

MEDIEVAL ULSTER
BEYOND WESTEROS AND
THE GAME OF THRONES

THE LORDSHIPS
OF MEDIEVAL
COUNTY DOWN



MAGENNIS



THE ENGLISH



CLANDEBOYE O'NEILL



McSWEENEY



O'HANLON



MAGUIRE



O'DONNELL



McDONNELL



O'BOYLE



O'NEILL



O'CAHAN



McQUILLAN



O'DOHERTY

THE LORDSHIPS OF MEDIEVAL COUNTY DOWN



The Earldom of County Down

In 1515 a report was compiled for King Henry VIII of England which described Ireland as a hotbed of warring lordships, both English and Irish, with about ninety warlords living by the sword and answerable to no-one but themselves.

Among them were the lordships of what is now County Down. The region had been part of the area invaded in 1177 by the Anglo-Norman adventurer John de Courcy who had marched into the Gaelic kingdom of Dál Fiatach and set about establishing a new lordship for himself that would encompass much of what today is County Antrim and County Down. By 1182 de Courcy had established five jurisdictions: Antrim, Carrickfergus, Ards, Blathewic and Lecale. Efforts to extend into north Antrim, however, were prevented by the Uí Tuirtre of mid Antrim who would remain in control of their kingdom for the next two centuries.

When John de Courcy first decided to head north to take on the Ulster Gaelic lords and establish a lordship for himself he brought with him 22 knights from high ranking families. They would, from an early age been trained in the art of war, horsemanship and allegiance. They would have been accompanied by their squires and some fighting men.

Part of the allure in following de Courcy would have been the promise of lands and titles and many of these knights, their families and descendants lived to take over tracts of land, such as the Savages of the Ards, the Jordans of Ardglass, and the Mandevilles and Whites of Killyleagh. A French speaking knight is recorded in one of de Courcy's charters as "Richard de Dundoenald" – Dundonald referring to an earlier Gaelic fort on the site of the Norman motte.

They displaced the Gaelic Lords, in particular the Dunlevys of the Dal Fiatach Ulaidh. This new English dominated territory became the Earldom of Ulster.

Under de Courcy's orders the knights organised the building of truncated conical, earthen mounds, called mottes, usually circled with a defensive palisade fence of pointed stakes and with a bailey at the top. The wooden constructions were sometimes later replaced with stone. These were used as part of an overall defensive plan to hold onto the land that they had invaded. In Co. Down there are thirty three mounds classified as mottes, of which eight have attached baileys still traceable. The ones at Dundonald and at Clough are easily accessed and are visible from the road. Most are from the period 1177-1220.

De Courcy gave his barons lands along this agriculturally rich territory with access to the coast so that their outposts could be defended from the water, supplied by ship, and to enable them to develop trade links and ports. These Barons and their descendants made their fortunes through growing and selling wheat and other corn. They paid tithes to their overlord but made handsome profits from the excellent agricultural land in the Ards and Lecale. They developed ports and trade in particular at Ardglass and Carrickfergus.

These Normans completely changed the economy. Irish Lords counted their wealth by the number of followers they could muster and the number of cattle they had – they had moveable economic resources. The Normans’ sources of income were based on land and on how that land could be exploited, principally through the creation of landed estates with a definite centre of administration. They moved to cultivation of wheat and grain as the rise in population in Europe in the 13th century provided a ready market for the export of grain to feed people in Britain and Europe.

John de Courcy built strategically placed castles at Dundrum and Carrickfergus and also built impressive monasteries and abbeys replacing more modest Gaelic structures and imported Benedictine and Cistercian orders from places relevant to him and his family in England. The message from these large, impressive, stone structures in the landscape was that the Normans ie the English, were here to stay. These buildings also became the focal point around which towns arose. The tradesmen and workers in these towns came from a mix of places but would have included people from De Courcy’s place of origin so broadening and tightening his network and sphere of influence, for example artisans from Chester set up the pottery at Carrickfergus.

In his lifetime de Courcy forbade his knights from establishing stone fortresses for fear that they would become too powerful and rise against him. Instead the coast was dotted with wooden mottes and baileys which overlooked the estates granted to these barons.

However, after the demise of de Courcy and from the 14th and 15th centuries these middle noble families built fortified, stone, tower houses which were essentially small castles. And from which the barons managed their estates. King John knew well of the threat from the Irish Lords whose territory had been taken and demanded that his lands be defended and on 20 March 1200 King John commanded all persons holding land in the Marches of Ireland to fortify their castles before the Feast of St. John the Baptist (24) or he would seize their lands (Calendar of Irish State Papers).

Tower houses were where justice was dispensed and where guests were entertained within the estate. They were a symbol of power and would have had adjacent accommodation for soldiers and horses. Some of these tower houses, while no longer inhabited, look much as they did in medieval times. Others, such as Killyleagh Castle, were extended and adapted as befit their changing purpose and their owners. They formed a necklace of castles along the coast which could be easily defended by ships at sea and also supplied with provisions by sea if routes inland were impassable.

After the 12th century invasion most of the ordinary Irish people carried on their lives under the new lords. Places like Killyleagh would have been at the centre of an estate and the local people continued to work the land. There was also some accommodation between the Gaelic and Norman ruling Lords as well as warfare. The new economic model of the landed estate led to the development of markets and ports, like Carrickfergus and Ardglass, where things were bought and sold. Imported spices and wine would have made their way beyond the earldom and into the Irish territories as well. In the account records of Norman estates there are payments to Irish men for services and goods. There were also intermarriages between Norman and Irish families which extended their influence and favour beyond their territory. Some became “more Irish than the Irish themselves” with many inter-relationships and alliances. The Whites were described by one commentator, Thomas Smith, as “save the name nothing remains English”.

De Courcy was usurped by another knight, Hugh de Lacy by 1207 and the Earldom of Ulster was established. The Anglo-Norman lordship passed through marriage to Walter de Burgh in 1264.

The End of the Anglo Norman Earldom of Ulster

The Earldom of Ulster eventually came to a calamitous end for the Anglo Norman families in the 14th century through a series of events that weakened it irrevocably.

In the first two decades of the 14th Century there was famine throughout Europe which decreased the, mainly Norman, Irish export trade and there were less people coming from Europe to settle here.

From 1315-1318 Edward Bruce, brother of Robert Bruce, tried to make himself King of Ireland and attacked many Norman settlements, disrupting towns and settlements and causing major economic hardship before he was killed outside Faughart in 1318. He came like a dragon burning and destroying settlements and abbeys, including Black Abbey and Grey abbey. Abbeys were a target for their wealth and also their food stores at a time of famine across the country. This famine is thought to have been a major factor in the defeat of Edward de Bruce who could not sustain his army.

When Edward de Bruce put Carrickfergus Castle under siege it was one of the Mandevilles who came to its defence supplying it with troops and corn by sea from Drogheda.

The murder of the 3rd Earl of Ulster, William de Burgh, between Belfast and Carrickfergus, by his own barons in 1333, led to a civil war. This murder was motivated by an internal family feud. William had starved his brother Walter de Burgh to death in a prison at the mouth of the Foyle, possibly at Greencastle. Walter's sister was Gyle de Burgh, married to Richard Mandeville one of the most powerful families in Ulster. She wanted vengeance for her brother's cruel fate and egged her husband Richard on to take revenge on the Earl (who was also her brother!), which led to William's murder and started a terrible civil war. This civil war tore apart families and long held allegiances and further wrecked the economy.

From 1348-1349 the Black Death ravaged Europe and up to half the population died. Because it was transmitted by rats and fleas in crowded areas it hit hardest in towns. While some Irish lived in towns it was mainly the Normans who were affected.

At the end of the 14th century there was a resurgence of Gaelic power throughout Ireland. A branch of the O'Neills, the Clondeboye O'Neills came in to south Antrim and north Down with the result that some of the Norman families were pushed further south. The Savages occupied the tip of the Ards Peninsula around Portaferry. The Mandevilles created the lordship of Dufferin in the 13th century, but perhaps because of their involvement with the murder of the Earl they decided to concentrate their power in north Antrim – their name synonymous with the McQuillans.

In the 15th /16th century Dundrum Castle was recaptured by the Irish, this time by the Magennises of Iveagh who ruled in west and south County Down. The O'Cahan's also gained power as did the O'Neills of Tyrone.

Queen Elizabeth set about controlling these Gaelic lords which led to outright war at the end of the 1500s. By 1603 the Gaelic lordships were finally defeated and their land was taken over by mainly Scottish settlers.

Across the country families adjusted to the new era and some embraced it through marriages that would win them favour with the new Lords. For example on the Ards, Patrick Savage married Hugh Montgomery's daughter, Jane and converted to protestantism. However, many Gaelic Lords, including the O'Neills, left the country for the continent, never to return, in what has become known as "The Flight of the Earls". In 1607.





John de Courcy

The White Knight, John de Courcy, was a tall, blonde haired, larger than life, buccaneering character, much admired by his followers, but falling short of great leadership because of his impetuous and often reckless nature. However, he is also known for conquering a huge area of eastern Ulster, changing the landscape with his legacy of mottes, castles and tower houses and setting up significant Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries.

De Courcy was a Norman and his ancestors were amongst the vikings who settled in the north of France and went on to conquer England. His family came from Somerset and they had lands in Yorkshire.

His fate was to become intertwined with that of another knight, his nemesis, Hugh de Lacy.

Like most young men of high birth, he was trained from a child in the art of fighting and war. He was amongst the knights who followed de Burgh to Ireland in 1176 following the death of Strongbow who had succeeded in taking over much of the south east of Ireland at the invitation of the King of Leinster. De Courcy was part of the garrison of Dublin in the new kingdom. Always impatient, he was ready for adventure and the chance to acquire land and fortune beyond the English controlled Pale.

Flying in the face of the accepted method of negotiating and making treaties with Gaelic Lords, de Courcy set out to do battle with them head on. His interest was surely as much about making his fortune and growing his personal power as it was to expand the influence of the English crown. His tactic was an unusual one – to head north from Dublin in the depths of winter, when weather and ground conditions were unfavourable and most campaigners rested up after a summer of battles.

De Courcy maintained that the English king had given him permission to head north, but if he did it was probably on the assumption that he would never succeed.

En route, it is likely that he was unimpeded by the Gaelic clans in Louth who were often at loggerheads with their northern neighbours and were probably happy to let him pass to attack them.

Travelling with just 22 knights – almost certainly on horseback, he came through the Moyry Pass and on to Downpatrick – then called Dun Lethglas, where he quickly ousted the Dunlevy clan from their stronghold.

His January invasion of Ulster came as a great surprise to the Gaelic Dunlevys, the last great Lords of the Ulaidh, in what is now County Down, and they were in no way prepared for the force that hit them.

The Dunlevys, first scattered before this small but fearsome fighting force allowing De Courcy to take over a strategic position at what is now known as the mound of Down. It is likely that the Normans made this mound higher and reinforced its defences to create a motte and bailey stronghold. But the Dunlevys were leaders of the Dal Fiatach, a powerful clan within the Ulaidh and they returned with a large army. For a time the battle could have gone either way but de Courcy's position on the high slopes, his weaponry and the skill and discipline of his men in keeping together and fighting as a single unified force gave them the upper hand and the low lying plain of the Quoile estuary ran red with Gaelic blood.

Following this defeat, the Dunlevys fought on for 60 years, but by the mid 1200s the majority of the family were granted exile in the Kingdom of Tyrconnell – some working as hereditary medics to the local O'Donnell kings. Some others went to nearby Scotland where they sometimes assumed the name Dunlop.

In Tyrconnell (modern County Donegal) the Dunlevys also assumed the nickname from where they came – Ulidh – and over time some branches went by the name of “Son of the Ulsterman” (Mac an Ultaigh) – which anglicised as McNulty. During this time, the reputation of the medic family members grew considerably.

In medieval times allegiances were often difficult to discern, and the great lords and the clans that followed them were constantly shape shifting in an effort to gain advantage over each other, to expand their power and to keep their families and kinsmen safe.

It helped to marry into a power base and John de Courcy's marriage to Afrecca, daughter of the King of the Isle of Man, was made for political reasons. She brought him the armed support he sought later in his campaign. She was of course well bred and well educated but would have had little independence or personal wealth.

Like most overlords, the de Courcys would not have lived in one place but moved between their castles across their extensive estates in Ulster, northern England and France. They were deeply religious and they played a major role in ushering in a new diocesan administrative order connected to Rome and new European religious houses. John de Courcy introduced the Benedictine order to Downpatrick and the Cistercians to Inch.

Afrecca was co-patroness of Grey Abbey, founded in thanks for a safe voyage at sea during a heavy storm. Legend says Afrecca is buried in Grey Abbey as she founded it and a carved effigy there is reputed to be of her.

John de Courcy was particularly interested in St Patrick and wanted to promote the connection between St Patrick and Downpatrick. He emphasised St Patrick as the chief saint in Ireland. Perhaps his aim was to usurp Armagh by making Downpatrick the chief site of veneration of Patrick. He would also have been keen to make connections between the new diocesan based order that the Normans brought to religious worship in Ireland with the old saints and traditions, in order to embed the new ways in the culture.

In 1186, De Courcy translated the remains of St Patrick, St Brigid and St Columba ie he exhumed them and moved some of the remains to shrines at the church at Downpatrick. This was a huge occasion in 1186, attended by the papal nuncio, Vivien, and bishops from all over Ireland. The Papal Nuncio took some of the relics back to Rome with him. Perhaps parts of the three saints are still in Rome. In Victorian times a bit of St Patrick's finger bone was sent from Rome to Belfast to put into a silver shrine that was made to hold St Patrick's arm and is now kept in the Ulster Museum in Belfast. The relic of the bone is held in a safe across the city at St Patrick's Church. Every year, on St Patrick's day, the two are reunited and the relic is put into the shrine on the altar at St Patrick's during mass. There is a shrine for St Patrick's arm now in the Ulster Museum, on loan from the Catholic Church.

John de Courcy was in his prime when he came to Ulster and he carved out an extensive Lordship which had little connection to England or English rule. Lecale has some of the richest lands in Ireland and was a great producer of grain – the basket of Ireland. The Normans extended their wealth through agriculture and the export of oats and wheat by ship from ports such as Ardglass.

While de Courcy had no legitimate children he may well have had illegitimate ones, who took his name, as was common at the time. Or perhaps the de Courcy's that came later were soldiers in his retinue. His most obvious legacy however is the line of defensive tower houses and castles, and magnificent abbeys in County Down and County Antrim that still stand proud in the landscape. Tower houses became residences of the middling nobles rather than the huge landowners – the biggest concentration in Ulster are around Lecale and Strangford Lough

During his lifetime de Courcy built many mottes and bailies and the imposing castle at Dundrum, but his finest stronghold was at Carrickfergus. It is a testament to de Courcy's strategic mind that Carrickfergus Castle went on to be a dominant force and prize possession of many leaders for centuries, withstanding attack from all sides.

Such was de Courcy's success and independence that the King of England doubted his allegiance to him. This impression was reinforced when de Courcy minted his own coins, which did not bear the king's head but instead depicted St Patrick.

Perhaps this was the final straw - King John sent Hugh de Lacy, a wealthy knight who would certainly have known de Courcy from his time in Dublin, to destroy his power. It took De Lacy five years but he finally ran de Courcy to ground in a most extraordinary way. It was said that the De Courcy, who was a formidable warrior, never took off his armour, except when he entered the church on Good Friday. This was how de Lacy's men found him and having no armour and no weapons he grabbed a large wooden cross and making best use of his strong, lean body and fighting skills, he battered 13 men to death before being finally brought down. Somehow, he managed to talk his way out of certain death and was released.

King John later captured him but he was again freed on condition that he would make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Sadly, we know little of his later years but it is thought he died in relative poverty on the continent.

For his work Hugh de Lacy became the first Earl of Ulster and the Normans, representing the English lords, loyal to the crown, who rose to the height of their powers across Down and south Antrim in the 13th century.





Savage of the Ards

The Savage family are a direct link back to the Norman Invasion of Ulster. William Savage or Le Sauvage as he would have been known then, was part of the invasion force of John de Courcy. One of the knights in that group of 22 knights and 300 foot soldiers who made the epic journey from the garrison in Dublin marching north in January 1177 to Downpatrick in an astonishing four days to engage Ruairi Macdunleavy, last King of the Ulaidh and take Downpatrick. The march north was an amazing feat of military determination. To have made that amount of speed over the distance, over difficult terrain, is impressive. Ireland at that time was heavily forested and what wasn't covered in trees, was bog or near unnavigable high ground. Also, January is well known to be the worst month of the year in Ireland for weather, making the going even harder.

William Savage's antecedent, Thomas le Sauvage from Avranches in Normandy, had been part of William the Conqueror's invasion of England in 1066 and the family had done well enough in the hundred years since. By the late 12th century William Savage's family were concentrated in Derbyshire, some in Cheshire, owners of lands and estates.

Their name Le Sauvage is sometimes interpreted to mean ferocious and/or uncivilised as in our modern meaning of the word savage. However, it's thought that the name has a more benign meaning. Sauvage refers to those Normans who did not live in the fortified towns but had their land out in the country forested areas. Sauvage coming from 'those who live in nature'.

As his reward for fighting alongside de Courcy, William Savage was granted lands in the Little Ards, an area south of the Blackstaff River on the Ards Peninsula. Fighting is the key word. Lands were won by the sword, held by the sword and ultimately could be lost by it as well. For these were difficult times and the lands they took were not always strictly theirs to take and they were not received into those lands at the 'pleasure' of the inhabitants.

The Savage Family in Ulster by G F Savage-Armstrong, 1906, in the most wonderful language writes: 'William Le Sauvage won with his sword, lands which for seven hundred years have remained in the possession of his posterity.' He also adds that to keep those lands, 'the conquerors then and for generations to come were seldom allowed to let the sword rest in the scabbard'.

For William Savage, trouble in those early days could come in many forms. By the beginning of the 13th century as his commander in arms John de Courcy came under increased pressure from the De Lacey's and King John's displeasure in de Courcy grew, Savage's loyalty to de Courcy was tested. Savage was not found wanting. In the spring of 1204, John de Courcy, in retreat, was defeated and captured by Hugh de Lacey. De Courcy secured his release by swearing to submit to the King and to give over hostages. According the Calendar of State Papers, Ireland 1204/1205 the second name on the list of hostages, after Milo, Fitz John de Courcy, is Robin (Robert) Savage, son and heir of William Savage. Robert was born in 1180, at that time he was a young man in his 20's. These two young men were to be given over to Robert Vipont (Vieuxpont) King John's trusted High Sheriff of Nottingham, Derbyshire and the Royal Forests. De Courcy supplied an additional seven hostages. The giving and taking of hostages was common practice. They acted as a guarantee of the keeping of a promise or agreement and insurance that it would be kept.

No matter how much William Savage shared in the fortunes and misfortunes of de Courcy, it is clear from the continuous presence of the family and their place on the Ards, that William did not incur the displeasure of the King and remained, unlike de Courcy, in possession of his lands.

Sources tell us that the Savage family were survivors, a hard thing to achieve in a land of fractured alliances and ever shifting allegiances. Even during the time of Edward Bruce's rampage through the northern portion of the island of Ireland, the subsequent Gaelic resurgence and the contraction of 'English' power towards its centre, The Pale and as the northern Norman families found themselves cut off from 'English' power, the Savage family maintained their hold on the Little Ards and their other lands. They were never courtiers, and although they held local official offices they kept a respectful distance from the inner workings of the monarch and the court. They appeared to be able to work themselves around the 'English', managing to keep themselves on the right side of the king and thus preserving their lands. In 1315 and the invasion of Edward Bruce, King Edward II demanded allegiances from the Magnates Hiberniae, to sign of letter of loyalty and give over hostages to be kept in Dublin Castle. Robert Savage did both. The Savage family also answered Edward II's call to take up arms against the invader, Edward Bruce. In John Barbour's epic narrative poem (14,000 lines of 8 syllables) *The Brus* (The Bruce) he calls the Anglo-Normans the 'flower of Ulster' and goes on to say:

And forowat drede or affray

In twa battaills took their way

Toward Cragfergus it to se.

But the lords of that countre

Mandevill, Besat and Logane

Their men assemblyst euerilkane

The Savages was also thair

And quhen thai assemblyst war

Thar war well near twenty thousand.

However, the Savage family also worked within an 'Irish' context, so much so that by 1536 when the Savage family were making their peace with Grey, the then Lord Deputy in Ireland sources tell us that Raymond Savage was treated as an Irish chieftain and not as a representative of the English in Ulster (Cal. Carew, 1, no.79).

The 1500's were difficult times for the Savage family. Although, they had allied themselves through marriage with the Maginnes family, the most powerful Irish family in Lecale, but there was ongoing conflict with their neighbours to the north, the O'Neill's of Clondeboye, and worst still conflict between the two branches of the Savage family. The family at Ardkeen and that at Portaferry.

The first castle built by the Savage family was at Ardkeen sometime around 1178. The site chosen for the castle may have been on even more ancient foundations. There is speculation there could have been an Irish rath on the site and the site may also have been used as a defensive strategic position for the invading Danes from around 800. A Savage family castle at Ardkeen is confirmed in 1180, there is a reference to it in De Courcy's Charter to Black Abbey a Benedictine abbey, St. Andrew's on the Ards, the abbey he founded on the peninsula. There is no trace of Black Abbey today. The tower house, was built a few miles north of Portaferry on a promontory offering a favorable defensive position. The castle at Ardkeen is picturesquely described by G F Savage-Armstrong as 'on a pleasant height, (Ardkeen means pleasant height) a large and strongly built castle, surrounded by a rampart and looking boldly down upon the Lake (Strangford Lough). From its summit is visible a splendid panorama of wood and sea and mountain.' There is evidence of a motte on the site and a church was also built close to the castle. The church was St Mary of Ards and was the burial place of the Savages of Ardkeen. Very little of Ardkeen Castle and its attendant buildings remain and it is thought that it was dismantled by the Savage family in 1717.

Around the same time as the tower house at Ardkeen was constructed, another Savage castle was built at Portaferry, like Ardkeen in an advantageous defensive position, the Narrows. Conforming to the simple squared construction of other Norman tower houses, the castle has one projecting tower to the south where a turret rises an extra story and contains the entrance and stair from ground floor to first floor. The castle we see today is mainly of early 16th century construction with early 17th century modifications. There are three stories and an attic and like the earlier tower houses it has a spiral staircase to access the floors above. However, unlike the earlier tower houses, the ground floor lacks a stone vault ceiling, all floors/ceilings are wood. In 1623, Patrick Savage married Jane, only daughter of Sir Hugh Montgomery of Rosemont, Greyabbey. With financial help from Jane's brother James Montgomery in 1635 alterations were made to the castle to make it more inhabitable and comfortable for his sister. Repairs were made to the fabric of the castle, a new roof and new flooring, the original defensive slit windows were made bigger and the arms of both families were put above the entrance door. Patrick and Jane had three children and their son Hugh succeeded his father.

Four kilometers to the east of Portaferry is Quintin Castle, built by John de Courcy in 1184. It was at one time occupied by members of the Savage Family, and in the later middle ages it was held by the Smith family a dependent family of the Savages. It is the location for Stokeworth, Season 5, Game of Thrones. It is one of the few continuously occupied Anglo-Norman castles in Ireland, though has been extensively altered over the years.

The Savages over generations spread out into the Ards and Lecale. They founded the Dominican Priory in Newtownards in 1244. It is believed that after the Battle of Ardglass in 1453, a naval battle, they wrested lands from the dominant Irish clan the McGuinness's and built up to seven castles in the immediate area.

Kirkistown Castle in Cloughy was built by Roland Savage of Ballygalget a member of a cadet branch of the Savage family in 1622. It brings us out of our medieval period but as the architecture is directly related to the castles all around the Ards from the earlier period. Add to that Kirkistown, to our eyes, is so beautifully picturesque and evocative of that period of Norman dominance on the peninsula it deserves attention. It is built on what is thought to be the site of a ruined 9th century round tower and enjoys commanding views of the countryside. Members of a cadet branch of the Savage family lived in it until the 1660's, it was then sold to the McGill family who made improvements to the castle. In 1800 it was renovated in the Gothic style and in 1836 further work was done by William Montgomery.

Harris in *The Ancient Present State of the County of Down*, 1744 describes Kirkistown Castle as 'an English Castle surrounded by a high wall, strongly built and containing within a good dwelling house of Mrs. Lucy McGill, now the widow Savage.' Harris makes no mention of Ballygalget Castle, the original home of Roland Savage who built Kirkistown, but it is thought that but by that time it had been neglected and in a near ruinous state. In the 1840's the castle was used as a temporary church for the Presbyterians of Cloughy while their church was under construction. By 1875 it was in the possession of the Montgomery family who owned it until into the 20th century. It was sold to the Brown family who then turned it over to state care.

Today we can see Portaferry House (pointed out from the stop on Windmill Hill) built in c. 1750 added and extended, assuming it's present shape c 1820. It is the home of the Nugent Family. Their name may be Nugent today but they are the Savage family. The same Savages that fought their way into Co. Down with John de Courcy. The blood line continues after more than 800 years. The same blood in the same place. Still in possession of a substantial share of their Co. Down lands. What is the secret of their success? Canny management of dumb luck?

Maybe a bit of both. They seem to have performed the duties required of them as 'English' in Ireland, they severed as sheriff's, senechals, other local offices. They created allegiances with their Irish neighbours and made marriage alliances when required. They never over extended themselves, they were not overly ambitious, they did not seek high office, they did not wish to immerse themselves in the intrigues of the English court. They did not hesitate to pick up the sword and fought ferociously pushing back intruders and invaders on their lands. They managed to settle family differences. They submitted to the 'King's peace' when they stepped beyond. They were survivors. Also, and this is maybe where the dumb luck comes in, they were good breeders! Always an advantage in a noble family that depends on its continuation through inherited wealth and title. And, they seemed to have enough male children in a time when primogenitor was the route of inheritance.

The Montgomery Family of Greyabbey wrote of their view of the state of Savage family at the beginning of the 1600's...'they have always been a stout and warlike people, loyal to the crown of England...they might have had some few civil broils amongst themselves ...they have become, as so many noble English families too much addicted to Irish customs, feuds and extractions, yet for a long time past, and now they are as much civilised as the British and do live decently and comfortably.'

But these 'Nugents' who are really Savage's, how did that happen? The name change occurred in 1812 when Andrew Savage inherited estates and lands in Co. Westmeath from his kinsman John Nugent. There is a charming story that a disgruntled old uncle of Andrew Savage/Nugent on hearing of the family name change commented he would 'rather be an old savage than a new gent'.





Hugh De Lacy

Hugh de Lacy was the first person to hold the role of what would become the Viceroy of Ireland. In other words he was second in command to King John who was recognised by Rome as the Lord of Ireland. As the King's right hand man it would have been de Lacy's duty to become intimately acquainted with the various members of the Anglo-Irish society. One of these members descended from the line of an ancient rival family, John de Courcy. John was an ambitious renegade knight and a devious plotter. It would however be the ambition and drive that would open the opportunity to take him down.

For minting his own coins de Courcy was guilty of treason, however de Lacy bolstered this with a story that de Courcy was open defaming King John, alleging he murdered his nephew Prince Arthur to ensure his succession to the throne. De Lacy proclaimed him an outlaw and broke the confidence of his inner circle of knights enabling his capture. Having orchestrated the downfall of his rival John de Courcy, Hugh de Lacy was made the Earl of Ulster in 1205 by King John.

De Courcy refused to go so easily and went across the Irish Sea to his brother-in-law Ragnold, the King of Mann. Securing a fleet de Courcy came to lay an attack on Dundrum. This time though being engaged in an uphill battle de Courcy was defeated and was brought to the Tower of London.

The usurpation of earldom saw de Lacy take up residence at the castle at Carrickfergus. De Lacy however got a little too comfortable within the great tower which was a thorn in the side of King John. John, enraged, was led to sort the issue out and lay siege in 1210. Hugh was exiled by John and forced to join the Crusades in France where he fought for thirteen years.

Despite the death of King John in 1216 it was only in 1223 that the silver tongued de Lacy talked his way back into royal affections and return to Ulster. However, burnt by previous experience he aligned himself with the O'Neill. For this his lands were confiscated and given to his elder brother Walter, Lord of Meath. In 1227, however, he was bound over into becoming the senior ranger for the King of England to keep abreast of Irish affairs.

De Lacy continued in the securing of the territory of Uladh. He introduced a number of orders to the area including the Knights Hospitaller and the Knights Templar. He spent his latter years at Carrickfergus and died at the castle in around 1243 when he was aged in his late sixties. His daughter Maude's husband Walter de Burgo became the Earl of Ulster in her right.

The Earldom continued to flourish under the de Burgo, Richard Óg De Burgh, the second Earl, was a close friend and ally of Edward I of England. His daughter Elizabeth became the second wife of the widowed Robert the Bruce and reigned over Scotland.

Robert's brother Edward however caused some problems for the successive de Burgo Earls. He laid claim to Ireland coming across the sea and landing at Olderfleet Castle, Larne on 26 May 1315. An army led by vassals of the Earl of Ulster including the de Mandevilles, Savages, Logans and Bissets of the Glens, and their Irish allies were sent to deal with the invaders. The Scots managed to capture the town of Carrickfergus, while the Earl's men held onto the Castle.

He proclaimed himself King and held a coronation in the Abbey of Saint Patrick, now Down Cathedral. Which he later burned to the ground. It was not the cunning of the Anglo-Irish that eventually saw off Edward, but a famine which weakened his army. He entered the Gap of the North in 1318 and was met by a great resistance. A battle was fought at Faughart at which Bruce was killed. His body was quartered, and his head sent to Edward II. He was interred at the ancient cemetery of Faughart.



The Gaelic lords



Clandeboyne O'Neills

THE "OTHER" Ó NÉILL LORDSHIP

At the end of the 14th century there was a resurgence of Gaelic power throughout Ireland and a decline in the English, Anglo Norman Earldom in Ulster. This led to a shift in the centres of power across the land.

Amongst the new power lords were a new branch of the O'Neill dynasty, the Clann Aodha Buidhe (the clan of blonde Hugh). They originated in Tyrone at the beginning of the 13th century with Aodh Méith Ó Néill (Hugh the Fat), a son of Aodh In Macáem Tóinlesc (Hugh, the lazy arsed youth). Hugh the Fat was a worthy adversary to John de Courcy. His grandson Aodh Buidhe (Blonde Hugh) ruled from 1260 to 1283 and his descendants established the Clann Aodha Buidhe, the Clandeboyne O'Neills.

Aodh Buidhe's grandson, Henry, took advantage of the deteriorating political situation to the east of the Bann in the mid 14th century and began the conquest of the Uí Tuirtre lordship and what had been the Earldom of Ulster in today's south Antrim and north Down. The Clann Aodha Buidhe now ruled over a territory that stretched from the Glens of Antrim, to the northern and eastern shorelines of Lough Neagh, and to Strangford Lough, with their lordship centred on Castlereagh in the hills overlooking modern east Belfast where they had their main castle and their inauguration site. While nothing remains of their castle, the Clandeboyne O'Neill inauguration stone survived and can be seen at the Ulster Museum.

In the 15th and 16th century the Clandeboyne O'Neills had several castles. As well as Castlereagh they also had a castle guarding the crossing of the Lagan, Belfast Castle, where Cornmarket now is and Shane's Castle near Randalstown. While nominally still clients of the main Ó Néill lineage in Tír Eógain, they developed their own autonomous rule, often making alliances with the Scottish Highland Mac Domhnaill lineage and the Ó Domhnaill lordship of Tír Conaill to thwart the ambitions of their dynastic cousins.

Leadership of the lordship during the early 15th century rested with two able brothers – Muircheartach Ruadh and Aodh Buidhe – the sons of Brian Ballach, who had reigned from 1395 to 1425 before being killed by the townsfolk of Carrickfergus.

In 1427 the brothers saw off the threat posed by Domhnall Ó Néill, ruler of Tír Eógain, through entering an alliance with Niall Garbh Ó Domhnaill of Tír Conaill, who brought his army to help defend the Clann Aodha Buidhe lordship. A subsequent peace treaty with Tír Eógain, however, allowed the brothers to concentrate their efforts against the English lordships, most notably the Mac Uidhilín (McQuillan) in north Antrim who in 1432 were forced to seek refuge with the Savages in the Ards peninsula.

Aodh Buidhe died in 1444, after succumbing to the effects of a spear wound that he received during a skirmish in Iveagh, and Muircheartach Ruadh had to resist a further invasion attempt by the Tír Eógain Ó Néill forces in the same year.

Meantime, by the start of the 15th century, the English colony had been reduced to the settlements of Carrickfergus and Downpatrick. The Savages continued to occupy the tip of the Ards Peninsula around Portaferry. The Mandevilles created the lordship of Dufferin in the 13th century, but perhaps because of the growing power of the Clandeboye O'Neills or their involvement with the murder of the 3rd Earl of Ulster they decided to concentrate their power in north Antrim where their name morphed to McHugelin then Mac Uidhilín / McQuillan. The Whites held on at Killyleagh.

An attempt to reconquer the earldom was undertaken by Lionel, son of Edward III, when he was the king's Lord Lieutenant in 1361, but the Clann Aodha Buidhe were now firmly planted and his venture was unsuccessful.

Some Gaelic clans moved closer to Lecale and the Ards as the O'Neill's took power. The Magennises consolidated their strength in south Down.

The O'Neill's attacked Carrickfergus Castle in the 1570s to try to take full control of the area but never succeeded due to the excellent strategic position of the castle, strong defences, its fresh water supply and the food and arms that it received by sea from barons such as the de Mandevilles. There are records of the castle having to pay "black money" to the O'Neills in return for safe passage of people and goods. The O'Neills would also have had a vested interest in the castle and the town of Carrickfergus in that it supplied them with imported silks, wines and spices.

Internal political rivalry between the sons of Niall Mór following his death in 1512 would eventually lead to a split within the lordship and its sub-division by 1553 into two units separated by the River Lagan: Lower Clandeboye, in south Antrim and Upper Clandeboye, in north Down. "Upper" was further south but closer to the Norman centre of power in Dublin.

At the end of 16th century there was increasing Elizabethan interference in Ireland and especially in Ulster. Generally, the further away from the Pale the more Gaelic the people and so Queen Elizabeth turned her attention to them the most.

In 1574 Brian McPhelim O'Neill, Lord of Clandeboye, invited the Earl of Essex, Walter Devereaux, to dine with him and his wife and brother at their castle at Castlereagh. This gesture of Irish hospitality, a mark of greatness in Gaelic leaders, was returned with a vicious attack from their guests, which would have shocked the Gaelic population. At that meal Essex killed 125 of O'Neill's soldiers and attendants, seized their host, Brian O'Neill and his two family members, and had them executed.

Another famous O'Neill leader, Shane O'Neill, met a similar fate at the hands of the Scottish McDonalds who took over large swathes of the north.

Within a year of murdering the O'Neill's Essex went on to massacre more than 600 hundred men, women and children of the McDonald clan who were taking refuge on Rathlin Island.

The renewed English interference in Irish affairs led to open warfare. The Maguires and the O'Donnells and then Hugh O'Neill, Lord of Tyrone, the biggest Gaelic lordship in Ulster, took part in the Nine Year's War 1593-1603. They were eventually defeated and left Ireland forever in the Flight of the Earls 1607.

Over this period Conn O' Neill of the Clandeboyne O' Neills had tried to avoid taking sides but was badgered into following Hugh O' Neill into war. He was arrested and put into Carrickfergus Castle. Probably in order to belittle Conn's status and to justify the later requisitioning of his lands, Conn was portrayed as a drunkard whose men had killed some soldiers in a drunken brawl while they were delivering a shipment of wine to Carrickfergus. It is more likely that he was imprisoned for treason for his involvement in the Nine Year's War. He escaped and traded two thirds of his estate to the Scottish aristocrats and adventurers, Sir Hugh Montgomery and Sir James Hamilton, in return for their negotiating a Royal pardon for him. The story goes that Conn's wife helped negotiate the deal with Montgomery. She is also credited with helping her husband escape from Carrickfergus Castle, by smuggling a rope into his prison cell in a round of cheese.

Conn went on to sell off his remaining land piecemeal, including eventually Castlereagh Castle in 1616. The last of the great Clandeboyne O'Neills, he died in 1619 and is buried in obscurity - possibly in the grounds of Moat House, a former graveyard, off the old Hollywood Road. His remaining lands were then taken over by Hugh Montgomery.





Magennis

Magennis (Irish: **Mac Aonghusa**) also spelled **Maguinness**, **Maginnis**, **McGinnis**, or **McGuinness**, means the “son of Angus”. They were a prominent branch of the Uíbh Eachach Cobha, from which the territory Iveagh gets its name. The Magennises would become chiefs of Iveagh, which by the 16th century comprised over half of modern County Down, and they had Rathfriland as their base. The Mac Artáin McCartan chiefs of Kinelarty, Knock Iveagh descend from the same genealogical line as the Magennis clan. Their inauguration site was at Knock Iveagh near Rathfriland.

By the end of the 17th century, however, their territory was much reduced and had been divided up between them, the McCartan chiefs and planted settlers from Britain.

One of the earliest mentions of the Magennis as chiefs of Iveagh, is in the charter granted to the abbey of Newry in 1153, which was witnessed by Aedh Mor Magennis, who was cited as being chief of Clann Aodha (Hugh) and of Iveagh. The Magennises are also mentioned in letters by King Edward II, where they are titled Dux Hibernicorum de Ouehagh, meaning “chief of the Irish of Iveagh”.

The Magennises allied themselves to the Earldom of Ulster, which was created after the Norman invasion of Ulster by John de Courcy, until the death of William Donn de Burgh, 3rd Earl of Ulster in 1333. After the subsequent collapse of the earldom, the Magennises by the 15th century had expanded Iveagh all the way east to Dundrum Castle, where County Down meets the Irish Sea.

By 1500 there were twelve branches of the Magennis clan the most prominent being: Castlewellan, Corgary, Kilwarlin, and Rathfriland, the rivalry between whom threatened the cohesion of Iveagh.

Throughout the 16th century, the Magennis clan ensured they remained on good terms with the English. One chief, “Arthur Guinez”, was on the losing side in the Battle of Bellahoe in 1539. Art MacPhelim Magennis of Castlewellan (possibly the same man as Arthur Guinez) and Donal Óg Magennis of Rathfriland were both given knighthoods in 1542.

Sir Hugh Magennis, the son of Donal Óg Magennis, was called by Sir Henry Bagenal the “civillist of all the Irishry”, with Sir Nicholas Bagnall cited as having brought Sir Hugh over to the Queen’s side from that of O’Neills. In 1584 Sir Hugh was regranted ‘the entire country or territory of Iveagh’, but not including the territory of Kilwarlin. When Sir Hugh died in 1596, his heir was his son Art Roe Magennis, whose sister Catherine was married to Hugh O’Neill. As such Art Roe joined Hugh’s side in the Nine Years’ War against the English. During this war, Lord Mountjoy, the Lord Deputy of Ireland, ravaged Iveagh to the point where Art Roe Magennis submitted to prevent the extermination of his people, and as such was promised he could keep his lands.

Following the Nine Years' War and just before the process of colonising Ulster with loyal Protestant subjects, the arrangement of dividing mighty Gaelic lordships into smaller weaker lordships, such as what happened in County Monaghan with the MacMahon's, occurred with Iveagh. In 1605 the "Commission for the Division and Bounding of the Lords" was established to replicate the Monaghan arrangement, with Art Roe Magennis applying to be made Lord Iveagh. In February 1607, the commission however decided to break up Iveagh, a process that continued until 1610, seeing the creation of fifteen freeholds. The Magennises were granted thirteen of these freeholds, with Art Roe being granted the largest. The rest however was given to officers in the Crown forces, most of whom had served in the Nine Years' War under Sir Henry Baginvald and Sir Arthur Chichester.

Amongst the freehold grants to the Magennises were:

- Ever MacPhelimy Magennis of Castlewellan, who was granted eleven townlands, constituting the Castlewellan estate in the parishes of Kilmegan and Drumgooland.
- Brian MacHugh MacAgholy Magennis of Munterreddy, who was granted seven and a half townlands, constituting the Bryansford estate in the parishes of Maghera (Bryansford) and Kilcoo. This estate was held by the Earl of Roden on account of his descent from Brian.

Sir Arthur Magennus, stated as being chief of the Magennises in 1610, granted from his own large estate to his kin:

- Glassney Roe Magennis of Ballymoney, three townlands.
- Fer-doragh MacFellimey MacPrior Magennis of Clanvarraghan, three townlands in Kilmegan parish.

The lands the Magennises held in these Iveagh freeholds diminished as the officers and other speculators went about extending their possessions at their expense through legal and illegal means. The native Irish had to cope within an English legal system weighted against them, and many accrued large debts, resulting in them having to sell vast swathes of their lands or losing them as collateral when they failed to pay their debts. Despite finally being appointed Lord Iveagh in 1623, Art Roe Magennis also found himself in a dangerous financial position. The viscount therefore sold thousands of acres in the 1620s and 1630s to the Scottish-origin landowners Sir James Hamilton and Sir Hugh Montgomery, who looked to County Down to expand their own holdings in Ulster, and acquired lands in Iveagh, Kinelarty and Lecale. This had the effect of dislocating the centuries-old clan structure of the Magennises and MacCartans.

The McCartan's were similarly disposed of some of their lands. In 1605 Phelomy and Donnell Oge (MacArtan) McCartan were pressurized into parting with one-third of their lands to Edward Lord Cromwell. An agreement was entered into on 12th September 1605, with Edward Lord Cromwell, the governor of Lecale who was at the time the owner of the church lands, which had been formed into the Downpatrick estates: whereby (MacArtan) McCartan granted to Cromwell the third part of all his country called (Killinartie) Kinelarty or in Watertirrye (Kilmegan) or elsewhere, the chief seat of MacArtan (McCartan) excepted, to hold for ever, in consideration of a certain sum of money, and that Lord Cromwell should educate in a gentlemanlike manner his son, Patrick, then aged fourteen years of age.

Cromwell appears to have honoured his promise to educate McCartan's son. However in 1636 he sold his entire interest in the Kinelarty lands to Mathew Forde, Esq., of Coolegreany, Co. Wexford, for £8,000. This is the estate known today as Fords of Seaforde.





Edward Bruce Invasion

Edward was the younger brother of Robert the Bruce. His exact birth date is unknown but it is thought he was born sometime around 1276. He died in October 1318 at the Battle of Faughart in Co. Louth (near Dundalk) and is buried there.

But what of this man? He was known to be a bit of a 'loose cannon', headstrong, hard to control, keep in check, especially by his brother, Robert. However, Edward was also known to be fearless, a skilled warrior and commander. He was one of Robert's chief lieutenants in the Scottish war of independence, so by the time he comes to Ireland in 1315 he is a seasoned campaigner.

After Robert Bruce wins the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, King Edward II continues his Scottish campaign despite Robert's victory. It is thought, this is when Robert considered sending his brother to Ireland.

Edward's 'adventure' into Ireland accomplished a number of things for Robert, first of all it created a second front for Edward II's forces, splitting their power, diminishing their effectiveness. It also gave Robert the opportunity to hit back at Richard de Burgh's lands in Ireland. Richard de Burgh, 2nd Earl of Ulster and 3rd Baron of Connaught known colloquially as the 'Red Earl', was a major supporter and supplier to the army of Edward II. Interestingly Richard was Robert's father-in-law. Robert was married to Richard's daughter Elizabeth. A marriage made in 1302 when Margaret was 13 years old. She was Robert's second wife and the marriage was approved by King Edward II. In 1302 Bruce had been involved in William Wallace's rebellion and was considered potentially dangerous but King Edward felt Robert would most likely be better held to account if he could be brought within the sphere of influence of the ally of the English King the powerful Earl of Ulster, Richard de Burgh. Marriage to his daughter was considered to be dynastically and politically shrewd. This did not stop Robert the Bruce moving against his father-in-law. Another positive of the invasion of Ireland was it would keep his hot headed younger brother occupied with the thing he did best... fighting.

According to Irish medieval scholar J F Lydon, Edward secured an invitation to Ireland by the King of Ulster, Donal O'Neill, therefore legitimising the invasion. Of course the link with the Irish and the Scots was strong and Edward could be viewed as a fellow Gael. Robert the Bruce wrote that his brother was sent 'so that with God's will your nation may be able to recover her ancient liberty.' The Scottish/Irish link had been further strengthened by the influx of the Scottish mercenaries, galloglasses, into Ireland from the mid-thirteenth century onward. Edward Bruce's connections with Ireland have been the subject of historical speculation.

Irish historian, Sean Duffy suggests that Edward Bruce, in his youth, may have been fostered in the household of the O'Neill's. On the other hand Scottish historian, Archie Duncan, speculates that Edward spent a great deal of time during his childhood with the Anglo-Norman Bisset family in Antrim.

Edward Bruce landed at Larne May 1315. Contemporary accounts claim he had an army of 6,000 men and a fleet of 200 ships, though this may have been an exaggeration. Edward began to cut a bloody swath through Ulster down to northern Co. Louth. At one point in his campaign he got as far as Dublin but failed to take it. That may have been the reason for his ultimate failure in Ireland. The Irish chieftains at first supported him and Edward encouraged Irish chieftains like Felim O'Conner to rebel in Connaught, further extending and straining the power and resources of Richard de Burgh.

Bruce took Carrickfergus in the summer of 1316 and was inaugurated High King of Ireland. Edward Bruce is technically the last High King of Ireland. Carrickfergus, the great symbol of Norman power in Ireland was his capital. While he held Ulster at this time, he did not have enough support outside of Ulster to think he could control the whole of Ireland on his own so he returned to Scotland to ask his brother Robert for help.

Robert came back with him to Ireland in 1316 and in 1317 Edward moved out of his power base in Ulster and made his bid for the rest of Ireland. Gaelic enthusiasm Edward had received at first had waned. O'Neill remained reasonably constant but it was not enough

The Scots burned and destroyed and committed unspeakable atrocities across the land as they moved across it and that tarnished their reputation with the native Irish even more. In early May 1317, Robert returned to Scotland and Edward retreated back to Ulster. At long last and belatedly, money, men and materiel from England started to arrive in Ireland to counter Bruce. In the autumn of 1318 Edward moved south into Louth and was defeated at Faughart, killed and buried there.

Edward Bruce's campaign has to be seen against the backdrop of famine in Ireland. From 1315, all over Europe there was severe famine and hunger stalked the land. Food was hard to come by and Ireland was especially badly hit. The Chronicles of Connacht under 1315 record 'many afflictions in all parts of Ireland: very many deaths, famine and many strange diseases, murders and intolerable storms as well'

On the Ards, Bruce is recorded to have burned Greyabbey, and Black Abbey. The religious houses at Greyabbey and Black Abbey were high status building associated with the enemy and a natural target for Bruce. But as large, strongly built buildings, they could also serve as shelter and housing for enemy troops and would need to be burned and destroyed fearing this would happen. After all, wasn't that the reason Brian O'Neill gave for burning Greyabbey in the 1500's. But, Edwards's harsh treatment of the site may have been also about food. At that time Edward was finding it very difficult to provision his troops. Greyabbey and monasteries in general were connected to farm lands, fishing ground and the good husbandry of livestock. Even in times when food was scarce monasteries would have had some stores of food. Edward would have wanted the food for himself and his troops but also wanted to prevent the enemy from getting their hands on provisions too.

J F Lydon said Bruce came within an ace of toppling the lordship. Edward Bruce has been blamed by chroniclers and annalists with destroying the power of the lordship and they lay the blame for the subsequent Gaelic Revival at his doorstep.

A contemporary writer in Ireland said of Edward: 'he was the common ruin of the Galls and Gaels of Ireland...for in this Bruce's time, for three years and a half, falsehood and famine and homicide filled the country, and undoubtedly men ate each other in Ireland.'

Famine most likely defeated Edward Bruce in the end, but in popular belief he has been blamed for all that Ireland suffered in that time, all of it is believed to be his fault.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Television audiences across the world have been thrilled by the exploits of the Starks, Lannisters, and Targaryens in HBO's hugely successful Game of Thrones TV series, and ancient monuments across Northern Ireland have been used as filming locations for places in the seven kingdoms of Westeros, the main setting for the series.

These monuments, however, have their own remarkable stories to tell, and this information has been produced through the Beyond Westeros project led by archaeologists from the School of Natural and Built Environment at Queen's University Belfast, working with the Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership, and supported and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Tourism NI, and the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities. It was developed as part of their European Year of Cultural Heritage programme.

