

RAILWAYS OF BINEVENAGH

AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY



CAUSEWAY COAST & GLENS
HERITAGE TRUST





BINEVENAGH AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY

Tourism NI

Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) was designated in 2006 by virtue of its outstanding natural beauty and its rich and diverse natural, built & cultural heritage. The Binevenagh area is located in the North West of Northern Ireland, running from the shores of Lough Foyle and the Roe Estuary to the small village of Castlerock and on to the outskirts of Coleraine.

The AONB boasts some of the finest beaches and dune systems in Ireland which rise steeply to Binevenagh mountain. From the mountain, at Gortmore viewpoint, there are spectacular panoramic views of Magilligan Point and Inishowen (Donegal), with the Scottish isles of Islay and Jura in the distance. The famous Mussenden Temple and Downhill Estate is also located within the AONB, as is the Martello Tower at Magilligan, exemplifying the area's rich defence heritage.

The Binevenagh landscape is home to special habitats which support a range of flora and fauna. The importance of these habitats is reflected in designations including Special Areas of Conservation and Areas of Special Scientific Interest. Such designations help to protect and conserve the AONB's special biodiversity.

INTRODUCTION



John Moore

Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is home to what is widely considered one of the best railway journeys in the world. The tracks and tunnels of the Derry/Londonderry to Coleraine railway have shaped this outstanding landscape, offering access to its stunning views, wildlife, amenities and local communities from the mid 19th century.

The story of the railways is a fascinating chapter in the history of Ulster's North Coast, a product of the expansion of industry and innovation in the early 19th century. The construction of the railways includes many interesting and eccentric events which have become the stuff of local legend, while the impact of the railways themselves has been significant.

This booklet explores Binevenagh's railways and how they shaped the landscape, helped us keep time, grew early tourism and even contributed to the War Efforts of the 20th century. Memories and stories of local people show what the railway has meant to generations of residents and visitors. We will also learn more about the rich landscape, wildlife and habitats which can be seen along the Derry/Londonderry to Coleraine line.

THE RISE OF THE RAILWAYS IN IRELAND



Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Services

It is unclear when the first primitive railways (or tramways) were constructed. Medieval German woodcuts show trucks and carts run on wooden rails were used in early mines, while evidence shows primitive tramways occasionally being used for mining in England as early as the 16th century. However, such examples are few and far between. It took an industrial revolution for the birth of the railways we see today.

Before the 18th century, Ireland's economy relied on agriculture, handicrafts, fishing and small scale cottage industries producing textiles, dairy and other items for market.

But by the 1720s things were beginning to change. Early industrial innovations were being pioneered on Ireland's North Coast by landowner and entrepreneur Hugh Boyd of Ballycastle. Boyd transformed Ballycastle from a small fishing port and market village into arguably the most important centre of early industry in Ireland.

Boyd expanded Ballycastle's harbour, built a glass house, salt works, increased manufacturing and established a colliery and other mines outside the town – he also gave Ireland its first documented railway.

Around 1740, Boyd constructed a tramway (consisting of simple wooden carts running on wooden rails) to transport stone from nearby quarries to build a new harbour. Later, he constructed an additional tramway to transport coal from Boyd's mines along the coast, for shipping to Belfast and Dublin.

These tramways, and the growth of Boyd's industries in Ballycastle, were crucial in helping to fuel early Irish industry, paving the way for the rapid change to come.

THE FIRST MODERN RAILWAYS IN IRELAND



The first modern railway powered by a steam locomotive was the Stockton to Darlington railway. It opened in North East England in 1825 and carried both freight and passengers.

In 1804, Robert Trevithick invented the first working steam locomotive which led to the development of the world's first modern railway network. Trevithick's work was built on by George Stephenson, whose locomotive powered the first public railway to utilise steam traction in 1825.

The new railways revolutionized transport and travel. People could now travel much faster than ever before. Previously, travel was via roads and a growing canal network but this was often long, tedious and expensive. The capacity to move large numbers of goods and people over long distances at speed meant the new railways quickly expanded, leading to the decline of canals as a mode of transport.



In the 1820s two small canals were constructed in the Binevenagh area. The first was a 2 mile long cut connecting Ballykelly to Lough Foyle. The second canal at Broharris was intended to connect Limavady to Lough Foyle in a bid to increase the town's trade. However, in a scenario repeated across the UK and Ireland, the arrival of the railway removed the need for canals and they fell into disuse.

'Railway mania' quickly spread and new railways popped up across Great Britain, Ireland and around the globe in the decades following the opening of Stephenson's Stockton to Darlington line. Thousands of miles of railway lines were constructed and many railway companies emerged as people realised just how lucrative the new industry could be.

THE LONDONDERRY & COLERAINE RAILWAY COMPANY (L & C)

The earliest proposal for an Irish railway was for a line between Belfast and Dublin as early as 1825 but this did not materialise. The first Irish railway opened in Dublin in 1834. The Dublin to Kingstown railway transported goods and people from Kingstown port into Ireland's capital.



William Dargan, 1799 – 1867

Called 'the father of Ireland's railways', William Dargan built over 800 miles of railway across Ireland. He helped to design the island's first modern railway, the Dublin to Kingstown, and built the lines between Belfast and Portrush. Dargan also undertook significant public works including the Ulster Canal and Belfast's Queens Island.

In 1836, Royal Assent was granted for a railway between Belfast and Lisburn, the second to be built in Ireland. Opening in May 1839, the Ulster Railway carried 3000 passengers on its first day and was a great novelty for the people of the area. Ulster's railway network continued to expand. New railway companies were founded and competed to build lines to connect the region.



HOYFM.WAG.184 TUNNEL AND SEA STACK, DOWNHILL, CO LONDONDERRY.
WA Green. © National Museums NI, Collection Ulster Folk & Transport Museum

GRAND PLANS

By the 1840s, Derry/Londonderry was a thriving port town with over 20,000 residents and was close to the neighbouring hubs of Limavady and Coleraine. The area boasted fertile farmland with strong linen and agricultural industries and so was seen as holding great potential for a new railway.

From the time of the Plantation Derry/Londonderry held strong connections with the city of London, hence in 1844 proposals for two new railways were raised in the city. One line was to run to Enniskillen, via Strabane and Omagh. The other proposed scheme would prove to be far more ambitious.

Plans were made for a railway line to connect Derry/Londonderry to Limavady and Coleraine, improving transport links for trade and travel. However, the railway itself was only part of a much grander scheme. An extensive land reclamation project would also be included. The new railway line was to run atop a 15 mile long embankment from Coolkeeragh, cutting across the north eastern corner of Lough Foyle to Magilligan Point. The embankment's construction was intended to reclaim around 20,000 acres of land which would be sold to finance the new railway.

Despite some scepticism, the Londonderry & Coleraine Railway Company (the L & C) received Parliamentary approval on 4th August 1845, and successfully raised £500,000 for the project. This gave the go ahead for the construction of the embankment and some 30 miles of railway between Coleraine and Derry/Londonderry, with a branch line to Limavady.



WORK BEGINS ON THE NEW RAILWAY

Construction commenced almost immediately after the L & C's plans were approved. Famous railway engineer Robert Stephenson (son of George Stephenson) and architect Charles Lanyon were commissioned to undertake initial surveys for construction of the great embankment and two tunnels at Downhill. In 1845 contractors began the land reclamation work at Coolkeeragh. Stone quarried in Moville, Donegal was ferried across Lough Foyle for the new embankment.

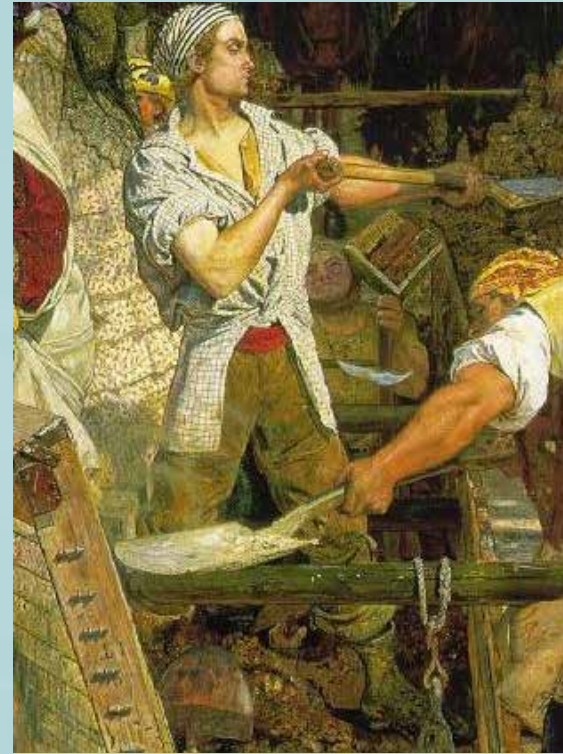
By June 1846, around 4,000 acres of land had been reclaimed and quickly sold and put to tillage. The construction of the Downhill tunnels was also underway by this time. Reports claim that the L & C were forced to bring in several hundred Englishmen to work on the construction as no local navvies could be found with the required expertise!



Tourism NI

Sir Charles Lanyon, 1813 – 1889

Englishman Charles Lanyon moved to County Antrim as County Surveyor in 1836 where he helped to oversee the construction of the Antrim Coast Road. A talented architect and civil engineer, Lanyon was involved in many prominent projects over his long career, including Queens University Belfast, Crumlin Road Courthouse and Portrush Town Hall. Belfast Central Station has recently been renamed Lanyon Place in his honour.



'Navvie' (an abbreviation of 'navigator') is a general term used for those who worked on the construction of canals, and later railways, across the UK and Ireland. At the peak of railway mania in the 1840s, around 250,000 navvies were employed to work on UK railways - around a third of these are thought to have been Irish labourers.

Traditional tunnelling and mining techniques were used to excavate the tunnels, alongside the use of explosives to remove large quantities of rock. The first blasting at Downhill occurred in November 1845. Lady Bruce, wife of landowner Sir Henry Hervey Bruce, lit the fuse for the explosion and hosted a celebration at Downhill Castle.

On 6th June 1846, almost 12,000 people watched as the Downhill cliffs were once again blasted for the creation of the tunnels. An estimated 22,000 tonnes of rock were dislodged from Downhill's cliff face during the 'Great Blast', while spectators watched and cheered from the shore and on pleasure boats out to sea. A banquet with 500 guests was then held inside one of the partially excavated tunnels, in which 18 ornate chandeliers were hung from the basalt rock ceiling!

An onlooker describes the Great Blast at Downhill,

“Saturday (June 6th), was the day, appointed for this tremendous explosion.....Some mercantile houses in this city suspended business to allow all in their employment a holiday; and vast numbers, both in town and from the country, eagerly availed themselves of the opportunity to witness [the event]...

....Thousands kept moving in groups to and fro upon the sand, or were seen to climb the steep ascent of Downhill....or to visit the tunnels...an object of considerable interest was the mine in which was deposited the elements of destructive power....

Mr Hemming [engineer] was most persevering in his exertions to prevent the possibility of accident or danger...At ten minutes after two o'clock with his own hands he took down the first flag, when two cannon shots were fired, Mr Hemming then took down the second signal flag and one gun was fired ten minutes before the explosion. At this moment the general interest became painfully intense; the breath was retained, and every eye was strained in gazing upon the cliff....[At] twenty minutes to four o'clock, a low muffled booming noise is heard, and simultaneously the whole front of the cliff was seen to give a general heaving outwards and slightly upwards....[and] fell with a rumbling crash into a thousand fragments, and a cloud of dust ascended into the air....a spontaneous cheer burst from the assembled multitude, and a rush was made to the scene of destruction.”

Extract from article 'The Great Blast at Downhill' in *The Railway Times*, 27th June 1846, Vol. IX, No.26

DELAYS & DIFFICULTIES

Despite initial progress, the railway's construction was soon fraught with difficulties leading to delays.

Early issues included the miners working on the Downhill tunnels attempting to unionize, which was illegal in this period. The unlucky miners were brought before Coleraine Court for their infraction! Meanwhile, the sheer scale of the planned project was also proving troublesome. By 1847, a hard winter and issues with the supply of materials and locomotives meant progress on the great embankment was slow and costs were increasing. Therefore, the decision was taken to scale down the plans; the railway would now follow the existing shore of Lough Foyle more closely rather than running almost entirely along the proposed embankment.

In July 1847 the western tunnel at Downhill was completed, making it the first railway tunnel in Ireland ready for use. Unfortunately, it would be six long years before any train



Towards Downhill, early 1900s. John Moore

would travel through it. Despite revisions, the demands of simultaneously constructing a large land reclamation and a railway continued to put strain on the L & C and its engineers. This led to yet more delays, disagreements and spiralling costs. In 1850 an Act of Parliament had to be secured to grant a 5 year extension to the project, while the original contractors were replaced in 1851. By 1852 the L & C were in such financial difficulties that the company was dissolved, reincorporated and further capital had to be raised to complete the project.



The horse drawn trains of Magilligan

In 1853 the L & C began construction of a branch line at Magilligan which is thought to have opened in early 1855. Evidence suggests that this branch was actually a horse drawn tramway, with horses pulling cars along a 4.5 mile track from Magilligan Station to Magilligan Point. The L & C intended for this branch to connect their main railway to the ferry service which crossed Lough Foyle to Donegal. However, it seems to have closed after only a few months, making this possibly the shortest-lived branch line in history.

“In the early 60s I interviewed Henry Jamison, approaching 100 years of age, about his young days. He told me that his father, who lived in Eglinton, had worked on the Derry to Coleraine railway and had walked to work (some 10 miles each way) every morning. He continued to work on the track as it passed through Eglinton, Ballykelly and on to Limavady Junction. He was prepared to walk long distances as work was scarce and 5 shillings a week helped to keep his family alive in difficult times during the Famine and its aftermath.”

Jim Hunter, Hervey Heritage Group

THE NEW RAILWAY OPENS.... AND THE END OF THE L & C

By late 1852 the end was finally in sight. The new railway was partially opened, with the first passenger train running between Derry/Londonderry and Limavady on 29th December 1852. Then a final push was made to complete the railway from the Broharris Junction (later Limavady Junction) to Coleraine. A local brickyard in Articlave employed 150 local men to make the bricks to line the Downhill Tunnels and the final construction work was eventually concluded.

On 18th July 1853, the Broharris to Coleraine section opened to all traffic. The Derry/Londonderry to Coleraine railway was finally complete, eight long years after the project had begun. In all, it had cost a staggering £9,500 per mile (around £760,000 per mile in today's money)!

Such huge costs, coupled with the onset of a financial depression in the 1850s, meant that the L & C struggled despite the railway opening. In 1860 the workings of the L & C were taken over by the expanding Belfast & Ballymena Railway Company via lease and reformed into the Belfast & Northern Counties Railway (BNCR). The BNCR would go on to have a virtual monopoly on all rail traffic in the counties of Londonderry and Antrim. By 1871 the L & C Railway Company ceased to exist.



THE IMPACT OF THE NEW RAILWAYS



Downhill Station, early 1900s. John Moore

The railway had a significant impact on its surrounding communities and on the landscape which would later be designated as Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The construction of the line itself offered employment during the Great Famine of the 1840s to early 1850s and provided increased opportunities for travel, communications, recreation and trade.

While the general social and cultural impact of the railways cannot be underestimated.

CHANGING TIMES

The strict timekeeping required for running an efficient railway network and the introduction of timetables actually helped standardise time. Before, each village, town and city could keep their own 'local time', which could differ by several minutes! However, railways required accurate signalling and exact timings, so a few minutes could make all the difference. By the later 19th century Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) was applied across Great Britain with the Time Act of 1880. Initially, Ireland had its own time zone, Dublin Mean Time, 25 minutes behind the rest of the UK – but this was later changed to GMT in 1916.



“My father Joseph Cairns was employed by the railway for 46 years from the 1940s. He cycled from Coleraine to Londonderry to start his shift as a platform sweeper, then fireman, before eventually becoming a train driver. This photo shows my father driving a steam train in the early 50s. Over his long career, my father enjoyed the company of his work colleagues and the beautiful landscape and views along the shoreline. He retired in the early 90s after a terrible accident on the train but he always said he loved his job on the railway and was lucky to have it.”

Josephine Kee

FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD CLASS

In previous centuries, ideals of propriety and status meant that class distinctions were more pervasive in society than they are today. Therefore, from the beginning, train cars (or carriages) were built to different standards which reflected such distinctions.

A premium was charged for more luxurious 'first class' travel for the wealthy. This was accompanied by second class for those of moderate means, while third class was reserved for the poor and working classes.

Initially, conditions in third class were incredibly uncomfortable, with passengers lumped together on hard benches and little concern over safety. However, over time conditions improved. By the later 19th century it was standard to offer closed carriages, improved lighting and more comfortable seating. These improvements meant that it became more common for better offs to travel third class, especially over long journeys. Thus, railways provided one of the few opportunities for people of different classes to interact, sitting side by side as railway passengers.

"The railway was never without light hearted moments. There was Tommy Maconachie the foreman at Limavady Junction who, when parcels were collected, just signed the delivery book on behalf of the owner... We had auditors who arrived unannounced to check the books and one asked Tommy why all the signatures were in the same handwriting. Tommy just replied - 'Sir you see we all went to Carrowmena school just down the road...' I also remember a Stationmaster/ Clerk called Dan Bradley who was travelling 'home' on the 5.30 ex Londonderry so I joined him in the second class compartment, for which he had a pass. However, a very officious ticket inspector saw my ticket which was only a 'third' and asked me to leave."

Alex Esdale – Former UTA and NI Railways Area Manager

EARLY TOURISM ON ULSTER'S COAST

The advent of the railways had a huge impact on Ireland's economy and industry. As early as the 1850s, the L & C recognised the tourism potential of their new railway given its proximity to the Giant's Causeway. Special fares were provided to Coleraine and on to Portrush, where passengers could arrange transport to the Causeway and other tourist attractions.



The Giant's Causeway has been a popular tourist attraction for over 200 years. The first Causeway Hotel was built in 1836 and Kane's Royal Hotel was built in the 1860s. Both hotels had tour guides associated with them, while locals often sold souvenirs to tourists at the Stones. Access to the north coast was boosted by the mainline railway to Portrush in the 1850s. In 1887, the world's first hydroelectric tramway was extended to the Causeway; it first opened in 1883 transporting passengers from Portrush to Bushmills. The tramway closed in 1949.

Later, the BNCR also recognised that encouraging the growth of Ulster's tourism could increase their passengers and profits, investing heavily in attracting visitors to both the Antrim and North Coasts. BNCR offered cheap excursions and day trips, and even undertook large scale tourism projects.

The most famous of these projects was the construction of the Gobbins cliff path at Islandmagee in 1902 – overseen by BNCR Chief Engineer Berkeley Deane Wise. His work at Glenariff alongside his BNCR colleague Edward John Cotton, was also impressive. In 1886 the BNCR opened a narrow-gauge railway running from Ballymena to Parkmore with the intention of profiting from tourism in the Antrim Glens. The company leased land at Glenariff close to Parkmore, and together Deane Wise and Cotton turned this area into a thriving tourist attraction: laying out rustic walks, paths, bridges and building a tea room for visitors.

Many such attractions built by the BNCR are still enjoyed by visitors today



The Gobbins Cliff Path. Alister Bell Personal Collection.

The railway's efforts to encourage the growth of tourism were largely successful. For the first time people from all walks of life had the ability to affordably travel faster, further afield and to enjoy day trips and excursions. This encouraged the growth of seaside resorts along the North Coast and in Binevenagh AONB.

PORTSTEWART AND PORTRUSH

Portstewart, which lies east of the AONB's boundary, quickly became a very popular destination with tourists and holidaymakers, as it remains to the present day. Portstewart was serviced by a small stop on the Coleraine to Portrush line on the outskirts of the town. Local landowner John Cromie had prevented a central Portstewart station being built in the 1850s as he feared the railway would ruin the town's character. This stop, Portstewart Station, was constructed across from Cromie's estate in retaliation for his objections. From 1882 visitors could avail of a tramway connecting Portstewart Station to the town centre. This tramway ceased operations in 1926. Portstewart Station closed in 1988.

Portrush also experienced a significant transformation due to the railway, evolving from a modest fishing village in the early 19th century to an expansive seaside resort with numerous hotels and entertainments. Famous BNCR engineer Berkeley Deane Wise oversaw substantial improvements in the town in the 1890s, expanding Portrush Station and renovating the Northern Counties Hotel.

"In 1972 I was required to move my family to the Coleraine area. I fell for the Downhill Demesne and Hezlett, and Castlerock station allowed me to commute to Coleraine. Once moved to Castlerock, I soon fell in with a loyal group of train travellers such as Harry Taylor, W.T. Ewing and Peter Craddock. But it was far from a smooth ride in the 70s and 80s. Disruptions due to political actions were a daily occurrence, sometimes leading to frustrations. One notable train driver often exceeded the speed limit on the stretch from Castlerock to Coleraine, triggering an automatic engine shutdown and further delay. Thankfully today's passengers on this, Michael Palin's favourite stretch of picturesque line, enjoy an excellent service!"

Mike Jones - Castlerock Community Association

CASTLEROCK



The small seaside village of Castlerock is situated within Binevenagh AONB, close to Downhill's dramatic tunnels and five miles west of Coleraine. The village was created by the arrival of the L & C railway in 1853. The Hervey Bruce family of Downhill (the local landowners) wanted railway stops close to Downhill for their own convenience. The L & C agreed and saw an opportunity to create a holiday resort in the area now known as Castlerock. The railway company incentivised investors to build holiday villas at Castlerock, by offering free first class travel for 10 years for anyone who built one. This scheme was later continued by the BNCR from 1860. With its long beach and proximity to the spectacular landscapes of Downhill and Binevenagh, Castlerock was hugely attractive for tourists, holidaymakers and investors - many villas were built alongside other amenities, creating the village seen today. Castlerock remains a popular destination in the summer months, enjoyed by locals and visitors alike.

BUILT HERITAGE



The railway undoubtedly helped to shape the landscape of Binevenagh AONB & beyond. The land reclamation and embankment, the railway tracks & tunnels and the built heritage of the railway's many stations can all still be seen across the landscape today - they have become familiar features, unique to the character of Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the surrounding area.

Derry/Londonderry, Waterside Station: Opening in 1852, Derry/Londonderry Waterside Station was later rebuilt 1873-1875 and remained in operation until February 1980, when it was forced to close following two bomb attacks in the 1970s. The station was replaced by a modern station with a new platform and reduced capacity. In 2016, Translink announced that the station would be restored and re-opened as a transport hub for the city. Waterside opened once again for rail traffic on 21st October 2019 and is now the only railway terminus in the city.

Derry/Londonderry to Limavady: In 1853, stations at Willsborough (later Eglinton), Carrichue, Ballykelly, Brighter were opened. Further stations at Culmore (1854) and Faughanvale (1855-59) followed later. The Ballykelly station was removed with the construction of an aerodrome in the 1940s and the other stations are now also closed.

Broharris (Limavady) Junction: Opened 1852. The junction station at Broharris had no platform; main line trains proceeded through this junction on the branch line to Limavady, before reversing and proceeding onwards to Coleraine from 1853. This station is now closed.



Roy F Burrows Midland Collection Trust/Kidderminster Railway Museum

Limavady Station: The station at Limavady, or Newtown limavady as it was then known, opened in 1852. The town was served by a 4 mile long branch line which extended from the Broharris Junction. When Limavady Station first opened the platform was several inches higher than the bottom of the train's carriages, meaning that the dignitaries on board had to disembark straight onto the track! Limavady Station remained in operation until 1955.



Roy F Burrows Midland Collection Trust/Kidderminster Railway Museum

Bellarena to Coleraine: After the final section of the railway opened in 1853 there were stations at Bellarena, Magilligan, Downhill, and Castlerock. There is some evidence of a station at Umbra, now closed. At Magilligan the station house was built by John Lanyon and remained in use until the 1970s. Downhill Station closed in 1973.

Coleraine Waterside station: The original Coleraine terminus for the L & C railway was located on the western bank of the River Bann, (in the vicinity of what is now called Waterside). The River Bann was a major obstacle for rail through traffic in Coleraine and initially there was a gap between Coleraine's Waterside and Northbrook Stations; passengers were required to disembark and cross the river by horse car. Northbrook Station was built in 1855 for the new Ballymena, Ballymoney, Coleraine & Portrush Junction Railway (incorporated into the BNCR in 1861). Coleraine's Waterside Station closed c.1860, while the Northbrook Station remains in use as the town's only railway terminus.



Coleraine's Northbrook Station c. late 1800s.
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Service

Coleraine's railway bridge: The first railway bridge in Coleraine did not open until November 1860 and its construction was overseen by William Dargan. The bridge allowed the L & C railway to continue directly to Coleraine's Northbrook Station, bypassing the town's Waterside Station which was rendered obsolete. Initially, Coleraine residents were critical of the new bridge, complaining that it might spoil their view of the river and cause difficulties for shipping. The bridge was constructed from timber and

iron with a revolving opening span to allow ships to pass. It remained in operation until 1924 when it was replaced by the current bridge, a steel construction famed for its efficient 'basculer' span mechanism. This mechanism allows the bridge to be raised up vertically allowing ships to pass, making for a dramatic sight!

Coleraine's original railway bridge pre 1924. John Moore.



Coleraine's current railway bridge. Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Services.



NATURAL HERITAGE OF BINEVENAGH

The outstanding natural beauty and important wildlife of Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) have been viewed and enjoyed by passengers on the Derry/Londonderry to Coleraine line for generations – what can you spot on your journey?

Binevenagh is home to a wide range of special habitats and species. At the heart of the AONB is Binevenagh Mountain with its scree slopes, forestry plantations, woodland, special grasslands, heath and bog. Meanwhile important dune systems and beaches stretch from the River Roe estuary to the west, along the shores of Lough Foyle and on to the coastal village of Portstewart in the east. Such habitats support a rich variety of flora and fauna and have been afforded special protections due to their environmental importance.

Protected Areas in Binevenagh AONB

10 Areas of Special Scientific Interest

1 Special Protection Area

4 Special Areas of Conservation

1 Ramsar site

5 National Nature Reserves



Fox



Otter



Common Lizard

NI's only native reptile species can be found in Binevenagh's dunes, where it can be seen basking in sunny spots.

Ronald Surgenor



Kittiwake



Oystercatcher



Purple Saxifrage

One of NI's rarest plants, confined entirely to the high mountain cliffs of Binevenagh, where it grows with two other rare arctic-alpines, mountain avens and moss campion.



Sea Campion



Marsh Orchid



Eyebright



Irish hare



Marsh Fritillary Butterfly

Once common across the UK and Ireland, this species is now under threat. Numbers have drastically declined in recent decades and this butterfly is now considered a priority species requiring urgent conservation action. Katy Bell.



Peregrine Falcon

Reaching speeds of up to 180kph, these birds hunt prey at speed and on the wing from great distances. With a recovering population, they often nest along sea cliffs and can now be spotted across the UK and Ireland. These birds remain protected species, at risk of persecution. Ronald Surgenor.



Fulmar



Curlew



Eider Duck



Bumble Bee



Scarce Crimson and Gold Moth

This is one of the UK's rarest moths found only in the dune systems of Binevenagh AONB and on the Isle of Man. Geoff Campbell.

Did you know that you can log your sightings of local wildlife online with the Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR)? Recording sightings of wildlife can assist greatly in conservation efforts. Search CEDaR Wildlife NI for more information



THE RAILWAYS OF BINEVENAGH IN THE 20TH CENTURY

John Moore

THE NORTHERN COUNTIES COMMITTEE (NCC) & WWI

From July 1903, BNCR railways were now managed by the Northern Counties Committee (NCC), a management committee of the Midland Railway of England.

This period, from 1900 to the end of the First World War, is often referred to as the Golden Age of rail travel. At this time the rail network dominated the land transport of people and goods, as combustion engine vehicles (early cars and lorries) were few and far between.

After the outbreak of war in 1914, the NCC and its railways played an important role, transporting troops and vital supplies. Many of the NCC's employees enlisted in the Great War, and some did not return. On Thursday

24th November 1921, the NCC

unveiled a memorial commemorating their railway workers who died during WWI. This memorial, a large obelisk structure, was erected in the concourse of York Road railway station, Belfast.



NCC War Memorial 1921. Nigel Henderson, PRONI
Cat: T3899/I.

NCC EMPLOYEES WHO FOUGHT IN WWI, 1914-1918, TAKEN FROM NCC ROLL OF HONOUR

Castlerock

William Hall
W.J. Swann

Coleraine

William Anderson
Samuel Borland
John Bringham
George Curran
Thomas Davies
Samuel Hayes
Andrew Johnston
Patrick Lagan
Samuel W. Moore
William McGroddy
William T. McKane
William McKirgan
John Smith
James Waddell
George A. Wilmont

Portrush

George H. Gillen
Robert Hamill
Thomas Hamill
R. Haslam
S. Hartley
William Hunter
William Kirkpatrick
H. Paget
L. Piolet
Samuel H. Smith
David Stevenson
W. Thorpe
James Wilkie

Portstewart

R.J. Kearney
William John McGuigan
Robert James McSheffery

Derry/Londonderry

John Adams
Thomas Bailey
William J. Bond
James Fleming
Samuel Miller
Thomas A. Morrison
William McGarvey
John McGinley
Alexander McLaughlin
John McLaughlin
Robert Simpson
Richard Thompson

BETWEEN THE WARS

After 1918, the fortunes of the railway declined. The war had led to rapid advancements in the development of combustion engine vehicles. A new transport revolution, to rival even that of the railways, was in progress.

1923 saw the railway companies further amalgamated and the NCC now fell under the London, Midland & Scottish Railway (LMS). Around the same time, the first bus services began. The new buses provided yet more competition for the railways, which would see a steady decline in the 1920s and 30s.



THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 gave the railways a second wind. Binevenagh's railway line was arguably the most important railway in Northern Ireland during the war effort of the 1940s. It served the newly constructed RAF aerodromes at Limavady, Ballykelly, Eglinton, Maydown and the important naval base at Derry/Londonderry. This area along the shores of Lough Foyle was particularly suited to housing airfields because of its even and flat landscape – partly thanks to the land reclamations of the L & C Railway Company in the 1840s.



A 1944 photo of a train crossing the airfield at Ballykelly, with a Liberator plane stationary on the runway. David Postle Collection.

During the war, the communities of Binevenagh AONB would have seen thousands of servicemen from across the UK and further afield brought in on the railway, travelling to the aerodromes and training stations in the area. For instance, in 1942 the first US troops to land in Europe disembarked in Belfast and were sent via seven special trains to Antrim and Derry/Londonderry – making the NCC the first railway in Europe to carry American forces during WWII.

“I remember the arrival of the American troops arriving at Portstewart in the middle of the night by special train from Belfast going to the Cromore Camp across the road. During their free time they travelled to Portrush or Coleraine for dances and some visited our house bringing some goodies and ‘candy’. Although I was young, I can remember hearing the German planes passing over after the bombing of Belfast and probably to Londonderry which was also bombed. My father was in the Royal Victoria Hospital and I remember that York Street was still smouldering when my mother and I were travelling to visit him.”

Alex Esdale – Former UTA and NI Railways Area Manager

In 1943 the RAF airfield at Ballykelly was extended to land larger aircraft for the Battle of the Atlantic. The longer runway now cut across the railway line between Ballykelly Station and Limavady Junction. This led to a unique arrangement between the NCC and the RAF. The airbase's control tower was linked to the railway's signal box, ensuring that no planes attempted to take off or land as trains were approaching!



A train poses for its passengers in front of an RAF Shackleton at Ballykelly in October 1970. The novelty of a train crossing an airfield lived on after the War. David Postle Collection.

POST-WAR TO THE PRESENT DAY

After the end of the Second World War the railways continued to struggle and a post-war re-organisation saw the NCC nationalised and absorbed by the new Ulster Transport Authority (UTA) in 1948. The UTA included bus services and went on to close many railway lines across Northern Ireland. It was at this time that many of the Derry/Londonderry to Coleraine railway's intermediate stations were closed, as was its branch line to Limavady.

The UTA was replaced by NI Railways in 1968 and then reformed into Translink (incorporating NI Railways, Citybus, Metro and Ulsterbus) in the 1990s. Translink continues to operate Northern Ireland's railways today.

Binevenagh's railway largely survived the upheavals of the 20th century and recent years has seen a boost to railway traffic across Northern Ireland. The rise of commuter travel and an increased focus on using public transport have given our railways a renewed purpose and have highlighted their importance.

The Derry/Londonderry to Coleraine line has also received renewed appreciation. In 2010, the outstanding beauty of the Binevenagh area was celebrated by the BBC's *Great British Railway Journeys*. Host Michael Palin described the line as 'one of the most beautiful railway journeys in the world'.



Tourism NI

BINEVENAGH AND COASTAL LOWLANDS LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

A new National Lottery Heritage Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme will see the delivery of many projects to celebrate and protect the natural, built, and cultural heritage of an area which includes much of the Binevenagh AONB. On 19th March 2020, the Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership announced that they had secured £3.4 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other funders to deliver an extensive five-year programme. This will assist in the ongoing revitalisation of this special area and its unique heritage in the coming years.

For more information on how to get involved visit:

<http://binevenaghaonb.ccght.org>



Landscape Partnership Scheme



FINAL WORD

Binevenagh's railway still carries thousands of passengers, locals and visitors, each year. This wonderful resource, an important piece of our local industrial and built heritage, continues to offer access to the unique landscape of Binevenagh AONB and holds special memories for many people.

Visit www.translink.co.uk to find out how you can experience this exceptional railway journey and see www.ccght.org for more information on Binevenagh Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust would like to thank all those who have assisted in the production of this publication. In particular, we thank everyone who shared their memories, stories, information and images of Binevenagh's railways – your help and support is greatly appreciated!



Downhill Station and tunnel, with Downhill Estate in the background, early 20th century.
John Moore

MORE INFORMATION

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- David Postle – Kidderminster Railway Museum
- Gavin Bamford – History Hub Ulster
- Chris Wilson – Roe Valley Ancestral Researchers



BNCR train at Limavady Junction 1920. John Moore

SHARE YOUR RAILWAY MEMORIES!

Help us to celebrate and record our rich railway heritage. Note down any memories, stories, poems or anecdotes you would like to share and get in touch.

Email to info@ccght.org or post to 27 Main St, Armoy, Ballymoney BT53 8SL

I remember...

*Memories shared will be added to our website and shared to NI Archive.



John Moore