

2011 - 2012

# Newtownards

## Heritage Guide



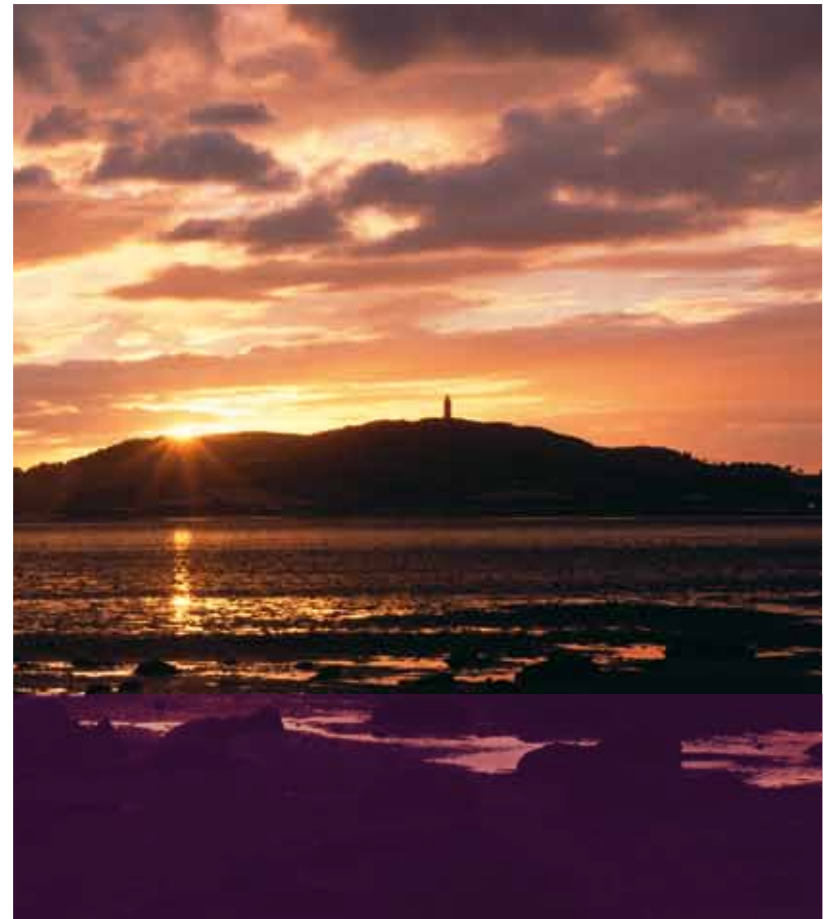
[www.ards-council.gov.uk](http://www.ards-council.gov.uk)



# Newtownards

## Historical Walking Trail of Newtownards, Co Down

- Brief history of Newtownards
- Old Regent House
- St Marks Parish Church
- The Ards Hospital (The Old Workhouse)
- A view of Scrabo Tower
- Regency Gift House, Library (The Queens hall) and Open and Direct building
- Strean Presbyterian Church
- The Market Cross
- The War Memorial and Rose Garden
- Newtownards Priory
- The Blair Mayne Statue
- Town Hall
- The Old Brewery/ Tourist Information Centre and Ards Crafts
- Description of the Ards Borough
- Coat of Arms



## All is not as it seems...

There is more to Newtownards than meets the eye. As we go about our daily affairs, traces of history linger on. Echoes of the past whisper to us through the centuries.

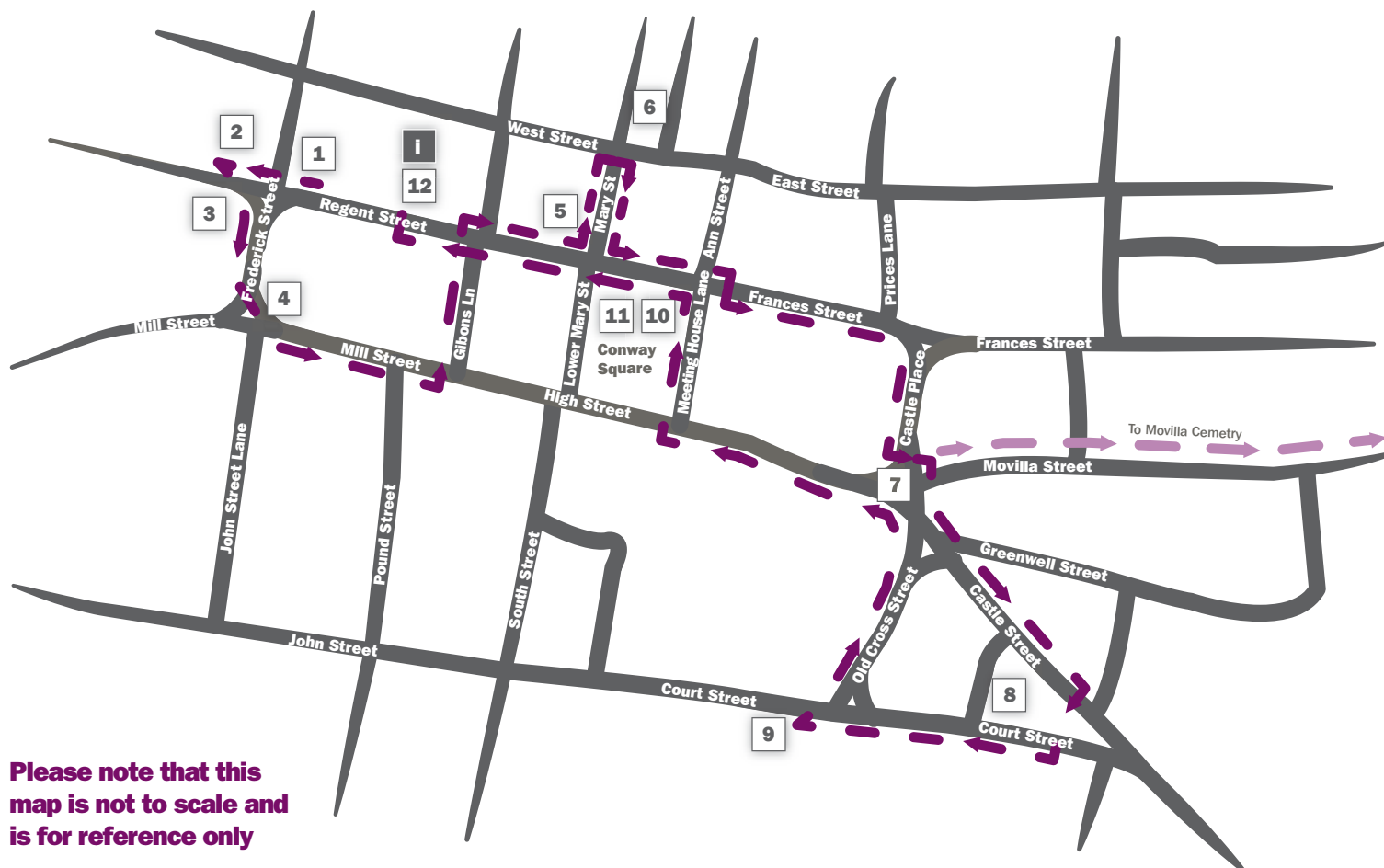
Turn over the pages and discover more about the buildings and streetscapes which have given the town its enduring character. Welcome to a time of rebellion

and reform, poverty and prosperity. The descriptions of each stop along the way are clear and concise. There are even questions to test your powers of observation.

Ards Borough Council presents the information in this document as a public service and whilst every effort has been made to ensure its accuracy, the Council cannot accept responsibility and assumes no liability for any action undertaken by any person using the information contained herein.

# Newtownards

## Town Map



Please note that this map is not to scale and is for reference only

## Further Information

### How to use this map:

Follow the arrows to find your way from place to place. Read more about each place you visit on the following pages.

### Stops:

Each stop along the way is indicated by a number on the map.

### Time to complete:

Main route (marked in purple) 1 hour approximately / additional route (marked in pink) 1 hour approximately (see page 20 for more details)

### Terrain:

Main route: flat concrete footpaths with some crossings at lights.

### Additional Route:

gradual incline along footpaths, uneven surface over grass to actual site.

### Quiz:

Occasionally questions appear in speech bubbles. See how many you can answer!





## Brief History of Newtownards

### Location

Situated 10 miles from Belfast, the Ards Peninsula has Strangford Lough at its heart. Newtownards, nestling at the foot of the Craigantlet hills, overlooks the northern shores of the peninsula.

### Early Settlements

Early inhabitants came here about 8,000 years ago. Saint Patrick began his missionary work about 432AD. Finnian, a pupil of Saint Mochai who was converted by St. Patrick, founded his own monastery at Movilla, to the east of Newtownards, 540AD.

### Ulster Scots

In May 1606, two Ayrshire Scots, Hamilton and Montgomery, pioneered the first large scale settlement of Counties Antrim and Down. Over 10,000 of their compatriots made the three hour voyage across the North Channel, transforming barren east Ulster and the Ards Peninsula into an industrial powerhouse.

### Present Day

Ards Borough Council was officially formed in 1972. The population of the Borough now stands around 74,400. As the years roll by, Newtownards maintains its endearing character and enviable reputation as a prosperous market town.



## 1 Old Regent House

As you step out of the Tourist Information centre & Ards Crafts, turn to your right, passing the bus station.

On your right, set back from the road, is a large building, constructed in 1820 as a home for the owner of the town brewery. The building later became the first site of Regent House School. It takes its name from the 'Prince Regent', who visited Newtownards to open Regent Street which is the main avenue through the town.

Located on land given to Lord Montgomery by the King during the early 1600's, the old Regent House building is one of the few examples of Greek Revival architecture in

County Down. It boasts many spectacular cornice ceilings along with a breathtaking ornate dome situated above a traditional split staircase.

Continue along your route as far as the traffic lights and cross the road on William Street.

### Question 1

How many rounded vertical columns support the elegant front porch of the old Regent House building?





## 2 Saint Marks Church

Saint Marks Parish Church was constructed of Scrabo stone in 1817. The building is a good example of planters' gothic architecture. Scottish colonists worshipped in the Priory church on Court Street then moved to Saint Marks in the eighteenth century when the building was completed. To retain continuity, one of the windows of the Priory was re-constructed in the south transept of the new church.

The Londonderry family contributed generously to the cost of St Mark's and their family crest is carved above the

west door. The weavers of Newtownards donated a rose window in 1868. The east window commemorates the fallen in the 1914-1918 War, and the baptistery was donated in 1966 as a memorial to Dame Edith Helen, Dowager Marchioness of Londonderry. Today the church can hold about 850 people.

**Now cross Church Street at the traffic lights and walk across the short distance as far as the gateposts and a large entrance.**



## 3 Ards Hospital (The Old Workhouse)

The dark grey building, visible from the main entrance to the hospital, constitutes the remains of the workhouse. It has now been renovated to become part of the infirmary unit. Access to the workhouse is by permission only.

Opened in 1842 as part of the Poor Law Act 1838, the site was built to accommodate 600 people. Called the poor mans jail, the workhouse was one of 43 such establishments constructed in Ulster.

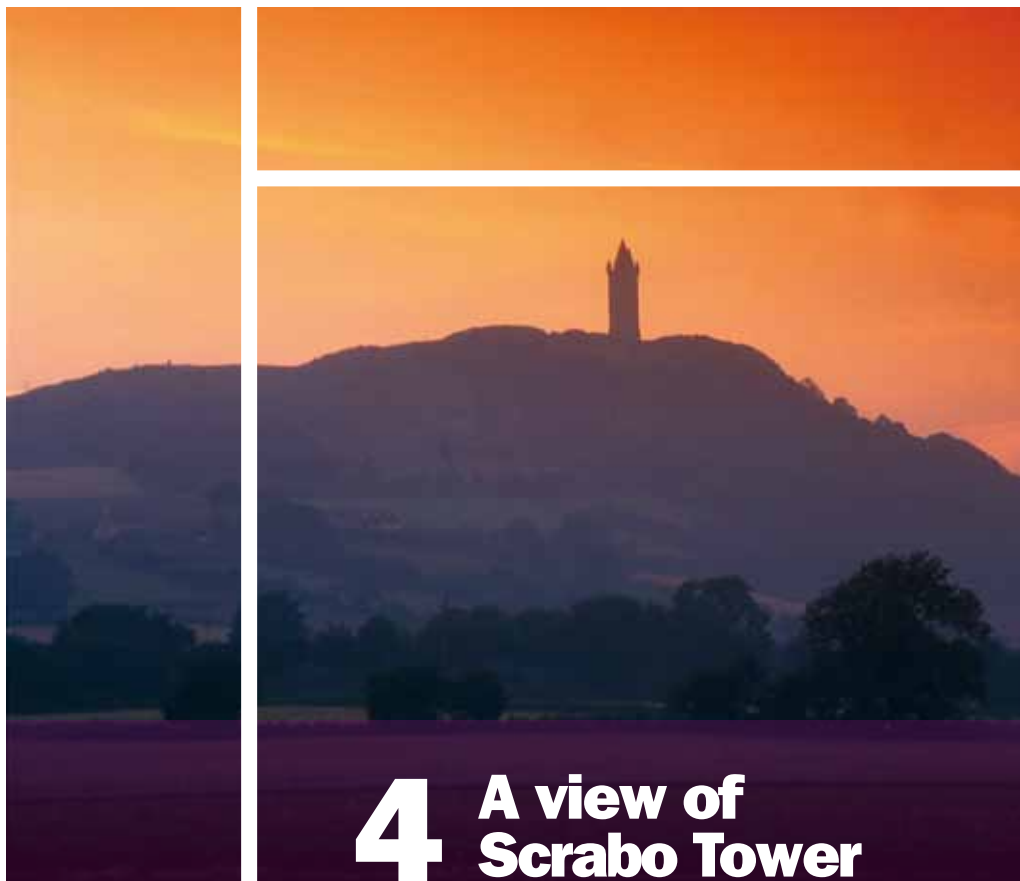
It was a very regimented environment on which males, females and children under 5 were separated from each other upon entry. Life was made as difficult as possible

so that residents would keep looking for gainful employment outside the walls of the workhouse.

However, despite efforts to reduce occupancy, the numbers swelled greatly during the Irish famine. Designed by George Wilkinson to hold over 600 people, the workhouse at one point had over 1000 residents.

**Retrace your steps to the traffic lights and cross Frederick Street. Follow the footpath as far as the roundabout.**





## 4 A view of Scrabo Tower

From this roundabout joining Frederick and Mill Street, you can enjoy a view of Scrabo Tower, Newtownards most famous landmark.

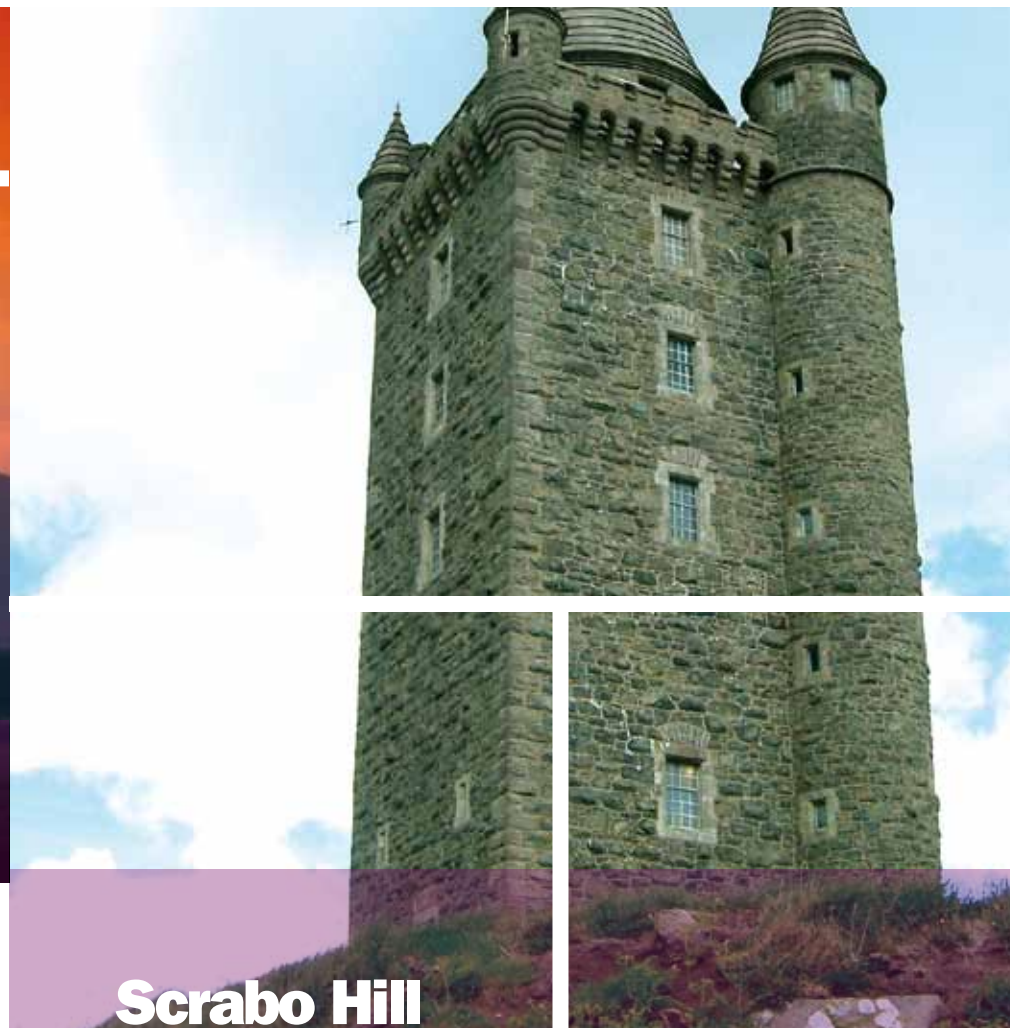
The tower was built in 1857 on the site of an iron-age fort, in honour of the 3rd Marquis of Londonderry. Tenants wished to express their gratitude for the concern shown to them by the 3rd Marquis during the famine.

The architectural style is that of the Scottish watch towers once built along the border with England.

As part of the opening ceremony, a jar containing an inscribed scroll to the late

Marquis, copies of the national and local newspapers of the day, an Ordnance Survey map of County Down, and coins of the Realm was cemented into the foundations.

The care of the tower remained in the hands of one family for more than 100 years. The last residents, the Millin sisters, Elizabeth, Jan and Agnes, ran a very popular tea room in it. The sisters were born in the Tower and were grandchildren of the first tenant, William McKay. Today the Tower is an exhibition centre managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.



## Scrabo Hill

The 538ft high hill is one of the dominant features in the Ards. The name 'Scrabo' is derived from the Irish, "Scra-beagh," meaning rough or scraggy – an apt description of the land on the hill.

**Turn the corner and walk along Mill Street until you reach Gibsons Lane. Walking past the bus shelter, head back onto Regent Street by crossing at the lights.**

### Question 2

What famous local landmark is depicted on the blue iron sign at the right hand entrance to the Hospital?

### Question 3

How high do you think Scrabo Tower is?  
137 feet, 187 feet, 207 feet  
How much do you think it cost to build Scrabo Tower?  
£3,010, £13, 010, £30, 010





## 5 Regency Gift House, Library (The Queens Hall) and Open & Direct Building

Walk along this stretch of Regent Street and observe buildings of historical interest.

Georgian Regency Gift House  
During the Regency period of 1811 – 1820, the government of the UK was headed by the Prince of Wales (later George IV) who acted as Regent while the King was ill. Regent Street became a prosperous area in which to reside and it is thought that the gift house was built at the time.

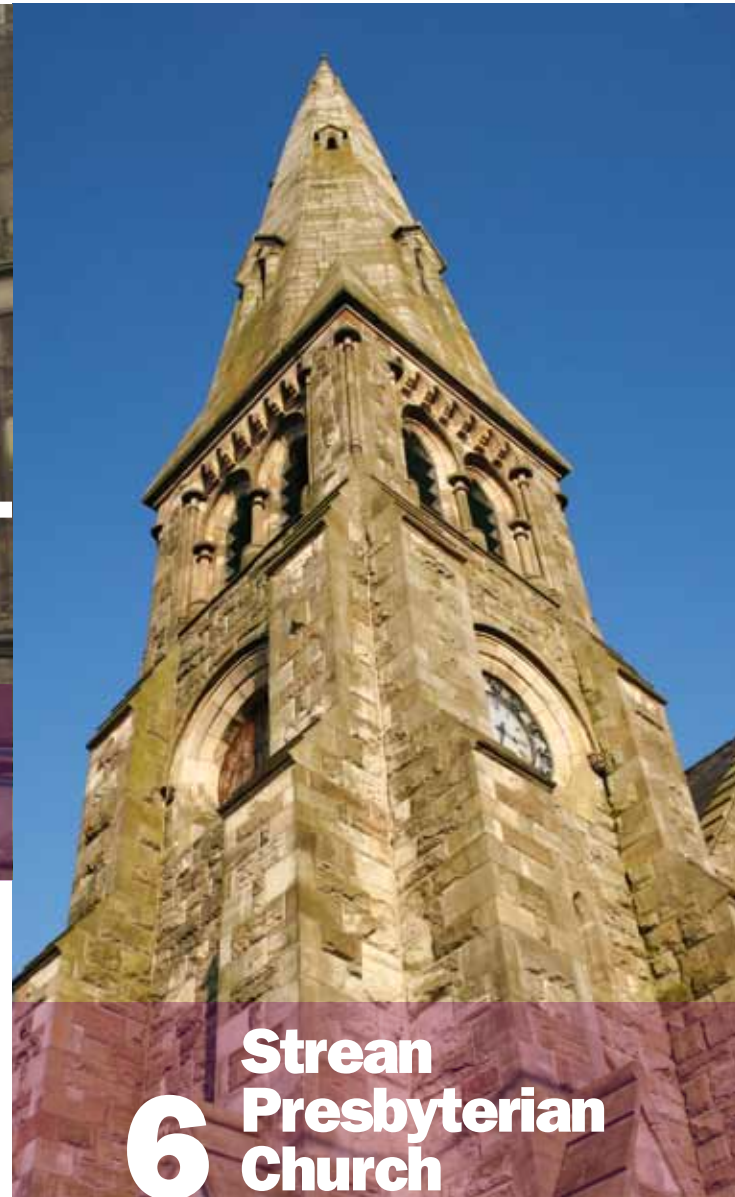
### Queens Hall

The late Queen Mother placed the foundation stone of the Queens Hall on 8th May, 1958. The building now houses the Newtownards Library.

### Open & Direct Building

On the corner with Mary Street, this building, originally the Belfast Bank became the Northern Bank in 1854 and still boasts a Belfast Coat of Arms high on the front façade. The Italianate architecture was designed by Charles Lanyon and bears close similarity to the edifices along the canals of Venice.

Now go around the corner into Mark Street and walk until you reach the junction with West Street.



## 6 Strean Presbyterian Church

The congregation of Strean Presbyterian Church was formed in 1865. The beautiful Gothic-style building made from Scrabo stone can be found in the town centre of Newtownards. Its spire can be seen from miles around.

Retrace your steps back to Regent Street once again. Staying on the same side of the road as before, continue on and you will pass the Post Office. Cross the road at the Ulster Bank, and follow Frances Street, past the offices of the towns Chronicle Newspaper, and down the hill to your right.





Newtownards has the only surviving 17th century market cross in Northern Ireland. The edifice, which stands at the east end of High Street, is an octagonal monument, originally built in 1636. It had resembled a similar cross in Edinburgh by having a flat roof, on which there was a carved lion.

Plantation villages of this time tended to flourish or die. Newtownards grew rapidly into a market town. The market was of crucial importance to the towns' prosperity and this was symbolised by the construction of a market cross. It represented, in stone, what the town stood for – trade, market economy, progress and civilisation.

However, this golden age of progress was to be the calm before the storm.

Newtownards was shaken first by a rebellion of local native Irish in 1641. Then the market cross was destroyed by Cromwell's Commonwealth troops 17 years later because of the Montgomery family's allegiance to the royalist cause. It was rebuilt in 1666 with a conical roofed structure but never regained the esteem it once enjoyed. One major reason for this was that the commercial centre of Newtownards had shifted to Conway Square with its impressive Market House. It was considered a more elegant representation of the towns' progress.

**Crossing at the lights at the bottom of the hill, follow Castle Street round to the left, pass the Old Cross pub and cross the road – take extra care on this busy road.**



## 8 The War Memorial and Rose Garden

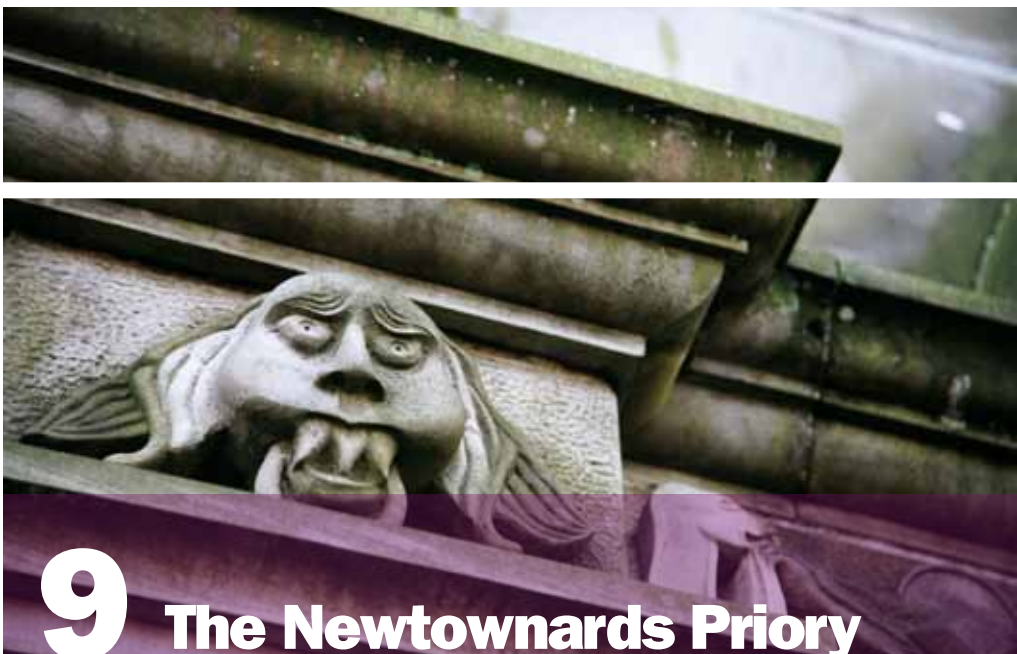
This quiet corner of Newtownards was originally the town centre until 1636. Here, on the Fair Green, the market and town fair were regularly held. On the war memorial, note the date 1613.

This is when the town was given a charter by James I to elect members to the new Dublin Parliament. He also granted

permission for 3 fairs to be held every year. To this day, a harvest fair is still held in September; a date originally designated by the King.

**Walk through the Garden and exit on Court Street. Take care when crossing the road.**





## 9 The Newtownards Priory

The Priory constitutes the ruins of a Dominican Friary, founded in 1244 by the Savage family. They were followers of John de Courcy, who brought the Dominicans from Dublin and Drogheda.

Known as the Black Priory, owing to the black mantle worn over the white habit, the Dominicans were a mendicant order whose sole responsibility was to take the message of the gospel to the people.

The Priory was destroyed by the O'Neill's in 1572 to prevent Queen Elizabeth I from planting an English settlement in the area. The structure lay dormant until the Scottish Plantation of 1606-09 when Hugh Montgomery arrived from Ayrshire in 1607.

When Saint Mark's opened in 1817, the Priory lost its status as Parish Church in the town.

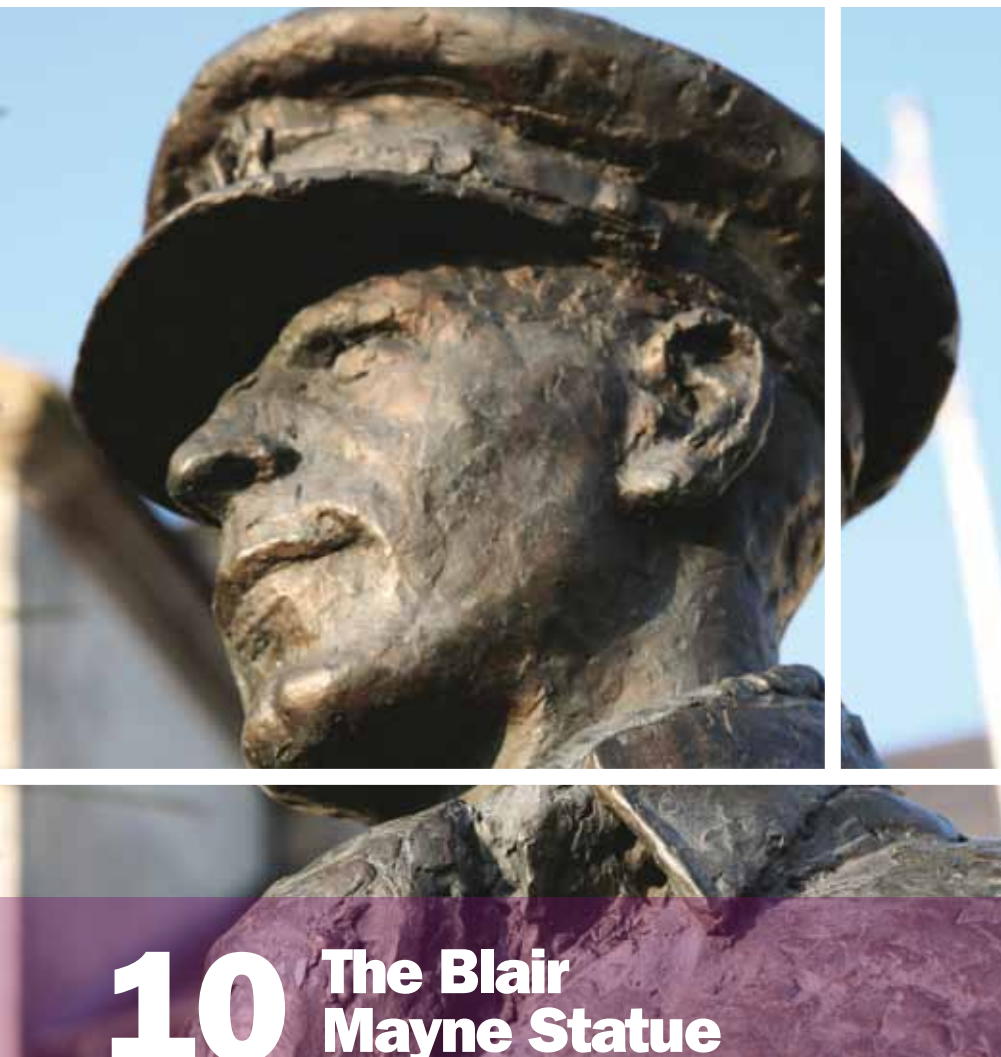
Access to the interior is restricted and opening is special arrangement only through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

**Crossing back over Court Street at the island, the route now takes you back towards the main shopping street in Newtownards – a myriad of long established independent traders including department stores and boutiques. At the Northern Bank cross over High Street and head towards Conway Square. For the next stop, the Blair Mayne statue, look to the right of the Town Hall building and see it beside a flowerbed.**

### Question 4

According to the green sign, in what year was the vault of the Priory constructed? Furthermore, who built it?

Did you know? Juventus and Newcastle United soccer teams, who play in black and white stripes, were formed by the Dominican Orders.

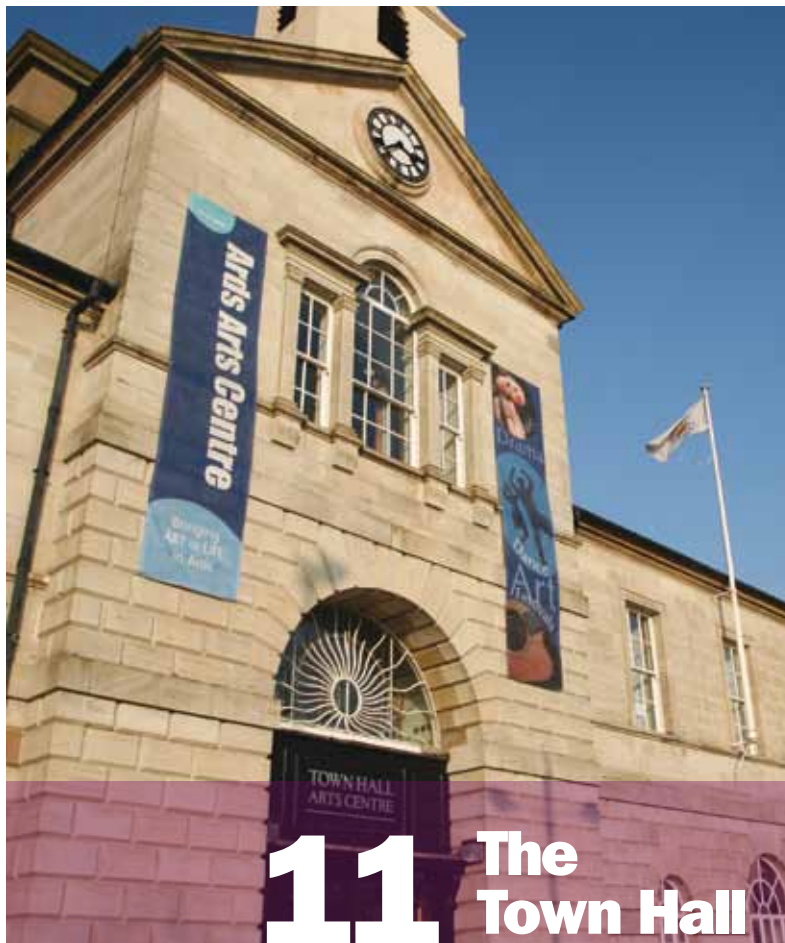


## 10 The Blair Mayne Statue

Blair 'Paddy' Mayne was a pupil at Regent House School in the 1920's and 30's. A powerful athlete, he played rugby for Queens and was later capped in six international games. He also won the amateur heavyweight boxing championship of Northern Ireland while studying at University. During the Second World War, this famous son of the Ards thrilled the world with his daring exploits behind enemy lines in Europe and the Middle East. As a leading member of the newly formed Special Air Service (S.A.S) he

was responsible for some of the most intrepid forages in the Allied campaigns. They operated in hostile territory, raiding airfields and blowing up planes. It is said of Blair himself that in one lightning attack, he personally destroyed 47 enemy planes. Sadly, after the wartime years, Lt. Col. Blair Mayne, met his death in tragic circumstances in a car crash in Newtownards. The bronze statue reflects the breadth of his character, not only a man of action but of reflection, carrying his favourite poetry book.





## 11 The Town Hall

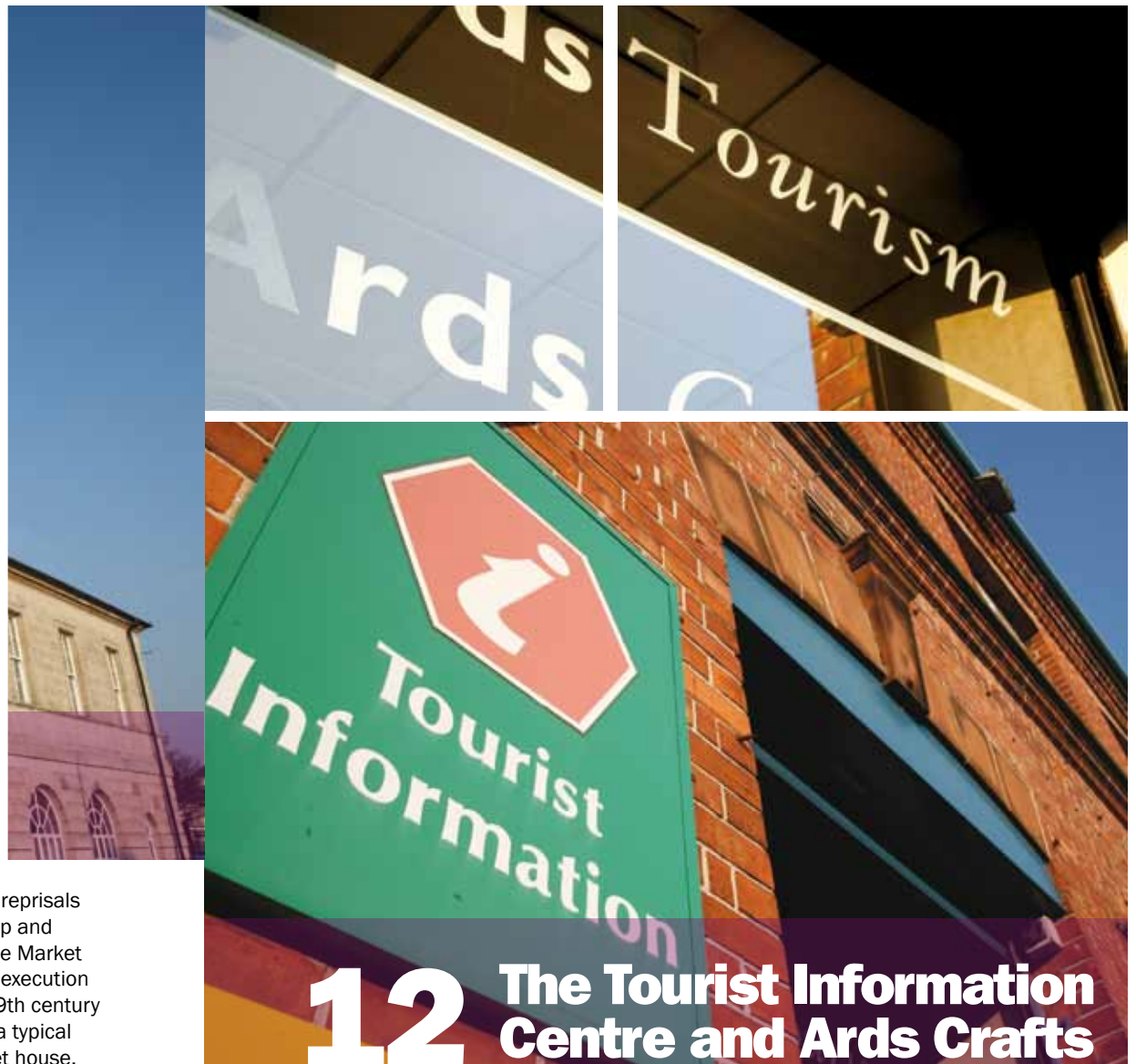
The Town Hall (Market House) is steeped in history. The ground floor of the building acted as a market for local traders. There was also a 'lock-up' cell with grilled windows around which were grooves reputed to have been made by the fingers of prisoners. The upper storey contained an assembly room, now called the Londonderry Room.

The Market House was seized by the United Irishmen, on their way to the Battle of Saintfield, during the 1798 Rebellion. By the end of Sunday 10th June, the whole of North Down and the Ards Peninsula was in the hands of the rebels. When the authorities resumed control by the end

of the week, a period of savage reprisals ensued. Rebels were rounded up and imprisoned in the cells below the Market House, to await judgement and execution by hanging. By the end of the 19th century the building was used more as a typical Town Hall than a court or market house.

Today, the building is home to Ards Arts Centre, where a variety of artwork is regularly exhibited and is open to the public.

**Exit Conway Square to the left of the Town Hall and walk back along Regent Street to the Tourist Information.**



## 12 The Tourist Information Centre and Ards Crafts

This building used to be the town brewery. Originally the brewery sat behind the Dominican Priory in Court Street and was built by the Colville family who became landlords in Newtownards from 1675 until 1744.

As part of the development of Regent Street, Robert Stewart moved the brewery

in 1819 to its present location. The rear of the building still shows evidence of the original stonework.

*We hope you enjoyed your tour of Newtownards. We would be happy to receive any comments relating to your experience of this self-guided walking tour.*





## Thirsty for More?

For the more adventurous walker, why not try our additional suggestion for a walk to visit Movilla Abbey, lying 1 mile (1.6km) east of the town centre.

Leaving the route at number 7 on the map, follow the route marked light pink along Movilla street, crossing Georges Street at the lights, walk along Upper Movilla Street which eventually becomes Old Movilla Road as far as the gates of Movilla cemetery.

This hilltop was occupied by one of Ulster's most important early churches, associated with the 6th century St Finnian. Plundered by the Vikings in 824AD it was refounded in the 12th century as an abbey and it adopted the Augustine rule, dedicated to St Malachy. This reflected a decision made by Celtic Monasteries to seek closer integration with Europe. It served as a parish church of the area. Indeed seven 13th century coffin lids, with foliate crosses, have been found around the building, built into the inside of the north wall. Shears indicate a woman's burial, and a sword for a man's burial. The church was extended in the 15th century and survived until the suppression of religious houses

in the 1540's. One stone only survives the pre Norman period: a slab with a sharply –cut ringed cross and an inscription in Irish asking for a prayer for Dertrend, "or do Dertrend".

All that remains of the monastery today is an undivided chancel and nave, 107 feet long and 20 feet wide, dating from the 13th and 15th centuries respectively. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1541, James McGuilmere, the last abbot, surrendered the lands and tithes to the Crown. They became part of the territory claimed by the Clandeboy O'Neills. The stone buildings were burned in 1572 to prevent a fledgling English settlement developing. The sacred history of the site has been recognised in its continued use, for many centuries, as a cemetery.

To access more information on the history of Newtownards, a list of suggested publications can be found on page 23.

### Question 5

What is the street number of the Tourist Information Centre and Ards Crafts?

## Borough of Ards Coat of Arms



# Borough of Ards Description and Explanation of Coat of Arms

The fleur-de-lys are from the shield of the Montgomery's, Earls of Mount Alexander; Sir Hugh Montgomery came into the Newtownards Priory property in 1608, and Newtown House descended from them to the Colville's, whose black mill-rind cross occupies the base of the shield.

The beasts support crosiers in allusion to the two monastic foundations associated with the town – Movilla Abbey and the Priory. The crosiers are black, the predominant colour of the habit of the Augustines and Dominicans to which these foundations respectively belonged. A unicorn supporting one side of the shield is an allusion to the Charter of 1613. It was introduced by King James and also represents the arms of the influential de Courcy family.

The grassy bank on which the unicorn stands has flax flowers growing from it in reference to the strength of the linen-weaving industry in Ards.

The black mill-rind cross which occupies the base of the shield represents the Colville family who acquired lands and property such as Newtown House from Hugh Montgomery.

Above the shield is the closed helm-proper to civic arms, decorated with the crest-wreath and flowing mantling or cloak in the livery colours of the arms, blue and white. Upon this is the Montgomery Crest, with the hand coloured red in allusion to the familiar Red Hand of Ulster.

The eagle is that of the de Courcys who invaded Ulster in the twelfth century. John de Courcy built the castle around which Newtownards was developed.

The Lion is the sinister supporter of the Marquesses of Londonderry, who have long been associated with the history and development of Newtownards.

The roses blossoming from the rich green earth are a reference to the floriculture industry in Newtownards.

The shield is parted diagonally in the shape of St Andrews cross and what is popularly known as St Patrick's cross. This partition alludes to the Scottish origin of the Montgomery's and also to the charter of 1613 granted to the Town of Newtownards by King James I.

The motto, Fidelis atque Fortis (Faithful and Brave), adapted from that of the Savages of Portaferry; one of the most ancient of Ulster families.

## Answers to Quiz Questions

### Question 1

How many rounded vertical columns support the elegant front porch of the old Regent House building?

4 Vertical columns support the front porch

### Question 2

What famous local landmark is depicted on the blue iron sign at the right hand entrance to the Hospital?

Scrabo Tower is depicted on the iron sign

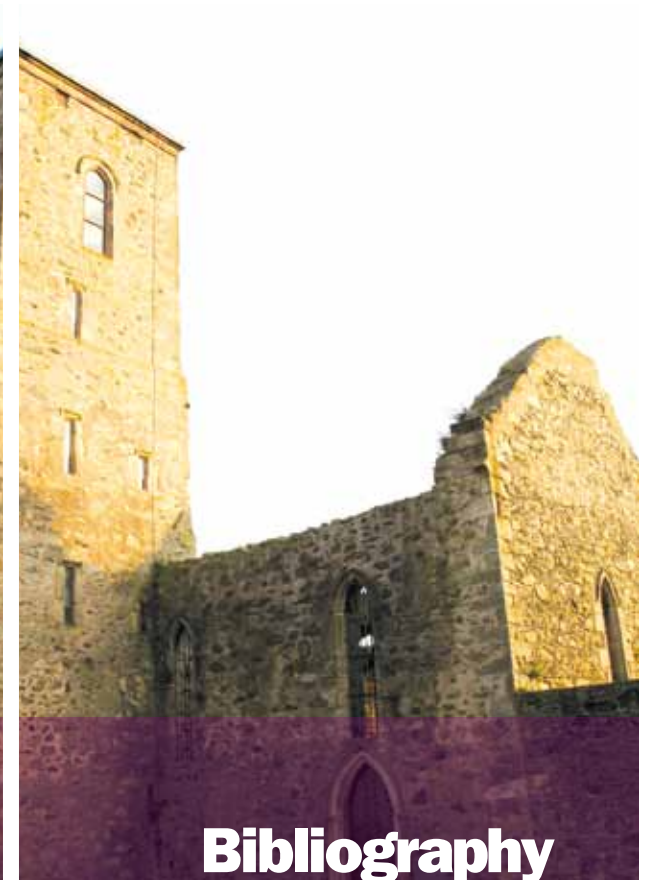
### Question 3

How high do you think Scrabo Tower is?  
137 feet, 187 feet, 207 feet

How much do you think it cost to build Scrabo Tower?

£3,010, £13, 010, £30, 010

The Tower is 137 feet high and it cost £3,010 to build



## Bibliography

### Question 4

According to the green sign, in what year was the vault of the Priory constructed? Furthermore, who built it?

The vault of the Priory was built in 1767 by Alexander Stewart

Did you know? Juventus and Newcastle United soccer teams, who play in black and white stripes, were formed by the Dominican Orders.

### Question 5

What is the street number of the Tourist Information Centre and Ards Crafts?

The street number of Ards Tourist Information Centre and Ards Crafts is 31.

Paul Whitla; Blue Badge Tour Guide

A short history of Newtownards; Ards Historical Society, publication No.4

Newtownards; Ards Historical Society

Ards Borough; Ards Historical Society

Defended Houses in Ards; Ards Historical Society

Additional Historical / Educational information has kindly been compiled by Dr Trevor McCavery and is available at Ards Tourist Information centre.

A guide to the Historic Monuments of Northern Ireland in State Care by Northern Ireland Environment Agency.



**Ards Tourist Information Centre**

31 Regent Street  
Newtownards  
BT23 4AD  
028 9182 6846  
tourism@ards-council.gov.uk  
www.ards-council.gov.uk

**Portaferry Tourist Information and Visitor Centre**

The Stables  
Castle Street  
Portaferry  
BT22 1NZ  
028 4272 9882  
tourism.portaferry@ards-council.gov.uk  
**Seasonal opening from Easter – end of August**



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