

The Story of Magheratimpany ; its old chapel and landlords

The place name Magheratimpany in the Gaelic, Mach-aire-ratha-tiomanach, signifies the plain of the fort of the hillocks. The map of 1720 shows five hill forts in the townland, while the first edition of the Ordnance Survey, surveyed in 1834, shows two and a portion of another. Today only one of these remains and it is to be hoped that it will not suffer the fate of the others. The townland was called in the ancient times Ballintanpany, Baile- tiompanach, the town of the hillocks.

This district lies within the axis of mid-Down, halfway as the crows flied between Ballynahinch and Seaforde, in a somewhat sequestered valley, where its many hillocks raise their lush grass-brown heads, vying with its each in altitude. From these vantage points one's eye can compass the undulating landscape of Co. Down, from the graceful and lion couchant-like Slieve Croob and the monarch of the Ulster peaks, Slieve Donard, to the blue Cave Hill shimmering through the haze; towering Scrabo the silvery waters of Strangford Lough to the cloud-like hills of the Isle of Man on the skyline of the mystic east.

Here animated nature is seen and heard at its best. The wood pigeon in his leafy bower, where the alder and the ivy strive for existence and superiority respectively, coos his welcome to the rising sun. The blackbirds and the thrushes, who struck the poetic chord in the mind of **John McMullan**, the Magheratimpany muse, when he composed his overture to their rousing whistle and gay songs, haunt the hedgerows and the laurels and command the topped of the lofty trees, filling the very air with their melodies accompanied by the different other songsters of the feathered world. The crow circles lazily around as she alights on the old pasture or root crops cawing incessantly, while in the thickening light, the repeated drumming of the snipe, the shrill cry of the plover, the lone call of the moss cheeper, the harsh screech of the owl and the measured crake-crake of the landrail fills the very soul of a lover of nature with the joy of spring and the perpetual companionship of the fowls of the night.

The name Ballintimpany, appears first in a document dated 10th April 1301, when it formed part of the endowment of the Commandery of the Knights Templar, a military religious order who held Dundrum Castle. When the Knights were dissolved by Pope Clement 5th by a Bull, dated 22 March 1312 their lands were granted to the Priory of Down. King Henry 8th granted Magheratimpany among other lands to Gerald, Earl of Kildare and King James granted the Crown title to Phelimy in September 1665. **Phelimy McCartan** granted to Lord Cromwell a third part of Kinelarty, including the lands of Magheratimpany, in consideration of a sum of money and that Lord Cromwell would give his son **Patrick McCartan** a good English education. The boy was then 14 years of age, Cromwell was a grandson of the well known historical character. Thomas Cromwell, who had risen from very humble origins to be the principal minister of King Henry 8th. He was appointed Governor of Lecale and McCartan county (Kinelarty) and the borders thereof " being empowered to prosecute with fire and the sword all traitors and rebellious persons therein". **Phelimy McCartan** had with other issue two sons, **Patrick** above mentioned and **Owen**, who were alleged on the evidence of prejudiced witnesses, whose depositions may be seen in trinity College Library, to have taken part in the rising of 1641 but there is no trustworthy evidence to support this allegation. Cromwell was succeeded by his son **Thomas**, the fourth Baron, who sold Magheratimpany with other lands to **Matthew Forde** of Dublin and Coolgraney in Co. Wexford. Clerk of the Crown and Peace Clerk of the Peace and Assizes and Clerk of Nisi Prius. These lands were into the lands of **Teaghconnatt**, (*Teconnaught townland*) the same being confirmed by paten dated 26th July 1637. **Matthew Forde**, who purchased the former estate of McCartan, married his daughter Eleanor, and had by her two sons and two daughters.

The old chapel of Ballintimpany, or Magheratimpany stood in a field on the south side of the late Miss Annabella Smyth's house. It appears in the Taxation of 1306 and in 1578 **Sir Nicholas Malby** speaks of a Holy Well beside the chapel of Ballintampanie venerated as 'of the Virgin'. The site that was dedicated to the Virgin has long since been forgotten. By charter of 1609 King James 1st created the chapter of the Protestant Cathedral of Down, the precentorship being endowed by the rectories of Loughinisland and **Drumcaw**, the former including the chapelry of Ballintimpany. The first precentor of Down was **John Marshall** M. A. 1609-1614. From the Royal Visitations or the Visitations of the clergy made by the Crown in 1622, formerly preserved in the Public Records Office, Dublin, we learn that the chapel and townland of Magheratimpany were still in the parish of Loughinisland.

During the Bishopric of the neglectful **Thomas Hacket**, who ruthlessly disposed of his preferments, the chapelry of Ballintimpany was in 1681 transferred to the diocese of Dromore, being included in the parish of Magheradroll. The learned **Monsignor O'Lavery** tells us that in this valuable Diocesan History that he was informed (about the year 1874) by an old man called **Burns, of Drumsnade**, that according to a story handed down by his father the townland had been transferred by the priest of Loughinisland to the priest of Magheradroll. The exact year of this change in the diocesan boundaries in the Catholic Church does not appear to be on record.

On an estate map of 1720 in the possession of the **Kenny family**, the graveyard, in a circular enclosure as well as the ruins of the old chapel, which was duly Oriented is depicted. This graveyard was used as a burial place as late as 1825. I heard an old man called **John Davey**, who was born in 1815, state that he remembered a funeral procession to the old burial ground when he was a lad and that keeners formed part of the cortege. Every vestige of the graveyard was swept away over a century ago so that one can only discern the burial ring in the field when it is under crop. In the centuries now passed into the shade of oblivion the district was well populated. It was indeed a centre of importance when the towns of Ballynahinch and Castlewellan were unheard of.

The McCartens had a stone built castle there which stood in a field next to Timpany House which no doubt gave rise to the local tradition repeated by the old people that the that the King of Ulster had once resided there, which is of course not the case. The land, goods and chattels of Patrick McCartan, gentleman of Ballymaghrytimpany, were administered in 1564 to **John Russell of Killough**. The castle was later occupied by the Russell family, one of whom, **James Russell of Magheytimpany**, gentleman, attended a meeting of the Co. Down Grand Jury on the 17th February 1613. According to the Subsidy Rolls of 1653, **Hugh Magriny**, of Maghera-Timpany paid £3 14s of subsidy tax. He also appears to have lived at McCartan's Castle.

During the 18th century my family resided there for a time prior to building on a new site occupied by Timpany House. Its ruins were incorporated in a modest long cottage building and were demolished in the last century. A pile of stones until recently marked the site. In a lease dated 29th November 1694, Matthew Forde, of the city of Dublin, granted to **Adam Maitland, of Hillsborough**, the townland of Magheratimpany. He by a lease dated 10th August 1703 leased his interest in the property of **James Robb, of Balleselogh (Ballysallagh)**, near Newtownards, my first ancestor to have an interest in these lands. **Robb** by his will proved in 1708 bequeathed the residue of his lease to his **son James, of Drumna Hall**, Ballynahinch, who was agent to **Sir John Rawdon**. He later took up residence at the old home of the McCartans. Drumna Hall later became the Rectory and so remained until 1817. His son, **John Robb**, who was born there on the 6th January 1746, was one of the foundation members of the United Irish Society and a Colonel of the Insurgents. His mortal remains rest in an exile grave in St. Mary's Church, Bergen, Norway.

In the original lease, **Adam Maitland** was succeeded by **James Haw of Moira**, a son of **Nicholas Haw**. It was dated 20th May 1730. **Peter Mason of Moira** acquired Maitland's interest and on the 4th October 1748, renewed the lease to **Robb. Stanhope Mason, of Moira**, and Liverpool, had four daughters, namely **Brittannia**, who married **Morgan Jellett** whose aunt was the first wife of **James Robb; Ruth**, who married **Graham** of Dublin; **Mary**, who married **William Speers** of Dublin; and **Susannah**, who married **Courtney Kenny** of Ballinrobe, County Mayo. **Courtney Kenny** still held a freehold there in 1804, which was registered at Newry on the 15th April in that year. In a letter to **James Robb**, my great-great-grandfather, headed Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo, Thursday 27th, year not given, Kenny writes; " Sir- I gratefully thank you for your letter of the 6th inst. and I am very sorry that I could not find time to answer it sooner. I am sure it is possible that your interest in the loans is bringing forth a good return, but surely the offer we made you of you landed estate, in Magheradroll parish in Down is an opportunity you should receive and take if possible. It is my intention to journey North and I hope to be at Moira on the 10th July, when I shall write you to advise you what date I could receive you there in company with you dear cousin Jellett, to complete the bargain, Very truly yours, **Courtney Kenny**. "

The **Forde family** of Seaforde always remained the head landlords from 1637 down to the buying out of their estates under the Irish Land Acts. In 1780 **James Robb** commenced building operations. On a heart-shaped stone still to be seen in the wall of Timpany House the following is inscribed:- "This house was built by **James Robb**, 1780".

The district always remained predominantly Irish, upwards of seventy-five per cent of the population have always been members of the Catholic Church. In the rental of 1720 **Matthew Waring**, whose will was proved in 1723 was the principal holding the lease of **James Robb of Drumna Hall** dated 10th May 1712; a holding of sixty five acres. The other names were **Hector McDonald, Patrick O'Gilmour, Patrick McMullan, Terence Smyth, Bernard Mooney, Bryan Rourke, Patrick McLeagh, John Ripert, Neil McCann. Patrick Lynch** of Loughinisland, the noted Irish scholar, writing to Bunting in 1801 says; " The best spoken and written Irish you will find is in Magheratimpany, where most of the elder generation do not speak English. Hume makes reference to Irish speakers in the district in 1830.

In the days of the volunteers who paved the way to the great measures of reform, the above **James Robb** raised a corps in October 1779 and had as his first lieutenant, **Patrick Davey**, one of the first Catholic officers to be admitted to the armed volunteers in Ulster. The second lieutenant or ensign was **John Hanna**. From the Muster Roll dated 28th March 1780, the other ranks mustered 22 principal names being **Smyth, Davey, McDonnell, Mooney, Snowden, Kennedy, Hill**. Twelve of the ranks belonged to the Catholic faith. The uniform of the corps was dark blue faced with scarlet button holes edged with yellow, silver buttons, blue trimmed cocked hats in scarlet and silver lace. One a silver medal still preserved, bearing the date of 1780, is inscribed:" A reward for merit to **William Snoddon** for skill with broad sword." **Patrick Davey** served in the American War in the 5th Regiment of Foot. "The Fighting Fifth" now the Northumberland Fusiliers and was under the command of Lord Moira at Bunker's Hill. According to the Monthly Returns War Office Papers, **Davey** was specially commended on the field after that engagement for gallantry. The **Davey family** originally came from **Douglan**, some miles to the west. In a lease dated 20th March 1781, in the Public Records Office, Belfast, Cornet **James Robb** leased to **Hugh Davey** fifty acres of land for a term of twenty-one years. There were many families of the name in the district, all being of the same ilk. There was **Hugh Davey**, whose will was proved in 1795; John, whose will was proved in 1827 and Patrick's will in 1818.

During the 1798 Rebellion many of the inhabitants joined the insurgent ranks. The hill forts of the district at that time played their part, for it was from these that the United Irish inhabitants kept watch over the valley for the approach of the red coat. An officer of the 22nd Dragoons writing on Friday, 15th June 1798 tells us that his troop passed through the district and laid waste many homesteads in the adjoining townland. I also heard different people who remembered the Insurrection state that two men were ruthlessly slain and buried on a hill facing south in the lands of **Richard McCaugherty** and that their remains were later removed to the old burial place. This story, handed down by one who talked to those who were there, is no doubt supported by the officer's record of the presence of the Dragoons.

The hills and dales of Timpany have witnessed many pageants of history from the days of the military knights of old, through the times of the sad vicissitudes of the princely McCartans to the days of the Volunteers who unlocked the door of penal oppression and have also witnessed the relentless pursuit of the bloodhounds of Col. **Nugent** in one of the most eventful periods of history in the North.

Here too the Celt clung to the faith of his forebears, sticking to his native sod and speaking his native tongue a little over a century ago and endearing himself to his fellow countrymen by lending the helping hand to him whose ox had fallen in the pit, speaking a kindly word to the sorely bereaved and many other good neighbourly acts too numerous to mention, displaying in every turn of daily life those perfect sentiments of the true Gael.

by [Colin Johnston Robb](#) published in 'The Down Recorder' on 9th October 1970