

Introduction

Global Derry ~ Londonderry



Water is one of the great connectors of peoples throughout the world. The river Foyle has brought many peoples to our shores and has also sent many away. Indeed the city that lies on a beautiful bend in the Foyle owes its very existence to the ancient waterway.

We know that the earliest human colonists of this land, the hunter-gatherers of the Mesolithic Period (c. 7,000 BC to c. 4,000 BC) travelled into the interior of the island on these waterways.



Waves of settlement and colonisation followed by assimilation but often conflict. In medieval and early modern times the Foyle serves as a water highway into the heartlands of Gaelic Ulster and was one of the avenues by which this territory was eventually conquered by the English during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

The location of the port of Derry-Londonderry so far to the west and in the middle of a huge river catchment, was of immense importance to its growth as a point of embarkation and destination, especially for transatlantic trading and emigration ships of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The city's influence has travelled far and near and not just across the Atlantic but across the globe. The name has now spread to the four corners of the earth and can be found in the most unlikely of places. But, first the name itself

The city has been variously known as Daire Calgach, Dhoire Cholmille, Londonderry and Derry, as well as a number of other variations of these names. The common element linking them is an Irish word, Daire or Doire (anglicised as Derry) referring to an ancient oak grove. Oak trees probably arrived in Derry about 5,000 years ago as part of the ongoing changes in vegetation and forest cover following the Ice Age. The Derry oak grove gradually acquired ritual significance and this eventually resulted in the naming of Derry after the distinctive oak grove on the hillside overlooking the Foyle.

Indeed one of our first emigrants, Colmille (also known as Columba), whom many credit with founding the Early

Christian monastery has a strong folk connection with the oak. Speaking from his monastery on the island of Iona in the Scottish Hebrides, Colmille is supposed to have said: Though truly I'm afraid Of death itself and Hell I'm frankly more afraid Of an axe-sound, back in Derry.

Many places can claim to be historic but Derry-Londonderry can truly claim to be given the sheer length of its history and of people coming and going from its riverbank. Derry-Londonderry has been a frontier place throughout its long history, always located on the edge of the territory of one population group or another. This frontier characteristic of the city and surrounding area has always gone with the people who left its shores. Sometimes that transition was not an easy one or even a positive one as the trade in human beings and displacement of the indigenous peoples tore them away from their communities and robbed them of their sense of place and individuality.

People do follow resources - good agricultural land, timber, the potato, flax and linen, coal and even gold itself are all part of this story. They in turn bring their own resources with them. But our greatest resource is the people themselves and the culture, skills, history and heritage that they brought with them. These skills vary, from the gift of oratory to printing, shipbuilding to aviation, weaving to distillation. This community memory is what matters most and endures to this day across this great planet that we call home.

Derry-Londonderry can rightly say that it has achieved global status in name and in spirit.

