

Castle Robin

Castle Robin Fort in the townland of Mullaghglass, between Stoneyford and Lisburn, has a long-lost story that may surprise many.

In ruins for hundreds of years this ancient fortification in County Antrim, was once an



important site for defence and changed hands many times over the course of its turbulent history.

Archaeologists have discovered that this location was originally an ancient Celtic settlement comprising two ring forts. These forts, often known as raths, are particularly common in Ireland. It is estimated that the number of raths throughout Ireland is

around 40,000.

Although some sources incorrectly date them to the Bronze age, it is now accepted that they date back to around 500 – 1000AD.

A rath fort, generally constructed on level ground, consisted of a circular defensive wall of various sizes, either made of earth or stone. An earthen rampart around the rath would be reinforced with a wooden palisade. A settlement would then be safely enclosed within these defences.

FAIRY FORTS

For many years the remains of these raths were known to Irish folk as fairy forts. It was a general belief that after the defences had been abandoned, they became the meeting places for the Sidhe or the little people.

Fairy celebrations would also be held within the circular enclosures. It is said that if you held your ear to the ground, you would hear music and if you fell asleep with a rath the music would enter your soul.

However, to damage or demolish a rath or take away stones for building, would incur the anger of the fairies and incur severe punishment.

John de Courcy's conquest of the North

With the twelfth century Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland and John de Courcy's conquest of the north, this area was of significant importance. Lying in the lush Lagan Valley, the district had strategic value. Whoever controlled the river Lagan controlled the surrounding land, travel, communications and the important crossing points.

The O'Neills – 16th Century



During the sixteenth century the site of Castle Robin on the white Mountain became a stronghold of the O'Neill clan. The O'Neills of Clannaboy held large tracts of land in County Antrim. Their chief residence was at Edendaffcarrick, now Shane's Castle. They also had forts at Killyleagh and Castlereagh.

The position of Castle Robin in former times was considered one of some strategic importance. It gave the owner a good view of the enemy for some distance all round, from the hills behind to Lis-na Garvach in front, now Lisburn.

The fort was the scene of many a festive gathering in the good old times, when the O'Neill's, the O'Lynns, including the historic Brian, the O'Lavery's the O'Hagans and the O'Hanlons, with the Teagues of bohill and their cousins from Moyntaghs, near Lough Neagh, all met to talk matters over.

The construction of the castle

After the Elizabethan conquest of Ireland, the land was parcelled out to English supporters. The Norton Brothers, soldiers of the crown were rewarded with various prizes.

Fulke Norton the eldest was granted an estate in Templepatrick, now Castle Upton. Gregory Norton was put in charge of the English garrison at Carrickfergus. McSkinin records Capt. Gregory Norton as mayor of Carrickfergus.

The youngest brother, Robert, was given the old O'Neill castle in Mullaghglass. It is said that Robert, who was one of the Earl of Essex's captains, was awarded it on condition that he build a strong fortification on the site.

Description of the Castle

According to history, the castle was rebuilt in 1579. The three storey tower-house measure 84ft long and 36ft wide. The stone tower rose to a height of 40ft. The building was called Castle Robin, named as a diminutive of Robert.

The tower house at Castle Robin was one of the casualties of the 1641 Rebellion. It was burnt to the ground and never rebuilt.

The 18th Century

However the flat land around the ruins of Castle Robin was to witness further military display in the eighteenth century.

The plain was used as a parade ground and exercise yard for the Union Regiment of the Irish Volunteers whose headquarters were in Lisburn.

Castle Robin Today

Very little remains of this historic site that has been witness to so much conflict in the history of Northern Ireland

The motte while overgrown, still retains much of its original shape, however the tower-house now consists of a couple of broken-down walls shrouded in foliage.

