The Story Of

COMBER

by

Norman Nevin

Written in about 1984

This edition printed 2008

FOREWORD:

Norman Nevin MBE was not a native of Comber but much of Comber's past was researched by him. He came originally from Newtownards, but settled and taught in Comber, developing a great love for the town. Over the years Norman Nevin became a well-known and popular figure here. In addition to his role as headmaster of Comber Primary school, he was Lieutenant Colonel of the Army Cadet Force and an Elder in First Comber Presbyterian Church. He never married, and it is said that he regarded the school as his family, maintaining an interest in his former pupils. He has been described as "a great man with high moral values and integrity.

Norman was born on 3rd. May 1909 and died on 19th. February, 1996. - Just short of his eighty-seventh birthday. He left behind a wealth of information about Comber, which he meticulously studied over the years. He could often be seen about the town with a camera, recording people and events. He also wrote this story up to about 1984 and, probably, had it typed up by his school secretary but always refused to have it published. Unfortunately, the printed document was on A3 size paper which was too large for comfortable reading. The document was housed in Comber Library and was at one stage photo-copied and reduced in size to A4. This did not however make it any easier to read as the type was also reduced to a very small size.

The writer decided, in 2007, to transpose the document into larger type on computer, keeping as far as possible to the original, and print it out. This is the result. Computer files of this document are available from the Library in Comber or from the writer.

Erskine Willis January 2008

Note: The book "A Taste of old Comber" BY Len Ball and Des Rainey acknowledges the use of a lot of Nevin's work and is an excellent book on Comber history.

THE STORY OF COMBER

WHENCE CAME THE NAME?

Comber is a village of some eight thousand inhabitants, situated on the North West shore of Strangford. Lough (formerly Loch Cuan*),* on each side of the Comber River which is formed by the junction of two rivers — the Enler and the Glen. This junction is at a point behind the former Lower Distillery. It was in this sector between the two rivers that the Cistercians built their monastery in 1199 — 1220. The Cistercians always built beside a river, of which they made full use, even for sanitary arrangements. It is from this joining point that the name COMBER originated. As "Comar" is an Irish word which means the confluence or joining point of two rivers.

About nine hundred years ago, people began to insert the letter B into Irish words and so COMAR became COMBER, but Comar was the usual pronunciation of the name, as very few could read. This was all, the more pronounced when Sir Hugh Montgomery and his Lowland Scots came to settle here in 1606. At the present time this dialect is more likely to be heard in Newtownards and the Ards Peninsula e.g. "Are ye goan tae the Comar Races?" "Naw am no goan this year." The name has varied over the ages. In the Irish Tripartite, 890 A.D. it was DOMHNAC COMBUIR, in 1031 it was KILL COMBUIR, in 1121 it was COMAR and many years later it was CUMBER and later still COMBER.

One of these rivers is the Enler, which comes from beyond Dundonald on the Holywood side and flows down the great valley, which lies between the Castlereagh Hills on one side and. the Holywood. Hills on the other The Enler is joined at the Clydesford Bridge at Ballystockart by a tributary, called at its source, the Gransha River, where it provided the power for the Gransha Mills and, later on its course it became the Ballystockart River and provided the power for the Knocknasham Mills at Ballystockart. Opposite Nurseryville, the Enler supplied the water for a mill race to run parallel with the railway, then to cross the Castle Lane at the present Albion Factory and supply power for the four water-wheels in the Andrews' Flour Mill and Bleach Green. This was where the world—famous firm Isaac Andrews and Sons, Flour Millers of Belfast, originated.

The other river came from Moss Brook, near Moneyreagh, (old name Moneygreer or Royal Bog) from which great quantities of peat were sent to Belfast and other places. The river was joined by another stream from Ballyalloly Lough, and passes down the side of the Ballygowan Road, providing the power for various old mills, both flax and corn. Just before it reaches the Thomas Andrews Junior Memorial Hall, part of it has been diverted by forming a mill race, which passes through the present Spinning Mill, but was originally to supply the present dams at Laurelbank, now a park and nature reserve for wildfowl. Originally these dams supplied the water for a mill race to the old Upper Corn Mill, which was on the site of the present Laureldale Hall. It was here that the Andrews family first started in business, when Thomas Andrews (1698 - l744) got a lease in 1722. This was in their possession until about 1900, when the site was cleared. From the mill it flowed under the Pound Bridge at the Technical School (Thompson's Hall) and round the backs of the houses in Mill Street to join the Belfast Road mill race behind the Castle Buildings in Castle Lane and so on to the Flour Mill and Bleach Green, where there was the Square Dam.

The original river flows at the back of the Memorial Hall, crosses under the Old Ballygowan Road, then under the present by-pass road (formerly the railway to Newtownards) past the gardens of the houses in High Street and around through the old Cooperage, beside Second Comber Presbyterian Church, under Killinchy Street (formerly Barry Street and the Market Street) and past the Upper Distillery on the Car-Park side to join up with the Enler at the end of Waterford. Loney, later called Potale Loney (Pronounced locally as Potyal Loney), which passes the present Comber Recreation Football Ground. This river also supplied the Distillery Dam, which was on the south side of Second Comber Church and is now the Church Car Park. The

water was conveyed across the valley at the back of the Church by what was locally called “The Troughs”, originally a wooden structure, but now of concrete.
The ground for this dam belonged to James Milling of The Square, and he gave it to the Distillery Company in exchange for the weighbridge in a wooden hut in The Square (derisively called ‘the Market House’) where the farmers had their barley weighed before taking it to the Distillery on a Thursday.

In those days water was important as a source of power and every opportunity was taken to use it to the best advantage. Wind power was also very important and the landscape round Comber and down the Ards Peninsula was dotted with a great number of Windmills. The remains of some are still to be seen in those familiar round towers up to twenty feet high. Contrary to widespread belief, these are old windmill stumps and were never watchtowers to be used when a French invasion was probable.

IN THE BEGINNING

For ages and ages, the land we now look at and walk or drive upon had been submerged under the waters of a stormy ocean and then some two hundred million years ago, due to the forces of the gases under the crust of the earth, it had surfaced as part of the continent of Europe. At various times it was subject to the extremes of heat and cold. When the climate was hot and wet, the land was covered with jungle and swamps: when it was cold, it was like the Arctic regions – covered with ice, anything from one thousand to two thousand feet thick. About 13,000 years ago there was a warm spell, when plants and animals including the giant deer and reindeer came back. This stage was succeeded by an extremely cold glacial period about 11,000 years ago; when all plant and animal life was extinguished. It did not last for more than 500 - 1,000 years and was the fourth and final Ice Age.

The warm stage which succeeded the Ice Age opens up about 10,000 years ago and. the climate at first was similar to that of the Scandinavian mountains today, that is, a July average temperature of only ten degrees Centigrade. In a very short tine however the temperature increased to fifteen degrees Centigrade, which is similar to that of today. The ice, which had come from Scotland in a N.E. to S.W. direction now began to melt and. this caused vast quantities of water to flow towards the sea, The melting ice flooded what is now Lough Neagh and this overflowed into the Lagan valley forming Lagan Lake. The water from this drained towards Belfast Lough, but was in such a vast quantity that some of it turned right and carved out the great valley, which lies between Dundonald and Comber, with the Castlereagh hills on one side and the Holywood hills on the other, and poured into what is now Strangford Lough, which had been carved out by the ice. Evidence of this is found in the large number of “drowned” drumlins - islands with a smooth, rounded outline of a bill, steep on the N.E. side and gently sloping to the S.W. - which prompted someone to describe the Co. Down countryside as resembling a basket of eggs.

In the summer of 1975, Mr. James Baxter of Castle Buildings crossed the Cricket Green to the place where a mechanical digger had been working, as he wanted a bucket of sand for his garden. Twenty-eight feet below the level of the Cricket green he found in the sand, containing sea-shells, a curious stone, it was Silurian slate, perfectly smooth and rounded, obviously caused by the action of water - either the sea or a great river as the Enler had once been.

When the last ice was melting, the land, released of its load, rose more quickly than the sea-level so that temporary land bridges, almost, if not quite completely continuous, connected Ireland with the Isle of Man, Wales and Cumberland. These land bridges played an important part in the migration of fauna and flora into Ireland, but it seems probable that some of the first human immigrants came rather later and had to cross some open water. Dense forests of oak, thorn and hazel slowly covered the lowlands and with thick scrub and undergrowth formed a great barrier. Through these forests roamed the great mammoth, hyenas, wolves, bears and the gigantic deer

THE FIRST PEOPLE

Until some months ago, it was generally believe that the earliest evidence of men in Ireland dated back to around 5,500 B.C. that is about 7,500 years ago and. strangely enough that the north-east of the island, today the least Irish part of it, has the longest archaeological record.. A new method of dating pollen, charcoal and wood etc. by radio-carbon dating is much more accurate and Dr. Peter Woodman, excavating at Mount Sandal on the river Bann, just south of Coleraine, has shown just recently that here is the earliest record of men in Ireland, dated by radio-carbon to between 8,700 and 8,600 years ago. Dr. Woodman, excavating at Newferry, which is at the N.W. corner of' Lough Neagh, where the Bann makes its exit towards the sea, has found charcoal which is 8,150 years old. Charcoal and wood col1ected from the raised beach at Cushendun, which had been considered the place of the earliest evidence of man, has now been dated. 7,500 years old.

The basalt cliffs of Antrim show that the basalts have preserved beneath them a band of chalk exposed on the cliff face - which is loaded with flints that were so precious to early man. Along the Antrim coast, humanly worked flints are to be found in vast numbers, particularly in the raised beach gravels at Larne, where they have long been collected and studied, and hence the people who made and used them are known as Larnians. Who were these Larnians and where did they come from? They came from Europe and reached Northern Ireland via Wales, England, Isle of Man and Scotland. They lived entirely by hunting and fishing and were ever on the move, especially along rivers and. along the shores of lakes. They had axe-like implements of chipped stone, but they did not use these for forest clearing as their successors did. They do appear to have made small clearings as seasonal camp-sites and these may have been fenced to keep out wolves and foxes and. the occasional wandering bear. Most implements were made by a flaking process. Suitable rounded pebbles of flint would be collected; one end would be struck off and a flat surface produced; by striking blows at the perimeter of this surface, elongated flakes would be detached and. the two types most sought for were parallel sided blades or knives and. leaf-shaped flakes, to be used as pointed knives or mounted on a shaft to serve as an arrow or spear-head, These people learned that a thin edge could be strengthened by removing small flakes at right angles to the edge. Flakes were thus turned into scrapers and borers. In the same way one edge of a flake could be blunted, so producing a 'backed.' knife. Core-axes were occasionally made by chipping off flakes from a chosen pebble until it was reduced to the desired shape.

It is believed that these people, who were nomadic, travelled slowly down the Dundonald valley to make their settlements around Strangford Lough where fish and fowl were plentiful. They left their evidence in the rubbish heaps and collections of fish spears, knives, axes, scrapers etc which are found here and. there all along the valley. In 1958 some boys were sent to clear the new playing fields at Comber Secondary School of stones to allow the new grass to be cut. Neil Witham and. Jim Swindle each picked up a curiously shaped stone**,** which later were identified as flint axe heads. They are now in the Museum in Belfast. Eventually these wanderers reached Strangford Lough, where food was plentiful and encamped on a safe place, an island, later called Slesny and later still Rough Island., at Island Hill. Here they caught any little animals that they could and. gathered berries, roots and nuts, while from the sea they caught fish, seabirds and gathered all kinds of shellfish. These were consumed at a communal eating place on the island, the shells being thrown on to one big heap, seven or eight feet high, to be found thousands of years later in 1936 by Americans from Harvard University excavating on the island for flints and. other traces of their habitation. Later these wandering people spread round all the shores of the Lough, which provided them with all their needs. Strangely enough not a single trace of these people has been found on the shore-line from Donaghadee to Ballyhalbert, They were river folk. This period lasted roughly until 3,000 B.C. These Mesolithic or Mid-Stone Age men were tall, strong and hairy with broad noses and. large foreheads. They were wanderers clothed in the skins

of animals and carried heavy wooden clubs, wooden spears or flint hand-axes. They were quite satisfied to do no more than get enough food.

THE NEOLITHIC AGE – The First Farmers

We now come to the Neolithic Age (New Stone Age), which was very roughly around. 3,000 B.C. until 2,000 B.C. - that is four or five thousand years ago. The sea-level had come to stand approximately where it is today though there were some later fluctuations. It was from this time onwards that the Atlantic coasts of Europe were settled by small groups of colonists from the South - the Mediterranean -seeking land for their crops (wheat and. barley), fodder for their livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and dogs), and flint and. other hard stones for their tools. They came to this district from the Iberian Peninsula and Brittany, the light soils attracting them. These were the first farmers and in choosing the land which best suited their purpose, the farmers had to clear the mixed oak forests and for felling or ring barking the most serviceable tool was the axe of hard, fine grained stone which could be ground and polished into shape. Ideal stone for this purpose was found in the north-east of Ireland and a trade in axes developed with other parts of Ireland and with England.

Farming meant that they had to stay near their growing crops, so life was more settled and. they learned among other things to build. better houses and to spin and. weave The homes, at first, were crude shelters made from branches and. leaves, later they were probably huts in the form of a cone of logs, held firm by a double ring of stones at the base. Very much later they were houses made of wood and thatch surmounting stone walls.

We still do not know a great deal about these people, but we are slowly adding to our knowledge. We do know however that they left very impressive monuments behind them - great stone tombs - which indicate their interest in magic rites of food production and hopes of future reward. The term MEGALITHIC is applied to these tombs, because in many cases they were constructed of large stones -from the Greek - Megas - great and. Lithos - a stone. These are sometimes locally called “Giant’s Gravel”, “Giant’s Ring”, “Druid’s Altar”, etc but they are all chambered graves, some containing many burials. We should remember that when we are looking at a Megalith that we are often looking at the skeleton of the tomb only, the covering mound or cairn of small stones and soil and subsidiary features having been removed. Outside this, further standing stones were often placed surrounding or leading into the mound. Thus we see the chamber, consisting of supporting stones and the roof, when the cairn of stones and soil, which once hid it has gone, or the uprights only may remain after cairn and roofing material have vanished.

The grave goods such as the leaf-shaped arrowheads are the product of high craftsmanship and long practised skills and their pottery vessels are of very high quality. One of these arrowheads, of great beauty, was found by Mr. William Steele, when digging the garden of his new home on the Glen Road, in 1975. We have several examples of these Megaliths in the Comber district and. they are well worth a visit. The best example is at Greengraves where we have the Kempe Stones. This is a portal grave, that is, a single chamber grave with tall entrance pillars. The chamber measures about five feet square and is entered over a sill, rising to half the height of the well-matched portal stones. The back of the over sailing capstone - 8½ ft. x 7½ ft. - rests on a smaller horizontal roofing slab. All the stones are basalt. Traces of the cairn survive - apparently a long cairn. The height of the Megalith is ten feet and, the weight of the capstone is 17 tons.

Other examples in the district are the locally known “Giant’s Grave” on the left hand side of the Killinchy Road, in Ballygraffan, another on the right hand side of the Ballynicholl Road, known locally as “The Five Sisters” and yet another on the right hand side of the Ballygraffan Road near the old Windmill Stump. In a Year Book of 1887 it was stated that beside the “Five Sisters” was a capstone measuring 18 feet long, five feet broad and four feet thick. This has now disappeared. In all these cases the stones were probably dragged on rollers (tree trunks) from the shore of nearby Strangford Lough. This huge capstone, known as “The Druids’ Altar” was used by Roman

Catholics as a place of worship, when they were not allowed to worship anywhere, as it was off the beaten track.

THE BRONZE AGE - The Metal Workers

The Bronze Age was roughly from 2,000 B.C. until 500 B.C. The New Stone Age people discovered that the earth contained such materials as gold, copper, tin, silver and iron. They looked on them as unusual sorts of stone. They could not be chipped but could be hammered or beaten into shape and would last a long time. Much later and more slowly it was discovered that the metals could be melted by great heat and poured into shapes to harden again. Then moulds were invented and. it was found that many well-shaped weapons and tools could be made easily. Again it was found eventually, that a mixture of two metals sometimes gave a harder and better weapon. Copper and tin were the first metals to be used in such a way and eventually it was found that the proportion of one part tin to nine parts copper was the best. This was bronze.

This was the Age of the "Beaker Folk" known for their distinctive type of pottery, (Beakers). In Southern Ireland these people most likely came from Iberia and in Northern Ireland from Central Europe. Early in the second millennium they began to exploit their native sources of copper and copper axes and other small tools and weapons were being made in Ireland. About 1750 B.C. a bronze industry was established. The need to import tin to add to the native copper stimulated contacts already established with Spain and Central Europe as well as with Cornwall and the Early Irish Bronze Age was a time of brilliant achievements with, not only copper and bronze, but with silver and gold. Ireland at this tine, had some of the finest goldsmiths, silversmiths and coppersmiths in Europe, and supplied much of Britain with bronze implements as well as silver and gold ornaments.

These new people brought with them new customs and new ideas, but the places where they lived are not known with any certainty except for the many artificial islands (Crannogs - from crann meaning a tree) built in lakes and marshes. Hunting was still important for food, but farming did improve slowly. Wheat, oats, rye and barley were grown and wooden spades, graips and yokes as well as flint and bronze sickles were in use, flax was probably first grown in this age and the horse was first brought into Ireland. Clothing also improved with long, loose dresses for the women and short kilts for the men, made of cloth woven from wool and goat's hair. Many ornaments of stone, shells, bone and metal were worn by both men and women, but they were often charms against evil. This improvement in clothing became important because around. 500 B.C. the weather became wetter and stormier and as a result peat began to cover large areas and probably hid traces of the earlier inhabitants. Characteristic of this period are the ceremonial circles of earth or standing stones or a combination of the two. These had some magic - religious significance to Bronze Age man, probably connected with sun and fertility worship. Examples of these are to be found at "The Giant's Ring" not far from Purdysburn and at Ballynoe, south of Downpatrick. These are the most mysterious relics of antiquity as they are places of ritual and not burial or habitation and. therefore their excavation produces little to serve as evidence of date. The "Cock and Hens" stones at the 'hairpin' bend in Dundonald are also an example of this. There are also many single 'standing stones' in the countryside like those at Dundonald (The Long Stone), Ballyhalbert and outside Dundrum on the road to Maghera, which are also of this era, from these stones evolved the stone gate posts of later years, the belief still clinging that if one drove one's animals between these posts, they would prosper and be more abundantly fertile.

Also associated with this period are the box-like graves of stone slabs, called 'cists' - containing cremated remains, in an earthenware urn and often with a food vessel beside it. Some of these were found west of the Primary School in Comber, beside the river in 1858, at the entrance to Andrews' Bleach Green in 1850, by a farmer in Ballyloughan in 1885 and on the site of the Primary School when it was built in 1937. These are now in the Museum in Belfast. A few years ago, shortly after the river had been cleaned and deepened, Leslie McWilliams was fishing near

Ballyloughan when be saw something shining on the bed of the river. He waded in and found what proved to be a spear head of this period. It is now in the Museum. This was most unusual as nothing had been found south of the Lead Mines in Newtownards that was made of bronze. The end of the Bronze Age brings us almost to the end of Prehistoric times in Ireland.

THE IRON AGE AND THE CELTS

The Iron Age may be considered in two phases, an early one extending over the last two centuries B.C. and a little beyond and a second which may be called the Roman Iron Age, extending into the fifth century B.C. The early period is marked by a growing isolation from Britain for the Irish scabbard shapes, seem derived from continental models, current around the third century B.C. Persisting Late Bronze Age traditions must have been the background to life during this period of the Iron Age in Ireland. Iron production was slow to be developed. Socketed axes of cast Bronze continued to be used and ornaments, horse-bits and scabbards and their chapes, elsewhere made of iron, in Ireland were always of cast or beaten bronze.

This separation from Britain changed during the first century A.D. as there are from that time some objects of British origin. Some have an early Romano-British character and give meaning to the term Roman Iron Age in Ireland. Other objects seem to have come from the native people of South Britain just before the Roman Conquest in A.D. 43. In l851 a group of objects was found near Donaghadee, the background of which is among the native people of South Britain.

Among the invaders who came to Ireland in the late Bronze Age were groups described as Celtic. This tern is used, not because they belonged to a particular race of people, but because of the language they spoke and their ways and style of making things. They were sandy, fair or red haired and. spoke Gaelic which is a Celtic language, About 1,000 B.C. they reached England from Western Europe and made themselves rulers over much of the country and around 800 B.C. they reached Ireland. They probably came to Ulster first from North Britain but they did not conquer the whole country. In the later Iron Age there were further Celtic invasions in the South of Ireland and the North was the last to fall under their rule. Many small tribal kingdoms were set up and then commenced the long struggle for the better lands, until by the time of Christ; there were five great kingdoms in Ireland - Ulster, Connacht, North Leinster, South Leinster and Munster. This was the period of the Irish epic tales of Concobar, leader of the Red Branch Knights in his fights with Maeve, the warrior Queen of Connacht. Tales of Finn Mac Coul or Fingal belong to this period.

Hill forts are rare in Ireland. Of those in Co. Down only that on Cathedral Hill, Downpatrick - by far the largest and most regular - is of the early Iron Age. Those at Dunbeg near Ballynahinch and. on Scrabo resemble the smaller hill-forts in Scotland and. Wales. We are interested in Scrabo or should it be Scraba? In bygone days the people of the Ards always called it Scraba, which seems more likely to be correct as it means “the rough ground.” whereas Scrabo means “the sward of the cows”. Walter Harris, writing his account of Co. Down in 1744 calls it “Scraba”. The summit of this prominent hill-top at 540 feet is enclosed by a bank of piled stone and earth, now about three feet high, forming an oval hill-fort about 300 feet long by 120 feet wide. In places, especially on the South the rock outcrop seems to have been scarped to create a ditch, it is not clear where the entrance lay. Hut groups of this period, enclosed or not, have rarely been recorded in Ireland. Search has been made in Co. Down especially in rough, broken, upland country, and surprisingly, no examples of any antiquity have been found, except in the enclosed groups round the top of Scrabo. Here there is an irregular polygonal enclosure, five hundred yards west of the tower, within the hill fort on Scrabo. It is about 100 feet by 90 feet internally, within which can be traced the footings of small houses. Large facing stones can be traced in both inner and outer faces of the enclosing walls, which vary from two to five feet in thickness. The entrance survives on the East, marked by large stones.

The house sites are marked by low earthen banks containing much rubble stone showing through the turf, which in dry weather is thin and parched along these wall lines. Remains of three or probably four houses can be traced. One is against the enclosure wall, which it uses as does the smaller, more rounded one on the other side of the entrance. Several flint flakes and sherds of undecorated Late Bronze Age or Iron Age were picked up in the l930s.

THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY

The Early Christian Era runs roughly from *450* A.D. until 1200 A.D. In Europe this period was "The Dark Ages", when Christianity and Learning almost died out, following the collapse of the Roman Empire. It was also the period, when Ireland earned the name - "A Land of Saints and Scholars". The story of St. Patrick and the numerous legends concerning him are well known, but the truth of some details is weaker than often supposed. His birthplace is by no means a certainty, but the general opinion is that it was somewhere along the estuary of either the Severn or the Clyde, and that he was born late in the fourth century.

The Britonic Picts of Galloway had their St. Ninian and "Candida Casa", 398 A.D.in Wigtonshire, long before Ireland had St. Patrick. This was just across the Channel from Strangford Lough (Loch Cuan), and had become a celebrated Monastery and College. The Mull of Galloway is quite close to Down and no doubt there was trade and social contacts between the two places and possibly resulting in some Down people becoming Christians, before the arrival of St. Patrick. However, his success as a missionary was so great that he has become the Patron Saint of Ireland. His original name was Sucatus or Sochet and he later adopted the Roman name of Patricius. He most likely did land on the shore of Loch Cuan at the mouth of the river Slaney and met the local Chieftain, Dichu, who was converted and who gave him a barn, in Irish - Sabhall - which became his first Church - Saul.

Mochaoi (pronounced Maughee, or by the English - Mahee), founder of Nendrum (the island of the nine ridges) Monastery and its first Abbot, was converted by Patrick on a journey from Saul to Bright. Mochaoi's mother, Bronach, was the daughter of Milchu, the farmer of Slemish, where Patrick had been a slave for six years. (From the Triparte Life;) - "In 433 A.D. as Patrick was going along the way he saw a tender youth herding swine, Mochaoi was his name. Patrick preached to him and baptised him and tonsured him and gave him a gospel and a Menistir (a sacred vessel). The meeting place was at Ballynoe or Legamaddy (site of a circle of standing stones)" Mochaoi was educated at Templepatrick and later had a cell at what is now called Kilmakee in Co. Antrim, i.e. the Church of Mochaoi. Mochaoi founded Nendrum in 445 A.D., St. Colman, a pupil of Mochaoi, founded Dromore around 500 A.D., St. Finnian, a pupil of St. Colman and of Whithorn, founded Movilla in 540 A.D. and St Comgall founded Bangor in 555 A.D. He, like St Finnian, graduated in the schools of Co. Down and finished in the older established "Magnum Monasterium" of Galloway and then went to the Continent. At first these places were devoted to the ascetic life, simple, frugal and industrious but became in turn the centres of material culture and were a powerful influence in founding the tradition of Irish Learning which was to spread over Europe.

Tradition has it that Christianity came to Comber about 1500 years ago. Apparently Patrick having visited his favourite convert, Mochaoi, travelled north on his way to Donaghadee and hence to Scotland and the famous monastery at Whithorn, where he was always welcome. When passing through the Comber district, Patrick was abused badly by Saran, one of the sons of Caelbadh, the local Chieftain of the area. Conla, brother of Saran, hearing with great sorrow, how uncivilly Patrick had been treated, went to apologise for his brother' a behaviour and to venerate Patrick. He consecrated himself and all his property to his service, offering to him a remarkable field called the Plain of Elom, for the purpose of erecting a church thereon. Conla built the church and Patrick blessed him and. told him that his family and descendants would be great and. powerful. This came to pass as Conla was the ancestor of the great Magennis family of South Down, who later became the Earls of Roden. The widow of the fourth Marquis of Londonderry

was the daughter of the third Earl of Roden. She became a Roman Catholic in 1855, being largely influenced by Cardinals Manning and Newman. She built at her own great expense the beautiful Chapel and Schools in Newtownards and provided a set of Communion Plate in pure gold. She also gave a very large subscription for the building of the Roman Catholic Chapel in Comber. She is buried in a vault; beside her husband in the Old Priory in Court Street, Newtownards.

Conla's Church flourished and in the course of time became an Irish Monastery with many buildings for its many activities. Its situation was most likely on the plain across the river from the present Cricket Green. This would be "The most remarkable Plain of Elom." The lane leading down to the site of the old Andrews' Flour Mill and Bleach Green, past The Old House" (built in l744 and site of the present Cinema), is known to the older generation of Comber, as "The Monks' Walk", possibly as it leads to the site of the Monastery.

THE IRISH MONASTERY

St. Columbanus, a monk of Bangor, who did outstanding work in Europe, saw the monastic life as contemplating and. practising the presence of God. For him, Jesus is "the joy of Man's desiring" and "to long for God is greater bliss than any worldly pleasure or any earthly fulfilment." This is the idea we still have of life in a Monastery, but some Irish saints were not meek and mild; indeed some were depicted as violent, vengeful and mighty cursers.
The head of the monastery was the Ab or Abbot, who might be in Holy Orders and yet again he might not. He directed all the activities in the monastery and. his word was law. Under him was the Bishop, who attended to the religious services and who ordained, consecrated and performed other sacramental duties. There was the head of the monastic school, where the sons of the wealthy were educated, together with the eldest sons of the lay monks, They were taught Latin from a Latin Psalter, which they loved and constantly recited; (I wonder was it from this that children in National Schools learned everything by rhyming aloud in class, including spelling, tables, geography, history, grammar, and. Euclid. A method that was not always successful). They also learned to read, to write, to draw and to illuminate letters with beautiful designs. So they produced copies of beautiful and famous books, which took a long tine to complete and which became part of the monastery treasure. This work would be supervised by the Scribe, who would order the work to be done again, if it was not perfect, and they believed strongly in corporal punishment for carelessness.
Other Officers were the Lector or Reader, the anchorite, the butler, baker, cook, carpenter and. the most lowly - the janitor, who had his hone in the outside wall and. who rang the bell for the services, of which there were six daily.
The monks went to bed when the sun went down, slept and then rose for Nocturnes round the middle of the night. At dawn they attended Lauds then Terce at 9.00 a.m., because Christ was given to Pontius Pilate at that hour. Sext or mid-day was the next service as Jesus was put upon the Cross at that hour, then None or 3.00 p.m., because at that hour Jesus died on the Cross and finally Vespers was said in the evening. In the monastery, the smith included all branches of metal working in his craft. Not only did he work with iron, but he was a goldsmith, silversmith and coppersmith as well and produced many beautiful articles in gold and silver that became treasures of the monastery. He was the "gowan", one of the most important members of the community and was held in the highest esteem. The name is preserved in hereditary surnames, and place names like Gowan, Macgowan, Magowan, Ballygowan (the town land of the smith) and. Lisnagowan.

Some of the monasteries, with their bishops and priests, had frequent lapses from grace as in the case of Columkille or Columba. While studying with Finnian at Movilla, he, without permission, in the dead of night copied the Psalter from St. Martin's manuscript of the Gospels, brought by St. Finnian from Whithorn. He was found out and Finnian claimed the copy and. when Columba refused to give it up the case was taken before the Ard-ri, who pronounced his famous judgement,

"as every calf belonged to its mother cow, so every copy belonged to its mother book". Columba refused to accept the judgement and. war resulted with the slaughter of 3,000 men.
St. Colomba's condemnation by a Synod, his anathema by book, bell and candle, and his banishment to the Celtic colony just formed at Iona, is a chapter of history forgotten and more frequently replaced by the garbled tales of self-banishment on the part of this fiery churchman, whose early title was "The Wolf" and the name Columba, the Dove, only bestowed on him as a term of' sarcasm, The evening of his life spent amongst the savage people of North west Scotland made some atonement for the bloodshed of his early years.

THE AGUSTINIAN MONASTRY

The first Monastery in Comber was part of the ancient Celtic Church, which was organised, not on a diocesan basis but rather on a tribal one. It continued to flourish and grow wealthy, owning several townlands and considerable treasure. In the Annals of Loch-Ce it is recorded that in A.D, 1031 the Vikings burned Kill (or Cill) Combuir with its oratory, killed four clerics and carried off thirty captives. In the Annals of the Four Masters it is recorded that in 1121 A.D. Cormac, Abbot of Comar was killed. At the Synod of Cashel in 1101 A.D. Cellach, Bishop of Armagh began the reform of the ancient Celtic Church and by 1110 A.D. at the Synod of Bresail, the Roman Diocesan Episcopal system was adopted, with Cellach, as High Bishop or Archbishop of Armagh. It was at this time that continental Orders were being introduced to Ireland.
The Benedictines were never popular in Ireland, though they did settle at Down and Nendrum. The Augustinian Canons were popular and though leading a celibate life under religious rule, they wanted to be near people to whom they might minister, so they often set up their establishments in old monastic centres like Comber, where the Augustinian Rule was adopted by the existing community. It was known locally as the Black Abbey, because of the black habit worn by the monks. The Abbey became obscured in later years by the fame of the Cistercian Abbey sited near the present Square, and it completely disappeared from history, the Cistercians taking over its townlands. Portions of the buildings remained until 1644.

THE NORMAN ENGLISH. - John de Courcy 1177 A.D.

Pope Adrian 1V "for the purpose of extending the limits of the Church, checking the torrent of wickedness, reforming evil manners, sowing the seeds of virtue and increasing the Christian religion and in consideration of a payment of one penny per house per annum" gave Ireland to Henry 2nd of England. Leinster and the South and West quickly became the spoil of the King's Knights, but Ulster, the difficult, remained untouched until 1177 A.D. when John de Courcy, with twenty-two Knights and about 300 followers invaded Down, defeated the Irish at Downpatrick and paid his followers with large estates in the land of the rolling hills, Geoffrey do Marisoo (Morris) got Dundonald and his neighbour de Hanwood has left his name in Ballyhanwood; Ralph do Rossal (Russell) Ballyrussel got the Comber district, where he erected two and possibly three "Mottes". We have the remains of one near Maxwell Court, one at Ballyalloly and one at Ballyrickard - a mound at the Moate Corner on the Newtownards Road. On the opposite side of the road leading to Scrabo was a small church - a ruin in 1622 and all trace of it has since disappeared. Ballyrickard or White Richard was a Parish containing six townlands - Ballyrickard, Ringcreevy, Baliyneganeme, (Glass moss and Longlands), Ballyhenry, Castleavery and Carnemuck. Carnennuck was near the island of Slesny (Rough Island) and seems to be the townland of Cherryvalley which in 1679 was called Chirivally also Carrowcrossnemukley.

The Normans resettled existing religious foundations as at Nendrum in 1178, which de Courcy repaired for Benedictine monks from St. Bee's in Cumberland. In 1183 he repaired Downpatrick and established monks from Chester. In 1187 he founded a Cistercian Abbey at Inch, outside Downpatrick. This was on the site of an older Abbey called Erinagh, which he had destroyed. Another Cistercian Abbey was built by Affreca, wife of de Courcy, at Greyabbey in 1193. Affreca was the daughter of the King of Man, and on a journey from there to Co. Down, she was caught in a fierce storm at sea and vowed that if she reached land safely, there she would build a church.

In Comber, an abbey for the Cistercian Order, was built in 1199 and. it is generally believed that the man responsible for it was Brian Catha Dun, head of the O'Neills of Claneboye (not C1andeboye). In 1201 the founder had the misfortune to cross swords with do Courcy and perished in the conflict. The abbey was occupied by monks from Caermarthenshire and it flourished until such establishments were dissolved by Henry V111. In 1543 the last Abbot, John O'Mullegan resigned the Abbey and its possessions to the Crown. It had seven townlands - Ballymonster,Carnesure, Cullintraw, Cattogs, Troopersfieid, Ballynichol and half of Ballygowan. In previous years, when the Augustine Abbey closed it had taken possession at the townlands of that abbey and later got possession of Ballyaltikilligan, where there had been a church and also claimed the tithes of the quarter "Kilmud." So by l543 it was quite a wealthy and. prosperous foundation.

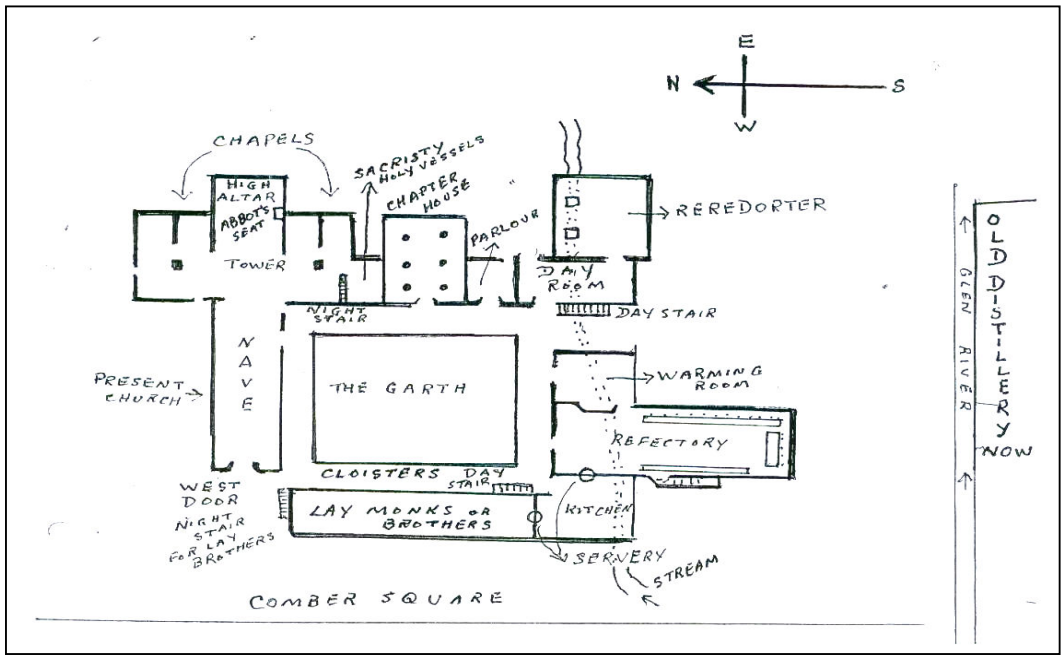
THE CISTERCIAN ABBEY IN COMBER

The Cistercian Abbeys of the twelfth century are all remarkably alike in layout, as the plan was dictated by the rules of the Order, The architect was to strive for utility and simplicity and all unnecessary decoration was to be avoided. In Comber, the present site of St. Mary's Parish Church was the site of the Cistercian Abbey.

When it was built it was a virgin site with no buildings in the vicinity and. it was in the angle of two rivers - the Enler and the Glen, where they joined. These rivers were essential, not only for fishing but also for sanitary purposes, as even in those days they had a crude but efficient type of flush toilet called the reredorter or necessarium. When the foundations of the recent new hall were being dug out, traces of the bed of a fairly broad stream, in the form of smooth damp clay, came to light. This came from the direction of the Glen River which passes down the side of the Upper Distillery and can be seen from the present Car Park in Killinchy Street. It is only a few yards away and a channel cut from it could have been used for the reredorter of the Abbey and to carry away refuse from the kitchen. It could also have bean used in later years as an open drain from the Glebe House, which was built in 1738, just as there was a similar open drain from the "Old House" (now the site of the cinema/supermarket) to the Enler River, which came to light as a covered drain or "tunnel", when the New Car Park was being made. The drain in the Church grounds flowed past the end of the gardens of the houses on the south side of Bridge Street and into the Enler River. People still living remember this stream.

In the Cistercian Abbeys it was customary for the highest building - the Church to be built on the North side of the Cloister, which was the centre of the Abbey complex. Greyabbey is a good example. This enabled the monks to work or read there, profiting from the sun and. sheltered from the wind; the cloister also linked the various buildings that were sited round it. The Garth was the area enclosed by the Cloister. In Comber the present Church probably occupies the site of the Nave and Choir of the Abbey Church and beyond the east end of the present Church would be the Transepts, each with two Chapels and a squat tower in the middle leading to the Presbyter containing the High Altar and the Abbot's Chair.
Here also would be the Piscina in the wall, where the Holy Vessels were washed, the water of which became "Holy Water". In the South transept, that is, towards the present graveyard, a doorway led to the Sacristy, where the Holy Vessels were kept and opposite would be the Night Stair leading to the Dormitory for the Monks. The Dormitory was on the East side of the Cloister above the Chapter House, the Parlour and. the Day Room, behind which was the reredorter or necessarium. The Chapter House was the room in which the monks met daily for monastic business. A chapter of the Rule of St. Benedict was read. They confessed their faults and received punishment, and. were detailed their various tasks for the day. The Parlour, next door, was the only place in the Abbey where essential conversation between the monks was allowed. Beside this was the Day Roan, the largest of' the rooms on this side of the square, and here the monks carried out whatever duties had been allotted to them.

On the South side of the Cloisters (the side towards the Distillery) beside the Day Roan, was the Day Stair, leading to the Monks' Dormitory. Beside this was the Warming Room, where a communal fire was kept burning during the winter months. This was the only place where the Monks could get warmed unless they visited the kitchen. Beside the Warming Room was the Frater - the Refectory or Dining Hall, set at right angles to the Cloister. At the end farthest from the door, towards the South was a raised platform for the Abbot or Prior and. his guests, and on the wall behind them was a Crucifix that acted as a reredos to the high table. Long tables with stone legs were placed down each side and the monks sat on benches with their backs to the wall, Silence daring the meal was interrupted only by a monk reading from the Bible, and the pulpit for this was in the West wall and was reached by stairs mounting southwards in a passage in the wall. Just inside the doorway to this passage was a locker for the reader's books.
The kitchen was at the west end of the south range of buildings, where it could serve not only the refectory of the monks on the south side but also the refectory of the lay brothers on the west. For each it had a service hatch with a revolving stone-topped table in each. On the west side of the Cloister, that is the side towards The Square, were the lay-brothers' refectory, necessarium, cellars and workshops, with their dormitory above and with a Night Stair leading to the Nave and at the other end a Day Stair leading to their refectory. Where The Square is now was probably their burial ground, as bones were dug up when digging out the foundations for the Gillespie Memorial in 1844.



Comber Abbey

After 1543 Comber Abbey lay deserted and decaying rapidly. All the treasures had been removed and anything of any value or use had been plundered. Queen Elizabeth gave the territory of North Down to various favourites in her Court in turn, but none of them could succeed in seizing it from the O'Neills of Claneboye. Sir Bryan McPhelim O'Neill of Castlereagh (the grey castle) the head of the O'Neills went to London to the Court of Queen Elizabeth, made terms with the Queen and received a grant of his lands from the Crown, including the northern and eastern parts of Down. He was naturally furious when this same land was given to Sir Thomas Smith, her Secretary, in 1571 and when he failed to take it then gave it to her favourite, the Earl of Essex. O'Neill in righteous anger decided on a scorched earth policy and in 1572 burnt the ancient abbeys of Movilla, Bangor, Holywood, Newtownards, Greyabbey, Comber and Nendrum and destroyed

every house in the area, lest they should provide shelter for the invaders. So, all the abbeys became desolate ruins.
Essex sailed from Liverpool on the 16th August, 1573 and by mistake landed on the Copeland Islands, then realising the error made his way to the shelter of Carrickfergus. He was disillusioned and embittered and based his failure on poor support from his friends. He was relieved of his task by the Queen and was made governor of Ulster. He was determined to have his revenge on the O'Neills. He captured Sir Bryan, his wife and his half-brother Rory MacQuillan and he killed about 200 others. This took place in Belfast, then a handful of cottages clustered near the Church, and a small castle at the ford of the Lagan, "They passed three nights and days together pleasantly and cheerfully, all good friends. Then when they were eating and drinking and. making merry the treacherous Essex struck, seizing Bryan, his wife and his brother and putting the others unsparingly to the sword - in Bryan's own presence." They were taken to Dublin in chains where they were killed and cut in quarters.

THE COMING OF THE SCOTS - HAMILTON AND MONTGOMERY

In 1586 Sir Con 0'Neill, who had succeeded. Sir Bryan as head of the O'Neills made a formal surrender to Queen Elizabeth and. received his lands back again. A few months before the death of Elizabeth in March, l603, Con O'Neill, a drunken sluggish man, being then with his brothers, friends and followers at Castlereagh, in **a** great debauch sent some servants to Belfast with small casks for wine. Returning drunk, the servants encountered some soldiers who treated them badly and. took the wine from them. In the scuffle one of the soldiers received a wound from which he died the next night. This was magnified and Con was put in prison in Carrickfergus Castle.

When James 1st came to the throne, the confinement was relaxed arid Con was allowed to walk the streets and entertain his friends in the day tine accompanied by only one soldier. Hugh Montgomery, Laird of Braid.stane, In Ayrshire, and. In favour with King James 1st, made a bargain with Con that he would arrange for his escape from Carrick, would take him to London and. there get him a free pardon in return for half his territory. Hugh Montgomery got a kinsman of his named Thomas Montgomery, the owner of a vessel trading to Carriok fergus, to make love to Anna Dobbin, daughter of the Town Marshal of Carrick and effect Con's escape. This he did, hiding Con In the tower of the Abbey Church in Bangor for three days until the wind was favourable for a quick crossing to Scotland. There he married. Anna Dobbin and both lived happily in Newtown till a ripe old age. Anna died in 1664.

"THE BEST LAID SCHEMES GANG AFT AGLEY."

Montgomery got his agreement with Con O'Neill concerning the division of the land, endorsed and registered in the Town Council Book of the Royal Burgh of Ayr, in case Con should change his mind. There remained only the obstacle of the King. Hugh Montgomery took Con to London and with the help of powerful friends viz the Earl of Eglinton - another Montgomery and in great favour with the King, and also Hugh's own brother, George, Dean of Norwich, who had kept the King well informed of events both in London and. in Dublin, he succeeded and Con made the necessary submission to King James, kissed his Majesty's hand, surrendered all his lands and begged the King's pardon. This was granted. The estate was to be divided into two parts, one to be given to Montgomery and. the other to be returned to Con O'Neill by letters patent. Sir Hugh Montgomery had achieved his aim. But another powerful Scot was watching with great interest and an even greater desire to share in the hand-out. He was Sir James Hamilton, a very clever and well-educated agent of the King.

In a chapel of the Parish Church of Dunlop, Ayrshire, stands a marble monument with the following inscription – "Here lye the bodies of Hanis Hamilton, sonne of Archibald Hamilton, of Raplock, Servant of King James the fift, and of Janet Denham, his wife, daughter of James Denham, laird of West Shields. They lived married together 45 years during which tine the said Hanis served the cure of this church. They were much beloved of all who knew them and

especially the Parishioners. They had six sonnes - James, Archibald, Gavin, John, William and Patrick and one daughter, marryed to William Mure of Glanderstown." The floor also bears an inscription: "Here lyeth the bodye of Hanis Hamilton, Vicar of Dunlop, quaha deceist ye 30 maii, 1608 ye age 72 years; and of Janet Denham his spouse."

This was a fitting monument to one who had laboured so long in the service of his church and was a reward typical of the times to a dedicated minister and. his lady wife - the mother of six sons, yet this exemplified the irony of another inscription on the wall of the same building above the door, dated l64l, "This school was erected and endowed by James, Viscount Hamilton, in love to his Parish, in which his father, Hans Hamilton was paster 45 years, in King James the sixt, his raigne". For no where else, either in Scotland, the land of his birth, or in Ireland, where he became wealthy and. powerful beyond his own ambitious dreams, and one of the greatest landowners in Ulster, does any monument exist to James Hamilton Viscount Claneboys.
He was probably educated at the University of St. Andrews. It is known that a James Hamilton received en M.A, degree there in 1585 and he is probably the person referred to since he had a prodigious capacity for learning. In a short time he was looked, upon as one of the greatest scholars and. hopeful wits of his time and was noticed by King James and his Council, who got him to write a book on the right of King James' interest and title to the crown of England after Queen Elizabeth's death. This he did to good effect and was sent to negotiate among the gentry and nobility of Ireland on this subject.
Hamilton's book pleased the King, but Hamilton, the man, pleased him even more. James V1 was doubtful of succeeding quietly to the throne of England on the death of Elizabeth, so in 1587 he sent two clever emissaries, James Fullerton and. James Hamilton to Dublin to keep up a correspondence with the Protestant nobility and. gentry there and to conceal the object of their mission, they set up a school of Latin in Great Ship Street. The schools flourished as Hamilton and. Fullerton were well qualified to teach the subject. One of their very successful pupils was James Usher, future Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland. He was the principal author of the Articles which formed the basis of the "Westminster Confession of Faith." On the establishment of Trinity College in 1592, Hamilton and Fullerton were the first two Fellows appointed.

In 1600 King James, realising that the old Queen's end was near, recalled both Hamilton and. Fullerton and sent them to London to act as the Scottish King's agents in the negotiations that would follow the death of Elizabeth. Hamilton was prominent at Court in London. He missed nothing of what happened in the capital and. there is evidence that he witnessed the Earl of Essex's a rebellion at first hand, although he took no part in it. Here he waited, watched, listened and bided his time for the destiny that he knew would be his when James became King.
Let us return to Sir Hugh Montgomery and Con O'Neill in London, where Montgomery had achieved his aim. Sir James Hamilton got to know what was going on and decided that he would like a share in the spoils. He paid his friend Sir James Fullerton a large sum of money to act on his behalf. Fullerton was at that time a great favourite Of James the First of England and Sixth of Scotland and he persuaded the King that the territory for Montgomery was far too large and. that Hamilton, who had served the King well, should have a share. The King agreed and Fullerton persuaded the King to give all the land to Hamilton on condition that he shared it out with Montgomery and Con O'Neill. Hamilton, thinking that Bangor would become a great port, took North Down for himself and gave Newtownards and part of the Ards Peninsula to Montgomery, while Con O'Neill retained Castlereagh.

CON O'NEILL - THE VICTIM OF SCOTTISH GREED.

Con O'Neill soon disappears from the scene. He was weak, drunken and. careless for the future and parted on most unfavourable terms with portion after portion of his land to Hamilton, Montgomery and. to Moyses Hill, ancestor of the Downshire family. For example, Montgomery wheedled eight townlands to the value of £15,000 out of Con for the only consideration of £317.

Montgomery also persuaded O'Neill to grant him the reversion of the remainder of his lands, should O'Neill ever be guilty of any unlawful act. Montgomery felt sure that within a reasonable tine he would be the owner of two thirds of the whole great estate. But once again he was outwitted by his fellow Scot, James Hamilton, who together with Moyses Hill persuaded the hapless Con into conveying the Castlereagh property to them, some 66,000 acres "upon the only consideration of paying for him a fine of £60 and the yearly rent of £160**."**

Con O'Neill died landless and penniless about 1618 and was buried in the townland of Ballymagh between Holywood and Belfast. The orchard of "Moat House" at Sydenham is the site of the ancient graveyard. One of Con's sons, Con Og took an active part in the rebellion of 1641**,** became a Colonel and was killed in 1643, near Clones by a Presbyterian minister after quarter had been given. Con's other son Daniel was taken to England and brought up as a Protestant at the Court of Charles 1st. He had a most distinguished career in the Army. In 1635 he petitioned for the recovery of his father's lands but was threatened with imprisonment.

He petitioned again in l64l describing in detail how his father had been tricked by Montgomery, Hamilton and Hill "taking advantage of a weakness and inexperience of the laws of the Kingdom and made to believe that he had committed some capital offence against the Crown**."** This petition was forgotten in the confusion of the Civil War. After the Restoration in 1660 Daniel O'Neill, whom Pepys refers to as "the great O'Neale" returned to England from the Continent, was loaded with wealth and honours and appointed to the very lucrative position of Postmaster-General. He had married Katherine, Countess of Chesterfield and he died childless in 1663 aged sixty. Charles 2nd wrote **"**Poore O'Neale died this afternoon of an ulcer in the gutts; he was as honest a man as ever lived. I am sure I have lost a good servant!"

THE HAMILTONS 1606 - 1679

James Hamilton was knighted in 1603, was created Viscount Claneboye on 4th May, 1622 and "died in 1643, without sickness, unexpectedly ere he finished his will**"- "**He was honourably entombed in the place he had prepared for himself in the church of Bangor in which his whole family is now laid by him**".** He was 82 years of age. So passed from the scene one of the great figures of the Ulster Plantation, hard-headed**,** grasping, determined, the most successful of all the Planters; a man of superior intelligence, unafraid of the formidable tasks his ambition laid in his path, the confident of Monarchs and witness of the greet events of his time. It was said that he was without conscience and perhaps that is so; he was possessive of what was his, regardless of how he came to possess it. He was meticulous in his management of his estates and his fortune. He was less than generous to those of his friends and servants, who bound to him by the expectation of reward from his will, were disappointed when he failed to sign that important document**.** Within thirty-five years of his death his vast estates passed out of direct succession and, about 1679 after long litigation was unequally divided among representatives of his brothers**.** Hamilton brought his brothers to Ireland to establish the family as a power in the country.

"Archibald is educated in learning**;** then bred a writer to the Signet in Edinburgh. He afterwards settled in Limerick as Commissary and becomes a man of great judgment and integrity. He bought a good estate and lived in great plenty and wealth. By his first wife he had two daughters and by his second wife he had 22 children."

"Gavin became a merchant in Glasgow and. later purchased lands at Holywood and obtained a lease of 'the great Bann near Coleraine and provided himself with three merchant ships."

"John was brought over by his brother James and bought a considerable estate at Monella**,** now Hamilton's Bawn in Co. Armagh**.** William also brought to Ireland by James**,** bought land in various parts of Down and was nominated first Provost of Killyleagh in 1613."

James Hamilton was married three tines. **"**His first two ladies proved but little comfortable to him**"** and "his putting away of his second lady was not with general satisfaction to his friends." There is no record of any divorce yet the son of his third wife succeeded him.

THE EARL OF CLANBRASSIL

James, second Viscount Claneboye was described by his father as "no a lad o' pairts", and asked his tutor not to drive him too much, and he was enormously fat, phlegmatic and easy going. He was very friendly with the second Viscount Montgomery. On one occasion on a journey from Bangor to Killyleagh Castle, where his wife was staying, he spent the night at Newtown House with his friend.

Having been supplied with plenty of "the medicine for flea-bitings" and regaled with stories of ghaists and of the "Broonie o' Newtown House", he retired to bed and slept in his shirt. In the morning he was awakened by a servant to find that his shirt had been cut off with the exception of the cuffs and the neck-band.

The servant was very discreet, blaming it on "the Broonie", but as he could not get a shirt big enough to fit the Viscount, he fixed him up with a piece of cloth, until he could call at the house of his cousin, Robert Hamilton, who lived just outside Comber at Catogs (Cattogs). Here he was supplied with another shirt big enough for his great bulk and was saved the embarrassment of meeting his wife at Killyleagh, shirtless, and more importantly, avoided her anger.

The years from 1640 were those of war and nation-wide strife. This was the rebellion of l64l when the Irish insurgents were led by Sir Phelim O'Neill and opposed the English forces under Munro, who devastated the county of Down in a savage onslaught. Command of the rebels was then assumed by Owen Roe O'Neill, who was a leader of a different stamp and who at Benburb totally defeated Munro and destroyed his army. The rebellion became a civil war and dragged on for years. In this upheaval, Lord Claneboye raised a force from his estates and although he was not fitted for this sort of thing, defended the country round Killyleagh**,** while Lord Montgomery also received a commission to be Colonel of 1000 foot and five troops of horse**,** all paid for by himself to defend Newtown and North Down.

In 1647 Lord Claneboye was elevated in the peerage to become the first Earl of Clanbrassil in the County of Armagh. In 1648 both he and Montgomery joined the Duke of Ormond in opposition to the Parliamentary Army, then in Ireland under Cromwell. Munro, having burned Antrim and Lisburn, joined the two Lords and their troops with a view to attacking Venables at Belfast, thus relieving the garrison at Carrickfergus. Venables got word of their intentions and surprised them on the plains of Lisnagarvey at a place called Lisnastrain not far from Lisburn. On the 6th December, 1649 they were defeated and totally dispersed. Clanbrassil and Montgomery escaped with difficulty and fled south and joined Ormond. Later they all surrendered and were imprisoned. Of the four thousand of the Royalist Army, one thousand foot were killed and 500 horse taken at Lisnastrain. Clanbrassil lost his estates for six years pending payment of a fine of £9,000. His wife, the clever Lady Ann Hamilton, a good and able woman, interceded with Cromwell, and paid half the fine to secure his release and eventually his estates. This was the result of being loyal to Charles 1st and taking up arms in the royalist cause against the "Roundheads" and Commonwealth Party. He was incapable of shouldering the burdens of his life and his times and must be regarded charitably. His son James who would have been his heir - a very hopeful youth, died at the age of fifteen years in 1658 and also his daughter in infancy. These tragedies demoralised Hamilton completely and broke his spirit. He became even more corpulent and so decayed gradually till at length he died on 20th June, 1659. He was buried with great splendour at Bangor, beside his father on 29th July, 1659.

He left behind him a much depleted estate and. large debts and in view of what was to happen after his death, it is interesting to note one certain provision in his will. "If it do happen that my sons decease without issue and heirs, I do then appoint the remainder of my estate to be divided into five equal portions among the eldest sons of my five uncles." (The brothers of his father)

Another odd occurrence was that the Secretary, having written the will perfectly, reached for the sand pot to sprinkle the pages and dry the ink, by mistake picked up the inkpot and spilled ink on the document. He dried up the blot as best he could and took it to his master for signature. His lordship would have none of it and directed that it should be rewritten. This was done and signed. The Secretary then rolled up the good copy inside the blotted one and put them away.

Many years later the Lady Alice Moore, wife of the second Earl, wishing to destroy the will to have the estate for herself, in her haste took the spoiled copy and destroyed it, not knowing that the good copy was left safe. On throwing the spoiled on to the fire, she exclaimed, "Let there be no more talk of wills."

When the only surviving son, Henry, succeeded to the title as third Viscount Clandeboye and second Earl of Clanbrassil in 1659, there were hopes of a marriage that would bring a large dowry and repair the family fortunes. But he went his own way, being "very much drawn to idleness and low companions."
He married Lady Alice Moore, daughter of the Earl of Drogheda, who brought no dowry but she was pleasure seeking and most extravagant and who added so much to the burden of debt on the estate that he had to sell a considerable portion of his lands to his tenants and others. It was said that she tried to supplant Nell Gwynne the affections of Charles 2nd. She persuaded her husband to set aside the disposition of the estate made by his father and to settle the property on her and her heirs. This was when she thought that she had burned the will. Henry's mother, the Lady Ann, hearing of this, told him "Son, expect that within three months, if you do this, that you will lodge with your grandfather and father in the tomb of Bangor." He signed the will and she became, as she thought, sole executrix, and sole heiress and within three months, under very suspicious circumstances, he died suddenly and within five hours was privately buried in Christ's Church in Dublin, where they were living. Soon after, his corpse was lifted and was privately buried in Bangor. Another story that reveals the character of the Lady Alice concerns a certain tenant visiting his Lordship for the renewal of his lease, a visit that would require a stay overnight in the Hamilton home and being aware of the proclivities of the Lady Alice, the influence she exercised upon her husband and the necessity of her goodwill, took the precaution of bringing with him his young, handsome and strapping son.

THE END OF THE HAMILTONS

This petulant woman, it was she, who in 1669 ordered the 'Preaching house' of the Rev. Gilbert Ramsay to be pulled down. This was the First Presbyterian Church in Bangor and had been built on Fisher Hill (Victoria Road). The destruction of his church is said to have broken the minister's heart. But retribution was at hand. Immediate action was taken by the five Hamilton cousins, James Hamilton of Tollymore, Sir Hans Hamilton of Hamilton's Bawn, James Hamilton of Neillsbrook, Archibald Hamilton and Patrick Hamilton. These men affronted by the character of the Lady, angered and stunned by the death of Henry and suspicious of that horrible even but unable to prove anything joined to contest the Lady's claim and assert that the will of Henry's father was valid and binding.

It was agreed that James of Tollymore and Hans of Hamilton's Bawn would act for all five. The Hamiltons were wea1thy and could afford the long, expensive legal proceedings. The Lady Alice could not. A serious fire in her Dublin home did damage to the extent of £4,000 and she also married again to find that her husband had less money then she had and could spend more than she could. Without money she found herself without friends and "she was severely chastised by the great wits of the day." In 1677, two years after the death of her husband, she died alone and neglected in Roscommon House, Dublin on the 26th December. Her servants had her corpse sent to Bangor privately and so buried without any solemnity. About a month later the case ended, but the two Hamiltons betrayed their trust and would not share the estate, showing that they still had

the Hamilton avarice and trickery. There were other Hamiltons, cousins and nephews but the Bangor branch thus died out. Bangor and the "faire stone house of Planter James of 1606 passed to James Hamilton of Tollymore, grandson of William, the brother of the first Lord Claneboye in 1679.

SIR HUGH M0NTGOMERY

Hugh Montgomery was born about the year 1560, the son of Adam Montgomery, 5th Laird of Braidstane in Ayrshire. According to the writer of the Montgomery Manuscripts, a nephew of Hugh, he was of middle stature, of ruddy complexion and had a manly, sprightly and cheerful countenance. On the other hand the portrait of Hamilton now in Cast1eward, shows him to be a handsome man of middle height, with a high forehead, angular face and clipped beard and in general appearance more Spanish than Scottish. Of dark complexion, his casually formal pose suggests some arrogance, but little of the astuteness attributed to him.

Montgomery was "strong and agile beyond that of any of his children, he had a vigorous constitution, seldom being sick. He was greatly sober, being temperate in meat and drink.
He coursed badgers and hares with greyhounds on foot and frequently on horseback with hounds he hunted deer, the fox and wolves when occasion offered. Wolves did not disappear until late in the 18th century and were very numerous in l640. His lordship kept a bloodhound (in Scotland called a sleuth-hound) to trace out thieves and woodkerns (native Irish); he also had a huntsman, a falconer, to manage his hawks, netts and spaniels. He would not play games for money. He was well educated, knowing Latin, Logic and Ethics. He spoke gravely and was a good writer. He had a soldier's temper and showed it in his dealings with Hamilton."

Both men had their eyes set on North East Ireland, where they hoped to obtain from James V1 of Scotland, and 1st of England, grants of large tracts of land on which to settle their relatives and friends. They were both well-known at Court, both had powerful friends there and both expected a reward for services rendered.

THE MONTGOMERIES

Hugh Montgomery, 1560 - 1636, Laird of Braidstane in Ayrshire had been a soldier in Holland under the Prince of Orange. He had a soldier's temper and showed it in his dealings with Hamilton. He was made a Knight in 1605 and a Viscount in 1622. Montgomery arrived in North Down in 1606 and found a wasted countryside. "In three parishes could not be found thirty cabins nor any stone walls but ruined, roofless churches and a few vaults at Greyabbey and a stump of an old castle at Newtown, in each of which some gentlemen sheltered themselves."

In Newtownards, the stump of the castle in which Montgomery and his friends stayed was the castle that formerly belonged to the O'Neills, but which was then a ruin, beside the east wall of the Old Priory in Court Street, also in ruins. Montgomery set to work at once and the walls of the castle were roofed in as a house for Lady Montgomery and her children and servants. They proceeded as fast as possible to build stone houses although the poorer men in the wild and homeless country adopted the Irish fashion and built houses of wattled booths and sods. By 1607, the people, not being able to supply all their needs, it was common for Scottish people in favourable weather to ride, carrying wares for sale from Stranraer to Portpatrick, leave their horses there, cross to Donaghadee, hire horses and ride to Newtown market, sell their produce and return home by bedtime. It was also a good opportunity to have a good gossip about old times and recent events both in the old country and the new.

In 1611 the Plantation Commissioners reported that Newtown in the Ards had 100 stone houses all peopled with Scots. Lady Montgomery had farms at Greyabbey, Comar and Newtown. She also encouraged woolen and linen manufacture; the woolen trade flourished until 1673 when it was forbidden by England. While Hugh Montgomery spent his tine in disputes and lawsuits with Hamilton, Lady Montgomery continued the building work.
About 1610 a portion of the ruined Abbey in Comber was fitted up as a Church for the rapidly increasing population. This was the site occupied by the present Church of Ireland.
Hugh Montgomery was a decided Episcopalian and so was careful that the Churches under his patronage adhered to prelacy, and this order continued throughout his lifetime. Viscount Claneboye paid for one third of the rebuilding as he owned one third of Comber.

Sir Hugh supplied six bells for the churches on his estate (the Comber one was lost in the Rebellion of 1641). Sir Hugh also provided a Geneva or "Breeches" Bible for use in each of the churches. It was an English translation prepared by Protestants in exile in Geneva and. printed there in 1560. It got its name as it used the word "breeches" for "aprons" in Genesis Chapter 3 verse 7. The entrance to the Church was on the north side. The bell was a necessity as few people possessed a clock and in any case forty-two houses had been built on what is now the Ballydrain Road near the stream which flaws into the Comber River Estuary. This village, built by Lord Claneboye was called New Comber and the bridge over the river was called New Comber Bridge - a name it still bears to this day, and in the vicinity is a large dwelling house called New Comber House. Just before you reached the bridge the road or main street widened out into a small square in which was a Mercat Cross or in present day language a market cross.
It also had a ball green and on the river a ducking stool. Lord Claneboye had maps made of all his estates and there is one of this village still in existence, made by Thomas Raven. The house at Catoge (Cattogs), the residence of Robert Hamilton, nephew of Lord Claneboye is also marked.

In 1622 Sir Hugh Montgomery's eldest son also called Hugh married Lady Jean Alexander, daughter of Sir William Alexander, Secretary for Scotland. As a wedding present Sir Hugh built a large Manor House on a gently rising bill outside Comber for the happy couple and called it Mount Alexander Castle.
From this we get the present Castle Street and Castle Lane. The stone for the building came from the ruins of the old Cistercian Abbey. Not all the stones were taken and some of them are in the walls surrounding the present Church. One at least has been recognised as it bears a Mason's Mark in the form of a cross with a dot at the end of each arm. It was in the gable end of an old building (the Scouts' Den) and is now being removed for preservation inside the Church~ Masons in those days went about in bands and each man had a special mark which he made on a stone at the end of each day. The Secretary then knew how much work the mason had done and he was paid for that amount of work. The same mark is on a stone in Greyabbey, showing that the same band of masons who built Greyabbey from 1193-99 also built Comber from 1199-1220 A.D. Lady Montgomery also had a corn mill, in Comber to provide meal for the people. These were driven by water-wheels and in Comber the mill was on the opposite side of the river to John Andrews Bleach Green and was known as "The Old Mill". This may have been the mill attached to the Monastery there and way have been renewed by Lady Montgomery.
Lady Montgomery died (the date is unknown) and Viscount Montgomery married the Viscountess Wigtown in 1630, but she stayed only a few months in Newtown House, built on the site of the Old Priory buildings and returned to Scotland for good. The Viscount visited her from time to time. He died in May, 1636 and was buried in September. He was 76 years of age. Thomas Kennedy and John Lockart, both of Comber, led the funeral procession, followed by 76 old and poor men in black gowns and carrying black staves, then came the gentry in order of importance.

The records of Hugh, the second Viscount Montgomery were lost, but it is known that in 1641 on the outbreak of the rebellion he received a commission to be Colonel of 1,000 foot and five troops

of horse all paid for by himself. He died in 1642 of a "drowsy distemper". His son Hugh, the third Viscount, on receipt of a letter from his father regarding the state of his health, hurried home and saw his father die.
The third Viscount Montgomery was the most likeable of all the Montgomerys, but his life was a long record of misfortune. As a child he had fallen and so hurt his ribs on his left side that an abscess had formed leaving a wide opening, which was covered by a silver plate. When the plate was removed his heart could be seen beating. He had been attended by Dr. Maxwell, who told King Charles 1st. The King asked Dr. William Harvey to see him, although he was now a strong and healthy man. Harvey took him to see the King, who kept him at Court a few days. It was at this time that he received the letter from his father and returned to Newtownards. He then took over the command of his father's forces.

THE TROUBLES OF THE SIXTEEN FORTIES

Charles the First believed strongly in 'the Divine Right of Kings' and had as his advisers Strafford and Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, who were both determined to make him independent of Parliament. Their mismanagement caused two parties to grow up by degrees, one for King and Church and. the other for Parliament and the Puritans. Laud tried to force the Scottish Church to use the English Prayer - Book and this provoked such a storm of anger that the Scots bound themselves by a National Covenant, flew to arms and invaded England. Charles who had neither men nor money had to patch up a peace with the Scots and Presbyterianism was restored to Scotland in 1640. The Irish, taking advantage of England's troubles broke into rebellion in October, 1641, determined to expel the English, possess their estates and re-establish the supremacy of the Roman Catholic Church.
The conflict was begun with the utmost savagery, and in its progress the most wanton and repulsive cruelty was inflicted on such Protestants as fell into their hands. Neither women nor children were spared. The brains of the children were dashed out before the eyes of their mothers, some were thrown into pots of boiling water and some were given to pigs that they might be eaten. A protestant clergyman was actually crucified. Many had their hands cut off or their eyes put out, before they were killed. It is estimated that at least 40,000 perished. The Presbyterians suffered less than other Protestants, as their leading ministers had been driven out of the country and. many of their people had followed them.
The rebels swept up to within a mile of Comber, where they met with such strenuous opposition from the Scots colony of North Down that their progress was completely stayed. Civil War broke out in England in August, 1642 between the two parties - Cavaliers and Roundheads and because of this troops could not be sent to Ireland. Ten regiments were speedily raised in Scotland and the first contingent arrived in April 1642. After a few weeks campaign Antrim and Down were cleared of rebels and a respite was gained.

In June, five army Chaplains constituted themselves into a Presbytery at Carrickfergus and took measures to reorganise the Church in Ireland according to Presbyterian rules. Applications for ministers were received from many parishes of which Comber was one. Three years later in 1645 James Gordon came to Comber as the Presbyterian minister, mainly through the influence and exertions of the Lady Jean Alexander, widow of the second Viscount Montgomery.
In the Civil War the Montgomerys took the side of the King and in 1646 Viscount Montgomery under General Munro headed the forces at Benburb and "warmly charging but coldly supported" was captured by Owen Roe O'Neill and clapped into Cloughwooter Castle, a stronghold on an island. He was released two years later and returned to devote his time and money to the furtherance of the Royalist cause. In December 1648 he married. Mary Moore, sister of the first Viscount Moore. She was only seventeen years of age and when she appeared in Newtownards

with a sister and two young brothers, there were great rejoicings with a tournament and sports lasting several days. Montgomery accepted from the King the appointment of General of the Royalist Forces in Ulster. A momentary gleam of success for the Royalists encouraged the Scots to proclaim Charles 2nd as King, at Newtownards from the Mercat Cross. There was great rejoicing and revelry in the town, claret flowed from the spouts of the Cross to be caught in any kind of utensil and drunk. Trumpets and drums were sounding, guns were firing and bonfires set alight and every window in the town was illuminated with candles. This took place in 1649 after Charles 1st had been beheaded, when many supporters of the Parliamentary Party, including the Scottish Presbyterians were so shocked that they turned to support the young Prince of Wales and the Royalist Party.

CROMWELL IN IRELAND

Cromwell, after settling with the English Royalists, made short work of the Irish. At Lisnastrain on 6th December, 1649, Montgomery was defeated and fled to join the King' a chief servant, the Marquis of Ormonde, and in April 1650 they went to Clonmel and submitted to Cromwell. Montgomery was allowed to return to Newtownards to stay with his young wife and see his daughter Jean, then three months old, for the first time.
He was soon summoned to London and was banished to Holland where he wearied and. worried, thinking of his girl wife. At the end of a winter in Holland he petitioned for release. He appeared before the Council in 'Whitehall and was fined £3,000. He had to go to Dublin regarding the fine and stayed there with his wife and children at the house of his brother-in-law, Viscount Moore, but this was not allowed, and he had to go into lodgings. He was later permitted to go to Howth Castle but was persecuted by being called to Dublin so often, sometimes twice a week, regarding fines, taxes etc all to impoverish his estate, that he had to go into lodgings again. Then his wife died, in 1655 at the age of 24 years and he was 35. He was again imprisoned in various places but was eventually released on account of ill-health, on bail and was eventually allowed to return to Newtownards.
He was very depressed and because of too much inactivity and too much wine he became corpulent and unhealthy. He was persuaded to reside with his mother at Mount Alexander and with her husband, Major General Monro, who had been imprisoned in the Tower but later released. When Henry Cromwell came to Ireland the persecution ceased and. Montgomery went to Dublin to pay his respects to him. There he had a stroke from which he recovered and he returned to Comber to enjoy the company of his grandmother, mother, sister and brother and Major-General Monro.

December, 1659 saw the last of the Montgomery troubles. In May, 1660 Charles 2nd became King. Montgomery, who had been active in his interests hurried to Whitehall to kiss His Majesty's hand. Honours were showered on him. He was created Earl of Mount Alexander in 1661 and received a grant of lands in Kildare, which however, was later revoked. He was appointed Master of Ordnance and Military Stores in Ireland. He married the widow of Sir William Parsons and this was a happy union. He had three short years of happiness - he was allowed to keep £500 per year from his estate, he had his pay from the Army and his wife had money. His daughter Jean and his two sons attended boarding schools in Dublin, he had clothes, coaches and money to spare, but in September 1663, his body being grown unwieldy and. bulksome, a fatal lethargy attacked him - the drowsy distemper of his father - and on a hurried journey from Mount Alexander to Dublin, this best of the Montgomerys died at Dromore. He was buried by torchlight in the church his grandfather had restored in Newtownards, with great pomp and heraldic display.

HUGH – SECOND EARL OF MOUNT ALEXANDER.

Hugh, the second Earl of Mount Alexander and fourth Viscount Montgomery, was only thirteen years of age when his father died in 1663 and in that year misfortune came to him when Newtown House was burned with all its contents. However, William Montgomery (the writer of the Montgomery Manuscripts, 50 years later) secured for him a grant of land in exchange for the lands in Kildare. Then he was 21 years of age i.e. in 1671 he came to live in Newtownards in the Gatehouse of' the burned mansion. In the following year he married Catherine Dillon, who brought no dowry and who died in the year following her marriage, 1673.

The interest had not been paid on the old debts of the estate and. these were such a burden that in November, 1675 the young earl sold the whole parish of Newtownards to Sir Robert Colvil for £10,640. Later in the same month another slice was also sold to him for £3,000. This was land at Greyabbey, Ballyblack and Cunningburn. The young Earl went to England and took for his wife Elinor Berkley, daughter of Lord Fitzharding, a worthless scamp. She brought him little money but ran him into further debt.

A bit of common gossip in the little country town at the Earl's gate (Comber) is found in a letter dated 1680 from the Rev. James Gordon, Presbyterian Minister of Comber to his daughter Jean in Edinburgh. "Receive here with some of myne own and brethren's principles which I did communicate some two years ago unto my poore Earle of Mount Alexr. His English lady and highly Episcopall has moved him to fall off his estat almost and its very likely at her father Lord Fitte harding his coming over to Ireland she'll move him to goe live in England." Relations between Mr. Gordon and. the Montgomerys were never very good. In l649 when the Lady Jean, daughter of the first Earl, was born, Mr. Gordon refused to baptise her unless the Earl would stand on the penitential stool and recant his support of the Episcopalians. This he refused to do. Despite pleadings to Mr. Gordon by the first Earl's mother, the Lady Jean Alexander, who had always been a Presbyterian as had the first Viscount's wife, the baptism was refused and was done by Rev. Mr. Matthews of the Church of Ireland. In 1663, Gordon with other ministers was arrested for complicity in Blood's Plot (To restore the Commonwealth).
They were given the option of staying in prison or leaving the kingdom, although there was no trial, nor any evidence to connect them with the plot. Lady Montgomery (Jean Alexander), who had pleaded for the baptism, interceded on behalf of Gordon and he was given liberty to remain in Comber. Lady Montgomery died in 1670 and, in 1684; Gordon's name is mentioned as a tenant in Ballyhenry. There is no record of his death, but he did conform to the Episcopal Church.

In a very few years it became necessary to sacrifice more of the estate and this time in 1679 the manor and lordship of Mount Alexander went to Sir Robert Colvil for the sum of £9,780 - the Earl reserving only the Manor House and farm buildings, gardens, orchards, demesnes with certain townlands, tithes etc. He thus lost two thirds of what his father had left him. He seems to have passed his time in struggles to be free of debt, pleading for this, his father's losses in the service of the state. He died in 1716 without issue and what was left of the estate went to his brother Henry, who had been living a quiet life of a country gentleman at Rogerstown, Dublin.

Henry, a kind, easy tempered man, came to Comber with his two sons, Hugh and Thomas. He devoted himself to farming. He died in 1731.

Henry the third Earl of Mount Alexander and fifth Viscount was succeeded by his son Hugh, to whom he left in his will £20, as he had made ample provision for him before his death. To his second son Thomas be left all his personal property and. £997 owed to him by Lord Howth.

Hugh was a good-looking proper man who devoted himself to farming. He married Elinor Barnwell in 1703. They had five children who all died, in childhood. Hugh, the fourth Earl and sixth Viscount, died in l744 and was buried in Howth.

He was succeeded by his brother Thomas, seventh Viscount and fifth and last Earl. He had bean a witty and nimble boy, He married in 1725 a Hugenot - the young widow of Philip Grueber, a London merchant. She had been Marie Angelique de la Cherois, daughter of Daniel de la Cherois of Lisburn. Much of Thomas Montgomery's time in the early years of the marriage was spent in Dublin on supposed business connected with lawsuits. His wife became suspicious of the frequent and long visits. The last seventeen years of his life were spent in the Manor House in Donaghadee. He died in 1760 at Hillsborough Castle, being the 80 years of age.

The Countess survived her husband and when she died the remnants of the great estate went to her cousins Samuel de la Cherois of Donaghadee and Nicholas Crommelin of Carrowdore Castle.

COMBER - THE VILLAGE

Comber, at the confluence of the Enler and the Glen rivers is one of the satellite towns and villages encircling Belfast. It is in fact a village, but is exceptional in its population size, in part due to the development which has occurred since 1950. Despite the stimulus to development given by the Plantation, the linen industry and the advent of factory organisation, Comber has only slowly progressed in size. Only after the 1939-45 War did the town develop into a mushroom growth of urban extension. The absence of many buildings between two widely separated periods of good town planning, gives the town a close juxta position in a small area, of ancient and modern. A dual personality has resulted in having a degree of local village life and 'imported' urban features. From the following figures it will be seen that the population did not have any significant increase until 1951.

POPULATION

Year: - **l764** (1700) **1831** (1377) **1841** (1964) **1881** (2165) **1901** (2095) **1911** (2686)
1951 (2508) **l961** (3980) **1971** (5575) **1975** (6,000 plus).

In 1841 there were 368 houses and in 1971 there were 1630 houses.

The original village consisted of a number of cottages and cabins built around or near the Cistercian Monastery and depending on it for support and employment. At the time the Scots came with Sir Hugh Montgomery and. Sir James Hamilton in 1606 a few families settled around Comber, but the greatest change was when Sir James Hamilton in 1610 built a new and planned village on a new site. This was on the Ballydrain Road, just outside the present village. A map of this new development is still in existence and was drawn by Thomas Raven in 1625. The top of the map is South, the bottom North and it is marked "Owld Cumber" for the original village and Cvmber for the new development. It obviously became known as New Comber as that is the name of the bridge over the stream at the present time, and in the vicinity is a large dwelling house called New Comber House. This village had one main street with two side streets branching off towards the Comber River. On the north side of the bridge the road widens out to form a square, in which is marked a Mercat Cross. On the south side of the village beside Cullintra is a Ball Green in which is marked what looks like either a gibbet or a Maypole. Each cottage has a long strip of land attached for the production of food for home use. When the present town was re-planned in 1731 the site was moved two thirds of a mile to the North-West to the crossroads, as communication became more important and. this gave us our present Georgian Square, which had been a burial ground probably for the Abbey. It is interesting to note the early Georgian houses, in The Square, with their distinctive windows and 'Sentry-Box' doorways.

Since the arrival of the Scots settlers, agriculture has been an important basis of Comber life. Built on the townland of Town Parks (497 acres), Comber town (95 acres) is surrounded by large farms. For a long time an agricultural system, manorial in its outlook, and feudal in its relationships, dominated the area. More and more houses are going up in the Town Parks but some land survives as an example of the unique organisation of small, annually rented, holdings situated near a large industrial area.

The cottages forming the prototype Comber possessed a considerable portion of land and set an early precedent to Town Park farming. The origin of the system was that when the town people found it difficult to pay rates and rents on a labourer's income or safeguard themselves against unemployment they approached the landlord for a piece of land for cultivation or grazing animals to provide extra money. They consequently began farming the land within the Town Parka boundary. Tilling was achieved either by the spade or possibly using a small wooden plough pulled by man or beast. These small-holders gained supplementary incomes by selling the surplus in local markets. In 1818 the rent was fixed at £1 per acre and in that year 54 out of 91 tenants farmed the Town Parks and the greatest proportion lived in The Square.

The disappearance of the market in Comber had led to specialisation in Market Gardening to cater for the urban populations of Belfast and Newtownards. Comber is noted for early potatoes, but every effort is made with the help of fertilisers to provide a wide variety of' garden produce.

FAIRS AND MARKETS

In the early years of the Scots settlement the advancement of trade was restricted by subsistence agriculture and the scarcity of money encouraged a form of barter. Even by the nineteenth century, people maintained a simple standard of life. Pig-rearing - "the gentleman that pays the rent" - and embroidery provided a supplementary income. The market function slowly developed from two fairs- (April; 5th and October 19th) plus a weekly market, by 1750 to a peak of four annual fairs (January, April, June and October) in the late 19th century, beside the regular market day on Tuesday. The town was important as a collecting centre for much agriculture produce and dealt extensively in animals (pigs, sheep and cattle) and Linen. Several horse dealers (including James Milling) attended fairs, when the horse was extensively employed in military affairs, and traded with British and European markets. The town possessed a variety of business establishments, including a local sufficiency of small secondary industries, designed to cater for the needs of an agricultural district - blacksmiths, carpenters, saddlers, harness-makers,- enterprises well adapted to local resources and demand. The town lost value as a market centre with the coming of swift railway and motor transport. The farmer found it more profitable to deal directly in Belfast and the housewife found it easy to travel to shop in the city. The appearance of the Ulster Bank in 1850 and the Northern Bank in 1865 indicates the prosperity of the town at that period.

Situated at the head of Strangford Lough, Comber in the past maintained a reasonable maritime trade through its 'outport' at Castlespie and Ballydorn. At Castlespie there was a pier extending into Strangford Lough for about 400 yards and on which was a narrow gauge railway in connection with the Lime, Brick, Tile and Pottery Works. Vessels of considerable tonnage could discharge and load there, but in 1771, when John Andrews built his Flour Mill, wheat was brought by boat, not only from the little ports on Strangford Lough but from Dublin, Drogheda and even the North American colonies and landed at the mouth of the Comber River, within a mile of Comber. In 1850 it was felt that the erection of a pier would increase the town's prosperity, so that ships of 200 tons might berth. The advent of the railway in 1850, however, killed the idea. Cargoes of coal from North-West England and particularly Scotland increased after 1850 as the local turf from the 'Royal Bog' at Moneygreer became scarce and the local coal remained unexploited. Norwegian timber was commonly imported, while wines, silk and brandy were regularly smuggled, hence the name "the Ghaist Hole", from a trick involving a ghostly clad figure being pulled across on a rope suspended across the road. This effectively kept imaginative and inquisitive natives from the scene of operations. It was also used to bring in a cargo of muskets at the time of the 1798 rebellion.

Exchange cargoes, destined mainly for Britain included potatoes, pigs, sheep and sand. Sand from the Glass Moss was in great demand as it was used in making glass. Coal was regularly imported until the 1939 - 45 war. The fairs ceased around the time of the 1914-18 war, while the markets gradually petered out. The passing of the fairs and markets was the initial step in a commercial decline and Newtownards became a favourite centre for shopping especially on Saturday, the market day. The Market House, erected about 1850 in Killinchy Street on the site now occupied by the Telephone Exchange, was no longer required and was used as a store by the Distillery Company. From then until 1950, Comber, lacking social provision, was a decaying town. Since 1950, Comber's main objectives - housing, water and sewage - have been achieved. There was no proper sanitation until 1950 and many houses in old Comber still had dry toilets for some years after that. A piped water supply did not come until shortly before 1957 to replace the former pumps and street fountains. A £150,000 sewage scheme to serve the town has been constructed at Ballyrickard on the shores of Strangford Lough.

In the past, the Parish was the unit of local government. The Established Church was responsible for collecting the Parish and County cesses fixed by the Applotters. Comber Parish was tithe free except for three townlands. Taxes, levied on the parish at a fixed amount per acre, were spent on caring for the poor and maintaining the by-roads.

The town was under the jurisdiction of the Manor of Comber and a Manorial Court was held every third Thursday for recovery of debts not exceeding £10. The excise Officers from Comber supervised trading in the Lough, as smuggling was common in rum, wine, sugar, tea and whiskey. Comber was by-passed by the Anglo-Normans, who defended the opposite end of the Dundonald gap and by the Scots, who chose Newtownards as their headquarters.

Spring (April 5th) and autumn (October 19th) were the hiring fairs. About 1900 a ploughman earned £8 for six months, including food and lodging and was engaged on the down payment of 1/- (A day's wage). Boys earned from £2 - to - £4 according to experience. Thursday was the day to bring barley to the Distilleries. About the year 1900 prices were;-

Potatoes 2/- per cwt	Bacon 6d per lb.	Straw 1/2 per cwt.
Coal 114/- per ton.	Oats 4/6 per cwt.	Sand 8/ - per load.
Turnips/Cabbages/Carrots 6d per doz	A young Pig 10/6	A fattened Pig £2
Dress 4/6	Apron 9d	Stockings 6d to 1/- a pair.

Many buildings in old Comber are over 100 years old, giving a wide variation in house types from Georgian and Victorian select residential type to old, ill-designed., one and one and a half storied working class dwellings. These are at present fast disappearing and will only be remembered in photographs. Several rows of four-roomed terrace houses were built for workers in the Spinning Mill around which they are grouped. They were let at extremely low rents were kept in excellent order. Comber was unfortunate that it was not under the Town Improvement Act of 1898 and. so changed little territorially, in quality or number until 1950.

From a small Plantation village, Comber quickly gained fame as a manufacturing and commercial centre. At the peak of its prosperity the town provided contacts between the rural community and the outside world and was the centre of education, banking and other professional services for the district. It was a Stage-coach centre in pre railway days, on the route between Belfast and Downpatrick. Most of the present road system was in place by 1800. Evidence for the periods of town growth lies in the early Georgian Square, the Victorian residential and workers' houses, the inter-War semi-detached buildings and the post 1939-45 War estates.

INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE IN COMBER IN 1865

Linen Manufacture 1	Hotels 4	Blacksmith 2	The Spinning Mill 1	Wheelwright 1	Saddler 1
The Distilleries 2	Dyer 1	Carpenter 1	Sewed Muslin Manufacturers 3	Tailor 3	Milliner 3
Miller and Linen Merchant 1	Draper 2	Dress-Maker 3	The Gas Company 1	Watchmaker 1	Grocer 11
Marine Dealer 1	Tannery 1	Public House 9	Tallow Chandler 1	Painter & Glazier 1	

THE ANDREWS FAMILY

The Andrews family looms large in the industrial history of Comber. One or more of their ancestors came from Scotland to try for fortune in the newly acquired estates of Hamilton and Montgomery. They are first mentioned in the Muster Roll of 1630 of Viscount Claneboye, his men and arms, Island of Mahee thus :- "No. 1251 Thomas Andrew - Sword and Musket; No. 1329 Robert Andrew - Sword and Snaphance. (A snaphance was a superior weapon with a spring hammer.)
In 1641 occurred the disastrous rebellion of the native Irish, and Robert and James Andrew mustered at Comber and Andrew at Portaferry. These were probably the sons of Thomas and Robert of Mahee. The Civil War between Charles 1st and Parliament was being fought at this time and when Cromwell had disposed of the King, he came over to Ireland and ruthlessly stamped out the rebellion. Protestant landlords, who had fought for the King, were heavily fined. This was when Viscount Montgomery suffered so severely that his estates never recovered. At the Restoration, of Charles 2nd, grants were made against arrears of pay to those officers who had fought for Charles 1st or Charles 2nd and Lieutenants Richard and John Andrew appear on these lists.

On the Rent Roll of Ye Manor of Mount Alexander for 1684, Robert Andrew holds the lease of 31 years of a tenement and one rood of land for the yearly rental of £1: 6: 6. This Robert was probably the son of Robert Junior who mustered at Comber in 1642. He in turn had two sons John and James both of Comber. James was a merchant and had one son James who died in 1712 and his father died in 1727.

John had a son born in 1698 called Thomas, who was the founder of the Andrews' interest in milling. On the Mount Alexander rent roll there is a mention of two mills in Comber in 1684 held on lease by John McMurray for 41 years from 1681 at an annual rent of £47, Both were multure mills, that is, the tenants were bound to have their corn ground here and pay the accustomed toll of the sixteenth grain to the miller. If he had it ground at any other mill, he had to pay the Lord of the Manor two shillings for every barrel of corn ground the miller's multure or soccage was scarcely half this.

McMurray's lease expired in 1722. He probably held it as an investment and let it out to the actual miller yearly. Sir Robert Colvil bought the Manor in 1679 and gave the lease to Mrs. Jane Meredith in 1726 for a forty-one year period. She gave the sub-lease on the Upper Mill (on the site of the Laureldale Hall) to Thomas Andrews, who had already been working it for four years that is in 1722, when he was 24 years of age. Mrs. Meredith died in 1730 and the lease of the two mills went to her nephew John Meredith, who assigned it to the Rev. Charles Morris. In 1764 Rev. Morris died and his widow sold the last three years interest to William Bell, who had worked the Old Mill (opposite the Cricket green) for him. In 1768 when the lease had expired John Andrews got a fresh lease of the two mills from Alexander Stewart (ancestor of the Londonderry family) who had bought the Manor of Comber from Sir Robert Colvil. This lease was for the lives of his three sons, Michael, John and James at a yearly rent of £120.
Sir Robert Colvil in 1679 gave two acres adjoining the mill race of the Old Corn Mill to Thomas Hannington on lease for ever. In 1764 Lord Mount Alexander gave T. Hannington "One house and garden backside in Cumber and three acres of land in the Holme between the Great Water and the Old Corn Mill together with all the Head Weirs, Mills, Dams, Mill Seats already erected and Tuck Mills to be erected on the premises or part thereof." Altogether about 76 acres were granted forever at a yearly rent of *£5.* In 1722 T. Hannington conveyed all these to Charles Caldwell and in 1733 Caldwell demised all these to Thomas Andrew, plus a parcel of ground adjoining, containing seven acres, bounded on the North by the domestic of Mount Alexander, for the lives of John, his first son aged 12, Thomas his second son aged 6 and Aaron his fourth son aged 3, with a covenant for renewal.

Thomas Andrew was a man of some importance in Comber, for although he was a Dissenter, he was a Churchwarden in the years l733-4~5 along with James Lemont of Gransha Mill and they built the entrance pillars to the Church grounds and had their names carved on the right hand one - to be seen to this day. The name Lemont is sometimes spelt Lamont and in the Comber district was pronounced Lamon. It is from this that the name LA MON HOUSE, the restaurant at Gransha, is derived. Thomas Andrew married Agnes Reid, daughter of James Reid, a linen draper of Ballygowan, and when her husband, Thomas, died she went to live at the Trench and died there in 1776. In 1735, Thomas Andrew changed the name to Andrews to distinguish it from Thomas Andrew, a distant cousin, the father of John Andrew, a cooper in Comber. Thomas Andrews died in 1743 at the early age of 45, leaving three sons - John born in 1721, Thomas born in 1727 and, Aaron born in 1730. Aaron died soon after his father. Thomas left the mill in Comber in 1774 - probably there was a shortage of water or possibly he was getting married. He rented a Bleach Green at Mount Pleasant in Ballymena. In 1779 the Bleach Green was sold as trade was bad. He returned to Comber and in 1783 went to Jamaica and died there, a very wealthy man. None of his money, however, came to Comber.

The real founder of the family enterprises in the linen and milling trades in Comber was John, (1721-1808). He is known as John the Great, and in his time was a soap - boiler, chandler, (Watchlights) miller, malt star, distiller, farmer, brick maker, contractor, linen-draper and bleacher.

As well as working the Upper Corn Mill (on the site of the present Laureldale Hall), John Andrews commenced making soap and candles at the rear of two houses in Castle Street (behind the present Cinema), although he had served his time to the linen trade in Belfast. The candles were made in one quality only, each being one lb. in weight and were called "Watchlights" probably the first time a Trade Name was used. Soap was also made in one quality only for either household use or for linen bleaching, and both were sold throughout the district to traders and the big houses. The usual order was for twelve dozen candles and two cwt. of soap, to people like Alexander Stewart (ancestor of the Londonderry family) of Newtownards, John Blackwood of Ballyleidy (ancestor of the Dufferin family), Robert Gillespie of Comber and James Crawford of Crawfordsburn. The linen bleachers took a ton or more of the soap in a single delivery. The principal raw material of both soap and candle was obtained from the cattle, sheep and pigs killed in the neighbourhood, and if the local supply was not sufficient then the odd ton or so was obtained from the Belfast butchers. The soda or potash required was got by burning weeds, 1/- per bushel being paid for the ashes. Another source was kelp, the ashes of seaweed, which was plentiful in Strangford Lough. The price for this in 1760 was £3: 7: 0 per ton. Candle making was stopped in 1785 and soap-boiling in 1788, probably because they had enough to do in the flour mill and the bleach green.

In 1745 John .Andrews built his first Wash Mill, a low thatched building, on a site on his own side of the river, opposite the Old Corn Mill, and established a Bleach Green. The business flourished and in 1763 he bleached 2,000 pieces of linen. He had taken over his father's leases in 1749 and had married Mary Corbitt in l746, and had a family of fifteen children. Very strict regulations for the bleaching of linen were issued by Dublin Castle, one of which was -"No lime, Soapers Dregs or horse dung to be made use of in bleaching. Penalty £5"- "No cloth shall be made and lapped for sale with any chalk, dung or flower (flour), or whilst wet or damp, the penalty being forfeiture of the cloth to the informer." There was also a second Bleach Green in Comber at this tine (1758) owned by James Riddel.
Because of its relatively dry climate, East Down has always been one of the most important grain-growing areas in Ireland. As early as 1683 the Lower Ards exported every winter great stores of good wheat, oats and barley to Dublin and elsewhere. The dense population of the county also required a large production of grain for human food. This was already apparent in 1732 when it was stated that Down and Armagh had become 'corn counties' to feed the growing numbers employed in the linen industry. Flour milling developed in Co. Down as a

result of the bounties paid by the Irish Parliament after 1759. The flour mill at Comber was built by John Andrews. The wheat was collected by agents in all the little ports on Strangford Lough as far south as Killough and. shipped to the mouth of the Comber River, where it was unloaded and carted to the mills. Co. Down wheat was generally insufficient to supply the Comber mill and two or three cargoes a year were usually brought from Dublin or Drogheda and even the North American colonies.

In 1768 John Andrews got possession of the two Corn Mills - the Upper and the old. In 1771, the low thatched wash mill was removed and a new flour mill was built on the site. This was a five storey building and cost £1,400. It was not demolished until around 1900, when a Comber man named McBurney pulled it down and used the stone to build a row of houses in the Castle Lane, opposite the Cricket Green, and known as McBurney's Row, although the proper name is Castle Buildings. Beside the new flour mill John Andrews built a new Bleach Works and Beetling Mill (still standing). He also commenced making bricks on the site and sold them at 12/6 per thousand - that is 62½p. About this tine a windmill was built beside the present Unitarian Church and the site became known as Windmill Hill. One of John Andrews' quarries was below Windmill Hill, where the new Baptist Church now stands and this was later the site of the old Gasworks, which closed in 1957. John Andrews was also a contractor for making new roads and he built the road and Pound Bridge in Mill Street. The Pound was where the Technical School (originally Thompson's Dance Hall) now stands and the entrance gate to the Pound is still at the rear of the Technical School. Stones were quarried, some for building purposes but mainly for use on the roads. At that tine every man was required to give his own labour and the work of a horse for six days in the year, making and repairing roads. Some people naturally paid others to do the work for them and John Andrews on various occasions was the contractor. The Highroad Account was first mentioned in 1778 when Matthew Munn, the smith, was paid 6/4 for two hammers, and for the next ten years a big trade was carried on in stones. Two of the buyers were the Parish Church and the Meeting House, 100 loads and 20 loads respectively.

The only money coined in Ireland since the silver crown and half-crown of Charles 2nd was of copper, but the English guinea, half guinea and silver coins were in circulation, although not in sufficient quantity to enable the business of the country to be carried on in comfort;. The guinea of 21/- was valued at 22/9 Irish money and the half guinea and silver coins were in proportion. All goods were bought and sold in English money, but the books were kept in Irish money, which, with the exception of copper, had no existence. This shortage of coinage was caused by the very large numbers of prosperous farmers leaving the country for America (not less than 6,000 each year) because of bad times, trade restrictions, high taxation, increase of rents by the landlords and were mostly Presbyterians, penalised because of their religion. They took with then all the gold and silver coinage they could lay their hands upon and in a few years became the backbone of the American Revolution. Trade was therefore most difficult and was carried on to a large extent by barter.

In the early days of the Andrews firm every worker had a ledger account into which his wages were credited each week and the soap, candles and meal taken were charged against it. Then a bullock or cow was killed it was divided up, each person, taking in the summertime perhaps two or three stone, but when the general slaughter took place about November (owing to the shortage of winter feed) the amount taken was as much as three cwt. per head. This was hung up in the roof of the cottages, and dried and preserved by the smoke of the turf fire, so that it kept the whole winter. Pigs were dealt with in the same manner, but the quantity taken was never more than a few stones. When herrings were plentiful and cheap, several thousand were bought by the firm, each person taking 100 and upwards, which they salted for future use. The average price was about 2/6 per hundred. If a little cash was needed it was paid out and marked in the account. If a man required a suit, an order on John Logan of Newtownards was given to him. It would cost 17/- for the cloth etc and 4/- to the tailor for making it. This may seem cheap, and it was a cut price, but it amounted to five or six week's

wages. The working day in winter was from daylight to dark and in summer twelve hours. After work there was little else to do but play cards and drink whiskey which was priced at 5½ gallons for £1:1: 6.

In 1783 John Andrews won £10,000 in the Irish State Lottery and it came at a particularly good time as trade was bad. With part of the money he bought the townland of Carnesure.

Before 1770 John Andrews cultivated only sufficient land to supply his household and his workers with oats, and wheat (which were ground in the mill) flax for the women to spin and potatoes and onions for those who were unable to grow their own. Each man had a free allowance of turf. Large quantities were cut from Ballymalady, Ballyrush and Mrs. Stevenson's near Ballygowan. When the turf was ready for bringing home, anyone who had a horse and cart could earn 3d per cash from the first two bogs, a distance of two miles, and 4d from Mrs. Stevenson's. A cash, also written kesh or kish was a basket, value 3/3, which was supposed to hold one cubic yard, but if the turf was light it was piled high. In 1762 over 600 cash were brought home. A little coal was bought for household use only, but in another fifteen years turf was so scarce in the neighbourhood that coal had to be used in the furnaces for boiling the linen, in place or turf. In Comber in 1760 the lowest rate of pay was 8d per day and in 1796 a labourer working on the fans received 10d and when reaping 13d. The rent of a cottage was not more than 30/- per year, the landlord doing the repairs.

Owing to the shortage of cash all sorts and conditions of people were continually borrowing small sums of money. On 7th December 1761 it is recorded in the handwriting of John Andrews that 1/- was lent to the Rev. Mr. Stewart in John Williamson's. John Williamson was the local innkeeper. Another was to Matthew Munn at ye rase Course. The racecourse referred to was off the Newtownards Road in the townland of Cherryvalley. "Course Hill" is still marked on local maps. An interesting advertisement is, "Mr. Vincent intends teaching to sing at Cumber and to begin on Thursday next, the ninth day of this instant June at eleven o'clock" 3rd. June, 1763. Another "On Monday next there will be a Ball at the Castle of Mount Alexander near Comber, for the benefit of a family in Distress. Tickets at 2/2 each to be had at Mr. Alexander Riddle's, Merchant in Comber." December, 15th 1763. In the accounts is this item: ½ stone of Miserable - 3/91/2-. 'Miserable' was second quality tea and was the quality ordered for the Castle.

During the spring and summer of 1778 the inhabitants of Belfast were much alarmed by the presence of the American and French privateers in the Channel. Ireland was denuded of troops because of the American War and had a landing or attack taken place, defence would have been impossible. Companies of Volunteers were therefore formed, the government supplying the necessary arms. At first only Protestants were accepted, but later large numbers of Catholics were enrolled. In September, 1779 the number in Antrim and Down was almost 4,000, rather more than half of them in Down, the number in Ulster being 42,000. By 1782 this total had risen to 100,000.

There were two Companies in Comber with a combined total of 100 men. John Andrews commanded one of the Companies and the other, together with the Newtownards Company of 115 men was under Robert Stewart (afterwards 1st Marquis of Londonderry). About a year later Hugh Gillespie was appointed Captain of this second Company, Robert Stewart becoming Colonel of the First Independent County of Down Regiment, which included both Newtownards and Comber Volunteers, John Andrews Company, known as the Comber Rangers, and of which his sons were lieutenants, was raised entirely by himself. He also paid all expenses including the cost of the men's uniforms and equipment. This could not have been less than £4 per head. The uniform was red with green facings and the Company was formed on 28th July, 1779, and numbered 54. Newtownards Company was formed on 1st June, 1779, and had a blue uniform with orange facings. In 1783 the foundation stone of the White Linen Hall in Belfast was laid by John Brown, W.M. of the Orange Lodge of Belfast.

This was a Masonic Lodge and Lieutenant Thomas Andrews of Comber, a member, was present.

In 1783 there was an election, John Andrews supporting Robert Stewart as did the Volunteers. Hugh Gillespie, however, must have taken the other aide as the second Company in Comber rejected him and appointed Robert Rollo Reid as Captain and Arthur Meredyth

White as Lieutenant and called themselves the Comber True Blues. Stewart lost the election to Lord Kilwarlin, a member of the Hill family of Hillsborough. In 1784 "a duel was fought in a field near the Mall, on Saturday morning last between Mr. An---ws of this town and Lt. G-----pie, late of the 104th; they exchanged a shot, happily without effect and. were preparing to fire again when their seconds very prudently interposed and settled the dispute to the honour and satisfaction of both parties," Fifteen years after the formation of the first Company of Volunteers in 1778, the government of the day became alarmed at the growing power of the force in politics and disbanded them in l793.

One Friday night in May, 1786, James Andrews, then 24 years of age, was returning from Belfast with a considerable sum of money, accompanied by Mr. Hall of Cherryvalley. They were being driven in a chaise and about eleven o'clock they were stopped by two foot-pads about a mile out of the town and. after snapping a pistol, which happily missed fire, they were robbed. Mr. James was six feet four inches tall and large in proportion and. it was said that an ordinary man with his shoes on could easily put his feet into James' shoes; Mr. Edward Hall was of middle age. One would have thought that they could have taken care of themselves. But considering the time of night, it is likely that they had been attending one of those dinners at which toasts are drunk so long as anyone could stand to propose one and so the reason for their lack of enterprise is apparent.

By 1786 a Post Office had been established in Comber showing the advance made in Comber since Harris in 1744 described it thus, "Cumber is but a mean village, and has no trade; yet seems by its situation to be capable of it, on account of the advantages of the tide. There is here at low water a pleasant strand of some thousands of acres and near the town a horse-course of a noted fine sod, two miles in circuit. It was anciently remarkable for an Abby of Cistercian Monks, founded in the year 1199, by whom is not certain; though some ascribe it to the Whites, who settled early in this Country under the famous John de Courcey. But it was a more ancient Abby of Regular Canons founded here by St. Patrick. There is now in the Town a large Meeting House, and. a decent Church, with a Vicarage House." This improvement was largely due to the enterprise of the Andrews and Riddel families. Alexander Riddel owned the distillery in Killinchy Street from 1761 until 1767, when he sold it and became an extensive bleacher in Comber. It was known as "The Mound Distillery" as there was a mound of earth between it and the river Enler, Alexander Riddel is the ancestor of Riddel's of Belfast, whose name still exists in Riddel Arcade and Riddel Hall in Queen's University.

We are now approaching the end of the 18th century, the second century after the Scottish Plantation and. we find an aristocracy or gentry losing touch with the people on their lands and communicating with them through agents only. We have an Established Church clergy of fair education, more earnest and faithful than their predecessors yet pluming themselves on the superiority of their Church and their position in relation to others equal in learning and manners but who are Dissenters. We have a Presbyterian ministry, plain-living and hard-working with some of the younger members looking at doctrines through New Light glasses and preaching ethics rather than spiritual truth.

There is also a quickly-growing manufacturing and trading class, mainly connected with the linen production and bleaching, whose houses and 'improvements' dot the roads near the towns, many of them having enlightened ideas and scientific tastes. There is yet a larger body of sharp and intelligent, but imperfectly educated, small traders, quick to earn profits by seizing opportunities in trade, now much more free.

Turning to the rural areas we find yet another class - farmers holding from twenty to one hundred acres. They will not change from the dialect and theology of their fathers. Their interests are narrow and have little regard for beauty and none of sanitation in their dwellings. A hearth tax which allows one hearth free, but requires payment for all, if more than one

exists, has made them abandon all fire-places save one. They sleep in rooms with no chimney ventilation and believing that the night air is noxious, open no windows. They are sharp-witted and well able to take care of themselves in anything relating to buying had selling. A very much greater number are the small cultivators who supplement their income by working in some way in the linen industry. At the end of the line are the land-labouring class, who can neither read nor write and who know little of the comforts and decencies of life. Their living accommodation in out-buildings or in small cottages is extremely deficient. Wages are low - about three guineas per half-year, with food, a boy getting for the same time one guinea until he arrives at man's estate.

THE 1798 REBELLION.

Due to the excessively bad handling of Irish affairs by the English government, distress and discontent were prevalent throughout the whole country. Discrimination and oppressive laws against Dissenters and Roman Catholics, and British Government measures for the suppression of Irish trade, were the main causes. As a result of this unrest the Society of United Irishmen was founded in 1791, the objects of which were to reform Parliament and the Repeal of the Penal Laws. John Andrews and indeed most of the principal inhabitants of Comber joined. When, however, it commenced to advocate revolution on French lines, those members possessed of property, including John Andrews, withdrew and by doing so earned the name "Turncoat" from their less wealthy neighbours.

In January, 1795 Lord Fitzwilliam was appointed Lord Lieutenant and was about to bring forward Catholic Emancipation when he was recalled in March and repression of the most severe character was the order of the day. The result was that the United Irishmen had a rapid increase in members and being driven underground became a secret society. Soldiers were quartered in Comber on many occasions during the next two years, while engaged in marching through the country burning the houses of those suspected of being United Irishmen. The Officers billeted themselves on John Andrews in the "Old House" which he had built in 1745 on the site now occupied by the Comber Cinema, and did so without payment.

On 3rd March, l797 a number of men beset the dwelling house of Mr. Cumming, a respectable farmer of Comber and demanded any weapons that he had. He fired at them and they broke open the windows and door, rushed into the house and murdered him. The Newtownards and Comber Cavalry offered a large reward for information on this atrocity but without result. This was but one of many murders in Co. Down and in 1797 the county was put under martial law. This in turn led to many atrocities throughout the county on the part of the soldiery, particularly the York Fencibles stationed in Newtownards.

The United Irishmen prepared for rebellion and pikes by the hundred were secretly made in the dead of night in blacksmiths' shops. A pike had a wooden shaft about seven feet long, often with iron spikes in it to prevent the enemy seizing it when attacked. This was set into a sharp pointed head about ten inches long. It was at this time that a cargo of muskets was landed secretly at the "Ghaist Hole", in Comber and never more was the "ghost" required than on that night. The rebellion, however, was doomed to failure from the very beginning. The government paid out large suns of money to informers everywhere. One of the most active was Nicholas Maginn of Lessens Saintfield, a Roman Catholic, who became a member of the Provisional Committee of the United Irishmen. He attended every meeting and reported every move to the Rev. James Cleland, Rector of Newtownards and among many other things Agent for Lord Castlereagh, to whom he passed on the information for cash rewards. On one occasion Maginn was paid £700 for information. Later he took to drink and eventually died in gaol for his debts. Cleland built Stormont Castle for himself and also the ornate mausoleum in the churchyard at Dundonald.The United Irishmen in Ulster, mostly Presbyterians, had planned for a simultaneous rising in Antrim and Down, which would

trigger off risings throughout the Province. The date agreed by the two counties was Thursday, 7th June, and on that day the Antrim men rose in revolt. The North Down uprising was deferred because their leader, the Rev. Steele Dickson of Portaferry, was arrested on Wednesday 6th at Ballynahinch, on information given by Maginn. Colonel Bryson was also arrested and imprisoned in Newtownards Market House (the cell is still in existence and can be visited). The rebels were thus without a leader. On Saturday, 9th June the insurgents from North Down assembled on Scrabo Hill and led by Dr. Jackson of Newtownards, passed through Comber on their way to Saintfield. In their progress, besides other outrages, they set fire to the house of a farmer named McKee, who had been an informer, and burnt his family and servants - eleven in all with circumstances of great cruelty. Later eleven men were hanged for the atrocity. At Saintfield, Henry Monroe of Lisburn was elected as the new leader.

Monroe at Saintfield heard that Colonel Stapleton and his York Fencible Regiment together with the Newtownards and Comber Yeomanry and two pieces of cannon had left Newtownards to march against them They then placed themselves in ambush behind a thickset hedge on either side of the road where it was deep about a quarter of a mile from Saintfield. When Stapleton's force reached Comber, they did not know which road to take for Saintfield, so they enlisted the help of the Rector of Comber, the Rev. Mortimer. He saddled his horse and taking his nephew with him, conducted them on the way.

One Officer halted his men at an inn in High Street (the Coo Vennel), and ordered the proprietor to supply them with drink. The publican enquired, "An wha'll pye me?" - "Serve the liquor and ask no questions", said the Officer. "An' whun wull ye gie me the money?" said the publican. The Officer ordered the publican to be seized, which was done instantly and then they carried out drink until all were satisfied. Not content with that, they turned on every tap in the bar, so that the liquor would run freely everywhere. The Officer then shook his sword in the poor man's face and swore that on his return from Saintfield, he would burn the place. Such was the treatment meted out to the local people regardless of the side they supported.

The Officer was killed in the ambush and some days later his body was carried down the hill of the Coo Vennel, in a cart. The soldiers in charge stopped at the same inn for refreshment. The inn-keeper went out to look at the body, having served his customers, and recognised his troublesome customer. Taking the dead man's hand he said, "An whut wae ir ye the day? Man but am gled tae see ye sae quate, be what ye war tither day."

The ambush at Saintfield was successful, Stapleton's force was taken completely by surprise, the hour was six o'clock in the evening of Saturday, 9th June, and in less than one hour 56 of the military force were dead and 36 of the insurgents. Stapleton and his troops returned to Comber and were quartered for the night, by order, in the Presbyterian Meeting House at the top of the Coo Vennel. The Insurgents proceeded to Ballynahinch.

One of the first to be killed was the Rev. Mortimer of Comber as was his nephew. It was said that his body was tied to his horse and when given a slap on the back, the animal returned to the Rectory in The Square, Comber. Another version and more likely as there is no record of the Rector being buried in Comber, is that during the night the bodies of the 56 Royalist dead were stripped naked by the country people, including the Rev. Mortimer, whose body was found propped up against a gate-post, completely naked. A grave was dug in the nearby river bank and all the bodies put into it. The burial place is still known as York Island. Captain Unit, Lieutenant Chetwynd and Ensign Sparks were killed and there is a memorial tablet to their memory in the Parish Church in Comber, paid for by their brother Officers. The next day, Sunday, 10th June, Colonel Stapleton marched from Comber to attack the Insurgents again, but after he had proceeded a short distance, he changed his route and. retreated to Belfast. This was probably because of news that insurgents from Portaferry, who had been

successful there, had also attacked the Market House in Newtownards and released the prisoners held there and were now on their way to join their friends at Ballynahinch. The number of the insurgents there was estimated to be anything from seven to ten thousand.

The Battle of Ballynahinch was fought on Tuesday evening, 12th June and on Wednesday morning the 13th June. Munro placed a strong force of his troops on Creevy Rocks to oppose the march of Generals Nugent and Barber, who had been joined by Colonel Stewart with troops from Downpatrick. He also placed a party of his best musketeers on Windmill Hill and. the rest of his troops on Ednavady Hill, overlooking the town. It was late in the afternoon when the insurgents at Creevy Rocks, having inflicted severe casualties were dispersed by superior numbers, as were those on Windmill Hill and all withdrew to Ednavady. The Royalists entered Ballynahinch, when the Insurgents withdrew and spent a Wild night burning houses, looting and drinking. Munro was informed of this but refused to attack during the hours of darkness, when the enemy could easily have been destroyed.
Early next morning the attack began with the rebels discharging eight small pieces of cannon, which was replied to by the heavy artillery of the army. Munro then led his men in a charge against the main body of the King's troops, forced them back and entered the town right to the Market Square where the fighting was very severe. Nugent ordered a retreat. The trumpet call for this was mistaken by the insurgents, who thought it announced the arrival of more troops for a renewal of the combat, and seized by sudden panic and confusion turned in the moment of victory and fled. Nugent's troops rallying pursued the enemy and no quarter was given, particularly by the yeomanry. Thus ended the fighting in the '98 Rebellion. But soon began a series of horrible outrages by the military that are foul blots upon the history of Ireland. The only casualty in the aftermath in Comber was in October, when a person named Clarke was hanged in The Square, and his head was placed upon a spike by sentence of the Court-martial. Recently, when work on the surface of The Square was in progress, the workmen came upon an oak beam in perfect condition about four feet below the surface. It had been sawn off and was sunk into the ground. Was this the remains of the gibbet? It was on a diagonal line from the corner of the public house known as "The Gillespie Arms".

INDUSTRY IN COMBER.

To return to the Andrews family. After the Rebellion, linen was scarce and the price rose from 19 pence per yard to 3/1 per yard. Like many other linen drapers, John Andrews and his son James, who was in partnership, bought large stocks. Unfortunately within the year the price fell and many linen drapers, who had accumulated stock at the high price, had failed to sell in time. Money was scarce and. James Andrews was hoping for another large win in the lottery. He wanted to borrow £1,000 to tide them over. At the same time, Thomas, the eldest son, who was in business for himself in Belfast, required £7,000 to save himself from bankruptcy. He wrote from London asking his father for help. Eventually John Andrews, mainly by means of a mortgage on the townland of Carnesure and loans from various local people, managed to raise the money. It was 22 years before the mortgage on Carnesure was cleared. Thomas never repaid the money, but in his father's will, it was seen that there must have been some arrangement that this £7,000 was his share of the property. He was left £500 and the remainder went to James.
Michael had been given a bleach green at Annsborough, but he suffered from the effects of a fall from a horse and his father had to clear his debts too. Michael died in 1805 leaving two sons, Thomas John and Michael. In 1810 Michael started on his own account with a few looms in Little York Street in Belfast. He prospered and secured a lease of land at Edenderry, where he built a large factory, houses for the workmen and a residence for himself, which he called Ardoyne, the whole being completed in 1819. He introduced the Jacquard loom from France and in a few years Ardoyne damasks were known all over the world and orders were

received from most of the royal palaces of Europe and the White House in America. Michael is credited with being the founder of the Belfast Savings Bank in 1815, although Thomas John was also a member of the Committee and was Secretary for 41 years.

John Andrews (John the Great) died in 1808 and was succeeded by his son James (l762-l841) during whose lifetime the business continued to expand under the name of James Andrews and Sons. James had a family of nine boys and three girls and all the boys on reaching the age of eight or nine years were sent to Crumlin Academy run by the Rev. Nathaniel Alexander, a Presbyterian minister. All did exceptionally well, finishing the Course under 15 years of age. Robert and Charles took their degrees at Trinity College Dublin; the others went to Glasgow University. The two elder boys entered the business in Comber in 1809, John confined himself to buying and selling linen and to farming, while William Glenn became master of every section of the business and acted as traveller as well. In 1816 Thomas and Isaac entered the Comber firm as business continued to increase. The trade with drapers' shops increased rapidly, William and Isaac travelled throughout Great Britain and brought in much new business, while John attended to correspondence and orders and Thomas looked after the bleaching and milling. The next four boys took up law - James and Joseph became solicitors and Robert and Charles became Q .C.s, George the youngest died in 1833 when he was only 23 years of age.

The "Old House" was built in 1744, by John Andrews, the Great (1721-1808), in front of two small houses where he commenced business making soap and candles. The site is now occupied by the Comber Cinema and the extensive gardens belonging to the "Old House" including the circular pond are now in the Enler Car Park, the Tennis Courts and the Hockey Pitch. On the left of the house were the stables (now the Cinema Car Park) and on the right were the coach houses and harness room. In front of the "Old House", across the street was another garden belonging to it and was approached by a 'Right of Way' marked out in white pebbles. This garden was on a steep incline, which went up in three stages and was fenced off from the street, back from the line of the houses, by a wall surmounted by an iron railing. This was known locally as "the Palace Stages". At each end of the wall was a large holly bush and the garden contained a number of ancient yew trees, which were referred to at a meeting of the British Association held in Dublin in 1835. It was believed that the trees were at least 400 years old. Unfortunately a number of years ago, when the present shops were built the trees were cut down and the place is now a bare yard. The house beside this garden was built in 1792, when James Andrews (James Andrews & Sons) married Miss Florence Glenny, and the name given to it was "Uraghamore", an Irish word meaning "the place of the old yew trees". In August, 1826, John Andrews, son of James, married Sarah Drennan, daughter of Dr. William Drennan, who was against Union with England and was the first person to apply the expression "Emerald Isle" to Ireland. In 1826 John Andrews spent £500 either rebuilding or more likely enlarging "Uraghamore" for his bride, but it was a full year before it was ready for occupation. In 1830 this same John Andrews became Agent for Lord Londonderry, who was often in financial difficulties and who borrowed money from the firm. In fact, three years before he died he owed them £3,000. In 1832 John Andrews was one of twelve Commissioners to obtain an actual survey and estimated cost of a new mail coach road from Downpatrick to Belfast, passing through Killyleagh, Killinchy and Comber and being 32 feet wide. He was very much liked by Lord Londonderry's tenants, as he was fair, considerate and generous. He played an important part in the building of Scrabo Tower, and was the founder of the Spinning Mill in Comber in 1864

6th/7th January 1839 THE NIGHT OF THE BIG WIND.

Owing to the expansion of both flour and the linen business it was decided to install in 1834 a steam engine which could be used for either mill, when water was scarce. The cost for the engine, engine house and chimney was £1200. In the night of January 6th and 7th, 1839, much damage was done to buildings in Comber by the wind. It was known as 'the night of the Big Wind' all over Ulster. The distillery, belonging to Johnston and Miller in Killinchy Street, was entirely blown down. The other distillery on the Newtownards Road, also suffered damage and the chimney of Andrews' Flour Mill was blown down. The top of the windmill on Windmill Hill was blown off and damaged the roof of the new Unitarian Church and held up the Installation of the Minister for a year. The mill chimney was rebuilt with circular bricks bought in Scotland at 35/- per thousand 7,000 bricks were used.

After the steam engine was installed, the whole works were re-organised in 1836. First there was the provision of more power to drive more machinery. To obtain this, new water wheels were erected and when completed, there were four of them, each operating different sections of the works. In addition there was one at Castlebeg for the beetling engine and another at the Corn Mill. Another improvement was the Spring Dam. This was excavated by the side of the Bleach Works to a depth of twenty feet and fifty feet in diameter, the sides being built of cut stone. Thomas died in 1838 and a Commercial Traveller was appointed to allow William Glenny to take Tom's place. Another one was appointed when Isaac also retired from travelling.

James Andrews died in 1841, in his eightieth year. The advent of the railways in the l84Os meant more business for the firm. A radius of 30 miles was the utmost economic distance to send flour by road. This included Portadown, Banbridge, Castlewellen, Strangford and Portaferry. The best town for business was Downpatrick. There were public hangings there until after the middle of the century.

One of their carters always arranged to be there when a hanging took place. One day he arrived too late and. when asked, "Whut happened ye the day Geordie, that ye wur late? It wus the purtiest hangin' that ye iver seen." "Hangin", said Geordie, "Man a did better than that. A stappit at the Quoile Brig tae see twa men droondit."

In l845 a meeting was held to promote 'a railway from Belfast to Holywood and from Belfast to Comber and Newtownards. The shares were over-subscribed and John Andrews, John Miller and Guy Stone, all of Comber, were on the Committee to promote the railway in Parliament. The Holywood Line, four miles in length was opened in 1848 and that to Comber and Newtownards on 6th May, 185O, carrying about 1,000 passengers on that day. The engines were detached from the trains coming from Newtownards, just before reaching Belfast and they proceeded down a long bank to the platform by their own momentum. On some occasions men working near the terminus assisted the brakemen in checking the speed by throwing pieces of wood on the rails in front of the carriages. The line to Downpatrick was not completed until l859, Donaghadee in 1861 and Newcastle in 1869. The coming of the railway meant great changes in business and the Repeal of the Corn Laws meant that home grown wheat died out and foreign wheat: was used instead. Much later there was a private siding into Comber Spinning Mill. There was also one for the North Quarry at Scrabo opposite the present Ulster Print Works. Bogies travelled round the face of the hill from the South Quarry to the North Quarry and then down the "Drum Brae" and under the road to the railway siding. There was a large area for the cut stone at the Belfast station.

THE BIG HOUSE IN THE SQUARE

James Andrews in his will left an extra 30 acres of Carnesure and £1,000 to his son Isaac to build a house for his bride when he married. "Uraghamore" was left to John and "The Old House" was left to Margaret, Mary and his unmarried son or sons for life, passing afterwards to John or John's eldest son. Isaac married in 1844, but instead of building a new house at Canesure, he bought the home of the Stitt family in the Square. At a later date, with the object of enlarging his garden, he also bought the adjoining house, in which General Gillespie had been born in 1766. He immediately set about demolishing the Gillespie home and. the story goes that the foreman found a hidden hoard of gold. He removed the treasure to a safe place at the dinner hour and. late at night took it home. It is said that he never worked again but was always well-dressed and had money. His descendants live in Comber to this day. To the rear of this house in Comber Square is the site of an early dry-spinning mill belonging to the Stitt family, owners of the Killarn bleach green. In 1808 John Proctor of Leeds, flax and tow machine maker advertised in the Belfast Press that he was creating a spinning mill in Comber. John Stitt & Co. received £522 in bounty from the Linen Trustees in 1808-9 for installing 348 spindles. The venture did not last long for by September, 1812 the plant was up for sale. William Stitt became insolvent in 1840 and four years later his house was purchased by Isaac Andrews.

THE POTATO FAMINE l845-6

In l845-6 occurred the Potato Famine in Ireland. It did not affect Co. Down as much as other places but the Andrews family were prominent in subscribing to the Relief Funds of both Comber and Newtownards. Members of the family were also on the Committees for distributing relief to the poor. Since wheat was too expensive, James Andrews & Sons imported direct to Comber large quantities of Indian corn. Buck wheat, peas and beans were obtained from Prance and. there was a direct shipment of wheat from Egypt, the first of that variety seen in Comber. Apart from the price, the buck wheat, peas and beans turned out a bad speculation, as not even the starving poor would. eat the meal made from them and so they had to feed it 'to their cattle end pigs. It was from this that the farmers discovered the great value of maize for their animals.
Owing to the increasing flour trade, more and. more wheat had to be imported and in 1859 storage of the different cargoes till they were ground became a problem.

Stores rented in Belfast were too costly, so it was decided to build one in Comber. It was first thought to use iron cylinders, a simple form of modern silo, as in France, but the cost was going to be too great. An old school friend, James Macauley designed a suitable building and William Glenny Andrews supervised the building work. The inscription on the foundation stone reads, "This grain store was built by John Andrews, William G. Andrews, Isaac Andrews, James Andrews; Foundation stone laid the second day of May, 1860. J. Andrews & Sons, Comber." This building, 86 feet long, 36 feet broad and. consisting of six floors was not completed until 1863, having been built by local talent and costing £1,750. The building, which was still standing and in good repair until July, 1978 (it was set on fire one summer evening by vandals) had been used for the manufacture of rice starch and so is sometimes referred to as "the old starch mill"; this venture by a Dutchman named Stem, was not a success. It had also been used by the Comber Distilleries as a grain store (its original use) and appears in one of their advertisements as part of the Distillery. During the l939-45 War it was fixed up as a billet for .American soldiers. This was when the iron steps were erected at the gable end and doors cut into each floor - a fire precaution. Finally, after the War it was taken over by two retired Indian Army Colonels as a piggery, but this was later discontinued and it was unoccupied.

In 1863 a new Company was formed with the name John Andrews & Co., the Co. being John's three sons, James, John and Thomas. A new spinning mill was then built in 1863-4. There had been a spinning mill in Comber in the early years of the century; this was before the introduction of 'wet

spinning' about 1825. It was owned by a man named John Stitt and later by his son William Stitt, who became bankrupt about 1840, because he could not compete with the new methods. The plans for the new mill were prepared by James Combe & Co., who also supplied the machinery, but the engine and boiler were supplied by Victor Coates of the Lagan Foundry. James Andrews attended to the buying of everything required, while his brother Thomas, then only 20 years of age, superintended the building operations, carried out without a building contractor. In 1864 spinning commenced and. made steady progress and its products were quoted as of a standard for government contracts.

James Andrews married in 1863 and. commenced. building Carnesure House, It was built by direct labour under his supervision. In the following year his father died. William Glenny Andrews, the only practical miller and bleacher in the family had not trained any of his nephews in either trade. He was now an old man and. had allowed the Bleach Works to become out of date. In 1868 everything including the Flour Mill seemed to go wrong and from that date until 1876 there was a steady loss of £2,000 a year. William Glenny died in 1871 and. every member of the family benefited from his will.

In 1876 John Junior, second. son of Isaac, was persuaded to return to Comber from Liverpool where he was Manager of the North Shore Flour and. Rice Mill, and he was given sole control of the milling business (his condition for returning to Comber) and. in lieu of salary, a percentage of the profits. In 1877 he showed a profit of £2,000. He then persuaded his father to allow him to negotiate with his cousins James and John, with the object of buying their shares in the flour and corn mills. James and. John agreed and. the partnership was dissolved in 1879. In 1880 mills in Meadow Street, Belfast were bought and. modernised at considerable expense and in 1882 the Belfast Mills were secured. The name of the firm was now Isaac Andrews & Sons. The Belfast Mills had a capacity of 200 tons of wheat per week, the Meadow Street Mill 180 tons and the Comber Mill only 90 tons. So in 1883 the Comber Mill closed down, The Bleach Green had been closed in 1872. John Andrews & Co took over the Corn Mill (site of the Laureldale hall) to preserve the water rights .and twenty years later the buildings were removed and the site cleared. Thus ended the old UPPER MILL, where they had first started.. In recent years when the Laureldale Hall was being built beside the Pound Bridge, the foundations of the old Upper Mill were revealed.

The Spinning Mill under the direction of Thomas Andrews of Ardara continued to flourish and was enlarged In 1907. Thomas died in 1916 leaving four sons, John Miller, who took over the Mill, Thomas of Titanic fame, James who became Lord Chief Justice of N. Ireland and William, who was also in the mill. When John Miller Andrews died in 1956, the management passed to his son John L.0.And.rews, later to become Sir John Andrews, and. about eight years ago the mill was modernised, a process that continues.

SIR ROBERT ROLLO GILLESPIE, K.C.B. 1766 - 1814

Hugh Gillespie of Perthshire in Scotland, a scion of the Clan Macpherson, took refuge in County Down after the unsuccessful "Fifteen" Rebellion in Scotland in 1715. He had married the daughter of the third Lord Rob, who could trace his descent from Eric de Rollo, the Dane of Normandy in the 8th century and from whom William the Conqueror was descended. The Robert Rollo of the period had fallen with his Prince at Flodden. In 1651 the head of the family was created Baron Rollo for constant fidelity to the Crown by Charles 2nd. Hugh Gillespie had accompanied his brother-in-law, the fourth Lord Rollo to the unfurling of the "Standard" on the Braes of Mar and later to the battle of Sherrifmuir, where they were defeated by Argyle and forced back on Perth.

Hugh Gillespie then fled to Cherryvalley near Comber, where he built a large house, with a Georgian porch with rounded pillars. He was succeeded by his son Robert, who was married for the third time before his only child, Hugh Robert Rob, was born in January, 1766, in the house of a cousin also called Hugh, which was in The Square, Comber, in the shadow of the church, which stood on the site

of the old Cistercian Abbey. For some unknown reason, his first Christian name was dropped later in life, possibly because of a dispute between the two families.
His early days were spent at Cherryvalley and. this was a period of extreme parental adoration, which his exceptional good looks did nothing to diminish. The child soon found that to express any desire was synonymous with attainment. Young Rob, with his fine, somewhat girlish features, slim body, small stature, was most certainly a spoiled child, and this affected his character throughout his life. To want anything was to obtain it. To wish to do anything was a mere prelude to instant performance. He lived in an era of lavish extravagance and he absorbed the extravagance of' the period. Riding, drinking, carousing, hunting, shooting, fishing, racing, cock-fighting and fighting were the normal pastimes of the day. Rollo was very much a son of the period. His parents, who were very wealthy took the boy with them to live in the extravagant surroundings of the Spa at Bath and. this also had an effect on his life and, outlook.
At the age of ten, his parents bought for him a commission as Ensign in the 45th Foot, which entitled him to wear a sword. Three years later, while still a schoolboy of thirteen years of age, at Norlands House - the Prince of Wales Military Academy for young gentlemen, conducted by Thomas Marquois, professor of artillery and fortifications - he was promoted to Lieutenant and transferred on paper to the 104th Foot, without having done one day's duty in the Army. So it would be quite wrong to think that as a boy he played games with other boys in Comber. His adoring parents, however, wished him to take up law and so removed him from the school and the influence of the professor to a private tutor called Rev. Mr.Tookey. When Rollo returned to Bath for his first vacation, he announced that he wished to become a soldier. His wish as usual, was granted and he became a Cornet of the 3rd Horse and his father paid out £1,102 for his uniforms. He was now an Officer in the Cavalry and a proper gentleman.
Vain pleasures were the order of the day with the cavalry in Ireland and drunken frivolity the chief means of passing the day. Few could outvie him in the consumption of claret and other more potent liquor and the young Cornet, invariably elegantly dressed as a dandy, found no lack of encouragement or companionship with his brother officers in their pursuit of boisterous pastimes end the worship of Venus. This gay life lasted until 1786, when, at twenty years of age, he became entranced with Annabella Taylor of Dublin aged 19, then visiting the Dean of Clogher, which was where Gillespie was stationed. When she returned to Dublin, he followed, met her again and the couple eloped and were married in November 1786.

In the following Spring Gillespie's troop moved to Athy in Co. Kildare and after dinner one evening at Gillespie's house, when every man had had too much to drink, a violent quarrel arose between Mackenzie, a brother officer, and William Barrington a local squire, who knew Gillespie's wife well.

Oaths and insults led to a challenge to a duel. Gillespie seconded Mackenzie. Early next morning the two met, fired twice and missed and a reconciliation was suggested. There are two versions of what then took place and both are biased.
Sir Jonah Barrington, a brother of the duellist, states that Gillespie objected to the reconciliation and having a fiery temper and being insulted, shot the duellist, Barrington on the spot. The other version is that Barrington, the duellist labelled Gillespie a coward living amongst a regiment of cowards. Gillespie, in extreme rage, whipped out his handkerchief, held one end himself offering the other to Barrington, engaged to fight at point blank range. Both fired simultaneously. The cock of Gillespie's pistol was knocked off by his opponent's ball. Barrington was shot through the heart and carried to a neighbouring cabin. Gillespie, mortified, knelt beside his dying opponent and beseeched a proof of reconciliation, without avail. "Take him away; take him away," whispered Barrington and expired. Gillespie, disguised, fled to Scotland via Donaghadee, where he met his father, and stayed there several months. He returned to face trial at the Spring Assizes of 1788 at Maryborough. The trial commenced with no less than ten military officers in the jury of twelve persons. The case for the prosecution was

heard and the jury most honourably acquitted both Mackenzie and Gillespie, without hearing their defence.

In 1791 Gillespie's father died and Gillespie receiving promotion to Lieutenant in the 20th Light Dragoons in 1792 set sail from Belfast for Jamaica. Within days of landing, Gillespie contracted that terrible disease - Yellow Fever, and it was two months before he recovered. In 1793 Gillespie, eager for active service, transferred to the 13th Foot and. with them sailed to San Domingo where they were welcomed by the white planters and the French garrison submitted with joy.

In January, 1791, Gillespie was promoted Captain and on the 2nd February he landed with a small force on the beach at Tiburon. In the dark they scaled the hilly paths to the fort and attacking silently with the bayonet completely surprised and overwhelmed the enemy, who after a short tussle fled in panic. At last, at the age of 28 Gillespie had used his sword in battle for the first time. The British gained control of most of the island and only the capital, Port-au-Prince had not submitted.

It was decided to demand the surrender and Gillespie and a naval captain, Captain ~ow1ey, volunteered to carry the summons. They swam ashore with swords in mouth (?) and finally reached the beach through heavy fire. On landing they were immediately captured and taken to the Governor and charged with spying. The situation was extremely dangerous, until Gillespie noticed a Masonic emblem dangling on the Governor's stomach. Glillespie gave a Masonic sign and the attitude of the Governor immediately changed. They were given a great dinner, the Governor tasting the food before handing it to the visitors to show that it was not poisoned. After the meal they were returned to their ship safely but without the surrender of the town. It was not until June that year, after fierce fighting in which Gillespie took part and had the distinction of being mentioned for gallantry, that the capital was taken. Gillespie then returned to Comber in October, 1791, all military operations having ceased.

In February, 1796 while waiting at Cork to return to San Domingo and the West Indies, Gillespie was involved in a fracas and nearly missed the boat. He was at the theatre and noticed that during the playing of the National Anthem, his large-nosed heavily built neighbour did not stand nor did he remove his hat. Gillespie requested him to do so and when he refused the impetuous, fiery Gillespie caught him by the nose and in the struggle broke it. The lady to whom the man was engaged broke off the engagement, when she heard of it and the outraged lover swore revenge - against Gillespie. He took out a warrant against him for assault and battery and law officers were looking for him. To get on board the troopship, Gillespie disguised himself as a woman and carrying a borrowed baby in his arms walked aboard without being discovered. His small stature and youthful face stood him in good stead.

On landing in San Domingo much fighting followed without much success and by July, 1798 the British decided to leave the island to the French, and a treaty for peaceful withdrawal was signed. It was Gillespie's job to pay out compensation to the planters and bonus payments to the local troops. Many of course were dissatisfied with the amount they received. One night when Gillespie was recovering from a bout of malaria, he heard his native servant screaming downstairs. Hastily he snatched up his sword, rushed downstairs in his nightgown and found the body of his faithful servant in a pool of blood. Behind it a band of villains were brandishing their weapons and searching for Gillespie's room. Immediately the gang attacked the little man awaiting them in night attire on the stairs. With great dexterity and ferocity he attacked, killing six outright and the other two turned and fled. One swung round and. fired his pistol. The bullet passed through Gillespie's hair and severed the temporal artery. The night patrol heard the shot and hurried to the spot to find Gillespie in a dead faint on his bed. Medical attention was procured and Gillespie soon recovered.

Gillespie now returned to peace time duties with the army in the West Indies. He was promoted Lieut. Colonel in 1799 at the early age of 33 and took command of the 20th Regiment. He devoted himself to improving conditions for his troops and in taking care of them, when there was an epidemic of fever, even to the extent of taking the whole Regiment, the 2oth Light Dragoons, to the seaside. In this way he added to his reputation as an administrator and his men worshipped him. In 1802 he brought his Regiment back to England and before leaving the West Indies received praise from every quarter. But this great care of his troops led to him being accused by a newly joined Major of the Regiment of using Army Funds, not only for the troops, but for his own use. Various very senior Officers treated the accusation with disdain, yet even when the Regiment returned to England the trouble continued. Gillespie could not ask for a Court-Martial to prove his innocence, but after two years he tricked the Major into bringing public charges against him. The Court Martial found him not guilty and most honourably acquitted. Major Cameron was informed that His Majesty had no further use of his services.

Gillespie now wished to go to India for a change of scene. This was in 1805 and from this time on his wife Annabella is never mentioned, although she was a widow for 19 years after Gillespie's death. He obviously had domestic troubles, caused no doubt by being an over gallant man and also most extravagant, which left him without adequate cash resources. He made his way to India, overland, in 1805 and had various adventures on the way. Early in 1806 he joined his new regiment in Arcot. In July of that year occurred the famous ride to Vellore, about which there is a poem by Tennyson "Riding at dawn, riding alone, etc".

The trouble in Vellore was caused by the introduction of a new style of turban, which to the natives resembled turbans worm by half-caste converts. Further, no ear-rings or caste-marks were to be worm by troops on duty: chins were to be shaven and moustaches cut to a certain length. All this would damn some castes in the eyes of their co-religionists in this world and would destroy all hope of salvation in the next. The native Princes living in the fort of Vellore and receiving lavish pensions from the East India Company played on these fears for their own ends and the uprising took place. The British had been warned by several people that the rebellion was about to take place, but no action whatever was taken. The force in the town consisted of 400 British and two thousand Indian Officers and troops. On 10th July the storm burst. At 2.00 a.m. the massacre started. All Europeans were immediately attacked. They had only six rounds per man and the natives held the Magazine. Col. Fancourt was shot on his way to the main guard. The Princes' standard was hoisted on the flagstaff - green with tiger stripes and a sun in the centre. This was the flag captured later by Gillespie and in 1821 presented by his son, Lieutenant R.R.Gillespie to King George 4th. According to the poem, Gillespie was out for his usual canter on his horse Black Bob, when a severely wounded man, who had escaped told him of the massacre. Gillespie, losing no time, led his Light Dragoons on a fierce charge from Arcot to Vellore. Here they blew open the sates and. attacked the native troops, wreaking a terrible vengeance for the massacre. "The very stones remember still, the end of them that stab by night." After Vellore, Gillespie was given a grant of £2,500 which was some help to his lack of money He was appointed Inspector-General of Cavalry, shortly after his exploit at Vellore in further recognition of his services there. He held this position for twelve months, when the Court of the Directors of the East India Company, preferring minor economies to prolonged gratitude for the saving of their possessions, abolished the post.

In 1807 the Light Dragoons left for England, but Gillespie stayed in India and transferred to the 8th Royal Irish Regiment stationed at Cawnpore. Here he led a gay life and on one occasion went tiger hunting with the Adjutant-General and the Military Secretary - this was good company for his future prospects and was worth the money he spent in arranging the shoot.

The party encamped amongst sylvan surroundings at a place called Mornee, unaware that Gillespie's services were being coveted for higher game than tiger. The local Rajah, being at enmity with the Sikhs, had need of a military commander of merit. At this time India was filled with military adventurers ready to sell their services to the highest bidder. Whether the Rajah of Mornee mistook Gillespie for one of these men or whether he had heard of his reputation, is not known. He approached Gillespie with the offer of the command. Gillespie of course refused. The Rajah was furious and surrounded Gillespie's camp with troops and threatened to use force. Little did he know the man with whom he was dealing. Gillespie, sitting in his tent, the flap open wide, sent out an order for the leader of the armed forces to appear before him. The leader arrives and stands before him. For a full minute or more Gillespie stares at the hill man. Under the solemn survey of those brown eyes of Gillespie, the left eye large and compelling, the right eye threatening from a slight droop in the upper lid - the hill man's glance wavers. Nervously the toes of the bare feet wriggle on the matting floor of the tent. Finally Gillespie speaks. Pulling out his watch and setting it on the camp table before him, he says, "Go tell the Rajah, your master, that if in half an hour he does not recall his men from around my tents, I shall take his fort and expel him from the country."
The sublime assurance - indeed the whole episode - is typical of Gillespie. At most, his party, including cooks, servants and coolies, cannot have exceeded thirty men. Not only was the ultimatum obeyed, but an escort of honour was provided to conduct Gillespie's party through the Rajah's territory. Gillespie returned to the Royal Irish at Cawnpore.

It was Gillespie's duty to be responsible for the business side of the regiment, the details of interior economy, the accounts, hygiene, parades etc. He was good at these but they were no substitute for active service. Gillespie had tasted glory and was now possessed by a savage craving for more. At the same time he wished for a better social life at Madras and in 1809 transferred to the 25th Light Dragoons stationed there. On leaving the 8th Royal Irish, he was presented with a written tribute, ending with "Signed by all the Regiment". He also received a splendid sword, which cost 200 guineas and was inscribed "The gift of the Royal Irish". The sword is now in the Regimental Mess of The Queen's Royal Irish Hussars". All this was most irregular and to this genuine but embarrassing document and gift, Gillespie replied with consummate tact and feeling. "Comrades, the sword you offer is a tribute of too great value. Let it be less so, and without any ornament but an inscription "The gift of The Royal Irish", which will make it more valuable to me than were it covered with gold. I shall receive it with gratitude, and when I draw it in defence of my Country, I shall remember you."

In 1809 he was promoted to Brevet Colonel and given command of the Garrison at Bangalore, which was the strength of a Brigade. Again he greatly enjoyed the gay social life. Two years later, in 1811 came another promotion, this time to Colonel and was given command of the Mysore Division. In this position he planned and carried out a most important expedition to Java, then occupied by the French, who had taken it from the Dutch, and who were attacking and capturing English trading ships on the route from India to Britain. This proved most successful and Britain took possession of Java. In the following year came another promotion, this time to Major-General and he had to return to Java to quell a rebellion, which he did with ease, as a result of most skilful planning and brilliant execution.

In 1813 Gillespie, after long disputes and acrimonious dealings with Mr. Raffles, the civilian Lieutenant-Governor of Java, sailed for Bengal with 60,000 Spanish dollars and on arrival was given command of the Meerut Division. The rise of the Gurkha kingdom of Nepal and its repeated depredations along the seven hundred miles of common frontier had for some years caused anxiety to the Government of India. Emboldened by their success the Nepalese had for years been encroaching upon the northern frontiers of the Company's possessions. At various times the Gurkha Government had appropriated more than two hundred villages and extensive tracts of land. These depredations were justified by the Gurkha Government at Khatmandu that they were merely a reoccupation of tracts originally owned by chiefs of Nepal. On 22nd May, 1814 a party of Ghurkhas attacked a Police post at

Bhotwal. The Police were overpowered, eighteen were killed and the Chief Inspector was tied to a tree and. murdered with arrows. War was inevitable.

Gillespie was destined to take part in the campaign, but was very doubtful of success as his force lacked any knowledge of mountain warfare, which was necessary in a campaign to be fought in a country of vast mountains, forests and narrow valleys against a people of' proved fighting ability.
Four divisions, totalling 30,000 troops were formed to invade Nepal whose armies, strung along the entire frontier, totalled no more than 12,000 men.

GILLESPIE'S LAST ATTACK

Gillespie's part of the force consisted of one British Infantry regiment, his old friends, the 8th Royal Irish Dragoons, native infantry and artillery, totalling 3,500 men and 14 guns. On the 18th October, Gillespie's force occupied a fort called "The Dun" and on the 22nd entered Debra, a charming little town, without meeting any resistance, as the Gurkhas had retired to Kalunga, a fort strongly posted on a hill about 600 feet high and covered with intricate jungle. Lord Moira, who had insisted on combining the offices of Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief was directing operations from far-distant Lucknow, and had given explicit instructions that in no case were attempts to be made to storm places which should be reduced by artillery. Lieutenant-Colonel Mawbey, sent ahead by Gillespie to take Kalunga, decided as it was so strong a defensive fort, to return to Debra and await the arrival of Gillespie. Gillespie arrived on the 26th and decided to storm the position regardless of the Commander-in-Chief's instructions. Gillespie decided this so that he could keep to an arrangement that his force would join another British force on November, 1st. On 29th October he issued orders for the attack - orders so thorough and with such detailed forethought - yet which were to prove to be his last orders. His plan was to seize the plateau some eight hundred yards south of the fort and there establish his batteries for his guns. By dawn of the 31st. the guns opened up on the fort and three attacks converging from different points were to be launched simultaneously. At 2.00 a.m. the three columns moved out on their separate routes. At 7.00 a.m. the gun signal was fired, (five distinct shots from the guns) warning all troops that two hours later the general assault was to be made, but was found later not to have been heard.

Just before nine o'clock, the hour set for the assault, an enemy detachment, which during the night had occupied a hill outside the fort, made an attack on Gillespie's flank. They were driven back to the fort by Gillespie's force, which followed them right to the foot of the fort wall. Here, however, was a serious check as the Gurkha Commander had cleverly sited a gun to enfilade the gateway to the fort. The British troops were thus forced back to the shelter of scone huts. The time for the general assault was long past, but still there was no sign of the converging columns. At 10.00 a.m. the troops in the huts were reinforced with two guns, three companies of English Infantry and the rest of the Royal Irish Dragoons. The guns were within twenty-five yards of the fort walls, there was still no sign of the converging columns, so Gillespie decided that a personal example was what was needed. He turned to Kennedy, a Horse-Gunner and a fellow Ulsterman and said, "Now Charles, now for the honour of Down". (Charles Kennedy, ninth son of John Kennedy of Cultra Manor, Craigavad., Co Down had later written on the back of a portrait of his that Gillespie's last words were, "Now Charles, now for the honour of Down." This is much more likely than **"One shot more for the honour of Down"**, which was quoted by Colonel Cairns at the unveiling of the statue in The Square, Comber, in 1845, and. is engraved on the memorial. The date of his death is given on the memorial as 24th October, 1814 whereas it should be the 31st.
Placing himself at the head of the attacking force, Gillespie once more ordered an assault on the fort. The Royal Irish advanced to the attack, ready and willing to support their old Officer and comrade. The British infantry, however, sullen and discontented, hung back as soon as they got within musket range

and then the Sepoys followed their example to a great extent. Vainly Gillespie, far in advance, called to them, cajoled them then cursed them to come on. He could not believe that troops personally led by himself could be letting him down. He could be seen waving his hat in one hand and the sword of the Royal Irish in the other, followed only by his faithful Dragoons, until he reached the very entrance to the wicket gate of the fort. Suddenly, the hat descended, abruptly the sword no longer glinted above. Gillespie fell, shot through the heart, on the threshold of the position he had sworn to take or die for.

It was the Royal Irish and Charles Kennedy, who under heavy fire, bore his body away in the retreat. A retirement was immediately ordered, and not until now did one of the columns arrive and cover the retreat. On receipt at Calcutta of the news of Gillespie's death, the Garrison flag was flown at half-mast from sunrise to sunset and minute guns to the number of forty-five, were fired at noon in his memory. The number of guns was intended to correspond with Gillespie's age. At his death, however, he was within three months of the completion of his forty-eighth year. News of his death did not reach England for some months and in the New Year Honours List of 1815 he was awarded the K.C .B. :- Knight Commander of the Bath.

His body was brought in a barrel of rum to Meerut and buried there. The column over his grave was repaired by the 8th Royal Irish in 1862. There is a statue of him in St Paul's Cathedral in London by Chantrey. It is a broad robust marble, far more robust than he can have ever been in real life, in knee breeches, gazing with half turned head towards his old chief of West Indian days, Sir Ralph Abercromby. The inscription is "Erected at public expense to the memory of Major General Robert Rollo Gillespie, who fell gloriously while leading the troops to an assault on the fortress of Kalunga in the kingdom of Nepal." (Note no mention is made of the K.C .B.)

The monument in The Square, Comber was unveiled on 24th June, 1845 (St. John's Day). Fifty lodges of the Masonic Order were present and it was calculated that between twenty-five and thirty thousand people crowded into the town to witness the ceremony. The Newtownards Amateur Band was also present. The Illustrated London News reported the proceedings and produced a drawing of the occasion. "Early on the morning of Tuesday the rain fell in torrents but as the day advanced, the sky cleared up and. the weather became more propitious. About three o'clock Colonel Cairns and several of the gentlemen who had been most active in raising the monument, ascended the platform. The crowd assembled was addressed by Rev.Townley Blackwood, Colonel Cairns, Alexander Grant from Derry, Percy Boyd, Quarter-Master J. Mansley, 8th Hussars, M. Hamilton of Dublin and Rev. R.J. Jex Blake, who referred to the harmony and. good feeling that had characterised the proceedings of the day, cautioned the multitude against indulging in ardent spirits and. advising them to leave the town for their hones without delay. The column is 55 feet high and a distant relative, who was in the army, posed for the sculptor. Gillespie would be surprised, if he came back, to see the figure with his back to the house in which he was born and even worse to see the sword in his right hand. At the action in Vellore, the Princes' standard - green with tiger stripes and. a sun in the centre, was captured by Gillespie and in 1821 was presented by his son Lieutenant Robert Rollo Gillespie to King George 4th.

BLACK BOB

There is an interesting story about his horse Black Bob. A month after Gillespie's death his horse was put up for sale. The men of the 8th Royal, Irish, out of respect for their old leader raised five hundred guineas among themselves and bought the beautiful black animal. Black Bob was now the pet of the Regiment and always preceded it on the march. He knew the trumpet calls of the 8th better than any other. On parades he took his accustomed place at the saluting base, just as if Sir Robert was in the saddle. Eight years passed and the Royal Irish were ordered to return to England so had to part with Black Bob. He was sold to a civilian in Cawnpore and half the purchase money was returned, to ensure that he would be well looked after.

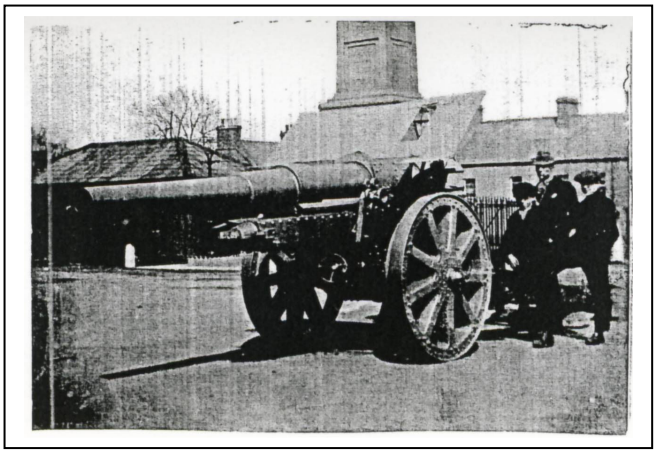
Black Bob was only three days with his new master, when he heard the trumpets of the 8th. sounding 'Garryowen" as the Regiment marched, before dawn, to embark on the "Ganges" en route for Calcutta. Bob became frantic and lashed out with his hoofs. He destroyed his stall and eventually sank among the straw, bleeding and half strangled in his stall collar. As time passed he saw no more the familiar uniforms, nor heard the voices or trumpets of his old friends in the 8th. He refused to eat and pined away. In pity his new owner turned him into a field and immediately Bob leaped the fence, returned to the barrack square and came whinnying up to the saluting base, where he fell to rise no more

SECOND LIEUTENANT EDMUND DE WIND. V.C.
13th BATTALION. THE ROYAL IRISH RIFLES.
1884 - 1917

Edmund de Wind, born in 1884, was the son of Arthur Hughes de Wind, C .E. who was the Chief Engineer of the Belfast and County Down Railway and who lived in a house he built for himself, called "KINVARA", on the Killinchy Road., Comber. He died on 27th February, 1917.
Edmund de Wind's mother was Margaret Jane Stone, daughter of Guy Stone, C.L, who lived at Barnhill, on the Belfast Road. She died in 1922, aged. 81 years. Edmund's aunt was Elizabeth Stone of Barnhall, the last surviving member of the family and she died in 1943, aged 94 years.

Edmund de Wind, joined the 15th (Service) Battalion, The Royal Irish Rifles and took part in the battles at THIEPVAL, 1st July, 1916, MESSINES RIDGE, 1917, Third BATTLE OF YPRES, 1917, CAMBRAI, 1917, and the great GERMAN ATTACK in 1918. It was here that our local hero made the supreme sacrifice on the 2lst March, 1918. At the RACEOURSE REDOUBT, near GRUGIES, Edmund de Wind held the post for seven hours, though twice wounded and practically singlehanded. Twice, with only two N.C.O.s, he got out on top, under heavy fire, continually, clearing enemy out of the trench. He continued to repel attack after attack until he fell mortally wounded. "No Surrender" were words he knew so well.
He was posthumously awarded the VICTORIA CROSS - the greatest award for bravery and devotion to duty that any soldier can achieve. His Victoria Cross was one of three gained by his Regiment during the Great War of 1914 - 1918.
There is a tablet to his memory in Comber Parish Church. After the War a large German gun was presented to the town as a memorial to him and was placed in The Square. It had his name and details inscribed on the side of it. Most regrettably, the gun was removed during the 1939 - 1945 War in the drive for scrap metal to aid the production of munitions. Fortunately the metal plates containing the inscription were preserved and are now in the porch of the Parish Church, in The Square.

LEST WE FORGET



135 Quick firing German Field Gun

CAPTAIN GEORGE JAMES BRUCE D.S .0. M.C

13th BATTALI0N, THE ROYAL IRISH RIFLES. (1st CO. DOWN VOLUNTEERS)
GENERAL STAFF OFFICER ON THE HEADQUARTER STAFF ULSTER DIVISIQN.

George James Bruce was the eldest son of Mr. Samuel Bruce, of Norton Hall Campden, Gloucestershire.
His mother was Louise Mary Julie Colthurst of Blarney Castle, County Cork. He was of Scottish descent, an ancestor having been killed at Flodden in 1513. Another ancestor was the Rev. Michael Bruce, Minister of Killinchy, who suffered much persecution on religious grounds.

George Bruce was born in 1880, was educated at Winchester and in 1907 married Hilda, daughter of Mr. John Blakiston-Houston, D.L. of Orangefield, Belfast. Before the 1914 - 18 War he resided at CUAN, Killinchy Road, Comber and was Managing Director of the Comber Distilleries Company Ltd., of which his father was Chairman. He was a most versatile sportsman. He played cricket for North Down and for The North of Ireland Club, was a Plus Two handicap player in the Golfing world, was a magnificent shot and a fine tennis and billiards player.

He was commander of a company of the Ulster Volunteers in 1912 and drilled his men in the Distillery yard on the Newtownards Road. On the formation of the Ulster Division, he obtained a Commission in the 1st County Down Battalion, commanded by Colonel W.H.Savage. He was promoted to the rank of Captain on 1st September, 19114. He went to train with his men at Clandeboye and was a very popular and efficient Officer. The Battalion then went to Ballykinler for rifle practice and later proceeded to Seaford in Sussex, He crossed to France with his Comber men and with the late William Humphries as his groom and was prominent in all the battles in which the 13th Battalion, The Royal Irish Rifles took part, including the Battle of the Somme, at Thiepval, on the 1st July, 1916.

He eventually became Brigade Major of the 109th Infantry Brigade, much to the regret of his men in the 13th Battalion, R.I.R. and was killed in action on 2nd October, 1918 at Dadizelle, in Flanders, at the age of 38 years - and just about six weeks before the Armistice was signed on 11th November, 1918.

There is a tablet to his memory in Comber Parish Church.

"LEST WE FORGET"

COMBER :- 426 men answered the call to arms in 1914.
79 made the SUPREME SACRIFICE.
The War Memorial was unveiled on 14th April, 1923.

COMBER ROMAN CATHOLIC CHAPEL

The foundation stone of the Church of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, Comber, was solemnly laid by the Most Reverend Dr. Dorrian, on the 23rd of October, l868.

The Church stands on a beautiful site on what was then the outskirts of the town. It is in the early Gothic style and built of Scrabo stone. It is seventy-two feet long and thirty feet wide and sixty feet high including the belfry. Mortimer Thompson was the architect. It was dedicated by the Most Reverend Dr. Dorrian on 8th September, 1872.

One of the returns to Parliament, preserved in the Record Office in Dublin, is marked. Cumber and endorsed, "Taken by Jeffy. Gumly, gagr. of sd. walk, Sept. 3rd., 1764.." It is not stated whether it refers only to Comber or to "Comber Walk." It gives the following information: - Cumber - Churches - two; Meeting Houses - one; Chaples - none. Number of Protestants of the Church of Ireland - three hundred and fifteen; Presbyterians - one thousand two hundred and twenty; Papists - one hundred and sixty-five. Total number of inhabitants - one thousand and seven hundred."

Father Close commenced to celebrate Mass every Sunday in Comber and as there was no Church he obtained the use of the Market House, which was in Market Street, now Killinchy Street. The Market House was built in 1850.

Chapel or place of worship for Catholics in 1863 was at the Crescent. The building was at the rere of a house and later became a blacksmith's shop.

A N N E Mc Q U I L L AN OF CQMBER, SPINNER EXTRAORDINARY

"Belfast Monthly Magazine"
May, 1809.

Anne McQuillan was about 25 years of age, rather below the middle size, delicate in her constitution but cheerful and lively in her manners, though her health and sight were considerably impaired by intense application to the improvement of her art.

Anne McQuillan obtained two awards from the Linen Board for the great advance she achieved in the production of superfine yarn. In one instance the thread of Anne McQuillan's yarn of 105 hanks from 1 lb of flax, was 214 English miles in length. Each hank contained 12 cuts and each cut 120 threads and each thread measured 2½ yards. A sample of the fine thread was given with the May issue of the magazine.

The wheel off which Anne spun her superfine threads was made before the marriage of her grandmother, Mrs. Wilson, who brought it to her husband's house in 1716. The Lady Dufferin of the period repeatedly purchased yarn and had it manufactured into thread by Anne McQuillan and then into fine lace in the neighbourhood of London.

THE COMBER GAS COMPANY

This Company dates from 1847 and was established during a general wave of industrial prosperity. It was formed by the tradesmen of Comber, for the advancement of the town in industry and social amenities. In 1925 it was maintaining an average output of 10,000,000 (ten million) cubic feet arid employed seven people. It consumed an estimated 800 tons of coal per annum during its peak production in this year; Coal was supplied from Belfast at £1: 6: 8 per ton. The gas was supplied to street lighting, all the houses and larger buildings, while profitable contracts were secured for the bye-products (coke, tar and spent oxides.).

The coming of electric power in 1925 proved fatal to the Gas Company. Production decreased to 8,000,000 (eight million) cubic feet in 1927, but stood at 6,000,000 (six million) cubic feet in 1950, and at its closure in 1957 was 4,000,000 (four million) cubic feet. The custom of four hundred to five hundred people gradually diminished until, when closed, it was running at a loss. The decrease in output and the rise in costs, especially on coal and labour, ensured a loss in the business.
Electricity was cleaner, cheaper and more efficient than gas. The existing meters were not suited to the rising cost of gas and were expensive to replace. Many of the customers lived in houses, which meant a loss of business, when they moved to the new estate on the Darragh Road.
Expansion was impossible due to lack of capital. As a private firm it had to pay its way. Some human factors were also involved in the closure.
In 1886 John W. Ritchie was Managing Director. J.O.A. Brownlow was Secretary of the firm and James P. Sheen was the Treasurer. The foreman was David Patterson,
The Gasworks was on the site of the present Baptist Church, in Mill Street, and earlier had been a quarry at the bottom of Windmill Hill, both owned by John Andrews, “John the Great”, (1721-1808).

THE TANNERY AND STEAM TRACTION ENGINES.

On the site now occupied by W.R.M. Homer’s Chemist Shop was a Tannery or Tan-Yard where leather was made and it was a very slow process. It was owned by the Ralph brothers in the late nineteenth century and the story is told that when the Inspector came from Belfast to grade the sides of leather and stamp them, one of the brothers would take the Inspector across to Milling’s Hotel for refreshment, while the other brother stamped the hides that were below standard.

James George Allen, one of the Allen family of Unicarvel, married a Miss De Wind of Comber and they lived in one of the Georgian houses on the north side of The Square, a house which was recently the Comber Post Office and is now occupied by Trevor Allen & Co. George Allen was a very clever engineer and. he set up a small workshop at the rear of his house, where he did the work for his customers. In his spare tine he built for himself a motor-car, the first one to be seen or owned in Comber. His business improved and he took over the old Tan-yard and commenced building steam traction engines and steam-rollers. As there was practically no traffic, he tested them round the Square and sometimes down Bridge Street and out along the Newtownards Road. One frosty morning he was testing one along the road, but on passing over the railway lines at the level-crossing, the engine skidded and crashed into one of McWatters’ bread-carts drawn by two horses. The bread-cart was smashed and unfortunately both horses were killed. As he was involved in constructing steam-rollers, he also got contracts for re-surfacing roads in various parts of the county from the Grand Jury in Downpatrick. Mr. Tom McKeag has one of the metal plates with the maker’s name from the side of one of his engines. George Allen was also the Sub-District Commandant of the first unit of the “B” Special Constabulary in Comber. Traces of his furnaces can still be seen in the wall beside the path leading to the Car-Park, from Mr. Horner’s shop.

THE DISTILLERIES.

Comber began to manufacture alcoholic beverages in the 18th century, for in a 'Return' dated 3rd. September, 1764, which was made by a Revenue Officer, who styled himself as a "Guager", it is stated that the number of inhabitants was 1700 and that the little town was a hive of industry and activity, having a brewery, paper mills, flour mills, and bleaching greens, in the heart of a thriving agricultural district. As a natural consequence of the extensive grain growing, brewing and distilling were important industries.
James Patterson, who died in 1763, owned a malt kiln and distillery in what is now Killinchy Street, but was then called Barry Street and later Market Street. This became the Upper Distillery in 1825, having, up to that date, been called "The Mound Distillery", because there was an earthen mound to the rear of the buildings. The lane leading down to the Distillery was known as Waterford Loney as there was a ford across the river at the end of the Lane or Loney. It was better known in later years as Potale Loney locally pronounced as "Potyal" Loney. Potale was what was left of the barley after the whiskey had been made. Farmers came in their box-carts to carry it away as feeding for their cattle.

Alexander Riddel (ancestor of Riddel's of Belfast still remembered in Riddel Arcade and in Riddel Hall in Queen's University.) who was also an extensive bleacher in Comber, took over the business (the distillery) in 1761 and ran it until 1767. In that year John Andrews (John the Great) rented the buildings and bought some utensils to carry on the business. He employed William Murdoch, brother of Daniel Murdoch, who had married a daughter of John Andrew, the cooper, to run the business for him. On William Murdoch's tombstone in the Church of Ireland graveyard, he is described as "the eminent distiller of Comber". This arrangement ended in 1788. William Murdoch died in 1805 aged 85 years.

Distilling apparently continued on the site, for a distillery was there when John Miller (1796-1883) came to Comber in 1826. John Miller lived in "Aureen", in The Square, and his name is on the edge of the footpath in front of the house, picked out in white cobble stones. This is private ground belonging to the house. Also on the footpath in white cobble stones is a hare, a greyhound (Master McGra) and the Trainer. This footpath was originally perfectly smooth and was washed with soap and water every Saturday night, to be clean for Sunday. Master McGra, a greyhound owned by Lord Lurgan, family name Brownlow, won the Waterloo Cup against the best dogs in Britain on the plains of Altcar in 1869, 1871 and 1872. George Johnston was running the Distillery in 1825 and took John Miller into partnership in 1826. The business was successful and in 1829-30, 80,000 gallons of whiskey were produced. Power for this Distillery came from a breast wheel, 14 feet in diameter on the river and in summer months by a steam engine.

In 1825 on a site on the Newtownards Road (now occupied by Space Dyers) was a paper mill owned by John Ward in conjunction with two partners and had a town store in Pottinger's Entry in Belfast. In this Entry, John's son Marcus opened a small general printing works some time in the eighteen-thirties. Out of this small business grew the great fins of printers and publishers, Marcus Ward and Company, whose directors were Marcus Ward and. his three sons, Francis, John and William. It became so great that it had branches in London, New York and Sydney. A quarrel among the brothers wrecked the firm, which, after a long and expensive lawsuit, ended its existence in 1899. One of the grandsons of Marcus became editor of The Times, Robert McGowan Barrington-Ward, one of five distinguished brothers. A great and very honourable business, employing 1400 highly skilled workers of all sorts perished; and a world-wide reputation was lost.

In the middle years of the nineteenth century the firm expanded rapidly and premises were acquired. in London and in Belfast at the Royal Ulster Works, Dublin Road and at the block between Fountain Street and Donegal1 Place. The firm was producing at this time a wide range of stationery such as paper, inkwells, pencils, blotters, dairies, and water—colour blocks. They also specialised in fine bookbinding and most notably in fine printing. The firm was also well known for the high quality of its chromolithographic work, a colour printing process

which involved the separation of as many as twelve colours in one design. At that time they had as many as 150 books in print, many of them educational books heavily illustrated. Prominent among these were the Vere Foster headline copybooks, used all over Ireland for the teaching of writing, Civil Service style and similar copybooks for the teaching of Drawing. One of the two steam driven printing machines, bought specially for the printing of Vere Foster's Copybooks was able to produce 16,000 copies per day, while other machines could only produce 300 or 400 per, day. This enabled the books to be sold very cheaply to the schools.

In 1825 William Bryne took over the Paper Mill and established a distillery. In 1834 the firm was enlarged and was owned by Bryne, Stitt and McCance. In 1860 John Miller got complete possession of both distilleries (Upper and Lower) and from then on both were run very successfully. The Lower Distillery consisted of two buildings at right angles to each other, one was 210 feet long and the other 180 feet long, both built of Scrabo sandstone. The power came from an undershot wheel on the river, 18 feet in diameter and in summer months by a steam engine as the water level in the river was low. In 1925 the Lower Distillery was capable of storing 50,000 casks -the contents of many of them being over twenty years old.

In the early 1920's the Upper Distillery was re-built with Scrabo stone at a cost of £50,000 and it was then described as the most up-to-date distillery in Ireland. The latest type of machinery had been installed for cleaning; grinding and dealing with the barley from the time it leaves the kiln passing through many receptacles and stages entirely automatically. The granary had a capacity of 6,000 tons. In 1925 electric light was installed throughout both distilleries. They were owned by the Bruce family, John Miller having sold them to Mr. Samuel Bruce around 1873.

In connection with the Upper Distillery there was a mechanics' shop, a forge, a joiners' shop and a cooperage, where casks were made, on the other side of the street beside Second Comber Presbyterian Church.
Market House, built by Lord Londonderry for Comber, on the other side of Waterford Loney, in 1825 was taken over by the Distillery as a store and a house was built for the Manager. The lower Distillery was closed prior to 1931 and during the 1939-45 War was used by the Army as a Command Supply Depot for troops in the district. Hollywood and Donnelly Ltd. had become the owners of both distilleries and the working Directors were John Gilligan and. Matthew Gillich. The Upper Distillery last distilled in 1952 and closed in 1956.

JOHN MILLER. J.P.
1796 - 1883

John Miller was born in January, 1796 in Downpatrick. For some years he held a position in connection with the Customs and in September, 1826 he settled in Comber, having become one of the partners in the ownership of the Upper Distillery. He later became sole owner of both distilleries and amassed a large amount of money. He retired in 1873 and sold both distilleries to Mr. Samuel Bruce.

Mr. Miller was a Protestant Episcopalian till 1822. In that year he was residing in Limavady, then called Newtownlimavady, and having heard a sermon by the Rev. William Porter, he adopted the Unitarian form of faith, and henceforth was a very active and generous supporter of the Unitarian Church. Shortly after his settlement in Comber he gave proof of his determination to promote the interests of Unitarianism as far as he possibly could. He resolved that a congregation should be established in that town, and having procured a loft sufficiently large enough to accommodate a considerable number, he waited on the Rev. John Porter of Belfast and intimated to him that he would have the loft fitted up, if Mr. Porter would send ministers out to conduct the services. The Rev. Mr. Porter complied with his request and. amongst the ministers who preached in Comber were Revs. Dr. Montgomery, S. Nelson, W. Crozier, Hugh Moore and F.Blakley.
In 1838, chiefly through the efforts of Mr. Miller, assisted by Mr. John Andrews and others, the present Unitarian Meeting House in Comber was built. His contributions to the Unitarian Church were frequent and bountiful, and when the Sustenation Fund of the Remonstrant Synod was organised, Mr. Miller gave £2,000 to

it. In fact, it is greatly owing to the support generously given by Mr. Miller that the congregation of Comber has prospered so well. From the very beginning of his career in Comber Mr. Miller was a conspicuous friend of the Unitarian Church and as his business extended his contributions to the support of the Church of his adoption were correspondingly enlarged. In politics Mr. Miller was a pronounced Liberal.

Unwittingly to obtrude himself on the political platform, he was yet a resolute promoter of the policy of Mr. Gladstone. During the candidature of Mr. James Shaman Crawford in 1874 for the representation of Co. Down, Mr. Miller worked energetically in the Liberal cause. (From the NorthernWhig of January, 1883.)

(From the Northern Whig, 17th July, 1838.)

"Installation in Comber :- On Monday, the 9th inst. the Remonstrant Presbytery of Bangor held a meeting in Comber for the purpose of installing the Rev. William Hugh Doherty in the pastoral charge of the (new) congregation in that place. The Rev. Dr. Montgomery preached on the occasion, and in a sermon remarkable for sound reason, deep thought, and vigorous eloquence, explained the difficulties, the duties and the hopes of Unitarian Christians in the present times. The Rev. F. Blakely delivered a suitable and very impressive charge to the Minister and people. After the service the Congregation adjourned to the site of the new Meeting House. James Andrews Esq. Sen. then laid the foundation stone, in the usual manner, and addressed the assembly in a few appropriate remarks. He congratulated them on the happy prospect of having a Christian temple erected for the worship of the one and only living and true God, according to his will revealed by Christ Jesus, his only begotten and well beloved Son; and he admonished them to exercise charity and brotherly love towards all who differed from them in religious sentiment. The Rev. Dr. Montgomery then delivered a suitable address in which he took occasion to inform the audience that Mr. Andrews had, with great generosity, presented to the new Congregation the munificent gift of two acres of land for ever, as a site for the Meeting House, and Glebe-house and also a donation of £100. The good Gentleman concluded the interesting services of the day by invoking the Divine blessing upon the important work in which they had that day commenced. In the evening, the members of the Congregation, the Presbytery, and a number of the respectable members of other religious communities dined together in Mr. Milling's hotel: James Andrews Esq. Sen. Chairman, John Andrews Esq. J.P. and John Miller Esq. Croupiers. The following toasts were given from the Chair :—"The Queen, may her reign be long and prosperous", "The Duke of Sussex and the rest of the Royal Family", "The Lord Lieutenant and prosperity to Ireland", "Lord Londonderry, one of the best of landlords", "Civil and religious liberty all over the World", "The Rev. W.H. Doherty, may he be successful in his advocacy of Christian truth," "Our Christian brethren of other denominations," "The Remonstrant Congregation of Ballyhemlin", etc. etc. The toasts were responded to in speeches replete with good feeling and Christian charity; and not a sentiment was uttered that could give offence to any member of any Christian Church. The Company separated at an early hour, much gratified by the proceedings of the day."

OPENING OF THE NEW CHURCH POSTPONED.

Above the quarry in Mill Street, where the new Baptist Church is now situated is a hill named Windmill Hill, as there was once a windmill on it, built in 1792 built by John Andrews. James Andrews, who was the owner of the Flour Mill, Bleach green and other workshops in Comber, decided to build a new residence for himself and he chose the land beside the windmill as the site. The new Unitarian congregation had just obtained a lease of a site on a hill in Killinchy Street, opposite the Upper Distillery for their new church, from Lord Londonderry. As the Unitarians and indeed all Presbyterians were more likely to be supporters of the Liberal Party than the Tory Party, a deputation from Comber met Lord Londonderry and had a discussion with him regarding this lease, with the result that it was withdrawn.
James Andrews, with great generosity, gave the land on which he was going to build his house, to the new congregation, free of charge, as a site for their new Church and Manse. The site in Killinchy Street was however

given to another body of Presbyterians as a site for their Church and this became the Second Presbyterian Church in Comber.

The Unitarian Church was almost ready for the Opening Services, when on the night of the 6th/7th January, 1839 there was a terrific storm. It was known for long afterwards as "The Night of the Big Wind", all over Ulster, and many a tale was told of narrow escapes from death and of the terrible damage done that night. It was apparently really terrifying. In Comber, the distillery in Killinchy Street, owned by Johnston and. Miller was entirely wrecked. The Lower Distillery on the Newtownards Road also suffered damage and the chimney of the Andrews Flour Mill was blown down. The top of the Andrews' Windmill was blown off and landed on the roof of the new Unitarian Church, damaging it severely so severely indeed that it held up the Installation of the Minister for a year.

SCHOOLS IN COMBER

Education and schools in Comber started in the monasteries. An important aspect of life in the monastery was the activity in the school where the sons of the wealthy chieftains in the neighbourhood were educated, together with the eldest sons of the lay monks. They were taught Latin from a Latin Psalter, which they loved and constantly recited; they also learned to read, to write, to draw, and to illuminate letters with beautiful designs. So they produced beautiful copies of famous books, which took a long time to complete and which became part of the monastery treasure. This work would be supervised-by the Scribe, who would order the work to be done again, if it was not perfect, and they believed strongly in corporal punishment for carelessness. In the ruins of the monastery of Nendrum on Mahee Island, close to the Monastery School, slate tablets were found containing Celtic designs. Among these was one that could be called the first Headline Copybook. At the top of the tablet was an excellent design, obviously executed by the Scribe and below this was a poor effort at copying the example by the pupil. No doubt, punishment was administered, for there was a great improvement in the next attempt directly below the offending one.

SCHOOLS ESTABLISHED IN NORTH DOWN BY THE SCOTS.

When the Scots came to North Down in 1606, one of the things they did at an early stage was to estab1ish schools. Hamilton of Bangor, who was well educated and indeed was one of the first two Fellows of Trinity College, Dublin, set up schools at Bangor, Holywood, Ballyhalbert, Dundonald and Killyleagh. Montgomery of Newtownards, not to be outdone set up a great school in that town and. appointed John McLellan, later succeeded by John Hutchinson, at a salary of £20 per annum to teach Latin, Greek, Logycks, Goff, Football and Archery. Another Master was appointed to teach Orthography and Arithmetic. There was also a Music Master, who was also Precentor of the Church, who got instructions, "that both sexes were to larn the art and help drown the noise made by the ordinary people at the services in the Church." For this great advantage the parents had to pay. The next reference to education was that there was a school of Philosophy in Killyleagh, conducted by the Rev. James McAlpine, a Presbyterian Minister. It was still in operation in 1712 despite an attempt to close it in 1698 by the Episcopalians. A similar school was opened in Comber about 1685 and. was conducted by John Binning, a stepson of the former Presbyterian minister in Comber, the Rev. James Gordon. Some candidates for the Ministry received part of their education here, but it was interrupted by the Wars of 1689 - 1690 and never started again.

THE LETTER THAT LED TO THE SIEGE OF DERRY

The Rev. John Hamilton was minister in First Comber Presbyterian Church on 3rd December, 1688, when an anonymous letter was found on the street, addressed to the Earl of Mount Alexander, warning him that a general massacre of the Protestants was planned for the following Sunday. The alarm caused by the letter led to the

shutting of the gates of Derry and the Rev. Hamilton fled to Edinburgh, where he was eventually appointed to a church. He was followed by others including John Binning, Sir Robert Colville, who had bought the Newtownards and Comber estates, Thomas Herrington and his son, both large land-owners in the town and John Griffith also from Comber. Many others, even from Dublin, did the same thing, some going to Scotland and others to the Isle of Man. The letter was considered by some to be a fake, because it was badly written by an uneducated person, but fake or not, it was effective in preparation being made for the coming sieges and battles. Here is the letter.

"To my Lord, this deliver with hast and care."

"Good my Lord,
I have written to you to let you know, that all our Irish men through Ireland is sworn, that on the ninth day of this month, they are to fall on to kill and murder, men, wife and child.; and I desire your Lordship to take care of yourself and all others that are judged by our men to be heads, for whosoever of them can kill any of you, they are to have a captain's place; so my desire to your honour is to look to yourself, and give other noblemen warning, and go not out either night or day without a good guard with you, and let no Irish man come near you, whatsoever he be: so this is all from him who was your father's friend, and is your friend, and will be, though I dare not be known, as yet for fear of my life."

THE CHARTER SCHOOLS.

The next schools to appear were the Charter Schools in Bangor, Killough and Ballynahinch. In Bangor, the Hon. Sophia Hamilton, wishing to do something for the poor of the town, started a school where some eight year old children would be taught the spinning of flax for linen. The teacher was paid 6/- per year for each child and the parents were given sixpence per week for feeding and clothing. Schools of a similar type were started in Killough and Ballynahinch. These were mainly for "Popish children trained for useful labour and the Principles of the Protestant religion and to preserve them from the influence of their Popish relations." They were boarding schools and the children were taught how to work at the manufacture of linen, how to cultivate lands and gardens and produce all the necessary vegetables. Two hours each day were devoted to English, Writing and Arithmetic, and the remainder at linen manufacture from flax to cloth. In winter evenings the boys made fishing nets and the girls were busy at knitting, sewing, brewing, baking and dairy work. Rewards for good work were either 2/- (l0p) to their parents or a portion of bread on Sunday after Divine Service. In l784 and 1787 these schools were visited and it was reported that the children were ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-taught, sickly pale miserable objects. Some had been six years there but could not read as all the time had been spent in working. Nothing was done to change these so-called schools. At the beginning of the 19th century it was found that the children lived in hunger, nakedness, filth and ignorance. Few would take Charter School children as apprentices, even when tempted by large fees. Yet these schools continued until 1832 after one hundred years of existence and fifty years of adverse reports. National Schools for children up to twelve years of age began in Ireland in 1831. The hours were 9.30 a.m. - 3.00 p.m. in winter and 9.30 a.m. - 5.00 p.m. in summer. These continued until 1923 (although the hours were changed) when they became Public Elementary Schools and in 1945 Primary and Intermediate Schools.

COMBER PAROCHIAL SCHOOL, 1813 & THE LONDONDERRY SCHOOL, COMBER.

In 1813 a day-school was established in connection with the Church of Ireland and occupied a site in The Square, where the present Church Hall is now situated. It functioned from that date until a new Public Elementary School was opened on Darragh Road, (then called the 'Back Loney') in November, 1938. The original school, was built jointly by the Countess of Londonderry (her husband did not become a Marquis until 1816), and the Executors of the Erasmus Smyth Charity. It was a single storey building facing The Square and

with a small playground (originally a garden) in front. It had two rooms, one forty feet long and 18 feet wide and the other 30 feet long and the same width both had ceilings 10 feet high. It had accommodation for 126 pupils. In 1837 the school had 233 pupils - 137 boys and 96 girls. They were all Protestant except 8 who were Roman Catholics. School attendance was of course not compulsory. The Master received £30 yearly from the Erasmus Smyth Foundation and one halfpenny from each of his pupils as were able to make the weekly payment. In 1832 Lord Londonderry erected a house for the Master at the rere of the School. It has now been re-modelled as a house for the Curate. Immediately before that it was the residence of the Sexton.

"Sloth and filth, No sanitation".

In 1841 Lord Londonderry inspected the town and wrote some very harsh and scathing comments on the state of the place. He did likewise in Newtownards. He considered the school "both neglected in interior cleanliness and outward management - the garden and premises indicating sloth and filth."

We have to remember here, that there was no normal sanitation scheme in existence at that time and that most of the houses had no back doors. Slops, filth and rubbish were pitched on to the street and allowed to rot there. For this reason, one place in Newtownards was locally known as "Chuckiestown", as all slops and dirt were thrown on to the street without warning. One could quite easily be 'in a pretty pickle'. The open drains in the streets were seldom cleaned out and consequently were blocked. No wonder, disease, especially "Consumption", later called "T.B.," was rife and people including the wealthy had very large families - fifteen to twenty - in the hope that some of them would live past the age of fourteen years. James Andrews, at this time had nine sons and three daughters. It was at this time that the so called "tunnels" were made. They had nothing to do with smugglers, brandy, silk, tobacco etc. These 'tunnels' were originally open drains from the large houses of the wealthy to the river. Then to protect their delicate noses from the stink, the drains were bricked over and the whole thing covered with soil. In the course of time, when proper sanitation was provided, they fell into disuse and were forgotten about. Occasionally they come to light now, and of course people jump to the conclusion that they were tunnels used by smugglers. They were well planned and provision was made to prevent flooding from the river when the water-level was high. This was achieved by putting in doors which opened towards the river and when the flood water came up from the river, the doors closed. One of these doors was discovered when the new Enler Car Park was being constructed. It came from what had been "The Old House" in Castle Street, a residence of one of the Andrews' families, and is now the site of the Cinema, and went towards the river. The flood door, made of solid oak is still there in perfect condition. Another, although not as good, came to light when the foundations for the New Hall at the Church of Ireland were being dug. This was a stream taken off the Glen River, which flows between the Upper Distillery and the Car Park in Killinchy Street. It was probably used by the Cistercian Abbey to clear their kitchen drain and reredorter into the River Enler, and later used for the same purpose by the Glebe House, built in 1738. This stream flowed in the open at the bottom of the gardens of the houses on the south side of Bridge Street, within living memory, but when the Glebe House was removed, it dried up.

In 1852 the Principal of the school was Samuel Mills and the Assistant teacher was Miss Betty Gilmore. In 1870 it was Owen Laveille, Principal and Mrs Turner, the Assistant. In February, 1886 Hugh Montgomery was appointed Principal of the School, his first appointment to a school having been in 1867. His Assistants were George Bunting, receiving his first appointment as a teacher on the same day as his Principal i.e. 1st. February, 1886. On the 1st. October, 1886 Miss Maggie J. Dickson received her first appointment as Assistant Teacher. In 1887, the Inspector reported that "The school accommodation was fair. The floor and desks old and needed a good scrubbing. The Out Offices not quite satisfactory there should be a urinal for the boys. The pupils were not steady enough, talk too much and would copy." This was of course by an infamous Inspector called J.B. Skeffington, who was an atrocious writer, yet had no hesitation in criticising the children's writing.

Mr. William H. Spence, the next Principal, was born in October, 1863 and got his first appointment as an Untrained Teacher in October, 1882. He was trained in Marlboro' Street, Training College, Dublin, in 1891-92 and was appointed Principal of the Londonderry School in Comber on the 1st. May, 1897. Mr. Spence continued to teach in this school until his retirement on 30th. March, 1928. Teachers in this school during his

time were: - Miss M. Lyons from 1897 until 1899, when Miss A. Bell was appointed as Assistant. When she left in 1907, Miss Everina D. Drennan was appointed and resigned in 1910. Miss Lizzie Cunliffe followed from 1910 until 1911 and was succeeded by Miss Sarah O. Browne from 1911 until 1926; Miss Ellen Jane Devlin followed from 1926 until 1927, and then came Miss Annie B. Palmer from 1927 until 1935. Mr. Joseph Leslie Northmore became Principal in 1928 and later transferred to the new Public Elementary School as a Privileged Assistant in 1938. Miss Florence Charlotte West was Assistant from 1935 until 1938.
For the greater part of the existence of this school, the staff consisted of a Principal and one Assistant, but at times the average annual attendance justified a second Assistant. In l893 there were 147 pupils in attendance for examination, but this had fallen to 116 in 1898 and to 75 in 1910. By 1913 the number present had dropped to 56 and in 1914 to 49. The numbers then took an upward turn and by l927 was 814. The number then fluctuated between 50 and 70 until in 1938 it was 46.

Let us end on a good note for this old school, which had served the town well for 125 years throughout a period when teaching ideas were very restricted, when those children who could learn easily by rhyming were counted clever and when everything had to be done according to rule and custom and. anything different was regarded as frivolous and time wasting. Take Grammar for instance. As an aid to Parsing words, many lists of words had to be memorized such as prepositions: - about, above, according to, across, after, against etc. right to the end of the alphabet. Possessive adjectives - my, thy, his, her, its, our, your, their. Personal Pronouns Nominative I, Possessive Mine, Objective Me. Plural Nom. We, Poss. Ours, Obj. Us. And so it went on - rhymes, rhymes, rhymes. The same applied to Geography. Mountains and highest peaks, rivers and tributaries, capes, bays etc. all learned off by heart. Drawing consisted of copying from a card intricate designs with lots of curves on each side of a line down the middle and both sides had to match exactly. Geometry consisted of the propositions of Euclid, learned off by heart. Again this was a rhyme and most of the pupils had no idea what they were talking about. It was just another rhyme to learn. An angle to many was a small curve one made in a corner. Teachers, in general, did their best, but the Inspector was the bogey man and a certain amount of work had to be done, whether all the children understood it or not otherwise there were sarcastic comments and an adverse report. Here is an example. In the Inspector's remarks for 1913 are the following. "The rooms have been done up and are in good condition Offices have been lime-washed; some lime should be thrown into the pits to check the foul smell. Ventilation has been improved by putting in some movable panes of glass. Penmanship was fair. A number sat wrongly and held the pen faultily. Pupils should be made to sit in the proper position and to hold their pens in the correct manner, otherwise writing cannot improve." These were pens with steel nibs and often the paper was of poor quality and the nib would stick in the paper and cause a blot. The "proper position" was as follows. Try it for yourself. "Pupils should sit upright with straight backs. Both feet should be together and pointing forward. Left forearm should be along the bottom of the page, pen between forefinger and thumb, with the forefinger perfectly straight and the pen pointing directly over the right shoulder." Pupils, who were naturally left-handed, were required to use the right hand as above. Writing should be upright or slightly sloping to the right. Backhand writing was an odious crime and like a bent forefinger deserved instant punishment with the edge of a twelve inch ruler. At this time Vera Foster's Headline Copy Books were used in every school to obtain a uniform style of writing as used in the Civil Service.

COMBER NATIONAL SCHOOL.

In 1831 another school was built in Comber, this time in connection with the Presbyterian congregation. It was built with the assistance of the London Hibernian Society, who gave a grant of five pounds ten shillings and paid the master sixpence quarterly, "for each of his pupils, who are qualified to pass an examination." This was the beginning of 'payment by results'. He also received 2/- or 2/6 per quarter from each of his pupils. In 1837 there were 34 males and 32 females attending the school. This building is still in existence, as it is now

the Lower Committee Room and the Minister's Room. It was rectangular in shape with the entrance facing the Coo Vennel or High Street. This school continued until 1869. It had a Principal and one Assistant Teacher.

On the 22nd September, 1864, the minister of the Church, the Rev. J. M. Killen received a letter from a Mr. William Simms of the Linen Hall, Belfast, containing a cheque for three hundred pounds.
This was a gift from the late Mr. Roddy to the congregation and was sent in accordance with instructions given to his wife, before his death. In January 1865 a meeting of the congregation was held in the Meeting House and the question of contributing to the Assembly's New Manse and School Fund was considered, but it was decided to raise a Fund for the completion of their own Manse and the enlargement of their own Schoolhouse. Mr. Killen was requested to obtain subscriptions from the members of the Congregation and the meeting resolved to give him all the assistance in their power. One hundred pounds from the money left by Mr. Roddy was to be used to complete the Manse, this was to be replaced from subscriptions from the congregation.

On 20th July, 1865, the Church Committee met and decided to extend the schoolhouse. £100 to be raised by the congregation and £100 to be raised, if possible, by the Rev. J. M. Killen. Mr. Killen was authorised to lift a hundred pounds from the bank for the completion of the Manse, thus leaving £100 of the money left by the late Mr. Roddy still in the Bank. On the 9th December, 1869, the Building Committee met as arranged, all members being present, the remainder of Mr. Roddy's legacy with interest, having been received from Dr. Killen, who also handed in £50 received from the Marchioness of Londonderry, as her donation to the building of the school, per Mr. Brownlow, the Committee proceeded to pay Messrs. Samuel White and James Kyle, the contractors, one hundred and fifty-three pounds fourteen shillings and eight pence, being the full amount of the balance due them including extras for their contract of 2nd. August, 1869. Signed John White, Chairman, James McKee, Secretary.

This new extension was at right angles to the existing school and was divided into two rooms by glass panelled partitions, which were movable if required for concerts and social functions. So, with the old building, there were now three classrooms viz 40 feet 9 inches by 23 feet 10 inches (which later accommodated five classes - First to Fifth); one 30 feet 8 inches by 20 feet 8 inches (for Sixth and Seventh classes) and one at the end towards the Unitarian Church Lane, 21 feet by 20 feet 8 inches (for the Infant Classes and it had an iron stove and large iron kettle for Cookery Lessons) On the gable end of this room, facing the playground, the stables and the shed for traps which the farmers used to bring their families to Church on Sundays, was a large stone panel, which is now at ground level, facing the Church and. is weathering badly, on which was carved: -

ERECTED
1869
REV. J. M. KILLEN D. D.
PAST0R.

The earliest record of a teacher in this school is that of a Mr. Boone, who was the Principal in 1886, but no other information about him is given. He must have retired or for some reason left the school in 1886, for it is recorded that Mr. James Chambers was appointed Principal on 1st October, 1886. Mr. Chambers was born in 1853 and commenced teaching in 1869, either as an Untrained Assistant or as a Monitor. He was trained at Marlboro' Street Training College, Dublin in 1885-6 and received his Training Diploma in February, 1889. This indicated that his service was now satisfactory. The Assistant at that time was Miss Anna Macdonald, who was born in 1850, became a Monitress or Untrained Assistant in September, 1865, was at Marlboro' Street Training College in 1875-76 and commenced teaching in Comber School on 1st. February, l889. She stayed until 3rd. June, 1910 when she retired, having reached the age of 60 years. Also on the staff at this time was Mr. H. J. Tweedie, about whom there is no information, and the same applies to another Assistant, Mr. Archibald. Kirkpatrick, except that he appears to have left in 1901. Mr. Chambers, unfortunately, left many spaces unfilled in the records, which would not have been tolerated by Inspectors in later years. It was at this time (1901) that it was stated by the Inspector that 162 pupils were present for the Annual Inspection. This was the time when "Payment by results" was in operation.

In 1903 there were 208 pupils on the rolls, a big school in those days, and the Inspector reported that the members of the Teaching Staff were well qualified for their positions and most conscientious in the discharge of their duties, with the result that the pupils attending the school receive an intelligent and effective training. His only criticism was "I should like to see more attention given to mental and practical arithmetic." The following year there was an unbelievable change, a decline seemed to have started and the high standard had fallen greatly. The following criticisms were made. "The children make too much noise when marching during a change'. The pupils should not be permitted to draw with short pencils or to make too much use of rubbers. The children should not be permitted to spit on their slates and use their cuffs to clean them. The teacher should be provided with a piece of wet, sponge with which to damp the slates, when the children wish to clean them. The teaching notes of the teachers should be prepared daily and. suitably graduated; otherwise notes are of little value." Maybe, the Inspector had imbibed too freely the night before. It did happen at times.

Miss Annie McCappin came to the school as an Assistant, straight from the Training College Marlboro' Street, on 1st. August, 1901, aged 21 and stayed until August, 1911. Mr. Chambers continued as Principal of the school until 31st December, 1909, when he resigned at the age of 56. A special inspection of the school was made in that year and the Report was highly critical. It stated that "Proficiency has declined considerably and in the case of Arithmetic, Drawing, Geography and Grammar it is very low. The pupils are not under proper control and are noisy and disorderly. The Schoolroom requires doing up, the Offices are dirty and of a bad type and. new desks would be a great advantage. Yet, two years earlier the Inspector's Report stated "With the exception of Standards six and seven Reading and Arithmetic (the Principal's), all other parts of the school curriculum are carefully and. intelligently taught. The teachers make suitable preparation for their work and are very attentive to their duties. The schoolroom and classrooms are kept clean and comfortable." It would appear that the standard of work in the senior classes deteriorated greatly towards the end of Mr. Chambers' time as Principal. There was a pub just across the playground in the Unitarian Church Lane, and that may have played a large part in the decline. There is a story told of that, which may or may not be true.
Mr. James Millen was appointed Assistant on 1st. January, l908 and became Principal when Mr. Chambers resigned in December, 1908. He was 28 years of age when he came to Comber and had been trained in Marlboro' Street, T.C. from 1898-1900. He stayed four years and left for pastures new on 12th. August, 1912. He was succeeded by Mr. William Pollock of Bangor, who took up duty on 13th. August, 1912. Mr. Pollock was then 29 years of age and he spent the rest of his career as a teacher in Comber, ending up as Principal of the new Public Elementary School on Darragh Road. He retired on 31st. December, 1945, to prevent "Squatters", then very prevalent, taking possession of his bungalow at Orlock, particularly as he was living in the School Residence, just across the road from the school.
The next Assistant to come to the school was Miss Barbara Proctor, who was appointed on 6th. June, 1910. She was a local, her father being Manager of the Comber Distillery. Miss Proctor was not a Trained Teacher but was given the ridiculous task of teaching the Infants and Fourth Standard by the new Principal, Mr. James Millen. This, quite naturally horrified the Inspector, when he came for his Annual Inspection, as did the fact that Miss McCappin was teaching First and Third standards. Miss Proctor spent the whole of her teaching career in Comber and. transferred with the others to the new Public Elementary School in 1938 and eventually retired on 3rd. March, 1952 at the age of 64 years. She contributed much to the welfare and education of the youth of Comber and while she maintained good discipline in her class, she was a most sympathetic, friendly and effective teacher.
Other Assistants in Comber National School, later Public Elementary, were as follows:-

Miss Emily McKee from 1911 to 1916; Miss Evelyn Maud Dunlop from 1911 to 1914, Miss Maud E. Reid from 1916 to 1919; Miss Florence E. Reid from April to August 1919, Miss Alice Sloane from 1919 to 1935, Miss Chrissie Proctor from 1922 to 1923; Mr. Clifford. Pollock from 1923 to 1928; Miss Evelyn Maud Hayes from 1927 to 1957; Francis G. Chesney from 1928 - 1931; **Norman McD. Nevin** from 1931 to 1940, and from 1943 to 1974 (in Comber Primary School); Miss Mary E. Masson from 1935. Miss M. E. Masson went to America in 1938 on a Teacher Exchange arrangement with the Ministry of Education for one year, but as she had an uncle living there, she decided not to return to Northern Ireland.

Monitors and. Monitresses appointed to the school at various times were: - Susennath Hamilton, from l904 until 1909; Miss E.M. Dunlop from 1908 until 1911; George Strange from 1909 to 1912; Jacob Haire from 1911 until 1914: Eva Caughey from 1914 until 1917; Christina Proctor from 1915 until 1918; Annie Haire from 1917 until 1920.
In 1932 the number of pupils attending the school had increased considerably and the Session and Committee of the Church decided to erect a new classroom for the Infants. A large hut of corrugated iron was erected on the site of the former stables and was heated by a large iron stove burning coal. This provided ample accommodation for the Junior and Senior Infants under Miss Alice Sloane and later Miss Masson and greatly eased the congestion in the main buildings.
The school continued to function efficiently until the new Public Elementary School was opened in November, 1938, thus being in existence and serving the community of Comber from 1831 until 1938, a span of 107 years, but not as long as the Londonderry School, locally called the Church School and quite often The Square School, which was in existence from 1813 until 1938, a span of 125 years.

INSPECTORS

Quite often, the Principal and the Inspector were at loggerheads on practically every subject and this could arise for various reasons such as a clash of personalities, an incident when they were both at the Training College, or that the Principal knew that he was equally well educated as the Inspector but had greater experience of practical teaching. This frequently led to clashes and often the Assistants suffered most. This is illustrated by an incident that happened in the Londonderry School in Comber, in the 1880s. The Inspector arrived at 9.05 a.m. unexpectedly for a General Inspection, although he should have given three days notice. He wrote that he was pleasantly surprised to find all the teachers and pupils already at work. In his report at the end of the Inspection he wrote, "Proficiency was good in most respects, but Grammar in Fifth and Sixth, especially Parsing, needs special attention. He noted that Drawing in The Senior classes shows at times too much use of the rubber. Other criticisms were: - Notes for Object Lessons should always be fresh. Questions on Subject matter of reading lessons should be written out and drawing copies prepared and dated. Good progress was made in Arithmetic, but the children never answer in Sentences. Then he noted that supervision of the children at play should be more efficient. One pupil was taken away by a relative without the teacher's knowledge and, two others came in three minutes after one o'clock." This was sent to the Headquarters in Dublin and the officials there sent a communication to the school requiring a full explanation of how such an occurrence could possibly happen.

SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT OF TEACHERS.

In 1855 teachers were paid by the Quarter (Three months) on the following scale. Principal £ 7: 10: 0. Assistant £4: 0: 0. Paid Monitor £1: 15: 0. In 1856 there was an increase viz Principal £9. Assistant £4: 10: 0. In 1889 salaries had risen to: Principal £ 11. Assistant £ 6: 15: 0 per quarter.
"On the walls of every National School are suspended the Practical Rules which are to be strictly observed by Teachers and the third of these rules enjoins that Teachers are to avoid fairs, markets and meetings, but above all political meetings of any kind."
"The Commissioners have resolved that after this notice they will withdraw the Salary from any teacher who shall make the subject of National Education, the proceedings of the Commissioners or their Officers a matter of any comment in any publication."

SMYTH'S NATIONAL SCHOOL – SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, COMBER.

This school must not be confused with the Erasmus Smyth Charity Foundation which gave assistance to the foundation of the Londonderry School in The Square, built in connection with the Church of Ireland in 1813. On an inside wall of one of the rooms of this school is a marble tablet with the following inscription: - " For his munificent contributions amounting to £700 to the Church Manse and School funds of the Second

Presbyterian Congregation of Comber, the Session and Committee have erected this tablet to John Smyth Esq. of New Comber House as a tribute of gratitude for his liberality and respect for his character and have, agreed to call this building to which he contributed a sum of £100, **SMYTH'S SCHOOL HOUSE, 1861**." Thus came into being the third National School in the village of Comber.
Like the school at First Comber, the earliest record of a teacher here was that in 1886 the Principal was Mr. Boyce, but nothing else was told of him. In 1898 the Principal was Mr. Hunter and his Assistant was Miss Crawford. In 1881 the Schoolroom and the Manse were enlarged. Mr. James McCrea is the first Principal about whom there is complete information. He was born on the 20th. April, 1880, became an Untrained Assistant Teacher in May, 1901 and was trained at Marlboro' Street, Training College in 1904/05. He received his Training Diploma in December, 1909, having been appointed Principal of Smyth's National School, Comber, in February, 1907. It was the rule that a teacher passing out of the Training College, successfully, had to teach in a school satisfactorily, in the judgement of the School Inspector for two years, before being awarded the Training Diploma and the first increase in the Salary Scale. This still is the rule. He continued to teach in the school until 30th April, l914.
Teachers in the School during Mr. McCrea's term were: - Miss Ella N. McKeag, born in 1889 and Not Trained. She was appointed in April, l911 and continued until 31st. March, l9l9. Next was Mr. John Gamble born in 1891 and trained at Marlboro' Street in 1910-1912. His first appointment as a teacher was to this school on 1st. October, 1912. He apparently was not a great success as in June, 1913, the Inspector wrote "Mr. Gamble had fifth and sixth classes together in the same class and was giving instruction to one in Reading and to the other in Arithmetic - a very injudicious arrangement." "Part of the weakness in Grammar and Arithmetic of the highest standards is certainly due to Mr. Gamble, who is leaving." Mr. Gamble left on the 11th. August, 1913. Another Assistant was Miss Mary A. T. Thompson, born in March, l889. She was trained in Marlboro' Street, with Mr. Gamble, from 1910-12 and was appointed to this school on 1st. November, 1912, one month after Mr. Gamble. She remained until 31st. March, 1915. Miss Margaret Murdoch, born in 1895, took the place of Mr. Gamble on 18th. August, l913 as an Untrained Assistant. She did however, go to Marlboro' Street, Training College from 1914-1916 and received an appointment to Smyth's National School in 1919. This would be to take the place of Miss McKeag, who had just left.

When Mr. James McCrea left the school in April, 1914, he was succeeded by Mr. Alfred Hadden, who was born on 11th. May,l878, so he was 36 years old when he came to Comber. He had been appointed a teacher, Untrained, in February, 1899 and was then trained in Marlboro' Street, in 1902-3 receiving his Training Diploma on 5th. December, 1905. Mr. Hadden remained in Smyth's School until 3rd. November, 1938, when, being the senior Principal by age, he became the first Principal of the new Public Elementary School on what is now Darragh Road, but then 'The Back Loney'. Unfortunately, Mr. Hadden had removed from Comber to live at Knock and there was a rule that the Principal must reside within three miles of the school. So Mr. Hadden either had to return to live in Comber or retire. He decided to retire.
Other teachers in the school were as follows: - Miss Evelyn Maud Dunlop, born in 1892, who came to Smyth's National School in 1915 from Comber National School and stayed until 1st. June, 1928. Miss Margaret Murdoch returned to the school in 1919 and stayed until 3rd. November, 1938, when with others she transferred to the new Public Elementary School, eventually retiring in 1960. Mrs. Louie Cathcart came in 1928 aged 34 years and stayed until 23rd. January, 1931. Miss Evelyn F. E. Wilson came on 26th. January, 1931 and left on 30th. June, 1931. Her stay was a very short one. She was succeeded by Miss Annie Ritchie, just out of College on 1st. July, 1931 and her stay lasted until 14th December, 1934. Miss Stirling came on 17th. December, l934 and remained until the school closed for good on 3rd. November, 1938.
According to the Organiser's Observation Book, the following teachers were responsible for certain subjects. Mr. McCrea was responsible for Science, having been trained for this in l904-05. The Report on this was "Satisfactory progress is being made in this branch, at the same time the full value is not obtained from the instruction unless practical work is done by the pupils." E. C. Ingold, Inspector. Apparently it did not occur to him that there was no special room set aside for this subject, no benches or tables and no apparatus for the use of the pupils. There were only two rooms in the school and these were fully occupied by nine classes. Teachers had to endure such thoughtless criticisms and any defence would only ensure a more domineering and arrogant

attitude by the Inspector on future visits. Miss Kenning took Science and object Lessons, and Miss Crabbe took Object Lessons. Both these teachers had been trained from 1905-7 and both came to the school in 1907. The report on these teachers stated that a new scheme of Object Lessons should be drawn up and arrangements for practical work should be made and it would be better to have both Science Lessons on the same day. This meant that the whole School Time-Table should be changed so that this Inspector could see her subject on one visit. These Organisers were interested only in their own subject and thought that it should take precedence over every-thing else, regardless of numbers and facilities. Miss M.L.Glynn came in March, 1909 and gave a most scathing report on the teaching of needlework, forgetting of course that the teacher had to contend with ten or twelve other subjects and also that the girls, however poor, had to provide all material and equipment. In those days, nothing was free. Nevertheless, Miss Glynn thought that there was a lack of uniformity of method and skill in holding materials. "The garments, which are good, have occupied too much time. Forms (seats) should be arranged in parallel positions so that the whole class may see the teacher's demonstrations from a favourable position.

A thorough training should be imparted to Juniors in drill form, in such exercises as holding materials for sewing, knitting, tacking, folding work etc. Cutting out, ironing etc should be introduced without delay. Cookery lessons were introduced in 1919. By 1919, things were going well, or was it because it was a different Organiser. "Practical work - very good. The subject is taught in the principal room, while other work is going on. The teachers deserve credit for the results obtained." 1921:- "The pupils were engaged in Practical Cookery for me today. The results were very satisfactory. The work is carried out quietly and methodically under difficulties." "Children today are clean and well-behaved." "The laying of tables might well be included in the syllabus." Who provides the tables and where would you keep them?

Of course all was not well at General Inspections, when the Inspector paid his Annual Visit. In 1913, "The walls and ceiling are much in need of painting." Three months later, after the summer holidays, in August, he wrote," The walls and maps should be kept dusted properly." 6th June 1914:- "School and premises as before. No new steps taken towards building a new one. Present classroom too small. General proficiency, good on the whole, though it is still capable of further improvement." December, 1914: - "No change in use of premises." "Pupils not to wear bags on their shoulders when standing in class." "Attention should be paid to the correct method of holding pens and additional attention to the attitudes in the desks." "The classroom is 14'x11'6", yet there were 35 pupils in it for one lesson and 51 for another. While the Junior Division (51 pupils) was in the classroom, there were only 24 in the Schoolroom, the Middle Division then being at Drill. As far as possible this overcrowding should be avoided." "I was surprised to hear an incorrect pronunciation of "policeman" allowed to pass unnoticed in Standard 3." "The Middle Division should not face the sun when doing drill and they should be able to do "Right turn" and "Left turn" without hesitation." "The playground was littered with papers when I arrived at 1.50 p.m." "Please see that 1st. and 2nd. standards sit and hold their pens correctly." "While the children in the Junior Division should speak distinctly, they should not shout at the Reading Lesson." February, 1929, "A partition in the Main Room is very much needed." 11th October, 1935:- "This is a good school. The erection of partitions and the installation of modern furniture and equipment have much improved the conditions under which the work is conducted. A very good tone prevails and throughout the school a spirit of hard work is evident."

Success at last!

COMBER SPINNING MILL SCHOOL.

John Andrews, the Agent for Lord Londonderry, who lived in Uraghmore, in Castle Street, decided in January, 1863, to build a Spinning Mill in Comber and formed a new Company with his three sons, James, John and Thomas, to be called John Andrews & Company. James Andrews attended to the buying of every-thing required, while his brother Thomas superintended the building operations, which were carried out without a contractor. The mill commenced working in June, 1864. One month earlier, on 13th. May, 1864, John Andrews, the father of the three boys, and Agent for Lord Londonderry, died, and the control of the mill was taken over by the youngest son, Thomas, who lived at Ardara.

There were three schools in Comber, "for the education of the children of the poor" and "combined secular instruction", later changed to "combined literary and moral instruction", viz the Londonderry School in The Square, Comber National School, at First Comber Presbyterian Church, and Smyth's National School at Second Comber-Presbyterian Church, built respectively in 1813, 1831 and 1861. Yet only a very small fraction of the total number of children in the town - less than one tenth - attended any school. This was the position until 1892 when an Act of Parliament introduced compulsory school attendance. Local Authorities were obliged to form School Attendance Committees to enforce the law, yet even this obligation was not honoured generally. Owing to the existence of several Factory Acts, the only children compelled to attend school were the "half-timers", (from eight years of age and. upwards). Under one of the Factory Acts, a mill-owner was compelled to see that children, working in the mill, also attended school for half of each day. For this purpose a room was sometimes set aside in the mill, but more often an outside building was taken or built, and a teacher appointed. One half of the working children attended morning school and the other half the afternoon school. Later, the half-day method tended to change to the permitted alternate day - work and school - pattern. This led to a large increase of "half-timers". It is interesting to look at the roll books of the l890s and see that in the main the "half-timers" showed the best attendance - regularly at school on Tuesday and. Thursday of one week and Monday, Wednesday and Friday of the next. If a day was missed at school, the next two days had to be at school and work missed with of course loss of pay. Consequently, the "half-timers" were the most regular attenders. This system lasted until 1930. If one attended a school, which accepted "half-timers", one was often fuming with rage at the treatment these poor boys and girls received from their insensitive teachers, when they could not give the answer to something which had been taught, when they were at work. It was certainly a hard life for them.

EVENING SCHOOL AT THE SPINNING MILL.

In 1867, three years after the opening of the Spinning Mill, Mr. Thomas Andrews set up an Evening School for any of his young workers, who wished to improve their education. He was not compelled to do this, nor were they compelled to attend. Nevertheless it proved successful for it had sufficient scholars to justify a Principal and an Assistant Teacher, and it did not close until the 16th. December, 1878, when there was a flourishing. National Day School. The Board of National Commissioners of Education, (for the whole of Ireland) with its Offices in Marlboro' Street, Dublin, was a most bureaucratic organisation. There was no devolution of control to local committees or anyone else. The smallest details within a school were dealt with by the Board, and when the Treasury gained control in the second half of the 19th century it stifled all efforts to improve either buildings or outlook. A good example of this is the occasion when an Inspector arrived at the Londonderry School, in The Square, Comber, at lunch-time. He noticed that a parent took her child home for some reason, without asking the Principal's permission. The Inspector reported the incident to the Commissioners in Dublin, who in turn demanded a full report of all the circumstances of how such a thing could possibly happen, unless by gross neglect on the part of the Principal. The Principal had to reply, no doubt using his imagination freely. The Inspector had not mentioned it during his visit.

Another example of the Commissioners' miserly attitude is revealed in their response to an application on the 10th. September, 1877, for a grant of salary to the teacher of the Evening School, sent in by Mr. Andrews. The letter was acknowledged by the Office of National Education, in Dublin, stating that the District Inspector would be directed to report upon the case. On the 23rd. October, 1877, a communication from the Commissioners was sent to Thomas Andrews, Esq., Comber, stating that they had granted the salary of 10/- per month to Alex. Stewart and Rachel Porter each, as Principal and Assistant of the School, from 31st. August, for every month the school shall command an average attendance of 50 pupils. Pupils of the Day School are <u>not</u> to be entered on Rolls or Register. The Evening School ended on 16th. December, 1878. The pay of 10/- per month was officially called 'a gratuity', in the hope that it would be increased from local sources to an amount, which could be called a salary. Apparently the Commissioners had not been informed of the closing of the Evening School, for in a letter dated 25th. January, 1878, it states that the District Inspector has been directed to hold Results Examinations of the Day and Evening Schools in the first week in March

next. By this arrangement Results Fees from the Rates will be available. By a Factory Act of l874 any child (a child was anyone under the age of fourteen years) who passed through the Fourth Class could obtain a Certificate to enable him or her to start work. Special examinations were arranged in the school for any children who wished to start work. The subjects were Reading: - Any passage from the Fourth Book of Lessons. Writing: - Writing in small hand eight lines dictated slowly from a Reading Book. Spelling and Handwriting, to be considered. Arithmetic: - Compound Rules - money, weights and measures, time table, square and cubic measure and any measure which is connected with the industrial occupations of the district. Anyone who had passed through the Fourth Standard or Class could leave school and start work. The following certificate was issued to Comber Mill National School - "I hereby depute the Teacher of the Comber Mill National School to issue to the pupils who have passed in the Fourth Class such Certificates as may be required to prove that they have reached the standard of proficiency prescribed by or pursuant to the provisions of the Factory Act, 1874." Signed: J.Gordon, Inspector of National Schools. 4th. February, 1879.

COMBER SPINNING MILL NATIONAL DAY SCHOOL.

It would appear that this school opened in March, 1877, for a communication from the Office of National Education, Dublin, acknowledges receipt of a communication dated 29th March, 1877. Another letter from Dublin is in reply to the letter of the 29th. is dated 16th. April, 1877 and states that forms of Application for aid to your newly opened school were sent on 3rd. March. As they had not reached, Comber, duplicates were included. This was signed by J.E.Sheridan, Secretary. Another letter from Mr. Andrews, dated 6th August, was acknowledged as received on August, 9th. A reply to this was sent from Dublin on the 20th. August stating that the Commissioners had voted the sum of £38 per Annum towards the salary of William C. Groves, Teacher of Comber Spinning Mill School, Co. Down, to commence from 4th. July, 1877. A salary is also granted to Kate White as Assistant from the same date. A grant of £4 was also voted towards School Requisites. It states that the funds of the Commissioners do not enable them to give a free stock, large enough for the entire wants of the school, therefore additional Requisites such as books, stationery, slates etc to the value of £1: 5: 0 (which may be ordered, carriage free from this Office, on the forms provided) must be purchased by you for sale to the pupils. As the Commissioners have now received this school into connexion, they require that the INSCRIPTION "Comber Spinning Mill National School" and no other, be conspicuously set up upon the outside House, or on such other place as may render it conspicuous to the Public, and that the Register, Report Book and Class Rolls be kept, faithfully, accurately and neatly and in strict conformity with these regulations. Along the edge of this document is written - "Note - Kate White is to be paid as Principal Teacher her Class Salary from 1st. March, 1877 till 4th. July 1877 and Maggie Graham as Assistant from 1:4:77 until 30:6:77". So the school opened on first March, 1877 and Kate White was the first Principal.

The following letter from the Education Office, Dublin, dated 18th. October, 1877 was sent to Mr. Andrews. Esqr, adverting to your letter of the 2nd. Instant, in which you claim salary for Miss Porter as 2nd. Assistant in the above named school, whom you "have appointed in the room of Miss Graham from the 4th. July last", I beg to remind you that in taking this school into connexion the Commissioners made a grant of salary for one Assistant only as you will perceive by a reference to the Board's order conveyed to you. The order of the Board was made on the 14th. August, granting aid to the School from the 1st. April preceding, which allowed salary to Margaret Graham up to the 30th. June, and on her resignation on that date Kate White became her successor and filled the vacancy created. In order to secure the recognition of Miss Porter application must be made in the usual way, and with that object in view I beg to enclose the form employed for the purpose. I am Sir, your obedient servant, John E. Sheridan, Secretary. After all that, a letter dated 23rd. November, 1877, was sent to Mr. Andrews stating that a salary of £25 per annum; with a share of Results as was granted to Rachel Porter as Assistant from 16th. July, 1877.

MONITORS AND M0NITRESSES.

Monitors and Monitresses were young people, who wished to become teachers in National Schools. It was like serving an apprenticeship. No Manager of a School was obliged to take one, nor could he appoint one. This was done by the District Inspector, who examined the young person each year. In the early years they had to serve five years, but later this was reduced to three or four years, according to the age of the young person and at the age of 18 years they had to pass an examination called The King's Scholarship and then go to a Training College for two years. They also had to sign an agreement that they would serve five years in a school in Northern Ireland or refund the cost of their training, which amounted to something like a year's salary. This applied even if they were unable to obtain an appointment to a school, or to a female who wished to get married and give up teaching. In the early years as a Monitor or Monitress they were paid, but only if recommended by the Inspector, after their Annual Examination, at the following rates. First Year £5; 2nd. Year £6 ; 3rd Year £8; 4th Year Males £12, Females £ 10; 5th Year £l8 and £16. These amounts were paid quarterly. Gratuities awarded to teachers for instructing Paid Monitors were: 1st Year £1. 2nd. £1:10: 0. 3rd. £2. 4th. £3. 5th Year £3. They could then teach in a school, if appointed, as Untrained Assistant at a lower rate of salary than a Trained Assistant.
A letter from the Office of National Education in Dublin, dated 2nd. April, l878, was received in Comber, inquiring whether Francis Munn, Monitor in the Spinning Mill School had resigned and if so from what date? The answer was that he had resigned from 19th. January, 1878. On 23rd. September, 1881 a letter was sent out from Dublin stating that the answering of Robert McCullough, Second. Class Monitor in Comber Spinning Mill School, at the examinations held in July last, having been unsatisfactory, he has not obtained Classification, and no gratuity has been awarded to the Teacher. For the same reason he is ineligible to be retained as a Monitor and Salary is consequently discontinued from 30th. September, 1881.

On 28th July, l882 came the following letter: - "Sir, We are to state that Annie Watson was continued for two additional years as Second Class Monitor from 1st. 3u1y, 1881 her salary consequently for the Quarter ending 21st. June, 1882 was £2: 10: 0. The Money Order for that amount is therefore returned herewith, (also the claim filled in for £4.) We are, Sir, Your obedient servants, Win. H. Newell. John E. Sheridan.

PRICES of BOOKS AND REQUISITES FOR SCHOOLS, 1884.

Books and other requisites for schools could be obtained from the Commissioners in Dublin at very low prices, carriage free to the nearest railway station. Schools were supplied each year with a form giving details of the items available, the price of each and a space for ordering. Here are some items from the form for l884. - **100 years ago.** First Book of Lessons (Reading Book) Part 1 and Part 2 - ½d each. Second Book - 2½d. 3rd. Book - 2½d. 4th Book - 4d. 5th Book - 3d. 6th Book - 6½d. Poetry Book - 7d. Grammar Book 2d. Arithmetic Book 5d. Sullivan's Grammar - 2d. Atlas - 3d. Table Books ½d. Sullivan built two fine schools in Holywood with the money he made, Sullivan Upper and. Sullivan Lower. Vera Foster's Copybooks ?d. Vera Foster's Home Exercise ½d. All Vera Foster's books were printed by Marcus Ward & Co. whose father, John Ward lived in Comber and owned a paper mill on the site of the Lower Distillery, now Space Dyers at the bridge on the Newtownards Road.. Quills were 8d per 100. Nibs 6d per gross. Slates 12" x 8" - 1/6 per doz. Slate pencils - 3d. per 100. 12" rulers 1d. each. Drawing pencils 1d. each. 25 sewing needles - l½d. Knitting Pins - 5d per quarter gross. 30 hour American Clock - 13/6. Eight Day Spring Clock - 25/- Sewing Machine 65/- with stand 70/- Framed Blackboard, 42" x 30" - 6/6.

COMBER – SPINNING MILL (DAY) SCHOOL.

Although the Office of National Education, Dublin, acknowledged receipt of a communication dated 29th. March, 1877, concerning this school, the first entries in the School Register of pupils are dated 20th. October, 1877. The first entry in the Register is Robert James Anderson, Age 5, Presbyterian, father a labourer. The next five are all aged 5 years and are the sons of labourers viz William James Henna, I.C., James Wherry, Pres. Ballywilliam, John Alex. Kirke, Pres. Robert James Fisher, I.C., John Welsh,Unit. William Copeland,(6) Unit. Carnesure. Andrew Best, (6) I.C. Father Dead. Samuel McKelvy, (5), Ballywilliam, Father - Hackler. John McClelland & Henry McClelland, both 4, Father - Hackle-Maker. David Munn, 5. Father a Blacksmith, William McVea, 4. Father - Nightwatchman. John & James Niblock, 5 & 4. Father a Farmer. Francis H. Finley, 4. Father - Engine-driver. William Watson, 5. Father - Mill Manager. William Miller, 3½ -. Father - Postman. Hugh Dunseath, 5. Father - Shoemaker. William Frame 3. (Unit.) Father - Reeling Master.

The school continued to flourish and in 1890 John Murray was appointed Principal. He was born on 4th. May, 1867 and was appointed an Untrained Assistant in November, l885. He went to Marlboro' Street, Training College in 1888-89 and came out a First to First teacher. He spent the rest of his life in Comber, retiring on 29th February, 1928. In 1884 the Inspector, J.B.Skeffington, wrote, "Considering the large numbers and the irregular attendance, the results are very fair. The teachers appear Efficient. Discipline and Order have improved and are good. The schoolroom and premises are in good order and there is a sufficient supply of books and apparatus." The following year the same Inspector found that only the First Class was good. All other classes in all subjects were either very fair or poor. Could he have had no breakfast after the night before? It did happen at times. He did, however, state "The numbers have been so large during the year that the staff had more difficulty." By 1889 the decline had continued, "Answering on the whole very fair. The pupils who have failed in essential subjects should not, unless under exceptional circumstances, be promoted. Special care with Monitor will be required to bring her up to standard of proficiency." 1893 - Mr. Murray had taken over. "The Monitress has at present practically no knowledge of her special Monitress's Course for Fourth Year. No effort should be spared to work her up in these subjects." 1893, later. "Examined 101 pupils for Results Fees. The answering as far as marked was very creditable, and the demeanour and conduct of the children were admirable. Needlework particularly had been very skilfully taught. More attention is necessary to Explanation especially in Second Class and figures in Third Class are not well formed." And. so we had the ups and downs of Class Inspections by Inspectors. 1901:— Attendance for Examination 79 boys + 81 girls. The proficiency generally is very pleasing and marks a distinct advance on the work of last year." 1902:- "154 present. The progress made by the pupils during the past year was excellent. No weakness was observed in any branch of the school programme." 1903 - "My inspection of the school showed that it is conducted in a very satisfactory manner."

This continued until 1907 when a new Inspector arrived - the infamous W. MacMillan. "The discipline is very good and the place is well kept. Not sufficient progress is made in Arithmetic, Geography and Grammar, the answering in these subjects being unsatisfactory. Pupils should be trained to answer in sentences. The Course in Kindergarten is exceedingly limited. The Monitor knew nothing of the history in her special course, her Grammar was also poor and she knew nothing of the British Possessions on the map."

1908:— "A new Classroom has been built but it is not yet furnished. Then followed more criticisms including "A large class of Junior Infants should not be left to themselves as was the case at 11.30 - 12,00" Finally - "2nd. April,1928. Visited to furnish Retirement Certificate for Mr Murray, who retired as from 29th. February, 1928." S.Scott, Inspector.

Mr. Murray was succeeded as Principal by Mr. W.J.Taylor, who was then 47 years of age having been born on 25th. August, 1880. He was at Marlboro' Training College from 1898-1900 and was first appointed a teacher under the Board on 1st January, 1902. He remained in the Comber Spinning Mill School until, like the other schools in the town, it close on3rd November, 1938. He transferred to the new School as a Privileged Assistant under Mr. Hadden and then succeeded him as Principal in 1939. Other teachers in the school at various times were as follows.

COMBER SPINNING MILL (DAY)

TEACHERS IN THE SCHOOL.

NAME-	REL. DEN.	DATE OF APPOINTMENT HERE	DATE OF APPOINTMENT UNDER THE BOARD	AGE	TRAINED	DATE OF LEAVING
Annie Moore	Pres.	Feb. 1895	Oct. 1894	19	1896 - 7	29/10/1915
..zie J. Davis	I.C.	July, 1905	Mar. 1903	20	———	31/10/1910
..a Caughey	Pres.	Nov. 1907	Nov. 1907	19	———	31/3/1910
Thomas Joseph Dailey	I.C.	Apl. 1910	July,1904	26	1902-3-4	31/3/1916
Ella Nora McKeag	Pres.	Nov. 1910	———	21	———	31/3/1910
Louisa Donnan	R.Pres.	April 1911	———	21	———	30/6/1911
Caroline L. Murray	Pres.	July, 1911	July 1911	19	1912-13-14	3/11/38
Gertrude E.M. Edgar	I.C.	Jan. 1912	Jan. 1912	21	1909-1910-1911	31/3/1915
Minnie E. Martin	Pres.	Sept. 1912	———	23	———	29/3/1914
Ellen Jane Hoffman	I.C.	March 1914	———	24	———	30/6/1914
..sther Smyth	Pres.	Jan. 1915	———	20	———	26/2/1915
.. (Frame) Morris	Unit.	April 1915	June, 1908	24	1916-17-18	3/11/38
..lizabeth (Wright) Crowe	Pres.	Nov. 1915	March,1915	23	1912-13-14	3/11/38
Robert Kirkpatrick	Pres.	April 1916	Aug. 1913	23	1911-12-13	30/8/1918
Margaret Murdock	Pres.	Sept. 1916	Aug. 1913	21	———	30/4/1917
Evelyn Blakely	Pres.	May 1917	May 1917	22	1914-15-16	30/6/1917
Mabel Isabel Girvan	Pres.	Sept. 1917	Sept. 1917	20	1915-16-17	31/1/1918
Ethel Mary Bell	Morman	Feb. 1918	Feb. 1918	22	1915-16-17	28/2/1918
Eva Martha Tate	Pres.	Mar. 1918	Aug. 1916	23	1914-15-16	3/4/1918
Evelyn Blair	Pres.	April,1918	April,1918	22	———	30/4/1918
..a Harriet Moneypenny	E.C.	May, 1918	Oct. 1909	30	———	30/6/1918
..es Patton	Pres.	Sept. 1918	July,1917	28	1915-16-17	31/1/1927
Nath. Stewart Ennis	E.C.	April,1927	Nov. 1909	40	1906/07/08	31/8/1927
Sydney Robert Stewart	Meth.	Sept. 1927	Aug. 1926	23	1924 - 26	3/11/1938

MONITORS AND PUPIL TEACHERS IN THE SCHOOL.

NAME	Rel. Den.	Age	Appointment	Left
Agnes McFadden	I.C.	15	1/7/04	30/6/09
Mary Eliz. Vic. Carson	Pres.	16	1/7/09	30/6/12
Christina B.P. Finlay	Unit.	15	1/7/09	30/6/12
..tha Frame	Unit.	16	1/7/12	30/6/15
.. hia V. Murray	Pres.	15	1/7/17	30/6/20

ALL WERE TRAINED IN MARLBORO' STREET, DUBLIN EXCEPT SYDNEY ROBERT STEWART.

OTHER COMBER SCHOOLS

THE SCHOOLS IN COMBER, 1928.

LONDONDERRY P.E. SCHOOL, THE SQUARE, COMBER. BUILT IN 1813.

Accommodation for 126 pupils. Two rooms :- 40 feet X 18 feet. Both 10 feet high.

Principal & 1 Female Assistant. Pupils - E.C. 45. Presbyterians - 18. Total pupils 63.

Within compulsory age - 32 boys + 22 girls.
Outside compulsory age - 6 boys + 3 girls.

St. MARY'S P.E. SCHOOL, KILLINCHY STREET, COMBER.

One Room - 20 ft 5" X 13 ft 6". 10ft 6" high.
One Female Principal.
Pupils :- R.C. - 21. Within compulsory age :- 8 boys + 10 girls
Outside compulsory school age - 2 boys + 1 girl. Total 21.

COMBER P.E. SCHOOL, HIGH STREET, COMBER. BUILT IN 1831.

ee Rooms :- 21 ft X 20ft 8" ; 30ft 8" X 20ft 8" ; 40ft 9" X 23 ft 10". All 14ft high.

ils :- Pres. - 193. E.C. - 11 Other Denomination 14 Total 218. ACCOMMODATION - 204 pupils.

Within Compulsory Age :- Boys 83 Girls 93 Total - 176
Outside .. .. :- 25 17 42

Male Principal. 1 male Assistant 3 Female Assistants.

SPINNING MILL P.E. SCHOOL. BRAESIDE, COMBER. BUILT IN 1867

Three Rooms :- 32' 3" X 30ft 4" 18' 9" X 18' 6" 37' 6" X 24' ALL 12' 10" high.

Pupils :- Pres. 128. E.C. 59 Meth. 5 O.D. 35 Total 227. ACCOMMODATION FOR 222 pupils.

Within Compulsory School Age :- Boys 103 Girls - 88 Total 191 TOTAL 227
tside .. .. .. :- Boys 22 Girls - 14 Total 36

Male Principal. 1 Male Assistant 3 Female Assistants.

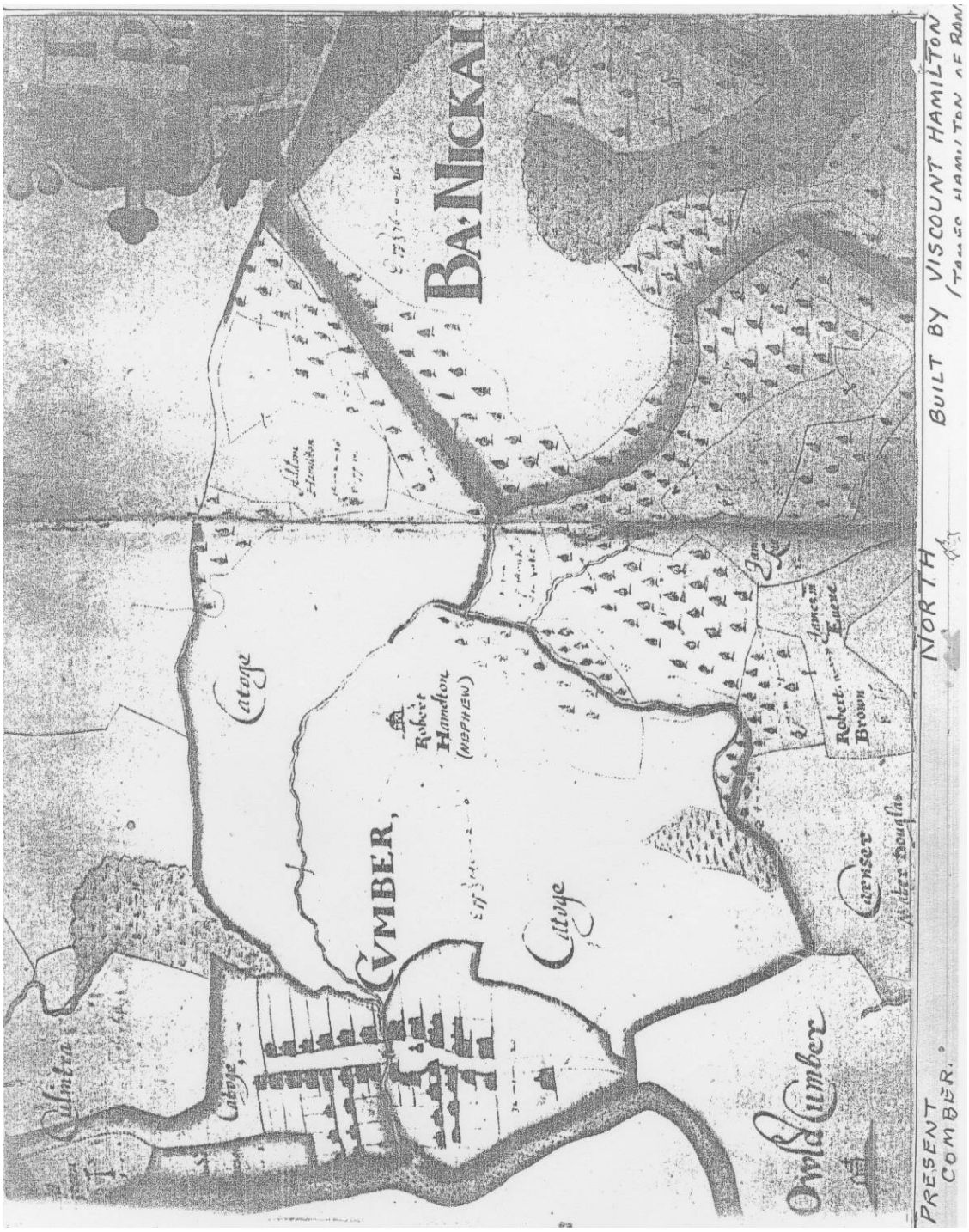
SMYTH'S P.E. SCHOOL. KILLINCHY STREET, COMBER BUILT IN 1861

Two Rooms :- 42' X 40' 14' 9" high. 14'6" x 11' 6" 9' 7" high. ACCOMMODATION FOR 185 pupils.

Pupils :- Pres. 122. E.C. 3. Total 125.

Within Compulsory School Age :- Boys 54 Girls - 53 Total 107 TOTAL 125.
Outside .. .. .. Boys 7 Girls - 11 Total 18

NEW COMBER - Map, 1625, by THOMAS RAVEN.



A STORY OF

NENDRUM MONASTERY ON MAHEE ISLAND.

If you like silence amid beautiful surroundings of marvellous scenery, on a green carpet of close cut grass, then visit **Nendrum**, site of an ancient monastery and the ruins of a mediaeval church, set in the centre of three prehistoric cashels of almost circular dry-stone walls. The outer cashel is about half a mile in circumference and encloses an area of over nine acres. This is about the same size as the Giant's Ring, outside Belfast. The middle cashel encloses about two and a half acres and is about 420 yards in circumference. The inner cashel encloses about one acre and measures about 250 yards in circumference. This one is about nine feet thick, the middle one is about seven feet thick and the outer one about six feet thick. The height of the original walls is not known, nor is the date of erection. There is a very similar site on the island of Inishmurry, six miles off the coast of Sligo, and being an island, it is in a much better state of preservation.

MAC CUIL – CYCLOPS.

According to tradition this island, together with the islands of Reagh, Sketriok, Ranish, Trasnagh and the townlands of Ardmillan (the mill on the height), Ballydrain, (the townland of the blackthorn) and Ringneill (the point of the Irish) where the earliest traces of grain being grown (in the Neolithic Age) were found, were all owned by an Irish chieftain called MAC CUIL, a savage tyrant, nick-named CYCLOPS. He wished to murder Patrick, whom he regarded as an imposter and foreigner.

One day he saw Patrick and his friends travelling towards Comber on the road, which was across the water - on the western side of the island. He decided, first to make a fool of Patrick and then to kill him. One of his men, called Garban, pretended to be ill. They covered him with a cloak well wrapped around him. Mockingly, St. Patrick was asked to cross the water to the island to say something magical over him to restore him to health. St. Patrick realised their ill-concealed mockery and said, "It is no wonder that the poor man is ill." When they uncovered him they found that the man had apparently been smothered and was dead.

Overcome by this they cried, "This is truly a man of God." and were baptised. Their leader was most penitent and Patrick ordered him as a penance, to leave the country, taking only his coarse clothes and no oars for his boat and to land and Serve God where the winds would drive him. He was chained up, put into a coracle and pushed out into the water to drift away.

He eventually landed on the Isle of Man, was set free by two holy bishops, who received him most kindly and instructed him. He later became the saintly Bishop of Man.

Thus Patrick got possession of the island. Garban had fainted from lack of air and soon recovered!

M0CHA0I.

When Patrick was first brought to Ireland as a prisoner by Nial of the Nine Hostages, he was sold as a slave to a farmer called Milchu, who lived in Co. Antrim, near a hill called Slemish. Milchu had a daughter called Bronach, who was the wife of Colman of Derrykeighan near Dervock in Co. Antrim.

They came to live just south of Downpatrick and had a son called Mochaoi, pronounced "Maughee", but by the English "Mahee", as they could not say "Maughee".

In the autumn of 432 A.D. or the spring of 433 A.D., Patrick was on his way from Saul to Bright to convert an important personage named Ros, who lived there. He was the brother of Dichu, who gave Patrick a barn at Saul and was his first convert. At a place called Legamaddy or later on Ballynoe, where there is still an ancient circle of standing stones, he saw a tender youth (about fourteen or fifteen years old) herding swine. Patrick stopped to talk to him, learned who he was, preached to him, baptised him and tonsured him (cut his hair). He gave him a Gospel and a Menistir (a sacred vessel) and at another time a winged or flying crozier. He arranged for the boy to be educated at Templepatrick and later Mochaoi had a cell there, now called Kilmakee, which of course means the church of Mochaoi. Originally it was Cil Mochaoi and is now a stone and earth rath.

NENDRUM, ON THE ISLAND OF MAHEE.

It is virtually impossible to give exact dates for those early years, so two dates have been given for his birth viz 415 A.D. and 420 A.D. It is agreed that he was converted either in the autumn of 432 A.D. or the spring of 433 A.D. Two dates are also given for the foundation of the monastery of Nendrum viz 445 A.D. and 450 A.D. In the Annals of Ulster his death is recorded thus "496 A.D. - Mochaoi of Nendrum rested." In the Annals of Tighernach the date is 497 A.D. The date was the 23rd June.

To reach Nendrum on the island of Mahee, you travel from Comber on the Ballydrain Road, passing the bird sanctuary at Castlespie, a place in bygone days famous for pottery and bricks. One of its chimney stacks was the highest in Ireland being 173 feet high. At Ballydrain turn left and proceed to Ringneill where the earliest traces of grain being grown were found. You now cross the causeway constructed by Samuel Murland in 1824, to Reagh Island or as it is now called Islandreagh and here turn right to travel down the island to another causeway also built by Samuel Murland in 1824, on to the island of Mahee.
At this point is the ruin of a castle, sometimes called Mahee Castle and sometimes called Browne's Castle. This was a Tower House, similar to Sketrick, and was built in 1570 by an Englishman called Captain Browne, who had obtained a lease of the island, as he thought, in perpetuity from Bishop Merriman, the Bishop of Down. However, on the death of the Bishop, he found that the lease was only for the life of the Bishop. He tried in every way to be restored to his property, but had no success. The island then passed in succession to Rowland Savage and in 1606 to Sir Henry Peirse, 1622 to Sir James Hamilton, Viscount Claneboye. About 1700 it reverted to the Bishop of Down and in 1902 it was leased to Henry Waring Knox of Waringsford. The next possessor was Samuel Murland of Castlewellan, who joined the islands to the mainland. It then came into the possession of James Craig, whose representatives about 1906 sold it through the Land Commissioners Courts to the tenants.

Just before you come to the causeway leading to Mahee Island, on the left side across the water you see eight of the nine hills on Mahee Island.

It is from these nine hills that the name 'Nendrum' is derived Nene meaning nine and drum meaning a hill. The ninth hill which you cannot see is the one on which the monastery was built. This was a Celtic monastery similar to that on Iona, though it is very much older, and was originally built of planks and wattle, of very simple design, while the monks lived in dry-stone, bee-hive huts.
It was founded in 445 A.D. and was undoubtedly visited by St. Patrick, who presented it with a Clocca or bell, which became a holy relic. It was made of wrought iron, riveted on one side and the

whole covered in bronze. It measured five and a half inches by four and a half inches at the base and was nine inches to the top of the handle.

When the monastery was raided and burned by the Vikings in 974. A.D., most likely the door-keeper, who lived in a little house in the outer wall at the opening leading to the port, and who was responsible for ringing the bell from a different window in the Round Tower, for each service, summoning the monks to attend, got the bell from the Sacristy and fled to the north. At the northern gate of the outer cashel, at a corner outside the gate he hid the bell and covered it with stones. To everyone in the Monastery this was the most sacred and treasured relic they possessed and was worth taking any risk to save it. There it lay for 950 years until it was found when the site was being cleared in 1922 - 24. It is now in the Museum in Belfast. The wooden handle had decayed and no clapper was found, but the hook to which it had been attached was still there.
St. Patrick had six artificers in metal in his retinue, three iron workers and three braziers.

Each day there were six services in the monastery. The monks went to bed when the sun went down and were awakened when the bell rang for NOCTURNS, the service held at mid-night. At six in the morning the bell rang again for the first service of the day called LAUDS. Three hours later was the service called TERCE, which represented the hour when Christ was handed over to Pilate. At mid-day was the service called SEXT, which represented the hour at which Jesus was nailed to the Cross. Three hours later i.e. 3 p.m. was the service NONE, representing the hour at which Jesus died, and then at six o'clock in the evening was yet another service called VESPERS, which ended the day. In the monastery grounds was a sun-dial set up by itself to indicate the time of day. This sun-dial, although broken, has been put together and is set against a corner of the church building to preserve it. From this we tend to think that these early Irish saints were all meek, mild, forgiving people, but this is not always so. Many were violent, vengeful and mighty cursers, men of power and related to the aristocrats of the neighbourhood.

St. Patrick died in 461 A.D. and St Mochaoi on 23rd June, 496 A.D. The ruins of the church on the site at present are not, as one would expect, placed exactly East and West, but are slightly off that line so that the rising sun would shine on the East window on the date of Moohaoi's death i.e. 23rd. June, each year.
St Moohaoi was succeeded by Caylan or Caeolan, holding the combined Offices of Abbat and Bishop of Nendrum.
Some years later Caylan (the slender one) was transferred to Rath Celtchair Monastery, in Downpatrick, which was a Celtic Monastery until De Courcy's time. During Caylan's time at Nendrum, St. Colman was a pupil there and there is a legend connecting him with a large stone, six feet long, six feet broad and six feet thick. This stone, of Co. Antrim basalt and brought to its present position during the Ice Age, is called St. Colman's Stone and is in the bank inside the Outer Cashel at the present Car Park. On the other side of the road, can be seen a straight line of built up rocks across the bay. This was the fish pond or fish trap for the Monastery. The fish came in with the tide, especially mullet, and when the tide receded the fish were trapped. It could also have been the place where the fish, caught by the monks, were kept until required.

At the corner of the present Car Park wall is the Monks' Well, still in good condition. It is now covered over for protection against present day vandals. (This does not apply to unemployed youth only, for I have seen on a Sunday afternoon, University students having great fun, amid roars of laughter with a human skull, retrieved from a grave.) In due course St. Colman left Nendrum and established a monastery and school at Dromore. One of his pupils was St Finnian, who in 540 A.D. founded the abbey of Movilla near Newtownards. Colman believed in corporal punishment and was going to strike Finnian for some reason, but was prevented by an unknown power. He then brought Firnnian to Nendrum to be taught by Caylan. Caylan, looking at the boy, said, "This boy shall never be my disciple, for truly, in heaven and in earth he far surpasses me in honour and in merit, for he will be a bishop renowned for wisdom and conspicuous for religion and holiness." Just at that time St. Nennius, the head of the great monastery and school called Candida Casa on

the Mull of Galloway in Wigtonshire, arrived and he decided to take Finnian back with him to be educated at Whithorn.

After the transfer of Caylan to Downpatrick, there is a gap of one hundred years in the history of Nendrum.
Then succeeded the heads of the monastery as follows, with the year of their death.
Critan, 638 A.D.; Cronan Beg (the small) 642 A.D.; Mochua, a variation of the name Mochaoi, 644 A.D.
This gave rise to the legend of Mochaoi falling asleep for 150 years, while listening to the sacred bird's song at Ballydrain, where he was cutting blackthorn rods for his monastery at Nendrum.

"Three melodies of delightful music
The angel in the shape of a bird sang,
In the middle of a wood at the foot of the tree
Fifty years each melody lasted."

Cunimine, 659 A.D.; Moraind, 673 A.D.; Maine, 682 A.D.; Cuimen, 698 A.D.; Oegetchair, 730 A.D.; Snethoest 750 A.D.
There is another gap of 120 years, during which there were numerous raids by the fierce Northmen, who returned home each autumn with their plunder. Towards the end of the ninth century, there was a period of rest from the raids and Nendrum was restored. The Abbots then were: - Colnian, 871 A.D.; Maeloon, 917 A.D. and finally, Sedna 0'Denman (Diamond), who was burned in his own house (the Round Tower), in 974.A.D, when Nendrum was laid in waste.

The Round Tower was probably built about the middle of the ninth century and replaced an earlier wooden one. It would have been about sixty to seventy feet high. The Danes settled here and became Christians. In the Annals there are frequent references to the Danes of Loch Cuan during the eleventh century and this was probably one of their permanent settlements. Loch Cuan then became Strangford Lough.

South of the church were two circular mounds, slightly depressed in the middle. In these were found the remains of two heaps of skeletons of men, women and children, thrown together any way and every way and covered with soil and a few stones. The natural decay of the bodies had caused the depressions in the mounds. The only relic found was a small polished stone pierced and worn as a charm round the neck of a female skeleton. Two skulls of Scandinavian or Nordic type of strongly built men in the prime of life were found. One had a long sword-cut running back from the temple and was the cause of death. Under the base of one of these mounds was found a fragment of the foundation of a building of stone and mortar. So these bodies cannot have been placed there, before the introduction of this type of masonry, usually believed to be ninth century. One Norwegian silver coin was found of the date about the year 930 A.D. All were buried without orientation, which suggests that they were buried by pagans. If it had been Christians, they would have been buried with the feet towards the East. Nothing was heard of Nendrum from this until John de Courcy came in 1178 A.D.

THE BENEDICTINE MONASTERY.

In 1178 John de Courcy granted to St. Mary of York and St. Bee's in Cumberland and to the monks serving God there, two thirds of the Island of Mahee, two thirds of the town thereof (this is what is known as "The Old Town") to the south of the monastery, two thirds of all benefices, which are founded therein and two thirds of all lands and towns belonging be the said church. The other third

to Malachy, Bishop of Down. He also granted the land of Ballyglighorn in Dufferin with rights to cut wood for building and. burning and to graze horses and cattle.

It would seem that a large and well-endowed Benedictine Monastery was established here to last, as far as human precaution could, secure for all time. But excavations show that no Norman building, except possibly the Church, superseded the ancient remains of the Irish-Celtic structure. Beyond the fish-trap towards the East was the part of the island called the Deer Park, suggesting that venison formed part of the diet in the old monastery. This Benedictine foundation did not seem to flourish.

By 1303 Nendrum was a Parish Church valued at only seven marks. In 1366, Maurice McKerly resigned as Rector in favour of John Hackett, who had been Rector of Raholp. This was an exchange between the two rectors. In 1450, Patrick McNycholl is mentioned as Rector of Nendrum. This is the last mention of Nendrum until Captain Browns got possession of the island and built his Tower House, now called Mahee Castle. In 1639 a new Parish Church was built for the area in Tullynakill on the site of some ancient sacred building.

In 1572 Sir Bryan McPhelim O'Neill carried out a scorched earth policy, burning and destroying every sizeable building that could provide shelter for any incoming English or Scottish planters. Nendrum suffered this fate and disappeared for two centuries.

NENDRUM RE - DI SCOVERED.

Bishop Reeves, perpetual Curate of Ballymena undertook in 1843 to edit the Down, Connor and. Dromore portion of the Taxation Roll of Pope Nicholas IV dated 1306. The existence and even the name of Nendrum were utterly unknown and forgotten. In the Roll the name of the Parishes were not in alphabetical order but in topographical order and to this fact, is due the discovery and existence of Nendrum. When Dr. Reeves was collecting the material for his great work, he visited in person each parish and found out as much as he could from local tradition and personal examination of the antiquarium remains then existing.

In 1844 Dr. Reeves stayed for some time with his friend, Mr. Guy Stone of Barn Hill, Comber and from there was driven by his host to visit various sites within driving distance. He visited what was on the Taxation Roll as Ecclesia de Dramcro, which he established as Drumreagh. Ecclesia Rencady was Ringhaddy, Killinchenemaghery (Island Church of the Plain) to distinguish it from Killinchenekille (Island Church of the Wood) viz Killinchywoods. Then came Ecolesia Nedrum, followed by Ecolesia Kilmode. This was Kilmood, but where was Nedrum, lying between Killinchy and Kilmood?

Guy Stone could think of nothing like a church in that district, but there was an old lime-kiln on Mahee Island.
They both visited the site to find it very much overgrown, but on searching discovered it to be the bottom of an ancient Round Tower. The diameter of the interior was six feet seven inches and the external diameter was fifteen feet. The walls were fifty inches thick and it was reckoned that it must have been between fifty and sixty feet high. The stones for building it were taken from the surrounding cashels. This building succeeded an earlier wooden structure and was used as a watch tower and a place of safety if the monastery was attacked by enemies. It was destroyed in 974 A.D. For the next eighty years the site and its ruins and cashels were forgotten once again.

NENDRUM SITE RESTORED – 1922-1924.

In 1922, the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society took an interest in Nendrum and decided to clear up the site, which was overgrown with weeds of all kinds.
At first it was thought that the work could be done in two or three weeks with ten men. £75 was voted from the Funds to carry out this work. Major C. Blakiston Houston, who had a summer residence at Nendrum, assisted in the work with Canon Carmody, but the man in charge, who put a great effort into the project was Mr. H. C. Lawlor, a member of the Society. The contract for the work was given to James Lowry and was carried out under the personal supervision of James Lowry Jun. The success of the venture was entirely due to him. So great, an amount of work had to be done that an appeal to the public for funds was made and raised £600. The Down County Council gave £45 for the repair of Browne's Castle, at the north end of the island. The work continued from 1922 until 1924.
Farmers gave strips of land so that the lane leading to Nendrum could be widened, dangerous corners rounded off and three miles of road was tar-macadamed.

Nendrum was unlike Iona in that it was not a centre of family relations, nor was it officered by those, who were of the founder's kin as was the case in Iona. It was also unlike other Irish monasteries, where the appointments of successive Abbats fell into the hands of a particular family or clan as was the case in Bangor and Armagh. Nendrum had no one to chronicle its history or perpetuate the honour of its founder or his successors.

The monastery proper was the space enclosed by the vallum (the inner cashel) and embraced the church, the refectory, the kitchen, the guest chambers (hospitia) lining the main pathways and the artificers workshops.
The most important building was the Sacra Dcinus sometimes called the Ecclesia and was provided with an altar remote from the West door. On one side was the exectra or sacristy with two doors one leading internally and the other externally. Here may have been kept the clooca or bell by which the congregation was summoned to services. Near the Refectory was the kitchen. Here were kept the ordinary domestic vessels, dirks, knives, small baskets, frying pans, stock pot, water jar and saucepans. The hospitia included the Abbot's house which was detached and usually on an eminence, the lodgings of the community and the guest houses - they were separate, detached, dry-stone bee-hive huts. In Nendrum they were built of wattles and planks and ocoupied the space to the South, South-West and West of the Inner Cashel wall and. inside the middle cashel.
In the tenth century at Nendruin the various workshops were between the Inner and. Middle cashels. There was a very ancient pottery inside the Inner Cashel near the N.W. doorway. A large number of polished rubbing stones were found in various places, many near the pottery. A leather tannery was close to the Pottery. Various pieces of iron slag and a large fragment of crude pig-iron were found outside the Middle Cashel on the north aide suggesting that a smithy was there at some time.
It is uncertain whether the general cemetery was inside or outside the vallum. It was usual to bury the Abbats and other high officials within the church. This was the case at Nendrum, where the bodies are buried shoulder to shoulder in rows head to foot all facing the east. Many graves have also been found, not only close to the church, but in many places inside the inner cashel and several between the inner and middle cashels. The port was on the west side and is still marked with large stones and an opening in the outer cashel.
Whether the present quay on the south side is the same as 1400 years ago, would be difficult to prove, but here was the boat-builder's yard. Boats built of wicker, covered with hide or cut and hollowed out of solid logs in various sizes were made, some big enough to transport two cows and some were adapted for fishing. In the middans were found vast quantities of shells from oysters, limpets (much larger than today), periwinkles and scallops. There was a great trade across the Channel, for Nendrum was well known and greatly respected by the monasteries there.

The smith was the most highly respected craftsman in the community for he worked not only with iron but with precious metals and created many of the treasures of the Monastery. He was the "Gowan" and from this arises the names Magowan, Maccoun, Ballygowan, Lianagowan and Ballykennedy.

NENDRUM SCHOOL.

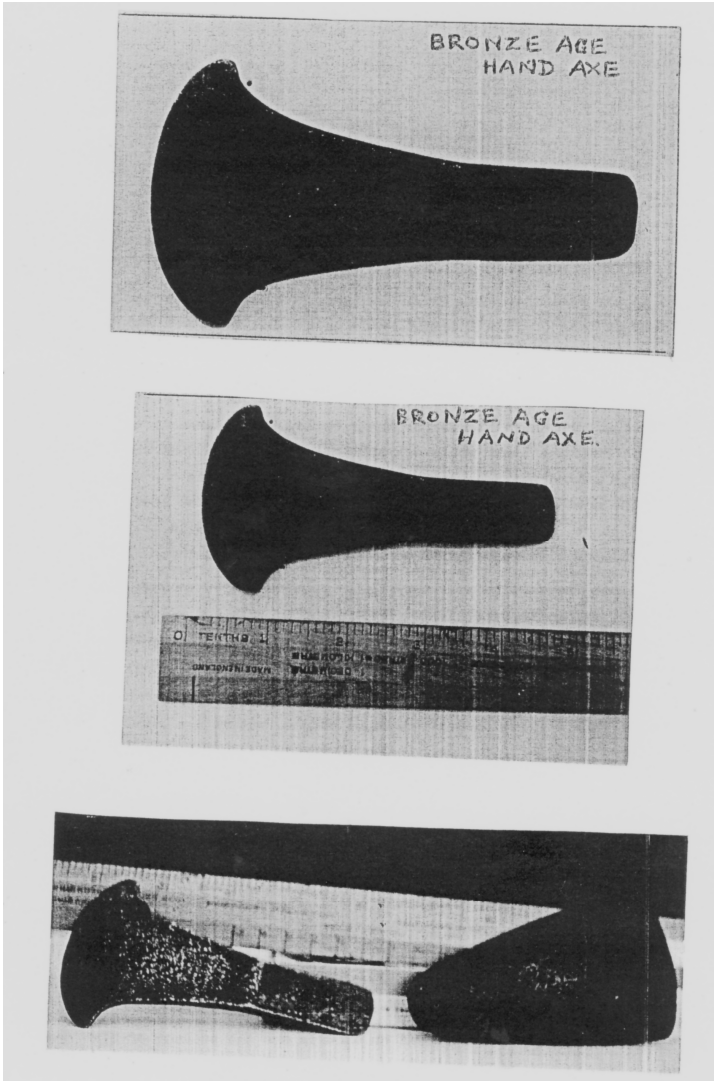
Like other monasteries of later years, Nendrum had a school. It was situated between the Inner and the Middle cashels on the western side and was orientated similarly to the Church.
The foundation and part of the walls can still be seen and it will be noticed that they are field stones, probably taken from the cashels and cemented with hard clay. It is a rectangular building forty-seven feet by thirteen feet with a doorway on the north side.
When the site was being cleared by H. C. Lawlor in 1922, a number of nails lay where the door had been and all were of the same length 1¼ inches. One nail had a small piece of wood at each end, evidence of the thickness of the door. Also found was a hinge, a door handle and a large iron hook.
The sons of the wealthy in the neighbourhood would be educated here together with the eldest sons of the lay monks.
The head of the school would be the Scribe and he would teach them Latin from a Latin Psalter, which they loved and constantly recited or rhymed. (I wonder was it from this that children, in National Schools, learned everything by rhyming aloud in class, including spellings, tables, geography, grammar and Euclid. A method that was not always successful.)

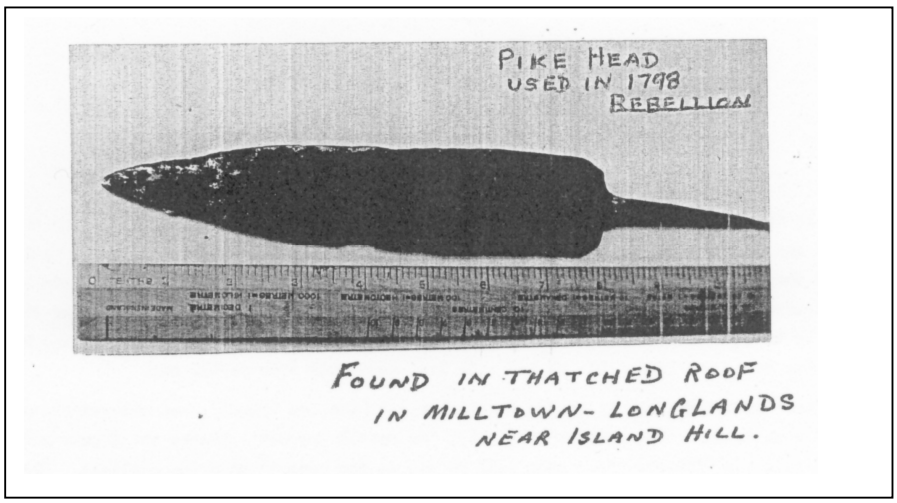
A piece of slate found in the school shows an intricate design, obviously done by the Scribe and underneath a copy, carelessly done by the pupil. Punishment must have followed for the second attempt underneath the first showed a great improvement. Was this the first headline copybook? Ah, memories of Vere Foster. In those days they believed strongly in corporal punishment for carelessness and cheek.

In the debris of the site a stone mould for making cresset lamps was found. Sheet metal was laid on this mould and hammered into shape. This was until recently preserved in the West wall of the church as was part of an ancient piscina, which held the holy water. These have recently been removed to form part of a small Museum in one of the houses nearby, which have recently been acquired. Various other 'trial pieces' of the school have been preserved and will, no doubt, be exhibited. One most interesting find was a highly polished, slightly curved black stone, which, when dipped in water becomes a perfect mirror. Two other interesting finds were two stones, one square and one oval, which could be suspended from the waist by a leather thong. Both aides of each were scored, but always in a diagonal direction and this was done by striking it with a pointed piece of iron to produce a spark to light a fire. A circular grindstone, fifteen inches in diameter of Ballygowan freestone was also found with many other polishing and rubbing stones.

The Museum should prove most interesting and a great attraction. It is also hoped to have a machine showing slides of various parts of the site.

See page


BRONZE AGE
HAND AXE
BRONZE AGE
HAND AXE.


PIKE HEAD
USED IN 1798
REBELLION
FOUND IN THATCHED ROOF
IN MILLTOWN- LONGLANDS
NEAR ISLAND HILL.