

## Hidden Gems and Forgotten People

### CARRICKFERGUS AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



#### **BALLYNASHEE (THE TOWNLAND OF THE FAIRIES) NARROW GAUGE RAILWAY STATION**

**(The Wall to The right of the building masks the entrance to the former road tunnel)**

*To find, take Rashee Road (B94) from Ballyclare, then Sawmills Road at the five corners, at first cross roads turn left into Ballynashee Road and stop at junction with Braepark Road. Looking down from the humped back former Rail Bridge you will see the station.*

This unprepossessing redbrick building with a modern corrugated roof is one of the few remnants left and reminder of an important railway system that was not only commercially important but also a social necessity for the area that stretched from Retreat near Cushendall to Larne, 48 miles away. There were branches to Ballyclare and Doagh. Ballynashee was the highest station on the network being 202 meters above sea level. The system was built in the first instance to carry iron ore from the mines west of Cushendall in North Antrim to Larne for shipment to the Scottish steel mills and later developed also for the carriage of passengers and goods. So in the late 1880s, in its heyday, this station would be busy with both freight and passenger trains stopping there and with trains with wagonloads of ore passing through en route to Larne. During this period narrow-gauge lines served so many small communities throughout Ireland. Gradually, during the first half of the 20th century the motorcar, bus and modern road freight transport together with the decline in the iron ore traffic radically reduced the traffic that was the lifeblood of this railway. By 1940 the system was shut down, the rolling stock was transferred to the County Donegal railways and the rails ripped up; most of the rails were later shipped to Normandy to help the transport logistics associated with the allied liberation of Europe in June 1944.

The station building is used to store gardening equipment and some household goods. Recently there was an item in the local press that carried the tragic story of the Ballyclare man whom, after a particularly convivial night out with some friends, got out at Ballynashee late one evening by mistake and was murdered not far from this station back in the 1930s! Some of the more elderly locals would tell you that on occasions in the dead of a dark misty night the sound of a ghostly train whistle is heard from a phantom locomotive labouring up the valley towards Ballynashee! And the sound of the Banshee.