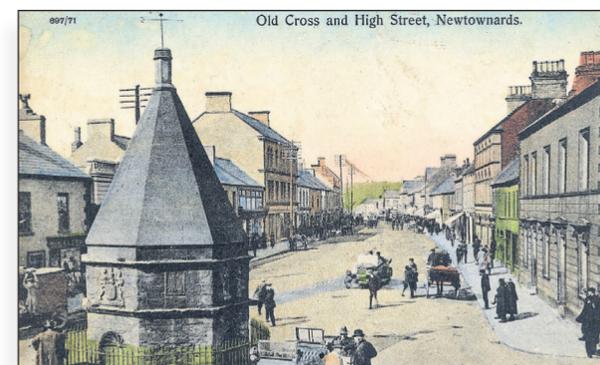
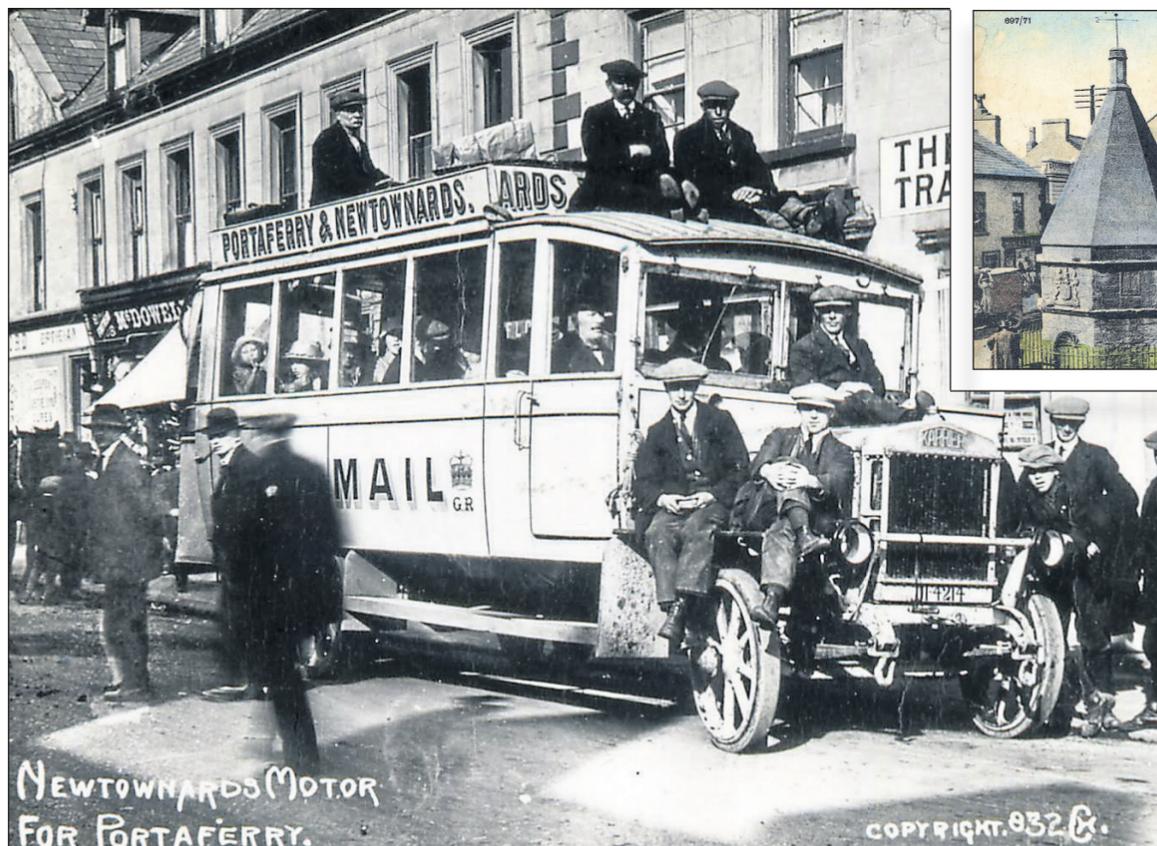
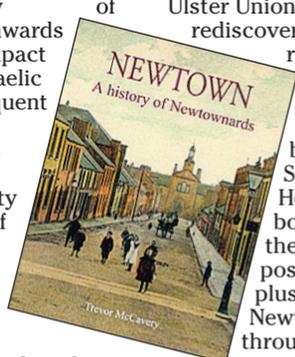


Ards down the ages

Trevor McCavery's acclaimed book *Newtown: A History of Newtownards* has just been revised and updated in a new commemorative edition. **David Roy** spoke to Dr McCavery about exploring 9,000 years of the Co Antrim town

ORIGINALLY published in 1994, Trevor McCavery's book *Newtown: A History of Newtownards* instantly became the go-to reference work for anyone interested in the origins and evolution of the town. Stretching from the Middle Stone Age to the present day, the book begins with a fascinating account of the Co Down town's Mesolithic and Neolithic origins. Dr McCavery charts the establishment and rise of the great Celtic monastery Movilla from 500AD onwards before covering the impact of the Normans, the Gaelic revival and the subsequent Scottish Plantation. The author, who holds a doctorate in History from Queen's University Belfast and has himself lived in Newtownards for the past 21 years, goes on to chronicle the dynastic turmoil and political unrest of the 18th century – including the 1798 Rebellion when a United Irish 'army' bent on revolution attacked and set up camp on Scrabo – and the growing market town's gradual expansion and industrialisation in the 19th century, post Regency renovation and Famine. Dr McCavery also examines the predominantly Presbyterian



■ DAYS GONE BY: Left, waiting for the Portaferry bus to leave. Hand-painted postcards from the first decade of the last century show, above, High Street, Newtownards circa 1900 with Ulster's only surviving 17th century Market Cross – wine flowed from its spouts on days of celebration; and below, Conway Square at around the same time. The Union Jack belies that fact that there was also a strong and long-standing tradition of radical liberalism in the town

town's image as a stronghold of Ulster Unionism, in the process rediscovering a tradition of radical liberalism first cultivated by its aristocratic landlords, the Londonderrys, based at Mount Stewart. He concludes the book with a look at the first, second and post World War periods, plus an account of how Newtownards developed through the Troubles to the present day.

The Newcastle, Co Down-born teacher spent 12 years as head of history at Regent House School, where he subsequently served as headmaster from 2007 until his retirement earlier this month. Having authored several other historical works since the book's original publication, Dr McCavery

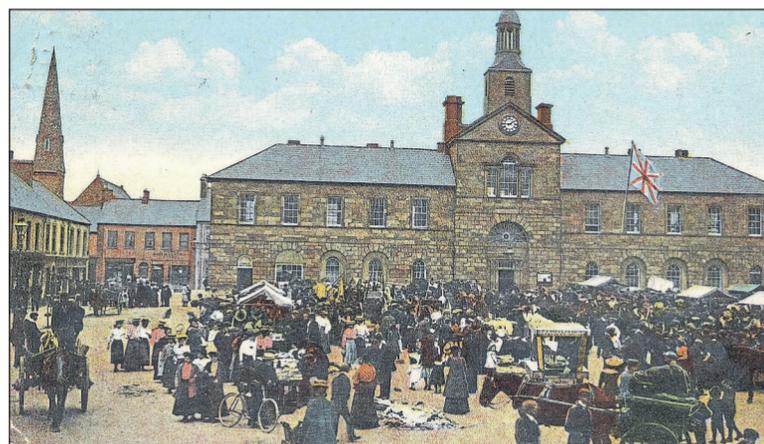
is delighted that Newtown has recently been reissued in a new enhanced 2013 Commemorative Edition to mark the 100th anniversary of Newtownards being granted its royal charter. "The book has been updated with a lot of colour added," he enthuses. "There were also a few little corrections which I was able to make." Our foremost expert on all things 'Ards admits that the settlement's uncertain prehistoric origins presented a challenge when writing the book. "It's not really until you get to the

written sources that you're on solid ground," he explains. "And even with them then you can't always be sure of their authenticity." This is particularly true of Newtownards's important ecclesiastical heritage. "When you're talking about the Celtic monastery of Movilla (St Columba's alma mater), there are an awful lot of stories associated with the founder, Finnian, about what was supposed to have happened. "You have to be careful – but the basic facts are there: Movilla was

illustrious and one of the four main Christian centres in Ireland. "There's no doubt about the reality of the monastic settlement and how important it was." As readers will discover, the author expertly interweaves educated supposition with historical record to great effect. "A lot of people have said to me that they really enjoyed the early chapters," reveals Dr McCavery. "It sort of opens up a world that they don't often get a chance to glimpse into." However, for the writer himself, it is a period long after Movilla was attacked and burned by the Vikings which proved most intriguing. "The whole stereotype of Newtownards being solidly committed to the Union really wasn't the case until the very end of the 19th century," he explains. "You had the Tenant Right movement and event the Tenant farmers of the 1880s who were Home Rulers - that sort of thing fascinated me. "I'm still not sure that aspect of the town's history is fully appreciated today."

Of course, anyone who spends a bit of time with Dr Trevor McCavery's highly readable and attractively illustrated book will always be able to set the record straight.

■ Newtown: A History of Newtownards by Dr Trevor McCavery is out now published by White Row. Buy online at Whiterow.net.



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Dr Trevor McCavery

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