

# **NIPA Panel Project 2024**

## **Ballymoney Amateur Photographic Club**

### **“Architecture in our Local Area”**

Ballymoney Photographic Club meets three times per month, twice at a venue in Ballymoney and once at another venue in Coleraine. The club has around 30 members who come from a wide area that stretches from Limavady to Ballycastle and almost as far south as Ballymena. The topic for the panel project was chosen by club members at a meeting earlier in the year. As a club we wanted a topic that was accessible to all members and did not require specific equipment or access to subjects. “Architecture in our local area” met those criteria and in addition it tied in with the subject of one of the five rounds of the NIPA Interclub competition for the current year.

Throughout the season members were asked to post suitable images in an album on the club’s closed Facebook page. Members were encouraged to photograph a range of buildings and structures from private homes to churches and other public buildings, from different periods in history, and to consider their interior and exterior features.

At another club meeting in late November, the members present participated in choosing the images from the submitted group that form the panel presented here. It was considered important that at least one image from each of the nine members who contributed to the project was included in the final panel. The contributors were: Anne Doherty, Donal Healy, Gráinne Dixon, Helen Gilmore, Ian Marr, Jennifer James, Joan Kennedy, Leonard Ferguson and Pete Irvine.

The overall panel layout was decided on aesthetic considerations such as balancing colours and tones present in the images, the mix of aspect ratios, and also the mix of colour and monochrome images. However, the individual images will be discussed in chronological order according to the date of construction as this will provide a better flow to the narrative.

The Coleraine venue at which the club meets once per month is very close to the oldest known settlement site on the island of Ireland. While there are no surviving architectural remnants from that site there are many others from ancient sites scattered across the region in which our members live. For example, Craig’s passage tomb and dolmen near Dunloy date from the Stone Age, at least 4000 years ago. Many of these early constructions had an intimate connection to the movements of the stars and this is suggested by the nighttime image of Craig’s dolmen by Gráinne Dixon.

Several thousand years of history pass before any significant surviving examples of architectural structures are found in the region. Bonamargy Friary at Ballycastle dates from around the year 1500 and has several well-preserved features including the east window, a staircase and a sealed burial vault. The coffins of several Earls of Ulster and chieftain, Sorley Boy MacDonnell, lie within.

In the following centuries as travellers visited countries on the continent, they brought back knowledge of architectural styles that were then incorporated into buildings here. The grand Italian-inspired Downhill House was built around 1780 but today is standing in ruins after being almost entirely gutted by a fire in 1851. The aerial shot by Pete Irvine shows the floor plan that includes two long wings which stretched northwards towards the sea and ended in two immense curving bastions.

Nearby, perched right on the cliff edge at Downhill, is Mussenden Temple which was built in around 1783 as a library for the Earl-Bishop. Its design was based on the Temple of Vesta in Italy.

The Bishop's Gate Lodge at the Downhill estate features a doorway with a pointed, or Gothic, arch.

The Town Hall in Coleraine was built in 1859 in the Italianate style that was inspired by 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian Renaissance architecture. Of particular note is the five-stage tower, the third stage of which is Baroque in appearance, while the fourth stage features a clock and the fifth stage displays a cupola. The surrounding buildings in the Diamond in Coleraine are also interesting as they are built in a range of styles from modern to not so modern.

Most of the buildings within the local area were constructed in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Built in 1915, the historic Causeway Memorial School, close to the Giant's Causeway, is well preserved and was in use until 1962. After this it was used for about 50 years as an educational resource, allowing children to experience what schooling was like in bygone days.

In medieval times round stone towers were a common feature in the vicinity of churches and monasteries. In modern times round buildings have also been constructed in our region but not always with an ecclesiastical function. Examples shown in the panel include a round building in a private garden, Saint Joseph's Church in Dunloy (the interior of which has been captured by Anne Doherty), and an entrance at the Ulster University.

In the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, many older structures in our local area have been demolished and replaced with modern buildings in new and dramatic styles, and constructed using a range of modern materials. The modern block of apartments in Portrush, with an older structure in the background, reflects these changes. Other examples are the striking new visitor centre at the Giant's Causeway, opened in 2012, and the new Northern Regional College building opened in Coleraine in 2024.