

Bangor (Hamilton)



Origins - Bangor is an ancient Christian and monastic site. In the early 1600s the ruined Abbey was one of the few buildings here. One account says that, after his jailbreak from Carrickfergus, Con O'Neill was hidden in the ruined bell tower before going to Ayrshire to finalise his deal with Hugh Montgomery. Montgomery's rival James Hamilton built a house at Bangor. In 1611, the Plantation Commissioners surveyed the town and wrote that "Sir James Hamylton, Knight, hath buylded a fayre stone house at the towne of Bangor... about 60 foot longe and 22 foote broade; the town consists of 80 newe houses, all inhabited with Scotysmen and Englishmen...". Bangor grew rapidly the earliest days of the Scottish settlements. On the monument to John Gibson, dean of Down, in Bangor Abbey, it is recorded that his congregation increased from 40 in 1609 to 1,000 in 1623.

Corporation - On 18 March 1612 [1613] Bangor received a charter of incorporation. This provided the basis for municipal government in the town. Bangor was also now a borough with the right to send two MPs to the Irish House of Commons in Dublin. The provost and twelve burgesses named in the charter were as follows:

Provost:

John Hamilton (most probably the brother of Sir James Hamilton)

Burgesses:

Sir James Hamilton

William Bailie

Patrick McDougall

William Cunningham

Cothered McDougall (probably the same as the Uchtred

McDowell who was provost of Bangor in 1615; in 1617

Uchtred McDougall received a grant of denization)

Robert Hamilton

John Ralston



John Hamilton

William Stephenson (in 1617 he received a grant of denization)

Alexander Blaire (in 1617 he received a grant of denization; in 1620 he was identified as a saddler, in 1625 he was a tenant of lands near Bangor)

James Blaire

Francis Austin

We can see that Scottish norms of local government were transplanted to Bangor in the early seventeenth century for two men, William Barclay and Thomas Bradshaw are known to have held the position of 'bailie', a Scottish term for a municipal magistrate.

Raven's maps - Thomas Raven drew a series of beautiful maps of Bangor and surrounding townlands for Hamilton in 1625, which are on display at North Down Museum. By this time Bangor contained some 70 houses and was divided into two separate sections, separated by a stream over which there was a bridge. Close to the bridge was a mill. To the west of the town there was a rabbit warren. Raven's map also shows a 'Ball Greene' to the north-east of the town, showing the Hamilton was concerned to provide for the recreational needs of the townsfolk. Hamilton also built the Tower House in 1637; Hamilton Road is named after him.

Churches - Between 1617 and 1623 the old Bangor Abbey church was rebuilt with the exception of the tower which survived from the medieval structure. To begin with this church was used by all Protestants in the parish, though after 1623 the minister here, Robert Blair, was a Presbyterian.

After 1661, and the emergence of the Presbyterian Church as a denomination distinct from the Church of Ireland, there arose a need for a dissenting meetinghouse.

Such a venue for public worship was built in 1668 at the top of Fisher Hill (now Victoria Road) during the ministry of Gilbert Ramsay. This was demolished the following year on the orders of Alice, Countess of Clanbrassil. This meeting must have been rebuilt some time after that and remained here until around the middle of the eighteenth century.

Bangor sundial - One of the most remarkable survivals from this period is the sundial that was formerly fixed to Bangor Abbey. This is today on display in North Down Museum. The sundial is made of slate and features some amazing inscriptions and carvings. It was the work of John Bonar. He was a schoolmaster in Ayr, but clearly he had other skills in the realm of horology. Another of his sundials survives at Kenmure Castle in Kirkcudbright. The Bangor sundial is dated 1630. At around this time he created this sundial, he wrote a poem on a voyage between Bangor and Ayr, perhaps the return trip from delivering his sundial.

Bangor Schools - Sir James Hamilton founded a school at Bangor not long after arriving there. This was one of a number of schools he established in the parishes under his control. In his will of 1616 he specified that the schoolmaster of Bangor was to be paid £5 per annum. Hamilton was particular concerned that the children of poor people would be given educational opportunities.



This concern was also shared by his son, the 1st Earl of Clanbrassil, who in his will of 1659 stipulated that the master of the school in Bangor was to receive £20 a year to enable him to 'educate poor scholars'.

The first recorded teacher in this school was John Watson who was here in 1620. His father-in-law had been a shipmaster and burgess of Irvine. In 1681 the schoolmaster in Bangor was John Gowdy. Describing the school in 1683, William Montgomery of Rosemount wrote: 'In the middle of this town is a large, lofted, slated house, which serves a master which teacheth Latin for a dwelling and the scholars for a school.'

First recorded Ulster-Scots settlers:

28 Nov 1617 - Daniel Adams

28 Nov 1617 - Alexander Blair

28 Nov 1617 - John Gemmil

20 May 1617 - Archibald Hamilton

28 Nov 1617 - William Hamilton

28 Nov 1617 - Robert Hogg (Ballyleidy)

28 Nov 1617 - James Howie

5 July 1617 - Paul Reynolds

28 Nov 1617 - Andrew Semple (Ballygrainey)

28 Nov 1617 - William Stevenson

28 Nov 1617 - John Wilson

(date tbc) - John Blackwood

1623 - Rev Robert Blair

1625 Raven Maps contain the names of Mr Austin / Alexander Blair / Saunders Hamilton / Saunders Blair / Archibald Dunlop / John Forsith / Gawn Hamilton / William Hamilton / Andrew Lindsay / James Logan / Ba..McGee / Alexander McLellan / John McLellan / Thomas McLellan / David Montgomery / Archibald Monett / James Nesbitt / Gabriel Pollock

See: Raven Maps at North Down Museum / Bangor Castle / Bangor Abbey