

FREE

# A wee bit of maritime history... 7



## The Andrew Nugent

**The Reverend John Orr witnessed many events during the great maritime boom in Portaferry.**

About the launch of the *Andrew Nugent* in 1826 he wrote:

*'The great trade of our town was shipbuilding. Vessels up to 400 tons burthen were constructed. Notice having been given that a very beautiful vessel of 300 tons would be launched from the*

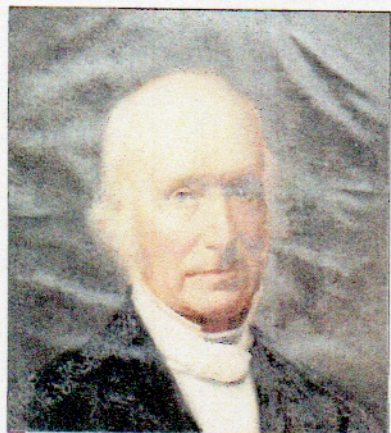


*shipyard of Mr. Thomas Gelston at one o'clock, the fineness of the day, and the novelty of the scene collected together an immense assemblage. On the signal being given the 'Andrew Nugent' glided majestically into her native element amidst the cheers of thousands of spectators.*

*I never saw so many people in Portaferry on any occasion. In the evening about 30 gentlemen sat down to dinner in Mr. Gelston's. I had the honour of being one of the party.'*

Read on to discover the tragedy which struck the *Andrew Nugent*. Find out more about John Orr too.





**For 53 years John Orr was the minister of Portaferry Presbyterian church.** He was born at Ballybean, Co. Down in 1796 and came to Portaferry in 1822. There he met and married Jane Eliza McCleery, the daughter of the merchant, James McCleery, and granddaughter of Thomas McKibbin of 7 High Street, Portaferry. John and Jane lived in McKibbin's house and had nine children.

John Orr was responsible for a large number of innovations in his church and served in many organisations in Portaferry and beyond.

In 1823 he began the practice of reading the scriptures in public services.

He introduced the practice of reading an address at the graveside.

In 1865 he introduced the 'weekly offering.'

He visited his parishioners day in and day out, knew minute details of their families and the name of every child in his congregation.

He risked his own life by visiting others during the cholera epidemic of 1832.

He served on 4 committees connected to the Synod of Ulster.

He served on 14 committees in connection with the Presbyterian Assembly.

He was the Moderator of Presbytery four times and once Moderator of the Synod of Belfast. He was also clerk of Bangor Presbytery.

Rev. John Orr introduced a savings bank—known as the 'Portaferry Penny Bank.'

He also, together with the Parish Priest, started a Temperance League whose members promised never to touch spirits. Beer and wine were permitted! Orr was the patron of Portaferry National school which was erected, opposite the church, in 1849.

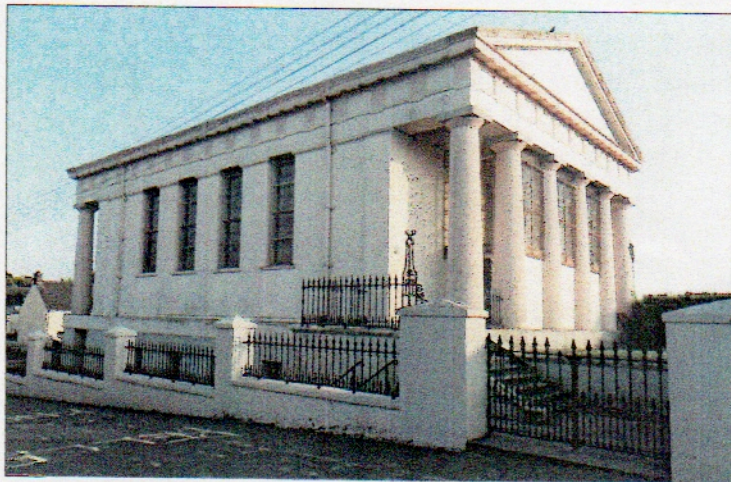
It was said that he was a painstaking and energetic preacher, spoke truth fearlessly, had few equals and none could lay blemish on his character.

After 53 years of service John Orr retired in 1875. He died in 1878 and all denominations in the district attended his funeral.



Portaferry had one of the first Presbyterian congregations in Ireland and was founded in 1642. The original site was at Templecranny and then moved to the present site. The original Meeting House was rebuilt in 1751 as a plain T-shaped barn but needed further work in 1839 after it was seriously damaged in the "Night of the Big Wind" on 7th January.

The Rev. John Orr engaged the brilliant young architect, John Miller, who designed the present neo-classical building based on the ruined Temple of Nemesis in Greece. It took less than two years to complete and cost £1999.12s6d - this being met by the congregation and neighbours of all denominations. Raw materials were transported by horse and cart from Scrabo and Orr supervised every detail of the building. It was opened by the noted evangelical Presbyterian, the Rev. Henry Cooke, in September 1841.



In Portaferry, Orr also carried on the classical school which had been founded by a previous minister, Rev. Steel Dickson. A Blue Plaque on the church commemorates him. Dickson joined the Society of United Irishmen in 1791 and was a consistent advocate of Catholic emancipation. Reputedly he was Adjutant General of the United Irish Forces in Co Down. He was arrested two days before the rebellion of 1798 and imprisoned in Inverness until 1802. With the vacancy at Portaferry having been filled, Dickson was installed in Keady. He then lived in Belfast, dependent on charity from his friends.

William Steel Dickson died there in 1824, in much reduced circumstances.



## Loss of the *Andrew Nugent* 1839 – Aranmore Island

On the night of the 6th January 1839 a storm for the ages hit Ireland and left such an indelible mark that “the Night of the Big Wind” or “Óiche na Gaoithe Mór” in Irish, is still recalled today, over one hundred and eighty years later.

Without warning, a wind of fearsome ferocity began pounding the country, from north to south and from east to west. It reached a peak and hurricane strength around midnight and blew hard until 6a.m. the following morning, Monday 7th January.

The wind receded as quick as it struck, but left a trail of mass destruction in its wake. There was significant loss of life from collapse of buildings onto inhabitants, boats sank and even fish were blown onto the shore. One of those unlucky ships was the *Andrew Nugent*, a 164 ton sailing vessel, lost with its entire crew and a local pilot. A total of fourteen men perished in this tragedy. The ship had left Sligo with a cargo of butter bound for London. Whilst seeking shelter in the islands around Aranmore, the ship was wrecked and sunk.

The Captain, a man named Crangle\* and a local pilot named Tom O Donnell battled bravely to save her in those last unfortunate hours but their efforts were in vain against the power and might of the wind. Both were lost in the tragedy. (*Tales and Sceals.wordpress.com*)

\* Captain Hugh Crangle was reared in the townland of Tara, 2 miles from Portaferry. Together with William McCleery Jnr, he was part owner of the *Andrew Nugent* which had sailed from Sligo to North America, principally Quebec., for over a decade.

### **The *Andrew Nugent***

Builder	Gelston, Portaferry	Build Date	1826
Material	Wood	Tonnage	164
Dimensions:	76 ft long:	22 ft breadth	14ft depth
Rigging style:	Brig	2 masts	