

# DOWN MEMORY LANE

## Two Portrush curiosities

By Dr Peter Wilson

**EACH and every town has its curiosities – things that are in public view but about which there seems to be little, if any, available information.**

Portrush is no different in this respect and the two features described below fit neatly into this category.

However, as often happens when things get mentioned as being unknown or mysterious, someone pops up with a credible explanation and the unknown then becomes known and the mystery is solved.

So, let's see if anyone can throw light on one or other of my two Portrush curiosities.

### The Harbour Stone

Down by the Harbour, about mid-way between the RNLI Station and the pedestrian bridge, sits a large almost rectangular block of basalt that measures 120x93x72 cm.

It rests not on the ground but on a number of smaller stones, creating a gap of about 15-20 cm beneath it.

The squared faces of the block indicate that it has been carefully cut to size, perhaps at the quarry of origin. However, one corner of the block has been fractured and a large piece of rock is missing.

The boulder is also distinguished by an alignment of three small rectangular slots on the top face. Similar slots occur on the side of the boulder nearest to the adjacent wall. These slots indicate that it was the intention of the stone masons to remove this irregular corner of the boulder that diverged from the overall rectangular outline, but the work was never completed.

It is the only free-standing block of rock in the vicinity. So, what is it doing there? What purpose does it serve?

I thought at first that it might have been a leftover from the time when boulders were brought in and used to rebuild the harbour walls. Square and rectangular blocks can be seen forming the harbour walls. So, this explanation is reasonable.

Maybe the boulder was just left behind, perched there as a feature to diversify the

harbour-side area. Large boulders, known as rock armour, have also been used to protect the harbour walls and form a seemingly random pile of boulders dumped against the outer sides of the breakwaters. But these boulders would surely have been brought in by boat, and anyway they are generally of irregular outline rather than being square cut.

Another thought was that the boulder was deliberately placed there to serve as a memorial of some kind that never came to fruition. Perhaps it was to commemorate the RNLI, or the fishermen of the port, or to mark the refurbishment of the harbour. Maybe an explanatory plaque was to be placed upon it, but never was.

So if you know the reason why this block of rock sits where it does, I for one would be interested to know.

### The Ramore Head freshwater spring/well

I use the word 'freshwater' with some caution in respect of this curiosity; I assume the water is 'fresh' but cannot claim to have tasted it.

The spring can be found on the east side of Ramore Hill, overlooking Portscaddan and Ravelleggy Point, and a short distance below the shelter with four seating bays.

It is indicated on the 1900 six inches to one mile Ordnance Survey map as a 'Well'.

A path passes within 10 m of the spring and it must be passed by thousands of people each year but very few seem to know of its presence; it is not an obvious feature.

The spring is now 'contained' by a stone-work structure of roughly hewn dolerite blocks over which much vegetation has encroached.

The open area is about 60x45 cm and at the front it is about 45 cm deep. The structure extends back for another 50cm or so below the cap stone. The front part of the well contains a lot of surface debris; there seems to be water only at the rear. A shallow depression runs from the spring towards the tarmac path. This is either a pathway to the spring or an overflow channel, or possibly both.

Because it is indicated on 1900 map as a Well, the stonework structure is very likely to be at

least that old, although it may have been renewed.

I have not been able to find any reference to the spring/well in any of the literature I've consulted which may indicate that it went out of use as a water source many years ago and is effectively unknown to the present generation.

Two suggestions regarding this feature are:

(1) a holy well with links to St. Patrick - after all, Portisewart has one at Strand Head so why not Portrush?

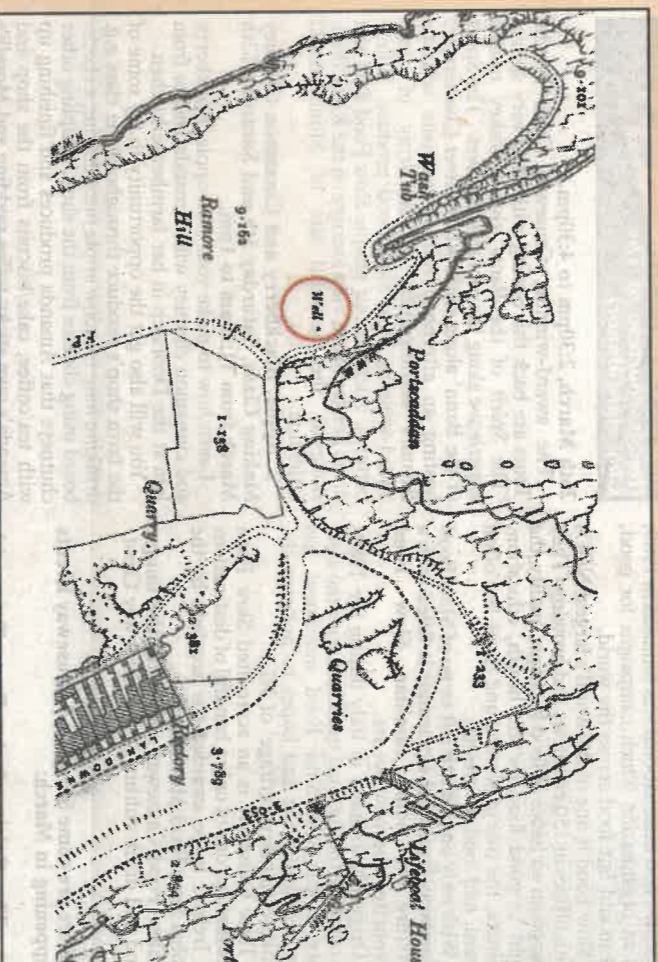
(2) is this the water source indicated and deliberately mis-located on the earliest known map of Portrush as being in the area now occupied by the recreation grounds. That map shows the defensive character of the Ramore headland, and it would not be beyond reason to

suggest that certain elements were exaggerated in order to make the site look a more sustainable one – one with an abundance of freshwater.

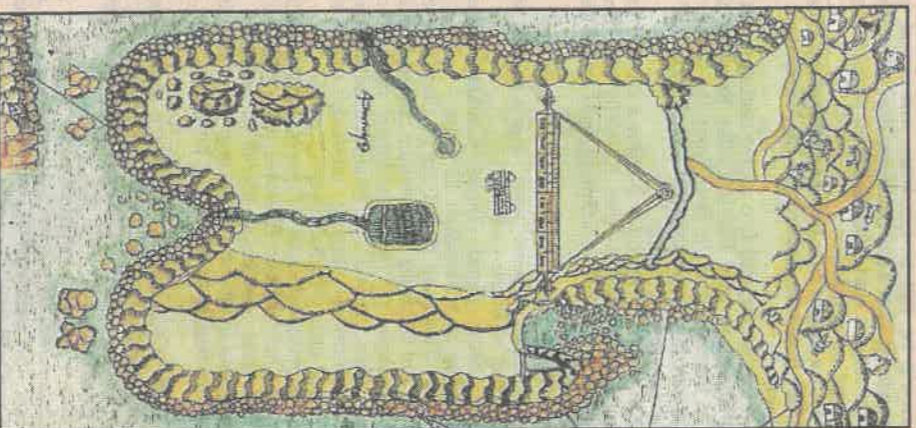
Anyway, this is just speculation on my part. What cannot be denied is that the spring/well exists and in the past served as religious site and/or water source but has since gone out of use and collective memory.

So, as with the Harbour Stone, I would welcome any information that might fill the knowledge gap.

● Portrush Heritage Group would like to thank Peter for this intriguing contribution to their series of Heritage Newsletters. Comments on the points raised to Peter at chairman.portrushheritage@gmail.com



Part of the 1900 Ordnance Survey map showing location of the well. Copyright Land & Property Services.



The earliest known map of Portrush showing the abundant water source in the area now occupied by the recreation grounds. North is at the bottom.



A. The Harbour Stone. B. The top surface of the Harbour Stone with aligned chisel slots.



A. Freshwater spring/well (arrowed) below the shelter on Ramore Head. B. Close-up of the spring/well.

Article reproduced with the kind permission of Portrush Heritage Group