

BELLAGHY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



TIRKANE SWEATHOUSE
Located about three miles NW of Maghera

This unusual dry-stone structure was used to cure fevers and pains up to the end of the 20th Century. It was probably constructed in the 16th-17th Century and many similar sites around the country were built in the 18th and 19th centuries. In Germany, these sites are known as Irish baths and this suggests that Irish Missionaries who travelled to Europe in the Dark Ages introduced sweathouses to that country.

A fire of turf or wood was lit inside the structure and the entrance was closed so that the heat built up and the stones became very hot. Then rushes were spread on the hot floor and water thrown on the stones to produce steam. The patient then sat in the sweathouse for as long as possible before emerging to bathe in a nearby small stream. It is only one of five such monuments in the country.