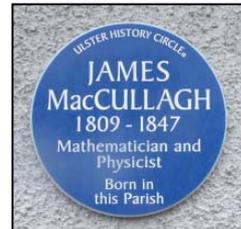# ULSTER HISTORY CIRCLE

JAMES MacCULLAGH (1809-1847)

James MacCullagh, the eldest of twelve children, was born in the townland of Landahussy in the parish of Upper Badoney, Co. Tyrone in 1809. He was to become one of Ireland and Europe's most significant mathematicians and physicists. He entered Trinity College, Dublin aged just 15 years and became a fellow in 1832. He was accepted as a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1833 before attaining the position of Professor of Mathematics in 1834. He was an inspiring teacher who influenced a generation of students, some of whom were to make their own contributions to the subjects. He held the position of Chair of Mathematics from 1835 to 1843 and later Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy from 1843 to 1847. In 1838 James MacCullagh was awarded the Royal Irish Academy's Cunningham Medal for his work 'On the laws of crystalline reflexion'. In 1842, a year prior to his becoming a fellow of the Royal Society, London, he was awarded their Copley Medal for his work 'On surfaces of the second order'. He devoted much of the remainder of his life to the work of the Royal Irish Academy. James MacCullagh's interests went beyond mathematical physics. He played a key role in building up the Academy's collection of Irish antiquities, now housed in the National Museum of Ireland. Although not a wealthy man, he purchased the early 12th century *Cross of Cong*, using what was at that time, his life savings. In August 1847 he stood unsuccessfully as a parliamentary candidate for one of the Dublin University seats. He was devoted to his country but was profoundly critical of the lack of national self-respect that he saw about him.

His failure to win the Dublin University seat for the Liberals, combined with overwork on his researches, contributed to his death by suicide on 24 October 1847. His body lies buried in the family vault at St Patrick's Church, Upper Badoney, County Tyrone.

Location of plaque: St. Patrick's CoI Church, Upper Badoney, Plumbridge, Co Tyrone

[*The Ulster History Circle erects blue plaques in public places throughout the province to commemorate people who have made a significant contribution to the community locally, regionally or in the wider world. Not all are well known and many have been forgotten in the place where they were born or worked.*]