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View of Scrabo

Newtownards Walking Guide

 Strangford
Lough

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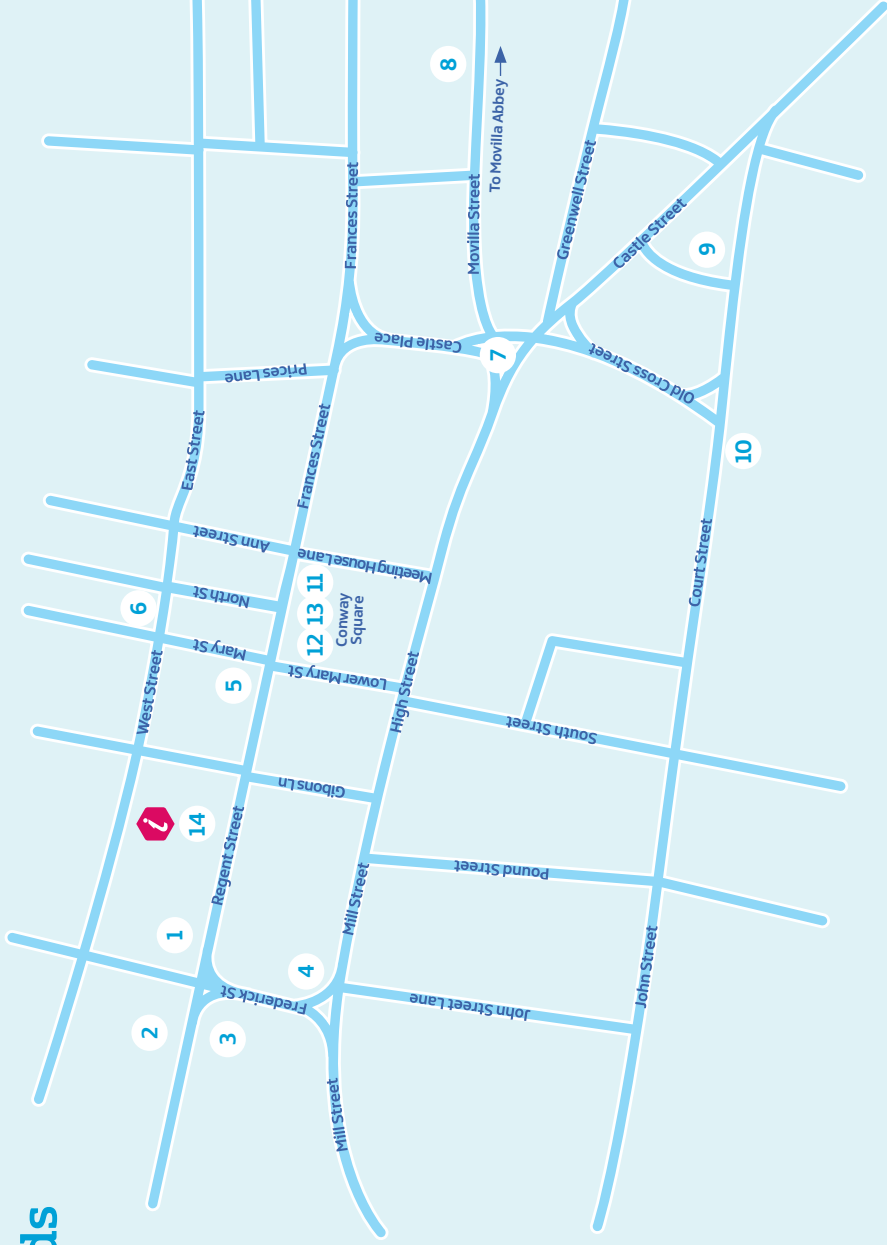


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Please note that this map is not to scale and is for reference only



Historical Walking Trail of Newtownards, Co Down

This tour begins at the Visitor Information Centre on Regent Street located beside the bus station (point 14).

The main route consists of flat concrete footpaths with pedestrian crossing opportunities. If you extend your walk please be aware of a gradual incline along footpaths with an uneven

surface over grass to the Movilla Abbey site. Please be aware when crossing the road and keep an eye out for traffic at all times. The tour will last approximately one hour. For your convenience, there are also public toilets and a wide range of cafes and restaurants in Newtownards.

We hope you enjoy learning more about the area. Be sure to look out for the other walking guides in the series. These can be downloaded from www.visitstrangfordlough.co.uk along with ideas on what to see and do in the area. We appreciate your comments and suggestions so please contact us via the website.

Just to set the scene, let's start with a little history about Newtownards

Location

Situated 10 miles from Belfast, Newtownards, nestling at the foot of the Craigantlet Hills, has Strangford Lough at its heart and overlooks the northern shores of the Ards peninsula.

Early Settlements

The first settlers in the area came from either North West England or the Isle of Man. They used the lough and its resources such as fish, seals and berries as their source of food. Finnian, a pupil of Saint Mochai who was converted by St Patrick, founded his own monastery at Movilla, to the east of Newtownards in 540AD.

Newtownards: Royal Charter

In 1613, King James I granted 'Royal Charters' to 40 towns across Ireland (14 now in Northern Ireland and 26 in the Republic of Ireland). The town of Newtownards was among them. While the original Charter has long been lost, an early Latin copy of the document does exist and an English translation reveals King James declared that, from 25 March 1613:

"the aforesaid town of Newtowne in the Ardes aforesaid and all and singular castles, messuages, tofts, mills, houses, edifices, structures, curtilages, gardens, orchard gardens, waste grounds, lands, tenements and hereditaments whatsoever lying or being in or within the said town of Newtowne aforesaid or in or within the precincts of the same town in the County of Down aforesaid henceforth be and for future times in perpetuity shall be an entire and free borough of itself by the name of the borough of Newtowne".

For the first time, the town of Newtowne held Borough status.

With it came the establishment of "a body corporate and politic" consisting of a provost and twelve burgesses – the equivalent of our current Mayor and Councillors.

The Charter goes on to name the first Provost of Newtowne as "Huge Mountgomerie, Knight".

Hugh Montgomery (1560 – 1636) was the Ayrshire Scot who along with fellow Scottish lowlander, James Hamilton (1559- 1644), made the crossing from Portpatrick to Donaghadee in 1606, bringing with them the first wave of Scots whose number would reach 10,000 in the course of the next few years.

They began the Royal-approved settlement of lands in the East of Ulster. The granting of the Royal Charter was a reward for the extent and speed of the settlement and Montgomery was made First Viscount of the Great Ardes on 3rd May 1622.

While Montgomery was named as the first Provost, the "first and modern twelve free burgesses of the aforesaid borough" were declared by King James to be "George Conigham, Patrick Showe, Patrick Mountgomerie, David Kenidie, Thomas Mountgomerie, William Mountgomerie, Robert Conigham, Robert Mountgomerie, Alexander Gordovne, James Doncan, William Callender and George Gibson".

The provost and burgesses had "the full power and authority to elect, send and return two discreet and fit men to serve and attend in every parliament in our said Kingdom of Ireland hereafter to be held". As well as this right to return two members to parliament, the new corporate body could also "hold a Court in





View from Scrabo Hill in Newtownards

some convenient and open place within the aforesaid borough”.

In the 19th century the Municipal Corporations Act (Ireland) 1840 was passed by Parliament and the new law dissolved all but 10 of the existing 68 boroughs in Ireland. The Borough of Newtownards was among them.

In March 1937, the then Newtownards Urban District Council took advantage of a change in the law brought about by the Municipal Corporations Act (Northern Ireland) 1926 and petitioned the Governor of Northern Ireland for the grant of a Charter of Incorporation which would see the town once again designated as a Borough. Following a recommendation by the Privy Council of Northern Ireland to the Governor, James Albert Edward, Duke of Abercorn, Newtownards was granted its Borough status by royal prerogative during the reign of George VI.

The status came into being formally from noon on the 23rd day of May 1938 when the first meeting of the new Borough Council was held and the first Mayor, Councillor W H Simms, was elected.

When 1973 brought local government reform in Northern Ireland, a district council whose area included an existing municipal borough could resolve to adopt the Charter of the old municipality and thus continue to enjoy Borough status. The new authority representing the Ards therefore became Ards Borough Council. The population now stands around 78078.

In 2015, following the Review of Public Administration, the 26 local government councils in N Ireland were reduced to 11, with Ards Borough Council and North Down Borough Council amalgamating to form Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Let's begin the walking trail



At the Visitor Information Centre, turn to your right and continue passing by the bus station.

1

Old Regent House

On your right, set back from the road, is a large building constructed in 1820 as a home for the owner of the town brewery, Peter Johnston. The building later became the first site of Regent House School. It takes its name from the "Prince Regent" who visited Newtownards to open Regent Street which is the main thoroughfare through the town.

Located on land given to Lord Montgomery by the King during the early 1600's, the old Regent House building is one of the few examples of Greek Revival architecture in County Down. It boasts many spectacular cornice ceilings along with a breathtaking ornate dome situated above a traditional split staircase.



Now continue along your route as far as the traffic lights and cross the road on William Street.

2

Saint Mark's Church

Saint Mark's Parish Church, "the prettiest building in the town" as classed in the notes to the first Ordnance Survey maps in 1832, was constructed of Scrabo stone in 1817. The building is a good example of Planter's Gothic architecture. It cost some £5446 to build. Scottish colonists worshipped in the Priory church on Court Street, then moved to Saint Mark's in the eighteenth century when the building was completed. To retain continuity, one of the windows of the Priory was re-constructed in the south transept of the new church.

The Londonderry family contributed to the cost of St Mark's and their family crest is carved above the west door. The weavers of Newtownards donated a rose window in 1868. The east window commemorates the fallen in the First World War and the baptistry was donated in 1966 as a memorial to Dame Edith Helen, Dowager Marchioness of Londonderry.



Now cross Church Street at the traffic lights and walk the short distance as far as the gateposts and large entrance.



3

Ards Hospital

[The Old Workhouse]

The dark grey building visible from the main entrance to the hospital constitutes the remains of the workhouse. It has now been renovated to become part of the hospital unit. Access to the workhouse is by permission only.

Opened in 1842 as part of the Poor Law Act 1838, the site was built to accommodate 600 people. Called the poor man's jail, the workhouse was one of 43 such establishments constructed in Ulster. It was a much regimented environment with males, females and children separated from each other on entry. Life was made as difficult as possible so that residents would

keep looking for gainful employment outside the walls of the workhouse.

However, despite efforts to reduce occupancy, the numbers swelled greatly during the Irish famine. Designed by George Wilkinson to hold 600 people, the workhouse held over 1000 residents at one point.

During the 20th century, the infirmary wing and fever block were put to use to treat any poor, sick person in the area and not just in-mates who were ill. In 1932 an Edinburgh doctor, Alexander Calder, took over the hospital expanding its facilities and capabilities and it gained a good reputation for treatment and care.



Retrace your steps to the traffic lights and cross Frederick Street, Follow the footpath as far as the roundabout.



St Mark's Parish Church, Newtownards



Scrabo Tower

4a

A view of Scrabo Tower

From this roundabout, joining Frederick and Mill Street, you can enjoy a view of Scrabo Tower, the most famous landmark in the area.

A competition was held in 1855 to select a design for a fitting monument on Scrabo Hill with a budget of £2000. This monument was to be built in honour of the 3rd Marquis of Londonderry. The actual designer of the tower, Charles Lanyon, came fourth in the competition but was selected because his design came within budget. The tower was then built in 1857 on the site of an iron-age fort and the architectural style is that of the Scottish watch towers once built along the border with England.

On March 6 1857 the foundation stone was laid along with a time capsule containing an inscribed scroll to the

late Marquis, copies of the national and local newspapers of the day, an Ordnance Survey map of County Down, a list of those who subscribed to the building of the monument (one of whom was Emperor Napoleon III of France) and coins of the realm.

The care of the tower remained in the hands of one family for more than 100 years. The last residents, the Millin sisters, Elizabeth, Jan and Agnes, ran a very popular tea room in it. The sisters were born in the Tower and were grandchildren of the first tenant, William McKay. Today the tower is managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and, at the time of writing, is undergoing remedial work so public access is not possible.

4b

Scrabo Hill

Scrabo Hill was formed as a geological accident. The earliest reference to the hill was as early as 1275 and named Scraboc from the Irish "Screabach" meaning rough or scraggy which is an apt reference to the thin soil covering.

Today the tower is managed by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and, at the time of writing, is undergoing remedial work so public access is not possible.



Turn the corner and walk along Mill Street until you reach Gibsons Lane. Walking past the bus shelter, continue back onto Regent Street by crossing at the lights.

5

Regency Gift House, Library (The Queen's Hall) and Open & Direct Building

Walk along this stretch of Regent Street and observe buildings of historical interest.

Georgian Regency Gift House

Regent Street became a prosperous area in which to reside during the Regency period of 1811-1820. Due to the illness of King George III, his son the Prince of Wales was appointed Prince Regent, hence the name. Developments during this time began to shape the town that we now recognise and much of this work was a result of activities undertaken by the Marquis of Londondery who had control of municipal affairs. It is thought that the gift house was built at this time.

Queen's Hall

The late Queen Mother placed the foundation stone of the Queen's Hall on 8th May 1958. The building is now also home to Newtownards library.

Open & Direct Building

On the corner with Mary Street this building, originally the Belfast Bank, became the Northern Bank in 1854 and still boasts a Belfast coat of arms high on the front façade. The Italianate architecture was designed by Charles Lanyon and bears close similarity to the edifices along the canals of Venice.



Now go around the corner into Mary Street and walk until you reach the junction with West Street.

6

Stream Presbyterian Church

The congregation of Stream Presbyterian Church was formed in 1865. The beautiful Gothic-style building made from Scrabo stone

can be found in the town centre of Newtownards. Its spire can be seen from miles around.



Retrace your steps back to Regent Street. Staying on the same side of the road as before, continue on and you will pass the Post Office. Cross the

road at the Ulster Bank and follow Frances Street past the offices of the Chronicle Newspaper and down the hill to your right.

7

The Market Cross

Newtownards has the only surviving 17th century market cross in Northern Ireland. Standing at the east end of High Street, it is an octagonal monument originally built in 1636. It had resembled a similar cross in Edinburgh by having a flat roof, on which there was a carved lion.

Plantation villages of this time tended to flourish or die. Newtownards grew rapidly into a market town. The market was of crucial importance to the town's prosperity and this was symbolised by the construction of a market cross. It represented, in stone, what the town stood for – trade, market economy, progress and civilisation.

However this golden age of progress was to be the calm before the storm. Newtownards was shaken first by a rebellion of local native Irish in 1641, then the market cross was destroyed by Cromwell's Commonwealth troops 17 years later because of the Montgomery family's allegiance to the royalist cause. It was rebuilt in 1666 with a conical roofed structure but never regained the esteem it once enjoyed. One major reason for this was that the commercial centre of Newtownards had shifted to Conway Square with its impressive Market House. It was considered a more elegant representation of the town's progress.



The Market Cross



If you want to extend your tour at this point you can continue to Movilla Abbey, located 1 mile east of the town centre. If not, please move to stop number 9, the War Memorial and Rose

Garden. To get there, cross at the lights at the bottom of the hill, follow Castle Street round to the left past the Old Cross pub and cross the road – take extra care on this busy road.

8

Movilla Abbey

[extended tour route]

Follow along Movilla Street, crossing George Street at the lights. Walk along Upper Movilla Street, which eventually becomes Old Movilla Road, as far as the gates of Movilla cemetery.

This hilltop was occupied by one of Ulster's most important early churches associated with the 6th century St Finnian. Plundered by the Vikings in 842AD it was refounded in the 12th century as an abbey and it adopted the Augustine rule, dedicated to St Malachy. This reflected a decision made by Celtic monasteries to seek closer integration with Europe. It served as a parish church of the area. Indeed, seven 13th century coffin lids with foliate crosses have been found around the building, built into the inside of the north wall. Shears indicate a woman's burial, and a sword for a man. The church was extended in

the 15th century and survived until the suppression of religious houses in the 1540's. Only one stone survives the pre Norman period: a slab with a sharply cut ringed cross and an inscription in Irish asking for a prayer for Dertrend, "or do Dertrend."

All that remains of the monastery today is an undivided chancel and nave, 107 feet long and 20 feet wide, dating from the 13th and 15th centuries respectively. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1541, James McGuilmore, the last abbot, surrendered the lands and tithes to the crown. They became part of the territory claimed by the Clandeboye O'Neills. The stone buildings were burned in 1572 to prevent a fledgling English settlement developing. The sacred history of the site has been recognised in its continual use, for many centuries, as a cemetery.

9

The War Memorial and Rose Garden

This quiet corner of Newtownards was originally the town centre until 1636. Note the date of 1613 on the memorial, a reminder of the date of the granting of the town charter. As part of the charter permission was granted to hold 3 fairs every year and to this day, a harvest fair is held in September as designated by King James I.

This green area, known as the "bowling green" belonged to the Marquis of Londonderry who gave the land as a free gift to the town. The war memorial was built in 1934 and commemorates residents of the town who were either killed or went missing during the First and Second World Wars.



Walk through the garden and exit on Court Street. Take care when crossing the road.

10

The Newtownards Priory

The Priory constitutes the ruins of a Dominican Friary founded in 1244 by the Savage family. They were followers of John de Courcy who brought the Dominicans from Dublin and Drogheda. The priory was originally 96ft in length and 24ft wide and 1 storey high with various additions over the years.

Known as the Black Priory, owing to the black mantle worn over the white habit, the Dominicans were a mendicant order whose sole responsibility was to take the message of the gospel to the people. National conferences of the entire order were held on the site in both 1298 and 1312. Interestingly, Juventus and Newcastle United soccer teams who both wear black and white strips were formed by the Dominican orders!

The Priory was destroyed by the O'Neills in 1572 to prevent Queen Elizabeth I from planting an English settlement in the area. The structure lay dormant until the Scottish plantation of 1606-1609 when Hugh Montgomery restored, extended and lived in the building for a time. When Saint Mark's opened in 1817 the Priory lost its status as parish church in the town.

Access to the interior is restricted and opening is by special arrangement only through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Crossing back over Court Street at the island, the route now takes you back towards the main shopping street in Newtownards which is a myriad of long established independent traders including department stores and boutiques.

At the Danske Bank cross over High Street and head towards Conway Square. For the next stop, the Blair

Mayne statue, look to the right of the Town Hall building.

11

The Blair Mayne Statue

Blair "Paddy" Mayne was a pupil at Regent House School in the 1920's and 1930's. A powerful athlete, he played rugby for Queen's University and was later capped in six international games. He also won the amateur heavyweight boxing championship of Northern Ireland as a student. During the Second World War this famous son of the Ards thrilled the world with his daring exploits behind enemy lines in Europe and the Middle East.

As one of six co-founders of the newly formed Special Air Service (SAS) he was responsible for some of the most intrepid forays in the Allied campaigns. They operated in hostile territory,

raiding airfields and blowing up planes. It is said of Blair himself that, in one lightning attack, he personally destroyed 47 enemy planes. Sadly, after the wartime years, Lt Col Blair Mayne met his death in tragic circumstances in a car crash in Newtownards. The bronze statue reflects the breadth of his character, not only a man of action but of reflection, carrying his favourite poetry book.

Blair Mayne was a highly decorated soldier and held four distinguished service orders, Legion d'Honneur and Croix de Guerre. One of these orders was awarded when he was a junior officer which was considered highly impressive.



Now look to the left of the Town Hall building, just across from the Blair Mayne Statue and you will see the TT monument.

12

The Ards TT

From 1928 to 1936, the Tourist Trophy (TT) motor races took place on a road circuit encompassing Dundonald, Newtownards and Comber. At the time it was Northern Ireland's premier sporting event regularly attracting crowds in excess of half a million spectators and was described as one of the most exciting road races in the world!

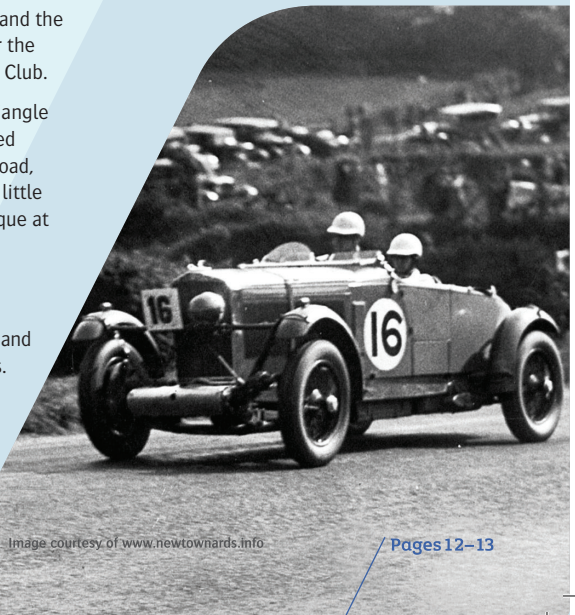
The Ards TT was the culmination of much thought and enthusiasm by two people. One was the legendary Harry Ferguson, the other was Wallace McLeod. McLeod was the head of the motor engineering school at the Belfast Technical College. The men were helped in their dream by the fact that (unlike the rest of the British Isles) the law in Ulster enabled roads to be closed off for motor racing. In 1927 the two men visited a race at Brooklands and persuaded some of the drivers that, if they could find a suitable Ulster road circuit, then they would participate. The venue was found and the six hour race was organised under the auspices of the Royal Automobile Club.

The circuit was in the form of a triangle 13.7 miles in total. The race started at the pits on the Newtownards Road, Dundonald. In fact, there is still a little commemorative building and plaque at that spot to mark the location.

The cars then set off towards Newtownards via Quarry Corner then up and over Bradshaw's Brae and into Conway Square, Newtownards.

Then the cars left Newtownards and roared along the straight road to Comber. That section was the fastest part of the course. The following section passed around the notorious "Butcher's Shop" corner in Comber and along the Belfast Road to the hairpin in Dundonald. This hairpin was also the end of the tram line from Belfast so it was here that many city folk made their way to watch the racing. Then from the hairpin it was back to start the circuit all over again.

The first driver to complete 30 laps of the circuit was the winner. However on September 5th 1936, in wet conditions, Belfast driver Jack Chambers lost control of his car and crashed into the crowd in Newtownards killing eight spectators. This tragedy brought an end to nine years of racing over the Ards road circuit.



13

Ards Arts Centre

Ards Arts Centre (Market House) is steeped in history. The ground floor of the building acted as a market for local traders. There was also a “lock – up” cell with grilled windows around which were grooves reputed to have been made by the fingers of prisoners! The upper storey contained an assembly room, now called the Londonderry Room.

The Market House was seized by the United Irishmen, on their way to the Battle of Saintfield during the 1798 Rebellion. By the end of Sunday 10th June the whole of North Down and the Ards Peninsula was in the hands of the rebels. When the authorities resumed control by the end of the week a period of savage reprisals ensued. Rebels were rounded up and imprisoned in the cells below the Market House to await judgement and execution by hanging. By the end of the 19th century the building was used more as a typical Town Hall than a court or market house. The Town Hall was given to the



town commissioners in the 1900's as a gift by Lord Londonderry.

Today the building is home to Ards Arts Centre, where a variety of artwork is regularly exhibited and is open to the public.

Conway Square in which the town hall sits was named after Lady Sarah Frances Seymour – Conway, daughter in law of Alexander Stewart, who established Mount Stewart.



Exit Conway Square to the left of the Town Hall and walk back along Regent Street to the Visitor Information Centre and to the final point on the tour.

14

The Visitor Information Centre & Ards Crafts

This building used to house the town brewery. Originally the brewery sat behind the Dominican Priory in Court Street and was built by the Colville family who became landlords in Newtownards from 1675 until 1744.

As part of the development of Regent Street, Robert Stewart moved the

brewery in 1819 to its present location. The rear of the building still shows evidence of the original stonework. By 1837 more than 7000 barrels of beer were being brewed annually at this location.



Ards Visitor Information Centre

Have you ever called into Ards Visitor Information Centre? If not, whether it's your first time in this part of the world or you live nearby, we would love to see you! Located in Newtownards, just beside the bus station, the Centre is your first port of call for local and national information on attractions, activities, accommodation, events and much, much more. The Centre has a large range of guides and leaflets on many visitor facilities throughout Northern Ireland and friendly staff waiting to help you find the best ways to spend your time in this wonderful part of the world.

There are lots of hidden gems waiting to be discovered on your doorstep and further afield - best of all many are even free! Our staff are armed with all the information you need to get the best value for your money whether looking for a day trip, overnight stay or short break away.

We also hold events guides for Northern Ireland's large attractions and museums such as The Opera House, National Trust properties & the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum. Our events board is ever changing, with posters for local events and activities.

We can help you get from A to B with maps for sale, souvenirs of your visit and a vast array of local books. The Centre is also home to Ards Crafts which stocks a wonderful selection of locally handcrafted products.

For further information, please get in touch:

Ards Visitor Information Centre
31 Regent Street
NEWTOWNARDS
Northern Ireland
BT23 4AD
☎ 028 9182 6846
@ ardsvic@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

visitardsandnorthdown.com



The Visitor Information Centre



visitstrangfordlough.co.uk

For more information contact any of the following Visitor Information Centres:

Ards Visitor Information Centre

31 Regent Street
NEWTOWNARDS
BT23 4AD
☎ 028 9182 6846
@ ardsvic@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

Bangor Visitor Information Centre

Tower House, 34 Quay Street
BANGOR
B20 5ED
☎ 028 9127 0069
@ bangorvic@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

(Seasonal office Easter – end August)

Portaferry Visitor Information Centre

The Stables, Castle Street
PORTAFERRY
BT22 1NZ
☎ 028 4272 9882

(Seasonal office Easter – end August)

Cockle Row Visitor Information Centre

The Harbour, Main Street
GROOMSPORT
BT19 6JR
☎ 028 9127 2269



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