

The Ards and North Down area has rich connections with the two World Wars. From the Battle of the Somme links with Clondeboye in the First World War to General Eisenhower's inspection of the troops in Bangor prior to D-Day in 1944, there are many sites of interest where you can learn how the Borough played its part in both conflicts.

We hope you enjoy the World Wars Trail.

For further information on the trail, additional sites of interest and general information please visit: [visitardsandnorthdown.com](http://visitardsandnorthdown.com)

Or contact:

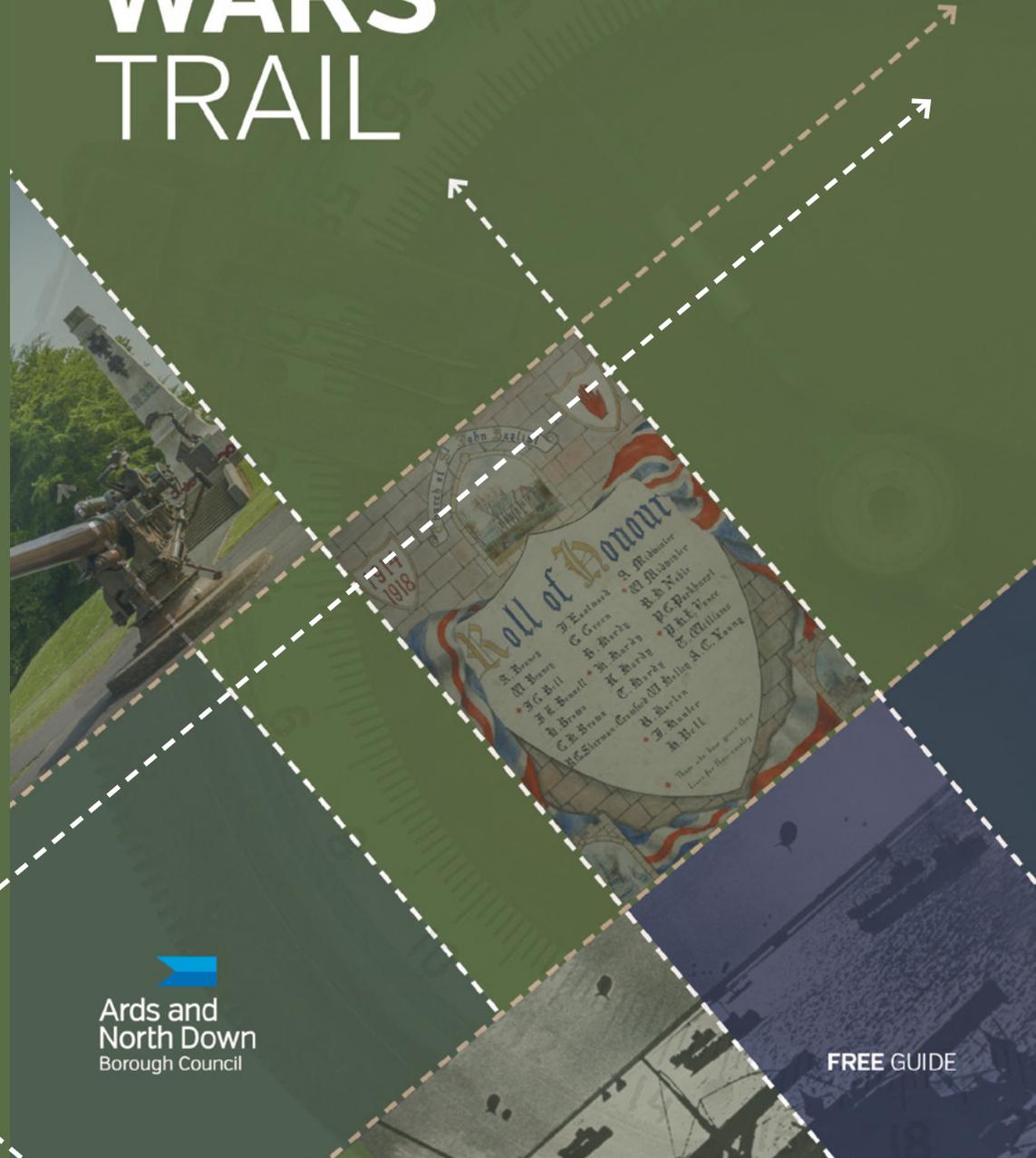
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Newtownards BT23 4AD  
028 9182 6846  
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Bangor BT20 5ED  
028 9127 0069  
[bangorvic@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:bangorvic@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

**NB** This booklet provides the visitor with information on key sites of interest which are open to the public. It also refers to others where access is either limited or not permitted, please check first.

Ards and North Down

# WORLD WARS TRAIL



  
Ards and  
North Down  
Borough Council

FREE GUIDE

The area has rich connections with the two World Wars. From the Battle of the Somme to the D-Day landings in 1944 there are many sites of interest where you can learn how the Borough played its part in both conflicts.

### The First World War

Although it was not a legal requirement, vast numbers of men from Ards and North Down volunteered to fight in the British Forces, especially the Army in units such as the Royal Irish Rifles. There were important training camps at Holywood Palace Barracks, Grey Point Fort (for artillerymen) and particularly at Clandeboye, where the iconic 19th century Helen's Tower provided the model for the later Memorial Tower at Thiepval in France.

It is estimated about 1,300 men from Ards and North Down died while on active service in the Great War.



### The Somme Museum, Helen's Tower and Clandeboye Estate

The Somme Museum at Conlig sets out Ireland's role in the Great War. It houses a re-creation of First World War trenches, much military memorabilia from the period, exhibitions and a café. It emphasises the extent to which volunteers came from all sides of the Irish community.

The Museum and Tower are located within Clandeboye Estate, known as Clandeboye Camp during the First World War. The grounds were used for training by the 36th (Ulster) Division prior to their embarkation from Belfast for England and then to France.

Helen's Tower was built by the First Marquess of Dufferin and Ava in loving memory of his mother Helen Selina Sheridan. A more sombre association with the tower however, is the replica built in Thiepval. This tower was erected, through public subscription, in memory of those from Ulster who lost their lives in the Great War. Many of these men spent their last days training in the estate of Clandeboye under the shadow of Helen's Tower. This building was dedicated on 19 November 1921 and was inscribed with a slightly altered version of Lord Alfred Tennyson's original poetic dedication for Helen's Tower.



### The Victoria Cross

In the First World War three Victoria Crosses, the highest military award for gallantry, were presented to local men:

- Edward Barry Stewart Bingham for the Battle of Jutland on 31 May 1916
- John Spencer Dunville for actions near Épehy on 26 June 1917
- Edmund De Wind in the Spring Offensive on 21 March 1918

Dunville lived at Redburn House in Holywood but the stable yard alone remains. Only Bingham survived.

### The Second World War

Once again, many local men volunteered to fight overseas, but this time soldiers, sailors and airmen from outside Northern Ireland, including America and Poland, also came to train or serve here. Although the Borough did not suffer as badly as Belfast in the Blitz in spring 1941, five civilians were killed by German air raids in Bangor, 13 soldiers at Newtownards airfield and 11 crewmen on SS Troutpool which was sunk by a German mine off Bangor.

### Grey Point Fort and St John's Church (Helen's Bay) and Crawfordsburn Country Park

The well-preserved Grey Point Fort was a crucial part of the coastal defences for Belfast and the Lough for 50 years after its completion in 1907. Although no shots were fired at enemy ships, over 100 officers and 3,000 men were trained here to serve with the Artillery in the First World War.



In addition to the two huge guns and a 25 pounder, the Fort also contains an extensive collection of military memorabilia, including many Second World War military radios and receivers.



Grey Point Fort is located in the picturesque Crawfordsburn Country Park, which accommodated a temporary US Army camp during the Second World War. You can still see Crawfordsburn House, now converted into apartments, which once housed some of the men.

St John's Church, within walking distance of the Fort, has an interesting range of First World War memorials, with the individuals' stories described in a booklet in the church.



### Mount Stewart and Newtownards Airfield

The historic Mount Stewart House (owned by the National Trust) played a part in both Wars as a military hospital. In the Second World War the Headquarters Company of the Royal Engineers were based there too but it also has some connections you may not have thought likely.

In the lead up to the Second World War some more "unusual" visits connected to Mount Stewart took place. Lord Londonderry, cousin of Winston Churchill and a former Secretary of State for Air, flew to Berlin in 1936 attempting, in vain, to reason with Hitler and other senior Nazis.

Later in the year Lord Londonderry welcomed to his home German ambassador Joachim Von Ribbentrop, who landed at Newtownards along with several SS soldiers. A striking 18 inch Meissen statue of a helmeted

SS stormtrooper holding a flag is a reminder of the visit. Whilst not a Nazi sympathiser, Londonderry's futile crusade meant that he was ever afterwards classified as an appeaser and he lost favour with Churchill.



In the grounds of the estate, some of the trees bear carvings that appear to have been made by soldiers and airmen stationed in the grounds during the Second World War. One carving looks to have been by a Royal Air Force airman in 1940, while another reads 'Victory is Ours, RAF'.

There were three active airfields across the Borough in the Second World War, of which Newtownards is still commercially operational today. In April 1941, 13 young soldiers (one aged just 16) from the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were killed in a German air raid on the site. The airfields on this side of Northern Ireland mostly housed fighter and training squadrons. Limited ruins can also be seen at Ballywalter, while runway lighting and control tower remains can be found at Ballyhalbert. There are also memorials to individual airmen killed in accidents.

Training flights took place along Strangford Lough and if walking there today you may still find spent shells from these aircraft on the shore.

### North Down Museum, Bangor Castle, Eisenhower Pier, Ballyholme Beach and Ward Park

Bangor Castle, now the Borough Council headquarters, served as a military hospital during the Second World War and a local contingent of the Ulster Home Guard drilled in the grounds. Once the family home of the Bingham's, a blue plaque, by the front door, marks the Castle as the birthplace of Rear Admiral Edward Barry Stewart Bingham VC OBE, while a commemorative stone in the garden recognises him as a recipient of the Victoria Cross. Others of the ten children of Lord and Lady Clanmorris served with distinction in the Great War. Gerald Bingham was killed in action 8/10/1918.

The adjacent North Down Museum houses a fascinating exhibition on both Wars including the original Victoria Cross awarded to Barry Bingham for his actions at the Battle of Jutland, alongside personal items. There is also a small scale replica of the 'Lone Sailor' sculpture, presented to Bangor in recognition of those who offered American GIs a "home away from home".



Before departing for the D-Day landings on the beaches of Normandy in June 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower inspected 30,000 American soldiers and sailors. They gathered in three huge US Navy battleships (the Nevada, Texas and Arkansas) in Belfast Lough. He also visited the Naval Headquarters in Bangor's Royal Hotel. The main pier was renamed Eisenhower Pier after him and has a

commemorative mural. The nearby Ballyholme beach was used as a training ground for landing craft.

A public air raid shelter still stands in Ward Park, a reminder of one of the raids on the town. Nearby Bangor Golf Club has a print of James Beadle's historic painting of the attack at the Battle of the Somme by the 36th (Ulster) Division on 1 July 1916; it was damaged by shrapnel from a German bomb dropped on the night of 15 April 1941 (the night of a major bombing raid on Belfast). A Second World War pill box can also be found on the course.

### Memorials

There are many memorials across the Borough commemorating those who died in both wars, as well as individual servicemen's graves. Some of the finest public memorials include:

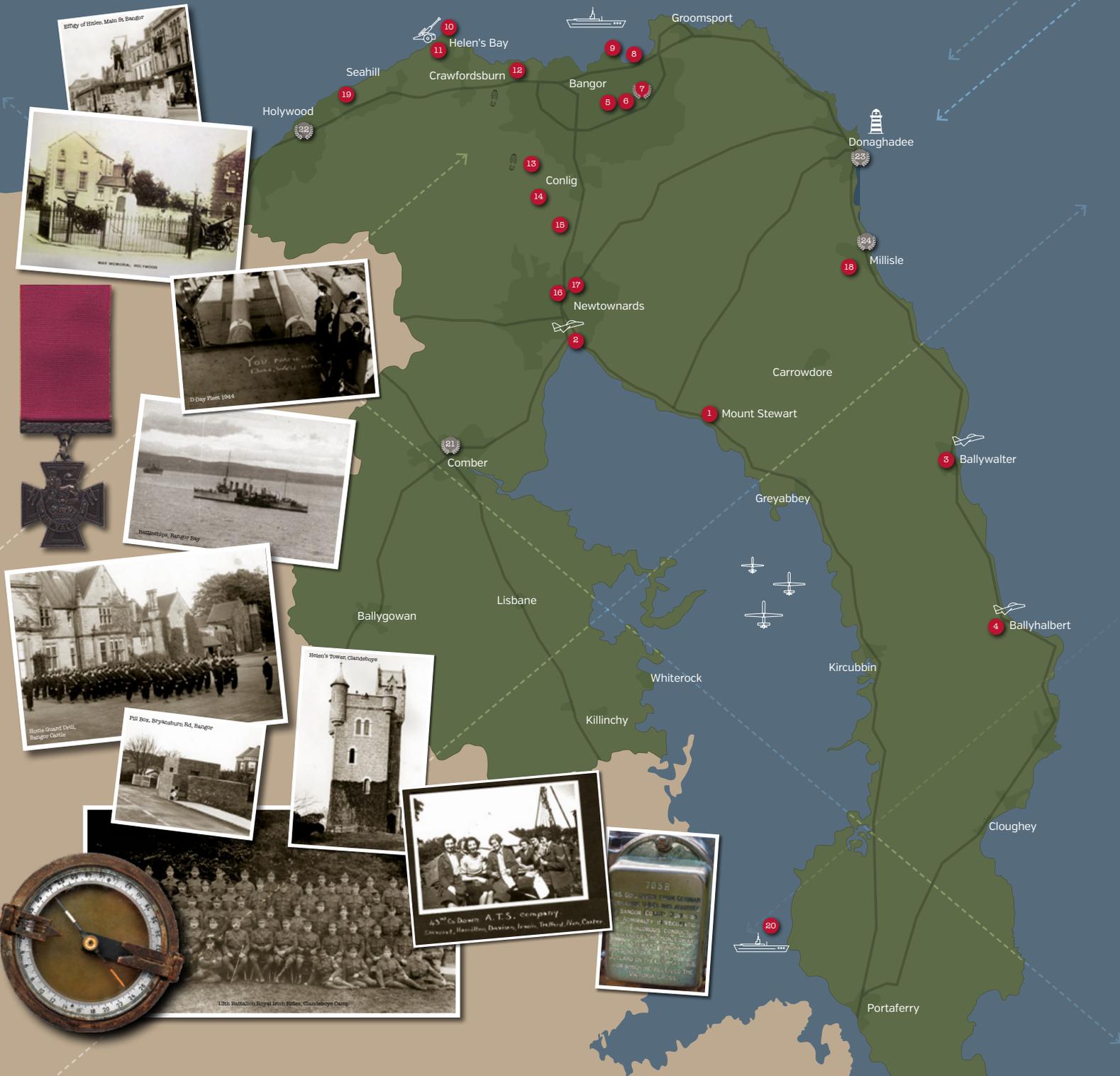
- The gun from a First World War German U-boat in Bangor's Ward Park (presented in honour of Barry Bingham VC)
- The statue of much decorated, Second World War SAS leader Blair Mayne in Conway Square, Newtownards
- A commemoration of the soldiers killed at the airfield, Court Square, Newtownards
- War Memorials in Comber Square, Redburn Square (Holywood), and Donaghadee
- A Holocaust Memorial Garden which can be seen at the entrance to Millisle Primary School.



### Other Points of interest

- Ballyrolly Farm outside Millisle (limited access), which was used to house over 300 Jewish refugee adults and children from 1938 to 1948
- Cultra railway station which featured in a 1942 propaganda film, A Letter from Ulster, about US soldiers in Northern Ireland
- The remains of SS Empire Tana, visible at low tide at Ballyhenry Bay, Portaferry. Originally Italian, she was captured by the Allies and used as part of the Gooseberry Breakwater on 'Sword' Beach for the D-Day landings

Throughout the Borough there are various remains of war time buildings and structures, including air raid shelters, POW camps, look-out posts and pill boxes that still remain today. See website for further details.



### Points of Interest

- 1 Mount Stewart
- 2 Newtownards Airfield (operational)
- 3 Ballywalter Airfield (remains)
- 4 Ballyhalbert Airfield (remains)
- 5 Bangor Town Hall
- 6 North Down Museum
- 7 Ward Park
- 8 Ballyholme Beach
- 9 Eisenhower Pier
- 10 Grey Point Fort
- 11 St John's Church
- 12 Crawfordsburn Country Park
- 13 Clandeboye Estate
- 14 Helen's Tower
- 15 The Somme Museum
- 16 Conway Square
- 17 Court Square
- 18 Ballyrolly Farm
- 19 Cultra Railway Station
- 20 SS Empire Tana (remains)

### Memorials

- 21 Comber Square
- 22 Redburn Square
- 23 Donaghadee
- 24 Holocaust Memorial Garden

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