



Malin Head

An Enchanting Place,
A Colourful Past



Acknowledgements

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The author would like to thank the following for their assistance:

Contribution to research

Carol Dempsey
Ciara Joyce

Images appear courtesy of

Andy McInroy
Daniel Love
Donegal County Archives Service
Irene Haggan
National Library of Ireland
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ISBN No. 978-0-9574403-4-0

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- 6: Cloncha Monastic Site

Sites of Exquisite Beauty (not discussed in booklet)

- 7: Five Fingers Strand: A golden beach nestled amongst some of the tallest sand dunes in Europe
- 8: Knockamany Bens: This coastal road to Malin Head is graced with breathtaking panoramic views.
- 9: Kinnagoe Bay: A secluded and beautiful beach surrounded by sea cliffs. Also the site of the Spanish Armada wreck of the La Trinidad Valencera, which sank here in September 1588.



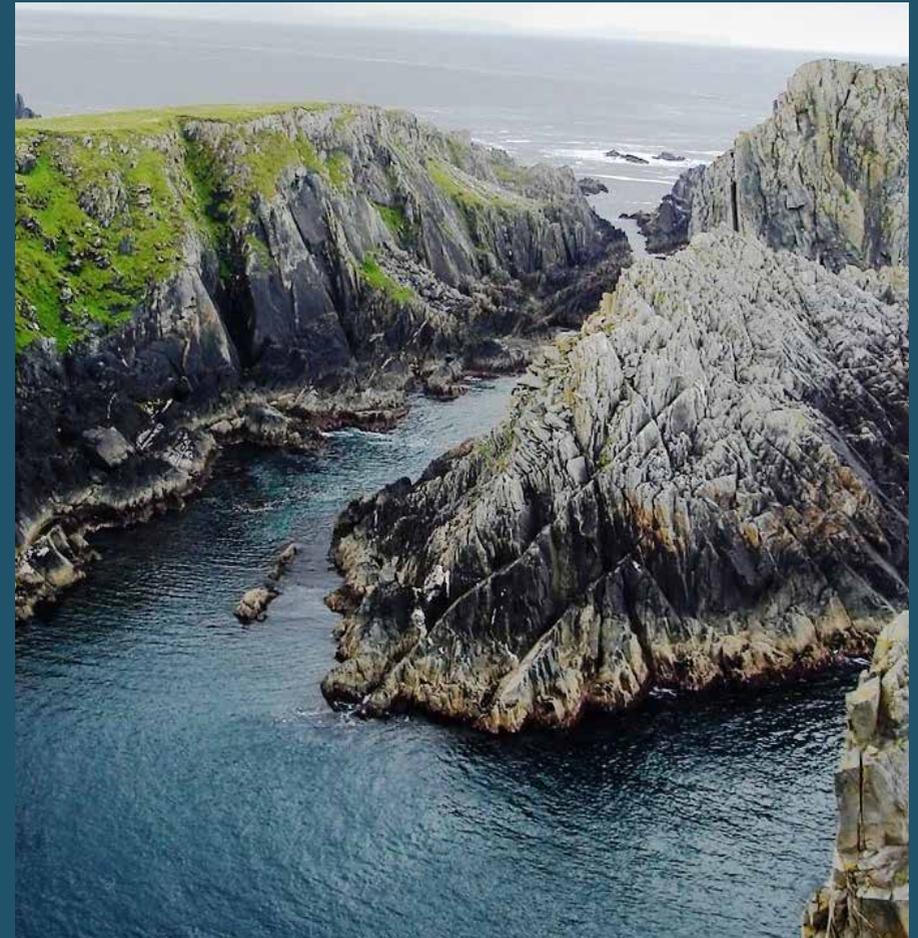
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Welcome to Malin Head

Malin Head is renowned as “Ireland’s most northerly point” but perhaps there are few who recognise the implications of this unique fact; how it compliments and contributes to the richness of its history, heritage, and landscape. The word “Malin” comes from the Irish word, Malainn, meaning braeface or hillbrow. This description falls short of capturing the dramatic and untamed beauty of this headland in all its “solitary loveliness and bewitching grandeur.”¹ In this booklet, the captivating charm of Malin Head and its surrounding area is depicted through a weave of history, local folklore and natural heritage.

Malin Head lies 15.3 km north of the village of Malin. Banba’s Crown is the most northerly point of Malin Head and it is from here one can see Tory Island and Fanad Head lighthouse, heralding the entrance to Lough Swilly. Among other visible headlands to the west are Horn Head, Bloody Foreland and Dunaff Head. To the northeast lies Inishtrahull Island and looking beyond this island one can see the hills of western Scotland, and the island of Islay, on a clear day.

¹ Maghtochair, *Inishowen: Its History, Traditions, and Antiquities*, (Londonderry: The Journal Office, 1867), p. 126



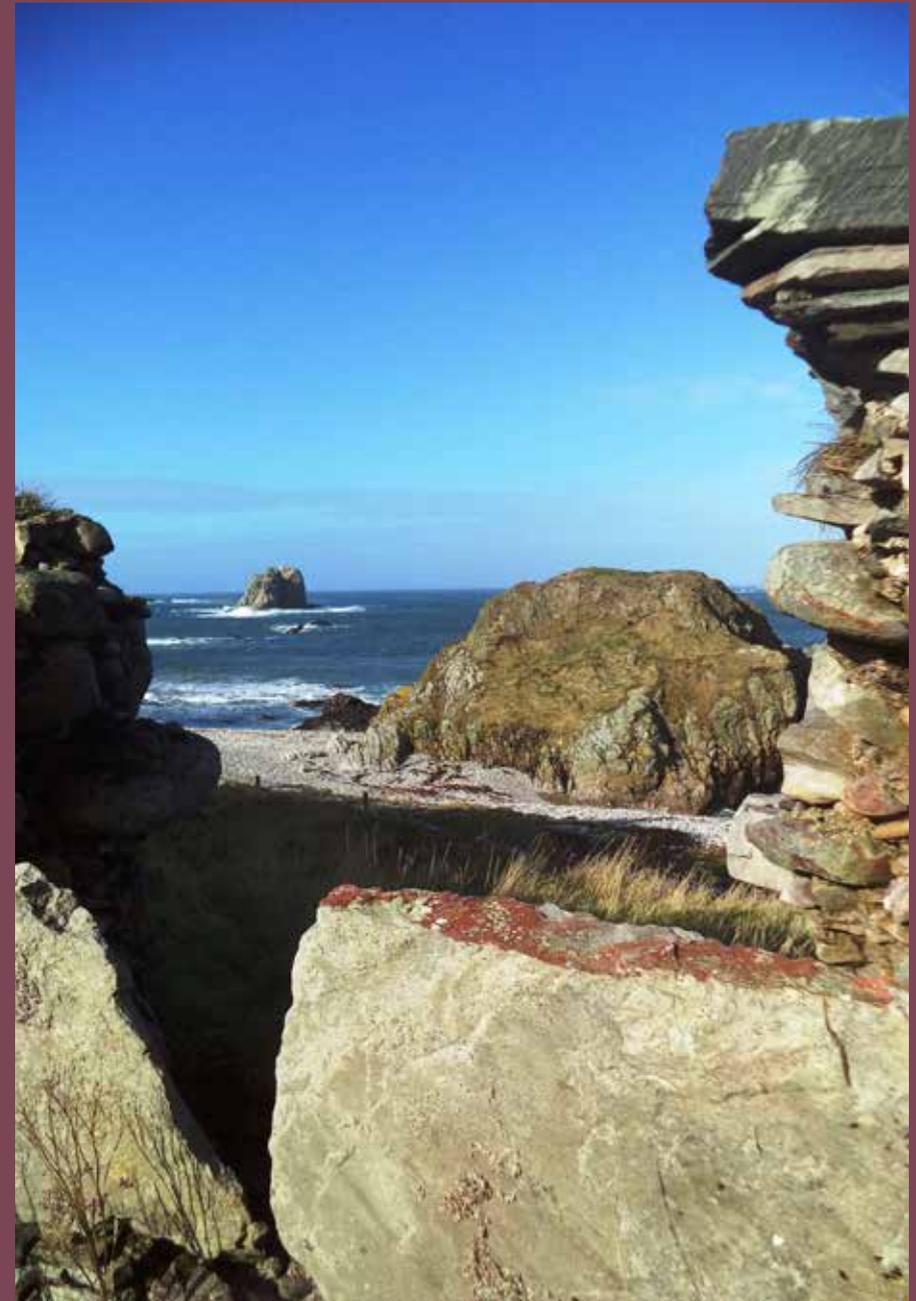
'The Scheldrin'

Setting the Scene: A Weave of History, Archaeology and Folklore

Of Priests and Pagans

Inishowen or “Island of Eoghan” is so named because in the 5th century this peninsula, which was once an archipelago of islands, came under the rule of Eoghan, son of the powerful and fearsome Irish king, Niall of the Nine Hostages. Malin Head is one of three distinct areas of Malin parish, with Malin town to the south and Glengad to the west completing the triad. In the past this northernmost parish in Ireland was more commonly known by its ecclesiastical title of Cloncha (Cluain Catha); meaning battlefield. The remains of souterrains and promontory forts dotted along the Malin coastline are evidence that

this remote parish had a turbulent past. Strategically located at the tip of the most northerly Irish peninsula, Cloncha was the site of many historical battles against rival Celts (Irish and Scottish), Vikings and the English. Evidence of Viking invasions are to be found in Old Norse location names at Malin Head. Examples include Ineuran Bay (which translates as “small sheltered harbour”) and Scheidrén (which translates as “shield”).² The Scheldrín are the impressive sea stacks located at the north-western tip of the headland.



View of Doon Promontory

² The Malin Head Trail, http://malinhead.ie/MH/Malin_Head_Trail.html

A Legacy of Prehistoric Malin

As a peninsula, Inishowen was the ideal location for Ireland's earliest inhabitants: nomadic hunter-gatherers who hugged the coastline, reliant on seafood as part of their staple diet. Evidence of these Mesolithic people include flint implements and shell middens (ancient deposits indicative of human domestic activity). One such midden was discovered just above Trabreaga Bay at Drung (8km south of Malin Head). In this same location, barely 100m away, an excavation in the 1960's unearthed three Bronze Age cist graves containing the remains of two adults (male and female) and an infant. A Bronze tool, a piece of rock crystal and a Bronze pygmy cup were buried with the bodies.³

Note: The exact location of archaeological sites in Malin townlands can be seen on the Archaeological Survey Database of the National Monuments Service website, and is accessed via <http://webgis.archaeology.ie/NationalMonuments/FlexViewer/>

Further evidence of pagan Malin includes megalithic tombs and standing stones. One such site was recorded at Umgal (four miles south of Malin Head) by archaeologist Mabel Colhoun. The remains of what Colhoun described as a multi-chambered cairn are now too scant to ascertain its identification as a megalithic structure.⁴ Local tradition claims that this ancient "grave" -as named in an 1848 Ordnance Survey map- was the burial place of Ossian, pre-eminent poet of pagan Ireland and son of Fionn MacCumhaill.⁵

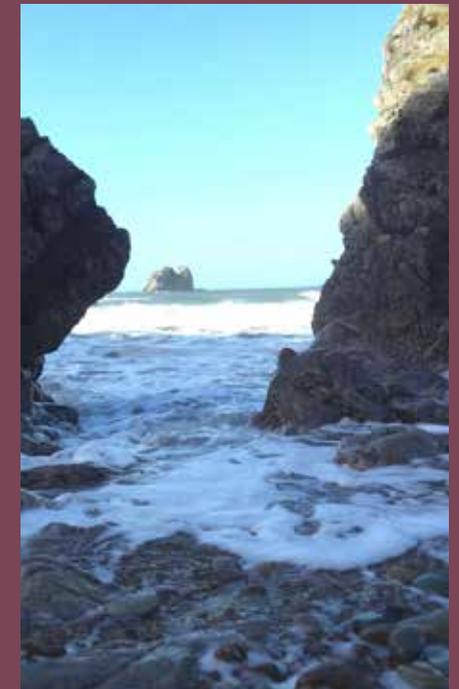
³ Brian Lacy, *Archaeological Survey of County Donegal*, (Donegal County Council, 1983)
⁴ Ibid.
⁵ Harry P. Swan, *Twixt Foyle and Swilly*, (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Co. Ltd, 1949)

in 1816, Reverend Edward Chichester referred to local men in Malin who repeated fragments of Ossian's poems that had faithfully been passed down through generations of oral tradition.⁶ In 1837, a separate account by topographer Samuel Lewis noted that nearby place-names corresponded with events recorded in Ossian's poems.⁷

Doon fort flanks the western end of the bay below a ruined church and cave. A natural tunnel goes through the rock on the landward side. Folklore claims that the smooth hollowed rock in the middle of the tunnel was the "saint's chair" while the "red-coloured rock of the roof above is a blood-stain, made as the saint was murdered where he sat".⁸

Defensive Promontory Forts

There are two rock projections located on the coast at Ballygorman, named Doon and Dungolgan forts. These bastions of rock stand guard at either side of the bay in which the sacred site of Malin Well is nestled. The earthwork traces and tunnel that led to their classification as promontory forts have all but disappeared.



View of Sea stacks from Malin Head.

⁶ Reverend Edward Chichester, "Parish of Cloncha" in William Shaw Mason, (ed.), *A Statistical Account or Parochial Survey of Ireland Vol. II*, (Dublin: Hibernia Press Office, 1816)
⁷ Samuel Lewis, *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, (London: Samuel Lewis and Co., 1837)
⁸ O. Davies and H.P. Swan, "The Castles of Inishowen" in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology, Series III, Vol. 2*, (Ulster Archaeological Society, 1939), pp. 206-207

The Arrival of Christianity

The baptism of Eoghan by St. Patrick at An Grianan of Aileach in the 5th century marked the birth of Christianity in Inishowen and hailed the beginning of a flourishing monastic era. The important 6th century monastic foundation at Cloncha (3 km from the village of Culdaff) was "the centre for conversion of a large part of Inishowen"⁹ and came under the influence of Colmcille's disciples at an early date. Among those buried here are Father Sheridan who was chaplain to Bonnie Prince Charles,

and Bishop McColgan who ruled the diocese from 1752 - 1765. The nearby monastic sites at Carrowmore and Culdaff meant that this remote area was a thriving and sophisticated place of learning in the early medieval period. In the 9th century, hermitages began to accumulate in the area around Cloncha. Malin Head was the ideal hermit's haven and the raw beauty of its surroundings inspired prayer and fasting. Tradition maintains the famous site of Malin Well is a legacy of this era.



Cloncha Monastic Site. St Buadan's High Cross stands almost 4 metres tall and dates from the 11th century. In the background is the ruin of a 17th century Plantation church.

⁹ Neil McGrory, *Inishowen: A Journey Through Its Past*, (Culdaff: The Sweat House, 1988), p.21

Malin Well: A Sacred Site in a Magical Setting

This site of pilgrimage is situated at Drumnacille (ridge of the church) in the townland of Ballygorman, one mile east of Portmore Pier. Whilst local tradition connects more than one saint with the site, it is St. Muirdhealach who features most prominently. St. Muirdhealach (d.1088)

was a Donegal man living in the 11th century. He settled in Germany where he became a Benedictine monk. A talented scribe known as Marianus Scotus, he produced manuscripts in Regensburg which included the Pauline Epistles now residing in the Imperial Library in Vienna. In 1078 he founded the abbey of St. Peter in Regensburg and became its first abbot.¹⁰ The special features associated with this site are St. Mahar's Church, The Wee House of Malin and Malin Well.



Malin Well Site.

St. Mahar's (Gorman's) Church

The ruin of this simple, late medieval church sits on a raised beach overlooking the restless Atlantic Ocean. Folklore claims the church was built by St. Mahar with stones that came from Downhill, at the mouth of Lough Foyle, County Derry. A human face was carved into the top corner stone between the east gable and the south wall.

¹⁰ Catholic University of America, *New Catholic Encyclopaedia Vol. 9*, (Catholic University Thomson/Gale, 2003), p. 164

The Wee House of Malin

A few yards south west of the church is a small cave carved into a cliff face known locally as the Wee House of Malin.



Wee house of Malin

There are rough stone seats all around the interior and legend claims it accommodates all who go into it. It is suggested St. Muirdhealach was the hermit who lived in the cave and in 1752 renowned Englishman, Bishop Pococke, wrote, "Muirdhealach lived in a cave in the rock of the cliff where poor people lodge who come for cure".¹¹

¹¹ Brian Bonner, *Our Inis Eoghain Heritage*, (Limerick: Salesian Press, 1984), p.77

Malin Holy Well

This revered early Christian well is located in the natural cavern in the rock on the shore directly below the church. The well is supplied by a spring and is covered at high tide. It is possible the well was originally a site of worship in Druidical times. The well is said to have been blessed by St. Muirdhealach and to have healing properties. Until recently it was a famous place of pilgrimage on the 15th August (Feast of the Assumption). Donegal pilgrims, as well as those from neighbouring counties, came to partake in rituals associated with the curative powers of the well. This pilgrimage was



Malin Well Site



Malin Holy Well

called the Malin Well Fair and there are some dismissive accounts relating to the rituals performed. In 1801 McParlan observes the culmination of pilgrimage festivities into an unusual ritual with, "people dropping beads in the water...all vehemently whispering prayers.... but the ceremony finishes by a good ablution in the sea, male and female, all frisking and playing in the water stark naked and washing off each other's sins."¹² Another account by Reverend Edward Chichester in 1814 referred to the degeneration of festivities into "the most disgusting drunkenness and debauching" and "the clergy of the Church of Rome

¹² James Mc Parlan, *Statistical Survey of the County of Donegal*, (Dublin: Graisberry and Campbell, 1802), p.117

¹³ Rev. Chichester, (1816), p. 181

¹⁴ Bonner, (1984)

have.....forbidden the offensive orgies by which he [St. Muirdhealach] is worshipped."¹³ This second account was by no means unbiased and possibly exaggerated for the purpose of discrediting this popular Catholic pilgrimage.

The O'Gormans and the Holy Stone

There is a long tradition of the O'Gorman family living in Ballygorman. It is said that the Holy Stone of Malin was given into the care of the O'Gorman family by the saint (Muirdhealach) of Malin Well. There was a cure connected with the stone. The stone was applied to the affected part of the body and subsequent sweating meant that the cure was working. Rivalry over possession of the stone emerged between various branches of the O'Gorman family. Those who dwelt in neighbouring Ballyhillion stole the stone and the Ballygorman branch recovered it by force. As a result of the disagreement, the Parish priest, Father Neil O'Flaherty, confiscated the stone at the beginning of the 19th century.¹⁴ It is not known what has become of it.

Conquest and Consequence: Malin Head Under British Rule

Of Lords and Legend: O'Doherty Chieftains in Malin

The O'Dohertys became the Celtic lords of Inishowen from 1413. State Papers of 1600 state that O'Doherty had sought refuge in a place beyond a river which "cutteth off the far end of the country from all the rest,"¹⁵ and where castles were built to resist Scottish raids. Could the area in question be north of Malin village? Cloncha was recognised as a separate district of Inishowen and English reports c.1600 refer to it as an island. Malin was not an island but the narrow strip of bog which divided it from the rest of Inishowen provided a natural defence and could easily be manipulated to form entrenchments so as to cut it off from the mainland.¹⁶ Whilst there are no visible traces of castles on

the landscape, there is a romantic theory that the exquisite setting of Dunargus promontory near the townland of Culoort could be the site of the elusive Don'yrishe castle and the O'Doherty fortification of Malin.¹⁷

When Culoort (a townland neighbouring Malin Head) was confiscated in 1604, Cahir O'Doherty bought it, determined that this strategic outpost remain in the possession of the Gaels.¹⁸ In return for peaceful submission to Queen Elizabeth 1, the O'Dohertys retained their rights to land in Inishowen. This privilege was short-lived as the 1608 rebellion of Cahir O'Doherty brought about the



View of Dunargus promontory

complete subjugation of Inishowen during the reign of James 1. The land of Inishowen was bequeathed to Sir Arthur Chichester, Lord of Ireland and Marquis of Donegal.



Bogland in the area of Keenagh and Culoort

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 113

¹⁶ Davies and Swan, (1939), p. 179

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bonner, (1984)

Anecdotes Relating to the O'Dohertys in Malin

Maghtochair (Michael Harkin), writing in the mid 1800s, notes the presence of the direct descendants of Cahir O'Doherty in Culoort. He refers to a piece of glenwood oak, handed down through the family for generations, into which is carved the date 1525. In addition, a parchment is said to list the names of Cahir and Conn as heads of the O'Doherty household in Culoort up to Harkin's time. Following Cahir's demise in 1609, Lord Chichester pledged £10 annuity to his descendents in Culoort in recognition of the chieftain's rightful claim to the land. This annual payment was said to have lasted until the death of the fifth Earl Chichester (d. 1799)¹⁹

A distinguished branch of the O'Doherty clan called the Mac an Meirge O'Dohertys lived in the townland of Keenagh. Chichester granted Richard O'Doherty and his heirs the right to lease their land forever. This was a privileged position at a time when landlordism (the middle-man concept) was being implemented

and the Irish – displaced from fertile land - reduced to serfdom. This land was sold two generations later by the widow of a son of Sean O'Doherty (who was a Major in the army of James II). It was John Harvey of Derry who bought the land. According to tradition, the land sold for the price of £50 and a silk gown and Harvey subsequently moved to Keenagh and opened a shop. Major O'Doherty had another son who reportedly had a weakness for alcohol. His regular purchase of liquor from Harvey's shop left him without money and eventually without land. Having secured all of the O'Doherty land in Keenagh, Harvey became the agent in the area for the Marquis of Donegal.²⁰ Whether or not there is truth in this tale, the Harvey family became one of the principal landlords in Donegal in the succeeding generations.



Malin Hall, built by the Harvey family in 1758

¹⁹ Maghtochair travelled through the remote areas of Inishowen, celebrating its beauty and gathering information from local people about the history and traditions of the area. His articles were published in the *Derry Journal*.

²⁰ Ibid.

The End of the Gaelic Era

With the arrival of English-speaking settlers and ministers of the Established Church, the Gaelic order was dismantled as the British system took root. The enforcement of the Penal Laws meant that Catholics had to practise their religion and education in secret. Large upright stones, called Mass Rocks, acted as alters at which priests said mass in remote locations, near cliff edges, nestled amongst hills, or on the nearby island of Inishtrahull. At illegal Hedge Schools, children were taught by poor nomadic scholars and if detected the school masters could face execution or deportation. A number of Hedge Schools existed in Malin Head where students were educated in literacy, mathematics, and sometimes Latin and Greek. In Bree (Malin Head), Donnell O'Doherty taught navigation.²¹

Whilst a small number of Gaelic speakers were recorded in Malin Head and Inishtrahull island in the 1901 census, native Irish speakers had all but disappeared in this area by the mid 1800's.

The idyllically-situated Roman Catholic chapel at Lagg (built in 1784) was the first erected in Inishowen following the relaxation of the Penal Laws. A little further along the coast road towards Malin town stands the Presbyterian meeting-house, built in 1711. According to tradition, the church was built below the high water mark and so was liable to flooding twice daily at high tide. The vulnerable position of this edifice- at the edge of Trabreaga Bay- is testimony to the fact that the Presbyterian community faced oppression under the Establishment.



Catholic Chapel at Lagg

²¹ Conall K. Byrne, "Hedge Schools of Inishowen" in *Donegal Annual No. 33*, (Ballyshannon: Donegal Democrat Ltd., 1981), p.46

Malin Town

George Harvey, High Sheriff of County Donegal, built Malin Hall in the townland of Norrira in 1758. Over the next decade, Harvey planned the picturesque village of Malin below his residence, where the Ballyboe River flows into Trabreaga Bay. Present day Malin is an award-winning town and retains its original charm and character. An impressive ten-arched bridge leads to the heart of the quaint triangular-shaped village.

This stone bridge replaced a wooden one that was destroyed by a storm in 1757. Modest period townhouses surround the leafy green on its three sides.

Malin was a bustling market town in the late 1700's to early 1800's. Busy fairs for the sale of cattle and sheep were held on the village green thrice yearly and a market took place every Tuesday. The town also operated a mill and in



Malin town

1936 this mill switched on the town's electricity for the first time.²² Apart from its early commercial and industrial functions, Malin town held the distinction of accommodating a courthouse where petty sessions were held once or twice a month. In addition to a constabulary barracks, there was a Revenue Police barracks, set up to quash poitín distillation for which the area was notorious. The Church of Ireland, which stands next to the courthouse, was built in 1827 and became the parish church. Its construction was funded by a £200 grant from the Board of First Fruits²³ and two £100 donations from Bishop Knox of Derry and Mr. Harvey of Malin Hall. The 1916 Rising, War of Independence and Civil War of the early 20th century had little effect on Malin but the presence of the R.I.C in Malin incited an arson attack on the courthouse in 1922.²⁴ The building was repaired by locals and is still used by the community as a club house. It is hoped funding can be gathered to restore the inside of the courthouse by exposing and/or reinstating its original features.



Malin Courthouse

In 2013 Malin town hosted the acclaimed and highly popular 'Guth Gafa', an annual International Documentary Film Festival.

²² Conal Byrne, *Malin: Aspects of its History*, (1990)

²³ The Board of First Fruits was an institution of the Church of Ireland that provided grants to fund the building of churches and glebe houses in Ireland.

²⁴ Byrne, (1990), *ibid.*

Striking Features of the Natural Landscape

Geology

Malin Head is composed mainly of metamorphic and igneous rock formed over 400 million years ago, but it is the island of Inishtrahull, located 5 miles northeast of Malin Head that is worthy of particular attention. The oldest rocks in Ireland occur as a small outcrop on this island. These rocks are known as gneiss, a coarsely crystalline metamorphic rock which requires extremely high temperatures and pressures to form. It is estimated that they are approximately 1,780 million years old.²⁵ Scientific research into the origin of the Inishtrahull gneiss has concluded that the rocks are not related to the Irish mainland but are part of the Rhinnes Complex of southern Greenland. The Hebridean Islands, Colonsay and Islay, anchored off the coast of Scotland also correlate with the Rhinnes Complex of Inishtrahull and southern Greenland.

Malin Pebbles

The Malin Head coastline is awash with a variety of pebbles that include gemstones such as opal, jasper, amethyst and topaz, to name a few. These semi-precious stones were (and still are) used to make jewellery and were set into seals in the early 19th century.



Malin Pebbles

²⁵ J.S. Daly, R.J. Muir and R.A. Cliff, 'A precise U-Pb zircon age for the Inishtrahull syenitic gneiss, County Donegal, Ireland', *Journal of The Geological Society* 148, (1991), pp. 639-641

Devil's Bridge and Hell's Hole

The striking natural features etched into the coastal landscape of Malin Head include Hell's Hole and Devil's Bridge. Situated west of Banba's Crown, they were viewed with both awe and trepidation by past inhabitants and were featured in folktales passed down through the generations.

The natural jagged arch called Devil's Bridge has been shaped by centuries of Atlantic erosion.



Devil's Bridge

Hell's Hole is a deep chasm in the cliff face, about 250 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 100 feet deep. The water rushes into the narrow neck making a thunderous sound as it enters the cavern at the end of the gorge.



Hell's Hole

One tragic tale, "The Legend of Inishtrahull", was related by Barney McGonigal, an Inishtrahull native who settled in Malin Head. The story is as follows: One day a man was crab-fishing at Port Mór (Inishtrahull). He saw a mermaid

on the rocks combing her hair. He threw his shark skin crab bag over her head and in the struggle her tail fell off and she had feet and legs. He took her home and hid her tail. They had two children, a boy and a girl. The boy found his mother's tail and she took it from him, went into the sea, and was never seen again. The children followed her and were drowned. The distraught father threw himself over the rocks at Devil's Hole (Hell's Hole).²⁶

Ballyhillion Raised Beach

Below Banba's Crown to the east lies Ballyhillion Beach. This raised beach is of particular scientific importance. This is because four different stages of sea level change and glacial activity can be seen, showing the changing connection between the sea and land from when the glaciers began to melt at the end of the last Ice Age.



Ballyhillion Raised Beach

Note: For a detailed and illustrated account of the flora, fauna, and bird-life that grace the Malin headland visit:
http://www.malinhead.ie/MH/Malin_Head_Trail.html

²⁶ Harry P. Swan, *Romantic Inishowen*, (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis, 1947), pp. 81-82)

Living in the Northern Extremity

Moving away from the coastline, the landscape of Malin Head is a colourful blanket of bogland and heather. The bog was both a blessing and an inconvenience in the past. It provided an abundance of fuel, so few suffered the bitter weather on this exposed headland. On the other hand, where bogland predominated, fertile land was sparse.

A chiefly agricultural community, the inhabitants of Malin Head also relied on the rich harvest of the sea and as a result this area was one of the least affected by the Great

Famine. Seaweeds were eaten (sloke and carageen) and used as fertilizer, and the waters around Malin teemed with fish and shellfish. Captain Hart, who came into ownership of Malin Head, financed the construction of Portmore Pier and harbour in 1837. A safe port, it could accommodate most boats in Inishowen. Surplus catch was sold, fresh or dried, at Moville and Carndonagh markets, from where it was sent to inland towns or exported to Glasgow and Liverpool. Another export from Malin that became very profitable

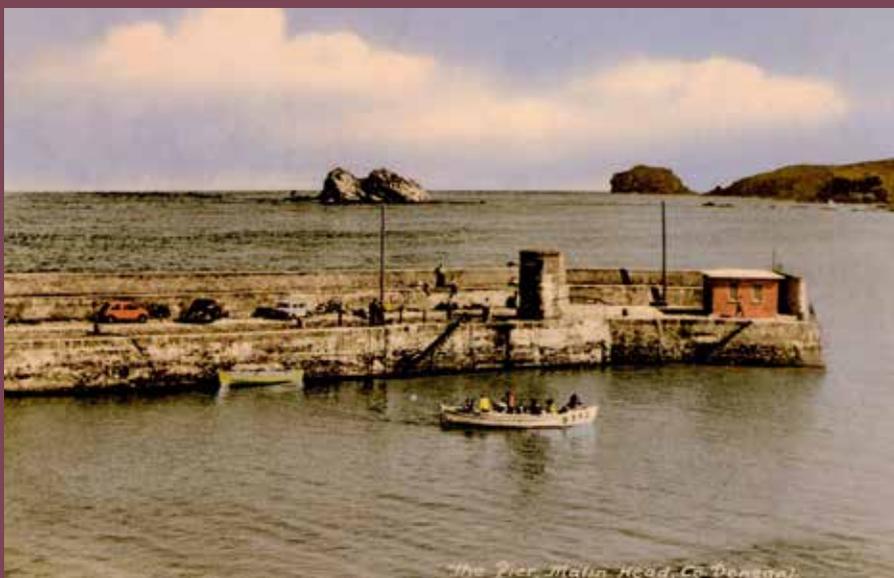


Daily life in Malin Head, c.1900. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

during the war years was rabbits, which were snared in abundance at Lagg and the area around Devil's Bridge.

From the earliest times people, goods, and ideas travelled between Scotland and north Donegal, forging strong commercial and personal links. From the end of the 19th century, migratory labourers from Malin made the seasonal journey to Scotland to earn money harvesting crops during the Scottish Harvest. These workers travelled to Scotland in groups of six and stayed in a house called a Bothie

which was supplied by the farmer. It is said that on one occasion the women of Cloncha made some poitín to welcome the hard-working men home. Their illegal activity was discovered by the police, and following a trial in Malin court, they were all sentenced to three months in gaol despite the fact that one of the women was feeding a baby of six weeks old.²⁷



Portmore Pier

²⁷ Byrne, (1990)

The Restless Ocean

Emigration

The curse of economic migration took hold of Malin from the early/ mid 1800's. Emigrants bound for Canada and America boarded the boat at Moville which took them to Derry before their arduous passage across the Atlantic. On occasion, people who were on the run from the law would lie low on Inishtrahull before embarking on their journey to freedom. It was customary to light bonfires along the headland as a send-off to loved ones. For many of the emigrants who embarked at Derry port, Inishtrahull lighthouse was their last ever glimpse of Ireland as the liner ferried them away from their native land.

Cloncha had a population of 6,654 inhabitants in 1837.²⁸ Between 1841 and 1851, Malin saw a population decrease of 731 people.²⁹ A passenger list of the *Briq Trial* travelling to St. John in Canada in

April 1833 lists fifteen passengers from Malin, mainly labourers and single women in their twenties. It was to New Brunswick that William Elder (1823 - 1882) travelled. A Presbyterian clergyman from Norrira, Malin town, Elder became editor of St. John's *Daily Telegraph* newspaper. His entry into politics saw him elected to the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick.³⁰

During the same period, 77 emigrants from Malin are recorded journeying to America with the Cooke and McCorkell shipping company. It was to Boston that the America bound Malin emigrants flocked. By the early 1900's there were few in Malin Head who did not have a relative in Boston. Indeed, Inishowen emigrants as a whole were instrumental to the rise of the Irish to political power in Boston. Malin Head native,

²⁸ Lewis, (1837)

²⁹ Sean Beattie, "Emigration from North Donegal", in *Donegal Annual No. 44*, (Ballyshannon: Donegal Democrat Ltd., 1992), p. 20

³⁰ ibid

Daniel Doherty is an example of a well-respected and active participant in Irish-American affairs.



Photograph of Daniel Doherty with Eamon de Valera. c.1960s. Courtesy of Donegal County Archives.

Born in Ballyhillion in 1890, Doherty emigrated from Donegal to America at the age of 19. Having worked as a farm labourer and a miner, he served in the U.S army during World War One after which he settled in Boston. Doherty became an influential member of the Donegal Association of Boston.

In 1950 he addressed the U.S Congress in Washington with a petition willed by 15 million Americans asking for the recognition of Ireland as a thirty-two county Republic. Doherty was in direct communication with many eminent politicians over the course of his lifetime, most notably John F. Kennedy, whom he had in attendance at the Donegal Association 50th Anniversary dinner in 1958, and Eamon de Valera.³¹



Boston newspaper article on Daniel Doherty. Courtesy of Donegal County Archives.

Shipwrecks

The treacherous water around Malin Head has become a graveyard of ocean liners and German U-boats, casualties of the world wars. In earlier times seafarers were occasionally lured into the shallow waters of Trabreaga Bay (translated as the "lying strand"), some having mistaken it for Lough Swilly.

The Cambria

In 1870 this passenger liner struck rocks and sank off Malin Head. All the passengers and 80 of her crew perished except one man who was found next day in an open boat near the entrance to Lough Foyle. He did not live long after his rescue.

The Daniel Morris

This cargo ship sank in Trabreaga Bay below Knockamany Bens in 1876. Its cargo of white flour was salvaged by some of the locals and it is maintained that this was the first time bread was baked using white flour in Malin.

The Twilight

In the autumn of 1889, this 779 ton ship left St. John's for Derry. A strong north west wind blew up and grounded the ship on the Five Fingers Strand. The lifeboat from Culdaff had to be pulled overland but sank in the bog road which was built on quick moss. All were rescued and the cargo of deal (planks of pinewood) was auctioned on the beach. The wreck of the *Twilight* can occasionally be seen at low tide.³²

³¹ Donegal County Archives Service holds a collection of Daniel Doherty's private papers: P/11).

³² Byrne, (1990)

War, Weather, and Communications

An Important Role in Early Communications

The landmark of Ireland's most northerly point is the signal tower on Banba's Crown. This tower was constructed in 1805 by Lloyd's shipping insurers by Order of the British Admiralty during the Napoleonic Wars. Its original purpose was to act as a coastguard, reporting on ships passing along this busy transatlantic route. Semaphore and telescope were used to maintain communications with ships



Banba's Tower and Marconi Wireless Station. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

and with the island of Inishtrahull where another signal tower was erected on the western end of the island. When in line of sight of the tower, ships would signal their destination using flags and in turn the coastguard would inform Lloyds in London. The semaphore system was subsequently replaced by Morse code in 1902 when the Marconi Wireless Company (located beside the tower) superseded Lloyd's signal system. The Marconi Company sent the first commercial message by wireless from Malin Head to the passenger ship *S.S. Lake Ontario*. In the years to come, Malin Head became an important base for transatlantic communication. In 1912, the *Titanic* tested its Marconi radio equipment with Malin Head.

Smuggling was rife along the eastern coastline of Inishowen at the beginning of the 19th century. The principal commodities smuggled were tobacco and rum, and towards the middle of the century the coastguard station was built on Inishtrahull to combat this trade. The sea

captains would transfer the contraband to the islanders' boats. The islanders then brought it to Inishtrahull until it was safe to bring it ashore to hide in coastal caves. From here it was taken to Derry by the captains' agents and sold.³³

³³ *ibid.*, p. 20

The World Wars

The current coastguard station at Malin Head was built by the British in 1913. During World War One (1914-1918) the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were billeted at the station. During the war, many ships were destroyed off Malin Head. Some fell victim to mines whilst others failed to navigate through treacherous winter conditions. One such ship was

the destroyer *HMS Racoon*, which sank on 9 January 1918. It is believed it struck the Garrive Isles when caught in a snow storm a mile off Malin Head. None of the 100 man crew survived. In 1996 Malin fishermen unwittingly came upon live ammunition from the wreck among their lobster pots.



Coastguard Station. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

During World War Two, look-out post huts were built at Malin Head to protect Irish neutrality. They were manned by the Irish defence forces who kept watch and reported activities at sea and in the air. These huts still stand on the headland. Another symbol of Irish neutrality was the 'Eire' sign, painted on stones and pressed into the grass. Still visible below Banba's Tower, the sign was a message to World War Two pilots that they had entered neutral territory.

August 1940 the lighthouse keeper on Inishtrahull used semaphore to relay to Malin Head look-out posts that crew from the torpedoed cargo ship, *The Havildar* (which was enroute to Burma) had landed on Inishtrahull.³⁴ In the same month another ship in distress was the 16,923 ton *Transylvania* which was damaged by a torpedo off Malin Head. Three hundred survivors were safely transferred to trawlers. Two officers and 20 men were killed. Today the wreck



Eire Sign below Banba's Crown.

The Battle of the Atlantic began on 3 September 1939, 250 miles north west of Malin Head. The ocean became a hunting ground of German U-boats and submarines. Distress signals were received at Malin Head. On 24

of the *Transylvania* sits upright and almost intact 135m below the water's surface.

³⁴ Michael Kennedy, *Guarding Neutral Ireland*, (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), p.36

National Weather Station

The first weather station at Malin Head was established by the British Meteorological Service in 1885 and weather reports were transmitted by personnel employed by Lloyd's Insurance Company. Coastguard officers continued this work until 1920 when a local family was contracted to provide climate data and one weather report each day. Today, Malin Head weather reports are mentioned as part of the BBC Shipping Forecast. In 1955 the current synoptic station was built by the Irish Meteorological Service whose personnel recorded hourly weather observations. The high wind speeds recorded at Malin Head is what distinguishes it from other stations around Ireland. Storm force 12 winds are recorded most years. The average

daily wind speed is 20mph. The highest gust speed recorded at Malin Head was 114mph when the tail end of Hurricane Debbie struck the west coast in 1961.³⁵ The Aurora Borealis puts on a spectacular display here during times of increased solar activity.

³⁵ Met Éireann, "Weather Observing Stations," <http://www.met.ie/about/weatherobservingstations/malinhead.asp>

Inishtrahull³⁶

No account of Malin Head would be complete without giving due regard to the small, yet formidable, island of Inishtrahull. This hour-glass shaped island stretches a mile long and there are many Irish translations for the word Inishtrahull, including Inis Tra Fola- Island of the Strand of Blood- which has a remarkable legend associated with it. In the distant past two brothers from Inishtrahull were on a fishing expedition but fierce winds blew up and forced them to land on an island of the Inner Hebrides. They were treated with hospitality by the Highlanders, but one of the men fell in love with a daughter of the chieftain. The young lovers were refused permission to wed and they stole away to Inishtrahull. After a number of years, the armed Highlanders discovered the whereabouts of the maiden but she and her eldest son plotted to out-smart the Scotsmen. The maiden invited her clansmen to dine with

her and when they fell asleep, well watered with poitín, the Scotsmen were slaughtered. Their bodies were rolled over a cliff onto the strand at Portmore and today Roman Nettles and Fool's Parsley mark the spot.³⁷

The discovery of a small inscribed "cursing stone", buried 8ft deep and dating from 750 AD would suggest the island was inhabited from the earliest times. The 1851 census lists 11 houses with 68



Inishtrahull Island. Courtesy of Seán Beattie, *The Book of Inishtrahull* (Culdaff: Lighthouse Publications, 1992) and Jim McLaughlin and Seán Beattie, *Atlas of County Donegal* (Cork University Press, 2013).

³⁶ Seán Beattie offers an illustrated and comprehensive narrative on Inishtrahull (including extracts from the accounts/poems of lighthouse keeper D.J. O'Sullivan) in his *Book of inishtrahull*

³⁷ Seán Beattie, *The Book of Inishtrahull* (Culdaff : Lighthouse Publications, 1992), p.32

residents. The last inhabitants left the island in 1928 following an order of compulsory evacuation. Many of the families settled in Malin Head. The evidence left to us by the people who once lived here includes a ruined settlement of stone cottages and a schoolhouse, two graveyards (from different periods), and a standing stone featuring an inscribed cross.

oil burned in wick lamps and fitted in separate metal reflectors.³⁸ Its function was superseded by the lighthouse that was completed in 1958 on the western end of the island beside the existing fog signal station. The light from this station can be seen from a distance of over 30 miles in clear weather. Lighthouse keepers did duty in rotation, usually spending a



Ruined Island settlement below lighthouse. Courtesy of Andy McInroy (photographer)

A cross-inscribed Mass Rock was sadly stolen from the island in 2009.

The first lighthouse was built in 1812 at the eastern end of the island. Its light was visible up to a distance of 19 miles. For many years the source of this light was vegetable

month on the island and a fortnight on the mainland. Sometimes the keepers were detained on the island for a few weeks longer because the winds could be fierce and the tides dangerous through Inishtrahull Sound. The lighthouse on the eastern end of the island

had a walled enclosure so the keeper could grow vegetables, protected from the salty sea-air.³⁹ In 1987 Inishtrahull Lighthouse became fully automated.

For the residents of the island, fishing was their livelihood. A cow provided milk, hens provided eggs, and sheep provided wool. Apart from potatoes, crops could not grow in this harsh environment. Fish was caught in the summer and cured and stored for winter consumption. Some was sold to passing ships or to the market in Carndonagh. The eldest member of the island was the "king," who kept order and acted as advisor and mediator.⁴⁰

The geographical location of Inishtrahull- the northernmost landmass of Ireland- means that the

island is blessed with wildlife rarely seen anywhere else in Ireland and has been designated a National Nature Reserve.

The island hosts a large and varied seabird colony. The Shag, Common Gull, and Great Black-Backed Gull population are of national importance. The island was the first Irish breeding site for the Eider and retains a large breeding population. Its winter population has included Barnacle Geese and Arctic Tern.

Grey seals are regular visitors to the island. Basking sharks, cetaceans (whales and dolphins) and sunfish are visitors to Inishtrahull Sound.

Note: Boat trips to Inishtrahull are available subject to booking during the summer months.



Islanders, c. 1900. Courtesy of Seán Beattie, *The Book of Inishtrahull and Atlas of County Donegal*.

³⁸ Swan, (1947)

³⁹ Beattie, (1992)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

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The Malin Head Trail is an illustrated and highly informative guide to the interesting coastal features of Malin Head.

www.malinheadwrecks.com

Photographs and videos taken of the many shipwrecks off Malin Head.

www.malinheadcoastguardradio.com

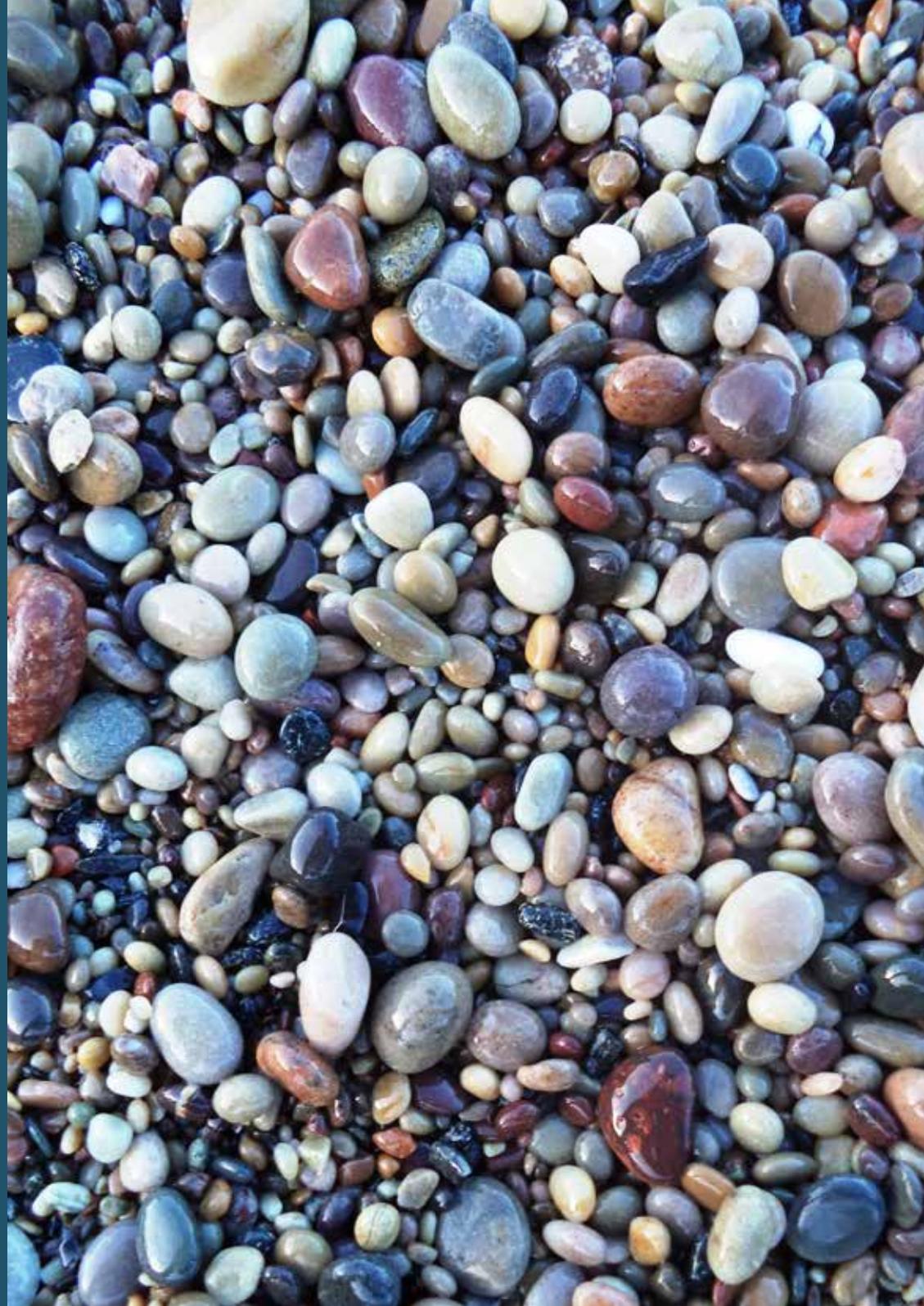
A detailed account of the history of the coastguard operations in Malin Head.

www.met.ie/about/weatherobservingstations/malinhead.asp

Information on Malin Head's weather observing station

www.movilleinishowen.com

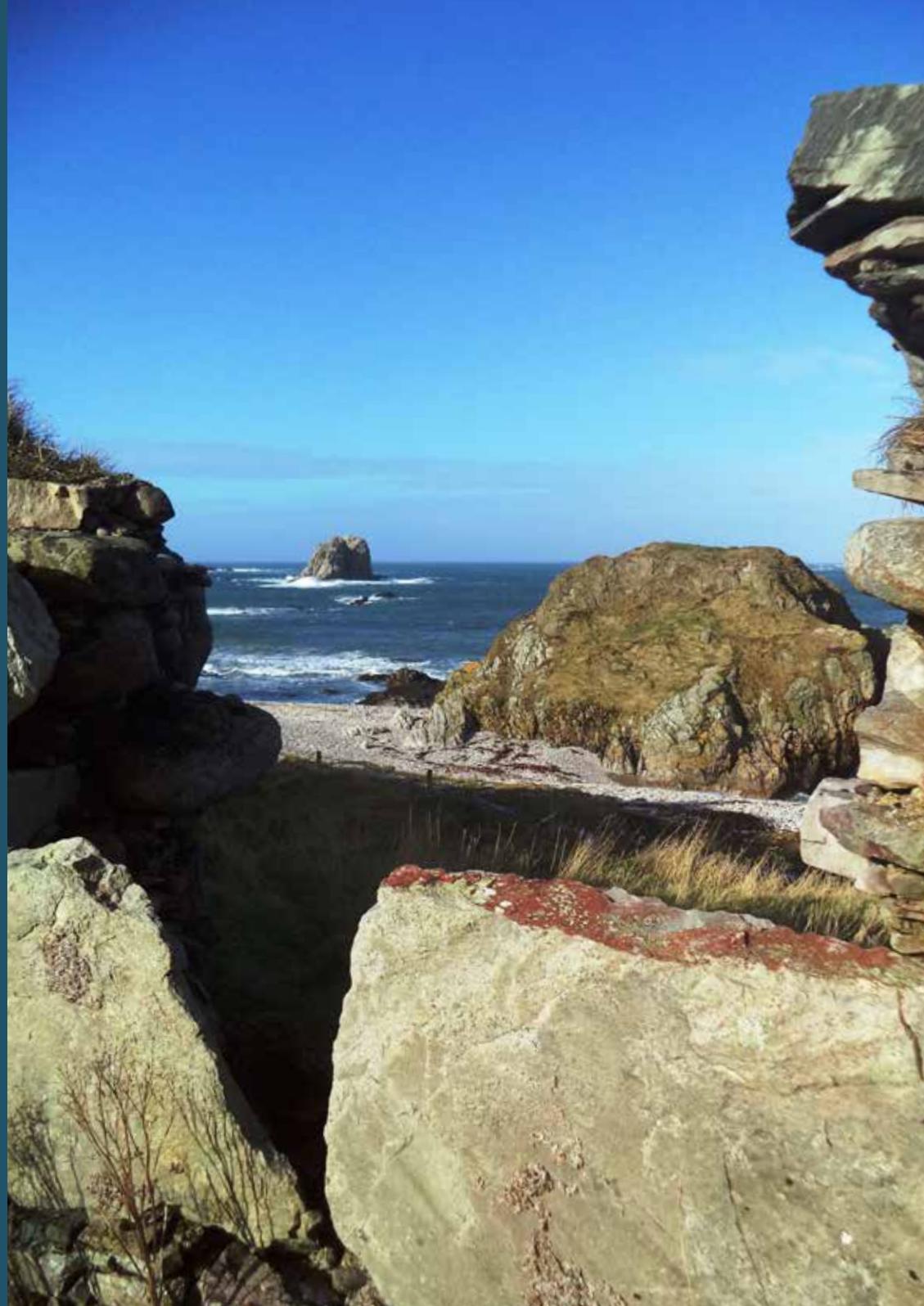
This site contains a number of informative historical articles



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