court' grave type found most prominently, and almost exclusively, in the north of Ireland. This particular 'court' grave had two chambers with an east facing 'horned cairn' entrance made of small stones. There was probably a Neolithic settlement near the site, as these tombs were generally situated on or near fertile ground.

The largely unknown and neglected chambered grave at Carrick East situates these people deep in the floor of the Valley of the Roe itself. This latter site was excavated in 1936 and revealed six pottery vessels, including round bowls, which were typical of the sort of goods left with the dead in Ulster in the period. Enough of one pot remained

to allow it to be restored. It was a simple round-bottomed bowl 7.7cm high, 7.6cm in diameter and 5-6mm thick. The bowl was decorated to a depth of 4.7cm from the rim with six irregular horizontal grooves, 1mm deep. Flint pieces and scrapers were also found in the tomb. Carrick East is described as a possible 'court' tomb by archaeologists, but to date, despite excavation, its central irregular oval with opposing single chambers defies a more precise classification. There are many examples throughout Ireland of burial tombs which come from the same period as Carrick East. The 'court' cairn at Audleystown in Co. Down, where the bones of thirty-four people were found, is one of the most impressive examples of a burial site in the north that dates from this time. Newgrange, in the Boyne Valley, is a unique and spectacular example of the sheer scale of the building projects that these people could undertake. It was, in essence, the same

Carrick East chambered grave

'Beaker people' pottery found at Largentea, Limavady

people who were to be found clearing the forests and establishing farms for themselves in the Roe Valley.

Another type of burial site, the type known as a 'wedge' tomb, is also to be found locally. These are particularly interesting because of what they tell us. Examples of these, such as those at Kilhoyle and Boviel and the hill-top burial on Carn Top, when taken along with the stone cairns near Largentea Bridge and at Gortcorbies on the Keady Mountain, show our ancestors using the high ground along the Sperrins, from the Benevenagh escarpments to the Keady Mountain and Benbraddagh through to the Glenshane Pass. 'Wedge' tombs were commonly used across different periods of settlement and the 'wedge' tomb at Well Glass Spring is especially important. Excavations undertaken in the 1930's, of the three-chambered tomb at Well Glass Spring, revealed the remains of six adults, a twelve year old child and an infant, a flint scraper, and sherds of a distinctive 'Beaker people' style pottery. Similar fragments of this pottery were found in the area of the stone cairns near Largentea Bridge, and at Gortcorbies. 'Beaker' pottery is more usually associated with the people who lived in the later period and this signals the presence in our area of people who could work with a new material, metal.

The Metal Workers

The use of metal in Ireland seems to have come about some time around 2,000 BC, as

part of a very gradual change in lifestyle. On a second site, uncovered at Killane during the construction of the Limavady by-pass, coarse pottery fragments and flint artefacts were found in an area measuring ten metres square. There may also have been a timber building on the site dating back to between 1,500-500 BC, in the Bronze Age period. A piece of copper waste, or slag from copper smelting, was discovered in the larger of two hearths revealed during the excavations, suggesting that the hearth may have been part of a furnace. Burnt deposits further supported this idea, as they seemed to indicate the line of the flues radiating from the hearth.

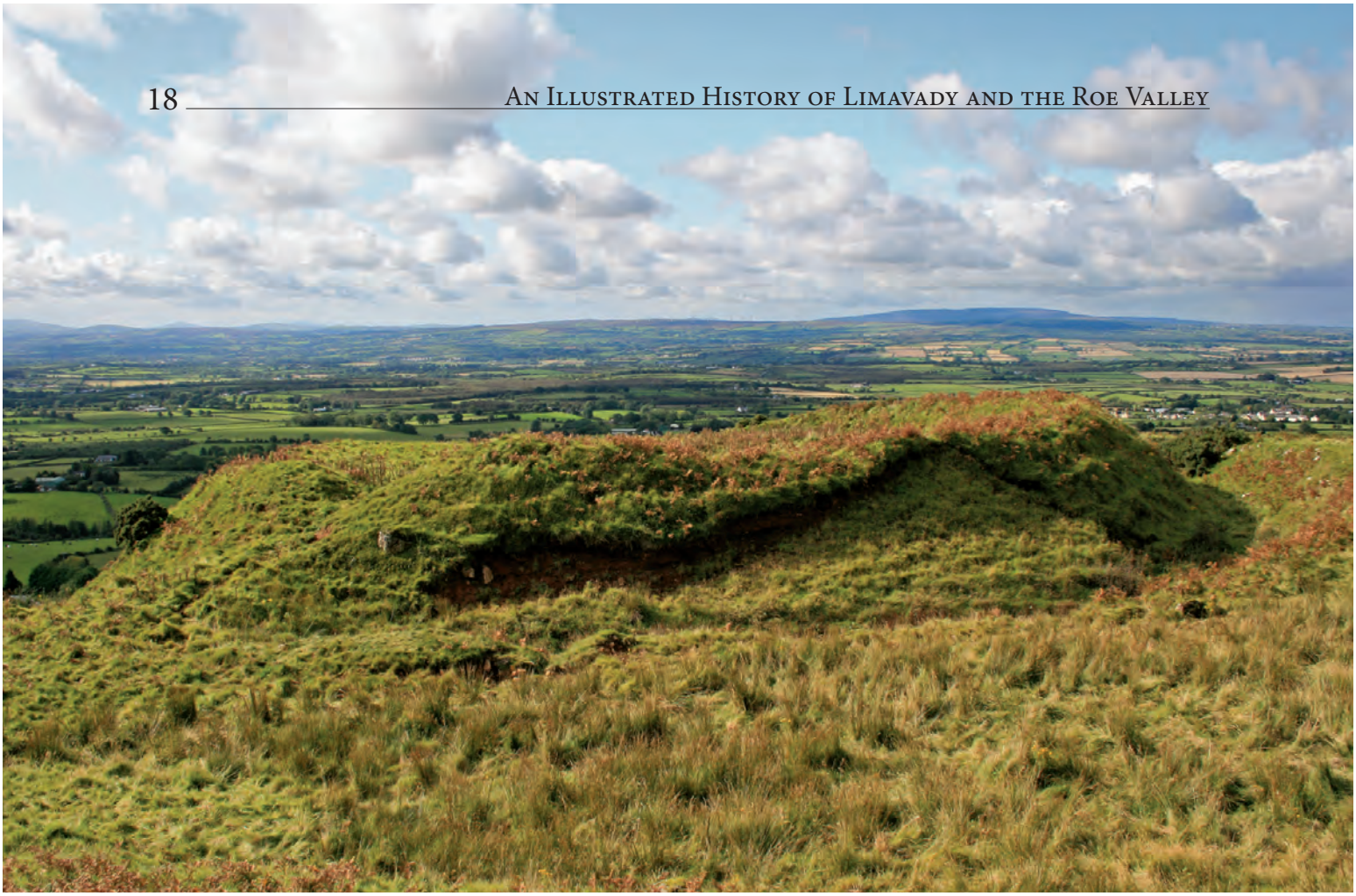
Copper was the first metal worked, but later it was alloyed with tin to make bronze axes, cauldrons and small items like pins and fasteners for adornment. In the neighbouring Sperrin Mountains, gold could be panned in the streams, just as it still can to this day -though to a much lesser extent! Gold, like copper, was also used to make dress pins, and fasteners. Rings, bracelets and highly elaborate neck ornaments known as gorgets and lumulae were also produced at this time.

From around 500 BC a new metal, iron, was introduced to Ireland. The metal workers of this period are renowned for the unique artistic style they created which delighted in distinctive, highly decorative and intricate patterns. They are equally known for having brought a considerable military element into our society, while on the practical level, the iron tools they manufactured allowed these people to cut the forests even more effectively and to be able to establish simple farmsteads in the lowlands and valleys.

The King's Fort and the Rough Fort

The Rough Fort on the outskirts of Limavady and the King's Fort near Drumsurn, are two highly prominent and important examples in our area of these defended farmsteads or ringforts.

Situated just below the summit of Donald's Hill, in the townland of Kilhoyle, and overlooking the hamlet of Drumsurn, the King's Fort is one of the best preserved raths in Ulster. Positioned to use the natural defences offered by the terrain, it is protected on its south side by a steeply falling slope and it has an impressive ditch on its north side, with a bank around six metres high. As well as having a moat, the rath had souterrains, or man made tunnels and it is thought that in addition, the outer enclosure of the King's Fort may have been planted with thorny scrub such as gorse or blackthorn, giving its inhabitants even more protection. The souterrains or tunnels would have led to chambers in the defences or to 'escape hatches' outside the rath. The location and scale of the rath would suggest its owners were once important and influential people in the



The King's Fort, Drumsurn

area, people of status, in what was at the time, a warrior-led society.

While it has been estimated that there were over 40,000 of these defended farmsteads in Ireland, much fewer now remain and fewer still are as prominent and as well preserved as the Rough Fort, situated on the edge of Limavady town.

Although such sites are often called 'forts,' they are more properly known as raths and would have been home to an extended family which would have farmed the adjoining land. Some raths survive as slightly raised platforms and some were paired or grouped as the need to expand arose. The banks of these raths were normally of raised earth, though where it was readily available many were faced with stone, or indeed built entirely of stone. Occasionally the banks had a palisade that gave added security, but the defensive structure seen at the Rough Fort was probably as much for protection against wolves as against humans. Cattle had a special significance for these people, being used as a means of measuring a person's wealth and status. Consequently the cattle would have been brought inside the palisade of the rath at night to prevent them from being stolen or attacked. The trees that now ring the Rough Fort and give it a picturesque and imposing aspect were not planted until a later century. The 19th century Ordnance Survey

I hope you have enjoyed reading this extract of *An Illustrated History of Limavady and the Roe Valley*. If you wish to purchase a copy of the book please visit www.limavadyhistory.com today to place your order!