

## BayBurn Historical Society – Secretary’s Annual Report for 2024-25

To finish our 2023-24 season we had our annual outing, to The Balance House near Glenavy which is run by the Ulster New Zealand Trust. The house is the birthplace of John Balance, (1839-93) the Premier of New Zealand, who founded NZ’s great reforming Liberal party, ensured that women could vote, a world first, and 25 years before the UK. The exhibition was most interesting, and hard to leave to continue our day by visiting Antrim Castle Gardens.

Our 35<sup>th</sup> season opened in September 2024, with our guest speaker Mr. Eric Woods, who gave us an enthusiastic talk on “The Silk Roads” as he described not one, but several routes of trade through China, Indonesia, Uzbekistan and Kurdistan.

October brought a return of Mr. John Witchell the retired estate manager, for Lady Dufferin & the Clondeboy Estate. His talk on The Blackwood Family, from the 1880’s with photographs where possible was enlightening.

In November Moira O’Rourke, Heritage Development Officer for North Down Museum, gave a talk on the restoration of the Gun Powder Store at the Moat in Donaghadee. The Store was conserved and restored in 2021, and is now home to the only accessible Camera Obscura on the island of Ireland.

In 2025 the January speaker was Mark Doherty and he gave a very interesting talk on Lord Pirrie, Chairman of Harland & Wolff, & a man of influence. He and his wife gave of their time and money to help their community, and were responsible for the building of the Royal Victoria Hospital.

In February Alison Murphy came from Portaferry to relate the town’s ship building industry, and showed photographs of the shoreline with the various firms who were engaged in the activity. Portaferry was at that time a charming, bustling town, which as well as the shipbuilding also had a brewery. Ships set sail from there to Newfoundland with people seeking a new life.

March was a non event as our speaker double booked himself, and although he did arrive late in the night, most of our members had gone home. I must again apologise for this wasted evening. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the committee on my behalf, when I was ill last year, especially Carol, Pat & Richard who got the programme of speakers and circulated it to all members.

8<sup>th</sup> May 2025

Sandra Martin, Secretary