

A FEW PLACENAMES NOT ON THE MAP

BY FRANK WATTERS.

Throughout our area there are local names for places and physical features which you will not find on any map. Some of them are self-explanatory but here and there, there is a name which may puzzle or intrigue. Almost always these local, unofficial names are much more interesting than those imposed by a bureaucrat in an office somewhere. Some physical features of our landscape attract names because they are prominent in some way and hills are particularly popular in this regard. In many cases the name of a hill is the only echo of a time when a family once lived there. The following are just a few of the very many hills with a little local folklore or history behind the name.

Flannigan's Hill

Overlooking Fourtowns Presbyterian Church is a hilly field known as 'Flannigan's Hill'. It was, as the name suggests, once owned by several generations of the Flannigan family.

This hilly field has considerable significance for the local Presbyterian Congregation, for it was in Flannigan's Hill that the local Presbyterians people gathered to hold their weekly meetings during the late 18th century when, under the Penal Laws, their services were illegal. The lower slopes of Flannigan's Hill provided a secluded meeting place while the summit afforded a fine vantage point from which large tracts of the surrounding countryside

could be observed by sentries, who were ready to warn of the approach of the authorities. The last of the Flannigan name was 'Tarans' (Terence) Flannigan who died around 1860. His will tells us that his children had all emigrated, three to America and one to Scotland. The Flannigans were Catholics but were obviously on excellent terms with their neighbours and 'Tarans' Flannigan appointed his Presbyterian neighbours, William and James Wylie as his executors. The Flannigans have long since gone from the Fourtowns but the name Flannigan's Hill remains as an echo of other times.



Fourtowns Church

Rafe's Hill

The long hill on the Newry Road, just south of Poyntzpass, is known as Rafe's Hill. The 'Rafe' in the title comes from Ralph (pronounced 'Rafe') Williamson, who lived in the large farmhouse to the east of the road just at the summit of the hill, around the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth centuries. The hill and the house in which he lived are in Aghantaraghan townland.

The Williamson family were long-established in the locality, for the Muster Roll of Ulster of 1630 includes one Roger Williamson who was very likely one of the English settlers Sir Charles Poyntz brought over from his home in Acton, Gloucestershire in 1610. The Muster roll records that Roger Williamson had "no arms" (meaning he had no weapons). James Williamson (Ralph's grandfather) appears in Griffith's valuation of Aghantaraghan in 1864 as a tenant of Colonel Maxwell Close. Ralph's father, Joseph, died in January 1892 and was buried in the family plot in Acton graveyard. On the death of his father, Ralph

inherited the family home in 1892 and his unmarried sister Eliza came with it.

According to the census of 1901, Ralph was 32 years of age and lived there with his 26 year-old wife Sarah and their two children and Eliza who was also 26.

By 1911, Ralph's family had grown and they then had five children. At that stage, while Ralph and his sister were still Presbyterians, significantly I feel, Sarah Williamson's religious denomination had changed, and she and her five children were then designated as 'Baptist'.

Until a few years ago, there grew in the garden of the late Alfie Donell's house along the Old Road, a fine copper beech tree. According to Alfie, Florrie Morton (nee Stratton) told him that the copper beech had been planted in early 1912 by the said, Ralph Williamson. As an 11 year-old, Florrie told him she had a clear memory of the tree being planted. It was very shortly after this that Ralph disappeared without trace.

Because of the speculation surrounding Ralph Williamson's disappearance, this tree in Alfie Donell's garden became known as 'The Titanic Tree' and was pointed out as a local link with the great shipping disaster. However, almost a century after it was planted, because the tree had grown so big and was so close to his house, and, following a period of very stormy weather, Alfie became increasingly concerned that the tree might be blown down and in falling destroy his home. So, in the autumn of 2007, he reluctantly decided to have 'The Titanic Tree' cut down. At the time, Lauren McNulty, the young daughter of a neighbour of Alfie's wrote this poem to commemorate the end of the famous tree.

'The Titanic Tree'

**There was once an old copper beech tree,
That people came from miles around to see.
It stood in my neighbour Alfie's garden so strong and tall,
But Alfie always had a fear that someday the old tree
might fall.
In a September storm she began to sway from side to side,
Had she come down, Alfie could neither run nor hide!
His mother always said, "Never take a saw to that tree!"
But Alfie had no choice, "It's either the tree or me!"
One Saturday preparations were made by Alfie and co,
He said his farewells, he was sad to see her go.
Alfie was now worry free
And that was the end of the old copper beech tree!**

Lauren McNulty age 14

Now, according to Alfie Donell, Ralph Williamson ‘was never seen or heard tell of again’. His disappearance coincided with the Titanic disaster and, in seeking an explanation for Ralph’s disappearance, the theory was suggested, and gained credence over the years, that he must have been aboard the ill-fated liner. That “he must have gone down with the Titanic’ became spoken of as an established fact. That the name “Ralph Williamson’ doesn’t appear in any list of passengers or crew, or in the lists of those lost or surviving, does not

shake the theory in the slightest, for it is asserted that he was very likely to have sailed under an assumed name or may even have been a stowaway.

While the ‘Titanic’ theory has undoubtedly a ‘romantic’ appeal, I feel that there is a more likely, if more mundane, explanation for Ralph’s disappearance. It may have been that his somewhat wayward life style did not lead to a happy home life. We’ll never know, so let’s just agree with Alfie’s version, “He must have gone down with the Titanic!”

Geordie’s Hill

The late Lewis Smart had a great fund of tales of former residents of the Fourtowns and their activities and there was hardly a gap in a hedge that hadn’t an anecdote of its own. One of the tales he told me once was the strange story of ‘Geordie’s Hill’. The character involved was a man called Geordie Hear (Hare or O’Hare), who lived on that road nearly 250 years ago. Geordie’s Hill is a steep hill on Fourtowns School Road from its junction with Greenan Road.

According to Lewis, Geordie Hear was more than fond of a drop of drink and was a regular customer in the Crown House, which was a public house in those bygone days. On one occasion, when he was particularly well-oiled, as he made his way home Geordie said he had a very frightening experience. He said that as he came up this hill, an object that he described as a “barrel a’ flames” came out through a field-gate at the top of the hill and rolled down the hill towards him. He said that he had to jump into



The Crown House

**“a ‘barrel a’ flames’
came out through
a field-gate”**

the hedge to let it past. At the bottom of the hill the barrel turned right and headed for Drumsallagh. Geordie put the incident down to the devil, or the presence of evil spirits, but his

neighbours privately suggested that it was the presence of spirits of a different kind that caused Geordie Hear to meet the ‘barrel a’ flames! He said that he was so shocked, that he had to return to the Crown House for a glass of whiskey to steady his nerves! However, the incident, real or imaginary, led to this hill being known thereafter as ‘Geordie’s Hill’.

The Buck’s Hill

The name ‘The Buck’s Hill’ is well-known locally. It is specifically the hill from the junction of William Street up what is now officially called ‘Loughadian Road’. It is apparently named after an individual known as ‘The Buck Wilkinson’, who lived in the townland of Loughadian in Victorian times. Who was the ‘Buck’ and how did he acquire the title? The name ‘Wilkinson’ has been in this area for at least 400 years. In The muster Roll of Ulster in 1630 there was, living in Acton, ‘Roger Wilkinsonne’, (sic) whose family was among the original supporters Charles Poyntz brought over in 1610.

An old headstone in Acton Graveyard records that John Wilkinson of Loughadian, who died in 1830, aged 84 years, is buried there, as is Samuel Wilkinson, probably his son, who died in 1891 aged 81 years. Could one of them have been ‘The Buck’? This family plot in Acton

would indicate that, although the family were now living in Loughadian, Co Down, they were originally from Acton and continued to use the family plot in the old graveyard. James Wilkinson aged 87 lived in Loughadian in 1901 and John Wilkinson (61) was there in 1911. So there have been many generations of Wilkinsons living in the townland of Loughadian. As well as that, several generations of Wilkinsons lived in the townland of Drumsallagh and one of them, William John and his wife Mary Jane, had 8 children by the time they were 35. One of that large family, Samuel, was the father of the renowned traditional flautist, Dessie Wilkinson, who came to talk to our society and play for us a few years ago. The last Wilkinson to live in Loughadian was the late Violet. Which Wilkinson was known as ‘The Buck’ I haven’t been able to establish but, whoever he was, he is immortalised locally in the name of ‘The Buck’s Hill’.

“The Buck Wilkinson”

The Bonfire Hill

A hill in the townland of Corcrum was known to previous generations as ‘The Bonfire Hill’. (We would call it the ‘Bonfire Hill’ but my father and his contemporaries said ‘bone-fire’ which is probably the more correct original pronunciation.) The reason for the title is pretty obvious for there must have been a bonfire there in bygone days. Bonfires on hilltops were beacons used to spread news of important events, such as the birth of an heir to the throne or to warn of approaching danger, but while that may have been an occasional function of the local ‘Bonfire Hill’ site, I think it was, in former

times, a meeting place to celebrate the annual festival of St John’s Eve.

We are all very familiar with bonfires to mark significant times - the Eleventh Night, Halloween or Guy Fawkes Night. These bonfires are simply the continuation of a custom which goes back almost to the dawn of time. Fires and bonfires are at the very centre of our history and, of course, one tradition is that St Patrick defied the druids by lighting his paschal bonfire on the Hill of Slane. One of the occasions when bonfires were lit all over Ireland, and indeed still in many

parts of Europe, was St John's Eve, June 23rd, midsummer's day. The feast of St John the Baptist falls on June 24th as it was tradition that he was six months older than Jesus. Like many of our other Christian festivals, the pagan pre-Christian festival marking mid-summer, was given a Christian significance, but just like the use of holly and mistletoe at Christmas time, some of the old pagan rituals somehow managed to survive.

We do know that the tradition of lighting a bonfire on St John's Eve was observed locally because of an incident which occurred on The Bonfire Hill on June 23rd 1789.

While details of the incident differ to some extent but the general outline of events is clear.

As a group of local country folk were celebrating

around a bonfire to mark St John's Eve, a group of Yeomanry came up and ordered them to disperse. When they either refused to obey, or were slow to do so, several of the country people were shot. One account states that the yeomanry were under command of a Captain Warburton.

The importance of this incident could hardly be overstated. The repercussions of the French Revolution coupled with repressive laws and

depression and widespread poverty in Ireland, had created a volatile situation particularly in Co Armagh where Peep o' Day Boys and Defenders were very active, and this incident was part of a chain of events that led directly to the Battle of the Diamond, the foundation of the Orange Order and the United Irishmen's rebellion of 1798 and all that followed.

**“Bonfires on hilltops
were beacons”**



Bonefire Hill

Cob Coy

People familiar with local landmarks in their area often include mention of them, almost unconsciously, in their conversation, confident that their listener knows what they are talking about. The late Rev Cyril Scott, who spent a lifetime as Presbyterian Minister of Cremore, was telling me once about his visits to various members of his congregation. In the course of our talk he said something like, “Well, when I’m visiting them, I always go over Cob Coy”. At the time I had never heard of ‘Cob Coy’ so, needless to say, I asked him to repeat. He told me that Cob Coy is the name given to the summit of a hill on the Rathconvil Road which runs from Tanikey School in the direction of Loughgilly.

***“Cob Coy’s the boy would
tighten the best of a horse
in this country!,,***

Approached from the Tanikey end, the hill is not very impressive other than providing a fine view but, coming from Loughgilly direction, it is a very long and extremely steep in parts. In the days of the horse and cart, it must have

been a very daunting prospect indeed for anyone coming from that direction. The origin of the name ‘Cob Coy’ is a mystery and no one knows what its significance

is. However, it seems that in the past Cob Coy was almost looked upon as a personality. Mr Scott told me that one old member of his flock had once said to him that, “Cob Coy’s the boy would tighten the best of a horse in this country!”

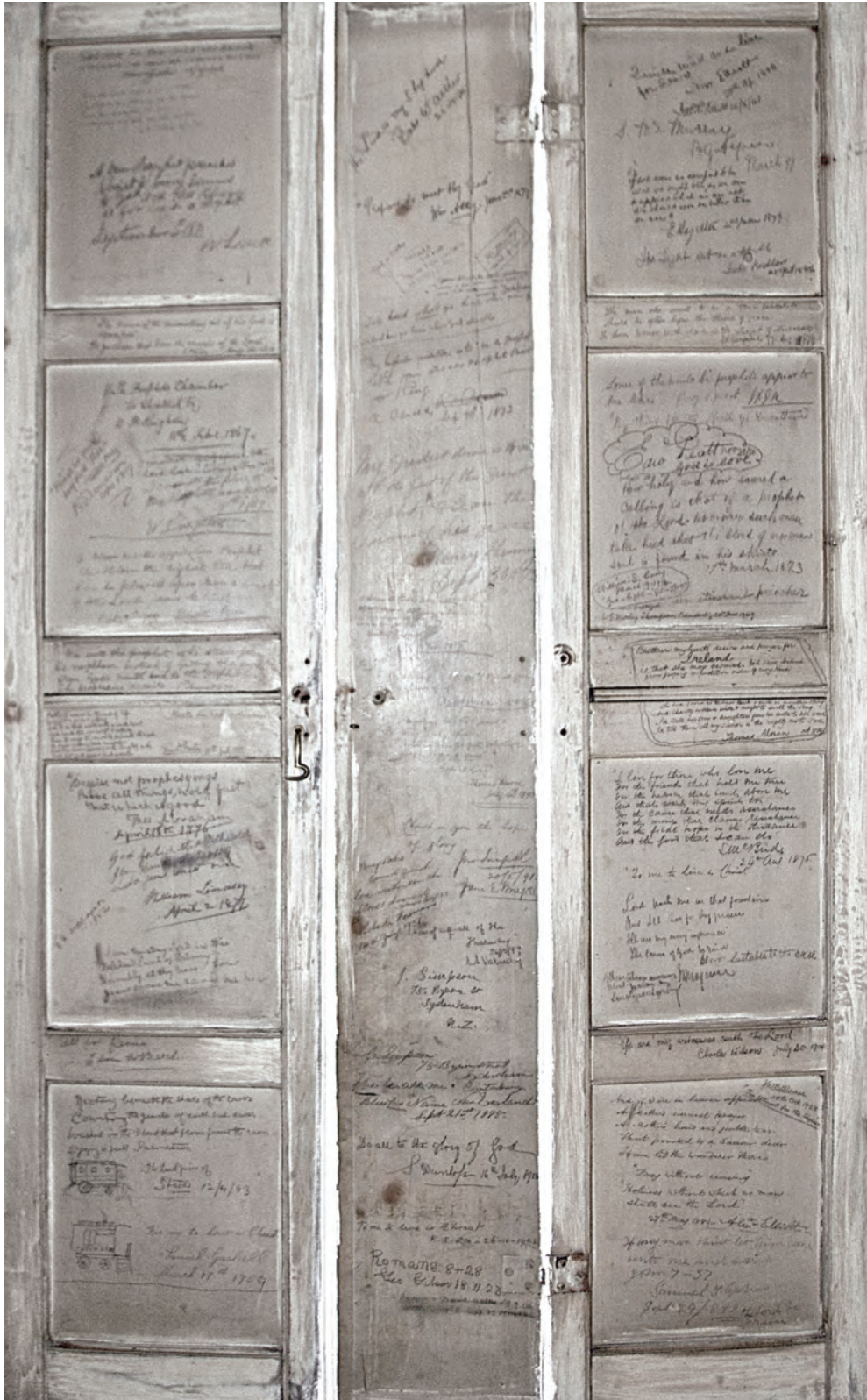


Near the summit of the hill is Cob Coy House

Gracey's Hill

The Hill on the main Tandragee Road that runs down from Acton Lake towards Scarva, past the gates of Druminargal House, was known to

several generations as 'Gracey's Hill' after the family who lived there for many years. The last of the Graceys to live there died in the 1950's.



A shutter in Druminargal House

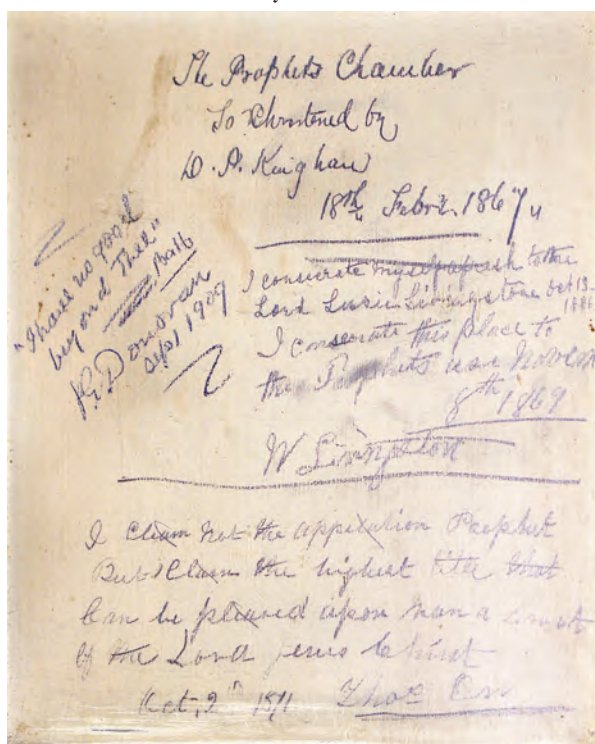
Today the house, which was the birthplace of Charles Davis Lucas VC, is owned by the Megaw family.

The Gracey family were egg-merchants and were comfortably off. They were very dedicated Methodists. John Wesley, the great 18th century evangelist, who founded the Methodist movement, came to Ireland many times and made several visits to a group of followers in the locality, firstly at Terryhoogan and afterwards at Tandragee, where a Methodist church was established. On his first visit here on Wednesday July 21st 1756 he preached in the open air in a meadow at Terryhoogan, and the open air meeting in Ballinabeck graveyard on the first Sunday of August each year commemorates that historic gathering.

Throughout the 19th century, the Methodist congregation at Tandragee was visited by leading Methodists who conducted revivals to encourage and renew the local group. The Gracey family of Druminargal House were leading members of the local Methodists then and it became customary that, when one of these esteemed visitors came on a visitation to the local church, he was given accommodation in Druminargal House.

In 1867, one of these visitors, either of his own initiative or at the request of the family, left a memento of his stay in the form of a Biblical quotation, written on the wooden window-shutter

of the guest bedroom. Succeeding esteemed visitors added their own favourite texts and so began a tradition which lasted for almost a hundred years. As a result the shutters of the guest room in Druminargal House accumulated over the years not only many interesting quotations but a record of the many leading Methodists of the day and an unusual record of visitors to Druminargal House. The Graceys have gone but their hospitality and dedication to their church combined to create a unique collection and the hill past their former home is still known as 'Gracey's Hill'.



The earliest inscription on the shutters, Druminargal House

The 'Kill Brae'

At the Ballyargan end of Acton Street, the road dips down steeply to the Connywarry Bridge before climbing up again on the other side. The steep little hill is known as 'The Kill Brae'. The name derives from events around 250 years ago when Acton was a little place of some importance.

In February 1685, Toby Poyntz, son of the original Charles, was granted a patent to hold three fairs

annually at Acton. These fairs in April, August and November, continued to be held there for the next hundred years. However around 1785 the fair was removed from Acton to Poyntzpass, apparently because of violence which had become a feature of the gatherings in Acton.

At that time what was known as 'faction fighting' was associated with many fairs. These events were not usually sectarian and were organised in

much the same way as a ‘challenge’ football match might be organised today. Men from one area would arrange to meet another group on the fair day and armed with cudgels and blackthorn sticks would stage a pitch-battle on the street, while others looked on. In fact many attended the fair primarily to see the fight and support one side or the other. It was said that when a late-comer asked a man what sort of a fair it was, he was told, “Ach a very poor fair surely – twelve o’clock and not a blow struck!”

Many of the participants in these contests were severely injured, and in one such confrontation in Acton, a man was killed.

The Faction Fight in which this unfortunate individual died was, according to the unpublished Memoirs of Acton poet and historian John Quin, writing around 1840, a contest between the ‘country people’ and the ‘village people’. It was this violence that prompted the moving of the fair to Poyntzpass. There is no record of who the deceased was, or to which faction he belonged, but the place on Acton Street, where the death occurred, was known thereafter as ‘The Kill Brae.’

“ Ach a very poor fair
surely – twelve o’clock
and not a blow struck! ”



The ‘Kill Brae’ Acton Street

Crockeragh Hill

A steep hill on what is today officially Lissummon Road is known as ‘Crockeragh Hill. The name is one of several surviving Irish phrases in our locality and comes from the Irish *cnoc a’Ratha*, (the hill of the rath) and takes its name from the magnificent Lissummon Rath which dominates a wide area of the surrounding countryside and can be seen from far and wide.

In the days of yore, when heavy iron bicycles were the norm, and before the coming of light-weight mountain bikes with multiple gears, cycling up Crockeragh Hill was regarded as a challenge, a severe test of fitness for any man. It was seen by some young fellows that cycling up this hill was almost ‘a rite of passage’ from childhood to manhood. Oliver Murtagh told me that he recalled how the late Peter Rafferty arrived into Lissummon School one morning and, flushed with

pride, announced to his admiring classmates, “I come up Crockeragh Hill on the bike without getting off!”

Until relatively recently there was an ancient well at the side of the hill, known as ‘the Crockeragh Well’. This featured in an article on wells in 1990 in (‘Before I forget ...’ No 4). Sadly it appears that

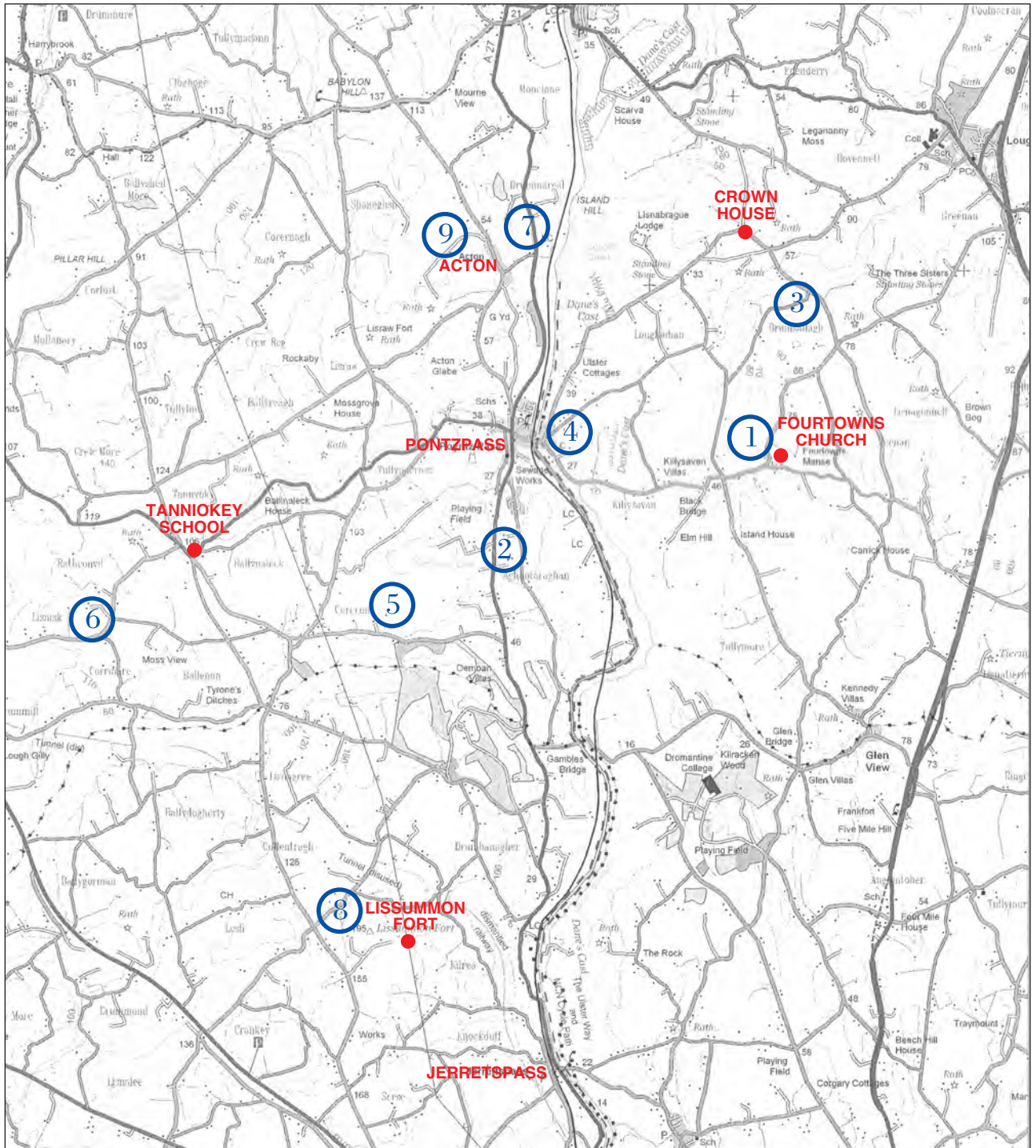


The Crockeragh Well

the Crockeragh Well has been filled-in at some time in the intervening years.

A story handed down in the Mackin family concerned a child called Joseph MacRory who as a

toddler fell into the Crockeragh Well but luckily was rescued. This would have happened in the mid-1860s. That child Joseph MacRory (born 1861) grew up to become Cardinal MacRory, Archbishop of Armagh from 1928 up to his death in 1945.



Key

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|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Flannigan's Hill | 4. Buck's Hill | 7. Gracey's Hill |
| 2. Rafe's Hill | 5. The Bonfire Hill | 8. Crockeragh Hill |
| 3. Geordie's Hill | 6. Cob Coy | 9. The 'Kill Brae' |