

Sandy Orr, one of the men commemorated in the Fishermen's Memorial, who died at sea aged 19.

7 Portavogie Harbour

The busy harbour was once known as St Andrew's, back when it was newly completed in 1910. It was deepened and improved in 1955, then again in 1985, when Princess Anne reopened it. The harbour size doubled, the berths deepened and an ice-making plant and fish market were built. The harbour has recently had a further £2 million renovation, and the new pontoons provide berths for further fishing boats, as well as some visiting vessels.

The old Coastguard station is on the other side of the road, opposite the harbour.

You'll find the Fishermen's Memorial just within the harbour. It commemorates the local men whose lives were lost at sea. Its sculptor, Colin Telfer, is from Maryport in the north of England, an area with strong links to Portavogie through the fishing industry.



Smiddy

8 Colourful Murals

To the right of the harbour, you'll see the George Best mural. The famous footballer lived in Portavogie in the years before his death, and locals remember him well. The wall mural beside it, at the harbour entrance, celebrates the village's maritime heritage, as do the murals at the local primary school.

9 New Harbour Road

Less than 100 years ago, New Harbour Road was just a cart track. It's now one of Portavogie's main roads. The sign Brandon's Brae, at the top of the road, is a tribute to the headmaster of the old National School. The cottages at the top of the road are around 200 years old. The Community Centre is a more recent addition, with its car park and post office. A fine public walkway runs behind the building, beside the play park.

Back in the 1920s, Portavogie had three blacksmiths, or forges. The one on New Harbour Road was known as 'The Smiddy', and the house and old forge still stand. Like the water pumps, the Smiddy was once a real focus for locals, and a great place to catch up on village news.

10 Skippers' Row

Just round the corner on the road to Cloughey, you'll find the main road lined with fine, well-established houses, known locally as 'Skippers' Row'. Skippers with thriving businesses built these in the heyday of the fishing industry.

11 South Shore, Green Isle & Bird Isle

Portavogie has a second lovely beach, known as the South Shore. Approach it from the village, behind the Quays Restaurant, or from along Cloughey Road. A sign indicating an Area of Special Scientific Interest marks both entrances. The jagged rocks here were once blasted to build the harbour.

From the shore, you can see Green Isle and Bird Isle, home to nesting terns. You can walk to both islands at low tide, but check the tide tables first!

On the shore is a small rock known locally as the 'Pig Rok' (rock), as it's shaped like a pig's back!

Looking out to sea towards Cloughey, you'll spot two markers. The one on the right is Kilwarlin, or South Rock, Lighthouse. It was first lit in 1797, and named in honour of Lord Kilwarlin, 2nd Marquis of Downshire, who supported its construction. A manned light vessel replaced it in 1877, which was automated in 1982. The lightship was decommissioned in 2009 and a navigation buoy replaced it, although the lighthouse on the South Rock still stands.

12 Fishermen's Paths

Approaching the port from the south, you might spot the traces of the old Fishermen's 'pads' or paths. Many walked from Cloughey and Ratallagh to work at the harbour.

13 Ratallagh & Ringbuoy Point

The car park at Ratallagh has picnic tables and great views. From here you can spot local wildlife, including seals and gulls, terns, oystercatchers, curlews, ducks and geese.

14 Kirkistown Castle & Plantation

This building dates from the 1600s and was constructed for Roland Savage. It is signposted just off the main road to Cloughey. The trees at the crest of the hill near the castle are known as the Castle Planting, and also date from this time. The castle is currently closed to visitors.

15 Kirkistown & the Bog Road

Kirkistown Race Track was once an airfield, and you can see the old airstrip from the road.

The Bog Road is home to the local legend of the ghostly 'Wee White Woman' at the Queen's Well. The lady is believed to have died in the snow close to the blue Portavogie sign. Stories persist that she haunts the road.

16 Cloughey

Heading south from Portavogie, you soon come to Cloughey. It's worth stopping at Cloughey Warren car park and strolling across the dunes along the boardwalk. The name refers to its history as a rabbit warren, where animals were once farmed and bred for food and fur. There was a warren at one time in Portavogie too. Although rabbit farming has long since ended, it's still a good spot to see wild rabbits.



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Portavogie Harbour

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Portavogie Heritage Trail

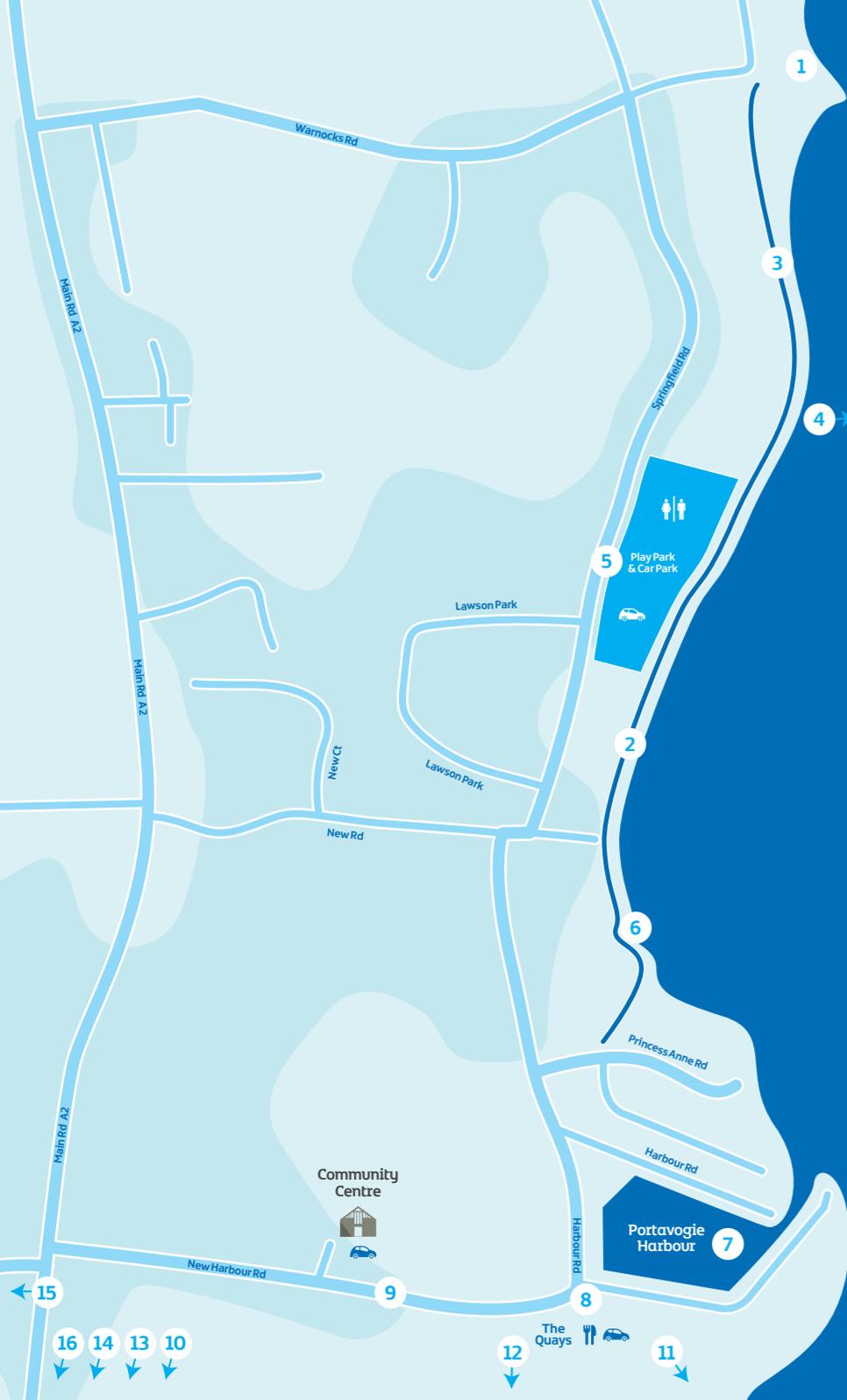


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This guide was produced in a collaboration between Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership, Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority, Ards and North Down Borough Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council as part of the Maritime Heritage Initiative.

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Portavogie Map

Key

- 1 Puddle Dyke, Stablehole & The Cove
- 2 The Prom (or East Shore)
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Please note that this map is not to scale and is for reference only

Portavogie Heritage Trail

Today, Portavogie is the second largest fishing port in Northern Ireland, after Kilkeel. The harbour is an important commercial hub of the fishing industry, and the village's name is well-known as the home of the famous Portavogie prawn.

Portavogie back in time

The village became an important maritime centre because of its location and the rich supply of superb seafood in local waters.

Stablehole was Portavogie's original settlement, and marks the start of this heritage trail. Scottish settlers arrived in the area in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. They favoured Portavogie for its sheltered shore where they could beach their boats. As well as the influential Hamiltons and Montgomeries, settling families included those named Cully, Palmer, Orr and Donnan, to mention just a few. A map of Portavogie drawn for James Hamilton's estate in 1625 shows no houses or buildings, and simply features eight rabbits! This area still has strong links to Ulster Scots heritage and language.



Fishing heritage

In the early 1900s, Portavogie had a large fishing fleet. These boats followed the fish as far as Kinsale in the south of Ireland, and to the west coast of Scotland and England.

Portavogie keeps its strong Ulster Scots identity and fishing is still at its core. Shellfish is the main catch of local boats, particularly prawns and scallops. The fleet currently stands at around 50 boats.

Many of these vessels are small, inshore potting boats, targeting crab and lobster around the coast. Others provide work for up to five fishermen each. Strong family connections in Portavogie mean that many crews have ties that go back for generations. It's not unusual to see groups of fishermen stretching out their nets along the quay and in the car park for a mending session.

From port to plate ...

Once the catch is landed at the harbour, it's either processed locally by one of several Portavogie businesses, or transported for processing further afield.

Fishing supports many different onshore jobs, including boat repairs, painters, plant hire and chandlers, which in turn boosts retailing and business in the village. Boatbuilding is a strong tradition, its strength drawn from decades of local expertise.

Seafood is one of County Down's most highly-prized exports. The celebrated Portavogie prawn features on many restaurant menus, locally and globally.



Exploring the heritage trail

This heritage trail runs from the northern end of the village at Stablehole and The Prom, to the South Shore, and beyond to Ratallagh on the Cloughey Road.

Two public car parks are useful for visitors – the Community Centre on New Harbour Road and the Anchor Car Park on Springfield Road. Both have children's play areas and the Anchor has public toilets.

Puddle Dyke, Stablehole & The Cove

At the northern end of Portavogie, you'll find a sign for Puddle Dyke, at the junction with Warnocks Road. Walk down the narrow Puddle Dyke and find Stablehole close to the sea. Farmers once brought their horses here, collecting seaweed to fertilise their fields. The Cove is also visible from Stablehole. This horseshoe-shaped inlet has a sheltered beach where fishermen used to beach their boats, long before using McCammon Rocks closer to the present harbour.

Further northwards out of the village, at the foot of Lemons Road, lies a small cluster of houses. These are close to the rock known as Butterlump Stone. Many years ago, another small harbour stood here. Stones from it were used to build a sea-defence wall, still visible at the edge of the gardens.

The Prom (or East Shore)

A public footpath runs along the beach at the East Shore, known locally as The Prom. From here, on a clear day, you can see the coast of Scotland, and the Isle of Man if you turn south-east. On particularly fine days, even the Scottish fields are visible. Notice the dip in the Isle of Man coastline - this is the site of Peel harbour.

From The Prom looking north towards Ballyhalbert, you'll also spot Ireland's most easterly point. This is called Burr Point, and Burial Isle lies near it, not far from the shore. Rumours of ancient treasure on Burial Isle have never been confirmed.

The Old Pump

Along The Prom, you'll find the last remaining water pump in Portavogie. Notice the inscription showing it was made in nearby Portaferry. The village pumps were once a real centre of social life, and locals got all their water from them. Portavogie Culture and Heritage Society recently restored this pump.



McCammon Rocks

The McCammon Rocks lie just out to sea from beach here, and you can walk to them at low tide. Years ago, fishermen anchored their boats on the rocks and punted into the shore with their catch, where horses and carts waited to receive them. Keep your eyes open for seals around the rocks – they're very common here.

Notice also the old fishermen's cottages along the shore. Many have been renovated over the years.

Anchor Car Park

Heading along The Prom towards the harbour, you'll find the Anchor Park. This car park has plenty of room for visitors' vehicles, as well as public toilets, a fantastic children's play park and picnic area. You can access the Anchor Car Park on foot from The Prom, or via Springfield Road.

Palmer's boatbuilding yard & old slipway

The site of this former yard is beside the old slipway, which stretches out into the water from the shore. This family-run business was once a hub of boatbuilding activity in Portavogie. Villagers also celebrate Eileen Palmer, who set up the Fishermen's Choir, which still thrives today. The founding fishermen in the choir all wore black sweaters, knitted by relatives. Poignantly, each garment had a unique pattern, ensuring that the wearer could be identified if they were lost at sea.