



Look Again!
Heritage at the Doorstep



Rathmullan Tidy Towns



**Comhairle Contae
Dhún na nGall**
Donegal County Council

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Preface

Much of Rathmullan's built heritage dates back to the 19th century. The streetscapes we are familiar with emerged mainly from an earlier footprint of smaller one-storey, thatched houses.

The overall goal of this Tidy Towns project is to “Look Again” at features that have survived from the 19th century or earlier and which give Rathmullan streetscapes their own unique character. From such awareness comes an increased appreciation of that legacy in a time of great change affecting built heritage in Ireland.

This appraisal draws extensively on the survey of Rathmullan carried out for the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH)

(<https://www.buildingsofireland.ie/>) That survey, which was mostly completed here in 2010, is a valuable record of a substantial part of Rathmullan's built heritage at that point in time. The majority of the photographs featured in this booklet are recent, the work of Letterkenny-based photographer, Ruth Keogh.

This review is limited to a selection of houses in Rathmullan and its environs – there are many more with equal claim to owning unique heritage features. Likewise, the local historic monuments, churches and hotels described in the NIAH survey, are outside the scope of this booklet.

We are grateful to Heritage Keepers through the Burrenbeo Trust for financing this project and for inspiring us to explore and enhance our place in this way.

Look again! Be aware and enjoy Heritage at the Doorstep.

Aine Ní Dhuibhne

Rathmullan Tidy Towns

June 2023.



The Brae

1. First Constabulary Barracks

This substantial two-storey house dates to the early nineteenth century and retains much of its original form and appeal. The replacement modern fittings are in keeping with the original fabric. It was originally two adjoining buildings that were later amalgamated. The building to the south served as the Constabulary Barracks from the 1830s. The present building was operating as a hotel - Rathmullan Arms Hotel - from the early 1900s. The building represents an increasingly rare example of a building type that was a commonplace feature of the streetscapes of small Irish towns and villages. making a positive contribution to the streetscape to the west end of Rathmullan. The rubble stone boundary walls and the simple wrought-iron gate to the site, add to the setting.



2. The Cottage



This local authority cottage was built c. 1915 within the then town boundary. Most small towns and villages have groups of similar houses from that period usually built outside what was then the town or village boundary. The NIAH notes: “This modest but appealing small-scale house, retains some of its early form and character - natural slate roof, cast iron rainwater goods, exposed rafter ends, a porch with painted timber bargeboards and replacement wooden sash windows.

Church Hill Road

3. At the Gate End

The present single-storey house, with a small extension to the south gable, originally consisted of 3 small stone houses with thatched roofs pre-1900. It retains much of its architectural character with a long low profile. Its visual appeal and integrity are enhanced by the retention of salient fabric such as the natural slate roof and timber sliding sash windows. It is an addition to the built heritage of Rathmullan along the main approach road into the town from the north-west.



Main Street



4. Figure-inscribed Stone

In earlier times the stone lay on top of large rocks that formed part of a collapsed sea-wall. It is believed that the decorated boulder may have been part of a more complex monument originally, located further southwards. It is indeed a most mysterious carving seeming to incorporate traces of pre-Christian or possibly Coptic influences in the cruciform design. The figure is described as a stylised horned head on a cross-shaped body. The face has slightly protruding eyes and a wide-open mouth. It does not have a particularly benign expression. It was placed on the present site in 1999.

5. MacSweeney's Castle Site

It seems credible that the first settlers in Rathmullan lived on or in the vicinity of the Hilly Head. The site or area is known as “Ard na gCaiseal” (The height or raised ground of the cashels/stone enclosures) which would suggest more than one fortification was built there. Equally it may be Ard a'Chaisil, indicating it was the site of one fortified structure - maybe Maolán's Ráth or Cashel? In 1516 it was recorded that MacSuibhne's Castle at Ráth Maoláin fell to his enemies. That was the last fortification there and was marked on the 1601 military drawings during the Nine Years War. This shows its position in relation to St. Mary's Friary (Abbey). There is no trace above ground here now of Mac Sweeney Fanad's castle. It is recorded in the Record of Monuments and Places -DG037-00702- 037-/03/6 22960/42751
RATHMULIAN AND BALLYBOE Castle Site.



6. *And a' Chaisil*



This house was once part of a line of 30 houses on the shore side, stretching from the former RIC Barracks/ Arms Hotel and ending almost opposite the Friary/Abbey. All but this house and the Arms Hotel were swept away early in the mid-1850s. This house was the second location of the RIC Barracks in the mid-1800s. Part of the building to the west accommodated a shop later. At the start of the 20th century Rathmullan Post Office was located here.

This attractive and substantial two-storey house, probably dating to the early nineteenth century, retains much of its early form and character. Its visual appeal is enhanced by the retention of timber sliding sash windows, cast-iron rainwater goods and painted block-and-start quoins to the corners. It represents a building type that was a feature of the streetscapes of small Irish towns and villages and makes a positive contribution to the built heritage at the centre of Rathmullan.

7. Settlement Cluster at Market Square

Under the terms of the Plantation of Ulster there were requirements to build houses for people who would secure and defend the Plantation. The earliest indication of settlement in the vicinity of the former Carmelite Friary /Knox's fortified home and MacSweeney's Castle on the Hilly Head is in the records of the Plantation post 1609. By the middle of the 17th century these houses numbered over 40 – “15 were stone houses and 30 timber houses and cabins which were thatched and inhabited with Britons.” The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage notes that the present street plan and houses in the centre and E quadrant of Rathmullan are probably built on the footprint of the seventeenth century plantation town of Rathmullan. The location of that post-Plantation settlement was the Market Square area as noted in the NIAH.





8. Old Dispensary and Courthouse



The corner-sited former Dispensary was built in the mid-1800s. This modest but well-proportioned building, retains much of its early form and character with timber windows, natural slate roof and projecting rendered brick eaves course. The site slopes to the rear having a basement level with carriage-arch, two windows and surviving examples of cast-iron rainwater goods.

The old Dispensary building shares a roofline with the former Courthouse and so most likely was built in conjunction with it. While the front of the Courthouse has undergone some alterations, the windows and one of the original carriage arches to the rear have survived. These two buildings are of particular interest in the social history of the area.

9. Abbey Graveyard and Gates

The graveyard, within the site of the former Carmelite Friary, may have been used for burials from the start of the eighteenth century when Killygarvan Irish Church was no longer serviceable as the Parish Church. It contains a collection of standing, recumbent, and table-type memorials, mainly of nineteenth century date and more memorials erected during the 20th century. This graveyard is an interesting addition to the built heritage and social history of Rathmullan. It forms part of an interesting complex along with the remains of the Friary, at the centre of Rathmullan. The simple rubble stone boundary walls, and the fine gateway to the south-west corner of the site with ashlar gate piers, add to the context and setting.





10. Pump/Water Hydrant

A piece of mass produced cast-iron, which is an appealing and subtle feature in the Rathmullan streetscape. This water hydrant is a reminder of the mechanisms installed for the provision of clean drinking water in the period before mains water supply systems. The fluted details enhance the artistic design quality of the piece, combining aesthetics with functionality. The original fluted dome has been replaced with modern cement capping. It was made at the Glenfield and Kennedy Ltd. Foundry in Kilmarnock, Scotland where many of the cast-iron hydrants found throughout Ireland were manufactured.

11. New Heritage Street Furniture: Commemorating the Flight of the Earls

This commemorative manhole cover was presented by Donegal County Council in 2007 to mark the 400th anniversary of the Flight of the Earls from Portnamurry, Rathmullan on 14th September 1607.



12. House on Brock's Corner

The house at this slight turn and slope on the road was known as Brock's Corner in the earlier part of the last century. Mrs Brock was a confectioner, recorded in Slater's Directory for 1890. At least one of the wide window openings, served to display the confectioner's delights and this was remembered by an earlier generation as a place of special interest for them as children! The house has a mildly canted or sloping feature to the front, creating a distinctive and interesting structure.





13. Red Pebble-dashed house

This modest house, dating to the mid-to-late nineteenth century, reflects its original form and character. It retains the original timber sliding sash windows and natural slate roof with clay ridge tiles. It represents an increasingly rare surviving example of a building type that was, until recent years, a ubiquitous feature of the streetscapes of small Irish towns and villages and is an addition to the built heritage of the Kerr's Bay area. The reddish pebbledash walls incorporate pieces of blue glass – most likely broken Milk of Magnesia bottles. Both the product and the application of pebbledash to exterior walls, featured in the earlier decades of the last century.



Flush quoins



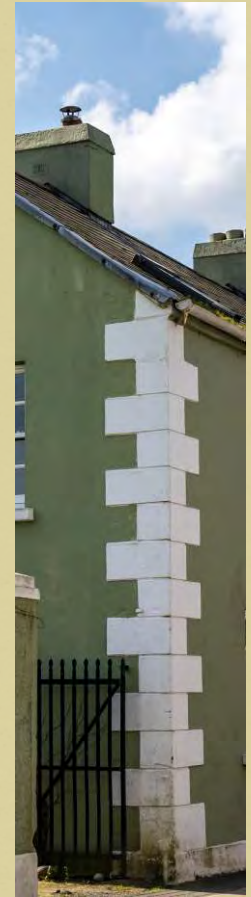
Mildly battered (sloping) three-storey tower with dogtooth string course and corbelled eaves above



Sandstone surround with hood moulding



Brick eaves course



Block-and-start quoins



14. Coastguard Station



Although altered and now in alternative uses, this former coastguard station, built c. 1875 retains much of its early form and character. It is well-built using local rubble stone masonry while the good quality ashlar quoins to the corners is testimony to the skill of the masons involved. Of particular visual appeal is the mildly battered three-storey tower to the north end, a feature of many contemporary coastguard stations. The corbelled eaves course and the dogtooth stringcourse to the tower add some ornamentation. The house to the north end with the tower and the three-bay two-storey house to the south end were probably originally in use as the inspector and chief boatman's residences, the single-bay two-storey houses between were originally the coastguards' houses. The form of this building is typical of many coastguards station designs in Donegal and elsewhere. This building went out of use as a coastguard station after Independence. This building is an important element of the built heritage and maritime history of Rathmullan, and is an appealing feature along the coastline to the north-east of the town.

15. Coastguard Station Sheds

Each of the regular Coastguard Station houses had 2 small sheds, one for storage and a privy and the second for storing fuel - turf and coal. Originally there was one central passageway through the sheds, leading to the “gardens” - the small strips of ground allocated to each household where the coastguards and the succeeding householders grew vegetables. There was also a central washroom for washing clothes with a big fireplace provided with a large metal pot for heating the water on washdays. There was a large rectangular cement storage tank situated between the doors of every two houses to collect rainwater. Each tank was fitted with a tap.





16. The Boathouse

This well-built former boathouse and attached outbuilding was associated with the Coastguard Station to the west though built at a later date. It was built using local rubble stone masonry. The good-quality dressed ashlar sandstone block-and-start quoins to the corners of the boathouse, and to the carriage-arch give the structure a robust and picturesque appearance. The present coastguard station replaced an earlier station at Rathmullan which was located close to this boathouse. The building reflects aspects of the built heritage and the maritime history of Rathmullan and remains an appealing feature along the coastline to the north-east of the town.



17. Old Rectory

This former rectory was built for Reverend Narcissus George Batt (c.1824-98). He bequeathed the house to the Church of Ireland parish of Killygarvan to be used as a Rectory. The England-based clergyman, N.G. Batt having travelled extensively on the continent of Europe was a great admirer of the magnificent architectural gems found there. The influence of that lifetime's interest is reflected in the architectural composition of this house, built in Rathmullan where his cousin Thomas Batt was the landlord. Among the many fine architectural features noted in the NIAH (Recorded 2010) were: Pitched double-pile slate roof, paired central chimney stacks having chamfered stringcourses and terracotta pots; Timber bargeboards to gables on paired timber consoles with timber bargeboards to gables and cast-iron rainwater goods on timber eaves boards; Roughcast walls with cut-sandstone flush quoins to corners; Pointed-arch central door opening with sandstone surround; Square-headed window openings in tripartite arrangement (ground floor) and Cusped lancet window openings in bipartite arrangement (half-dormer attic) with block-and-start surrounds framing one-over-one timber sash windows. The quality of the materials and craftsmanship employed then, guaranteed the survival of the form and much of the original fabric of the building which constitutes an important component of the later nineteenth-century built heritage of Rathmullan.





18. Post Box

NIAH describes the post box as an attractive item of street furniture that represents an early surviving artefact of mass-produced cast-iron ware. It is still in use and was recently conserved by An Post. Its survival is testament to the quality of its original design and to the materials used in its manufacture. The modest design of the box is enhanced by the P 7 T motif in Celtic Revival-style script and by the foundry mark to the base. The use of Old Irish lettering represents evidence of the promotion of an indigenous national identity by the newly independent state. It was cast at the Jessop Davis Foundry (c. 1890-1964) of Enniscorthy, County Wexford.

This simple piece of street furniture is an integral element of the built heritage of the local area.

19. Late Victorian-style House

This semi-detached late-Victorian house retains much of its early form and character. It features a dormer attic, bracketed eaves course, moulded clay ridge tiles and segmental headed doorway opening. The dormer window, with rounded opening to the front, has clay ridge tiles, a timber spear finial, timber bargeboards supported on timber brackets. The windows at first floor level have segmental-headed openings. Local lore suggests that the attached house was built first, specifically for Mary Jane Batt, cousin of the local landlord Thomas Batt and that this house was constructed later. Both buildings date to a period when Rathmullan was becoming a popular seaside resort and Pier Road was then being developed.



Chapel Road



20. Killycolman Stone

This carved stone dates back to the early ecclesiastical period in County Donegal and comes from Killycolman. The townland name suggests an association with a Saint Colman and it was possibly the location of a monastic settlement in that area. The townland also retains pre-Christian monuments recorded as - a cairn that contained many cist burials, a number of standing stones and a cashel. The tall regularly-shaped stone slab (1.6m x.36m) had a Maltese cross inscribed within a circle but now retains only part of a faint outline. It was taken to the grounds of St. Joseph's Church late in the last century and is now erected behind the eastern end of the church. This stone together with another decorated stone now located on the seafront near the junction of Main St. and Pound/Market Street, are the oldest examples of built heritage in the NIAH survey within Rathmullan's boundaries.

21. Stone Sculpture

A niche above the exterior of the three-light East window of the chancel of the Friary, originally held a sculpted stone figure in bas-relief, showing a mitred bishop or more likely an abbot. When it became dislodged and fell from its original location in the 1950s it was taken to the grounds of St. Joseph's Church. It was later set within St. Joseph's Church. It dates back to the building of the Friary which was completed in 1516.





22. Benchmark

A Benchmark (BM on the Ordnance Survey maps) is a simple “crow’s-foot”- shaped mark that is carved into stone especially in walls in the built environment. These were used in the 1800s O.S. mapping to mark the height above mean sea level at particular locations within the survey and the 6-inch O.S. maps show many Bench marks in this area. The surveying of this area was carried out in the 1830s and these were generally incised on the more permanent features such as stone walls.

This well-preserved example can be seen at ground level, opposite Owl Cottage and so gives an indication of the age of the rubble stone wall. This wall was most likely part of the boundary wall of the summer lodge (now Rathmullaⁿ House) built for the Knox family c. 1820.



23. Gates to Rathmullan House

The elegantly-appointed sweeping gateway makes a suitable first impression at the main entrance to Rathmullan House. The finely-carved and well-detailed ashlar gate piers exhibit craftsmanship of the highest quality, and are among the best examples of their type in this part of Donegal. These piers have a classical architectural character that compliments the style of the gate lodge here and were more than likely built at the same time. The intricate cast-iron gates and railings survive in good condition and are examples of high-quality mid- nineteenth century mass-produced metallurgy.



24. Rathmullan House Main Gate Lodge



This impressive and appealing gate lodge was originally built c.1841 to serve the main entrance to Rathmullan House. This building is classically proportioned with low hipped roof, overhanging eaves and central chimneystack. It remains an integral element of the built heritage of the local area but requires much needed conservation at present.

Kinnegar Road

25. Rathmullan House

Second Gate Lodge

This attractive gate lodge, known as Rose Cottage, was originally built to serve as a secondary or service entrance to Rathmullan House. Its low front elevation is classically proportioned with regular openings and a low hipped natural slate roof with overhanging bracketed eaves. It has a quasi-open bed pediment to the entrance porch. Its visual appeal and integrity are enhanced by the retention of salient fabric such as the timber sliding sash windows and the natural slate roof. It is constructed in rubble stone masonry while the block-and-start quoins to the corners add to the robust character of this former gate lodge. This lodge was one of two built around 1841 by Thomas Batt. It is an integral element of the built heritage of the local area.



26. Fort Royal Gate lodge



This charming gate lodge was originally built c. 1845 to serve the main entrance to Fort Royal and maintains much of its early form and character. Its visual appeal and integrity are enhanced by the retention of salient fabric such as the natural slate roof and timber sliding sash windows. The paired window openings have dressed stone surrounds with hood mouldings. The round-headed doorway has double-doors and the exterior of the windows have timber shutters. The bargeboards to the gable ends and to the timber entrance porch have timber spear finials. This appealing building has a strong presence in the landscape to the north of Rathmullan

Houses noted in local history

A. Priory House

The original house here is the oldest extant dwelling house in Rathmullan. A peat wall was uncovered in the interior during renovations late in the last century. These carefully constructed interior walls were a feature in some of the oldest houses in Ulster built in the 17th and 18th centuries. At the time of Griffith's Valuation 1857, it was the home Rt. Rev. Patrick McGettigan, Bishop of Raphoe. He vacated his official residence in Letterkenny for the use of the nuns of the Loreto Order whom he had invited to the town to open a secondary school for girls there.





B. Wesleyan Meeting House

The Wesleyan Meeting House was constructed in the mid-1840s and the nearby Manse was built shortly afterwards. It was used as a Meeting House for some decades thereafter.

The short street on which it was built became known as Wesleyan Street but later was also known as Major's Road. The building was used as a classroom for Junior Classes when St. Joseph's National School was being extended and refurbished (1952-3). When the more Senior Classes, accommodated in the Courthouse, joined with the Junior classes to practise for the Christmas play in 1952, the visiting children sat in the original pews fitted with draught doors. The building with its unique façade was repurposed as a café - An Stad- in recent years.

C. The Manse

The Manse, beside the Wesleyan Meeting House, has retained much of its salient fabric in the hipped roof, window openings and classical doorway.

During the second half of the 19th century it served as the manse or home of the Presbyterian Minister. It was sold in 1919 but the name – The Manse, was still used locally until recent times.





D. Convalescent Home, Pound Street



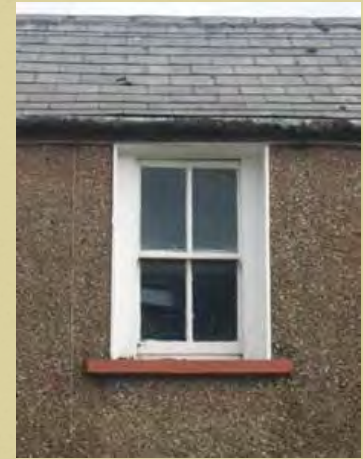
This house was built as a convalescent home for working women at the end of the 19th century, thanks to the tireless work of Cassandra Jane Louisa Hill. She was the youngest child of Cassandra Knight (niece of Jane Austen) and Lord George Hill. The family lived at Ballyare, Ramelton. The new building was to be “a shelter to the sick and weary without distinction of creed or party.” It proved difficult to raise funds for its upkeep and so within a short number of years it became the town's RIC Barracks. By 1923 the Civic Guards (later An Garda Síochána) had taken over from the RIC. After the Guards moved to Pier Rd, the premises served as a Guest House. It was known for many years as Ashleigh House.



Segmental-headed doorway



Clasped hand gate hinge on ashlar pier



Clay ridge tiles and two-over-two pane timber sash window



Cusped lancet bipartite window opening



Decorative bargeboards to gable and porch



Dormer attic with timber spear finial

