

Hidden gems and Forgotten People

GLENS OF ANTRIM HISTORICAL SOCIETY & CARRICKFERGUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



RUINS OF ACCOMODATION AND DINING HALL FOR PEAT DIGGERS FOR THE AMMONIUM SULPHATE PLANT AT CARNLOUGH.

The ruins are situated on the high moorlands amongst the hills about two and a half miles to the west of Carnlough and can be accessed by following the Cranny River along Whitehill Road towards the source of the river. These ruins suddenly appear and dominate the skyline looking like remains of an isolated monastic settlement in this beautiful but desolate landscape.

In the early 1900s two gentlemen, an American, CW Mottram, and a German, H.C. Woltrick discovered, after some research, that the peat in the area was particularly rich in ammonia. After some preparations and setbacks, a firm called Chemicals Ltd in about 1902 began to exploit these reserves of peat that contained other chemicals as well as ammonia. The ruined building was principally a dining hall to feed the army of peat diggers and around this were hutments to provide sleeping accommodation for the numerous labourers many of them tramps that came from beyond Carnlough. It must have been a considerable complex. Wagons drawn by a steam engine brought the peat from the workings after it dried to a two-mile overhead ropeway, whose concrete and metal anchor points are still visible. This was constructed to convey the peat in buckets down to the processing works in Carnlough. Here the peat was apparently reacted with caustic soda and the resultant gas passed through sulphuric acid to produce ammonium sulphate, a nitrogen rich fertiliser. All that is left on the moors are the ruins of the dining hall.

This very promising industry that gave a great deal of employment was abandoned in 1908, due it is thought, to a lower content of ammonia in the peat that was practical for them to use. After only six years of operation most of the equipment was sold off leaving only the shell of the accommodation, as well as the concrete foundations of the processing plant in Carnlough. The long aerial ropeway was dismantled in 1920.

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PHOTO: Cameron Kane (CDHS)