



Ballygally Castle. From the south. The castle is described as 'a living postcard—a charming, almost teal-colored Scottish baronial castle overlooking the sea in Northern Ireland'.

Carncastle & Ballygally, County Antrim

The small sept of the Agnews, or O'Gneevs, occupied the extreme southern part of the lands of the Bissets. They, like the Bissets, had strong connections to Galloway and they may have come over with them to Ulster in the 13th century. They were certainly there in the 15th century, when they were attached to the O'Neills of Clondeboy, and the parish of Cairncastle was part of their lands. The earliest centre for this estate was probably sited at the motte and church of Carncastle, about two kilometres west of the coast at Ballygally.

The Agnews/O'Gneevs were probably responsible for constructing a stone tower on rock, accessible over a rocky little promontory, just off the shore at Ballygally Head. Little of it survived in the early 19th century and even less of it does today. The south-west angle is the biggest bit and two other corners give the plan.

The grant which Randal MacDonald received from King James in 1603 included the parish of Carncastle. He granted it to James Shaw of Greenock, probably before 1613. He built a tower in the Scottish style at Ballygally, a rather more sheltered and accessible location than Carncastle on its rock. He probably used the stones from the older tower for his new one. Externally the tower is notable for the roofline, with high gables and two Scottish rounds. The bawn wall, with its little angle turret, may be a 19th century conceit. The tower is an L-plan with a projecting turret at the northern angle, which housed the door and stair to the upper floors. The door has a continuous moulding and a date stone of 1625 with the arms of the Shaws. This turret is now enclosed by a later extension and the whole has been converted into a hotel. A plan and section published in 1901 shows it to have had four storeys internally, none of them vaulted.



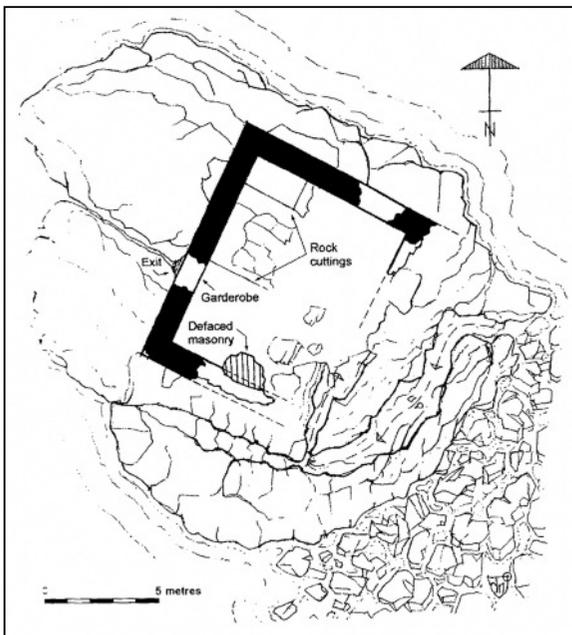
Ballygally Castle. The date of 1625 inscribed over the lintel of the doorframe with its strong and fashionable bolection moulding. The stairs have some of the widest winders of any vice-stair in Scotland, matching Falkland Palace.



Ballygally. The tower house from the south.



Carncastle. A fortified islet 1 kilometre along the coast from Ballygally. BELOW: Plan after Johnson, 2003.



Further reading

C. Porter: 'Ballygally Castle', in *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* (2nd series), 7, 1901, pp. 65-77.

D. Newman Johnson: 'Carncastle, a fortified islet on the north-east coast of Co. Antrim', in J. R. Kenyon & K. D. O'Connor (eds.): *The Medieval Castle in Ireland and Wales*, 2003, pp. 217-381

See also Listing description:
<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/content-databases/buildview?id=1230&js=true>.