

## Ballymacarrett AD 500 - 1700

At the opening of recorded Irish history in the 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, the beginning of the Early Christian period, the east Belfast area seems to have lain in the petty-kingdom of the Ui Blathmac, who were part of the Dal Fiathach or Ulaid overkingdom. This territory gave its name to the medieval and later deanery of Blathwick, which included Knockbreda parish. There were other more obscure tribes or subdivisions in the Belfast Lough area. The 11<sup>th</sup> century 'Book of Rights' mentions the Breadach tribe, whose name survives in that of the parish of Breda or Knockbreda. Other tribes like the Crotraidhe 'of the fleet' and the Ui Dearca Chein also seem to have been located nearby.

In the medieval period, the Anglo-Normans conquered south Antrim and north Down. The Belfast area was part of a division of the Earldom of Ulster known as county or 'bailiwick' of Carrickfergus (containing much of south-east Antrim), while the area on the opposite side of the Lagan was part of the Anglo-Norman county of Blathwyc. There was a medieval 'Castle', Borough 'town' and chapel of 'Le Ford' in the present centre of Belfast on the west side of the Lagan. The actual area of the Skainos development site was close to the west end of the Connswater ford and to the shoreline. However, despite the similarity in physical setting to that of Belfast, there is no evidence for substantial medieval settlement in the area of the proposed site.

The O'Neills of Clann Aodh buidhe ('Clannaboy') crossed the Bann from Tyrone in the 14<sup>th</sup> century and slowly carved out a vast territory consisting of south/mid Antrim and north Down. This became known as Clannaboy or Clandeboye, and was done at the expense of the Anglo-Normans in south Antrim and north Down. North Down became known as Upper or Southern Clandeboye. In 1552, the O'Neills defeated the Savages and the Lord Chief Justice at Belfast. The 'Book of Rights' also includes an interesting but unclear allusion to the losers crossing the river and building a castle.

At some point in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the tower house of Castlereagh became the most important site in southern Clondeboye. References of 1573 and 1586 note the wooded and wet nature of the area immediately across the Lagan from Belfast.

Brian McArt O'Neill, chief of Clondeboye, had briefly joined the Tyrone O'Neills in the war against Elizabeth. As a result, his lands were devastated by a brutal 'scorched earth' campaign. After the long war with Elizabeth I of England, political intrigues, and the flight of the Irish chiefs overseas at the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the area was earmarked for plantation by 'loyal British Protestant subjects'.

British settlement was mainly an *ad hoc* private enterprise in Antrim and north Down, and of a mainly lowland Scottish character. Most of the lands of the southern Clondeboye O'Neills were split between two Scottish lords, James Hamilton and Hugh Montgomery and the Clondeboye chief, Conn O'Neill, whose life they had cynically saved for a price. Ballymacarrett was part of the lands that were retained by the latter party in the carve-up. However, Conn was feckless and slowly sold off his share of the lands, townland by townland. The land passed through a couple of owners before becoming part of the Hamilton Clondeboye estate. This was certainly the case in the 1660s when the townland belonged to 'James Lord Viscount Clannebyes'. It was leased by the Hamiltons to various people in the early and mid 17<sup>th</sup> century.

These leases noted a ferry and fishing at Ballymacarrett, as well as a mill on the Connswater (then called Owen O'Corke). This river was renamed after the twilight chief of the Clondeboye O'Neills. Raven's map of 1625 only noted rural settlement in the immediate area, although there was a village known as West Hollywood, a little east of the Connswater at Strandtown.