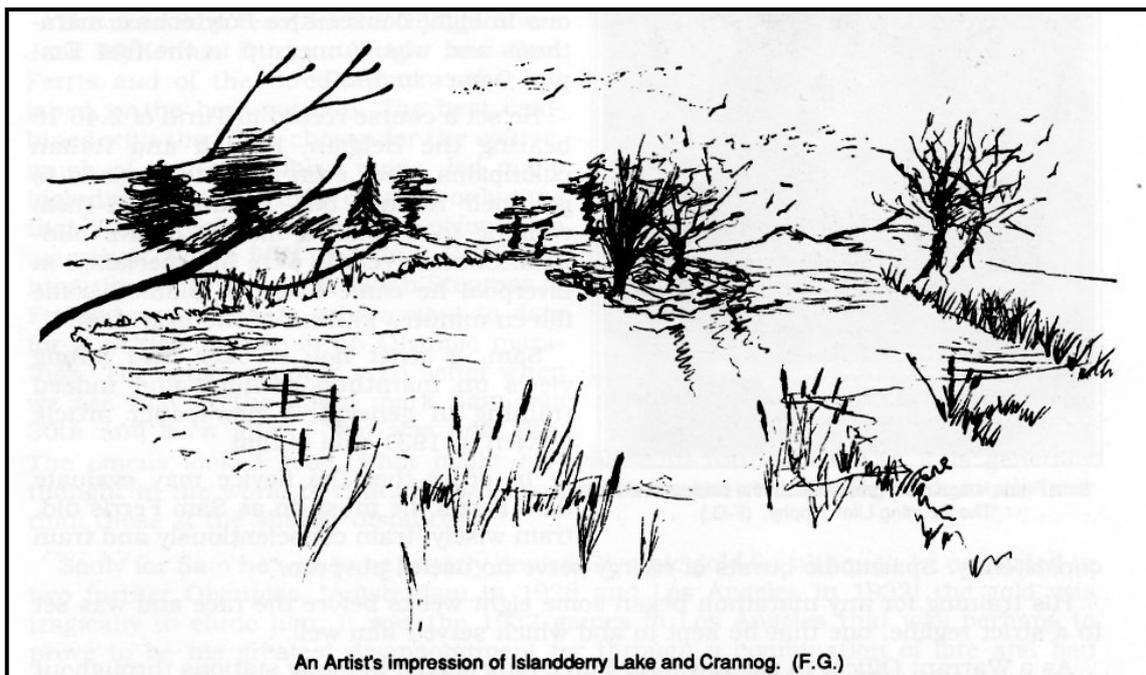


TALE OF A TOWNLAND BY MARTIN CAMPBELL

Extracts from a thesis written by Martin Campbell, Belfast in the Spring of 1992. The Townland of Islandderry lies 3 miles to the west of the town of Dromore.

One of the first signs of settlement in the area is the "crannog" in Islandderry lake - a man made island supported on oak beams and reached by a causeway. It was used as a place of safety by both man and beast. In the early 19th century a dug-out canoe and oars were found nearby. The lake itself was man made in prehistoric times and in the 17th century stretched to over 20 acres. Today, with constant drainage schemes it has been reduced to approximately 2 acres. Flowing across the north of Islandderry and dividing it from the neighbouring townland of Gregorlough is the Shankerburn, the main stream in the area, it flows into the lake.



Prior to the rebellion of the Irish Catholics of October 1641 the townland was the property of Art Oge Mac Glaisne Magennis. Following the defeat at the hands of Cromwell in February 1642 Art Oge had to forfeit his lands to the Crown.

The first proprietor was Alexander Woodall/Waddell from Moffat Hills in Lanarkshire, Scotland, who paid a quit rent of £5.13.4 to Art Oge

for 679 acres, 3 roods and 4 perches. This was the beginning of a long association between the Waddell family and Islandderry.

Alexander Waddell built Islandderry House on the site of a rath overlooking the surrounding countryside, across the Lagan, as far as the Mournes.



A sketch of Islandderry House. (F.G.)

A two storey building, it was built in a style similar to the peel houses of lowland Scotland. Interesting features of the house are a well in the basement and a reputed escape tunnel running from the house and coming up on the other side of the Lagan about a mile distant.

Alexander Waddal married Elizabeth Hamilton and over the next hundred years or so his progeny quietly prospered in the area. Thus the Islandderry estate came down through the Waddell family into the possession of Robert (b. 1752 d.1810). This description of him was given to Lord Downshire by Thomas Lane of Hillsborough with whom he, Robert, had had a serious difference of opinion "as garrulous as an ignorant and uninformed man may be". Robert's son James (b.1782 d.1859) fought under Wellington's command in the Peninsular War retiring with the rank of Major to Islandderry. He was responsible for the closing of the old county road and the building of the road round the lake - now the Lough Road - for which he was paid one shilling by the County.

Catherine Meade Waddell (b.1790 d.1869) also lived in Islandderry House at this time. A spinster lady, she undertook the building of the first, and only school house in the townland. Built 200 yards from the site of a former hedge school, it consisted of one large classroom and a further two living rooms for the teacher - a Mistress Mary Milligan.

In the second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry of 1826 one, James Murphy is listed as the Headmaster at an annual salary of £19.0.0.

It was a fee paying school of the Church Education Society and by 1858 had 56 children male and female, 22 of whom belonged to the Established Church and 34 were Presbyterian. The school cost £53 to erect, thirty pounds being donated by the Waddell family and twenty three pounds by the Church Education Society of Kildare Place, Dublin.

Since 1938 the building has been home to the Kilntown Orange Lodge.

On the 31st of October 1796 the Islandderry Yeomanry was formed with Robert Waddell as Captain. When they were disbanded in 1803, by which time James Waddell was Commandant, he was given two inscribed Irish silver two-handed cups "As a token of their respect, gratitude and esteem" One still exists in New Zealand - the other was stolen. Others named in the Yeomanry records are Wm. Boys, Jn. Magill, Joseph Hanna, Jn. Harrison and Lieut. Wm. Nicolson.

Although, at the time of the Art Oge land forfeiture the population of the townland was only 18 (16 Scots and English and 2 Irish), with the coming of the outside landlords there was an influx of people to farm the land. Many small farms were rented out by the Waddells, the main one being Islandderry Farm about 1.5 miles north east of Islandderry House on the road to Hillsborough. Originally comprising 295 acres it had grown by absorption of the surrounding land, until, in the mid 19th century it stood at 426 acres. Today it is 457 acres.

The Griffith Valuation of 1863 shows the townland supporting 19 small farms ranging from Mary Jane Waddell 117 acres to Samuel Gooley with only 2 acres. Other names listed as being tenant farmers are Poots, McMurray, Preston, Savage, Patterson, Colter, Isabella McAvoy, Beggs and Downey. Many of these names are now peripheral to the townland. As the land was fertile, with little or no bog, the main crops grown were barley, potatoes, turnips and corn. Any spare was usually taken into Dromore market.

Behind the old McCain house, there is a disused quarry. The rock, known locally, as pigeon rock, is a baked and hardened limestone - a poor marble. In more recent years it has been used for road surfacing although it would have originally been quarried to feed the lime burning kilns in the area notably at Moira and the aptly named Kilntown two miles from Islandderry.

The population peaked just before the famine in 1841 with 211 people in 34 families. Although the area was not directly affected by the famine (there was only one rumoured incident of a mother and child dying by the wayside above Shankerburn) the population began to decline. Along with other areas within a 30 mile radius of the city Islandderry began to feel the draw of industrial Belfast. People drifted towards it in search of work and entertainment. Many also emigrated to America, New Zealand, Canada and mainland Britain. Waddell's, McCains', Dempsters' all left.

Land purchase schemes, and in particular, the Northern Ireland Land Act of 1925 gave many tenant farmers the opportunity to buy their land. Those in Islandderry were no exception and so without an annual source of income from rents the Islandderry estate began to decline.

It was sold by Timothy Waddell to Mr. and Mrs. Bertie Wilson. At the beginning they lived in Alexander Waddal's old house but when they began to renovate it, it was discovered to be virtually beyond repair. A new family house was built one hundred yards away and Islandderry House now lies forlorn and derelict. The main staircase has collapsed, ceilings are down and the basement impenetrable. Mr. Wilson died last year and the estate is managed as a dairy farm, under the name Island Dairy, by his remaining family.

Islandderry Farm lay empty for many years supposedly due to local superstition that bad luck went with the ownership of the house.

Former owners include a Mr. McClelland from Banbridge and a Major Beaumont from Lurgan. It is now owned by Prima Farms, a large company whose land agent is Mr. Draffin of Dromore.

Although new houses abound Islandderry is no longer a close-knit farming community. Only three of today's residents were born in the townland. Many of the old homesteads are derelict, but a twenty-five minute drive, by way of the Hillsborough by-pass and the M1, brings you into Belfast. Islandderry has been transformed into perfect commuter land.